

Usually Friendly Indians Were Sometimes Threat To Settlers

By Mark Anson

McPherson county is rich in Indian lore probably dating from the Coronado visit in 1541 up until nearly the twentieth century.

Along Gypsum Creek, Sanford and Lowell Reese found a number of Indians when they settled in 1866—Indians who were not always friendly. The brothers built themselves a fort to protect themselves from these Indians.

In digging for the fort they discovered a Spanish coin probably dropped by an Indian many decades before. Near the fort they built, were distinct signs of an ancient village believed to be a site visited by Coronado. Hundreds of spear points, arrowheads and other Indian relics could be picked up.

Kidnap, Kill Settler

One afternoon the Reese brothers noticed Indians in war paint across the creek. They warned their neighbors and then retreated to their fort. The next morning the Indians had disappeared but a man named Wiley Temple, who lived a mile away, had vanished. They found his body a week later with seven arrowheads in it and the scalp gone.

But after that, the Indians in the vicinity were always quite friendly. In the winter of 1871 and 72 Sanford Reese's son, G. A. Reese, saw about 600 Indians camped near Twin Mounds, a favorite Indian campsite. Camped near Lindsborg.

Indians often passed through

Lindsborg settlement and in 1870, in the winter, three hundred Indians camped along the river close to Indian Creek. Along Turkey Creek several hundred Indians frequently camped.

Settlers, until recent years, could remember the Indian encampments below Twin Mounds and seeing the young Indians cutting squares of ice from Gypsum Creek then sliding down the hillside on the ice.

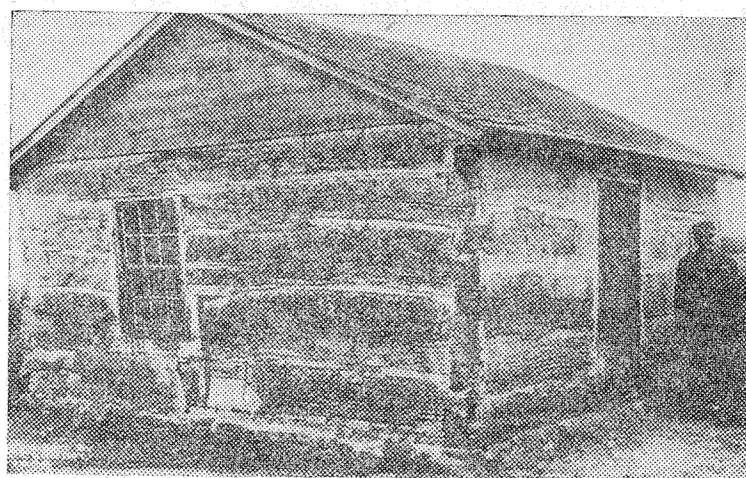
Kidnap Mrs. Bassett

In 1868 settlers living on Sharps Creek heard that Indians were on the warpath. A war party carried away Mrs. Martha Bassett after ransacking the house. The Indians stripped her and took her and her baby with them, only to turn them loose after a time to permit them to return home. The raiders, Osage Indians, fled the area.

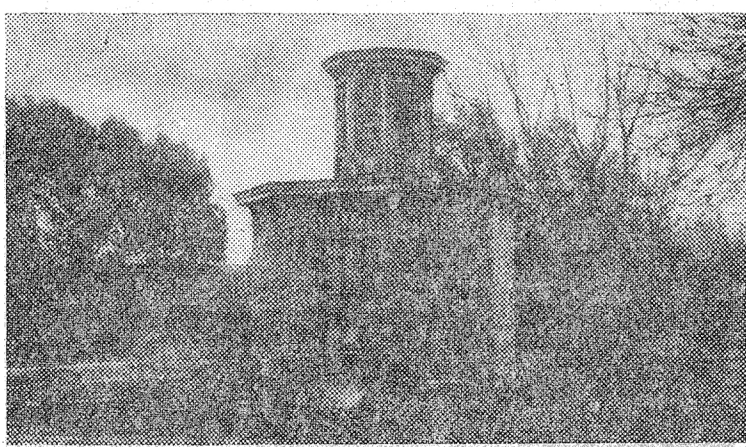
But most of the Indians were friendly and traveled often from one campground to another greeting the settlers as they passed.

