DAVID JAMES STEEPLES

DOUGLAS STEEPLES WITH LOIS STEEPLES SETTLES

David James Steeples

Third Edition

David James Steeples, January 27, 1873---April 24, 1953:

Kansas Pioneer, Family Patriarch

Douglas Steeples
with
Lois Steeples Settles

Third Edition (June 20, 2013)
Electronic Publishing by Michael Settles.

In memory of David James and Myrtle Fulcher Steeples,

Partners, Parents, Patriots, Stewards of the Earth

Contents

Introduction

THIS BOOK would not have been written save for the encouragement of the immediate descendants of David James and Myrtle Fulcher Steeples. Few official and unofficial documents exist to support our findings. We have had, then, to rely heavily on written and oral recollections, and craft a largely oral history. The result is still both important and useful. While written primarily for a family audience, it may hold wider interest. Given the intended audience, standard scholarly references do not appear. However, all quotations are exact, and facts triple-checked. Many people have provided information. These include all of D.J's. eight children, Edith Steeples Whisman, Chester F.D. Steeples, William Wallace Steeples, Alveda Steeples Newman, M. Wayne Steeples, Mildred Steeples Ross, Olive Steeples Herron, and Freda Steeples Lowry, and virtually all of their twenty-three children, of whom eight are now deceased.

Among D'J's. Grandchildren, Lois Steeples Settles and Jean Steeples Webb (daughters of Wallace and Marie Kobler Steeples) Ruth Nutsch Deatrick (daughter of Olive Steeples Nutsch Herron and Clyde Nutsch), Diane Smith (Olive's granddaughter), Loretta Ross (wife of Richard,

son of Mervin and Mildred Steeples Ross), Shirley Newman Gray (daughter of Alveda Steeples and Roscoe Newman), Barbara Cross (daughter of Freda Steeples and Floyd Lowry), Hillon and Duane Steeples (sons of Chester and Olive Kobler Steeples), Norma Steeples Dreyer (daughter of M. Wayne and Dorothy King Steeples), and Berdena Whisman (widow of Edith Steeples Whisman's son, George) made important contributions. Lois Settles deserves special recognition as a collector of information, fact checker, and skilled editor. Her work makes her a virtual co-author. Her son, Mike, performed yeoman service in creating a website for this book. I must also add to this list the name of my wife, Christine Steeples. She set a very high standard through writing an autobiography and offering penetrating criticisms of this work.

It is hard to remember or understand many events, even today's in our own lives. It is much more to do so to reconstruct stories of past lives. This is especially true when evidence, as is true of many of our forbears, is fragmentary. In this respect, Granddad Steeples was unexceptional. It has been a daunting task to fashion as much of the story as we have here. Even so it is clear that he was and is important beyond his immediate and extended families. His influence on his descendants is still palpable, nearly sixty years after his death. Examining his life helps explain to his progeny, especially those who knew him, much of how they came to be who they are.

This account may be of interest to readers beyond our family. It is a record of a pioneering life and adaptations that ran through the transition of America from an agricultural to an industrial and urban society. D.J. Steeples' life bridged three of our most severe business depressions (1873-1879, 1893-1898, and 1929-1941), contained two world wars, and spanned two generations

that lived through the most sweeping transformation in our country's history. His may be viewed as a prototypical life that unfolded and intersected with these events.

There is truth in one of our military service's recruiting claims that we may paraphrase to read, "We are a family of one." I hope that some one or other of us will continue the story begun here, to preserve this statement as true. My view here accounts for the informal nature of the following pages, and the fact that they are written largely as a story. We make sense of our lives by mentally organizing our experiences as stories. This happens almost unconsciously, as story is the most natural way to make sense of what happens to us.

Writing history is a peculiar business. The Requiem, below, will treat ways in which this is true. Relying on oral accounts or recollections written long after events took place compound the difficulties to be overcome in creating an accurate reconstruction of things that happened in the past. We care too little about our past, and especially what we can learn from it, for better or for worse. We have long since thrown aside anything like an official bard or spokesman who has memorized and ceremonially retells our important stories to refresh our sense of shared identity. As any careful reader soon discovers, we care so little about polished expression that few people can now think, speak, or write clearly. Electronic record-keeping has, meanwhile, enabled us to recover countless bits of information while storing it outside of our bodies. It has blurred, if not destroyed, an ability to see that bits of information cannot replace rigorous investigation so as better to understand our world and ourselves through the construction of organized knowledge about large questions. Meanwhile, in our schools, we have made humankind's exciting part excruciatingly boring. We teach neither a child to know nor how to make of knowledge the power of an adult.

Introduction

The result is clear enough and will be recorded in the Requiem below. All in all, the road to accuracy in our story is a hard one. I hope that this manuscript will serve as an adequate beginning.

I must close with a reiteration of the words of gratitude extended to those mentioned above, and add expressions of thanks to the Kansas Historical Society, Rooks County Historical Society, Rooks County Recorder of Deeds, Rooks County Probate Court, several previous writers (among them Pam Kroetsch Marks, Gilbert C. Fite, James C. Malin, Walter Prescott Webb, John Ise, Elliot West, S.J. Sackett, Nancy Limerick, Richard White, Ray Allen Billington, William E. Koch, Mari Sandoz, and the great novelist Ole Rolvaag) and others too numerous to mention.

Douglas Steeples, Lois Steeples Settles

Chapter 1

From Old World to New

CHICAGO, FRIDAY, January 27,1873. It was a typical winter day. The temperature was hovering near ten degrees. What little sunlight could penetrate a layer if clouds created a landscape notable for its nearly monochromatic grayness. Sooty, greasy smoke from countless coal stoves cast a dark pall of drifting gloom and settling fly ash over the scene. A piercing breeze tossed the grimy stuff about, until it swirled on to roofs, plants and a covering of dirty snow on the streets and ground.

Inside a workman's home, probably a rental apartment or part of a multiple-family dwelling, the moans of a woman in labor subsided. In their place one close enough could hear the squalling cries of a newborn baby. It was a boy. His happy parents named him David James Steeples. He was named after one of his father's brothers, hence the second member of his family to bear the name.

From Old World to New

That David was born in Chicago ended one epoch in the history of our family and began another. His mother, born Mary Ann Morrison (or Morison, both spellings are on record) first saw the light of day on October 20, 1847. She began her life in the Kirk of Scotland (now civil) parish of North Leith in Edinburgh. Her husband Francis (Frank) Oliphant Steeples' birth, on March 4, 1843, preceded hers by about three and a half years. He arrived in a home in the parish of Inveresk, in Musselburgh. It was a half dozen or so miles from Edinburgh's city center and on the south shore of the Firth of Forth and adjacent to North Leith.

The origin of British surnames is ancient and obscure, save for those of aristocrats. Their use became common only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They usually derived from a great achievement, a place of residence, or an occupation. In 1542, Henry VIII ordered all Church of England parishes to keep annual records of baptisms, marriages, and deaths. We find the first instance of record for our name a year later, in 1543. Its first mention is of a widow, with neither a given name nor that of her deceased husband. In 1593, the record became continuous with the marriage of William Steeples to Dorothy Piggot in Kirk Ireton, Derbyshire. William Steeples, Sr. (October 17, 1818-July 12, 1869) was the first person with our surname to be born in Scotland. Kirk Ireton was then a part of the parish of Wirksworth, which still contains a neighborhood called the "Steeple Grange." The Grange (farm) itself ceased to exist in 1514. Near Wirksworth, in Hopton, is a cemetery filled with Steeples headstones, at St. Margaret's Church.

Barbara Cross and I began research into our genealogy, working in local records, in the 1850s, long before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) had collected the

records now in their *Ancestry.com*. It adds little to what we found in our research.

For years preceding 1543, we discovered that we must turn to etymology (the history of words), records of court proceedings, and tax rolls. The earliest surviving notice of our surname dates back 680 years, to 1332. It appears in the Lay (non-church) Subsidy [tax] Roll, Lancastershire, in *Sub.R.Lan*, in *LCRS* 31, 21. There we read, "The Exchequer Lay Subsidy Roll of Robert de Shireburn and John de Radecliffe, taxers in the County of Lancaster . . . [shall collect a tax from a Johan Steppel] . . . ." The root of "Steppel" was in words was the Germanic of Angles, Lower Saxons, native Frisian islanders intruders who invaded and drifted into Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries and afterward. It derived from *steep* in Old Frisian. Originally, it referred to a steep slope, or cliff. It evolved into *steap* in Old English, *stepel* in Middle English, and *stouf* in Middle High German. As Old English metamorphosed into Middle English it came to mean free-standing high dwellings or towers. None was part of a church or served as a spire. That Johan bore a tax and owned a surname in 1332, a century or so after surnames began to become common, hints that he owned land. Such ownership made him a person of record subject to royal taxation.

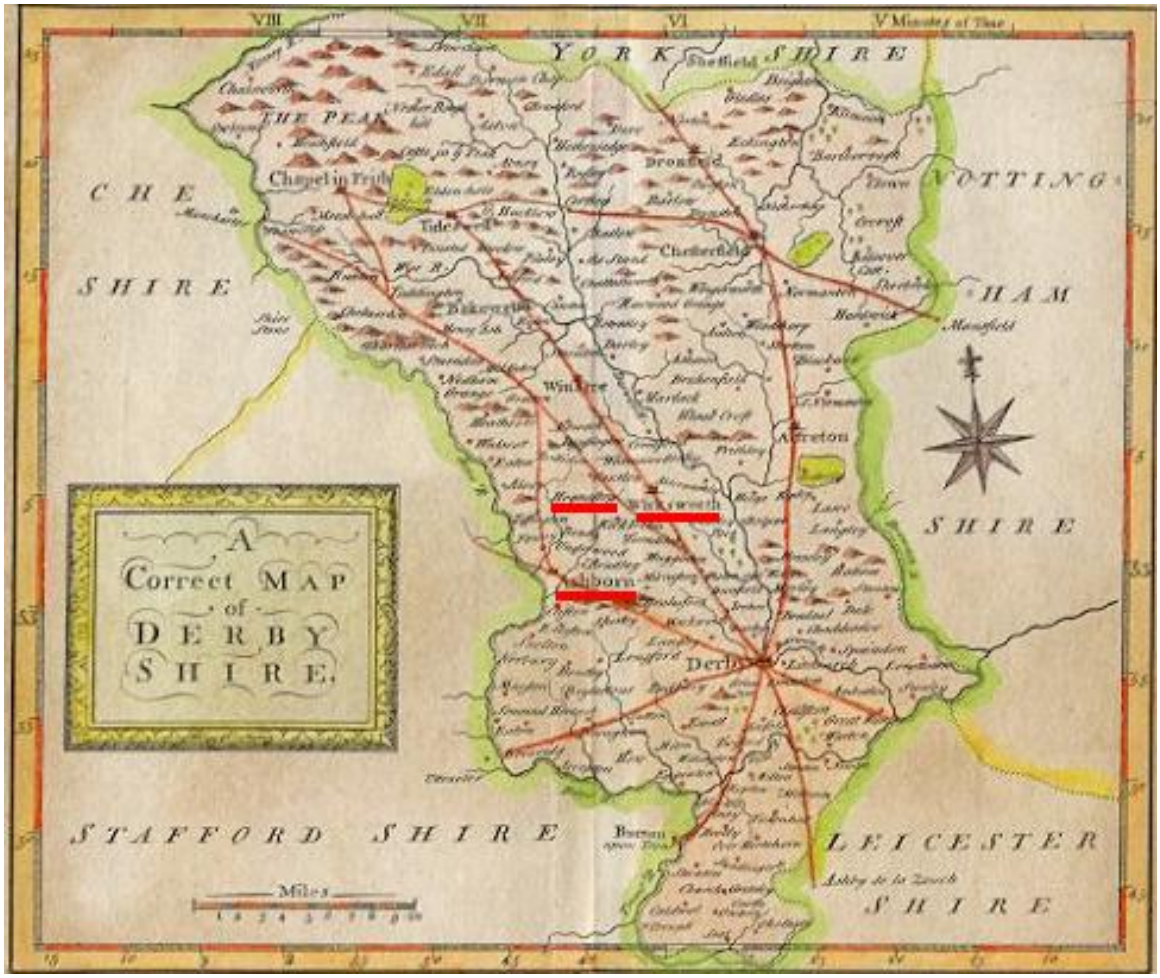
Only when builders began to erect church spires, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, did the word "steeple" take on the connotation that we know today. That meaning spread with the expansion of Christianity and the construction of churches, during and after that period.

The first known reference to a person surnamed "Steeples" was in 1543, a year after the crown decreed the parish record-keeping noted above. We can trace our lineage from that year, with one gap. Its first mention is of only a surname of a widow and says nothing of her deceased

husband. The name does not reappear until September 2, 1593, when the first William Steeples of whom we know married Dorothy Piggot in Kirk Ireton, Derbyshire. Kirk Ireton was then part of the church parish of Wirksworth. The concentration of Steeples presently centers in Derbyshire and extends to neighboring parts of Nottinghamshire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire.

A New Map of England, John Senex, 1700
Derbyshire Outlined in Black

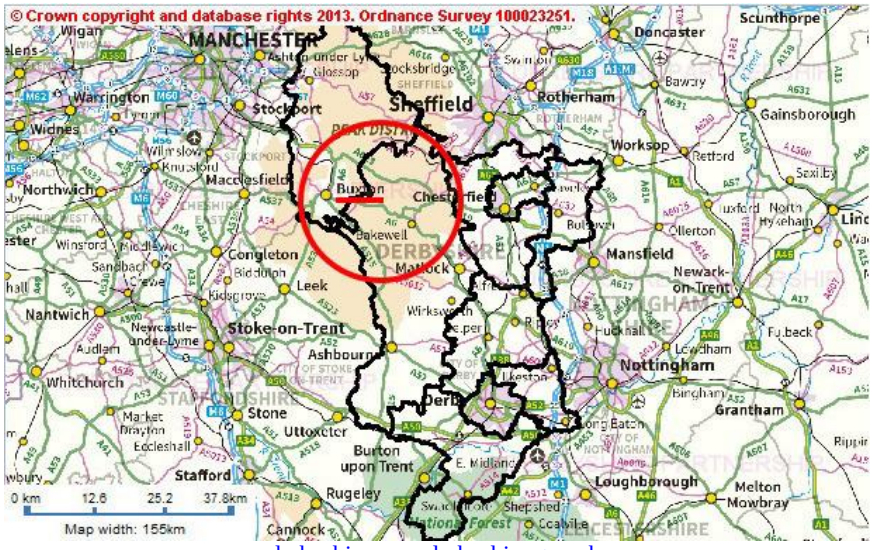
Derbyshire, ca. 1800 (border shaded in light green)
Principal Local Steeples Centers Underlined



Position of Derbyshire

County Map of England & Wales -- © 1800-UK.com
Free Maps for Personal Webpages

Central Concentration of Steeples Family, Radiating out from Buxton



derbyshiremaps.derbyshire.gov.uk

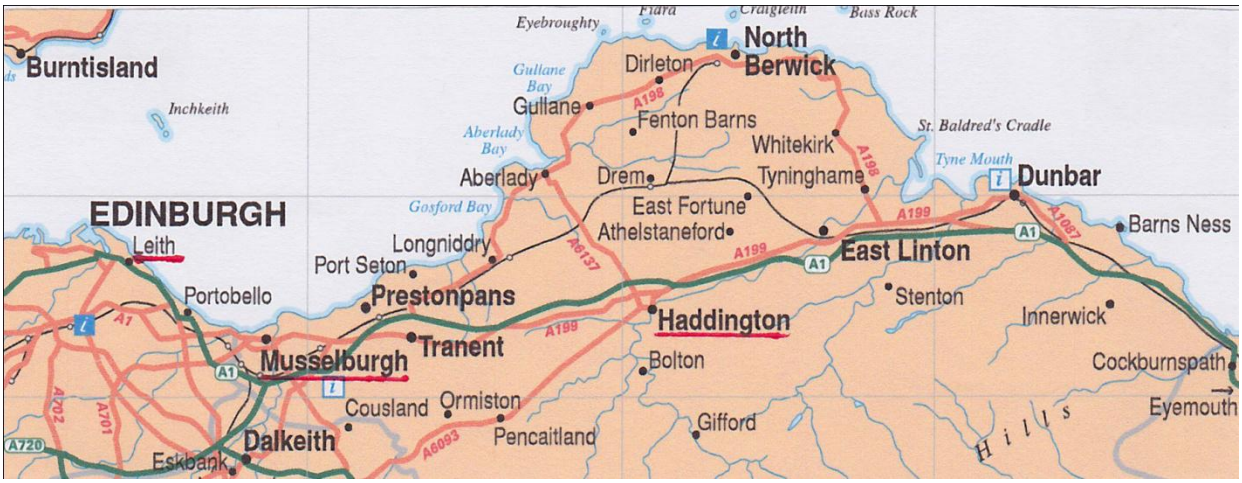
Aerial View, Village of Wirksworth, Dbys. Steeples Grange Highlighted, on High Street

St. Margaret's Church, Carsington, Dbys. Steeples Cemetery

Wirksworth Parish, Dbys. Central Location of Steeples

www.wirksworth.org.uk

Northern Midlothian and Haddington (Now East Lothian)



From Old World to New

The Steeples were a varied lot in the nineteenth century and earlier. Many were listed as freeholders, who owned land—farmers. Others, notably those who drifted to Scotland, were tradesmen, skilled craftsmen, fishermen, merchants, and freeholding farmers... some were laborers.

The first of our forbears to settle in Scotland was Stephen Steeples. He mustered out of the Royal Artillery in Haddington, the seat of Haddingtonshire, some miles south of the Firth of Forth, in 1805. On May 5 of that year he married Jean (or Jane, the notation is barely legible) Hill and settled in that town. His son, William, saw few opportunities in Haddington and moved to a considerably larger community, Musselburgh. Set within a short distance from Edinburgh's city center, it offered greater prospects for prospering. As a skilled painter, he rose quickly to the middle class.

As early as 1814, he bought both a dwelling and rental property in central Musselburgh, on High Street. His home, made of stone, was a typical row house of the era. Its two storeys fronted directly on the cobblestoned street, close to the burgh's commercial center. It was perhaps eighteen feet wide, possibly sixty feet or so deep, and held windows fronting the street and at the rear. The latter offered a relaxing view of a well-tended flower garden and a bit of lawn. A family member, Jill Leitch, still lived there in a flat after 2000. By 2008, though, that was no longer true. It had been sold and converted for business use. A new front with display windows for a news and tobacco store now projected to the sidewalk. By 2012 a picture framer worked there.

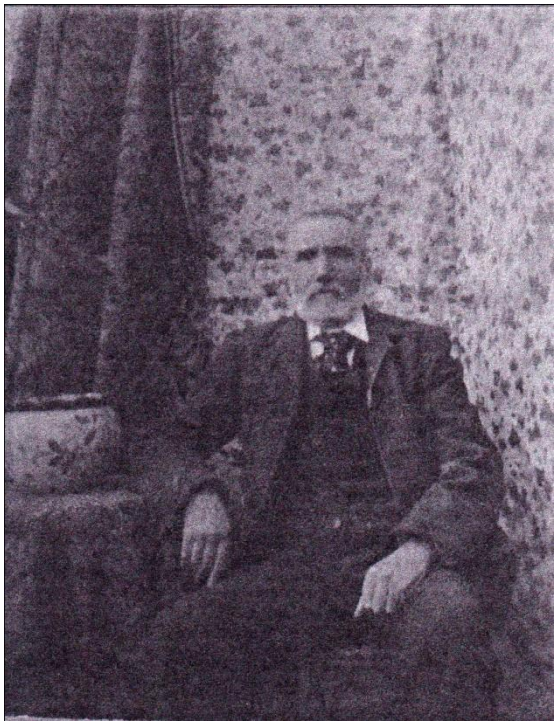
It was here that Frank lived and grew up, as private tutors educated him. They were

necessary because school attendance was not compulsory in Scotland until passage of the Education Act of 1872. Until then, only those who were well enough off could afford to pay tutors. Even that late the law required only children aged five to thirteen to attend school. An amended act in 1883 raised the "leaving age" to fourteen. But those who met Standard III in reading, writing, and arithmetic by the age of ten could work half time. Standard V added music, to expand mental discipline and impart an aesthetic sense. On meeting Standard V, even if not fourteen, youth could leave school and work full time. Godliness and morality permeated nearly every aspect of the curriculum. None of this affected William, Sr., who died in 1869, or Frank, twenty-nine in 1872.

The Militia Act of 1792 required all Scots of military age to serve in reserve units. The unpopular law extended to William, Sr. and Jr., and Frank and his other brothers. While it prescribed regular training, it carried no obligation to enlist in the regular army. One of William's sons and Frank's brother, William, Jr., and a cousin, George, were active and respected members of the Musselburgh Civil Artillery, No. 5 Company. I now own a pewter trophy awarded to William, Jr., in 1863, 1864, and 1865 (and also to George in 1865) for excellence as "gunners." It was not unusual that they, possibly like Stephen as a gunner, enjoyed a degree of wealth and status.

That William Sr's. children received tutoring, and were reasonably educated by prevailing standards tells us much. Their educations, by virtue of William's expectations and means, suggested that they enjoyed more than privileged cultural opportunities. They would also have gained access to prospective marriage partners of comparable backgrounds. Some of Frank's grand-children, especially Aunt Edith Steeples Whisman, believed that he had studied at Oxford

William Steeples, Jr.
24 iii 1840 – 11 v 1890



David James Steeples
24 xi 1852 – 18 iv 1918

"97 | PAINTERS W & D STEEPLES. DECORATORS | 97" [Musselburgh]

University for a time. While at Oxford, she recollected, he had saved a life. For doing so he had received a medal with a depiction of a stag on it. Ultimately, Frank gave it to his wife, but its whereabouts are now unknown. In any case, Frank, while still a youth, became adept at writing and expression, arithmetic and mathematics, geometry with measurement and some algebra. He also became an apprentice, then a journeyman stone cutter and mason. To the knowledge thus gained, he added a willingness to work hard, patience, physical strength, and growing skill.

All of these things Frank accomplished before passage of the 1872 Education Act. By that year his age had placed him beyond its reach. So had geography. Remaining in Scotland, even with his skills, seemed to offer too few career options for an ambitious young man. The country was poverty-stricken. Most young men went a-fishing, into the mines, or to laboring on farms or in emerging factories. Many were caught in a chronological gap, able to find only a series of menial jobs until they reached sixteen and could vie for an occasional open apprenticeship. Even then, there were too few opportunities to absorb the growing population of youthful males leaving school. In the countryside, the fortunate inherited family freeholds; in towns, shops. Much manufacturing still employed the "putting out" system. Cotters on farms received payment for piecework sent to them. Such circumstances drove large numbers into highland regiments of the Royal Army – the King's/Queen's Own, Gordon, Seaforth, Argyll and Sutherland, City of Glasgow, and oldest and by reputation the most fearsome, the Forty-Second Highlanders (the Black Watch).

All things considered, Frank regarded the American West and Chicago in particular as

areas emerging to challenge New York's premier position among the nation's cities. As early as 1852, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt and his son, William, had financed and/or cobbled together a system of railroads, the New York Central, linking Chicago to New York. At first glance, Chicago's site appeared to be undesirable. It was a marshy area of porous clay bordering the outlet of the Chicago River into the lower western edge of Lake Michigan. Insects and rotting organic matter in bogs and shallow streams infested it during warm seasons. Scarcely endurable cold weather often froze it and even Lake Michigan's surface in deep winter. Winds from every direction buffeted it.

Health considerations aside, there were many pluses. One was that it could receive ship traffic from Lake Superior. Another was the proximity of the Chicago River. Its 133-mile North Branch flows south two to five miles west of Lake Michigan and converges with the ten-mile South Branch a mile or so from the Lake. The combined flow runs into the lake just north of the present Wacker Drive. A ten-mile low, marshy portage once separated the South Branch from the south-westward flowing Des Plaines. A few miles downstream it, in turn, united with the Kankakee to form the Illinois, which flowed into the Mississippi where that stream and the Missouri met. In 1848, workmen dug a shallow canal to open a water passage to the Des Plaines and create for Chicago a water route to America's great heartland. Beginning in the twentieth century, the city began to excavate a waterway that reversed the flow of the Chicago from Lake Michigan to the southwest and could accommodate large river vessels.

Progress on these projects, with the coming of the railroad, completed Chicago's list of advantages. It could become the hub of a system of lines opening the prairies of Illinois and Iowa

to settlement. In 1850, only a single railroad extended west from Chicago, splitting about forty miles out to provide connections with Aurora and Elgin. In a decade nine lines radiated in all directions from the Windy City, joining it to every place of importance in Illinois. That was only the beginning. In the language of the once-dominant local Indians, the Hočąąk or Wisconsin Winnebago, the metropolis (*Gųųšgónąk,ra*, or "*Skunk Running*") was well on the way to becoming the :

Hog Butcher for the World,

Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,

Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler,

Stormy, husky, brawling,

City of the Big Shoulders.

Between 1850 and 1860, Chicagoans multiplied from 29,953 to 102,260. A decade later, they numbered 198,977. They shot to 1,698,575 by the turn of the century. The city's spectacular growth during the Civil War decade illustrated a fundamental truth. During the war years alone, nearly a million persons migrated west. People in Europe facing few chances to better their lot could not, if they were reasonably well-informed, avoid thinking that the U.S. was a land of promise. Chicago's rocketing rise suggests strongly that nowhere was this truer than in the American West.

Frank Steeples was one of those who thought so. Official immigration records show that he departed Scotland by way of Glasgow, about sixty miles from Edinburgh and seventy-three from Musselburgh. He sailed on one of the ships of the Anchor Line. It specialized in

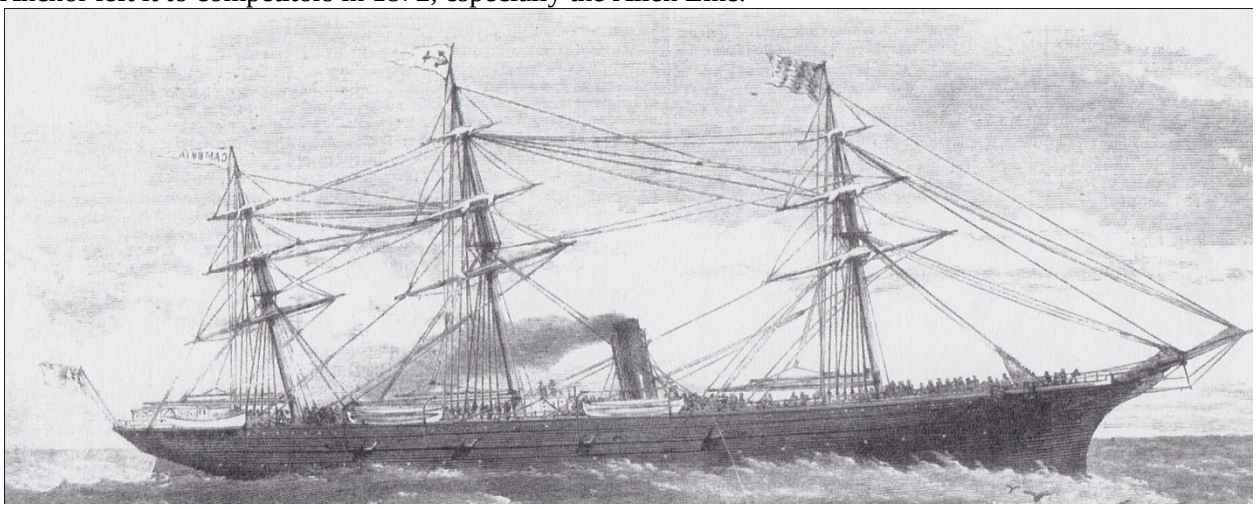
Frae the Auld Hame Tae America
Steeples Home, Inveresk Parish, Musselburg, 2008

A recent photo of the house where William Steeples and his family maintained their home, which was two or three blocks away from the W & D Steeples store.

Photo courtesy of Eileen Leitch-Bell.

As readers can see, the former living room is now a picture framer's business. A descendant of William, Jr. lived in the old house until after 2000.

S.S. Cambria, sister ship for the ***S.S. Anglia*** and the ***S.S. Australia***, was built for Alexander Stephens and Sons, founded in 1856. Stephens changed his line's name in 1865 to the "**Anker Linien** [in English, the Anchor Line]." Built the first *Anglia* in 1869, for Handysides and Henderson, to carry immigrants from Norway to Glasgow. There, Scots emigrants boarded, and the ships sailed on via a stop at Moville in Ireland to New York and Quebec. Business as a feeder line for Norse and Scots was unprofitable, and Anchor left it to competitors in 1872, especially the Allen Line.



transporting immigrants (including many from Scandinavia who came to Scotland as a jumping-off point). In an age of transition from sail to steam, his journey placed him on a steel-hulled, full-rigged ship with a clipper stem. Christened the *Anglia*, she was 324 feet long, 35 a-beam, drew 22 feet of water and weighed 2,140 gross tons. Two 750-horsepower, coal-fired steam engines supplemented her sails a single screw that belched smoke from one funnel. She carried around a hundred first class, eighty second class and eight hundred steerage passengers. Like her two sister ships, the *Cambria* and the *Australia*, she crossed the Atlantic in seven to eight days. All departures were on Saturday evenings, arrivals usually on Sundays or Mondays. Frank reached New York early, on Friday, May 12, a week after embarking.

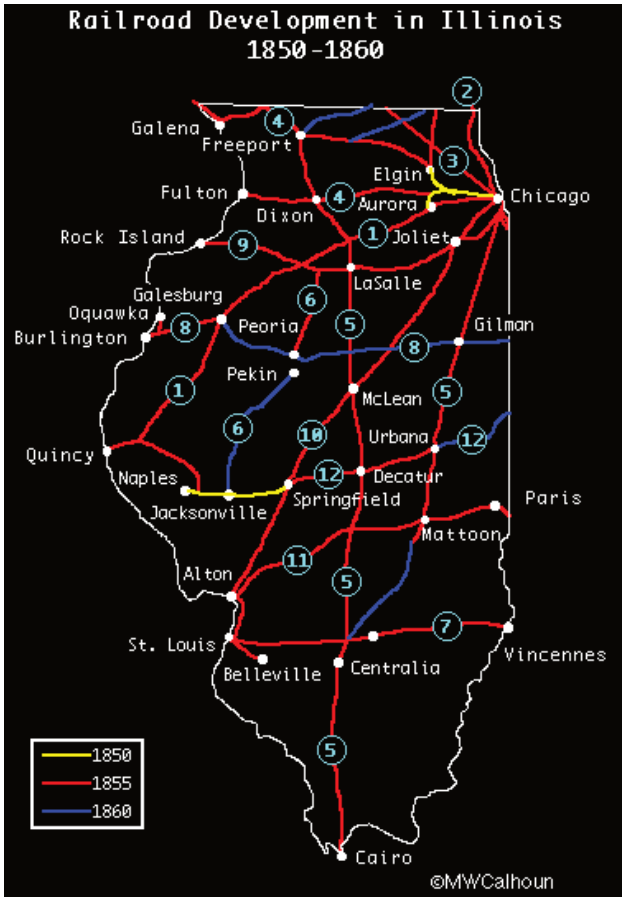
A thirty-hour rail trip took him to Chicago by some time the following week, probably via the New York Central. What met him is almost indescribable. Here was a city of 300,000, astride the Chicago River hard by Lake Michigan. Already a substantial business, industrial and rail center was forming in the area that would one day be known as The Loop. The whole place had a temporary, haphazard look, despite its orderly, rectangular plan of streets and blocks. Virtually all of it looked as if it had been thrown together. The seven-story Palmer House (hotel) overlooked surrounding buildings of no more than five or six levels clogging the scene.

There were some pretentious masonry business buildings, but wood was the prevailing construction material. This fact alone would have been enough to limit the height of structures, for it stretched lumber to the extremes of its strength. It likewise reached the limits of human willingness to climb stairs in those pre-elevator days. Modern structural steel and elevators, making curtain walls and skyscrapers (Chicago's contribution to architecture) possible were not

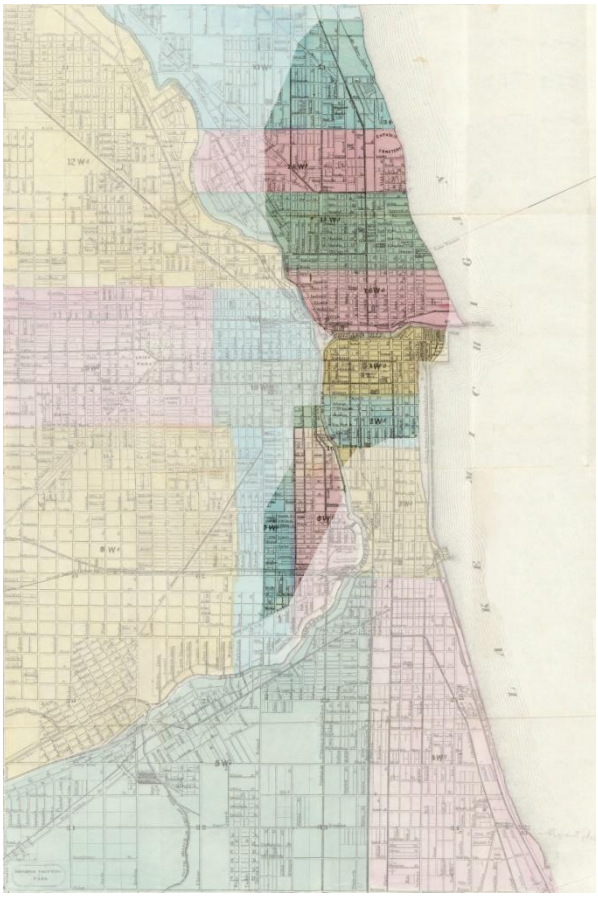
available until the 1880s. Building methods when Frank arrived severely curtailed work for stone cutters, especially those who had become master craftsmen who could specialize in ornate decorative work. There was little room on wood or masonry structures for carved bas relief, friezes, classical motifs, figures from nature and the like.

