

Ghost Towns

of
Greeley County,
Kansas

by
Conner Sorensen



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GHOST TOWNS

of

GREELEY COUNTY KANSAS

HECTOR

GREELEY

CENTER

TRIBUNE

HORACE

Conger Sorensen

Ghost Towns in Greeley County

— by Conner Sorensen

Across the high plains of western Kansas and eastern Colorado the rivers flow in long parallel lines from west to east. When the railroads came, they built up the major river valleys, the Santa Fe on the Arkansas and the Kansas Pacific on the Smokey Hill, and settlements sprang up in their wake. Just east of the Kansas-Colorado border, on the high land between the Arkansas and the Smokey Hill rivers, lay the rolling prairies from which Greeley county was to be formed. Settlement in this area was thus a sort of backwater lagging behind the beachhead towns along the railroads: Wallace, Sharon Springs, and Wakeeney to the north; Kendall, Syracuse, and Coolidge to the south.

Prime Field for Speculation

With settled areas to the east, north and south, Greeley county area became prime field for speculative interests, especially speculation in town property. The railroads brought a large influx of immigrants into the general area between 1886 and 1888. Within these same three years a railroad was constructed through the county itself. Disputation over the possible location of the county seat was a significant factor. The story of four ghost towns that blossomed and died between 1886 and 1888 is the story of the by-product of town building in a situation of speculation, railroad construction, and county seat disputes.

HECTOR, the First Ghost Town

Hector, the first ghost town in Greeley county was founded by the Greeley County Land and Town company with headquarters in Garden City. A glance at the residences and of the

company directors indicates the widespread attraction for speculation in western town property. A. R. McCartney, president, and O. V. Hays, secretary, were from Garden City; George W. Johnston, treasurer was from Boonville, Mo.; J. H. Mathers, town agent, was from Wallace, and J. T. Samsdell was from Topeka.

Watch Greeley With Interest

This town company had been watching Greeley county with interest. In 1884 there were only about 20 people in the county, and a few more in 1885, but in 1886 immigration began in earnest, adding some 500 persons that year. Early in the spring of 1886, they sent their agents out to choose a town site. They selected a location on a high level plain about four miles north of present day Horace where a post office had been established December 15, 1885. On March 23, 1886, they purchased a 40 acre plot for \$120. In April, C. C. Thompson began publishing the Horace Echo, a newspaper which served mainly as the promotional organ of the Greeley Land and Town company. The campaign to attract people to Hector began with this puzzling invitation:

If you are an honest, industrious, sober citizen, and want a good home in the grandest country on earth, come to Greeley county and get it. If you are a meddlesome, lazy, backbiting, scandalmonger, stay where you are and save the peaceable inhabitants the expense of purchasing tar and feathers for your ornery carcass (sic).

Although Thompson complained in his first issue that "...

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running a printing office on the lee side of nothing puts us to great inconvenience," the Hector Echo was soon flooding western Kansas with supplements urging settlers to come to Hector and "put up a building and secure good lots free before it is everlastingly too late." Hector, "the Biggest Boomer of the Booming Southwest," ran the posters, was "Emphatically the Last Chance."

Several Businesses Located

These tactics must have had some positive effect for that spring several business located in Hector. These included the land company of Donahue and Melhorn; C. A. Murphy, a well digger; a lumber yard operated by C. P. Orwan of Wallace; a hardware store operated by Burrington and Boyle; I. W. Hitchcock, a carpenter; and A. A. House who sold trees for timber claims. Incidentally, C. C. Thompson in partnership with his brother operated a land and loan company and sold organs and sewing machines on the side in addition to printing the Echo each week.

Hector Had Two Hotels

Soon Hector had the distinction of having two hotels and two stage lines. The buffalo house of Thomas Bowles on the Hector, Syracuse and Wallace Star route soon encountered the competition of the Reynolds' Palace hotel on the Coolidge, Hector and Sharon Springs Daily Stage. These two back lines forming a long "X" across Greeley county stopped at Hector each trip, which according to the Echo, made Hector, "the commercial center of the county." Another source of town pride was the excellent public well, completed by the middle of May, with 13 feet of water, "cool, clean and clear,"

which supplied the nearby settlers. Even residents of Tribune had to haul water from Hector for a time, some of them sneaking over after dark.

To these substantial accomplishments was added the rathered fantastic claim that 400 town lots had been sold and that \$40,000 worth of Hector stock had been bought by Kansas and Missouri capitalists. Seemingly the only thing remaining was for some one to strike gold in the main street of Hector, a possibility that must have occurred to the Echo editor, for on May 13, 1886 came the headline, "GOLD DISCOVERED AT HECTOR." "Large quantities taken from a well at Hector," the article asserted. "We believe the precious metal to be in sufficient quantities to pay for working . . . the close proximity to the great gold fields renders this belief most tenable."

