
A New York Orphan Comes to Kansas

by Harry Colwell

WHEN THE WEST was developing and the need for manpower was expanding, so many orphans, both boys and girls, were sent to the western states that the migration came to be called the Orphan Movement. Harry Colwell¹ was one of these orphans. Looking for adventure, he came to Kansas in 1899 as a teenager under the sponsorship of the Children's Aid Society of New York City. Years later, in 1964, he wrote his autobiography in which he called his Kansas years "the best possible kind of bringing up."

Following are excerpts from Harry's reminiscences of his coming to Kansas after a childhood in New York City.² Phyllis Swanson of Leonardville, Kansas, brought the manuscript to the attention of the Kansas State Historical Society.³

[An] interesting happening of those early orphanage days was the introduction of a program of military drill for the older boys. . . . I remember having the honor of becoming cadet captain of one of the small companies [of the Baptist Boys Brigade] into which we were divided. We of course became very much interested in everything of a military nature. When the United States Battleship *Maine* was blown up in

Havana Harbor, we followed every detail of what followed with intense interest, the declaration of war against Spain, the war maneuvers in Cuba, the transfer of the theatre of war to the Philippine Islands, and finally Admiral Dewey's great naval victory at Manila. New York followed all these events with intense enthusiasm.

In the spring of 1898, at the height of the war enthusiasm, a mammoth parade was conducted in New York City, to give public expression to the intense feeling all through the East over what was happening in the war. Among other organizations asked to participate was the Baptist Boys Brigade, and a company of thirty-two boys from the orphanage was included in the Baptist Boys Brigade contingent. Our company was in charge of Captain Hahn; I enjoyed the honor of marching at his side as cadet captain.

The parade started down town. Its route uptown included Riverside Drive, and of course, passed our orphanage block. As we approached, we boys could see a large crowd of people gathered on the front lawn, including all the other children. When in pass-

1. Harry Colwell was born on March 1, 1885. Available records leave indefinite whether he was born in Petersburg, Virginia, where his parents had lived for many years, or in Brooklyn, New York, where they later moved. It is known, however, that his father died in July 1888, his mother in January 1890, both in Brooklyn.

The Children's Aid Society records indicate that Harry and his brother Frank (who was five years older) were placed in the Half Orphan Asylum in New York City following the death of their father. Subsequently, on October 9, 1890, records of both the Children's Aid Society and the Graham-Windham Home show that both boys were transferred to a second orphanage located at Seventy-third Street and Riverside Drive (communications from the Society and the Home to Harry E. Colwell). This orphanage was a private charity, and many of its trustees were from New York City's socially prominent families. Here the boys were given good food and care, adequate schooling, and the opportunity for wholesome play, including the fun of playing sandlot baseball on what became some of the city's choicest and most exclusive real estate. Harry enjoyed the thrill of seeing Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley in the Wild West Show and Barnum and Bailey's circus in Madison Square Garden.

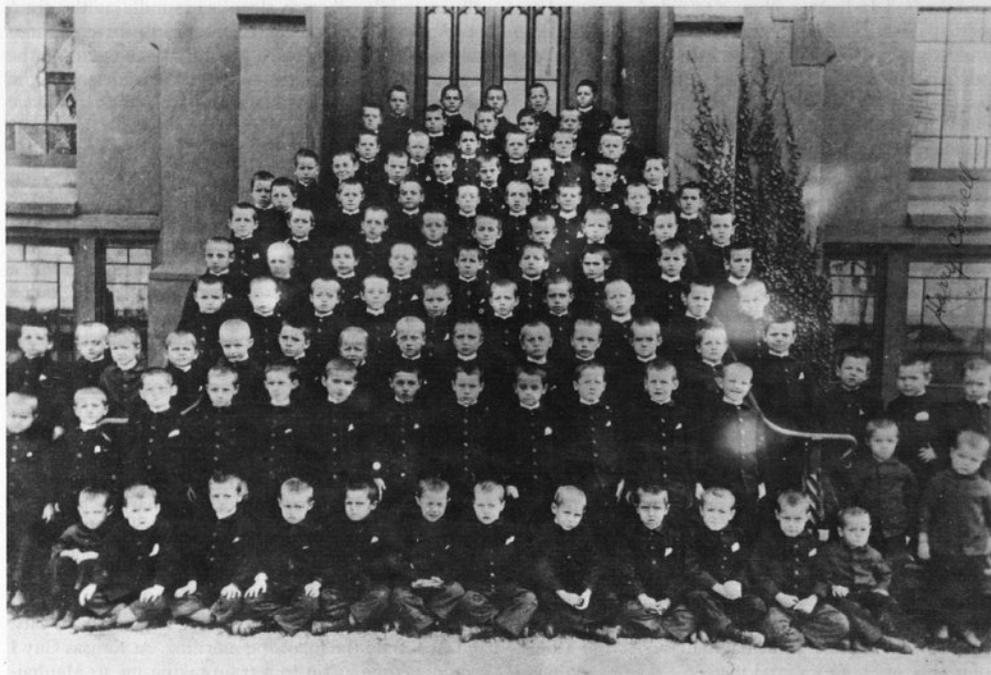
While the Graham-Windham Home is the current successor of the Riverside Drive orphanage, the organization was founded in 1806 as the Orphan Asylum Society in the City of New York. Lo-

