

The Rough and Gone Town of Ladore, Kansas

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Most towns anywhere carry a certain character with them throughout their existence. For the now non-existent town of Ladore, Kansas, its character can best be defined as a rough-and-going old west town, partly due to the flow of alcohol and lynching of fine men that occurred there in the spring of 1870. Ladore is located in southeast Kansas along the southern fringe of the Neosho County line. As seen in Figure 1 below, Ladore is in the Ladore Township Sec. 27, and was situated along the Labette Creek and the once-in-use tracks of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad Company.

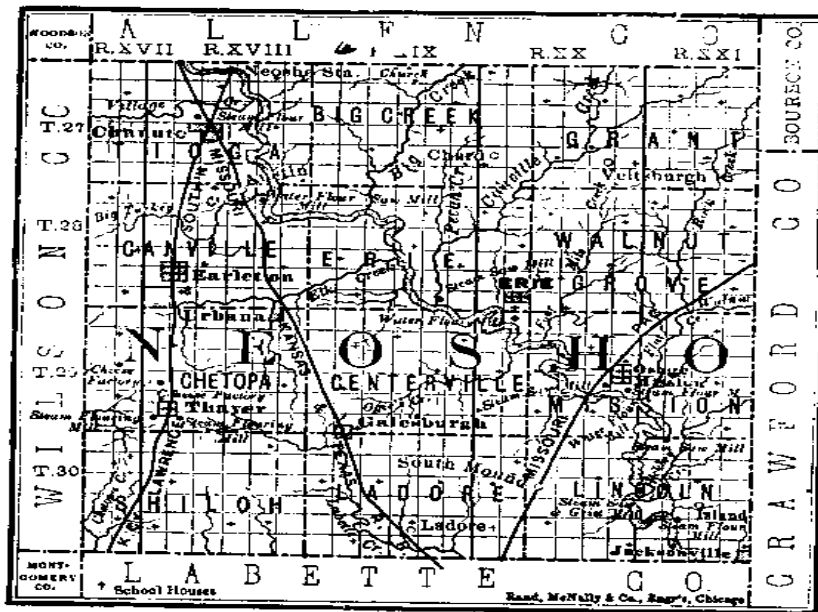


Figure #1

The lost town of Ladore, Kansas is located in southern Neosho County in the township of Ladore. The date of this map could be estimated to the early 1880's.

Source: A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*.

Originally the town was called Fort Roach after the founder J. N. Roach. The post office's name was Fort Roach from October 8, 1867 to February 12, 1869. The post office then changed its name to Ladore on February 12, 1869 until its discontinuation on March 15, 1901. What is interesting about this is that before the town's discovery, there

was an old log fort located near where the town was to be built. No information in this article or others can provide details on why the fort was erected and what its use was for. By the time Ladore was discovered, the old fort had long been abandoned but the remains were still visible. The fort would have been located along the Labette Creek west of Ladore. Speculation can arise to its purpose such as “it may have been used during the Civil War, or it could have been for Indian protection.”¹

The town of Ladore was occupied at a very interesting time in American history. Why so interesting? Imagine a time when the Civil War had recently ended, Native Americans were fighting for settlement rights, and the railroad company was revolutionizing the American way of life. In Neosho County, native forests would have been present along streams and the physical environment is one of an upland valley. Even though Ladore had a short run at being a town, it is important to reflect on its existence. People at one time occupied this forgotten town and gave it a character and a story. Ladore, like many other ghost towns across Kansas, was created and deserted due to the railroad and left more questions to be asked than answers to be told on the town’s history.

One can only speculate where the name “Ladore” came from. Most likely somebody brought the name with them from somewhere else which was not uncommon during this time period. According to Zelinsky’s “Rule of First Effective Settlement,” people will leave traces of themselves when traveling to new places. The migration of people means they will stamp the land with their culture, values, and ideas. Since Ladore is a French name, research shows that there is a parish municipality called La Doré

¹ W. W. Graves, Vol. 2 of *History of Neosho County* (St. Paul, Kansas: Journal Press, 1951).

located in Quebec, Canada. Parish municipalities like La Doré were established by the Catholic Church which served as a governmental structure because there was no secular municipal government in the area. It is quite possible that somebody migrated from La Doré in Quebec, to Ladore, Kansas at the time of frontier expansion. The other interesting aspect is the Catholic Osage Mission that was established in St. Paul, Kansas, a mere 15 miles away. According to records, when Ladore was a lively city in the early 1870's, the Catholic Church was the only church building in town.² This information makes for a fascinating case that somebody who was connected with the Catholic Church came to Kansas from Quebec and helped name the town as we know it today, Ladore.

