

#### Kansas historical quarterly

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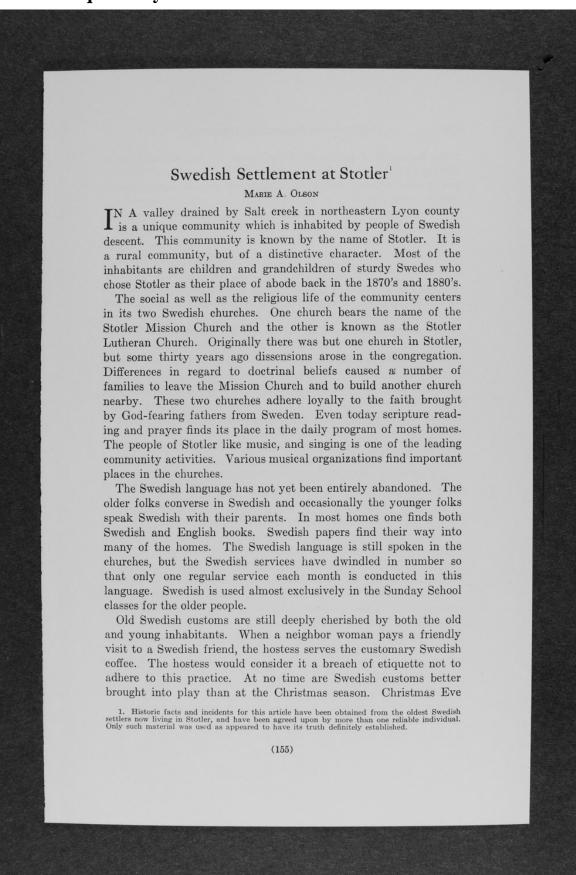
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# KANSAS HISTORICAL SOCIETY





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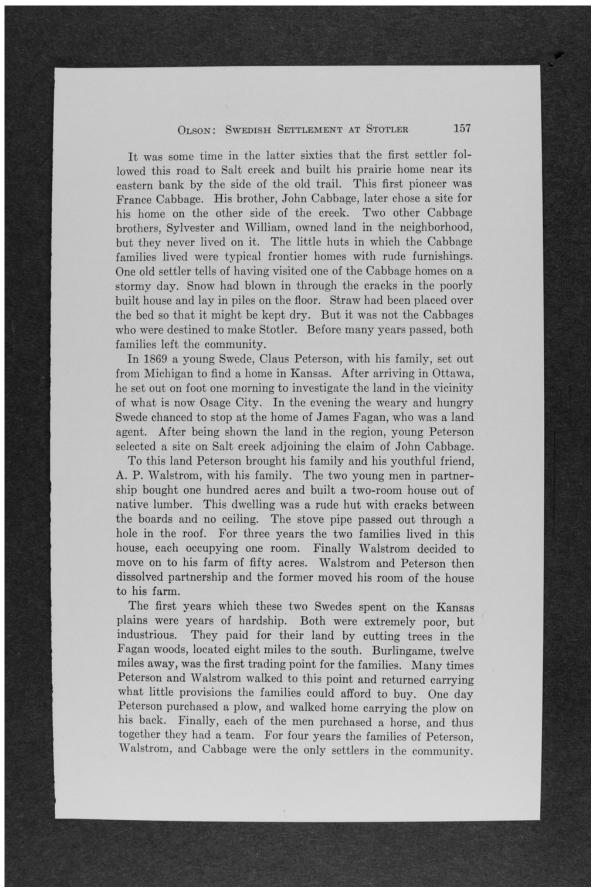
THE KANSAS HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

is the beginning of festivities. The celebration on this evening is entirely a family affair. Each family gathers at home for Christmas supper after which presents are exchanged around the Christmas tree. At 5:30 on Christmas morning the people, both old and young, gather at church for Christmas services. The old Swedish hymn "Var Halsad Skona Morgonstund" peals forth from the churches, which are lighted by Christmas candles. The old Christmas story is the text of the morning. These services are the height of the Swedish Christmas festivities. As the crimson rays break forth in the east, the worshippers turn their footsteps homeward. The remainder of Christmas Day is customarily spent in family groups. In the evening the children of the Lutheran Church give a program consisting of recitations and songs. A few evenings later a similar program is given by the Sunday School children of the Mission Church. These programs are the children's affairs and are events to which they eagerly look forward. Christmas festivities continue for about a week, during which time the various families invite relatives and friends to their homes. These much-loved Swedish customs will likely continue to be observed for years to come.

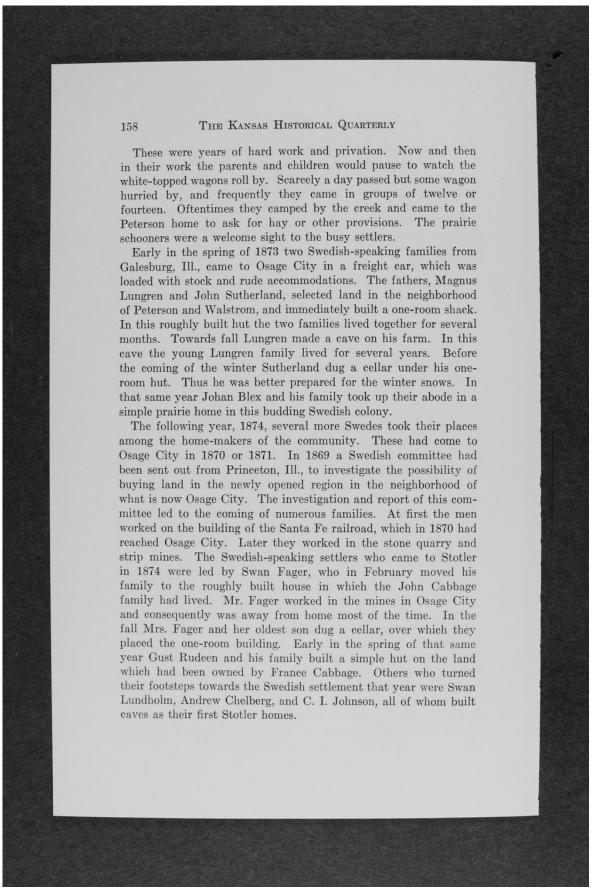
The land on which Stotler is located was once a part of the great territory claimed by the Osage Indians. In 1846 it became a part of the Indian reservation for the Sac and Fox Indians of the Mississippi. In 1859 the Sacs and Foxes agreed to sell the western half of their Kansas reservation and by the year 1864 this land was opened to white settlement. The region now included in Stotler was a part of this area. It was purchased by a land company in the East known as Seyfert, McManus & Company. This company later sold the land to private individuals.

