

## Menlo

Located in North Randall Township, Menlo had its beginning in 1888 when the Union Pacific branch line from Salina reached the county. A townsite named Zillah had been laid out along the Sheridan-Thomas County line. One and a quarter miles northwest, a small settlement named Mystic, had a post office, store, hotel, livery stable, blacksmith shop, and several dwellings, which were moved to Zillah when the railroad came there.

The new town was then renamed Menlo when the post office was established in 1889. The first school was built in 1890. There was also a general store, an implement building, and a broom factory, which was operated for a short time.

As more families came to live in the Menlo area, additional businesses were required. During the period from 1890 to 1900, a hardware store, drug store, a doctor's office, and the Farmer's Cooperative Creamery were added. Both Shellabarger Grain and Robinson Grain Company constructed elevators in 1903. C. A. Bailey built a blacksmith and machinery shop with a hall above, which served the community for gatherings as long as there was need. Jacob Shroth built a large two-story frame hotel.

A lumberyard was established, first by the Chicago Lumber Company, then by the Foster Lumber Company. The Menlo Farmers Mutual Telephone Company was organized in 1905 as was the Menlo State Bank that same year, with H. V. Christensen as cashier. He was associated with the bank until it was sold in 1951 to the Farmers and Merchants State Bank in Colby.

In 1905 Fred Christensen, affectionately known as Little Fred, opened a confectionary and short order business. Later it became a variety store, which he operated for over forty years until his death. The first newspaper in Menlo was the Menlo Enterprise with Asa Scott as editor.

In 1909 rural mail service was established with Wilbur Maxwell and Lee Cummins as carriers, using horse and buggies and later motorcycles. Daisy Bruns Green was postmistress from 1912 -1930.

The period from 1910 to 1930 was the time of greatest business activity. In the early 1920s the town of Menlo was at its height. It boasted a railroad depot, three elevators, stockyards, a two-story hotel, a hardware store, a cafe, three general merchandise stores, a bank, a meat market, a lumberyard, a variety store, a barber shop, the post office, a machine shop, a blacksmith shop, five gas stations, a creamery, the newspaper the Menlo Leader, a dress shop, and a movie theatre.

The town was noted for its windmills. There were about forty residences, many with its own windmill, besides the living quarters in the shops and stores. There were community dances, parties, and many other social activities.

The first school building was later used as a Methodist Church and services were held there continuously until October, 1938, when the congregation dedicated a new frame church building. In March, 1939, that building burned. Services were then held in the schoolhouse again until June, 1944, when a new brick church building was dedicated. Pastors well known in the area were N. W. Beauchamp, J. R. McCroskey, Rose Flowers, D. Otis Gunckel.

The first schoolhouse, built in 1890, was a frame building occupied until 1904 when a new larger frame structure was built at the north end of Main Street. At the time of consolidation in the twenties, other elementary districts joined with the Menlo district and a high school was added requiring a large brick structure to be built beside the old building. The enrollment reached about two hundred elementary and one hundred high school students. During these years, students of the Menlo Schools excelled in athletics and scholarship. There were two State Championships in basketball and a finalist in the National Scholarship

program. With changing times, the dwindling enrollment caused the district to be dissolved in 1963, with the territory being added to adjoining districts.

Even though located in the center of a rich farming area, the town of Menlo has declined from about twenty-five institutions in 1905 to three in 1975. During the depression of the thirties, the economy was responsible for closing many businesses. As the automobile became part of the rural life and good roads made it easier to reach larger commercial centers, more businesses closed. The national trend of movement to urban centers led to the closing of others. Upon retirement, people moved to larger communities.

In 1975, the population is down to around forty, with a post office, a recreational center, the church, and the Menlo-Rexford Cooperative Elevator operating to serve the community. In the summer, transient workers add around twenty to the population number.

Thus is added another chapter to the story of "ghost towns" of Kansas. Tribute is paid to the people who lived during this time creating many memories of good community spirit, of friendliness, and helpfulness. Thanks is given to those who dreamed and struggled to make it a good place in which to grow up and live.