Ladore was built on hopes of becoming a junction of the Sedalia division of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas railroad. Before the railroad came through Ladore, people came to southeast Kansas following the opening of new lands and the promising future of the railroad. Settlement of a town later to be called 'Ladore' from 'Fort Roach' was established with the help of J. N Roach. The growth of Fort Roach was rapid from the beginning and stemmed from the idea that the town was going to be booming. A general store was erected by Neely & Co. according to the *Annals of Osage Mission*³ and completed in September of 1869 along with a new residence for the owners. General stores were an important part of a town during the post-Civil War era. They served as a place of commerce and social gatherings. With the building of a general store and the promise of a new hotel and other businesses, Ladore would soon grow.

Railroad track came to Ladore on May 10, 1870. This was the Neosho division of the Missouri, Kansas, & Texas Railroad or the Katy. "Immigrants, honest settlers,

² W.W. Graves, "Fort Roach-Ladore," Vol. 1 of *History of Neosho County* (St. Paul, Kansas: Journal Press, 1949), 466-471.

³ W.W. Graves, *Annals of Osage Mission* (St. Paul, Kansas: Graves Memorial Library, 1987), 106.

squatters, promoters, adventurers, all accompanied by the lowest riffraff of the frontier, were flooding into southern Kansas in the wake of the railroad.”⁴ This wave of diverse people formed a frontier mosaic. The railroad provided a link from the eastern and southern parts of the country to the West at a time of westward expansion following the Civil War. This became the main means of transportation for people throughout the United States and created a new chapter in American history. Along with bringing people westward, the railroad was crossing into territory already claimed by Native Americans. The land in Neosho County had already been settled by the Osage Indians until 1865 when the tribe signed a treaty at Canville creek near Shaw, Kansas. The signing of this treaty sold the Osage land of Neosho and Labette counties to the United States.⁵

An early account of local Indians tells how they constructed their huts: “They plaited the reeds into mats six feet wide and perhaps twenty feet long. Three or four poles were then stuck in the ground, their tops fastened together. This formed a frame over which the mats were placed, thus forming a hut.”⁶ Buffalo skins would have sometimes been used for their doors. This is all a part of the frontier mosaic and the combination of cultures and people that were living out on the Kansas frontier.

An account from L. A. Bowes who was a track foreman for the Katy described Ladore as “the toughest place I ever struck. Whiskey was sold in nearly every house in the town.”⁷ Also on May 10th, 1870, a group of around three hundred people were

⁴ V. V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 55.

⁵ R. G. Fister and G. V. Labadie, *Golden Book of the Osages* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

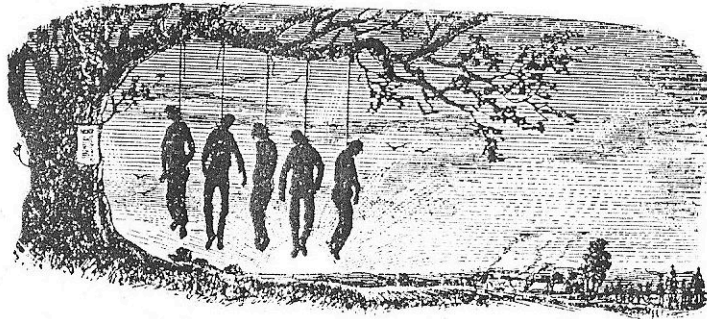
⁶ W. W. Graves, Vol. 2 of *History of Neosho County* (St. Paul, Kansas: Journal Press, 1951).

⁷ V. V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 55.

involved in the lynching of five men. According to the accounts of the event,⁸ seven desperadoes came to town and were robbing and taking over. The men were armed and firing their guns and most likely drinking since whiskey and booze could be found all over Ladore which added to its rough character and reputation. At around seven p.m. that night, the seven men ended up at a boarding house kept by J. N. Roach or the founder of Ladore. Roach was repeatedly beat over the head with revolvers until the desperadoes thought he was dead. They then kidnapped his two daughters and hired hand. That night the leader of the gang shot one of his comrades dead while presumably hiding out. The next morning a search party was sent out to recover the girls and catch the men. Two of the men were found passed out drunk at a saloon, another was found with one of Roach's girls in the woods, three others including the leader were found going up the road to the Osage Mission. They were locked up at the barber shop then led down to the Roach house to have the girls properly identify their assailants. Five of the men were hung from a limb on a hackberry tree. One of the men was not hung because he was not identified by the girls as being an attacker. The five men that hung from the hackberry tree were taken down and laid in a single grave under the tree. One of the desperadoes to be buried had his pants and boots stolen. The two men who were caught at the saloon that morning had also attempted an attack on Jim Abell's wife the night before. The Abells' owned the Inn in town and when the two desperadoes came looking for more alcohol, they trapped Abell's wife in the attic with her two daughters. She fended them off with an axe until they got tired of trying and got liquored up instead. "The 'Wild Bills,' 'Texas Jacks,'

⁸ Accounts of this event are found in multiple sources: V. V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier*, W. W. Graves, Vol. 2 of *History of Neosho County*, A. T. Andreas and William Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas* and L. A. Bowes, "One Limb and Hemp for Five," *The St. Paul Journal*, September 11, 1902.

