

# Joe Kubin Saw McPherson Rise From The Bare Prairie

By L. E. Lindell

The day was warm, the sky clear and a gentle breeze blew from the south the day Joe Kubin, now 98 and the first homesteader in Jackson township west of McPherson, climbed down from his covered wagon onto the sod he was later to break and turn in to his own farm.

That was 76 years ago in mid-October 1871, more than a year before the townsite of McPherson was laid out by the town company that came down in covered wagons from Salina.

Joe Kubin also came down from Salina to stake out his claim on what was to be known then as "The Flats". There were no trees to be seen in any direction and the only movement was the waving of the heavy prairie grass in the light breeze. The grass was still green for the fall frosts had not yet turned it brown.

## Came From Wisconsin.

Joe, with one brother and two sisters, arrived in Salina after driving overland in a covered wagon pulled by a team of horses from Wisconsin. His father and mother and other brothers and sisters came a few weeks later, and he met them in Topeka and brought them on out to Central Kansas. Most of his sisters remained in Topeka where they found employment.

At the federal land office in Salina Kubin was told there was no land to be had along the Union Pacific railroad grant in the Salina area, and it was from a tip from a livery stable hand that he learned of the open prairie country in a good soil area some 35 miles to the south. He was told there was a thriving town in the area known as King City, which was on the route of the Santa Fe Trail.

The Kubins and their covered wagon arrived first at the two-room log cabin of Phil Kumli and his family on Sharps Creek at the northwest edge of what is now Jackson Township northwest of McPherson. The Kumli's, hearing the Kubins were going to homestead near them, invited them to use the second room in their cabin until they could build their own home on their claim. The Kubins welcomed the opportunity.

## Stakes Out His Claim.

The next day after arriving at the Kumli homestead Joe Kubin rode away to stake his own claim, which was 160 acres of prairie land in section 15-19-4W, in northern Jackson Township. A neighbor woman living up on Sharps Creek told Joe after he had staked his claim on "The Flats" that he was crazy for homesteading where he did because the "wind will blow you off the plains out".

The first building the Kubin claim was a one-room sod house and his brother built. This sod house was unique for it had a shingled roof and Joe says he believed it was the first shingled roof in this part of the country. Joe started breaking the sod with a team of oxen and in his spare time working for a man up on Sharps Creek cutting posts out of the timber along the creek. His wages were \$20 a month.

"There were a lot of snakes around our soddies," Joe Kubin explained, "but they didn't bother me any. The mosquitoes were so bad they nearly drove me crazy." When Joe came to what is now McPherson County there was only one house at Lindsborg, near the ford on the Smoky Hill River, but King City, which is now Elyria, was booming and with 17 houses making up the village. There was nothing on the townsite of McPherson but bare prairie and if you had good eyes you could see one small eight-foot cottonwood tree off to the southwest from where McPherson now stands.

## Bobcat Killed On Creek.

"I killed a bobcat up on Sharps Creek once," Joe related, chuckling at his experiences of the past. "I was working for a fellow and we heard the dogs barking down in the timber along the creek. He told me to go down and see what they were making a fuss about so I took my musket and went to see what all the racket was about. I found the dogs had a spitting hole cornered in a bunch of elderberry shrubs. I shot the cat and took him up to the cabin to skin." Joe says he remembers hanging the bobcat up on the side of the log cabin and skinning it. Just as he finished skinning the cat, he turned around and found himself face to face with a large Indian. There was only one Indian but he was enough to frighten Joe. The Redman was dressed mainly in a blanket. He grunted a few times and walked into the house. The women in the house were scared but they gave him a hunk of bread and he put it under his blanket. The Indian also put the carcass under the bobcat and Joe said he gave it to him without any argument. The Indian also put the carcass under the bobcat and Joe said he gave it to him without any argument. The Indian also put the carcass under the bobcat and Joe said he gave it to him without any argument.

