

# **GEORGE O. ABBOTT, AN OLD SETTLER AND PERSONAL FRIEND OF BUFFALO JONES AND JOHN STEVENS**

Finney County, Kansas

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*Consultants: George Oliver Abbott and William Holmes*

*\* Additional information added about George Oliver Abbot*



**GEORGE OLIVER ABBOTT**

George O. Abbott came to Garden City, Finney County, Kansas, at the age of fifteen years, with his family. He entered Garden City in a railroad boxcar with one cow, some chickens, and two horses, all belonging to his father.

Judge A. J. Abbott, (*Abijah Judson Abbott*) his father, homesteaded land near Garden City. He was Garden City's first district judge, dividing his time between his homestead and judicial duties.

While still living in Sterling, Kansas, George Abbott became acquainted with Charles Jesse "Buffalo" Jones\*, a well-known first white man to start preserving the American buffalo. Jones came to Finney County before the Abbott family did, and became well established in the area. Mr. Abbott tells of his friendship and experiences with Jones in his own words:

*“Jones discovered that the buffalo were becoming extinct, and even though he was a great hunter himself, he realized that something should happen, or there would be none of the famous American game left. So he organized an expedition to scour the plains for the one remaining herd that was known to be left in Western Kansas at that time. My father prevailed upon Jones to take me along. I had heard great tales of hunting out here and was anxious to do some on my own with Jones on his first expedition of buffalo calves. Full-grown buffalo are wild and dangerous, and without the equipment at hand in those days, it was impossible to capture them, but the calves could be caught quickly and raised. The expedition was a dangerous undertaking, but my father trusted me with Jones’s care. We left here with Jones and several other men in their company. We had two farm wagons, one platform spring buggy, six horses (two of which were old racehorses), two saddles, and about five dogs.*

*Our journey started towards the Northwest. The weather was warm, and the only available water supply was from buffalo wallows. This water was a coffee color due to animals basking in it and from vegetation. We had to boil the water for drinking purposes. The thirstiest I ever got in my life was on this trip. In the afternoon of the tenth day, we sited five buffalo grazing under the setting sun. With the use of a spyglass, Jones could tell there were no calves, but he decided to take the buffalo anyway. He and ‘Kentucky Johnson’ quickly saddled the two racehorses and ‘made ready to ride.’*

*Each took a 45 caliber with an extra heavy charge, and together, they had 90 rounds of ammunition. They made the two saddle horses go in front of them towards the buffalo. When they were within two hundred yards of them, the buffalo began to paw up the earth and “show fight.” It is the habit of buffalos in danger to paw up the land until they have a dust screen, which is hard to penetrate all around them. The dogs burst from behind the horses where they had been ordered to stay and began running towards the buffalo’s noses. Barking and snapping, they kept them bunched together until the men could jump on their horses and head toward them. The buffalo began running in a northern direction with the dogs still at their noses.*

*Jones and Johnson began shooting at the buffalo, and they had a dried layer of mud about two inches thick on their hides. We could see the dust fly from the spot where the bullets had hit. The buffalo turned and started for the wagon where we were. The two men continued shooting, and were sure that the buffalo must be getting all of the bullets, for none whizzed past us. When they were within one hundred yards of us, one of the buffalo trotted to one side and quietly laid down like it was tired. Another did the same thing when it was about fifty yards from us in a northern direction. When this one dropped, Jones got off his horse and dropped to one knee to take a better aim at it. The instant that the buffalo saw Jones dismount, it got up, whirled, and came at him at a terrific speed. After Jones emptied his gun on the buffalo that had dropped in front of him, he immediately started after the other buffalo, escaping over the hill. Johnson was also in pursuit. He left me orders to take my gun and finish the one that had dropped*

over. I was frightened, but I got my gun and went to see if it was breathing or not. I made sure it was not breathing and then went up to it. Jones later wanted to know why I did not shoot at it anyway, so I could tell everyone when I arrived home that I had shot and killed a buffalo. "I never thought of that," I told him.

Our supper that night, after the buffalo were all skinned, instead of being the usual hot biscuits, bacon, and coffee, was delicious buffalo steak, hot biscuits, and coffee.

After supper, we had to mold bullets as our round of ammunition had all been used that day. We always carried the materials for making cartridges right along with us on a trip of this sort. We molded the bullets using the same shells over and over. While the men were casting their bullets and telling stories around the campfire, the dogs, lying on the ground (buffalo grass) close by, suddenly began to growl. Jones said under his breath, "Indians." Without knowing why I did it, I jumped into the wagon and grabbed a shovel so I could shovel dirt on the fire to put it out. It was about as bad a scare as I had ever had in my life. Jones and the other men had a great laugh at my expense since it was a well-known fact that there were no Indians in the countryside at that time.