cated originally in Greenwich Village, the orphanage was moved to Riverside Drive in 1840. It remained there until the turn of the century, when it was relocated as the Graham School at Hastings-on-Hudson in Westchester County just north of New York City. Maurice V. Odquist, *The History of Graham* (undated leaflet); information from Mrs. Lydia Zuke, Graham-Windham Home.

On or about November 17, 1894, Frank Colwell, then fourteen years old, was sent west by the Children's Aid Society and was placed with a family in Coffeyville, Kansas (information supplied to Harry E. Colwell by the Children's Aid Society). Subsequently, after exchanging correspondence a few times, Harry lost contact with Frank.

2. These reminiscences are taken from Harry Colwell's memoirs, which his son, Harry E., recently published under the title *Growing Up in Old Kansas* (Houston: Harry E. Colwell, 1985). The excerpts from this work are published here with the kind permission of Harry E. Colwell.

3. Working with the manuscript version of Harry Colwell's memoirs, Phyllis Swanson provided the summaries used in this narrative and supplied information for many of the notes. She is the editor and publisher of *City of the Plains: A Story of Leonardville* (1982) and wrote a column for the *Riley Countian* from 1978 to 1982.



Boys living at the Riverside Drive orphanage posed for this photograph in the early 1890s. Harry Colwell is standing in the third row, second from right (with hand on hip).

ing Captain Hahn gave the command, "Eyes Right," our maneuver was greeted with loud cheering. We in the marching column were very proud of ourselves over the incident. . . .

Memories of those early days persist. One of the best remembered centered around the visits to the orphanage of one of our wealthy lady trustees when she came to the orphanage to attend board meetings. She would drive up in an expensive open carriage, drawn by two well-groomed, bob-tailed horses, a liveried coachman sitting perched up front and two liveried footmen behind, sitting with folded arms, facing to the rear.

When the carriage would draw up at the doorway entrance on the West End Avenue side, the two footmen would alight, go around and open the side door of the carriage, allowing the lady trustee to descend; she then disappeared in a long, trailing gown into the open doorway. The carriage would then drive ceremoniously away. Those of the children who hap-

pened to be on hand on such occasions would remain at a distance, much impressed by the ceremony. . . .

During the summer I was thirteen, I was asked one day to come to the office of the superintendent of the orphanage. The request was an unusual one and I remember complying with a high degree of curiosity as to what it might portend. The superintendent told me that he had just received a letter from a farmer in Kansas, Mr. Maxwell by name, asking if there were an older boy in the orphanage who would like to come out west and make his home with the Maxwell family.

He went on to say that another boy from the orphanage had gone out to the same farm some years before and had grown up there, finally marrying the oldest daughter of the family. The superintendent said that he was sure, from everything he had learned, that it was a good opportunity, one which it would be worth considering. He asked me to think over the letter and let him know a little later what decision I made.

I was not long in deciding. To me the "West" meant

cowboys and Indians, a chance to ride horses and to participate in all sorts of exciting adventures. Next day I told the superintendent that I would like to accept the opportunity that had been offered. He replied that nothing would probably be done about it until the following spring, so I had that fall and winter to speculate over what kind of life might be forthcoming. . . .

One morning in early April the following spring [1899], I was told that the time for going west had arrived. With two other boys I was taken downtown to the Children's Aid Society in lower New York City.⁴ We found gathered there about fifty other boys about our age. We were told that the entire group was to start west that afternoon, our destination to be Chicago, where the boys would be placed in farm[s] or other homes. The expedition was in charge of a Mr. Trott, agent for the Children's Aid Society, who would accompany us on the journey. . . .

About mid-afternoon we started on the long train ride. Our group had a railroad coach all to itself, there being nearly enough boys to fill it. As we sped north along the east bank of the Hudson River, the train slipping smoothly and rapidly over the rails amid a panorama of changing scenery, we were fascinated by the sense of easy motion and speed of travel. It was the first experience of the kind for any of us.

For a time the novelty of this thrilling sensation gripped our interest and imagination. As the afternoon wore on, however, and the sun began to settle in the west, doubt and uncertainty began to assert themselves. I wondered what would happen at the end of the train ride, whether things would really be as pleasant and exciting as I had imagined. Thoughts of the friends I was leaving behind and the likelihood that I would never see them again brought on a questioning, depressed attitude.

