

A Trip to Bronson

Dennis Goodno
May 2005

Since I first started doing genealogy about twelve years ago, I had often thought about making a pilgrimage to the town of Bronson Kansas where my great-great grandfather, Ben Goodno lived for the last thirty-four years of his life. This opportunity presented itself when I planned a trip to the Grand Canyon with the Lancaster Photography Association on May 22-23, 2005. I figured that as I was already several hundred miles east I might as well continue on to Bronson Kansas.

My first stop after leaving Grand Canyon was Tucumcari, New Mexico. This was a "Route 66" town that obviously has gone downhill since interstate 40 bypassed the town. Route 66 was the major highway that ran from Chicago to Los Angeles and made famous by "The Grapes of Wrath" and the TV series "Route 66". This highway was official decommissioned in about 1985. It is now becoming a tourist attraction in some areas, but as I drove east on I40 I could see the devastating affect on the towns that I40 bypassed, such as Tucumcari and El Reno, OK. The photo is in front of the Tucumcari convention center.



From my father, Robert Harry Goodno's birth certificate, I had the address in El Reno where he was born in 1912 (817 South Rock Island ave.), so I stopped in El Reno. The house was still there! But it is in pretty bad shape. There are so many untrimmed trees you can hardly see the house in the photo! It is on a street shared with other 100 year old homes near the center of the city, most need lots of work.



Next stop was Fort Scott Kansas (Bourbon county seat). The town has a population of about 8300, Bourbon county has a population of about 15,000 (it had almost 25,000 in 1900!). I was expecting to see flat prairie land covered was corn fields but I saw green gently rolling hills covered partly with trees and mostly alfalfa fields. I didn't see what I had expected until later when I drove through western Kansas. Fort Scott's claim to fame is the old fort which is now a national historic site.



I spent some time in the courthouse researching Ben Goodno's probate papers and the Goodno land transactions. The people were very helpful. I think I gave them something to do for a change. They are just starting to use computers for record keeping but are still recording land transactions in 20 pound books as was done in the 1870s! The town is dead. I had no trouble parking directly in front of the courthouse during

peak business hours.

When I completed my work at the courthouse I went across the street to the "Old Fort Genealogical Society of Southeastern Kansas, Inc." for further research. About 10 years ago I had previously asked the society to research Ben Goodno's probate records at the courthouse. Point of interest, they do not have an internet connection yet even though they have a website! For their efforts I paid \$15 to join their organization!

To summarize what I learned:

- Ben, his brother John Mayberry Goodno, his son Harry (my great grandfather), Ben's daughter, Lucy Belle, Ben's wife and some of John's sons all bought and sold land in Bronson and vicinity starting at least as early as about 1880. Ben moved to Bronson shortly after it was founded in 1883. He had moved to Kansas about 1870.

- Ben had a business: Goodno & CO. that sold agricultural Implements, seed and grain. His business started as early as 1885 and lasted at least until the Goodno building burned down in March 1910. A large part of the Bronson business district was destroyed in this fire which originated in the Goodno building.



- Ben died January 13, 1913 without a will. He owed many creditors, including his brother John and daughter Uhlma. Some of his personal property and land was sold to pay off his creditors. I can only guess that the reason he was in so much in debt was because of the fire less than three years earlier.
- I found Ben and his second wife's, (Ada Louella Williamson) marriage certificate in the courthouse.
- Ben's daughter, Lucy Belle married Milford Donoho who was educated as a lawyer and published the first newspaper in Bronson.

I then drove about 20 miles west to Bronson. My first stop was the Bronson Cemetery. I located Ben Goodno's grave that he shares with his first wife Adda (Sarah Adeline Hyde) who died in 1888. He married his second wife in 1889. Ada Louella died in 1930 in Alhambra, Ca. Ben's children were Harry Goodno, Lucy Belle (Donoho) from his first wife and Uhlma May (Brown) and Marion Fern (Mcgee/Donoho). All the children died in California except for Harry who probably died in Amarillo, Texas (I haven't confirmed that). I also photographed Ben's brother; John Mayberry Goodno's grave that he shares with his wife Kate (Catherine Jane Ressler). There are also several John Goodno descendants interred in the Bronson cemetery.



I went to the Bronson library. This is a brand new building and the nicest building in town, because it was built with a government grant. During the hour or so that I was doing research there, no one



else came in! The other structures in town are in pretty bad shape. The city hall is a double wide mobile home! I drove around and photographed homes that were at one time owed by some of the Goodno's. I couldn't confirm the one that Ben lived in before he died. Bronson has a population of about 346, but has seen better days! I was told that no one wants to stay in Bronson, it is a depressed area there are few jobs and the competition from other towns and businesses is too great. The per capita income of Bourbon County in 1999 was \$16,393, whereas the rest of Kansas was \$20,506 which of course is still far less than California.



