

The Story of Aqua Pura

By WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

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PEOPLE who write about Kansas, as a rule, write ignorantly, and speak of the state as a finished product. Kansas, like Gaul of old, is divided into three parts, differing as widely, each from the other, as any three countries in the same latitude upon the globe. It would be as untrue to classify together the Egyptian, the Indian and the Central American, as to speak of the Kansas man without distinguishing between the eastern Kansas, the central Kansas, and the western Kansas. Eastern Kansas is a finished community like New York or Pennsylvania. Central Kansas is finished, but not quite paid for; and western Kansas, the only place where there is any suffering from drought or crop failures, is a new country—old only in a pluck which is slowly conquering the desert.

Aqua Pura was a western Kansas town, set high up, far out on the prairie. It was founded nine years ago, at the beginning of the boom, not by cowboys and ruffians, but by honest, ambitious men and women. Of the six men who staked out the town site, two—Johnson and Barringer—were Harvard men; one, Nickols, was from Princeton; and the other three, Bemis, Bradley and Hicks, had come from inland state universities. When their wives came West there was a Yassar reunion, and the first mail that arrived after the post office had been established brought the New York magazines. The town was like dozens of others that sprang up far out in the treacherous wilderness in that fresh, green spring of 1886.

They called it Aqua Pura, choosing a Latin name to proclaim to the world that it was not a rowdy town. The new yellow pine of the little village gleamed in the clear sunlight. It could be seen for miles on a clear, warm day, as it stood upon a rise of ground; and over in Maize, six miles away, the electric lights of Aqua Pura, which flashed out in the evening before the town was six months old, could be seen distinctly. A schoolhouse that cost twenty thousand dollars was built before the town had seen its first winter; and the first Christmas ball in Aqua Pura was held in an open house that cost ten thousand. Money was plentiful; two and three-story buildings rose on each side of the main street of the little place. The farmers who had taken homesteads in the country around the town had prospered.

Barringer was elected mayor at the municipal election in the spring of '87, and he platted out Barringer's Addition, and built a house there with borrowed money in June. There were two thousand people in Aqua Pura then.

There was not a lawless element. There was not a saloon in the town. A billiard hall, and a dark room, wherein cards might be played surreptitiously, were the only institutions which made the people of Aqua Pura blush, when they took the innumerable "Eastern capitalists" over the town who visited western Kansas that year. These "capitalists" were entertained at a three-story brick hotel, equipped with electricity and modern plumbing in order to excel Maize, where the hotel was an indifferent frame affair.

This is the story of the rise. Barringer has told it a thousand times. Barringer believed in the town to the last. When the terrible drought of 1887, with its furnace-like breath singed the town and the farms in Fountain county, Barringer led the majority which proudly claimed that the country was all right; and as chairman of the board of county commissioners, he sent a scathing message to the governor, refusing aid. Barringer's own bank loaned money on land, whereon the crop had failed, to tide the farmers over the winter. Barringer's signature guaranteed loans from the East upon everything negotiable, and Aqua Pura thrived for a time upon promises. Here and there, in the spring of 1888, there was an empty building. One room of the opera house block was vacant. Barringer started a man in business, selling notions, who occupied the room. Barringer went East and pleaded with the men who had invested in the town to be easy on their debtors. Then came the hot winds of July, blowing out of the southwest, scorching the grass, shriveling the grain, and drying up the streams that had filled in the spring. During the fall of that year the hotel, which had been open only in the lower story, closed. The opera house began to be used for "aid" meetings, and when the winter wind blew dust-blackened snow through the desolate streets of the little town, it rattled a hundred windows in vacant houses, and sometimes blew sun-warped boards from the high sidewalk that led across the gully to the big red grade of the unfinished "Chicago Air Line."