Booming and Stumbling, Illinois, 1850-October, 1871

Illinois Railroads: 1850, 1855, 1860



The Great Chicago Fire, October 10, 11, 1871



Frank Steeples probably followed the usual practice of young, unmarried workingmen, rooming in a boarding house. About five months after his arrival, disaster struck. Desiccating winds and rainless, withering hot weather had baked Chicago through July, August and September. Around 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 10, flames erupted in or near a small barn next

to an alley behind 137 DeKoven Street. A strong southwesterly wind quickly scattered burning objects abroad, creating an uncontrollable and spreading inferno. Before burning had ceased, on Tuesday October 12, it had charred an area about a mile wide and six long, including the city center. Flames had even leaped the Chicago River. It had incinerated more than three hundred city blocks. Authorities had imposed martial law and detailed troops to help fire fighters. Some 17,500 buildings were gone. Ninety thousand people were homeless and at least 125 dead. People circulated wild rumors about the fire's origins. Later a newspaperman admitted that he had invented the story blaming the disaster on Mrs. O'Leary's cow, to excite readers and sell papers.

Rebuilding began before embers cooled. Within six weeks, it was clear that some people had learned to use non-inflammable construction materials, usually of brick walls. In a year they lined 3 ½ miles of streets. Another 4 ½ miles ran between structures no better than those that had burned.

Rebuilding might have created many jobs for stoneworkers. It did create some. Frank was financially able to return to Scotland in 1872 and marry Mary Ann Morrison. Genealogical and other evidence suggest that residents of Musselburgh and adjacent North Leith often socialized. Social contact may have been how the couple met. Aunt Edith remembered their wedding date as Friday, April 5, 1872, with a departure for America following immediately. However, the official Edinburgh marriage record and the Mormon genealogical site sets the date and place at Wednesday 8 May, 1872 at 22 St. John Street in North Leith Civil Parish, Edinburgh. A law office presently occupies this location.

In 1872, 22 St. John Street was the home of John Lowe and Helen Simpson Doig Morrison. Mary Ann's father, a wine merchant's son, was a prominent, highly successful cabinet maker. He could easily afford to provide well for his children. Aunt Olive Herron remembered Mary Ann as having strong interests in history, language, business, and music. Like Frank, she received her education from a private tutor. I cannot explain the discrepancy between the Mormon and Aunt Edith's dating of Frank and Mary Ann's marriage, unless it be a faulty memory.

In any event, the two-hour rail trip from Edinburgh to Glasgow was a trifle compared to the voyage that followed and the tiring train ride from New York City to Chicago. Sadly, known ships' passenger manifests and immigration records in the National Archives do not refer to them. An immigration officer at Ellis Island did note the entry of a "Mary" on May 18 or 19. This could have been Mary Ann, although there was no reference to Frank. Little evidence has surfaced about the extent and nature of communication between Frank and his family after his immigration to the U.S.

We do know from family oral tradition that the couple remained in Chicago for about three years. It is likely that during this period they rented something like an apartment. They were far from established in the city. Nor was it likely that as a newly-arrived immigrant craftsman Frank would rise quickly to the level of employment and compensation that his skills merited. A wrenching financial panic ushered in a deep business depression that persisted from September, 1873, to mid 1879. It made his situation ever more difficult than the makeshift character of most business in Chicago. Under the circumstances, the Steeples with their infant son were up against it. Frank was fortunate to find work on a new federal building, erected to replace the fire-ruined

main post office. As with much else, it was both ugly and poorly built. It fell to the wreckers' ball in 1905.

Then a new opportunity presented itself. Iowa had begun to erect a new state Capital in Des Moines in 1871. The work of 1871 and 1872 was unsatisfactory. Weather soon made the weak and porous sandstone foundation unsound. It had to be removed and work begun again. A sturdy granite, left from the most recent glacial epoch and carved into fitted blocks, replaced it. Impermeable, dense black Iowa sandstone blocks, rising course by course, lay just above, than a yellow sandstone mapped progress in raising strong walls. By the mid 1870s, work on interior and exterior walls was advanced enough to allow carving finely detailed stone and wood ornamentation both inside and out. This was work that was made for Frank. He moved his family to Des Moines in 1875 and worked there for about three years. By this time, his craftsmanship was such that he could be considered at least a budding architectural sculptor. After visiting the Capitol in 2009, Don Steeples inquired about Frank's fine stone carvings and later received the following reply:

Don:

There are some bas-relief eagle stone panels on the sides of the west projection. (see attached PDF). The original carvings were sandstone and were replaced during Phase 6 about 18 years ago with Indiana limestone panels. I'm not sure what happened to the originals; many were shipped to Indiana as models for the replacement pieces. The originals were probably installed around 1877 which matches your ancestor's timeline. The sandstone pieces started to

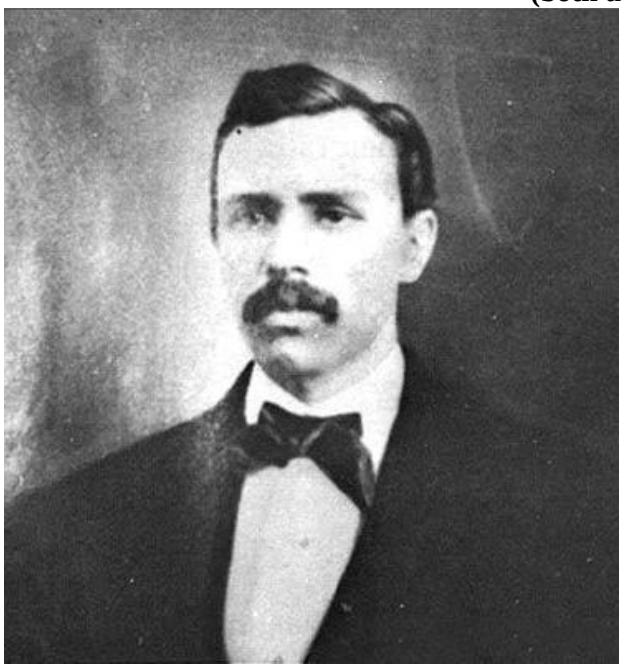
deteriorate within 20 years of installation, due to acid rain. This type of grey sandstone we referred to as "bluestone" and was Carbonaceous sandstone from Carroll County, Missouri. Most of it has been replaced by now.

We run into people often with such a personal and proud connection with this building. Thanks for sharing. Let us know when you're back in town and we'll give you the tour.

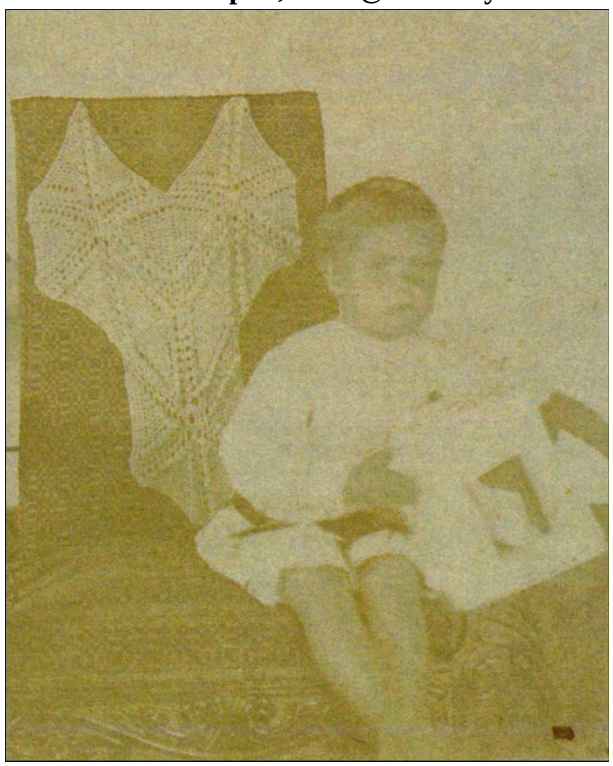
Regards;

Scotney J. Fenton, Assoc. AIA

Francis Oliphant Steeples **Mary Morrison Steeples Burns**
(both undated)



David James Steeples, 1874 @ 1 ½ **David James Steeples, 1876 @ 3 ½ - 4 years old**



U.S. Post Office, Customs House, and Courthouse – Chicago, 1880-1896

Main Portico, Iowa State Capitol

Photo Courtesy of John Baldwin

Upward View, Central Tower of Capitol

Photo Courtesy of John Baldwin

Iowa State Capitol, Bas-relief Eagle Stone Panels

Throughout his adult years, Frank suffered from increasingly labored breathing. A doctor diagnosed him as a victim of "stone-masons' consumption," the masons' version of miners' "black lung diseases." Today we call it silicosis. His physician advised him to relocate to the recently-opened lands of northwestern Kansas. There, free from the smoke, dust and foul air of cities, he might be able to regain his health as a farmer in a land with cleaner, drier air.

Meanwhile, Frank and Mary Ann's family bravely dealt with the best, and worst, that life could hold. Mary Ann delivered Helen Isabel "Belle" Steeples on December 17, 1875. Belle lived only until December 31, 1877. Francis Oliver, Jr., arrived on March 31, 1878. Much-loved little Frankie died on March 3, 1880, according to his headstone in Pleasant View Cemetery outside of Palco, Kansas. A second girl, as was not then uncommon, received the name of her deceased sister upon her birth on September 27, 1879. Her parents gave her a different nickname, though, "Nell," or "Nellie." Like David James, she lived to a ripe old age.

A cycle of wet years began on the Great Plains in 1877-1878, stirring excitement about the region's prospects. Emergence from the long business depression further buoyed optimism. Newly-completed railroads were soon heavily promoting immigration from eastern America and northern Europe to America's great mid-section. On his doctor's advice, Frank moved his family to Kansas to begin a new chapter in his life.

Chapter 2

Beginning Afresh in Kansas

RAW AND NEW, Rooks was one of eight counties that the Kansas State Legislature created in 1867. Problems between the U.S. and several Indian peoples figured in an elapse of four years between passage of the law forming the county and the beginning of white settlement there. As late as 1867, Kiowas, Comanches and Southern Cheyenne refused to sign treaties confining them to strictly limited reservations. On October 21, 1867, the former two nations finally accepted a treaty at Medicine Lodge Creek, Kansas, just east of the town now bearing that name. The Southern Cheyenne seemed to bow to the inevitable exactly one week later. The way at last appeared to be open for white settlers to occupy the region. Still, they hesitated. It remained to be seen whether or not the Indian peoples who met U.S. delegates at Medicine Lodge Creek would abide by the treaties.

Hesitation turned out to be wise. Indian-white warfare in the Wheat State was not yet over. The Cheyenne's militant Dog Soldiers stubbornly resisted efforts to confine them. Intermittent fighting continued through the next two years, with attacks on railroad track-laying crews, farmsteads and any easy white target. Combat reached a climax after Lt. Col. George A

Custer attacked Black Kettle's peaceful band on the Washita River in Indian Territory in the winter of 1868–1869. They killed Black Kettle and his wife and more than a hundred warriors. Afterward, bloodshed reddened the landscape between the Arkansas and Platte Rivers and west of modern Junction City in Kansas. Fighting was especially intense between the Republican and Saline, Solomon and Smoky Hill Rivers. Cheyenne resistance finally collapsed after a calamitous defeat below White Butte on the north bank of the South Platte River, July 11, 1869.

The Battle of White Butte was a necessary, but not a sufficient, precondition for settlers to enter Rooks or the other seven new counties created in western Kansas two years earlier. Another obstacle to settlement was difficulty of travel to the region. Fortunately for eager white land seekers, the advancing Kansas & Pacific Railroad (K.&P.) reached Fort Hays the same season that Frank and Mary headed for Kansas, spring, 1879. The newly-laid tracks soon bowed under the weight of train-load after train-load of prospective homesteaders bent on occupying the finally-safe lands of the state's northwest. Surprisingly, others had preceded them even before the coming of the iron horse. The first ten settlers in Rooks County came on horseback over raw grassland in January, 1871. All were stockmen, who left their families behind to reach Rooks County quickly. All came due west from Washington County, taking advantage of a well-watered route along the Republican and Solomon Rivers. Their first house was up by the end of February.

Months later, some of the growing number of new residents organized the Stockton Town Company. The legislature granted it a charter in 1872, and shortly afterward approved a just-formed county government. There was a bit of wrangling before settlers agreed on a name

for the town. They finally adopted, appropriately as cattlemen, Stockton. They positioned the community shortly north of the South Fork of the Solomon River and designated it as the county seat.

The Steeples had some means when they reached Fort Hays. We do not know how well off they were. We do know that Frank held at least most of his inheritance from his father's estate. He might also have laid some money by through plying his skilled trade. Mary, too, might have received gifts or loans of money from her prosperous middle class family. Without hard evidence, we cannot say more than this. In any event, Frank bought a wagon and a team in Hays, which required possession of some cash. After loading all of their essential goods on the wagon, they began to clip-clop north. Their destination was some thirty miles away, a Public Land Office at (long vanished) Kirwin, in Philips County. There on April 30 they filed for a homestead and signed certificates of intent to become citizens. Afterward, they retraced their steps about fifteen miles south and turned west some eight miles more. Assuming the usual ten to fifteen miles that a team could cover in a day, their trip would have taken no more than three days. They reached their claim no later than May 3, 1879. Here they would make their home.

Happily, for westward-bound immigrants in the U.S., Congress had in 1785 created a survey system that would govern sales of federal public lands for the entire country west of the Ohio River. The system provided for lining out six mile square townships, all with square-mile "sections" numbered in identical in numbered order and defined in relation to surveyed prime meridians and ranges in each western state. This process in one stroke made it possible precisely to define, under cover of law, every parcel of land thus surveyed. The consequence of this

decision was immense. The ability to provide exact legal descriptions of lands thus surveyed was one of two essential prerequisites for ensuring private property rights and thus a free economy. The other prerequisite was inclusion in the Constitution of a provision forbidding any state to abridge the right of contract. The Fourteenth Amendment later broadened this protection. The immediate import of these steps was that Frank and Mary Steeples knew exactly where their claim was before they ever saw it.

There was one little wrinkle here that might have set aside that outcome. When the state legislature created the county in 1867, surveyors chained out only twenty-three of the one square mile (640 acre) sections of their township, North Hampton, rather than the usual thirty-six. A Kansas atlas from the end of the century made it clear that the survey had been completed by the time that Frank and Mary reached their claim. It was the southeast "quarter" (160 acres) of Section twenty-five. Along its southern border lay the route of the present County Road 18, between Zürich and Palco, about four miles east of the latter. Population decline has resulted in reducing the county's townships to twelve now. The former North Hampton sits in Township 8, if any readers are curious enough to want to visit the original homestead site.

We know what our new arrivals saw. The prospect, although now patched with fields of wheat and other crops, still contains extensive pasture land of mixed tall and short grasses and native shrubs, as well as invasives. We have no record of their reaction to what they saw. Surely Mary was glad that during times of slow work Frank would no longer have to play what she regarded as a "disgusting" role as a black-faced end man in minstrel shows, as he had in Iowa. There would be neither time nor opportunity for that. Whether he would miss such play, or it was

an early display and source of the later family sense of humor no one can guess.

As to the scene itself, beneath their feet was greening spring grass, mostly short, with some bunches of tall. The southeast corner of their quarter was level. A mixture of sand bluestem and little bluestem grew on a brown topsoil up to a foot deep. A rich loam of decomposed vegetation (mostly grass from the few thousand years since the most recent glaciation), clay and disintegrating whitish to yellowish sandstone and limestone, the land could yield generous crops in years with good growing seasons and precipitation. There was little change in elevation for about two miles due north and three south. West, the plains ascended irregularly to the Rocky Mountains. Beginning in and continuing west, Frank and Mary could see the upper limits of a swale that contributed occasional runoff to an intermittent creek. Here and there, scattered cottonwoods, willows, black walnut trees, and a few sycamores bordered it, with scattered marshy spots. It, in turn, curved northerly about fifteen miles down to the South Fork of the Solomon. Beyond, to the north-northwest, a series of horizons undulated through a distant blue haze. Under the mid-day sun, they receded from view about thirty or more miles away. On clear summer evenings, lightning intermittently lit far-away thunderheads as they drifted along behind the horizon. The scene united the intimate beauty of abundant small growing things with spaciousness and infinitude. At times, a feeling of isolation, even when neighbors were less than a mile away, could drive people mad.

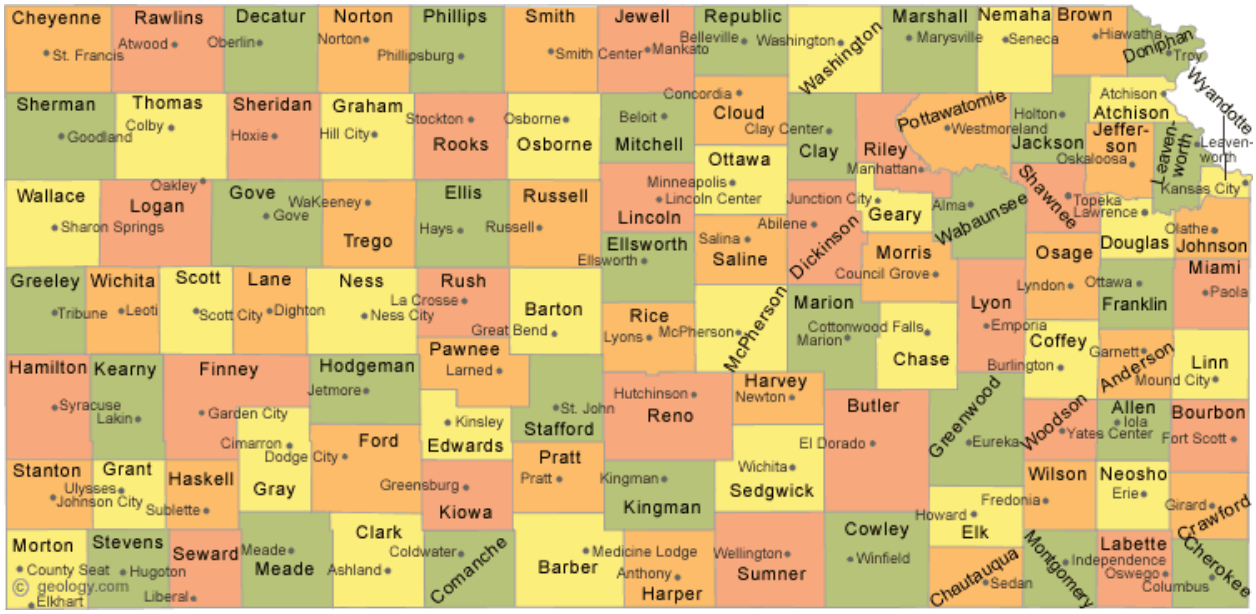
Ecologists now classify the northwest Kansas region as the rolling sand plains of the western high plains, or the sandstone steppes of the Great Plains. It lies a bit north and west of the Smoky Hills, so called because of the bluish haze that often rendered views of them indistinct. As

one moves west in Kansas, the elevation of this mixed prairie slowly rises from 1,500 feet to an average of 3,000 feet and a top elevation surpassing 4,000 feet. There are extensive windblown sand sheets and some dunes. From the air today, one can make out other aeolian features that stood as obstacles to travelers and prospective settlers. Notable among these were sand-scoured bare outcrops of sandstone and limestone and areas blown nearly clear of topsoil. These offered a cross sectional view from the surface down through the topsoil to underlying bedrock.

The natural vegetal cover, besides the grasses mentioned, included a mixture of sand, sage, prairie sandweed, occasional spikes of yucca (known locally as “soapweed”), some burrs and prickly pears and, of course, sunflowers. The few trees amid native grasses and other plants on the Steeples homestead formed a thin fringe along most watercourses. Where still water pooled, there were scattered stands of reeds and canes, sometimes green algae. Well into the twentieth century old buffalo wallows were visible. The major streams of Rooks County are the Solomon and Saline rivers. There are few other watercourses of any size. A rolling upland with some level areas separates the two rivers. Usually dry swales separate higher swells and carry water into tributary “runs.” The absence of a forest cover, with a soft limestone and sandstone remnant from an ancient seabed two hundred miles long and ten to forty wide under the topsoil proved to be an unexpected asset. Early settlers discovered that they could easily quarry the rock to make posts for fifty thousand miles of fences. The general region hence came to be called the Post Rock Country. Rooks County is at its western extremity. An observant traveler is likely to find considerable interest in the subtle variations in the plains landscape. Its spaciousness makes it seem literally to be the floor of the sky.

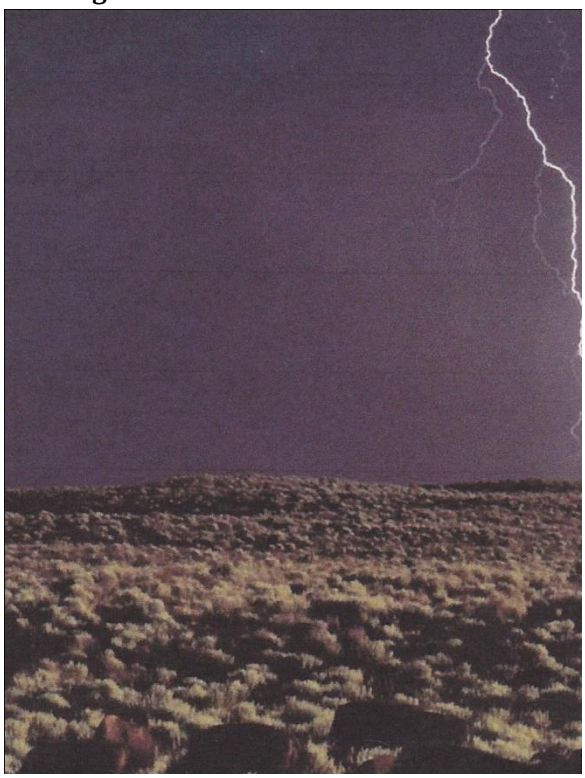
Position of Kansas in U.S., Counties, County Seats, and Cities

Kansas Counties, Seats



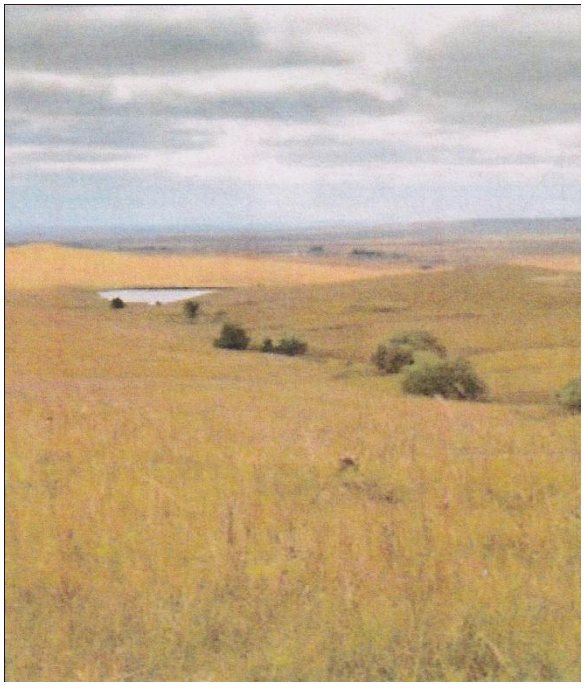
Map, Physical Features of Rooks County
Frank Steeples' Homestead S.E. ¼ of S.E. ¼ of Sec. 25, North Hampton Twp.
D.J.'s First Land Purchase, S. 80, then N. 80, N. ¼ Sec. 36

Resting Buffalo Under Plains Thunderstorm

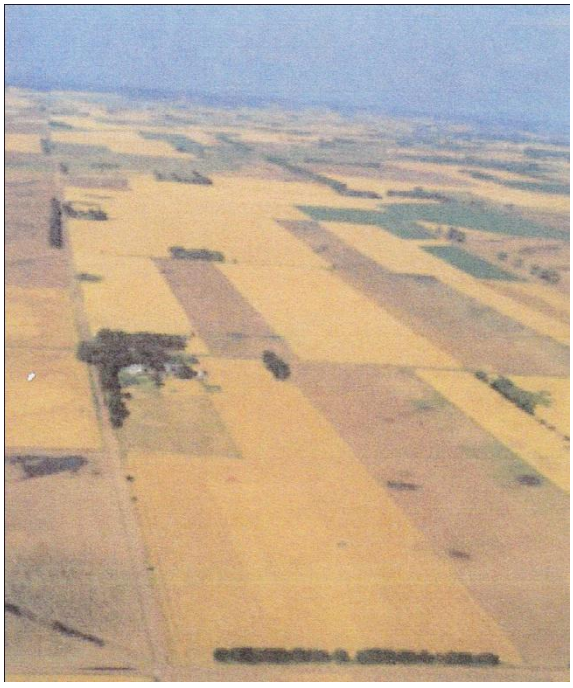


Soapweed, Lush Native Plants, High Spring

Plains, Swale, Stock Tank, Break, Late Spring



The Breadbasket of the World



Beginning Afresh in Kansas

Early explorers that the American government dispatched to survey the Louisiana Purchase and other points west found the absence of trees in the prairie plains (Iowa, much of Illinois, southern Wisconsin, southern and western Minnesota and parts of Indiana) striking. The apparent barrenness of the prairie and Great Plains, three hundred to nearly five hundred miles across and reaching from Texas well into Canadian Alberta, made an even stronger impression. Lt. Zebulon M. Pike remarked on it in his report on his 1806-1807 exploration of the Arkansas River. Maj. Stephen H. Long's 1819-1820 trek up the Platte through modern Denver's site led him to name the plains "The Great American Desert." The name stuck, achieving its widest use in the 1850s and 1860s.

By the 'sixties and after, though, the advancing frontier forced land seekers out of the forests and woods into Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska. In the '80s and '90s they thronged to Montana and the Dakotas as a grander view of the Promised Land overtook them. A plains-wide catastrophic 1874 locust plague faded from memory, as did interims of areal drought. Two wet seasons, as we saw, in 1877 and 1878, fed a notion that the weather was "becoming more seasonable." Somehow, rain followed the plow.

Everything was too good to be true. The fact of the matter was that the 160 acres adequate for an eastern farm was insufficient for prairie and plains conditions. Only if irrigated would that acreage suffice. In the sub humid and arid west farms required 640 to 1,280 acres, and then only if new crops and methods were adopted. Drought struck in 1883, just as the range cattle population caught up with demand for beef and the need to stock northern ranges. Thirst weakened herds. Three head died for every two that made it to market. From 1884 to 1890,

cattlemen faced devastating drought, die offs, price declines and ferocious winters. The worst winter fell in 1886-1887. It was so cold that freezing cottonwood trees exploded. Cattle strong enough to do so drifted ahead of storms far to the south. In 1887, Texans encountered cattle with Montana brands. Ranchers belatedly found that they must fence and rotate pastures and fields, to avoid overgrazing and protect growing alfalfa intended for winter feed.

The successes of trail ranches and the wet seasons of 1877 and 1878 were misleading to would-be western farmers. Working as Director of the U.S. Survey of the Rocky Mountains, Maj. John Wesley Powell in 1878 published his famed *Report on the Lands of the Arid Regions of the United States*. In it, he bluntly stated the cruel truth. Save for some well-watered climatic "islands," the country west of roughly the ninety-eighth meridian was semi-arid. The exceptions to this generalization were three. One was the Pacific west coast with its series of powerful winter storms sweeping in from the Gulf of Alaska. Another was the Plains areas subject to summer monsoons from the Gulf of Mexico. The second was the result of the retreat of the jet stream (edging the polar front) northward as southerly lands warmed. This allowed hot low pressure areas to form in the Southwestern interior, drawing in ocean air that released its moisture as it rose off mountains. The last followed the advancing polar front south as the winter sun retreated, opening the way for waves of excruciatingly cold "Alberta Clippers," to roar into the U.S. They were so named because they entered typically from the Province of Alberta and moved as quickly as clipper ships.

It followed that the old rules about land and its uses must change. Unless there was a water flow of at least five gallons a minute, an area could not be irrigated. Anyone who attempted

to water his land with less water was doomed to failure. Straight-line political boundaries made no sense. Instead, political units should be designed to conform to drainage basins. This would encourage cooperative allocation of water and avoidance, in the interest of the community, of wasting it. Powell's message was too radical for land jobbers, speculators, town boosters, railroads—anyone who hoped to make a quick dollar dealing in prairie and plains lands or other dry parts of the West—to tolerate. They drowned out his unwelcome, but true, message with a roar of opposition.

This was the country that Frank and Mary Steeples hoped to turn into a prospering farm. Their six-year old son, David James, would of necessity not have long to learn what one needed to know to manage affairs. Not one of the three Steeples understood that this strange new land with its unfamiliar kinds of beauty concealed enormous challenges. Much would have to happen before any of them understood those challenges and how to deal with them. They were innocents in a place that gave innocents no quarter. Fortunately, both Frank and Mary brought important strengths to their situation. Little Davey would have to acquire some, and as it happened, quickly.

Among their strengths were sound pre-collegiate educations, strong native intelligence, a shared good business sense, good character, strongly sustaining religious convictions and a well-developed work ethic. To these they added cordiality and confidence unblemished by pretentiousness or a lack of humility. They possessed, too, an easy way with people, a willingness to ask for and render help, and determination. Not least important, even in that time and place, were their physical strength and attractive appearances. Frank, if slender in build, carried himself well and by all accounts made an immediate good impression. Mary enjoyed

these same qualities. Too, despite his poor health, Frank could work long and hard. Beneath his unruly hair were a prominent forehead, straight brows, piercing blue eyes, an Aquiline nose, a dignified moustache and a confident oval chin. His shoulders were broad, if sloping. About six feet tall, he appeared every bit a man to be reckoned with. Mary, too, was handsome, blue-eyed, clear-complected, compactly yet impressively built with a comely figure. She commanded respect as well as friendship, remaining attractive and strong even after a loss of teeth in old age gave her a bit of a pinched look.

Frank and Mary needed these qualities, and more. When they arrived in North Hampton Township, they knew little about the ways that nature could in western Kansas bring both seasons of bounty and benign beauty and times of fierce hardship. The owners of newly-built railroads from the 1870s until well into the ‘90s were engaged in intense competition. For the most part, they laid track through largely unsettled territory. If they were to generate profits, they needed to lure people to this territory, to produce, ship, and consume. In millions of promotional circulars, brochures, and other published materials they advertised the prospects of farming in it extravagantly. Eastern wits responded with snide remarks about Minnesota, the Dakotas and Montana, Wyoming, and Nebraska as our “northern banana belt.” Behind their sneers lurked truly demonic acts of nature on the plains. Blizzards and whiteouts. Blue northers . . . swooshing cold fronts that could blow in at fifty miles an hour and drop temperatures by a degree a minute. Torrid, rainless summer days that could desiccate crops in half a week, sometimes even a day. Drought for years on end. Lightning-ignited prairie fires that could outrace men afoot or on horseback, consuming everything that could burn. Flash floods when the skies opened and

released as many as thirteen inches of rain in sixty minutes. And, of course, tornadoes. But without Dorothy and Toto.

Early settlers might not at first be able to repel nature's attacks. But time, technological and agricultural advances, and experience brought progress in learning how to deal with them. Unfamiliarity with the new Kansas environment was far from the least of the challenges that the Steeples faced. If they knew little about natural forces, they knew next to nothing about farming. Too, they must buy any supplies that they needed as far away as Stockton, tiny but ambitious Zürich, Plainville, or Hays with its closest railroad connection.

They, and especially Frank, through deeds and thought anticipated what New York Yankees famed catcher and folk philosopher once said: "You can do a lot of observing just by watching." Through conversations, assisting neighbors and requesting their help, and observation he and Mary changed from raw immigrant newcomers to increasingly capable pioneers.

