

Special Thanks

I would like to thank the Chapman Center for Rural Studies at Kansas State University, especially Dr. Morgan, who is responsible for making this book a reality. I also greatly appreciate the support and guidance of the Wabaunsee County Historical society, most notably Mr. Winkler.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my father, Craig W. Scribner, who has been a constant positive and supportive influence in not only my writing ventures, but also my entire life. Thanks for everything, Dad.

A Note to the Reader

I felt that the best way to present the township of Pavilion would be to discuss it within the vast realm of historical fiction. The following passage is a historically backed re-creation of life in the rural Kansas township. I have done extensive research on the township of Pavilion as well as the surrounding area, and I have chosen to integrate facts with fiction in an effort to reconstruct the quotidian flow of life in Pavilion. This story is not based on one specific event in the history of Pavilion. Instead it is a synthesis of actual events, along with real people and fictional creations. These have been intertwined in order to provide a comprehensive presentation of what it might have been like for a child of pioneering parents to reside in the railroad township of Pavilion in 1888.

History of the Manhattan, Alma, Burlingame Railroad

Prior to the coming of the railroad, waterways and wagons were the main mode of transportation for mass quantities of goods and passengers in Kansas. However, that all changed on March 20, 1860 when the first iron rails were laid on Kansas soil.¹ Railroads stretched into Kansas at a time of massive westward expansion in the United States. Vast tracts of land in the western portion of the country were opened up for settlement and pioneers claimed land and established small communities and townships at a feverish rate. The early pioneers of Kansas understood the value and importance of railroads, “both as agents in the stimulation of industrial enterprises and the promotion of civilization.”² The pioneers also realized that the “natural means of transportation in the great extent of country in the then Territory, stretching from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains, were in no wise adequate to the demands of the people that were soon inevitably to occupy this soil.”³ Kansas pioneers knew that in order to truly prosper, they needed the support of the railroad. Railroads were instrumental in the building of many towns and they offered potential for continued success; but railroads were also a competitive business and therefore were responsible for the dwarfing and killing of many other small towns.

This paper focuses on the Manhattan, Alma, Burlingame (M.A.B) section of the Santa Fe Railroad, which was voted to be funded by Wabaunsee County, Kansas in 1879. Residents of Alma, Kansas celebrated the attainment of the railroad line with a festival in

¹ William G. Cutler. *History of the State of Kansas*. (Chicago: 1883), Wabaunsee County, Part 1. Accessed on April 15, 2011. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/wabaunsee/wabaunsee-co-p1.html>.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

which “Five bands took part...there were basket lunches, speeches by railroad and political dignitaries and a firework display that lasted far into the night.”⁴ It was estimated that over 5,000 people from all over the state attended the festival. This celebration illustrates how important and monumental the construction of a railroad was, not only to the towns which directly benefitted, but also to people from all over the state. The building of a new railroad opened doors for Alma to new businesses, the ability to support a larger population and grow larger as a town in general, “although Alma’s population never reached more than 1,200.”⁵ More than anything, the railroad enabled the residents of Alma to ship their goods to more distant customers, especially Kansas City, which was the largest client for the shipment of cattle. Communities near Alma benefitted from the railroad in a similar fashion.

Residents from towns that were named as stops along the M.A.B. – Manhattan, Wabaunsee, Pavilion, Fairfield, Bismark, Eskridge, Harveyville, and Burlingame – also attended the celebration in Alma. One of the largest advantages provided by the M.A.B. was travel time (mail and passenger) between Manhattan and Burlingame, and all of the towns in between. Travel time on the M.A.B. from Burlingame to Manhattan was approximately four and a half hours, as opposed to a full day’s trip by wagon before the M.A.B. arrived.⁶ Overall, the M.A.B. brought opportunity and progression to the small Kansas towns and communities through which its rails were laid.

⁴ “Kansas Town Feels Loss of Train”

⁵ “Kansas Town Feels Loss of Train”

⁶ “M.A. & B Railway Time Schedule”