Particularly in the northern part of the county, the settlers were afraid of the Indians in the early days, when the Comanches, Sioux and other tribes were on the warpath and rude forts were constructed and home guards organized.

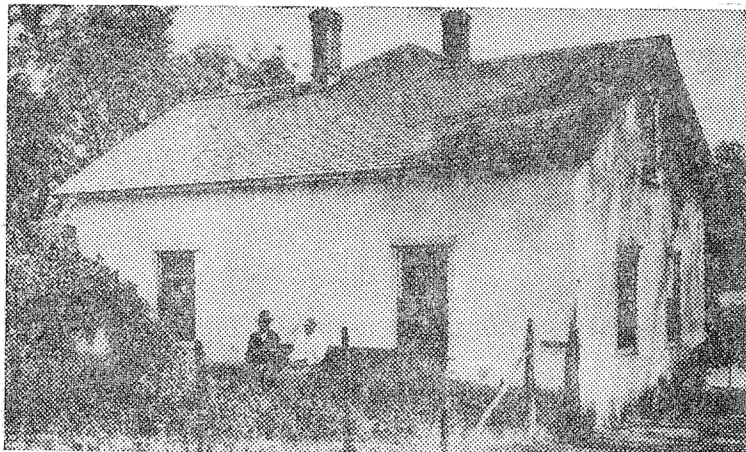
The early settlers had their share of Indian adventures although in many ways the Indian history of the country reached its climax in 1825 when the Kawes signed a treaty on the banks of Turkey Creek six miles south of McPherson.



IN 1908, WHEN this picture was taken, this was the oldest residence standing in McPherson County. It was Lindsborg's post office and a wholesale house built by C. E. Norstrom in June, 1868 and was half a mile west of Lindsborg.



JUSTICE HOLMBERG, who had his word in the county seat election, had his office in this building in Sweadall. An early description of the office says "In the cellar he had liquor, in the office justice was administered, and in the tower he would watch his working men and look out for Indians from across the river."



ALL THE EARLY SETTLERS met at Bolagshuset, built at Sweadall by the Chicago Company in 1868. It was the rendezvous of all the early settlers in the Smoky Hill Valley.

Major Holmberg Was "Eliminated" At The County Seat Election Of 1873

When the time came to vote on a new county seat for McPherson County, on June 10, 1873, Major L. H. Holmberg decided to take a hand. Major Holmberg fought bitterly to keep the county seat at his "town" of Sweadall, but this failed and the county seat was moved to Lindsborg.

Now the time had come to vote on moving it to McPherson.

As the old accounts recount the tale:

"Major Holmberg came down from Lindsborg early to challenge any illegal votes. He came early so as to be on hand when the voting commenced. Some of the McPhersonites held a hasty consultation over the possibility of the major carrying concealed weapons.

"William Fouts, one of McPherson's citizens, and a Civil War veteran, was deputized to find out if possible, so he took position under the court house steps. In this way he could gaze up under Holmberg's coat as he ascended to the voting precinct. "Joy unspeakable reigned when the gleaming weapon was discovered attached to the major's belt. He was arrested and as it was impossible to find a justice of the peace in the town he was taken to King City and had his hearing before Squire Pier of that place.

"The major was detained until after voting time so he could not observe others voting and lost his own vote besides."

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It's Easier To Get Your Mail Today

"It's a long way to have to go ten blocks to mail a letter at the post office. Why don't they have things a little more convenient?"

But 75 years ago the early settlers of McPherson county would have considered that practically nothing.

In the late 1860's the nearest post office was in Abilene, sixty miles away. On one occasion a settler who hadn't made the trip for a while discovered awaiting him a two weeks old telegram telling of the death of a near relative.

But in 1873 McPherson got its own postoffice and the long treks ended.

By 1874 the mail was being delivered to McPherson. At mail time, people use to come to McPherson from miles around and stand in groups awaiting the mail. When the carrier came they crowded into Bowker's store and postoffice and postmaster Bowker called out the names of those who had mail and handed it to them if they were there.

Getting one's mail today is much simpler.

Huge Prairie Fires Raged Throughout County To Terrorize Early Settlers

By Mark Anson

While in 1947 McPherson county residents worry during harvest season about wheat fires, the men and women who settled the city and county 75 years and more ago fought prairie fires that raged through the tall grass and were a constant threat to their homes.