Boom Was Over

Yet despite the propaganda of the Echo, Hector's boom was over by mid summer. Hector was located just four miles west of Tribune on the same side of the White Woman creek, and Tribune had considerably more support from the settlers, who felt that one town north of the White Woman was enough. In June an election was held in which Greeley county voted as a township of Hamilton county. Hector gave her votes to Tribune to place the township officers over there. During the summer and fall Hector was transplanted to Tribune. The Echo ceased publication in July and the post office was discontinued in November.

The Greeley Land and Town Company, with their town moved off their site, indulged in a parting shot. According to

Greeley House); Hunter and Davis Loan Company; E. Brown's General Store; Charles Osker's Palace Drug Store; J. H. Morley's Lumber Yard; and V. V. Martin's City Bakery with a harness and shoe shop in connection. The Hooker brothers operated a blacksmith shop and manufactured "cut away plow" for breaking the sod.

Had Great Promises

Greeley Center seemed to have had great promise. It was established early and attracted an impressive number of businesses and settlers to swell its population. But that fall one of the most interesting and significant events of town development in Greeley county took place. On Aug. 11, 1886, the brand new town of Horace was plotted three miles southeast of Greeley Center and on September 16 the Gazette moved to the fledging town. "This will probably be a surprise to many of our readers," Ben Wible comments in the first issue from his new location. By Sept. 16, Horace, barely a month old, contained two lumber yards, a hardware store, a restaurant, dry goods store, two real estate dealers, a livery stable, a physician, a drug store, a hotel, three building contractors, a newspaper (the Gazette), a post office and numerous houses. The significance of all this for Greeley Center was that many citizens and many firms moved over to Horace.

The question is, why did these people move from Greeley Center to Horace? Contemporary witnesses indicate that they were motivated by the same speculative hopes that had planned Greeley Center, only here it was the individuals themselves who wanted to reap the profits of boom town specula-

tion rather than have outside interests do so such as the Greeley Town Company. The Wichita Standard comments that "... the boys are tired of trying to build a town without the aid of a company who would derive all the benefits" and the Nickerson Register states that the Wible brothers "... finding the town was not backing them in their work, changed their base of operations to a more appreciative community." But the Greeley Center people had a slightly different version of their reasons for moving, as shown by the following indignant statement:

"The Horace Gazette of last week slopped over considerably in trying to impress on its readers . . . that Horace is 'the people's town' when they know that the town company is composed of only five persons, and that the scheme of making that the county seat and also making the fortunes of the concoctors was planned as early as July, 1885. Four persons were put on that land for the express purpose of proving it up for a town site . . . Blow up your town, boys, with all your might and main, that's right, but for heaven's sake don't give us 'the peoples town' racket."

Lose to Horace

Greeley Center lost a substantial number of businesses to Horace that fall but the town was by no means through. Some eastern Kansas businessmen became interested in it and succeeded in replacing the Greeley Town Company with their own Greeley Center Town Company. A. N. Deming became president; J. R. Price of Hutchinson, vice-president; M. A. White of Arkansas City, secretary; and Robert O. Deming of Oswego, treasurer. Price, the vice president,

was the only director who had been in the original Greeley Town Company.

Then in November, 1886, two months after the Gazette moved to Horace, Greeley Center got a new paper, the Greeley County News, edited by A. J. Hunter, another member of the Greeley Town Company. Hunter, who had lived in Greeley Center since its birth that spring, expressed confidence in its future. "Greeley Center," he announced, "is now in the eve of her ascendancy . . . owned and backed by one of the strongest town companies in western Kansas . . . her future seems assured."

Showed Signs of Revival

In the spring Greeley Center showed definite signs of revival. Some houses were moved back from Horace, and a half dozen new buildings, including a new hotel, were constructed, and the first ice cream parlor was opened. A new city hall, 24' x 60', was completed and the Union Sunday School of Greeley Center held a cake and ice cream sale to dedicate it. The prairie schooners of new immigrants crowded the streets and citizens of Tribune and Horace came over to watch the boom.

Just what part the Greeley Center Town Company played in this renewed activity, if any, remains unclear. Sometime that spring another town company became involved in Greeley Center. This was the Lombard Town Company, consisting mostly of Leoti businessmen, which incorporated on June 8, 1887. These men were William D. Reed and H. P. Smith of Leoti, E. H. Conn of Tribune, and James Linney, John Y. Foster, W. R. Wiley, and Forest Wickey who gave their address as Lombard. Why the Greeley Center Town Com-

pany withdrew their support remains unexplained. The actions of the Lombard Company, on the other hand, reveal a hint as to motivation for supporting Greeley Center. It seemed likely that the railroad was coming to Greeley Center, and if this proved true, the county seat might be established there.

