

Every Small Town Was Someone's Home Town:

The Vanished Community of Broughton, Kansas



“Memories fading the heartbeat reduced to the printed word.” — Mark A. Chapman, 2012

Figure 1: Hundreds of escaped day lilies from the old Broughton home gardens fill the town site in spring. Photograph by Janet Adam, April, 2012.

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At the latest estimate, Kansas may have nearly 9,000 vanished, named communities.¹ These places had many faces: small crossroads villages; depot mail drops on rail lines, lingering communities that coalesced around a church, rapidly-fading religious colonies on the bleak western plains; villages that grew up on both sides of a river; towns that had as many as five names -- and towns that had a single name but no people. Vanished town signs state proudly that here was the first orphan-



Figure 2: Cottonwoods on Main Street, Broughton, Kansas, 1916.
Photo courtesy of Clay County Museum and Historical Society.

age, denominational church, ladies' institute, Pony Express stop, mission, or trading post. Regardless of how these towns are remembered, and for what, they are all related in one way: they were someone's home town.

Broughton, Kansas, a crossroads village in Clay Center Township, Clay County, was Mark Chapman's home town. When it was bulldozed in 1966 to create the Milford Reservoir spillway, families relocated who could trace their roots to original settlers of the 1860s. Those first family names persevere in the area although the town is gone: Bauer, Chapman, Hemphill, Martin, Sanders, Ristine, Mall, Scheinkoenig and Dalrymple.² Although he had moved away before the relocation of his parents, Mark Chapman came to believe that the survival of family names was not enough to keep the town memory alive. That group of people, the 80 or so residents who left, were an aging cohort. Once gone, and their recollections with them, Broughton also would become mysterious and shadowy, a heavily-wooded tract bumpy with the mounds of bulldozed homes... a piece of old sidewalk... a brick. In truth, that is the picture of the town site today, but Broughton itself is alive, vigorously preserved in a written history. Years later, in 2005, Mr. Chapman drove the recovery of his town.

First settlers arrived in Clay County in a wave of town-founding after the Civil War. So many tiny settlements arose then, in fact, that a researcher has been able to create a lost towns map of Clay County depicting 143 communities.³ Although one of the earliest towns, with first farms plowed in the late 1860s, Broughton was still a viable village in the early 1960s, while scores of towns around it had faded. At least fourteen Union veterans from Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois received military bounty land in the area; their names are preserved on a plaque in Broughton Cemetery. The rich bottomland of the Republican River, curving through the county, enticed settlers to raise wheat and later, to ship stock on the two rail lines, the Union Pacific and the Rock

¹ Melvin D. Bruntzel, independent researcher, communication to M.J. Morgan, Manhattan, Kansas, March 8, 2012.

² See M.J. Morgan, *Portrait of a Lost Town: Broughton, Kansas, 1866 – 1869* (Manhattan, Kansas: Chapman Center for Rural Studies, 2010), Chapters One and Two.

³ See Angela Schnee, "Lost Towns of Clay County," original GIS Map. Chapman Center for Rural Studies, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. See also "Lost Towns and Settlements: Former Clay County Sites are Now Nearly Forgotten Places," *Clay Center Times*, Jan. 12, 1922.

Island, that held the town between them like a compass.⁴ First post offices were in the homes of settlers: at the Lorenzo Gates' home south of Broughton, and in the David Graham log cabin, where mail arrived from Fort Riley, hauled by wagon.⁵ An early photograph taken well before 1900 shows a wide, curving prairie main street, also known as Tompkins Street. The photo picks up a grain elevator, a dry goods store, Hanna and Ensign, and perhaps a "farm implement" store. The bare, rolling terrain is evident, as the crescent of elevated land known as Dalrymple Hill rises visibly behind the town.