By 1870 the Indians were no longer a danger to early settlers but prairie fires were an enemy with which they often had to contend. They usually plowed a fire guard around their homes; when a fire was seen, they kindled another fire to meet it and to save their home.

In Turkey Creek township, Thomas Finnan had a huge cattle ranch but in the middle 70's that was sold when a prairie fire burned all the grass and nearly burned his home and family.

Awe-inspiring Sight

Alex Hendry, who recalled seeing Indians with scalp on their belts, thought one of the most awe-inspiring sights he had ever seen was in the fall of 1873 when an immigrant started a prairie fire near Abilene.

"... All that afternoon we could see the volume of smoke and fire coming across the prairie. The fire spread... west as far as McPherson city. When the fire reached the old Santa Fe trail in the eastern part of the county near Old Empire, the sunflowers and rosin weed with a large accumulation of tumble weed created a bonfire which could not be excelled. The smoke filled the air like big storm clouds and the course of the fire through the Santa Fe trail north of King City and south of McPherson could be traced as the fire reached the trail by its intensely black smoke. Flames Destroyed Game

"The fire traveled with such speed that antelope, wolves and prairie chickens were overtaken and burned by hundreds. The buildings at King City were saved only by the settlers turning out with their teams, plowing furrows and starting a back fire which succeeded in burning a mile in width before the big fire came on. ... It traveled like a railroad express train... It was probably twenty miles wide."

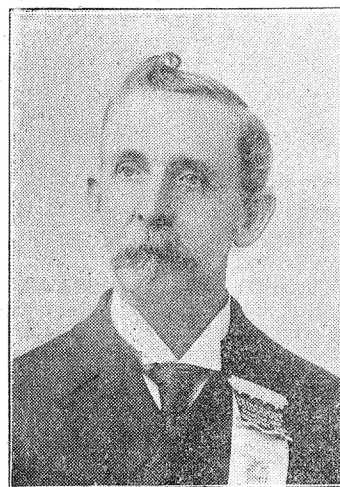
C. H. Way of Canton township started a fire once in a vain hope that he would smoke out a great storm of grasshoppers which had descended on his crops. But he and his neighbors could not control the flames and they burned until they came to a lake and burned itself out. The grasshoppers remained and ate almost all the crops in 24 hours.

Great Prairie Fire

In the winter of 1875-6 was the "great prairie fire." About 10 o'clock one February morning black clouds of smoke began to blow up from the south and soon after the flames began to leap through the smoke. The fire jumped a strip of green wheat 20 rods across to attack the Gateka farm where the family successfully saved their buildings. Before sunset the flames had crossed the Smoky River.

"For hours the black ashes were in the air, hiding the sun until it was almost black as night, pouring into the house, around the door and windows, until the paper on the wall, the carpet on the floor, and even my babies faces were black."

Other early settlers remember seeing horsemen fleeing before a raging prairie fire and barely escaping.



JOHN LAMER, 1870—A settler near Lindsborg, the Civil War veteran had a 320-acre farm and raised large numbers of cattle and livestock, and was active in county affairs. He was the father of Mrs. P. J. Galle.

A High Liquor License

There is some question as to whether or not saloons ever operated in McPherson. Some old timers say there were, some say there were not. The records of the county commissioners for 1873 would indicate there were.

"July 28, 1873, the following resolution was adopted by two of the board, Mr. J. W. Sanborn not voting, as follows, to wit: It is hereby ordered that a tax of \$500 shall be levied upon each license granted in McPherson County to a tavern keeper, dram shop keeper or grocery keeper for the sale of intoxicating liquor for very period of twelve months. John Fern, chairman."

If any liquor was sold in the county after this date, it was done so illegally, for county record show that not a single one of these \$500 licenses was ever issued.

Lots Of Game In Early Days

Game was plentiful in McPherson county in the early days and a wide variety of wild life was to be found in the various parts of the county.

Panthers were rare but there were some wildcats, an occasional elk and gray wolf, and many coyotes. Buffalo were few but deer, antelope, turkeys and prairie chickens often were killed for food on Gypsum Creek. There were plenty of fish in the streams, and particularly buffalo fish. There were some wild animals including beaver, otter, and coons and some of the settlers trapped the beaver and otter.

