

TALES OF FINNEY COUNTY

Finney County, Kansas

Written by Delora Black

Consultants: Mr. Frank Killion, Mr. Will Holmes, and Mrs. Ellis (Minnie) Titus

Frank F. Killion* came to Finney County in 1885 with his family when he was twelve years old. They homesteaded land twelve miles from Eminence, Kansas. At that time, Eminence was a part of Garfield County. Later, Garfield County became part of Finney County because its acreage was not enough to be up to the constitutional law. (So... on 18 Mar 1893, there was no longer a "Garfield County".)

In 1889, Mr. Killion's father (*John V. Killion*) traded his homestead land for a store in Eminence. Eminence now, in 1936, is nothing but a post office. Yet, during the middle and last part of the 1880s great land boom, it had a population of about 300 inhabitants. C. J. "Buffalo" Jones,* well known as the first white man to start preserving the American buffalo, was one of the more prominent early Western Kansas settlers. He was president of the Eminence Township Company. Eminence and Ravanna were the two most essential townships in Garfield County. Ravanna, at that time, had a population of about 400 people. Today, in 1936, it is nothing but ruins. The people of Ravanna still are there in the Ravanna district, but there is nothing left in use, but the schoolhouse, built around 1888.

The bonds that voted to build the schoolhouse continue being (*in 1936*). The building has only one room used as "the country school". The other classrooms were never finished.

An election held in the fall of 1887 was to determine if Eminence or Ravanna would be the county seat. The returns were in favor of Ravanna. Eminence people took offense, claiming that there was fraud in the election, and they "brought suit" to the Supreme Court. The decision came out in their favor, and in 1889, Eminence declared the county seat. It was then Ravanna's turn to take offense, and they took the case to the Supreme Court to have the county disorganized. A Kansas law states, "No county shall have acreage of less than 432 square miles." Two men, one representing the town of Eminence, and the other representing Ravanna, were hired to survey the land acreage. The surveyor from Eminence found the area within the Kansas law, and the other man found it to be less. Thus, the Supreme Court awarded the decision to dissolve Garfield Township and combine it with Finney County.

While the case was still in the Supreme Court, the people of Ravanna held an election to vote for bonds to build a courthouse. They imported people to help carry the election. Outsiders could quickly come in, stay for 30 days to establish residence, and

then be eligible to vote. Then they could leave after the election. The bonds for the courthouse carried.

The Clerk of the district court of Garfield County removed his office from Ravanna to Eminence after the Supreme Court named it as the county seat. Eminence also had a county treasurer by the name of W. T. Williams. Still, for a while, the people of Eminence were a bit dubious about removing the county treasurer's records from Ravanna to Eminence. One-day two men from Eminence went to the Ravanna courthouse. All day long, they loafed around the courthouse. That evening when the other Ravanna officials had gone home for supper, they, with the help of the county treasurer, loaded the treasurer's books in a wagon and started to Eminence. On the way out of town, a few startled Ravanna citizens saw them and immediately gave chase. In their pursuit, the Ravanna men sidetracked on a side road, reached Eminence before the wagon did, some of the towns' worthy citizens captured them and held them prisoners, until the books arrived. In addition, when a man tried to escape, someone shot his horse from beneath him.

When the Supreme Court's decision reached in favor of Eminence, the town held a big celebration. C. J. Jones, mentioned before as preserving the American buffalo, brought a few to the festival as a unique attraction. People came for miles around, even a few people from Ravanna. The town of Eminence presented Milton Brown, a prominent attorney for the area, with a gold-headed cane.

There was a large barbeque held, and important men from all parts of the area gave speeches except for the very few men from Ravanna.

When the county seat first started in Eminence, Ravanna had two commissioners and a county clerk, while Eminence had only one commissioner. One of Ravanna's commissioners wished to resign, but to keep the majority; he did not want to do so until Ravanna replaced him with another man from that area.

As soon as Tom Rowe, the commissioner from Eminence, heard about this, he pretended a 'falling out' with the people of Eminence. With loud declarations of Eminence people's faults and their town, he worked his way into the people's confidence from Ravanna. Being with the prominent leaders, Mr. Rowe planned to help appoint the other commissioner. With full confidence that he could resign and still have two commissioners for Ravanna, the resigning commissioner resigned. The board met to select a candidate for the office. They chose the name G. M. D. Goff. At that time, Mr. Goff was a contractor who was building the courthouse at Ravanna. When they proposed his name, the county attorney stated that it was unlawful for anyone who had a contract with the county to hold an office. Dramatically, Tom Rowe said that he would abide by the law even though it favored Eminence. With his help, the county clerk then selected J. E. Dawson, an Eminence man, as a commissioner, thus giving Eminence the two commissioners. Tom Rowe then returned to his home, confident that he had done his job well.

