

THE STORY OF DEEP HOLE

Clark County, Kansas

Originally written by Ella Mendenhall and Roland E. Mayse

Rewritten by ELMER STEGMAN

References: The Clark County Clipper and The Harper County Journal (Published at Buffalo, Oklahoma)

* *Additional information added about certain people mentioned in this story*

Deep Hole was formerly a small area in Clark County, but it is now extinct. However, in the beginning, the name Deep Hole designated a deep quicksand hole in the Cimarron River. Later, close to the same area, was the location of the town by the same name. It was ten miles south of Ashland, Kansas, just below the point at which Clark Creek empties into the Cimarron River. It was at the point where the Cimarron River crossed by the "Wire Trail". The Wire Trail was the name given to the telegraph line, which at that time was the connecting link between Fort Dodge, Kansas, and Camp Supply, located in the Indian Territory.

At Fort Dodge and Camp Supply, soldiers were stationed to protect the early settlers from the Indians who, at times were none too peaceful. At times, when the settlers aroused natural hostility of the Indians to a very high feeling of animosity, the Indians went on a warpath—looting and killing to their heart's content. It was the duty of the soldiers to prevent this from happening, as much as they could.

A very interesting account is given as to how Deep Hole received such a natural and very appropriate name. This is how it happened: A group of government freighters were on their way to the camp supply with several wagons. The wagons were loaded with food and other supplies for the soldiers who were stationed at a place not yet named. When they reached the Cimarron River, it was full to the top of its banks. It was a roaring, whirling, raging mass of brush, trash, and muddy water.

At that time there was no bridge across the rivers in the west and to cross them it was necessary to ford the river, which meant finding a place you thought the water was low enough to cross. Forging a treacherous stream was a very dangerous undertaking, and it was doubly so when there was quicksand in the stream and it had to be crossed with heavily loaded wagons, as the case happened to be in this instance.

The men who were driving the teams hitched twenty teams to one of the wagons, which was lightly loaded with freight, and succeeded in getting it across the river. In the same manner, they succeeded in getting several more similarly loaded wagons across. They then decided to try crossing the river in the same way with one of the

wagons which was loaded with flour and of course much heavier than the wagons formerly taken across.

They were unfamiliar with the condition of the river bed and being unaware of a deep hole in it near the place at which they were crossing, they drove too close to the hole. As a result, the wagon was overturned when the tongue was loosened and pulled out. They were very anxious to save as much as possible of their valuable cargo, so they hitched a chain to the front wheels of the wagon and again commanded the horses to pull it. Out of the water came a portion of the front wheel and at the time, the rest of the wagon with its load of flour gradually sank from sight into the whirling water and was buried in the quicksand beneath the river. It was then and there that Deep Hole received its name.

At one time James L. Sawtell* owned and operated the little town called Deep Hole. It lived a very short life (*closed up in 1887*), as most of the early areas did, due to its poor location, the lack of trade district, and the lack of capital. All of the buildings of Deep Hole, except one, the saloon, were on the north side of the Cimarron River. This was the source of the supply of liquor furnished to and consumed by the cowboys of the vicinity and whoever else felt inclined.

Also, after Clark City was moved to Ashland, the saloon which had been in Clark City was closed.

Deep Hole ceased to exist when Ashland, which was backed by a sufficient amount of capital, sprang up and absorbed all of its former business. The Ashland Town Company was in such a financial condition as to be able to offer building sites free of charge to any or all of the residents of Clark City and Deep Hole who expressed a desire to move to Ashland and then carried it out. The Ashland Town Company had a very strict understanding with each of the individuals, however, should the holder of the lot start a saloon on it, they thereby automatically forfeited ownership of the lot.

While Deep Hole still lived, a Fourth of July celebration was to be held, and the following interesting account is given for one of the proposed features of the entertainment: Several of the citizens decided, that in addition to other events to be offered by way of entertainment on the program, that there would be the firing of a cannon. From a detachment of soldiers stationed in the neighborhood at the time, a cannon was secured, loaded, and all in readiness for the big event. The zero hour had arrived and the fuse was started in the usual manner, but for some unexplained reason, in place of firing, as it should have done, the big war gun backfired. The explosion caused it to roll into the river and into the quicksand hole (from which the town took its name Deep Hole) and sank from the view of the astonished Fourth of July visitors. The cannon was never seen again, and so far as any of those one-time residents of Deep Hole (who now live elsewhere), know... that particular piece of government artillery still rests beneath the sands of the Cimarron River.

Additional Information
JAMES L. SAWTELL

JAMES LOW SAWTELL, son of Rev. Eli Newton Sawtell (1799-1885) and Ophelia Van Buskirk (*also spelled Van Buskein*) (1813-1899), was born on 20 Dec 1852 in Ohio. In 1880, he was still living with his parents and they had left Ohio, living in New Market, Middlesex County, New Jersey. James eventually left there, moving on to Deep Hole, Clark County, Kansas. The story tells that he owned and operated many of the businesses in the town.

He married **ANN (ANNA) VIOLA HURST**, daughter of Harbin Green Hurst (1821-1885) and Susan Elizabeth Sieg (1826-1865), on 27 Jan 1886 in Ashland, Clark County, Kansas. Ann was born on 19 Feb 1862 in Harrison County, Indiana. The following year (1887), the town of Deep Hole discontinued and the couple left for Florida.

James and Ann had one known daughter, **OPHELIA V. SAWTELL** (1887-1971).

Three years after moving on to Florida, James passed away on 9 Nov 1890 at the age of 37 years. His burial was at the Evergreen Cemetery in Ocala, Marion County, Florida.

In 1893, Ann married Samuel Robert Pyles (1851-1933) and they had three children. Ann died on 4 Mar 1939 in Marion County, Florida. She was buried at the Woodlawn Cemetery in Ocala, Florida.