

## **The dawn of civilization**

An account by Adolph Roenigk of Lincoln County, and his time in Kansas, starting in the summer of 1868. Roenigk recounts working for the military at Fort Harker, Indian depredations and attacks on Indians, of which he includes an account of the "Mulberry scrap." He also writes of the lawlessness and subsequent swift justice that took place during settlement of the area.

Creator: Roenigk, Adolph, 1847-1938

Date: 1913

Callnumber: Historical collections: Lincoln County

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 219479

Item Identifier: 219479

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## The dawn of civilization

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During the summer of 1868 numerous depredations were committed by the Indians in the border settlements of our State; Necessary measures were taken for protection against these Marauders; Militia were organized to patrol the outlying districts.

In the fall Govenor Crawford issued a proclamation organizing a Regiment of Cavalry, the 19th. Kansas, and preparation was made for a Winter campaign. Horses for this regiment were bought at Fort Riley, the price paid was \$ 160. per head.

I was living at Manhattan at that time and took a horse to Fort Riley to sell to the Government but he failed to pass the Veternary and I had to take him home again.

While at Fort Riley I leared mor of the particulars of the expedition to be sent after the Indians, that men were needed in the west and went to Fort Harker to work for the Government. Fort Harker was at that time one of the most important military posts on the frontier Settlements and the outfitting depot for the comming expedition.

As stated in history the main body of the regiment started out from Topeka for the Indian Territory, but two troops started from Fort Hays as also did General Custer and the 7th. Cavalry with a number of Indian Scouts.

I remember we had a lot of horses for this regiment at Fort Harker In November a train load were shipped to Fort Hays the starting point of the expedition. I and a number of others were sent with these Horses.

I remember we loaded the horses about dark arriving at Ellsworth perhaps Nine oclock; here we had to lay over and wait for morning, as at that time trains west of Ellsworth only run in day time.

During this night we were quartered up stairs in an open frame Building; The weather was quite cold. There were no beds nor even a stove to make fire to keep warm. Those pf our men that were fortunate enough to have blankets rolled themselves up in them and laid down on the floor.

I and some others were not prepared, had no blankets, so there was



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nothing else to do than to crawl in with some other fellow, and part of the time walk the floor ##### trying to keep warm.

While working at Fort Harker as a common roust-a-bout, I with about fifty other# men were boarding at what was nick-named the "Alligator Messhouse", it might have been properly called "Camp starvation", as it was the only place where I might say we did not get enough to eat. We knew the Government issued plenty of rations but somehow these never reached us at the "Alligator Messhouse. We made up a long petition ##### setting forth that we were starving & etc., it was signed by all the men and send in to headquarters, but we never heard from it, nor did we notice any improvement in our fare.

I had no money to buy anything to eat on the outside and well remember a man hiring me to chop ##### some fire wood; it was dry cotton-wood and the axe was very dull; it was my first experiment of this kind and right there I formed rather a poor opinion of Kansas Timber; At every stroke ## the axe bounced seemingly as hitting a bale of cotton, but I managed to chop and break up some wood for which I received fifty cents; part of this I at once invested in a loaf of bread, and it tasted good without butter.

I got tired of this sort of thing, gave up going with the expedition and looked around for something else to do.

While at Ellsworth one time I met John Cook (at the depot waiting for the train) who told me about Fossil creek. While we were talking the Railroad Supervisor (as he was then called) McCormick came up and Cook asked him for a job for me at fossil creek. McCormick's answer to me was; "##### I'll put you at Wilson"; "No not to Wilson" said I, and leaving I went back to Fort Harker to try the Alligator Messhouse once more.

Wilson had a bad reputation at that time according to my idea; others may have thought the same as hands were always short at that Station. Indians had been bad about there, killing two men a few months prior to this.

Fossil creek of course was no better as we learned later, but I did not know it at that time.

a short time after this I took the train to Fossil creek and went to work on the Railroad.

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On this occasion I believe it will be appropriate to say something in a general way of the conditions of affairs existing here at that time; The many things that the early settler had to content with.

I will recall a few incidents to illustrate the extreme hatred between them and the Indians by describing some things which happened during my stay here. Things of such importance that would command great headlines in leading papers of our land today was scarcely noticed at that time.

Some of our old timers were no angels by any means, and it has been truly said; "That man ~~##~~ largely is what his environments make him", He will adapt himself to existing conditions and do things under one set of circumstances that he would not do under another.

I will say something about the bad men who are always in evidence in any new country.

There is a great deal of hidden history- events transpired at that time that will never be brought to light.

The manner of dealing with the rough element was different at that time from what it is today, and people who may still be living and could tell about it will not do so for fear of incriminating themselves or their friends; for that reason much of this kind of history will always remain a blank.

As the country was opened for settlement the settlers came here to make homes for themselves and families.

As this had been the Indian Country we cannot blame him for not giving up without a struggle what had been his home from time immemorial but in his ignorant and savage mode of warfare he killed indiscriminately not sparing the wives or innocent children. On the other hand the settlers had no use for the Indian in any shape, either good or bad, it was a common saying "the only good Indian was the dead Indian". It was dangerous for those Indians that were civilized to leave their reservations and come near settlements where depredations by hostile Indians had been committed.