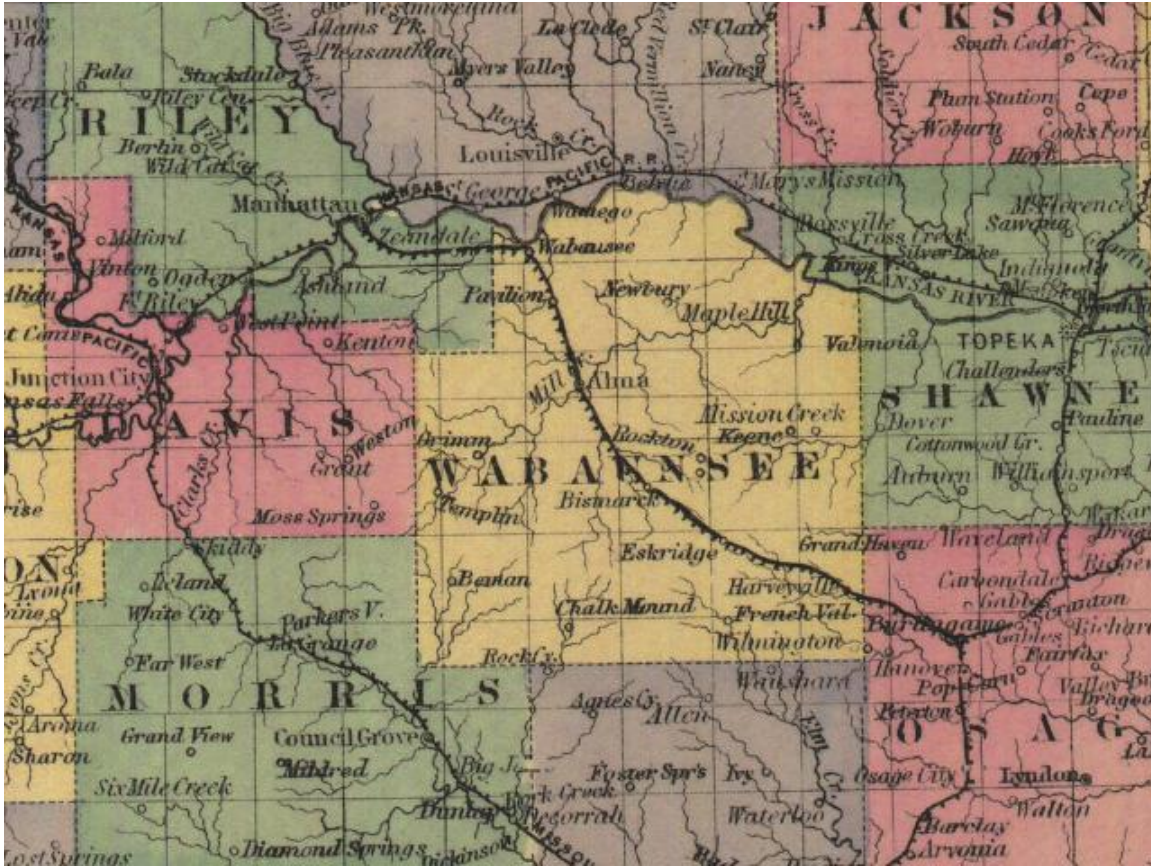


Figure 1: This map illustrates the Manhattan, Alma, Burlingame Railway sweeping across Wabaunsee County from the northwest corner down to the southeast corner. (G. W. and C. B. Colton, 1880.)

In 1880, Manhattan was the largest city in Riley County with a population of 2,105.⁷ It was also home to the Kansas State Agricultural College, a large portion of the population. The M.A.B. marked the fourth railway to enter the city, adding to its already impressive access and distribution capability. The M.A.B. did not have a profound impact on the city of Manhattan, but it did add to its resume as a city in the west of the United States. The M.A.B. created easier travelling for students in Wabaunsee County and Osage County, which previously did not have access to a railway that led directly to

⁷ William G. Cutler. *History of the State of Kansas*. (Chicago: 1883), Riley County, Part 1. Accessed on April 27, 2011. http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/riley/riley-co-p1.html#MAP_AND_POPULATION.

Manhattan. This was exceptionally true for aspiring college students living along the M.A.B.

Among the towns through which the M.A.B. passed, Burlingame had as much reason to be as excited as any other town. Burlingame was located in Osage County, thirty-five miles southeast of Alma, at the intersection of the “Atchison, Topeka, Santa Fe Railroad along the eastern limits of the town, and the Manhattan, Alma, Burlingame extended to the westward, both roads occupying a depot in common, in the eastern part of the city.”⁸ Burlingame was a thriving town that supported two flour mills, a pottery business and six mining companies. The mining companies benefitted greatly from the railroad, as they were able to ship coal to more customers.

For Eskridge, like many towns in Kansas, “about the only thing it had to indicate it was a town before the coming of the railway was its name.”⁹ The growing town of Eskridge relied on the M.A.B railroad for their subsistence and development. Thanks to the vote for the M.A.B. to be built, by 1887 the village of Eskridge had established a stable base of enterprises. It had a population of 800, several stores, a cheese factory and stone mill, and was home to two or three lawyers, three doctors, two newspapers, and two stone contractors.¹⁰ From 1880 to 1887, Eskridge benefitted so much from the M.A.B. from that the citizens of Eskridge called for another railroad line to support their shipment demands. The Rock Island Railroad discussed building a line from Maple Hill

⁸ William G. Cutler. *History of the State of Kansas*. (Chicago: 1883), Osage County, Part 5. Accessed on May 1, 2011. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/osage/osage-co-p5.html#BURLINGAME>

⁹ William G. Cutler. *History of the State of Kansas*. (Chicago: 1883), Wabaunsee County, Part 7. Accessed on March 27, 2011. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/wabaunsee/wabaunsee-co-p7.html#ESKRIDGE>.

