

SOULE CANAL IN GRAY COUNTY

(Asa Titus Soule)
Gray County, Kansas

Written by Juanita Trebilcock

Consultants: D. W. (Doc) Barton, Joseph Byrne/Burns, and Mrs. Terrence Byrne/Burns, all of Ingalls, Kansas

Reference: The (Cimarron, Kansas) Jacksonian, 13 Aug 1914

** Additional information added about Asa T. Soule*

During the early years of the settling of Kansas, the western part of Kansas was still known as a part of the Great American Desert. At that time, it didn't seem possible that Western Kansas would ever be a productive part of the nation.

Civilization first came to Southwestern Kansas with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railroad in the early eighteen seventies. For several years the people who settled here struggled along, depending on the weather alone for success or failure to raise their crops. Then came men who promoted irrigation ditches. The first one to be built in Western Kansas was the "Garden City Ditch" in Finney County, constructed by W. H. Armentrout in 1879. He was known as the father of irrigation in Western Kansas. But the greatest irrigation ditch ever to be built in Western Kansas was the Arkansas Valley Irrigation Ditch, backed by A. T. Soule* and was sometimes referred to as the "Soule Canal."

Mr. A. T. Soule was from Rochester, New York. He was a millionaire, reputed to be worth \$10,000,000. It was an excellent enterprise that Mr. Soule started in Western Kansas, but it was never determined whether it was for pleasure or pecuniary profit. The great irrigating ditch which he built was a million-dollar ditch, ninety miles long. The canal began in 1882. It started about three miles west of Ingalls, Kansas, and ended almost three miles east of Spearville, Kansas.

This means that A. T. Soule was one of the Western Kansas promoters who did a great deal towards establishing civilization and further progress in this section of the country. Although most of his efforts were comparatively fruitless, nevertheless, he had a high aim and did his best in striving to fulfill them. Mr. Soule had great confidence in the future of Western Kansas. He threw all his power and a great deal of his wealth into developing the enterprise he undertook. Three projects were of particular interest. He constructed one of the greatest irrigation ditches ever to be built in Western Kansas through Gray County and Ford. The irrigation ditch ran through the fertile Arkansas Valley, taking its waters from the Arkansas River and creating natural moisture for the farmers. If it had been a success, it would have helped the county people more perhaps than any other thing.

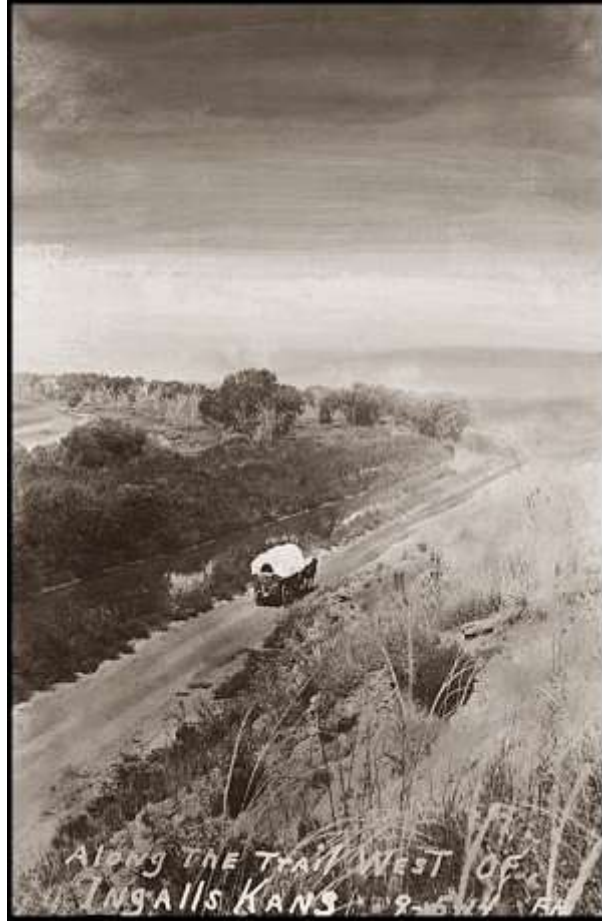
In 1884, Soule built a town close to the head of the Canal and named it Ingalls, after Senator John J. Ingalls. It became the headquarters for the workers on the irrigating ditch. It also became a siding for the Santa Fe railroad. At first, the town of Ingalls seemed to be a successful venture. It grew and became quite a flourishing business center, and Soule backed it to the limit. He owned seven-tenths of the city plat. He helped lay out the town and constructed the first building on the town site. It was a two-story hotel. He then immediately built an office, a bank building, and a store all on the north side of the railroad track. Those buildings all burned later. Soule also built the first church in the town. It is used today as a City Hall. For a time, Ingalls was the county seat of Gray County.

