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SOURCE ARTICLES

A HISTORY OF BOOT HILL CEMETERY

NEWTON'S FIRST BURYING GROUND

NEWTON – The Olathe Mirror says men die in Newton before they take sick. *The Kansas Daily Commonwealth, Topeka, Kansas. Saturday, March 23, 1872. Page 2.*

NEWTON – Since last August [1871], 20 men have been buried at Newton, every one of whom “died with their boots on.” *The Brown County World, Hiawatha, Kansas. Thursday, March 7, 1872. Page 1.*

NEWTON – The first cemetery or burial ground this city ever had was what was known as “Boot Hill,” and was located on the south side of east First street, just before reaching the dry creek bridge, and about where G.O. Smith residence now stands. The place derived its name from the numbers of persons who were buried there with boots on in the wild and early days. All the bodies that could be found were removed from there to the present cemetery or elsewhere in the fall of 1873. *The Newton Kansan, Newton, Kansas. June 3, 1886. Page 3.*

NEWTON - Henry Brunner, who in the early days of Newton ran a restaurant in the town, says there were 24 men buried in “Boot Hill,” who had been killed in shooting scrapes. Mr. Brunner, who now lives at Fitzgerald, CA., located in Newton May 19, 1871. It was in Brunner’s restaurant where the first marshal, named Bailey, died from being shot. He says shooting and killing was an every Saturday night occurrence, and that he saw Holliday and Fitzpatrick killed by Marshall Johnson. “My memory says there were seven killed and fourteen wounded over in Hyde Park, south of the tracks one night. I remember Buffalo Bill as our marshal,” he says. McClusky, who was then marshal, was the first man killed in the “massacre,” as it has been called, and Brunner thinks there were 24 buried in “Boot Hill.” *The Hutchinson News, Hutchinson, Kansas. April 5, 1921. Page 13.*

NEWTON – Newton City's first burying ground was known as "Boot Hill." It was located on East First street just east of the Missouri Pacific railroad on the south side of First street, the first interment was made along some time in June of 1871. At one time it was said of the thirty-two interments only two had died a natural death, the others had died with their boots on. *The Evening Kansan-Republican, Newton, Kansas. Tuesday, October 27, 1903. Page 1.*

NEWTON - Street Commissioner Bellville is doing good work on Boot Hill, East First street. He is afraid that he will be obliged to disturb the "stiffs" in lowering the grade. *The Republican, Newton, Kansas. June 28, 1886. Page 5.*

NEWTON – Boot Hill Being Used For Filling. Just south of the bridge on East First street that spans the ravine which has received the name of Slate Creek, is a knoll of ground that was named many years ago and still bears the name of "Boot Hill." The knoll in the vicinity of Boot Hill is now being levelled off. The earth is being hauled to property owned by Dr. J.T. Axtel near by, and the workmen while loading their wagons with dirt, have frequently heard the remarks of the passerby, "Why are they hauling away Boot Hill?"

Dr. Axtell having visited that knoll recently, was reminded of the time when he was a young medical student, in Newton, in the office of Dr. Hartley. At that time the entire east part of Newton was prairie, but it was rumored that Boot Hill was to be placed under cultivation with the farm land about it, and Dr. Axtell went to the owner and asked permission to open up some of the graves in the hill, that he might have some skeletons for his study of anatomy. He took three skeletons from the hill in 1879. Parts of one of these skeletons he has in his possession at the Axtell Hospital now. He has the skull and several of the bones. One of the skeletons he gave to the Masonic Lodge to be used in its degree work.

Should "Boot Hill" be entirely removed, it would take from view one of the oldest landmarks of Newton. Old timers can well remember the time when newton was mostly prairie, and there are a few who can remember the time when bodies were buried in Boot Hill.

It was the use of the place as a burying ground, that gave it the name of Boot Hill. Newton then had the reputation of being a tough old place and the story was circulated in eastern states, that when cowboys and ruffians were shot down in Newton, they were taken right to Boot Hill and buried with their boots on. So Boot Hill was really a burial ground, but the report that the men were placed in the ground just as they happened to be when shot, is not verified.

Dr. Axtell says that the skeletons he took from the hill showed that the bodies of the men had been put in wooden boxes, and while they were buried in the every day suits they had worn, no boots were found to substantiate the early day story from which the burial ground derived its name.

Judge C.S. Bowman, Dr. Gaston Boyd, Sam Lehman, A.B. Gilbert, and D.W. Wilcox are among the men of Newton who can give accounts of the happenings when the town was in its infancy.

Dr. Axtell stated that one of the skeletons taken from the knoll was that of Martin, who was killed in the Newton Massacre. The clothes identified him. *The Evening Kansan-Republican, Newton, Kansas. Wednesday, January 20, 1915. Page 1.*

NEWTON – Boot Hill Not Being Disturbed. The Kansan is convinced that the exact spot so well known to old residents as “Boot Hill” is not the little elevation being removed by Dr. Axtell. It is thought by many that possibly burials were made in the vicinity in question in early days, other than those known to have been made in the exact location known as Boot Hill, though not in the place now being graded down.