Our Scots novice farmers saw at once that housing and a water source were their most urgent initial needs. The railroads themselves warned that settlers would need $800.00 to $1,000.00 to get established. Few new arrivals had even a limited grasp of the capital requirements for success. Fewer still had the needed sum. Frank and Mary probably spent the going rate for a wagon in western Kansas in the 1870s, between $75.00 and $150.00. The average team of two horses sold at the time for around $150.00. An ordinary plow, with a single curved cutting blade (both the point, or share, and the moldboard to turn the soil over) cost $15.00 to $30.00. A pegged harrow (field rake) went for less. As a rule, homesteaders laid out under

$100.00 on tools and implements. They dug their own wells, rarely having to go a hundred feet deep, often thirty or less, and sometimes in favored spots as little as ten, to strike water. The only cost here was time and a few dollars for a spade, some piping, wood for framing to prevent a collapse of well walls and a hand pump or a windmill. Homemade, a windmill with a tank could cost as little as $1.50.

Housing, too, could be quite inexpensive in this country of few trees and much grass. Frank soon noted that digging into a hillside, and piling sod blocks twelve by twenty inches by four inches thick could, with corner supports, enclose a house. If there were no conveniently situated hill, one might simply build from the surface of the ground straight up. Some planks, poles, or where available logs, could support a sod roof. If it were possible to add a ridgepole and use shorter supports, so much the better. A mixture of water, clay, sand, and ashes could plaster interior walls. These could also be whitewashed, just as floors could be swept and even covered with area rugs. If any cash were needed for the simplest of one-room sod houses, it might be as little as $2.75 for a window and twice as much for a door. Framing must in both cases be home-made to stay within so small a budget.

Most soddies contained more than one room. If that were the case, costs could rise proportionately. Typically, there was at first some sort of animal enclosure attached to or very near the house. Or a homesteader might actually use a room as animal shelter when the weather was brutally cold. After all, body heat from horses and milk cows could help combat low temperatures. At the least, furnishings tended to include a table, a chair or three, a baby crib, a bedstead with a straw tick, a laundry tub that could also serve as a bathtub, a kerosene lantern, and

Sod Houses in Pioneer Kansas

Interior, Farmer/Botanist Elam Bartholemew House, Rooks County

Last Dugout in Smoky Valley, 4.5. Miles from Lindsborg, MacPherson County

Near Cimarron, Gray County

places to store utensils, clothing and fabric materials. Soap could be made at home, for personal cleaning, laundering on a washboard and washing dishes. After hand-wringing washed fabrics, homemakers usually hung them on outside lines to dry in prairie winds. There might be a Hoosier cabinet for storing kitchenware, flour, sugar and the like. Birth control was scarcely an issue. Growing families and children meant a growing supply of labor available at no cost in cash.

Personal hygiene usually involved use of an outhouse, especially to protect the privacy of women. Rags, washed and re-used time and again, met other, related needs. As for eliminating human waste, men quite often relieved themselves any place where they could not be seen. As for cleanup, recall that in western countries men shake *right* hands.

We know almost nothing of the dugout that Frank and Mary built, except that it stood at the southeast quarter of their land and faced south. We know nearly as little about the soddy that replaced it. Given the experience of neighboring families, the Steeples probably had two or more rooms fairly quickly. They enjoyed good protection from the elements in their house, as sod was an excellent insulating material. These dwellings were quite durable. More than a few families lived in them for twenty years or more. One major inconvenience of living in them is that during a heavy rain drops of mud might fall from the roof between supporting planks. Another is that a prolonged dry spell can bring a sheen of dust down from the roof into the house.

Once Frank and Mary had a house and well, and had possibly planted some potatoes and another vegetable or two that would store through winter, they faced a long list of other questions? Should they buy a cow to provide milk for the little children? A separator to divide milk from cream? A churn to make butter? Chickens for eggs and meat? Use buffalo or cattle dung

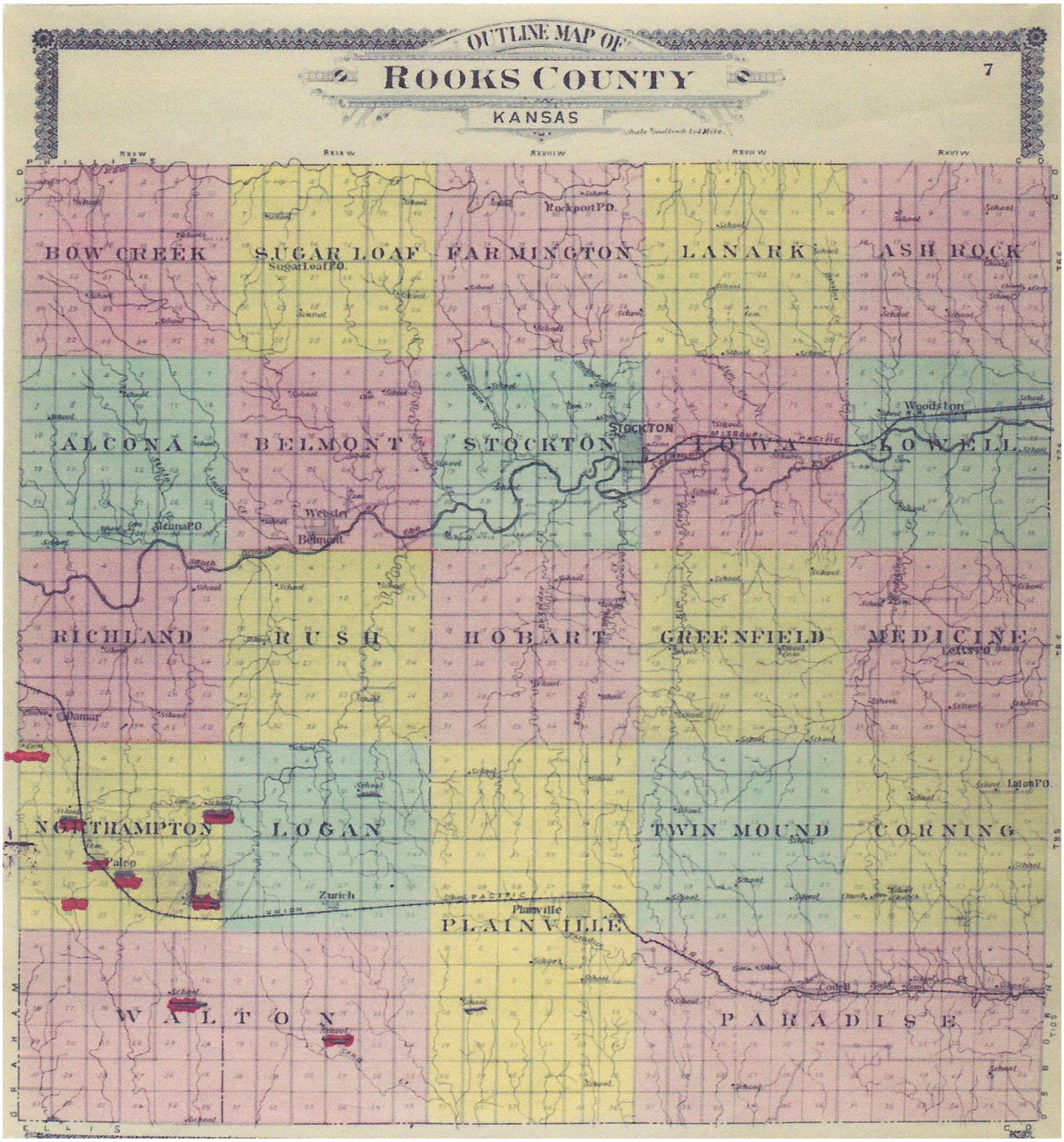
("chips") for fuel in a land where wood was so scarce. How did one milk? Separate cream? Churn? What about an enclosure if there were chickens, and a coop and fence for protection? Winter feed? Swine and or sheep? How to neuter male calves (shears, knives, or teeth?). How to slaughter and process cattle and swine? The best option(s) for cash crop(s) to earn what money might be needed?

As eager as most settlers, they must have wondered how to create a school? The map on p. 55 underscores schools that locals quickly erected, although terms might be as short as three to five months. We'll take up education again, at length, in the next chapter. Frank was unlikely to have been familiar with Maj. Powell's report, but sooner or later its implications would encourage his descendants to acquire significant land holdings. This subject, too, is considered below, in the last chapter. A map of Steeples lands in North Hampton Township in 2011 is on page 56.

Then one wondered about how to turn over tough plains sod for planting, when and where and what to plant, and then harvest. The importance of adding a vegetable garden and orchards? Establishing some trees to protect the house from constant Plains winds? The differing advantages of planting spring wheat and hard red winter wheat? Whether or not to fulfill the requirements to patent the land as a homestead (by paying the $10.00 filing fee and living on and working the land for five years to obtain it without incurring further cost). Or, after residence and work of six months buying it at $1.25 per acre as the 1862 Homestead Act also allowed.

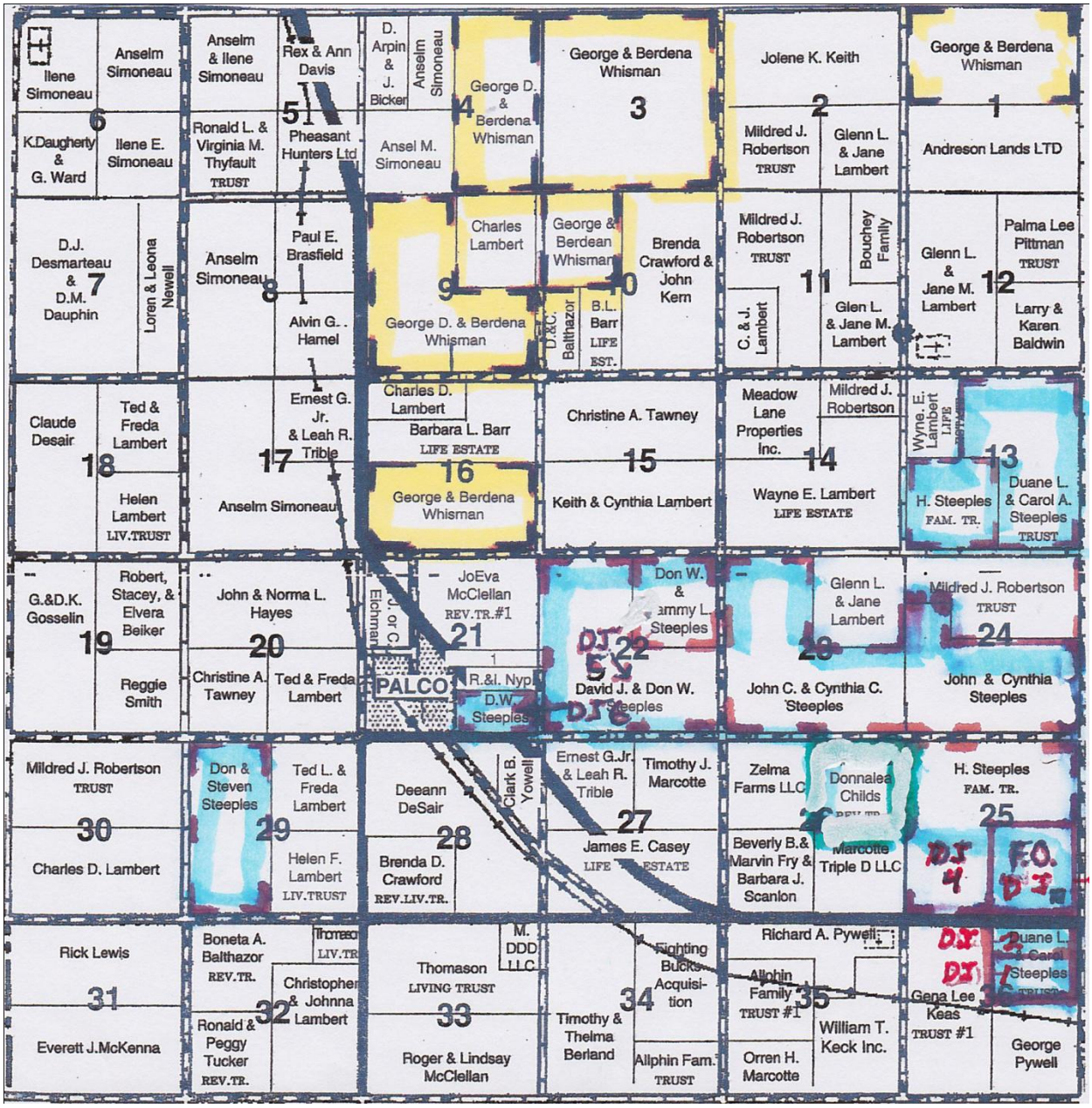
At first, homesteaders favored rye, potatoes, and perhaps carrots and later dried apples, for home consumption. Chicken and wild rabbits, even an occasional deer, and, in time pigs and beef cattle could provide meat. Field corn required too much water to thrive dependably on the Plains.

Schools in North Hampton Township Mentioned in Text



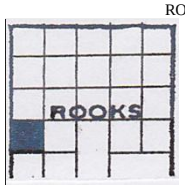
T-9S NORTHAMPTON TWP. R-20-W

D.J. Steeples Land Acquisitions (1-6). Other Steeples Land, Red Border, Whisman, Yellow



FAIRVIEW TWP. ROOKS COUNTY, KANSAS 2011

Section #21
1 Charles & Natalie Knipp
F.O. Homestead outlined in red & blue.
D.J. Acquisitions identified in red & blue, numbered in order acquired.
Other Steeples lands in North Hampton Twn. Outlined in red & blue.
Whisman lands outlined in yellow, Rick & Donnalea Childs in blue.



Wheat, then, became the first major cash crop. Familiar strains of white spring wheat—Michigan White, White Bluestem, Early May, Red Amber, and Mediterranean Red—first found favor. In Ohio, Minnesota, Missouri, and the central Plains, soft winter wheat replaced them. Alternating drought and wet cycles farther west led settlement to advance and retreat into the 1930s.

A group of Volga German immigrants fleeing tsarist oppression reached Kansas in autumn, 1874. Each family brought, among other things, a peck of hard, red winter wheat that had been developed in Turkey. In some places there, the climate resembled that of western Kansas and the higher Plains. Not long after the coming of Turkey Red, Canadian David Fife visited the Crimea and Turkey and searched out other varieties of red winter wheat. One of these proved so productive when he introduced it in Canada that it was named Red Fife hard winter wheat. Agriculturalists have hybridized all varieties of hard red winter wheat now grown from Turkey Red and Red Fife.

Farmers planted hard winter wheat in the fall, enabling seeds to bud and develop root systems before it went dormant for winter's chill. If covered with an inch or two of snow to protect it from extreme cold, it resumed growing when warm spring returned. This gave it a head start in spring. It could be reaped as early as June. It tended to gum up grist wheels, hence grist milling. The invention of steel roller milling in 1878 ended that problem, making milling it inexpensive and growing it profitable when the harvest was good and the price favorable. High in gluten, it was excellent for bread. Mixed with soft spring wheat, it made a fine all-purpose flour. The Steeples homesteaded as the transition to hard red winter wheat was taking place.

About the same time, locals introduced a new, drought-tolerant feed crop, alfalfa. At first,

many of them greeted it with skepticism. After it had proved itself (multiple cuttings were possible during a growing season), they gradually adopted it as a major cash crop, along with wheat. Its main use was as fodder for draft horses and winter feed for cattle. Growers also raised sorghum (for sweet syrups, sugar, and fodder) and Kaffir corn (a non-saccharine maize also known as African millet and common by 1893). Barley, too, was a major crop, mostly for fodder, in northwestern Kansas.

Here were the seeds for prospering as a Plains farmer. The Steeples must plant them.

Chapter3

Cultivating Community in a New Country

CREATING A FARM and a home were only the first of many tasks facing homesteaders in northwestern Kansas. Fortunately, they settled when they did and for the most part arrived and under the circumstances they did. If American patterns of settlement had not changed since the arrival of the first English colonists, it is difficult to see how the Great Plains might have been occupied successfully. Early immigrants to New England followed the European pattern of creating towns from which residents walked to their fields. Their lives were communal. To the South, abundant navigable rivers encouraged the dispersal of settlers. The discovery that certain crops could be grown profitably on large plantations further scattered European arrivals, the growth of reliance of slave labor, and the development of racism. After the War for Independence, the opening of lands in the West broke down the Old New England Way. Migrants to newly-opening western lands began to disperse. Instead of townsfolk farming in the countryside, things reversed. Settlers occupied the countryside, a necessity where large farms were necessary. Towns often came later.

That was the situation in northwestern Kansas, with some new ingredients. One was the

growth of Chicago as the railroad hub of the interior, the continent's heart for ranching and then farming. Another was the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862, making farmsteads available for a trice to settlers who filed claims and then worked their land for five years.

Scattered rural plains schools, one room and one teacher or not, irrespective of the length of the school year, held real and symbolic significance. They were a physical expression of civic spirit as well as places where that spirit permeated instruction. The universality of schools reminds us, too, that the soil may not have produced the principal crop. Because they received no pay, could perform needed labor and help develop the country, we might view children the most important crop of all.

We have no records of Davey's schooling. So we must get at it by referring to the content of schooling in general where and when he grew up. Already with a year of schooling behind him when he reached Kansas, he needed several more to earn a certificate. He also must shadow his father, and later his stepfather, to master the craft of farming.

The educational starting point for American public school students in the 1870s was not a school, but distinctive folk speech that originated before the Revolution. It made of many nouns, for instance, verbs. Examples: "lynch," "portage," "judge," "farm," "canoe." And verbs into nouns: "dump," "personal [as a notice in a newspaper]," "beat," "scoop [in journalism]." And assimilation of words from every language spoken here: "Colorado," "*llano estacado*," "grandeur," "cache," "sauerkraut," "cacao," "banjo" and so on. Some champions of traditional good usage despaired as American English emerged and departed from previous practice.

But one figure became the giant in shaping our language, and thus what young Steeples

learned. His name was Noah Webster. Born in West Hartford Connecticut, October 16, 1758, he studied law, was admitted to the bar and "lawed" briefly. Then he shifted to teaching and came to specialize in the meanings, usages, and histories of words in our language. In 1783, while teaching at Goshen, New York, he published *A Grammatical Institute for the English Language*. It reformed, simplified, and standardized spelling here. More, it introduced diacritical marks to standardize pronunciation and eliminate class distinctions that differing pronunciations revealed in England. With a 1784 reader grammar and 1785 reader it became the single greatest influence in shaping, and through eliminating class-based differences in pronunciation, *democratizing* our language. The first volume became the famed *Spelling Book (Blue-Backed Speller)*. By 1837, fifteen million copies had sold; by 1890, seventy million. Public schools almost universally used it. David Steeples surely encountered Webster's volumes, including his 1828 *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. From these books, young Americans learned everything from the alphabet to the definitions and pronunciations of every word that Webster could discover. From them, students, including Davey, gained full oral and written admission to universal linguistic citizenship.

William Holmes MacGuffey towered right beside Webster in his lexicographical work, nationalism, and linguistic democratism. Born in Pennsylvania, he graduated from Washington College there and was from 1826 to 1836 professor of languages, philosophy and philology at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. There he was prominent in winning passage of a law creating common public schools in the Buckeye State. Later he was president of Miami, then Cincinnati's Woodward College, and last, professor of moral philosophy at the University of Virginia. His

reputation rests chiefly on his series of six elementary school textbooks that he published between 1836 and 1837. Their countless editions sold 122 million copies. *MacGuffey's Readers* contained extracts from ancient writers (Aesop, Cicero and others), American patriots (including Patrick Henry), and men of letters from every genre. They stressed self-improvement, patriotism, and moral virtues and an underlying foundation of Protestantism. Like Webster's spellers, they are still in print. They make very clear the poverty of current American education, and why our literate forbears thought and expressed themselves so well. Their influence on Davey Steeples was palpable.

There was a third realm in which schools encouraged nationalism as well as mental discipline and practical application: mathematics. As early as 1787, Chauncy Lee had fruitlessly urged that the mishmash of European measurement and monetary systems be replaced with a uniform decimal system. Early in the nineteenth century while Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams expanded the argument in what is still the definitive three-volume book on weights and measures. But "as late as the 1870s, children" in American schools were yet learning to do "business calculations using English Sterling currency" because of the "inertia perpetuated by authors and publishers" who still hawked their texts as being "especially suited to the needs of the new nation." Only after the 1870s did teaching decimal and practical or applied arithmetic begin to become common here. This was just as young Steeples was approaching the study of arithmetic.

Davey's interest in arithmetic, then mathematics, was strong. I have in my library three of his books, one a systematic introduction to algebra and the other a *Practical Treatise on the Uses*

of the Steel Square. We know from his later work constructing farm buildings and keeping records that he put his knowledge of mathematics to good use. We know from the third of his books in my library that he went beyond introductory Latin, too, and from a surviving eighth grade school completion examination (see the Appendix, below) that he would have been expected to know basic American history, world geography, physiology, and botany. Everything that he learned was taught through rote memorization and classroom recitation or writing. It rested on the theory that the mind was a muscle. Different parts of it must be exercised in order to cultivate a well-developed, balanced intelligence. Music was prominent in this curriculum, to discipline the mind and nourish good taste.

This view of mind lost favor early in the twentieth century. Then, with the coming of micro-biology and a new neuroscience that used advanced electronic instruments to track mental activity, it rose again in a much more sophisticated form in the late twentieth century.

Teachers emphasized, besides the subject discussed above, one final discipline: penmanship. Writing a fine cursive script was both a mark of an educated person and a product of well-developed brain-muscle connection. Most popular for teaching penmanship between the 1840s and the early twentieth century were books teaching Platt Robert Spencer's writing system. First published as *Spencer and Rice's System of Business and Ladies' Penmanship* (1848), it remained unchallenged through around 1900 as his *Spencerian Key to Practical Penmanship* (1866). Students mastered it by dipping their pen points into inkwells in their desks and endlessly repeating the cursive forms of every letter in the alphabet. They then learned how to connect letters so as to pen beautifully-crafted words. A rival form that Austin Palmer devised and

published in 1894, *Palmer's Guide to Business Writing*, superseded Spencer's popularity around the 1920s.

Typewriters, later ballpoint pens and computers, pretty well thrust cursive writing aside in and after the 1960s. Its loss amounted to a de-emphasis on the role of motor skills in developing literacy. This loss in turned diminished the role of disciplined learning of every sort and opened the way to illegible scribbling that reflected laziness of mind and regard for clear thought, too. Lately, a few charter schools and prestigious private prep schools have reintroduced it. It also claims a small group of defenders of writing as an aesthetic as well as intellectual form of communication.

How sure can certain we be that the sort of education described above is pretty much the type that Davey received? Only indirectly, through knowledge that his knowledge and convictions were what teachers commonly imparted, and were consistent with his behavior as an adult. With one added consideration, it seems to me that these were persuasive, reasons. The further consideration is this: both of his and Mary's parents grew up in homes where a sound education carried such importance that his grandparents saw to it both received private tutoring. He (and she) mirrored the sort of patriotism, commitment to virtues, work ethic, self-dependence, and religious convictions, civic mindedness and sense of the importance of community that ran through everything we know of them. In sum, the upbringing he received at home, especially from his mother after a tragic loss when he was eight years old, we see rounded out the shape of the man.

Turning back from David's formal education to his life on the farm, we must note that he

with his parents speedily absorbed a wide range of practical lessons. One of the greatest was that a people living on scattered new farms could save a great deal of time and money through acting together, building informal community by sharing their knowledge, tools, machinery and time. Survival, he learned, required exchanging help. His practical experience with a community of students was surely enriching, although he may not, before he finished school, have thought consciously in such terms. Here again, evidence is lacking. One can only consider the question. The same is true of whatever the character and quantity of time Davey spent in town, or, for that matter, at play. Given his parents' background in Scotland, it is possible to imagine that that, too, was a potential source of understanding the value of community and the importance of civic responsibility. It is difficult to believe that he was unaware of his grandparents' relative prominence.

The circumstances of beginning to farm in a country just opening up placed a premium on community in the countryside, then, as well as within most densely populated places. It was apparent from the get-go that with his parents Davey could not escape learning many practical lessons that placed on community a very useful function to families within a neighborhood. Sharing and helping permitted a great many successful farms to succeed from an initial investment or less, sometimes much less, than $500.00. Frank and Mary were:

> fortunate enough to get settled . . ., break 10 to 15 acres [maybe at the rate of half an acre a day], and then raise a crop of sod corn or wheat, and perhaps some potatoes . . . [for] food for the coming winter . . . . [Others who] moved to their new homes in the late summer or early fall . . . too late to plant or harvest any crops

> . . . often suffered severely. . . . [The Steeples were] fortunate enough to have a good crop the first year," having settled early enough to get some seed in the ground and later harvest "during a period of rising prices . . . ."

Two or three successive good years were enough to allow for an increase in capital and start on the road to success. Those who arrived too late to get a crop in, or when prices were weak or natural disaster struck, could quickly become ensnared in debt, then forced out. Thousands in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakota Territory in the 1880s, 1890s, and every decade through the 1930s suffered thus. Often their plight forced them to sell their 160-acres of land for as little as $50.00.

The Steeples were briefly among the favored families. They readily won acceptance, made friends, traded help as good neighbors and warmed to farm life. Davey soaked up a love for growing things. Neither he nor Mary ever lost that love. But Frank's respiratory problems would not relent. They became inexorably more grave. Just as the countryside was first hinting a green sheen in 1881, he developed pneumonia. Weakened, he succumbed to it on April 29, 1881. His death, at thirty-eight years, left behind a thirty-four year old widow and two small children. Davey was just eight. Nellie, born sixteen months to the day before Frank's death, was less than a year and a half old.

Mary was in deep trouble. Davey was too young and small to work a farm. Alone, they could not run one either. Neither could she afford to sell it for a song. With two dependent children, she had few options. No neighbors in this newly-settled land had the means to employ domestic help. Job prospects were, for women, strictly limited. Training to enter the new

profession of nursing, only twenty years old, bore prohibitive costs even if she could arrange for childcare. There was little local demand, as yet, for milliners or seamstresses. Her own strict code of conduct and prevailing morés placed the world's oldest profession out of the question. What, then, could she do?

The remaining practical option, especially for those who had lost a spouse, was remarriage. It could provide children with a two-parent home, possibly step- brothers and sisters, and perhaps half brothers and sisters as time passed. Meanwhile, farming, gardening, maintaining a household, managing business affairs, and caring for children could be divided or shared. Love might in time grow from such practical arrangements.

Mary soon found a new husband. Her success formed a complete new household. She was able to remain on the homestead, even though current laws meant that it would have to be proven out under the husband's name. As it happened, compatibility, fidelity, and ability did grow into love.

Archives record the route to Mary's second marriage. Her new partner's name was George Samuel "Sam" Burns. His appearance in northwestern Kansas' open plains was part of a larger story. He was a native of Grant County, Kentucky, whose northern border was about three miles south of the Ohio River opposite Warsaw, Indiana and extended about fifteen miles east before it turned south. His birth occurred on 13 August, 1834. In 1857, he married Sarah Mills. Her first cries had echoed in 1833 in the hills of Indiana's Crawford County. In 1859, the Burns moved to tiny Powersville, in Putnam County, Missouri, hard by the Iowa border. They were now in a strange environment. They had left the wooded East, with its familiar ways of clearing

forests to farm. They were in the southern part of the tall-grass prairies of our Central Lowlands, east of the plains. Indians periodically burned this country, to keep it open for good hunting. The annual die-off of grasses during years between burns quickly composted into a rich top soil, as deep as three to four feet in Grundy County, Iowa. It could grow as tall as a man on horseback, and send its tightly-matted roots as far down as it was tall. Indian burning had created here a fire sub-climax biome.

As we saw earlier, westward-migrating Americans for a generation crossed over the grasslands to the Pacific Coast. Not until farms filled neighboring forested ground and people had discovered the fertility of the grasslands did settlers venture into this reputed Great American Desert.

Sarah Burns died in the winter of 1873 at the age of forty. She left Sam a widower with their eleven year old daughter, Mary Elizabeth (b. August 18, 1861). In due course Mary Elizabeth wed Franklin Douglas Fulcher. He was nearly five years her senior. They set up housekeeping in Powersville. There, another branch of the family tree budded. Sometime around 1880 the prospects for profit lured Sam to Rooks County. He put down stakes in a new hamlet about half-way between Fort Hays and Stockton. Homesteader Washington Irving Griffin had platted it on his land, a place known as Paradise Flat because of its attractive natural features. He opened a post office there in May, 1878. At the suggestion of a neighbor, Griffin had named the place Plainville.

The spot grew into a modest trading village. Somehow, Mary Steeples and Sam Burns met. They soon saw that they were compatible and their needs were complementary. His were

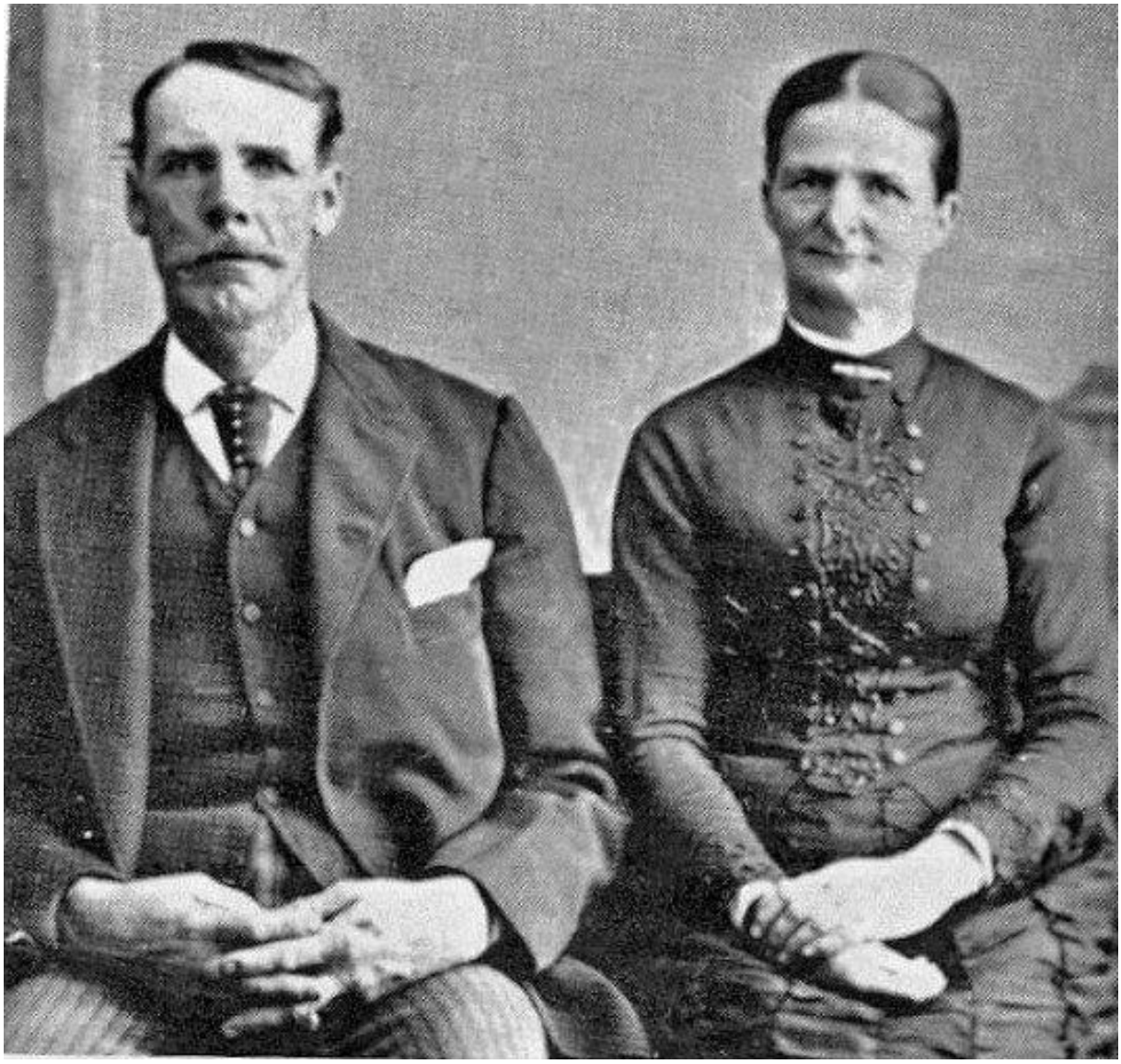
for a home-making partner, hers for a husband to perform the heavy farm work and guide Davey to manhood. Together they could create for themselves a degree of economic security in farming and fulfill the requirements for patenting the homestead. They could find companionship in ways available only in a marriage. They created a normal home for Davey, and any new children who might come along. Too, more children would mean more labor to help build up the homestead.

Mary Steeples and Sam Burns became man and wife in 1882 (there is no official record of the event). Sam moved into the soddy with his new wife, Davey and Nellie. He proved out the homestead soon after the marriage. Later, three more children joined their blended family. George Henry was born on September 8, 1883; Mary Ethyl on November 5, 1886; and Olive May on March 19, 1889. It was in this increasingly comfortable sod house that Davey grew to become Dave. He lived there twenty years, earned an eighth grade certificate, and learned how to succeed at farming. At some point, they built a stone house to replace the soddy.

