

# A Thin Line Between Love and Hate

Leonardville and Riley:

The Evolution of a Small Town Rivalry



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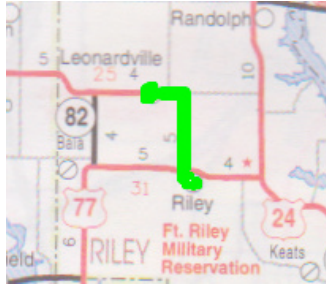
There is this funny thing that happens when two towns are founded too close together; it makes for an INSTANT RIVALRY. In American settlement history, geographers call this phenomena “twinning” and the towns are referred to as twin or rival towns.<sup>1</sup>The towns become like the children of a large family living in too small a home, constantly competing for space and attention. At the beginning of a town rivalry the towns vie for space and resources. As the rivalry grows it evolves into a whole new monster, one that spills over into all aspects of life. This rivalry can become a sort of tit for tat social relationship in which almost every action is seen as a personal insult. These rivalries can span generations and often still exist even though no one remembers how or when it first began. The rivalry we will examine began over one hundred years ago, and it can still be found today.

An example of one such rivalry can be found between the small rural farming towns of Riley and Leonardville, Kansas. These two towns are situated 18 miles northwest of Manhattan, Kansas, in central Riley County. They are located approximately five miles apart, and due to this close proximity the towns have always had to compete for available resources.

The map below shows exactly how close the two towns are.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Chun-fen. "Twin Cities of Waterloo and Kitchner." *Economic Geography* 22: 2 (1946): 142-147.



**Figure 1 Map of Leonardville and Riley, This map shows how close Riley and Leonardville are. SOURCE: 2009-2010 Kansas map distributed by Kansas Visitors Bureau, altered by author.**

This fact in and of itself would not make the story of Riley and Leonardville any different than any other rival town combination found in the state. The Riley-Leonardville rivalry does have several factors that make it a very fascinating case to study. The survival of both towns makes them quite unique. Often in these twin city situations one town ends up dying out or one becomes almost completely dependent on the other<sup>2</sup>. Another aspect that makes Riley and Leonardville such an interesting pair is the consolidation of their school districts in 1959. One would think that with the unification of the two towns through the schools the rivalry would die; however, this is not the case. The rivalry today may not be as blatant as it once was, but it can still be found in the attitudes and minds of the people who live there.

By examining Riley and Leonardville we will see that the contention between rival towns doesn't ever truly end. Once a town rivalry has begun the people that live in the towns never completely let it go, and it is carried on from generation to generation. We will also see that when

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, "Twin Cities,"146.

forced to combine some aspect of daily life such as schools, business districts, or hospitals a buffer zone is created. This zone becomes a neutral area that is considered part of both towns.<sup>3</sup>

The area that is now occupied by the towns of Riley and Leonardville would have appeared very different as the first settlers filtered into the area. Vast open prairie and gently rolling hills would have been all that could be seen for miles in any direction. The landscape was almost void of trees except for the few cottonwoods, elms, oaks, and scrub brush that grew along Wildcat Creek which runs through the town of Riley. The first settlers at the site that later became Riley settled near the head of Wild Cat Creek.<sup>4</sup> Leonardville was not located near a major source of water, but ground water was plentiful.<sup>5</sup> The accessible ground water made it possible for people to spread out on the prairie, and lessened the need to settle along the rivers and creeks. In the book *Leonardville, City of the Plains*, Ed Seacrest gives an account of what it was like in early Kansas:

“...the first settlers along the rivers and creeks thought that the high prairie was uninhabitable, that it could not and would not ever be settled. As late as 1861, one could mount a pony at or near the mouth of Fancy Creek, and steering a little southwest, one could ride twenty miles without a sign of life, save a flock of prairie chickens or an antelope, until the rider pulled rein at the Republican River near Clay Center. Within a few years, however, the prairie was dotted with houses, barns, schools, churches, and villages.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Riley, Kansas, Centennial 1870-1970*, Riley Promotional Association, 1970, 3. This is a booklet that was produced for the Centennial Celebration and came from the private collection of the author.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Davidson, "The Flint Hills Aquifer in Kansas," last updated April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009. <http://academic.emporia.edu/schulmem/hydro/TERM%20PROJECTS/2009/Davidson/Ken.htm>. December 8, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Swanson, *City of the Plains: A Story of Leonardville* (Riley County, KS: Leonardville Centennial Committee), 1982.



