



Courtesy of American Angus Association and Kansas State Board of Agriculture.

Facts and Fiction

What is it that runs all along the road but never moves?

Why, a FENCE, of course! And there is a lot more to be said about fences. This is the second issue of *Heritage of Kansas* which deals with fences in this state. The May 1960 issue, "Fencing the Prairies," was concerned mainly with fencing in the 1860's and '70's, with the invention and development of barbed wire, and with the various fences used by early Kansas settlers—hedge and stone and wire.

This issue stresses more the years after 1880, and the effects of fencing on the economy and way of life of the open range areas. The emphasis moves to the western part of the state, to the unsettled cattle country of the '80's and '90's.

But before that aspect of Kansas' development is investigated, there are a few fence miscellanies which should be discussed. For instance, where did Washburn University of Topeka get its name? Did Kansas have any early fence factories? Is barbed wire a suitable substitute for a telephone line? Why did some people make cement posts for their farms instead of using Osage Orange or some other more common post material?

The answer to the first question starts in 1865. In that year Lincoln College was opened in Topeka by the Congregationalist Church. In 1868, a man called Ichabod Washburn of Worcester, Massachusetts, gave the college a gift of \$25,000. The college changed its name to Washburn University in his honor. Now what in the world does this have to do with the subject of fences?

Well, Ichabod Washburn was, in the 1830's, a blacksmith and a maker of machinery and lead pipe in Worcester. He got an order for some screws one day, so he tried making wire for screws out of iron rods. His attempt was successful, and that was the birth of the wire industry in the United States. (Previously all wire had been imported from England.) Sometime later, he took his son-in-law, Philip L. Moen, into partnership,

and the Washburn and Moen Manufacturing Company became leaders of the wire industry in this country.

The development of the telegraph in the late '30's and its subsequent growth opened up a lucrative market for the wire industry. In the late 1850's and early '60's, much wire went into the manufacture of hoop skirts. In the late '60's and thereafter, the invention and development of barbed wire provided a vast new demand for wire manufacture. The Washburn and Moen Company prospered through the years, and Ichabod Washburn was able to make his gift to the Topeka school. So that's where Washburn University got its name—from a manufacturer of wire.

Kansas has had several manufacturers of barbed wire but the two earliest were the South Western Fence Company established in Topeka in 1879, and a small factory started in Lawrence by Albert Henley, which later became the Consolidated Barb Wire Company.

Henley began operations in Lawrence with four small hand-operated machines for making barbed wire. By 1879, another barbed wire factory came into Lawrence, and the competition stimulated Henley to expand his operations. He built a new plant utilizing water power from the dam. He put into use his newly invented automatic wire machine which took wire from three coils, twisted two of the strands together and attached barbs cut from the third to the twisted pair.

Around 1881, the managers of both Lawrence plants were compelled to make certain agreements and settlements with the powerful Washburn and Moen Manufacturing Company (then under the leadership of Ichabod's son Charles) which had a monopoly on patents and processes in barbed wire manufacture. A couple of years later, these two Lawrence companies merged with a third which had entered town, and the new factory was called the Consolidated Barb Wire Company.

Consolidated kept growing through the years, adding new equipment, hiring more employees, improving its wire. In 1896, it started producing a new Henley-patented woven wire fence that proved to be very popular. In 1899, Consolidated was forced to sell to American Steel and Wire Company because of its monopoly on all steel rods from which wire was made. The factory was dismantled by its new owner, and Lawrence lost one of her most important business enterprises of that day.

Now to come forward a few years to the era of the early rural telephones, the "farmer-owned" phones: When phones first began to be used in rural areas, each farmer had to put in his own line from the nearest town to his home. Since the installation of poles and line could be rather expensive, some people cut down costs by attaching a single strand smooth wire to insulators fastened to already existing fence posts. Others installed poles for their lines, all right, but set the poles in line with a fence so that the bottom portion could double as a fence post, thus again cutting ex-

penses slightly. But the cheapest (and apparently the least satisfactory) installation was the use of the top barbed wire of a fence. By separating the wire from the posts with insulators, hooking in with "Central" in town and into the battery-powered "crank-and-holler" phone in the house, a farmer could have a relatively inexpensive telephone. The *New York Times Magazine* of April 3, 1960, made mention of these "fence phones" in "A Line On Party Lines" by Hal Borland:

In the wide open spaces of the West, farmers occasionally set up their own party lines on barbed-wire fences. The transmission strand was usually, but not always, fastened to the fence posts on insulators, and gates and roads were bridged with overhead wire. They were makeshift lines and often went dead when it rained, but they linked remote farmhouses in Kansas and Colorado, and sometimes they tied in with regular telephone lines and gave intermittent connection with towns and doctors.

