

Skiddy, Kansas

The Only One of Its Kind

A Lost Town Study by Eric Scribner



Anna Subiec, 2010

Skiddy, Kansas: the Only One of Its Kind

There is very little information available pertaining to the disappearing railroad town of Skiddy, located in the extreme northwest corner of Morris County in Kansas. This paper draws from an article in the *Council Grove Republican* written by a 1936 Kansas State graduate named Don McNeal (“The Old One”). McNeal uncovers the early years of Skiddy in his weekly column “Let It Be Said.” This piece also includes dialogue and pictures provided by Dolly Anderson, a current resident of Skiddy, and Ruby Mann, a former resident and storeowner of Skiddy.

No other town in Kansas had a luxury that Skiddy enjoyed. Being the only town or city named Skiddy in the entire nation, letters from foreign countries addressed to “Skiddy, United States” would safely reach the railroad community in the Flint Hills of Kansas. The town’s name was derived from a New York immigrant named Francis Skiddy. Francis “was said to have been an official of one of the New York companies that furnished the money to build the railroad” through Skiddy.¹ So, in 1869 the small railroad village of Skiddy was born along the Missouri, Kansas, Texas Railroad, or as the locals referred to it, the “KATY” railroad.²

¹ Don McNeal, “Let It Be Said,” *Council Grove Republican* (Council Grove, KS), Feb. 22, 2008.

² Mann, Ruby (former resident of Skiddy, KS) in discussion with the Eric Scribner, March 8, 2011.

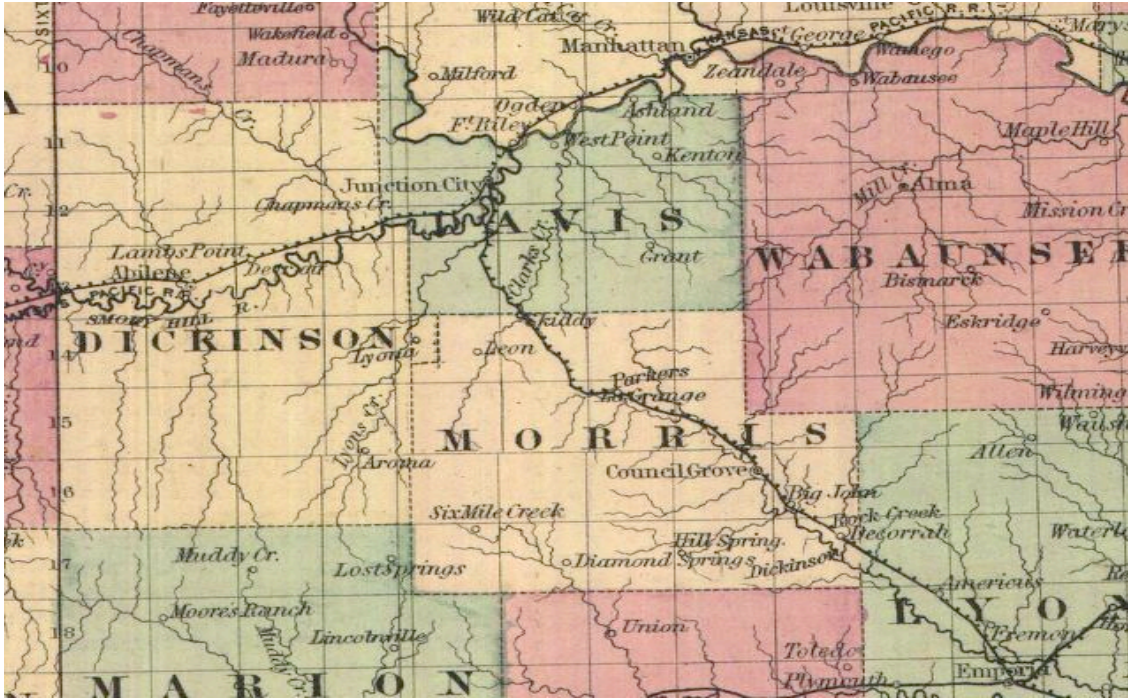


Figure 1: This map depicts the location Skiddy at the northern most edge of the Morris County. This map also shows Missouri, Kansas, Texas (KATY) railroad running through Skiddy in 1871. (“Colton’s Kansas” G.W. and C.B. Colton & Co. (1871))

In 1871, incoming settlers found the valley site of Skiddy surprisingly lovely. Today that “nestled village” feeling is still palpable. Dropping down from a plateau into wide creek bottoms, a traveler will find the nucleus of the town still visible along a curve in the road. Enormous trees hide the old school in summer, but the corner mercantile store still stands, gray and weathered. Rapidly, only ten years after statehood, surveyed sections of land were purchased around Skiddy, and prospective buyers began to consider bottomland farms a lucrative investment. A year later, despite its “safer” valley location, a prairie fire swept across the plains and threatened the blossoming town. All of the male citizens of Skiddy fought the fire under the leadership of Patrick Maloney, who was said

to be “the best firefighter in the state.”³ This fire served as unifying agent for the citizens of the town. The women contributed by pumping water and small boys aided in the effort by providing wet sacks. A thrilling story also circulated in the town that during the prairie fire, a man and woman on a buggy rode furiously ahead of the fire for 60 miles and when they finally stopped, both horses dropped dead from exhaustion.⁴