When the first settler found his way to the community, the prairie region was the home of wild plants and animals which thrive on the Kansas plains. The red men roamed the region, and frequently pitched their tepees along Salt creek. Except for a few scattered trees along the creek, there was nothing to obstruct the view for a distance of many miles. An early trail (known as the Burlingame trail and the Lawrence-Emporia road) wound its way across the prairie from Burlingame, passed over the region which was to become Stotler, and then continued its way towards Emporia. Over this trail rolled numerous westward-bound prairie schooners, and now and then a government train carrying provisions for soldiers stationed in the western forts plodded over the prairie trail.

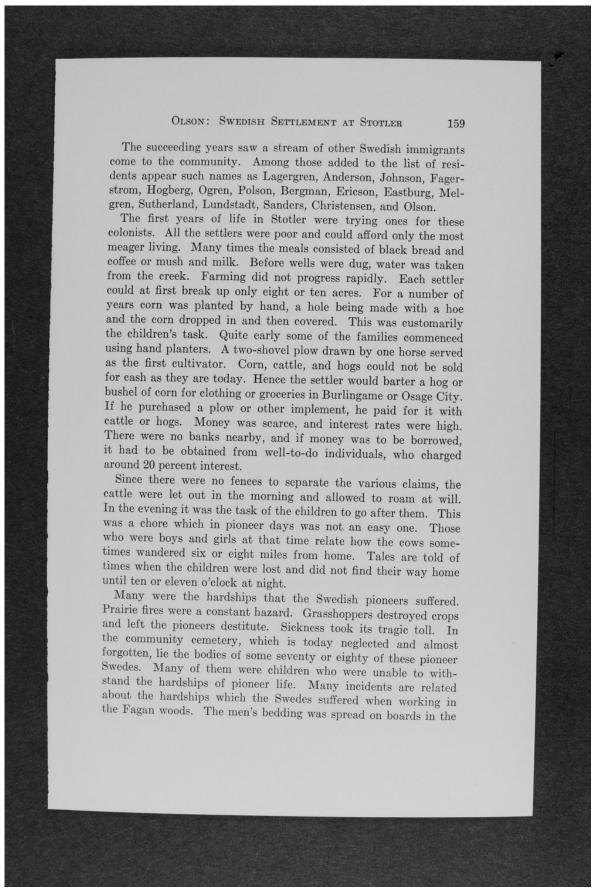




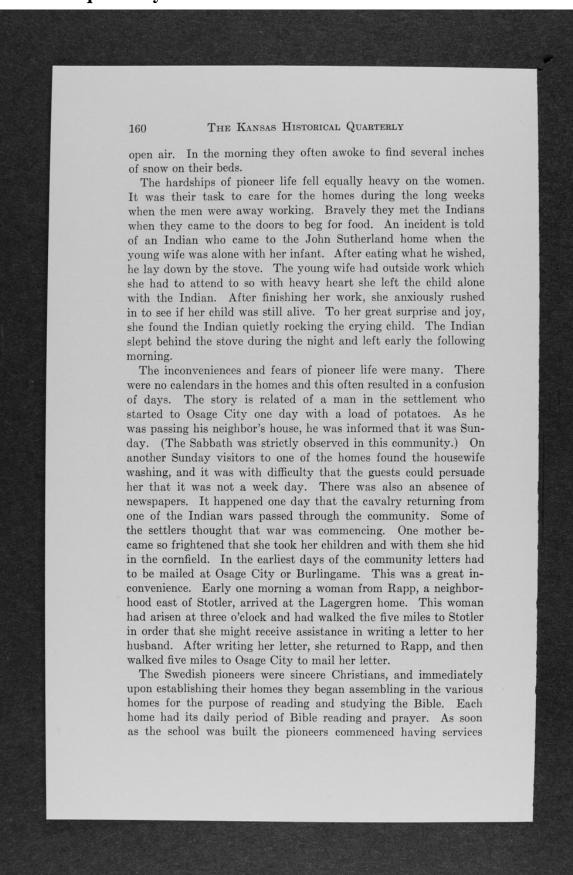




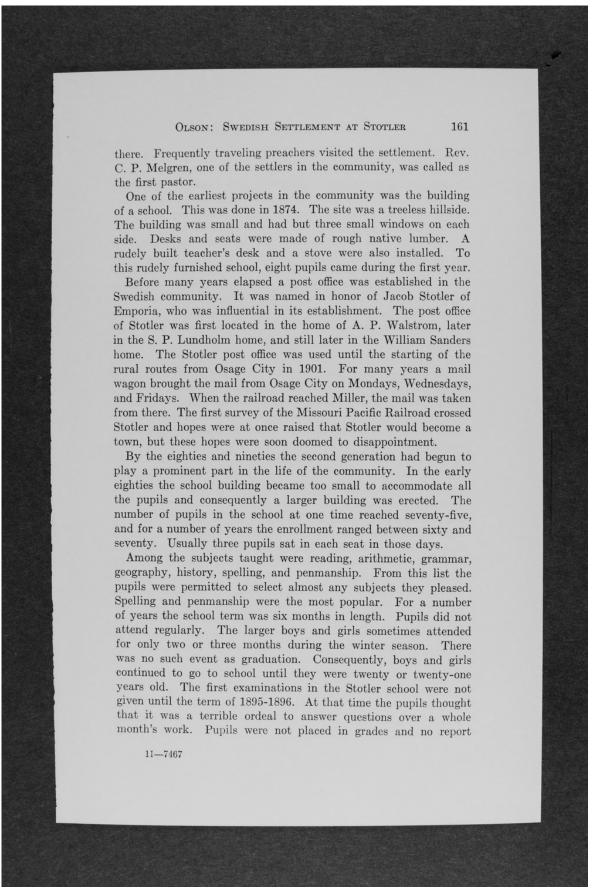




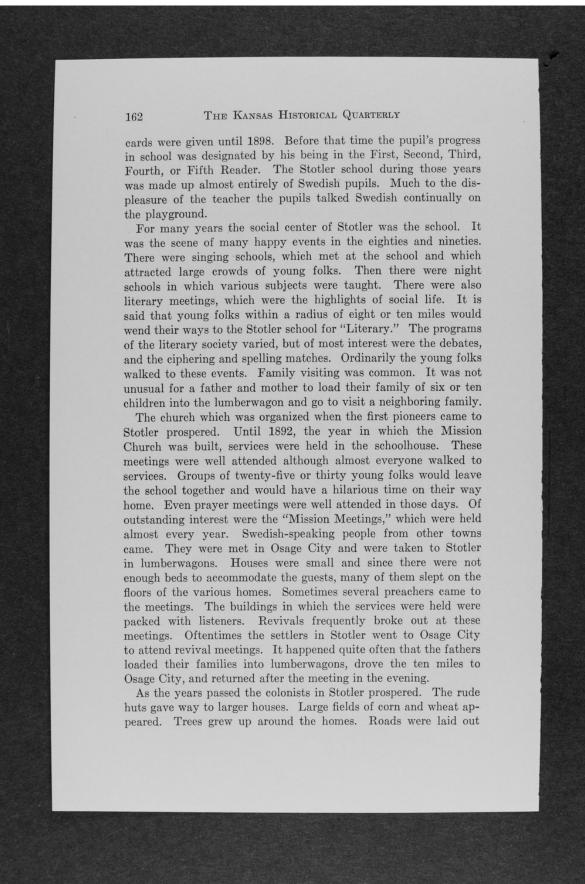




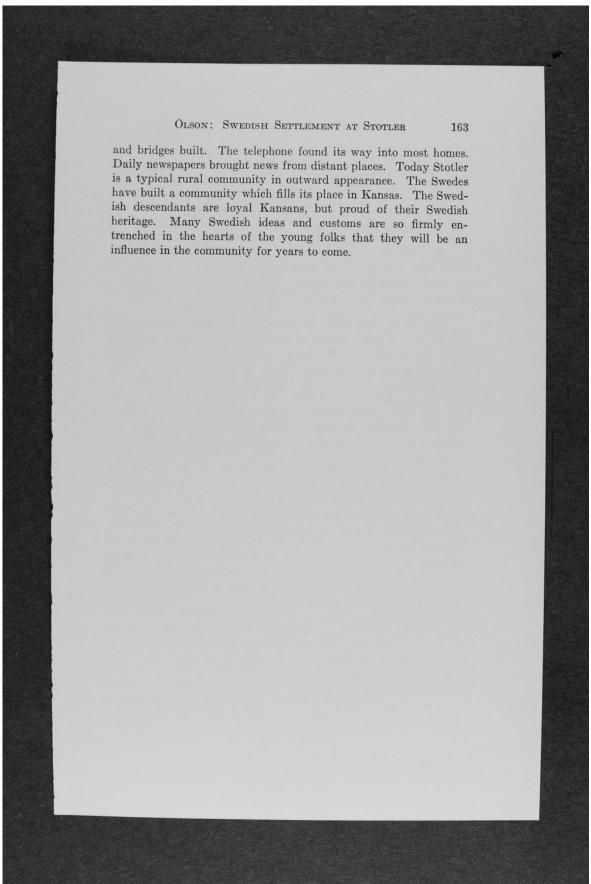




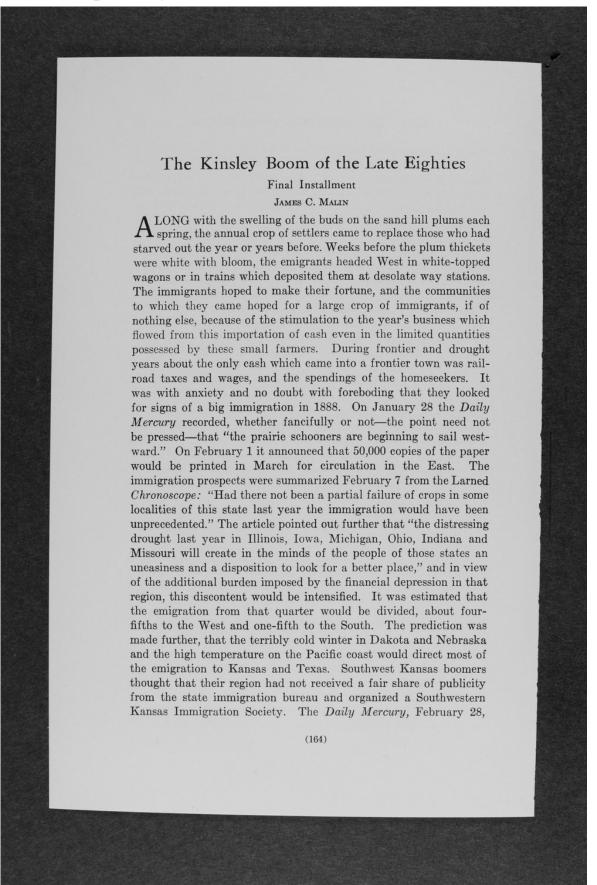




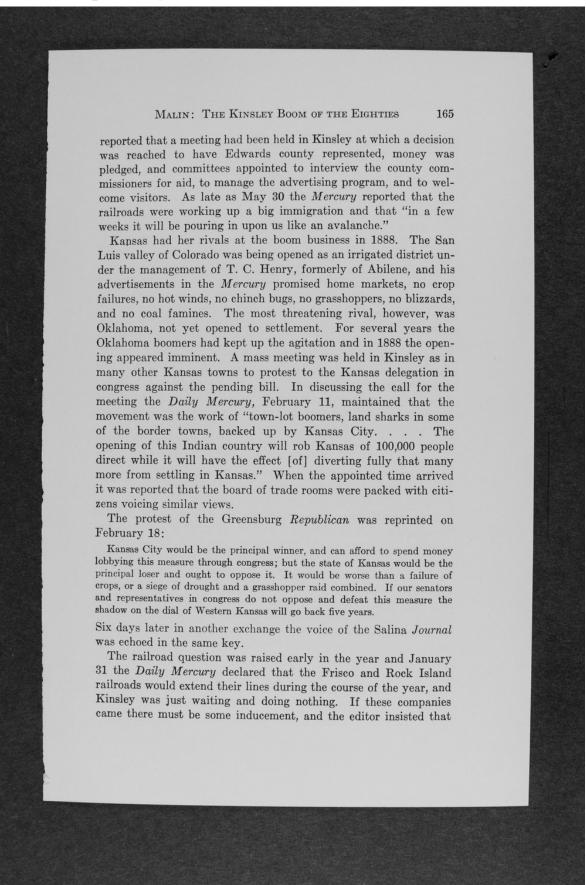














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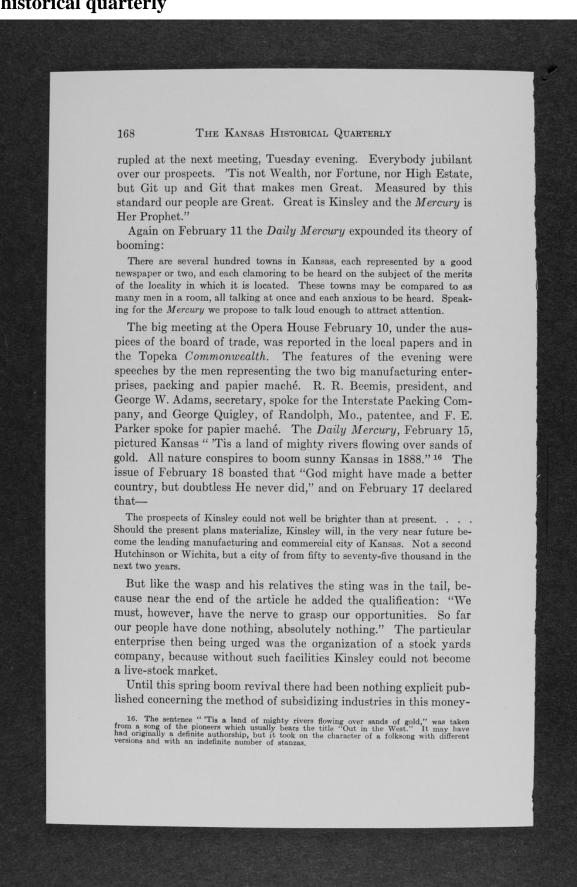
