

# ***THE HISTORY OF PRESNO***

**COMPILED BY THE**

**1926 FOURTH YEAR ENGLISH CLASS**

**PRESNO HIGH SCHOOL**

Transcribed by Dianna Diehm, April 2001

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## **FORWARD**

The 1926 Fourth Year English Class of Presno High School presents to the public the result of its attempt at writing the history of Presno. The material has been compiled from talks given to the class by five pioneers, interviews with many old settlers, and early publications. Much material has been gathered in order to gain accuracy, and it has been hard to determine what events should have a place in history. Perhaps many things could be added and others left out; but on the whole, the class feels that it has included the main events.

It feels that the experiment has been very worthwhile, for it has been very interesting, and it has given each student a more sympathetic appreciation for his home town and a deeper feeling regarding the hardships and sacrifices that their parents went through to make the town what it is. The class wishes to thank especially Mr. Wederath, Mr. Jost, Dr. Newman, Mr. Stevens, and Mr. West for their assistance; Mr. Griffith, who sent material from Sioux City; Mr. Sedgwick; the State Department of History, and the City Council, who gave the pictures and made publication possible.

**TheoButt**

**Irene Juhnke**

**John Sweeney**

**Hazel DeBolt**

**Alta Kenobbie**

**Minnie Swinson**

**Durward Green**

**Harold Martin**

**Bernice Van de Drink**

**Oscar Hilmo**

**Marion Miller**

**John Wagoner**

**Ida Juhnke**

**Helen Ohlson**

The first mention of "Presho" dates back to 1872-3 when Presho and Lyman counties were created by the government. Contrary to the belief of many that the name "Presho" is of Indian origin, the fact is that the town was named for J. S. Presho, an early trader and the operator of a ferry at Yankton. In 1897 Presho County became part of Lyman County.

It was not until 1890 that a proclamation was issued by President Harrison that said that this section of country west of the Missouri River was fit for white men to live in, but at that time large tracts were reserved for the Indians. When the Great Sioux Reservation was opened in 1893, it was immediately filed on by incoming settlers and speculators, and soon small towns and post offices sprang up. The first town site was Gladstone, located on the west bank of the Missouri River, a short distance south of where Oacoma is now located. It was the seat of Lyman County and was burned by cattle rustlers who thought that law and order would be their ruin. Oacoma then became the county seat.

Many other post offices, such as Hotch City, South Earling (now Vernon's farm), Lund, McClure, and Presho were established in hopes that the railroad would some day run through them, but most of these were abandoned on account of lack of water on the tableland. Water was only one problem of the early settlers. With these rolling prairies covered with long grass that has never felt the sickle edge, prairie fires were very common. In 1900 an unusually big fire started five miles east of what is now Presho and swept as far west as the town site of Murdo. A girl and two small children lost their lives. All feed was destroyed, and so the homesteaders banded together, drove their stock up near Kadoka and erected sod shelters for the winter. Rustlers were also a menace, and the pioneers could not borrow money with horses and cattle for security because they were apt to be stolen.

The present city of Presho has had four plattings. Before the extension of the railroad from Chamberlain, four blocks known as East Presho were platted out on Matson's place, north of the Fair Grounds. It consisted of a post office, a hotel, saloon, land office, and a general store. Another platting was North Presho, a block platted by Mr. Rice, who moved the building, which is now Mrs. Mullen's home from South Earling and established a hotel and general store. A cheese factory, now Abdnor's store, was hauled overland from Brookings and did business for four years. Cheese was hauled to Chamberlain by wagon for market. The fourth platting was made several years after the other three plattings and was called Greater Presho. It is located on the hill south of the main part of town.

The third platting, which begins the history of Presho proper, was made by the Milwaukee Land Company. On June 2, 1905, this land company bought the section from Sidney F. Hockersmith, who in 1894 had been given the right by the government to homestead the land on which the main part of the city of Presho now stands. Mr. Hockersmith was the first to receive a title from the government, but in 1890, before the land was surveyed and open for filing, Mrs. Sophia Van Horn squatted on it and had her shack about where the Anderson Lumber Company now is. When her mother, Mrs. Helleckson, died, she went to live with her father in the old Mullen residence, and thereby lost the land to Mr. Hockersmith who came in with a government lease. Mrs. Van Horn buried her mother on the slope, which decided the location of the present cemetery. The Milwaukee Land Company platted out sixteen blocks and on November 9, 1905, brought a professional auctioneer from Chicago and had the lot sale, the anniversary of which is celebrated as Presho's birthday. A special train that brought the bidders stayed in Presho over a day.