On June 2, the News declared that at the "eleventh hour" Greeley Center had entered the county seat contest and though small in size compared to Tribune or Horace, it had more friends than either of them. Greeley Center based its chances on several factors. It was in a good geographical position near the center of the county and since Tribune and Horace were deadlocked in bitter rivalry, the town that lost in the preliminary fight might join with Greeley Center to establish the county seat there. But all other considerations depended on the prime factor, the railroad. For 1887 was the year of railroads in Greeley county and it was well understood that all other aspects of town development depended on which road (or roads) would be built, where it would go, and where its depots would be located.

Many R. R. Lines Planned

The 1880's were the heyday of railroad promotion and construction, and numerous lines were planned for Greeley county. Rumors and reports of all shades of validity and credibility circulated freely. In April, 1886, Kansas and Missouri businessmen were reported to have filed a charter for the Memphis and Western Railroad which would pass through Greeley Co. from east to west. In May the Greeley Center editor had been "reliably informed that the Union Pacific was commencing

a survey from some point west of Wallace through Greeley Center to the Texas panhandle, to be built that summer. In July appeared the triumphant headline, "WE TOLD YOU SO!" based on the information that the Kansas, Scott City, and Colorado Railroad was running a survey just south of town and that this was a sure thing and Greeley Center was to be the county seat. This road was to run through Scott, Wichita and Greeley counties with a depot at Greeley Center and the railroad also planned to build two towns on the eastern and western borders of the county.

Railroad Was Chartered

In August, the Kansas, Colorado, and Pacific Railroad was chartered. Originally it was to run from St. Louis to Denver and on to the coast, but later its range was restricted to Salina and McPherson westward. In November the advance engineers of the Chicago, Kansas and Western Railroad, a branch of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe camped near town and assured the citizens that Greeley Center would be the county seat. They were back in January, 1887, and again in April, this time with the news that the C. K. & W. R. R. was now running cars to Lane county, 70 miles to the east, and that they planned to reach the western border of Kansas by January 1, 1888.

In March, 1887, surveyors of the Syracuse, Montana and Texas Railroad were running a survey north and south through Greeley county. This railroad was planned to run from Miles City, Montana to Galveston, Texas, with the purpose of shipping cattle and grain to the coast.

Could Do Nothing

Yet all these assurances could

do nothing for Greeley Center unless the "paper railroads" actually constructed their lines. The only one that was to lay its track in Greeley county was the Denver, Memphis and Atlantic Railroad. The D.M. and A. surveyors, who made their headquarters at Greeley Center in March, 1887, told the townspeople to "Look out for the cars" before snow flies, and their track was complete to the state line before winter.

The Denver, Memphis and Atlantic was controlled by the Missouri Pacific Railroad thru ownership of its capital stock. It had two sections of track, all in Kansas. One section extended from Chetopa to Larned with a branch from Stafford to the Kansas-Oklahoma state line. It was 272 miles long. The other section was building from the east line of Ness county west to the state line where it was eventually to connect with the Pueblo and State Line Railroad in Colorado. The Missouri Pacific acquired control of the D. M. and A. late in 1887 and did a small amount of actual construction.

Anxiety Running High

By June 30, 1887, the D. M. and A. had reached Scott City, some 4 miles to the east, and anxiety was running high in all the Greeley county towns as to where the railroad would actually come. Horace, feeling somewhat uneasy about its position since the railroad surveyors had repeatedly made their headquarters at Greeley Center, made a last minute appeal for Tribune, Horace, and Greeley Center to combine to form one town on the railroad, presumably at Horace. Greeley Center countered with the familiar project of a new town, "a peoples town" on the railroad.

The suspense must have been well nigh unbearable that July as the iron rails inched across the prairie through Wichita Co. at two miles per day. The people of Greeley Center watched the road crew work just one-half mile south of town. In early August the smoke from the engines of the construction crew could be seen from town and were causing "much enthusiasm" in Greeley Center.

No Siding at Greeley Center

But it was no use. When the D. M. and A. was completed to the state line in August 11, 1887, siding had been put in at Horace and at least two other places on the open prairie, but none at Greeley Center. Possible reasons for locating sidings where there were no towns will be discussed later. Why Horace got a depot and Greeley Center did not is open to speculation. Horace was larger, closer to the railroad tracks, and perhaps her water supply was better, although this was disputed at the time.