One of the incidents I wish to mention happened at Ellsworth in the fore-part of the winter of 1868 while I was at Fossil creek. When a party of Indians (supposed to have been Pawnees) returning from the south on the way home to their reservation in the north made a stay at Ellsworth.

They hitched their ponies to posts along the streets, some were in the



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stores, others on the streets and around town, when someone fired a shot as a signal to drive them out of town; immediately firing began. The Indians offered no resistance but jumped on their ponies to retreat out of town and across the smoky river but were unable to make their escape until five or six were killed. My informant told me that one of them mortally wounded fell on the banks after crossing the river.

We heard of the affair at the time; that it was entirely without any provocation, and it was pronounced a dastardly outrage, but never have I seen a line in any newspaper or anything written in history in regard to it from that time to this.

The only excuse the people of Ellsworth had was their intense hatred of Indians on account of a raid committed by Hostile Cheyennes in the summer prior to this. At that time the hostiles captured a herd of mules on the bottoms across the river south of town, with the mules were several herders two of which were taken prisoners. At nightfall they took their prisoners to a position in plain view, but beyond rifle range of the town, staked them to the ground, built a fire on the breast of each and danced around them rejoicing. The Indians were in such numbers and the town so small that the victims' friends and the few inhabitants at the time had to listen to the unfortunates' cries until away in the night until death relieved them, for they were unable to bring relief.

The next morning the Indians were gone, but the blackened and half-burned bodies were found still fastened to the ground, scalped and terribly mutilated. The Indians were very bold as it was within four miles of a military post, Fort Harker. I heard of it while working there.

It seems very few soldiers were at the fort at the time as it happened at the beginning of hostilities early in the season.

In our own (Lincoln County) a story was told of an affair that took place in south east part of the county during about the same period "it was called the Mulberry scrap", one soldier was said to have been killed, one citizen wounded and it was also rumored that some Indians were killed. It happened so long ago that it was considered a myth and little believed by the people of the present day. But when Miss Elizabeth N. Barr made an investigation for her book; (History of Lincoln County) It was found not only to be true but far more to it than people had believed.

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Since the book was written, I met two of the participants and will hereby relate in condensed form what I learned of them and also Quote from Miss Barr's book.

As had been the <sup>ir</sup> custom the friendly Pawnees from their reservation in Nebraska used to pass back and forth to steal horses from the plains tribes in the south (or any other tribes) and sometimes annoyed the settler to much to their everlasting undoing. On this occasion a band of nearly a score of Pawnees were coming through the neighborhood, and stopping at Tom Skinners house compelled Mrs Skinner to cook for them.

When the settlers heard of this they gathered together to see what could be done. Several suggestions were made, but it was decided to go for troops that were camped not far from the present site of Lincoln. Three of the settlers went.

The captain told them that he would sent a messenger to Fort Harker during the night for orders and to have the settlers ready by day-break and he would have some soldiers there by that time.

Accordingly a ~~####~~ Lieutenant with about a dozen soldiers took up the trail with the settlers the next morning and overtook them on the Mulberry. The Indians had stopped at the home of Chas Martin to get food and tobacco, but the advance scouts did not succeed in holding them until the main body of men came up.

The Red Men scattered and the settlers began hunting them up and down the creek.

After a preliminary scrap in which several Indians were killed, the leader of the settlers and on the ~~#####~~ Lieutenants proposition it was decided to make good Indians of them right then and there. ~~#####~~ They followed the red men to a rocky gorge where sixteen of them took refuge in a cave.

One of the soldiers who was not careful enough to keep out of range, was shot by an Indian and died at Martin's house two hours later.

Finding no other way to get the Indians it was decided to throw hay in the mouth of the cave and fire it. Seeing what was about to be done the Indians dashed out of the cave under a rain of shot; nearly all were killed; only one was captured and the Lieutenant took him to Fort Harker. Three or four of these indians, or at least several had discharges



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from the U.S.Army.

The following morning a lone Indian on foot was seen coming from the scene ostensibly trying to make his way back to his reservation

Two of the settlers met him south of the Saline river and killed him, so as to be sure that he would not molest the settlement further by perhaps stealing a mount on his way home.

Thomas Alderdice while here on a visit a few years ago told me that an investigation of this affair was held by the Government and that he was a witness, but of course nothing came of it.

Lincoln County on the other hand suffered from hostile Indian raids. Fifteen persons at different times, were killed, among whom were women and innocent children.

It has happened that hostile Indians after committing depredations camped within a few miles of the soldiers camp, and often complaints were made by the settlers of insufficient protection given by the Military to the sparsely settled districts, but it was extremely difficult for the Government to satisfy the people of the east who were clamoring for the rights of the Indian and at the same time protect the settlers of the west.

In our county one old settler, a pioneer during the Indian troubles took a claim on the very outskirts of the settlements. It was said of him that in his time he made more than one good Indian of the hostiles and he has never denied the tales attributed to him.

In conversation with an old timer the following story was told me; While going west on a Buffalo hunt this party with other stopped at the cabin of our Pioneer as it was the last inhabitation to the Buffalo range.

