

## From "Footprints of Bourbon County" 1991

### Bronson Marion Township

A few years after the Civil War and twenty miles west of Fort Scott, Kansas, one could see only grassy plains in any direction one would look. In 1879, the track for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, then known as the Fort Scott, Wichita and Western Railroad was laid through it, and in the autumn of the same year preparation were under way for the building of Bronson.

The city of Bronson derived its name from that of Ira Bronson, at one time, Clerk of the District Court of Bourbon County. He was closely connected and identified with the construction of the Fort Scott, Wichita and Western Railroad, the first railroad built into this immediate section.

In 1881, the town of Bronson was platted on land belonging to Evaline Wier. Mrs. Evaline Wier (1828-1918) owned the south half of the section on which Bronson now stands. After the completion of the railway between Ft. Scott and Iola on

July 4, 1881, she is credited with having built the depot, thus assuring the location of the townsite on her property. Two miles northeast of the new town was a little hamlet named Wilsonville. They had hoped the railroad would come through their village but were missed. They had hoped to become a city of the first class. In an early day it had a store, blacksmith shop and post office. After being missed by the railroad, they abandoned their little village and moved to the new town. George H. Requa (1839-1915) became the first



Bronson Pilot Office

postmaster and general merchant of Bronson after he accepted Mrs. Wier's offer of two lots of his choice in what was then her cornfield if he would move his store and post office, called Wilsonville. When the Methodist Episcopal Church building was built in 1889, he made the largest contribution in the amount of \$100.

The Wright sisters were Sarah, Mrs. Blatchley Wright; Mary Ann, Mrs. Jonathan C. Wilson; and Ellen, Mrs. J. W. Young. With Blatchley Wright's donation of a one-acre tract three quarters of a mile to the northeast of the Bronson townsite and money from the Mexican War pension of the Wright sister's mother, Lucinda Wright, a South Methodist Church called Wright's Chapel was built just before the town was started. In 1883, the chapel was moved into Bronson to what is now the northeast corner of Highway #54 and Clay Street and was called The South Methodist Church. In 1939 they united with the Methodist Episcopal Church. The post office, operated by Albert Martin, was loaded onto a wagon and moved to Bronson. This was perhaps the only post office in the United States that was ever moved without the consent of government officials.



Depot - Bronson, KS

The first store to be opened in Bronson came from Wilsonville being moved by the owners Martin and Requa. The building is gone now but did stand just west of what was known as the Wright, Ireland & Company. Joe Reno built the second store.

Land in the neighborhood was on the market at that time at prices ranging from \$5.00 to \$15.00 per acre.

The first residence building in Bronson was built by Al Martin and the second were built by Porter Mattox.

To the southwest of the new town was a small community known as Rocklow. A young doctor had set his practice up there. He too came to Bronson with his brother, Ed, who was also a doctor. They were Dr. J. S. Cummings and Dr. Ed Cummings. They had a drug store as well as their practice here. Dr. J. S. Cummings looked after the sick and injured in Bronson for over fifty years. There was also another doctor, Dr. A. D. Horvell making three doctors to care for the ill in the new town.

Building was slow at first then in a few short years, Bronson became a thriving town and by February 22, 1883 the town had 225 inhabitants, six general stores, two large well stocked lumber yards, one hardware and furniture store, harness shop, barber shop, boot and shoe shop, butcher shop, hotel, restaurant, billard hall, two millinery establishments, one paint shop, three livery stables, one large coal yard, three ministers and three churches were constructed. Also two real estate men, one firm that dealt exclusively in implements and farm implements, three doctors, one lawyer and a good supply of artesian the Pilot publishing establishment. The first Pilot being issued February 22, 1883 by Judge M. H. Donoho.

A hotel was erected in the year 1882 by Mrs. Mary Chambers.



The train has just left - Bronson, KS

In the early 1880's the South Methodist Church was moved in from north of Bronson. The Methodist Church was built in 1884 and the old Baptist Church was built in 1884 across the street west of the present Baptist which was erected in 1925.