¹⁰ “A Century of Rail History,” *Eskridge Independent*. (Eskridge, Kansas), April 24, 1980.

through Eskridge to Emporia, which “proved to be a ‘paper’ railroad that never got off the drawing board.”¹¹

The village of Fairfield was a community in which the importance of the railroad to the community was an absolute matter of life and death. Before the M.A.B. was laid through Wabaunsee County, mostly farmers populated the village of Fairfield and its name did not appear on most Kansas maps. However, after the arrival of the M.A.B., it was necessary to put Fairfield on the state maps, as it was then a stop on the railroad line. Fairfield’s role had drastically changed and its potential for continued success had also increased—as long as the railroad existed. The same can also be said of the towns of Wabaunsee, Bismark and Harveyville, all of which faded from Kansas maps after the loss of the M.A.B railroad in Wabaunsee County.

The Santa Fe Railroad arrived in Alma, Wabaunsee County in 1880. However, in 1885—only 5 years later—the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway built its main line through Alma, rendering the M.A.B less lucrative and less important. Consequently, the M.A.B. was sold on the auction block to Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. The M.A.B was under operation until 1898, when its tracks were torn up, leaving a scar across the Flint Hills.

The fate of the township of Pavilion can be traced directly to the M.A.B. In 1854, the Bisbey family chose the site for Pavilion, which was located seven miles northwest of Alma. The Bisbeys felt that the possibility of a railroad being built through the area was very high. They “envisioned a town growing up there and named the place, Pavilion, for

¹¹ “Old Friend Is Gone” *Eskridge Independent* (Eskridge, KS), March 27, 1980.

their home town in New York.”¹² When the M.A.B. finally arrived in 1880, Pavilion was offered the opportunity to expand the exportation and importation of goods (cattle, grain, and wheat) and sustain a livelihood.

Before the M.A.B. railroad arrived, Pavilion, like many other small communities in the area, did not appear on maps of Kansas. Despite its appearance on the map, Pavilion never attracted enough settlers to be called a town. The township of Pavilion was platted in the traditional grid pattern, but there was never a downtown. However, Pavilion did have a hotel, post office, a grain mill and a train depot. During the M.A.B. railroad’s operation, Pavilion served as a service stop on the line. It provided a place for steam engines to replenish their water supply and a pickup spot for cattle and crops to be loaded and shipped to Kansas City. It is undeniable that the train was responsible for the death of many Kansas communities, but it can also “be said that the railways were responsible for bringing settlement to the area.”¹³

In 1895, the Rock Island Railroad decided to build a line through Wabaunsee County that ran nearly parallel to the M.A.B. line. The Rock Island Company was a larger, higher quality line and quickly ousted the services of the M.A.B., which discontinued service just a year later in 1896.¹⁴ With the closing of the M.A.B., Pavilion lost its direct access to a railroad, because its platform and station were built on the M.A.B. The Rock Island Railroad traveled close by Pavilion, but did not select Pavilion as a stop. An unlucky turn of events sent Pavilion into a hopeless decline. The final

¹² Matt Thomson, *Early History of Wabaunsee County, Kansas, with Stories of Pioneer Days and Glimpses of Our Western Border* (Alma, KS: 1901), 347.

¹³ *Eskridge Independent* (Eskridge, KS) January 25, 1979.

¹⁴ *New Branches From Old Trees: A New History of Wabaunsee County* (Wabaunsee County Historical Society, 1976), 881.

blow came in 1903 when Pavilion's post office closed, which often indicated the death of small communities. The exact date of Pavilion's demise is uncertain, but from 1854 to 1896 Pavilion would have been a productive and bustling community with all the hope and optimism of other growing Kansas communities.

An Historical Re-Creation of Life in Pavilion, Kansas, 1886.

As my father and I walked towards town, I watched the cloud of smoke narrow to its source as if it were running down a funnel from my mother's kitchen. The locomotive's smoke stack steadily belched smoke as it pulled its long line of cars through town, heading northwest towards Manhattan. I watched one car, which I guessed was filled with cattle, until it passed the hotel of Pavilion.¹⁵ The hotel was a two-story limestone building, which also served as the Pavilion post office.¹⁶ I could make out several figures dressed in denim unloading a variety of goods near the hotel: livestock, canvas bags of mail, boxes of salted meats, sacks of grain and other countless odds and ends required by the farmers living hard by. The train was nearly out of sight now, but the mass of dark smoke lingered behind, hanging over Pavilion like a storm cloud.

The crop season had come to a close and Mr. Willig had hired my father and me and several other hands to build a large barn on the southern border of his land. Mr. Willig was a member of one of the oldest and wealthiest families living in Pavilion.¹⁷ My father always spoke highly of Mr. Willig and had said on many occasions that the residents of Pavilion owed a great deal to him. Mr. Willig, who was originally from Germany, had been among the first to settle in Pavilion and he was responsible for much of the town's success.¹⁸

¹⁵ Chris Ridder, Field Notes, conversation with author, Pavilion site, October 2, 2010. Chris Ridder believed that the Hotel also operated as a post office at some point, possibly before the construction of the Post Office.

¹⁶ In 1871, a Post Office was established at Pavilion, with Bisbey as Postmaster. This continued until 1903, when Pavilion lost its Post Office.

