Not So Fancy, Fancy Creek

Clay County, Kansas

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By

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When I first chose to research the lost town of Fancy Creek, Kansas, I was not sure what I would find out about this mysterious place. I knew that it was in the northeast portion of Clay County, in both Goshen and Highland Townships, but other than that, I had no clue of its history or of the people who inhabited it. I knew that visiting the Clay County historical society would be a good place to start so I headed to Clay Center to dig deeper into this "lost town."
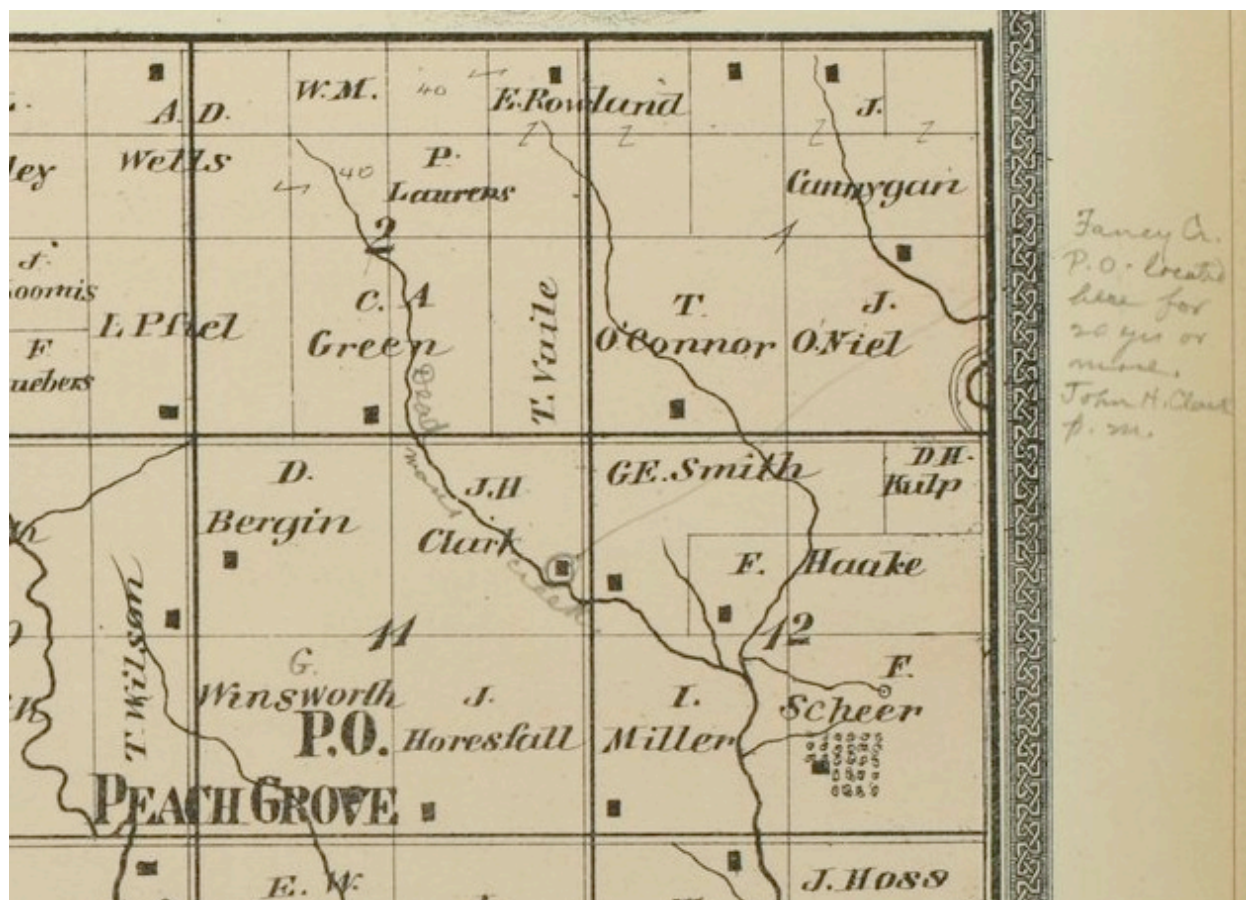