Riley was settled in 1855 when the Hair brothers first staked a claim near the Wild Cat Creek. They were followed by brothers Tom and Stephen Soar in 1856, and John Locke and his family in 1859. The 1860's brought Aaron Southwick and family along with many other such families. The end of the Civil War brought another influx of settlers, mostly soldiers, who claimed the land not already taken.<sup>7</sup> An early account of life in Riley County, by Winifred Slagg states,

“Settlers used their covered wagons for shelter until dugouts could be built but John Locke and his two sons, John Jr. and Stephen, 12 and 10 years of age, erected a stone house. They dug the rock out of the south bank of Wild Cat Creek, hauled it across by ox-teams and cart, and built their house on the Fort Riley road a quarter mile south of the cross roads...”<sup>8</sup>

The photograph below shows the Locke home as it currently exists. It is one of the earliest homes in the area, and is about one hundred and forty years old.



**Figure 2 John Locke house, Riley, KS. Dec. 2, 2010. The limestone portion of this home was built by Mr. Locke and his sons. Which they removed from Wildcat Creek that is located near the property. They used stone since it was readily available and lumber was not. This was also one of the earliest permanent dwellings built at Riley. SOURCE: Photograph taken by author**

<sup>7</sup> *Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970* (Riley Promotional Association, 1970), 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970* (Riley Promotional Association, 1970), 3.

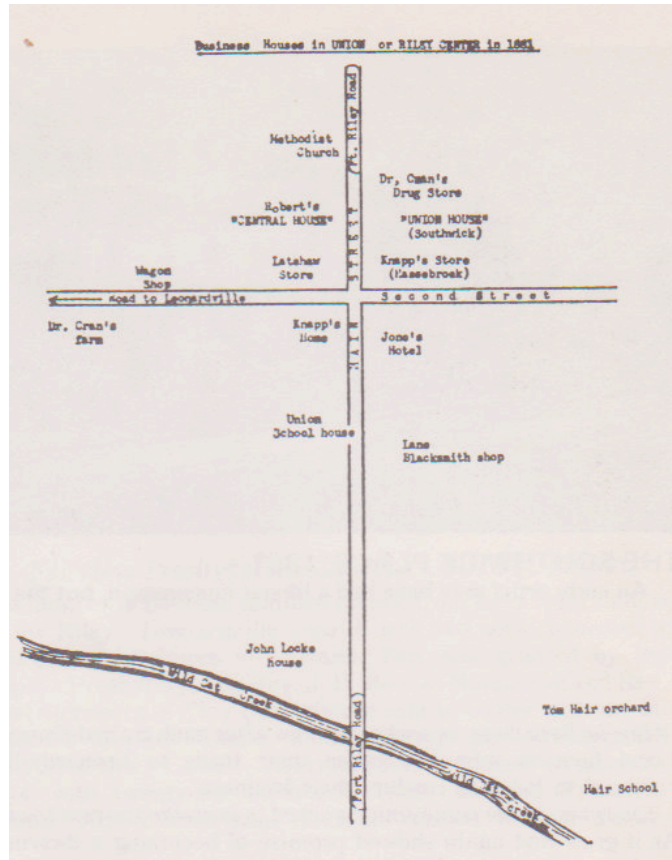
By the end of the 1860's most of the land in the area had been claimed. It was evident that there needed to be some sort of trading center in the area. The closest town was nearly twenty miles away, which was too far to travel in a day's time by wagon. Several area families decided to form the Union Townsite Company. Riley was originally to be named Union; however there was already a Union post office, so the name was changed to Riley Center and later shortened to Riley.<sup>9</sup>

An early map taken from the Riley Centennial book shows how the town was laid out.<sup>10</sup>  
Note the photo below of the "Union House" which is noted on the map.

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<sup>9</sup> *Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970* (Riley Promotional Association, 1970), 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> *Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970* (Riley Promotional Association, 1970), 3.