¹⁷ "Business Directory and History of Wabaunsee County" (Topeka: Kansas Direct Company), accessed Nov. 19th, 2010, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/wabaunsee/1907/29.shtml>. "Willig, of Pavilion, who is considered one of the wealthiest men of the county, owns a large area of valuable land."

¹⁸ *Ghost Towns of Wabaunsee County* (Wabaunsee County Historical Society, 1976). "Wabaunsee owes John Willig a great debt."



Figure 1: Pictured is a hand-carved beam from the original Willig barn, which is still standing and is now being used for storage. (Eric Scribner. *Willig Barn*. 2010. Pavilion, Kansas.)

My father's high regard for Mr. Willig began in 1872. My father broke his leg while working for Mr. Willig earlier that year. I was a baby and my mother was seven months pregnant with my sister. Up until this point, my father had planted his land by hand, digging to the desired depth and sowing the seed into the soil. With a severely damaged leg and my mother unable to leave the home, my father was incapable of planting his crops. So Mr. Willig, in the goodness of his heart, rented his grain drill to my father at a discounted price. Normally it would have been ten cents per hour. I never found out how much of a discount Mr. Willig gave my father, but I thought that it must have been quite a bit considering my father had been out of work for weeks. Whenever

anyone mentioned the name of Mr. Willig or his family, my father would nod his head and advocate, “Mr. Willig is a good man.”¹⁹

My father and I had spent all day chopping down oak trees on Mr. Willig’s land. Our job was to strip the bark, and carve them into long, foot-wide beams that would be the main supports for Mr. Willig’s barn. It was some of the hardest work I had ever done in my life. There were several times throughout the day when I strongly desired to take a rest, but I dared not risk the hard-working reputation my father had established with Mr. Willig. My arms burned from continually raising the broad axe above my head, slinging it downward and feeling the vibrations run through my arms and into my shoulders as the sharp edge of the axe bit into the wood.

The walk home from the Willig’s land was only a little more than a mile from our home, but my father and I never took the shortest route. We enjoyed the time we got to spend together. Instead of going through town, we usually headed southeast, walking along Antelope Creek until we came to the M.A.B. railroad, which we then followed directly to our land. In the summer, we would stop at Antelope Creek, take off our shoes, and sit on the bank, letting our cramped, stifled feet dangle carelessly in the cool current.

But now it was late November and the first snow of the year had frozen the surface of Antelope Creek. When we came to Antelope Creek, I knelt down at its icy edge and listened to the water gurgling a few inches below the surface. My father carefully observed the animal tracks bordering the creek and remarked, “Lots of deer tracks. A few large ones.” As we exited the forest near the railroad bridge over Antelope

¹⁹ *New Branches From Old Trees: A New History of Wabaunsee County* (Wabaunsee County Historical Society, 1976), 881. “John Willig had the first Buckeye Dropper in the neighborhood, in 1865, and in 1866 the first grain drill, which he rented out for ten cents and acre” (881).

Creek, we both stopped for a moment to listen to the faint sound of another freight train whistle as it left Pavilion towards Manhattan.

My father and I began to speak of how hungry we were the moment we caught the first glimpse of our house's windows flickering just above the moonlit hills. While we walked through the corn crops, my father told me that he wanted me to come hunting with him the next day. I had been anxious to go hunting ever since I had gotten sick and missed the last hunting outing. I couldn't stop grinning the rest of the walk home.

My father had built our home when he and my mother arrived in Wabaunsee County in 1860. My parent's first home was a sod house, assembled from the abundant grasses of the Flint Hills.²⁰ That was only a temporary residence, though. My father soon gathered limestone, as it was the most plentiful, durable material available and began building a two-story house for my mother. It was not a large home, but it was well built and comfortable, even in the winter.

When my father and I entered our house we kicked off our boots, dropped the money we had earned that day on the dining table and embraced the warmth of the insulated cabin. My father walked around the table and kissed my mother on the cheek as she chopped up carrots and beets. Then he picked up my eight year-old sister Susan, who laughed and asked my father if he was proud of her for picking up walnuts that

²⁰ "Houses in Kansas History," *Kansas Historical Society*, January 2010. Accessed May 1, 2011, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/housing-in-kansas-history/15143>. "Sod houses required little expenditure because they usually were built of local materials. Native grasses and their roots that held the dirt together were cut into rectangles to be used as building blocks in the house. The labor expended was relatively moderate, but sod houses had to be rebuilt or abandoned periodically because of water damage and infestation by vermin. Most settlers lived in sod houses only long enough to gather the resources to build more livable frame dwellings."

day.²¹ Susan then skipped to my feet and gave me a handful of walnuts. I thanked her as I popped them into my mouth one by one.

Mother told me that dinner was almost ready, so I bounded up the narrow, creaking stairway that led to two bedroom doors; the left door was tightly sealed, preventing entrance into my parents bedroom, and the right door stood ajar and revealed the foot of my sister and my bed. I slipped off my overalls, then sat on the bed and looked out my bedroom window.