The first lot sold was that on which the Farmers and Merchants Bank now stands. Peter B. Dirks and E. M. Sedgwick bought it for \$500, \$480 more than the list price. The building that Mrs. Mitchell now occupies for her confectionery store was on wheels where the Van Horn pool hall now stands; and as soon as Mr. Sedgwick and Mr. Dirks bought the lot, they moved the building there and started to do business within eight minutes after the sale of the lot was announced. Nels Garnos made the first deposit while the bank was on its way to its permanent location. There were no fixtures in the bank at all, but it had the \$5,000 capital necessary to start a bank at that time. Two barrels and a plank served for a counter. When the cashier, Mr. Clowe, went to dinner he took with him all the money in a little satchel and carried a six-shooter for protection. He was never robbed. Mr. Montgomery was president and Mr. Sedgwick, vice president. One-third interest was held by Mr. Topper. For two years the bank did not close day or night.

Presho was the end of the railroad in 1905 with the "Y" south of the track opposite the campgrounds. As newcomers would go as far west as they could get, Presho drew an enormous population after the lot sale. As many as 240 cars of immigrants were unloaded in one month. Until they could get their claims, they occupied every space of ground just north of the tracks on the creek banks. Some put up tents, some had covered wagons, and some built temporary huts of sod. During the first six months, the sound of the hammer could be heard almost any hour of the day or night. Settlers hauled lumber from the railroad yards and built

their 8 x 10 shanties, the average cost of which was \$40. Knutson's and Sedgwick's residences were the first real houses here.

Very early Presho had a population of over 2,000, and to accommodate these transients, many bunkhouses were built and every place of business had cots upstairs to rent. Mr. Morris built "The Arcade", the first hotel erected south of the tracks. At this time, the town could accommodate about 350 strangers with sleeping room.

Any newly settled country or town has many interesting characters when it has a large floating population, and Presho was no exception. Rattlesnake Bill, Beefsteak Bob, and Fitzmorris were a few of the eccentric people who added local color to the west. Rattlesnake Bill was a cowboy who loafed around and told stories about snakes. He claimed that he picked up rattlesnakes by the tails and cracked their heads off. Beefsteak Bob was a dope fiend who painted for his living. Fitzmorris was an aristocratic duke who wouldn't work and pretended to be a preacher.

In the spring of 1906 the railroad was extended to Rapid City to which place there had formerly been a stage. Supply yards for the extension were located near the present campgrounds; and, as it rained nineteen days that May, work progressed very slowly. There was no depot in town, and A. L. Walker, the first depot agent, had his office in a box car. He shipped the first car of coal into Presho and B. R. Stevens was the first to buy a load.

The post office was one of the early institutions of service. It was located in the building which is now Clute's Harness Shop, and Isaac Helleckson was the first postmaster. Later it was moved to the building now occupied by the Hilligoss show repair shop and finally to its present location. At first there were no mailboxes. Many interesting pictures may be seen of the line of people from the post office door straight across the street patiently waiting for their mail, which had to be separately looked for from large bundles. The line was the same no matter what the weather was.

Presho had a newspaper in 1905. E. L. Senn, present prohibition officer, established the "Presho Post," which later became the "Lyman County Herald." Mr. Senn owned sixteen other papers in Lyman County at that time. They were called "proof sheets" and were used to advertise the ownership of claims.

Besides real estate offices and restaurants, several stores were started. Argo and Sweeney ran a general store in the building now occupied by B. B.

Stevens, and Martin and Kenobbie had a big general store in the building now occupied by Reuland & Deisch. There were dance halls above these stores, and it is said that the buildings shook with the square dances of twenty years ago as they would now with the Charleston of 1926. People came as far as twenty miles or more on horseback to these dances. Entertainment was a treat to the people who came as far from their friends and social life to this unsettled, lonesome prairie land.

Argo and Sweeney owned the first automobile. It was manufactured by the International Harvester Company and modeled after a high-wheeled buggy. Its chief fault was that it wouldn't run up hill. The Sheldon Brothers owned a large livery stable where the Entsminger Lumber yard now is. A large "Blue Front" livery stable owned by C. S. Hubbard also helped supply the homesteaders with teams to haul their lumber to their claims. This stable has been torn down and replaced by a filling station.

Another bank was started almost as soon as the Sedgwick bank. W. H. Pratt was the president, and he located in the building, which is now Robert's Drug Store. He also had a land office in the back. Later Mr. Dixson bought out Pratt and operated the First State Bank until it was closed two years ago.

Besides those mentioned, others to engage in business when the town was very new were: Herman Jost, who owned a jewelry store; F. M. Newman, druggist and physician; Richard Sehnert, who established a bakery and ran a hotel; White & Parrick, real estate; Mitchell & Chamberland, real estate; Helleckson & Horton, mercantile business; Ed McKim, implement business; John Hansen, saloon; F. C. Wederath, lawyer; Bezanson and Stevens, hardware; M. E. Griffith, real estate; John Conley, real estate; C. H. West, real estate; J. W. Jordan, postmaster in 1906; Sheffer and Wilson, grocery store, and R. J. Clute who had a harness shop. During the first 6 months after the lot sale, a very creditable looking town was erected, with both sides of main street built solid for about two and half blocks, with some places of business on side streets.

In April 1906 the town was incorporated and North Presho, East Presho, and South Presho became Presho, a third class city. The first governing body consisted of Isaac Helleckson, the postmaster; Mr. Pratt, the banker; and Mr. Church, the drayman. Mr. Helleckson, as chairman of this council, acted as mayor. Ed Christenson was justice of the peace. One of the first improvements that the new city undertook was that of sidewalks. Planks had been used, but with frequent rains such as there were that spring, the mud in the streets was often ankle deep. Each night storekeepers would scoop it out of their stores with a shovel. An

election was held that declared liquor traffic legal, and four saloons were established. They operated until the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment was passed, and present records show that the town has improved 70 per cent since the saloons were abolished.

For the first year or more people associated in mass, there being no class distinction; and they rallied to the support of any worthy cause to aid in sickness or distress, and to provide funds for the erection of churches and other public buildings. The first celebration in Presho showed a good example of cooperation. Two citizens solicited the town and in four hours time \$1,200 was raised to finance the Fourth of July celebration in 1906. A framework was erected on both sides of Main Street and boughs were cut and hauled to form a shady bower. A racetrack and grandstand were built opposite Medicine creek to the northwest of the present tourist camp. Probably the first auto race ever held west of the Missouri River took place on that day. The cars were each two-cylinder cars; one a Buick and the other a Reo. Harry Pontius was the driver of the Reo and he won the race. It was estimated that at least five thousand people attended the celebration. Many traveled seventy-five to a hundred miles overland, camping on the way.

The water supply for the town was taken from the creek and from the artesian well drilled by the Chicago & Milwaukee railroad company in December 1905. The overflow formed what was called the "lake" and a bathhouse and plunge was operated by Mr. Clausen and owned by C. S. Hubbard. It cost the people twenty-five cents to take a bath, and every Saturday night the bathhouse and plunge were kept very busy. C. S. Hubbard owned five boats, which he kept for rent. They were interesting because they were named for the new brides of Presho—Alice Ohlson, Mildred Hubbard, Grace Miller, Sophia Edinger, and Marion Sweeney. In 1906 the city drilled the well on the hill west of town.

Edward "Buster" Kenobbie, born April 3, 1906, was the first baby born in Presho. He was born to Frederick Martin and Mabel (Clark) Kenobbie.

As the Norwegians were the first people to settle here, theirs was the first church. In 1890 the Medicine Valley Lutheran Church was organized by the Rev. M.O. Waldahl of Pukwana. This was the church north of the tracks and it is now the house of Dale Beale on his farm south of Presho. Another Lutheran church, called the Presho Norwegian Evangelical church, was organized in 1892 and was the beginning of the present church, built in 1907. In 1917 these two Lutheran churches united under the name, "The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America" with the Rev. C. O. Rolfsen as pastor. He served until 1920 when the Rev. G. N. Isolany came to Presho.

The Methodist church was built in 1906, and the Rev. J. R. Payne was the first pastor. Until the time of the present pastor, the Rev. Ralph E. Rich, there have been thirteen other pastors. Before their church was built in 1907 the Catholics used to go to Sweeney to church. Father J. B. Kelly was the first resident priest here, and between his term of service and that of the present Father Frei, there have been six priests. A Christian church once stood where the Norwegian Lutheran parsonage now is, but it was later moved to Hilmoe where it is used with the Presbo minister as pastor.

Before 1909 the Rev. Engel, who lived at Chamberlain, came out every two to three weeks to preach to the German Lutheran congregation. Then the Rev. G. Steffen became minister at Draper where he had filed on a claim, and he preached at Presbo, Murdo, Draper, and Hilmoe. 1913 the Rev. Labrence had his residence in Presbo, and after him came the Rev. Mr. Ehlers, the Rev. Mr. Pautsch, the Rev. Mr. Jenson, and then the present Rev. T. H. Joeckel.

It was about this time too that the lodges were organized. The Workman lodge was the first one, in 1906, and the I.O.O.F., the Masonic, the Woodman, the Royal Neighbors, the Rebekah, and the Eastern Star were formed just a few years later.

School was first held in the old Lutheran church, which stood near the present Campbell residence. Miss Lola Campbell was the first public school teacher. She was a homesteader, who lived several miles south of town and who walked in or rode horseback each morning. In 1907 bonds for \$7,000 were issued for the public school house for which W. B. Hight was contractor. The site for it caused a controversy between two political parties, which centered around the two banks. One party wanted the present site, which was owned by the Milwaukee Land Company, and the other party chose a site in Greater Presbo. The bonds for this building are due next year. The first 4-year class to be graduated was in 1915. There were eight seniors then—Maella McKim (Mrs. Mairose), Holis Andis, Donald Crawford, Maclin Walters, Pearl Fahrenwald, Elsie Beale, Edmund Harrington and Kenneth West. In 1920 the school was consolidated with several outlying districts, but consolidation failed the next year by a 60 per cent vote of the people after the case had been taken to the Supreme Court. The high school was also accredited in 1920.

The first county fair was held in Presbo in 1907. It was a success in every way, and the next September another took place. The feature about this fair that people remember was the airplane, which was made by Harry Pontius out of bicycles and canvas. He attempted to fly it, but it hit a corner of the grandstand

and was wrecked. Another successful fair was held the next year, but in 1910 the occasion was spoiled with rain. On account of dry years and the war, no fairs were held from 1911 to 1922, but since the fair was revived in 1922 three very successful ones have been held.

In 1900 there was one telephone in Presho, in the Rice building north of the tracks. The line ran from Chamberlain to Rapid City. The second line was built by Mr. Blunck and Mr. Sedgwick between here and White River out of ash trees from the Blunck ranch near the river. The next line was from Chamberlain to Pierre, the present line, owned by the Bell Telephone Company and built in 1910.

The first electric light plant was installed by O. E. Helgerson in the back of his garage in 1910-11. He wired his own buildings and then the Arcade Hotel next door. He later put in a larger plant and supplied the residence district. The city bought Mr. Helgerson's plant in 1922 and built the present building. The city sold to the Northern Power & Light Co. in 1925.

When the war came in 1917, there were hardly any young men left in Presho, but all of them came back except three. Edward Butrick was killed in France and it is for him that the local Post of the American Legion is named. William Mang and Kenneth West also lost their lives. Following is a list of Presho boys who went to war: Andrew Clausen, Roy Scott, Harry Scott, Thomas Huffman, Russell Mullen, L. K. Lewis, James Ely, Otto Sehnert, Richard Sehnert, Carl Kuhrt, C. J. Boe, Thorwald Boe, Orville Ellefson, Wallace Lonie, Roy Fry, Floyd Payne, Clarence Gross, Clarence Husman, Don Crawford, Walter Dittman, Paul Thompson, Jim Herman, Leo Etherton, Albert Hulce, Roy Winchell, Jim Waller, William Fahrenwald, Rudy Nerk, William Lang, Floyd O'Toole, Charles O'Toole, Jack Foley, Frank Mullen, Clinton Bartow, Hans Libner, Henry Kuhrt, Leo and Garner Salisbury, Jacob Manhalter, Mathew Jenson, Gunerus Olson, Ole Howe, Dale Beale, Henry Boe, Enoch Tjornslund, Oscar Alkire, James Alkire, John Halgrimson, Clarence Jost, Henry Halgrimson, Louis Fosness and John Kinney.

It was during the war, too, that Presho became noted as a hay-shipping center. In 1914 there was a heavy rainfall, which produced an immense hay crop. Contracts were made with the government for prairie hay and about 900 cars were shipped at eighteen dollars a ton. The annual shipment increased to 1,000 cars, this making Presho the second largest shipping center for prairie hay in the United States. In 1918 there was a very heavy hay crop. It rained almost continuously for a month, and most of the crops were destroyed, but it was very favorable for the growth of grass. In the last few years, there has been a falling off in the

shipment of hay on account of less rainfall and continuous harvesting, but at the lowest over 500 cars have been shipped.

Several fires in recent years have damaged the business section of town. On the night of June 5, 1922, five buildings were entirely burned: Helgerson's hardware store and theater, pool hall, Stanley's real estate office, and Robert's drug store. In 1924 a fire broke out in Campbell's meat market and burned the market, Newman's drug store, and telephone office. Campbell's market and Newman's drug store have since been replaced by two fine brick buildings. In December the Catholic Church burned, but plans are being made to erect a modern building in its place.

Thus in twenty years Presho has grown into the largest town between Chamberlain and Rapid City.