**Figure 3 1881 Map of Riley; Riley, KS 1881, This map shows the crossroads and the location of many early Riley businesses and residences. Only two of these buildings remain. Most of the other buildings were moved to Leonardville. SOURCE: Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970, 5. From the private collection of the author. May be found at the Riley County Historical Museum.**



**Figure 4 The “Union House”, Riley, Ks, 1870, The “Union House” which is shown on the map above was built by Aaron Southwick. It was the first house built within town limits. He kept a few staples for sale and provided lodging and meals to passing travelers. SOURCE: Riley Centennial book: 4. From the private collection of the author. May be found at the Riley County Historical Museum.**

The charter members of the town site company were: Aaron Southwick, Tom Hair, Tom Soars, Stephen Soars, John Locke, and Dr. J.W. Crans. It was decided that the town would be

located at a crossroad where the Southwick, Soars, Locke and Weible claims met. Southwick, Soars and Locke all sold five acres of their claim to the town site company in order to form the new town. Mr. Weible wouldn't sell any of his land so the town started with three corners rather than four. <sup>11</sup> Winifred Slagg writes, "...by 1878, its (Riley) growth had reached the "Boom" stage and Riley Center showed promise of becoming an important town on the prairie."<sup>12</sup> Riley was well on its way to becoming a quite successful town. It had close to a dozen businesses, two one room schools, and a church. Little did the people know that all their success was about to be challenged. In the early 1880's there began to be talk of the Kansas Central Railroad building through Riley County; railroad officials were looking at the towns of Riley and nearby Randolph. The people of Riley knew that if they could get a railroad to come through their town that it would almost assuredly ensure the town's survival.

The citizens of Riley would have been quite content to have the railroad arrive and leave the rest to history, but that is not how the story ends. Unfortunately for Riley, there was a group of enterprising farmers living about five miles north of their little town who had other ideas for the Kansas Central Railroad. Jim Olson writes,

"In the central part of the county was a farm owned by Lambert Erpelding. Erpelding lived in Chicago, but had sent his three young sons, Frank, George, and John here to farm the land... Erpelding wanted that railroad, but he needed a town to lure a railroad. To the north of the Erpeldings were farms owned by Lucien Kilbourne on the west and John Ford on the east. Erpelding persuaded them to donate a corner portion of their farms at the point where it adjoined the Erpelding land to create a town site."

There were already Post Offices located at Alert, Bala, Randolph, Riley Centre, May Day and

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<sup>11</sup> *Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970* (Riley Promotional Association, 1970), 3-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970* (Riley Promotional Association, 1970), 4.

Winkler's Mills, but none in their area. So, on February 15, 1881 a post office was established on the Lucien Kilbourne farmstead.”<sup>13</sup>

With the establishment of a post office the men of the newly born town were ready to talk with railroad officials and persuade them that the rail lines should come through their town. Erpelding and Kilbourne sweetened the deal by offering the rail company every other lot in the new town, and the town would be named after Leonard Smith, the man making the decision. This was a deal the rail company couldn't refuse as money was needed in order to continue building the line. Below a picture shows the train depot located at Leonardville.



**Figure 5 Leonardville Train Depot, Leonardville, KS, 1909-1910, This was the depot for the L,K,&W railroad also called the “Little Kansas Wiggler”. This train station was the sole reason Leonardville was founded. Notice the wagon full of milk cans the railroad provided a way to ship food products to neighboring towns and villages. This became a thriving business for towns which in the past had to consume food goods locally.SOURCE: Leonardville, City of the Plains, website.**

The town of Leonardville was platted in September of 1881, and the railroad laid tracks through town in October of the same year.<sup>14</sup> With the birth of this new town something else was

<sup>13</sup> Jim Olson, "General Leonardville History," accessed December 7,2010, <http://sites.google.com/site/leonardville66449/Home/leonardville---yesterday/01---historical-info>.

<sup>14</sup> Jim Olson, "Kansas Central Railway & Leavenworth, Kansas, & Western Railway," accessed October 8, 2010, <http://sites.google.com/site/leonardville66449/Home/leonardville---yesterday/2-the-railroad>.

born: a bitter rivalry with the town of Riley located five miles away. With this one act a rivalry was created that would last for generations.

Naturally, the citizens of Riley were upset that the railroad had bypassed their town, and many felt that Riley could not survive. Winifred Slagg writes,

“Businessmen and residents alike in Riley Center felt their village was doomed and that their only future was in a railroad town so they began to move six miles northwest to Leonardville which peaked the boom in that town. Merchants in Riley moved their families, dwellings, business buildings and merchandise to the new railroad center. Many residents took their houses and joined the exodus. Riley Center was left looking like a ghost town. Only the post office, school building, the Stadel wagon shop, the Lane blacksmith shop and a few families remained in the deserted town.”<sup>15</sup>

This left the outlook for the town of Riley quite bleak and the people who stayed never forgot the slight that they had suffered. The fact that the town was able to hold on is extremely remarkable. There is little known of Riley during this time, and for six long years the village struggled to endure.