Broughton's location gave it a definite edge for survival: unusually rich farmland, fed by alluvial runoff from the Republican; a valley town site right at the point where the last of the Flint Hills drops away to real prairie of the north-central counties; and a pre-existing and well-traveled trail, the Fort Riley-Fort Kearny Military Trail. Most important in the earliest photos, however, is the presence of nine cottonwoods, planted along Tompkins Street by an auctioneer in 1890.⁶ These trees became the hallmark of the town, remembered and mentioned by every person interviewed to create the book about Broughton. By the time the Army Corps of Engineers came with bulldozers, the trees had reached a magnificent maturity, shading the streets with what people remember as the sound of "...lake waters cooling lapping."⁷ Today there are two of the original nine cottonwoods left. One shaded the blacksmith shop that re-opened during the Great Depression to sharpen the plowshares of farmers battling drought.

The first name of Broughton was Rosevale, also spelled Rose Vale; it was also Springfield and then Morena, a platted railway

subdivision never filled in with homes. It was finally named permanently for W. S. Broughton, a promoter of the area who died in a train wreck just outside the town in 1898.⁸ By 1900, the town had an established church, the Broughton United Methodist Church, a two room stone schoolhouse, and two rail lines arriving from the east (Rock Island) and the south (Union Pacific). Stockyards holding sheep, cattle, and hogs flanked the depots of these trains. Many of the early town families were successful stockmen, such as the Bauers and the Scheinkoenigs. Other prominent families, notably the large Harris clan, arrived in the 1890s. Just before World War I, Broughton hit its peak population of 125. Due to pressing competition from at least a hundred small towns in Clay County, Broughton held on but did not surpass its neighbors. By this time, it boasted a lumberyard run by Jim and Sadie McCully.⁹ Also dotting the bustling main street were freshly opened and thriving businesses: a bank, two general stores, a doctor's office, implement store, two cafes, a meat market, and a hotel.¹⁰ Despite these anchors, Broughton never developed a city structure, a town council or a mayor; it never had a public water system, continuing to use the town pump and many residential wells. Yet the community of original settlers and many married children was tightly knit. In 1917, when the church burned, Broughton men donated time and money to rebuild it; the Frank Scheinkoenig family donated a corner lot.¹¹

Even across the hard Depression years, change began to accelerate in rural Kansas. A telephone exchange arrived in Broughton in 1939, although some households had box telephones on kitchen walls long before this. Electric lines also appeared in the late 1920s and 1930s, replacing the old Delco generators used by every farmer.¹² By

4 For a discussion of the role of the river in Broughton, including its devastating floods, see "The Republican River" in M.J. Morgan, *Portrait of a Lost Town*.

5 Morgan, *Portrait of a Lost Town*, 138.

6 Morgan, *Portrait of a Lost Town*, 9-10.

7 *Ibid.*

8 "Broughton is the New Name Selected," *Clay Center Dispatch*, March 17, 1888.

9 Morgan, *Portrait of a Lost Town*, 54.

10 The Industrial Edition of the *Clay Center Dispatch*, Vol. XII, No. 272, Jan. 29, 1914.

11 Janet Timmerman, "At the Heart of Things: Broughton Methodist Church, 1887 – 1965," in M.J. Morgan, *Portrait of a Lost Town*, 86.

12 See M.J. Morgan, *Portrait of a Lost Town*, Chapter Five, "Decades of Change."

this time as well, automobiles and tractors were commonly seen on the old country roads and in the fields, north and south of the river. Young people began moving away from the farms, especially after World War II. Over fifty young men from the Broughton area served in that war, and six would never return, including the fun-loving Harold Woods and Raphael Osbourne.¹³

