

## **OLD SETTLERS OF LAKIN**

### Kearny County, Kansas

RUTH AUSBUN copied the story from the Kearny County Prairie Breeze yearbook in 1936 for the Federal Writers Project.

The book "HISTORY OF KEARNY COUNTY KANSAS" gives the person who actually wrote the story was Jennie Rose O'Loughlin.

*Thanks to Julie Grubbs McCombs at the Kearny County, Kansas Historical Society for her help and support!*

"Mighty Oaks from little acorns grow." How true this somewhat trite expression becomes with the memory of the first school to be established in Kearney County, Kansas. Perhaps it will be of interest to those few students who attended that first school to remember it and to those who have since attended school in Kearny County to remember as well.

Since the opening of school in Kearny County, three new buildings have been erected, some of which have long since been razed, and recently a new magnificent high school structure has been completed.

In the summer of 1879, Mrs. Amy Loucks, who, with her husband and two sons, resided on a government claim to homestead near the present site of the city of Deerfield, Kansas. They came to Lakin to determine if there were sufficient children of school age in and about Lakin to warrant the opening of a private school. After visiting with the various families and learning their attitude toward such an institution, it was decided to open a school.

In November, the first school was opened by Mrs. Loucks in her home, built that year. Later, the school was held in a building fourteen feet by sixteen feet, formerly used for a general store. Mr. A. B. Boylan had purchased the store building from Mr. Tibbetts, who had expressed himself as "going to return to civilization."

Although many of the early schools throughout the United States did not permit girls to attend, the first Lakin School invited them to enroll and furnished them the same advantages as were accorded to their brothers. After a succession of private schools, which were sometimes held in summer, sometimes in winter, and sometimes the whole year through, the first public school in Kearney County was established in September of 1884. And at that time, School District Number One was organized.

The first public school was held in the town hall, but in 1886 the building was destroyed by a cyclone. A two-story brick building was started in the spring of 1886 and completed when the regular term of school was opened the following September. All bricks for this new building were made in Lakin. The building had four large school rooms and a "bell ballroom."

Three of the students who had attended Mrs. Loucks' first private school were among those enrolled in school at this same time. Of course, the number of students enrolled

in school at Lakin in 1886 was few, and the new building appeared to be many times too spacious for any future needs. One lady remarked, "I sure feel sorry for those poor little children in Lakin - rattling around in that great big schoolhouse like peas in a pod." But those were instrumental in causing the new building to be erected, like all Kansas pioneers, they had faith in the future growth of Kearney County and were interested in the future education of their children.

In the year 1912, it was found necessary to make an addition of two stories, containing two large rooms, to the building erected in 1886, for that time, instead of "rattling like peas in a pod," the students were packed as "sardines in a can."

The former students who appear in the "Who Is Who" figures the standing of a college or university. Johns Hopkins University ranks first with twenty-two, and the University of Kansas comes second with seventeen. Lakin schools have one former student named in "Who Is Who," Mr. Charles J. Dillon, and should hold a high place among the smaller elementary and high schools. No doubt many more of the graduates and students of Lakin high school will appear in that publication in the future. For many have to say they gained a statewide reputation in their various fields of endeavor.

The house Mr. Boylan bought from Mr. Tibbetts, which was used as a schoolhouse, formerly belonged to J. H. Potter of the Potter and Mitchell real estate firm, who had built the house on his claim by the river south of town. F. L. Pierce and Fritz Meyer moved it to town. Mr. Pierce succeeded Mr. Potter in the land business. Mr. Tibbetts, as well as many others of the pioneers, was well educated, bringing many books with him to the new country. It was said that he could read in sixteen languages. He left Kearney County in 1882.

The Santa Fe Railroad was completed to the western state line on 28 Dec 1872. On that day, the first cars were run over the entire route from Atchison to Colorado. Immediately after the construction of this road, the late John O'Loughlin saw the advantage of the location for a store and a trading post at Lakin. In April of 1873, he established himself in the dugout and prepared to supply the needs of the traveling public.