Mr. Trott had brought along a supply of provisions. Toward evening we ate a lunch, and as dusk, then darkness, came on we curled up on the car seats preparatory to spending the night on the train. Youngsters sleep well under almost any circumstances. Soon

4. The Children's Aid Society was founded in 1853 as The Mission to care for an estimated ten thousand dependent children then on the streets of New York City. Reading rooms, lodging houses, and schools were set up to care for the homeless children, some of whom were accidentally lost, some abandoned by parents. Charles Loring Brace was the guiding spirit of the society from 1853 until his death in 1890. The placing-out system attempted to find good homes for the children in newly developed lands that had a critical need for cheap labor. Over ninety thousand children were sent west in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Miriam Z. Langsam, *Children West: A History of the Placing-Out System of the New York Children's Aid Society, 1853-1890* (Madison: Published by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1964), vii-viii, 1-8.

all, or nearly all were sleeping soundly as the train sped onward. I remember waking up several times during the night, sensing the forward motion of the train, and listening drowsily to the clack, clack of the wheels beneath, then relapsing into sound sleep once more.

With the coming of daylight curiosity returned. We were by now traveling westward through more open country. The landscape was broken up into large farms, dotted here and there by farm houses and huge, red barns. Farmers with their teams of horses were beginning spring work. The sky was clear and the air warm. An atmosphere of awakening life pervaded the scene. We boys responded to its stimulus with a lively sense of curiosity and excitement. After a breakfast lunch we all felt better and watched with heightened interest the ever-changing scene as it unfolded before our eyes.

Later in the morning Mr. Trott came to the seat I was occupying, sat down beside me and said he had things to say that I should be sure to understand clearly and remember. He told me that the group of boys was going to Chicago but that my special destination would require a different route. He said I would leave the train further on, to proceed direct to St. Louis, which I would reach that evening. There I would change trains for one taking me to Kansas City, to be reached the following morning. At Kansas City I would change again to a train taking me to Manhattan, Kansas, where I would make a final change to a much smaller train running north to a stop called Garrison Crossing. This stop was the final destination of my railroad ticket. I would then have to buy another ticket for Leonardville, ten miles west of Garrison Crossing. At Leonardville I would be met by Mr. Maxwell, the gentleman with whom I was to make my future home.

He had me repeat these directions to be sure I had noted them correctly then took me forward to another coach in the train, telling me that it would be switched off a little later to become part of the train going direct to St. Louis. He gave me a supply of food to last the remainder of the trip, also giving me a dollar in cash, cautioning me to save enough from it to purchase the railroad ticket from Garrison Crossing to Leonardville, which would probably cost something less than fifty cents. He then said good-bye and left me. . . .

The train reached St. Louis that evening. Remembering Mr. Trott's instructions, I inquired of the train conductor before getting in. He gave me directions for finding my way through the Union Station and locating the train for Kansas City. He was kind and sympa-

thetic, telling me not to worry, that everything would be all right. In the station I again inquired of a uniformed trainman and soon found myself on the train which would take me to Kansas City.

The second night on the train wasn't so strange as the first. I slept soundly and reached Kansas City in the morning. More familiar with procedure by now, I had no difficulty locating my train for Manhattan, Kansas, which I reached by noon. Here again I made the necessary connection, changing to a much smaller train running north to Garrison Crossing, about sixteen miles distant. The train consisted of a smaller locomotive and three coaches. The road was known as the Blue Valley Railroad.⁵

We left Manhattan soon after noon and in a little over an hour had reached my final stop. Garrison Crossing consisted of but a single building, the railroad station, set directly in the junction of the north

and south tracks with those of another road, the Leavenworth, Kansas & Western Railroad, which crossed them at right angles. Besides the Blue River which ran from north to south, there was nothing in sight but open country, except for an occasional farm house on the hillsides here and there.⁶

When I left the train and it had puffed away to the north, leaving me standing alone on the station platform, a feeling of loneliness and desolation nearly overcame me. Hitherto I had felt sustained by the stimulus of going somewhere. Now, suddenly left alone in such a desolate spot, the outlook became both depressing and discouraging. In a few minutes the station agent, having disposed of the business which accompanied the coming and going of the train, came around the corner of the station building. I told him I would like to buy a ticket to Leonardville. He said it would cost thirty-two cents, but that there would be no

5. "Six miles of the railroad track had been built as far as the Rocky Ford Dam and Grist Mill by 1874; the road was completed by the Manhattan and Blue Valley Railroad Company as far as Garrison (six miles north of Stockdale) by 1886; and on to Randolph by May 31, 1886." Winifred N. Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas* (Manhattan: By the author, 1968), 198.

6. The tracks of the Kansas Central (later the Leavenworth, Kansas and Western) were completed to Garrison in 1880. Garrison Crossing was on the west side of the river and was only a railroad stop. Garrison was east of the Blue River in Pottawatomie County and had a schoolhouse and a few shops. *Ibid.*, 201.



