

THE STAGE COACH PERIOD OF WICHITA.

By

FRED A. SOWERS.

The public carrier system that peopled this valley so marvelously in the early seventies was crude and simple, consisting of vehicles of every kind and class, drawn by animals of high and low degree; mules, oxen, horses, and even burrows, a motley and heterogeneous mixture of all kinds and classes of people came with them, and they mingled together without distinction. The prairie schooner comers and the ox-cart people as well as the old-fashioned baronche occupants went into camp together on the outskirts or crowded the dimly outlined lane through the prairie and sunflowers, irregularly dotted at intervals with one-story houses, and dignified by the name of Main street, Wichita. News was transmitted by newcomers and each new arrival brought his budget, which started a scurrying to and fro among the inhabitants, like a prairie dog town, chasing back and forth to get and tell the latest news, as there were no newspapers here then; so came in one day a newspaper printed at Lawrence, Kan., conveying the intelligence, as read out loud by Uncle Reuben Riggs, a newly arrived country lawyer from faraway Illinois, that one Henry Tisdale, of Lawrence, Kan., had determined to erect a stage station at the new town, just started, called Wichita, way down on the Arkansas river. This station was to be a relay station and was to maintain several teams and stage outfits. The stages then hung about Humboldt, Emporia, Fort Scott, with several that had ventured as far as Eldorado and Augusta.

This news was received in much the same way the announcement of a new railroad coming to our city would be today if it included terminals, shops, etc. So, true to the item, along in the spring came Dr. Terrill, superintendent of the Tisdale overland, with the material and a couple of carpenters. Together they staked out and located a stage barn on a few lots near where the Second ward school house now stands, then the property of Uncle Waterman. This location for a time became the Sabbath and idle hour meet for citizens and newcomers to visit while in process of construction, and when the occupation and stage coach equipment was being added, it then was an absorbing and

looked upon with much the same interest that our citizens of today visit and view the construction of the Beacon Building, the Schweiter Building, or the Forum; the effect on real estate inflation was also the same, only in a minor degree, for owners of lots in the vicinity of the stage stables stiffened the prices, and every one was, as today, a unit in predictions as to the future growth and greatness of Wichita. But to go back to our subject—the kind and character of the earlier vehicles used to bring emigrants. First came, with the establishment of the public carrier system, the old-fashioned two-mule “jerkie,” a thing about as comfortable to ride in as a tobacco hoghead for a toboggan, rolled down a rough hill; this kind of vehicle seemed constructed to teach difficult acrobatic feats, and it was soon discovered that the strong-ribbed roof was of a necessity to keep the passengers from being shot up and out over the sides, thus entailing upon the stage company numerous suits for damages to life and limb. A Frank Todd was the driver of one of these “jerkies,” and in his boyish, devil-may-care spirit seemed to take delight in making the passengers he carried as uncomfortable as possible. He would husband the resources of the mules, so to speak, until he came to an unusually rough, rock-ribbed or wallowed road; then he would put the “bud” to them, and the way the “jerkie” would flounder, grate, raise up and dip and side toss, turn upside down and churn the passengers was simply awe-inspiring; a yell and protest from passengers inside, some in deep bass oaths, others in the hysterical screams of women and children, were lost in the whirl, smash and resonant whack of the whip, and the loud-mouthed pretended “whons” of the driver, who in reality was making no effort to restrain them, for that was no part of the program. There were two of these hell-conceived conveyances called “jerkies.” They were routed from Emporia and later from Cottonwood Falls, as the Santa Fe Railroad kept building west toward Newton. The driver of No. 2 “jerkie” was a round-faced, star-booted, uproarious “little periwinkle,” who was afterward killed in some kind of a fracas at Sedgwick City; he was usually accompanied in his drive in from the outskirts, seated alongside of him, by a dirty-faced little claim hobbler who was also the possessor of the only clarinet within a hundred miles around, which he kept assiduously blowing on minor keys with a flat sameness that emitted a fa-la-lal-fa-lou from the sonorous department of the clarinet, which, besides heralding the approach

of the stage from several miles away, brought the sparsely settled community into the solitary street to watch the incoming stage, to note the arrivals and learn the news, and to cluster about the three stopping places—the Munger House, Martin’s restaurant or the Allen boarding-house, located near the corner of Third and Main streets.

