

CHARLES EDWARD VANMETER

Stanton County, Kansas

Written by Eunice Rumford

*Consultants: Mr. Charles E. VanMeter &
Mrs. Charles E. Rumford (Mother of Eunice Rumford, writer of this story)*

Reference: History of Kansas and Kansans by William Connelly, 1918

** Additional information added about Charles Edward VanMeter*

One of the most outstanding citizens of Stanton County has spent nearly one-half of a century witnessing the trials and hardships of one of the extreme western counties. Due to a limited number of resources, it has been one of the most sparsely settled counties. Mr. VanMeter was an early settler here and many other elements have entered into his life experiences. He was a farmer, schoolteacher, a soldier of the United States Army, a minister of the Gospel, a newspaper editor and publisher, a merchant, and a public official. He turned his abilities into many avenues of usefulness in service to humankind.

Mr. Charles E. VanMeter was born in Springfield, Ohio on November 2, 1853. When he was just over a year old, early in 1855, his parents moved close to Yellow Springs, Ohio, and in 1856, the family moved to the far northwest, to Rochester, Minnesota. The following year they moved to Jackson County, Missouri, where his father followed farming until June 1903, when they moved to Lakeside, Washington.

Charles E. VanMeter got his education in the public schools of several different states. He followed farming during his youth and in 1874, at the age of twenty-one, he enlisted under Col. Delancy P. Jones. He was a member of Company D in New Orleans, under Capt. James H. Gageby. He was sent to Alabama and from there he was rushed to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to protect that city from the strikers of 1877. Next, the troops went to the coal regions of Wilkes Barre (Pennsylvania) guarding the mines for a month from strikers, and then were hurried off to Montana to "put down" the Nez Perce Indians who had broken out of their reservation and gone on a warpath.

Mr. VanMeter completed his military service as Sergeant Major in the northwest and discharged at Fort Missoula, Montana in 1879. He always looked upon the army service as a great value for him since it took him too many parts of the country and familiarized him with the different people he met. He felt the soldier training was a splendid thing for any young man.

After leaving the army, Mr. VanMeter joined his parents at Lees Summit, Missouri, and it was from that point he came to Kansas. He was a man of a liberal education when he came to this state. He had already attended Lincoln College at Greenwood,

Missouri and for two years, he was a student at the noted institution, Old Park College, along the Missouri River.

Mr. VanMeter united with the Presbyterian Church at the age of sixteen, but after leaving the army, he joined the Methodist denomination. During his college career, he became interested in gospel work, and became a colporteur, traveling to sell books for the American Bible Society and traveled in that capacity until 1884, when he was located at Valley Falls in Jefferson County, Kansas. For a few months, he worked as a newspaperman there. He then moved to Nortonville, Kansas where he helped his cousin, R. E. VanMeter, edit and publish the first paper of that town... the Nortonville News, for three months. In the fall of 1885, Mr. C. E. VanMeter moved to Hodgeman County, entering a homestead twenty-eight miles north of Dodge City. During the fall and winter, he worked on the weekly paper at Cimarron. Besides looking after his homestead claim, he engaged in ministerial duties in that area.

He joined the Methodist Conference and stationed at Hartland, in Kearny County, as pastor of the Hartland Church and Circuit.

The Conference next directed him to Johnson City in Stanton County where he arrived on July 17, 1887, as assistant pastor of the church. He continued his work until the spring of 1888, when he was sent to Englewood in Clark County, where he preached to the people of that locality for a year. The Conference then returned him to Johnson, where he was placed in charge of the local work for the Methodist Church.

Mr. VanMeter later bought an interest in the Stanton County Telegram, established by W. J. Cross. He soon became its sole proprietor and conducted the paper for a year, being connected with its publication until 1891. At that time, he had a homestead just east of Johnson City, the northeast quarter of section 33, township 28, & range 40. After occupying it, he was again connected with newspaper work on the old Johnson Journal, established by George J. Meckler. In 1898, Mr. VanMeter established the Stanton County Journal and continued its publication until about 1905, when he sold his interests. Thus, for several years Mr. VanMeter had an important part in the history of the local press and did more than any other individual to sustain the live local news. By 1936, at the age of 83 years, he had not been active in journalism for twenty-five years, but he still helped when the staff was short of help.

For several years, he served as a county official. His first important public office was that of a Probate Judge. He was elected county clerk, and he served as deputy district clerk. In the past, he had served on the educational board for the High School. As a man of education and a natural leader, Mr. VanMeter did his part as a teacher in some of the early schools of Western Kansas. For one term, he was in charge of the school in District Number 28 of Stanton County. For that work, he was paid \$25 a month, then the ruling wage of a teacher in the county.

In politics, Mr. VanMeter was a Republican and cast his first presidential vote for Mr. Garfield. He was chairman of the Stanton County committee that arranged for the right of way for the extension of the Santa Fe Railway through the country.

