

National Impact Causes the Destruction of a Kansas Town:

Log Chain, Nemaha County, Kansas, 1860s-1870s

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HIST 533 Lost Kansas Communities

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The mail carrying trade was an integral part of the growth and expansion of the United States. It followed the pathways and trails of travel. Also, the carrying trade led to the creation of stores along these trails, which included methods of carrying mail across the country. In 1860, the Pony Express was put into motion. The beginning of the Pony Express led to the creation of many small Kansas towns. One of these small towns was called Log Chain. The town of Log Chain played an important role in one of the most famous mail carrying passages in the United States; however, when national factors such as the railroads were developed and the Pony Express died, Log Chain followed in close pursuit.

Description of Log Chain

Noble H. Rising and his family came to Kansas in 1858.^{1 2} Some ghost towns in Nemaha County, Kansas during the late 1850s and early 1860s were help built by and had the leadership of Noble H. Rising. Some of these towns were Albany, Pleasant Spring/Granada, and Log Chain.³

Log Chain was built on the Log Chain Branch of a creek. In August 1860, Richard Burton had described a stage station as, "...a few log and timber structures near a creek."⁴

There is no solid proof as to what station Burton was describing but many believe it was the Log Chain station. While the buildings Rising constructed at Log



A Pony Express station located near Hanover, Kansas similar to the station in Log Chain. Source: The Kansas Collection. Available at http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1945/45_8_roothickman.htm

¹ Pony Express Home Station. "Don C. Rising: 1844-1909," accessed October 28, 2010, <http://www.xphomestation.com/drising.html>.

² John and Enid Ostertag, *Every Name Index to Tennal's History of Nemaha County Kansas* (St. Joseph: Compilers & Researchers, 1993), 72.

³ Kansas Heritage Group, "Ghost Towns of Nemaha County" by Morris W. Werner, last updated April 2010, <http://www.kansasheritage.org/werner/gostnmco.html>.

⁴ Kansas Heritage Group, "The Pony Express in Nemaha County," by Morris W. Werner, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www.kansasheritage.org/werner/ponyroad.html>.

Chain were few in number, they were no doubt extremely expansive. The house was a twenty-four by forty foot log cabin and the barn was a massive seventy feet in length.⁵

The meaning of the name Log Chain is quite interesting. It's known that Log Chain ranch was built near a creek. In 1844, General Albert Sidney Johnson and his United States troops were on their way east to Illinois to quiet citizens and Mormons involved in an uprising called the Mormon War. As the General and his pack train attempted to cross this creek, they had great difficulty. Scores of chains were broken by the teams of oxen. The pile of chains that grew on the side of the bank of the creek may have given the ranch its name.⁶ Another belief is that the station's name may be quite simply a corruption of nearby creek with a similar-sounding name.⁷

The Area Encompassing Log Chain

The area surrounding Log Chain was suitable for a rural community. Farmers from the Log Chain/Nemaha County area were able to grow corn for a living with an average annual growing season of one hundred and seventy days. The average temperature for Kansas was 55 degrees Fahrenheit. July was the hottest month with an average of 79.2 degrees Fahrenheit, and January was the coldest month with an average of 30 degrees Fahrenheit. The combination of sunny days and typically low humidity levels allowed comfortable temperatures for its residents.⁸

⁵ Pony Express Home Station, "Kansas Stations: Log Chain," accessed November 18, 2010, <http://www.xphomestation.com/kssta.html>.

⁶ Ralph Tennal, *History of Nemaha County, Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 123-125.

⁷ Kansas Heritage Group, "The Pony Express in Nemaha County."

⁸ Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self, "Average Annual Growing Season in Kansas, In Days," in *Historical Atlas of Kansas* by Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 52.

The Purpose of Log Chain

Several trails ran through territorial Kansas in the 1860s. The Pony Express and California Trail from St. Joseph, Missouri ran directly through Log Chain which is now located in Nemaha County.⁹ Along these travel routes, the carrying trade (or businesses that functioned along trails) was an integral part of the reason for growth of many Kansas towns. Examples of these travel routes would be stands, ferries, and the Pony Express. The Pony Express began in 1860 with the mission of resolving the slow communication problems between the east and the west coast of the United States.¹⁰ The purpose of Log Chain was for it to be a station on the Pony Express route. Log Chain was to be the next station on the line after Kickapoo, which was on the Overland Trail. Kickapoo was an eating station on the line, also kept by Noble H. Rising.



Figure 3. Map showing Pony Express route from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California. Source: National Park Service available at <http://www.nps.gov/poex/planyourvisit/maps.htm>

Even though Log Chain was built by Rising, it was the home of Robert Sewell. Robert Sewell, better known as “Old Bob” Ridley, was the Overland driver. Old Bob Ridley was famous for his never ending supply of chewing tobacco. He was known to keep all the stock tenders and others on their run supplied with the quote, “filthy weed.”¹¹

As mentioned before, the people had great difficulty crossing the creek by Log Chain due to its quick sand bottom. Wagons often needed help getting out. To accomplish this, people hooked a log

⁹ John Clements, *Kansas Facts: A Comprehensive Look at Kansas Today County by County* (Dallas: Clements Research II, Inc.: 1990), 360, 380; Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self, “Territorial Kansas Trails,” in *Historical Atlas of Kansas* by Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 23.

¹⁰ Kansas Heritage Group, “Ghost Towns of Nemaha County” by Morris W. Werner.

