

Hearty Harveyville,
Wabaunsee County,
Kansas

History 558

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Harveyville is the type of town that people always ask about: "Where is that?" Though the town of Harveyville did not exist until the Santa Fe Railroad came in 1880, the first settlers moved to the area in 1854, when Henry Harvey and his sons staked their claim there.¹ At the time, there were no railways west of the Mississippi River, so settlers had to travel to Kansas City to buy their goods.² Over the years, the railroad crept closer, moving to Leavenworth, then to Atchison, to Lawrence, to Topeka, and finally to Burlingame, which is only six miles from Harveyville.³

In the early days of the settlement, people had few ways to earn a living. The primary crop at this time was sod corn.⁴ Almost everybody in the area planted this crop. Settlers who were lucky enough to own a cow sold butter in Kansas City to make more money. The good luck that the farmers had at first came to an end when the rain stopped falling in 1860. The subsequent 18-month drought discouraged many settlers, some of whom returned home. As tension mounted across the country over the ethics of slavery, the "good housewives" of Harveyville would fix meals for people using the Underground Railroad, which ran through the town, using the food they had grown to help people get to free land.⁵

When the Civil War broke out, men who remained in the town joined Company A of the Osage Battalion and in 1865 they marched to Kansas City and took part in the "Battle of the

¹ *Business directory and history of Wabaunsee County* (Kansas Directory Company: Topeka, 1907), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 68.

³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Blue” where they were not supposed to fire under any circumstance.⁶ After the war, a swarm of grasshoppers descended on the fields, leaving behind desolation and starvation for the residents, who successfully sought aid from Ohio. 1880 in when the Santa Fe Railroad began to take control of the Santa Fe Trail and this is when Harveyville was founded. The town was incorporated in 1905 and had a population of over 300 by 1910.⁷ The town of Harveyville had its own light plant until the Kansas Power and Light Company took it over in 1924.

In 1903, the first formal school was built, and Harveyville added another school in 1922. The schools have since been torn down, and in 1939 the Harveyville High School was built. In 1954 the Harveyville Elementary School was built. In December 1971, the high school was combined with two other schools, Eskridge and Dover, to make the Mission Valley High School. The elementary school in Harveyville then held pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and sixth through eighth in the building now known as the junior high. 2001 was the year that more consolidation began. Dover, Eskridge and Harveyville seventh and eighth graders all attended junior high in Harveyville. The next year, kindergarten through fourth grade was divided between Dover and Eskridge, while fifth through eighth graders were at Harveyville. A bond to build on to Mission Valley was passed in 2002 to incorporate pre-K through twelfth grade. The school year of 2004-2005 was the first year for the entire district to be in one central location. It is still there today and has roughly 500 students for the entire school.

A couple men from the area left a great impression of where they were from. There was a doctor by the name of Dr. Youngman who practiced medicine for seventy years in Harveyville.

⁶ Luella Romine, “Happy Birthday, Harveyville - - 1880-1980,” *Eskridge Independent*, September 18, 1980.

⁷ Frank Wilson Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, Etc.* (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 826.

He was a very well-known person in the area. Dr. Youngman delivered children entire families, even delivering multiple generations. Another gentleman only spent the first two years of his life in Harveyville, but that does not mean he does not consider Harveyville his hometown. This gentleman became a well known general in the USMC, General Lewis Walt. He was an officer who served in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. He was awarded numerous medals in his 34 years of service, including two Navy Crosses and the Purple Heart.⁸

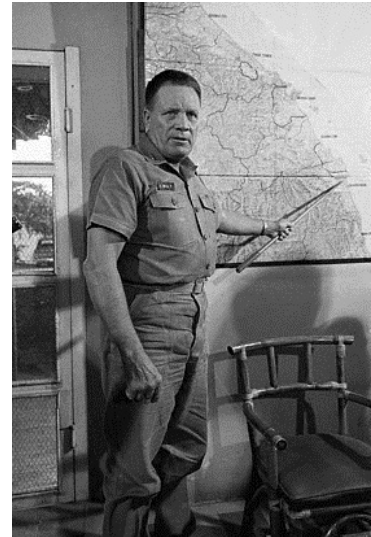


Figure 1: General Lewis Walt.

2011 will mark the 74th annual Harveyville Fair. The fair is the biggest event that draws people to the town. In recent years, one of the attractions on Friday nights is a strong (wo)man competition. On Saturdays, there is usually a turtle race and frog jump to get things going, in addition to booths, food vendors, and displays in the fire station, such as vegetables, quilts, 4-Her's ribbons from the fair, as well as a kiddie parade and a regular parade. The fair usually ends with a tractor pull, and in some years, there is a dance.

For being considered a “lost town”, Harveyville has just as many businesses today as it did in 1907. In 1907, there was a bank, two barbers, two cream stations, and a contractor of

⁸ Marine Corp History Division, "General Lewis William Walt, USMC," http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/HD/Whos_Who/Walt_LW.htm



Figure 2: The Osage City Grain Elevator Co. in roughly 1907.



Figure 3: The co-op in the early 2000s. The grain elevator has been torn down and the building is now owned by the Harveyville Seed Co.

stone, brick and plaster work. There was also a dry goods store, along with three grocery stores, a meat market, a drug store, a furniture store, two hardware stores, a tack shop, a hotel, a livery stable, a lumber yard, two real estate offices, and two restaurants. There were two elevators; now, the Harveyville Seed Company is located where the Osage Grain & Elevator Co. used to be. In 1903, the *Harveyville Monitor* was started as the first newspaper in town. There is not a town newspaper anymore, but there

are two local papers that cover the news in Harveyville, The Mission Valley Herald and The Wabaunsee County Signal Enterprise. 4-A Real Estate & Insurance and Mohler Law Office is currently housed in the building that was the newspaper.

Some other businesses that are currently available in Harveyville are Jepson’s Pottery, a flower shop called A Special Event, and Bell Wildlife Specialties, which offers guided and unguided tours, lodging, and full service taxidermy. There is also Bob’s Repair & Service, Country Bumpkin Pumpkin Patch,



Figure 4: The former location of the *Harveyville Monitor*. It is currently home to Mohler Law Office and 4-A Real Estate.

Create A Plaque, which makes custom cabinetry and furniture, Fairview Farms, which provides the community with Christmas trees, and the First

National Bank of Harveyville, as well as JBJ Photos, Triple C Photography, and Riggins Market & Deli. There is also the Harveyville United Methodist Church, which was started in 1892, the Harveyville Church of Christ and the fire station. The most recent business in town is the Harveyville Project, whose owner purchased the old elementary and junior high school buildings. Their purpose is “to provide an inspiring, energizing environment to foster creative output.”⁹

Even though Harveyville is considered a “Lost Town,” the community keeps the town going. Without the citizens taking pride and trying to promote the town, Harveyville would probably be a ghost town after the schools were consolidated. Harveyville is a quiet, small town in the southeast corner of Wabaunsee County that is welcoming to all that visit their community.

⁹ Nikol Lohr, “The Harveyville Project,” http://harveyvilleproject.com/?page_id=10

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