The Old Ghost Town of Lindsey in the Solomon Valley

Theo. H. Scheffer

The name of the town of Lindsey, unhappily, can be accounted for only by reference to Cutler's history of Kansas, published in 1883, in which he chronicles as follows:

In 1857-'58 the hunters and trappers who visited Solomon Valley gave names to many of its creeks. For some unexplained reason these wayfarers left a wagon-load of plunder behind them, just above Minneapolis, for the ownership of which a lawsuit was subsequently tried in the District Court, at Junction City. Judging from the evidence there produced, the "gentlemen" who gave Fisher, Lindsey, Brown and Chris creeks their names, were not the most savory morsels of humanity in the world. Most of the names of these Solomon Valley creeks have since been changed—in respect to the living.¹

Not so brave a start for the pioneer town of Lindsey in Ottawa county of the valley. Cloud county, adjoining, was apparently stuck also with the name of one of these "gentlemen"—"Fisher" creek, entering the Solomon near Glasco. Capt. Zebulon M. Pike crossed the river there, September 23, 1806, on his way to the Pawnee Republic, of the Indian people.

The governor of Kansas territory signed the bill creating Ottawa county—and two others—on February 27, 1860. Section 2 appointed county commissioners for these counties, to wit: "... for the county of Ottawa, R. C. Whitney, Henry Martin, and _____ Branch, of Pike Creek." (Probably Pipe creek as now known.)² Though thus created, the county of Ottawa was not formally organized until six years later, 1866. Ayersburg was designated as the temporary county seat. However, on May 21, 1870, an election of the local settlers on the river was held and the permanent county seat was established at Minneapolis. (If they could make it stick, which they eventually did.) Thereby hangs a tale of community rivalry, which we may not recount here for lack of space. The standard bearers of this conflict were the Solomon Valley Pioneer, first published at Lindsey in September, 1870; editor, W. Goddard; and its "mendaceous contemporary," the Minneapolis Independent, first issued in October, 1870; editor, George Mackenzie. It may be

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². Laws of Kansas, 1860, ch. 44.
LINDSEY, OTTAWA COUNTY, IN 1872

A REPRODUCTION OF C. F. HOLLINGSWORTH'S SKETCH OF THE NEW GHOST TOWN OF LINDSEY

Top: (left) Barn on Lambert's old farm; (center) Lambert's residence; (right) Henry Drusher's cabin.

Second Row: (left) W. E. Well, warehouse; (right) Mr. Hart's residence.

Third Row: West Side of Main Street—(left to right) Dicky Knight's blacksmith shop; George Shaw, harness shop; Moran's candy, tobacco, etc.; Geoffrey Schar, shoe shop; (first floor) E. Hollingsworth, store and shed; Best Hotel (later the Potter House) and old well; Mabie's store; C. G. Olney's residence, real estate office; W. E. and Jacob Well, warehouse; E. H. Delmonte, painter.

Fourth Row: East Side of Main Street—(left to right) Livery stable; Printing office; Solomon Valley Fireman; R. Knight, residence; E. Crosby, store; (the family lived above); P. Crosby, drugstore; stage barns; Henry Olsen, residence; frame for Presbyterian church (it blew down twice).

Bottom: (left) Outbuilding, Crosby store; (center) Lindsey schoolhouse, built in 1871.
noted here that in the election just cited the vote had stood at 146 for Minneapolis and 139 for Lindsey, the small majority for Minneapolis being attributed to "Pipe creek vote."

Ayersburg, originally designated by the governor as the county seat of Ottawa county, was a cabin in the fringe of timber on the banks of Lindsey creek, some little distance west of the old stage hotel in pioneer Lindsey. The site of this civic center, the Best Hotel, may now be located by a large cement slab covering the old brick-lined well at the hostelry, which once stood on the west side of the north-south highway where it is intersected by the section-line road coming down from the east.

A post office was established at Ayersburg on July 16, 1864, with one John Boblett as first postmaster. He lasted a little more than a year, when he was succeeded by Seymour Ayres, the only burger of Ayersburg, on September 12, 1865. He, in turn, was replaced by Thomas Waddell, of Lindsey, on July 5, 1867. And that was the last of Ayersburg, so far as official recognition was concerned, though the name appeared on Keeler's map of Kansas, in 1866-1867, and on Colton's map in 1867. George Washington never slept there, but we did, on a rainy night when fishing on the Solomon. The cabin must have been pretty leaky then, for we could not find enough dry material about or in the place to kindle a fire on the hearth.