THE KANSAS HISTORICAL QUARTERLY 166 Kinsley must present its case. On February 10 the same paper reported that the Omaha, Kansas and El Paso Railroad would be built from Kinsley to the south line of the state "at once, or in a short time at least." A four-line item in the same issue, however, leaves a reader wondering. It read: "The officers and directors of the Kinsley and Milkyway Rapid Transit Company will meet this evening for the purpose of discussing the practicability of running a branch line to the moon." Was it just another vagary of Hebron's sense of humor, or had the printer's devil put one over on the "Old man"? The issue of the following day recorded that the stockholders meeting of the O. K. & E. had been held the preceding day. officers were elected, with Hebron of the Mercury, secretary, and the president had reported that arrangements had been made to finance construction to the south line by way of Ford City. For some reason new flights of fancy did not come easily to the Mercury in booming railroads in 1888. The leap-year issue of February 29 reprinted substantially a last year's article about the Santa Fé cutting out its arcs. The only other significant mentions of railroads occurred on April 6, when the president of the O. K. & E. appeared before the board of trade stating that construction would begin as soon as the bonds were voted, and April 17 when a promise was made of a speedy bond election. One of the most peculiar features of the boom of 1887, as it was reflected in the press of Edwards county, was the neglect, almost omission, of agriculture. There were no discussions of field crops, or of live stock, varieties of products, adaptation, or methods of production. The ballyhoo was railroads, town lots, and manufacturing. The farmer came into the picture only as an incidental factor connected with the other three subjects. Other cities and towns had behaved similarly. During the long winter the Kansas boomers themselves became conscious of the omission, and there were numerous instances where western Kansas papers in 1888 began to emphasize the necessity of building a sound prosperity on the product of the local farms. In this connection the Mercury fell in line urging the business men to get behind the sugar factory and to assist in modernizing its machinery to produce sugar as well as syrup. This would provide a market for sorghum, the sure crop of Edwards county, and on January 12 it returned to the rural question suggesting "that it was high time an effort was made to boom our farming lands, just a little. City building is all right and proper, but the country