The Leonardville railroad station, Harry Colwell's final destination after the lengthy journey from New York City in 1899.

train along until the following morning at ten o'clock. This bit of news was the last straw to completely discourage me. I had carefully saved up enough money for the ticket to Leonardville, but had anticipated no other expense. Now, left stranded ten miles from my final destination, with no means of meeting the expense of staying somewhere overnight, I experienced a real morale crusher.

I carried my telescope bag into the station waiting room and sat down on one of the seats, giving way to a crying spell over the hopelessness of the situation. I must have sat there for some time, oblivious of what went on around me, when I suddenly heard a man's voice calling out, "What's the matter, bub?" Looking up I saw two men standing in the doorway of the waiting room.

I sobbed out my story as best I could. One of them spoke up, "Don't worry, sonny. I know Ed Maxwell. He is a fine man and you will like him. We'll find you a place to stay overnight, then you can go on to Leonardville in the morning." This sudden turn of events changed the whole complexion of the situation. I brightened up at once and went along with the two men. They took me to a farm house about a quarter of a mile from the railroad station, where they introduced me to the farmer and his wife, explaining my predicament. These readily agreed to let me stay with them overnight.

The people were very kind. There were two children in the family, both younger than myself. I enjoyed the first hot meal I had eaten since leaving New York two days before. We passed a pleasant evening. I told my hosts some of my experiences, both at the orphanage and on the train coming west. They in turn told me something of life in the West. Next morning, after thanking them for their kind hospitality, I walked back to the railroad station in time to meet the L. K. & W. train coming in from the east.

Looking out the window of the train on its way westward, I could see that the land was not nearly so fertile or prosperous looking as it had appeared further east. The tracks on this side road were not in very good condition, for the train lurched from side to side as we rolled along. Added to the discomfort of the ride was the growing apprehension over what I would really find, now that my final destination was almost here. As the train rounded a bend and the railroad station came in sight, I could see a dozen or more men standing on the station platform, awaiting the arrival of the train.

No sooner had the train stopped and I had climbed down from the coach steps to the platform, than one of the waiting men stepped forward, reached

for my bag, and in a rather gruff voice said, "Come along with me." Somewhat taken back at this abrupt reception I stepped back, jerked my bag out of the man's hands, and said, "What for?" He looked startled for a moment, then said, "Aren't you the boy who is going out to Ed Maxwell's?" When I told him I was, he said that he was the hotel keeper in town and that Mr. Maxwell had asked him to meet the train and take me to the hotel until he had time to get in from the farm. Thus reassured, I went along willingly enough. We crossed a muddy street and went into the hotel, a small frame building, where I sat down to wait.

In another half-hour Mr. Maxwell came in. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with a kind of Van Dyke beard and very pleasant blue eyes. I liked him immediately.⁷ The hotel keeper talked with him for a few minutes and must have told him about our encounter at the station, for they both laughed as he looked in my direction. In a few minutes we were ready to leave and went out to the team, which was hitched to an open spring wagon. I noticed that the tails of the horses were tied up and inquired the reason. Mr. Maxwell told me that it was done to prevent the horses' tails becoming clogged with mud, which was everywhere at that season.

Leonardville was a village, or "town" as it was called in the West, of about four hundred population.⁸ We drove up the street to the main corner, where we turned west for two and a half miles. Mr. Maxwell explained that the land was laid out in square miles, or "sections," each section consisting of six hundred forty acres of land. The roads ran straight east and west, or north and south, following the section lines. He told me that his own farm had originally included four hundred acres, but that he had recently sold eighty acres to his son-in-law, reducing the size of the farm to three hundred twenty acres, a half-section.

The roads were muddy, due to the frost having come out of the ground only very recently. Mr. Maxwell had bought a bag of peanuts which he gave me. I remember asking him if it was all right to throw the

7. Edward Alexander Maxwell was born in Ontario, Canada (family lore indicated Brockville or vicinity), on January 13, 1845. He left Canada about 1867 and settled first near Dubuque, Iowa, moving to Fayette County, Iowa, in 1870. He came to Riley County, Kansas, in the late 1870s or 1880. He served as a Riley County commissioner, 1895-97. Information from 1880 Census, Riley County; Colwell, *Growing Up in Old Kansas*, 87; Ruth Sanders, Junction City (granddaughter); and Warren Ford, Leonardville (grandson).

8. Located about twenty-five miles northwest of Manhattan, Leonardville had evolved from a settlement known as Alembic. It prospered after the Kansas Central tracks were completed across Riley County in October 1881. Phyllis Swanson, ed., *City of the Plains: A Story of Leonardville* (N.p., 1982), 4; Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas*, 173-74.

shells into the roadway. He assured me, with a twinkle in his eye, that it was entirely all right to do so. After traveling two and a half miles due west, we turned south for a mile, then west again a half mile to the entrance to the farm. The farm buildings lay an eighth of a mile to the north, in from the road. Rounding a bend, we came in sight of the house, a two-story frame and stone building set in the side of a low hill. After putting up the horses we went inside, where I was introduced to the rest of the family.