Our house was located on a 155-acre plot of land southeast of the town of Pavilion. The M.A.B. railroad slashed through our land from the northwest corner to the southeast corner. I had become so accustomed to the noisy intrusions of the trains passing by night and day that I hardly noticed them anymore. Our house had been built in the southwest corner of the plot, just at the edge of the tree line that bordered Antelope Creek. My father had surveyed the land before we purchased it and had decided that sowing the land as closely to Antelope Creek as possible would provide the best conditions for the crops.²²

Mr. Bisbey owned the most valuable plot of land in Pavilion to the west of ours. Antelope Creek ran through the Bisbey's land, as did the headwater of our little creek, so

²¹ William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, (Chicago: 1883), Wabaunsee County, Part 1, Accessed on April 27, 2011. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/wabaunsee/wabaunsee-co-p1.html>. "in some localities, after the trees have shed, walnuts and hickory nuts can be shoveled up by the bushel."

²² William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, (Chicago: 1883), Wabaunsee County, Part 1. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/wabaunsee/wabaunsee-co-p1.html>. "The flat lands lying along these streams and creeks are denominated "bottom" lands, the soil of which is exceedingly rich and productive, nine successive crops of wheat having been taken from some of them without a change or a failure."

his crops always yielded the highest output and supported the widest variety of crops: wheat, oats, corn, rye, barley and also delicious apples and peaches.²³



Figure 2: An image taken from the 1880-1885 Wabaunsee County Atlas illustrating the town of Pavilion as well as the discussed land of Mr. Bisbey and Mr. Frowe.

We ate well that evening. My mother and younger sister had cooked up the remaining deer meat from the most recent hunting venture that my father and I had taken

²³ William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, (Chicago: 1883), Wabaunsee County, Part 1, Accessed April 27, 2011, <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/wabaunsee/wabaunsee-co-p1.html>. "The products of the county are, mainly, agricultural, and consist of wheat, oats, corn, rye, and barley...of which immense quantities find their way to Chicago, St. Louis, and other chief marts."

into a stew. They had also prepared boiled onions, roast turkey, vegetables, and pudding for dessert.²⁴ My father and I remained at the table after my mother and sister began washing the dishes and discussed the details of our hunting venture we had planned for the following morning. We decided that we would leave just after dawn.

It turned out to be one of those bitter cold mornings that kept the animals in their thickets, dens, holes and nests a little later than usual. Snow powdered the fur of foxes and wind ruffled the feathers of birds. I could imagine the deer stiffly emerging from their beds of leaves, fur rustling softly in the frosty breeze, as they shook the thin sheet of snow away from their bodies.

I heard my father's boots clambering up the steps and knew that it was time to get out of my warm bed. His footsteps approached my door, and then he swung it open my door and cheerfully hollered, "Get up, Frank! We're wasting daylight!" That was the morning ritual, the way of life on my father's farm.

My father had lived a respectful life. He had moved to Pavilion from New York in 1856 when he heard from his long-time friend Mr. Bisbey, who had moved with the Emigration Aid Company, that there was good land to be settled and the potential for a railroad to be laid.²⁵ My father and mother were young, and the opportunity to settle on the cheap lands in Kansas sounded better than working in a shoe factory in New York.

I rolled out of bed and began throwing on layers of clothing to fend off the biting wind. I clambered downstairs, chasing the overwhelmingly aroma of crackling bacon.

²⁴ Food Timeline FAQs: 19th century American foodways. Accessed April 26, 2011. <http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodpioneer.html#frontier>.

²⁵ *New Branches*, "When James Madison Bisbey, his wife, Hannah, and their four children came to Kansas as part of an Emigrant Aid Company that settled in Manhattan, in the fall of 1854, the Bisbeys chose as a site for their new home a place on upper Antelope Creek, two miles south and one mile east of the present day Wabaunsee. They envisioned a town growing up there and named the place, Pavilion, for their home town in New York" (881).

After a quick breakfast of milk toast, bacon, cornbread and coffee, my father nodded to me and we stepped out of the house and crunched our way through the snow towards Antelope Creek. Both of us slung our pack over our shoulders, which each contained a hatchet, skinning knives, a pair of dry socks, and some extra ammunition. We had bundled up for this hunting excursion—long underwear, overalls, sweaters, and buffalo skin coats. I rested my rifle upon my shoulder and became increasingly anxious as we walked through our crops toward the wooded area that bordered Antelope Creek.

Although it was a bitterly cold morning, the sun was beginning to gather strength as it crawled over the rocky hills east of our farm. I knew that as the day progressed and more snow melted, the streams would flow more heavily and break through the ice and snow, bringing the deer and other animals to its luring gush and flow.

The edge of the wooded area near Antelope Creek came into my view. There weren't any leaves on the oak, hickory, walnut, cottonwood and sycamores; only frosted buds clinging to life until spring arrived.²⁶ Branches creaked in the wind and I occasionally heard the sharp crack of an icy branch breaking and crashing down to the frozen ground. As soon as we entered the forest, I swung my rifle off my shoulder and I watched my father do the same.

