

# GRAY CENTER SCHOOLHOUSE

Gray County, Kansas

Written by Iris Scott

*Consultants: Mr. William Webster "Webb" Egbert and Mr. James Harvey "Harve" Egbert,  
both of Cimarron, Kansas*

*\* Additional information added about certain people mentioned in this story*

The Gray Center School House is one of the oldest landmarks in Gray County. It is located one mile west of the center of Gray County. That is where the schoolhouse got the name, Gray Center. In the fall of 1887, it was voted to build a schoolhouse and where to build it. At that time, every section of land for 10 miles on either side of the railroad track was owned by the Santa Fe Railroad Company. This land was sold to the farmers on easy terms. The other sections were homestead land. The schoolhouse was set on what at one time was railroad land.

The school is of a wooden structure 24 by 36. The carpenters were Mr. Mathews, Mr. Opp, and Mr. Cox. The building has now been repainted and re-shingled, but another remodeling has not taken place. The schoolhouse sits on a rock foundation. The rock was shipped from Nevada.

Before the schoolhouse was built, the school was held in the Israel Egbert\* home. That was located approximately one-half mile east of where the schoolhouse is today. Mrs. Kate Hannan was the teacher then, and she had around 12 pupils. The first public gathering in the schoolhouse was on Thanksgiving Day in 1888. The school was not completely finished, and they had no desks for the pupils' schoolwork. The dinner that day was spread out in the center of the floor. The carpenters were invited to eat with them. Class began in the schoolhouse several days after the dinner, although there were still no desks for the pupils who attended.

Mrs. Frank Smith was the first teacher in the new schoolhouse, and she had around 20 pupils. Mr. Jonathan W. Egbert,\* Mr. Harvey, and Mr. Bullinger were on the first school board. Jonathan W. Egbert (*brother of Israel Egbert*) was the first Superintendent, and Mr. Frank Smith was the first Assistant Superintendent.

The first Sunday school was organized in 1887 at the Israel Egbert home. There, John Morrison\*, the presiding elder, delivered the first sermon at the Israel Egbert home. Sunday school was later held in a sod house built two miles east of the recent location in 1886. Rev. Meyers was the first minister there, and he was of the United Brethren denomination.

Sunday school was reorganized in the spring of 1889 in the new schoolhouse. Sunday school and church services have been carried on longer in this rural community than in any other rural community in the county and probably in the state.

At the time the schoolhouse was built, there were around eighteen families in the community. Mr. Israel Egbert, with his family, along with Mr. Jonathan Egbert and his family, were among the first settlers in this community. Others were Cadwell, Peel, Culp, Strait, Bullinger, Smith, Harvey, Maple, Willhite, Luton, Fesler, Laughmiller, Snyder, and Fraizer.

From 1888 to 1893, many good literary programs and debates were given at the schoolhouse. Then in 1893, 1894, and 1895 came the drought. All but three families left the community. Sunday school was discontinued until better years.

In November of 1886, Mr. Webb Egbert (*son of Jonathan W. Egbert and Elizabeth Davis*) saw a herd of 60 antelope on the hill just west of the schoolhouse. Small antelope herds were seen roaming about for several years after that.

The Gray Center Community plans a celebration for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the spring of 1937. For several years, the Methodist Church was held at the Gray Center, and before that, it was the Union Church. Before the Methodist Church was organized, other ministers who held services were Christian, Baptist, Mormon, Presbyterian, Carmelite, and United Brethren religions.

This year, in 1936, the Gray Center Community voted on consolidation. The schoolhouse is left to the church and Sunday school.

#### Additional Information

##### ISRAEL EGBERT

ISRAEL EGBERT, son of James Egbert (1798-1868) and Sarah Brandenburg (1808-1875), was born on 12 Jun 1831 in Warren County, Ohio. He married MARY ELIZABETH COLEMAN, daughter of Harvey Coleman (1811-1879) and Eliza Foster (1816-1843), on 18 Dec 1856 in Morgan County, Indiana.

Mary Elizabeth Coleman was born on 14 Aug 1840 in Hensley Township, Johnson County, Indiana.

Ten children were born to this marriage:

SARAH ELIZABETH "LIDA" EGBERT (1857-1940) married Henry L. Matthews

EMMA ANN EGBERT (1859-1873)

JAMES HARVEY "HARVE" EGBERT (1861-1945) married Minnie Laura Tabb

HORATIO SEYMOUR EGBERT (1864-1925) married Belle Griffith Palmer

RACHEL ADELAIDE EGBERT (1866-1869)

EDWIN DWIGHT EGBERT (1870-1947) married Carrie Outhwaite

GEORGE GILBERT EGBERT (1873-1874)

DESSIE GERTRUDE EGBERT (1875-1940) married William Homer Wilcox

PIERRE COLLIE EGBERT (1878-1945) married Bertha Elizabeth Francisco (*See story "Reminiscences of Pierre Collie Egbert, Cimarron, Gray County, Kansas"*)

VERNA M. EGBERT (1881-abt. 1910) married George A. Henry

In 1880, Israel and Mary were still living in Morgan County, Indiana, in the town of Jackson. They moved on to the Gray County area of Kansas in 1886. Israel passed away only four years later, on 12 Jan 1891, in Cimarron, Gray County, Kansas. Mary died there on 4 Nov 1925. Their burial was at the Ingalls-Logan Cemetery in Ingalls, Gray County, Kansas.

