Farmsteads are made up of a variety of structures, with barns and houses being perhaps the most distinctive. Depending on its characteristics, however, the silo can be a beautiful, interestingly designed, imposing edifice visible from miles around, and at one time it was a regular feature in the Kansas farm scene. Silos also were a vital part of the farm’s economy, especially if the operation was one that fed a good number of livestock.

Silos, which were constructed in four basic varieties (tower, portal, trench, and bunker), came into widespread use on the Plains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whether built of wood, brick, tile, or concrete, the round tower or upright silo, like its less conspicuous counterparts, was filled with ensilage (chopped green corn or sorghum), which then fermented into a superior quality feed for the farmers’ stock.

Filling silo, as depicted in this early twentieth-century Jefferson County photograph, usually occurred in late summer. This labor-intensive job required crews comparable to the large numbers of harvest hands needed during the steam-threshing era.

This is the second in a four-part series of photographs on the inside front covers of Kansas History featuring familiar structures on the family farm.
“PROUD ARE WE”: PRIVATE RHINEHART AND THE COLLEGE COMPANY OF THE TWENTY-SECOND KANSAS VOLUNTEERS by Justin Dragosani-Brantingham

CHAUTAUQUA: THEN AND NOW Presidential Address by W. Stitt Robinson

A “FIEND IN HUMAN SHAPE”? WILLIAM CLARKE QUANTRILL AND HIS BIOGRAPHERS by Barry A. Crouch

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