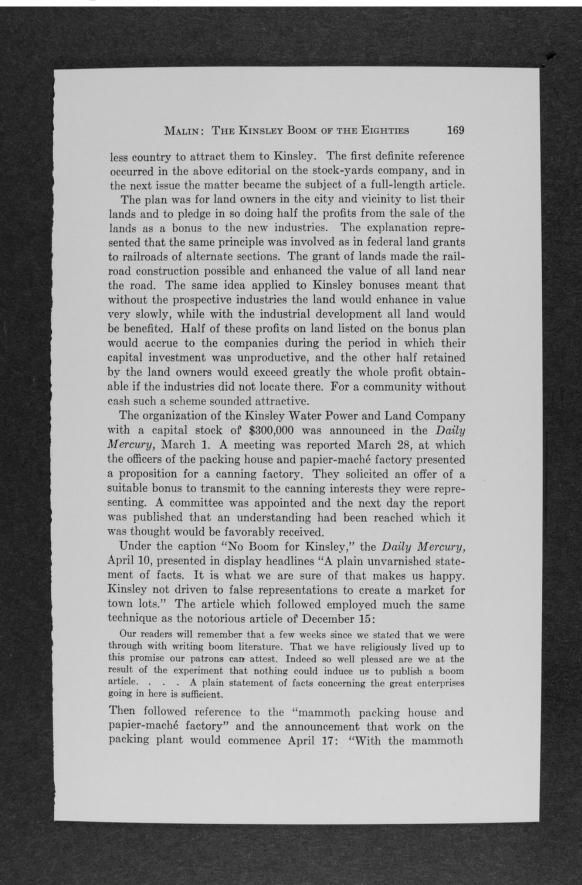
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Malin: The Kinsley Boom of the Eighties 167 must be kept in the line of procession. . . . " A few days later it advised all farmers to plant a little flax, in view of the papier maché plant, and even if there was no market for the straw the seed was as valuable as any other crop. The failure of crops the preceding year was so serious that many farmers did not have seed to plant another crop. As early as February 22 the Mercury reported that Greensburg had raised \$800 to buy seed for Kiowa county, but except for flax seed. Edwards county did not act until March, when the board of trade arranged to advance seed of all kinds to farmers unable to buy through the usual channels.15 They would do nothing about the sugar mill, however, and a meeting reported in the Mercury April 6 that Bennyworth, the owner, stated that it was too late to expect to renovize the mill for the current season. The conclusion seems justified that, except for the imperative matter of spring seed, the business and boom leadership, although conscious of something lacking, did not understand how or where to take hold of the agricultural problem. Their peculiar talents were much more fitted to the attempt to revive the industrial boom of 1887. The first boom article in 1888 of the type so common the year before was printed by the Daily Mercury, February 3: Already our people have caught the inspiration of the great boom coming, and are marching in time to the music. There are more new buildings planned in Kinsley today than ever were built here in any two years of the city's history, and there are more inquiries being made by eastern people regarding our city than ever before; and it is safe to presume that when spring opens there will be such a rush to Kinsley as our most ardent and enthusiastic boomer never dreamed of . . . By the middle of April or the first of May the probabilities now are that more than a million dollars worth of buildings-business houses, hotels, factories and machine shops will be in the course of erection. In addition to all this we have here one of the finest and best waterpowers in the state, a stream, whose banks on either side might be dotted with mills and factories and still not exhaust its power. Fortunately for Hebron's equanimity the phrase "Oh, Yeah" had not yet been invented. He might have pointed in defense to the report in the same issue of the paper, however, that the First National Bank had just declared a four per cent dividend on its first six month's business and placed \$1,500 in its surplus fund besides. The next day the headlines to the news story of the meeting of the board of trade ran "Over forty new members added. . . . Four hundred dollars subscribed in ten minutes. Which amount will be quad-15. Daily Mercury, March 9, 1888.