After the “jerkies” were pushed west, the old-fashioned overland coaches came into use, having been displaced by the building far west of the Union Pacific Railroad. Some of those coaches were pecked with bullets and gouged with arrows, reminiscences of Indian fights, flights and narrow escapes. Their drivers were heroes of such escapades and were gentlemen of cloth, arrayed in shining top boots, big pearl buttons and broad-brimmed sombreros, a belt and two revolvers. Dan Parks, our oldest policeman, was a driver of one of those Pullman coaches—Pullman compared to the “jerkie.” Dan made the drive from Augusta, while Bill Brooks, one of the historical drivers, who had rustled with Indians and drawbacks from a boy, drove from Emporia, Cottonwood Falls and Eldorado. His pride was to deliver the mail, Indians or no Indians, high water or floods; so on several occasions arriving at the east bank of Chisholm creek, at Central avenue now, where the crossing was—Chisholm was then quite a river here; on several occasions the water was out of its banks, and Chisholm creek reached to where the high school now stands. Bill, on such occasions, would dump his passengers with Dan Hoover, whose claim house was on the east side of Chisholm, near the hills; he would then unhitch the lead horses, fasten the mail on one horse, mount the other and swim the mail into the hamlet. Bill was a desperado as well as a stage driver. He was killed afterward in a pistol duel near Eldorado or Cottonwood Falls. In the meantime, by stage, prairie schooner, freight wagon, besides divers and sundry conveyances, Wichita grew to be quite a smart village. With the rapid changes came the railroad, built from Newton down to Wichita by the A., T. & S. F. R. R., in May, 1872; thus was displayed the old stage coach mode of travel, while civilization began to crowd out many of the endeared objects of pioneer life, leaving for a time a heart-burdened sense akin to pain. Such feeling was generated in the pioneer bosom in the sad day and the hour the old-time stage drivers threw their long whiplash over the leaders for a final departure, with a regal smile and a toss of their sombreros voicing back a long fare-

well, they disappeared over the prairie swell, seeking their new stations farther west.—Fred A. Sowers.

THEATERS IN WICHITA.

The New Auditorium. 157 St. Francis avenue; seating capacity, 1,800; J. A. Wolfe, manager.

Crawford Theater. 201-205 South Topeka avenue; E. L. Martling, manager.

Elite Theater. 409 East Douglas; seating capacity, 400; F. A. Beal, manager.

Marple Theater. 421 East Douglas avenue; seating capacity, 650; W. H. Marple, manager.

The Novelty Theater. 408 East Douglas avenue; Frank Garrety, proprietor.

Orpheum Theater (vaudeville). 119-123 North Topeka avenue; Mrs. Mary Waterbury, proprietor; E. G. Olson, manager.

The Princess Theater (vaudeville). 115 South Lawrence avenue; seating capacity, 1,000; L. M. Miller, manager.

Yale Theater. 504 East Douglas avenue; vaudeville and moving pictures; seating capacity, 350; Pells & Hamilton, managers.

"IDA MAY" A VICTIM OF COWBOY SPORT.

Murray Myers, election commissioner, tells a story about the time when a lot of cowboys "shot up" the house of "Ida May," a character of the early days in Wichita. Although "Ida May" was not by any means as modest and moral as her name might lead one to judge, she was quite a figure at the time, and she occupied the largest building on Main street. This building was at the corner of Eighth and Main, and had been built by Morgan Cox and a man named Green, who sold it to the woman. "At supper one night some of us heard that a bunch of cowboys were going to have a little fun at 'Ida May's,' so we slipped out around toward the river and sneaked up as near to the house as we thought was safe," said Mr. Myers. "Presently we saw the cowboys coming on horseback. There were about forty of them and they were riding like mad up Main street, which in places was not much more than a cowpath. They surrounded the house and then the fun commenced. The boys were careful to shoot high at first, so no one would be hurt. Every volley was followed by a series of screams that could be heard distinctly by

those of us who were lying hidden far enough away to be safe. Those fellows circled about that house and fired into it nearly an hour, and when they quit and rode away there was not a whole window or door in the building. It was said that at the first volley all the inmates of the place lay down on the floor and in this manner escaped injury from the flying bullets."

THE FUEL PROBLEM PERPLEXED PIONEERS.

