

The Mahaffie Homestead
By Miss Ella Mahaffie
(as told to Jessie Benton)

*Aunt Ella died June 23, 1958
This may have been written for the Olathe Centennial
Celebrated September 1957*

Few motorists who hurry past a handsome stone and frame house which stands on the north side of old Highway 50, (now called Kansas City Road), one mile northeast of the courthouse at Olathe, Kansas realize that it was the first stage coach station on the journey from Westport, Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The picturesque stone house was built by J. B. (Beatty) Mahaffie in 1865. Leaving his birthplace in Fayette County, Ohio, Beatty Mahaffie, then twenty-five, migrated to Cass County, Indiana in 1843. There he was married the following year to Lucinda Henderson. In 1857, the couple settled in Johnson County, Kansas three years after the Shawnee Indian territory was thrown open to settlement by the white man.

To acquire the 160 acres on which the Mahaffie homestead stands, its owner paid \$600.00 in 1858; \$400.00 to the estate of Benjamin Reynolds, a veteran of the war of 1812 who had filed on the claim, and \$1.25 an acre to the government of the United States. Soon afterwards he acquired the quarter section adjoining the homestead on the north, which included a quarry, for a reputed price of \$50.00 and a yoke of oxen.

A few months before the Mahffies settled in Olathe, Dr. John T. Barton had stood on the brow of a hill east of the present town, and heard his Shawnee Indian guide exclaim, "Olathe". The word meant "beautiful" in the Shawnee language, and so Dr. Barton christened the town site which he was about to survey. When Beatty Mahaffie bought the land, there was nothing on it but a load of fence rails. He paid \$400.00 for a story and a half frame house, and used four yokes of oxen to haul it to his farm from Olathe.

The first night the house stood on his land, he took in \$5.00. From travelers along the Santa Fe Trail who welcomed the chance to pay for the privilege of sleeping on the floor, as the great tide of immigration swept westward. Inadequate as was the first five boom [sic] frame story and a half house, seldom was a traveler along the Santa Fe Trail refused food and lodging, while many caravans of covered wagons camped overnight along the draw of the Mahaffie [sic] place.

The plow had broken only five acres of the prairie when Beatty Mahaffie settled there. Within the year, he hauled his first crop of wheat, 400 bushels of golden wealth, selling for \$1.00 a bushel to the Wyandotte Mill. By 1865 his farm yielded 1300 bushels of wheat, selling for \$2.40 a bushel at the Washington Mills in Wyandotte.

Three stage lines with passengers and mail stopped at the Mahaffie station. One stage left Westport in the morning for Lawrence, Kansas, stopping for noonday dinner. A stage from Lawrence [sic] arrived at five o'clock in the afternoon in time for supper. One stage line from

Westport to Fort Scott stopped twice a week, while a third arrived twice a month from Santa Fe. Horses were changed every ten miles, four horses to a stage coach on dry road, six to eight in muddy weather. Freight wagons hauled loads weighing from six to eight tons.

Then the stone house was built, the Mahaffie family numbering several sons and daughters. The eldest son, W. A. (Billy) Mahaffie, then a teen age boy, hauled the sand from the Kaw River [sic] by wagon. The stone came from the quarry on the place. Little changed to this day, except for a second story added to the frame section of the house at the rear and a small front porch replacing a two story front porch extending across the entire façade of the house. The eighty-five year old house is as sturdy as the day it was built.

In stage coach days, the dining room was in the basement under the stone section of the house, with an outside entrance to the west. The kitchen was on the east side with inside stairs leading from the dining room to the east room on the first floor, and a storage room north of the kitchen. The temporary story and a half frame house then became a granary [sic] and hog house. The stone smoke house stands to this day a few yards from the house on the west.

Of the Mahaffie children only two survive, Miss Ella Mahaffie, 1036 No. 24th St., Kansas City, Kansas, for many years principal of the Park school, and Frank Mahaffie, pioneer Olathe citizen. Deceased brothers and sisters are Isabel [sic] M. Julian, W.A. Mahaffie, Effie M. Carithers, John and George Mahffie, and Murkle Mahaffie who died in infancy.

Early day housekeepers had their hands full. The table was supplied with vegetables, fruits, meat and poultry raised on the farm. Quantities of pies, cakes and homemade bread were baked in the kitchen. In spite of having sufficient negro help, Miss Mahaffie can never remember her mother being idle.

From the orchard apples, peaches, plums and cherries were picked; while currants, gooseberries and strawberries, as well as vegetables, grew in the garden. Every spring, Alfred Rehsamen, a Swiss, came to trim the grape vines in the vineyard. In place of spraying the orchard, he trimmed the trees and picked the borers out of their trunks. He was accompanied by his wife and children, Gussie, Bill and Frank, who spent the day.

Buckwheat for buckwheat cakes, the batter started with the first cold weather, and added to each day throughout the winter, was raised on the place. Beehives yielded the honey for their sweetening. Excitement was great when the bees swarmed in spring or early summer, as the children rang bells, beat on pans and threw water at the bees in an attempt to settle them on the limbs of trees. Then the limbs might be cut off and carried to the hives where the bees made combs in the small wooden frames placed in the hives and filled them with honey.

