

FIRST McPHERSON BUILDING—The Bowker store was the first structure built in McPherson and went up in 1872, soon after the city was founded. It stood on the southwest corner of Kansas and Main Street and then stood back of the county jail until recent years.

Bronze Tablet On Telephone Building All That Remains Of First Structure

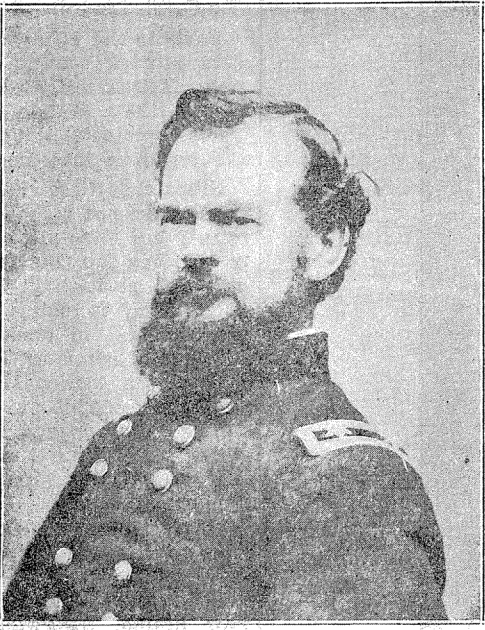
A small bronze tablet on the side of a modern brick building is all that remains of the first building in McPherson 75 years ago.

The tablet was put up in 1932, when McPherson had its first birthday party and was 60 years old, by the Daughters of the American Revolution to mark the site of the frame building that served as a store and living quarters in 1872 for the Harrison Bowker family.

That building was two stories high and was built on the southwest corner of Kansas and Main Streets and several "firsts" in McPherson city occurred in it. The building was moved later to the area behind the county jail where it remained until recent years.

In the wooden structure was the first death in the newly-founded townsite, that of Bowker's mother who was living with him. The first post office in McPherson was in that building and

General McPherson Was Only Union Commander Killed In Civil War Action



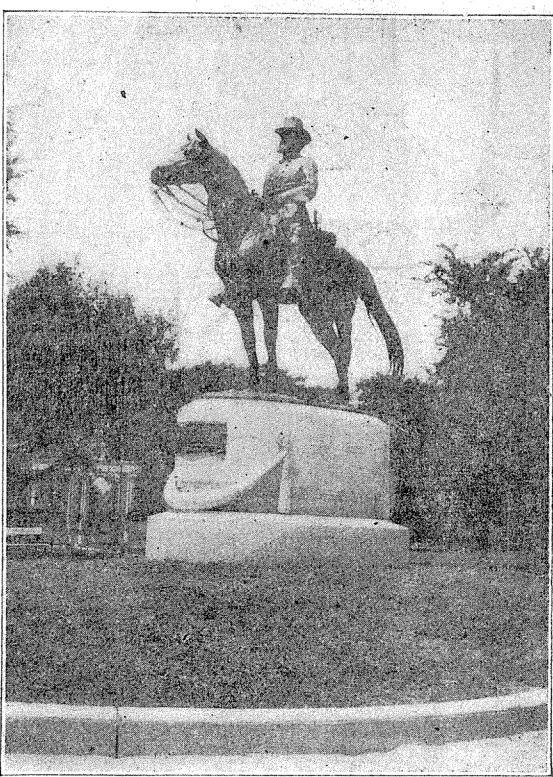
General James B. McPherson

By Ed Weillepp

General James Birdseye McPherson, after whom the county and the city was named, was a general in the Corps of Engineers in the Union Army during the Civil War and was the only Union commander to die on the field of battle.

General McPherson was born Nov. 14, 1828, in Clyde, Ohio, of Scotch-Irish parentage. He entered West Point and was graduated from there as a brevet lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers in 1853.

His early duty in the Army included work as an assistant instructor at West Point, work on the defenses of the harbor of New York, work on the building of Ft. Delaware, helping open the Hudson River to navigation and work on the harbor defenses of San Francisco Bay.