But the fact is that Horace did get the railroad facilities and Greeley Center did not. Thus Greeley Center lost its last chance to survive and within a year she was to become the second ghost town in the county. A list of the towns in the county made that winter does not even mention Greeley Center and by 1894 the last trace was cleared away and the townsite plowed up.

REID —

• The coming of the D.M. & A. spelled the end of Greeley Center and the beginning of Reid. name from Whitelaw Reid, at that time editor of the New York Herald Tribune; One of the sidings of the new railroad was

placed right out on the prairie 2½ miles west of Greeley Center and became the site of the new town. The agency behind this strange development was the Denver and Memphis Town Company of Sedgwick, Kansas. This somewhat elusive organization had some connection with the railroad, at least to the extent of knowing where the depots were to be located.

The chain of events which led to the founding of Reid is as follows: On July 21, 1887, the D.M. & A. construction crew was laying track one half mile south of Greeley Center. It was not until four days later, July 25, that the D. M. & A. agent bought the 100 foot right of way from Joseph McMurtry two and one half miles west of Greeley Center where Reid would stand. Yet two weeks earlier the D. M. & A. Town Company had already made an agreement with Mr. McMurtry to buy an 80 acre plot south of the railroad survey. The agreement was that McMurtry would sell the land to them for \$200 and that he would receive in addition one business lot and two residence lots in the new town. The D. M. & A. Town Company guaranteed that the D. M. & A. depot would be located there and that a town would be laid out. The agreement was sealed with a \$500 bond which either party would lose if the agreement were not fulfilled.

Kept Their Bargain

The D. M. & A. Town Company evidently kept their part of the bargain, for September 22, 1887, the Greeley Center paper reported that their surveyors were busy laying out the new town on the railroad. This sealed the fate of Greeley Center. In the fall of 1886 she had lost heavily to Horace and now in the fall of 1887, Reid and Horace

were to take what was left of her. A. J. Hunter of the Greeley County News followed his predecessor to Horace and most of the buildings were soon moved to Horace or Reid.

The fall of 1887 was Reid's turn to boom. The Greeley County Tribune was moved from Tribune to Reid, and J. M. Hawkins, its new editor, changed its name to the Greeley County Republican. Under its former editor, Carter Hutchinson, the Greeley County Tribune had been Democratic, as had all the other papers in the county, which, however, was then, as now, predominantly Republican. When Tribune won the permanent county seat in November, 1888, the Republican was moved back to Tribune where it has remained. In the first issue of the Republican, November 3, 1887, Hawkins announced that "... where two weeks ago we were nothing but buffalo grass, today we boast of 10 businesses and houses already completed." The evacuation of Greeley Center to Reid which had already begun continued throughout the winter. In December the Greeley Center Sunday School moved to Reid and in February 1888, the pride of Greeley Center, her three story hotel, was moved to Reid.

Roster of Businesses

In the year of Reid's boom the roster of businesses advertised in the Republican indicates J. Y. Foster's Grocery Store (with groceries, hardware, cigars and notions); F. P. Goodan's Land and Loans Agency; A. T. McLaughlin, M. D., Physician and Surgeon; Frank Bowels' Reid Hotel (later run by E. R. Palmer); J. M. Hawkins Real Estate and Loan Agency; J. A. Beeler and Company, Headquarters for Boots and Shoes, and Groceries; C. F.

Logan's General Store with Groceries, Meats, Flour Seed Oats, Hats, Clothing. Feed and Canon City Coal; Spargur Brothers (who moved from Horace) and sold John Deere plows. Holliday Windmills. and a full line of tree and garden Seeds; I. B. Newman's Astor House; and the Fulton Brothers store.

Changed Hands Rapidly

Under the surface of this boom, Reid town-site property changed hands rapidly. A new town company, composed mostly of residents of Reid, incorporated as the Chicago Townsite and Investment Company, December 15, 1887. Its directors were John Lewis, president; D. D. John, vice-president (from Windfall, Indiana); W. C. John, secretary; and J. Jewell, treasurer.

The Reid townsite was located on the north half of the quarter section owned by Joseph McMurtry who had agreed to sell this plot to the D. M. & A. under bond of \$500. That this transfer never took place was probably due to the influence of the men who founded the Chicago Townsite and Investment Company. On December 12, three days before incorporation, Lewis and John bought the south half of McMurtry's quarter for \$200. Then on December 30 they bought the north half, (The Reid town site) again for \$200, agreeing to pay any suit which might be brought against McMurtry by the D. M. & A. Town Company. Thus the local company replaced the D. M. & A. company in the Reid townsite.