Walnuts for the walnut grove still standing on the place were brought from Missouri. As Beatty Mahaffie prepared the hills, his children, Billie and Effie, dropped in the nuts and hid a few in the grass at the end of each row to be collected later for a feast. An old-fashioned flower garden filled with four o'clocks, touch-me-nots, zinnias, marigolds and bachelor's buttons, yielded bouquets for the house. In an herb garden grew horehound, sage, catnip and pennyroyal used both for seasonings and medicine. In the winter, Mrs. Mahaffie treated colds with homemade

horehound syrup, and in the spring administered a spring tonic brewed from rhubarb roots she would also gather horsemint which was a purple blossom and looks like thistle in July and August, and dry it, make tea of it, and take it for insomnia.

Getting food supplies prepared for the winter involved drying corn, apples and peaches. Sauerkraut was made by the barrel, the cabbage being chopped with one of the spades which had been cleaned and scored. Minced meat, too, was made by the barrel. Cooked out of doors over an open fire in huge [sic] copper kettles, making apple butter was an all day's job. Apples were pared by hand, and cooked in sweet cider to the proper consistency which sometimes took until midnight. As the apple butter neared the stirring off stage, it appeared to splatter and splash, burning the face and hands of the stirrer, who needed to be agile.

Sheep were raised both for wool and for meat. It took twelve or more hogs a winter to provide enough hams, bacon, sausage and lard, butchered, processed and smoked at home. Sheep and beef were slaughtered at intervals to vary the menu, while the butter was churned in the kitchen along with the cheese making. Sausage was made by cleaning the entrails of the hogs and receive the ground meat as it came through the spout from the grinder turned by a hand crank.

Each winter the summer's supply of ice was cut along Indian Creek wherever the water had frozen deep enough, and stored in the ice house against hot summer days.

Mistress, children and servants alike worked hard. When not tending to the preparation of food for the larder, Mrs. Mahaffie usually had knitting in her hands.

One negro boy, Dick Bucie, whom the Mahaffie boys said snored so loud he could be heard clear to the draw, was their favorite companion as they ate supper at his table in the kitchen spread with a red table cloth.

On the trip from Indian to Johnson County, the Mahaffies had found a desirable farm in Missouri, but Mrs. Mahaffie refused to settle there. "We're Democrats" she said, "but we'll never own slaves. Kansas will be a free state, and that's the place for us". Thus it was that they settled on the border and experienced all the stirring events of the border war which preceded the admission of Kansas as a free state, and the stirring Civil War days which followed.

Frequently the warning went out to settlers along the Santa Fe Trail to go to Olathe for protection afforded by the militia. On those occasions stage horses were hurried to the back of the farm and hidden. The doors to the house were left wide open with bread, butter, cakes and pies left in the cupboards. When the family returned the cupboards were bare of food but nothing else was disturbed.

Quantrill passed the Mahaffie stage station on his famous raid to Olathe on September 6, 1861. As a boy, starting towards Olathe on foot, Frank Mahaffie was taken up to ride behind a stranger on a fine mount. Later he learned that he had ridden behind Cole Younger. Once the warning was sent that General Sterling Price was coming. The family hastened to a neighbor's farm back off the Santa Fe Trail. Wanting clothing from the homestead the next day, Mrs. Mahaffie sent Jack, a negro servant boy ahead, with instructions to harness the best horse in the stable, and

have it ready when she walked back. When she arrived, Jack stood at the house with a stage horse hitched to the buggy that usually required three men to get it into the harness.

“How in the world did you ever get that horse into the harness without help, Jack?” Mrs. Mahaffie inquired.

“O! Lord, Missus, this is no time for kicking!” was Jack’s reply.

On another occasion two men heavily armed and splendidly mounted, rode up and ordered a breakfast of ham, eggs, biscuits and coffee to be prepared at once. One man sat in the door to watch the horses. The other sat where he could watch the preparation of the food. When they sat down at the table, each man placed a revolver on either side of his plate. They are hurriedly, thanked their hostess, threw a dollar each on the table and were off. It was learned later that they were horse thieves who ended their days dangling off the end of a rope.

The close of the Civil War brought the coming of the railroad and the end of the stagecoach. Beatty Mahaffie was one of the ten incorporates of the Kansas City, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad in 1865. First known as the Kansas and Neosho Valley railroad Company; later as the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf; it was acquired by a group of Boston capitalists in 1868, and completed to Olathe in December, to Fort Scott a year later, and to Indian Territory in 1870.

The fine old landmark has changed hands four times in its 85 year history. Retiring in 1881, its original owner sold it in 1883 to J.H. Hershey, who added modern heating, plumbing and lighting facilities. William P. Browning Jr., 6405 Willow Lane, Johnson County, Kansas, owned it for several years. For a period of time it belonged to Robert D. Kissick, 5400 Pawnee, Johnson County, Kansas. March 1, 1955, it was bought by Charles E. and Fay E. Miller, 845 West 52nd Terrace, Kansas City.

J. H. Hershey was the father of Helen Hershey who married Leonard Julien.

- 1.) How did the beliefs of the Mahaffies influence where they settled?
- 2.) How did the location of the Mahaffie farmstead support its success?
- 3.) Compare and contrast the contributions of Beatty and Lucinda Mahaffie to the success of the stagecoach stop and farmstead.