### NEWSPAPER OBITUARY FOR ISRAEL EGBERT

*The Ingalls (Kansas) Union Newspaper – Thursday, 15 Jan 1891*

*And... The Cimarron (Kansas) Jacksonian – Friday, 16 Jan 1891*

On Monday, at about 4 p.m., Mr. Israel Egbert, a highly respected citizen of Salem Township, dropped dead while in the act of taking a seat after returning to the house and having completed his feeding and other work for the night. He was apparently in good health, yet it is believed his death was caused by heart failure. Mr. Egbert was a well-to-do, industrious, honorable, and upright citizen. He leaves a devoted wife and family of children to mourn his death. His remains will be laid to rest at the Ingalls Cemetery, with the Rev. J. H. Morrison conducting the ceremonies.

### NEWSPAPER OBITUARY FOR MARY ELIZABETH (COLEMAN) EGBERT

*The Cimarron (Kansas) Jacksonian – 5 Nov 1925*

Mrs. Mary Egbert died at the home of her son, J. H. Egbert, after an illness of two weeks following a stroke of paralysis. She was born in Johnson County, Indiana, on 14 Aug 1840 and passed away on 4 Nov 1925, aged 85 years, 2 months, and 20 days.

Funeral services were held Thursday afternoon at the United Brethren Church. Interment was at the Ingalls Cemetery.

Mrs. Egbert came to Gray County in 1886 and with her husband, became one of the pioneers who helped build the country and remained despite the hardships. She was a member of the Baptist Church of Morgantown, Indiana, from the time she was 19 years old. She leaves to mourn five children and their families; J. H. Egbert and P. C. Egbert, both of this community, Ed Egbert of Wichita, Mrs. Lydia Matthews of Cincinnati, and Mrs. Dessie Wilcox of Oceanside, California.

**Additional Information**  
**JONATHAN W. EGBERT**

**JONATHAN W. EGBERT**, son of James Egbert (1798-1868) and Sarah Brandenburg (1808-1875), was born on 12 Apr 1840 in Morgan County, Indiana. He married **ELIZABETH DAVIS**, daughter of John D. Davis and Fannie Jones, on 22 Apr 1866 in Morgan County, Indiana. Elizabeth was born on 8 Jan 1842 in Indiana.

Six known children were born in this marriage: **WILLIAM WEBSTER “WEBB” EGBERT** (1867-1950), **JAMES A. EGBERT** (1871-1930), **CORA EGBERT MOSBARGER** (1873-1962), **BERYL EGBERT HADFIELD** (1875-1958), **FRANCES “FANNY” EGBERT HARKINS** (1881-1961), and **ROY EGBERT, MD** (1882-1953). (*Another child mentioned in the obituary for Jonathan Egbert is believed to have died at birth or very young*)

In 1886, the family left Indiana and settled in Gray County, Kansas. Jonathan Egbert died on 9 Oct 1899 in Cimarron, Gray County, Kansas. By 1910, Elizabeth had moved back to Indiana, making her home in Indianapolis, Marion County, where two of their children lived. She died there on 28 Sep 1920. Burial for Jonathan and Elizabeth was at the Cimarron Cemetery in Cimarron, Kansas.

**NEWSPAPER OBITUARY FOR JONATHAN W. EGBERT**

*The Cimarron (Kansas) Jacksonian News – Saturday, 14 Oct 1899*

That life is a strange panorama of light and shade, and that it is “only a step to the grave,” this community was brought to solemnly realize last Monday morning when news of the sudden death of “Uncle Jonathan” Egbert was heralded forth like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. He retired in usually good health Sunday night. A sudden twitching of his body and a slight groan awakened his wife about 4 o’clock the next morning, and she extended her hand only to touch his lifeless form. The angel of death had come and gone – the companion of years had gone home.

The funeral was held Monday at the Christian Church, the sermon being preached by Rev. John Bull.

Rev. Bull furnishes us with the following biography:

“Jonathan W. Egbert was born near Martinsville, Morgan County, Indiana, on 12 Apr 1840. He united with the Church of Christ about 1864 and attended for a time the school now known as Butler University. In 1866, Jonathan married Miss Elizabeth Davis and settled down, farming on the old homestead where he was born. He moved to Kansas in 1886 during the great emigration

into this state. He settled on a farm near the center of Gray County, Kansas, where he has since resided. He served the church in Indiana as a clerk and was a genuine lover and admirer of the faith. He was a lover of good men and hospitality. He loved to hear the old story of Jesus and his glory.

He was of cheerful temperament and had a cheery word and salutation for all his intimate acquaintances.

Jonathan Egbert was the father of seven children, six of whom, with his beloved companion, remain to mourn his departure. He died at his home on 9 Oct 1899, aged 59 years, 5 months, and 23 days.”