While Riley was left to fight for survival, Leonardville experienced an overnight “Boom” that was common in railroad towns. In a “Leonardville Monitor” article from 1884 editor Preston Loofbourrow writes of the town,

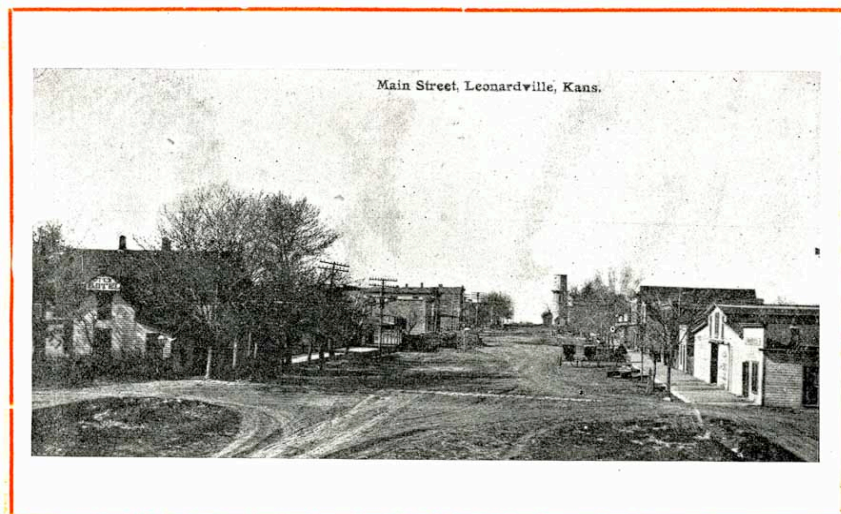
“...Several buildings were also brought here from Riley Center, and the town of Leonardville became a materialized fact, a living town, the nucleus of the present live and promising city, and future metropolis of northern Riley. Since that time, it was grown rapidly, men of means have been attracted by its unusual promise, and its circle of commercial influences is widening as the weeks roll by.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Riley, Kansas: Centennial 1870-1970* (Riley Promotional Association, 1970), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Preston Loofbourrow, "Leonardville 1884," <http://sites.google.com/site/leonardville66449/Home/leonardville---yesterday/01---historical-info/leonardville-1884>, accessed December 7, 2010. This is an article republished on the “Leonardville , City of the Plains” website, which was created by Jim Olson.

Loofbourrow goes on to name all the businesses in town and in three short years, the town boasted five general stores, a hardware store, two drug stores, two furniture stores, several liverys, a skating rink, a bowling alley, two blacksmith shops, a real estate office, a bank, a bakery, and a harness shop. There were several doctors and a dentist practicing in town, five churches, a creamery, a hennery, a newspaper, several hotels, a mill, and an extensive cargo business. <sup>17</sup>It is hard to believe that all of this could even be built in that short of a time, but most railroad towns were often erected virtually overnight. Leonardville surely proved this to be true. An early picture of the town shows how quickly the main business district of the town developed.



**Figure 6 Leonardville business district, Erpelding Avenue, Leonardville, KS, approximately 1909. This is the main street that runs through Leonardville. The water tower seen in the distance was built in 1908. You can also see that the town had wooden sidewalks and electric or phone poles can be seen. Leonardville was quite the metropolis in its “Hey Day”. It provided almost any service early settlers would need. SOURCE: “Leonardville, City of the Plains” website. Jim Olson webmaster.**

In the same 1884 article the first traces of the rivalry that would evolve between the two towns can be detected. Loofbourrow writes,

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<sup>17</sup> Loofbourrow, “Leonardville 1884.”

“It [Leonardville] is nineteen miles east of Clay Center and one hundred and twenty-eight miles west from Leavenworth. There is no town of importance nearer than Clay Center on the west, and Garrison on the east is not likely to interfere in the least with the future growth and development of Leonardville. South, there are no trade centers nearer than Junction City and Manhattan; and north none nearer than Waterville and Blue Rapids.”<sup>18</sup>

One might notice a glaring omission from Mr. Loofbourrow’s list; the town of Riley is not even mentioned.

