

Fact vs. Speculation:
Finding the True Meaning Behind the Westmoreland Slaughterhouse

Westmoreland, Pottawatomie County, Kansas 1859-1959

Lara Zuk
HIST 533
Spring 2010
Professor Morgan
Chapman Center For Rural Studies
Kansas State University

Fact vs. Speculation:
Finding the True Meaning Behind the Westmoreland Slaughterhouse

Imagine the Kansas Territory in the year 1856. It had only been two years since the Kansas-Nebraska Act which opened up the territory for settlement. Times were turbulent with the debate over slavery becoming more heated with each passing day. With the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was repealed now allowing new territories to vote whether to be a slave state or free state.¹ Looking forward, the Kansas-Nebraska Act divided a nation and was paramount in leading up to the Civil War. While tensions increased nationally, many people were beginning to legally settle the new territory. One such person was John McKimens, Sr. Originally from Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, he migrated to Kansas and arrived in 1856 in what is now Westmoreland, Kansas. He helped to establish Pottawatomie County which is located in the Northeast corner of Kansas in 1857.² In 1859 John McKimens, Sr. received a patent from the United States Government for 160.02 acres.³ On this land he was able to establish a successful farm and at the time of his death owned 250 acres.⁴

Part of farming is the raising of animals to eventually be used for food. Many farmers slaughtered their own animals on their farms and the meat was then sold at the local meat market.⁵ With many farmers already practicing this, the reason for a public

¹ "The Kansas-Nebraska Act," *The History Place*, accessed May 4, 2010, <http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln/kansas.htm>.

² Ward, Carolyn, and Tom Ward, "John McKimens," *Blue Skyways*, accessed May 11, 2010, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1918ks/biom/mckimej.html>.

³ Government Patent to John McKimmins from the United States of America, November 10, 1859, Register of Deeds Office, Pottawatomie County Courthouse, Westmoreland, Kansas.

⁴ "John McKimens."

⁵ Marian Bradley, personal interview by author, Westmoreland, Kansas, April 19, 2010.

slaughterhouse seemingly holds no value. The motive then behind the opening of the Westmoreland Slaughterhouse must be called into question.

Definitions

For the purposes of the following argument these definitions shall be used. The act of slaughtering is the initial killing of the animal and preparing it to be delivered to a butcher.⁶ The act of butchering is more intricate where a butcher processes and prepares the already slaughtered animal for final sale to the consumer.⁷

Slaughterhouse Beginnings

John McKimens, Sr. reportedly donated one seventh of an acre along the Southwest corner of his land, between 1859 and the beginning of the first newspaper in Westmoreland in 1882, for the opening of a slaughterhouse.⁸ There is no deed record showing the actual sale or lease for that one seventh of an acre. However it is speculated that some sort of gentlemen's agreement was reached for the public use of the land.⁹ Since it was already opened before the newspaper began there was seemingly no need to announce the slaughterhouse in an advertisement.

The communal use of slaughterhouses can be linked to Germanic culture during the middle ages. During the fourteenth century slaughterhouses were constructed in the middle of towns.¹⁰ The reason for this is German towns were centered on access to

⁶ "Slaughter," Interapple, Inc., accessed August 27, 2010, <http://www.webster-dictionary.net/definition/Slaughter>.

⁷ John J. Metter, *Basic Butchering of Livestock & Game*. (Massachusetts: Storey Publishing, 1986), 1-6.

⁸ Marian Bradley, personal interview by author, Westmoreland, Kansas, April 19, 2010.

⁹ Marian Bradley, telephone interview by author, Westmoreland, Kansas, May 10, 2010.

¹⁰ Hartmut Boockman, *Die Stadt im Sp□ten Mittelalter*, (München: C.H. Beck Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986)

water, usually from a river.¹¹ By having the slaughterhouse built in the middle of the town there was an easier clean up and therefore was more hygienic.¹² Though not built in the middle of Westmoreland, the slaughterhouse was located near a water source.

The land donated for the site of the slaughterhouse is in a grove of trees and runs along a creek. The terrain immediately surrounding the slaughterhouse is fairly smooth. To reach the slaughterhouse one was required to cross over the creek using the stone bridge to the north; the remnants of which are seen in Figure 1.¹³



Figure 1: Photograph of the remnants of the stone bridge. SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Jim and Marian Bradley.

Continuing over the bridge though, the land becomes slightly rougher and would be seemingly uncomfortable to cross in a wagon or cart. Between the slaughterhouse and the stone bridge also lies a hand dug well as seen in Figure 2.

¹¹ Heinz Ellenberg, *Bauernhaus und Landschaft in Ökologischer und Historischer Sicht* (Stuttgart: Eugen Ulmer GmbH & Co, 1990) 160-163.