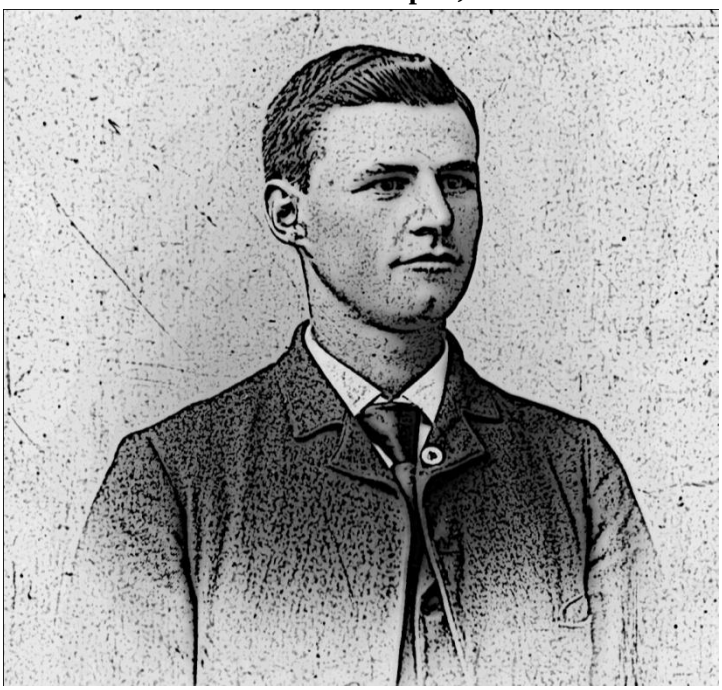
Both Dave, by 1890 a strapping teenager, and Nellie, just short of her teens, strongly disliked Sam's treatment of them. She left home for good, running away to Denver when she was sixteen, in 1895. He stayed on the farm, but not on good terms with Sam. Mary was very loving toward all of her children for her entire life. Many years later they, and then their children, vividly recalled her generosity, gentle instruction in homemaking and good manners, and fondness for them.

Young George, much kinder than Sam, later became a favorite uncle to Dave's children.

Wedding Picture, Mary Morrison Steeples and George Samuel Burns 1882



David James Steeples, 1893



With mother Mary Ann Morrison Steeples Burns and sister Nellie, 1894

Cultivating Community in a New Country

Meanwhile, another Burns-Steeples tie budded. Its roots were deep, predating the American Revolution. Manifests listing all passengers from Britain through 1776 noted that two men surnamed Fulcher landed in Baltimore, in 1750 and 1751. Aunt Mary Fulcher Yohe, who spent many years researching to qualify for membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution, found two others who reached North Carolina just before that bloody war erupted. Both fought in the North Carolina Line. Over several generations Fulchers moved from Cartaret County around Morehead City; and Ocracoke Island, just south of Hatteras Island in Dare Couty; to Person County around Roxboro; and adjacent Caswell County near Danville, Virginia. Later generations settled west in Wythe County, Virginia; then Kentucky, next Missouri, then Kansas, and finally Idaho.

In 1893, Frank Fulcher and Mary Elizabeth moved from Powersville, Missouri, to Rooks County. Granddad's children years later wrote of Frank as having come from a "very poor family. He was an able farmer, but could "never get very far ahead" because of the size of his family of thirteen children. He was "educated in Missouri but" not "very well. He was quick-witted and clever, but he habitually spoke ill of his neighbors. He enjoyed giving his children and grandchildren a "Missouri rub" of their faces with his unshaven cheeks. They did not share his pleasure. They described Mary Fulcher as "having a bad temper which she cannot or does not . . . control." She kept a clean house but preferred gardening, ruined her health with work, and wore a buckskin shirt.

Dave's children recalled Sam Burns more favorably, although "he could not read any more than his name." Some of their memories of him are contradictory. Although remembering him

as poor, some thought he "seemed to have all the money he wanted" without working for a living. The Fulcher farmstead, according to Aunt Edith and plot maps, lay about a mile south and some west of the Steeples homestead. This would have been about equidistant with the Steeples-Burns land from Pleasant View School. One of Frank's children was eleven year old Myrtle Eliza, born in Powersville on May 26, 1882. She had already completed her first five years of schooling in Missouri. Once in North Hampton Township she enrolled in Pleasant View School. A few months after arriving, Frank lost his farm because of excessive debt. He relocated about a dozen miles south, to a farm just over the Ellis County line.

We do not know how Dave and Myrtle met. But living so close, and with her in even closer Pleasant View school, and a Christian Church just a hop away, it would have been hard not to cross paths. Energetic, capable, hard-working, and with fine looks and character, he was a very desirable marriage partner. As for Myrtle, although she was nine years younger than he, through graduation she became one of the neighborhood's most eligible young women. Intelligence, youthful beauty, a proven willingness to perform good farm work, and a strong commitment to prevailing high moral and spiritual standards only made her more appealing.

When Myrtle graduated, Dave was twenty-three. We know that he was visiting her regularly in Ellis County not long after they met and her family moved there. No later than early 1898, they were planning to marry. He was twenty-five, she, sixteen, a not uncommon difference in ages of marital partners at that time.

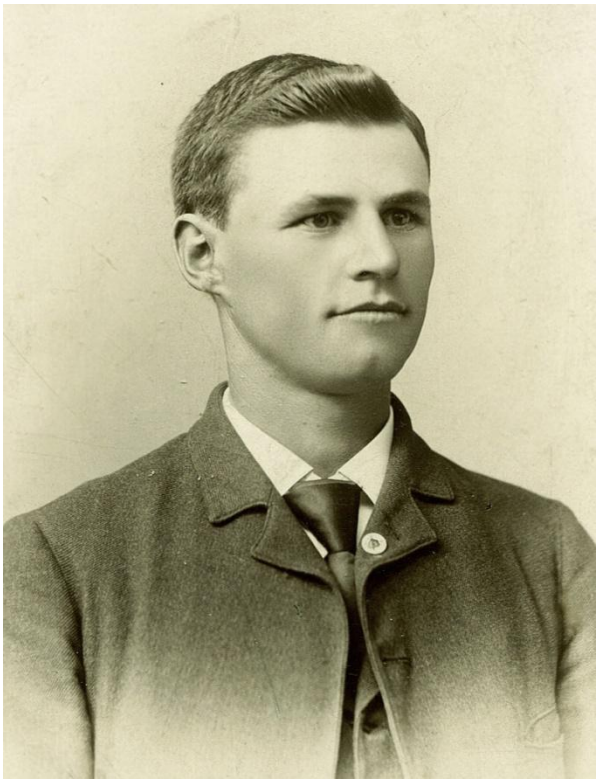
Chapter 4

Good Times, Hard Times

DAVE AND MYRTLE were a strikingly attractive couple when they married, on November 26, 1898. He had become not only a finely-proportioned man who stood just over six feet tall. He was, by any measure, very handsome. In that era, photographic portraits were supposed to depict people as thoughtful, well bred, and strong. Current fashion defined smiles or grins in pictures as signs of silliness. Consistent with prevailing standards, his facial expression projected assurance and steadiness, together with gentleness. Altogether, he looked to be a strong person, one who commanded respect. As for sixteen year old Myrtle, soft brown eyes, a frame of lovely auburn hair, lady-like bearing and unblemished skin joined fine proportions to make her nothing short of a beautiful young woman. The couple appeared to be perfectly suited for each other.

They were not so pinched financially to have to take a "bicycle built for two," at one extreme, but too practical to take a "surrey with a fringe on the top" at the other, to their marriage ceremony. Dave was sufficiently well off in 1898, for reasons described later, to own the southern half ("eighty" of the northeast quarter of Section thirty-six of North Hampton Township that year. A shay, with its

David James Steeples and Myrtle Elizabeth Fulcher, 1898



roof and partial siding would have been an obvious and affordable choice. Given a secular decline, worsened by the depression of the 1890s, of 50 percent prices, he could easily have purchased a team of two horses for around $65.00 and a shay for another $65.00 for his marriage with Myrtle. The two likely drove it to and back from their wedding in Stockton, although even in 1898, county section-line roads were very poor, at best. The 1859 state constitution forbade state spending for internal improvements such as roads, canals, and railroads.

The constitution's intention was to avoid piling up so much debt by borrowing for improvements as to follow other states into bankruptcy. With the state out of the picture, counties and townships were left with responsibility for roads. Whenever a majority of landowners within a township or a county petitioned, as appropriate, the township board or county commission, the

relevant body created a benefit district and appointed road reviewers. These oversaw the roadwork. Rights of way were forty feet wide. The county assessed the landowners for three-fourths of the cost of construction and paid the rest from its own budget. The funding formula changed over time.

It may be surprising to learn that an organized movement for road improvement in the country began only in 1895. Then, thousands of riders of newly-popular bicycles formed the League of American Wheelmen. A bike ride that Dave and a friend took to Salina in the 1890s to attend a religious revival was one illustration of the wave of enthusiasm for two-wheelers. The League in little more than a decade became a significant political force. In 1900, the Kansas Good Roads Association formed, in reply to a growing use of vehicles dependent on internal combustion engines, notably cars and trucks. In that year, Kansas ranked among the top ten states in terms of the number of autos in use. But as late as 1928, Kansas was the only state without a state highway system. Its creation, treated later, brought far-reaching changes.

We must imagine Dave and Myrtle, then, either wearing or keeping easily at hand, warm clothing against the normal chill and possible storms of November as the they rode smartly to Stockton. We've no record of the duration of their round trip. Given the pace of horse-drawn vehicles, we should guess in terms of three to five days at the least.

Dave could further afford to have built a framed, clapboarded sided house for Myrtle on his eighty. A shortage of labor delayed its completion until 1900. It rose just south of Sam's eighty, on Section thirty-six of the township. While it was a-building, he and Myrtle moved into the Burns home. Probably by now of stone, it had almost certainly undergone numerous

improvements that made it quite livable by 1898. But not up to the standards that David James Steeples thought were appropriate for his Myrtle.

When the couple moved into their nearly completed new house, in 1900, it was under roof and sided. Workmen finished interior walls with lath and plaster. White paint protected the exterior siding. The house held two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living/dining space. Off the kitchen on the south side of the house was a mudroom for storing winter boots, coats, and the like. I believe that there may also have been a well handle and spout there, or just outside. The kitchen might have contained a Hoosier cabinet for storage of flour, sugar, other foodstuffs, pots and pans, flatware, utensils and the like. Edith was born there, as workmen were finishing the dwelling, in 1900. Dave, after Edith's birth, initially slept on the floor and Myrtle with the infant in the bed. He feared that he might roll over in bed and hurt the wee bairn. Myrtle forced him to share the bed after a big bull snake came out of hiding in the bedroom one night. Edith was taking her first, clumsy and unsteady steps when she neared one year old.

Neat and tidy, this modest house was where all of the children were born. Several were adults when Dave bought more land, with a house, near Palco years later. As the youngsters multiplied and grew, Dave and Myrtle's love steadily deepened. She mothered with such warmth and kindness that none of their children recalled her in other than idealistic terms. Memories of Dave preserve impressions of him as kind and caring before death took her.

Motherhood and the demands of farm life had already begun to cost her the fresh bloom of youth evident in her 1898 photograph by 1901. Within another year, Dave's appearance was less youthful, too. By 1908, his well-defined features revealed a happy man of thirty-three nearing his

**Original Farm House that D.J. Finished in 1900. "The Old Home Place."
All Children Born Here. Height of Trees, Flowers Suggest Date Around 1915 (?)**

Grandson Duane, and Carol's Home, Aerial View their new house. Patterns So., W. of house show where tornado destroyed buildings. Red roof implement building and Quonset shop survived. Roof of new house earth color, north of drive. Disturbed soil S of NE road junction shows ruins of Frank Steeples' soddy.

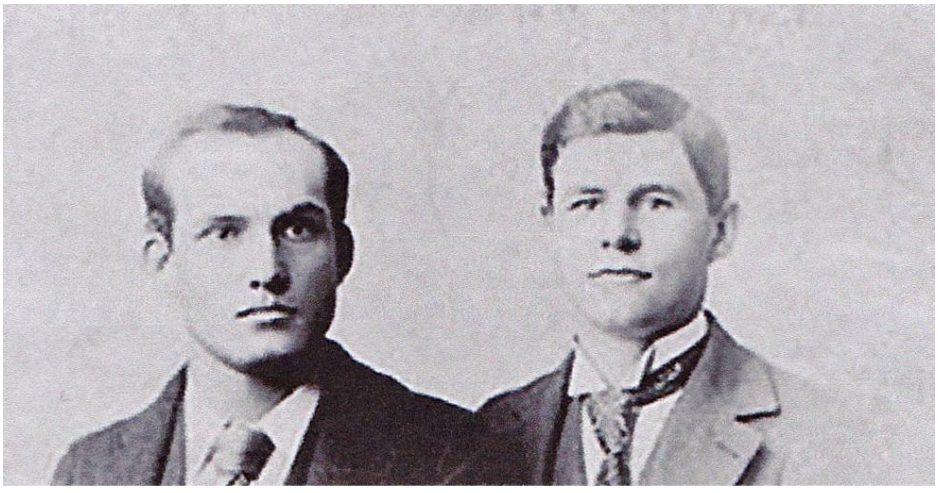
The Steeples Family Shay (ca. 1919?)

prime. Myrtle, now twenty-six, had filled out. Soft brown eyes and a hair style that drew attention to a high, broad forehead joined with a pert nose and soft mouth to present a fetching young matron.

Dave, during these years, was improving his land and adding to it. A chicken coop, a shop, a livestock yard (west and north some of the house) and a pig sty were not long in coming. The most commanding new building was a proudly whitewashed, handsome barn. Over its main floor, with stalls for milking, and for horses, was a large second storey. It served as a hay mow. Apple and cherry orchards were beginning to flourish. So was a bountiful garden. In good weather, Myrtle often worked in it while seated or kneeling on the ground, with a basinet at her

Back, Lizzie Fulcher
Front, "Sam" Burns, Myrtle Fulcher Steeples, Edith, ca. 1901 (?)

Frank Meade (friend) and David James Steeples, 1902



Fulcher Family. Undated (ca. 1888-1890?)
Upper Row, Left to Right: Maggie (McNealy), Myrtle. Front Row: Elmer, Grandpa Franklin Fulcher, Mary (Yohe), Grandma Mary Elizabeth Burns Fulcher (holding Everett), lower center, Ben

Maggie Ruth Fulcher (McNealy), Myrtle Fulcher Steeples, Undated (ca. 1908?)

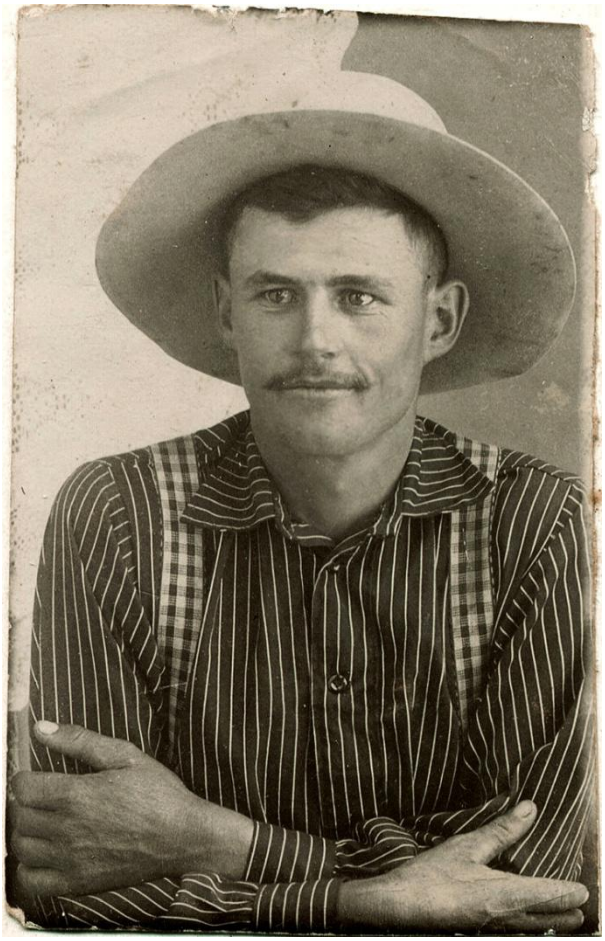
Edith (ca. 1902)

Edith, Wallace and Chester, ca. (1905-06)

Chester and Wallace (ca. 1909)

Wayne (ca. 1913)

David James Steeples. Undated (ca. 1908-09?)



side. There was also an expanding belt of trees to protect the tidy home from winter's icy northwestern winds.

Although Dave did not intend for it to become a place for playing, the hay mow did, at least for some of his younger children and many of his grandchildren. Olive and Freda recalled stacking bales to make an imaginary house in it. Their snug play-space got lots of use, at least *until*. Until their father discovered that they had built into their "house" a hay fireplace and chimney, and lit some candles there. End of playhouse. Like the children, visiting grandchildren later enjoyed "playing in the hay loft when it was so well filled with we [that] we

could reach the gable and swing from the hay fork track and jump in the soft hay." How many of us can recall the sweet smell of fresh bales of hay, and the dust and itches that followed playing in them?

Dave and Myrtle maintained meticulous records of their business affairs, allotting to each year a separate volume. After Myrtle's death, he continued the practice carefully. While his major concern was with business transactions, he also gave notice to special family events. He referred to the volumes as his "day books." To judge from differences in handwriting, Myrtle may have written the earlier records, and he too have done so after her death. The earlier books are in an elegant, feminine-appearing, cursive. Later, the penmanship, while quite legible and systematic, was bolder and appeared to be less polished. He began one volume of his records with these entries:

Nov 27, 1898 [date of marriage]

David James Steeples born in

Chicago, January 27 1873

Myrtle Steeples born in Mo

May 26, 1882

Edith Gertrude Steeples born in Kansas

Rooks Co Aug 29 1900

Chester Francis David Steeples born in

Kansas Dec 1 1902

William Wallace Steeples born in

Kansas Febr 3 1904

Alveda Beatrice Steeples born in

Kansas May 30 1905

Marion Wayne Steeples born in

Kansas Aug 7 1906

Mildred Lucille Steeples born in

Kansas Oct 11 ‘08

Olive Marie Steeples born in

Kansas Sept 7 1910

Freda Ruth Steeples born in

Kansas Aug 27 1912

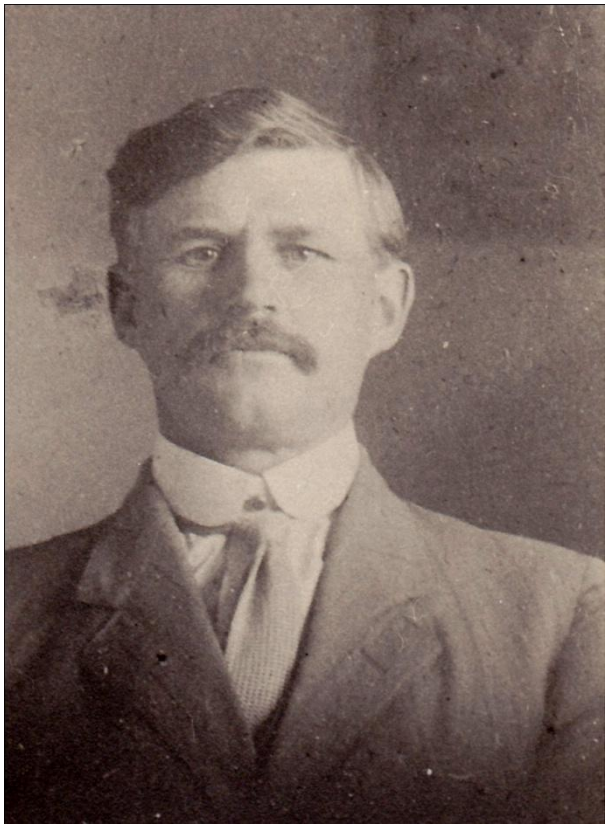
There are no notes as to still births or miscarriages. Wallace’s Jean Steeples Webb mentioned that one of either occurred during the years in which no children were born. There is also a story of fourteen pregnancies. Given intervals between recorded births, (averaging around sixteen months or so) these tales could have approached the truth. Absent any known records, we have no means of settling the question. Reference to Freda’s birth concluded the entries. This abrupt ending omitted mention of the tragedy that ended the list of births of eight healthy children.

By 1912, the Dave, at thirty-nine, and Myrtle, at thirty, in a formal photographic portrait, appeared to be solid, comfortable, and capable citizens. Her face radiated kindness. Her auburn hair, perhaps with a hint of gray at the temples, was swept back to frame a face that would have

ranked as beautiful in that day. She projected through her appearance the depths of her kindness and capacity to love, showing little or no trace of her toil during fourteen years of marriage to a farmer. Nor did she show the toll that bearing and caring for eight (I am guessing from her overall appearance that Freda's birth on August 27 preceded taking the photograph) must have entailed. Dave, now coming to be known as D.J., still stood a straight six feet. His hair was just beginning to gray at the edges, and he had lost none of it. The long-familiar steadiness of purpose, strength, integrity, and penetratingly direct gaze of icy blue eyes still stared out at beholders. One might imagine that he held his youngsters to the same high standards that he and Myrtle pursued. One might also imagine, comparing their visages, that she was a softening influence, bringing out the kindness and gentleness that he carried within himself. Then, too, we are left to ponder the degree to which his care for and protection of Myrtle may have preserved her health and strength.

Two years later, the entire world of D.J. and his family came crashing down without any forewarning. Myrtle, pregnant again and still barely into her thirties, suffered a partial miscarriage in late winter, 1914. Local medical treatment was unsuccessful. D.J. took her via the Salina & Oakley R.R. to Salina, and then on the K. & P. to Kansas City, Missouri. He placed her in Swedish Hospital. There, physicians did everything that they could to combat the infection raging inside of Myrtle's abdominal cavity. Despite their efforts, she steadily weakened. Myrtle asked Dave to stay the night with her in the hospital, just hours before her death early on March 15, 1914.

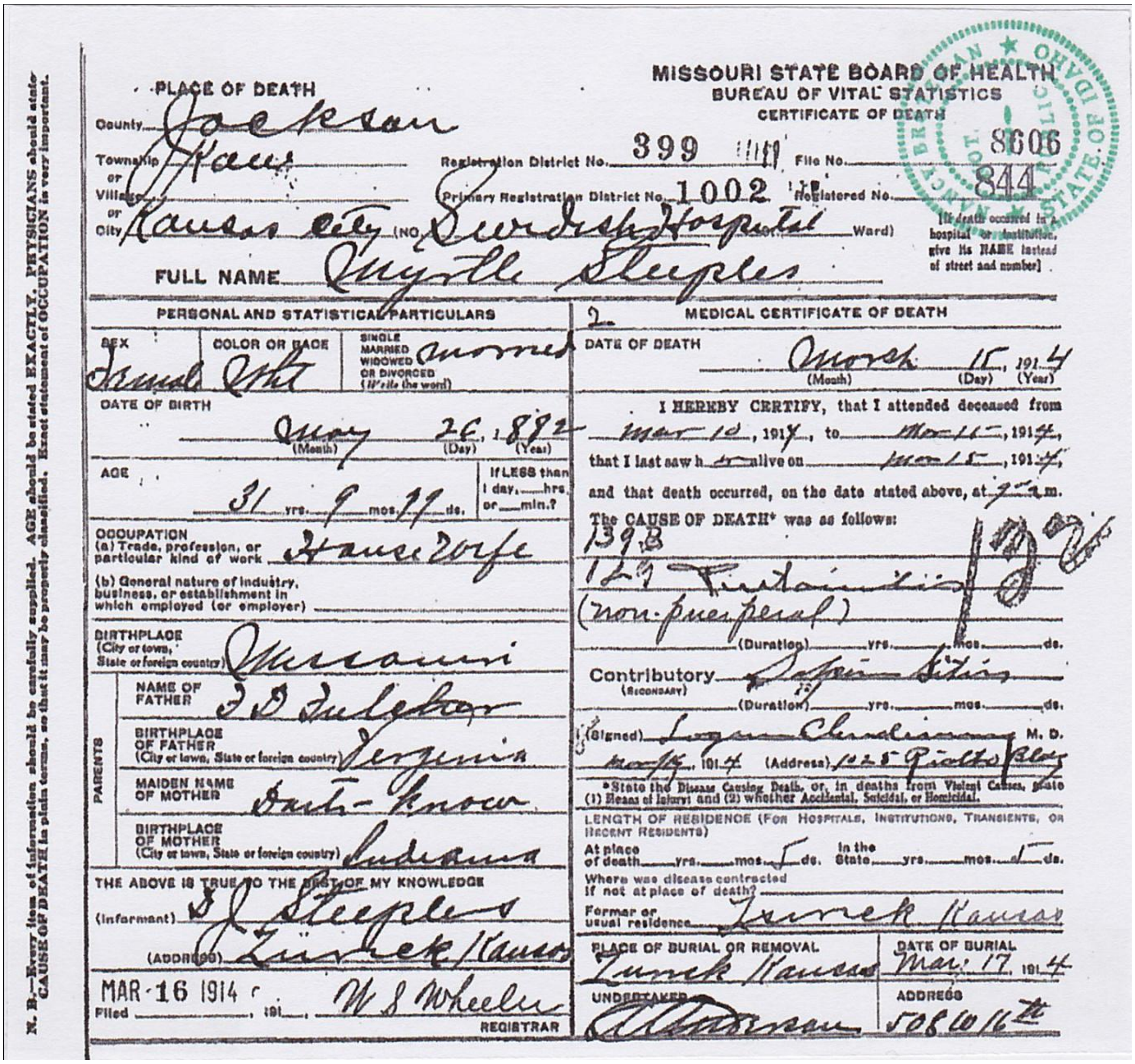
David James and Myrtle Fulcher Steeples, 1912



Dave stayed with Myrtle through her last night, mixing hope with despair. While waiting, he wrote his children a heart-rending letter:

> Dear ones at home.
>
> I cannot give you any encouraging news about Mamma. Her temperature is 103 again and her pulse is 130. The Doctor was here a few minutes ago and he said that she had a lung complication now something like lung fever and I am very much afraid that it will take our dear Mamma from us. She is very weak now and can't stand much more or this. I am very lonesome without my babies. But I can't leave Mamma now. I had to stay with her all night last night. She was awful sick last night and didn't want me to leave her. Poor Mamma can't hardly talk to me any more. She is so weak she told me this morning for you children to do nothing that she didn't want you to do and you would be alright. I wish we could all be together once again and all be well. We have all been so happy that it almost breaks my heart to think that we may never all be together alive again.
>
> I want all of you to do just as Grandma [Steeples-Burns] says and I may bring Mamma back alright yet.
>
> Take good care of baby [Freda] and bug [Olive]. I would like to put my arms around all and give you a kiss.
>
> It seems that I am all alone in my sorrow here because the world moves on just the same as if Mamma was alright but it don't look very bright for me. I will close with love and kisses to each of my darlings at home.
>
> Papa

Copy of Myrtle's (Grandma Steeples)' Death Certificate
March 15, 1914



N. B.—Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should state CAUSE OF DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important.

MISSOURI STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

PLACE OF DEATH
County Jackson
Township or Village Kaw
or City Kansas City (No. Swedish Hospital Ward)
Registration District No. 399 File No. 8606
Primary Registration District No. 1002 Registered No. 844
[If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number]

FULL NAME Myrtle Steeples

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

SEX Female
COLOR OR RACE White
SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED (Write the word) married
DATE OF BIRTH May 26, 1882 (Month) (Day) (Year)
AGE 31 yrs. 9 mos. 17 ds. If LESS than 1 day, ___hrs. or ___min.?
OCCUPATION (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work House Wife
(b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer)
BIRTHPLACE (City or town, State or foreign country) Missouri
PARENTS
NAME OF FATHER J. D. Sulphur
BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (City or town, State or foreign country) Virginia
MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Don't Know
BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (City or town, State or foreign country) Indiana

THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE
(Informant) S J Steeples
(ADDRESS) Zurich Kansas

Filed MAR-16 1914, 191__, W S Wheeler REGISTRAR

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

DATE OF DEATH March 15, 1914 (Month) (Day) (Year)

I HEREBY CERTIFY, that I attended deceased from Mar 10, 1914, to Mar 15, 1914, that I last saw her alive on Mar 15, 1914, and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at 9 a.m.

The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows:
139B
129 Peritonitis
(non-puerperal)
(Duration) ___yrs. ___mos. ___ds.
Contributory (SECONDARY) Salpingitis
(Duration) ___yrs. ___mos. ___ds.
(Signed) Logan Clendening M. D.
Mar 15, 1914 (Address) 1025 Rialto Bldg

*State the Disease Causing Death, or, in deaths from Violent Causes, state (1) Means of Injury; and (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal, or Homicidal.

LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (FOR HOSPITALS, INSTITUTIONS, TRANSIENTS, OR RECENT RESIDENTS)
At place of death ___yrs. ___mos. 5 ds. In the State ___yrs. ___mos. 5 ds.
Where was disease contracted if not at place of death?
Former or usual residence Zurich Kansas
PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL Zurich Kansas
DATE OF BURIAL Mar. 17, 1914
UNDERTAKER Stevenson
ADDRESS 508 W 16th

The death certificate, signed that date, cited as the CAUSE of Death "Peritonitis (non puerperal)" and added a nearly undecipherable CONTRIBUTARY Cause "dropsy [edema] situs."

It was a bereft, but determined, father who accompanied his wife's remains back home for burial at the growing Steeples section of Pleasant View Cemetery. D.J's. devotion to her, and his grief at her loss, were so great that he never considered the common, practical course of remarriage. Nor did he follow the advice of neighbors that he "put the little girls up for adoption [to receive upbringings proper for their sex] . . . ." He said, "No, I've lost one of my family but I am going to keep the rest of them if I can. . . ." Confidence that God would in His appointed time reunite D.J. and Myrtle became the rock on which he stood for the rest of his life. Not even that confidence did much to assuage his grief, though. As far as we can tell, he never ceased mourning her loss. Still, the main reason, according to Jean Steeples Webb, that he never remarried was stepfather Sam Burns' mistreatment of Dave and Nell. He would do all possible to avoid the risk that through remarriage his own children might end up with a stepmother as mean as Burns had been to him and Nell as a stepfather.

Fortunately, Grandma (Steeples) Burns, Jemima Morrison Meade, and neighbors offered as much help as they could. Although she was but thirteen and a half years old and in the eighth grade when Myrtle died, the task of being a surrogate mother fell on Edith. She wanted to go on to high school, but had to settle for an eighth grade completion certificate. D.J., for his part, always followed the rule his mother had taught him when he was a boy, about gender roles. "Girls were made to serve men and boys . . . " Given as much, his daughters all accurately saw their father as a person who favored his sons. Grandma Burns, if partial to sons, was an

important role model for her granddaughters, of a refined woman, skilled homemaker, and caring mother.

D.J. seems to have been unaware that his decision not to remarry placed a heavy burden on his young ones. They were denied the motherly love that had gentled him and led him to refer to himself as "Papa." To the other measures noted above, he added prayers for divine guidance. And, as long as most of the children were young and at times unruly, he was a strict disciplinarian "of necessity with eight kids to ride herd on all by himself. We learned early in life," wrote Olive, "who was in charge and never forgot it. He mellowed a lot as we got older and had a very good sense of humor." Only after establishing clearly who set the boundaries, and the children had matured to some degree, did he ease up. Even then, he expressed little affection.

Mildred, her memory now becoming confused, told me at a Christmas Eve party in 1987 in Tanya and Bob Stormes' home that "Dad" twice surrendered to rage. First, after a horse kicked one of the children, he kicked it for three hours. Second, she added, he once gave Wayne such a beating for misconduct that Wallace asked him to stop lest he kill his son. Mildred's current mental state, the high regard that Rooks County folk (and, his children I learned after reaching adulthood) granted Granddad, leave it to readers to decide for themselves what to think of this matter.

Chapter 5

Plowing Through an Agricultural Revolution

THE TRAGEDY of losing Myrtle began yet another chapter of D.J's. life. She was only thirty-two when she died, and he but forty-one. He faced the challenge of raising eight children aged from Edith, at thirteen and a half, to Baby Freda and Bug Olive, respectively one and a half and three and a half years old. He must also ensure that his general, mixed farm with its varied crops (Kaffir corn, Milo, native grass, field corn, sorghum, oats and barley for feed, wheat to sell, potatoes and carrots to cellar for winter, with home-grown and canned and dried foods, milk cows, horses, swine, beef cattle and sheep) was as self-sufficient as possible. The wheat crop was his major source of cash. He also sold wool, a few cattle and pigs. When there were spare butter, eggs and the like he also sold those. His cash income he saved, spending only on items he could not produce and major purchases. Already, by 1898, he had experienced two major business depressions, a recession in the mid 1880s, unnerving and ravenous swarms of locusts, weakening

wheat prices and episodes of severe drought and bitter winters. He had noted well by 1914 that any or all of these, especially when coupled with over-borrowing to get established, had ruined many settlers.