## A Tough First Winter.

The first winter Joe Kubin spent in McPherson County was a tough one. A local ranch by the name of Wilson & Simpson had moved in 1,200 head of cattle from Texas and they came late in the fall. The cattle were used to the milder weather in Texas and when the big blizzards and below zero weather hit the Kansas prairie the cattle "died like flies."

# Churches Came In With The Early Pioneers Of City Of McPherson

By Jessie Hill Rowland

The first religious service was held in the first building erected by Harrison Bowker in July 1872. Rev. Ambrose Shelley, a United Brethren minister and usually known as Father Shelley took charge of the service and preached the first sermon.

In its early days McPherson was a very religious little town and as soon as the McPherson Town Company building was completed in 1873, all denominations met together in the large hall on the second floor. The following denominations had a representative minister who took his turn in the pulpit: The Methodist, Rev. John Simpson, the Baptist Rev. D. McGregor, the Congregational, Rev. Hodge, the United Brethren, Rev. Shelley, the Free Methodist, Rev. William McClintick. A union Sunday school was carried on by Clarence Bowker, Superintendent and Miss Helen Scofield Organist. Each church denomination commenced early to count its membership with a deep desire to soon have a place of meeting all to themselves. However it made no difference to the church goers who preached. Perfect peace and harmony governed all and each Sunday the hall was usually filled to capacity.

## The Old Water And Light Plant Was All Trouble

By Ed Wellepp

On November 24, 1908, the city of McPherson paid out \$52,000 to purchase the water and light plant. On July 23, 1910, that plant burned to the ground and out of its ashes, little by little, grew one of the finest municipal water and light plants in the state of Kansas.

But before that day in 1910 when the plant and its sins went up in flame and smoke, the water and light plant had caused nothing but city fights, court litigation and in its own way, excitement.

Sometime back about 1888, the records are not clear, the first water and light plant in the young city of McPherson was built by a private concern known as the Houston Water and Light Company on the approximate site of the present plant.

## Plant Soon Sold

The plant was soon acquired by the Western Water and Electric Company, but apparently McPherson was not yet ready to support a plant. Almost every home had its own well, there was an abundance of public watering troughs for the horses and the electric light was still pretty much of a "gadget." Electrical appliances were almost unheard of.

On March 30, 1891, after a fight which threatened to split McPherson right down the middle, the city passed an ordinance which put into effect a 20 year lease with Western Water for the purchase of water for fire protection and lights for street lights for the city.

## She Went "Bust"

But Western Water couldn't stand prosperity, and on May 21, 1891, the county went "flat busted." At that time its mortgages and debts totaled \$68,862, and it went into the hands of the receivers, the Central Trust Co. of New York. John W. Ashman, Livingston Cushing and C. E. Gibson each received a one-third share of the financially strapped plant.

This brought about the famous fight between the city and the receivers of the water and light plant and their agent, a Mr. Wise. On June 1, 1898, Wise informed the city of McPherson that if the city did not pay its back water and light bills amounting to \$1,650, the company would discontinue service to the city. By June 7 the deadline had passed the water and lights went off.

Nothing much was thought of this until the night of July 3, 1898, when the First National Bank, located where the Grand Building now stands, caught fire.

## No Water For Fire

When firemen arrived to fight the blaze, there was no water. E. H. Heithecker and F. D. Entriken tried to the water plant to get the water flowing out, as the Daily Republican of that day reported, "Mr. W. E. Stout, plant engineer, refused to turn on the water as he was under orders of the U. S. Court not to do so. A revolver was pointed at him and under protest he then turned on the water."

But it was too late, the bank burned to the ground.

This waterless-lightless situation continued and soon the city was being flooded with letters from insurance companies threatening to hike fire insurance rates unless some sort of fire protection was forthcoming. The city dads even considered buying one of those now-fangled "chemical wagons."

## Paid The Bill

Finally, on Sept. 5, 1898, the city commissioners voted to "pay up." Western Water received a check for \$1,125.25, and the water and lights went back on.

The plant continued in the hands of the receivers, losing money and causing the town fight to continue until 1907. By this time C. E. Gibson, of Boston had acquired most of the ownership of the plant and dickering was started for the purchase of the property by the city.

