

HISTORICAL INFORMATION CONCERNING
THE BROCKMEYER FARMSTEAD (a/k/a GREEN HILL STOCK FARM)
IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, KANSAS

The Brockmeyer family arrived in America from Germany in July 1852. The family consisted of Henry Brockmeyer, his wife Sophia, and their children Ernst, Fred, Henry, Sophia, and Charlotte. Mr. Brockmeyer died in 1854 in Yatesville, Connecticut. Mrs. Brockmeyer apparently never remarried. In 1855, Mrs. Brockmeyer and family moved to Marshall County, Kansas. Fred Brockmeyer had gone to Kansas in advance of the family, and his letter with instructions for their westward journey remains in the family records. Sophia Brockmeyer married G.H. Hollenberg in 1858. In 1858 or 1859, the Hollenbergs moved to Cottonwood Station in neighboring Washington County, Kansas. Cottonwood Station was a major stop on the Oregon Trail, and was a station for the Pony Express during its existence from 1860 to 1861. The wood frame Hollenberg ranchhouse still remains at Cottonwood Station, and is a national historic site.

The Brockmeyer Farmstead is situated about one mile down Cottonwood Creek from the station, on lands assembled by the Brockmeyer family from 1868 to 1872. The northerly portion of the farmstead (in Section 9), which includes the large stone house, was obtained under the Homestead Act. The deed signed by President U.S. Grant is dated January 15, 1875. The southerly portion of the farmstead (in Section 16), which includes the large stone barn, was acquired by Ernst Brockmeyer from the State of Kansas in 1868. Fred Brockmeyer acquired the land from his brother Ernst and moved to the farmstead location in 1869; adjoining land was acquired from the State of Kansas in 1871 and 1872. G.H. Hollenberg, Brockmeyer's brother-in-law, laid out the town of Hanover to the immediate north and west of the Brockmeyer farmstead in the spring of 1869, and Hanover Township was formed in 1870. The City of Hanover was officially incorporated on July 5, 1872, and in that year G.H. and Sophia Hollenberg moved from Cottonwood Station into Hanover. In 1873, Fred Brockmeyer donated 3 acres from the southwest corner of the southerly quarter section, which along with property donated by Hollenberg became the Hanover Cemetery. An engraved marble shaft located near a small pool in the cemetery memorializes Hollenberg himself, who died at sea on the Steamship Bolivia on July 1, 1874 while returning to Germany to encourage further immigration. Sophia Brockmeyer Hollenberg was remarried to Judge William Kalhoefer on September 4, 1875.

The Brockmeyer Farmstead consists of seven native limestone buildings constructed by Fred Brockmeyer in the 1870s. Such a large cluster of early stone buildings is unique in this region. According to his obituary, Brockmeyer had learned the trade of masonry in Germany. The published notes of G.H. Hollenberg dated 1871 state that "Fred Brockmeyer has now completed one of the finest two-story stone residences in the country." A "birds eye view map" of Hanover dated 1879 shows the two-story rock home and another outbuilding. In addition to the home, which includes a wood frame "L" addition dating to 1912, there is a large stone barn built into a sidehill with a large hayloft, a stone stable also built into a sidehill with primitive horse stalls and a hayloft, a three-sided stone shelter barn also with hayloft, two small square stone buildings (one believed to have been a milkhouse, the other perhaps an early residence), and a wood frame building with stone ends (most recently used as a granary and believed to be a former residence rebuilt after being damaged by fire).

The quarter section on which the southerly portion of the farmstead is situated is composed of a variety of topographical and other natural features. A perpetual creek runs through the property, providing a constant water source for livestock. Another intermittent creek feeds into the main creek, as does a natural spring. Two small plots of cultivated land lay along the creek, with a high hill rising above a substantial grove of native oak trees. The creek cuts a large limestone cliff into the hill, which is a native prairie grass pasture. The stone for the buildings may have been quarried on the property, and there is an exposed area of cut stone and other similar indications of quarrying in the pasture. According to a 1906 plat book, the property was known as "Green Hill Stock Farm." The family records include cardboard milk bottle tops imprinted with "Green Hill Dairy / Fred Brockmeyer."

The Brockmeyers played a significant role in the early development of the community. Fred Brockmeyer was a charter member of the Lutheran church in Hanover in 1874, and a member of the original church building committee. The church building, located a block west of the farmstead, was built of brick and native limestone in 1887. Fred Brockmeyer served as a county commissioner from 1897 to 1900; during his term the first permanent county jail was built (now a historic site). Brockmeyer also served as treasurer of Hanover Township from 1876 to 1877. Fred Brockmeyer died in 1910; services were conducted in the stone house and the Lutheran church, and he was buried on his land previously donated to create the Hanover Cemetery. Land records show that ownership of the farmstead property was consolidated from his heirs to Fred Brockmeyer, Jr. in 1916.

The Great Depression brought an end to the Brockmeyer family's ownership of the property. In 1928, Fred Brockmeyer, Jr. mortgaged the property to Ignatz Kloppenberg, who then purchased the property at a sheriff's sale in 1933. Fred Brockmeyer, Jr. declared bankruptcy in 1934, but a sheriff's deed conveyed the property to Ignatz Kloppenberg in 1935. On March 8, 1935, an auction of the Brockmeyer farm implements and livestock (17 head of cattle and 4 horses) was held on the farmstead. In 1946, William Kloppenberg became the owner of the property, and he is remembered as the last person in the area to farm with horses, a practice he continued on the property until well after mechanized agriculture was common. William Kloppenberg died in 1976, and his wife Florence died in 1988. The property was purchased at auction from the Kloppenberg heirs by the Laue family in April 1988.

Brant M. Laue
Updated May 2008