

“Early Settlements in Eastern Kansas: What Makes a Community? A Case Study of Hector, Johnson County, 1856-1900.”

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Figure 1: Charles Pincomb and sons in buggy with horse, southwest of Carriage House on Santa Fe Drive. Source: Overland Park Historical Society.

**This study focuses on a Post Office community and what defines a community. It focuses on Hector, Johnson County, Kansas from 1856- 1900. The author used newspapers, atlases and plat maps, site work, biographies, and historic photograph collections.**

## Early Johnson County and a Post Office Community

Johnson County, Kansas proved to be an important area during the Carrying Trade era. When families were moving west during the 1850s, it was likely that they would travel right through Johnson County, a far eastern county bordering Missouri, and then restock before returning to their journeys. The Santa Fe Trail was a well-known passage to the West, and it passed through Johnson County. Many families traveled on the Santa Fe and other trails and most likely never set foot in Johnson County again.

Then there were the families who came to Johnson County, settled in the area, and called it home. The Johnson County area at the time was an ideal place to settle. The land was moderately level prairie, fertile grassland, offering a great opportunity to raise cattle and horses. There are also many creeks and rivers running through the area, providing good water sources. Along the rivers and creeks grew dense stands of cottonwood trees that would prove essential to building any structure on a farm. Johnson County was one of the original 33 counties organized by the Territorial Legislature in 1855. It was not until September 17, 1857 that the county was officially organized by the Reverends Thomas Johnson and William Johnson.<sup>1</sup> However, families had moved to Johnson County before it was organized, had acquired land, and had already started to build a sense of community. One such area was located within Shawnee Township and was called Hector. The first to settle here was John Dyche in 1857. Because of the violence of Bleeding Kansas and the Civil War years, it wasn't until 1866 that a post office would be established and John Dyche would be appointed Postmaster; however, this post office

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<sup>1</sup> "Johnson County, Kansas." *Kansaspedia*. Kansas Historical Society, 2015. Web. <https://www.kshs.org/p/johnson-county-history-bibliography/13471>.

played a large part in establishing the Hector area as a community. Hector was never an actual town or city; it was only a Post Office drop for the people in that area. This area is considered a Post Office community (also sometimes called post villages). Post Office communities are often left out of the history books, but they played a critical role in holding together growing neighborhoods of settlers.

## **Hector Community**

The Hector area was first settled in 1857 by John Dyche, within Shawnee Township. Later, township lines would be re-arranged and Hector would lie within the Mission Township. This area would have appealed to settlers for a couple of reasons. The land that John Dyche settled on was gently rolling prairie land. He also had a creek, Boone Creek, which ran through his acreage.<sup>2</sup> John Dyche was born in Eastern Tennessee and raised on a farm. At age 23, he came to Shawnee Township and staked his claim. This area was ideal for a farm raised boy who wanted to raise and trade livestock. With rich prairie grasses and a good creek, John Dyche was able to establish a productive livestock farm. Other arrivals who settled near him were Levy Clark and John Hollingsworth. A sense of community was established early when John Hollingsworth began to teach classes in a school set up in a house owned by Levy Clark. This temporary school was established in 1858. It shows a lot about a community when area families agree that it is important for their children to receive an education and they establish a school just a year after settling. In 1865, a proper school house was built. A year later, in 1866, the Hector Post Office was established. John Dyche was appointed the first Postmaster. The 1902 *Standard Atlas of Johnson County, Kansas*, shows a cluster of school, church, and cemetery on Sections

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<sup>2</sup> The Dyche land lay in Section 27 of Mission Township. See *Standard Atlas of Johnson County, Kansas* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1902).

27-28, just to the east of Dyche land, along Boone Creek.<sup>3</sup> This was probably the Hector community. This is another example that shows that this community was thriving and had grown to the point that a closer post office was necessary so that it could accommodate the incoming families. The post office was discontinued in 1884. Although it was reestablished in 1895, it only lasted until January 15, 1900.<sup>4</sup> This would be the last time Hector would be a post community, since the surrounding towns and cities had been growing and encroaching on the Hector area.