Although Mr. Soule built his town at the head of that Canal and managed to make it a very prosperous and lively city while the irrigation ditch was being constructed and used, it failed. It had flour mills, a cheese factory, a printing press, and hotels. Real Estate offices and other businesses thrived, and for a long time, the town was equipped with a gambling joint and other places of amusement, which usually follow new towns and successful enterprises. Old-timers say that Ingalls was somewhat lawless for a time. Through Mr. Soule's efforts, Ingalls, was for a time, the county seat of Gray County. His dream undoubtedly was to make the town the "city of the West."

The founding of the college at Dodge City was Mr. Soule's other effort to help the people of Western Kansas. It was also doomed to failure when Mr. Soule was backing it, although it later became a successful organization. It was an unsuccessful venture in Western Kansas in those early days. It would have been a great benefit to the early-day youths in Western Kansas if it had succeeded. Some of the buildings were quite magnificent for those days in the western part of Kansas, but the college seemed to be doomed. It was taken over later by the St. Mary's Catholic Church. The school has been attended by many students who are not of the Catholic faith because of the exceptional training they could receive in music.

It was a great disappointment to Mr. Soule that his enterprises did not prove to be successful. For a man who had succeeded in building up a great fortune in a business venture in the east, A. T. Soule's projected enterprises in Western Kansas were singularly unsuccessful. The great irrigation ditch he built did not irrigate long, and the town began to dwindle in size. The ditch closed in about 1892.

Later, in about 1895, two brothers from Colorado took over the old Soule Canal, and again the irrigation ditch helped to water the great Arkansas Valley. This time the Canal was called the "Eureka Irrigation Ditch." Once more, Ingalls became the headquarters for the workers on the ditch. Many of the men now living in Ingalls worked on the ditch after it was started the second time. The ditch company built a new office in Ingalls. The office land on which the office stood now belongs to Doc Barton of Ingalls.



Along the trail west of Ingalls, Kansas
To the far left of the trail is one of the Soule irrigation ditches
5 Sep 1914

For about a quarter of a century, the Great Ditch took its water from the Arkansas River in Ingalls. It flowed gradually to the uplands northeast of Cimarron, with thousands of acres of valley land under it.

Several Gray County valley farms were watered by it, and in the year 1913, about four hundred tons of alfalfa from these farms were exported to Pawnee. In one place, the Eureka Irrigation Canal irrigated alfalfa in 1914, which yielded four and one-half tons per acre in three cuttings besides the seed crop. At the average price of hay and seed that year, the crop gave a return of \$50 to \$60 per acre. This shows what well-controlled irrigation and moderately intensive farming did. Alfalfa farming under the big ditch was nearly a “sure thing” as anything possibly could be. It is said that during that time, the ditch was taken over by a New York firm.

The great Eureka Irrigation Ditch Company stopped functioning in 1921. Although they had helped the Arkansas Valley farmers a great deal, they were unable to maintain the Irrigation Ditch on a paying basis.

Parts of the old engine can still be seen in the river where the head of the irrigation ditch was located. The great wheel, ten feet in diameter, can also be seen. The old ditch itself is still plainly visible. It follows the Arkansas River most of the way, winding through the Arkansas Valley. Beginning three miles west of the town of Ingalls, the ditch passes between there and the Arkansas River. About one mile east of Ingalls on the north side of Cimarron, the old Canal can be seen from Highway U.S. 50.