Mrs. Maxwell was younger than her husband and very pleasant.⁹ She greeted me cordially, saying that she hoped I would like it there with the family. Her manner was pleasant and reassuring. There was an older son, Alexander, about nineteen years of age. Everyone called him "Allie." Then there were four younger girls, Mary, Florence, Cora, and Ruth, ranging in age from fourteen down to four. Finally there was a baby boy in arms, Edward, born the preceding September. I was asked to sit down and be comfortable.

In a few minutes the three youngest girls of the family came into the room, lined up directly in front of me, and proceeded to give me a very thorough looking over. They were not impertinent, just curious. Of course I was embarrassed, but couldn't take offense and soon decided that I was going to like it here. . . .

That afternoon the eldest daughter of the family, Edna, came over with her husband, Eugene Smith, or "Gene" as he was affectionately called by the family. Gene told me about his own earlier experiences coming from New York to Kansas. He also had come as part of a carload of boys, but procedure had been different than in my case. The man in charge of the boys had taken them from one community to another. Any farmer who took a fancy to a given boy could take him, with little or no ceremony.¹⁰

In Gene's case he was taken by a farmer who soon afterward tired of his bargain and began to neglect the youngster. Mr. Maxwell learned of the situation and offered to take the boy off the farmer's hands, an arrangement to which the other readily agreed. From



Edward A. and Florence Maxwell provided a home in Kansas for Harry Colwell, an orphan from New York City.

then on Gene made his home with the Maxwell family, growing to manhood there and only the previous fall having married Edna. . . .

Gene's story was an absorbing one to me, in view of my own recent experience. It established a kind of bond between us and I came to like him very much. He had a younger brother, Bert, who also had come out from New York as a boy. Bert was now a young Methodist minister, serving a church not far from the community in which his brother lived.

Toward evening that day I was given an introduction to farm life and work. When time for the evening farm chores arrived, Mr. Maxwell suggested that I come along with the men to begin to get acquainted with farm operations. I was glad of the opportunity to learn. We went first to the corral where the cattle were kept during daytime hours at that season of the year. There was quite a large herd, among which were eight or ten milk cows, these having to be separated from

9. Florence Estella Richardson, born in Scott Township, Iowa, on February 22, 1850, was married to E. A. Maxwell on March 21, 1877. Information from Ruth Sanders, Junction City; Colwell, *Growing Up in Old Kansas*, 87.

10. A local committee consisting of a retired minister, a physician, the mayor, a farmer, and a businessman was in charge of distributing the first orphans to arrive in Leonardville. The demand exceeded the supply, and another company of orphans was requested. The editor of the *Monitor* reported that the boys were "bright little fellows," well trained and fairly well educated. He took two of them into his home and trained them to handle type in the newspaper office. *Leonardville Monitor*, June 17, 1886.

the others and shut up in a nearby shed for milking. The cows were let out of a gate from the corral, then driven about forty feet to the door of the milk shed.

Mr. Maxwell told me to stand just outside the gate of the corral and as the cows came through to turn them to the right toward the milking shed door. I don't suppose anyone there even thought of the possibility of my being afraid of cows. But I had never been close to such large animals before. When I saw one of them coming through the gate straight toward me, her huge head wagging from side to side and two enormous eyes glaring like balls of fire, I had all I could do to restrain myself and keep from running away. Fortunately I was able to stand my ground. I soon noticed that the cows turned automatically toward the milk shed door on coming through the gate. I hoped that no one had noticed my sudden panic and no one made any comment. But I noticed the hired man wearing a kind of suppressed grin. Later I learned that he had told the family that I was afraid of the cows. . . .

Life on the farm was crude, even severe. Water for

drinking, and in fact for all household uses, had to be carried by hand from the pump and windmill, a hundred or more feet from the house. For heating we burned chunks of wood in an iron heating stove. Corn cobs were used for fuel in the kitchen stove. There were no indoor toilet facilities, an outhouse some distance away serving the purpose. In the evening when we were gathered around the supper table, a kerosene oil lamp threw a circle of light for several feet, leaving the outer corners of the room in a kind of semi-darkness. No one complained of such conditions. As I look back, we were just as happy then as are people today who enjoy much greater conveniences.

We put in long hours of work, rising at five o'clock in the morning and spending an hour and a half doing the outdoor farm chores before coming in to a breakfast which was as substantial a meal as at any other time of the day. We were at work in the field soon after seven o'clock, took an hour off at noon, then returned to the field for a long afternoon which in summer time often lasted until after eight o'clock. Afterward we



Members of the Maxwell family in 1906: left to right, Edna Maxwell Smith; Harry Colwell; Cora Maxwell (in front); Mary Maxwell; James Bond, also an orphan from New York; and Florence Maxwell.



