

Skyscrapers & Steeples



Join us June 10th, for a luxury bus tour visiting five historic sites in Ellis, Rush, and Ness Counties in Kansas. The tour will include the "The Skyscraper of the Plains" in Ness City, the Post Rock Museum in La Crosse, St. Joseph Kirche in Liebenthal, Holy Cross Shrine in Pfeifer, and the Basilica of St. Fidelis in Victoria. Along the way, tour guides will point out other historic sites. The tour also includes an authentic German Buffet and quarrying/rock break demonstration. (details on page 2)



KPRLC Membership

Don't forget to renew your membership in the Kansas Post Rock Limestone Coalition. Your support helps us continue our mission of "promoting, preserving, and protecting the history, art, and architecture of the Kansas Post Rock Limestone region through education and tourism."

To join or renew, visit our website www.kansaspostrocklimestone.org/ and select membership.

Next Meeting (Update):

The next meeting of the Kansas Post Rock Limestone Coalition is scheduled for **Wednesday, May 31** in Dodge City, Kansas in the El Vaquero dining room of the historic Santa Fe Depot. The meeting will begin at 10:30 am and everyone is welcome. Lunch will be available.

Your RSVP is requested before May 30 to: kansaspostrock@gmail.com



Who Set the First Stone Posts? A History from Seafloor to Lakefloor

by: Bradley Penka, KPRLC Chairman

The fencepost limestone, also known as Post Rock can trace its origins to over 60 million years ago when western Kansas was at the bottom of a great inland seaway. When the waters receded, the deposits at the bottom created the Greenhorn formation and at the top of this formation is a marker bed known as Fencepost Limestone. The Fencepost bed outcrops only in an 18-county region in Kansas known as Post Rock Country.

Fencepost limestone has several unique properties: it is located only a few feet or less below the surface; it has a consistent thickness of eight to twelve inches, and is relatively soft when first exposed and hardens after exposure to air. Consequently, it was the perfect building material for early settlers. These settlers, faced with a lack of trees for fence posts, soon discovered that by quarrying a six-foot section of stone, standing it on end, and attaching barbed wire to the face, it became the perfect fence post.

There has been much debate as to who was the first settler to use the native limestone for fence posts. The consensus is that they first appeared in 1876, at the time the use of barbed wire became widespread.

In *Land of the Post Rock: Its Origins, History, and People*, Grace Muilenburg and Ada Swineford quote an article of Russell Record, February 10, 1900 as stating "The idea of using stone for fence posts is supposed to have been conceived by C. F. Sawyer, who lived on the Saline River northeast of Bunker Hill..." However, the quote goes on to state that, "Sawyer built this fence in December 1878." A large portion of the quote does not appear in the original article including mention of the date of 1878, although later news articles further credit Sawyer with first using stone posts between 1878 and 1880. Sawyer's grandson Earl claims the date was as early as 1873, however, it is doubtful stone posts were used prior to the widespread use of barbed wire coming in late 1874.

As to the probable location of this first post rock fence, Sawyer owned land 4.5 miles north and 4.5 miles east of Bunker Hill, (SW ¼, section 2, T13s, R12w) along the Saline River. Today that land sits under Wilson Lake so any remnants of his fence have likely been destroyed. (continued on page 2)



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The Kansas Stone Age

On June 10th, the Coalition is beginning "The Kansas Stone Age," a series of educational tours of historic sites in the Kansas Post Rock Region. This year's tour, "Skyscrapers and Steeples" will explore sites in Ellis, Rush, and Ness Counties in central Kansas.

You will enjoy a visit through the beautiful Post Rock Country beginning with the magnificent Ness County Bank Building dubbed "The Skyscraper of the Plains" in Ness City, Kansas. You will then travel back to La Crosse, Kansas to visit the Post Rock Museum, one of the "8 Wonders of Kansas Architecture." There you will experience an authentic limestone quarrying and dressing demonstration followed by an authentic German Meal hosted in the internationally recognized Kansas Barbed Wire Museum. There will also be an opportunity to visit the other museums on the La Crosse Campus.

