

# MACK CRETCHER

## 1868-1946

-Patti  
Unruh



**M**ack Cretcher, author and former editor of the Sedgwick Pantagraph, was born in Spring Hill, Ohio on December 9, 1868. He came to Sedgwick, Harvey County, Kansas with his parents John Curtis Cretcher and Mary J. (Hornbeck) Cretcher in February of 1871. The Cretcher family took the train as far as Emporia, (which was at that time the end of the Santa Fe Railroad). They then traveled to Sedgwick by covered wagon where they settled on a farm near Putnam, before relocating to a farm approximately two miles northeast of Sedgwick.

Mack was educated in the Sedgwick school system. It was not uncommon for him to share his school-day memories with readers of the Pantagraph during his tenure as editor. On seeing old school friend Calvin Race in June 1906 he told his Pantagraph friends that teacher “C.Q. Bullock used to use the switch on the whole bunch of us over at the school house 20 years ago.”

On May 20, 1897 he married Alice May Johnson, daughter of Gilbert and Helen (Kent) Johnson of East Wallingford, Vermont. Mack and Alice Cretcher had one child who died in infancy.

Mack was active editor of the Sedgwick Pantagraph from May 1892 to 1913 and his common-sense, matter-of fact approach to news was a hit not only with the subscribers of the Pantagraph, but with other editors and readers from across the state. On May 17, 1906 he shared the following in the Pantagraph:

“With this issue the Pantagraph starts out on Volumn 25, having completed 24 years of ups and downs, but not outs in Sedgwick. For 14 years of that time the writer has had editorial charge of the paper. Our business year ended May 1, and it is a source of satisfaction to us to know that the year of 1905-1906 was the best year financially since we took charge in May 1892. It at least makes us feel that we are not loosing our grip.

Things are pretty well balanced in this old world after all. Sometimes we imagine we are getting the worst of it- worse than anybody- and at other times know that we have received more than a full measure. In the long run things are pretty well evened up. We of course, have the ambition to see this, the 25th year of the paper now starting, the best in the city’s history. If it isn’t, we will grin and bear it and scratch a little harder, just like people do when they don’t get what they want. In the meantime we wish to thank our patrons for all favors and assure them that we will appreciate their continued support.”

During his time as editor of the Pantagraph he served as President of the Kansas Editorial Association.

In 1913 after selling the Pantagraph, he was assigned to the Philippine Islands as Assistant Director of Agriculture, serving there eight years, being a member of the Philippine Commission at the London International Exposition. He returned to the United States in 1922 and served two years of Kansas Governor Jonathan Davis' administration as his personal secretary. In 1925 he became the editor of the Newton Journal and continued that work until he retired in March of 1940.

Mack Cretcher was an impressive figure in the city of Sedgwick during the early 1900's and by 1923 he was already the published author of "Tenderfoot in the Tropics". In the fall of 1923, while still under the assignment of Kansas Gov. Jonathan M. Davis, he published his second novel "The Kansan". The book, a political novel depicting the account of life in pioneer days, begins just at the close of the Civil War. "The Kansan" tells the story of Jim Brandon whose father died on the way to Kansas and how Jim is befriended by Jonathan Butler, falls in love with Marion Butler, grows up with the country, becomes editor of the Bison City Bugle and is finally successful with business and love. The book, one of the most successful of 1923, necessitated a second edition due to high Christmas sales. The publishers, Dorrance and Company notified Mr. Cretcher: "You do not know how pleased we are with this latest success of yours. By the way, we have an offer from England for the book. We shall accept the offer, which provides for royalty. This is the same basis on which we have heretofore disposed of English rights, and we congratulate you that the English market is interested in your book, because this does not happen to many American novels compared with the large number that are published." And as promised by the publisher, the rights were sold to an English firm and Mack Cretcher could not have been more pleased with the transaction. The original manuscript of "The Kansan" was donated to the Sedgwick Historical Society and Museum on Memorial Day 2006 by descendants of the Cretcher family. Along with the original manuscript was a scrapbook of press releases and book reviews detailing the novels success. A Topeka Capital article notes that while Gov. Davis was recuperating from a two month illness at his Bourbon County farm, that his nurse read "The Kansan" to him during his long recovery.

The appointment as Gov. Davis' secretary forced him to spend all of his time in Topeka and away from his home in Sedgwick..."except when duck hunting season is on." And Mack Cretcher loved his duck hunting. He wrote many articles about the new laws being enforced in Kansas in regards to hunting and fishing, and kept the citizenry of Sedgwick apprised of the goings-on of the local hunters and gun club.

His sentiments were ostensibly transparent when on October 26, 1905 he wrote: "Fish are being sold openly all over town, but you can't give a wild duck away without violating the law. The fisherman robs the streams and sells the fish, and has no license to pay, nor any restrictions about written permission from the land owner. Just why the hunters should be hedged about restrictions and the fishermen given such a free run is unclear."