Town Lot Drawing

One of the promotional schemes tried by the new company was a town lot drawing. Tickets were \$25 each; all lots were "in the original townsite of 160 acres," and every fourth ticket was a business lot.

That spring another group of townmen, anxious not to miss this opportunity, formed the Astor town company. The directors of this company, styling themselves as "the people town company of Reid," included Aaron Moore, president; D. S. McGee, vice-president; J. Jewell, secretary; and T. A. Carson, treasurer. They incorporated with the purpose of laying out and selling additions, and soon bought the quarter section across the tracks north of Reid for \$1,600. E. J. Lee, who sold them the quarter, had bought it one year previously for \$200, which illustrates the profits possible in boom town property. See Greeley County Register of Deeds, Final Receipts, I, 125.

These two companies soon combined and reorganized to form the Union Town Company of Greeley County. Its directors were W. N. Paine, president; T. A. Carson, vice-president; C. W. Spargur, manager; and W. C. John, secretary.

Anything Possible . . .

Today it is difficult for us to see just what these men expected Reid to become, but to them almost anything must have seemed possible. After all, Reid had already replaced Greeley Center, one of the largest and oldest towns in the county. They were on the railroad and they had a depot. So the promoters decided to try for nothing less than to bring the county seat to Reid.

The county-seat fight was well under way before Reid was founded. In 1886 Tribune had won the township election, and with 81 out of 161 votes naturally claimed that she would be the county seat when the county would be organized. At that time, Greeley Center had complained that the election was

kept secret until a half hour before the voting took place, and that many of the votes cast were not by eligible voters. Tribune had her hopes confirmed a year later however, when Governor Martin sent S. O. McDowell as county enumerator to determine if there were the requisite 2,000 residents to organize the county. McDowell was also to take a county-wide poll to determine preference for temporary county seat. The poll taken by 1887 went to Tribune, but this time Horace charged fraud in the census and filed an injunction to keep the county from being organized.

Injunction Filed in 1887

The injunction was filed in June, 1887, and was in effect during the fall and winter of Reid's emergence. Reid supporters (as had the Greeley Center supporters before them) hoped for a draw between Tribune and Horace and a compromise choice of Reid for the county seat. Against Tribune they repeated Horace's injunction charges of fraud. Even more important, the D. M. & A. railroad (which was built after McDowell's poll) had missed Tribune, going 1½ miles to the south on the other side of the creek. Horace was unfit also, they said, because of its saloons, gambling, and houses of ill fame, and one murder had been committed there already. One Reid booster summed up the situation in these words:

Has No Railroad Station

Tribune has no railroad station. The trains do not even stop there and to see those who wish to get off at Tribune go rolling down the dump is an amusing sight . . . How would it look to see a county judge plowing up the ground with his nose, and smashing

his plug hat against a tie? It would never do. Horace has the railroad but no good water. They also have "tanglefoot" and the brains of our county officials would be in precarious condition. Reid is the only town with good water and a railroad depot.

Reid New and Growing

It was true that Tribune had approximately 200 inhabitants and Horace 300 while Reid had 50, but Reid was new and growing. Feelings between Tribune and Horace were becoming so embittered over the injunction that it was felt they would never vote for each other. In addition, the western half of the county was heavily populated at that time, and it was calculated that if Tribune and Horace balanced each other off the western settlers could deliver a majority of some 50 votes for Reid.

Despite these hopes, events worked against Reid. Tribune moved across the creek in December and January to relocate on the railroad, and after some haggling she was granted a depot by the Missouri Pacific. Then in July, 1888, the injunction was lifted and Tribune was declared the temporary county seat. It soon became clear that votes from the western part of the county would go to Horace rather than Reid. Part of the reason for this was the rivalry between Reid and Colokan, another town that had sprung up to the west, in the wake of the railroad. Further, dislike had developed for the Lombard Town Company which was connected with Reid. Early in the summer the Lombard Company had hired two prominent men from the Presbyterian Colony located now in the west. These men had done some construction work in Greeley Center, but the Com-

pany had refused to pay them.
Tribune Won 420 to 202

When the vote for permanent county seat was taken in November, 1888, Tribune won with a total of 420 votes to 202 votes for Horace. Reid received only two votes. A week after the election the Republican moved back to Tribune, and Reid began its decline. In 1891 there were only 25 people living at Reid, and for some reason they had changed the name of the town to Astor. By this time the business houses had dwindled to six: J. A. Beeler's Central Store; W. K. Hunter's Hotel; J. Jewell's real estate and notary public offices; L. R. Rodgers drug store; and H. Tiernan, the railway and express agent. Within a few years even these were gone. The buildings were probably moved to Tribune and Horace, although I have no record of this. The town company ceased paying taxes on their land in 1897, and in 1901 the quarter section was sold for \$35.01 in back taxes.