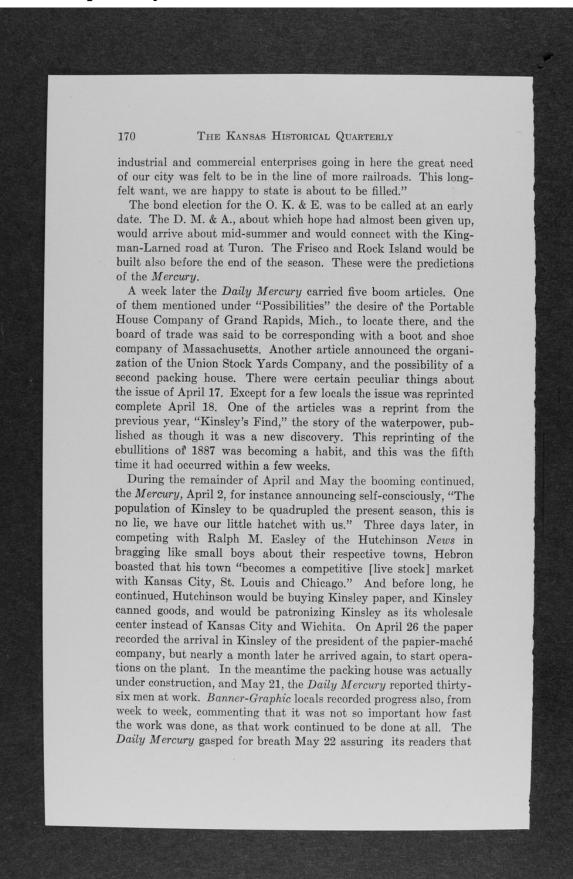




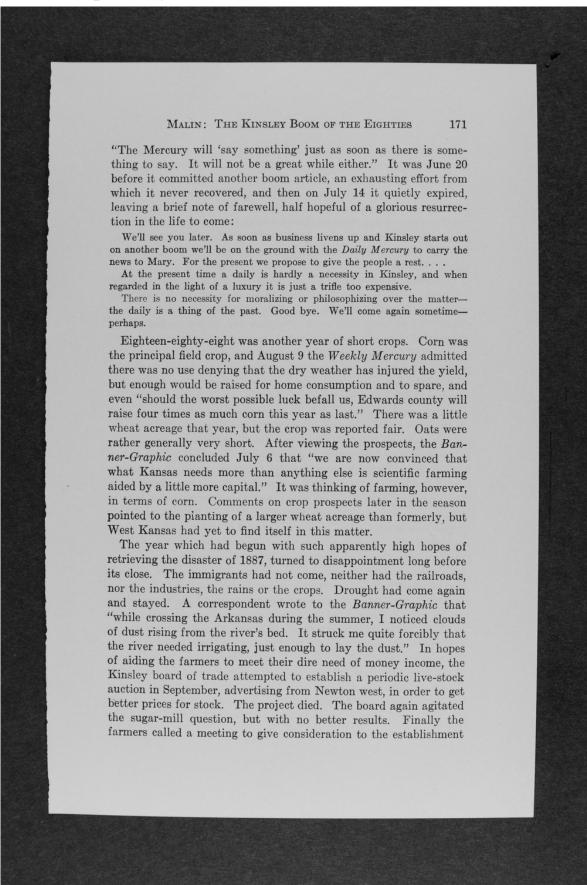




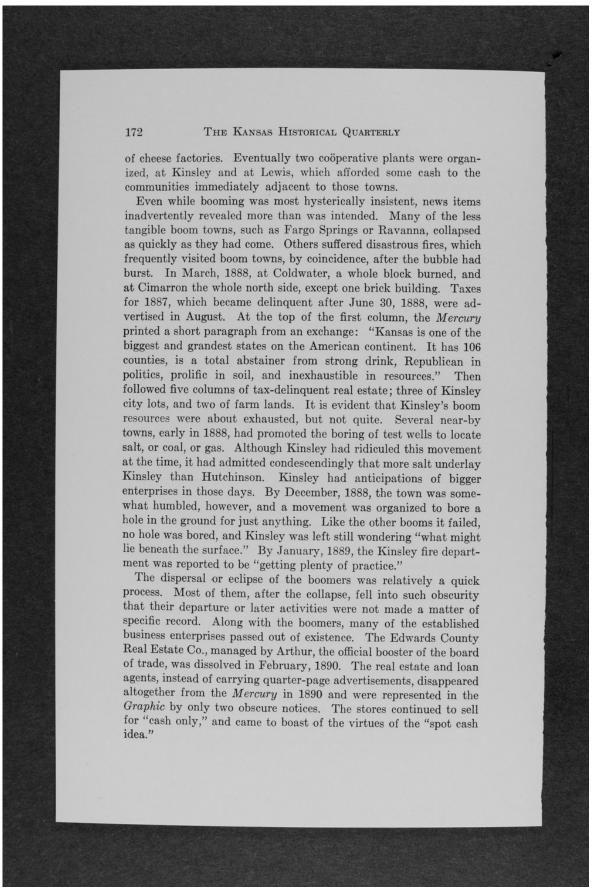














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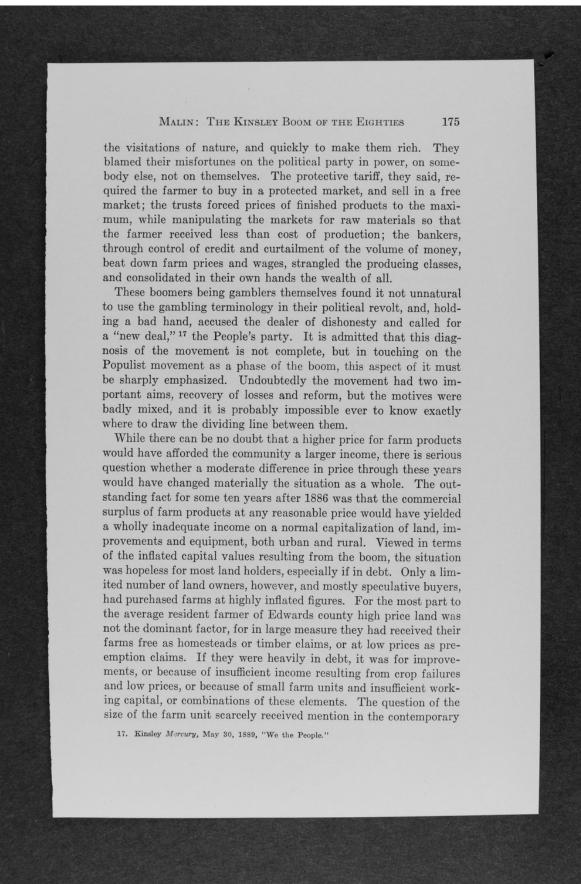
MALIN: THE KINSLEY BOOM OF THE EIGHTIES 173 A prolonged depression brings forth other marks of its demoralizing ravages, and usually the last phase of a boom and its collapse is the rise of political discontent. In 1887 there had been a People's party movement in the county elections. In 1888 the national and state elections provided a wider range of agitation. The Knights of Labor became active as early as January, and in the late summer political organization produced vociferous Union Labor and Prohibition parties. The Democratic Graphic, while supporting the Democratic ticket, nevertheless gave aid and comfort to the other two minority parties, avowing that as neither had a newspaper through which to present its views, the Graphic would undertake to give them full publicity. The Republican ticket was elected, but the leaders of discontent set about preparing a continuous system of agitation, partly through the organization of a Union Labor club which held meetings every week for discussion of economic issues, especially money and tariff. The political campaign opened early in 1889 for a year in which only county officials were elected. The Mercury, May 30, took notice of the so-called People's party movement, insisting that the people were really quite unaware that such a "spontaneous uprising of the 'people'" was taking place. Rather it was a movement with two or three politicians as wet nurses and "the capital stock . . . is in its name . . . spelled with a capital P. Its assets will be based upon the supposed gullibility of the 'People'." A week later the Mercury again belabored the political "soreheads." In the November election the People's party polled a modest vote, but did not elect any candidates. Their boom was not yet ripe. The next stage in the evolution of the political boom began in January, 1890, when the so-called Edwards County Farmers Alliance was organized at Kinsley with county-seat politicians as ringleaders. The unsuccessful People's party candidate for county treasurer in the election of the preceding November was chosen president, and the candidate for register of deeds secretary. In spite of the name this was merely the Kinsley subordinate alliance, and in a few weeks others were organized throughout the county. The real County Farmers Alliance was organized at a delegate convention held at Lewis February 17. The Alliance was represented as nonpolitical, and in that guise drew membership without respect to party lines. But as summer wore on it became clear that the leaders of the Union Labor party of 1888 and the People's party of 1889, combined with regular Democrats, were really in control and