## The City Buys It

A deal was made and on Nov. 24, 1908, the city voted by a 1-500 majority to buy the plant for \$52,000. This included \$65,000 for the water plant and \$10,000 to extend it; \$16,000 for the electric plant and \$5,000 to extend it.

Repair work was started and was under way when the plant burned to the ground.

Since that time there have been city squabbles over the plant manager, expansion, new services and machinery but through it all the plant has continued to grow.

This, however, comes under the heading of recent history.

# The County Once Went To The Rockies

By Ed Wellepp

In 1860 McPherson County extended from its present eastern boundary to the Rocky Mountains. At that time it was known as Peketon (also Pekton and Peckton) County and the county seat was established at Beach Valley.

The 1860 state legislature declared that "all that territory west of the sixth principal meridian and south of township 16, in Kansas Territory, be and is hereby erected into a county, to be known by the name of Peketon County."

"Ashel Beach, A. C. Beach and Samuel Shoff, be and are hereby appointed commissioners to divide said county into election precincts, fix places for holding election and make all necessary arrangements for the first election in said county."

Kansas extended west to the Rockies and included Pikes Peak and Denver.

## Part of Marion County

On Feb. 17, 1865, Peketon County was abolished and what is now McPherson formed a portion of Marion county which, did records say "was at that time established and which extended from the west line of Chase County to the present western boundary of the State of Kansas."

The boundary lines of McPherson County were fixed in 1867 and the legislature gave the county its present name. It was from that time until 1870 attached as a township to Saline for judicial purposes. The county comprised 1,080 square miles and took in three townships which now belong to Harvey and two which now belong to Reno County. It ran 36 miles from north to south and 30 miles from east to west.

The final change was made in 1872 when, at the insistence of C. C. Hutchinson and with the concurrence of the members from McPherson, the south row of townships was lopped off and the county was reduced to its present limits.

## Political Move?

This move came as a blow to King City, a little town southwest of the present town of Elyria. King City was in a fight to become the county seat, but when these six miles were cut off, the city was then too far south in the county to become the county seat.

Lindsborg felt that by striking off this row of townships, it would stand a better chance of becoming the permanent county seat, a position which it held in 1872.

However, it was felt that Lindsborg was too far north from the center of the county and in 1873 an election was held which moved the county seat to McPherson.

## Four Big Townships

The first townships organized were Turkey Creek, comprising what is now Spring Valley, Lone Tree, King City, Groveland, Hayes, Little Valley, Superior, Turkey Creek, Mound, Meridian and five other townships which later went to Harvey and Reno Counties; Smoky Hill, which comprised what is now known as Smoky Hill, New Gottland, McPherson, East half of Jackson, Harper and Union; Sharps Creek, which comprised what is now known as South Sharps Creek, Castle, Marquette, west half of Jackson, Harper and Union; and Gypsum Creek, Battle Hill, Canton, Empire, Delmore and Bonaville.

New Gottland and Meridian were organized in 1873 and other townships followed soon thereafter.

# County Was Prairie Before Settlers First Came Here

By W. J. Krehbiel

Just before Isaac Sharp became the first settler in 1859, McPherson county was a vast uninhabited prairie, flat in the south and hilly in the north. There were no trees except along the Smoky river in the north, along its tributary creeks, along Gypsum creek in the northeast, Turkey creek in the middle south and along the Little Arkansas river in the extreme southwest portion of the county. Wild life was plentiful—buffalo, elk, antelope, deer, prairie chickens, beaver, some coyotes, a few wild cats and an occasional panther.