THIS STATUE of General James B. McPherson stands near the courthouse, a memorial to the McPherson County men who fought in the Civil War. Erected at a cost of \$15,000, it was dedicated on July 4, 1917, at a ceremony which brought an estimated 40,000 people to McPherson.

Marquette Resident Has Lived In County Longer Than McPherson City

Marquette — Mrs. Christine Nordstrom of Marquette who is rounding out her 78th year as a resident of McPherson County, has been a resident of the county since before the establishment of the county seat in McPherson. When she came to what is now McPherson County back in 1869 there was nothing but open prairie and no form of county government.

Mrs. Nordstrom was two years old when her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Sjöberg, brought her to what is now the Marquette community. Sjöberg was a Swedish cabinet maker and came to the United States in 1868 and sent for his wife and two daughters the following year.

Idea Went Wrong

In the boom days of 1888 and thereabouts, dozens of ventures that promised quick fortunes were started by McPherson people.

One of those was a salt mine, started here late in 1888. A salt well was drilled and by January 4, 1889, it was down 525 feet and filled with rock salt brine.

The brine would evaporate one-quarter pure salt and at the rate the well was flowing it would yield a carload of salt an hour.

But there the story ends. Evidently the promising salt mine was a "dry hole" and the salt venture, like so many others, folded and disappeared.

Big Basin Was Part Of Early Chain Lakes

There is a point about five miles west and five miles north of McPherson where a raindrop will split in half, part of it going north to the Smoky Hill River and the other half going south into the watershed of the Arkansas River.

This south slope is level and there is evidence that this strip of land once was an island sea or an old river bed, and more than 100 lakes or pools were scattered along this depression. Until drained, some 30 years ago, most of these shallow lakes had water in them all the time, and in wet seasons covered large areas. With the exception of Lake Inman and Lake Farland none of them were over five feet deep.

The name Chain Lakes was given these pools. The northern part of the 18 mile chain was called the North Basin. South of that was the Big Basin, three and a half miles west of McPherson. This lake covered 2000 acres and in the early days of the county was known as the reservoir for game birds.

The lake stretched completely to the south end of the county and beyond with Lake Inman covering 200 acres, Lake Farland 120 acres and others as large as 500 acres.

The basin and the chain lakes were paradise for the hunters and fishermen of the county until the lakes were drained. Migratory ducks and geese and other water fowl flocked in vast numbers to the lakes. The catches of fish and bags of game made about the Big Basin and the Chain Lakes are almost legendary with very few shots of a gun needed to get enough game to supply the neighborhood for a week.

Only small pools and Lake Inman remain of the Chain Lakes and the Big Basin.

Does Your Necktie Match Her Dress?

While the styles in womens clothes were slightly different in the 1870's than they are now, the women still had a passion for matching garments.

Mrs. F. J. Gateka tells of a necktie dance the literary society gave at the school house. All the women made calico dresses and neckties to match them. The men were then shown the neckties, each man put on the tie of his choice and discovered who his partner for the evening was by finding the women whose gown matched his tie.

The calico dresses worn at that party were much more comfortable than some of the women's gowns. They were long sleeved, high necked dresses which were almost long enough to cover their high shoes. Besides that, they wore at least two full, stiffly starched petticoats and plenty of "rats" in their hair. Sun bonnets covered their heads.

Perhaps the only comment about the clothing of those days that the pioneer women would make was that they were awfully hot.

Roof Falls In

Dugout life wasn't too safe in the early days.

The early history of the county shows that in 1872, the two sons of Philip W. Kohler, a shoemaker of Empire, were killed when the roof of their dugout fell on them while they were in bed asleep.

Just one other danger that beset the pioneers.

Poisoning Plan Backfired On Perpetrators In 1871

An "affair of the heart" in 1871 turned into one of the strangest murder cases in McPherson's history.

It started when Robert Keiser was poisoned by "his wife and paramour, E. Handy." The couple fled the county, leaving Mrs. Handy behind. But they prepared to do away with her too, and poisoned a cheese to send her. Somehow, however, Mrs. Keiser got hold of the cheese and ate it, dying herself.

