

HOW SHERLOCK BECAME HOLCOMB KANSAS

Finney County, Kansas

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

In the 1870s, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad went through Garden City, Finney County, Kansas. At that time, most of the towns along the new railroad began.

The Town Company, which was owned by the railroad company, surveyed and laid out two townships in Finney County. First was Pierceville, twelve miles east of Garden City and on the county's east side. The other town was Sherlock, about seven miles west of Garden City.

The Santa Fe Railroad intended to make Sherlock the main town along the new railroad when first laid out. It was called Sherlock after its promoter and director of the Santa Fe Railroad, Thomas A. Sherlock. His home was in Cincinnati, and at this time, he was considered a very wealthy man. During the Civil War, Sherlock helped Ulysses Grant by getting men and supplies down the Ohio River through boats and barges. After the Civil War, General Grant would visit the Sherlock family at their home in Cincinnati.

Later on, in the panic of 1893, Sherlock, like thousands of others, lost everything he had. The Santa Fe Railroad at that time went into the hands of a Receiver. Mr. Sherlock lost his fortune.

The town of Sherlock had a store, post office, and lumberyard. Garden City was started in the fall of 1878 and surveyed in the spring of 1879. When Garden City was in its early years, the Santa Fe Railroad refused to recognize Garden City because it did not have a thing to do with its founding. Plus, the town at that time was small. The mail had to be picked up in Sherlock and taken to Garden City.

Garden City started because of its excellent valley location. Two brothers, James R. Fulton and William D. Fulton, and a few of their friends, all from Sterling, Rice County, Kansas, came here in 1878 and started the little town of Garden City. The railroad refused to stop trains there or throw off the mail. So, to receive their mail, C. J. Jones, later known as Buffalo Jones, one of the most famous men in Western Kansas history, and others would drive to Sherlock every day on a buckboard, a one-seated four-wheeled, slat bottom crated sort of wagon which was very common during those days. They also took the mail sent out from Garden City on their trips every

day, and Garden City had a post office that disbursed to the people any mail that arrived from Sherlock.

In the course of a few months, the people of Garden City made a deal with the Santa Fe Railroad and gave them a five-eighths interest in the Garden City town site of 320 acres, and then they began to stop trains there, let passengers on and off, plus take off freight. They finally recognized Garden City as a town. In 1884, when Finney County was first organized, the county's people voted on a permanent county seat. Garden City had grown rapidly and had the greatest majority of votes over Sherlock. There was no disturbance over the selection of the county seat, and people took it with little hard feelings.

Sherlock continued as a town. Mr. Darius C. Holcomb* had a considerable amount of land adjacent to the town. On his property, he put the largest pumping plant for irrigation in Western Kansas. At that time, he was helped in the project by donations from many business people in Garden City. Their reason for helping was due to the value that kind of pump irrigation would bring to the land around Garden City. Plus, Sherlock had an abundance of underflow water at a shallow depth that would be valuable for developing the county for agricultural purposes.

Mr. Herman Clyde Wiley*, a very able young man from Emporia, Kansas, began selling this land in the beautiful Arkansas Valley to men of wealth outside Western Kansas. He made a deal with Mr. Holcomb, owner of a significant portion of the town's land, with the purpose in mind to build Sherlock on a new, more extensive scale. He changed the name 'Sherlock' to 'Holcomb' in honor of the man who had built the great irrigation pump. Some of the old settlers thought that the town's naming might have been in the contract when selling Mr. Holcomb's land.

Mr. Wiley began on the progress of Holcomb almost immediately. He started the building of a two-story brick hotel and a bank building. Neither are in use today (1936) for the purpose for which they were intended. There were also other buildings built as a result of Mr. Wiley's ambitions. For a while, Holcomb was quite a flourishing little community. Later on, a group of interested men established the Holcomb Consolidated School District, which was said to be the largest consolidated school system in Kansas. They had several buses to carry the children to and from school.

The prosperity of Holcomb was at a time when everything was at its highest. Later the taxes on the school became burdensome to the taxpayers in the less prosperous times.

Garden City was famous in Kansas as a center of the irrigation project. The Sugar Beet Factory, located in Garden City, was built in 1905-1906.

Although there are other irrigation ditches and pumping plants, Mr. Holcomb built the one that attracted several wealthy men from outside Western Kansas. It was built

with a vast reservoir and was like a lake that would hold enough water so that the pump did not have to be running all the time. It was enormous, and the possibilities of abundant crops on a big scale seemed easily within reach, especially the sugar beet crops.