But when Sharp staked out his lonely claim southwest of Lindsborg and thereby gave the creek and the whole area its name, there was little game in the southern part of the county. The noise and bustle of the Santa Fe Trail, then over 40 years old, had driven wild life to the trees and brush of the north. Herds of Texas longhorns, fattening on the luxuriant McPherson grasses, had driven the buffalo west to Rice county where early McPherson county settlers journeyed for the hunt. In 1866 the Reece brothers came upon 18 buffalo in the Gypsum creek valley, a few small herds ventured near Marquette in the next few years and in the early seventies there were occasional small herds in the Natural corral southwest of Marquette. Otherwise the buffalo was extinct in McPherson county except for occasional



WHERE THE TALL CORN GROWS—Broom corn, not wheat, was the big crop in McPherson County before the turn of the century and this old picture from the Daily Republican files shows one harvest crew in a field of broom corn during harvest time.



BROOM CORN HARVEST—After broom corn was harvested, the women and children had their turn to work too. The broom corn was brought in and placed on a long table, where it was sorted and the brush straightened. It was scraped to get rid of the seeds and the brush then was cured in the sun and wind. It had to be kept from getting damp during the curing process. Sometimes the corn brought as much as \$100 a ton.

# First Autoists Were Pioneers In 1902

Pioneers in a more modern sense, F. A. Vaniman and H. J. Harnly in 1902 traveled in a one cylinder, four-and-a-half horsepower, side crank, side-steered Oldsmobile from McPherson to Colorado Springs, bringing the first "horseless" carriage into many towns along the way.

The car, owned by Mr. Vaniman, was equipped with an acetylene lamp, single-tube bicycle tires, curved dash, hanging step footrest, and a second seat with its back to the first so that passengers could look out into the dust behind. The machine weighed 650 pounds and on the dash was pasted a paper with these words:

"REMEMBER, IT HAS RUN AND IT WILL RUN AGAIN."

## Umbrella For Top

Instead of a top, the car carried a large umbrella. The maximum speed attainable was 20 miles an hour when the ground was level. At the time, the speed limit in most communities was eight miles an hour. One law required that if the driver of an automobile met a woman driving a buggy, he should stop, get out of the car, and lead the woman's horse past.

Before the two men could start on their trip, they had to have a spade, rubber boots, a tow rope, a jack and chains, and a tarpaulin (a prairie schooner cover). Gasoline was available only at drug stores and groceries, but they usually had a quart or two at most, so a five-gallon can was carried on the rear seat with the luggage. The travelers had to be their own mechanics, for there were no garages.

## Created Sensation

The car created a sensation in nearly every town it visited and the trip almost was made by car. But two miles from their destination the car's transmission broke and a team of horses towed them into town.

For the benefit of modern motorists, the average speed was 12 miles an hour for the round trip; the average distance covered per day was 104 miles; and the average cost of gasoline was once cent a mile.

Quite different from 1947.

strays, one of which was killed at the edge of the McPherson townsite in 1875.

## County Was Prairie

As far as known Isaac Sharp had the county to himself except for the cowboys, roving Indian bands, Fuller's ranch and tavern on the Santa Fe Trail south of Galva and for Gerry's trading post on the Fort Harker Trail in Turkey Creek township. But soon settlers came, lured by the Home stead act. In 1866 a few settled in scattered localities along the Smoky and Gypsum creek, but from 1868 they came in droves, practically completing the initial settling by the end of 1874 when McPherson city was a two-year-old.

Many residents of Madagascar are believed to be descendants of Malaysians whom ethnologists believe must have journeyed to the island in small boats centuries ago.

# Livestock Raising Started Early In McPherson County, With Huge Ranches

Livestock, a profitable occupation in McPherson county today, came early to the county as the pioneers used cattle for farm chores and food, horses for chores and transportation, and hogs and sheep for food and tallow.

Longhorn steers and oxen joined with teams of horses in the breaking of the prairie sod and the planting of wheat, corn and some vegetables. But except for farm uses, many of the early settlers objected to the cattle herds for John A. Peterson of Marquette, herding Texas cattle in King City and Turkey Creek townships and at Dole's ranch in Canton and Battle Hill townships, heard objections that the cattle had Texas fever.

However, many of the settlers in the southern part of the county had their own huge cattle herds and thousands of cattle with the brand of Thomas Finan roamed the land. The pioneer ranch was usually a part of the earliest settlements in McPherson county but these ranches soon dwindled as thrifty settlers came who desired to till the soil.