The Canal ran north of the railroad siding at Sears, north of Dodge City, south of Wright Station, and south of Spearville. It ended about three miles east of Spearville. Wooden signs can still be seen along the canal. The words on them are, "The Eureka Irrigation Ditch."

Many farmers remember using water for their farms and crops from the great canal. Witt Barton, a son of Doc Barton (the first cattleman in Western Kansas), was one of the surveyors for the great irrigation ditch after it was started the second time.

The farm of Mr. and Mrs. William Robbins is located where an individual irrigating plant was used in 1914. It is located on the south side of the river and away from the irrigation ditch. It became quite an important institution.

Mrs. Robbins established a small canning factory. Her products, especially beets, and piccalilli, were in great demand, being sold by groceries all along the Santa Fe in Western Kansas. They supplied the Harvey Houses with vegetables, and the reputation of the Robbins brand spread far and wide. A large steam boiler, the same as was used in the larger canning factories, was installed. Inquiries about the canning factory were received from all over the United States.

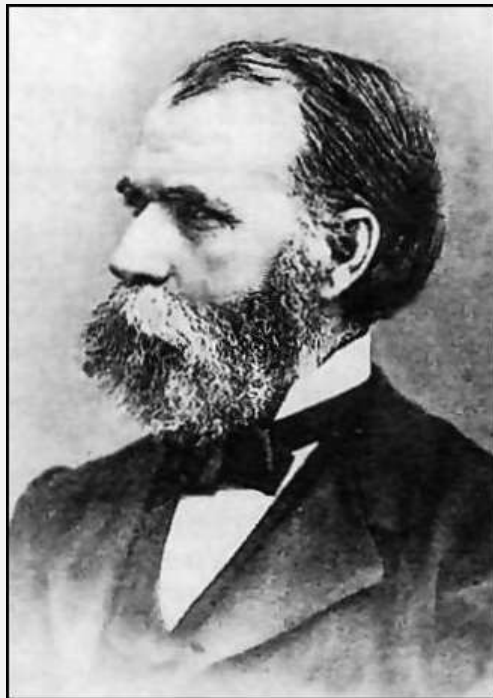
Today even though the big canal was a success and is no longer used in Gray County, there is a great deal of irrigating done nevertheless. Many farmers have their own individual irrigation plants and ditches. With these, it is possible to raise a greater quantity and quality of feed. The irrigation plants also irrigate gardens, and many housewives make their spending money on the vegetables they sell from their gardens. Sugar beets are also raised using irrigation, and they find a ready market because of the sugar factory nearby in Garden City. That factory is a blessing to many people due to its furnishing employment.

Farmers make excellent use of the river itself during flood time. Those who are fortunate enough to have row crops and other types of crops planted near the river in the Arkansas Valley dig small trenches and irrigation ditches from the river to their fields. When the river is at the flood stage, they open the trenches and ditches. They spend both day and night watering their crops while having an abundant supply of precious water to use. So while they may not have their own irrigation pumps, they know the value of irrigation and take the fullest advantage of the natural irrigation ditch and the river at every possible opportunity.

Many events have taken place in Gray County since the construction of the great canal by Mr. Soule. There have been droughts and dust storms, which have hindered progress to some extent. Perhaps if Mr. Soule had been more of a success, the prosperity and success of the people in Gray County would not have been so severely affected by the drought. Natural rainfall would have been supplemented by irrigation, and better crops would have been raised.

However, Mr. Soule played a huge part in the lives of the people in Gray County, and they owe him a great deal for his efforts toward making the Western part of Kansas a better country. It is men with their faith and forethought that have helped make Western Kansas a productive section of the country.