Wheat and corn brought dismal prices for most of the period 1867-1947. Wheat bettered its 91.4-cent 1883 level only in 1915 at 96.1 cents and reached $1.43 in 1916 as the Great War blighted farming in Europe. After besting $2.00, 1917-1920, recovering overseas farming and domestic harvests growing faster than population drove it down again. The Great Depression of the 1930s pushed it into an abyss. Allied and home needs for food and materiél finally brought improvement to $1.10 in 1942 and reliably around $2.00 or more by the 1950s. Underlying all, a persistent tendency: from 1867 to 1900 the harvest tripled from 210 to 599 million bushels. Population did not quite double. Given higher equipment and operating costs, the price improvement by the 1950s was little enough.

Through the nineteenth century and up to around 1940 changes in farming that had begun about 1700 in England made successful settlement on the plains possible. They were so sweeping as to be a revolution that climaxed during D.J's. lifetime. Even so, given his wariness of excess, he probably would have rejected the word as too immodest. Because he left little evidence of the changes he made in his way of farming, we must infer his actions from what Kansas wheat farmers in general were doing.

The experiments of Englishman Jethro Tull (1671-1741) and his resulting book, *The Horse-Hoeing Husbandry* (1732) began the agricultural revolution. Born in Basildon, Essex, after a brief stay at Oxford and travels on the Continent he returned home. He lived,

experimented and died there and was interred in the local cemetery. His work centered on improving strains of sainfoin (a legume native to Eurasia used especially as forage for work horses). He developed a seed drill in 1701. It replaced sowing by hand-broadcasting seed with use of a horse-drawn row of pipes set at furrow intervals on a cross beam and designed to release seeds at measured intervals. He advocated using horses, instead of slower oxen, invented a horse-drawn hoe to clear weeds and modified the plow to ease weeding of planted fields. Not long after his death, Thomas Jefferson in 1784 applied algebra to design the "least resistance" plow to date. An iron tip (share) on a wooden mouldboard curved through use of algebraic equations slid more easily through the soil than any predecessor. It was particularly useful for running along hillsides. In 1822, South Carolinian Edmund Ruffin added his *Essay on Calcareous Soils*, showing how the use of lime could improve crop yields.

Novel conditions on the American plains gradually but necessarily transformed farming methods. Successful farming there demanded new crops, implements and ways. Like his peers, then, D.J. had constantly to be on the watch for means of improving his own operation. He was not a person to leap upon the first train to leave the station. In the language of computer technology he was not a "first" or "leading" adopter. He needed to observe results for a time, to be sure that any changes in growing and harvesting crops would work. And that he could afford them.

There was much to consider. D.J's. task was easier than it might have been because he worked through changes with his step-father as he grew up. Both of them, then, participated in a process that made plains agriculture distinctive. After reaching maturity, information from

neighbors and others sources became crucial. Likewise, the regional look of humankind's impact there differed from those elsewhere. Neighbors' and his success in embracing the right methods at the right time help us discover what sort of man he was. To ease understanding and preserve brevity, discussion below will be organized by topics.

We treated weather (and to a degree climate) earlier. Geography and prevailing winds resulted in low precipitation east of mountains close to the Pacific, and then the Rockies. Moisture-laden westerly winds cooled and their water content condensed and fell as they lofted over the heights. What was left, increased east of the Rocky Mountains by summer monsoons from the Gulf of Mexico, reached the plains. This was not enough to sustain the sort of farming practiced in Europe and eastern North America for centuries. Most western streams flowed heavily, if at all, only during the spring snowmelt or occasional local thunderstorms.

Not until John Wesley Powell's 1878 *Report* were these conditions explained. It took a hundred years for them to win broad acceptance . . . over the furious objections of would-be land speculators and railroad immigration agents. If mountain runoff were to be available for irrigation, Powell wrote, it must be stored in high reservoirs and led through impermeable ditches to fields. Otherwise, as it flowed to the plains, it would evaporate or sink into sandy ground. Too, there was only enough free-flowing water to irrigate half of the fertile area of the smallest of the seventeen western states. As we saw above, opponents blocked acceptance of Powell's ideas. Impermeable surface rock near the surface of the high plains concealed an immense reservoir of water, stored in a lower, permeable formation. It stretched from the Texas Panhandle through the Dakotas. This Oglalla Aduifer (except where it emerged as artesian springs) was unavailable for

farming before the advent of late twentieth century technology.

Windmills, used in Europe for centuries to drain lowlands, won wide use to raise water to the surface in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and the Dakotas, but only for domestic, gardening and stock watering use. H.B. Wade's United States Wind Engine and Pump Company began manufacturing them in their modern form in Batavia, Illinois, in 1869. They replaced the ancient technology of masonry towers with revolving sails with steel frames, a wind vane, and a bladed, governor controlled wheel to drive the pump. Henry J. Barber's Fairbanks, More & Company of Beloit, Wisconsin, also shared briefly in the windmill's story. Tellingly, thirty of the country's thirty-one windmill producers operated "along the edge of the prairie and Plains country" in 1919. Even so, with water tables often more than one hundred feet or more down and well drilling costs of $1.25 to $2.00 a foot, limited drilling for water until 1950 or after. Then, new technology allowed expanding reliance on the Oglalla Aquifer, "mining" stored glacial water more rapidly than the aquifer could be recharged. This conduct, over the longer term, could bring the dustbowl back.

Scant water output from windmills and low stream flow and precipitation moved plains farmers to try all sorts of ways to get water. They went to heroic lengths during droughts. Prayer meetings. Exploding dynamite to shake rain from the clouds. Firing cannon shells into them to blast rain loose. Lofting particulate chemicals around which drops might condense and fall. Even sillier things. D.J. spurned foolish efforts to obtain water. But he exploited windmills fully (see below).

Turning to new crops was one crucial step in solving the problem of how to prosper in

farming on the semi-arid plains. Another, which originated in the ancient Near East, found its untiring publicist in Nebraskan Hardy W. Campbell, in the 1890s. It worked where precipitation was as low as ten to fourteen inches a year. It required cropping fields in alternate years and fallowing them in summers and often likewise biennially. While fallow, the soil's surface must be tilled within forty-eight hours of a rainfall. This formed a carpet layer (or mulch) of pulverized, dry surface earth. The mulch prevented the sun from drawing water through capillary action to the open air to evaporate. A summer's (in some places up to two years') storage of water in the earth would make the topsoil itself a reservoir. Just as ranchers had learned after the calamitous winter of 1887 that they must fence off feed-growing areas and pastures, so that they could be rotated rather than overgrazed, farmers must fence fields to separate cropping, fallowing, and pasturing. Steeples met this new approach, called "dry" or "dry land" farming cautiously, lagging behind many others.

Dry farming required more land per farm than other kinds of tillage. In lending fencing new importance, it stimulated a new industry. In 1873, J.J. Glidden in De Kalb, Illinois, invented an inexpensive fencing material, barbed wire. He soon sold a half interest to Washburn & Moen, which U.S. Steel later acquired. Production remained in De Kalb, though, close to the most active markets.

The plains imposed still other obstacles to farming profitably. One was how most efficiently to prepare the land, plant, weed, reap, and separate crops from chaff. New rail transport solved the problem of getting produce to market, making for a strong incentive to do these other things.

Plowing Through an Agricultural Revolution

The third need for successful plains agriculture turned out to be to develop and use new machines and power sources. These were essential to improve efficiency and permit working large properties, to cover costs associated with new implements and coax adequate harvests from a semi-arid land. Perhaps more important, the only weapon a farmer had to counter falling cash crop prices was to increase cash crop output. There was a huge problem here: growing output pushed prices down. Millions of individual farmers were competing to sell to relatively few large buyers. Since they were so many and could not unite to control production, and thus prices, they were at buyers' mercy. They were caught in a vicious cycle. Technological progress cut in two directions. It boosted harvests, which plains farmers needed to survive. But it depressed crop prices, which threatened them.

The first step in farming, tilling the soil, was problematic through most of the nineteenth century. Fortunately, innovations gradually began to ease plowing. Early in the century, Jefferson's design gave way to iron shares and mouldboards. By 1840, John Deere was manufacturing chilled steel plows, which further eased turning over furrows. Sulky, or riding, plows were available in 1861. A wary Steeples apparently shared, borrowed, or bought one only after doing so was prudent beyond a doubt. They became common in the 1890s; he began using them much later. A double-teamed sulky plow could break two, rather than one-half acre, of previously untilled sod in a day.

Lister plows ("go-devils") came into wide use before the 1900. They had two mouldboards and shares, joined in a "V" at the front so as to turn earth out on each side and make a complete furrow. Teams of one or two horses could pull a single go-devil, driver walking

behind and steering. Double go-devils with teams of two to four horses could open two furrows about forty-two to forty-four inches apart, just right for field corn. A sulky double go-devil could turn up to six acres a day. Adding pipes equipped to drop seeds at measured intervals united plows with seed drills.

Variants came quickly into use for other row crops, as did riding versions. In 1900, the evolution of the plow to its modern form was complete. The peg-toothed harrow (a horse-drawn device with a row of vertical steel pegs attached to a crossbar) that pulverized broken soil and could uproot weeds between planted furrows) arrived in 1868 and was common within twenty years. By 1900, disk plows, invented separately in Australia and California, were on the scene. Large machines with sixteen or more disks, adjustable for both plowing and harrowing, arrived in the 1930s.

A cautious D.J. embraced these innovations slowly. Olive reminisced many years later that in his "conservation efforts" he "rotated crops." He delayed combining drills with go-devils. His drills, Olive recalled, were "pulled by one horse. We were supposed to walk behind the drill and plant the next year's wheat crop. I remember walking some but due to many sand burs, cockleburs etc the cross bar on the drill was a good place to stand and ride." She added that when she was "probably about fourteen [ca. 1924] . . . Dad thought I could handle a four horse team and cultivate corn. What a mistake that was!" Wayne, then "about twenty-two [actually eighteen]" was driving a second team along side of her. She was "merely holding the lines" on her team, which "knew . . . [she] couldn't handle them." Wayne traded off with her, trying to teach her to manage teams. They "behave[d] beautifully" as long as he was in control. But as soon as she

took over, her team were “right back in the corn row eating corn”.

The crucial fact here is that D.J. was still using one horse- or two horse-drawn drills to plant wheat and field corn. There was no sulky drill or harrow: the driver was still supposed to walk. There were at least eight horses on the farm to provide motive power. While Olive was correct in referring to crop rotation as a method of conservation, planting winter wheat between ripening rows of corn was mixed cropping, not rotation or conservation. Nowhere, by the way, did she mention summer fallowing, a core element of dry land farming. D.J. ridiculed terracing and contour plowing as silly when Wallace adopted them in the 1950s. Nor did Olive mention nitrogen-fixing legumes as natural fertilizers. D.J. had good reasons to use horses. His were huge, probably Percheron mares, could reproduce, were very powerful and could be “fueled” from his crops.

The final steps in producing crops of wheat or field corn involved cutting them and threshing grains of wheat from chaff and ears of corn from stalks, then seed from cobs. For centuries farmers used hand tools—sickles, then in the 1800s cradles—to cut wheat. Tying it in shocks and then flailing it to separate the grains followed. This technology limited a man to a crop of 7.5 acres, the amount he could harvest in a season. Field corn underwent similar hand processes, with shucking cobs taking the place of shocking wheat. In 1831 Cyrus McCormick, after his father had failed in twenty years of attempts, fabricated a horse-drawn reaping (wheat cutting) machine. Cheap labor and the doubtful reliability of the strange-looking contraption severely hindered its sales in McCormick’s native Shenandoah Valley. Then, anticipating the future expansion of row crop farming on the prairie plains and the Great Plains, he in 1847 made a

momentous decision.

Foreseeing that Chicago's advantageous location would make it the center of things agri-cultural in America, he moved to that city and built a factory. Replacing hand fabrication, he became an early champion of advertising, steadily improved his reapers, and introduced field-testing and installment payments. By the time settlers were farming the prairies and entering the plains, his reapers had virtually all of the components of modern reapers. Scots engineer Andrew Meikle had as early as 1784 devised threshing machines, which in the mid-nineteenth century became geared to horse-drawn reapers. Harnessed teams drew the machines, which contained reels to lay stalks down over reciprocating knives for cutting, main wheels, gearings and dividers to operate other components. Another set of knives headed the stalks, then moving belts took the heads to concaves containing rapidly spinning pegs. These mechanical threshers separated grain from chaff, screened it by size, and fed it to men standing on a platform to sew it into burlap bags. They had time to take just two or three stitches. Fans blew straw through pipes at the rear, so that it could be machine-raked and bound with twine into bales.

Mechanical reapers were the focal devices in the industrialization of farming. By the late nineteenth century, McCormick's factory was producing thousands of reapers yearly. The while, California mechanics had designed a machine that combined a header (another knife, to separate wheat heads from straw) with a thresher and a hay baler . . . a combine. Holt and Rice of Stockton, California, introduced and sold several of these in 1877-1878. Only "bonanza farmers" could afford them. They required teams of sixteen to twenty horses, cut eighteen-foot swaths at two and a half to three miles per hour, and could reap thirty-five to forty acres a day. In 1900,

McCormick's company joined John Deere's to form International Harvester.

As early as 1825-1840, mowers and hay rakes entered use. Shortly, in 1842, Buffalo, New Yorkers built the first modern grain elevator. Fred Hatch of Spring Grove, McHenry County, just north of Chicago, followed with the first modern silo for crop storage in 1873. Boxlike, it stored harvested grain above ground instead of in trenches where moisture and vermin could take a heavy toll. Most corn and hog growers still relied on slat-sided cribs as late as 1970.

Massey-Ferguson, meanwhile, introduced steam-powered tractors on the Iowa prairie by 1868. Clumsy, unwieldy and unpredictable, they never caught on. Neither did the company's two-cylinder internal combustion powered vehicles. In contrast, the Ford Motor Company's Fordson Tractors became so popular that they were in almost universal use on the prairie plains and the Great Plains by the 1930s. Yet it was not until 1954 that the number of tractors on American farms passed that of horses. Interestingly, by 1938 a cautious Steeples was driving a Deere tractor with lugged wheels. In 1941, he maneuvered through federal war paperwork and bought a new tractor.

These inventions and innovations, occurring mostly between1832 and 1900 or so, did not take the western farming country by storm. They became predominant in use slowly. It was no accident that factories producing them were at the edge of or on the plains, where they held a unique regional importance. Their arrival posed one decision after another for farmers. Should one, any, or many of them be adopted? When had one proven itself? How did cost balance out with earnings? Steeples' cautious timing may well have been typical of that of many of his peers.

We do know that by the early twentieth century he was using a simple version of a

horse-drawn reaper/header. One is shown, with a team of horses and a crew of three or four men, in an undated photograph below. It shows a reaper like those described above. From what we can see, it is a good guess that D.J. either shared harvest work with neighbors or hired a few men to help with it.

D.J. Steeples and Harvest Crew Cutting Wheat. Undated (Ca. 1900?)
Note Header, Grain Conveyor to Grain Bin at Side, Horses in Front, Rear

After her husband Clyde died, in 1938, Olive Steeples Nutsch and her daughter Ruth Marie moved back in with D.J. They dwelled there until Olive married James Scott Herron, in 1947. D.J. had not abandoned using horses that late. By then Ruth was ten years old and had lived with Granddad for nine of them. The record of her experiences with him is unmatched.

D.J's. home was becoming a place of refuge by the late 1940s. Discussion below will treat further changes in his domestic arrangements. These involved Wallace and Marie and their younger children, and later Edith. She was trapped in a very bad marriage at a time when divorce was all but unthinkable. The first of the three children, Lennice, that she bore for husband Harry

Whisman, on August 12, 1923, had only a stump for a left foot and a thumb and forefinger for a left hand. "Harry claimed, as was [a] common [belief] then, that it [the birth anomalies] was because of Aunt Edith's sin. He would have nothing to do with Lenice [sic]," D.J's. first grandchild. Our cousin Lois Settles added, "Aunt Edith took tin cans and made a hole in them, put a sock on the stump, and Lenice [sic] learned to walk with a tin can on the stump." Eventually Kansas' crippled children's services provided assistance for her. Harry allowed Edith no money. Once, after D.J. had given her some chickens so that she could sell eggs to earn some money of her own, he stomped on and ruined a week's worth of eggs. Sons George and David often appeared in school with bruises from strappings. The story is that none of his family escaped Harry's mean ways. Still, Edith did not leave him until she took on a new family role in 1950. He died on May 20, 1953, a month after D.J.

We read earlier of Steeples' careful business practices and his record-keeping in his day books. He never had much spare cash but knew how to stretch money to its limits. If cautious about buying new implements and ways, it is also true that he really *liked* working with horses. He knew, too, that his children, then his grandchildren, enjoyed riding and working with them. More important, eliminating horses would entail choosing another cash crop to replace the oats that helped feed them, and payment for new machines and fuel. His children held many fond memories of the horses. This was hardly true of the dirty, hand-cutting jobs of shucking corn and stacking bales of hay, then having to walk to school dirty and unkempt. Some of the youngsters knew that corn-shucking machines and binders had been available respectively since 1890 and 1892, too.

Plowing Through an Agricultural Revolution

As low prices buffeted prairies and plains farmers between 1921 and 1939, vegetable oils began to replace lard. Serious work at hybridizing lines of corn, canola, sunflower, soy, and other oil-yielding seeds was in progress. About the same time, breeders were working to make pigs leaner and meatier, and to improve strains of cattle. All of these efforts weakened the rendering industry.

In 1926, Congress passed the U.S. Highway Act, funneling federal financial assistance to states to create a paved interstate highway system. To win U.S. funds states had to contribute a specified share of highway construction costs. It took a special session of the state legislature, after the U.S. withheld a $2,000,000 subsidy, to change Kansas' constitution to allow funding for internal improvements. When solons finally acted, in 1929, Kansas alone had no statewide road network.

The 1926 highway act turned out to combine great advances with a classic example of un-intended consequences. It enabled more Americans to travel more often and farther than ever before. The greatest number rode in the Model A Ford, introduced in 1928. (The Model T, or "Tin Lizzy," had sold in the millions after its appearance in 1908.) Previously, reliance on horse-drawn vehicles had confined routine shopping and the conduct of business in rural areas to round trips to town of no more than a day. Since there was before the 1930s no rural free postal delivery, local newspapers drew on wire services for news at large and filled their columns mainly with items of local interest only. Conditions limited the mental horizons of rural folk. World-wide, even national, affairs received little notice in small, isolated communities. These circumstances together granted little, rural towns on the plains a uniquely inward-looking political, commercial

and social outlook.

A spreading web of highways sped commerce and tied the nation more tightly together. It eased travel and opened overland trade routes, broadening commercial and physical horizons. Booms in the movie and radio industries did likewise. They brought entertainment and the world into town and home. Farm folk and residents of even tiny hamlets benefitted from a new ability to drive to larger towns and even cities. There, broader choices of goods and services and greater price competition greeted them. Trucks were much more flexible in moving freight than railroads, with their fixed routes and schedules. Growers could sell crops to elevators beyond the immediate area, seeking out the best prices from competing purchasers, warehousers, and shippers farther away.

Good as they were, these and other changes also brought unforeseen negative consequences, too. Railroads began their long decline as our major means of moving goods and people. More shopping in larger communities weakened businesses in smaller places. Ease of access to larger centers with competing elevators eroded the position of small town rivals that had previously enjoyed local monopolies because of difficulty of shipment. Capital needs for opening and operating implement dealerships and many other lines of trade far exceeded local resources and likely returns.

A way of life began to fade as Kansans abandoned up to two thousand town sites by mid-century.

Consequently, the physical *look* of the plains changed. To this point, distinctive visual features clearly bounded them. They were still a natural grassland, rising gently as one traveled

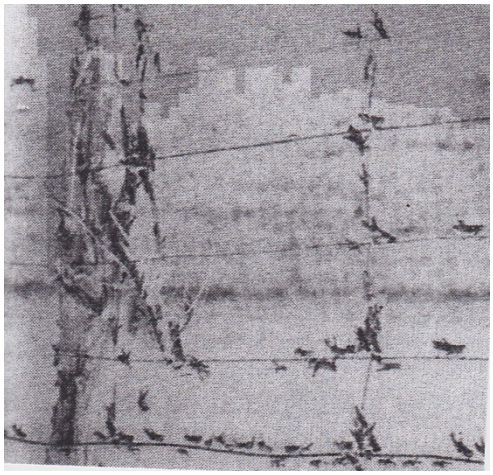
westward. But oats and barley were much less evident as crops. Hard winter wheat, sorghums, alfalfa and cattle were increasingly prevalent. Barbed wire fences remained noteworthy. Electrical water pumps began to displace windmills in the 1960s. These time-tested machines began to fall into disrepair, until their leaning ruins fell to the ground. Local elevators, once towering about every dozen miles as sentinels guarding railroad sidings and small towns were in the 1960s becoming less common. The closure of a local elevator often brought that of an adjacent flour mill. Jobs and people drifted away. A fall in the number of farms, with depopulation of the countryside, heightened a look of emptiness. Visible but uneven decline began in the Great Depression of the 1930s. War and prosperity in the '50s brought a temporary improvement, but conditions worsened afterward.

The expansion of western plains farming, mostly of wheat, during World War I, left huge newly-plowed areas vulnerable where rainfall was too little. In the early 'thirties, a cycle that replicated one of five hundred years earlier blistered the southwestern plains. Sporadic dust storms began in 1932 and 1933. In 1934, they became catastrophic. Hundred-degree or higher temperatures baked western Nebraska, Kansas, and especially southeast Colorado and the Oklahoma panhandle. Seeds failed to germinate. Tender new shoots withered. Dust caked cattles' eyes shut. Unable to see, many starved or died of thirst. Ceaseless winds picked up particles of recently planted fields and carried them vast distances. One dust cloud, on May 9 and 10, 1934, was 1,500 miles long, 900 wide, more than 10,000 feet high and covered a third of the country. Crews three hundred miles at sea had to sweep their ships' decks daily. Dusters crossed the Sahara and even reached Europe.

Locusts, Drought, Dust and Desperation
Down "Main Street, U.S.A." to the Golden State

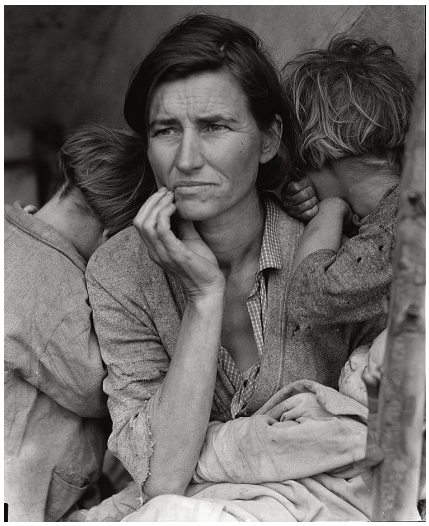
Into the Storm

"Black Sunday", April 14, 1935, Dodge City, KS

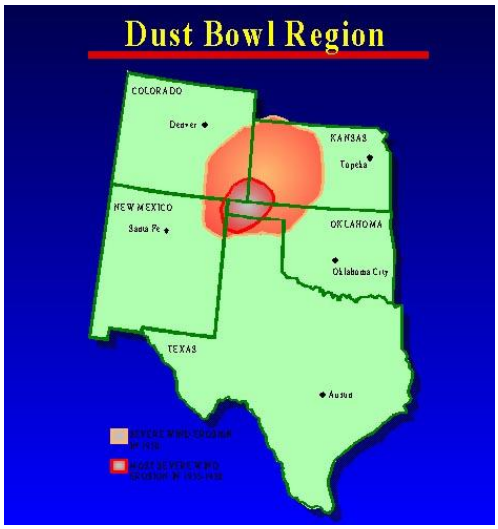


Locusts Eating Wooden Fenceposts

Dusted Out



No Hope



Ground Zero

Flying dirt in the most-affected areas darkened the sky and reduced visibility as much as the fiercest blizzards. Blackened skies confused chickens into roosting long before nightfall. People stuffed wet rags, newspapers, towels and the like under doors and in window frames in fruitless efforts to hold the dust at bay. Dust buried fences, trucks, and even caved in house roofs.

The nadir came in 1935, when Kansas weather bureaus alone counted nineteen dust storms. Records show that by "24 March, southeastern Colorado and western Kansas had seen twelve consecutive days of dust storms, but there was worse to come. Near the end of March a new duster swept across the southern plains, destroying one-half of the wheat crop in Kansas, one-quarter of it in Oklahoma and all of it in Nebraska—5 million acres blown out."

On the twenty-seventh began the deadliest series of blows ever. They climaxed on Black Sunday, April 14. The day dawned rosy and bright. "Suddenly there appeared on the northern horizon a black blizzard, birds and animals fleeing before it . . . [The temperature plummeted fifty degrees in a few hours.] It became pitch black, so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your eyes." One woman later recalled that her husband "had to crawl home a half mile in the bar ditch . . . and got dust pneumonia afterwards." Some people died. On March 30, as this series of storms was blasting the plains, D.J's. grandson, Douglas, was born in Great Bend, Kansas. Fortunately, they finally subsided, until they were gone after 1938.

How did sixty-two year old D.J. fare against this natural onslaught? Better, by far, than many, if not most. Part of his relatively good fortune was the result of geography. His farm lay at the northeastern edge of the area that a lethal combination of winds, drought and ill-placed cultivation subjected to dusters. Too, while he was by no means wealthy, care had left him with

sufficient funds to get by. He bought only what he could afford and nothing that he could not. His purchases in 1924 and 1937 of three quarters of Section 22 of the township, just east of Palco, were prescient. The parcel held good level land for tillage, a well-watered hollow sheltered from the wind and some pasturage. In 1926, he moved into the house that the previous owner of the former purchase had built, along with a barn and a chicken coop. Always eager to own what he needed to prosper, he did not wait long to add a shop, pens, and other necessities. Only teenagers Olive and Freda moved with him. He had also noted carefully the directions of prevailing winds and incoming storms. His house was in the hollow. He tilled only the lee sides of hills, leaving windward sides in grass so that soil would not blow away. These actions protected his lands. Far from acting recklessly in an area where farming was often a form of gambling, he had watched his cards closely and played them carefully.

Recurring droughts, interludes of lethally low prices and other disasters led plains farmers time and again to cry out for public relief. Nebraska's legislature granted it first in 1868, a year after receipt of statehood. There and elsewhere on the plains state relief appropriations, for rations, seed, or both, were frequent as the nineteenth century neared its end. Prevailing public opinion (save for People's Party sympathizers) put relief from the federal government off limits. Still, by the twentieth century, conditions in much of rural western America demanded a national response.

We need note here only a few measures to illustrate the beginnings of federal action to assist farmers. While others faced challenges, plains wheat, corn, and southern cotton growers were most at risk. Their troubles were known collectively as "the farm problem," which some

classes of growers felt slightly, if at all. The 1914 Smith-Lever Act created a federal-state partnership to found and fund a Cooperative Extension Service through expanded programs in land-grant universities. Placed in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it acted through county extension agents. It expanded research to improve crops and farming methods. It offered instruction in areas of youth and 4-H, the environment, community economic development, home and family, and agriculture and food. During the Great Depression, agents taught farmers about marketing and encouraged creation of marketing and buying cooperatives. Wives received lessons about good nutrition, food preservation, home gardening and so on. In World War II, in 1944, the highly popular Victory Garden initiative increased vegetable output for domestic consumption by 40 percent over that of 1939. Meanwhile, a stream of publications advised farmers on all aspects of their businesses. They also received daily market and weather reports. Research experiment stations, such as that at Hays, Kansas, were one major element of the extension service's work.

In the 1930s, depression forced many farms into sheriffs' foreclosure sales. Angry agrarians in several plains and southern states struck or forcibly interfered with sales. Conditions prompted our largest internal migration ever, 2.5 million people within a half dozen years, and the failure of at least 200,000 farms. Most migrants abandoned devastated marginal plains wheat farms or were southern sharecroppers whom machines replaced. The exodus generally was toward a land rumored to contain abundant work: the Golden State, California. Hordes of jalopies of every description, filled with undernourished and unkempt children, haggard and dirty adults and their meager possessions, took to the road. The most popular route was "Main Street,

U.S.A.," U.S. Route 66, "All the way from Chicago to L.A. [really Santa Monica]." If ever the U.S. lived through a tragic era when the "grapes of wrath" were a major crop, the depressed 1930s were that period.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal" tried variously to relieve needy farmers. The Supreme Court in 1936 (*U.S. v. Butler*, 297 U.S., 1) struck down the Agricultural Adjustment Act (A.A.A.) of the previous year. It would have granted farmers prices for certain major crops set at a fixed percentage of parity with the purchasing power of dollar prices of the base period of 1909-1914, if they contracted with the government to limit production. Other actions followed, treating farm mortgages, crop loans, rural electrification and creation of a Soil Conservation Service to reduce erosion. On February 29, 1936, F.D.R. approved the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act to replace the invalidated A.A.A. Rather than supporting crop prices through contractual restrictions of crop output, it paid price insurance to growers who voluntarily participated through county land associations. Payments were for land leased from the associations to the government, to withdraw from production specified "soil-depleting" crops and devote the land, instead, to earth-conserving crops and uses, including fallowing. Other initiatives (contour plowing, terracing, and so on) gave farmers further relief.

D.J., given his temperament and political leanings, probably greeted the A.A.A. with skepticism if not outright hostility. Imposed contractual limits on farm output violated individual rights. He also was not likely to have approved killing six million little pigs and destruction of huge surpluses of staple crops to firm up prices. The waste involved, when city folk were searching in garbage cans for food, was deplorable. Turning from coercive contracts to

"insurance," meaning that the government bought surplus harvests to prop up prices was scarcely more palatable. "Benefits," including incentives for planting (wind) shelter belts of trees and replacing stubble-burning with plowing stubble under might have seemed more attractive. Or not, since these were other ways to limit personal freedom, and possibly even to let the camel's nose of socialism in under the edge of the tent of individual responsibility. At best, I imagine, an aging D.J. might have left ideology out of the conversation and accepted the Soil Conservation Act as necessary on practical grounds only.

In any case, it was during the 'thirties that D.J's. prudence paid off. A depression survivor, he followed his well-established, proven routines to avoid going under. Granddaughter Lois related how her sister, Jean Webb, summed the situation up:

> Remember, they had a huge garden. Aunt Alveda and Aunt Olive (after Clyde died) lived with him and they canned for the winter. Grandpa was very frugal and when others were moving to California to get away from the dust, selling their farms, he was buying. I don't know what property he had or whether he sold off some of it, but I am sure it would be in Rooks Co. records [the records are in fact incomplete; his land was all in North Hampton Township]. The story was he had a full section for each child. I do not know if that is true but that is a LOT of land. Dad (Wallace) bought the land we lived on from the estate and I believe Chester bought all the rest of it. [All] of the profit from that was split 8 ways. In other words, his Scottish nature kept him not only above ground, but he was in good financial shape. Consider he had his kids working for him at no cost in many years

> . . . [sic] the profit was banked, [he] bought property and he was not hurting. He made no improvements on the house. He tore down the dilapidated [sic] barn and built another and he build [sic] a new shop. All that before we moved there [1948, on Section 22]. Chester's son, Duane Steeples said that he and George Whisman mixed the cement and poured all the floor of the shop. It was quite large. It took them several days. [Jean and Lois later clarified D.J 's. goal regarding land ownership. He actually appears to have wanted only one quarter per child. See next chapter.]

Having met D.J. Steeples chiefly through reference to events typical of farmers' experiences in his region and time, we can now move on to firmer ground. His children and Ruth held, and several recorded, vivid memories. We should probably begin with Edith, his eldest daughter. She was old enough when Myrtle died to have learned much and become a good observer of family history. She had learned, too, what her grandmother Mary Ann Burns, Jemima Morrison Meade (Mary Ann's niece) and friends could recall. As Myrtle's surrogate, she came to know D.J. better and more fully than her siblings. She also owned a sharp memory, skill as a writer, a keen mind and a well-developed sense of humor. That sense of humor misled some people to take her less seriously than they should have. Overlooking her mental qualities disserves her and involves a loss for us. She, more than they, was aware of the hard times of the 'thirties pressing on D.J. She saw that, while far from rolling in the lap of luxury, he could in 1940 hum with some degree of security the state song, "Home on the Range." While so humming he might also have been able faintly to hear less comforting sounds.

Plowing Through an Agricultural Revolution

In the background was a cacophony of noise from the stream of migrants struggling toward the Golden State. It was a disturbing and tragic mixture. It included explosions from backfiring jalopy motors, pops from tire blowouts, the cries of hungry children, the clatter of possessions loosely tied to vehicles and more. If people in the ant-like procession on U.S. 66 were singing, their songs were not apt to be "Home on the Range." They were more likely to have resembled Woodrow Wilson "Woody" Guthrie's mournful anthem to the period, "Talkin' Dustbowl Blues":

But the rain quit and th'wind got high,

Black old dust storm filled th' sky

I traded my farm for a Ford machine

Poured it full of this gasolene

And started . . . rockin' and a rollin'

Out to California . . . the old fruit bowl.