That same year was one of two other murders, one when a Mrs. Parisot was shot and killed and the other when a C. Morris was shot by James Savage.

It was almost a crime wave in 1871.

Which One Is The Oldest Building?

By Ed Weillepp

There is a wide difference of opinion among old timers as to the oldest building on Main Street. Not the first building ever put up, all agree on the Bowker Building; but some building, now standing on Main Street, which still contains some part of the foundation or walls of one of the old buildings.

The search has narrowed down to three business houses: The Daily Republican; The Telephone Building and Walker's Cafe.

Sometime prior to 1880 an unknown photographer took pictures of each block on Main Street. It is known that these photos were made before 1880 because the McPherson and Citizens State Bank Building, erected in 1880, do not show in the pictures.

One Side Burned

The entire west side of Main from Martin to Euclid burned to the ground in 1883, so this can be ruled out.

It is believed that the Republican building is the oldest, built some time about 1873 or 1874. At that time it was only 70 feet in length and was known as the McGinn Building. At one time church services were held on the second floor and preserved on the second floor today is a small patch of blackboard which was used either for school or church Sunday school lessons.

Although the building has given a new face and has been added to and remodeled, the foundation, basement walls and main walls of the front 70 feet are still the original building.

The telephone office building, site of the first building in this city, contains parts of the old Charles Wheeler Hardware Store building. The modern brick surface has been put on right over the original native stone. Old photographs show it to be about the same size as today, and certainly one of the most imposing structures in the town at that time.

Little is known about this building now housing Walker's Cafe. Early photos show that at one time it had a second story which housed a printing office and it was probably known as the McClintick Building. It was occupied for many years by the Pearson Sisters and their millinery store and was probably one of the last of the older buildings on Main Street to be remodeled.

It may be that there are other buildings on Main Street today which are older. The memories of old timers and early photographs, however, fail to record them.

Lydia Park Recalls Her Arrival Here

One early McPherson pioneer remembers vividly today her arrival in McPherson on October 16, 1878, with her mother, Mrs. Keziah Martin, and the four other children of the family. She is Lydia Martin Park, and this is her story:

"We spent the first night in the old 'Jeffers House' near the Santa Fe depot. Mother complained because she had to spend the night killing bedbugs, but Mrs. Jeffers told her if she remained in Kansas for a while, she would not let a little thing like a bedbug bother her.

"After breakfast, we went to Bowker's store to wait. . . . We waited until 4 o'clock before anyone came from northwest of town, then John Spiller Sr., said we could ride out with him to Grandfather Ramey's home. . . . the last lap of our journey from Knoxville, Iowa, was ended.

"I spent most of the winter helping my aunt, who lived in a dugout, gather fuel—corn stalks and cow chips. At first I refused to pick chips and used a sharp stick to help them in the sack. But familiarity breeds contempt and as the weather grew colder and a larger supply was needed, I wasn't so particular.

"In August, 1879, mother rented a little house at 601 S. Ash and we moved to town. She immediately had two 10-bushel boxes buried in the back yard to protect us from cyclones. . . . One night there was a flood instead of wind and we were almost drowned before we could get out. . . . some of the blizzards and hail storms were terrible. . . .

"The first school I attended in McPherson was in a little one-room building located near where the Stanley home now stands. I cannot remember the teacher's name, but she was an expert at cracking your knuckles with a ruler.

"Later a new brick building was erected where the Park school now stands and all pupils attended the same school. Prof. Hulise was the only superintendent. I remember who received two black eyes and a dreadful crack in his skull.

"All's well that ends well. My life in Kansas has been a happy one. . . . The belles of the gay nineties will never fear competition from any other generation. . . ."