We moved through the trees as quietly as possible, scanning the brush for any sign of movement or disturbance of the tranquil forest. Icicles hung from the tree branches and gleamed in the early morning sunlight. Drops of melted ice pitted the snow

²⁶ William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*. (Chicago: 1883), Wabaunsee County, Part 1. Accessed on February 6, 2011. "Numerous streams and creeks also break the face of the country, and on the banks of these watercourses some very fine timber grows, consisting of several varieties, chief among which are oak, hickory, walnut, cottonwood and sycamore."

with countless indentions, making it nearly impossible to discern any animal tracks. Nonetheless, my father seemed to be on the trail of something.

I followed him along the creek until we came upon a vast clearing. The snow was heavily trodden in this area. The remnants of several campfires also remained. My father whispered, "Stop. Be quiet." He went ahead alone and explored the area as I hid behind a shrub with my gun at the ready. After a few moments, he lowered his gun and motioned to me to come along. He told me that he thought that a large group of Indians, possibly Pottawatomie, must have passed through during the night.²⁷

My father and I decided to head deeper into the woods towards Antelope Creek, where we hoped to find an animal quenching its thirst. I walked ahead of my father, eager to claim a kill. I could hear the trickle of the creek. It wasn't far. As I neared the creek, I knelt beneath a heavily snow-laden tree branch and caught sight of an enormous buck no more than 30 feet in front of me with its head bent over as it drank from a hole in the frozen creek. In my excitement, I sprung upward to steady my rifle and attempted a shot. My head struck the branch overhead, breaking free a cascade of snow upon my head and disrupting the silence of the forest. The buck's head flung upward and he darted downstream.

I frantically regained my footing and gave chase, crossing between the path of my father and the deer. I was going to kill that buck if it was the last thing I did! I skidded to a stop to take aim when suddenly I heard a thunderous bang. My right leg was warm and wet and I saw my father kneeling above me with tears in his eyes. His mouth was

²⁷ Matt Thomson, *Early History of Wabaunsee County, Kansas, with Stories of Pioneer Days and Glimpses of Our Western Border*. "October 3d, 100 Pottawatomie Indians passed through Alma going on a visit with friends in Indian Territory" (339).

moving, but I couldn't make out the words. The trees above me became blurry and dissolved into blackness.

Snow was floating in the air above me and I could feel the sharp, ice-encrusted grass on my back. Tears had started to well up in my eyes from the rock-hard snowball that had struck my face. An overwhelming sense of embarrassment and emasculation swept over my body from head to toe as young Evelyn, with her sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks came to my side in her little stocking cap. I wiped the tears from my eyes and sat up, but kept my head cast downward to hide my face.

"I'm so sorry Frank. I didn't mean to hit you in the face," said Evelyn

I took a few breaths to clear to fight off the temptation to cry and whimpered, "It's okay. I'm all right, Evelyn."

That night, the residents of Pavilion and the surrounding area gathered around the Christmas tree in the Pavilion Public School.²⁸ Through the hazy windows of the school, I could see silhouettes of meandering people who were probably talking about dishes that they had prepared for the party and how brilliant the lights on the tree looked. Evelyn and I weren't supposed to be outside. We were supposed to be inside waiting to open presents, but we loved playing in the snow together. If my father were to see my eye he would be upset, so we decided to stay outside for a few minutes and wait for the redness around my eye to fade.

²⁸ *Alma Signal*, January 5, 1888. "When Santa Claus arrived at our school room, No. 22, he found a huge tree loaded down with handsome gifts for him to present to every one present; and apples, candy, nuts, cookies and popcorn balls without number...Lastly all enjoyed the social hours after Santa disappeared, and many hope that he will return in a similar manner next year."



Figure 3: Once the heart of community social life, the Pavilion School of District #22 still stands today, though it is only used for storage now. The wood framing still remains intact, the limestone has continued as a stable foundation and the engraving above the door can still even be read, “Est. 1883.” (Eric Scribner. *Pavilion School*. 2010. Pavilion, Kansas.)

We walked towards the school and sat on the steps beneath the front door and leaned against each other for warmth. I was only ten years old, but I knew in my heart that I deeply cared for Evelyn. We sat together outside until the front door of the school opened and Mr. Bisbey shouted, “Get in here children! It’s time to open presents!”²⁹

²⁹ *New Branches*, “Pavilion had a school house across the road from the Bisbey farm. Organized as School District No. 22 in 1871, a stone school house was built there in 1883...The school house was the center of Pavilion social life for many years, with school entertainments, box suppers, and pie socials” (881).

The bedroom door creaked open and in walked my father's longtime friend, Mr. Bisbey. I slowly willed my eyes open, but was unable to speak; I only managed a weak grunt. Mr. Bisbey stopped at the foot of the bed and shouted, "Edward, he's conscious!"

My father jumped out of the chair beside the bed and held my hand reassuringly. "Stay quiet, Frank. Save your energy. You are going to be okay. The doctor is on his way."