During the year the sugar beet factory was being built, there was such an abundance of rainfall that the whole crop was produced without the aid of irrigation. The Holcomb ditch is still in use, but it has been neglected with the passing years and is not as important as it was in the early days.

Heavy rainfall is rare in Western Kansas, and more often, the only way crops can be produced is by irrigation. The system of irrigation is interesting. There is one large ditch dug from the reservoir, and that ditch is a branch work of smaller trenches leading along the rows of sugar beets or crops that are grown there. These smaller trenches have to be carefully watched to keep them from damming up and stopping the water. Men are busy most of the time while the water is running, watching with a shovel in hand. During the beet season, Mexicans are hired for fieldwork as they seem to tolerate the heat of the beating prairie sun.

Since the building of the town of Holcomb, due to agricultural conditions, dry years, and other reasons, Holcomb has declined as a town. All that is left now is the large modern consolidated school building and the old hotel building (and now the hotel is being used as an apartment house).

There are a few filling stations on the main highway, plus the lumberyard and the town's residences. The bank is now in Garden City. The people are mostly farmers, and quite a few have homes near the school yet still have their farms farther out in the county. The Holcomb Consolidated School has a high ranking. There is an excellent selection of subjects, and the teachers all meet state requirements. During the building of the school, there was also a teacherage constructed to accommodate it. The teachers stay here together and share the expenses among themselves. The school is active in sports, except for football.

Additional Information

DARIUS C. HOLCOMB AND HIS FAMILY

DARIUS C. HOLCOMB was born in November of 1836 in the state of Illinois. He married HARRIETT (HATTY) A. YOUNG, daughter of Levi Young and Jane Dauphin Jackson, on 3 Oct 1865 in Peoria, Peoria County, Illinois. In 1880, they were still living in Peoria but soon moved to Kansas City, Missouri. They moved to Finney County, Kansas, in 1894. They established a

livestock ranch west of Garden City in a town originally called Sherlock. The town was later renamed, Holcomb. The Holcomb family lived there until 1920, when they left Kansas and moved to Long Beach, Los Angeles County, California. Darius Holcomb died there on 25 Mar 1923, and Hatty died a month later, on 14 Apr 1923. Cremation was the choice for both.

Darius and Hatty had three children:

ETHELBERT "BERT" W. HOLCOMB was born about 1867 in Peoria County, Illinois, and died on 13 Mar 1930 in Los Angeles County, California. He married 16-year-old Ella Willis on 14 Nov 1893 in Garland County, Arkansas. Ella was born on 4 Feb 1877 in Arkansas and died on 25 Sep 1947 in Los Angeles County, California.

HARRY "BRUCE" HOLCOMB was born on 27 May 1873 in Peoria County, Illinois, and died on 4 May 1957 in Bellflower, Los Angeles County, California. He married Cora Wilkinson in about 1900. Cora was the daughter of Levi and Virginia Wilkinson. (*Levi Wilkinson was one of the first settlers in Garden City, Kansas.*) Cora was the first baby to be born in Garden City on 1 Dec 1879. She died on 2 Nov 1961 in Los Angeles County, California. Burial for both was at the Valley View Cemetery in Garden City, Kansas. They had two daughters, Mrs. Marjorie Mahaney and Mrs. Elizabeth Fike, and both lived in California.

INA FLORENCE HOLCOMB was born on 19 May 1877 in Peoria County, Illinois, and was married to Benjamin Franklin Simonds. Benjamin was born on 8 Aug 1875 in Massachusetts. In 1921, they left Finney County, Kansas, and moved to the state of California. They had two daughters, Jeannette, who married Garth T. Riddle of Ventura, California, and Vivian, who married C. Walter Springer of Garden City, Kansas. Benjamin died on 19 Mar 1951 and Ina passed away on 2 Dec 1963, both in Ventura County, California.

Additional Information

HERMAN CLYDE WILEY

HERMAN CLYDE WILEY, son of William James Wiley (1838-1928) and Sarah A. Meek (1847-1927), was born on 26 Feb 1882 in Monroe County, Ohio. By the year 1900, the family was living in Emporia, Lyon County, Kansas. There, he married **EDNA M. WILCOX**, daughter of Lynn G. Wilcox (1859-1924) and Annie Mary Jones (1860-1922) on 8 Jan 1909. Edna was born in May of 1887 in Lyon County, Kansas. Herman and Edna lived in Hutchinson, Kansas, for one year after they married and then moved to Garden City, where Herman organized the Great Western Land Company. He bought and sold land in the area, which helped bring many people to the Finney County area.