While the town of Leonardville was basking in success, the people of Riley were left to simmer with their bitter feelings for six long years. This would all change in 1887 when there was once again talk of another railroad that would be making its way through the area. Once again Leonardville attempted to persuade railroad trustees to bring the railroad through their town. In a piece written for the Riley Centennial book J.A. Meyer writes about how citizens from Leonardville tried to deter progress in the town of Riley. He writes, “Leonardville, not wanting a town so near to them, came down and persuaded Jake [Wieble] not to sell. They told him, that if it [his land] was worth \$150 to them, it ought to be worth it to him.”<sup>19</sup>

Jake Wieble decided against selling his land, and it looked as if Leonardville might have its way. This did not deter the railroad company which changed the location of where the line would run five blocks southeast of the town crossroads. This is why the town of Riley has two main streets, one being Broadway and the other called Main Street. The Rock Island Railroad Company went ahead as planned and track was laid through the town connecting it with Keats and later Bala.<sup>20</sup> This was the breath of life the struggling little town needed. It also created

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<sup>18</sup> Loofbourrow, “Leonardville 1884.”

<sup>19</sup> J.A. Meyer, "Remembrances of J.A. Meyer." *Riley, Kansas, Centennial 1870-1970*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Riley, Kansas, Centennial 1870-1970*, 20.



another facet to the back and forth that has gone on between Riley and Leonardville for over a hundred years, but this time it was Riley that had the upper hand.

With news of a railroad, people and businesses came clamoring to Riley for a piece of the money that was to be made in the newly revived town. Riley was back on the map and now posed as real competition to the town of Leonardville. Soon the rivalry had spilled over into almost every aspect of town life; if one of the towns had something new then the other quickly had it also. There was an attitude of “we can’t let them outdo us” that in some ways can still be found today. Bessie (Locke) Noble recalls this time in an article she wrote for the Riley Centennial Book. She states,

“As I remember there was little hard feeling among the old residents and all worked together to build a new town, as they were now at least located on a railroad, a very desirable thing at that time. It really was a thriving little city and people from all around came to Riley to trade instead of going to Leonardville.”<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Noble’s sentiment (pretty much) sums up the way the people of Riley felt towards the town of Leonardville. The towns found all sorts of ways in which to compete with one another. Soon the rivalry became centered on two aspects: schools and sports.

The schools, being the focus of many small towns, saw the rivalry from the very earliest of days, and both towns began a course of outdoing the other. Leonardville and Riley started out with a one room school house that was common of the era. These buildings served all the students of the town and kids of all ages. Leonardville was the first to offer high school classes, and Riley soon followed and began high school classes as well. Leonardville began offering High

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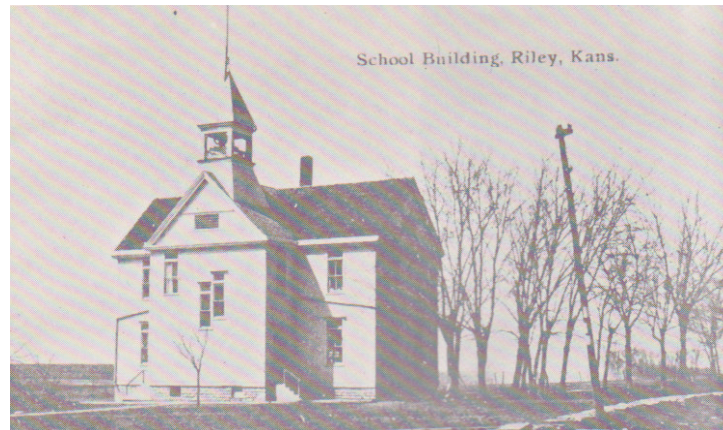
<sup>21</sup> Bessie Noble, "Notes From Bessie (Locke) Noble." *Riley, Kansas, Centennial 1870-1970*, 24. From the private collection of the author. May be found at the Riley County Historical Museum.

school courses in 1911, and Riley in 1912. It was very unusual to have two high schools located only miles apart. Normally one high school would serve many of the rural one room schoolhouses.