The Edward A. Maxwell home on the farm in Bala Township replaced the original house.

took care of the evening chores before coming in to gather round the supper table, always after dark.

Sitting around the supper table at the close of the day's work provided an opportunity for family relaxation and visiting. We discussed various events of the day and the many happenings of farm life. There was no urge to go anywhere in the evening, for there was no time and facilities for community entertainment didn't exist. Besides we were usually tired enough after the long day's work to enjoy just sitting around the table and talking a while before retiring in preparation for the next day's work. . . .

During those evenings around the supper table, Mr. Maxwell was the central figure. He had a fund of stories which the children delighted to hear, incidents about his boyhood days in Canada, and later in Iowa, where he had met and married Mrs. Maxwell. . . .

We were a good-sized family, large enough to enjoy each other's companionship. Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell were splendid parents. His word was law in his household, yet there was never any sign of coercion or domination. The children were obedient but enjoyed the

greatest freedom of action. They idolized their parents, obeying them without loss of dignity or self-respect. Many times since those days, as I have looked back on my teen-age years, I have realized that we all enjoyed the best possible kind of bringing up. . . .

The first winter after coming to Kansas I attended the neighborhood rural school and graduated from the eighth grade of the elementary, or "common" school, as it was then called. I remember the graduating exercises were held in Leonardville, four miles distant. The graduates of several rural schools within a range of several miles were included in the ceremonies. The program we presented that evening consisted of readings from Longfellow's poem, "Evangeline. . . ."

After graduation from the elementary grades, there was no further opportunity for schooling. Although the ideal of free public education had been accepted by the nation as a whole, its application was still somewhat restricted. The public high school had not yet been extended into the small centers that far west. There was nothing for me to do but continue to



Harry Colwell and members of the Maxwell family looked forward to the weekly trip to Leonardville.

work on the farm during the years when most young people today attend high school. It was the accepted way of life for everyone living in a rural area. . . .

One variation in the monotony of farm life was the weekly trip to Leonardville to do the family "trading." The term "shopping" was never used. There was not a great deal of money in circulation in those pioneer times. The general store in town issued what were known as "due bills," credit slips given for specified amounts of eggs and other produce brought in by farmers. The due bills could be exchanged for their value in groceries, clothing, and other purchases. They replaced money as a medium of exchange for routine purchases.

The trip to town, four miles away, was made either with horse and buggy or with team and wagon. This was naturally a much slower means of travel than the later automobile, which was just beginning to make its appearance during my later years on the farm. The trip to Leonardville and back usually consumed most of the afternoon, those who went usually staying in town until time to return for the evening farm chores. In late winter the roads sometimes became impassable in places because of deep snow drifts. People would

then cut the barbed wire fences along the highways, traveling through the fields to avoid the deep drifts. In spring the fences would be repaired and travel on the roads resumed.

There were no hard-surface roads. I remember that there used to be considerable agitation for what was known as "dragging the roads." A split-log road drag would be drawn by a team of horses. After each rain, while the dirt was still wet and loose, the road drag would be used, the driver scraping the loose top soil from the outside edges in toward the center. After the roads had been worked over by this method for a while, a rounded surface would result, highest in the middle of the road. The roads would then dry off almost immediately after a rain, allowing traffic to proceed scarcely without interruption.

Those were the days just before the advent of the automobile on the American scene. When automobiles first appeared they were very scarce for a long time and used to be referred to as "gasoline buggies." Many problems accompanied their gradual take-over of travel. At first most horses were badly frightened at the sight of the strange new means of travel. Its greater speed, the sputtering motor, the absence of

horses drawing the vehicle, and at night the glare of headlights, all combined to scare the horses met on the road. It was common to see drivers get out of their buggies and stand at their horses' heads until the contraction had passed. . . .

Because of the lack of any considerable body of water in our part of the state, there was a dearth of good fishing. Farmers used to wait until after the corn was planted in spring, then organize a community fishing expedition, driving some fifteen miles to a stream known as Fancy Creek. We usually made the trip in hay wagons, several families sharing one conveyance. A community picnic lunch added to the attraction of the trip. Once arrived at our destination, we would bait our hooks and fish for several hours. I never cared much for fishing, but went along on these expeditions for the fun of it. While the others were fishing I would find a shady spot under a tree and read a book which I had brought along for the purpose. I remember one such trip which was interrupted by a heavy rain, drenching everyone without in the least interfering with our enjoyment of the trip. . . .