The Republican River had always characterized the town, stamping it with a 'river culture' that included illicit noodling for catfish, boys known locally as 'river rats,' enormous watermelons grown in the humid bottomlands, and summer swimming and winter ice-skating. But the river also brought angry, chocolate-colored floodwaters, taking out bridges, inundating wheat and strawberry crops, drowning the large chicken and turkey flocks Broughton was famous for. Destructive floods hit Clay County in 1903, 1913, 1935, 1944, and 1948, culminating in the severe Kansas flood of 1951. The 1935 flood was actually the worst for the Broughton area. In Clay Center, just six miles to the northwest of Broughton, floodwaters disabled the city light and power plant. At least six people drowned. In Broughton, horses and other stock perished.¹⁴ Townspeople fled to the high ground, Dalrymple Hill, north of the Rock Island line. In the 1951 flood, the Army Corps of Engineers estimated non-crop damage in rural areas of Kansas as high as \$30,857,000.¹⁵ This flood spurred the Eisenhower administration to action

Beginning first in neighboring Riley County with the construction of Tuttle Creek Dam on the Blue River, the Army Corps, under the auspices of the Missouri Basin Flood Control Act, moved on in the 1960s to the Republican River.¹⁶ Headlines were ominous: "Milford Dam Construction Starts in 1961 – Wakefield, Milford, Next Towns

Doomed to Die," (Topeka Capital-Journal, May 1, 1960). One by one, Broughton families began buying new homes in Clay Center, Manhattan, or Nebraska. The rich wheat fields were vacated. Along Welsh Road, first paved in the 1930s, long border fields of Bauer land filled in with tall prairie grasses. Back in the early part of the century, a Broughton newspaper correspondent had fondly noted "98 red pigs playing



Figure 3: Broughton Town Site Marker, photographed in

the Bauer alfalfa fields."¹⁷ Animals disappeared as well as people. Acres of fruit trees planted by original settlers – apple, cherry, and peach -- died of neglect, insect damage, and outright destruction. Broughton Methodist Church remains the only original structure preserved intact; in 1965, the church community merged with the rural church populations of Bethany and Hillside to become Countryside United Methodist Church.¹⁸ Jacked up and moved east down Welsh Road, carefully set down onto large blocks of ice, the church slowly settled into its new home. The Broughton School eventually became a private residence. In the 1980s, the lands around Broughton became a series of designated wetlands where waterfowl may be hunted. The Republican River has gradually grown more and more shallow and accreted, as outwash from upriver Nebraska farms creates huge sandbars and

¹³ Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁴ See Ronn Coates, "The 1935 Republican River Flood in Broughton," in Morgan, Portrait of a Lost Town, 29-30.

¹⁵ Report on Flood Protection in Kansas River Basin (Board of Engineers, Kansas Industrial Development Commission, 1953), 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷ Broughton Items, Clay Center Times, April 23, 1914.

¹⁸ Morgan, Portrait of a Lost Town, 89-90

islands. The flow is mild and tepid. Viewing it from the cement bridge that replaced the old iron Broughton bridges, it is almost impossible to imagine that in 1885, residents south of town saw a steamboat heading downriver.¹⁹

Led by Leo and Irene Chapman, parents of Mark Chapman and descendants of original German settlers the Vogelmanns and the Dietrichs, dispersed community members erected a town marker to commemorate Broughton. Constructed of tombstone marble, it stands today at the entrance to the town site, at the corner of old Tompkins Street and the country road leading south to Milford Reservoir.

Like thousands of lost Kansas communities, Broughton endured the grasshoppers of 1874, repeated river floods, rail disasters, violent storms, the Dust Bowl drought of the 1930s, the effect of two world wars, and school consolidation. When the town was razed, the post office was still open, two businesses were operating, and the old McCully I.O.O.F Hall saw vigorous square dancing upstairs. The cottonwoods were thriving, shading the broad main street in the sometimes unbearable Kansas summers. The remnant of that street can yet be seen, as in the photograph below. Leo Chapman, born in 1919 on the old Chapman homestead along the Republican, stands remembering his home town.



Figure 4: Leo Chapman at Broughton Town Site, Clay County, Kansas, 2004. Photograph by Sandra Reddish.

¹⁹ Ibid., 28.