

A Brief Sketch of Pence, Scott County, Kansas: The Golden Town of the Wheat State

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In northwest Scott County, where wind is plentiful and trees are few and far between, sits the disappearing small town of Pence, Kansas. Platted on October 27, 1886, Pence is located in Beaver Township, which is in the most northwestern corner of Scott County. In its heyday during the late 1880s and 1890s, Pence boasted many shops and stores, a church and a school, as seen in Photo 1. There were many promising aspects of the small town, including the discovery of a variety of metals, one in particular that drove most Americans mad with greed. Also during the early parts of the 1890s, there was an abundance of wild horses in the area, which could only be caught by depriving them of any access to water; once the horses became very thirsty, Penceites would drive them into a corral, which held a water tank.¹



Photo 1, Early photo of Pence, Kansas, Scott County, SOURCE: History of Early Scott County, Page 33.

¹ Wyatt, Earl J. "Pence in 1887." (1887).

There were surprisingly quite a variety of specialty stores, shops and laborers that laid roots in the young town of Pence in the 1880s and 1890s. Some of these shops and laborers included house and sign painters, well-diggers, carpenters and plasterers, stone masons, general contractors, a livery and feed stable, a blacksmith, a dry goods store, and a local paper, *The Pence Phonograph*, a daily hack line connecting the town of Pence with Scott City.² There was also the Pence City Hotel, Pioneer Meat Market, a furniture store, Pence City Bank, a lumberyard and a windmill dealer.³ The town appeared to be thriving, and the anticipation of the Missouri Pacific railroad laying down tracks through the town only fueled the town's pride. Unfortunately for Pence the railroad changed its course as it did quite often in the 19th century. The railroad company decided to build the railroad to the more promising town of Scott City in 1887.⁴

One of the most exciting events to take place in this small town was the discovery of gold in March of 1888, seen in Photo 2. The discovery was made by Jonah Harris while he was digging a well on his farm four miles east of Pence.⁵ After the discovery, the matter was kept quiet for some time until positive proof could be established. Samples of soil from the area were then

² *The Pence Phonograph*, November 5, 1887.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Wyatt, Earl J. "Pence in 1887." (1887).

⁵ "GOLD!" *The Pence Phonograph*, March 10, 1888, page 1.

sent to a notable chemist in Jacksonville, Illinois, who analyzed the soil and confirmed that it did in fact contain gold and also a small amount of silver.⁶ However, the chemist said that the amount of gold present would not yield much money to prospectors. This statement did not deter people from coming to Pence! Just one week after the first reports of the discovery of gold appeared in the Pence Phonograph, the paper reported great numbers of people flowing into the small town.⁷ Eventually a shaft was sunk in Pence in order to search for more gold and silver. Also during that same week in which the shaft was being sunk, J.E. Dick, the owner of the town lumberyard, found a rather large nugget of gold but he refused to take the \$20 offered to him for it.⁸ The excitement of the gold rush in Pence did not last long -- within a few months gold fever had passed and the town returned to its normal state, still anticipating the arrival of a railroad, which would never come.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "GLORY!" The Pence Phonograph, March 17, 1888, page 1.

⁸ "Digging for Gold!" The Pence Phonograph, March 31, 1888, page 1.

GOLD!

A Rich Find of the
Precious Metal
Near Pence.

J. Harris, a Farmer, Discovers
it While Digging a Well,
Sixty Feet Below the
Surface.

Great Excitement Prevails
Among the People of the
Community.

Some of the Dirt Analyzed by
by a Reliable Chemist of
Jacksonville, Illinois,

Leaving no Doubts in the
Mind of Anyone but what
it is the Pure Stuff.

Photo 2, Article from the Pence Phonograph announcing the discovery of gold,
SOURCE: The Pence Phonograph, March 10, 1888.