As each town grew they built bigger and better school buildings. Leonardville was usually the leader in this race. Residents would find the need to build a new school house and Riley would soon follow course. Figures 6 and 7 show the earliest schools of both Leonardville and Riley.



**Figure 7 Leonardville's first schoolhouse. Leonardville, KS, 1884-1890, The central building was built in 1882, but Leonardville quickly outgrew its one room school house so two additional rooms were added. As a rough estimate it looks like there were close to ninety kids attending the school at the time of this photo. This was a large number of attendance and was not what was commonly seen in the one-room schoolhouse. SOURCE: Leonardville. The City of the Plains, website. <http://sites.google.com/site/leonardville66449/Home/leonardville----yesterday/3-schools>**



**Figure 8 Riley's first high school, Riley, KS, 1900-1910, This building was built in 1875, but didn't have its first graduating high school class until the 1916-1917 school year. This would be its first and last because it had a new school ready for the 1917-1918 school year. SOURCE: Riley County Legacy, 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary special section of the Riley Countian. From authors personal collection. May also be found at the Riley County Historical Museum, and at "The Riley Countian" offices in Riley, Ks**

By 1909 Leonardville had outgrown its school building. The citizens of the district voted to build a new school building at the cost of \$7,560, and construction was finished in the spring of 1910 as seen in the photo below.<sup>22</sup> Leonardville Rural High School began offering high school courses in the fall of 1911. Before 1911 high school students from Leonardville attended school in Clay Center.

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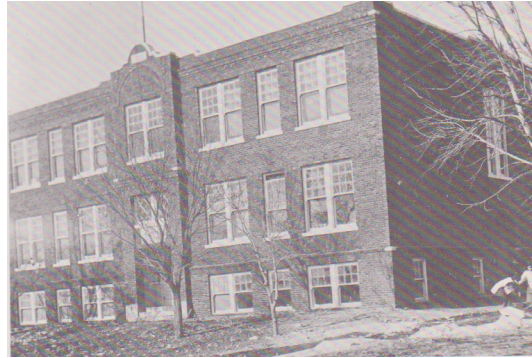
<sup>22</sup> John Olson, "Riley County High School Turns 50," last updated September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009, accessed December 7, 2010, <http://sites.google.com/site/leonardville66449/3---rchs>.



**Figure 9** Location where fist high school classes were held in Leonardville, Leonardville, KS, 1910-1920, Construction on this building was completed in 1910, and the first high school classes began in the fall of 1911. This building was the pride of the whole town, and was used as a grade school until Leonardville and Riley consolidated districts in 1959. It was located at the south end of Erpelding Ave.; all that remains is the sidewalk that can be seen in this picture. SOURCE: Leonardville. The City of the Plains, website.  
<http://sites.google.com/site/leonardville66449/Home/leonardville----yesterday/3-schools>

Riley couldn't be outdone by Leonardville and in 1918 followed suit. Their new school building was ready just in time for the start of the 1917-1918 school years.

The photograph in figure 10 shows Riley's new school building that housed all grades until the high school was built in 1930. Then it was used as a grade school until 1959.



**Figure 10 Riley school built in 1918, Riley, KS, 1920-1959, This building housed all grades until a high school was built in 1930 and was then used as a grade school until 1959. This building stood where the playground at the grade school is now located. SOURCE: Riley Centennial book, from the author's personal collection. May be found at the Riley County Historical Museum.**

As with all schools, athletics soon became a major extracurricular activity. According to the Riley and Leonardville yearbooks from 1920, both schools list boys and girls basketball, baseball, track, and tennis as the sports most enjoyed by the students. Riley and Leonardville always opened the season by playing each other and often ended it by doing the same. Accounts from townspeople say that the rivalry was fierce. Once again the written accounts of these match-ups is often less dramatic and the rivalry is seen more in what is left unsaid. Newspaper accounts of the meetings are very matter of fact, not at all like what one might expect to see out of such a bitter rivalry. Another instance of the rivalry can be found in the 1920's yearbooks themselves. Leonardville and Riley played each other in the opening game of the basketball season at Riley. The Leonardville yearbook records the score as Leonardville 45, Riley 42; however, the Riley yearbook shows their boys coming out on top with a score of Riley 44,



Leonardville 40.<sup>2324</sup> It is difficult to say for certain who actually won that game, but this probably was not the only instance where incorrect scores were reported to make the home team look good. Figures 11 and 12 show the 1920 basketball teams from both schools.