For his pioneer home, Mr. VanMeter moved a shanty 12 by 14 feet, out from Johnson City, and for a few years, this humble abode served to accommodate his family of four. Later, more substantial improvements were constructed, and in the years 1919-1920, he completed his final home, a two-story modern residence of nine rooms, a basement, and a picturesque "U" shaped driveway. Today, there is a forest of trees that he planted years ago and they now shelter and shade the premises. At one time, he had two hundred peach trees, forty apple trees, plus some pear and plum trees. His driveway is flanked on all sides with beautiful Red Cedars and Chinese Arborvitae. His distinguished home is three miles east of Johnson City. Six years ago, a natural gas line was laid across his place and he is fortunate to heat his home with it.

Of all his agricultural efforts, broomcorn has yielded the best profits, but he always relied on livestock as one source of income. Mr. VanMeter favored the Hereford cattle and owned a herd of about 50 head, a good grade of this famous stock.

On March 12, 1888, in Stanton County, Mr. VanMeter married Laura E. Knapp. Rev. Spagne Davis united them in marriage. Laura was born in Saybrook, McLean County, Illinois on October 25, 1863. She was the daughter of Charles W. Knapp and Rebecca Mary Peabody. Her father was a lawyer and came out to Johnson City, Kansas in 1886, and was one of the first members of the bar. There, Laura was the secretary of the Methodist Sunday School for several years. She had a stroke in about 1931 and confined to her bed and chair.

Mr. and Mrs. C. E. VanMeter have a very interesting family, which consists of four sons and two daughters. The sons have served in the army. Their oldest daughter, Carrie Knapp (VanMeter) Hibler, was born on February 2, 1889, in Englewood, Kansas. She now lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Charles Harvey VanMeter lives in Johnson City, Kansas. He is married, and has two children. He is engaged in Farming in Stanton County. He was postmaster there for twelve years. He was County Clerk at the time of the "World War". When he went to serve in the war, his father (Mr. C. E. Van Meter) finished his term as county clerk. He was a non-commissioned officer of the United States Marine Corps at Parris Island in South Carolina. Charles was born in Johnson City on June 6, 1891.

Russell Engle VanMeter was born on the old Stanton County homestead on August 16, 1893. He served in the signal service of the National Army. He now lives in California and is a carpenter. He builds moving picture scenery in Hollywood.

Flora Virginia VanMeter was born on December 6, 1896. She taught school in the Herich Neighborhood (Southeastern part of Stanton County) and lived at the Reace home while teaching. She was a graduate of Washburn College in Topeka. In 1936,

she was living in Los Angeles, California, and working for a bank. During that year, she made a trip to the South Sea Islands.

Glenn Irving VanMeter was born on November 16, 1900 in Johnson City, Kansas. *(Other records give his birth date as 17 Nov 1900)* He worked in the shipyards *(as a welder)* in San Francisco.

Lyle Peabody VanMeter was born in Johnson City, Kansas on June 13, 1905. He was married and was engaged in farming.

Mr. C. E. VanMeter has been a prominent, dependable, and progressive citizen. He was one of the staunch men to help build up the country. He is highly respected for his honor and uprightness. He is still very active at the age of 83. Since about 1925, Mr. VanMeter has been devoting his time to farming, weather reporting, and writing insurance for the McPherson Alliance Insurance company, for which he has been an agent, for a great number of years. For the last five years, he has let others do his farming and he devotes his time to caring for his invalid wife.

As the VanMeter home is located in the dust bowl, the drought and dust storms of the last three years have destroyed a large portion of his trees that are not under irrigation.

Additional Information **CHARLES EDWARD VANMETER**

CHARLES E. VANMETER, son of John Lyle VanMeter (1820-1909) and Martha Ann Engle (1824-1861) was born in Springfield, Ohio on November 2, 1853.

Charles' wife, **LAURA ELIZABETH KNAPP**, daughter of Charles W. Knapp (1834-1902) and Rebecca Mary Peabody (1843-1914), was born on 23 Oct 1863 in Champaign County, Illinois. Laura passed away on 2 Nov 1940, in Stanton County, Kansas. Charles died there on 9 May 1946. Burial was at the Johnson Cemetery in Johnson City, Stanton County, Kansas.

Additional details about their children...

CARRIE (VANMETER) HIBLER was born on 2 Feb 1889 and died in April of 1971 in Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma.

CHARLES HARVEY VANMETER was born on 6 Jun 1891 in Johnson City, Stanton County, Kansas. He died on 15 Mar 1958 in Los Angeles County, California.

RUSSELL ENGLE VANMETER was born on 16 Aug 1893 in Stanton County, Kansas. He died on 11 Sep 1976 in Arroyo Grande, San Luis Obispo County, California.

FLORA VIRGINIA (VANMETER) JOHNSON was born on 6 Dec 1896 in Stanton County, Kansas. She was married to Dr. Clarence Arthur Johnson. He died on 27 Aug 1959 in Los Angeles County, California. Flora died there on 6 Oct 1984. Their burial was at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery in Glendale, Los Angeles County, California.

GLENN IRVING VANMETER was born on 17 Nov 1900 (*the story above gives 16 Nov 1900*) and died on 2 Dec 1963 in San Francisco County, California. His death was caused by suicide. He married Elfrida Savage on 20 Nov 1933 in Carson City, Nevada.

LYLE PEABODY VANMETER was born on 13 Jun 1905 in Kansas and died on 9 Aug 1993 in Riverside County, California. Burial was at the Conejo Mountain Memorial Park Cemetery in Camarillo, Ventura County, California.