

# Life on the Mahaffie

## Olathe, Kansas (Johnson County): 1858-1886



Figure1. Photograph of the Mahaffie home in current-day. Photograph by the author. The House is one of the remaining structures that still exist today on the Mahaffie Stagecoach and farm.

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The Mahaffie Stagecoach and farm was founded by Mr. and Mrs. Mahaffie, in the year 1858. Upon arrival to Kansas from Indiana, the family established their carrying trade business in Olathe, Kansas, located in Johnson County. Throughout the paper, different techniques of maps, photographs of the actual stagecoach site, periodicals, and censuses are used in order to discover what this historical community's purpose was.

Steam rises, tracks rumble, brakes screech: the time for rest has come. Imagine a period in history where cars, planes, and other public transportation were not available, back when the backbone of America thrived on hard work and dedication, in order to strive for a more advanced and luxurious future. Such a place was Mahaffie Stagecoach in Johnson County, Kansas. Upon reaching my destination, these are the thoughts that kept racing through my head. Around the time of 1858, this piece of land was purchased by the Mahaffie family, located near downtown Olathe, Kansas, in current day Johnson County. According to the Kansas State Census of 1850-1890 from *Ancestry.com*, Beatty Mahaffie and his family are officially listed a part of Johnson County in the year 1859.<sup>1</sup> Since technology at this point in time was severely hindered by a lack of resources, the family had to pull their wooden house by oxen to its location, after arriving in Kansas from Indiana. Having this in mind portrays a strong theme of hard work and commitment for what lay ahead in the near future.

Since Mahaffie Stagecoach was a prime location for a stopping point between Fort Scott and Leavenworth, numerous passengers and the U.S. Mail could be transported from Independence, Missouri, all the way to Santa Fe. “After the war, Olathe became a major stop along the Santa Fe Trail. As many as 600 wagons a week traveled through Olathe on the way toward the gold fields and farming settlements in the far west”.<sup>2</sup> The family was contacted by Sanderson Stagecoach Line in order to fulfill the need of supplying nurture and food, as it was vital for their carrying trade business to satisfy those who took part in this experience. With

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas Census, Olathe, Kansas, 1859. Acquired on 12/12/2012 from: [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=kscen&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsln=Mahaffie&msrpn\\_\\_ftp=Olathe%2c+Johnson%2c+Kansas%2c+USA&msrpn=71955&msrpn\\_PInfo=8-%7c0%7c1652393%7c0%7c2%7c3249%7c19%7c0%7c1541%7c71955%7c0%7c&dbOnly=\\_F0002778%7c\\_F0002778\\_x%2c\\_F000277A%7c\\_F000277A\\_x&uidh=000&pcat=35&fh=0&h=7659845&recoff=9&requir=294915&cur=0&dnyref=1](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=kscen&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-d&gsln=Mahaffie&msrpn__ftp=Olathe%2c+Johnson%2c+Kansas%2c+USA&msrpn=71955&msrpn_PInfo=8-%7c0%7c1652393%7c0%7c2%7c3249%7c19%7c0%7c1541%7c71955%7c0%7c&dbOnly=_F0002778%7c_F0002778_x%2c_F000277A%7c_F000277A_x&uidh=000&pcat=35&fh=0&h=7659845&recoff=9&requir=294915&cur=0&dnyref=1)

<sup>2</sup> Olathe Historical Society, "History of Olathe." Last modified 2012. Accessed November 20th, 2012. <http://olathehistoricalsociety.org/index.php/history>.

business looking up in the 1860s, railroads were arriving on the horizon, casting a gloomy future for the Mahaffie Stagecoach. For this little community, the overall theme is portrayed as a diligent bunch looking to serve others, put food on the table for their family, while attempting to stamp their purpose in life.

