

# **ARROWHEADS AND OTHER INDIAN RELICS**

Hamilton County, Kansas

Written by Ruth Ausbun

*Reference: Mr. Ernest Webb McNeill, owner of the hardware store in Syracuse, Hamilton County, Kansas*

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

Mr. Ernest McNeill\* bought out D. A. Scranton's hardware store on Avenue A and moved it to Main Street's west side in Syracuse. He had many impressive collections of Indian relics. Among some of the more interesting were arrowheads belonging to various tribes of Indians. They were different colors, sizes, and shapes and were made of Flint Stones. The Indians made these by rubbing rocks together and shaping them. They ranged in size from very small to those about as large as a person's hand.

There were several different sizes and shapes of knives, a pocket knife, and one used to cut animal hides. The Indians would somehow put a stick on the knife blade and then pull the animal hide around it.

Mr. McNeill had several animals mounted and various hides of animals lying around on shelves. One of the animals was a badger and it was displayed in the window of the hardware store and attracted many visitors and curiosity seekers.

He gathered over a thousand of these Indian relics all from the vicinity of Hamilton County. He had made a study of them but could not tell which tribe made them. Several different tribes of Indians roamed the prairies of Hamilton County in the early days.

You could sometimes find arrowheads on Indian burial grounds. It was an old tradition of the Indians to be buried with their swords, hunting apparatuses, food, and things they thought they might need in the future world hereafter. Many of them believed that they would always be what they were here on earth. For example, if one's father was a hunter, he would be that in the world hereafter. While others thought they might turn into trees or a dog. Indeed we find that the Indians were very superstitious in their beliefs and actions.

Farmers found arrowheads in their plowed fields, where the Indians once camped. The terrific wind storms sometimes blew the soil off the ground and disclosed the items.

For many years the most significant and uneasy fact in colonial life was that the great herds of roaming buffaloes and antelope were becoming nearly extinct. A small party of explorers in this region on a single trip killed twelve buffalo, eight elks, fifty-three bears, twenty deer, four wild geese, and one hundred and fifty turkeys. When wild

pigeons swarmed in large numbers, they darkened the heavens like a cloud. The most important of the animals were the furbearers, such as the beaver and the badger.

There were also the old guns that the Indians used. They were about one and a half feet long and resembled the shotguns of today. They used them when fighting and killing wild animals. They also killed animals with arrowheads. Many claimed that the arrowheads were tiny, about one-fourth inch long, which seemed almost impossible for one not acquainted with the Indian's ways.

Although Indians were everywhere, their actual numbers were surprisingly small. Each tribe had only ten or twenty wigwams constituting an independent nation. Some of the larger tribes that lived in Hamilton County were the Creeks, Choctaws, and Seminoles.

Some of the Indians that the early settlers first had to deal with were wild and uncivilized. They lived by hunting antelope and buffalo, and the men did the hunting and the fighting. The women did the housework and tilled the soil. Although they were thought to be inferior to men, they were regarded as the undisputed mistress of household affairs. Women were able to hold property in their own name. The dwellings were, as a rule, sod huts or wigwams made of skin or bark. Basket weaving and pottery were the principal arts with which the Indian women were skilled.

Although the Indians were always troublesome and often a source of terror, they nevertheless were ready to exchange the skins of fur-bearing animals for the trinkets, firearms, plus rum and brandy that belonged to the white man. Of course, the white man was more than ready to make the exchange. In the seventeenth century, homes were very poorly heated if heated at all. Furs were a source of warmth, and they covered the floors and used as bed clothing. However, the Indians did not command high prices for their pelts, receiving only fifty cents to three dollars compared to twelve dollars now.

Almost everywhere, a white man could buy land from the Indians "for a song." Before taking actual possession, the white man generally went through 'the form' of buying it by exchanging rum, food, and articles of little value. Sometimes this was for large stretches of territory. The Indians were tempted to sell land cheaply because their possessions were almost immeasurably extinct. There were more than 5,000 acres of land for each Indian. The Indians, like the white men, depended on the land. In the early days, the fields' chief product was for their immediate use, such as beans, pumpkin, potatoes, and most importantly, all maize or Indian corn. But, there was very little ground plowed up by the Indians in Hamilton County. They lived mostly on animals, which they would hunt for meat. They also tamed some of the wild horses.

When the Indians were here, there were hundreds of wild horses. When the white men came, it did not take long for the wild animals to become extinct. The Indians had no roads, only paths worn by horses and cattle. The horse and cattle stock

received their water from the Arkansas River, and 'water draws' filled with rainwater. Usually the rivers water filled up to its banks. The only way they had of crossing it was horseback or a wagon pulled by horses.

North of Syracuse is a graveyard with several Indians buried there and many Indian relics. These items are of no benefit to those who find them, but an arrowhead is said to bring twenty dollars.