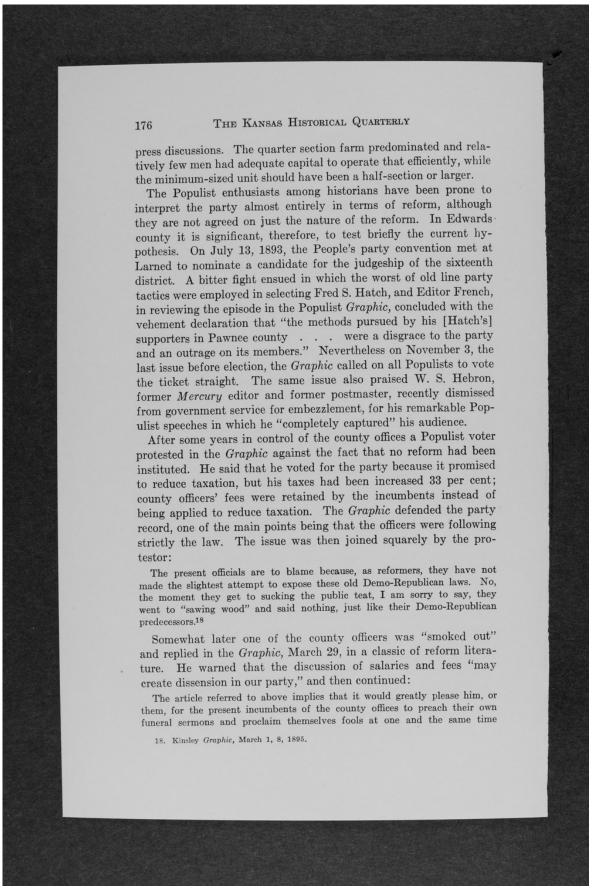
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174 THE KANSAS HISTORICAL QUARTERLY were determined on using it for political purposes. During its early months the Alliance discussed agricultural problems, especially those touching the marketing of farm products, but later in the year they turned almost exclusively to the political issues of 1890 as they were drawn between the Republican and Democratic parties, the Alliances opposing the Republican party on tariff, trusts and money. In effect, the Alliances took essentially the Democratic position on all the main issues of the campaign. In March the Kinsley Alliance, renamed Sunflower, adopted a political platform and pledged itself not to support any candidate who would not pledge himself to it. The state Alliance, later in the month, took similar ground. The Republican Mercury supported the Alliance movement through the early part of the year, but denounced the attempts of the political element, especially the Sunflower Alliance, to make it a political party. Finally, July 24, with the calling of Alliance nominating conventions to put candidates of their own into the field, the Mercury turned definitely against it, declaring that "The Alliance is now an opposition political party, and of course must be treated as such." The Kinsley Sunflower Alliance, not satisfied with casting votes against the Republican party ring in the county, voted August 30 a boycott of the Mercury. Shortly afterward, the County Alliance, acting as a People's party central committee, issued a call for a People's party convention to meet September 13 to nominate a county ticket. The outcome of the election in November was a clean sweep for the People's party in county offices, including a mortgage company lawyer for county attorney. The aim and excuse for booming was to get rich quick. It was a speculation or, to put it more vulgarly, a form of gambling. In the boom the mania had passed through several phases, in each of which a particular feature had received a larger emphasis than others; the small-farmer boom based on free government land or cheap government and railroad land, then the townsite boom, the railroad boom, and the industrial and town-lot boom. With the collapse of the boom as a whole, the emotional defense of a disillusioned and nearly desperate people alternated between religion and politics; religion from January to planting time, and polities from harvest (or the time when harvest should have come) to November, but in the nineties it settled down to politics pretty much all the year round. The political program took the form of an appeal to the government to rescue them from their folly and from