## Meet the Family

Moving from Indiana to Kansas in a time where wagon was the only viable option for a group, the Mahaffie family eventually found their new home in Olathe, Kansas. Beatty and Lucinda, the father and mother of the family, brought with them five children to Johnson County, as three more babies were conceived in the duration of their stay here. Since this business was a stagecoach and a farm, Beatty served as the ranch hand and main provider of the family. Even with the Inn opening in 1863, J.B. always considered his agriculture a top priority. He worked in the fields, serving with different boards such as the Johnson County Board of Supervisors.<sup>3</sup> Here, different businesses would comply with the board in order to achieve their liquor license. Since alcohol was a cheap, abused substance in the nineteenth century, these men had to make their case in order to obtain their rights to serve liquor, while getting a plethora of references from the local community. Even though Beatty served on the board, he was considered a viable voice when dealing with this situation. Grog shop owners were forced to maintain an “orderly house”, and to disallow service to a minor unless his legal guardian approved.<sup>4</sup> Having this recognition speaks volume to the integrity and character Beatty had, considering he was a board member,

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<sup>3</sup> Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm.” Olathe Historical Society. 1200 East Kansas City Road. Olathe, KS 66061. October 10th, 2012. Note this is an unnamed periodical.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

while being sought out to get approval from grog shop owners, otherwise known as bars in the present day.

With Beatty running most of the farms and different advisory positions in Johnson County, the job of nurturing the family while maintaining other farm and household duties belonged to Lucinda. Since she was the spouse of a highly touted spokesman in the community, the job of upholding the different family values and morals rested in her hands.



Figure 2. Statue of Beatty and Lucinda Mahaffie together. Photograph by author. Notice the postures and physiques of the married couple. Beatty, sitting down, possibly symbolizes his tiredness from doing both the farm and stagecoach operations. Lucinda, standing firm with head held high, portrays her strength and discipline she instills in herself, and her family.

Upon arrival to their newly acquired land, Lucinda insisted on making their new home in Kansas, since Missouri was a slaveholding state at the time. Having this image delivers a strong message of her personal beliefs on controversial topics, and shows the character she instilled not only for herself, but also her family. “As a wife and mother in the Victorian era, Lucinda was expected to provide a properly cultured, genteel, and religious environment for the benefit of her children and husband.”<sup>5</sup> Implementing and maintaining these high standards portrays how tough, yet sensitive she had to be in order keep things up and running at a steady pace. Not only did she hold the reputation of the Mahaffie family in the palm of her hands, but also worked diligently at whatever needed to be done that her husband could not get to, even if it meant working overtime. After the Barlow and Sanderson Stagecoach Line established their contract with them, chores and business responsibilities escalated. “If caring for her own family and farm duties were not enough, she soon found herself serving meals to stagecoach passengers and other travelers using the Santa Fe Trail and the Fort Leavenworth/Fort Scott Military Road.”<sup>6</sup> With a hefty serving on her plate, Lucinda eventually bore three more children, with the last one arriving in 1869. To put into one sentence, her youngest child Ella proclaimed to a newspaper reporter that her Mother’s hands were seldom idle.<sup>7</sup>

## **Barlow and Sanderson Line**

The infamous Santa Fe Trail, a passageway which was vastly used throughout the 1800s in order for travel and other necessities, such as trade and other commercial business. With the Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm being located in a prime position for resources and hospitality,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

the family was soon contacted by the Barlow and Sanderson Line business in order to fulfill their needs for a resting point along the way. The Barlow and Sanderson Stagecoach Line made a deal with the Mahaffie family in order to supply travelers going between Fort Scott and Fort Leavenworth, carrying the U.S. Mail from Independence, Missouri, all the way to Santa Fe.<sup>8</sup> With the details sorted out and agreed upon, the family was up and open for their carrying trade business in the year 1863.



Figure 3. Photograph of the slightly restored Mahaffie barn as it appeared in October, 2012. Photograph by author. The farm side of business would play a vast role when dealing with storage and providing resources for themselves and their people they supplied to.