Somehow, the technicolor seemed to have vanished from the American dream. Paralyzing business depression, blowing dust, and an agricultural revolution that made huge increases in harvests possible (plunging crop prices to devastating lows) appeared to have overwhelmed all prospects of realizing that elusive ideal.

Chapter 6

The Plainsman

IT MAY SEEM TO some readers (especially those who grew up on or regularly visit Steeples lands) that what we are treating is painfully obvious. Others, who have long since traded our rural roots for present urban, electronic technology-driven ways may be wholly unable to relate to it, as distant, primitive, even incredible. If so, they must consider D.J. Steeples as a person who lived in very different times. But still real and accessible. The absence of a collection of his letters, memoirs, or comparable documents does in some ways place a curtain between us and a fully-rounded view of the man. We are denied access to thoughts and emotions that would let us get inside of him and fully know him as a person. And we have time and again been forced to fill in gaps in his own story by looking to what typical contemporaries were doing as a basis for inferring what he was likely doing. To that degree, reservations about what we have written are fair enough.

That said, much of D.J. is recoverable from legal records, his day books, photographs, and written recollections and family oral tradition. These sources, while most of the evidence is oral, are

ample enough to let us capture much of both the outer and the inner person.

Before resuming our story directly, we must turn one last time to the indirect approach of reference to the broader historical context. Doing so will establish limits within which D.J. made choices and guess (from what we already know) at his probable actions as events unfolded. Remember that he had to contend with both the blessings and cruelties of plains weather. He experienced two major business depressions and one recession before 1900. He lived through a third depression, two great wars and generations of urbanization, industrialization and agricultural change by 1950. More, he did so in a highly-charged political era. In it, rival views of the appropriate role and scope of federal authority were a focal arena of controversy and change.

Things began to heat up seriously during the 1890s, when Dave was in his early twenties. The agonizing business contraction of 1893-1898 struck overproducing wheat, corn, and cotton farmers with particular force. Even before the crisis began, low prices had led many agrarians to join the People's Party. It set out a radical, even revolutionary, platform. Too, unemployment, repression of manufacturing labor and efforts to block crafts workers' attempts to unionize became crushing. In 1894, a great railway strike paralyzed shipping in seventeen states for several days, leading to the dispatch of the U.S. Army to Chicago and elsewhere forcibly to reopen traffic.

Had his interest in politics ripened far enough in 1892 and 1893 to lead him to form opinions about the proposals of the People's Party (Populists)? We don't know. From his later political stance we might guess what his reactions probably were. He would have viewed the Populists as raving maniacs. What else could a man of his tendencies think of their program? Of a platform calling for federal ownership of railroads and telecommunications? For monetary inflation

involving the unlimited coinage of silver dollars with a face value greater than that of their worth as metal? For fiat paper redeemable in . . . fiat paper money with no intrinsic value? For postal savings banks to protect small depositors from risks involved in placing their funds in speculating unregulated banking businesses? Even bolder, for creation of a system of government crop storage warehouses? With provision that farmers, when prices were low, could leave their stored harvests there and receive reasonable prices from the U.S. Treasury? For legally- mandated eight-hour working days for factory workers? Above, we briefly noted the U.S. government's entry into business regulation and addressing the farm problem. These and like issues persisted as time passed, calling ever more insistently for attention. And expanded forms of national action.

When the Great Depression struck in the 1930s, up to a third of our industrial labor force lost work. Lack of money for food forced more than a few city dwellers to rummage through restaurant and grocery market garbage bins for something to eat or feed their families. Thousands of hoboes begged their way across the countryside, looking for a little work, a little food, a place to put their heads down at night. Boll weevils were ravaging cotton farms. Low prices for their crops prevented tens of thousands of potato, wheat, corn, hog and other kinds of growers from making payments on taxes or mortgages. As we saw earlier, riots and occasional violence resulted at sheriffs' tax delinquency or mortgage foreclosures. Drought and blowing dust were added burdens.

While Davey was a boy and then a teenager, the economic role of the national government probably entered his thoughts rarely. Washington was far away, with its incessant politicking in Congress. The Supreme Court, with its majority of former railroad attorneys who showed little sympathy for popular complaints about real or imagined corporate misconduct was even more

remote. And the president? Before 1900, people thought it unseemly candidate to go out and campaign. The Republican Party paid the fares to bring 300,000 people by train to hear William McKinley give speeches from his front porch, in Canton, Ohio, in 1896.

We've no record of how D.J. voted in 1896. By then, though, it is doubtful that he had not formed some fundamental political convictions. Unlike today, American voters were then highly informed about substantial questions and could debate them for hours. By "substantial" I mean things as arcane as the tariff and monetary policy, monopolistic business combinations (often trusts), foreign affairs, government reform and the misconduct of many politicians. It was not unusual, either, for voter turnouts to exceed 90 percent in elections. Ethno-cultural issues (racism directed at persons of color, Jews and eastern and southern Europeans, prohibition of liquor sales, closure of businesses on Sundays, anti-Catholicism, contraception, pornography and so on) cleaved the electorate. But not so far as to prevent sensible debate and dealing pragmatically across party lines.

From the remarks Granddad made about affairs political and his political inclinations, to his children and grandchildren, we can draw some strong inferences about his political views within the context just set out. That he voted for Republication William McKinley is all but a given. In both 1896 and again in 1900. His votes then were probably a good early indicator of a staunch, unflinching partisan stance that characterized the balance of his life. He probably balloted for Theodore Roosevelt in 1904, surely for William Howard Taft in 1908 and 1912 (*not* Woodrow Wilson). For Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover. Emphatically against F.D.R. in 1936, 1940 and 1944. Against Harry S. Truman. With a final vote for Dwight David Eisenhower, although possibly with some misgivings.

When we turn to personal recollections about D.J. we encounter a fascinating, complex human being. We discover far more than we did in reviewing the challenges and changes with which he had to grapple. His sons Chester and Wallace left little direct information while they were alive. My Daddy, Wayne, because we shared the intimacy of the same household, had far more opportunities to talk with me about his father and share information from Chet and Wally. He called D.J. "Dad." He taught my sister Norma and me to refer to D.J. as "Granddad." His brothers and sisters after Myrtle's death appear also to have abandoned "Papa" and adopted "Dad" as they grew up. Their children usually called him "Grandpa." Either way, it is clear that he commanded respect.

As to personality and personal traits such as generosity, helpfulness, meeting obligations and showing affection to his family, we've a clear, in some ways mixed, picture. It comes mostly from oral and written recollections of his daughters and the female grandchildren who lived near by and whom he came to know well. At the center of his life was a brief list of tenaciously-held beliefs. The most basic appear to have been religious.

Granddad's faith was unshakeable. Its most important immediate source was his mother. After Frank's death, Mary Ann's mother, Helen Doig Morrison, and sister Jemima immigrated to help her. They reinforced in Mary Ann what we would today call "that Old Time Religion." Charles Darwin's theory of evolution appeared to many believers to challenge scripture, contributing to a wave of conservative religious revivalism. The holiness and Pentecostal movements, both with Methodist roots, led. Both preached that humankind could escape sin, guilt and eternal punishment

only through *experiencing* receipt of the Holy Spirit—that is, a rebaptism cleansing one of both sin and a desire to recommit it. The holiness movement went farther, professing that *only speaking in tongues was proof of genuine rebaptism*. The Biblical basis for such beliefs was discussion of Pentecost in the Book of Acts. Such beliefs surely affected Dave's upbringing. Aunt Edith wrote that Helen, who lived until 1898, "was very religious and reared her family accordingly." What Dave learned from Mary Ann he passed on, to the point of drawing Myrtle into a rebirth in Christ (as they termed it). He added that the purpose of girls' education was to prepare them for their social role, which was to serve men and become good housekeepers and mothers.

Dave's beliefs were so strong that in 1897 he and a companion bicycled a hundred miles in a day, to Salina, to a camp meeting. The two young men could barely walk the next day. Myrtle's obituary enlarges our understanding of the faith that she shared with D.J.:

> Myrtle Fulcher was born on May 26 in 1882, in Putnam County, Missouri.
>
> She came to Kansas with her parents in 1893.
>
> She was united in marriage with D.J. Steeples Nov 17, 1898 . . . .
>
> In 1909 in the Sabbath morning service at Zurich [sic] she fully gave her life to God, and in the home and community she exemplified the Christ life to all . . . .
>
> She departed this life March 15, 1914, leaving evidence to the last of her faith in Christ. . . .

The family added to the obituary a card of thanks "to the neighbors and friends for their kindness in this, our great sorrow. D.J. Steeples and Family."

After Myrtle's death, D.J. and his children continued regular Sunday worship at church.

Also, on Sunday evenings he read a few verses of scripture to his children and discussed them. After praying for guidance for the coming week, the family closed with the Lord's Prayer. Olive years later while living with D.J. often peeked through a crack between her bedroom door and frame to see why a lantern was still burning. When she did so, she saw her father reading intently at the table. He was studying scripture and referring often to a huge concordance. She and the rest of the family in time learned that he was studying the Books of Daniel and Revelation. He was convinced from current events and scriptural prophecies that the end of the world was near. He recognized that camp-meeting preaching could be salvative. Baptism by the Holy Spirit, yes, with a resulting wish to avoid sin. But by definition, no predestination, and certainly no speaking in tongues. Olive, Freda, Alveda and Edith absorbed much of this faith. Mildred and Wally later leaned toward Presbyterianism. Chet inclined toward the largest main line Protestant church wherever he lived. Wayne followed his wife Dorothy (King) into her Lutheranism.

D.J's. faith commanded unbending morality. It insisted on absolute honesty, fairness, abstinence from pre- and extra-marital sex, sobriety, duty, patriotism, honest work, neighborliness, and avoidance of sin. He followed prevailing practice in rearing children. When they reached the age of self-discovery (the "terrible twos") and began to say "no," parents must break them to full obedience. As a widower, he extended this principle to the whole of childhood. His offspring reported that when one child misbehaved, all received punishment. This crude kind of equal punishment quickly limited misbehavior . . . and encouraged the children to cover for each other. In that time, too, corporal punishment was common. Parental authority could run to middle age.

Cigarette- (and, briefly, pipe-) Chet, in his middle years received a blunt lecture to the effect

that if God had wanted people to smoke He'd have created them with smokestacks. Swearing, cursing and scatological language were strictly off limits. No one who knew him ever heard from D.J. stronger words than "By gosh," or "golly." Of course, alcoholic beverages were impermissible, for their consumption produced drunkenness, immorality and wasted money.

D.J's. sense of sexual morality strictly forbade birth control. Wally and his wife, Marie Kobler Steeples, brought five children into the world. Given intervals between their birth dates, their offspring could be regarded as two families, one of girls and the other of boys. The first three were Jean Marie (born September 25, 1927), Joanne (born July 15, 1929), and Lois Ellen (born July 29, 1933). After an interim of twelve years, Donald Wallace and then David James III (born respectively on May 15, 1945, and August 10, 1947) joined them. At some point after Marie delivered the boys, D.J. remarked to Wally that he and Marie must have practiced birth control. He had never believed in that. Meaning no unkindness, but with characteristic Kansan directness, Wally replied, "Yes, we do, and if you had, you might still have a wife."

D.J's. record-keeping illustrated both his care in management and in at least one instance his lasting influence. In his day book he "kept a record of his daily expense and his income (of course [wrote Alveda] we were on a farm so we had no daily income.) But he kept records which I learned to do and have done that all my life, which has been a great help to me." The first page of one annual volume, remember, showed how much his family meant to him. Its entries began with the birth dates of himself, Myrtle, and their children. Dated probably around 1922 or later, it mentioned no deaths nor, for that matter, miscarriages or stillbirths. Family lore has it that ill-fated pregnancies accounted for the births of the children in alternate years. The average of sixteen or thereabout months between

the arrivals of children casts some doubt on this story, although there is a tale that Myrtle conceived fourteen times. There is no way to settle this matter absent records.

D.J. predictably favored his boys. Nevertheless, he was particularly protective of his daughters, and their safety and moral purity. On one occasion, when he learned that Freda and Olive had set out (without permission or a chaperon) to Plainville to attend a camp meeting, he sprang into action. He drove quickly to the meeting, parked, and stalked up the center aisle of the tent looking for his girls. As he advanced, the traveling evangelist said that he saw the spirit of the devil entering the canvas-roofed temporary tabernacle. Undeterred, Granddad retrieved his errant daughters and took them home. On another occasion Olive wrote in a school essay, "Dad is quite strict with his children especially his daughters and has taught us to obey him." She had often felt like disobeying but had "found that disobedience doesn't pay." While recalling that he regularly read Biblical passages to the family, Olive said in a 1998 interview that she could not recall which verses were his favorites. But he often quoted maxims such as, "Be sure your sins will find you," and "Children, obey your parents which I'll always remember and know how true and to the point they are." In a high school essay written many years earlier, she had already made this point. She wrote, "Perhaps many people wonder why Freda and I never date during the school term. It is against Dad's wishes and seems very absurd to me yet I obey him and do not complain."

D.J's. children grew up in an age in which adults rarely voiced affection to their little ones. It is clear from his letter written to the children while Myrtle lay dying in the hospital that her tender spirit had led him to be comfortable with the endearing term, "Papa." After her passing, such references seem to have become more and more rare. But his abandonment of "Papa" for "Dad"

reflected the growing-up of his children more than anything else. We'll comment further on his life after Myrtle's decease later. Olive reminisced that "He was strong on discipline of necessity with eight kids to ride herd on all by himself." She continued, "We learned early in life who was in charge and never forgot it." Both statements rested on the disciplinary practices mentioned above. Fortunately she added, "He mellowed a lot as we got older and had a very good [make that 'teasing and mischievous'] sense of humor."

We'll turn to conditions at home before considering humor. Edith, despite her many good qualities, fell some short as a housekeeper and substitute mother. While younger she had, with Myrtle's encouragement, taken piano lessons. School also gave her a love of reading. It was not unusual when her brothers and sisters arrived home from school to find her locked in a room reading or playing the piano, instead of having prepared supper (dinner was the noon meal on farms at the time, unless school was in session). "Thinking back," Olive said, "I realize our house was a mess."

More than once, supper was cold oatmeal left over from breakfast. School lunches were usually bread and butter sandwiches, sometimes with a tomato, and occasionally in autumn an apple. Either way, meals consisted of home-grown, home-prepared food. Olive baked the bread and did the laundry by hand on a wash board. Another child hand-milled wheat into flour. Another milked and separated cream from milk. Churning followed. When they were old enough Olive and Freda cleaned the dishes. Fresh vegetables were available only when the garden and orchard were producing, or from apples, carrots and potatoes stored in the half basement of the farmhouse to which the family moved outside of Palco. There were also home-canned vegetables and beef for winter consumption. Milled wheat husks (bran) and germ ("shorts") could be chewed as treats.

Chester and Wallace began fieldwork as soon as they could, driving teams through the seasonal cycles from planting through harvesting and summer fallowing, and herding. Wayne when he was too young to manage teams in the fields could put out feed in the barn, fork hay, and so on. He also often slopped the hogs in the early mornings. He vividly remembered feeding little piglets rejected by their mothers, dipping fingers into buckets of warm fresh milk for them to lick early in frigid mornings. And dumping garbage and extra milk into their stinking troughs.

The older girls, Edith and Alveda, were the first to bear responsibility for cooking, sewing, house-cleaning and domestic chores. These passed on down the line as the younger ones matured. The last two, Olive and Freda, especially loathed taking "baskets and tubs" into "the hot [hog] lot" to fill . . . with cobs the hogs had eaten corn off . . . [for fueling the household stove]." The hogs "had [while eating made] the cobs so dirty and stinky we could hardly stand to pick them up." The stench from the cobs "was almost enough to run us out of the house but kids have to eat no matter what!" Cleaning the chicken house was not much less of a "detestable chore . . . ."

Elevator and bank receipts show what D.J. marketed as cash crops and where he banked. In the late 1920s, he was selling barley, wheat, and "ear [field]" corn as well as wool after a visit from an itinerant shearer. After Chester returned to farming, in 1938, he kept all of the sheep at Chester's farm, the "Old Home Place." The family ate no lamb or mutton.

D.J. banked as the 1920s began at the First National Bank of Palco. He often sold his harvests at Salina, where there were competing buyers bid prices up higher than they were in competition-free Palco. He recorded sales, made through Chester, of each bushel of wheat (and other products) sold, together with shipping costs and net receipts. He was no less careful with other

affairs, including a one-cent refund cheque from Sears, Roebuck & Company. His yearly income rarely exceeded $1,300.00-$1,600.00 in the ‘20s. Even in the 1950s, it still hovered below $2,000.00.

Myrtle before her death had sewn the children’s clothing from bolts of cloth. After she died, records in Granddad’s files for the 1920s include forms for mail order purchases from the National Bella Hess Company in Kansas City, Missouri. The forms contained detailed drawings showing how to measure material for clothing. When his girls first needed new dresses after Myrtle’s death, D.J. ordered a bolt of cloth and told them to make themselves dresses. Apparently, he thought that females were born with knowledge of how to do so. As none of them yet knew how to sew, each in turn stood upright while the eldest held the fabric against her and cut freehand patterns for front and back. She also cut holes for the arms and neck. Then out came needles and thread. In time, Grandma Burns and neighbors taught sewing and the fundamentals of housekeeping.

All of the members of our generation coming from rural backgrounds may have heard stories of walking outlandish distances to school. In D.J. Steeples and his children’s case, the stories were based, at least to a degree, on fact. Newly-arriving settlers and growing numbers of children brought rapid opening of new schools and redrawing of school district boundaries, to keep schools within walking distance of homes. Migrants from northern states were particularly supportive of public schools. Pennsylvanian settlers founded the first hamlet in North Hampton Township in 1877. They named it Cresson, after a familiar Pennsylvania town. All men, they sent for their families in 1878, after a few houses and business structures had been built of lumber and sod. A year later, they formed School District No. 68 and erected a one-room school on the William P. Jones homestead on

Section 17. It became a social and worship center as well as a place of learning.

Also in 1879, arrivals from the "Mid States ['Middle Border:' Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota Territory and Missouri]" founded Greenmound four miles east, in Section 13. They, too formed a school district immediately, No. 42 on land belonging to Frank Alvord. In 1884, Cresson's entire population moved from its initial location near where Palco now sits to a spot about one and a half miles southwest. It hoped to capitalize on a rumor that the K.&P. & R.R. was to build a Salina-Oakley branch on a route passing through. In 1885, they built a new, larger frame school. Then the railroad built through the place they had so hopefully abandoned.

Newcomers in a nearby neighborhood also established a school as a first priority, No. 30, in 1879. Made mostly of sod, it succumbed to fire. A stone structure, known as the Stone School, replaced it. I've found no plat map from the period that shows exactly where it stood. The best guess might be that it was near the intersections of Sections 29, 30, 31 and 32 in Walton (then part of North Hampton) Township.

These developments and others left North Hampton Township with the original district No. 68, Pleasant View district No. 92 (1885, on Henry Marcotte land southeast of Palco and about a mile and a half west of Frank Steeples' homestead), No. 61 when settlers organized Palco in 1888, and No. 42 at Cresson. Of these schools, only the Stone School was as far as four miles from Palco.

In young Dave's case, documented formal education included a year in Des Moines, Iowa, "four years in the Stone School, two years in a small school one and one half miles [north-?] west of Zurich, and one year in Pleasant View School." According to Edith, he graduated from "grade school [that is, eighth grade]" and went to Wesleyan College in Salina for a semester. Then (ca.

1886-1887) Sam Burns' illness, she said, forced him to return home. Passing the eighth grade completion test fulfilled the state legal educational standard at the time. College admission requirements, however, included possession of high school diplomas, which were then so uncommon that most colleges operated high school preparatory departments. Contrary to what his children remembered, Wesleyan's records contain no mention of D.J. How to reconcile this fact with vivid stories Alveda and Olive told of his pranks at college I do not know. Could they have been imagined? Garbled versions of stories of events at other times and places? Such as tipping over a stove of red hot coals and getting them back into the stove before a fire could engulf the building? Or piling boys onto a bed to see how many people it could support, only to collapse it? Or hallowe'ening and being chased by a professor (a title then also applied to high school teachers)?

Given the poor state of college records from the time, we'll never know whether or not D.J. made it to Wesleyan. What I have from his book collection at best leaves the question open.

Most of the oral and written recollections we have about D.J. come from Edith, Mildred, Olive, Freda, Jean, Lois, Ruth, Diane Smith, Wayne, Wallace, Hillon, and myself. One of the commonest memories is that of walks to and from school. As adults, several of D.J's. young ones told of eight-mile round trips, walking, through driving snowstorms. *Their* children (that is, my generation) have passed this bit of folklore on, sometimes skeptically. It appears that none walked more than about a three-mile round trip to grammar school. D.J. sent Chet and Wally to Hays for high school, expecting that they would then pay their ways through college. Edith, of course, had to leave school after Myrtle died. Only Alveda, Wayne, and Mildred walked the long walk from the Old Home Place to Palco High School, which opened in 1906. By the time they were old enough for

high school in the 1920s only Alveda, Wayne, Mildred, Olive and Freda were living with D.J. on the farm outside of Palco.

In most types of weather, all of the children walked barefoot, both to school and at home. Sharp stones, cold water, and mud did not pose much of a challenge. Sand- and cockle-burs and cold or frozen ground, though were painful. Ordinarily, if there were merely frost on the ground, the young ones did the chores barefoot. They learned to warm their feet by standing where cattle had been lying down. Because they rarely had more than one pair of shoes, these were to be reserved for "Sunday dress your best." No matter the weather, D.J. never gave his young ones rides to school. He did (did he find it a bit funny?) avert his eyes when it was sleeting or snowing and they left the house with footwear poorly concealed under their coats.

Granddad's sense of humor found other outlets, too, not all of them amusing to everyone. Olive remembered, wryly, "We all knew when spring came, we were going to clean all the yard, re-stack all the iron or other things that had been messed up during the year. He wanted the yard free of clutter, weeds, and anything else that would detract from the looks of the place." She went on to mention his ability to grow things, and how every year the children carried buckets of water to hydrate newly-planted trees and shrubs. Then, "I never told him this, but I thought . . . [carrying] those buckets of water] was a planned job to keep us busy and mostly out of trouble." Besides, he wasn't lazy and did not want any of his offspring to be regarded as slackards.

Freda in 1997 recounted another example of D.J's. sense of humor. Edith, she wrote, "came up one day from about 7 miles in a buggy and brought a dressed turkey . . . to cook for our dinner.

Dad was working in the shop and I guess came by the buggy and saw the turkey—he took it

out and put it in the shop for a joke." When Edith went out to fetch it and found it gone, she became frantic. She sent Mildred by horse "to retrace her trip and of course [Mildred] found nothing." D.J. finally brought the missing bird into the house intact. "He thought that it was quite a joke but the turkey was late in getting cooked!"

Then, of course, there was a well-remembered box elder tree close to the farmhouse near Palco. After each of the smaller children claimed a branch, Alveda was left with what she called the least desirable. By the time she reached it, her brothers and sisters were ready to climb down. As an aside, we might mention that Olive and Freda found their Grandma Mary Elizabeth Burns Fulcher (Sam's daughter by Sarah) to be grumpy and usually headed for the box elder when she was in the vicinity. Christmas, although without gifts (except for one year) was a merry time with decorations made of colored ribbons, garlands of popcorn, fresh fruit and nuts, and a cheerful meal. This sort of celebration, so unlike our own festival of consumption, was typical of the era. Grandma Burns, in contrast, made birthdays, although gifts were rare, major events with cakes and games.

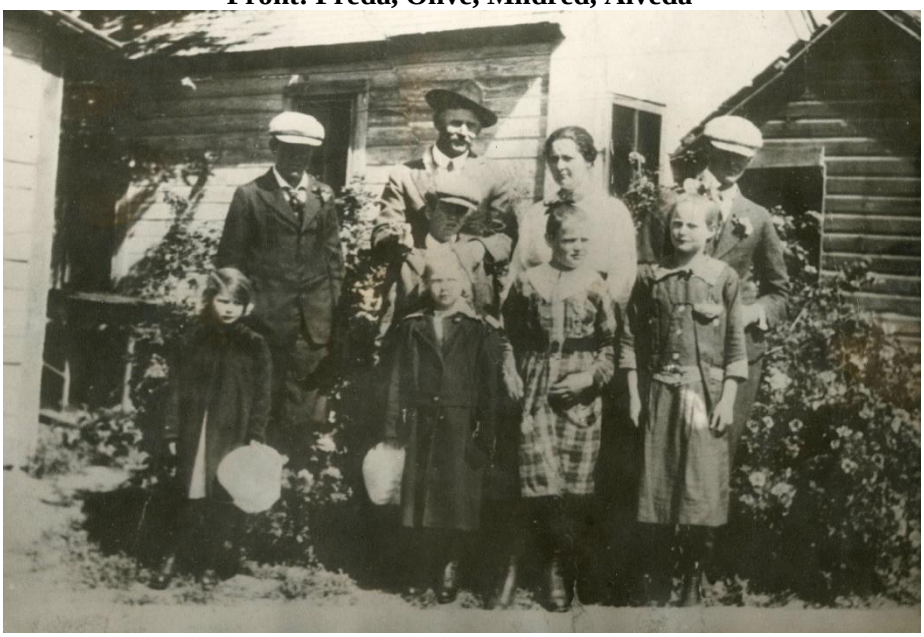
And D.J.? Not only fathering what Freda called "8 ornery kids" but adding to his other musical talents an ability to yodel. And a gift for turning an almost treeless, grassy landscape into an oasis. He kept up with the latest information on farming and gardening (even when he had insufficient money to pay for some of the improvements about which he read). By the late 1940s he was, as Lois Settles put it, "quite a self-made horticulturist." He had earlier planted a vegetable garden, ornamentals and a shelter belt of trees on the Old Home Place. Chester's son, Duane, told Lois that D.J. moved to the land outside of Palco because it had plenty of water and a fine location for a big garden. Of his four wells, he used one exclusively for a vegetable garden that grew to about

thirty-five by seventy feet. He kept up with innovations in irrigation methods. By the late 1940s, he had buried perforated plastic drainage lines down each garden furrow. He could then use valves to direct water through them and irrigate them from underneath the surface. This system allowed him to eliminate the risks of sunburning leaves and wasting water through evaporation. In time, the garden held a full row of Concord grapes and, with help from Wallace's wife, Marie, "almost everything imaginable . . .," carrots, "potatoes, tomatoes, radishes, [field] corn, green peas, beets, melons." He believed that young field corn was as sweet as sweet corn. He added some twenty crab apple trees, bing cherries, apple trees, rows of lilacs lining his drive, and such shrubbery as spirea. Marie helped greatly, planting flowers and a walnut tree. With Duane he had further planted more than a hundred cottonwoods in the marshy hollow. Intended to provide protection from summer heat and from storms, many yet survive. Wild cannabis (not of toping quality) joins them now.

Olive's daughter, Ruth, shared other appreciative stories. How Granddad let her ride his horses, Queen and Bess. Stand in the grain bin of his reaper during harvest. Hold the lantern in the middle of the night while he pulled a calf. Help him deliver lambs and dip her fingers in warm milk to suckle them until their ewes would accept them. Sit on his lap on the porch during summer evenings, "fighting away mosquitoes, eating an apple with a shared spoon, listening as he told stories, watching the sky. Somehow, I knew that we were safe if he was there. The wind would be whipping through his white hair as he looked for danger in the sky."

Alveda on another occasion reported that "when Dad and Edith were gone Chester would make cookies and Wallace would make candy," carefully hiding them. Once in a great while D.J's. day book noted a purchase of five cents' worth of candy for the children.

The Steeples at Home (ca. 1917)
Back L to R: Chester, D.J., Edith, Wallace
Middle: Wayne
Front: Freda, Olive, Mildred, Alveda



The Steeples Family Band (ca. 1919?)
Back Row, L to R: Millon, Edith, D.J., Wallace
Middle: Alveda, Mildred, Wayne
Front: Freda, Olive

The children, as is often true in large families, formed subgroups of their own. Edith and Alveda. Chester and Wallace. Wayne and Mildred. Olive and Freda. Edith and Alveda shared a love of reading. Chet and Wally took great fun in teasing Wayne and Mildred. At times, they tied her pigtails to a wagon and tried to make her pull it, as Wayne attempted to defend her. Freda and Olive had their own imaginary world, complete with the baled hay "house" mentioned above. Wayne also appears to have been a bit of a cut-up, maybe even a smart aleck, possibly in partnership with a mischievous Mildred. He delighted in whittling small propellers and nailing them to fence posts to whirl in the constant plains wind. Granddad thought this activity a waste of time and took the propellers down as quickly as he could, but Wayne always stayed a propeller or two ahead of him. Meanwhile, as Olive recalled it, she and Freda did many of Wayne and Mildred's chores so no one would get punished. Stuffed stocking dolls the girls treasured. Boys played with boy things. An undated picture probably taken within three years or so of Myrtle's death shows the family as a whole. Typically clothed for the time, they looked neither poor nor wealthy. They appeared as a solid farm family would have. Their house, despite Olive's later memories, seemed to be well kept and set among nice plants. A telephone line was conspicuous.

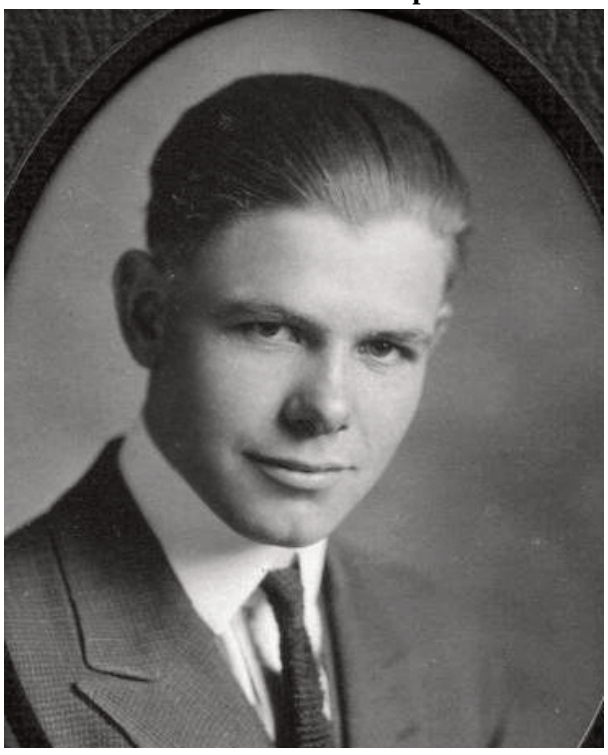
In important ways, the subgroups united as an entire family. As soon as they learned their ABCs, Myrtle and D.J. also taught the children the musical signs, treble and bass clefs, and how to sing the scale. "They taught," Edith wrote, "tempo very strictly as well as proper tone." Both sang in the church choir [sic] Mother played the organ, guitar and mandolin and Dave the violin and several band instruments as well." About 1909 Edith began organ lessons at the church as the Steeples owned no piano yet. Chet played a serious clarinet, and her parents bought Edith a cello.