After lunch, you will travel to Liebenthal, Kansas, the first Volga German settlement in Rush and Ellis Counties; The Holy Cross Shrine in Pfeifer, and The Basilica of St. Fidelis in Victoria, both listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Along the route, the bus will pass by several historic limestone treasures where you will be enjoy brief stopovers and photo opportunities. Some of those locations will include the history of the "Christ Pilot Me" sculpture near Bazine, and a chance to learn about different types of Post Rock construction methods and preservation in the small community of Alexander, Kansas. You will travel on a luxury tour bus with knowledgeable tour guides who will provide insight into the architectural characteristics and historical significance that make each of these buildings unique.

This tour will offer a glimpse of the area's history and an understanding of the values of the early settlers with a different perspective from other similar tours. Spaces are limited so sign up early.

Who Set the First Stone Posts

(continued from page 1)

Mullenburg and Swineford go on to say that Ralph Coffeen of Russell, Post Rock historian, credits a Scotsman, Joseph Menzies from southwest of Bunker Hill. He first used stone posts around the Bunker Hill cemetery (NE ¼, section 31, T13s, R12w) in 1876. This information was collaborated by sources of the era in Bunker Hill.

A third report credits James Chrudimsky and Charles Seirer as setting posts on the Seirer land in Russell County (S 1/2 , section 1, T14, R11w) northwest of the town of Wilson in 1876. Today, that land is situated .5 miles north of I-70, 1 mile west of the Wilson exit.

In 1915, the Lucas Independent reported the "first stone post in Lincoln County was quarried in the summer of 1878 in Cedron Township by H. Anglis and S. E. Bollie." There is a parcel of land owned by H Anglin, (E ½ SE 1/4 , section 26, T10s, R10w) along Spilman Creek in northwestern Lincoln County.

The Volga Germans in Rush and Ellis Counties were quarrying rock for stone posts also in 1878 according to Jacob Herrman, Liebenthal's oldest resident in 1973. *Die Liebenthaler Und Ihre Kirche* confirms that "by 1878, just two years after they had arrived, the settlers were already quarrying rock for posts." With Liebenthal being the first Volga German settlement in 1874, some of the earliest use of post rock fences can be traced to northern Rush County.

Given available information, a variety of sources claim the origin of the first post rock fence. It cannot be confirmed who first used stone posts, however, it becomes apparent that the first use of Post Rock for fences occurred in about 1878. The exact location of the first fence is difficult to prove, but it is likely the first use occurred in southeastern Russell County south of the present Wilson Lake.

Arguably, C. F. Sawyer has become accepted as the first to use a post rock fence northeast of Bunker Hill in what is today, the far northeast corner of Center Township in Russell County. Interestingly, if the first fence posts were indeed created by C. F. Sawyer, then those posts are once again submerged at the bottom of an inland body of water known as Wilson Reservoir or Wilson Lake.

Sources

- Mullenburg, Grace & Swineford, Ada. [Land of the Post Rock: Its Origins, History, and People](#), 1976, University Press of Kansas
- Dechant, Emerald V., [Die Liebenthaler Und Ihre Kirche: A Bicentennial-centennial Tribute, 1776-1876-1976](#), 1976, News Publishing Company. Hays, Kansas
- Penka, Bradley R. & The Rush County Historical Society, [Post Rock Country, Images of America Series](#), 2014, Arcadia Publishing Co.
- [Plat Book: Russell County, Kansas](#), Northwest Publishing Co., Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1901
- "Stone Fence Posts", [Russell Record](#), Russell, Kansas. February 10, 1900, pg 6
- "Pioneer in Stone Post Industry", [Wilson Echo](#), Wilson, Kansas August 24, 1911
- (untitled article), [The Journal](#), Russell, Kansas, April 20, 1887, pg 4
- (untitled article), [Lucas Independent](#), Lucas, Kansas, September 23, 1915, pg 4

Skyscrapers & Steeples Registration

To register online and pay by credit card, visit our webpage at:

<https://www.kansaspostrocklimestone.org/events>

For printed registration and to pay by check, visit the webpage above to download and print an application, or give us a call at 785-260-7930 and we will send you a copy in the mail. Registration forms are also available from any KPRLC board member.