

**PIONEER REMINISCENCES OF
ALMA IDELL (CHAMBERLAIN) WATERMAN**
Kearny County, Kansas

Written by Alma I. (Chamberlain) Waterman, Lakin, Kansas

* *Additional information added for Alma Idell (Chamberlain) Waterman*

I, Alma I. Waterman, was born on 13 Nov 1855 at Worcester, Otsego County, New York.

On a cold, snowy morning in December of 1880, my two children (*Blanche and Charlie*) and I arrived in Lakin (Kearny County), Kansas. My husband, J. H. (*James*) Waterman, had preceded us about two months before, as he was the Santa Fe agent at this place. The country looked dislocated and dreary, as there were only a few small trees where the Harvey eating-house had been. There were no fences or roads and only a few houses. We were very fortunate, however, in having pleasant rooms at the home of A. B. Boylan.

I had not expected to have much of a Christmas, this seeming to be such a far-off place, but Mrs. Boylan had already prepared a beautiful tree for her children, so we had a Merry Christmas after all.

I saw my first buffalo that winter and saw cowboys whom I had pictured as wild people, almost as much to be feared as the Indians. On the contrary, they were men who conducted themselves as gentlemen and from whom I never heard a blasphemous word. Many of them came from fine families in the east and were here seeking adventure. Of course, some were drinkers and tough customers, but we never had any fear and felt they would protect us if danger came.

Only a few families were here in town, the Boylan's, Loucks, O'Loughlin's, Pearl's, Pierce, Chapman, Brown, Dillon, Myers, Carter, Morgan, and Phillips.

The railroad station was a small building also used as the post office. All of the houses were in the old part of the town. After the depot was built, the town was platted, the streets were laid out, and all of the houses were moved to the new town site.

Mrs. J. E. Bennett, who arrived here in 1881, taught the first school that our children attended. We moved into the new depot's upper rooms, and it was there that we experienced one of the most thrilling events of our life. Some cowboys had attended a funeral at Deerfield and, to cheer themselves up, had started drinking, and as they came into Lakin, the passenger train stood on the track waiting for orders. They rode their horses up on the platform, and as the train pulled out, they broke the glass in the windows and put a few shots into the lower part of the cars. It happened that Vice President Coolidge's car was on the train, and as soon as the word reached Dodge

City, the sheriff and 40 to 50 men all armed with rifles, shotguns, or revolvers arrived. They captured two of the men at the saloon in town. The other man tried to get away on his horse, they shot the horse, and he got into Chapman's dugout, but they kept shooting until he put out a white flag of surrender. The three cowboys and the telegraph operator, who had been celebrating with them, were handcuffed, taken to Dodge, tried, and convicted, serving a short sentence in the pen. Therefore, their fun ended in disaster.

In a year or two, we took up a claim a mile north of town. We built a dugout with two rooms that were both warm in winter and cool in summer. We had our second blizzard while living there and did not realize how cold it was and how much suffering it had caused in the county until it was over. Our dugout was like a house above ground, except you had to go down five or six steps to enter.

A funny thing happened while we were living there. One night we heard a commotion at the back door. We soon found that it was our own cow. We had kept it staked out on a long rope. We found that the cow had fallen down the stairs. We had to do something quickly as she was standing on her head. We frantically grabbed a rope and a wagon to pull. Then we went inside and opened the door. She turned a somersault and walked out as well as ever. I laughed to think how comical we must have looked in the bright moonlight, but our neighbors were too far away to enjoy the sight.

My husband and I used to get in our two-wheeled cart, driving our horse, Serilda, to hunt antelope, and one day we came across the largest rattlesnake I ever saw. My husband made a lasso at the end of a whip to capture it and got the snake from behind the wagon. I think there were 13 rattles on the snake.

There was a real antelope hunter here in those days, Charlie Youngblood. He furnished the Harvey eating-houses up and down the road for many years with dressed antelope and buffalo. He was a born pioneer who, for the lure of adventure, left his home in Indiana and, with his wife and two sons, started out on the Western Trail in 1865. Charlie never appeared to regret his move and, for years, hunted on the western frontier. He made Lakin his headquarters many times, and I have seen the many antelope he brought into town.

We who lived in the early days saw the prairie in the summer in all its beauty for miles. One could ride without meeting a human being, and as there were no fences or roads, except the cattle and buffalo trails and the old Santa Fe Trail, we could go wherever our fancy dictated. In winter, during storms, the cattle from many miles around drifted in with the wind. Sometimes the railroad fence or the river would stop them, and many perished during the first winter we were here. In the spring, the cattlemen held their round-ups with many cowboys coming in from Texas and cowboys who lived farther north.