Now and then, even in fair weather, the line went dead, but if you waited five minutes the cow leaning on the fence would move and you could talk again. . . .

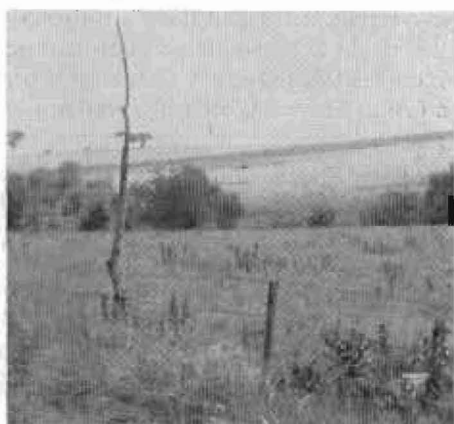
A few years ago, attaching a telephone line to fence posts was not uncommon; using a telephone pole also as a post for fence wire is still not uncommon today. But there are a couple of rather unusual kinds of posts that ought to be mentioned in connection with Kansas fencing. First, there is the matter of concrete posts located near Larned in Pawnee County, and a few in Elk and Woodson Counties. Concrete posts are not usually very practical, according to many fencers, because if the cement mixture or the climatic conditions are not precisely right, the posts will not hold up. However, according to Clyde C. Cook and his brother George, who made cement posts for their farms in the Ash Valley community near Larned, they have served well:

"We made them because they were cheaper than hedge shipped in from Eastern Kansas, and we had more time than money. That was in about 1912, and they're still standing as sturdy now in 1960 as they were when they were first made. We made the forms so that the posts were tapered from about four inches square at the top to six inches square at the bottom. The posts came out about six feet long. The forms were made of wood, and we could make six posts per batch of concrete. The concrete we mixed like for cement walks or foundations—three parts sand, one part portland cement, and just enough water to make it take form. We got the sand from a sand pit seven miles north and west from our place. We used four lengths of heavy wire per post for reinforcement, one wire near each outside corner of the post. After the concrete had been poured into the forms, but before it got hard, we put tie wires about twelve inches apart

into each post. These were used to fasten the line wires to. They looked like the round ends of big hairpins sticking out of one side of the post. It was hard work, mixing the concrete by hand. But I guess it was worth it because those posts are still in use on our farms at Ash Valley."

Concrete posts dating from the early 1900's can also be found on the Fort Larned Ranch, around the Larned cemetery, and on the old Fudickar place across from the cemetery. These posts were made a little differently than those just described, but the principal of wire reinforcements and "hairpin" tie wires was kept. It has been reported that the Missouri Pacific Railroad also used a number of concrete posts along its right-of-way, but these had an iron rod in the middle for extra reinforcement. Another informant told about sinking the form into the ground where the post is desired, and pouring the concrete "on the spot." "But you know," he said, "there just isn't any post as good as a good old Osage Orange post."

The second unusual post type to be mentioned is the pipe-in-rock found a few miles northwest of Emporia. A hole very nearly the size of the pipe (about two inches) is drilled in a big flat rock. The drilled rocks are lined up in fence position, and the pipe lengths are set into the tight holes. The big advantage to this post type is that on rocky land, the post does not have to be set into the ground: The big stone base can merely be leveled on top of the ground, and it is heavy enough to hold the post steady.



Pipe-in-rock posts (left) found in the northeastern corner of Chase County. Old poles for farmer-owned telephone lines (right), no longer in use. Lyon County.

But these are individual solutions to individual fencing problems. A much broader view of fencing problems and solutions is found on the following pages in Dr. Earl W. Hayter's article concerning the rise and influence of fencing in the western states, of which Kansas is a part.