The next morning one of the men, named Mr. Grace, was sent into town with the meat. He arrived in Kendall and shipped it east. Jones had markets along the way that he would send the buffalo meat to after his hunts.

We scoured the plains a few days more for buffalo, and while traveling along, we ran across several herds of wild horses. In those days, they overran the grasslands. They were a nuisance running across the trails and holding up the progress of the wagons. To keep the wild horses from luring our horses away, we had to watch ours very carefully. Jones decided if he could not have a buffalo calf, he would get a young wild colt, so he took it upon himself to lasso one. He succeeded in throwing a noose over the neck of a colt but did so without realizing that there could be a problem with the colt's mother. When the mother saw her colt in danger, she and another horse put up such a fight that Jones had to shoot the other horse. The mother charged straight at Jones, and he had to let go of the rope attached to the colt. It wound around the saddle horn in the typical way of cowboys when lassoing. The colt disappeared over the hill with the rope trailing behind him.

Still wandering around over the plains, we ran across an old Indian battleground. I was riding in the spring wagon with Jones ahead of Johnson when I asked him to stop to look for arrowheads. "Oh, you couldn't find anything in this grass," he said, but I begged him to let me try. To this, he said, "You wouldn't know one if you were to see it." However, he stopped the buggy, and I got out. I soon found a large arrowhead used for killing the white men who killed the buffalo. Jones said quickly, "Let me see it," and after examining it for a minute, he said, "It is, sure as the world," and then proceeded to put it in his pocket. I found another one that he had to inspect, and this one went the same way as the first one. He did not let me hunt much longer, for we were in a hurry.

*As I have said before, the weather was uncomfortably warm, and our fresh meat supply soon ran out.*

*Traveling along, we ran across an antelope calf that its mother had left behind while she probably went for water. The antelope mothers would leave their young and search for water since the baby antelope's feeble legs could not withstand the trip. Jones, looking through his spyglass, pointed it out to the dogs, but the dogs had been sick from eating so much buffalo meat that they could not run. The next day, however, he found an antelope, and this one, the dogs were of some help to him. They ran and grabbed it, holding onto it until we could come and kill it. We again had fresh meat.*

*When we got near the railroad, Jones had some important business he had to attend to, so he hurried on ahead, leaving me to come home in a lumber wagon with Johnson. We still had a large number of the cases of condensed milk we had taken along to feed buffalo calves, in case we should capture any."*

In 1886, Jones built the Buffalo Hotel on the "Buffalo block" in Garden City. It had its part in the Jones-Stevens controversy over the town's direction in those days. He hauled rock from Pawnee Creek, which is twenty-two miles away, and from Kendall to build his project. One big rock he pulled from there had a life-sized buffalo carved out of it, and he added it to the top of his hotel. However, the frost and rain caused it to chip which made it dangerous for pedestrians walking below. So, he had to have it removed. When first built, the Buffalo Hotel was two stories high. Stevens built the Windsor Hotel a short time later, and it was three stories tall. Jones then added a fourth level to his hotel. Stevens, not to be outdone, also built another level to his hotel, making it four stories high.

Jones can be well called the "father of the irrigation project" in Finney County. His remarkable energy, his brain, and his ability made his title possible. It was one of the great reasons for the big boom of Garden City in the 1880s. A series of incidents took place to bring about the sudden growth, and the first was the success of the irrigation venture. There was plenty of water in the Arkansas River at that time. Onions were produced at the extent of 1,000 bushels per acre by irrigation. The people of Colorado have since absorbed the water in the Arkansas River since it runs through Colorado and then on down through Garden City. But the rainy season set in to make it possible to raise crops here with the aid of irrigation. The west's land agents revealed that the rain belt had moved to the west, and people flocked to Finney County from all parts of the United States. But the rain moved away again, and the drought was sufficient in length to starve people out. At that time, Mr. Abbott became a railroad man.

Jones's first irrigation ditch was a deserted millrace at Sterling, Kansas. When he came to Finney County, he saw the possibilities of an irrigation ditch on a larger scale. Jones started the Great Eastern Ditch. The Craig boys, Jim and Bob, members of one

of the first Finney County family settlers, were his right-hand men in the construction work. The Amazon ditch was Jones's next venture.

Mr. Abbott was a carpenter when Jones built the great Eastern head gates across Sand Creek, west of Lakin, Kansas. Several years later, when Jones undertook the building of the Populist railroad from Galveston, Texas to Manitoba, Canada, fifty-seven miles was all he succeeded in constructing this railroad, due to others pushing him out. Mr. Abbott served first on this road as a carpenter, then as an engine fireman, and later as a locomotive engineer, having gained his experience on the Santa Fe railroad. Jones's railroad transported farm products from the middle states to a seaport town. His connection with the railroad ended in the American Boycott and railway strike in 1894.