¹¹ Washington County Historical and Genealogical Society, “70th Anniversary Edition: Supplement to the Washington County Register,” accessed November 18, 2010, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/wchgs/section1.htm>.

chain to the axle of a wagon and hitched extra yokes of oxen to the chain. Extra chains were always kept at the station just for these emergencies.¹²

Log Chain's Demise

Along with other small Kansas towns, Log Chain was only thriving with the help of the Pony Express. However, when the Pony Express ended in October of 1861 because the transcontinental telegraph was completed, change began to happen in a downward spiral.

If that wasn't enough to knock down the chances of success of many towns, railroad lines were then constructed within Nemaha County between 1867 and 1870.¹³ By 1878, there were two railway lines labeled the St. Joseph and Denver City Railroad Company and the Union Pacific Central Branch Railroad Company that ran through Nemaha County.¹⁴ Only the towns fortunate enough to



An illustration of a Pony Express Rider. Source: Smithsonian National Postal Museum available at <http://postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/mochila.html>

have been built by secure rail accommodations were able to survive. Over a period of less than a few years, a huge number of small Kansas towns shrank into nothing. Stores, hotels, saw mills, blacksmith shops, and wagon shops were shut down. Also, the residents living in those small towns moved to towns that were located along the railroad.¹⁵

Another Possible Factor Affecting the Decline of Log Chain

Although the main reasons that Log Chain, along with many other small towns, didn't survive were the end of carrying trade, the Pony Express coming to a close, and the rise of the railroads, there is

¹²Washington County Historical and Genealogical Society, "70th Anniversary Edition: Supplement to the Washington County Register."

¹³ Kansas Heritage Group, "Ghost Towns of Nemaha County" by Morris W. Werner.

¹⁴ Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self, "Railroad Development in Kansas, 1878," in *Historical Atlas of Kansas* by Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 30.

¹⁵ Kansas Heritage Group, "Ghost Towns of Nemaha County" by Morris W. Werner.

another possible factor that could have also affected the towns' growth. Around the time that Log Chain was first built, a national uproar was taking place across the United States—the Civil War.

Before the war officially began in 1861, the Kansas territory was trying to resolve one of the most important decisions of its time—whether it should enter the Union as a free state or a slave state. Senator Stephen Douglas, whose main concern was really organizing the territories for the expansion of the railroad, came up with a probable solution to the issue. He devised the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. According to this document, the people who lived in the two newly created territories of Nebraska and Kansas would be able to vote themselves as to whether or not they would be proslavery or a free state. Soon after the act went into effect, outbreaks of violence erupted across Kansas. Kansas would be nicknamed “Bleeding Kansas” because of the amount of mass violence and bloodshed.¹⁶ Eventually, in 1861, Kansas entered as a free state into the Union.

And, the year Kansas became a state, the Civil War began. Boys and men were leaving their homes and new settlements to fight in the war. Before the war ended in 1865, Kansas had 20,097 men admitted into the Union Army. Although Kansas did not contribute as many men to the Civil War as other states had, Kansas had a higher mortality rate than anywhere else.¹⁷

Even Log Chain had one of its own involved in the Civil War. The eldest son of N.H. Rising, Don C. Rising, was made assistant wagon-master in the Union Army after the Pony Express ceased to run. In 1862, he was located at Isle No. 10, Pittsburg Landing, Shiloh, Tuscumbia, and Corinth until he was discharged with sick leave.¹⁸

So, not only considering all previously stated factors contributing to Log Chain's demise, Kansas, which didn't have a high population to begin with, was losing many of its citizens to the violence of the

¹⁶ About.com, “The Kansas-Nebraska Act: Legislation Intended as a Compromise Backfired and Led to Civil War,” by Robert McNamara, accessed December 4, 2010.

<http://history1800s.about.com/od/slaveryinamerica/a/KansasNebraska.htm>.

¹⁷ Old West Kansas. “Kansas Timeline,” accessed December 4, 2010, http://www.vlib.us/old_west/lineoftime.html.

¹⁸ Pony Express Home Station. “Don C. Rising: 1844-1909,” accessed October 28, 2010, <http://www.xphomestation.com/drising.html>.

Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Civil War. Also, had this national turmoil not taken place during the time period of the creation of many of these small towns, there could have possibly been a larger influx in the population of Kansas. A larger influx of the population could have created even more small towns and also allowed the towns already existing, like Log Chain, to grow without the need of a location by the railroad lines.

Log Chain at the Present

What used to be a stop for the reckless Pony Express riders now looks like an abandoned homestead. There are signs of remodeling and newer buildings constructed over the last century but it still maintains the ghostly appearance of a Kansan's lost dream. The house has broken out windows from vandals, discarded and broken belongings scatter the site, the once grandiose seventy-foot-long barn lies fallen, and even the newer building built after the original Log Chain rests in shambles. Slowly but surely, the growth of trees and plant life is overtaking what was once a fully functioning small Kansas town.

While Log Chain was important because it was a station for the Pony Express, what it is now is typical of the average Kansas ghost town. Along with old or partially torn down buildings, most physical evidence that remains of Kansas ghost towns are abandoned root cellars, springs, and wells.¹⁹ Over a short period of a hundred years, often the old, well-worn pathways and wagon trails are gone, offering little for a passerby to view.

¹⁹ Kansas Heritage Group, "Ghost Towns of Nemaha County" by Morris W. Werner.

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