To raise the money for building the Eminence schoolhouse, they held a series of different parties. Necktie parties were the most popular. Each woman present at the party would make two bow neckties out of the same material, so the two were alike. She would keep one, and put the other one in a box to sell, usually at the price of ten cents a bow. After it was over, the buyers would hunt to see who possessed the matching bow neckties.

They were then required to take her to supper. They held necktie parties regularly for about a year, and not only did they furnish a great help towards the building of the schoolhouse, but they also supplied a source of entertainment to the whole neighborhood.

In the early 1800s, at Garden City, the Fulton Brothers had homesteaded the south half of the Garden City section. John Stevens, who was son-in-law to the Fulton family, had homesteaded the northeast quarter, and C. J. (Buffalo) Jones owned the northwest quarter. If the city built towards their land, that would make their land worth a lot more. Stevens wanted Garden City to run north and east, while Jones wanted it to run north and west. To divert some of the building toward his land, C. J. Jones bought the block, known as the Buffalo Block. There he built the Buffalo Hotel, plus some other business houses.

The only success he had after this purchase, to divert Main Street, was to make a diagonal street. With the same purpose in mind, Stevens built the Winsor Hotel and the Stevens Opera House on what is still part of the Main Street section of Garden City. Thinking that the people would tend to build around the courthouse, Stevens donated a city block. Jones went still further and not only gave a city block for the courthouse, but he developed a courthouse and donated it to the county as well. Garden City still runs practically north and south with diagonal streets. Marks of the Jones-Stevens controversy are there today. Jones Avenue is one of these streets in Garden City that is diagonal.

The county soon outgrew the Jones courthouse and moved it to a Finnup building on Main Street. When they were ready to construct a new courthouse, they had an election to determine where to build it, either on the Jones site or on the Stevens site. The returns were in favor of the Jones site.

Elected the first county commissioner from the Garfield district, was John V. Killion, the father of Frank Killion. He served two or three terms, then was out two, and then was re-elected for another two. In the third year of his second term in office, they appointed Mr. Killion as the Land Office receiver at Dodge City, and he resigned as commissioner.

Before they donated Steven's Park to Finney County for building a courthouse, it was a horse corral, and Will Holmes* helped clean up the area so they could plant trees. The old Jones courthouse built by C. J. "Buffalo" Jones was the local jailhouse and

then vacated, later to be torn down entirely. They used some of the rocks from that building to build the wall at the entrance to Finnup Park.

Trees were very scarce in the early days. On the Northern side of the Arkansas River, a giant cottonwood tree located on its banks was about the only tree found in that area. Stories say that people would come from miles around just to hang cattle rustlers on that tree. When the tree died, a man named Nat Adams hauled it away.

There has been much argument as to where this tree 'really stood.' Mr. Holmes states that its direction is six and one-half miles east of Garden City on the north side of the bank. He locates it by remembering the spot of the stump left by Nat Adams. Near this, you can find pieces of old harnesses, empty cartridges, and other remnants of ancient vintage, which leads searchers to believe that camps may have been located beneath the shade of this tree.

In the 1880s, Garden City voted to plant trees all over town and on both sides of the street. Buffalo Jones donated a carload of trees that came from Sterling, Kansas. Many believe that most of the beautiful trees in the residential section of Garden City are due to the voting on that day.

In addition, people in the 1880s complained about the board sidewalks still used at that time. These old sidewalks were made of pine and nailed crosswise to a two-by-four, the width of the path. Boards were sometimes coming loose, and people would often notice this. It was common for them to pick up the boards and take them home for stove kindling. One early settler tells of her embarrassment with one of these loose boards. Shortly after she and her husband had been married, they walked around the area where a "breakfast" took place in their honor. The husband happened to step on one end of a loose board. The other end flew up in front of her, and she fell, sprawling over the walk. Other people complained that in the winter, the boards became very slippery. In 1885, they laid the first piece of concrete. That was in front of the Ash Park Hotel, known then as the Kankakee Hotel. Mr. Finch, builder and owner, named it because he had come to Garden City from Kankakee, Illinois. Even though that piece of concrete is still there, the laying of concrete during those days seemed poorly done.

* See... *Frank F. Killion, Project Consultant – Finney County, Kansas*

* See story... *Celebrations and Occurrences of Interest, Finney County, Kansas, for information on C. J. "Buffalo" Jones.*

* See story... *William Holmes, Old Settler of Finney County, Kansas*