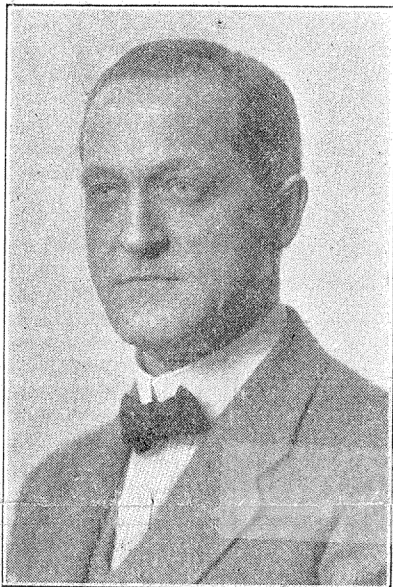
County Treasurer Robbed In 1875

McPherson broke into the crime pages in 1875, when a robbery was committed that never was solved—a robbery which left the county \$3,300 poorer.

C. B. Bowker, deputy county treasurer, had the books of the county at his office and a group of examiners were studying them. The treasurer, David Stephens, was away. The county had no safe, so that night, their inspection unfinished, the examiners turned the books over to H. Bowker. That was March 1.

The next morning the books and the money were gone.

On March 9, H. Bowker and C. B. Bowker were arrested and charged with the crime, but no evidence was presented that linked them with the robbery and there the case died, unsolved.



JOHN PAULDING, Chicago, creator of the General McPherson statue.

Went Up Fast

The young officer went up fast. In 1858 he became a lieutenant and was promoted to the rank of captain in 1861, the first year of the Civil War. He became a lieutenant-colonel and was chief engineer of the Army of Tennessee under General Grant.

He distinguished himself in commanding the infantry in the Battle of Corinth and was made a major general of volunteers and commander of a division. After Vicksburg he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the regular army on the strong recommendation of Grant in August, 1863.

By 1864 he was second in command to General Sherman, commanding the Army of the Tennessee under Sherman's supreme command in the campaign against Atlanta.

Killed In Action

On July 22, 1864, before Atlanta, he rode up through the woods to the Confederates' firing lines during a sudden violent attack by the enemy.

A shot through the lungs ended the life of the brilliant young warrior at the age of 36.

His body was returned to Clyde, Ohio, for burial.

It is said that General Grant, upon hearing of McPherson's death, said, "The country has lost one of its best soldiers and I have lost my best friend."

A Statute Proposed

In honor of its namesake, McPherson started a campaign in 1916 to raise money for a suitable memorial. Partly through tax levy but mostly through popular subscription a fund of \$15,000 was collected.

John Paulding, Chicago, was named the sculptor, and the granite base was ordered from the factory of the Giudici Brothers in Barre, Vt.

On June 20, 1917, the monument arrived and it was erected on June 21.

But the big celebration was not until July 4, 1917, when the official unveiling was held. Over 40,000 people crowded into McPherson for the event and the principal speakers included Arthur Capper, then governor of Kansas, and Gen. Nelson A. Miles, one-time chief of staff of the U. S. Army.

A plaque was added to the statue upon which are engraved the names of the 752 McPherson County men who served in the Union Army during the Civil War.

The life-sized statue of the general and his horse is considered one of the finest in the nation and is believed to be the only equestrian statue in Kansas.

Plenty Of Social Occasions Were Mixed With Hard Work In The Pioneer Days

Even for the early settlers, the oft-repeated maxim of all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy had its meaning and social affairs were mixed in with the more sober task of survival.

Where today bridge parties are the gathering place where local gossip is exchanged, the Swedish women of the 1870's had their cheese parties. When cool weather set in, women gathered from miles around in one home after another, bringing milk with them and making Christmas cheese for the pastor and for their own use. When the lengthy process of making the cheese was finished the women had their coffee and rolls, talked and even gossiped a bit.

At Christmas time came the dinners of Lutitfisk or stock fish and the cheese that had been made the preceding autumn. Home-made candles burned the windows early in the morning as the pioneers went to the Jultolla services.

Troubles for the pioneers sometimes were turned into social affairs, too, as the men came to help with the work when there had been sickness or an accident and the women gathered for a basket dinner and talk.

Another of the pastimes of the early pioneers was reading and discussing writings, for the people often came in their ox wagons to a school house or community meeting place for a meeting of the local literary society.