Another sign that the Hector area had a strong sense of community was that early on, the families established and built churches. Around 1868 or 1869, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was established and the church was erected around the same time.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2: Cumberland Presbyterian Church circa 1890. " SOURCE: Johnson County Museum, Shawnee, Kansas.

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<sup>3</sup> *Standard Atlas of Johnson County Kansas, 1902.*

<sup>4</sup> "Kansas Post Offices," Kanas State Historical Society. <https://www.kshs.org/p/post-offices/11307>.

<sup>5</sup> Cutler, William G. "Johnson County, Part 9."

This is a picture of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church taken around 1890. The image is not high quality, but notice how open the prairie is behind it and the tall trees that surround it, probably planted as a wind break. There are also two doors, separating men and women. This picture shows how the land looked in the Hector community. Unfortunately, the church has been demolished and all that remains is a carved stone that says when it was erected. The Methodists also erected a church around the same time, called the Linwood Methodist Church.

Today, the area where Hector community developed is located between the cities of Overland Park and Mission, near the intersection of 87<sup>th</sup> Street and Nall Avenue. The urban development of the Kansas City metro area has rolled right over old Hector. But in its first decades, Hector was becoming a strong community. One family in particular played an important role in this growth: the John Shapland Pincomb family.

## **One Family Called Hector Home**

A case study of a single Hector area family can reveal the success of these early settlers. John Shapland Pincomb was born in New York in 1839. Like many others, he moved into Kansas after the Civil War, likely due to the Homestead Act of 1862. By 1867, he had migrated to Johnson County and established his farm. Like John Dyche, the first settler into the Hector area, John Pincomb raised livestock and became well known for his breeding steers, heifers, and Poland China hogs. In the 1902 *Standard Atlas of Johnson County, Kansas*, Pincomb land lies in Sections 32 and 33, and one farm has a small part of Indian Creek flowing through it.<sup>6</sup> There are many newspaper accounts advertising John Pincomb livestock for sale.<sup>7</sup> He had established a

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<sup>6</sup> *Standard Atlas of Johnson County, Kansas*, 1902.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, *The Olathe Mirror*, November 3, 1898, p. 3, or December 23, 1897, p. 3.

name for himself and was well known for having healthy and strong livestock for the community and wider county area to purchase. John Pincomb was married to Sarah L. Ladell of Ontario, Canada. Together they had four children. They had a strong sense of progressive values, as two of their children left Johnson County to attend what was then Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan, Kansas. Mary Josephine Pincomb and Charles Edwin Pincomb both graduated from Kansas State with honors and majored in Agriculture.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that Mary went on from Kansas State Agricultural College to graduate school in New York City at Columbia University. It was rare at the time for a female to graduate from a four-year college with a degree in Agriculture, let alone continue her education at an Ivy League school like Columbia. It is also interesting to note that after Mary graduated from Columbia, she went on to teach at the University of Utah. Soon after graduating, she met a diplomat from Mexico. Mary married Benjamin Moats of Tampico, Mexico at the home of her father in Mission Township.<sup>9</sup> While his sister departed for life in Mexico, after graduation, Charles Pincomb went on to work for the Kansas State Bank and had a successful career.

The John Pincomb family demonstrates success through hard work and commitment, an example of a family important to the Post Office community of Hector. With railroad connections fairly close by for shipping, the livestock business was very profitable for early settlers like the Pincombs. By 1878, two railroads passed through Johnson County: the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe and the Kansas City and Santa Fe.<sup>10</sup> Not only economic success but values and morals helped the Pincomb family grow. They made sure that their children were

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<sup>8</sup> *The Olathe Mirror*, June 25, 1896.

<sup>9</sup> *The Olathe Mirror*, November 6, 1902.

<sup>10</sup> Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), Map #30.

educated and were able to go on and become successful. Charles married twice and had a total of seven children. The Pincomb family grew from its roots in Hector.

