

Edwin Smith

At the insistence of Henry Hiatt, his sister Lydia and her husband, Edwin Smith, came to Kansas in the fall of 1857. Henry had written to them reporting the wonderful advantages of this new country and of the homes to be had for anyone with the courage and grit to take up homesteading.

Edwin Smith was a descendant of William Smith of Wrightstown, Pennsylvania, and his wife, Mary Croasdale; Edwin's mother, Margaret Coale, was from a prominent Quaker family. Edwin married Lydia Hiatt on January 3, 1846 at Dublin, Indiana. Soon after their marriage, they returned to Pennsylvania where they lived for eleven years. By 1857 when they decided to come to Kansas, Edwin and Lydia were the parents of three children. They traveled as far as Jefferson City, Missouri by rail, then took a steamboat to Leavenworth Kansas, caught the stagecoach to Lawrence and continued on to the home of Lydia's brother, Henry, at Twin Mound.

During the winter of 1857-58, Edwin and Lydia lived in a small log house across the road from the farm of Henry and Frances and settled into the harsh life on the Kansas prairie. Log cabins covered with clapboards hewn from native timber, the cracks chinked with clay, dotted the prairie. Crops were uncertain and water scarce. Prairie fires were frequent and very destructive. When a fire started, it could burn over miles of territory, destroying houses, barns, corn and hay. Many friendly Indians lived in eastern Kansas during this period, and as they traveled from reservation to reservation, sometimes on foot, sometimes by pony, but always in single file, they gave little trouble to settlers. Although peaceful, they would steal almost anything they could lay their hands on, frequently asking for food or "fire-water" (whiskey).

In the spring of 1858 Edwin and Lydia obtained a quarter-section of land south of Twin Mound on Rock Creek, but financial difficulties forced Edwin to trade his equity in this homestead for a yoke of oxen and pre-empt another quarter-section west of Twin Mound. There he hastily erected a log cabin and tried to make things as comfortable as he could against the inclement weather.

Edwin and Lydia may never have envisioned themselves being involved in the Underground Railroad, but Lydia's brother, Henry, was very involved; occasionally, when a search of his property by pro-slavery parties appeared imminent, Henry secreted slaves at Edwin and Lydia's until it seemed safe to take them on to Topeka.

After the drought of 1860, conditions worsened for the family. In the summer of 1863, Edwin went to Lawrence and entered into a partnership with Mr. George Sargent in the grocery and meat business. They were just opening their store early on that August morning when William Quantrill and his guerilla band swooped down upon the town. Upon hearing gunfire, George ran out the back door of the store but was shot and badly wounded. Edwin fled to the cellar, which was half full of water. He remained there until he heard flames crackling over his head, then managed to escape through a window. He ran

through a back street into a garden near the Sargents' house on New Hampshire Street. There he found George's wife Angie standing near her husband.

The ensuing events were recounted by the Smith's daughter Winnie Smith Lyons, in *Reminiscences of Early Days of Kansas*: "As he hurried to her, she screamed, 'For God's sake, Edwin, go and hide in the weeds; they have killed George and they will come and kill you!'" Together they dragged George to a less dangerous spot, then seeing two men not far away, Edwin hastened into hiding in the tall weeds along the riverbank. Several hours later, when he was convinced that all danger had passed, he came out of hiding to help at the scene of the slaughter. George Sargent died of his wounds and was buried in Pioneer Cemetery. He was thirty-one years of age.

In October following the raid, the Smith family moved to Lawrence. They lived there nearly seven years before moving back to the farm at Twin Mound. Edwin died on October 28, 1898, Lydia on April 12, 1915. Both are buried in the Twin Mound Cemetery in Marion Township.