One of the accomplished hostesses of the early days was Mrs. Will McCormick. In the summer of 1875 she started making ice cream and many a lonely pioneer went to her house to laugh and play cards and eat ice cream in the evening and then go home feeling better. Mrs. McCormick, too, had a literary society but it was composed exclusively of college people.

There was dancing, too, usually in the school houses. The pioneers danced the Schottische, (three steps forward and three steps backward and whirl), the waltz, square and polka. Sometimes the dancing was in the homes, too.

While troubles didn't miss the pioneers, neither did the good times.

"A Dumb Good Clock"

When the courthouse was completed in 1894, the tower was furnished with a dummy clock.

Eleven years later E. A. Colburn at a meeting of the old Commercial Club on Feb. 7, 1906, suggested that the "dumb clock" be replaced by a "dumb good clock." The clock was bought with private subscriptions and \$400 appropriated by the county. It cost \$1,100 and first tolled the hours on August 2, 1907.

The big bronze bell weighs 1,980 pounds and one time 500 pounds of weights fell through the courthouse tower.

Street Cars Died Too Young

By Mark Anson

While the company didn't live out its allotted existence of 99 years, the McPherson Street Railway Company once operated horse-drawn street cars on Main Street and on Kansas Avenue.

The company was organized and got its charter January 26, 1886. It was formed for the purpose of "Constructing, maintaining equipment and operating lines in the aggregate length of 10 miles within the corporate limits of the City of McPherson."

Mrs. Susie Etter of McPherson, whose father owned a part of the railway, recalls that it extended from the Fair Grounds on Main Street, at the far north end of the present city limits, south about to the NCRA refinery site, although it usually stopped at the Rock Island tracks on the south unless there was a passenger to the end of the line.

The Kansas Avenue line ran from the Missouri-Pacific tracks on the west to College Hill on the east, with a branch line running to the cemetery, but that was operated only when there was a funeral.

Three street cars operated on the line, two on Main Street and one on Kansas Avenue. After William West bought the franchise from the original owners, the line was equipped with a car barn at Kansas and Elm Streets and more than four miles of track were laid.

Late in its existence, Mrs. Etter remembers, the drivers went on strike and she drove one of the cars, although she was but 15 years old at the time.

A number of old tokens, each good for one ride on the line, still are in existence and appear from time to time to bring nostalgic memories of the glamorous Eighties to the old timers and even to the youngsters.

On the tokens are the words curved around the face of the coin "McPherson Railway Company" with "STREET" across the center of the coin. On the back is a picture of a street car with a horse attached to it and the curved words "Good For One Fare."

But the street car company, originally incorporated for \$50,000, with 500 shares of stock valued at \$100 each, went broke about 1890, when one of the car operators was appropriating the funds for himself and from 1890 on, McPherson citizens walked.

Telephones Came In 1896

Something new was added to McPherson in 1896 and it was added at the Bixby-Lindsay Drug Store. The something new was the first telephone ever to be used in the city of McPherson.

That first telephone was a toll phone coming from Salina. Iron wire, 36 miles of it on poles placed 17 to a mile, connected McPherson and the Salina exchange which had been established two years before. The entire outfit cost about \$1,000 to install, considerably less than a single mile of the present copper line of many circuits connecting the two cities.

McPherson business men played a large part in getting the phone line, for the company didn't have the money to build it. The business men wanted that telephone and they sold tickets, each good for a phone call, to raise the money. Then, after the first phone was in, subscription lists were circulated and the money raised, together with money raised at Lindsborg, was enough to build the line and put in five or six phones in places of business here.

A few years later, J. H. Wright decided to put in a telephone exchange, the parent of the now-huge exchange here.

Those telephone pioneers had no easy time of it, for money was lacking to keep up with the constant demands for an extension of service and taxes went up. But the telephone stayed and grew until today, 51 years after that first telephone in McPherson, rare is the home without a phone.