**Figure 11 1920 Leonardville Rural High School basketball Team, Leonardville, KS, The schools began publishing a yearbook in 1919 that makes this one of the earliest team sports photos from Leonardville High School. SOURCE: Amanda Mutschler, *The Crimson. Leonardville Rural High School Yearbook 1920***

<sup>23</sup> Amanda Mutschler, *The Crimson. Leonardville Rural High School Yearbook 1920* (Leonardville: Leonardville High School Class of 1920, 1920). From the personal collection of Kevin Larson.

<sup>24</sup> Lester C. Walters, *"R" Book. Riley Rural High School Yearbook 1920*, (Riley: Riley High School Class of 1920, 1920). From the personal collection of Kevin Larson.



**Figure 12 Riley Rural High School Basketball Team 1920, Riley, KS, 1920, This group of boys had a great year in 1920. The yearbook states they had the best season of any RHS team to date. The team photo includes: Top Row (left to right) Lyman Walters, John Walters, and Casper Hassebroek- Assistant Coach, Donald Hassebroek, Walter Bohnenblust. Front Row (left to right) Orley Renner, Harry Quantic, Lester Walters. SOURCE: 1920 Riley Rural High School Yearbook, from the private collection of Kevin Larson.**

In the fall of 1920, the boys at Leonardville High School met and voted on which sports they would play during the 1920 school year. The boys voted to play baseball and basketball. Professor Morrow, who was also the coach, explained that he wanted the boys to consider playing football. The boys still voted for baseball, so he told them that they would meet again the next day to vote again. They voted once more and agreed that they would play football that year.

<sup>25</sup> The students at Riley, not to be out done, promptly took up football for the 1921 season.

When the two schools met in competition, everyone came out to watch and cheer on “their” team. Sports became an appropriate place to let the rivalry grow. This can be seen in an excerpt from the 1921 Riley Yearbook, “The next game of great importance was the long wished for game

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<sup>25</sup> "Boys Hold Important Meeting." *Leonardville High School Live Wire* 1, no. 1 (1920): 3.

with Leonardville at Leonardville in which every man did his part...the game ended by a score of 7-7.” This goes to further show that the most anticipated games of the season were the ones played between Riley and Leonardville. Jane Bergman, who grew up in the Leonardville area, recounts that as late as the 1990’s whenever Riley and Leonardville teams played, the whole town would come to watch.<sup>26</sup>

For many years the evidence of the rivalry could mainly be seen surrounding the various sports competitions. Evidence was occasionally found elsewhere. Kevin Larson a resident of Riley and local historian tells how the boys from Riley would get together and drive up to Leonardville where they would rise, a ruckus, and then come home. The Leonardville boys would do the same in Riley. Mr. Larson said that their parents often didn’t know because they weren’t supposed to travel to the opposing town.<sup>27</sup> Over several months during 1957 *The Riley Countian* ran several notices about minor vandalism being done in each town. One of Riley’s football posts was torn down, and Leonardville had a stop sign stolen.<sup>28</sup> One would assume that these are evidence of teen pranking that went on back and forth between the area students.

This tradition continued until the late 1950’s when the area schools began to have discussions regarding school consolidation. According to newspaper accounts of the time, Leonardville wanted to consolidate with Randolph, but a vote was held and Randolph voted no to the proposition.<sup>29</sup> Leonardville was forced to look elsewhere and turned to their bitter rival of Riley. *The Riley Countian* reported in April, 1957, that the school boards had met and agreed that

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<sup>26</sup> Field notes of author, conversation with Jane Bergman.

<sup>27</sup> Field notes of author, conversation with Kevin Larson.

<sup>28</sup> "County Schools Vote Monday," in *Riley Countian* (June, 13, 1957).

<sup>29</sup> *Riley Countian*, October 3, 1957.



the schools should consolidate. The towns of Keats, Leonardville, and Riley voted on the issue later that year, and the measure passed by a fairly large margin.<sup>30</sup> Most of the people recognized the need for a consolidated school system, due to dwindling enrollment. Parents also wanted their students to have greater options in class offerings that couldn't be offered with such low enrollment numbers. However, there were some who were vehemently opposed to the idea of Riley and Leonardville combining districts. Many adults believed the students would never get along. Kevin Larson and Martha Powell, Riley residents both recall a Leonardville bus driver who quit his job because he wasn't willing to drive his bus into Riley.<sup>31</sup> The biggest decision wasn't about whether or not to join the two schools; it was where the new high school should be located. Of course each town wanted the school to be closer to their town, so a compromise was made. Although there is no documentary proof, townspeople say the high school was located within inches of the exact center between Riley and Leonardville. Inches may be a stretch, but the school is located almost halfway between the two towns. This strategic location also created the necessary buffer zone that is now found today.