I felt as immovable as a large rock half buried in the earth. I barely managed to nod my head before I slipped back into another lucid hallucinatory state.

It was a humid Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1882, and the town of Pavilion was bustling with activity around the M.A.B. tracks. Having finished my chores on the farm I walked from our house to town—about a two-mile trip—to see what was being loaded onto and taken off of the boxcars that day; I was fascinated with the steam engines and workers. Everyone in the community knew the schedule of the trains traveling on the M.A.B. and many farmers and other needy residents were gathered around the station in keen observation.³⁰ There were also groups of people gathered around the passenger cars of the train that were collecting their bags and children.

I enjoyed talking to the men working on the train. I would ask them if I could drive the train or if I could help them unload. On this particular day, I met a brakeman who seemed particularly nervous. He said that it was his first day on the job.

"Where does this train originate from?" I inquired of the brakeman.

"Well, I'm not sure where it started originally. I joined the crew in Manhattan."

³⁰ Grant Zoller and Brian Cook, "The Rock Island Line: Life Line of Kansas," in *Broughton, Kansas: Portrait of a Lost Town, 1869-1966* (2010) 64-69.

“Oh, okay. What kind of stuff is on this train mister?”

“Geez, I don’t know. I saw a bunch of cattle loaded on in Manhattan. There was also a variety of grains, and lumber, and salted meats, and all sorts of other stuff that we loaded. Too much to see.”

“Say, were there any books loaded on anywhere in Manhattan and here?”

“Not in Manhattan.”

“Well, how about Wabaunsee. Any there?”

“Rats! I really want to get my hands on a copy of Mark Twain’s novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Where else are you stopping on the way to Kansas City?”

“Lots of places, kid. We still have many places to make stops. From here we are stopping at Alma, Bismark, Eskridge, Harveyville, and Burlingame. I am getting off in Burlingame and working another train headed back to Manhattan to be with my wife...Listen, junior, this is dangerous business for a kid to be hanging about so closely. You best back up a ways. It’s for your own safety.”³¹ The brakeman walked away from the train towards the station, glancing back to make sure that I stayed put.

I had been around the train my whole life. I knew the dangers. Nevertheless, I obeyed the man and stepped back to watch from a further distance. I observed Mr. Willig and a few other men as they loaded a boxcar full of cattle to be shipped to Kansas City—sheep were unloaded from another car, and large carts of grains were being removed from several boxcars.³² My father helped Mr. Willig until his name was called by a crewmember and he was handed a large canvas bag.

³¹ Matt Thomson, *Early History of Wabaunsee County, Kansas, with Stories of Pioneer Days and Glimpses of our Western Border* (Alma, 1901), 346.

³² “Wabaunsee County News,” February 9, 1888.

Standing still was never a habit that my father had allowed me to embrace, so I headed towards the train's engine to see what number it was and possibly have a word with the conductor. To my pleasant surprise, it was Engine #1."³³