The Indians excelled in pottery and art, and when there was a trade, it was with wampum beads or shell money.

There was not any gold or silver, so a lot of trading was by bartering, which meant one commodity was exchanged for another, such as corn for fish, a horse for a cow, a pair of shoes for a coat, etc.

Mrs. Irwin Harms (*Laura*) Helfrich\* of Syracuse, Kansas, had a collection of Indian arrowheads. Her and her children, in the sand hills south of Syracuse, gathered the majority of them. She was not aware of what tribe each item came from. They were in her furniture store, located on the east side of Main Street. They were neatly arranged on a board near the front window for visitors to admire. She had a large club made of stone and wood. The Indians had used it when they killed wild game for meat and furs.

A small statue of an Indian chief hung below the collection, and she had a pair of moccasins, made and once worn by the Indians. These were a blue color and made by hand. A friend gave them to her, and he received them from an Indian friend.

It's believed that there isn't a single Indian found in this area today (1936), although we have been able to discover many of their belongings.

**Addition information**  
**ERNEST WEBB MCNEILL**

ERNEST WEBB MCNEILL, son of Edgar Francis McNeil (*a Baptist minister*) (17 Jun 1870-12 Jan 1962) and Mary Alice Rhoades (28 Jan 1878-16 Feb 1919), was born 4 Jan 1898 in Denison, Grayson County, Texas. In 1906, when he was a small child, his parents moved the family to New Mexico, and in 1913, they moved to Oberlin, Decatur County, Kansas.

Ernest enlisted in the United States Navy on 20 Apr 1917 and released on 22 Feb 1919. About 1918, before his release, his mother and father moved to Garden City, Finney County, Kansas.

On 26 May 1922, Ernest married THELMA PAULINE WHITNEY, daughter of William B. Whitney and Mary E. Reeves. They were married at the home of her parents in Garden City. Thelma was born on 6 Jul 1898 in the state of Illinois. She was a schoolteacher in Garden City

before her marriage, and Ernest was associated with the Dierks-Peters Lumber Company in Garden City. In September of 1924, they left Garden City and moved to Strasberg, Colorado, where Ernest had accepted a job as a manager for the Strasberg Lumber Company. By 1927, they had already returned to Kansas, making their home in Syracuse, Hamilton County, Kansas.

Ernest McNeill died on 15 Aug 1983, and Thelma passed away on 27 Jun 1988. Their burial was at the Syracuse Cemetery in Syracuse, Kansas.

Two children were born in their marriage:

**WILLIAM NORMAN MCNEILL** was born on 13 Nov 1923 in Garden City, Kansas. He joined the Army and fought during World War II and the Vietnam War. William died on 14 Jul 1997 in Franklin County, Idaho, and the burial was at the Syracuse Cemetery in Syracuse, Kansas.

**ETHEL ALICE MCNEILL** was born on 28 Jul 1927 in Syracuse, Kansas. She attended Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia, Kansas. In 1966, she was living in Denver, Colorado, with her husband, Willard Joe Harnden. They were married on 9 Jul 1950 in Syracuse and divorced on 22 Aug 1969 in Arapahoe, Colorado.

Ethel died on 23 Jan 1998, and burial was at the Syracuse Cemetery in Syracuse, Kansas.



**ETHEL ALICE MCNEILL**  
*Sophomore year at Kansas State Teachers College*

Additional Information  
MRS. IRWIN HARMS HELFRICH  
Laura Ann (Grandstaff) Helfrich  
*The family knew her as "Nanky."*



Atchison, Kansas  
About 1895

*Photograph provided by Will Thompson and Susan Newman*

*Laura Grandstaff Helfrich was the great-great aunt to Susan Newman. Thanks to Susan for providing a lot of the following information.*

LAURA ANN GRANDSTAFF, daughter of William Henry Grandstaff (1838-1916) and Mary Letitia Thompson (1836-1923), was born in January of 1868 in Atchison County, Kansas. She married IRWIN "HARMS" HELFRICH, son of Jackson Helfrich (1827-1910) and Catherine Anne Hart (1828-1902), on 29 Mar 1889 in Atchison County, Kansas.

Harms and Laura owned a grocery store in Syracuse, Kansas. In 1924, they closed the store and opened a furniture store, selling new and second-hand merchandise. Harms died in 1929 and

Laura passed away in 1956. Their burial was at the Syracuse Cemetery in Syracuse.

## SYRACUSE, KANSAS FURNITURE STORE

Irwin "Harms" Helfrich

About 1924

*Photograph provided by Ardith Frazer*



*"In 1924, Laura and Harms opened a furniture store, selling new and second-hand merchandise".*

Two daughters were born in their marriage:

**LOIS HELFRICH** was born in January of 1890 and died in 1959. Burial was at the Syracuse Cemetery in Syracuse, Hamilton County, Kansas. Lois never married.