### NEWSPAPER OBITUARIES FOR ELIZABETH (DAVIS) EGBERT

*The Cimarron (Kansas) Jacksonian News – Thursday, 30 Sep 1920*

#### MRS. ELIZABETH EGBERT DIES

Word was received Tuesday, of the death of Mrs. Elizabeth Egbert, at Indianapolis, Indiana. She was a former resident of Gray County and was the mother of Webb Egbert, who lives southwest of town. The body has been shipped to Cimarron and should arrive Thursday evening. It will be taken to the home of J. H. Egbert. A funeral announcement will probably be made Friday morning or as soon as the body is received.

*The Indianapolis (Indiana) News – Saturday, 2 Oct 1920*

#### FUNERAL OF MRS. EGBERT

Funeral services for Mrs. Elizabeth Egbert, age 78, who died at her home, 2605 Roosevelt Avenue, Tuesday, after an illness of two months, were held Friday in Cimarron, Kansas, where the body was taken for burial.

Mrs. Egbert is survived by six children, Dr. James Egbert and Dr. Roy Egbert, both of Indianapolis; W. W. Egbert, of Cimarron; Mrs. Beryl Hadfield of Cimarron; Mrs. Cora Mosbarger, of Pueblo, Colorado; and Miss Fannie Egbert, of Lily, Alabama. Dr. James Egbert and Mrs. Beryl Hadfield accompanied the body to Cimarron.

### Additional Information REV. JOHN A. MORRISON

REV. JOHN A. MORRISON, son of James Morrison (1800-1879) and Mary Burns (1806-1864), was born on 20 Oct 1839 in Scotland. John immigrated to the United States in about 1841 with his parents, ending up in the LaSalle County area of Illinois.

He married **LOUISA JOHNSON**, daughter of James Johnson and Lovina Flinn, on 30 Aug 1863 in La Salle County, Illinois. Louisa was born in 1844. Six known children were born in their marriage: **JOHN ARTHUR MORRISON** (1864-1943), **MARY L. (MORRISON) PAUL** (1866-1930), **EDWARD MORRISON** (1867-1911), **GEORGE "CALVIN" MORRISON** (1870-1954), **JEROME MORRISON** (1881-1887), and **HALLIE (MORRISON) REYNOLDS** (1886-1960).

John and his family lived in different Illinois areas, where he was a minister for the United Brethren Church. About 1886, John and Louisa moved to the Gray County area of Kansas, where John performed the first sermon at the home of Israel Egbert.

Rev. John Morrison died on 31 Oct 1914 in Cimarron, Gray County, Kansas. Louisa died there, at her home, on 10 Sep 1932.

### Newspaper Obituary



Newspaper Photograph of  
**REV. JOHN MORRISON**

*The Cimarron (Kansas) Jacksonian - Thursday, 5 Nov 1914*

#### **ELDER MORRISON IS DEAD**

One of the men who has been a part of Cimarron for nearly thirty years and who was one of the survivors of the rapidly thinning ranks of the Boys in Blue has gone forever, and the familiar face of Elder John Morrison is no longer to be seen.

Only a person who has lived here for a long time or has made a careful character study of Old Cimarron can realize the critical part that John Morrison played in its affairs.

He was a very able public speaker, and his services were in demand all over this part of Kansas. Through all discouragements, he proved a strong pillar to the local United Brethren Church as a pastor and member of the congregation. His kindness of heart was well known to many.

Elder John Morrison was born in Glasgow, Scotland, about 1839. He came with his parents to America when two years old, settling in Fall River, Massachusetts. About twelve years later, they moved to Illinois, where he grew to manhood. In 1861, he answered his country's call, enlisting in the 104<sup>th</sup> Illinois, and serving about two years. He was honorably discharged due to illness. On 30 Aug 1863, he united in marriage to Louisa Johnson, to which union was born seven children, three of whom preceded him to the spirit world.

Brother Morrison was christened in the Scottish Presbyterian Church and united with the United Brethren Church in Jan 1863. He was licensed to preach in 1865 and followed his calling in different parts of Illinois.

In 1886, he came to Gray County, Kansas settling on a homestead two miles northwest of Cimarron. In 1887, he was elected Presiding Elder of what was then known as the Arkansas Conference, serving in that capacity for ten years and traveling over large portions of Kansas and Oklahoma.

In 1899, he with his family moved to Cimarron, where he resided until his death on 31 Oct 1914, aged about 75 years. About four years ago, he gave up active work in the ministry and lived a retired life.

Brother Morrison was a member of the G. A. R. of Cimarron, as long as the post was in existence. He was noted for his memorial addresses. He delivered the first memorial address ever delivered in Lexington, Illinois, and later the first to be delivered in Cimarron.

Brother Morrison leaves to mourn his loss, a wife, two sons, two daughters, several grandchildren, and a host of friends. He was an active member of the U. B. Church for nearly fifty years and never missed a service unless sick. He will be greatly missed by all.

Rev. Ramsay conducted the largely attended funeral. Rev. Doughty, Rev. Tilbury, and Rev. Westwood assisted him at three o'clock, Sunday, on 1 Nov 1914, at the United Brethren Church.