There was no bridge across the Arkansas River from Dodge City to Granada, Colorado, so the store's territory might be said to be from the Smoky Hill River on the north to the Red River on the south. After the Indians burned Thomas O'Loughlin's store at Pierceville in 1874, this was the only place between Dodge City and Granada where supplies could be obtained. The stock had to be varied to meet the needs of the trappers, freighters, soldiers, buffalo hunters, and cowpunchers. Besides the ordinary line of staple groceries and dry goods, one could buy Sharpe's rifles, fixed ammunition, oxbows, ox yokes, ox bright-colored silk shirts, scarves and handkerchiefs, Stetson hats, Dutch ovens, and crosscut saws. In 1901, Ernest McDowell sold the last pair of 'ox shoes' to a man driving cattle through the country. About the same time, the last of the fixed ammunition for buffalo guns were sold to a customer who made a memorable trip to Lakin for it, having heard that he could find some in stock at this store.

One day in the seventies, a man from Colorado asked for a crosscut saw. This request

was inconsistent when you consider the fact that there was not a log in the country. However, the accommodating clerk, Mr. D. H. Browne, surprised him by taking one from its place on the wall. An emigrant westward-bound had traded it to the proprietor for groceries. At the same time, he had disposed of a barrel of lamp chimneys. This is an example of the variety of goods that was obtained from trading.

Early settlers said that herds of buffalo extending as far as the eye could see were roving over the prairies. The meat from these animals was about the only kind of meat to be obtained, though some antelope and deer meat was used. It had to be cut, dried, and salted to use. Sometimes as much as a ton of meat was cured. One of the first Santa Fe engineers, Bill Levitt, tells that he has often seen the dugout roof shingled with hams, which formed a substantial part of the meats, which the train men ate later with Mr. O'Loughlin. There wasn't an eating-house in Lakin, but Mr. Potter soon built one. He later sold it to Fred Harvey.

The Indians killed the buffalo for food. Then some hunters killed just for hide and the tongue. This kind of slaughter kept up year after year, and thousands of hunters were employed to kill as many as possible. The building of the Pacific railroads divided the buffalo into two large herds, which ranged on either side of the Platte River, an estimated three million. Western men never thought that it was possible to kill such a large number of buffalo. Still, by 1875 the southern herd was practically exterminated, giving rise to a large industry for Lakin. The buffalo bones were gathered and shipped east, where their principal use was in fertilizer. Each wagon of the bones weighed about three hundred pounds. The average price was six dollars a ton, and hundreds of carloads were shipped.

One of the things that impressed Billy Russell,\* as he rode into Lakin (*On 7 Mar 1881*), was the sight of huge piles of bones, perhaps thirty carloads, stacked along the railroad track. Another thing was Harry Browne standing in the store door, no doubt wondering who the tenderfoot might be. Mr. Russell was a native of Boston. Although he felt quite sure that he could not be content in Lakin, from that Saturday afternoon until the following Monday morning, Mr. Russell became so attached to Western Kansas that he could not leave and continued to stay.

During the Santa Fe Railroad construction, Buffaloes were so numerous that they impeded the construction work. On more than one occasion, trains were delayed by running into herds. Guy Potter, an early resident of Lakin, was aboard a train, which was delayed one hour and forty minutes at Pierceville due to waiting for buffalo to cross the track. From one caboose that day, the brakeman shot thirteen buffalo.

Trappers brought in many kinds of hides. They were then given fifty and seventy-five cents compared to twelve dollars now.

It might be imagined that the storekeeper's life was dull and ordinary. However, the cattle movement lines were arranged, so chuck wagons from the north loaded at Lakin for the roundup on the south. In one day, the clerk instructed to send bills for one outfit in Chicago, another to Kansas City, a third to Denver, and soon to different points, thus showing the ramifications of the cattle trade. Recently residents of Adobe Walls, Texas, told of driving cattle through Lakin and later making frequent trips with loads of bones and hides exchanged for groceries.