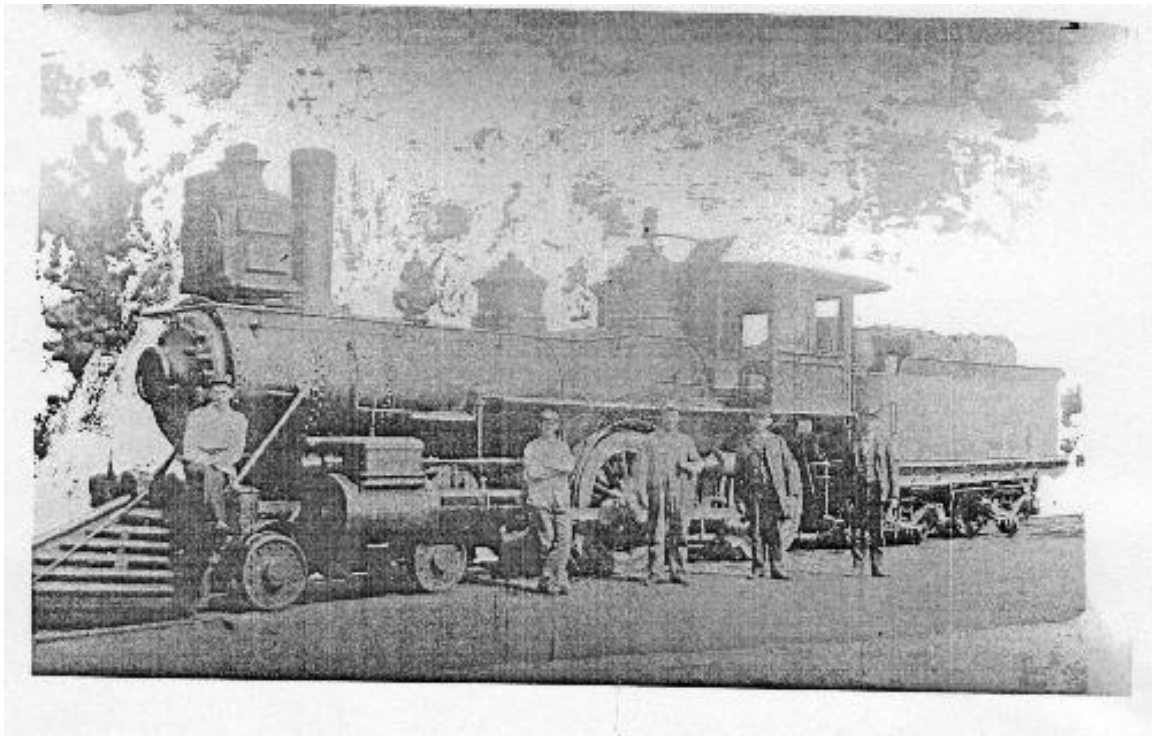


Figure #4: This picture was taken in 1880 and shows the M.A.B. Engine #1 with workers proudly standing by. (Picture provided by Wabaunsee County Historical Museum).

Steam began puffing from the engine and the conductor called, “All aboard!” I saw the brakeman I had talked to earlier emerge from between two cars carrying several items he had bought from the store. As he stepped over the rail, he dropped a package but did not notice. I yelled to him, “Hey, mister! You dropped something!” He turned towards me and gave me a friendly wave and made his way back to pick up what he had dropped.

³³ “M.A.B. Engine #1” Picture provided by Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

The steam was thick now and he disappeared as he ventured between the boxcars. Jus then the train began moving and the man did not reappear. The steam cleared from the tracks as the engine progressed down the tracks and away from the station. Suddenly women began screaming and I saw men rushing towards the tracks, but there was nothing they could do.³⁴

I heard the brakes squealing on the train tracks outside and the bell clanging and I immediately knew that I was in Pavilion. I was lying in bed in a room, which I quickly realized was inside the Pavilion Hotel. I could hear people on the steps outside my room as they rushed downstairs to the train. Then I heard my father and Mr. Bisbey talking, but I could make out only part of the conversation: “Isn’t on this train...four more hours...not have that long...fever isn’t decreasing...needs medicine.” A woman shrieked and her footsteps descended quickly down the hall.

My father and Mr. Bisbey came into the room, followed by my mother who seemed to be quite distressed, and stood by my bed with their heads down. I managed to whisper, “Pa, am I going to be okay?”

My father’s brow lowered and his lip quivered as he uttered, “You sure will son, as soon as the train with the doctor comes with your medicine.” Tears were welling up in his eyes.

Outside the hotel, I heard men shouting as the train started puffing out steam and gathering speed. Then the clickity-clack of the train became softer, like a clock quietly

³⁴ *Early history of Wabaunsee County, Kansas*. “1897: February 26th, a brakeman whose home was in Belleville, killed at crossing of M. A. & B. track, near Pavilion. His first trip. Blinded by steam and walked between cars” (346).

ticking. I looked out of the hotel window and saw smoke from the train rising above the low hills and gathering in the sky, blocking out the sun and casting a dark shadow over Pavilion.³⁵

³⁵ *New Branches*, "Railroad service was lost in 1896 when the M.A.B. Railroad went out of business" (881).

Works Cited

- Atlas of Wabaunsee County, Kansas*, Chicago: Gillen & Davy, 1885.
- “Business directory and history of Wabaunsee County,” The Kansas directory company of Topeka, Kansas, accessed Nov. 19, 2010,
<http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/wabaunsee/1907/29.shtml>
- Cutler, William G. *History of the State of Kansas*. (Chicago:1883), Part 1. Accessed February 24, 2011. <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/wabaunsee/wabaunsee-co-p1.html>.
- “A Century of Rail History,” *Eskridge Independent*. (Eskridge, Kansas), April 24, 1980.
- Eskridge Independent* (Eskridge, KS) January 25, 1979.
- Food Timeline FAQs: 19th century American foodways. Accessed April 26, 2011.
<http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodpioneer.html#frontier>.
- “Houses in Kansas History,” *Kansas Historical Society*, January 2010. Accessed May 1, 2011, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/housing-in-kansas-history/15143>.
- “Kansas Town Feels Loss of Train.” Undated clipping available at Wabaunsee County Historical Society.
- “M.A. & B Railway Time Schedule.” Undated clipping available at Wabaunsee County Historical Society.
- New Branches From Old Trees: A New History of Wabaunsee County*. Wabaunsee County Historical Society, 1976.
- “Old Friend Is Gone” *Eskridge Independent* (Eskridge, KS), March 27, 1980.
- Ridder, Chris. Field Notes, conversation with Eric Scribner (Author), Pavilion Township present day site, October 2, 2010.
- Thomson, Matt. *Early History of Wabaunsee, Kansas, with stories of pioneer days and glimpses of our western border*. (Alma, KS: 1901), 280-281, 339, 346.

“Wabaunsee County News.” *Alma Signal*, January 5, 1888; February 9, 1888.

Zoller, Grant, and Brian Cook, “The Rock Island Line: Life Line of Kansas,” in

Broughton, Kansas: Portrait of a Lost Town, 1869-1966 (2010) 64-69.