In 1903, as he approached the age of eighteen, Harry felt a growing concern about his lack of education. The young man from New York was hungry for an education. He decided that he must go to work for pay somewhere in order to attend a four-week term at the spring teachers' institute in Manhattan. Then he would be able to teach in a country school and earn more money to pursue further schooling. He finally worked up enough courage to approach Mr. Maxwell with his plans. Fearing his plans would mean leaving his Kansas home, he was pleasantly surprised to learn that the same problem had been bothering Mr. Maxwell, who offered to pay him wages when he reached his eighteenth birthday. This support enabled him to attend the four-week session, where he successfully passed examinations in twenty-one subjects with honors.¹¹

Securing a school to teach was more difficult. Letters and personal trips brought no results because of his youth and

¹¹ The Riley County Normal Institute was held from June 19 to July 25, 1903, in Manhattan. Examinations for first-, second-, and third-grade certificates took place on July 27-28. *Leonardville Monitor*, June 25, 1903. The paper noted Harry's departure and return on July 9 and August 6.



Harry Colwell usually brought a book to read on fishing excursions at Fancy Creek.

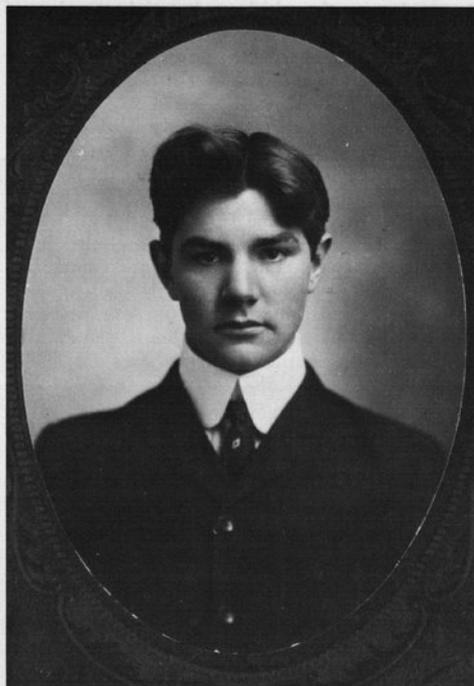
inexperience. But at last, after a several-day-long job-hunting campaign with horse and open buggy loaned by the home folks, he was hired to teach the Baldwin Creek school at a salary of thirty-two dollars for each four weeks of teaching. Board and room cost two dollars a week. Sometime during that winter of teaching, Harry met a man who was a general agent for selling stereoscopes and views. He decided to become a salesman the following summer, for he needed money to enter Kansas State Agricultural College at Manhattan the next year. He bought a bicycle and went from house to house in the rural areas peddling stereoscopes. Part of his territory included the Potawatomi Indian Reservation in northeastern Kansas, and he welcomed the chance to know this particular group of people who talked freely of the loss of their ancestral lands.

A double tragedy in the Maxwell family postponed his entering college once more. The oldest son, Allie, was killed in a Colorado train wreck caused by a mountain flood. He had been in Colorado visiting his sister, Edna, and her husband, Gene Smith. Gene died of pneumonia very soon after Allie's death, and the two bodies were returned to Kansas by train early in August.

During this period on the Maxwell farm, Harry and Mary Maxwell realized that they were very much in love. Mary had been his correspondent when he was out selling stereoscopes and views and had kept him posted on the rest of the family. On the weekends he hiked to Leonardville in order to return to the farm when family members finished their trading, and Mary had often driven him back to Baldwin Creek during the year he taught school there. The day before he left by train for college at Manhattan he and Mary were engaged, so he started school with a double incentive—a strong urge to acquire an education and a desire to justify the happy relationship with Mary. Early in January 1905 he entered Kansas State.

About two thousand students, male and female, attended the college. . . . In those days Kansas State conducted its own preparatory department, consisting of two years of high school work. . . . I found many other students in the same situation as myself, having missed the chance to attend high school during their middle teens and now having to make up this deficiency at Kansas State. . . .

During the first term I did a variety of afternoon jobs to earn money. I remember helping for two weeks to put up ice on the river for one of the ice companies which flourished in those days. I peddled pound boxes of honey and other supplies for a local grocer. I worked at various jobs in homes in the city, doing whatever people were willing to pay for. Toward spring I secured an afternoon job in the horticultural department at the college. This "hand farming" was a far cry from the four-horse operations I had been used to, but



Harry Colwell was eighteen years old and anxious to pursue his education when this portrait was made in 1903.

it did afford an opportunity to work in the soil. . . .

As a student working his way through college, I found the two most important expenses to be board and room rent. Until some permanent plan for meeting these regularly recurring expenses could be worked out, the whole matter of attending college remained on a precarious footing. As spring came on I was able to secure a job as extra waiter in a student boarding club known as the Campus Restaurant. It was located on the edge of the campus and catered to about seventy-five full time boarders, plus quite a large number of noon transients. It was as an extra waiter during the noon period that I secured the job. . . .

Another student and I were able to pay our room rent by doing janitor work at the college Y. M. C. A. dormitory. We looked after one of the three floors of the building. By the end of the first year I was therefore able to put the earning of board and room on a permanent basis. I figured on earning enough money

during vacation periods to take care of incidental expenses. Fortunately no tuition was charged in those days to students living within the state borders. . . .