Barringer did not go East that year. He could not. But he wrote—wrote regularly and bravely to the Eastern capitalists who were concerned in his bank and loan company; and they grew colder and colder as the winter deepened and the interest on delinquent loans came due. Barringer's failure was announced in the spring of '89. Nickols had left. Johnson had left. The other founders of Aqua Pura had died in '87-'88, and their families had gone, and with them the culture and the wisdom of the town. But Barringer held on and lived, rent free, in the two front rooms of the barn of a hotel. His daughter, Mary, frail, tanned, hollow-eyed and withered by the droughts lived with him.

In 1890 the hot winds came again in the summer and long and steady they blew, blighting everything. There were only five hundred people in Fountain county that year, and they lived on the taxes from the railroad that crossed the county. Families were put on the poor list without disgrace—it was almost a mark of political distinction—and in the little town many devices were in vogue to distribute the county funds during the winter.

There was no rain that winter and the snow was hard and dry. Cattle on the range suffered for water and died by the thousands. A procession from the little town started eastward early in the spring. White-canopied wagons, sought the rising sun.

Christmas eve, 1891, the entire village, fifteen souls in all, assembled at Barringer's house. He was hopeful, even cheerful, and talked bitterly of what "one good crop" would do for the country; although there were no farmers left to plant it, even if nature had been harboring a smile for the dreary land. The year that followed that Christmas promised much. There were spring rains, and in May the brown grass and the scattered patches of wheat grew green and fair to see. Barringer freshened up perceptibly. He sent an account of his indebtedness—on home-ruled manilla paper—to his creditors in the East, and faithfully assured them that he would remit all he owed in the fall. A few wanderers straggled into Fountain county, lured by the green fields and running brooks. The gray prairie wolf gave up the dog-out to human occupants. Lights in the prairie cabins twinkled back hope to the stars. Before June there were a thousand people in Fountain county. Aqua Pura's business houses seemed to live up. There was a Fourth of July celebration in town. But the rain that spoiled the advertised "fireworks in the evening" was the last

store buildings. He walked up and down in the little paths through the brown weeds in the deserted streets, all day long, talking to himself. At night when the prairie wind rattled through the empty building, blowing snow and sand down the halls, and in little drifts upon the broken stairs, the old man's lamp was seen by straggling travelers burning far into the night. He told his daily visitors that he was keeping his books.

Thus the winter passed. The grass came with the light mist of March. By May it had lost its color. By June it was brown, and the hot winds came again in August, curving the warped boards a little deeper on the floor of the hotel porch. Herders and travelers, straggling back to the green country, saw him sitting there at twilight, looking toward the southwest, a grizzled, unkempt old man, with a shifting light in his eye. To such a spoke to him he always made the same speech: "Yes, it looks like rain, but it can't rain. The rain has gone dry here. They say it rained at Hutchinson, maybe so, I doubt it. There is no God west of Newton. He dried up in '90. They talk irrigation. That's an old story in hell. Where's Johnson? Not here! Where's Nickols? Not here! Bemis? Not here! Bradley? Not here! Hicks? Not here! Where's handsome Dick Barringer, Hon. Richard Barringer? Here! Here he is, holding down a hot brick in a cooling room of hell! Yes, it does look like rain, doesn't it?"

Cattle roamed the streets in the early spring, but the stumbling of the animals upon the broken walks, did not disturb him, and the winds and the drought soon drove them away. The messenger with provisions came every morning. The summer, with its awful heat, began to glow. The lightning and the thunder jolted insolently in the distance at noon; and the stars in the deep, dry blue looked down and mocked the old man's prayers as he sat, at night, on his rickety sountry box. He tottered through the deserted stores calling his roll. Night after



"The Old Man's Lamp Was Seen by Straggling Travelers Burning Far Into the Night."

that fell until winter. A carload of aid from central Kansas saved a hundred lives in Fountain county that year.

When the spring of 1893 opened, Barringer looked ten years older than he looked the spring before.