In the wake of the prairie fire, Skiddy continued on its prosperous path as residents built structures throughout the town at a rapid pace. Railroad connections allowed sawn lumber to be shipped from the East. However, the earliest buildings were of native limestone. Among the first was a stone schoolhouse erected on a hill west of town in 1877. It was later replaced with a larger, wooden school “down in the valley.” A railroad station was also constructed for the shipping of grain and livestock, Skiddy’s main avenue of subsistence. By 1880, Skiddy was a thriving community—it boasted two stores, two blacksmiths, a lumberyard, grain elevator, a drug store, a harness and shoe store, and an astonishing seventeen-room hotel!⁵

The 1880s were Skiddy’s golden years. Skiddy established itself as a consistent provider and shipper of wheat and stock. Some cattle joined cattle driven up from Texas to be shipped east and abroad. The wheat shipped from Skiddy was primarily grown by the German population along Lyons Creek. Residents of Skiddy remember that “long

³ Don McNeal, “Let It Be Said,” *Council Grove Republican* (Council Grove, KS), Feb. 22, 2008. See also, “Legends of Kansas History, Tales, and Destinations in the Land of Ahs.” <http://www.legendsofkansas.com/morriscounty2.html>

⁴ *The Deadliest Woman in the West: Mother Nature on the Prairies and Plains, 1800-1900*, Rod Beemer, Caxton Press (June 1, 2006).

⁵ Don McNeal, “Let It Be Said.” *Council Grove Republican* (Council Grove, KS), Feb. 22, 2008. See also, William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas: Morris County*. (Chicago: 1883), Part 5.

trains of wagons loaded with wheat could be seen any day on the county line bound for Skiddy and the KATY railroad.”⁶

Alongside Skiddy’s economic success, residents also took pleasure in a variety of social events. As in most other frontier towns, the schoolhouse served as the site for these events. Spelling bees were a popular affair among the town’s children, whereas adults participated in hayrack rides and raced horses against the Kaw Indians in the area.⁷ The residents of Skiddy and local Indians lived together peacefully for many years, with very few conflicts occurring. A healthy relationship among white settlers and Indians was quite uncommon in this time period. Perhaps this speaks to the character of the residents of Skiddy.



⁶ Don McNeal, “Let It Be Said,” *Council Grove Republican* (Council Grove, KS), Feb. 22, 2008.

⁷ Don McNeal, “Let It Be Said,” *Council Grove Republican* (Council Grove, KS), Feb. 22, 2008. See also, William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas: Morris County* (Chicago:1883), Part 3.

Figure #2: Pictured above is the Skiddy schoolhouse, once the site of social gatherings and education for the residents of Skiddy. (Photo taken by Cheryl Unruh Dec. 1, 2009).

By the mid-1900s Skiddy was beginning to lose its value as a trade route. The train was pulled from Skiddy in 1953. Ruby Mann, who lived in Skiddy in the 1940s and helped run a department store, remembers what life was like. In an interview, she recounted that the wheat harvest was still thriving in Skiddy into the 1940s and 50s: “Big trucks of wheat would come down the hill to sell their grain at the elevator. There would be lines and lines of trucks and wagons full of wheat.” Ruby also remembered the convenience of the train: “I remember taking the train from Skiddy to Junction City and White City...they just let me ride along for free.”⁸ Ruby moved to Skiddy in 1946, to join her husband and help operate Mann’s Grocery and Locker. She witnessed Skiddy’s final years as a productive town as well as its final departure.

In an interview with Dolly Anderson, a resident of Skiddy since 1969, Dolly remarked that by the time she arrived “there were no churches in operation.” However, there was still a grocery store and a locker plant under the ownership of the previously mentioned Ruby Mann. Dolly also recalled that the cemetery is still intact, lying just north of Skiddy; its “oldest graves date back to the 1870s.”⁹

Today, Skiddy has been removed from most Kansas maps. The KATY railroad no longer runs through Skiddy and there are no operating businesses. However, nine families still call Skiddy home. Many structures are still standing including the churches, grocery store, grain elevators, and houses. The families living in Skiddy today mostly

⁸ Ruby Mann (Former resident of Skiddy, KS) in discussion with the Eric Scribner, March 8, 2011.

⁹ Dolly Anderson (current resident of Skiddy) in discussion with Eric Scribner, March 8, 2011.

utilize the land for ranching and truck farming. They continue to boast of its unique name and to recall the good times and prospering years.

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