Early in the settlement of Bronson ground was set aside for park purposes and most of the trees were planted by Porter Mattox in 1882. The *Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory* gave the following account in 1888. Formerly known as Wilsonville, is a station on the St. L., Ft. S. & W. div. of the M. P. Ry, in Bourbon county, 22 miles west of Fort Scott, the county seat. A weekly newspaper, the *Pilot*, is published, and 2 churches, a school, a bank and a



Bronson's first school

steam flouring mill are sustained. Population, 500. Exp., Pacific Tel., W.U. A. Ford, postmaster; Bank of Bronson, Pin, nell & Son proprs.; M. Barton, flour mill; F.E. Bowen, druggist; The Bronson Pilot, D.F. Peffley propr.; Carter & Anderson, general store; L.E. Collins & Co., general store; J.S. Cummings, physician; E.J. Daughters, justice of peace; Davis & Co. grain dealers; M.H. Donoho, lawyer; Wm. Gibson, shoemaker; Goodno & co., farm impts.; S.O.R. Harris, restaurant; H. L. Helman, grocer; Holeman Bros. & Co., hardware and lumber; A.H. Kane, hotel; W. K. Land, restaurant;



Clay Street, Bronson, KS-looking north from fire bell tower

Leonard & Earl, real estate; Jeffrey Love, general store; Eugene Marsh, druggist; Martin & Adams, general store; J.T. Morgan, general store; O'Neal & Flake, livery; D.F. Peffley, propr. The Pilot; Pinnell & Son, proprs. Bank of Bronson; S.F. Powers, jeweler; J. Rumble, meat market; B.F. Smalley, general store; SMith & Son, livery; O.W. Sprouse, railroad and express agent; A. Stahl, billiards; W.B. Webster, lawyer; Williamson & Thompson, blacksmiths. In 1891, Bronson held its first big 4th of July celebration in the city park. There wasn't enough shade in the park at this time so wires were stretched on poles some six feet overhead and the people of



Campbell Building - Bronson, KS

the community brought in branches cut from trees along the creeks to place on the wires to furnish enough shade. All reported a good time although some worried about the wires breaking and letting the branches down on their heads. Bronson had a 4th of July celebration each year for the next 25 years. In 1903, the band stand had been erected to accomodate the city band concerts.



Elevator - Bronson, KS

The first child born in Bronson was Grace Reno, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Reno. She was born the following spring after the founding of Bronson.

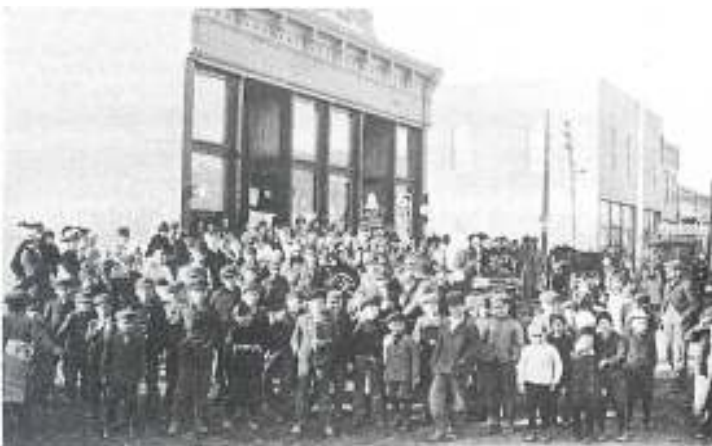
Lizzie Wilson, the daughter of Jonathan Wilson, was the first teacher of the "Wier" school district No. 92. Organized in 1879, district 92 became the Bronson school soon after the town started. Lizzie Wilson married William Land, whose father, M. J. Land, was a pioneer physician in the community and one of the original trustees of Wright's Chapel.

Toward the close of 1882, the town was incorporated and a mayor, councilmen, and other city officials were elected, who after serving about one year were legislated out of office by a petition being presented that the city revert back to a township organization. A vote was taken and the petition approved and accepted and the old city officials gracefully stepped down and out. Several years later, the town was again incorporated and Al Martin was elected mayor.