A great change has come over the country since the early days. The settlers took up the land and began tilling the soil. They occupied every quarter section and began making homes for themselves. We lived through two terrible blizzards, one cyclone, and a very exciting county-seat fight. There have been many interesting things happen, both tragic and humorous.

Although we now have modern improvements such as electric lights, telephones, city waterworks, a chamber of commerce, a federated woman's club, fine roads, profitable businesses, four churches, an excellent high school building, and many beautiful homes, still I shall always remember "the early days" as a happy part of my life.

The earliest record of my father's family, the Chamberlains, is that two brothers came from Hingham, England, and settled at Hingham, Massachusetts, in 1638. My mother's family (the Shelland's), came from Scotland. My great grandfather and great-great-grandfather were Rio soldiers.

Additional Information
ALMA I. (CHAMBERLAIN) WATERMAN

ALMA IDELL CHAMBERLAIN, daughter of Charles R. Chamberlain (1820-1899) and Mary A. Shelland (1833-1871), was born on 13 Nov 1855 in Worcester, Otsego County, New York. She married JAMES HAMILTON WATERMAN, son of Hamilton Waterman (1809-1887) and Mary Utter (1819-1877) on 11 May 1875 Worcester, New York. Like Alma, James was also born in Worcester, on 16 Mar 1854. In 1880, they arrived in Lakin, Kearney County, Kansas, where James worked as an agent for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad. On 14 Jul 1934, James died in Lakin, Kansas. Alma passed away on 11 Jan 1946 in Lawrence, Essex County, Massachusetts. Burial for both was at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Worcester, New York.

Two children were born in their marriage:

DR. MARY BLANCHE WATERMAN was born on 4 Nov 1876 in Worcester, Otsego County, New York. After graduating from Lakin high school, she attended a medical college in Chicago, Illinois, graduating in 1899 with a medical degree. She married Hobert A. Sanford in 1908. Mary "Blanche" passed away on 6 Jan 1966 in Orlando, Florida. Burial was at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Worcester, New York

CHARLES HAMILTON WATERMAN was born 29 Jun 1878 in Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois, and died 9 Dec 1940 in Borger, Hutchinson County, Texas. His burial was at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Worcester, New York

Newspaper Obituaries
JAMES & ALMA (CHAMBERLAIN) WATERMAN

JAMES HAMILTON WATERMAN

Thanks to Julie McCombs at the Kearny County, Kansas Historical Society for providing newspaper obituaries.

The Lakin (Kansas) Independent Friday, 20 Jul 1934

AGAIN WE ARE CALLED UPON TO NOTE THE PASSING OF ANOTHER PIONEER

JAMES HAMILTON WATERMAN was born in Worcester, New York, on 16 Mar 1855, and died at Lakin, Kansas, on 14 Jul 1934, at 6:00 p.m. He was the son of Hamilton Waterman and Mary Utter, being the youngest of a family of six children.

Upon leaving school, he learned the Morse system of telegraphy and followed the railroads as they advanced towards the west.

On 11 May 1875, he was married to Alma J. Chamberlain at Worcester, New York, and they soon went to Rockford, Illinois, where Mr. Waterman had a position with the Chicago and Rock Island railroad. Still following Horace Greely's advice, in 1878, accompanied by his wife and two small children, Mary Blanche and Charles Hamilton, he arrived in Sterling, Kansas, where he was station agent for the A. T. and S. F. R. R.

In 1880 Mr. Waterman and his family came to Lakin to take charge of the Santa Fe station, where they have since made their home, except for three years spent in Topeka and Hot Springs.

Mr. Waterman at once took an active part in the building up of the country. Though a staunch Republican, he looked more to the man than to the party and supported him, whom he considered the best man for the office.

Mr. Waterman bought a stock of goods from Mr. Tibbets during the time the Lakin town site was being prepared. He was engaged in the mercantile business and still working for the Santa Fe and hiring a clerk for the store. He was appointed agent for the Arkansas Valley Land and Town Company and had charge of the sale of the lots. Two streets of Lakin are named for him, Waterman Avenue and Hamilton Street.

Mr. Waterman held the office of county commissioner when Kearny County was a part of Finney County. He took an active role in the dividing of the counties and the various county seat fights. He was the first county clerk of Kearny County, having been appointed by Gov. John A. Martin on 13 Apr 1887, which position he held for some time.