In 1958 construction began on the new school and classes were held at the now-named Riley County High School in the fall of 1959. Each town maintained its own grade school. However, due to population loss, the Leonardville grade school was closed in the 1980's and the building was torn down in the 1990's.<sup>32</sup> This was very hard for the people of Leonardville, as they no longer had a school in their town. This is one reason the feelings of rivalry still exist today and remains a major sticking point for many Leonardville residents.

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<sup>30</sup> *Riley Countian*, October 3, 1957.

<sup>31</sup> Field notes of the author. Conversation with Kevin Larson and Martha Powell.

<sup>32</sup> Field notes of author. Conversation at Leonardville senior dinner.

By placing the high school at the midpoint between both towns an informal buffer zone was formed. In a Facebook survey of current town residents, all agree that the dividing line between the two towns is the Fairview Church Road which is the road that runs east and west along the north side of the high school. As in the twin communities of Waterloo and Kitchner mentioned previously, the school became the neutral ground and an area that is comfortably shared by residents of Riley and Leonardville alike. The consolidation went so smoothly in part because of the location of the new high school. The picture below shows Riley County High School in the background of the Fairview Church Road sign. This road has become the dividing line between Riley and Leonardville, but it has also become that area geographically where the blending of the two towns is found.



**Figure 13 An unofficial neutral zone, Riley County, KS, Dec. 2010, This photo shows the area that has become the dividing line between Riley and Leonardville. It has also become an informal buffer zone between the two towns. SOURCE: Photo taken by the author.**

With the school consolidation a decades long sports rivalry would die, this was one of the hardest things for the residents to deal with. For years the rivalry between the two towns had been centered on the sports match ups, but now the two towns would be on the same team.

“The last football game between Leonardville and Riley was held on a Tuesday afternoon. Originally scheduled for Friday the fourteenth, it was decided to make the last game a little more festive by combining it with Veteran’s Day on November 11th. Businessmen in the towns closed their doors and provided free coffee and donuts for the event. The pep band was a combined band of the two schools and played a concert before the game.”<sup>33</sup>

One would think that this would be the end of the rivalry, and in some ways it was. The school has found new sports rivalries with Silver Lake and Clay Center. The two towns have become an expanded community. Yet there is a feeling of competition that persists between them. In an informal survey of area residents asking whether they believe the rivalry still exists, a few feel that it is all but dead, while most believe that it is alive and well. It still bothers people from Leonardville when someone calls the school Riley High School. It bothers the people of Riley when Riley events aren’t attended by those from Leonardville. The rivalry isn’t as obvious as it once was, but it can still be found in off-handed remarks and in the attitudes the people have toward the opposing town. Ask someone from Leonardville to move to Riley and you might quickly hear “I wouldn’t ever live there”, people from Riley feel the same way. The people of these towns love “their” town and most wouldn’t consider moving to the other. For over one hundred years this rivalry has simmered, and even after having to share schools for over fifty years, you can still find subtle traces of this century long feud. Most people don’t even know how the rivalry began, but they still harbor the feelings of previous generations. Again, the towns are like the siblings of a large family and they will probably always pick on one another, but there is one thing that is certain. If an outsider ever stepped in and tried to threaten either one they would always be there to protect the other. While the towns may have their squabbles and resentments, they still form a shared community with similar struggles and concerns. It is

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<sup>33</sup> Olson, John. "Riley County High School Turns 50," accessed December 7, 2010, last updated September 11, 2009. <http://sites.google.com/site/leonardville66449/3---rchs>.

doubtful that the rivalry found between the two towns will ever completely die. As one Leonardville resident put it, “It is only natural for towns so close to have a rivalry with one another.”<sup>34</sup> That is, there will always be a conflict because it is “only natural”.

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<sup>34</sup> Field notes of author, conversation with the Seniors at the Leonardville Senior lunch. 10/19/2010.

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