‘Buckskin Joes,’ and ‘Alkali Ikes,’ left for more congenial climes, and the town settled down to a quiet peaceful village.”⁹



Ladore, Kansas, May 11, 1870

Figure #2

The five men hung from the hackberry tree were William Ryan, Patrick Starr, Patsey Riley, Richard Pitkin and Alexander Mathews. The man shot was Robert Wright and the one not hung was Peter Kelly.
Source: V. V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier*.

No sooner had Ladore been established, its downfall began. In 1870 there were 839 people living in the Ladore Township.¹⁰ And according to the 1880 census of the Ladore Township, there were 1,060 people.¹¹ Most of the population would have been located in Ladore since it was the only town in that township and a prominent site for the railroad company. “The main line or Sedalia division of the M. K. & T. was then being constructed through the country from the east and surveyed its line to Ladore...but suddenly the railroad company pulled up its stakes and passing to the south, made the junction some five miles south.”¹² The Sedalia division of the M. K. & T. was supposed to supply the new junction at Ladore. The railroad instead moved the junction five miles south and established the town of Parsons. Residents of Ladore raised the price of land

⁹ W. W. Graves, Vol. 2 of *History of Neosho County* (St. Paul, Kansas: Journal Press, 1951), 466-471.

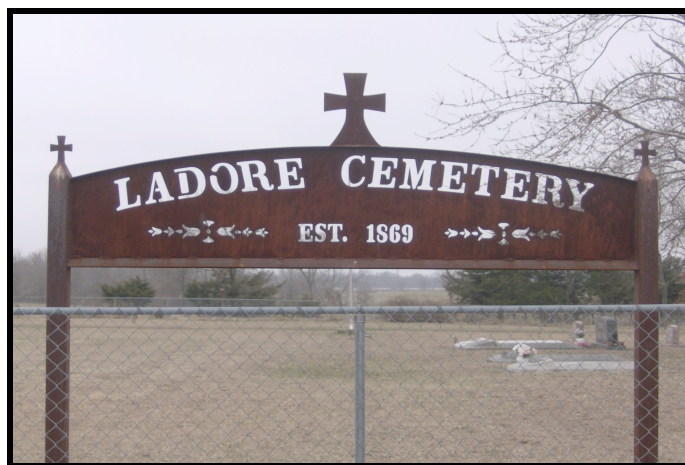
¹⁰ A. T. Andreas and William Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883).

¹¹ Osage Mission-Neosho County Museum. *Census Index, Neosho County Kansas, Book One* (St. Paul, Kansas: 1880), 86.

¹² Wallace Duncan, *History of Neosho and Wilson Counties Kansas*, (Ft. Scott, Kansas: Monitor Printing Co., 1902), 30.

above what the railroad company was willing to pay. Instead, property could be found at a lower cost in Parsons. The people of Ladore would have followed the railroad to Parsons as well and the town would have been well towards complete abandonment by the 20th century.

The once rough and tough town of Ladore, Kansas sustained a post office until March 15, 1901. All that exists of the town today is the cemetery that was established in 1869 (as seen in figure 3 below) and is located on a dead end road near Lake Parsons. According to the Chanute Genealogical Society and their recording of the tombstones in 1978, there were 83 tombstones accounted for at Ladore Cemetery.¹³ The small number of burials can correspond to the short amount of time the town was established and bustling. The alcohol and lynching were not the only things that made this town rough. There are stories and legends that people in close proximity to Ladore would lard the rail tracks as they vented their spleen on the railroad.¹⁴ The larding of the tracks would have made it difficult for the train to maneuver. This colorful story is just one of others that gave Ladore its character and makes it an interesting piece of frontier Kansas history.



¹³ Chanute Genealogical Society, *Neosho County Cemeteries*, (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth, 1978).

¹⁴ V. V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 210.

Figure #3

The photo above was taken on March 17, 2010 at the now non-existent town site of Ladore, Kansas. The cemetery dates to 1869 and is the only thing remaining of the town.

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