The Ayers family later moved up to Pipe creek on a farm, and established there a neighborhood of descendants, in school district No. 10. Lindsey was in school district No. 9. In the second issue of the Solomon Valley Pioneer, September 17, 1870, appeared an advertisement of the Ayers House, on Main street, Lindsey. This advertisement was accompanied by a picture of the hostelry, which Charlie Hollingsworth, still living at 95, says did not exist. He ought to know, for he came there the next year, and has prepared the sketch map of the old ghost town accompanying this story. Probably the picture was a "stock cut," for photographers were mighty scarce in those days.

A post office was established at Lindsey, on July 7, 1868, with Harry Makee (McKee?) as first postmaster. This appointment followed discontinuation of the office at Ayersburg cabin, little more than a quarter of a mile away. The new community grew up about the Lindsey House, as first advertised, a stage hostelry at the intersection of two roads. This place was conducted by Francis W. Best, and in later years by his widow, Mrs. O. B. Potter. It had
commodious livery barns across the road (Main street), and was a relay and stopping place overnight on the stage run from Solomon to Beloit.

The Lindsey village grew apace, as land-hungry settlers came in to take up farms in the valley and on near-by uplands to the east; some also to seek business opportunities. In the fall of 1870, John Henry was advertising in the new local paper as a dealer in “dry goods, clothing, hardware, groceries, and agricultural implements of every description.” Richard (Dicky) Knight announced “Blacksmithery, in all its various branches.” He had been flooded out in his pioneer establishment at a dugout in Bennington. George W. Shaw, harness maker, advertised “Double and single Harness made to order.”

There was an M. D. also at Lindsey; in fact two of them, one, J. K. Osborn, with an office in the drug store on Main street. This drug store was operated at the time by O. E. Martin, who had at least a good line of “patented medicines” on his shelves. In the spring of 1871, Erwin Hollingsworth came with his family into the community and shortly established himself in the mercantile business in the new Lindsey. The next year he purchased the farm, just south of town, on which was the site of the settlers’ Fort Solomon, 1864-1865.

There were other establishments on Main street, of course, but these given will serve to indicate early activity in business. C. C. Olney, later a prominent realtor at Minneapolis, was doing a “land office business” in Lindsey during its formative years. Many of the advertisements in the local paper, the Pioneer, were of firms and establishments at Salina and Solomon City, on the new Kansas Pacific Railway (U. P.) which had headed through these budding towns for Denver in 1867—three years previously. Also, Easley, Seymour & Co. were advertising a general store, at Delphos. And somebody, outside the city limits of Lindsey, was ready to produce sorghum molasses at his “Climax Cane Mill, one and a half miles south of Corning and Dalrymple’s Steam Saw Mill.” This, at option, on shares, or by the day.

We should mention here a suburb of Lindsey that was sprouting across the creek toward its rival town Minneapolis. Eaton, on the rising ground north of the Lindsey creek crossing, had a few homes but no business establishments. Eaton was sponsored by a blind minister, the Rev. T. C. Eaton, and others, who had dreams of a compromise town there between Lindsey, and Minneapolis, two
miles farther up the river, at the Markley mill site. Eaton’s own statement concerning the founding of the town was published in the *Pioneer*, March 4, 1871:

I was put under $6,000 bonds for the faithful appropriation of the money awarded to my youngest daughter, (Grace) for injuries received on the New York and Erie Railroad. . . . My bondsmen advised me to purchase lands in some part of the West. . . . I purchased with the funds two hundred and forty acres, lying at the center of the County of Ottawa. . . . Twenty acres are set apart for college grounds. . . . [There] is a public square . . . ; streets are . . . one hundred feet wide. . . . lots will be given to those who will erect business houses or residences.

And so we find the following in an issue of the *Pioneer*, dated March 25, 1871: “We understand that the lumber is bought, and the teams are engaged to haul it, for the erection of four large buildings at Eaton, and that some ten or twelve mechanics are engaged to erect them forthwith. E. E. Eaton, Esq., and Mr. S. Y. Woodhull have each bought a fourth of the townsite.” This issue of the *Pioneer* carried cards of S. Y. Woodhull, attorney and counsellor, at Eaton, and of Thomas Waddell, justice of the peace, “Office at his new building in Eaton.”

Again, in the *Pioneer*, April 15, 1871, “Mr. Eaton is now building a large dwelling house in Eaton, which will probably be the largest house in the county. He has gone to Solomon, to contract for lumber to build a large Store at Eaton.” The store never materialized. The requiem: July 1, 1871, “Lindsey and Eaton have joined hands and are united under one name—LINDSEY.” This was a defense merger in the county-seat conflict.

