

# **Killer Competition: A Case Study of Solomon Rapids, Mitchell County, Kansas 1870- Present**



**Laura Thiessen**

**History 533- Lost Kansas Communities**

**Dr. MJ Morgan**

**Kansas State University**

**Chapman Center for Rural Studies**

**May 2, 2012**

In this paper you will see how twin town rivalry can lead to the death of a town. This will be done using the case study of Solomon Rapids located in Mitchell County Kansas. This study includes recent photographs of the Solomon Rapids town site.

I grew up in the town of Beloit, Kansas as a child I used to go with my father out to the country to one of our farms by Solomon Rapids. I think I've driven through its remains a hundred times in my childhood and never really thought twice about its history or even the fact that it once held the promise of being a successful town. Solomon Rapids in its hay day had a school, church, post office some small businesses. So what caused Solomon Rapids to fail? The answer is simple, competition.

When Kansas was first being settled many towns were being founded at the same time and would often be located close together. This concept can be seen in Figure 1. As you can see the towns were founded along



Figure 1. Mitchell County in 1899. Source: <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/counties/MC/townhist.html>

the Solomon River one after the other. The explanation of this is a common phenomenon that occurred during the settlement of Kansas, a concept referred to as “twinning.” “Twinning” occurs when two towns are formed at roughly the same time and in close proximity to one another (usually 5-10 miles apart). This usually

leads to competition between the two towns.<sup>1</sup> Commonly in twin city situations one town ends up dying out or one becomes almost completely dependent on the other.<sup>2</sup> Solomon Rapids died before it had a chance to live, it was never platted or incorporated as a city. During its beginning people thought it was well on its way to being a town, but due to competition with Beloit, formerly known as Willow Springs, Solomon Rapids never became the town it could have been.

Solomon Rapids, Kansas was named after the rapids in the Solomon River, which are located about half a mile from the town site. Solomon Rapids is located 5 miles west of Beloit, Kansas. The town was founded in the spring of 1870 by “C. J. Brown, G. W. Anderson, R. C. Clark, and John S. Smith on the north side of the river about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile west of present-day Solomon Rapids.”<sup>3</sup> The Kansa tribe lived along the river, when the settlers began encroaching on their land the Kansa attacked. The settlers were then forced to build stockades in defense against the Indian attacks.<sup>4</sup> By the fall of 1870, as more people came to settle the stockade had become the town of Solomon Rapids.

---

<sup>1</sup> Angela Schnee, “Leonardville and Riley, Riley County,” *Lost Kansas Communities*, accessed May 2, 2012, <https://lostkscommunities.omeka.net/items/show/12>.

<sup>2</sup> Schnee, “Leonardville and Riley, Riley County.”

<sup>3</sup> Bunger, Bill, John Bunger, and Kyle Peterson. Solomon Valley Highway 24 Heritage Alliance, “Solomon Rapids Kansas.” Accessed May 2, 2012.

[http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/svha/history/towns/solomon\\_rapids.htm](http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/svha/history/towns/solomon_rapids.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Bunger, David. 1962 & 1976. Mitchell County Historical Essays. “Solomon Rapids, Kansas-My Home Town.” Located at Mitchell County Historical Museum in Beloit, KS.

R.C. Clark, a prominent lawyer, was one of the first settlers of the Solomon Rapids area. In the early 1880's Solomon Rapids had its leading town members. W.C. Cochran was elected to the office of Justice of the Peace, Trustee of Solomon Rapids, and was also a Civil War Veteran. F. L. Douglass was a merchant and farmer. O.B. Douglass was a farmer and mill owner. Don Peaslee, Mitchell County Clerk and in 1870 was elected the County Attorney an office which he held until 1872.<sup>5</sup>

The town of Solomon Rapids had a water powered mill which was erected by O. B. Douglass and was located along the Solomon River near his homestead, it measured 40 x 60 feet.<sup>3</sup> The first general store was owned by Yates Douglass. In the early years, "Some of the business places were a hotel, doctor, dentist, three general stores, and the elevator where the post office was."<sup>6</sup> School District #11 was formed in October 1872, and Miss Mary Green was one of the first teachers. May 17, 1873. The Solomon Rapids United Presbyterian Church was established, with thirteen charter members. Both the school and the church would serve the community of Solomon Rapids for decades.<sup>7</sup> With the establishment of the school, church and many small businesses Solomon Rapids appeared to be well on its way to being a successful town. Little did anyone suspect that Solomon Rapids would

---

<sup>5</sup> Cutler, William G. *History of the State of Kansas*. Chicago, IL: A. T. Andreas, 1883. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/mitchell/mitchell-co-p6.html>

<sup>6</sup> Bungler, 1962 & 1976. Mitchell County Historical Essays. 175.