It was his habit to sit on the front porch of the deserted hotel and look across the prairies to the southwest and watch the breaking clouds scatter into the blue of the twilight. He could see the empty water tower silhouetted against sky. The frame buildings that rose in the boom days had all been moved away. He sat and waited, hoping fondly for the realization of a dream which he feared could never come true.

There were days when the postmaster's four-year-old child sat with him. The old man and the child sat thus one evening when the old man sighed: "If it would only rain, there would be half a crop yet! If it would only rain!" The child heard him and sighed imitatively: "Yes, if it would only rain—what is rain, Mr. Barringer?" He looked at the child blankly and sat for a long time in silence. When he arose he did not even have a pretense of hope. He grew dependent from that hour, and a sort of hypochondria seized him.

That fall when the winds piled the sand in the railroad "cuts" and the prairie was as hard and barren as the ground around a cabin door, Barringer's daughter died of fever. The old man seemed little moved by sorrow.

That winter the postmaster left. The office was discontinued. The county commissioners tried to get Barringer to leave. He would not be persuaded to go. The county commissioners were not insistent. It gave one of them an excuse for drawing four dollars a day from the county treasury; he rode from Maize to Aqua Pura every day with supplies for Barringer.

The old man cooked, ate, and slept in the office of the hotel. Day after day he put on his overcoat in the winter and made the rounds of the vacant

night he walked to the red clay grade of the uncompleted "Air Line" and looked over the dead level stretches of prairie. He would have gone away, but something held him to the town. There he had risked all. Here, perhaps, in his warped fancy, he hoped to regain all. He had written so often, "Times will be better in the spring," that it was part of his confession of faith—that and "One good crop will bring the country around all right." This was written with red clay in the old man's nervous hand on the side of the hotel, on the faded signs, on the deserted inner walls of the stores—in fact, everywhere in Aqua Pura.

The wind told on him; it withered him and sapped his energy.

One morning he awoke and a strange sound greeted his ears. There was a gentle tapping in the building and a roar that was not the ruffaw of the wind. He rushed for the door. He saw the rain, and bareheaded he ran to the middle of the streets where it was pouring down. The messenger from Maize with the day's supplies found him standing there, vacantly, almost thoughtfully, looking up, the rain dripping from his grizzled head, and rivulets of water trickling about his shoes.

"Hello, Uncle Dick," said the messenger. "Enjoying the prospect? River's risin'; better come back with me."