I continued my journey home by driving west clear across Kansas. Like Ft Scott and Bronson, I saw many old homes needing work and abandoned farm buildings. The cities like Wichita were not so bad. The cheapest gas on my trip was in Wichita at



\$1.85/gallon. I stopped for a short time in Dodge City, they are trying to make it a tourist town but I was not impressed.



Below is a history of Bronson as of 1914, I am also sending separately because of its size, a chapter about Bronson from "Footprints of Bourbon County":

**From the cornerstone of the Bronson high school
May 27, 1914**

Bronson, Bourbon Co., Kansas is a town about 25 miles west of Fort Scott on the Fort Scott, & Western division of the Missouri Pacific railroad. Bronson was named after a man by the name of Ira Bronson who was interested in bulding the railroad through what is now Bronson in the year 1879.

The ground on which the original town of Bronson is located was owned by Mrs. Eveline Weir and is now called Mrs. E. Weirs' addition to the town that was p1atted in the year 1881.

The Bronson park was platted and the trees planted in the year 1882- the trees being set out by P. Mattox.

The first postmaster in Bronson was George Requa and the first hotl was run by Mrs. Mary Chambers.

The first birth in Bronson was Grace Reno-daughter of Mr & Mrs Wm Reno.

The first merchants were Requa & Martin.

The first lumber yard was owned by Holeman Bros & Co.

The first secret organization was the Knights of Pythias which was organized in 1883.

The first news paper was started in 1882 by **M.H. Donoho** (*Married Lucy Belle Goodno*), and the first house in town was bui1t by A. L, Martin.

Bronson had several disastrous fires since the town started, one on May 13,1890 and the other on March 13, 1910 which destroyed nearly two blocks in the business portion of the town but which is now almost entirely rebuilt with brick structures.

The first bank was called the Exchange Bank & was owned by Pinnell & Smith who operated it till 1888 when it was purchased by other parties and the name changed to the Bank of Bronson & Joseph Cook became its cashier. He was connected with the bank unti1 his death in 1910. A statement issued April 26, 1888 showed that they had loans of \$1674,49 and deposits of \$8752.00 compared with the deposits of today in the two banks of the town whose combined deposits are over \$200,000.

An o1d resident of Bronson gives the following as the first businesses of Bronson: Genera1 store -E. Carter, Furniture- A.O. Pullman, .Meat Market- Ide Helms, Livery barn-Ide He1ms, Restaurant-Robert Haynes, Druggist- Dr. Neal, B1ack smith- W. Osborne, Lumber yard- Holeman Bros., General store- Morgan, General store- Martin & Requa, Barber-Chas Young.

In the general store since that time we have had Carter. & Anderson, L.E. Collins & Co, Martin & Adams, Love Bros & Co, Chas Weir, Smally & Timmons, Joe Reno & And Wright Ireland &Co, & Adams Bros.

In the hardware business the following firms: Holeman Bros., T.A. Stahl, **B. H. Goodno**, L.E. Collins, W.D. Freeman, Hill & Baker, D.E. Holt, Geyer & Osborn, S. C. Foraker, R. Anderson, & Harris & Gay.

The following men have conducted drug stores in the past- Dr. Neal, Dr. Alumbaugh, Jay Good, J.C. McMlaughlin, Eugene Marsh, J.S. Cummings, R.R. Hickson.

Those conducting meat markets in the past: Ide Helms, Oneal & Flake, Darling Bros., Joe Runbel, Burris & Benefield, Holt & Bowers, John Blunt, N. McCoy, Osborn Bros., & F.F. Pohles.

The following named persons have had charge of Bronson Newspapers business in the past: M.H. Donoho, Marshall Holeman, H. E. Conflanes, J.P. Decker, Chris Ritter, J.L. Ritter, Lena Ferris, T.A. Tonney, & Lawrence Moore.

We have had the following named black smiths since the town was started: W. Osborne. L. Tompson, M.B. Williamson. Isaac Irvin, Wm Ward, Wm Anderson, Wm Holstein, J. Dannely, John Baker, D.E. Watson, Calton & Huffman, Guy Quist & Bert Hamilton.

In the lumber yard business the following firms: Holeman Bros & Co, S.A. Brown & Co, Goodlander & Konantz, Powers & Milligan, Marvin & Field, C.A. Marvin, & E.W. Dunkerton.

In the grain business we have had: Davis & Co, Hammel & McCarty, McCarty & Bowers, Noble Grain Co, Rodgers & **Goodno** (*Ben had died the previous year*), & Ross & Bowers.

The following named doctors have administered to the sick since Bronson began: Dr Danilles, Reynolds Yarnel, Burns, J.C, Cummings, E.B. Cummings, A.D. Howell, J.C. Lardner, & George Lambeth.