The deer and antelope were particularly plentiful. Settlers tell of seeing huge herds jumping out of the tall grass and disappearing again. Antelope meat, deer meat and buffalo meat were plentiful and cheap and many of the early settlers bought this game for their food. Buffalo meat sold for a nickel a pound.

Rabbits, quail, wild ducks and geese were other game creatures frequently seen by hunters and settlers.

Buffalo Were Rare Here Even In The Earliest Days

The great buffalo country of the early wild west was west of McPherson county and the great buffalo herds, which furnished so much meat to early settlers, seen only old lone bulls or stragglers from the herd into McPherson county except in rare instances.

Near Roxbury in the late 1860's early settlers on one occasion saw 18 buffalo resting under the trees. In the vicinity of Lindsborg, buffalo herds roved about in the neighborhood about the same time, although few ventured within the limits of the settlement.

While there was plenty of wild game in the county, W. O. Mathes says there were few wild buffalo in the county after 1866. In that year the first settlers who came to Smoky Hill township found fresh buffalo wallows, but no buffalo. Solomon Stephens saw one large herd go through Marquette township in 1868, leaving a trail a hundred yards wide on the prairie.

There is a natural corral west of Marquette, where a few buffalo hid until surprisingly late in the 70's. Indians camping on the streams would sometimes go there to kill one but they always went at night for they didn't want the white man to find the buffalo.

Buffalo were rare and when a few did come through they were killed immediately. There were buffalo trails, though, made by buffalo walking in straight lines following a leader to water.

In the 1870's Ludwig Engdahl of Marquette hid in the grass when nine buffalo thundered across the prairie toward him. Another time two buffalo passed the schoolhouse west of Marquette.

But those few incidents are nearly the only ones reported of buffalo in McPherson county.

Kidnapping Of Mrs. Bassett Almost County History Legend

By Jessie Hill Rowland

Numerous stories were written in the early days about the kidnapping of Mrs. Bassett by the Indians in 1868. The Bassetts came to Kansas in 1867 and Mr. Bassett filed upon a quarter section of land on Sharps Creek not far from Marquette. Neighbors were few and far between, but theirs were stout hearts and not long after establishing their home, a bright baby boy took up his abode with them.

On the 28th of September, Mr. Bassett went several miles up the creek to borrow some corn of his neighbor, Solomon Stephens. While there he was told a band of Kiowas were camping farther up the creek and no doubt had come up from the territory on a thieving expedition. The two men were determined to ascertain definitely their location. They had not followed the creek far when they found the Indians had broken camp and had started directly toward the Bassett home. So terrified was Mr. Bassett that he immediately summoned five or six men to his aid. Among them was Peter Hughes, Solomon Stephens and Mr. Ray. As they neared the Bassett home one of the men became frightened and turned back.

Let us leave them for a moment and follow Mrs. Bassett who was unconscious of danger near. When Mr. Bassett left her in the morning, he thought he had left enough wood to last during the day but it commenced to rain and was cold and raw almost like mid-winter. Mrs. Bassett, fearing there might not be enough wood, ran hastily to the creek near by and, gathering an arm-full, returned to their dug-out and was placing some of the wood in the stove. When she turned around there were five or six Indian warriors in the room. So stealthy had they been in their movements, not a sound had been heard. Mrs.

Bassett stepped over to their bed at once and took her baby from his resting place. The Indians seized two rifles that were at the foot of the bed. They then stripped the room of its contents. In one corner stood a trunk that contained some things dear to the heart of the owner. She surreptitiously turned the key in this, but the Indians carried it out doors, broke it open and divided its contents. When everything had been disposed of, they placed Mrs. Bassett on a pony and handed her baby to her and the band started on their way south. They had not gone far out on the prairie when the chief of the band dismounted and seemed to hold a heated argument with five or six of the other warriors. At length coming to a decision they made motions for Mrs. Bassett to dismount. They then stripped her of clothing and handing her baby back to her, rode on their way. Mrs. Bassett returned weak and frightened to their dug-out, and as it was said before it was bitter cold and she had nothing to wrap around her freezing little baby.

It was not long before Mr. Bassett arrived and when he called to her she was too frightened to answer him but he called again, "My God Mat, if you are alive answer me." Realizing that help had come to her, she was able to answer.