At any rate the “old timers” have been set to digging up old memories, and the following from L.H. Pershing will be of much interest: “Boot Hill at present is not being disturbed, as it is located on the west side of Slate creek, and is planted in shade trees, and is used as a lot for cows and horses by Martin Perkins. Coming to Harvey county as I did in the early 1870’s, I frequently saw the graves on the hill in passing by. As I own the place that is at present being graded I know there has never been anybody buried down there. Wishing to have it more uniform with the remainder of the place, I am having it graded.” *The Evening Kansan-Republican, Newton, Kansas. Thursday, January 21, 1915. Page 6.*

NEWTON – Remembering Old “Boot Hill.” More about the extent and location of Newton’s first burial ground, “Boot Hill,” was given the Kansan this morning by John Walton who became a resident of the town February 22, 1873. Mr. Walton says he had traversed a wagon road that wound about on the prairie over what was called “Boot Hill,” many a time. He says the entire knoll extended from the south of First street, to what is now Second street. The wagon angled across, in the vicinity of the place now occupied by S. Perkins on First street. Mr. Walton remembers some of the early day fights and shooting scrapes, along with the other old settlers whose names have been mentioned. *The Evening Kansan-Republican, Newton, Kansas. Tuesday, January 26, 1915. Page 4.*

SHERIDAN, KS

SHERIDAN - The burial ground at Sheridan contains the bodies of 8 men who died suddenly with their boots on, and is called "Boot Hill." *The Clay County Dispatch, Clay Center, Kansas. Saturday, July 27, 1878. Page 1.*

HAYS CITY

Boot Hill - On the northern limits of our city rises a prairie mound, and capping its summit may be seen a few stone and wooden crosses, marking the last resting places of a class of men, now fast disappearing, before civilization, law, and order.

The eminence referred to, is pointed out to a stranger, as a relic of the ancient regime of Hays, and bears the euphonious and characteristic title of "Boot Hill." On the eminence and its slopes, here 37 victims of the pistol and the knife - men whose lives were full of wild adventure, whose delight and animus were to carry terrorism in their presence and spread it on their approach and who, like all such desperadoes, at last died, to use a border phrase, "With their Boots on." In other words, their summons to Eternity came to them as unexpected and sudden as lightning's flash - came, perhaps, as they had meted death to others, and without mercy or shrift hurled them suddenly into the "vale of shadows."

"Boot Hill" encompasseth these victims of a mistaken life as a mother unfolds her little-ones, hiding as it were, from curious eyes in sorrow, the offspring that disgraced the fullness of her love. It is, but earth returned to earth, but these men will long live in the memories their lives created, and the God of Nature may not register their lives a wreck - existence, a loss? "Boot Hill" has its victims; may it not too, have its romance.

There, side by side, quietly sleeping the last long sleep, that knows no waking but in eternity, lie these victims of a wild career. For all, they were men - not cowards; they were not ALL "bad," and there was something in the very quality of the daring courage that led them into the wild revelry, where life for life, was game - that under other circumstances, would have led them into scenes where as leaders of a storming party of a forlorn hope, laurel wreathes would have been their tribute. As it is, they lie unhonored and unsung.

No, they were not always bad.

Who knows of their childhood, and from what tender influences they may have strayed? Who of us all, dare question the innocence of their childhood? Mothers' have watched over their baby foot-steps, joyed in their joy and grieved with their grief. Mothers' may have, in the long ago, parted from them, and in prayer and tears sent them forth into the world's tempest of temptation, pure in thought, pure in purpose, holding high and noble aspirations, alas! only to fail. No mother's tears have fallen o'er their last resting place, but the earth has gathered them to herself and hides from sight the erring children.

There is one more, a little child, sleeping on "Boot Hill," a victim, to the lawless society in which it existed. Innocent of any crime and fleeing for safety from a drunken street brawl - the little one had but scarce crossed the thresh-hold of the building on the corner of Main & Fort streets, ere it fell; shot through the brain, by a stray bullet from a pistol in the hands of one of the

"roughs" fighting on the street. We give it as one, and the most pitiful, of the hundred bloody scenes that marked the early history of this locality in which some of the most noted desperadoes of the Western border engaged.

But all this is past and gone, and like the 37 and the little one who lies beside them, they and their deeds live only in memory. *The Ellis County Star, Hays City, Kansas. Thursday, March 22, 1877. Page 4.*

HAYS - Only 3 of the many graves on Boot Hill can be identified. *The Hays City Sentinel, Hays City, Kansas. Saturday, February 16, 1878. Page 3.*

HAYS - In the division of the town property, "Boot Hill" fell to Martin Allen and C.H. Lebold, and now these gentlemen have a large and well assorted stock of skeletons to dispose of cheap. *The Hays City Sentinel, Hays City, Kansas. Saturday, March 23, 1878. Page 3.*

DODGE CITY

DODGE CITY - The 30th day of May is decoration day. Whether the deplorable graves on Boot Hill, or their occupants, will be green to the memory of any living mortal on that day we are unauthorized to state. *The Dodge City Times, Dodge City, Kansas. Sunday, May 6, 1877. Page 4.*

DODGE CITY - The old burying ground west of the city, known as Boot Hill, has been sold by the Town Company to Messrs. Fringer and Marshall, who will probably cut the land into lots and place it on the market. And thus in a short time what was once Boot Hill will be dotted with handsome residences, and the last vestige of memory of those who rest beneath the sod will fade away into oblivion. There are now about 20 of these graves, mostly the graves of persons who met death by violent means. There were a few who died from natural causes, but who possessed no money or friends to give them a more aristocratic burial place. When Gabriel blows his horn, verily it will be a motley crowd of sinners that the graves on Boot Hill sends forth to attend the final judgment. *The Dodge City Times, Dodge City, Kansas. Saturday, May 4, 1878. Page 2.*