Since George Requa we have had the following pest masters: A. Ford, H.J. Russet T.D. Webster, George Cambell, Harry Ross, and in a few days T.D. Webster will again become postmaster under the administration of President Wilson.

Since M.B. Williamson who was the first mayor, we have had A.L. Martin, **Ben H. Goodno**, Dwight Ferris, David E. Earl, J.C. Cummings, T.D. Webster, Wm Campbel, Dr Daniels, D.T. McCarty, Joseph Cooke, David E. Watson, C.T. Hammel, who was re-elected after two years out of office. The present councilmen are: /CaldwellLS.E. Russell, J.E. Zimmerman, C.O. Wright, Dr. Wolf & J.W. Gregory- /Davis city clerk, W.H. Noble, City treasure- J.M. Cubbison,

Bronson churches at present consists of the Methodist church- Rev J.H. Oliver pastor. They have a good building which they recently enlarged.
The Baptist church- Rev Lewis E. Durham.
The Methodist South- Rev John D. Wood,pastor. They have a new building.
The Holiness Chapel-Rev Brown-pastor.

The lodges of Bronson consists of the Knights of the Pythias with the largest membership, the JOOT next having a large membership, in partnership with the Knights of the Pythias own the lodge building & then we have the Masonic order, The Modern Woodman, The Rebekahs, The Royal Neighbors, The Eastern Star, The Workman Knights & Ladies Security and others.

Bronson business firms at present consists of the Bank of Bronson, W.W. Pres, J.M. Cubbison-vice pres., This bank Capitol stock is \$20,000. The Citizens State Bank-James T. Miles-pres., Owen M. Thomas vice pres., J.W. Meyer cashier. Capitol \$19,000.

The general stores consists of Wright & Ireland & Co, Love Bros,

Our lumber yards are conducted by E.W. Dunkerton & C.A. Marvin who also buys Cream and builds silos, our hardware & Implement dealers: E.W. Dunkerton, Foraker & Son, Harris & Gay, & R. Anderson Tinware S Stoves.

Ell Dunkerton, C.A. Marvian & Paul Mattox are furniture dealers,

Mr Dunkerton & Mattox are the undertakers & embalmers. Helms & Banta conduct a grocery store & buy cream & produce. W.G. Verner also buys cream & produce.

The physician consists of Dr James S. Cummings who has been here since the town started and who is at present a reprehensive from the district in the Kansas Legislative. Dr A.D. Howell & George Lambeth are the other doctors of the town.

Dr Joseph D. Wolf is the veterniarn. Dr Josep Wolf has a large practice.

The barbers are Jack & Joe Gregory and George Howard.

The grain & seed dealers are Noble Grain Co. Rogers & Goodno, Ross, Bowers & Broughton.

The blacksmiths- Guy Quist & D.E. Watson-the harness dealer F.D. Webster & Henry Verner. Mr Webster came to Bronson in 1882 and has conducted a shop since.

The meat market is in charge of Frank Robles- the restaurants Ritter Bros & W.E. love-the real estate W.S. Low & Anderson & Son-the livery barn-C.R. Houn & M.F. Duncan while Don VanOver runs an auto livery.

Mrs C.O. Wright has charge of the millenary business & Lawrence Moore the Editor of the Bronson Pilot.

Mayor C.T. Hammel is the stock shipper & he buys nearly all the livestock That is sold in Bronson. Mayor Hammel has long been identified with the business & social relations in Bronson. He is active in the M.E. church & is a firm believer in good government.

Another business that I want to write about is the oil & gas business which is something we are proud of. At the present time there is 100 or more producing wells within a radius of 6 miles of this town. We have citizens here that are interested in the oil business & I might name a few- E.T. Holeman who is one of the pioneer residents of Bronson, J.E. Zimmerman, J.L. Smith, Robert Lent & several others. Thousands of dollars worth of oil are pumped each year. Bronson gets its supply from the Kansas Natural Gas Co which has a pipeline running to Fort Scott.

And now in conclusion, last but not least, I want to say a word about the Bronson school. The citizens are proud of their school & school building now in the course of erection which is to take the place of the old building which was destroyed by fire on the morning of September 1, 1913. Part of this has stood since Bronson was started and has been added to different times until they used seven teachers. Several years ago a high school course was added.

Bronsons new school building started in April 1914 and is to be finished by September 1, 1914. The school pres. is C.O.Wright, clerk is L.B. Kayser, treas is T.D. Webster, & the principal of the school is Prof W.P. Reese.

And now the corner stone of our school building which was laid on Wed-May 27, 1914-this partial record of Bronson from the time it was platted till the present time is placed hoping that when it is taken out in years to come it will be a benefit to the citizens of Bronson as a record of the past in Bronson, Bourbon co, Kansas.

I remain
Yours truly

W.H. Noble
City clerk

May the 27th 1914