Making inquiry as to the possible danger of Indians, the question was asked; "if any Indians had been seen lately", the Pioneer answered; "there ~~#####~~ had been a few stragglers but he did not think there were any now", and took the party around to a lonely spot where they were shown a fresh mound; the white man's Indian burial ground, he had not taken pains enough to dig the graves deep enough, as the toes of a savage was sticking out.

This same old Pioneer was a kind neighbor, raised a respectable family and was held in high esteem by the people. After the county was organized he was elected repeatedly to one of the highest county offices.

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He fought in the battle of the Arikarie, was an Indian fighter always at the front, and a model citizen in time of peace. #####

He died of old Age some years ago respected by all who knew him. In those years the country was infected with bad men, horsethieves, Gambler and etc. To deal with this tough element severe measures had to be adopted; Instead of courts of Justice as now, Vigilance Committees were organized, and criminals were summarily hung to a tree. In some parts of the state the whole male population of counties arose to put down such lawlessness; there was no haggling about technicalities by Lawyers.

About Caldwell and Wellington in the early Seventies a number of bad men were hung. In 1874 several horsethieves were hung to a tree and with them a Lawyer named "Hasbrook" who had continuously defended the lawless element, manipulating their cases, furnished Alibis until it became impossible to convict any of them.

I am relating this here because I learned it from a friend of mine who lived there at the time and had a part in it. On request he wrote a history of many interesting events that took place in his career, but left out the main part and when asked about it he said; "I would write that, it would do, people are living today that took part in it, some afterwards became prominent in politics.

Similar things could be told of nearly all frontier towns; some had special graveyards for men who died with their boots on, I remember one was named "Boot Hill", and while I am dwelling on this I may as well mention that even in your own Town Russell, Three men that were buried on what is now your Townsite died with their boots on.

If a certain Cottonwood tree which stood (and may be standing yet on the north bank of the smoky river south of Ellsworth) could talk how many such stories it could tell.



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While I was at Fossil Creek we would now and then hear of it, but it was so common that a person might ~~get~~ go to that town a few days later and scarcely hear of it.

On the occasion of the arrival of the first church bell at Ellsworth in 1874, I saw a write-up in a newspaper, giving a description of the transformation of the town from bad to good. I was not interested enough to save the clipping and do not remember the name of the paper, but I distinctly remember that the article stated that twenty-eight men were hung there in the short space of a few years. How true this statement was, I could not vouch for, but I know that there were a number.

There are yet people living in those towns today who know about these occurrences, but if you should start out to investigate to write something for history, very little would you learn; it has been forgotten. You might find some people who want to tell a whole lot, but to get to facts you might have to do a great deal of sifting to separate the kernels from the chaff.

To be fair, and to be just to the Indian, it should be said that he was continuously taken advantage of; he was cheated by the Whites. There was no one to take his side in the west; right or wrong the Indian must go; he was driven from his hunting ground and his home.

Nor was he the only one guilty of slaughtering defenceless women and children; his civilized white brother did the same. To prove this statement, I need only to point to two instances that happened during our time. One at Sand Creek, Eastern Colorado, in 1864, called "The Chivington Massacre", where some hundred and fifty peaceable Indians were killed, two thirds of whom were old men, women and children. For this, the Commander of the troops, Major Chivington, was cashiered from the army. A station on the Missouri Pacific Railroad, in that vicinity, is now named "Chivington".

The other was ten years later, as History tells us-- as late as 1875, on Sappa Creek, in Rawlins County, by Lieutenant Henly. Here also a whole village was wiped out, and among the reported killed were a number of women and children.

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Summing up all we may say there was no one to blame.

Those occurrences may be classed as incidents that happened in the course of transformation of this country from a savage to a civilized State. It is modern Civilization. The Indian in his manner of living required to much space.

This now prosperous country with its network of Rail-Roads, Telegraph and Telephone lines, towns and cities, and farms producing food stuffs for Millions of people could not be left to a comparative small number, a few hordes of savages.

The Indian is ~~only~~ only one of the different dark races who are either civilized or crowded out by the more intelligent and energetic white race.

It is here the same as we see illustrated in nature everywhere; the fittest will survive, taken from my viewpoint it is Evolution -if you please.

Those men and women who took part in subduing the wild nature of this now prosperous country, I believe deserve just recognition and we may have a warm heart for the old pioneers that suffered hardships and privations while blazing the way to make this fit country to live in. Many have died, Others in years gone by became discouraged by failure of crops and many other obstacles and moved away to seek their fortunes elsewhere and very few are left here to enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Those of us who are here notice the great change, instead of coming out here to hunt Buffalos as we at one time ~~expected~~ expected to do, ~~we come out here~~ we now speed across the range by Automobile and attend picnics.

Judging from the past it is reasonable to predict that this country is still in its infancy; while at times dry weather and consequent failure of crops will be repeated, steady advancement is taking place as time rolls on, until these great plains, at one time a part of the great American Desert will become one of the garden spots of the world.

By A. Roenigk  
of Lincoln Kansas  
Summer of 1913