COLOKAN —

• Colokan was the last of the ghost towns in Greeley county. Its history stands apart from that of the other towns. Located on the western border rather than near the center it could not hope to contend for the county seat. Colokan was different also in that it developed after the surrounding country had been settled. Colokan, like the other towns in the county, was a speculative venture, but its history is really the climax of two earlier developments. The first settling of western Greeley County was accomplished by organized colonization. This is an interesting variation from the usual pattern of immigration, homesteading, and settlement.

For the story of these colonies we must look back to the spring of 1886 for it was then that the first large influx of settlers came into the county. Among those settlers was a group of Civil War veterans from the vicinity of Murphysboro, Illinois. These men formed a soldier's colony for the purpose of taking up soldiers claims in the west. Officials of the soldiers' colony were R. H. Morgan; president; R. Q. Thompson, vice-president; W. A. Rogers, secretary; and C. J. Childs, treasurer. Incidentally Thompson and Rogers had both served in the Illinois legislature.

Choose Greeley County

From Illinois this group had traveled through St. Louis and Kansas City to Garden City where they stopped to make a survey of western Kansas. The reasons for their eventual choice of western Greeley County were given in a circular which they published upon arriving back in Illinois. In southwestern Kansas, according to the circular, there were too many sand hills, and water was as much as 125 to 175 feet down. Hamilton County looked better but there were no large tracts of land left for settlement. Traveling north to Greeley County they found that even here much of the land close to the towns was taken. In Greeley Center they hired a surveyor who took them west to the state line (12 miles). The circular continues:

... the farther we went the better the country seemed to be. These prairies are sometimes called rolling prairies because the land rises and falls in gentle swells, which attain an elevation of about twenty feet and descend again to their original level. We saw several wild horses and antelope and prairie dogs without

numbers (sic). On arriving at the state line we took our spade and began to dig to find the depth of the soil, as the surface was all we could ask for. We went down to a depth of four feet in several places and found a black, sandy loam, seemingly with "no bottom."

Being thus convinced that this was the best location they immediately filed for 42 claims, which still left room for many more. The Civil War veteran had special privileges under the homestead legislation. He could file through an agent rather than in person. If he had been wounded he could subtract his period of enlistment from the five years proving up period (provided that he live on the land at least one year), and his widow or orphan children had the same privileges he did. See Kansas Board of Agriculture, Fourth Annual Report, 1875, p. 331.) The circular concluded with this admonition and invitation:

We do not advise everybody to go to this country. In fact we do not advise anyone to go unless they make up their minds to go to stay and rough it a little at the start; but if you are poor in health, poor in pocket, with no prospect of bettering either, then pull up stakes and go to the golden west.

Soldiers Repended

The soldiers with their families who responded to this opportunity began arriving on their claims the following spring and summer (1887). This colony in the west central part of the county was one of two such developments which became important factors in the brief history of Colokan.

The other colony to settle in Greeley County was composed of United Presbyterians. In the

same spring that Morgan and Thompson were searching for a colony site, C. M. Rogers of Hale, Iowa, and Dr. J. C. Kilgore of Manmouth, Iowa were touring the west with some friends. While in western Kansas they became impressed with the opportunity Greeley County offered for carrying out a pet plan of theirs. This plan for colonization had formed on the many trips they made together during which they would camp by the wayside and read stories of the colony business. Earlier they had listened eagerly to their fathers who told of early days, so now they resolved to try their plan in western Kansas.

The group they enlisted made preparations through the winter and in early spring, 1887, they packed their household goods, implements, and stock on twelve railroad cars, and headed west. Some of the men came before the others on passenger trains and other accompanied the freight, while most of the women stayed at Manmouth awaiting orders. Some 30 persons went in that migration. They traveled on the Union Pacific to Wallace, then drove their wagons to their new homes in west central Greeley County, south of the soldiers' claims. A list of persons in this first migration has survived. On it we find: from Hale: Marion Lynch and mother, William A. Mitchell, Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Rodgers, C. M. Rogers, Miss Romaine Rodgers, and C. H. Rodgers; from Little York: Emmett McCoy, Miss Bessie McCoy, Miss Nettie McCoy, Mr. Louver, Mrs. Morris, and Edward Blodgett; from Eleanor: J. M. Paine, Miss Gillie Paine, and W. T. Paine; from Alexis: Mr. Brown and brother-in-law. Taken from Manmouth,

Illinois Atlas and quoted in the News, March 17, 1887.

