

## ELKHART, KANSAS

Morton County, Kansas

Written by Edna January

**Ben Washburn**, formally of Rene County, Kansas, came to Morton County from Hutchinson, Kansas on 28 Apr 1913. Mr. Larabee accompanied him on the trip. They came by automobile, that was a very early make and it took several days to make the trip. Today it would take just a few hours. They did not have the good roads that we have today. They arrived in what is now the present city of Elkhart, Kansas, rather late in the afternoon and pitched camp on the place they chose as their lot for business buildings. The Star Lumber Company built their office there and today it remains at the same place. Mr. Washburn and Mr. Larabee were cooking supper, when one of the agents for the Santa Fe Land and Improvement Company saw their fire and called upon them. They were in charge of organizing the city and selling lots to the people. So... before the agent had left, the men had bought three lots on which the Star Lumber Company built their buildings and yards.

Mr. Washburn said that the year he went to Elkhart, Kansas, was a very hard one. His fellow partner in the lumber company had returned to his home and left him there to run the business. There were not many people in the country at that time and the few that were there, were scattered. The weather was very dry and it never rained, therefore there were very little crops raised that year. "There wasn't enough raised to feed a goose the way he should be fed. I would walk out on the street and there would not be a soul in sight. Gee... how I was blue, and was beginning to wish that I had not spent my money to buy part interest in the lumber company. However, the next year was quite different, as the rains started coming and good crops were grown. With the good crops and rains, came the people. They came from everywhere to Elkhart."

Ben Washburn became the city Mayor after the city incorporated in the spring of 1914. His City Council consisted of five members who were as follows: **Dick Straton (a hardware man)**, **Billy Blackburn**, **Leyar Hogan (who now resides in Moscow, Kansas)**, **Alvie Pesey (who still lives in Elkhart)** and **Harry Roberts (also living in Elkhart)**. The Mayor, Mr. Washburn, and the Councilmen, met in the office of the Star Lumber Company and made the first city ordinance. They made additional city laws at different times. They met in Mr. Washburn's office until they had a regular place to meet.

The first city well was put in shortly after the city was incorporated. Since the city was new and hadn't yet set up any taxes, there was no money in the city treasury to pay for the digging of the well. The Councilmen and Mayor mad an agreement that Dick Straton, one of the councilment would furnish the pipe which costed fifty cents per foot, and the others would dig up the money needed out of their own pockets. There was a man North of the Cimarron River who had a well drilling machine.

"It might as well have been a 600 post hole-digger as far as efficiency was concerned." The driller started on the well in the spring and finished it in the early fall, it was one

hundred and forty-six feet deep. This well, run by the power of the wind, furnished the water supply for the next three years, but as the population of the city grew, more

water was needed and the wind could not pump enough. In 1915, when an electric power system was installed, an electric pump engine was also installed and the windmill was torn down. The city of Elkhart owned and operated the light and water system for several years and then made the mistake of selling out to the Kansas City Power and Light Company in 1930.

The School district Number 3 was organized in the year of 1913, and school was held in the old Methodist Church building. It was the first church in Elkhart. The present grade school building was built in the year of 1914, and school has been held in the same building ever since. The high school building was erected in 1925. It is on a twenty acre tract of land in the Northwest corner of town (Elkhart), and cost \$65,000 to build and paid for improvements around the schoolyard.

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to build the building and improvements around the schoolyard. The yard is planted in grass and in the summer there are flowers planted in beds all around the yard. There is a school park which in a course of time the city will be very proud to say "It is a very nice park." The high school building is the place where the junior high school is held, also. (5)

The first United States Post Office in Elkhart was not called the Elkhart Post Office but was called Sid. The little Post Office was moved into Elkhart from two and one-half miles North of town where it was formerly located, when the city was first incorporated. The address was not Elkhart,

... Kansas, but Sid, Morton County, Kansas, even after the town was started for a short time. The mail was brought in two or three times each week by team and buggy from Hooker, Oklahoma, for five or six months after the Post Office was moved to Elkhart. Of course when the trains started coming through and started carrying the mail it came by train instead of the former way. John Marshall was the mail carrier from the Hooker Post Office to Elkhart, and it made no difference what time in the night he got in. Mrs. Stewart, the Post Master, always put the mail on the same night. The Post Office was

made no difference ~~at~~ what time in the night he got in, Mrs. Stewart, the Post Master, always put the mail up the same night. The Post Office was a general meeting place of all the men of the city. They met there while the mail was being put up and talked about many things, and laughed at things they thought were worth laughing at. Altogether it was a very good vacation to get away from the days work. In 1915 the present Post Office building was erected. (6)

Banks always play an important part in any city, and so they have in Elkhart. The first bank to move into the city was owned by Mayo Thomas and was moved from Richfield, Kansas, to Elkhart, Kansas, in the year of 1913.

was moved from Richfield, Kansas, to Elkhart, Kansas, in the year of 1913. The name of this bank was The Morton County Bank. The next bank to be brought in was The Elkhart State Bank own and operated by some men from Hooker, Oklahoma. In 1915 the First National Bank came to Elkhart and is now the only one of the banks remaining. The Morton County Bank went broke and had to close its <sup>1300</sup> doors in 1928. The Elkhart State Bank sold out to the First National thus making it a very strong and reliable bank. (7)