Mr. Abbott described Jones as a typical friendly Westerner; his hair was dark, almost black. He was a man with a very kindly disposition, and you could not help but like him. Jones was the most optimistic man I ever knew. He would undertake projects that were far too heavy compared to the amount of capital he had, and of course, the projects would fail. Jones had boundless faith in everything he undertook. He was a great joker, and his favorite words were "not by a jug full." In all the time I was around him, I never heard him swear.

Anyone who has explored Finney County's history will tell you that John Stevens\* was one of its greatest men. His exploits were not as widespread as those of Buffalo Jones, but he is one of the greats of Garden City, Kansas. Mr. Stevens was a pleasant, agreeable man, honest and straightforward with everyone, and was a man with few enemies. He was not the powerful, dominating figure that Jones was. What Stevens did was great because he was usually placed by certain circumstances, and not

necessarily because he went out of his way to do them. Jones and he were not friends because of their business associations. Jones owned one side of Garden City, and Stevens was the owner of the other part. Each wanted the town to go towards their land. Stevens was a poor man before the boom, and at one time, he was a wild horse hunter combined with hunting buffalo. During those days, all cowboys carried six-shooters. Stevens owned a big Sharp Rifle, which weighed close to fourteen pounds. On one of his prospecting hunts for wild horses and buffalo, he was cornered by a band of renegade Indians about twenty-five miles from Garden City on the Pawnee. They were a mixture of Indians and half-breeds. They shot his horse, and Stevens fell behind it for protection. Luckily, he had enough ammunition to hold them off from behind his horse until after dark. He then snuck back to the camp where the other men were staying. (He had wandered off alone from the group that day.)

When the Abbotts came here, Stevens was running a livery stable. He had a beautiful black wild horse that he had captured and tamed himself. It was domesticated and was considered a very valuable horse at \$110. That was an unheard price for a horse in those days.

The city chose Steven's land to build. He was a great promoter of horse-drawn streetcars, which were considered something in those days. There was one central street tract with sidetracks, and a horse or a mule drew them. People who wanted to ride stood on the street corners and waited. The ride was a slow process, and often if the people were in a great hurry, they got off and walked because of the many stops the car had to make. It was a simple sort of car with the driver on an open platform at the front end. During that time, cars were unheated, but they were uncommon in cities and were a product of 'the boom.' Jones had nothing to do with them as they were all on 'Stevens side of town' and used only in fair weather.

Because of the "Jones and Stevens" controversy, each trying to outdo the other, they both became bankrupt.

During the boom, the town seemed to grow, surprisingly, to those who were here. When the Abbotts first came here, there were just a few houses and buildings. Mr. Abbott's father was the sole judge here for nine years. Then Judge Hutchinson took his place, and Mr. Abbot's father entered law practice.

At the time of this writing, George Abbott was still living in Garden City, employed at the Garden City sugar company, in the electrical department.

\* See the Finney County story, CELEBRATIONS AND OCCURRENCES OF INTEREST for information on Charles Jesse (Buffalo) Jones.

\*See the Finney County story, THE STEVENS PARK for information on John Stevens.

### Additional Information

#### GEORGE OLIVER ABBOTT

*Thanks to Laurie Oshel, Assistant Director at the Finney County Historical Society Library in Garden City, Kansas, for providing information about George O. Abbott*

GEORGE O. ABBOTT, son of Judge Abijah Judson Abbott (1842-1929) and Ruth Townsend Barrington (1844-1903) was born on 6 Apr 1867 in West Branch, Cedar County, Iowa. George was the oldest of eight children. In 1875, the family moved to Newton, Kansas, and Garden City, Kansas, in 1882. His first marriage was to HATTIE RIDENOUR (daughter of Rev. C. N. Ridenour) on 6 Oct 1891. Hattie was born on 22 Jul 1866. After only two years of marriage, Hattie died on 30 Dec 1893 and buried at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Dodge City, Kansas.

George married again on 31 Mar 1898 to VIRGINIA MAY KIMMONS, daughter of Americus Jerome Kimmons (1850-1902) and Angeline Elizabeth Aten (1854-1890). They were married in

Houston, Harris County, Texas. Virginia was born on 26 May 1874 in Abingdon, Illinois. They had two sons, EARL G. ABBOTT and ROGER LEON ABBOTT.

George began working as an operating engineer for the Garden City sugar plant when it first opened in 1906. He later left the job for a few years to work for the Marsh Light Plant but returned in 1916. He continued working for the city plant & the sugar company plant, until 1937, after suffering a heart attack.