Additional information
ASA T. SOULE



Asa T. Soule

Rugged individualist of the eventful 1880s

His cash made the woolly west blossom

Photograph from the Hutchinson (Kansas) News – Sunday, 27 Aug 1939

Additional information found in the following:

Great Gunfighters of the Kansas Cowtown's, 1867-1886

True West Magazine, October 1957

The Democrat and Chronicle Newspaper (Rochester, New York) - 27 Jan 1879

Ingalls (Kansas) Union Newspaper - Thu, 11 Apr 1889

The Jacksonian Newspaper (Cimarron, Kansas) – 18 Oct 1889
The Globe-Republican Newspaper (Dodge City, Kansas) 22 Jan 1890
The Democrat and Chronicle Newspaper (Rochester, New York) - 25 Oct 1970
The Garden City (Kansas) Telegram Newspaper – 4 Nov 1975

ASA TITUS SOULE, son of Enos Soule and Mary Titus, was born on 2 Aug 1824 in Duanesburg, Schenectady County, New York. He married **MARILLA SOPHIA HUBBARD** in 1852. They had one son, **WILSON SOULE**, born on 4 Sep 1853 in Wayne County, New York.

Mr. Soule began his successful ventures in about 1873 when he bought out Doyle's Hop Bitters and started manufacturing the product, calling it Soule Hop Bitters, a patented medicine. Success came about six years later after working with the Hop Bitters formula, adding more alcohol and strong advertising. It was advertised as curing many diseases. In 1879, Mr. Soule was thought to be worth \$1,000,000. His next venture was to buy the Albany New York baseball team that had gone bankrupt. He bought all new uniforms, and instead of the names of the boys printed on the shirts, he had the word "Hop Bitters" printed on them. Also, the local ball field was renamed Hop Bitters Park. In 1879, Mr. Soule was arrested and admitted to sending obscene publications through the mail in the form of pamphlets. The pamphlets described a medicine designed for illicit use by women. The pamphlets contained vulgar expressions. The case was called to the United States Court in Albany. After the Judge reviewed the matter, Soule was fined \$1,000.

In about 1882, Asa Soule saw an opportunity in Southwestern Kansas to invest his money and create more success. He used his money to start the town of Ingalls and incorporated the Eureka Irrigating Canal Company, also known as the Soule Canal. The plan was to take water from the Arkansas River and use it for irrigation. Building the canal took several years and cost Mr. Soule about \$250,000. It was not a success due to the sandy soil of the area. Later in the early 1900s, a Kansas-Colorado water suit ended by allowing Colorado to take nearly all of the water out of the Arkansas River for irrigation purposes. By about 1908, the Canal was bought by a group of men from the east. They added dredges that floated on large barges to take out the sand. Different types of pumps were installed to help add water to the irrigation. Due to the sand still being the cause of seepage, the new additions were a failure, and in 1908, the Soule Canal shut down. During this time, Mr. Soule had bonded the canal for a million dollars and sold the bonds in London. It's thought that he made almost a half-million dollars.

The people of Ingalls and Dodge City had great respect for Asa Soule. He was responsible not only for the Canal that ran through Gray and Ford Counties but also for building a college in Dodge City. He named it Soule College and presented it to the Presbyterian Church. He also started the construction of the Montezuma and Trinidad Railways. Before he died, there were twenty-eight miles of track completed. He was the owner of the Dodge City Water Works and was the president and owner of the First National Bank in Dodge City. Yet others felt Asa Soule saw only an opportunity to become richer by starting the town of Ingalls. Some men had bought

cheap prairie land, platted lots and streets. They then resold them at a high profit. Part of the scheme was to make their town the county seat. So many felt Asa Soule was only out to make more money for himself.

A County Seat Dispute broke out when Asa Soule wanted to make his town of Ingalls the County seat of Gray County. Since Cimarron was already a well-established town, it was thought that the county seat should go to Cimarron. But, some say that Asa Soule did what he could to make it go to Ingalls. They also say that because of his money, he was able to hire gunmen from Dodge City to get the records in Cimarron and take them to Ingalls. They believed that he lied and cheated on most of his business dealings. He made many promises during that time to gather votes for Ingalls, but in 1887, Cimarron won the election. He then went to court, charging fraud in the election.