There had been a little pioneer log schoolhouse at the northeast corner of the Hollingsworth homestead, on which the settlers’ “fort” was located. But when the writer came to the nearly abandoned Lindsey townsite in October, 1879, he matriculated in the grades in a pretentious two-room building—only there were no grades; and the smaller, wing-room, was not then used, though it once had a teacher. As advertised for bids, in the *Solomon Valley Pioneer*, Lindsey, March, 1871, the original school building was to be 30 by 40 feet in dimensions. Charles Hollingsworth, who attended school there from the first, relates that a few years later, when A. B. Crosby was teacher, the school board added the wing-room to the schoolhouse, to accommodate the smaller children. Crosby’s wife became assistant teacher.

Shorn of this wing-room, its porches, and the anteroom where we ate frozen lunches in season, the schoolhouse took flight, in the
winter of 1898-1899, to a new site a half mile south. Here its flag floated on the breeze—and on the county map—until 1910, when the building was abandoned as a hall of learning and sold to a farmer who moved it to the home premises of Vincent Pieschl, where the Lindsey highway turns east toward Bennington, and here it now serves as a granary, 30 feet by 40 feet as previously stated.

At the site whence this old schoolhouse took flight the second time, a new building was erected, which served for school sessions until 1945, when children of the community found their way to classes at the county seat. This newer schoolhouse was struck by lightning at one time, and in repairing the tower, the old bell—probably the first to ring in the Solomon valley—fell to the ground and was broken. The metal was sold for junk and the proceeds were given to the 4-H club, which has fitted up the building for its present quarters. The bell clapper, minus the ringbolt, is reported in use for shot putting. It is now in the custody of Mrs. Vincent Pieschl.

There was never any church edifice in Lindsey, although services were held at one time or another in the schoolhouse. A minister of the Lutheran church dispensed the gospel there for a time in the early 1880's, to a small band of that faith. This mission preacher was the Rev. W. C. Seidell, who lived in Eaton at the time. His manse, or parsonage, is the only residence still standing in that little ghost suburb of Lindsey. The Presbyterian church undertook to build at Lindsey in the late 1870's, but the framework of their sanctuary was blown down twice in successive storms, and abandoned for construction in Minneapolis. Some zealous partisans of another creed declared this "Act of God" was judgment for proposals to raise money by sponsoring dances. We can't picture the Rev. H. C. Bradbury, a pioneer missionary of the day, in this role.

Bradbury had come into the Lindsey community in March, 1872, with the following "send-off" by the Solomon Valley Pioneer, March 23:

We are pleased to learn that the Rev. H. C. Bradbury, has this week arrived, and in future will look after the spiritual wants of Lindsey and vicinity. Mr. Bradbury comes under the auspices of the Presbyterian society and is to reside at Lindsey, we hope to see much good done through his instrumentality. We extend to the . . . gentleman a cordial welcome, and know we but speak the sentiments of the entire community. On to-morrow Rev. Mr. Bradbury in conjunction with Rev. Mr. Cary of Solomon, will hold services, both morning and evening. Let there be a large turn-out.
The Presbyterian church had been organized in Lindsey as per the following, appearing in the Pioneer, July 22, 1871:

NOTICE. There will be preaching in Odd Fellows' Hall, on Sunday the 30th July, at 11 a. m. by Rev. Mr. Carey of the Presbyterian Church, and immediately after service the organization of the church will be completed by the election of officers. All members of the church will please be present, and all those who desire to unite with the church, either by letter or profession, will have an opportunity to do so.

A community name is on most maps only so long as the name of its post office is on government records. Following the brief tenure of Harry Makee (McKee?) as previously recorded in this account, John Henry, a pioneer merchant, took over as the second postmaster at Lindsey, May 16, 1870. Then the office went to Ezra Crosby, a druggist of the town, on September 3, 1872. After that, on April 14, 1874, Mrs. Mary G. Best (Potter) became postmistress at Lindsey. Mail was dispensed in the lobby of the old stage hotel until May 9, 1881, when the mail bags were carried by M. C. Boyle to his little store across the tracks from the box car that for a time served as a "depot." That little store is still standing in the weeds and in advanced stages of disrepair.