In 1884, a four room frame high school building was erected which burned in 1913. The children attended school in the churches during the term of 1913 and 1914. A brick high school was erected in 1914.

The Bank of Bronson was first known as Holman Brothers, then the Exchange Bank and was organized in 1885 by Pinnell and Smith. The bank was located in the southeast corner of a building which stood on the site of the present Burtch Hardware Store.

In 1890, Bronson had the first great fire of its history in which the entire east block was destroyed. After this fire some of the businessmen of the little town of Xenia northeast of Bronson, who was also missed by the railroad, moved to Bronson.



Santa Claus reception at Love Bros. & Co., Bronson, KS

In 1903, Professor T. E. Osborne was principal of the high school and the course of study consisted of ten grades, eight elementary and two high school grades. In 1904 it became a 12 grade school.

Bronson had four rural mail routes, one of which carried more mail than any route in either Bourbon or Allen County. During '20s & '30s we were on route #4. Later route #2, now #1. .

The Bronson Cornet Band was one of the leading bands of Eastern Kansas. It consisted of 22 members. They owned handsome uniforms and fine set of instruments and they were entirely out of debt.

The Bronson Telephone Exchange was installed in 1903. In the fall of 1902, the first successful gas well was drilled by Uriah Holeman on his farm near Bronson. Bronson was piped for gas in 1904.

On Sunday, March 13, 1910, Bronson was destroyed by fire. The fire originated in the upper story of the Goodno and Company building on the east side about six o'clock in the evening. Robert Stevenson first saw the smoke issuing from the building and gave the alarm to Jess Ford whose restaurant occupied the north room of the lower floor. The businessmen and people of the town and community carried what property they could into the city park and posted watchers to see that there was no looting of property. The men worked through the night but were unable to save the building.



Scene Bronson, KS -Fire -looking SW from where fire started



Picture of Bronson burn of 1910



Funeral of the late Charles Love-2-4-10



Bronson, KS-Fire March 13, 1910 View from Clay Street

The present governing body (1991) is Mayor C. Carl Marsh, councilmen are Larry Neville, Richard West, Elvis Reeder, Roy Smith and Stacy Dawson. Ellen Harper is city clerk.

*(History written by Lucille Kuns and Vivian Bartlett, Bronson, KS.*



Rebuilding Bronson, KS 4-11-10

Materials for a new building were ordered the next day and construction started as soon as they arrived, but the city officials passed an ordinance that no frame buildings would be built within a half block of Main Street. The first building erected was about where the beer parlor is now. The Citizens State Bank was in the building now occupied by the post office. The Bank of Bronson took over the Citizens State Bank around 1929.

Electric lights were brought to Bronson in the spring of 1919. A celebration was held in Bronson in the spring of 1924 in connection with the opening of U.S. Highway 54. The water system was completed in 1955 and the sewer system in 1969.

The first world championship horse shoe pitching contest was held in Bronson in 1909.

Bronson Day is held annually the Saturday before Memorial Day with a horse pulling contest on Friday night before a parade Saturday morning. The Alumni Banquet is held in the evening and usually a dance.

Since the big fire of 1910 there have been several smaller fires that took some of the businesses. The Finley Lumber Company, Wade Building and restaurant on the east side.

Bronson has a real good library started by the OES club. In 1965, the library joined the Southeast Kansas Library System.

In 1978, the Missouri Pacific Railroad, which had previously abandoned it's line east of Bronson, removed it's tracks from lola to Bronson, leaving the town with no rail service.

Bronson at present has two filling stations, two mini grocery stores, two churches, an elevator, fertilizer plant, Chicken Shack Restaurant, hardware store, barber shop, beauty shop, trucking service, appliance sales & service, locker plant, Craw-Kan Telephone Company, post office, city hall, fire station, garage, beer parlor, insurance office, oil company and other businesses. There are numerous organizations and clubs such as: Masons, Eastern Star, Ruritan, E.H.U., 4-H Club, etc.

Bronson is located on Highway 54 half-way between Fort Scott and lola in west Marion Township and is the second largest city in Bourbon County. The city lake is east of town and the Bourbon-Allen Lake is south of town, offering fishing to the fisherman.