In January of 1889, the County Seat war began, with Ingalls believing it all happened differently than the town of Cimarron believed. The Dodge City Times Newspaper on 17 Jan 1889 presented the information that on Saturday morning, the Sheriff of Gray County, along with Fred Singer, Neal Brown, James Masterson (*younger brother to Bat Masterson*), Edward Brooks, Benjamin Daniels, and William Tilghman as deputies, went to Cimarron with a wagon, to get the county records and take to Ingalls. These men claimed to have an order from the Supreme Court. While they were getting the documents, some of the Cimarron people began firing their guns. The wagon got away with the records, but two men from Cimarron were wounded, and one was killed instantly. He was J. W. English. The Dodge City and Ingalls perspective was that the Cimarron people were to blame since the Ingalls officers were there with proper authority to take the records.

Cimarron's side of this story was presented in their Jacksonian Newspaper on 18 Jan 1889. The headlines were strong and to the point...

SAD AFFAIR!

THE STORY AS IT IS!

THE FREE SOIL OF GRAY COUNTY IS BAPTIZED WITH BLOOD!

CLOSE SHOTS!

ONE MAN KILLED AND EIGHT WOUNDED! A FEARFUL CONFLICT!

A GANG OF "TOUGHS" REMOVED THE COUNTY CLERK'S RECORDS AND ATTEMPT TO RUN THE TOWN!

The people of Cimarron saw ten to twelve men concealed in the bottom of a wagon arrive on Main Street at about 11:30 a.m. on Saturday. The men went upstairs to the Clerk's office and commanded A. T. Riley to throw up his hands while they began carrying the records downstairs

to the wagon. They kept a gun on him, and the men outside kept anyone from going near the wagon by opening fire on the citizens of Cimarron. The wagon got away and reached Ingalls safely. But the town of Cimarron discovered that during the battle, which lasted only about ten minutes, had killed one of their citizens, J. W. English. The governor of Kansas sent state militia to maintain order in Gray County. The hatred and bitterness continued, but there was no further bloodshed. Asa Soule had his court records, and Ingalls was the county seat. Soon after the County War, he went back to New York due to illness and died in January 1890.

The town of Dodge City felt they had lost a friend when he died. They felt Dodge City could not have made the advancement they made without his keen and first-class business abilities. Yet, there were conflicting thoughts about Asa Soule's business ventures throughout his life. His newspaper obituary shows a man wanting to help others. Still, other articles written throughout the years reveal the reasons for his business ventures were merely for high profit and for his name to be known. Either way, because of him, progress was made.

The U.S. City Directory for Rochester, Monroe County, New York, reveals Asa Soule died there on 17 Jan 1890. His wife, Marilla, died after his passing, but the date could not be found. The 1895 Dodge City Globe-Republican newspaper shows she bought out the other owner's share of the Electric Light Plant and Water Works in Dodge City, Kansas.

Asa Soule was buried at the Butler-Savannah Cemetery in Savannah, Wayne County, New York.

In 1893, another election was held, and Cimarron was returned to what they felt was their rightful place as County Seat.

NEWSPAPER OBITUARY

The Democrat and Chronicle (Rochester, New York) – Saturday, 18 Jan 1890

DEATH OF ASA T. SOULE

A PROMINENT BUSINESSMAN AMONG THE DEPARTED

SKETCH OF A VARIED CAREER

A SELF-MADE MAN IN EVERY WAY... HIS MODES OF ADVERTISING, SUCCESS WITH HOP BITTERS, AND INVESTMENTS IN THE WESTERN LANDS

Asa T. Soule died at the family residence, No. 155 Lake Avenue, at 8:15 last evening after an illness of three weeks. While sitting in his office on the afternoon of December 26th, Mr. Soule was seized with an attack of "La Grippe" and was immediately taken home in his carriage. He had been afflicted with acute stomach trouble for nearly ten years and, during the latter part of his life, had existed entirely upon liquid food. Utilizing an otherwise robust constitution, however, he had been enabled to transact his business affairs, and few of his most intimate

friends knew of his physical infirmity. His weakened condition made him easy prey to the epidemic, and from the first, the disease baffled the efforts of his physicians. Mr. Soule fought his sickness with outstanding tenacity and, on Thursday, showed symptoms of improvement. He failed rapidly yesterday but was conscious until a few moments before the time of his death, recognizing the different members of his family who stood at his bedside.