Andy Roy, an old settler in Turkey Creek township, was a breeder of pure bred shorthorn cattle

and Poland China hogs. Thomas Lay also raised many hogs and C. A. King was a stockman and cattle breeder, feeder and shipper. In 1893 he shipped and exhibited a steer weighing more than two tons at the Chicago Worlds Fair.

In the New Gottland area were a number of sheep and the settlers made their candles from sheep tallow and used the wool to spin into thread and cloth. M. Olaf Hokanson had more than two thousand sheep on his sheep ranch he operated.

In Canton township, C. H. Way began raising horses and raised broncos, then English Shire French Draft and Cleveland Bay thoroughbred and registered horses.

The cattle raisers were not too popular in the early 1870's for there was no herd law and the herds of cattle held for grazing destroyed the crops the settlers planted if the fields were not fenced in. Some of the cattlemen kept herds near McPherson for the college boys who came west in the summertime for adventure as cattle herders.

Thus the county got an early start as a livestock raising center.

# Handkerchief Helped Find McPherson

By Mark Anson

A covered wagon, with a white handkerchief tied around a rear wheel, located the townsite which grew into the city of McPherson, J. E. Gustafson, McPherson jeweler, remembers from tales told by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Gustafson.

J. E. Gustafson was just a year and a half old in 1872 when his parents located on a homestead where the Bay refinery now is. The family moved onto the location in April, 1872, and immediately built a sod house as living quarters.

## Couldn't Find Markers

In May, the men who founded McPherson arrived in the vicinity to locate the townsite they proposed to stake. But a difficulty arose immediately—they couldn't find the corner stones. Seeking help, they went to the Gustafson homestead.

Gustafson showed them the corner stone marking the section line on his homestead, but another difficulty arose. There was no measuring tape to mark the mile to the next section marker, half buried beneath the prairie grass.

The men tied a handkerchief around the wheel of the wagon and, counting the revolutions of the wheel, drove a mile west, Gustafson going with them. After a search of about an hour, they located the marker at the corner of what now is Main Street and First Street.

## Locate Corner

From there it was simple. Still using the handkerchief as a measure, the men drove due south from the stone they had just found, searched less than half an hour, and located the stone at what now is Kansas and Main.

So, with the aid of a handkerchief and a wagon wheel, the location of McPherson city was found 75 years ago.

# Dugouts, 3 Types Of Sod Houses In Days Long Ago

By Mark Anson

The first settlers in McPherson county both around McPherson city and in the county built their homes of sod or lived in dugouts for timber to build a frame house was a rarity. These dugouts and sod houses in many areas lasted as late as 1884.

Dugouts were usually dug on the open prairie. The homesteader would take two forked poles, put them down into the sod at each end of the dugout with the forked ends upright and put a pole across the forks. Other poles would then be laid to form the sides of the dugout, with grass, brush, and sod piles on them. Sometimes the dugouts were flat on the ground and grass would grow on the sod roof. The roofs of both dugouts and sod houses were usually a long blue stem grass which frequently grew to be quite tall on the house tops.

## Sod Houses Varied

There were three types of sod houses. Some were laid up rough, others plastered, still others hewed off smooth. The sod for the houses were broken with twelve inch breaking plows and these long strips broken into smaller lengths with a spade. Laid on each other to make a wall the grass roots helped hold them together. A rarer type was a semi-sod house of boards covered with sod. Plastered houses were plastered inside with lime and sand. Sometimes keel, a type of soapstone, was used for a roof.

## Built Adobe Houses

Later in the history of the country, adobe houses became common. Soil and straw were mixed by letting horses tramp on it and the mixture pressed into wooden bowls about twelve inches long, six inches wide, and four inches thick. These bricks then were hardened in the sun.

While there is some question as to whether there ever was a sod house in the city of McPherson there have been several adobe buildings here. And the rest of the county had plenty of sod houses and dugouts.