He was a member of the school board for many years, always taking an active part in school affairs as long as his health permitted.

Mr. Waterman proved up and lived upon a homestead just north of Lakin until some thirty years ago when he built a modern home and moved to town, where he has since lived.

He has always taken an active interest in politics, schools, and church. In Sterling, Kansas, he

joined the Congregational Church, but when the Lakin Presbyterian Church was built in 1895, he and Mrs. Waterman became members of that church. For over twenty years, he was Superintendent of the Presbyterian Sunday school, and for more than thirty years, was a teacher of a young men's class.

He was generous to a fault, giving of his time and money abundantly to any cause in which he was interested. He was firm in his convictions, outspoken in his opinions, a staunch & dependable citizen, and the material of which pioneers are made of. Though interested in many public activities, he continued his work with the Santa Fe, always considering himself a railroad man and other occupations as sidelines.

He was a Knight Templar, a charter member of the Masonic Blue Lodge, and a charter member of the Eastern Star chapter of Lakin and was always a faithful attendant at Lodge and Chapter. He was a devoted student of the Bible, John 17, being his favorite chapter.

He leaves to mourn his loss, his wife, his daughter, Dr. Mary (*Blanche*) Sanford of Mt. Vernon, New York, his son, Chas. H. Waterman of Borger, Texas, and a host of friends.

Dr. Houscher conducted the funeral services. The body was laid to rest at the Lakin Cemetery on Sunday, July 16, at 4:40 p.m. (*Actually buried at the Maple Grove Cemetery in Worcester, New York.*)

ALMA I. (CHAMBERLAIN) WATERMAN

Otsego Farmer & Republican (Cooperstown, New York), Friday, 18 Jan 1946

Mrs. Alma (Chamberlain) Waterman, aged eighty-nine, widow of James Waterman, died Thursday night at Mrs. Minnie Chamberlain's home in Lawrence, Massachusetts. On Monday afternoon at 2 o'clock, the body arrived from Worcester. Skinner Funeral home held the service. The Rev. L. C. Jones of the Baptist Church officiated.

Interment was in the Maple Grove Cemetery. Mrs. Waterman was born in Worcester, 12 Nov 1856 (*other records give 13 Nov 1855*), a daughter of Charles and Mary (Shelland) Chamberlain. She resided here until she was married and, in 1880, moved to Lakin, Kansas. They lived there until the death of her husband several years ago. She is survived by one daughter, Dr. Blanche Sanford of Methuen, Massachusetts, and four grandchildren.

Waterman Children Newspaper Obituaries

CHARLES HAMILTON WATERMAN

Otsego Farmer & Republican (Cooperstown, New York), Friday, 20 Dec 1940

WORCESTER – Committal services for the late Charles Hamilton Waterman were held on Monday morning following the body's arrival on the morning train from Borger, Texas. Mr. Waterman died in the hospital at Borger Monday, December 9th, following an accident in which

he received injuries on the previous Saturday. The deceased was born in Rockford, Illinois, sixty-two years ago, and was a son of James Hamilton and Alma Chamberlain Waterman. He had resided at Borger for the past fourteen years and was favorably known. He was a Shriner. Surviving is his mother, Mrs. James Waterman, and one sister, Mrs. Hobart Sanford, of Mr. Vernon, New York.

MARY "BLANCHE" (WATERMAN) SANFORD

Orlando (Florida) Evening Star – Thursday, 6 Jan 1966

DR. MARY BLANCHE SANFORD, 89, of 125 E. Grand Street, Orlando, died Thursday.

Mary (*Blanche*) had been a winter visitor here since 1952 and a native of Worcester, New York. She was a graduate of Northwestern University, interned in Cook County Hospital, Chicago, Illinois, was a physician for Blue Mountain College for Girls in Blue Mountain, Mississippi, and practiced in Kansas, New York, and Ohio. Her religious affiliation was the Salvation Army.

Survivors are husband, Brig. Hobart A. Sanford; son, Lt. Col. James H. Sanford of Sarasota; daughters, Mrs. Norma Cavaglieri of New York City, Mrs. Major Ruth Wright of Kearny, New Jersey, Mrs. Doris Merchant of Stamford, Connecticut, and six grandchildren. Carey Hand Funeral Home is in charge.

Cemetery Headstones

James Hamilton Waterman & Alma Idell (Chamberlain) Waterman



MAPLE GROVE CEMETERY

Worcester, Otsego County, New York

Headstone photographs provided by Lorna Puleo