"The problem of fuel to supply the needs of the settlers in this county was one of the most perplexing that they had to face," declares E. A. Dorsey, city treasurer. "This was especially true of those who settled in the western portion of the county. There being no timber and no coal on sale west of Wichita, the settlers were often forced to adopt dire expedients to prevent suffering in their families. Much of the corn raised in 1871 and 1872 was burned, settlers having demonstrated to their satisfaction that the corn on the market, after hauling, would not purchase coal enough to make equal heat. Cornstalks and sunflowers were common fuel for summer use, but the great stand-by for winter was buffalo chips, called by the Irish settlers 'Kansas peats.' When dry, these made an intense heat, and for use in the open campfire were superior to wood. There was one drawback to their use in stoves, however. The odor from the smoke permeated every part of the house. This peculiarity of the fuel occasioned one custom altogether unique. In the event that a member of the family was away from home at night, instead of placing a light in the window for his guidance home, a fire was started in the stove and the smoke gave the wanderer unflinching guidance from any point of the compass. One friend of mine, with particularly acute sense of smell, used to declare that he could smell the smoke from his chimney a mile against the strongest Kansas wind."

FARMERS BROUGHT WHEAT MANY MILES TO WICHITA.

J. T. Holmes, now in the restaurant business on North Main, was one of the real pioneers of Wichita. He came here in 1870, and remembers the days when Wichita, though a small town, was the center of trade for the farmers to a distance of sixty miles or more. These farmers, with their ox teams generally, but with an occasional horse or mule team, hauled all their wheat to Wich-

ita, and Mr. Holmes says he has seen hundreds of these loads of wheat standing in line waiting to be weighed. There were at that time five sets of wheat scales in the vicinity of the Santa Fe, which was the only railroad, and it took three policemen during the wheat hauling season to keep the men in line and prevent them from fighting to get ahead of one another. Mr. Holmes says he has also seen dozens of wagon loads of buffalo and cattle bones waiting to be weighed in much the same manner as the wheat wagons, many farmers who had no wheat to sell being driven to the necessity of gathering up the bones that were scattered over the prairies and hauling them to town to sell.

SEDGWICK HOME LUMBER HAULED FROM EMPORIA.

"I remember very well the day when the teams started from Wichita to Emporia after the lumber that was used in the building of what is now the 'Sedgwick Home,' " said Cyrus Sullivan, a pioneer, now engaged in the real estate business here. "It was one day in April, about the 20th, 1870, I think, when 'Billy' Greiffenstein started the teams off after the lumber for what was to be the finest dwelling in Wichita for several years. Up to that time most of the lumber that had been used in Wichita was cottonwood, sawed at some of the mills along the creeks or rivers near town, and this action of Mr. Greiffenstein's in sending away for pine lumber to build a house was regarded as an evidence of his wealth and importance in the community." Greiffenstein, who was afterward mayor of the town three or four terms, lived in the house several years, and it was finally bought by the city. About a year and a half ago it was given to the Associate Charities of the town to be used as a home for indigent persons.

THE TREND OF BUSINESS.

By

LINDLEY BOYD.

I have been a real estate dealer for many years in this and other states. For several years past I have carefully watched the trend of business in Wichita. For many years Main street

seemed to be the principal north and south street; the building of the Missouri Pacific depot near Second street and the building of the court house in its present location seemed to fix business in this way; later on came the building of the Missouri Pacific depot on West Douglas avenue, the city hall, the government postoffice, the Beacon Building, the Eagle Building, all south of Douglas avenue, has materially changed business in Wichita. In addition to this, Market street is rapidly building up in the blocks on each side of Douglas avenue; such also is the case with Lawrence, Emporia, St. Francis and other streets each side of the avenue on the north and south, but the building of the Smyth Block, occupied by the large dry goods firm of George Inness & Co., marked a distinct movement to the eastward in the business life of Wichita.

It must be recalled also that all of the railway depots except the Missouri Pacific are on the east part of Douglas avenue and on the south side of said street. In addition to this, four theaters and a new one just building are on the south side of Douglas avenue or south of the avenue. All of these things have given a strong trend of business to the eastward, and have entirely changed the character of the south side of Douglas avenue. The time was when the north side of Douglas avenue had the most travel and the most business. All that is changed, and the principal travel at this time is upon the south side of Douglas avenue. The old-timers of the town have abandoned the idea that the town should revolve for all time to come around the corner of Main and Douglas avenue.