**ELINORE "NELLIE" HELFRICH** was born in March of 1895 and died in 1948. She married Oliver Emerson Scott on 23 Jan 1916. The couple owned the "Scott Mercantile Company" in Syracuse, Kansas, a store that dealt with general merchandise. Oliver Emerson Scott was first married to Pearl Willis, and they had one child, Raymond Scott. Pearl died in 1908. The burial place for Nellie and Oliver was at the Syracuse Cemetery.

Nellie and Oliver had two children:

1.) **ROBERT EMERSON SCOTT** was born on 17 Mar 1917 in Syracuse, Kansas. He married Myra "Emaline" McMasters, daughter of Levi Wallace McMasters and Loise O. Philpott, on 28 Aug 1938. Emaline was born on 8 Dec 1920 in Syracuse, Kansas. In 1943, Robert and Emaline

moved to Garden City, Kansas. Robert died on 5 Aug 1999, and Emaline passed away on 19 Mar 2013.

Their burial was at the Valley View Cemetery in Garden City, Kansas. They had two sons, Robert E. L. Scott, and Franklin Winston Scott.

2.) OLIVE ELAINE SCOTT (1919-2011) was married to Robert Grant Frazer (1915-1990), son of Claude Frank Frazer and Ethel Thouvenel. They had three children: Lyndall (Frazer) Mixon Arko (1942-2002), Robert Lowell Frazer, and Ardith (Frazer) Snapp.



LOIS AND NELLIE

Daughters of Harms and Laura Helfrich  
1897, before the family moved to Syracuse, Kansas  
*Photograph provided by Susan Newman*

LAURA AND HER DAUGHTER, NELLIE, WROTE POEMS ABOUT SOUTHWEST KANSAS.

*Susan Newman provided the following article about  
Laura, who won a prize for the best-written song:*

*The Syracuse (Kansas) Journal, 16 Jun 1922*

MRS. H. HELFRICH WON A SONG PRIZE, \$15.00

The song committee, appointed by the Chamber of Commerce, to select the best song written by someone residing in Hamilton County, decided the following was the best and most appropriate

of all songs turned into the committee. Mrs. H. (*Laura*) Helfrich of this city wrote it, and someone will sing it to the tune of "Beulah Land."

The Chamber of Commerce offered \$15 to the person whose song they selected and the money raised by popular subscription.

*The "Best Song" written by Laura (Grandstaff) Helfrich*

### SYRACUSE

O, long ago on Sicily's Isle  
There grew and flourished for a while,  
So we are told by art and music,  
The ancient town of Syracuse.

But, statues, buildings, temples tall  
Surrounded by a mighty wall  
And the Gods of Greece, poor gods of clay  
Have perished all and passed away.

With humble hearts we now implore  
The living God, we all adore,  
To grant us the length of days and grace  
To make this a glorious place.

### Chorus

O Syracuse, my Syracuse.  
Let none oppose and none confuse  
But build and hope and love and plan  
With trust in God and faith in man  
The Lord of Hosts will not refuse  
To guard our modern Syracuse!

### Newspaper Obituary LAURA ANN (GRANDSTAFF) HELFRICH

*The Garden City, Kansas Telegram – Saturday, 1 Dec 1956*

Mrs. Laura Helfrich, 88, a resident of Syracuse since 1912, died yesterday afternoon at a Garden City convalescent home.

Mrs. Helfrich was the grandmother of R. E. Scott of Garden City and Mrs. Olive Frazer of La Junta, Colorado. Also, surviving are her son-in-law, Oliver Scott of Garden City, and five great-grandchildren.





ELINORE "NELLIE" HELFRICH SCOTT  
Daughter of Irwin "Harms" Helfrich and Laura Ann Grandstaff  
*Photograph provided by Ardith Frazer, granddaughter of Nellie*

THE OUTLAW TRAIL  
Elinore "Nellie" (Helfrich) Scott  
1933

A cowboy slept in his lonely camp  
The moon hung low in the sky.  
No sound was heard but the call of a bird  
And a coyote's mournful cry.

A sweetheart's arms could not hold him  
Nor a mother's tears prevail.  
So all alone without friends or home  
He rode on the outlaw trail.

As the first pale light of morning  
told of the approaching day,  
A posse crept up through the canyon's cut  
and surrounded the place where he lay.

His hand flashed down to his holster  
to shoot it out with the law.  
A streak of red and the boy lay dead,  
They had beat him to the draw.

They buried him there in the canyon  
where at night the coyotes wail.  
They put up a sign, one simple line:  
"The End of the Outlaw Trail"