I stayed out of college a year [1906-7] to earn some extra money and was pleased when the school board of my home district offered me the opportunity to teach the home school. It is a good feeling to realize that the people one knows best have the confidence to be willing to entrust their children to one's teaching. . . .

Gradually Harry came to conclude that what he really wanted was a liberal arts education, and after his junior year at Kansas State (1909) he left with the intention of teaching a year before transferring to one of the larger universities of the East or Middle West.

He had barely started to teach the Union school in his home neighborhood when he had a chance to go to Mexico as tutor of four children on a twenty-thousand-acre ranch about seventy miles northeast of Mexico City. He persuaded his fiancée, Mary, to take over the school and left in mid-October for Mexico. His Mexican experience came to an abrupt end with a telegram telling of Mr. Maxwell's sudden death on

January 13, 1910. Although he left as soon as he could, the funeral was over by the time he arrived back in Kansas. He found the family depressed with sorrow. They decided that Harry would take over management of the farm on a rental basis, plant the spring crops, and keep things going until future plans could be worked out. Several months later, Harry and Mary were married on June 22, 1910, at the Maxwell home by the Reverend Bert Smith, brother of the late Gene Smith.

After Harry had been managing the Maxwell farm for several years, the time came when the family began to make other plans, and they decided to move to Leonardville. With this decision Harry accepted a teaching position in the Bala neighborhood, five miles southwest of the farm, and shortly moved Mary and their son to Bala for the rest of the school term. During the following summer Harry served as minister for the Methodist church in Hollenberg, Kansas, near the Nebraska state line. By the end of the summer he and Mary had built up regular church attendance to over one hundred people, and although the Colwells left without receiving a salary, they were eventually paid in full. Harry had accepted an invitation to teach seventh and eighth grades along with



Harry Colwell with his pupils at the Union school, Bala Township, sometime during the 1906-7 school year.



Harry and Mary Colwell during the period they managed the Maxwell farm.



Harry and Mary Colwell with their infant son, Harry E., in 1915.

two high school subjects in Leonardville in the fall of 1915 and was enjoying his position when another opportunity developed.

During the late fall I received one day a letter from Dr. Reeder, Superintendent of the Graham School, originally located in New York City, but now at Hastings-on-Hudson, about eighteen miles up the Hudson River from New York City.¹² Dr. Reeder wrote that they were in process of constructing a new cottage

12. Rudolph Rex Reeder (1859–1934) was graduated in 1885 from a normal school in Illinois; he earned a Ph.D. at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he taught from 1898 to 1900. He was appointed superintendent of the Graham School in 1900 and was in charge when the institution was moved to Hastings-on-Hudson and a cottage system inaugurated. Later he became well known for his service in France during World War I as director of the Child Welfare Division of the American Red Cross and subsequently for establishing a school for nurses in Serbia. *Encyclopedia of American Biography*, n.s. (New York: American Historical Society, 1937), 7:179–80.

for a selected group of their older boys who might be interested in agriculture and gardening. He was looking for a man with agricultural background who, with his wife, would be interested in taking charge of the new cottage, the man also to look after a program of counseling and training older boys of the School. He knew I had been enrolled at Kansas State, and wondered if I knew of someone who would be qualified to fill such a position and interested in the position.

My wife and I discussed the letter. We couldn't think of anyone to recommend, but in discussing the subject the idea occurred that we ourselves might possibly qualify. Moving to New York City might open up possibilities for advancement not available in the West. I wrote to Dr. Reeder, asking whether he would care to consider us for the position. We exchanged several letters that fall. In the end he offered me the position, provided I could obtain a release from my teaching position. . . .

The people of Leonardville were very kind when I left [January 1916]. The school was dismissed the morning I took the train east, the students and quite a good many of the townspeople coming to the railroad station to see me off. It gave one a very warm feeling to see this evidence of friendship and goodwill. I couldn't help but contrast in my mind this cordial leave-taking with my lonely arrival at the same station fifteen years earlier. As the train pulled out, accompanied by a general waving of hands in farewell, I experienced a very warm feeling of affection for the many friends I was leaving behind.

Harry Colwell realized his long-time goal of getting a degree while he was working at the Graham School north of New York City. He studied on the subway on his way to classes

at Columbia and by 1920 had earned an A.B. degree from Columbia College and a master's degree from Teachers College at Columbia University. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa for his excellence in scholarship.

Harry spent the rest of his life in social welfare work and after his graduation became superintendent of a children's home in Saco, Maine. After several years he became superintendent of a larger children's home in Randolph, New York, in western New York State. Upon his retirement he and Mary moved to Rochester, New York, where he died in July 1968. Mary died in November 1982 in Houston, Texas, where she had gone to live with her son and his wife in her later years. Both are buried in the Leonardville cemetery, not far from the Maxwell family plot. KH