SEDGWICK COUNTY PAYS ITS FULL SHARE OF TAXES.

There are 105 counties in the State of Kansas, and they are worth, at a very conservative estimate, \$2,750,000,000; of that amount, Sedgwick county furnishes \$108,000,000, which is about one-twenty-fifth of the valuation of the state.

Sedgwick county certainly stands for its full share of state taxes. The valuation of the entire state for taxable purposes is about \$2,750,000. The rate is one mill, which makes the state tax \$2,750,000, of which Sedgwick county pays \$108,000. Thus this county pays one-twenty-fifth of the entire state tax. It possesses one-twenty-fifth of the taxable wealth of the state.

There are 105 counties in the state. Wyandotte is the only

one which pays more than Sedgwick, and its valuation exceeds ours by less than \$2,000,000. The vast wealth centered there in the packing houses, stock yards and railway terminals just a little more than offsets our lead in real estate values.

The farm lands of Sedgwick county which represent individual wealth are worth double those of Wyandotte, and city lots are quite as valuable here as there. In individual property upon which taxes are paid, Sedgwick leads the state.

Wichita, which, next to Kansas City, Kan., pays the most to the state treasury, and meets one-twenty-fifth of the entire expense of state government, has not a single state institution. The metropolis of Kansas has developed without the aid of state money, even in dribbles. Kansas City gets back, in the school for the blind, part, if not all, it pays the state. Topeka realizes in state money paid out for local purposes several times as much as it pays in. It has the insane asylum, the reform school for boys, and all the state officers, nearly, live there and expend their salaries there.

Atchison has the Soldiers' Orphans' Home; Leavenworth is close enough to Lansing to get back from the penitentiary expenditures as much as it pays the state; Lawrence is the seat of the university, where ten times its tax is spent. Emporia has an expensive normal school, and other cities like Manhattan, Hutchinson, Parsons, Dodge City, Winfield, Osawatomie and Rebat get back more than they pay in, but not one cent comes back to Wichita. Our senator and representatives leave more than their salaries in Topeka, so we may say truthfully that we do not get back a penny of the \$108,000 paid to the state.

In this connection it may be objected that the district judge and the court stenographer receive their pay checks from Topeka. It is true all over the state that judges are paid from Topeka, because it frequently happens that one judge presides in several counties, and it would be embarrassing both to the judges and the counties to have to figure out the proper ratio each should pay.

It is true that the legislature has appropriated \$500 to several Wichita hospitals and charities, but this is because those institutions are open to all. Residents of other counties, stranded here, taken ill here, find refuge in these aided institutions, and every year they give service to more state wards, or persons that the state usually cares for, than the amount appropriated.

Until the new census is published, it will be impossible to get

a direct ratio between the population of this county and city and the state, but it is probable that the ratio will be not less than one-twenty-fifth, and it may be one-twenty-third. But from any standpoint it is clear that Sedgwick county and Wichita deserve consideration at the hands of the state, when it is considered that for years this community has contained nearly 5 per cent of the population and has paid 4 per cent of the state taxes and never received back hardly a penny of it.

THE WICHITA HORSE MARKET.

All of the old-timers of the county will recall the old-time horse market of Wichita on West Douglas avenue. This market extends from Water street to the bridge across the Arkansas river. It was here that we heard that old resonant Howler, "Old Four Eyes," plying his daily avocation and selling horses and mules at auction. Here also was Bill Bilderback and Joe Fisher, Fatty Lawson, Barney Levi, and many others. Here also at a later date came Uncle Jimmy Benner, whose stentorian tones still wake the echoes of the street. Harry Hill, afterwards known as Oklahoma Harry Hill, and the Morgan brothers, kept feed and sales stables on West Douglas avenue, and from the earliest history of this locality the west end of Douglas avenue has been a market devoted to the sale of horses, mules and other live stock. Here also in an early day was the favorite stamping ground of Doc Black, a frontier character in Wichita. Most of these men have passed over. They have gone and the new-comers of a later day know them not; but the old-timers recall them as the web and woof of a frontier period fast passing away in Wichita.—Editor.