Hopes of the three rival communities, Lindsey, Eaton, Minneapolis, for county-seat honors continued to confuse the settlers' minds, even into the later 1870's. Land owners of the Lindsey community probably had the most at stake, for the three sites were so close together that any trade center would serve all equally well. To be nonpartisan, Minneapolis had the better site, in that it was on higher ground, well drained, and with a topography that lent itself to the construction of a dam for water power. Markley's gristmill there was in fact a drawing card.

Business firms began to move out of Lindsey from time to time, some to relocate in Minneapolis. John Henry established at the county seat, in the brownstone building which later became the Blue Store, illuminated in 1887, as facetiously reported, by both "electric lights and Israelites." Arc lights were new in the town that year, and boys were hoarding souvenir pieces of the discarded carbon sticks. The Crosby drug store interests of pioneer Lindsey were identified throughout the 1880's, at least, by a similar establishment in Minneapolis. George Shaw's harness shop also continued to serve the public at the new county seat for many years. Godfrey Schur, the shoemaker and cobbler of Lindsey, moved to a farm near Sand creek and the present state lake, where his children and grandchildren have since figured prominently in the neighborhood and
beyond. The Hollingsworth family stuck to their farm interests on the border of the Lindsey townsite and did not continue in mercantile business elsewhere.

Uncle Dicky Knight was perhaps the last business man to hang on at the ghost town of our story. When we came on the scene, in the fall of 1879, he was still shoeing horses and setting wagon tires at the old stand in Lindsey. But the railroad had come in that year, and there was a revival of local interest in business down by the tracks, a half mile south on "Main Street." Knight established himself there for a time, but later abandoned the forge for his farm, a mile or so east, at the source of a small branch of Lindsey creek—the "Knight Ponds." Sometime in the 1890's, or thereabouts, Uncle Dicky bought a long-barreled rifle and hit the Oregon trail, by rail, for the Pacific Northwest. He had two sons out there. Later a grandson, Henry G. Knight of Seattle, became chief of the bureau of chemistry and soils, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Before leaving this part of the ghost-town story, we may remark that there had been a little pioneer cemetery at the first rise east of Lindsey, on the farm of W. B. Bennett. We recall that the interments there were removed in the early 1880's; among them the remains of Francis W. Best, proprietor of the old stage hotel, originally built by Seymour Ayres.

With the coming of the railroad, in 1878-1879, there was a revival of business, down by the tracks, that for some years was quite complimentary to this new community. This new Lindsey clustered mainly about the Hollingsworth corners, where a short east-west road led from "Main Street" to a bridge across the Solomon river, quite near the old fort site. Lindsey was re-established there by a transfer of the mail bags to that place, from the old stage hotel, on May 9, 1881. Michael C. Boyle was the first postmaster, dealing out news and communications of sorts from his little store, already mentioned in this account.

In the early 1880's, Elias Kapp, relative of the Wolferspergers who later purchased the Hollingsworth farm, built a large elevator north and east of the tracks. To this he added later a grist mill and, still later, a small saw mill. In a couple of years another grain merchant, J. M. Smyser, built a second elevator across the Lindsey highway, almost opposite the Kapp establishment. Smyser was killed on his premises there in a railroad accident about Thanksgiving time, 1885.

The Lindsey post office at this railroad site was discontinued on
March 7, 1896, and re-established in January, 1899, with Ida M. Haddock as postmistress. She was succeeded by Jerome Hollingsworth, who dispensed mail for a few months, when the office was again discontinued, August 31, 1901. Once more the office was revived, May 16, 1902, to live this time for some 40 years. During this period ten office holders held forth, among them, Vesta Woltersperger, September 18, 1907, to January 3, 1910; and John N. Woltersperger, June 9, 1911, to March 29, 1916. This family lived on the old Hollingsworth farm, which was the site of Fort Solomon, alias Fort Podunck, in the middle 1860's. The last postmaster was Donald Joseph Lane, who took over on November 28, 1936, and held forth until June 30, 1942. Since then Lindsey has been, officially, only a memory. There is still, however, a flagstop at the place, with a little cubicle for freight, and a designation on the Union Pacific time table.

Only a few old-timers of the Minneapolis community will recall disappearance of the ghost town's first and last landmark, the old stage hostelry, which was burned in the late 1890's. And by these it would be remembered only as one of the neighborhood's farm premises. Its two-acre site, though submerged by wheat fields, still holds proudly aroff on the county maps, at the extreme S. E. corner of the S. W. ¼ of Sec. 8, T. 11, R. 3, as added to the G. M. Hamilton estate. The old town well, which also supplied the school for many years, is still intact on this site, in an alfalfa field. But it has lost its rope and buckets and is covered by a protective slab of concrete.