

## Old Fort Solomon at Lindsey

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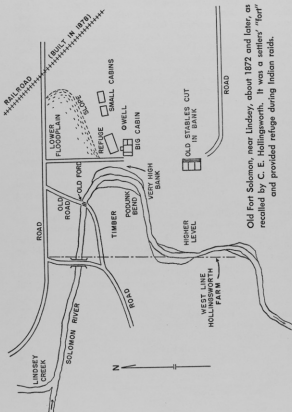
**A**MONG the very earliest settlers who came into Ottawa county to stick it out with economic adversity and raiding Indians were those on lands of rich choice along the Solomon river, near and downstream from the mouth of Lindsey creek. This coming of first pioneers may be placed in the latter part of 1863 and in 1864. The man Lindsey himself, after whom the creek was named, was a trapper who had been thereabouts as early as 1857.

The writer of this sketch came to dwell temporarily at the then recently abandoned old Lindsey town at cornhusking time in 1879. This was a bit late in pioneer history, but not too late to miss seeing parts of rotting logs which were pointed out as having been timbers of old Fort Solomon, a settler's stockade of defense against the Indians—not a military post. We were duly impressed, though just a boy in the lower grades of Lindsey school, if it had been graded. But the memory of these things has persisted through the years of growing up there, and in later advergence to the subject. Many of my schoolmates were younger children of these earliest pioneers, and all were neighbors of more or less frequent contact. So we had treasured stories and kept notes in mind until such time as they might be useful.

Only recently, 1953, the impulse to get impressions and notes together for completing a story of the old fort came through seeing a map indicating the site in the issue of the *Kansas Historical Quarterly* for November, 1952. This map placed the old fort, correctly, on the east bank of the Solomon river, and above the mouth of Salt creek on the west side. Lindsey creek was not shown on the map. Almost coincident, though a few months later than this account in the *Quarterly*, came a letter to the *Minneapolis Messenger* from C. E. Hollingsworth, now of Denver, Colo. This detailed an account of the old fort as he remembered its ruins on his father's farm. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Hollingsworth sent to the writer a rough sketch of old Lindsey town as he knew it before the exodus to Minneapolis, following location of the county seat there.

Included in this sketch was the approximate location of some parts of the ruins of the old fort site, which he indicated was sometimes called Fort Podunk. That, says Webster, "is typical of placid dull-

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Old Fort Solomon, near Lindsey, about 1872 and later, as recalled by C. E. Hollingsworth. It was a settlers' "fort" and provided refuge during Indian raids.

ness and lack of contact with the progress of the world." We question the "dullness"! The Cheyenne Indians raided within a few miles of the place twice: near Delphos in October, 1868, and at Pierce's Ford, just above Minneapolis, in the summer of 1869. Anyhow, Charlie Hollingsworth's location of the site is unmistakable: "at the top of an oxbow bend" of the river on his father's farm.<sup>1</sup> This was corroborated in a letter from M. C. Boyle, 1925, whose land holdings adjoined the Hollingsworth farm on the south.

Quite recently, through co-operation of the Minneapolis *Messenger*, we learned of a small booklet, *Short Stories of Pioneer Days*, printed some years ago, but not dated, by Mrs. Lavinia Gates Chapman, a pioneer homesteader at Lindsey. As one of the first comers, she had gone through it all and had wintered at least once in the fort.

Mrs. Chapman was really a very remarkable woman whom we were privileged to know in our youthful days as an interesting narrator of pioneer events. In August, before coming to the Solomon valley by covered wagon in the fall of 1863, she had barely missed loss of property and life when the bandit leader, Quantrill, retreated from Lawrence with his force back across the Missouri line past Blackjack, near Baldwin, where she lived. Mr. Chapman was a sergeant in the militia that harassed the retreating guerrillas.

"Times grew worse and after the burning of Lawrence, got no better," said Mrs. Chapman. "I said I would rather live among the Indians than in Douglas County." Men of the community could not sleep in their homes at night for fear of raiders, who spared only women and children. Nights were getting too cold to sleep out; and so the trek to the Solomon valley—Chapman, his wife, and three small children.