¹² Hartmut Boockman, *Die Stadt im Späten Mittelalter*, (München: C.H. Beck Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986)

¹³ Lara Zuk. Field Notes, in conversation with Nola Wilkerson; Westmoreland, Kansas, April 19, 2010.



Figure 2: Photograph showing the location of the hand dug well in relation to the slaughterhouse. Looking North of the slaughterhouse the "+" sign represents the hand dug well. SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Jim and Marian Bradley.

The original size of the slaughterhouse is unknown. However, a concrete slab that was most likely poured in the early 1900's and still remains is approximately ten feet by ten feet.¹⁴ It is assumed that before a more permanent structure was built the original slaughterhouse was most likely built from wood. In 1916 the Association of Schools of Public Health deemed that if anyone owned a building being used to slaughter animals, "the floors of such building... shall be constructed of cement, so as to prevent the blood, foul liquid, or washings from being absorbed."¹⁵ By 1923 the land the slaughterhouse was built on had become property of The Citizens State Bank (reasons unknown) and was sold in a sheriff's sale to Charles Sutterlin.¹⁶ One plausible theory is that after receiving ownership of the slaughterhouse, in order to keep with the public health code, a new

¹⁴ Charles Tohill, personal interview by author, Manhattan, Kansas, May 8, 2010.

¹⁵ Association of Schools of Public Health, "Kansas: Privies, Cesspools, and Drains. Refuse. Domestic Animals. Offensive Trades. Slaughterhouses. Public Buildings and Institutions," *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)*, Vol. 31, No. 26, (1916): 1735-1736.

¹⁶ Deed Record to C.F. Sutterlin and Iona M. Sutterlin from The Citizens State Bank, Westmoreland Kansas, April 10, 1923, Register of Deeds Office, Pottawatomie County Courthouse, Westmoreland, Kansas.

slaughterhouse was erected therefore explaining the presence of the newer concrete foundation.

Plausible Theories for Opening the Slaughterhouse

In the 1800's through the beginning of the twentieth century, meat was preserved much differently than it is presently. A common way to cure the meat was with salt and to help with preservation the meat was usually kept in a cellar.¹⁷ Since meat could not be kept for long periods of time many farmers would sell meat to a local meat market to be made readily available to everyone. Perhaps having a public slaughterhouse close to town allowed farmers who lived farther out to bring in their live animals. By slaughtering their animals after making the trip closer town, the preservation time of the meat significantly rises. A likely scenario was that the farmer brought the animal to the slaughterhouse. There it was slaughtered then transported into town and stored in the cold storage behind the meat market until time to be sold.¹⁸

The most memorable and numerous advertisements in the Westmoreland Recorder from 1885 to 1910 were for pork and/or other products from hogs.¹⁹ Naturally there were other meats available but more emphasis was placed on pork products in advertisements. Whether or not the actual meat sold in the meat markets was always from local farmers cannot be determined from the advertisements though.

¹⁷ Elizabeth L. Andress, and Brian A Nummer, "Curing and Smoking Meats for Home Food Preservation Literature Review and Critical Preservation Points," *The National Center for Home Food Preservation*. 2002. http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/nchfp/lit_rev/cure_smoke_rev.html (accessed April 28, 2010); Nummer, Brian A. "Historic Origins of Food Preservation." *National Center for Home Food Preservation*. 2002. http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/nchfp/factsheets/food_pres_hist.html (accessed April 28, 2010)

¹⁸ Marian Bradley, e-mail to author of interview with Ray Krouse, Westmoreland, Kansas, May 15, 2010.

¹⁹ Advertisements. *Westmoreland Recorder*, May 7, 1885 – May 5, 1910, accessed July 13, 2010.

Another plausible explanation dates back to the time period when the slaughterhouse was supposedly opened. Instead of being opened for public use, it could have been built as a convenience for the local farmers who would sometimes get together to slaughter their animals.²⁰ It could also serve as a convenience in that it was already established therefore local farmers did not necessarily need to furnish their own on their farm.

One alternative theory though is that due to its size, only being approximately ten feet by ten feet, that it was too small to serve as a slaughterhouse. Instead, it is the perfect size for a building to either smoke meat or tan hides.²¹ However, according to Marian Bradley, in all the oral accounts she has heard it has always been referred to as “the slaughterhouse”.²² She recalls hearing it was used for “locally raised farm animals... to sell at the meat market.”²³

The Final Years

There has been no definitive date given as to when the Westmoreland Slaughterhouse closed or was no longer used. Once the land was purchased by Charles Sutterlin, although he already ran a trucking company, he began slaughtering animals for local farmers. According to Ray Krouse, it is probable that a local meat market would purchase an animal from a farmer. That animal would then be sent to Mr. Sutterlin to be slaughtered and he would then deliver it to the meat market ready to be butchered and sold. Before the death of Mr. Sutterlin in 1947 the land had been deeded to his son and daughter-in-law, Cecil and Naomi Sutterlin. There is no record of Cecil taking over for

²⁰ Lara Zuk. Field Notes, in conversation with Marian Bradley; Westmoreland, Kansas, April 19, 2010.