25 Families on Claims

By February, 1887, there were some 25 families on their claims. and in March, barely a month after the colony was founded, Reverend A. B. McCarroll preached to a congregation of 47 persons in the residence of S. S. Williamson. A church building was planned, and by that fall (1887), when the building was complete, the congregation had over 100 members. At that time it was said that no section of the county looked more pleasant, with good frame buildings and a fire guard around each claim.

When the D. M. & A. was completed through the county in August, 1887, it went between the soldiers' colony to the north and the United Presbyterian colony to the south. With this concentration of settlers on either side of the railroad, the possibility of a town in the midst must have impressed many persons. Accordingly, in September the Colokan Town Company was formed with R. G. Burnett of Sheridan Lake, Colorado, president; A. D. Jones of Coolidge, Kansas, vice-president; George Lee of Coolidge, treasurer; and James Montgomery of Soldiers Colony, secretary. They chose a site on the railroad just one half mile from the state line, near a post office that had been established December 2, 1886. On September 26, 1887, the plat for the new town was filed, and Colokan. "The Star of Western Kansas," was born. On November 10, 1887, James Montgomery bought 80 acres adjoining the railroad for \$1,600 and the same day transferred it to the Western Town Company (another name for the Colokan Town Company).

Newspaper Established

A newspaper was established in Colokan, the Colokan Graphic, edited by O. Q. McNeil. Its first issue on November 10, 1887, contained advertisements for Robert Rockwell's new hotel and restaurant with "meals at all hours," S. S. Williamson's real estate and notary public office, and the building partnership of Morgan and Thompson. By spring several more businesses had opened including S. C. Clover's feed store; a General Store which offered groceries, flour, feed, and coal; a grocery store operated by Boggs and Woliver; and a blacksmith shop run by Charles Holmes. "We are here to stay," wrote McNeil of the Graphic.

From its inception Colokan had competition from another town just across the state line, Towner, Colorado. With the two towns only one and one half miles apart, it was obvious that the train could not stop at both places. Though Colokan had originally been given a siding it was soon taken up promoting this caustic indictment from the Graphic:

The D. M. & A. is the grandest fraud we ever saw . . . It refuses to stop at Colokan, haul lumber there, put in a crossing and culvert over the wagon road and it tries to build up Towner.

McNeil was assured that the Missouri Pacific would give them a depot when it took over operation of the railroad, and when this proved to be a false hope he waited expectantly on the Santa Fe which unfortunately stopped construction at the eastern border of the county.

In the mean time efforts were made to "relocate" the Towner

depot in Colokan. One report is that some Colokan men went to Towner one dark night and stole the depot but were mortified to discover in the morning that they had taken the wrong building.

As the feud between Colokan and Towner continued the Colokan Town Company underwent some modifications. R. G. Burnett was replaced by A. D. Jones as president, and in February there were talks between the Colokan and the D. M. & A. Companies over the proposition of combining Colokan and Towner at one of the two sites. The Colokan Town Company soon merged with D. M. & A. Town Company which would seem to indicate that Colokan would get no more support. The situation is not clear, however, because in March the D. M. & A. apparently began stopping for passengers at Colokan.

Tire of Dispute

By the middle of the summer the situation was pretty much a stalemate. Some settlers, tired of the whole dispute, moved over to start a new town on the state line. Others opposed the state-line compromise because of the obvious drawbacks of being under two sets of state laws. McNeil of the Graphic stopped publication in July and moved to Horace where he took up the practice of law. Greeley County citizen travelling on the D. M. & A. in August describes the situation in these words:

Colokan . . . we . . . found making faces at its neighbor and rival Towner 1½ miles distant. They are engaged in a friendly contest just now trying to see which one can strike the blue shale first . . . Like man and wife the two are one, but the question is, which one.

Evidently Towner struck the "blue Shale" first. Colokan had already had two dry wells and whether she ever had any well with water was challenged by some. Towner retained the depot and Colokan lost the friendly dispute with her neighbor. In 1889 her businesses had dwindled to three: Charles Holmes, blacksmith; R. H. Morgan, lawyer; and Hortio Perkins, notary public. The Western Kansas Town Company disposed of their interests in the town site. The post office remained until December 15, 1892, when it too was removed, the last vestige of old Colokan, "The Star of Western Kansas."

By winter 1888 the first flush of immigration into Greeley County was over and the population began to decline. The population had risen from 20 persons in 1885 to 500 in 1886 and then jumped to 2,461 in 1887. There were no census returns for 1888, but in 1889 the population dropped to 2,079 and then to 1,401 in 1890. The decline in population plus the fact that the railroad was completed and the county seat permanently settled meant the end of boom town building and speculation. The promoters moved on to new fields farther west leaving as their legacy four ghost towns in Greeley County: Hestor, Greeley Center, Reid, and Colokan.