George Abbott died on 28 Feb 1938, and Virginia died on 15 Jul 1966, both in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas, and burial was at the Valley View Cemetery.

### Newspaper Marriage Announcement

#### GEORGE ABBOTT AND HATTIE RIDENOUR

*The Dodge City, Kansas Globe Republican – Thursday, 15 Oct 1891*

At the residence of the bride's father in Ridenour Township, on Tuesday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, Rev. W. H. Rose officiated the marriage of Miss Hattie D. Ridenour to George O. Abbott of Dodge City.

The bride and groom are old residents of Ford County, and though young in years and having united their forces for the battle of life, it is the wish of their host of friends that prosperity and happiness will be their portion.

### Newspaper Obituaries

#### HATTIE S. (RIDENOUR) ABBOTT

*The Dodge City, Kansas Globe Republican – Friday, 5 Jan 1893*

MRS. HATTIE S. ABBOTT, aged 27 years, 6 months, and 7 days died at her home in this city, of consumption, on Friday afternoon, 39 Dec 1893.

The deceased was the only daughter of Rev. C. N. Ridenour of this county and was born in Bellville, Ohio, on 22 Jul 1866. When but a few months over four years old, death invaded their home, and she was left motherless.

In the spring of 1886, she converted to the cause of Christ and was a member and worker in the Presbyterian Church in this city. On 6 Oct 1891, she was married to George O. Abbott, son of Judge A. J. Abbott.

The funeral service was held at the Presbyterian Church last Sunday at 11 a.m. The Methodist, Christian, and Baptist churches were dispensed with morning services. All who could gain admission attended the solemn rites paid to the dead. In the pulpit, on either side of Pastor

Glendenning, Reverends Collins, and Waller occupied seats. Before them was the casket wrapped in flowers. Emotions and sentiments were strong and pure during the service.

The services opened with the usual invocation, followed by a hymn and reading of the scripture.

Then the choir consisting of Mrs. S. Jay Crumbine, Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Thome, and Mr. J. M. King, with Miss Drake at the organ, rendered the anthem "She's Gone To Rest," which was followed in prayer by Rev. Collins. Mrs. Crumbine sang the departed one's favorite song, "One Sweetly Solemn Thought." Hardly had the echoes of the singer's closing words subsided when Rev. J. S. Glendenning arose and proceeded to deliver one of the greatest sermons ever heard from a pulpit in this city. After the sermon, by Rev. Waller, everyone sang the hymn, "Asleep in Jesus". The services closed with an invitation to review the remains. A large number of friends followed the procession to Maple Grove Cemetery.

As an intimate friend of the deceased from the days of her girlhood, we know and commend the noble, Christian, womanly life she lived. A Pattern for all who would walk in the path of purity and peace, her name will forever live sacred in the memory of those who were near to her. In sickness and distress, hers was the hand of an angel in the ministrations of comfort and solace to the stricken. Death is a sad thought in all conditions of life. But now, much greater is the effect when the young and beautiful are taken just as life is beginning to blossom with the fruition of its richest treasures. But she is gone now, and the vacancy can nevermore be filled. Many fond hopes are taken away, and a heart seems to break over the grave of its lost companion. The little home here, brightened by her love and smiles, is now filled with desolation and mourning. But there is solace for the greatest sorrow, and the Christian hearts of those to whom she was dearest will realize a full measure of its consoling power.

### GEORGE O. ABBOTT

*The Hutchinson (Kansas) News – Wednesday, 2 Mar 1938*

GARDEN CITY – George O. Abbott, 70, an engineer at the sugar plant here for many years, died yesterday of a heart ailment. He began working for the sugar company in 1906, the year they started building the factory.

### VIRGINIA MAY (KIMMONS) ABBOTT

*The Garden City (Kansas) Telegram – Tuesday, 19 Jul 1966*

MRS. GEORGE ABBOTT

Mrs. Virginia Abbott, 92, 309 North 11<sup>th</sup>, died last night at St. Catherine Hospital after a short illness. She was born on 26 May 1874, and she married George Abbott in 1894 (*Actually 1898*). She spent the first few years of her life in Illinois, and then her family moved to central Texas, near Austin. She moved to Garden City not long after her wedding.



Her husband preceded her in death. Survivors are two sons, Earl Abbott, of Schenectady, New York, and Roger Abbott, of Sacramento, California. The Garnand Funeral Home will announce funeral arrangements.

### Cemetery Headstones

GEORGE OLIVER ABBOTT & VIRGINIA MAY (KIMMONS) ABBOTT

*Photographs provided by Kristi Meyers*



VALLEY VIEW CEMETERY  
Garden City, Finney County, Kansas