Mr. Soule's death closed one of the most energetic and active careers that have ever been associated with the business interests of Rochester. With tireless energy and remarkable perseverance, he had probably piloted to success more important enterprises than often fall to many business people.

Mr. Soule was sixty-five years old. He was born in Duanesburg, Schenectady County, and was the third of eleven children. His father, Enos Soule, was a prominent Quaker, and his ancestors were among the most active of the early pioneers. From this sturdy family stock, Mr. Soule inherited, as stated, a strong and vigorous constitution and keen business instincts. His father moved to Onondaga County when he was a mere child and a few years later located on a farm near Savannah, Wayne County, which has since been the family homestead. Much of the land in this vicinity had been occupied by the descendants of soldiers who had received grants from the government. Numerous litigations were constantly resulting from alleged trespasses and quarrels concerning the property titles. The elder Soule never allowed himself to be a party to any legal dispute and, as a result, often suffered at the hands of unscrupulous neighbors. Mr. Soule was educated at the village school in Savannah, but when still a young man, he obtained control of a patent medicine, which proved an excellent investment. For several years he was also interested in several small patents, and later he engaged with Alexander Pomeroy, of this city, in the manufacture of county maps throughout New Jersey. By this time, Mr. Soule had begun to acquire a substantial income from these various investments. He added an interest in several mineral springs in Michigan, becoming famous for their healing properties.

In 1872 the deceased was offered an interest in the Hop Bitters Company, then situated at Canandaigua. He finally purchased a controlling share in the business, and in 1873 the company was removed to Rochester. His unique and expensive methods of advertising his medicine soon made it famous throughout the country. He possessed a surprising knowledge of the English language and was the author of nearly all his early advertisements. One of his original schemes was the use of small United States flags bearing the legend, "Hop Bitters." In 1878 he conceived the idea of using the boat racing craze, then at its height, as an advertising medium. Courtney and Halon rowed their famous race at Lachine in October of that year with the support of the Hop Bitters Company. It was followed the next year by a regatta on the Potomac and later by the famous fiasco of Courtney and Halon at Chautauqua Lake. Not satisfied with these, Mr. Soule instituted a regatta on Parramatta Bay in Sydney, Australia, which spread his bitters' fame throughout that country.

This period was the turning point in the success of the Hop Bitters Company, and the fortune

that had been expended in advertising began to bear fruit. Mr. Soule's next project was a 'ball nine' that traveled throughout the country in the company's interest. In 1880, the business was extended to Toronto, Canada, and branch houses were also established in England, France, and Belgium. A year later, the Australian branch was started in Sydney.

When the prosperity of the Hop Bitters became assured, Mr. Soule turned his attention to other investments. He was one of the leaders in the development of Southwestern Kansas and furnished the capital for the construction of an extensive branch of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railways. He also acquired large tracts of land in that section of the state and was one of the founders of Ingalls. He also established a national bank at Dodge City and private banks at Ingalls and Spearville. He gave \$50,000 towards the founding of Soule College at Dodge City and endowed that institution with several thousand acres of valuable land in the vicinity. He also engaged in constructing an irrigating canal about seventy-five miles in length, through Western Kansas, which proved a profitable investment. In addition, he was an extensive real estate owner in this city and was largely instrumental in the growth of the seventh ward, where he invested heavily. At the time of his death, he was president of the Hop Bitters Company and the Electric Railway Company, as well as a director of several banks.

Mr. Soule was known as a man of strict integrity and exacting business habits. He was thoroughly conversant with the laws and terms of business. Several years ago, when the Clark heirs were making efforts to recover possession of large tracts of land on Coney Island, Mr. Soule drew up a contract for them which Judge Dexter, of Elmira, pronounced one of the best that he had ever seen. Mr. Soule led a quiet yet pretentious life, and while declared a careful financier gave liberally to many charities without the knowledge of many of his fellows. He left a wife and one son. The funeral arrangements have not been completed.