Four of Myrtle and D.J. Steeples' Children at ca. Twenty Years of Age

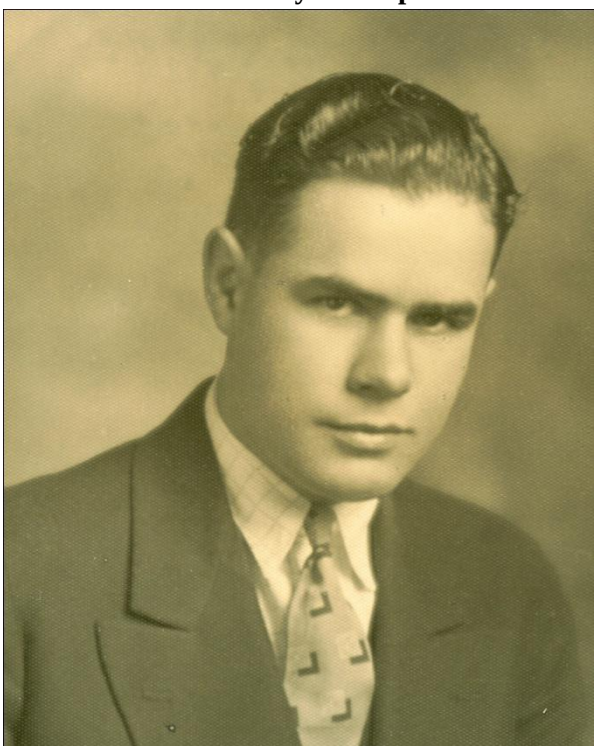
Freda Ruth Steeples

Olive Marie Steeples

William Wallace Steeples



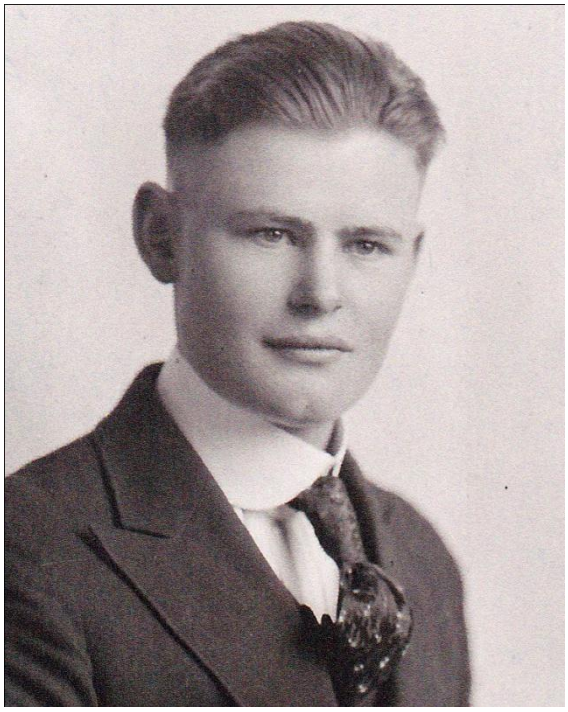
Marion Wayne Steeples



D.J.'s Children as Young Adults
Four of Myrtle and D.J. Steeples Children at ca. Twenty Years of Age

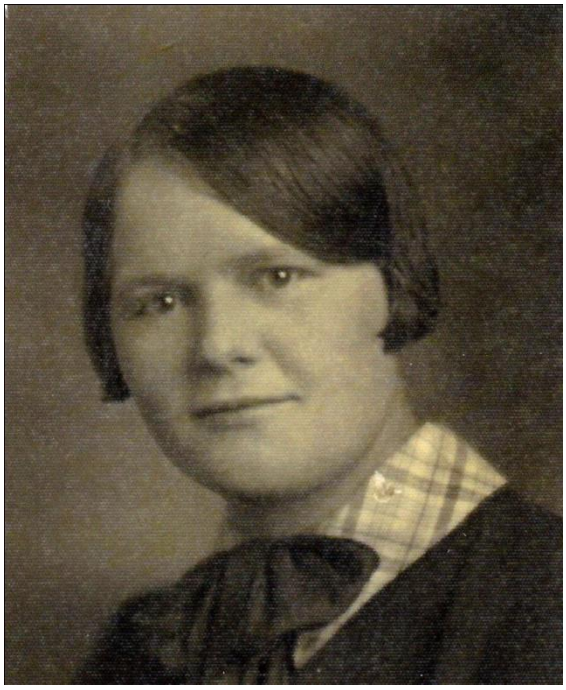
Edith Gertrude Steeples

Chester Francis David Steeples



Alveda Beatrice Steeples

Mildred Lucille Steeples



D.J. with Grandchildren, 1941, on Farm

Parents, with D.J.'s Grandchildren, 1941, on Farm

Because it was taller than she, she had to stand to play it. D.J. bought "several instruments" from Zürich's band members after its director closed his business and moved to Florida. He continued his children's musical training after Myrtle (she had played the baritone horn) was gone, forming a family band. Edith believed that "his insistence on . . . [each of us children's] learning to play was the fulfillment of plans that he and mother had made years before." D.J. played a tuba, Wallace a trumpet, Chester his clarinet, Wayne a "D" cornet, Edith a baritone horn, Alveda and Freda both tenor horns, Olive a snare drum, and Freda a bass drum. D.J., believing that nothing was worth doing unless it was done well, ensured that Wayne mastered his violin as well as his "D" cornet. The Steeples Family Band practiced weekly, except during performance season. Then it practiced every evening. It played at a variety of community events. Among them were the Farmers' Union Picnic, dedications of community buildings, church picnics, and biggest of all, Decoration Day celebrations.

As the children finished their schooling and moved on to pursue their lives, the band shrank and finally dissolved, probably in the mid 1920s. Music remained a regular feature of family life, though. When widowed Olive and Ruth Marie moved back in with D.J. in 1938, she began about nine years of public vocal duets with him at church. The band's instruments are now part of a Steeples collection in the Stockton museum.

By the time Granddad's children had finished their schooling, they had become strikingly attractive, intelligent-looking young adults. One would never guess from their pictures the hardships that they had endured as farm youngsters. Their faces reflected energy and brightness. We have been fortunate to collect images of all of them. They show that eight "ornery" motherless children had become unprepossessing, promising young adults, with hints that more changes would come.

Chet after graduating from Fort Hays State College taught manual arts and band for fourteen years in Holcomb, Penokee, Codell and Lenora, becoming a principal before he returned to farming at the Old Home Place in 1938. His wife Olive Kobler Steeples (Marie's sister) taught a total of twenty-five years. Wally also earned a Fort Hays degree and taught in Bogue and elsewhere, eventually returning to Palco as superintendent of schools in 1948. He turned soon to farming D.J's. land on Section 22, also selling securities for Investors' Diversified Services (I.D.S.) for a time. Mildred married Mervin Ross and settled in Lincoln to teach while he worked for the postal service. Edith after wedding farmer Harry Whisman stayed in Palco. Alveda managed D.J's. household until 1938, when Olive and Ruth arrived and succeeded her for nine years. They left to farm near Scott City in 1948, after she married James Herron.

The three remaining children ended up in California, circuitously. Freda and Floyd became one in Hays, in 1933. After a brief, difficult time in Plainville they located for a time in Denver. Later, they moved to San Leandro on the eastern edge of San Francisco Bay to operate a successful motor hotel. Alveda after leaving the farm took a job in Denver. She had been seeing Roscoe Newman, from nearby Webster. The need for work had drawn him to Colorado, where he became a truck driver. They married in 1939. Shortly they moved and cared for an estate in Glendale, California, and then to Cajon Canyon for a time while he delivered propane. Later, they settled permanently in San Bernardino. Wayne moved twice to California, first in 1938. When business weakened again, his sales job at Globe Mills disappeared. Bad business ended work distributing Bireley's sodas to retailers in Dallas, Texas not long afterward. He and his family returned to Hays to live with his wife's parents, and he opened a bakery that failed. When the U.S. was ramping up for

World War II he preceded his family back to California, in 1941. He had found work as a machinist assembling warplanes at Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank and added a second job at a Signal Gas Station. After several years of managing in the beverage business, he started a thriving leasing company. Sadly, only too late, in mid-life, did he realize he had made a great mistake in choosing his career path. He recognized that he really wanted to till the soil. He should have fulfilled D.J's. hope that he would work on and eventually buy the farm near Palco.

In mid-1941, all of D.J's. then-living grandchildren gathered at a reunion on his farm. Shirley Frances Newman (October 23, 1942) and Stanley Dwight Newman (June 16, 1945) remained to be born to Alveda and Roscoe. Donald Wallace (May 19, 1945) and David James III (August 10, 1947) had not yet joined Wallace's family. Olive Herron completed the roster of twenty-three grandchildren with Mary Alice (February 12, 1951) and Nathan James (December 15, 1932).

This 1941 event was the only such gathering of grandchildren during D.J's. lifetime. Reunions resumed in the summer of 1989. By then cardiac arrest had taken Wallace (1966) and Wayne (1967), and cancer, Chester (1981). The five girls passed away over the next two decades. Alzheimer's disease claimed Mildred (1993) and Freda (2001), complications of old age Edith (1993) and Alveda (2004), and stroke, Olive (2005). Reunions have grown and shrunk since 1989, with notable differences and declines in attendance of great grandchildren. Those who meet are grateful for chances to visit, even as the number of grandchildren shrinks. It is a loss to all of us that we have become more dispersed and less connected. Presently D.J's. descendants live in California, Kansas, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Washington State, Minnesota and New Jersey.

Family Reunion, August 8, 1989, Holiday Inn, Hays, KS
Top Picture, L. to R., The Widow/Aunts
Marie (W.W.), Dorothy (M.W.), Mildred (Mervin), Olive (Jim), Freda (Floyd), Alveda (Roscoe), Olive (C.F.D.), Floyd (Freda), Edith (in front, wheelchair, Harry)

Cousins, L. to R.
Back: Doug, Nathan, David, George, David James III, Hillon, Don
Middle: R.D. (Dick), Barbara, Tanya, Jean, Norma, Lois, Duane
Front: Doris, Nancy, Ruth Marie, Mary, Jo, Stanley
(Absent, Donna Lea, Shirley)

As his family scattered, D.J. dwelled alone unless one or another child lived with him and helped assist with his increasing need for help as he aged. It happened that he was rarely solitary at home and always could take pleasure in his many friendships. George Whisman and Duane Steeples continued to help with field work. Increasingly, he depended on Chester to help with managing his affairs. Still, as children and grandchildren continued to scatter and new generations came along while old ones aged, Granddad became an increasingly remote figure. Unfamiliar with many of his grandchildren, he was a bit awkward with them. Even to some of them a forbidding presence, with his dry humor and piercing blue eyes that seemed able to see right through a person. It was fortunate that the return of sons Chet and Wally with their families refreshed his connection with them. One may wonder whether or not in some way these renewing relationships came to occupy the psychological space that Myrtle had once filled. D.J's. physical strength and endurance naturally diminished as his age advanced. His mind remained sharp. Chester by 1952 was working enough land, with Hillon and Duane, to be in partnership as Triple S Farms. In 1978, he sold his interest to a grandson and retired to Plainville.

Sister Nell, always unpredictable, mischievous, and unsinkable like Molly Brown, appeared from time to time. When she did, her visits were usually without warning and not a few times left a trail of humorous stories. Years might elapse between these occasions. Once, after Chester and Olive had returned to the farm, she hove into sight and asked where he was. In town, she learned, and also what kind of car he had. She arranged for a ride to Plainville, found his unlocked car and comfortably seated herself beside the driver's place. At last, Chester showed up. As he entered the car, he was a bit nonplused to see her. She struck up a conversation, which lasted for several minutes

as they drove along. A growing suspicion finally led her to blurt out, "You don't know who I am, do you?" "I'm your Aunt Nell." A happy exchange of hugs and greetings followed. Later, but possibly during the same visit, Chester and Olive's kitchen became the setting for another story. Early one morning as he stood naked while looking out of the window and drinking his first cup of coffee, Nell walked in. Not one to be caught unprepared for surprises, she calmly said, "Mornin,' Chet." He replied, "Mornin,' Nell." Then both went about their business as if nothing unusual had happened.

I met Nell only once, at Chester's house, some years later, perhaps around 1952. She was in fine fettle. She was married at the time to her third husband. He was a merchant mariner from Seattle named David Shirley Abbott. We called him Uncle Shirley. He was present, and a character. During voyages on freighters, he displayed, besides his well-seasoned maritime skills, another that was uncanny. His crewmates learned about it at heavy cost. He was a murderous cut-throat pinochle player. To play against him or observe him play was an education. One quickly learned from him that he often ended a voyage having won virtually all of the wages of his crewmates. One who watched closely (as an observer) him play learned why, too: he was a card shark.

When Wally and Marie took up farming again, they moved with their youngest three children in with D.J. He had no intention at all of moving out of the house. The situation was in several ways intolerable. The household contained Granddad, Wally, Marie, Lois (then a sophomore in high school) and young Don and Dave. These grandchildren were virtual strangers to the aging farmer. And Wally held his own convictions no less strongly than D.J. held his. The situation became unbearably tense soon after Wallace's family arrived. One day during harvest as time for the

mid-day meal neared, Marie discovered that she did not have enough bread for the hungry crew working in the fields. She sent Lois to Palco to buy some bread. Lois was hurrying back to the farm when she overtook Granddad's rattling old truck. She passed it. He immediately judged that she was a reckless driver. It took about two years for them to get on the right track. As she matured, they began to converse at table in the evening. She discovered that he knew a great deal about politics, world affairs, horticulture, and a variety of other subjects. Equally important, he warmed up to her as a sensible person. When she graduated from high school, he astonished her by giving her a ten dollar bill—the first gift that he had, to her knowledge, ever offered to a grandchild.

Still, a crowded house, strong personalities and firm opinions were not a good mix. D.J's. Apocalyptic ranting about the imminent end of the world tried Wally's patience and frightened the younger children. Wally put a stop to the ranting. Then Chet persuaded Granddad that things were simply not working out. Nor would they even if Granddad relocated to a newly-finished, nice chicken house with a long row of south-facing windows and electric lighting. D.J. ought to buy some land in town, have a house built on it and invite Edith to live with him. She could care for him as he aged, in return for the house after he died. Chet's plan was a clever one. It would solve multiple problems. Wally and his family would have a house to themselves. Poor Edith, soldiering on as best she could in the house and with the abuse that Harry Whisman flung at her, would find a way to escape. More than that, she was quite comfortable with Granddad and a faithful, loving daughter. As for D.J., he could escape the rigors of living in the countryside, no matter how much he loved it, and enjoy the relative advantages of dwelling in town. He might even be able to work into the arrangement an understanding that he could farm whenever he wished, although Wally should

receive a tenant's share (two-thirds, usually) of net proceeds from sale of the harvest.

The old farmer gradually came to see the sense of the plan, or at least most of it. In October 1948, he bought lots 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 in Block 29 in Palco, for $1.00. This parcel lay in the vicinity of the block between East First and East Second Streets and Cedar and Elm Avenues. In 1950, D.J. and Edith occupied the new house. He still stood a ramrod-straight 6' 1" tall, strongly-built man with a full head of snow-white hair and those penetrating blue eyes. It was understood that he could continue farming whenever and as long as he wished. We'll turn to his business affairs in the next chapter, which will attempt to offer an assessment of this figure who cast so great a shadow over his growing family.

When Chester and Wallace and the young members of their families came back to the farms in North Hampton Township, the family's center of gravity returned to the area where Frank Steeples had homesteaded in 1879. Their arrival was a potent indicator of the importance of family to all concerned, as well as their shared love of farming and of place. On only one occasion did D.J. venture out, by train, to visit his California families, in 1946. We must emphasize again that his deep local roots rested on more than pining for Myrtle. He was determined, for his children's sake, to avoid subjecting them to bad treatment from the wrong stepmother. His memories of Sam Burns did not soften with the passage of time. While expecting his children, as adults, to be responsible for their own affairs, he never lost his sense of responsibility to and for them. Too, when he came to know grandchildren well, he extended that sense to them as well. Wallace's tomboyish Joanne, while in college, had never ceased spending at least part of every summer on Chester's farm, sharing in the work. She easily maintained a close and affectionate relationship with D.J.

Some of the stories recounted above buttress Olive's statement that D.J. mellowed as he aged. Surely the lessening pressures he felt as the number of children he cared for while they grew up was a factor here. I've not heard from other California cousins whether or not they experienced the same surprise that Norma and I did when he made his visit to the see us. When he left, he gave each of us ten dollar bills. Much more memorable was Wayne's behavior at the end of the visit. After seeing Granddad off, we returned home. Norma and I went about our business until we heard something odd. We found our father sobbing, "I never knew before that he loved me." Sometimes failing to voice affection can inflict deep wounds.

While Norma and I always looked forward to visiting Granddad, the farm, and our cousins, she did experience some shocks. One evening while climbing into bed in the basement of the house where Wallace's family had taken up residence, she let out a scream. On the floor in front of her was a snake. This would have been around 1952 or 1953. Don and Dave were in any case too young to recall the event, but they at the time found it hilarious.

Other events in rural Kansas held a special beauty. I can still recall Joanne's delighted expression as she drove a bunch of her cousins around a field on a tractor, and the loveliness of Kansas sunsets. The flashing of lightning that brightened the interior of distant thunderclouds whose tops still reflected fading sunlight stirred awe. Even the night competition between cicadas, hoot owls, darting night hawks, croaking frogs and the blinking greenish blinking light of fireflies a-courting imprinted indelible memories. Attending the Rooks County Free Fair, watching cousins prepare their animals for show. Observing livestock judging. And feeling the excitement of team-pulling contests. These were always high points. Livestock auctions never lost their interest.

D.J's. children who finished college all parented college graduates. Chester's Hillon and Duane earned degrees respectively in pre-vet and vocational ag at Kansas State. His Donna Lea earned an M.D., in child psychiatry, at Kansas University's medical school. Afterward she and her marriage partner, Rick Childs, practiced in the Kansas City area. Jean after graduating from K-State went with her husband Boyd Webb to Tulsa, where they became involved in the oil industry. Joanne, too, became a K-State alumna and moved with her husband Glenn Haslett to Peoria. There he was an engineer for Caterpillar, until they retired to Tucson. Lois migrated from K-State with her husband Bob Settles to Columbia, Missouri. Later, while a junior high school principal near Athens, Georgia, she earned a doctorate at the University of Georgia where Bob worked. They afterward retired to Palm Coast, Florida. Mildred, during years of teaching, finished a degree at Fort Hays. Her son Dick (R.D.) after a notable career in the U.S. Marine Corps earned a master's degree in History at the University of Missouri. While in retirement in Columbia, Missouri, he has filled several important posts in state government. Don finished a doctorate in Geophysics at Stanford and after many years of teaching became an Associate Provost at Kansas University. Norma obtained a master's degree in Library Science from the University of Oklahoma. Douglas gained a Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Dave earned an M.B.A. and became the chief loan officer at a bank in Stockton. Olive's Ruth became an R.N. Tanya Ross earned a bachelor's degree and mothered three fine children.

The remaining cousins became responsible, productive parents and citizens. Lennice was a caring and competent farm homemaker and mother. Her brothers George and David partnered in farming and ranching for several years. George remained in agribusiness until his death, and David

retired after managing an RV resort. Freda's daughters Doris (with husband Marvin Martindale), Nancy (and mate Ralph Dixon) and Barbara (married to Don Cross) all reared solid families. Alveda's Shirley and Stanley raised families while working respectively in retailing and computer technology. Olive survived two husbands and remained a farmer and gardener until her final illness, in her tenth decade. She and Freda never lost their childhood bond and appeared at one family reunion in identical dresses.

As of November 12, 2012, when COPD took Jean Webb from us, sixteen of the original twenty-three cousins were still alive. Hillon died just weeks later, on December 15, from mesothelomia, a result of his service in the U.S. Navy in World War II. Lennice Whisman Dorland was the first of our generation to die, on September 19, 1985, in Zürich. Cancer ended Doris Martindale's life on December 7, 1999, in Fremont, California. Nancy Jane Dixon followed on May 7, 2006, in Salinas, California. George Whisman died on August 30, 2006, in the Hays Medical Center. These three had all fought long battles against cancer. We lost Joanne Haslett unexpectedly (probably of a cerebral aneurism) in Tucson, Arizona, on March 2, 2012.

Presently (February 2013) fifteen members of our generation remain alive. Our advancing ages raise doubts about whether or not there will be another reunion or concerted effort to preserve memories of Granddad as the patriarch of our growing tribe. We still in many ways live in his shadow and should understand how this is true and defines us. Moving to town did not and could scarcely change him. He was old, his ways fixed. Palco was barely a spot on the map. Its three hundred souls, 1900-1940, rose briefly on an oil boom to 406 in 1950 and 575 in 1960, falling afterward to 277 in 2010. The surrounding, endless sea of wheat, other crops and pastures threatened

to obliterate what had become a tiny, shrinking village. Still, to the last, D.J. continued his familiar routine, farming whenever he wished and rooted deeply in the plains. His was a story that embodied Robert Frost's lines:

The land was ours before we were the land's.

She was our land more than a hundred years

Before we were her people

[Until we found salvation to be her people and] gave ourselves outright . . .

To the land vaguely realizing westward

But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced

Such as she was, such as she would become.

Chapter 7

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd

D.J. HAD NEVER aspired to fame or public recognition. He wished only to raise his children successfully, make his land fruitful and where possible improve it and be a good neighbor. Lilacs, announcing the arrival of spring's peak, were for good reason dear to him. They heralded the return of the earth to life, lifting ones spirits. Even though the passing years took their toll on him, his vision and mind remained acute. So did his ability to spot a humbug. Aunt Edith's numerous incorporations of references to him in a history of Rooks County were a bit overblown, but it is worth noting that he received considerable attention in a more general, professional history in northwestern Kansas. It is also true that he never considered his personal affairs as an excuse for avoiding larger responsibilities. While never seeking public office, he accepted it when fellow citizens elected him to it. He was a county commissioner for seventeen years, and long a school district trustee, too. Almost in spite of himself, he became a well-known regional figure.

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd

After taking up residence with Edith in the new house in Palco in 1950, D.J. continued to farm whenever he felt like doing so. All things considered, that was often enough. So it went, familiar activity after familiar activity for three years. Whenever he wished, he drove his modest pickup to his land outside of Palco and did what work he chose. This he did for as long as he lived. In January 1953, he reached the age of eighty. His management of business affairs is the one subject that remains for us to consider. Here, as in other areas of his life, there are rich nuggets to expand our understanding of the man. While a minor point, it is worth noting that Dave's good looks and bearing were lifelong, consistent with his character. They were thus assets that reinforced the respect he received.

During his eight decades of life, D.J. bought a good deal of land, but he never overreached himself. His acreage never exceeded by much what he could farm himself or, later, could sustain the families of the two sons who returned to farming. The records of the Rooks County Clerk's office catalog most of his land acquisitions. Unfortunately, they do not reference when the original homestead was patented, nor when he obtained his own first eighty some years later. That ground lay just south of Sam Burns' eighty in the northeast quarter of Section 36 of the township, just south of the road bordering that edge of the homestead. We can reasonably infer that he bought his original eighty no later than his November 26, 1898 marriage to Myrtle Fulcher. We can believe as much because workmen were already erecting a house for the Steeples when they wed.

It was an inheritance of £300 that launched him on the path to becoming a property owner. The journey began when William Steeples moved from Haddington to Musselburgh. By 1814,

his income as a painter and possibly from other sources had enabled him to amass £330 with which to buy rental property in the center of Musselburgh. William later drew up and revised several wills, the earliest on 4, 5, 8 and 16 May, 1863. Another followed on January 19, 1864, and a third on April 8, 1867. He wrote his last, with a codicil, on July 8, 1869. The codicil provided for creation of a trust to manage certain assets after his death. On August 17, the Edinburgh General Council approved it, including the designated three executors, and the codicil. A principal executor was "my eldest son, William [Jr.]." William, Jr., oversaw selection of the trustees, of whom he was one.

The trust was to discharge specific responsibilities. The first, if William, Sr., should predecease her, was to dispose to his wife, Elizabeth, an annuity of £25 per annum, paid biannually. The first of each year's payments was to occur in the "term of Whitsunday [that is, the liturgical season beginning the seventh Sunday after Easter (the Feast of Pentecost) and ending with the first Sunday of Advent]." The second was to occur during the following six months. The annuity was to expire with a final payment for the six months after Elizabeth's death, which occurred in 1887.

The second purpose of the trust concerned disposition of the remaining assets of William, Sr's. estate. Our cousin Eileen Leitch-Bell provided Lois with about a hundred pages of twelve-by-twenty-four inch pages of official documents concerning the provisions of the will affecting our D.J. Steeples. All are written by hand in a minute "copperplate" cursive script. The hand is beautiful, but deciphering it is no easy task. However, the substance of the document is easily summarized.

I've found no evidence that the Scots and Kansas Steeples were in contact between William, Sr's. death in 1869 and early 1894. Nor is there hint that Frank stood poorly with his family. He named D.J. after one of his own brothers. Similarly, it was he who, with Elizabeth, discovered that the old painter had passed away. Without question, he would have been present for the reading of the will and learned of his inheritance. When he died in 1881, he left no will. At length in January 1894, Dave came of age. He knew of William, Sr's. will, although from what source we cannot say. And that upon reaching his majority, he could request payment of Frank's legacy. Ten months later, on November 10, he borrowed from William, Jr., who was his older brother, £100 at 5 percent simple interest and repayable a year later during Whitsuntide. He pledged as security in event of default three rental houses that his grandfather William, Sr. had bequeathed to Frank, his father. These, at 71 High Street and 2 and 4 Link (formerly Tabernacle Wynd) Street in Musselburgh carried a value of £300. Most of the germane genealogical records of our family's history from Stephen's arrival in Scotland to the 1960s are contained in an old family Bible belonging, in 1969, to Bill (yet another William) Steeples, whom we met in Musselburgh. The Book of the Division of the General Register of Loans Applicable to the County of Edinburgh recorded the loan to D.J. on December 13, 1894, together with sureties, receipts, and so on. He repaid the loan in September 1895.

Why such a short-term loan? If we were to guess, we would look to the condition of the U.S. economy in 1894. It was then that the business depression of the '90's bottomed out. In cities, joblessness ran at no less than 25 percent. Drought blistered the wheat and corn belts west of the Missouri. Hordes of insatiable locusts joined failed rainfall to wreak havoc on the plains.

Still, the wheat harvest was up 7 percent to 542 million bushels in 1893. But the price, with the crop edging up, eased down 5 percent, to less than forty-nine centers a bushel, the lowest point since 1867. Given as much, many farmers could afford only to feed wheat to their livestock. Conditions were worse for field corn. The crop in 1894 was 13 percent smaller than that of the previous year. Corn rose briefly, to forty-five cents. The following year farmers brought in almost a third more corn, and saw its price plummet to twenty-five cents. Corn growers in droves ended up burning their harvest to warm their houses through the following winter. Across the western wheat and corn belts those who could afford to sit tight saw many gaunt families trudging eastward through ice and snow beside wagons filled with belongings. Some of the busted farmers had only strips of gunny sacking wrapped around their feet for shoes.

Could such conditions have led David Steeples to borrow £100 to pay outstanding expenses for 1894 and get by until his ship (or wagon) came in? Or might he have seen an opportunity to put the money out on short-term, at interest? Of simply deposit it to establish credit? Available evidence allows us only to raise such questions, not answer them.

D.J. wasted no time summoning his ship. As soon as he came of age he asked for the legacy left for his intestate father. William Sr's. executors and trustees replied quickly. On August 24, he received the £300 due him. He repaid his £100 loan weeks later, in September, six weeks before it was due. Some quick calculations allow us to set boundaries as to the range of possible net benefit to him of the bequest. If he had spent the entire loan ($240.00 U.S.), then after repayment he would have gained enough money both to buy an eighty, perhaps with a team and a plow. He could also have arranged to have a simple frame, clapboard house built. An

unimproved government-owned eighty went for $1.25 an acre, or $100.00 for the entire parcel. A railroad-owned, unimproved, eighty sitting next to a siding might in ordinary times command $3.00-$4.00 per acre. The U.S. was just emerging from depressed business in 1898, and many settlers had abandoned hope and their lands. The $3.00-$4.00 that railroads could charge in good times was beyond reach of many people, and people who were moving out were often selling entire quarter sections for as little as $50.00.

No matter how we slice it, there can be no doubt that his inheritance gave Steeples a major financial boost. Whether or not he bought a shay for his wedding trip to Stockton shades into unimportance when placed in this context. His first eighty, together with the original 160 homestead on section 25 and Sam's 80 (discussed later) are known collectively as the Old Home Place. That is indeed what it is. To illustrate further what D.J's. inheritance meant, recall that factory workers averaged $386.00 a year in 1894; steam railroad employees, $546.00; bituminous coal miners, $292.00; farm laborers, $214.00; and domestic help$100.00 to $250.00.

The Deed Book is more helpful for years after 1898. Here is a list of purchases of record.

1. From Henry and Anna Kern for $5,250.00 on July 26, 1920, the southwest quarter of Section 25, immediately adjoining the homestead on the west. Total ownership, 400 acres.

2. On November 21, 1924, from Harley and Asinath (?) Meade all of the west half of Section 22 of the township. This land lies about a mile east of Palco. Buying it pushed D.J's. land holdings to 720 acres in separate parcels.

3. D.J. bought from Rooks County a patent on eighty acres in the northeast corner of Section 36 on March 12, 1928. Sam Burns had previously patented this land, which had been

designated as "school lands" under the U.S. Homestead Act of 1862. The purchase price was $240.00. It was the amount of "money [recorded as property taxes in] in arrears from the certificate of the County Clerk . . . ." D.J's. mother (who was Burns' widow) had apparently allowed the county tax on the property to fall into arrears. Foreclosure and a sheriff's sale followed. It is conceivable that she and D.J. had entered into an understanding about using the sale to transfer the ownership of this acreage to him. By this purchase, he raised his land holdings to 800 acres.

4. On October 14, 1937, he bought from Alice M. Lambert the southeast quarter of Section 22 just east of Palco. He paid $1.00 plus the assumption of a $2,500.00 mortgage balance outstanding. The terms of this purchase from a single woman for a nominal sum and assumption of a mortgage implies that she had recently been widowed, as divorce was highly unlikely. Here, as far as the official county records show, he ceased adding to his lands. Total acreage, including his first 80 plus the original homestead quarter (160 acres), increased to 960, or 1 ½ sections.

There is also a story that the northwest quarter of Section twenty-five passed into Steeples' hands as pasture. There are no county deed records of any sale of this land to him, and no reference to one in the inventory of his estate. It appears that this bit of oral tradition is mistaken.

5. The County Deed Book notes that on October 14, 1948, D.J. pursuant to his emerging understanding with Edith about housing and care bought Lots 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 of Block 10 in Palco. The sellers were W.W. and Stella N. Stull, to whom he paid $1.00. He added as well an agreement with Hillon concerning mineral rights on ten acres. There are no further real estate transactions of record.

In January 1953, D.J. reached the age of eighty. He could look back across a long life

holding more than its share of tragedies as well as successes. His eight children were safely navigating and overcoming life's challenges, although Freda became with child before marrying Floyd. Granddad denied them any help, forcing them to live in poverty at first. In time, they brought into the world three fine daughters and made both a happy marriage and thriving business. Granddad's example and strong will had clearly prepared his offspring to work hard, be good parents, patriotic, and productive, as we observed earlier. His careful management and efforts to remain current in developments in farming also served him well and set a good example.

Steeples went to the county seat, Stockton, on Monday morning, April 20, 1953, to do what he thought was responsible for one who had reached his age. He met with attorneys Ruth Marshall and W. McCaslin to draft his will. When they finished the document, he signed it as devisee and they as witnesses. It took effect immediately. His business in Stockton concluded, he returned to the Palco home that he shared with Edith. Save for the trip to Stockton, the day was uneventful.

Spring, and particularly the month of April, is fickle in northwestern Kansas. Usually the last freeze occurs by the final week of the month. So it was in 1953. On Friday, April 24, the sun rose at an invigorating if about normal forty-six degrees Fahrenheit. A moderate wind of some twelve miles an hour failed to dispel the growing warmth that one working outside felt. The sky was clear. The anticipated high temperature was a mild sixty-six degrees. April 24 promised to be a perfect day for the season. It offered an irresistible opportunity for an old farmer to repair to his land and work it.

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d

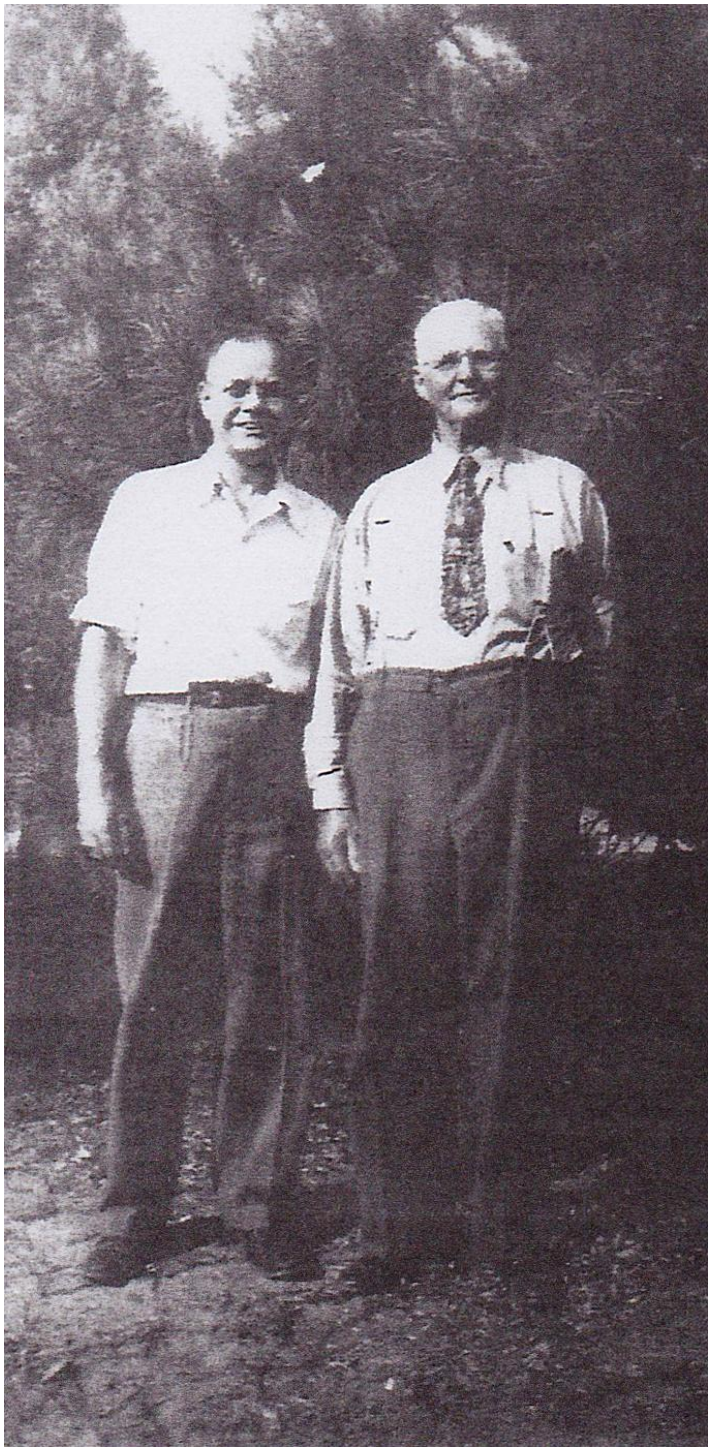
D.J. Feeding his Pigs

Piglets in the Hands of a Jokester

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d

D.J. Steeples in 1944

D.J. and Wayne Steeples in 1946



When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d

D.J. in 1946 at Alveda and Roscoe’s Home

Aerial View of House, Barnyard at Farm Outside of Palco

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd

After breakfast, D.J. drove out of town to the farm. Soon he was driving his Ferguson tractor across a pasture. He planned to strengthen a dam impounding a livestock watering pond, or "tank." As usual, he wasted no time getting started. He went to work, using his tractor and blade to scrape up, lift, move and distribute soil. But he erred seriously in choosing a route to the destination where he would let loose and level his load.