<sup>7</sup> Bungler et al., "Solomon Rapids, KS."

be a dream never fully realized due to its competition with its twin town Willow Springs.

Willow Springs was founded in 1868 by Aaron A. Bell. The town was named “after the fresh water springs surrounded by willows on the north bank of the Solomon River.”<sup>8</sup> After its establishment the town grew rapidly. It too had a water powered mill along the river, a post office, a dam and sawmill were being built and business prospects tended to favor Willow Springs.<sup>9</sup> By 1870, the area around Willow Springs and Solomon Rapids was well established and granted permission to elect a county seat. Solomon Rapids, Willow Springs and Glen Elder were all in a race for county seat. Aaron Bell knew that Willow Springs had the potential to be a successful town and county seat. He was able to get the people to realize the potential of Willow Springs as well and by the end of the campaign, despite Solomon Rapids having a larger population, Willow Springs won with 143 votes, Solomon Rapids had 43 votes and Glen Elder 36 votes.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> City of Beloit, "My Beloit; History." Last modified 2011. Accessed May 2, 2012. [http://www.beloitks.org/prod/welcome/my\\_beloit/history/](http://www.beloitks.org/prod/welcome/my_beloit/history/).

<sup>9</sup> Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*.

<sup>10</sup> Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*. [http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/mitchell/mitchell-co-p2.html#BELOIT\\_P1](http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/mitchell/mitchell-co-p2.html#BELOIT_P1)

The loss of the county seat election would lead to Solomon Rapids decline. Once awarded the county seat Willow Springs became more attractive to businesses and settlers. This caused Willow Springs to continue to grow and



**Figure 2 Grain Elevator at Solomon Rapids, KS. May 2012 Solomon Rapids, Mitchell County KS. Source: Photo taken by author.**

thrive. It also caused the growth of Solomon Rapids to stagnate. “Solomon Rapids would continue to have a variety of businesses over the years: the first cement grain elevator in north central Kansas, general store, post office, blacksmith, dance hall, hotel, grist mill, saw mill, dentist/doctor office, grocery store, lumberyard, coal yard, depot, two churches, and a school.”<sup>11</sup> Despite the number of businesses established, over the years Solomon Rapids would slowly decline in population. Most of the businesses were closed by 1940. The most dramatic period of decline occurred in the 50s. The post office which had been in operation since 1910 was discontinued in 1953. In 1968, the original elevator built by Charles Johnson and Mr. Thierolf in 1892, was destroyed by fire.<sup>12</sup> Not much remains of Solomon Rapids. Solomon Rapids Seed Inc. is now the main business still in operation. If

---

<sup>11</sup> Bunger et al., “Solomon Rapids, KS.”

<sup>12</sup> Bunger, 1962 & 1976. Mitchell County Historical Essays. 175.

you drive through the former town there are a few remaining residents, but most of the area has been converted to farmland. Figure 2 shows what remains of the town of Solomon Rapids today.

## Works Cited

Bunger, Bill, John Bunger, and Kyle Peterson. Solomon Valley Highway 24 Heritage Alliance, "Solomon Rapids Kansas." Accessed May 2, 2012.

[http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/svha/history/towns/solomon\\_rapids.htm](http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/svha/history/towns/solomon_rapids.htm).

Bunger, David. 1962 & 1976. Mitchell County Historical Essays. "Solomon Rapids, Kansas- My Home Town."

Cutler, William G. *History of the State of Kansas*. Chicago, IL: A. T. Andreas, 1883.

<http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/mitchell/mitchell-co-p6.html>;

[http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/mitchell/mitchell-co-p2.html#BELOIT\\_P1](http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/mitchell/mitchell-co-p2.html#BELOIT_P1)

City of Beloit, "My Beloit; History." Last modified 2011. Accessed May 2, 2012.

[http://www.beloitks.org/prod/welcome/my\\_beloit/history/](http://www.beloitks.org/prod/welcome/my_beloit/history/).

Schnee, Angela. 2010. "A Thin Line Between Love and Hate Leonardville and Riley: The Evolution of a Small Town Rivalry." <https://lostkscommunities.omeka.net/items/show/12>.

Angela Schnee, "Leonardville and Riley, Riley County," *Lost Kansas Communities*, accessed May 2, 2012, <https://lostkscommunities.omeka.net/items/show/12>.