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small town depots. The Santa Fe Railroad erected the depot before the city of Elkhart was incorporated. It was soon found that the small depot facing the West was not large enough to accommodate the country's trading and shipping, so it was turned around so that it faced the East and an addition was built onto it. Trade kept coming in and increasing and in the course of a few months the second depot couldn't handle all of the freight so it was made larger. The depot was divided where the freight room joined the office and the freight part was moved North so as to enable them to build in between the two parts. That was in 1915, and since then there has been no occasion to build the present depot any larger. (8)

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Elkhart, Kansas, used to be the largest shippingpoint on the Santa Fe Railroad Extension West. This was when it was the Santa Fe Railroad terminal and before this road was extended on to the Southwest. People came and brought their shipping freight to Elkhart to send out. They came from one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and thirty miles around for that purpose. Elkhart still has a large trade in shipping but the extension of the railroad on southwest of Elkhart to a little town in Oklahoma by the name of Felt, South of Boise City, Oklahoma, and the extension from Satanta,

purpose. Elkhart still has a large trade in shipping but the extension of the railroad on southwest of Elkhart to a little town in Oklahoma by the name of Felt, South of Boise City, Oklahoma, and the extension from Satanta, Kansas, to Springfield, Colorado, has caused the shipping industry of Elkhart to dwindle somewhat.

(9)

Elkhart's first printing press and paper was moved from a small town in Oklahoma by the name of Carthage in 1913. J. E. Burkes was the editor of the little newspaper called "The Carthage Tribune". The paper kept that name after it was moved to Elkhart until Mr. Burkes sold the press and paper to Eugene Smith a few years later. Mr. Smith, his wife, and boys ran the paper which they

it was moved to Elkhart until Mr. Burkes sold the press and paper to Eugene Smith a few years later. Mr. Smith, his wife, and boys ran the paper which they called "The Tri State News" and built quite a good paper of it. Mr. Smith died in 1918, but his wife and sons carried on the printing of the paper until Willard Maberry purchased the paper and press. He still has the ownership of the paper and other papers in Southwest Kansas.

(10)

The city of Elkhart has had an official city library on some form or the other since 1914. The present library is a very nice library for a small city like Elkhart. It has several volumes of reference books, any number of good

story books, and many other books of interest. The people of Elkhart, Kansas, has taken great pride in their city library and the different clubs and organizations very often give a book or a volume of books to the library. Private citizens have contributed quite a lot to the building of the present library.

(11)

Mr. Washburn expressed his belief that our present agricultural condition and the financial crisis of the present day has as its foundation and basis the years prior to and following the World War, beginning in the year of 1915.

The ground was in a good condition and almost any kind of crops grew well because there was plenty of moisture in the soil. The boys were being called away to the war or to train for it, and the United States was doing great business with the other countries. To supply their demand the United States urged upon all of the farmers their patriotic duty, that of growing all the food and other products they could on their farms. The farmers began to break up more and more of the ground, and plant more of the crops they were growing. The prices went sky high thus giving the farmer something to grow more crops for besides their duty to the government. The people who were fortunate enough to get to remain

duty to the government. The people who were fortunate enough to get to remain at home and farm were getting richer and richer every day. When the boys came home from "over there", they too began to farm on a great scale, thus raising more and more of the things already being raised, and breaking up more of the ground. There were acres and acres of sod broken up that should never have had the plow stuck in the ground. The prices began to lower and kept getting lower until they were so low that it didn't pay the farmer to try to raise the crop. There was no price on anything that paid to fool with them. There was also more

of which they were to pay the farmer to try to raise the crop. There was no price on anything that paid to fool with them. There was also more food than the people could possibly consume in the United States and the other countries had begun to stop trading so much with the United States. The food supply that was over supplied was too much of one kind that particularly hurt the Southwest part of Kansas, that was wheat. How does this affect the city of Elkhart? Well when prices were good there were a great number of buildings were erected, and a great number of business enterprises were established. When the prices began to fall and kept on falling there were a great number of those enterprises had to close their doors and put up a sigh "Bankruptcy"

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What does the breaking of the sod have to do with the present economical and agricultural condition? The breaking of the sod has removed the grass which served to hold the soil when the wind blew. Now that the grass is gone we are paying by having to suffer from the dirt storms and the damages that said storms cause. The dirt has driven and is still driving many and many people from Elkhart to places "where the dirt doesn't blow". However, while the prices were still high the city of Elkhart managed to lay pavement on its streets in 1920, taking them from prairie to pavement in seven years. (12)

The city of Elkhart has tried to get the county seat moved from Richfield, Kansas, but without avail. However, there are three of the county officials residing and having offices in Elkhart. They are the County Doctor, the County Attorney, and the County Sheriff.

Elkhart, Kansas has had a few outstanding people in its young history. One of them is Willard Maberry, who was a private secretary to the former Governor of Kansas, Alf Landon for about four years. Glen Cunningham was another of the well-known people of Kansas. He known all over the world because he has been the champion mile runner of the world. In 1923, Coach Potts of Elkhart High School had a football team that was never defeated and the opposing team very seldom scored when they were playing against Elkhart.

Elkhart, Kansas, a city of 900 to 1000 inhabitants has three hotels, three grocery stores, two drug stores, two dry good and clothing stores, one women's and one man's ready to wear shops, two hardware stores, one picture show, two lumber companies, two recreation halls, eight service stations, four garages, four elevators, one flour mill, three barber shops, two beauty shops, five restaurants, one blacksmith, two machine shops, a variety store, one bakery, one tire shop, two shoe shops, one cleaners, a dance hall, a radio shop, a jeweler shop, seven churches, a hospital, one dentist, three medical doctors, one mortuary, one ice plant, one green house, and a real estate dealer.