



ANNESS

FARMERS
COOP

ELEV

In extreme southwestern Sedgwick County, Kansas, lies farmland, and a lot of it. It was on a cool windy March day that I tromped around in the farmland, took pictures, and had an undefined feeling of melancholy that none of us could quite place. Personally, I was a little bit excited. Anness is a lost town, a relic of the past, and I was standing in what used to be the heart, “Anness Road.” It is difficult to get to the road, much less actually identify it. As the town site appears now, it is indistinguishable from the landscape around it, and it is Anness only in the memory of the land and the peeling paint on the sign of the farming co-op out front.

W.H. Wilson founded Anness in the 1880s. Originally living in Arcade, N.Y. Wilson sold the cheese factory he owned to buy land in the wheat belt of Kansas in Erie Township. The Santa Fe railway built an extension into his land, which caused him “much disgust.”^[1] Because of his apparent distaste for railroads, Wilson travelled to Topeka to speak to the Santa Fe administrators and propose a town site be made. Wilson gave the Santa Fe Company 51% of the 5,000 acres he owned and in return, was allowed to name the town. He chose to name it after his wife, Ann S. Wilson, to which the Santa Fe administrator proposed “Anness.” Wilson agreed, and a small farming community sprang up and exported produce and wheat from the farms that surrounded the area.^[2] In 1887, the town got its own post office, moved from Kalamazoo a few miles to the east.^[3] The first instance of Anness appearing on a map is from an unknown author from 1887, possibly coinciding with the founding of the post office. Erie Township at the time had a bit less than 300 people, though exact figures for Anness are not known.^[4] By the time Anness had their post office in 1887, Wichita was the fastest-growing city in the United States, growing by leaps and bounds from their 1880 population of around 5,000.^[5]

The map shown is from a Rand-McNally map from 1888. [6]



The town, for all its current desolation, used to be a community, complete with shops, a church, a saloon, and even a one-room schoolhouse. The only signs of civilization left in Anness now are the new co-op across from an older crumbling concrete structure (probably a co-op dumping station from the 1970s), and a house owned by an older gentleman.

The decline of the town was slow and absolute. A former resident of the town, Edith Peairs, interviewed in 1981, describes it was a smaller farming community, with probably less than 100 people at any given time. [7] Add in the lack of effort to modernize itself, and the town lost all reason to exist and withered away. The Santa Fe stop was, even in 1981, barely used, and no rails exist in Anness anymore. Anness is only tangentially connected to the rest of the world via a rough dirt road. Anness was also on the list of declining or extinct towns circa 1940 [8]. The Anness train depot itself was moved to Wichita and placed in Cowtown, but with the name changed to Wichita as well, not a trace of Anness remains in the building. [9]

Nothing about Anness was ever particularly noteworthy. It was a small town from its inception, and it stayed that way until the last small farm finally closed up shop. Peairs attributes the quick dissolution of the town to a combination of the proliferation of the automobile, the improvement of roadways, and the boom of aircraft construction in Wichita [10]. From all this, Anness lost its purpose

for existence, and died out. The area is still being used as farmland today as it was 110 years ago, though now many less buildings dot the landscape, and Anness, like so many other Kansas towns, exist only on old outdated maps, leaving behind little record of their existence.

Endnotes

[1] Orseumus Hills Bentley, *History of Wichita & Sedgwick County, Kansas, Past and Present Vol 1&2* (C.F. Cooper & Co, 1910), 617 - 618

[2] Forrest Hintz, "Just Passing the Time Was Anness's Nemesis." *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, October 19, 1981

[3] Robert W. Baughman, *Kansas Post Offices: May 29 1828 – August 3, 1961* (Wichita: McCormick – Armstrong Co, 1961), 4

[4] <http://tinyurl.com/3vk8adt>, accessed April 17, 2011, via Kansas State Historical Society (<http://kshs.org>)

[5] Craig Miner "Kansas: History of the Sunflower State, 1854 - 2000" (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002)

[6] <http://tinyurl.com/3n2acdj>, accessed April 11, 2011, via Wichita State University Library Special Collections (<http://wichita.edu>)

[7] Hintz

[8] <http://tinyurl.com/3fz75cm>, accessed April 11, 2011, via Kansas State Historical Society (<http://kshs.org>)

[9] Hintz

[10] *Ibid*