Location of the ghost towns in Greeley County from records in the Office of Register of Deeds:

Hector — NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 36, Twp. 17, R41.

Greeley Center — Five 40 acre plots in Section 16, Twp. 18, R41.

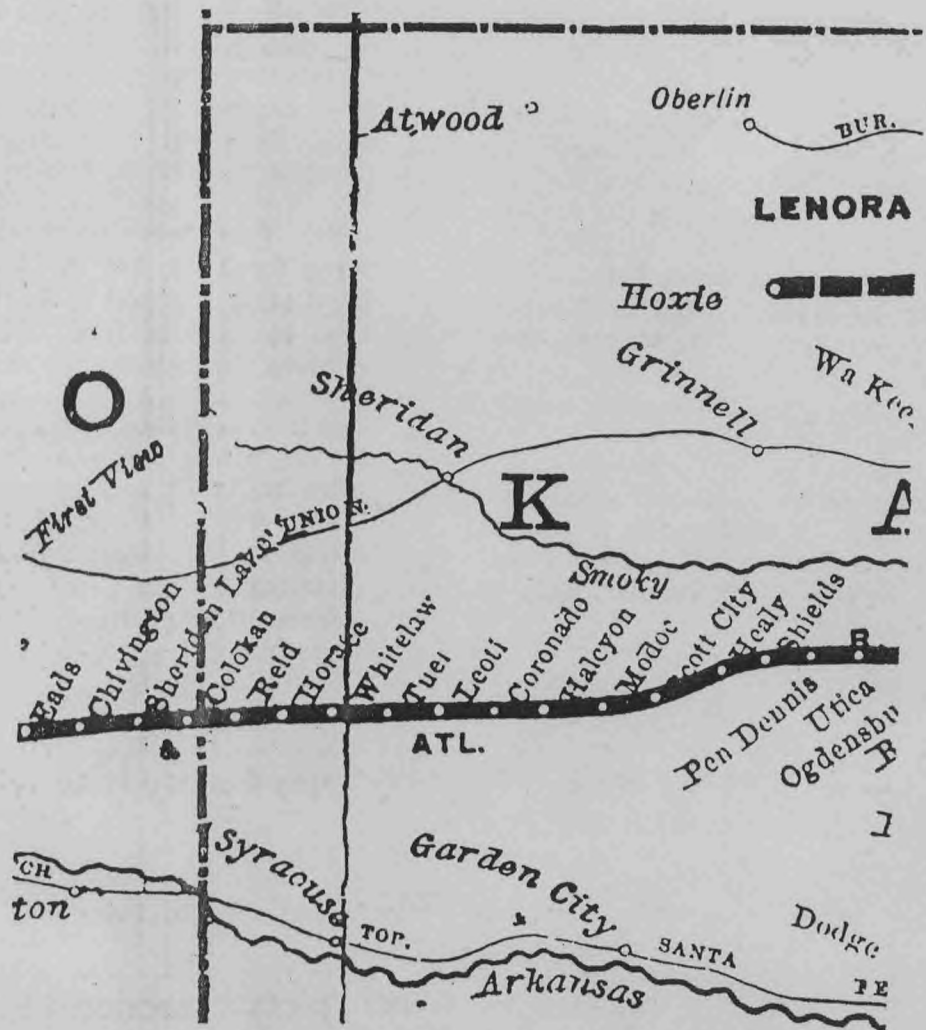
Reid — SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 24, Twp. 18, R42; and the Astor addition — NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 24, Twp. 18, R42.

Colokan — S $\frac{1}{2}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 23, Twp. 18, R43.

Tribune (original townsite) — Section 16, Twp. 18, R40.
Horace (original townsite) — SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 36, Twp. 18, R41; moved to NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 24, Twp. 18, R40 and NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 19, Twp. 18, R40 in August, 1886.

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The map on the front cover shows Greeley County as it appeared just prior to the construction of the Denver, Memphis, and Atlantic Railroad in August and September, 1887. (Louis H. Evert's "Official State Atlas of Kansas," 1887)

The map reproduced on this page, dated 1888, shows some of the changes after the completion of the railroad, including the disappearance of Hector and Greeley Center, and the appearance of Whitelaw, Reid, and Colokan. This map does not show the move of Tribune across the White Woman Creek. "Tuel" is possibly another name for Selkirk. Annual Report . . . of the Missouri Pacific Railway Company, 1888, reproduced in A. Bower Sagerer, "Building the Main Line of the Missouri Pacific Through Kansas," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XXI (Spring, 1955), facing page 328.)