The men took off their coats and wrapped the mother and child as best they could. Peter Hughes took the baby on his horse and Mr. Bassett took his wife on in front of him and the party started for Mr. Solomon Stephens' home where Mr. Stephens' sister Nannie gave Mrs. Bassett clothing and the baby had tender care but in a short time it died, owing to the exposure it suffered during the Indian raid. It was taken to Lawrence for burial and the Bassetts returned to their home lonely without the little one.

Historian Tells Of A Pioneer Wedding Held In Dugout In McPherson County

By Jessie Hill Rowland

"Hear the mellow wedding bells—Golden bells.

What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!"

Great must be the contrast of a Kansas pioneer wedding and the one thought of by Edgar Allen Poe. No doubt the happiness was all there, but there could be no ringing of bells to announce the fact.

My father was one of the early pioneers and a justice of the peace and so was called upon many times to repeat "Wilt thou, Mary?" and "Wilt thou, John?" Then came the test of trying to live happily ever after.

On one of these occasions my father was asked to preside at a wedding 10 miles from our home, and my mother received an invitation to accompany him. Upon arriving at their destination they were ushered down six steps into a dugout where the mother of the bride was preparing the wedding feast.

There was but one room and the furniture consisted of two chairs, one with only two rounds to the back and bottomless. A bed made of scantlings, a board table, a short bench, a stove and a motto hung over the door, "God Bless Our Home." There was no floor and a sheet had been stretched across one corner of the room. The bride and groom were stationed behind this, evidently under the impression it would not be proper to appear until time for the ceremony, but they were in such close quarters and the sheet was so short it put one in mind of an ostrich when it tries to hide by sticking its head in the sand.

Mrs. Brown, we will call her, was grinding something in a coffee mill, but arose to receive her guests with all the dignity of the first lady of the land. She placed one chair for my mother and one for my father, seating herself upon the bench she continued turning the coffee grinder. Soon after, some of the neighbors came in and at the appointed time the bride and groom emerged arm in arm from behind the temporary curtain and stepped forward to where my father was sitting. All became quiet and he pronounced the words that made them one.

Then all sat down to the wedding supper. The sheet that hung across the corner of the room was taken down and spread over the table for a cloth. Mrs. Brown's efforts at the coffee mill had turned out some delicious coffee made of dried carrots.

There were seven different kinds of sauce, all made out of wild plums put up in seven different ways. The rest of the menu was quite simple and consisted of plain bread and butter and fried pork. The table was shoved close to the bed and three sat on that side, while three sat on the bench. The chairs were occupied and two or three kegs finished out the number of seats.

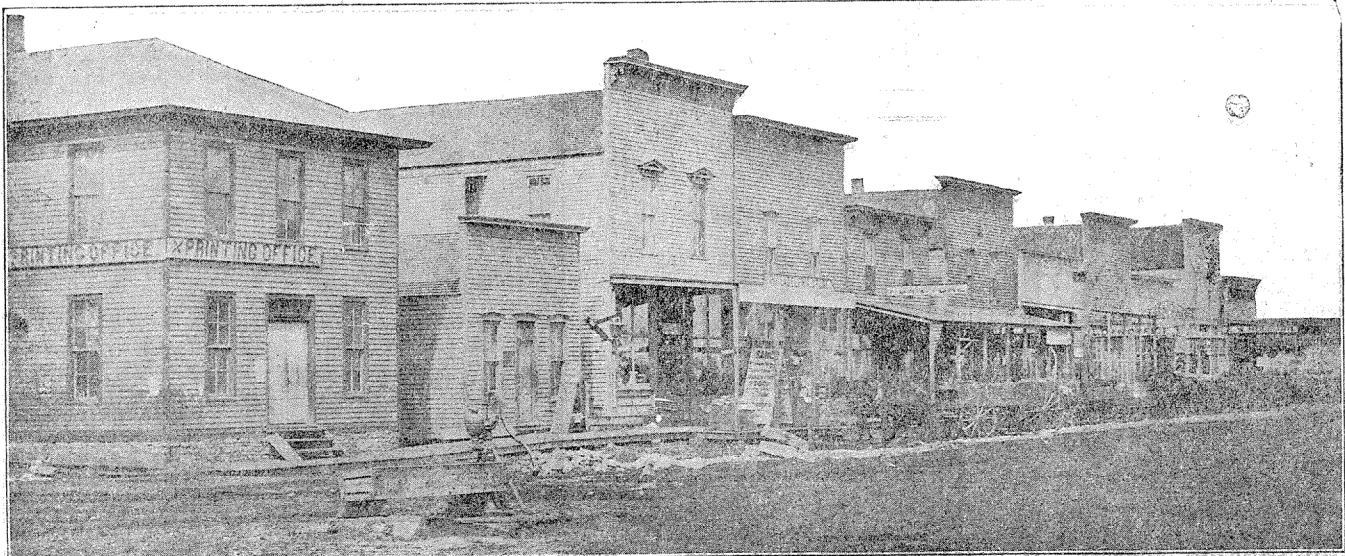
After the supper the bridegroom took my father to one side and asked him to accept some potatoes in payment for performing the ceremony. He readily consented and returned home.