Mrs. Chapman's reference to the old fort is rather brief, but she included in the booklet a double-page diagram of the stockade, with location of each enclosed cabin, the gates, the well, the schoolhouse, together with a roster of the settlers by cabin allotments.<sup>2</sup> To quote her memorandum: "In '64 they built a fort near the river called Fort Solomon, on the place now known as the Wolfersberger farm."

1. Mrs. Lavinia Gates Chapman in her *Short Stories of Pioneer Days* gives the legal description of the land where the stockade was located as follows: "N. 80 of S. W. Q., Sec. 17, Township 11, Range 8; Concord, T., Ottawa County, Kansas."

2. The names appearing with the cabins in Mrs. Chapman's diagram were:

|                           |              |                   |
|---------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Kirwin's Store            | Sheltonbrand | Dick & Frank Rees |
| S. B. Chapman             | J. M. Jones  | Israel Markly     |
| Sam Ross                  | Vern Carr    | Israel Markly     |
| Noah Ross                 | Abe Stell    | Mrs. Bruce        |
| Tom Dalrymple             | S. H. Wooden | Sam and Abe Ross  |
| Andrew Ingross and Sister | John Boblett | Sam Wright        |

No more! This land ownership succeeded that of the Hollingsworth family. The present ownership is ascribed to the J. O. Pitts estate. Lands adjoining, across the river, are the estate of the late Raymond G. Brown. In 1873 they had been patented to Jacob Horback.

The old fort site is at the "top," sharpest turn, of the elbow bend, Solomon river, something less than a half mile west of present Lindsey, and 20 rods, more or less, below the present river bridge on the east side of the river. The "stockade" itself was back one hundred feet or more from the steep river bank. There is some question, however, as to the use of the term "stockade" in connection with this defense position. M. C. Boyle, reporting as above, called the defense post a stockade. C. E. Hollingsworth, who came onto the farm with his parents five or six years following reported occupation of the fort, says that there were no indications in the ruins that a line of enclosure posts had ever existed. Nor was there evidence in the ruins of as many cabin sites as were included in Mrs. Chapman's sketch.

These discrepancies, together with Hollingsworth's recent statement that the little log schoolhouse was not at the fort site but near the intersection of the old highway with the present crossroad to the river bridge, suggest that Mrs. Chapman's "blueprint" of the fort may not have been too closely followed. The lady was a leader in the pioneer community and may have envisioned more than the needs of the occasion demanded.

Exact location of the old well on the fort site has been rather recently determined. Rise of the water in the Solomon river inundated this site during the high flood stage in the summer of 1951. Location of the former well was indicated by considerable subsidence at the spot. Filling of the old well originally by the Hollingsworth family, when they first came onto the place in 1872, had been reported by Charlie Hollingsworth.

Dick Pitts, who now farms the place where the old fort site is located, has been on or around this farmstead for about 35 years, following the Wolfersberger tenancy. He has reported the subsidence and refilling of the old well. The late Ira E. Sewell, a realtor at the county seat in Minneapolis, near old Lindsey, was local contact in this research. He had visited the old fort site quite recently and reported that the refilling of the former well is a circular mound about waist high, overgrown now with weeds.

The weeds, we discovered in the summer of 1955, are Kansas sunflowers. For we were privileged to contact the site in June and

found the mound at the well in the edge of a wheat field, perhaps 75 steps from the elbow bend of the river. Fortunately for our research, the Solomon, in the flood season of 1951, overflowed the higher level where the old fort had been located. For the first time in recorded history the waters laid drift over this area. And they caused a subsidence at the old well which Erwin Hollingsworth had filled in the early 1870's. Charlie Hollingsworth, his son, whom we visited at Denver since locating the well, has been easily able to locate the few structures of the fort with reference to the well site, and these will appear in his sketch accompanying this account.

Hollingsworth should be an eminent authority, as he lived for a time in one of the cabins at the fort, a large semi-dugout retreat, when he first came to the area in 1871. There were only three other cabins on the site at that time. At the mound-of-the-well we raised the national colors on a staff of iron pipe, June 10, 1955. Though the place had never been a military post, it is worthy of remembrance as a pioneer refuge. Thus we recall the days when women hid their children in corn shocks at the appearance of an unusual puff of dust on the prairie horizon that might indicate the approach of Indian horsemen.