After scraping the tractor's blade full of earth, he raised it and drove straight up a bank, releasing fill as he went. He failed to return to Palco at noon for dinner. His absence began to give Edith some concern. As the hours passed and he still did not reappear, her concern deepened into anxiety. As supper time approached with no Granddad in sight, Edith acted. She sent Lennice, Lois wrote years later, "down to see why Grandpa did not come home for dinner. She got up to the pasture and saw the tractor overturned. She left as she did not want to see" Granddad. Upon hearing of Lennice's discovery, Edith telephoned Duane at once. He and Carol were entertaining "dinner guests, Jean and LeRoy Berland. When they got the call they called George Sleichter . . . ." Sleichter owned an excavating company and "had the equipment they would need to get the tractor off [of] Grandpa. [As the body was cold they] . . . they knew that he had been dead for quite some time." Wallace was in Hays with Marie, at the hospital where she had just undergone surgery. Chester and Olive were also in Hays on some sort of business.

After Chester and Olive learned of D.J's. death, the story is that he drove at eighty or more miles an hour up the paved roads to the farm drive near the edge of Palco. Having ridden across a pasture with Chet, in his truck at fifty miles an hour, I believe that this is a credible account.

News of David James Steeples' sudden and tragic death sped through the northwestern

Kansas counties where he was so well known. People were shocked. His unsought prominence prompted the *Hays Daily News* to publish a story on his fate the day after his funeral and burial. It appears on page 163.

The funeral and burial were chapters in a story that had begun to take shape years earlier. A Steeples plot at Pleasant View Cemetery came into existence when D.J., Chet, and Palco merchant George Tribble exhumed the remains of Francis Oliphant Steeples and little Frankie from their graves on the original homestead and reburied them in the cemetery. They were probably so taken up with their work that day that they gave little thought to the plot's future. They did recall, Chester much later said, that when they opened the graves and coffins, "There was nothing left but a few bones." Myrtle's remains rested quietly with those of Frank and Frankie when undertakers lowered Granddad's casket to join them after the funeral on Tuesday, April 28. In time others linked to our surname, including Nell and more, joined our growing population in Pleasant View Cemetery.

Two days after the funeral and burial, on April 30, Wallace appeared before the Probate Court of Rooks County, in Stockton. There he presented a petition that the will be probated. The court granted the petition immediately after D.J's. witnesses testified that the will was authentic. It was, as a matter of fact, as important for what it did not contain as for what it did include. Steeples made no bequests to any religious body, civic organization, service group, educational entity, or other charity. Consistent with his deep, if generally not voiced directly to them, love for his off-spring, he bequeathed all of his worldly goods to them. The estate was to be divided equally, "share and share alike," among them. To assure as much, the will excluded any share to anyone who legally challenged it.

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd

D. J. Steeples

Killed When

Tractor Overturns

D. J. Steeples, 80, prominent pioneer farmer and landowner of Palco, was found dead under a tractor at his farm near Palco Friday night.

Mr. Steeples had been doing repair work on a pond with a shovel attached to a tractor. In driving up over a bank the weight of the heavy shovel of dirt pulled the tractor over backward pinning him underneath. He had been dead several hours when found. Evidence proved that death had been instantaneous.

A resident of Rooks county since 1879, Mr. Steeples had all the rugged strength and love of nature that is typical of pioneers. He was a successful farmer and also was active in civic affairs, having served for a number of years as a county commissioner and seventeen years as a member of the Palco Consolidated school board.

Surviving are his eight children, Edith Whisman of Palco, Chester F. D. of Plainville, William Wallace of Palco, Alveda Newman of San Bernardino, Calif., Marion Wayne of Burbank, Calif., Mildred L.Ross of Lincoln, Olive Hern [sic] of Scott City, and Freda Lowry of San Leandro, Calif. Also surviving are twenty-three grandchildren, four great-grand children, two sisters, Mrs. J.O. Chamberlain of Denver, and Mrs D.F. Abbott of Seattle and one brother, George Burns of Loveland, Colo.

Funeral services were held Monday afternoon at the Palco community hall with Rev. Clifford I. Moody of the Methodist church officiating. Interment was at Pleasant View cemetery.

There were some specific bequests, too. Edith was to get the several lots and the house he had built for the two of them in Palco in exchange for providing care for him as he aged. The $7,000.00 value of this property was, however, to be considered as part of her one-eighth share of his estate. He left "all of my shop tools" to his "beloved sons," Chester F.D. and W. Wallace, to be divided as they see fit." There was special reference to his lathe and his alfalfa drill. These were to be sold and the proceeds from the sale added to the estate for division among his children. He also stipulated that if any of his children predeceased him, their share was to be place into the corpus of the estate for equal division among the remaining heirs, "share and share alike . . . ."

Where Granddad had made gifts or loans of money to any of his offspring, the values of these must be considered as portions of their shares as heirs. The value of the same was thus to be treated as advancements on their legacies. This stipulation intended to ensure an equal net distribution of the estate. All of D.J's. personal property not referenced above was to be sold, and the proceeds placed as cash in the corpus of the estate. Likewise, his land in Sections 22, and 25 and 36, was to be sold after the expiration of five years from the time of his death. During the five-year interim, Chester was to serve as Executor of the will and Trustee of these lands. Any proceeds from harvests, rentals, or mineral royalties were likewise to be under the management of the Trustee. This person was to make equal annual payments there from to the legatees.

Most important was a further stipulation of the will pertaining to the farm land. After five years the Trustee was to "sell . . . [all of D.J's. farmlands itemized in the will] at a private sale among my children, provided they can agree or a majority of them then living can agree on a price" of "aforesaid lands." In such sale, Chester was to have first right to buy the northeast quarter of

Section 36 of North Hampton Township. Wallace in turn was to hold first right to buy the southwest quarter of Section 22. It was clear here that the governing aim was to keep the Old Home Place and the farm quarter near Palco in the family. The balance of the land, if Chester, Wallace, or both did not buy these two parcels, was to be "sold at private auction to be attended only by my children then living." Chester also received explicit permission to continue his farming on Sections 36 and 25. There was no mention of rent for such farming. There was, however, a provision for exercising and/or leasing mineral rights on lands of the estate for a period extending through twenty years. There was no statement forbidding collusion among heirs to bid up or hold down the sale price of any of the land in order to grant anyone a special opportunity to profit and therefore benefit from an unintended unequal division of the old man's property. Wallace never received income from his harvests. It would seem that D.J. thought rent-free use of the farmhouse fair compensation for raising crops.

The legally-required appraisal of the estate reported both its market and tax valuations. Together they reflect the material portion of David James Steeples' character and legacy both material and human. When he died, he would have been considered a farmer who was more prosperous than most in his region, but not wealthy. Appraisers valued his farmlands at $63,500.00, the lots and house in Palco at $7,000.00. He also held $8,000.39 in savings bonds, bank balances of at least $10,670.92 and some postal savings. There was also a $5,000.00 note from Alveda, plus accrued interest on open accounts of Chester and Wallace totaling $6.380.00, a 1950 Chevy pickup worth $800.00, thirteen dry cows, three milk cows, half interests divided equally with Chester and Wallace respectively, seventeen stock cows, half interests in ten yearling

and nine two- year old cattle, a disc worth $75.00, a tractor appraised at $1,000.00, and lathe and a saw filer, an alfalfa drill, and miscellaneous items. Altogether, the personal property added up to $36,418.22. What was liquid—savings bonds, bank deposits, some postal savings, was in 1953 a bit more than $18,000.00. Altogether, D.J's. appraised worth was $109,918.32 as of July 9, 1953.

This sum is misleading, for a 1953 dollar would buy what it costs $8.41 to buy today. Granddad's liquid assets as of July 1,1953, $18,000.00, equaled $156,426.00 in 2012 dollars. If his gifts and loans to his offspring of $25,000.00 could magically be converted to cash in the estate, the conversion would add another $210,254.00 in 2012 dollars, for totals respectively of $43,600.00 in 1953 and $366,676.00 in 2012 dollars. Performing the same exercise in multiplication for the entire estate would amount roughly to $924.400.00 today. At today's abysmal interest rates, even a lucky 2 percent on $924,400 would generate only $18,500.00 a year. Whether or not D.J. was involved in a self-employment social security program I do not know. I do know that in any event he would not be living high on the hog. It was self-sufficient farming that allowed him to live reasonably well on an annual cash income that rarely exceeded $2,000.00. He was far from wealthy, but not land poor. We might place him somewhere in the middling income group for plains farmers of his time.

By April 24, 1954, administrative, debt settlement, and other expenses had reduced the Kansas inheritance taxable value of Granddad's estate to $104,824.44 ($881,570.00 in 2012 dollars).

Chester, as Executor, decided to write down the balances to be paid to each of the heirs by

the amounts they owed the estate as soon as possible. This step would ease the task of prorating the eight shares. The Probate Court approved this plan on August 14, 1954. The judge declared D.J's. arrangements with Edith, and his loans, gifts, and shared interests to or with his offspring to be "advancements" on the total shares due to each as legatees. The initial payout to Edith was set at $6403.20 less the appraised value of the house and lots in Palco and a gift of $100.00. Gifts of $800.00 to Chester; $3,351.00 to Wallace; $300.00 to Wayne; $400.00 to Mildred; and $500.00 to Olive he treated correspondingly. Proceeding thus resulted as follows:

	Adjustments for "Advancements"			Net Distribution
	Edith G. Steeples	$ 6,501.31		$ 1.89
	Chester F.D. Steeples	$ 800.00		$ 5,603.00
	W.Wallace Steeples	$ 3,352.00		$ 3,050.69
	Alveda B. Newman	$ 5,042.77		$ 1,360.42
	M.Wayne Steeples	$ 300.00		$ 6,169.69
	Mildred L. Ross	$ 400.00		$ 6,003.19
	Olive Herron	$ 500.00		$ 5,903.19
	Freda R. Lowry	$ 00.00		$ 6,403.20
Totals		**$ 18,621.51**		**$ 51.325.23**
Eight Annual Distributions, 1956		(@) 215.67	(Crop Sales)	$ 1,725.00
Do., 1957		(@) 204.36	Do.	$ 1,634.88
Do., 1958		(@) 215.67	Do.	$ 1,725.00
Legal Fees		$ 1,175.00		$ 1,175.00
U.S. I.R.S. (estate)		$ 447.95		$ 447.95

KS Amended Inc. Tax Return '53	$	21.67	$	506.76
W. McCaslin Income Tax Fee Cert.	$	7.00	$	7.00
Court, Lawyer, Final Settl't.	$	57.75	$	57.75
Abstracting	$	586.00	$	586.00
Total Exp. Unavailable for Distribution	$	2,802.13	$	2,802.13
Balance Remaining for Heirs	**$**	**66,000.73**		**8,250.00/heir**
Total Distribution from Estate			**$**	**117,325.90**

directed until the required five years had passed before there could be a private land auction. As the judge ruled, Chester calculated the final distribution net of payment of debts, sundry legal, tax and administration costs. Chester Franklin David Steeples had met all expenses, distributed annual earnings from the estate equally to all eight legatees, and grown the assets to be divided. He had been a good and faithful steward. His administration of the will expressed and perpetuated D. J. Steeples' basic principles of honesty, prudence, and his own rigid view of fairness.

We must say one thing more about the final settlement of the will. From the first it was pretty clear that Chester would buy the property on Sections 25 and 36. Recollections about the terms of the land sales, especially to Wallace, are confused. Kansas Cooperative Extension Economist John Schneider in 1991 set the 1953 value of pasturage in northwestern Kansas at $45.00 per acre. Cropland on average sold for $89.00. Dividing the $63,500 appraisal of Granddad's land by 960 (his total acreage) results in a per acre value of $66.17. This was midway between the $45.00 for pasture land and $89.00 for cropped soil. It implies that about half of his land was in pasture and half in crops.

Lois reports that Freda and Mildred seem to have agreed respectively to bid Chet and Wally up from agreed-upon prices of around $3,000.00-$3,250 each for the farms. Freda did so, angering Chet. Mildred did not, but I believe that Freda, she and Wayne were unhappy about the outcome. There is a disconnect here between memories and reality. Such prices were $6.98 per acre, far less than the land's market value and would have about halved the $117,327.00 payout from the estate.

Several photographs in earlier pages of this chapter have shown D.J. in various settings. We met him first feeding pigs. Next, we saw him at play. He was smiling open-mouthed and unself-consciously advertising that two of his front teeth were missing. His grin showed a man delighting in holding two piglets by their tails. A picture of him at seventy one, in 1944, and another of him with Wayne in 1946 during his only trip to California to see his distant children and grandchildren there, follows. Then we see him in front of some pine trees at Alveda and Roscoe's home during that same visit to California. Below this picture is an aerial view of his house and barnyard on Section twenty-two outside of Palco. What follows is enough to overwhelm any grandparent: a 1941 snapshot of a horde of seventeen wiggling and noisy grandchildren, and another including their parents. During his 1946 trip, Granddad looked older but as fit as ever, standing erect, tousled white hair topping his head and those penetrating blue eyes still very intimidating. While seeming to those of us who did not know him well distant and a bit frightening, his softer features during these later years hinted at a gentle spirit lurking somewhere inside of him.

Granddad's death and burial brought his eight children, some of them already

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd

grandparents, together for the last time when they were all alive. The formal portrait of them below displays his offspring as they were: upright, hard-working, several of them civic-minded, all of them religious, and all good parents. The first page of the final photographs contains three recent views of D.J.'s farms and barnyards outside of Palco. The second shows the headstones of D.J., Myrtle, Frank and Frankie, and a view of the remains of the dugout/soddy/stone home where the Steeples saga in Kansas began.

These scenes, with an obituary, bring us close to the end of our story.

The Final Portrait of the Eight Steeples Sisters and Brothers

Rear, L. to R.: Olive Steeples Herron, Mildred Steeples Ross, Edith Steeples Whisman, Alveda Steeples Newman, Freda Steeples Lowry
Front, L. to R.: Chester F.D. Steeples, W. Wallace Steeples, M. Wayne Steeples

IN MEMORIAM

David James Steeples was born on January 27, 1873 in Chicago, Ill. He passed away April 24, 1953, at the age of 80 years, two months and 28 days. He was the son of Mary Ann and Francis O. Steeples. They came to Kansas in 1879 and homesteaded the property across from the farm which has been known as the home place of the D. J. Steeples family. On Nov. 27, 1898, he was united in marriage to Myrtle Fulcher, and to this union were born Edith Gertrude Whisman of Palco, Kans., Chester F. D. of Palco, Kans., William Wallace, of Palco, Kans., Alveda Beatrice Newman, of San Bernardino, Calif., Marion Wayne, of Burbank, Calif., Mildred Lucille Ross, of Lincoln, Kansas, Olive Marie Heron, of Scott City, Kans, and Freda Ruth Lowry, of San Leandro, Calif. He was predeceased by his wife, who passed away on March 14, 1914. He was a member of the Christian church. He leaves to mourn their loss all of his children, 23 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren, two sisters, Mrs. J. O. Chamberlain of Denver, Colo., Mrs. F. D. Abbott, of Seattle, Wash., and one brother, Mr. George Burns of Loveland, Colo. Mr. David James Steeples' long life was one of great courage and integrity. When he was 41 years old his wife passed away and left upon his shoulders the sole responsibility of rearing his large family. His appreciation for all the natural things of life and his sparkling sense of humor lent him unbounded strength to carry on his great burden. He sang in the Palco male quartette and he and his children formed what was called the Steeples' band. These memories will never be forgotten by all of his many friends. Seldom does a man leave behind him in this world so much beauty. Created by his noble strength and love of the soil, he lived close to God in his feeling for growing things. His spirit will live on in the vast fruit orchard which he planted and in the many trees and shrubs. His purple lilac bushes are enjoyed by hundreds of people who come to see them every spring and will stand year after year as a lasting memorial to him. His devotion to public service found expression in the several terms in which he served the people of Rooks county as a member of the Board of County Commissioners, and also his seventeen years as a member of the Palco Consolidated school district. Although he was highly successful in accomplishing the necessary things in life, he was never unmindful of the bright and beautiful things God's true gifts—music, flowers and laughter. That is why everyone loved him.

Funeral services were held Monday afternoon, April 27 at the Palco township hall with Rev. Clifford L. Moody of the Methodist church officiating. Interment was in the Pleasant View cemetery with Mosher Brothers in charge of arrangements.

* * *

In Palco For Steeples Funeral

Among relatives from out of town who were in Palco Monday for the D. J. Steeples funeral were George Burns of Loveland, Colo., Mr. and Mrs. J. O. Chamberlain, of Denver, Earl Fulcher of Nampa, Idaho, Everett Fulcher of Wichita, Mr. and Mrs. Don Rhudy of Lincoln, Rev. and Mrs. Hugh Berry of Lincoln, Mr. and Mrs. Ray Paul of Randall, Mr. and Mrs. Ervin Ross of Scottsville,, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Cole of Lincoln, Mr. and Mrs Rex Ryan of Lincoln, Mr and Mrs. Cromwell Mead of Salina, Mrs. Roena Gilbert of Seneca and Mrs Olive Robertson of Salina.

Card of Thanks

We wish to express grateful appreciation to all for their many expressions of sympathy at the time of the death of our father.—The D. J. Steeples Family. 18-tc

Hays Daily News, April 29, 1953

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d

Scenes at D.J’s. Farms
Yard to House at “The Old Home Place”, 1990s

House at the Farm in Palco, 2012 (deck added recently)

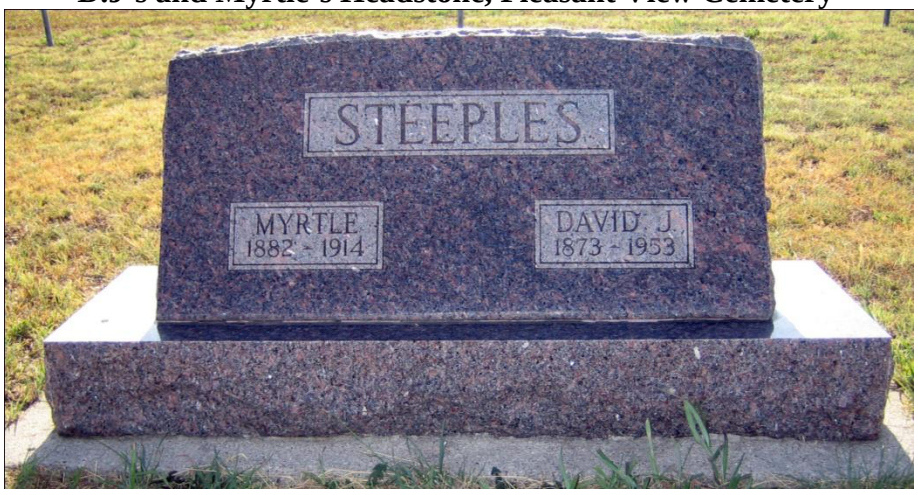
Barnyard at the Farm in Palco, 2012

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd

Remains of Frank's Dugout/Soddy/Stone Home, Site of His First Field

Frank's and Frankie's Headstone, Pleasant View Cemetery

D.J's and Myrtle's Headstone, Pleasant View Cemetery



What can we make of our pioneer forbear and family patriarch when everything is said and done? A summary of the principles by which he lived is the best way to proceed. His obituary gives us a firm beginning. He believed in fair treatment. Family he held foremost. He was a devout Christian. He was patriotic to the core. He was certain that the principles of the Republican Party enshrined those that were correct for the nation. His will's provisions for the future of his land reveal a hope that one or more of his sons would continue to farm on Steeples ground, and own enough acreage to provide for his family's needs. His management of land aimed to make it fruitful, and thus to his eyes more beautiful. Homely virtues, these. But rock solid, and morally uncompromising. These, which millions of his countrymen shared, he passed on to his children. He never gave up his apocalyptic view that The End Times prophesied in the Book of Revelation were near. He also deeply hoped for that Biblically-promised, better next world. Had he thought in such terms when he drove his tractor out on that fateful April 24, when lilacs would soon be blooming, he might have considered spring's gifts of life. Or he might have premonitionally understood what our First Americans meant when they said, "Today is a good day to die." Had such notions come to mind, he might even have— if he had thought of them—resonated to the words that Alfred Lord Tennyson put in the mouth of Odysseus as the old warrior roused his shipmates for one last voyage;

Tho' much is taken, much abides, and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will,
To strive, to seek, and not to yield.

Requiem

THE WORD "REQUIEM" derives from the Latin root *requies*, meaning "to rest." The term now refers to a religious act, a mass for the dead. As first blush neither the words "rest," nor its long-term companion, "retirement" would fit in D.J's. vocabulary, nor some account of his life. We'll take a brief detour now, to establish that we are neither credulous nor careless with evidence, before we turn to the requiem itself. The detour's need will become evident as we draw a distinction that may make some readers uncomfortable.

We'll begin with history. Past events and history are not the same things. The past *was*. History *is*. It derives from the classical Greek χιςτορια (historia), meaning, literally, "inquiry" or "to inquire." It is what our inquiry of the evidence about the past allows us to reconstruct of it. That reconstruction we call *fact*. Facts are man-made, thoughts about the past that the evidence permits. The ongoing search for evidence about the past, may reveal errors that need correcting, and/or that previously-held perspectives didn't get things right. So we constantly change our knowledge about the past. Because we do so, *the facts*, *the shape of what we know about the past*, *change*. When continuing research results in changes in our knowledge about the past, we revise

it. Revisionism has a bad reputation in some quarters, but history (inquiry about the past) is dead if we do not continuously rethink our knowledge about it, and reshape how we understand its meaning.

What historians create from the evidence as facts have a parallel in science, where we encounter they word *theory*. That word we define as the best available explanation of some natural phenomenon. Theory does not mean a wild guess, a subjective opinion, the result of fitting selected bits of evidence into some preconceived ideological framework, or the like. Scientists and historians together are constantly enlarging the evidence they have toward answering some one or another question. Scientific theories change just as facts do. Like historical facts, they represent rigorously unearthed, examined and tested evidence. The purpose of all of this research, once theories or facts are established, is not to find more and more evidence that they are true. That approach would transform research into an exercise that would solidify them into unchallengeable, unquestioned ideology. We work, instead, as physicist and philosopher of science Karl Popper wrote, to *disprove or falsify them*. In every case, the result of research, then, is tentative.

We all know of instances where a "fact" or a "theory" is subjected to a half-baked kind of research fashioned to bolster a preselected answer to a question. Take, for example, arguments about the literal inerrancy of the Holy Bible (how can we make a claim for the Bible that it does not make for itself?) Or evolution. We now know how it works. It happens as genes randomly jump from one position to another on an organism's DNA. UFOs? We have all seen, as Garrison Keillor would folksily put it, "things in the sky that we don't know what they are." No need here to conjure up aliens. Nor to turn to supernatural explanation. Simple common sense and

observation support a simpler conclusion. Whatever happens is natural. We might want to find out how. Period.

I took this detour because we needed to establish that the requiem, told as a story, does not come from credulous, uncritical, sources. The story is of an experience that two rigorously prepared professionals, one a scientist (a chemist), the other a historian, shared. We were Wayne and Douglas Steeples.

It was a summer night in 1953, a few months after Granddad's death. My father, Wayne, and I were sitting on a hanging swing on the front porch of my maternal grandparents' home in Hays. A single street light was contending feebly with a fluttering cloud of moths and the surrounding darkness. The bulk of Hays High School loomed vaguely across the street. Hooting owls, fluttering bats' wings, blinking and flashing green lanterns tracing the rising and falling flights of courting fire flies, the screech of mate-seeking cicadas and gentle rustle of trees' leaves completed the scene.

After a half hour or so, as we sat silently, we noticed faint, distant flickers of light, and echoing thunder. During intensifying flashes, we saw that the sky was beginning to cloud up. After some minutes, it was obvious that a heavy thunderstorm was approaching. Lightning shone more and more often, and more brightly. Rumbles of thunder became more ominous. Then the night fell perfectly still. Not a leaf was trembling. There was no wind. Nocturnal creatures were silent.

Suddenly a rush of wind blew in. Trees and branches bent, leaves thrashing about. Shortly, we could smell rain. By now, the storm was so close that lightning flashed almost continuously. Thunder clapped and boomed likewise. It was as if we were under countless

strobe lights switching on and off so quickly as to transform the night into day. Then the rain struck, at first as huge, scattered drops. Soon a gusty wind blew a falling flood into shifting serpentine patterns on the ground and street. We sat in silent fascination, fully focused on the tempest's furious beauty.

When the storm climaxed, something very strange happened. A figure appeared and stepped up over the curb. It began to walk toward the porch, featureless and dark against the lightning behind it. Neither of us spoke. Had the lightning given interrupted illumination, we would have been unable to identify the figure even as it neared the first porch step. But when it came within ten feet or so, we could make out its features. They were those of a beat-up farmer's hat covering a full head of white hair. Its face was familiar. It stood something over six feet tall and was wearing a blue chambray work shirt and bib overalls. Just as it reached the bottom step . . . it disappeared.

Daddy and I sat in silence for maybe half an hour. The storm slowly let up. Calm and the ordinary sights and sounds of night returned. Then he asked, "Did you see what I saw?" Long silence. "Yup." More silence. "What did you see?" Very long silence. "I saw Granddad." Longest silence. "So did I." Neither of us spoke of this to anyone else until long after his premature death in 1967. Finally, in 2012, while writing this book, I shared it with Chris, Lois, and my sister, Norma.

What can a skeptical, rigorous historian make of such a story so long after? Nothing, if we employ scientists' tests showing that every repetition of an experiment or observation yields the same result. Next to nothing if we rely on historians' disciplined tests of at least two, independent, reliable witnesses, and proof that others had experienced the same thing in a known

time. But our experience was *real*. We *shared* it. I personally am ambivalent about whether or not there is an afterlife, and even whether the question matters. The notion that "this life is not a dress rehearsal" does not disturb me. Nor does the possibility that there is such a thing as Mystery, whatever we may call it. "Requiem" or "Resurrection," which is it? I can offer no answer beyond what this account may imply.

And this: the event reminds us that D.J. lives on, at least in memory and perhaps much more.

Requirescat vel resurgum? In memoriam.

Appendix

Salina, Kansas Eighth Grade (Grammar School) Completion Examination in 1895
Few high schools then existed in Kansas, and no law yet set standards for them.

SOURCE:

http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kssvgs/school/8th_exam_exp.html

The following document was transcribed from the original document in the collection of the Smoky Valley Genealogy Society, Salina, Kansas. This test is the original eighth-grade final exam for 1895 from Salina, KS. An interesting note is the fact that the county students taking this test were allowed to take the test in the 7th grade, and if they did not pass the test at that time, they were allowed to re-take it again in the 8th grade.

Graduation Examination Questions of Saline County, Kansas

April 13, 1895

J.W. Armstrong, County Superintendent.

Examinations at Salina, New Cambria, Gypsum City, Assaria, Falun, Bavaria, and District No. 74 (in Glendale Twp.)

Reading and Penmanship. - The Examination will be oral, and the Penmanship of Applicants will be graded from the manuscripts.

GRAMMAR (Time, one hour)

1. Give nine rules for the use of Capital Letters.

2. Name the Parts of Speech and define those that have no modifications.

3. Define Verse, Stanza and Paragraph.

4. What are the Principal Parts of a verb? Give Principal Parts of do, lie, lay and run.

5. Define Case. Illustrate each case.

6. What is Punctuation? Give rules for principal marks of Punctuation.

7-10 Write a composition of about 150 words and show therein that you understand the practical use of the rules of grammar.

ARITHMETIC (Time, 1 ¼ hour)

1. Name and define the Fundamental Rules of Arithmetic.

2. A wagon box is 2 ft. deep, 10 feet long, and 3 ft. wide. How many bushels of wheat will it hold?

3. If a load of wheat weights 3942 lbs., what is it worth at 50 cts. Per bu., deducting 1050 lbs for tare?

4. District No. 33 has a valuation of $35,000. What is the necessary levy to carry on a school seven months at $50 per month, and have $104 for incidentals?

5. Find cost of 6720 lbs. coal at $6.00 per ton.

6. Find the interest of $512.60 for 8 months and 18 days at 7 per cent.

7. What is the cost of 40 boards 12 inches wide and 16 ft. long at $20 per m?

8. Find bank discount on $300 for 90 days (no grace) at 10 per cent.

9. What is the cost of a square farm at $15 per acre, the distance around which is 640 rods?

10. Write a Bank Check, a Promissory Note, and a Receipt.

U.S. HISTORY (Time, 45 minutes)

1. Give the epochs into which U.S. History is divided.

2. Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus.

3. Relate the causes and results of the Revolutionary War.

4. Show the territorial growth of the United States.

5. Tell what you can of the history of Kansas.

6. Describe three of the most prominent battles of the Rebellion.

7. Who were the following: Morse, Whtney, Fulton, Bell, Lincoln, Penn, and Howe?

8. Name events connected with the following dates: 1607, 1620, 1800, 1849, and 1865.

Appendix

ORTHOGRAPHY (Time, one hour)

1. What is meant by the following: Alphabet, phonetic orthogaphy, etymology, syllabication?
2. What are elementary sounds? How classified?
3. What are the following, and give examples of each: Trigraph, subvocals, diphthong, cognate letters, linguals?
4. Give four substitutes for caret ãuä.
5. Give two rules for spelling words with final ãeä. Name two exceptions under each rule.
6. Give two uses of silent letters in spelling. Illustrate each.
7. Define the following prefixes and use in connection with a word: Bi, dis, mis, pre, semi, post, non, inter, mono, super.
8. Mark diacritically and divide into syllables the following, and name the sign that indicates the sound: Card, ball, mercy, sir, odd, cell, rise, blood, fare, last.
9. Use the following correctly in sentences: Cite, site, sight, fane, fain, feign, vane, vain, vein, raze, raise, rays.
10. Write 10 words frequently mispronounced and indicate pronunciation by use of diacritical marks and by syllabication.

GEOGRAPHY (Time, one hour)

1. What is climate? Upon what does climate depend?
2. How do you account for the extremes of climate in Kansas?
3. Of what use are rivers? Of what use is the ocean?
4. Describe the mountains of N.A.
5. Name and describe the following: Monrovia, Odessa, Denver, Manitoba, Hecla, Yukon, St. Helena, Juan Fernandez, Aspinwall, and Orinoco.
6. Name and locate the principal trade centers of the U.S.
7. Name all the republics of Europe and give capital of each.
8. Why is the Atlantic Coast colder than the Pacific in the same latitude?
9. Describe the process by which the water of the ocean returns to the sources of rivers.
10. Describe the movements of the earth. Give inclination of the earth.

Appendix

BIOLOGY (Time, one hour)

1. Where are the saliva, gastric juice, and bile secreted? What is the use of each in digestion?
2. How does nutrition reach the circulation?
3. What is the function of the liver? Of the kidneys?
4. How would you stop the flow of blood from an artery in the case of laceration?
5. Give some general directions that you think would be beneficial to preserve the human body in a state of health.

RULES FOR TEACHERS - 1872

1. Teachers each day will fill lamps, clean chimneys.
2. Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's session.
3. Make your pens carefully. You may whittle nibs to the individual taste of the pupils.
4. Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.
5. After ten hours in school, the teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.
6. Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.
7. Every teacher should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.
8. Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity and honesty.
9. The teacher who performs his labor faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of twenty-five cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves