

## **A Little Bit of Kansas History**

**One of the most interesting dimensions of the world we live in is time. For example, if two friends were at an airport in the same line but a few minutes apart they would not even be aware that they just missed seeing each other. If two cars are at the same spot in an intersection at the same time there is a real problem but if they are just a second before or after the other car everything is fine.**

**One of the most difficult things for us to do is actually experience a moment of time if we weren't there. Let's look at a few examples: If you fought in the Revolutionary War you would tell an entirely different story than if you were reading about the Revolutionary War in a text book. If you were watching a space shuttle launch in Florida and felt the ground shake and hear the noise of the rocket engines you would tell an entire different story than if you watched it on television.**

**If you were there and watched the Crucifixion of Jesus you would tell a much different account than if you read it in the Bible. If you watched the movie "Top Gun" and observed the jet aircraft take off you would have an entirely different story to tell than if you were actually there and felt the aircraft carrier shake when a plane catapults off the deck. By just watching the movie you wouldn't know that during flight operations there is a tremendous smell of jet fuel, and a powerful wind blowing in your face as the carrier heads into the wind. You wouldn't know about the feel of salt water in the air and that you must have ear protection because of the jet noise.**

**So, when I tell you about a little bit of Kansas history, I hope you will try to feel it, hear it, smell it, and see the experience in your mind's eye.**

**Many felt it was the most beautiful town in Kansas. It was located on the side of the Kansas River and had been founded in 1854. The town had grown and now had a population of around 1,200 men, women, boys and girls. There were no paved roads and no**

automobiles. Just to the West of the peaceful little community were gentle rolling green hills that added to the beauty of the community.

Each day you could hear the sounds of horses, wagons and carriages and the blacksmith's pounding horseshoes on their anvils. You would notice the birds singing, the wind blowing through the trees and many other typical summer noises. Charlie Hart was one of the residents of the small town for a short while but he was gone now.

It was basically a happy little place but there had been rumors that had spread among the inhabitants for quite some time but nothing had happened. So they just went on working and raising their families.

On what was thought to be another typical hot August night the town's residents went to bed feeling the next day was going to be just a normal summer day in 1863.

The next morning around four o'clock, while most of the residents were still in bed, few of them noticed the sound of mounted horses galloping east out of town. But someone did. A short time later there was the sound of "GUNFIRE."

But wait...first let's go ahead in time to the 1950s when I was a young boy growing up in Topeka. Like most students, I always looked forward to summer vacation. School usually ended for the year towards the end of May followed by Memorial Day. On Memorial Day my father and mother would load my sister Wendy and I into our family car with a bucket. We would drive a few blocks to the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Gage Boulevard and turn west on 17<sup>th</sup>. In just a few blocks we would see vendors selling flowers near the entrance to Mount Hope Cemetery and we would get out of the car and pick out 16 peonies and put them in our bucket.

Dad would then drive into the cemetery and we would park on the road by the Singing Tower. After laying the peonies on the ground we would fill the bucket with water and Wendy and I

would place a flower in the container by each of the 16 graves. Wendy and I didn't know anything about the graves other than they were just relatives.

As we grew older we began to find out who they were and what they did. Five of the graves are people who lived in the little Kansas town in 1863. They are: The Rev Hugh Dunn Fisher also known as (Chaplin Fisher) who is my great-great-grandfather; Elizabeth Fisher his wife. Three of their sons: John W Fisher, my great grandfather; C.E. Fisher, MD; and Joseph C Fisher. Their 4<sup>th</sup> son, Frank is not buried in Mount Hope.

Of course there are other relatives buried there but they are not a part of this story.

Rev Hugh Dunn Fisher wrote the book, "Gun and the Gospel," which, along with many handed down family stories, is the basis of this paper.

Now let's go back in time to 1863. Who was Charley Hart? Charley taught school in the local community for a brief time. He was associated with the wrong group of people though and was run out of town. Who was Charley Hart? He was actually William C Quantrell. According to my great-great grandfather his name was spelled Quantrill. However in later years the "i" was replaced with an "e" in the last syllable. The town is Lawrence, Kansas.

As was mentioned before, there had been rumors of an attack on Lawrence for quite some time but nothing happened. The "CRY of WOLF," had been raised too often so the town became literally unprotected.

The well planned raid on Lawrence by William Quantrell and his Raiders was to occur on August 20, 1863, but it actually happened on August 21. One of Quantrell's spies actually lived in Lawrence in the Eldridge House as a cattle speculator and occasionally had wine with General Jim Lane.

Quantrell had planned to kill Jim Lane; Chaplin Fisher; and Col Eldridge. The raiders consisted of 150 of Quantrell's men and 150

Texas Rangers. During the raid men who lived in Lawrence were shot and killed in cold blood on their front porches while their wives and children watched. After the raid 154 of the best business houses and dwellings in Lawrence were burned to the ground. The property loss was valued back then to be 1 ½ million dollars. Two thirds of the Lawrence residents were homeless. Many did not even have a suit of clothing and few had a dollar of money.

That night nearly 100 widows and 200 fatherless children sat wailing in the streets. Beside the crying and sobbing sounds, there was the smell of smoke from the burning structures. A total of 185 men had been killed. It was one of the worst massacres of all time.

Now let's go back in time to the morning of the raid. My great-great-grandfather, Chaplin Fisher, had been ill. At about 4 o'clock in the morning he woke up to the sound of horses' hoofs in front of his house. He quickly got partly dressed and looked out the window and saw 3 horsemen rapidly riding out of town to the south.

He told his wife, Elizabeth, he was afraid something terrible was going to happen. She just thought he was sick and nervous and that there had been a railroad meeting the night before and some of the countrymen who had been there were probably just going out early to their farms.

Chaplin Fisher felt easier and lay back down to rest. About a half hour later Elizabeth got up. It was dawn. She looked out a window and saw a body of troops entering the outskirts of Lawrence. She hollered and I quote, "Pa, get up! There is a company of soldiers coming into town. I believe it is Quantrell and his men!"

He got up and went to the door just in time to see them shoot down Rev. Snyder as he sat milking his cow in the front of his house and confirmed his fears that Quantrell was upon them.

He threw on his shirt and put on his shoes and went out of the house to the stable and turned his horse and pony loose so they

would be less likely to be stolen. As I mentioned, Chaplin Fisher and Elizabeth had 4 children: John who was then age 12; C.E. who was 10; Joseph who was 7; and Frank who was 6 months old.

Elizabeth earnestly told my great-great grandfather to take John and C.E. and run about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile west to Mount Oread and hide in the bushes. As they started out Chaplin Fisher saw pickets stationed every hundred yards or so and he felt it would be impossible for him to get through their line alive. He figured the boys could run and get away. So, while the boys ran for Mount Oread, he went back to the house as he was sick.

John saw a school friend named Robbie and they ran together. They killed Robbie by John's side and his brains were spattered on John's face and frightened him so much he never fully recovered.

C. E. caught up with Freddie Leonard who was a year or two older, and they ran together. Somehow they evaded the pickets but were shot at from a distance several times. They hid in the town cemetery.

My great-great grandfather went to his home and went down to the cellar which was dirt. Elizabeth was afraid they would find him but he was just too weak to leave. She replied and I quote, "Well trust in the Lord and pray that he may save you. I will pray also, and do all I can for you."

She then saw 4 murderous villains ride up to the front gate, dismount and demand admittance. My great-great grandfather was in the cellar lying just beneath the front hall and could hear every word they said.

When they asked where Chaplin Fisher was, Elizabeth told them he had left with the little boys when they came to town. Using swear words they said he was in the cellar. Elizabeth told them she didn't want them to swear in front of the children and told them to go to the cellar and look for themselves.

They entered the house and walked right over where my great-

great-grandfather was laying in the cellar below and looked down into the cellar but it was dark.

They asked Elizabeth for a candle so they could go down in the cellar but she told them they didn't use candles. "When we go to the cellar we burn oil in a lamp," she said. At the raiders request she got an oil lamp. One of the men turned the wick down into the bowl and asked her for help. Elizabeth told him he had ruined it and that it would take at least half an hour before the lamp would burn.

While they waited they ransacked the house. Then they asked if she had another lamp and she told them yes but it was upstairs. When they told her to go upstairs and get the lamp she protested that she could not carry the baby and one of them must go up and get the lamp or hold the baby while she went for it.

One of the men took Frank, the 6 months old baby, and walked the floor with him cooing to keep him quiet while his mother went up for the lamp.

Perhaps wondering the while whether the father, whose life they were seeking, had eyes like the baby's eyes and what would become of the child if they took its father's life.

When Elizabeth returned with the lamp one of the men said, "Come on now, cock your revolvers and kill at sight."

The cellar was not completed. Some of the dirt had been thrown up in a pile on one side and my great-great-grandfather hid behind it. He lay as flat as he could with his face turned to the side. The lamp threw shadows on the bank of dirt and they did not see him though they were just a few feet away. Chaplin Fisher could have touched the leader on the shoulder. The men then went back up from the cellar.

They stole more things and then ordered the house burned. After the fire was started they left one guard and the rest rode off to kill more people. The guard told Elizabeth that if there was anything she wished to save he'd help her save it. She asked him to help

her put out the fire but he said if he did it would cost him his life. She told him if he wouldn't help her put out the fire just get on your horse and ride off.

He said he would but it would do no good for this is one of the marked houses and is bound to go and then he rode off. Elizabeth fought the fire and dealt successfully with other raiders so they didn't go to the cellar.

A neighbor lady came over and, since there were raiders all around the house, Elizabeth whispered to her that my great-great-grandfather was in the basement of the burning house.

They told Chaplin Fisher to come up to the first floor and Elizabeth dropped a dress over his head and shoulders. Then, under a carpet that she and the neighbor lady were holding, my great-great-grandfather crawled on the ground and followed them to a bush while 4 guerrillas, standing by the fence not 80 feet away, watched the two women with guns in their hands.

The neighbor lady called to Elizabeth loudly, "Let's throw those chairs and things on top of this carpet. What's the use of saving anything from that old burning house and then have them burn up outside?" (They kept the three chairs as heirlooms.)

Chaplin Fisher laid there until 11:00 in the morning and then the murderers left town. John came back a little later and told of his friend's death. Elizabeth was frantic and fearing C.E. had been killed she went out to find him. After about a mile she saw C.E. and his friend and told them everyone in the family was alive.

When they were all reunited they all knelt on the ground and thanked God for their safety.

The question was often asked of Elizabeth and I quote:

"Mrs. Fisher, how could you keep your courage and confidence and plan and do so much to save your husband," And always her reply was, "The Lord helped me. Has he not said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me.'"

**Who were the characters in the story and in the cemetery?**

**Rev Hugh Dunn Fisher was my great-great-grandfather. As I mentioned before, he wrote “Gun and the Gospel.”**

**He released the first slaves in Kansas. He brought them from Missouri. When they crossed the border he rose up in his saddle turned around and, with his hands in the air he shouted, “You are free,” and they all cried.**

**He officiated at Senator Jim Lane’s funeral and was later asked to take his place as a United States Senator from Kansas. He declined as he felt he needed to do God’s work in Kansas.**

**He started the first Methodist Church in Kansas.**

**Through Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s writings, Sherlock Holmes once said: “Any intelligent thinking man can only come to one conclusion: “There has to be a God”**

**I’m sure my Great-Great Grandfather would agree.**

**Elizabeth Fisher, his wife, was my great-great-grandmother.**

**Their 4 sons were:**

**John W Fisher, my great-grandfather. He was the 1<sup>st</sup> Student at University of Kansas**

**C.E. Fisher, M.D., their second son, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> student at the University of Kansas.**

**Joseph C. Fisher was their 3<sup>rd</sup> son. He was the 7 year old boy who stood by his mother’s side during the raid.**

**Frank Fisher was their 4<sup>th</sup> son who is not buried in Mount Hope Cemetery but was the 6 months old baby who softened the heart of one of the raiders.**



**Hugh T Fisher is John's son and my grandfather. He was an attorney, a Shawnee County District Attorney & State Senator.**

## **And that is a little bit of Kansas History**

**Again to quote Sherlock Holmes: "Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last."**

**I'm sure my great-great-grandfather is now experiencing that last lesson right now.**

**As each of us continue to enjoy the miracle of life, through the good and bad history of the past, let us remember that we are the ones who will create the future which will one day become history.**

**I encourage all of us to go out and make history that will have a positive impact on our wonderful world!**