One year later the bride called at my father's office and asked for the certificate he had neglected to make out. A nice little baby girl had taken up her abode with them. The bride returned again in a few days with the certificate to have a correction made, as it had been dated the day she called for it.

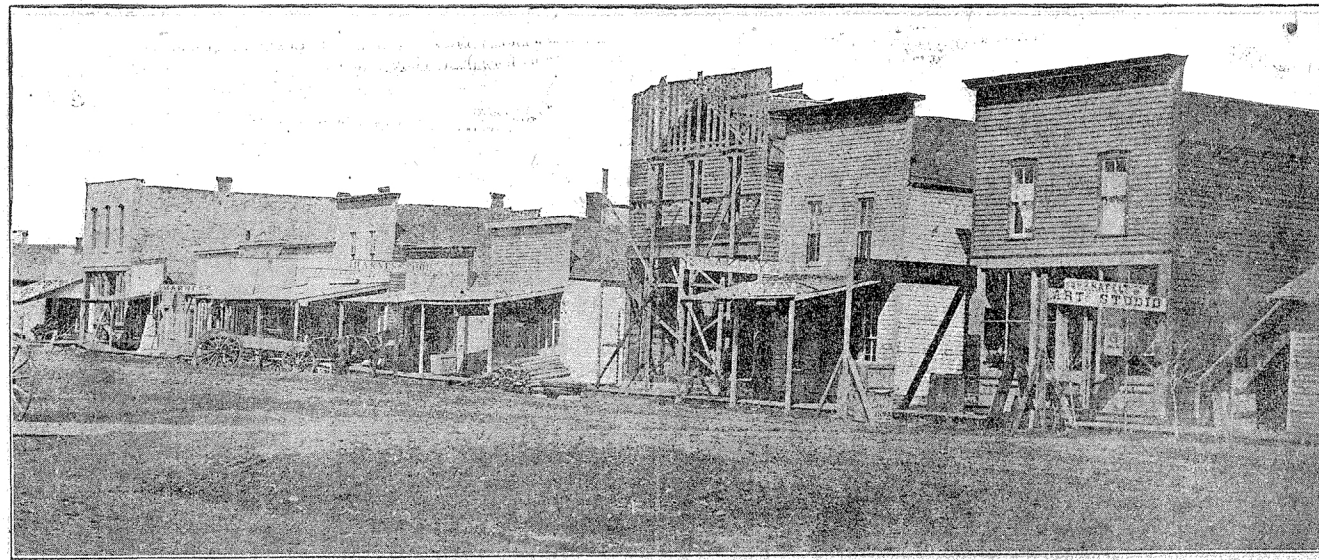
There are almost 700,000 beds in mental hospitals in the United States.



W. H. COTTINGHAM, 1878—Breeder of horses and cattle, McPherson Bank officer and mayor of McPherson.



PIONEER McPHERSON visitors watered their horses in this trough at the corner of Main and Marlin. This picture shows the west side of Main between Marlin and Euclid in 1880. The building marked "Printing Office" was the original McPherson Town Company building and served as the first courthouse in the city. This entire block was destroyed by a great fire in 1883.



BACK IN THE BOOM DAYS of 1880 there was considerable new construction going on, as shown by this picture of the east side of Main between Elizabeth and Kansas Avenue. Notice the wooden awnings and wooden sidewalks. The two-story building at the extreme left is the original Republican building, one of the first stone buildings on Main Street and at present believed to be the oldest building on Main Street with parts of the original structure still in it.