Figure 1: 1881 Atlas of Clay County. Notice the handwritten note about Fancy Creek. Source: www.kansasmemory.org

My first discovery was that Fancy Creek was never actually a town at all. It was a loose collection of settler homesteads in a township originally named Goshen. Goshen Township was first established and settled on March 18th, 1860 by Capt. G. Shaubel and others who came from the town of Goshen, Indiana. They named the area in remembrance of their hometown.[1] The first settlement along Fancy Creek itself was made by a man named Gabriel Spurrier in March of 1860.[2] These Indiana settlers were typical of the first wave of homesteaders, North Midland state settlers who came in before, during, and after the Civil War. They settled along the many creeks in eastern Clay County and western Riley: Deep Creek, Five Creeks, Fancy Creek, Chapman's Creek, Mall Creek, Pete's Creek, and Timber Creek.[3]

Fancy Creek got its first post office around 1870. J.A.D. Frazelle was the first postmaster appointed there and he likely ran the post office out of his home. Along with being the postmaster, he was also the first teacher at the log school house built in the fall of 1866. In reality, Fancy Creek remained a tiny settlement served by these two places. It was just the post office in Goshen Township. Because of this my research was much harder. Like so many of these early "creek" settlements, Fancy Creek had no town square, no city hall, no main street, and no one left alive who could tell me about the community. Its religious needs were first met by a Methodist Circuit Rider who was attached to the Leonardville Methodist Circuit. By 1880, an

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[1] Cathy Haney, Curator, Clay County Museum and Historical Society. Informal Interview, fall, 2011, Clay Center, Kansas.

[2] "History of Clay County," 1990, p. 23. Copy available at Clay County Museum and Historical Society.

[3] M.J. Morgan, Broughton, Kansas: Portrait of a Lost Town, 1869 – 1966 (Manhattan, Kansas: Chapman Center for Rural Studies, 2010), p. 5.

Evangelical Circuit Rider was serving Fancy Creek from the Evangelical Church in Leonardville.[4] There was no church in Fancy Creek that I could find.

Goshen Township and the Fancy Creek Post office were situated in the breaks of the Flint Hills called the Blue Valley. The Blue River ran to the east and named the valley. Goshen Township residents and to the south, Highland Township residents, relied mainly on raising cattle, and interestingly enough, grape vineyards for their income. This was a little different than many settlers in other parts of Clay County, who became wheat farmers. Fancy Creek settlers eventually came from all over the country, from eastern states like Maine, New York, and Maryland. They also came from other countries. One of the clear patterns that I noticed about the emigrants was that the vast majority of them were all from northern states, with the exception of settlers from Missouri. The families that came from other countries were almost all from Europe, places like Germany, England, France, Switzerland, Wales, and Scotland. German settlers were very numerous. There were also some families from Canada as well.[5]

After visiting the areas of Goshen Township and Fancy Creek, I found that all that is left is a lone cemetery in Highland Township (named Fancy Creek Cemetery). It still in use today. It is also possible to find the site of the old Fancy Creek School house. The cemetery is still very well kept and has head stones that date back to the 1880s; some are as recent as 2011. When I visited the old school house site, at first glance it seemed that it has long since been demolished, but as I looked further up the hill, I found an old building with a caved in roof and walls. I knew that the first school house was built as a log house. This one seemed newer and built of framed wood and

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[4] "Leonardville United Methodist Church Records," Kansas State Historical Society, kshs.org.

[5] "History of Clay County," p. 23.

cinder blocks, so perhaps it was a replacement school, built in the twentieth century. What had

taken place in this building? There is so much about the Fancy Creek area and Goshen Township

that is unknown and may never be known. The post office closed in 1901, and the community

quickly dissolved as the much larger town of Green expanded.[6] Fancy Creek had no newspaper

and only a handful of paragraphs and records remain about the area.

[6]"Kansas Post Offices, 1828 – 1961". Kansas State Historical Society, kshs.org.

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