And on June 28, 1906 he wrote: "All hunters licenses expire June 30, so if you care to go out with a gun it will be necessary for you to visit your county clerk and donate your dollar to Del Travis'

fish fund. There never was a bigger fraud perpetrated on a lot of good-natured fellows than that hunter's license graft. No sportsman kicks on the dollar which is asked but they do roar on the way the funds they raise are expended. The money is supposed to be used to protect the game of the state. What has been done in this line? What does the hunter get for his dollar? What part of \$40,000.00 raised last year has been expended to further the pleasures of the man with the gun, who pays the bills? Comparatively, nothing at all. The bulk of it has been used to maintain a fish hatchery in Pratt County so that streams can be stocked and fishermen who go license free may have better sport. This burden of the expense and the handicaps and restrictions are placed on the shoulders of the hunters simply because the boys are good natured and will stand for it. It is a rank imposition."

It was opinions and observations such as these that endeared Mack Cretcher to the people of Sedgwick. His memories which he so openly shared, are now but gentle reminders of how Sedgwick was at the turn of the century. Mack was less than three years old when he came to Kansas, but he was able to recount to the Sedgwick Pantagraph in 1939 that as an adult he still possessed vivid memories of prairie fires, blizzards, Indian scares, grasshopper invasion, floods, cattle trails, cowboys, early shootings, buffalo, antelope, sod houses and dugouts and the privations of those early settlers.

So dramatic was his memory of the great grasshopper invasion afflicting Sedgwick and many other parts of Kansas in 1874- that he shared his recollections with his Pantagraph readers in 1912. "In this part Kansas early history dates from 1874, commonly known as "Grasshopper Year." The real pioneer aristocracy is composed of those who settled here before that date. All the rest, to them are "newcomers." Kansas has had grasshoppers before and since that date, but never such a deluge of the pests at that time. They came rolling in from the west in perfect clouds one Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1874. Our folks were over at Frank Dick's west of the Little River visiting that day. When the bank of grasshoppers was discovered in the west, my father said he thought it must be a prairie fire. There was much discussion as to what was really coming, the fooling, and the tumbling mass resembling clouds of smoke. But all doubt was soon dispelled. Within a few minutes everything was covered with hopping, kicking grasshoppers, long bodied chaps that were very hungry. The ground was not only covered with them but the air was thick with them for hours traveling on east. They had to go because they were so thick they couldn't thrive very well three or four feet deep on the ground. Within two or three hours everything green in the way of vegetation had vanished, everything but the castor beans. That was the one thing no hopper would ever tackle. When we got home that evening things looked quite desolate. The hoppers had actually eaten holes in some cheese cloth curtains which mother had put up in the kitchen windows. And the pests did not travel on east until after they had secured a good square meal. They came when the corn was in the roasting ear stage and remained until they cleaned up the wheat that was sown late that fall. They made it a clean sweep. The wheat field north of our house would look quite green of a morning but by night it was barren. The grasshoppers kept this up until the wheat was killed. And that was a hard winter for us all. Some people here who hold their heads pretty high now used to scramble pretty lively when they heard that a box of "aid" goods had arrived at the depot and scrap to a finish to get their share of the cast-off clothing sent by charitable people from the east. But we all pulled through somehow and those who have passed through the privations of that time were the real pioneers, and a good many of them are still living in this locality."

Mack's health began to fail in the early 1940's largely due to a fall which fractured his hip. He spent his last three years in Bethel Hospital, bedfast most of the time. Mack Cretcher died at 6:30 a.m. June 20, 1946. His obituary in the Sedgwick Pantagraph described him as "an upright citizen, a faithful friend, a wholesome companion and a prominent figure in Harvey County affairs with a residential record here of 75 years." Mack's funeral was held at the Congregational Church in Sedgwick, and he was laid to rest at Hillside Cemetery, Sedgwick Kansas along side his wife Alice.



People come and go in communities, and often little is written or remembered about the footprints left behind. The same cannot be said of Mack Cretcher. He left behind volumes of printed material which allows us, some one hundred years later- a glimpse at not only the man, but the Sedgwick community he served for nearly three-quarters of a century. ■

*I am pleased to write this article about Mack Cretcher, mainly because I am exposed to his articles and editorials on a weekly basis. As owner/editor of the Sedgwick Pantagraph from 1892-1913, Mack Cretcher left an indelible mark on the history of Sedgwick, and one hundred years later in 2006- as I revisit The Sedgwick Pantagraph for article re-publication in the Harvey County Independent's ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO feature, I am able to get a glimpse of the man- and a sense of what community meant to him. - Patti Unruh, June 2006.*