Herman was a highly ambitious young man and successful in business when arriving to Kansas. He established the town of Holcomb as the story above tells. He died when he was only 30 years old on 29 Jul 1912 in Garden City, Kansas. Edna passed away on 23 Jul 1921 in Colorado Springs, El Paso County, Colorado. The Maplewood Memorial Lawn Cemetery in Emporia, Kansas was the burial place for Herman and Edna.

Newspaper obituaries

Newspaper obituaries provided by Laurie Oshel, Assistant Director at the Finney County Historical Society Library in Garden City, Kansas

HERMAN CLYDE WILEY

The Garden City (Kansas) Telegram - Tuesday, 30 Jul 1912

HERMAN. C. WILEY DIED AT 12:10 YESTERDAY AT NOON

HE HAD BEEN SICK JUST EXACTLY SEVEN WEEKS WITH APPENDICITIS

SERVICE AT 4:30 THIS AFTERNOON

REMAINS TO EMPORIA FOR BURIAL – ONE OF GARDEN CITY'S STRONGEST BUSINESSMEN AND HIS DEATH WILL BE KEENLY FELT

H. C. Wiley, who had been sick the past seven weeks, died yesterday noon at 12:10 at his residence, the Lynn home on North Main Street.

His mother and father (Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Wiley of Emporia), two sisters, Mrs. H. C. Nutting and Miss Geneva Wiley of Emporia and V. M Wiley of Hutchinson, together with Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox (Parents of Mrs. Edna Wiley), were with him at the time of his death. Another sister, Mrs. Henry VanFleet of Chicago and W. H. Wiley of Decatur, Illinois, arrived yesterday after Mr. Wiley's passing.

When death came to Mr. Wiley, it took away one of the most alert young businessmen of Garden City, and the whole community was saddened after hearing the news.

Just seven weeks to the day, Mr. Wiley had been sick, and at first, everyone thought he was getting better and would soon become well and stout again, but the past week or so, he had been sinking rapidly. He 'was doctored' in the Christian Science faith, and on Saturday, two medical specialists were summoned, but death was too near for them to do any good. Appendicitis, which later turned into typhoid pneumonia, was the cause of his death.

Mr. Wiley was the owner of the Great Western Land Company here, and he has done as much or more than anyone in Finney County to promote land development in the county. He had an elegant little home at Holcomb, and it is one of the prettiest show places in Western Kansas.

Mr. Wiley came here seven years ago and has always given his best efforts towards the up-building of this county. He was one of those indomitable personalities that made success. Mr. Wiley was determined to see Western Kansas win out, and his efforts were untiring on its behalf. In a word, he was public-spirited and to an extent equaled by a few of its residents.

He possessed a strong following of business and personal friends. Of course, enemies he had, but not more than a man who accomplishes things are bound to make. He will be missed in a multitude of ways, and for those who were accustomed to meeting him and associating with him daily, the news of his death will be hard to bear.

He was only a young man and had been married only a short time, marrying Miss Edna Wilcox of Emporia three years ago last January.

A short service will be held this afternoon at 4:30 and the remains taken to Emporia for burial.

EDNA (WILCOX) WILEY

The Emporia (Kansas) Weekly Gazette – Thursday, 28 Jul 1921

EDNA (WILCOX) WILEY

Mrs. Clyde Wiley of Topeka died Friday morning at 8 o'clock in Colorado Springs, where she had been for her health.

Mrs. Wiley's maiden name was Edna Wilcox. She was born in Emporia (Kansas) in 1887 and educated in the Emporia schools. In January of 1909, she married Herman "Clyde" Wiley and lived in Garden City until Mr. Wiley died. Mrs. Wiley lived on her ranch at Holcomb until two or three years ago when she moved to Topeka.

Mrs. Wiley was survived by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. L. G. Wilcox, and her brother, Clinton Wilcox, all of Topeka.

Mrs. Wiley had hundreds of friends in Emporia. When a girl, she lived at Twelfth Avenue and State Street and was a member of a group called "The Five." The other members were Mrs. L. R. Conwell, Mrs. Luther D. Thomas of Detroit, Michigan, Mrs. Burr Root, and Mrs. Loy Harris. A strong, handsome, lovely group of women they made. Mrs. Wiley is the first death in the group.

Funeral services for Mrs. Wiley were held Monday at 9:30 in the Dumm Chapel. Rev. J. H. J. Rice, the pastor of the First Congregational Church, conducted the services. Fred Green, Burr Root, Loy Harris, Calvin Newman, Harry Nutting, and Ed Rowland were the pallbearers. Interment at the Maplewood Cemetery in Emporia.