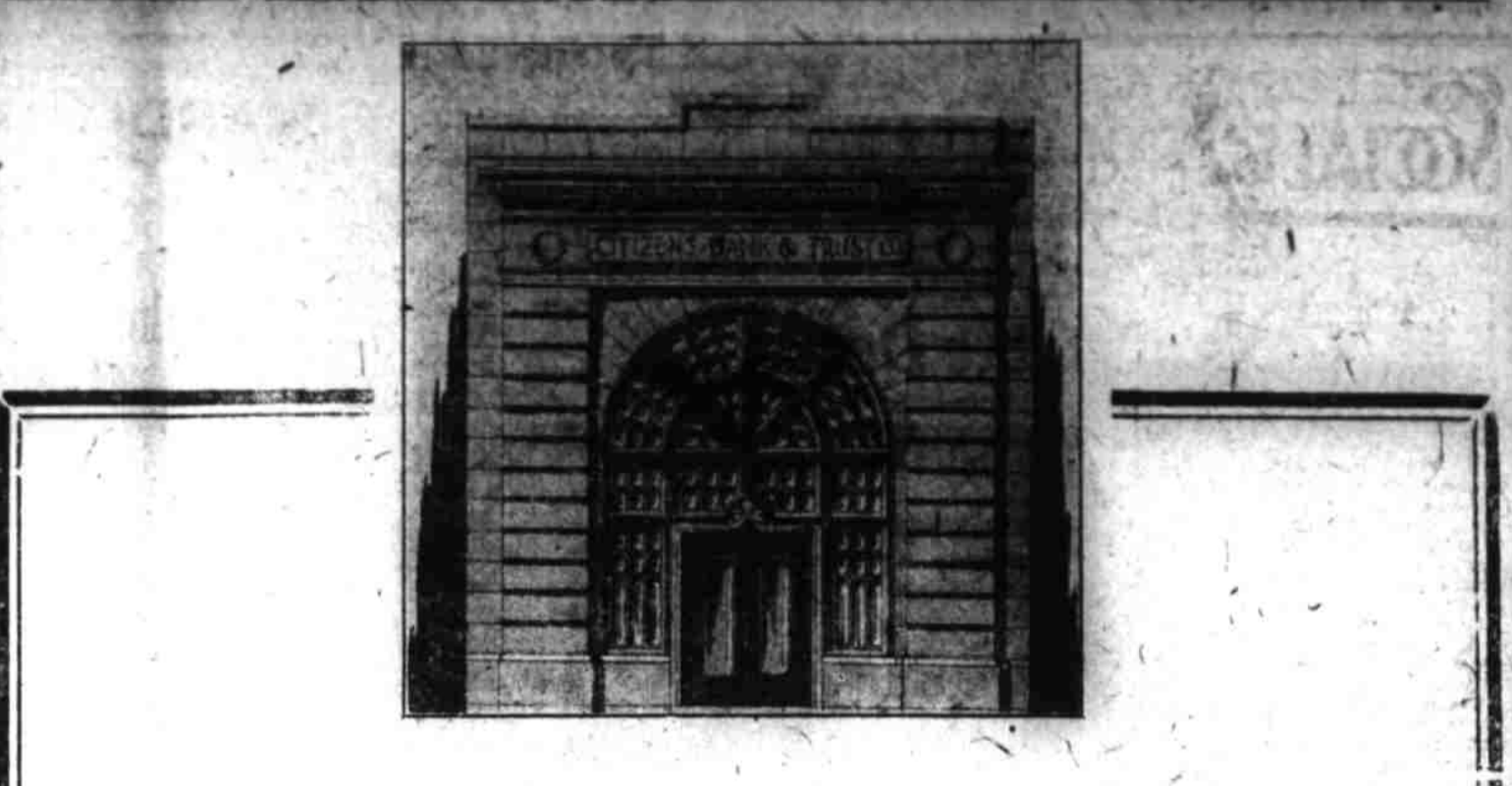
But the old man only answered, "Johnson? Not here! Nickols? Not here! Bemis? Not here! Bradley? Not here! Hicks? Not here! And Barringer? Here! And now God's moved the rain belt west. Moved so far west that there's hope for Lazarus to get irrigation from Abraham."

And with this the old man went into the house. There, when the five days' rain had ceased, and when the great river that flooded the barren plain had shrunk, the remaining party, coming from Maize, found him. Beside his bed were his balanced books and his legal papers. In his dead eyes were a thousand dreams.

and receive messages underground through the strata. About 50 feet from the receiving station in the mine was a six inch bore hole from the surface, lined with iron pipe and containing electric light wires which extended throughout the mine. The presence of these wires, the report of the engineers said, evidently assisted greatly in the reception, for when the receiving set was carried to another part of the mine removed from the wires the signals were barely audible through 50 feet of cover. The fact that the signals were detected, however, even though faintly, was taken as sufficient evidence by the engineers of transmission through the ground and to encourage further experimentation.

"The present preliminary experiments," said the report in conclusion, "while unsuccessful in indicating any practical methods of using wireless waves for underground communication, nevertheless indicate clearly that electromagnetic waves may be made to travel through solid strata. The absorption, or loss of intensity, with distance is very great for the short wave lengths used in these experiments. Longer wave lengths are known to suffer less absorption and may possibly be found practically effective under certain conditions."

The report found that signals from KDKA, a broadcasting station eleven miles from the mine, were recorded by a receiver located inside the mine, and that it was possible to send



Announcement

The Citizens Bank and Trust Company will occupy its new quarters at
 No. 24 South Union Street
 on
 Wednesday, January 31, 1923

This building has been planned, erected and equipped throughout for the service and convenience of this community, and we cordially invite you to call on the Opening Day and to inspect the arrangements we have made in your interest.

The building will be open for inspection Wednesday afternoon from two until four o'clock.

The formal opening will be held Wednesday evening from seven thirty to ten o'clock, to which the public is cordially invited. Music and souvenirs.

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Radio Transmission Underground May Help Miners.

Pittsburgh, Jan. 25.—Penetration of the earth's surface by radio waves is the object of a series of experiments being carried on by the Pittsburgh station of the United States Bureau of Mines, in an effort to perfect its life saving system.

The idea back of the project is development of a radio-telephone that will allow rescuers to communicate with entrapped miners when all other means of communication have been cut off by explosion or other accident. Information from the interior of a stricken mine would be of the utmost service in guiding the rescuers and enabling them to overcome the engineering problems presented, and many requests have been received by the bureau to devise means to utilize wireless methods for that purpose.

The preliminary experiments were carried out by C. M. Bouton of the Pittsburgh station, in conjunction with C. A. Bode, E. C. Douglas and F. D. Fessler, of the Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing company, at the bureau's experimental mine in Bruceton, Pa.

They found that signals from KDKA, a broadcasting station eleven miles from the mine, were recorded by a receiver located inside the mine, and that it was possible to send

and receive messages underground through the strata. About 50 feet from the receiving station in the mine was a six inch bore hole from the surface, lined with iron pipe and containing electric light wires which extended throughout the mine. The presence of these wires, the report of the engineers said, evidently assisted greatly in the reception, for when the receiving set was carried to another part of the mine removed from the wires the signals were barely audible through 50 feet of cover. The fact that the signals were detected, however, even though faintly, was taken as sufficient evidence by the engineers of transmission through the ground and to encourage further experimentation.

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Movies to Instruct Children in Swedish Schools.

(Correspondence of Associated Press.) Stockholm, Jan. 6.—That motion picture films will be extensively used as a medium of education in the public schools of Sweden is now assured. The Superior Board of Education, has been won over to the idea and, in conjunction with the National Bureau of Motion Pictures it has issued instructions to make the plan operative.

From now on Swedish children will learn their geography lessons from the screen, by which they will also be informed concerning the customs, industries, etc., of the principal countries of the world. Films will be used in teaching natural sciences, and in giving instruction in the technique of various trades. Physics can well be taught through slow-motion pictures and, as stereographic projection becomes more perfect, solid geometry can be taught in a way not otherwise possible.

The Board of Education plans a systematic inauguration of new new scheme. Thus one of the first steps is to give regular instruction to the young teachers in the proper care and handling of projecting machines, and other film apparatus.

In certain cases films will be purchased and become the property of the schools. Other films will be rented

and sent on tour from one school to the next. All government institutions and industries will be specially filmed for the purpose of instruction. Instruction by motion pictures in the regular curriculum of the public schools, under competent teachers, is taken here to mean a safe-guarding of the children's education and a correction of the misinformation and erroneous impressions now so often obtained from the commercial films in the public theaters.

Important Discovery.

"What we want to discover," said comrade, "who was the aggressor." "Eh?" said the fierce looking witness doubtfully.

"Let me explain," said counsel patiently. "If I met you in the street and struck you in the face I should be the aggressor."

"No, no. You don't understand. If I struck you without provocation I should be committing an act of aggression."

"Excuse me, boss, you'd be committing suicide," declared the witness darkly.

Aid to Prayer.
 Prayer is always most effective when mixed with equal parts of sweat.—Baltimore Sun.

USE THE PENNY COLUMN—IT PAYS