²¹ Charles Tothill, personal interview by author, Manhattan, Kansas, May 8, 2010.

²² Marian Bradley, telephone interview by author, Westmoreland, Kansas, May 10, 2010.

²³ *Ibid.*

his father in slaughtering animals.²⁴ It can be assumed then by that date the slaughterhouse was no longer in use. Another indicator that the slaughterhouse has been closed for a long period of time is the state of the concrete foundation as seen in Figure 3. The sides of the foundation are worn and beginning to break. The foundation has also suffered a large crack almost directly down the center where the foliage is once again claiming its place.



Figure 3: Photograph of the concrete foundation in its current state. Deterioration is visible in the form of cracks that run along the edge of the slab. SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Jim and Marian Bradley.

Looking at the same area today one would never guess what once stood within the trees. Their makeshift wall shown in Figure 4 shields the remains of the slaughterhouse from the outside world; as if protecting a well kept secret. If one looks closely though

²⁴ Marian Bradley, e-mail to author of interview with Ray Krouse, Westmoreland, Kansas, May 15, 2010.

and uses some imagination, trees slowly get smaller or disappear and a building begins to show through.



Figure 4: Photograph of the area where the Westmoreland Slaughterhouse once stood. Today it is overgrown with trees and foliage making it hard to tell a building was once there. SOURCE: Author's personal collection.

There is overwhelming evidence showing that a building once stood on that one seventh of an acre. It is remembered in oral memory as a slaughterhouse though its size could suggest a different purpose. The exact reason it was built could very well be lost but the evidence still remains that at some point in the history of Westmoreland, Kansas a building stood on that land. Someday though that evidence will be gone too.

Bibliography

Advertisements. *Westmoreland Recorder*, May 7, 1885 – May 5, 1910.

Andress, Elizabeth L, and Brian A Nummer. "Curing and Smoking Meats for Home Food Preservation Literature Review and Critical Preservation Points." *The National Center for Home Food Preservation*. 2002. Accessed April 28, 2010.

http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/nchfp/lit_rev/cure_smoke_rev.html

Association of Schools of Public Health. "Kansas: Privies, Cesspools, and Drains. Refuse. Domestic Animals. Offensive Trades. Slaughterhouses. Public Buildings and Institutions." *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* Vol. 31 No. 26 (1916): 1735-1736.

Boockman, Hartmut, *Die Stadt im Sp□ten Mittelalter*. M□nchen: C.H. Beck Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986.

Bradley, Marian. E-mail to author of interview with Ray Krouse. Westmoreland, Kansas, May 15, 2010.

Bradley, Marian. Interview by author. Westmoreland, Kansas, April 19, 2010.

Bradley, Marian. Telephone interview by author. Westmoreland, Kansas, May 10, 2010.

Ellenberg, Heinz, *Bauernhaus und Landschaft in □kologischer und Historischer Sicht*. Stuttgart: Eugen Ulmer GmbH & Co, 1990.

Government Patent to John McKimmins from the United States of America. November 10, 1859. Register of Deeds Office, Pottawatomie County Courthouse, Westmoreland, Kansas.

Marshall, Howard Wight. "Meat Preservation on the Farm in Missouri's "Little Dixie"." *The Journal of American Folklore* (1979): 400-417.

Metter, John J. *Basic Butchering of Livestock & Game*. Massachusetts: Storey Publishing, 1986.

Nummer, Brian A. "Historic Origins of Food Preservation." *National Center for Home Food Preservation*. 2002. Accessed April 28, 2010.

http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/nchfp/factsheets/food_pres_hist.html.

Interapple, Inc. "Slaughter." <http://www.webster-dictionary.net/definition/Slaughter>. Accessed August 27, 2010.

The History Place. "The Kansas-Nebraska Act." 1996. Accessed May 4, 2010.
<http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln/kansas.htm>.

Tothill, Charles. Interview by author. Manhattan, Kansas, May 8, 2010.

Ward, Carolyn, and Tom Ward. "John McKimens." *Blue Skyways*. 1998. Accessed May 11, 2010. <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1918ks/biom/mckimej.html>.

Zuk, Lara. Field Notes, in conversation with Marian Bradley; Westmoreland, Kansas, April 19, 2010.

Zuk, Lara. Field Notes, in conversation with Nola Wilkerson; Westmoreland, Kansas, April 19, 2010.