

## The Perilous Road to Peace

Submitted by Grant Clothier

When I was a child, my father recounted many exciting stories of the adversities encountered by his pioneer family. Among them were tales of grasshopper invasions, prairie fires and droughts. They gathered buffalo bones to sell for ready cash when times were hard and crops failed. However, the one story that remains forever fixed in my memory is the story of their effort to escape the danger of a possible Indian massacre.

The lone rider came out of the west one spring morning in the late 1870's and paused briefly at the homestead of my grandfather, J. B. Clothier. "An Indian raiding party has attacked some settlers over west of here and my be headed this way," he said breathlessly. "You'd best take your family to town where you'll be safe."

J. B. immediately swung into action. He rounded up and harnessed his fastest team of horses while grandmother dressed the children and hastily collected some extra clothing, bedding and a few provisions. Quickly he loaded his wife, their five children and the few meager provisions aboard the wagon, whipped up the horses and set out for Peace, a village just across the Arkansas River, about twenty miles northeast of their home, and safety.

James Byron Clothier was no stranger to hardship and danger. He was born in Wisconsin in 1848 and moved with his parents to Iowa the following year. When fifteen years of age, he lied about his age and volunteered for service in the Union Army. After the war ended, he rejoined his family who had, at the war's end, moved to Bates County, Missouri, where he married and started a family. In the spring of 1874 along with his father, Chancy, and six other families, he formed a wagon train that took up homesteads in western Reno County. Here, they formed what came to be known as the Peace Creek community.

After an anxious but uneventful journey across the empty prairie, the family reached the Arkansas River by mid-afternoon. Normally the Arkansas was a placid stream, meandering across the prairie of Central Kansas. However, because of the torrential spring rains, it had become a formidable barrier to the family's safety. They faced a predicament reminiscent of the Israelites at the Red Sea pursued by Pharaoh's army. With little hope the surging waters of the Arkansas would be parted by



Divine intervention, J. B. desperately sought a more practical solution to their dilemma. Finally, seeing no alternative, he plunged the frightened horses into the swiftly-moving stream.

In order to control the horses, J. B. climbed out of the wagon seat into the doubletrees, leaving grandmother and the children in the wagon box. As they cautiously entered the main channel, the chassis began to sink, but the wagon box, with grandmother and the children, remained on the surface, a boat without oars or anchor. In a heroic

effort to save the family, J. B. frantically whipped the horses forward, creating a drafting current which drew the box along behind the wagon frame. In a few moments the crisis was past as the wagon floated into shallow water where grandfather recaptured it and secured the box with its precious cargo to the wagon frame. With the help of his two older boys, he remounted the wagon box on its chassis and the family quickly covered the short distance to Peace.

After a few days of anxious waiting, the Clothier family learned the rumor of imminent danger was unfounded. They then returned home, but only after being assured the Arkansas River has resumed its normal peaceful character.

I knew my grandfather when he was past eighty years of age, hard of hearing and almost totally blind. However in my mind's eye he is forever the brave and resourceful pioneer who saved his family from a watery grave

Author's note: The city of Sterling was originally known as Peace when it was founded January 15, 1872. The name changed in 1876 when the city had a large enough population to become a city of the third class.



Freda Clothier Werner of Hutchinson, sent this photo dated May, 1910. A caption with the photo that appeared in the Sylvia Sun Newspaper, May 12, 1910, reads: "J. B. Clothier, a well to do farmer and an early settler in these parts came to town last Friday, bringing with him his eleven sons ... There are few men who can boast of being the father of so many sons. He has three daughters besides." Back row: Perry, James, Bert, Benjamin, Delbert, Elbert and Cecil. Front row: Viness, Charles, J. B., Clarence and Wiley. Mrs. Werner's father was Wiley Clothier. Happy Father's Day!