The banking facilities at the time were limited, so that the keeping of money was a problem. Money belonging not only to Mr. O'Loughlin but to others who entrusted it to his care was concealed in coffee cans, under bolts of calico, kegs of fish, and anywhere that one would not expect to find it. One day a fish keg was moved, and under it was one hundred fifty dollars being held for someone whose whereabouts had long since been forgotten.

To handle the increasing trade, it became necessary to move into larger quarters. After that, the dugout served as a storehouse, but it was later torn down. Children playing on the site found several dollars in small change, which was thought to have dropped down between the boards and dirt walls where it had been put for safekeeping.

When the new building was built in 1879, Lakin could boast of the Harvey House, section house, and depot. There was also the "Dora" Browns drugstore, O'Loughlin's store, The Lakin Eagle office, Potter Mitchell real estate office, Gray and Jones Supply Company, all of which faced the railroad.

In 1875, Mr. Boylan was the first telegraph and station agent located in Lakin. Before that time, he had made his home in Dodge City but made daily trips to the end of the line. He carried his telegraph instrument in the caboose, and, whenever communication was necessary, he could attach the device to the wire. After the depot was built, he was transferred to Lakin. He also was the first postmaster. Mr. J. H. Waterman was the third person to hold office.

Joseph Dillon came to Lakin in 1879 on May 1st, and, when Franklin Pierce arrived on the third, the Dillon's were planting their garden. Mr. Pierce recalls the first time he ever saw Mary Dillon, now Mrs. D. H. Browne, she was planting potatoes. The Dillon's crop was a failure, but in the fall, they had potatoes.

Mr. Pierce also decided to try his luck at gardening but thought it best to confine his activities to raising watermelons and was very successful in this undertaking. That same year he planted the large grove of trees which you now see west of town. For a while, Mr. Pierce was in the real estate business with C. O. Chapman and J. Longstreth.

In 1882 Mr. O'Loughlin was married. The following year the house was moved to its present location.

**Additional Information  
WILLIAM "BILLY" RUSSELL**

*Many thanks to Julie Grubbs McCombs at the Kearny County, Kansas Historical Society for sharing photographs and adding details about William "Billy" Russell and his wife, Cora Nicholls.*



WILLIAM "BILLY"& CORA (NICHOLLS) RUSSELL

WILLIAM "BILLY" RUSSELL son of Michael Russell and Mary Dillon was born 27 Jun 1856 (*May have been 1854*) in Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts. (*Other records give place of birth as Brockton, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, plus... South Braintree and Randolph, Norfolk County, Massachusetts.*) Both of his parents were born in Ireland.

In the 1870's Billy left Massachusetts for the Amarillo area of Texas. There, he worked as a cowboy for the Bates & Beale Cattle Company. On one of the cattle drives that took them from Texas up to the Dodge City, Kansas area, Billy discovered the town of Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. In March of 1881, he moved there and began working as a section hand for the Santa Fe Railroad.

Billy married CORA NICHOLLS, daughter of H. Charles Nicholls and Minerva Isabella Allegre, on 16 Sep 1891 (*May have been 17 Sep 1891*), in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas. Cora was born on 18 Sep 1872 in Eaton, Delaware County, Indiana.

Cora's parents moved the family from Indiana to Kearny County, Kansas in 1885. They held and taught the first Deerfield school class at their home. It was a half mile east of Deerfield.

In Lakin, Billy's family and friends all thought of him as being kind, cheerful, and loyal. Many called him "The Fun Irishman". Cora was an accomplished musician and artist. During World War II, she worked for the Red Cross, donating her time as a secretary.

Cora passed away on 20 Jun 1934. Billy died on 21 Apr 1939 in Lakin. Both were buried at the Lakin Cemetery.

Billy and Cora had six children...