Kentucky Creek Was Named In Early Days Of County By Reticent Hunter

By Anton Peterson

In the north central part of McPherson county a small stream known as Kentucky creek empties into the Smoky river. It is perhaps 15 miles long and its bed is generally made of granite, the greater part of the year.

Connected with this stream there is a story of early days which though now almost forgotten, still ought to be of interest because its chief actor was probably the first white man in this part of the county and because it explains the naming of the stream. The banks of Kentucky Creek are well wooded, and were before the county was settled. This was a haunt for beavers and other animals. Indians also probably used its sheltered bends for camping places, perhaps even for battle grounds, as we may infer from the flint arrow heads and implements that are sometimes found on the bottoms or in the bed of the stream.

When the first white (men) settlers reached this country they found one of their color here before them, a peculiar individual, who seemed to enjoy nothing so much as solitude. He spent his time in hunting and trapping and sold his skins to the traders of the Santa Fe Trail. How long he had been here he told no one, neither why he came nor anything else, only that he was a native of Kentucky. For this reason, whenever he was referred to, it was by the name of "Kentucky." Thus he lived, no one knows how, proving along the banks of his favorite stream from its source to its mouth and telling his story to no one. He probably had a dug-out or dwelling of some sort, which he used sometimes along the creek.

When the war of the rebellion broke out, "Kentucky" left Kansas and joined the Confederate army, with the probable intention of returning when the war would be at an end. However, nothing was heard from him afterwards. He probably met his death in battle, or upon returning, seeing that the country was fast becoming settled, withdrew to some more quiet place where he could live without being disturbed by men.

At any rate his creek received the name of Kentucky's creek or Kentucky creek and has ever since been known by that name.

Santa Fe Trail Brought Fame Early To McPherson County

By W. J. Krehbiel

From the time that Zebulon Pike showed traders to opulent Mexico the way through the Rockies, McPherson county has been on the map. The first freight train in about 1810 found the surest levels for travel, the timber patches and the water holes. Wealth lay at hungry Santa Fe, then in Mexico and older than the Plymouth Rock landing. Trading caravans of giant Conestoga wagons multiplied so fast that soon the Trail was so well marked with gaping ruts in prairie grass that no one needed a guide. At places it was 200 to 300 feet wide. When wet weather interfered, the caravans moved to dry prairie alongside, thus widening the road. Travelers did not enjoy driving alone so it was no uncommon sight to see six or eight strings of horses or mules plodding the ruts side by side.

The Trail entered McPherson county a few miles north and east of Canton and swung southwest, early south of Canton to a point 2 miles south of Galva where it crossed Turkey Creek, then no mean stream and with plenty of timber. There is where Charles Fuller in 1854 built his ranch house and tavern which became the rendezvous of travelers and migratory cowboys with their Texas longhorns fattening enroute to market. From Fuller's ranch it passed through the Santa Fe school grounds (one mile east and three south of McPherson) and crossed K17 three miles south of McPherson, continuing through Groveland and Hayes townships in a slightly southwestern direction to where the Little Arkansas river crosses the McPherson-Rice line in section 30.

At the Little River crossing but just over McPherson county's west line a Mr. Wheeler in 1865 built the famous Stone Corral. The next year the United States Army built there a large stockade by driving cottonwood logs into the earth so close together that no man could squeeze through. There was stationed the 7th Cavalry for two years and with it the man who later became the famous General George A. Custer who with his brigade were massacred by the Indians in Montana in 1876.

The Daughters of the American Revolution has marked the Trail through McPherson county with granite markers. One is east of Canton, one three miles south of McPherson on K17 and one on the west edge of the county. They also set a marker about a mile west of Elyria on Sora Kansas creek (now Dry Turkey) to mark the approximate spot where the United States made a treaty with the Kaw Indians in 1825 to insure peaceful travel over the Trail. Col. Inman in his book, The Santa Fe Trail, describes the spot as in an immense forest.

A railroad journey from New York to Jacksonville, Fla., required 27 1/2 hours in 1900 but only 19 1/3 hours in 1944.

The late President F. D. Roosevelt has his name or picture on about 40 stamps of 10 countries outside the United States.