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<sup>7</sup> "Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm." Olathe Historical Society. 1200 East Kansas City Road. Olathe, KS 66061. October 10th, 2012. Note that this is from an unnamed newspaper.

<sup>8</sup> Olathe, Kansas, "Mahaffie's Story." 2012. Accessed October 10th, 2012. <http://www.olatheks.org/Mahaffie/History>.

## Carrying Trade

Prepare, eat, clean, repeat: a few actions can sum up the labor put in on the Stagecoach operation. Since its start in 1863, the Mahaffie family was thrust into the role of serving those traveling along the Santa Fe Trail. With hundreds of family roaming the trails toward Olathe, the household had to maintain a clean, stable, and warming environment for their guests who stopped by. “Olathe was the fastest-growing city in Kansas in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.”<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, one can inquire that business must have been on the rise during the years of the Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm. “In 1867, Lucinda, her daughters, and hired helpers might have served as many as 50 to 100 meals a day. While the passengers ate, the incoming teams of horses were switched for fresh animals.”<sup>10</sup>



Figure 4. A photograph of a plat map where Olathe was located in the state of Kansas. Photograph taken by author. Notice the different forts and railroads present. Due to these resources, it is evident the railroad industry has already developed here, indicating the time must have been past the year 1870.

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Online Library Edition, s.v. "Olathe," accessed December 13, 2012, <http://library.eb.com/eb/article-9056956>.

<sup>10</sup> "Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm." Olathe Historical Society. 1200 East Kansas City Road. Olathe, KS 66061. October 10th, 2012.

With the resources of crops and housing, Beatty and Lucinda could feed and shelter numerous travelers who stopped by their stagecoach. Not only would their need for hunger and rest be filled, but also for their socializing with friends and strangers.

## **End of the Line**

In a quote written by the unnamed *Olathe Mirror* source in February 1886, the columnist writes about the social party to be given that evening at J.B.'s Mahaffie. "A good time is always expected there, as expectations are always met, no matter who you are."<sup>11</sup> Adding in this unique symbol of class and warming family environment shows the dedication to their local community, even after their stagecoach business was ended. With railroads arriving near Olathe in 1869, it is evident that this is the sole reason is the answer for the demise of their operations of nourishing travelers on wagons. Notorious for putting stagecoaches and other homemade businesses out of work, the train industry may have halted Beatty's inn company but did not stop his success in farming and agriculture. Serving as a board member for one of the earliest railroad companies to come through, this indicated J.B. and his family were content in giving up their operations. These circumstances hints to the fact that since his farm had now spread over 600 acres, the up and coming industry would not force the Mahaffie clan to suffer. Well before the trains came through, there is no doubt they would have been well off in terms of finances and security. "Farming was always the main occupation of James Beatty Mahaffie-he called himself a "farmer" rather than an innkeeper in the state and federal census."<sup>12</sup> Having this in mind, the overall point is tied together. Dedicated to hard work, serving others, and displaying a positive,

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<sup>11</sup> *Olathe Mirror*, February 26th, 1886. Note that this comes from the Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm museum.

<sup>12</sup> Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm." Olathe Historical Society. 1200 East Kansas City Road. Olathe, KS 66061. October 10th, 2012.



warm feeling toward others, it is clear this family was here to stay, either way. That they stayed until 1886 reaffirms their dedication to hard work and their community, as the family then packed up and made their way out of Olathe.



Figure 5. A photograph of the Mahaffie stagecoach icehouse as it appeared taken in October, 2012. Photo taken by author.



Figure 6. A photograph of the current land at the Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm Historic Site taken in October, 2012. Photograph taken by author.



Figure 7. A photograph of the backside of the Mahaffie household/inn as it stands today, taken in October 2012. Photo taken by author. The backside was where the customers would enter in order to eat and sleep. With Lucinda busy in the kitchen and other chores, they had to come in this way in order to give her space to work.

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\*Note that the Olathe Mirror Citation comes from the Mahaffie Stagecoach and Farm museum.