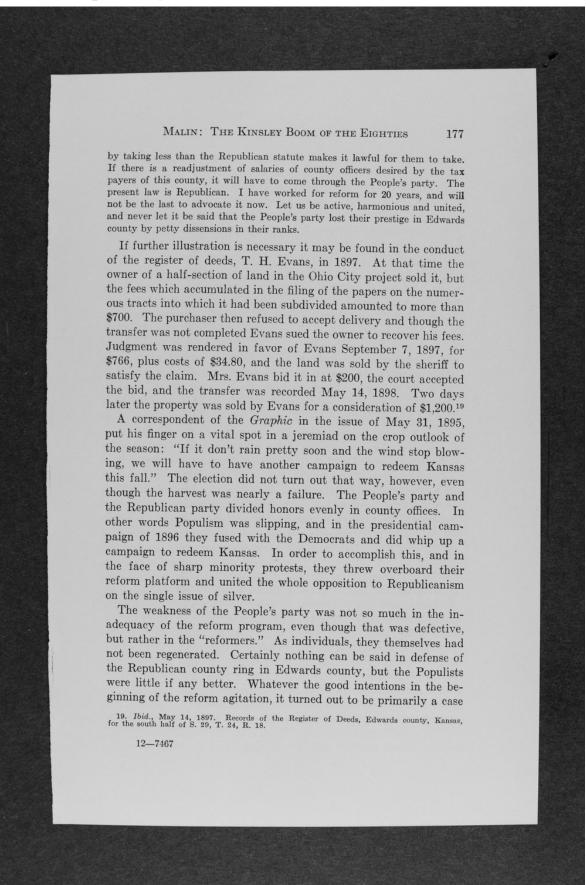






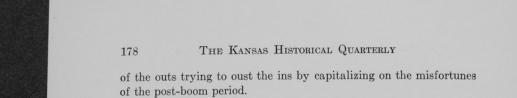








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The liquidation of the boom and the accompanying readjustment was a long-drawn-out process, covering over a decade. The people never did quite learn that prosperity would not return next year with a big spring immigration, a bumper corn crop, or a new industrial plant of some kind. On January 10, 1889, the *Mercury* seemed almost convinced:

It must be confessed that times are a trifle dull at present, but it should be remembered that it is only about six or eight weeks until the grass will start to grow.

P. S. We have been consoling ourself with this reflection for a week, but now that we have reduced it to writing we can't for the life of us see where the consolation comes in. We don't propose to eat grass, by a darned sight.

Six weeks later one cannot be so sure that booming was over:

The "booming" business seems to be over in Kansas and nobody cares to renew a boom of any kind; but the people of Kansas never let up on business enterprises, and are always keeping an eye on the main chance. Every town in Kansas, however small or unimportant, has something on foot to benefit the place. Salt wells, gas wells, coal mines, sugar mills, canning factories, foundries, creameries, paper mills and many other enterprises and industries are being considered and pushed forward. . . . It is this spirit of watchfulness and perseverence that keeps Kansas at the head of the procession.

The Banner-Graphic on March 15 was much less restrained in its article which opened with a similar condemnation of "wild speculation" and then urged the energetic development of "the grand and varied natural resources" of the country; gas, paint, salt and other substances—even diamonds might turn up.

To the disaster of drought and depression in western Kansas was added the opening of Oklahoma, which drew from the *Graphic* the second-hand, but no less fervent, comment that "Now that we have Oklahoma, hell is no longer a necessity." Kinsley and Edwards county sent forty or fifty of its citizens with good references to assist in the boom. The *Mercury* made the claim that there was not a farmer in the crowd. Kinsley was well represented in Guthrie, Lisbon, and Kingfisher. One lumber dealer loaded his stock in a car and joined the other forty-six lumber yards at Guthrie, while Hebron, in addition to editing the *Mercury* at Kinsley, edited a paper at Kingfisher. Although the Kansas boomers in Oklahoma had complete schooling in the art, and possessed absolute confidence in their extraordinary talents, they found it quite impossible to make a fortune out of nothing, and by the middle of the summer many



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MALIN: THE KINSLEY BOOM OF THE EIGHTIES 179 were returning. They found that even Kinsley offered greater prospects than Oklahoma. During the spring of 1890 several conventions were held throughout southwest Kansas in the interest of an immigration bureau.20 and in later years there were similar revivals, but all met the same fate. Population was moving out, not in. At the peak of the boom in 1887 the state census reported Kinsley population at 1,206 and the county at 4,717. Except for an increase in 1893, the decline in inhabitants was continuous until 1897, when the city figures were 681 and the county 3,024. The county did not again reach the boom numbers of the year 1887 until 1903, and the city of Kinsley until 1904. In contrast with the boom period the economic history of the county in depression is concerned almost solely with agriculture. Kinsley, the city, settled back into the obscurity of a country village where farmers brought their eggs and butter on Saturdays and traded for a few groceries. Its only distinction was the doubtful one of a county court house with an empty treasury. The certainty of the sorghum crop kept the sugar-mill issue alive, but not enough capital could be raised to modernize the machinery, so the plant operated only as a syrup mill. Kaffir corn was relatively new to western Kansas and the papers carried several articles during the spring in which its culture was discussed. There was no kaffir boom, but gradually the new plant became established as a reliable dry-weather forage and seed crop. For some time certain live-stock men had taken the initiative in coöperating with small farmers in horse breeding and in 1889 substantial shipments began to eastern points. Probably also part of the horses shipped were the better class of horses sacrificed by hard-pressed farmers to secure a little cash. These out-shipments of horses continued for the next two years. During this season several live-stock men entered heavily into the transient cattle business, buying their stock in Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona for grass fattening or even finishing in Edwards county. Many of these cattle were sold in small lots to farmers, or were handled by farmers on shares or a rental basis. In the following years, in addition to this type of business, Kinsley became for a time an important distributing point for western cattle to be placed in the eastern Kansas bluestem pastures or in the corn-belt feed lots. The wheat yield of the county in 1889 was large, but the acreage was small, and the corn crop was fair, but the price almost nothing. 20. Kinsley Banner-Graphic, February 28, March 7, 1890; Mercury, March 8, 1890.