**GUY ALLEGRE RUSSELL**

Kansas State Agriculture College in Manhattan, Kansas  
1914

**GUY ALLEGRE RUSSELL** was born on 3 Sep 1892 in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. From 1914-1920, Guy attended the Kansas State Agriculture College in Manhattan, Kansas. Guy married in about 1922. His wife, **VELMA LOUISE GOSS**, was born on 22 Jan 1895 in Dwight, Morris County, Kansas. In 1930 & 1940, Guy and Velma were living in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri where Guy worked as a sales engineer. In 1950, they made their home in Evanston, Cook County, Illinois. Guy was working as a salesman in the Silica Industry. His sister, Nina, lived with them at that time and was working as a nurse for the Cook County School of Nursing in Chicago, Illinois. She had attended classes there earlier.

Guy died on 1 Apr 1959. Velma passed away at the age of 100 years on 4 Jun 1995 at the Good Samaritan Nursing Home in Olathe, Kansas. Burial for both was at the Mount Moriah Cemetery in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. Guy and Velma had one daughter, Patricia (Russell) Fairchild, born in about 1928.

**MABLE RUSSELL** was born on 24 Aug 1896 in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. After graduating from the Lakin, Kansas High School, Mable went to California to take up studies that would help her become a teacher in Kearny County and Finney County, Kansas. She married **HOLBERT FRANKLIN HOSS**, son of Jacob Nelson Hoss (1862-1945) and Clara Mock (1866-1934) on 24 May 1922 in Holcomb, Finney County, Kansas. Holbert was born on 25 Jan 1894 in Greenfield, Hancock County, Indiana. Mable passed away on 21 Jan 1955 in Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas. Holbert died 11 Mar 1977 in Lakin, Barton Township, Kearny County, Kansas. Both were buried at the Lakin Cemetery in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas.

Holbert and Mable had two children: Franklin Russell Hoss, born on 28 Dec 1924 in Hibbard, Kearny County, Kansas. He passed away on 24 Dec 2006 in Elkhorn, Douglas County, Nebraska. Mary Frances (Hoss) Petty was born on 11 Nov 1935 in Hibbard, Kearny County, Kansas. She died on 1 Mar 2009 in Overland Park, Johnson County, Kansas.

**NINA RUSSELL** was born on 9 Feb 1898 in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. In 1931, she graduated from the Cook County School of Nursing in Chicago, Illinois. She continued to stay at the school, working there after graduation. When she retired in 1956, she returned to Lakin, Kansas. Nina never married. She died on 3 Jun 1971 in Ulysses, Grant County, Kansas. Burial was at the Lakin Cemetery

**MARY D. RUSSELL** was born on 25 Sep 1900 in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. She never married. In the 1930's Mary was teaching high school in Lakin, Kansas. During World War II, she served in the army as a captain of the Woman's Army Corps. In the 1950's she began teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in Deerfield, Kansas. Mary passed away on 23 Jul 1991 in Ft. Dodge, Ford County, Kansas. Burial was at the Lakin Cemetery in Lakin, Kansas.

**WILMER ATKINSON RUSSELL** was born on 19 Mar 1902 in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. In 1942, Wilmer was living in Topeka, Kansas. He married Marion Miller in about 1942. Marion was born in 1909 and died in 1974. During their marriage, they lived in Springfield, Sangamon County, Illinois. A year later, after her death, Wilmer married again to Elaine Elizabeth Roberts on 5 Nov 1975 in Alachua, Alachua County, Florida. He died on 12 Jun 1978 in Collier County, Florida and buried next to his first wife, Marion, at the Calvary Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois.

**LENORA RUSSELL** was born on 9 Feb 1904 in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. Lenora married **HAROLD E. YOUNG**, son of Ora A. Young (1882-1962) and Laura Schrooten (1885-1941), on 19 Nov 1927 in Lakin, Kearny County, Kansas. Harold was born on 8 May 1906 in the state of Kansas. In 1943, they left Lakin, Kansas and moved to Eugene, Lane County, Oregon. Harold worked as a mechanic and later had his own auto repair business. Lenora died on 18 Nov 1979 in Eugene, Oregon. Harold died there on 8 Dec 1998. Both were buried at the Lakin Cemetery in Lakin, Kansas.

Four children were born in their marriage: Laura (Young) Maier, William Russell Young, John C. Young, and Charles D. Young.