## **Hector Fades from the Records**

On January 15, 1900 the Hector post office was discontinued for good. However, the fact that the post office closed doesn't mean that a sense of community was lost. The families who lived in the area did not move away; rather their farms were surrounded and incorporated within the growing cities around them. The reason Hector was never established as its own town was because the cities that were around it started to grow at a more rapid pace. Hector was slowly swallowed by the surrounding cities such as Overland Park and Mission. Yet early family names did not disappear along with the Hector post office. They still owned land in the area and some went on to have successful lives. The 1902 *Standard Atlas of Johnson County* shows a large stock farm titled "Dyke Creek Stock Farm," spreading across Sections 32 and 33. This may refer to the Dyche family, still shown as owning land nearby.<sup>11</sup> The main person who continued to live in the Hector community and make a name for himself was the son of John Pincomb, Charles Pincomb. He eventually became prominent in the Overland Park State Bank. Today, we find his name above the door on the original building of the Overland Park State Bank. As for the Pincomb land and that of others who came to settle around Boone Creek, not much is left that can be tied to their original land. Although three Pincomb family members still owned land in old Hector area as late as 1922, these holdings eventually disappeared, too.<sup>12</sup> The Pincomb

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<sup>11</sup> *Standard Atlas of Johnson County, Kansas, 1902.*

<sup>12</sup> *Standard Atlas of Johnson County, Kansas* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle Co., 1922); for farms of Helen, Arthur, and Charles Pincomb, see Sections 32 and 33.

family is also represented in the historic photograph collections at the Overland Park Historical Society. See the Photo Gallery at the end of this essay.

Today if you go to the intersection of 87<sup>th</sup> Street and Nall Avenue, you will be standing just to the northeast of the original Pincomb farm. All of this land has been developed, and there is now housing and a subdivision here. What endures are gravestones in the Linwood Pioneer Cemetery, Leawood, Kansas, and in the Corinth Cemetery in Prairie Village, Kansas. Here lie many of the Pincomb family. Hector may not have ever made it as an incorporated city, but it was important to the people who lived there. They relied on their values to set up a community, one that made education and religion a dominant part of their lives. The little post community of Hector is now a vanished place in Johnson County, Kansas, but it was once an important anchor for many people who called Hector home.



## Photo Gallery



Figure 3: John Shapland Pincomb with wife Sarah and their five children. Source: Ancestry.com



Figure 4: Charles Pincomb (Right) standing at the Northwest corner of the Overland Park State Bank. Property of the Overland Park Historical Society.



Figure 5: Charles Pincomb crossing Santa Fe at 80<sup>th</sup> street in Overland Park. Property of Overland Park Historical Society.



Figure 6: A Modern Photograph of the Linwood Pioneer Cemetery. Cemetery where John and Sarah Pincomb are buried. Photo by Will Noonan.



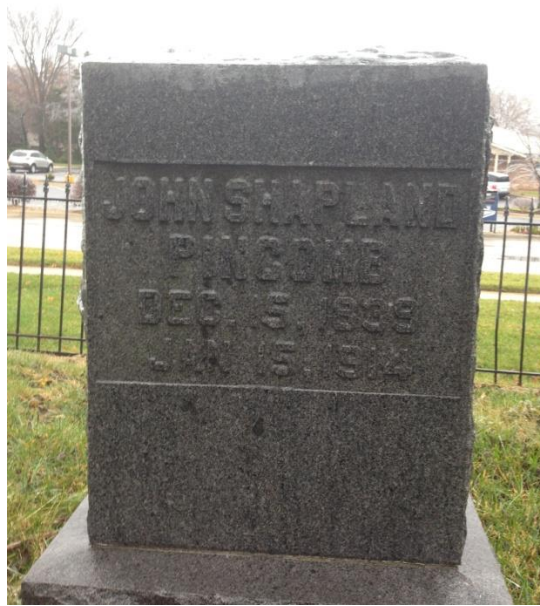


Figure 7: A modern photograph of the John Shapland Pincomb Tombstone. Photo by Will Noonan.



Figure 8: Modern photograph of the Sarah Pincomb Tombstone. Photo by Will Noonan.



Figure 9: A modern photograph of the Charles Pincomb Tombstone. Located in the Corinth Cemetery, Prairie Village, Kansas. Photo by Will Noonon.



Figure 10: A modern photograph of the Clara Pauling Pincomb Tombstone. Located in the Corinth Cemetery, Prairie Village, Kansas. Photo by Will Noonon.

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