

THE OLD BREWERY

By Tillie Hebrank Rochat
(a granddaughter of F. X. Hebrank)

Francis Xavier Hebrank came from Germany in 1848 to escape being conscripted into the army. He became a naturalized citizen in Tennessee in 1853 and moved to Council Grove, Kansas, in 1863 or early 1864.

The old brewery, one of the three oldest stone houses in Morris County, and one of the oldest breweries in Kansas, was built in 1864 beside a large oak tree.

This large oak served as a sort of post office for wagon trains and hardy individuals traveling the old Santa Fe Trail, hence the name which it now carries, "Post-Office Oak." (This was the first unofficial post office for mail exchange between Westport and Santa Fe. The tree, which has an opening in the roots where mail was protected from the weather, later was used by sweethearts to leave messages for each other.)

The lumber needed for the construction of the building and the huge beer vats were hauled from Leavenworth. The vats were at least six feet high and nine feet in circumference.

The basement of the building contained a large well and a huge underground storage room that had a cave-like outside entrance. During the Cheyenne Indian raid, the Cheyenne's surrounded the building and asked for water and something to eat. Mrs. Mike (Mary Louise) Metzger, the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. F. X. Hebrank, met the braves and for an hour drew water from the well in the basement to give to the Indians. During this time the other women and frightened children remained upstairs. No one was molested.

Near the basement there was a large cave used for storing beer. A tunnel connected the brewery and cave so that the family might take refuge in the cave in the event of an Indian raid. This tunnel was closed later and the cave used only for storage.

About 1870 F. X., the father, and his two sons, Eugene Francis and Otto, homesteaded farms northeast of Council Grove, and the basement of the Old Brewery was used for storing potatoes and other produce from the farm. I can recall that when I was a youngster the building was used as a laundry by some Negroes from the South. I also recall the cave was used by Edmund's Cheese Factory and remember long tables with rind of cheese on them.

F. X. Hebrank died in 1900 and the Old Brewery was inherited by his daughter Mary who lived there until her death in 1925. It was subsequently sold to Will Young, and his wife still owns (1975) the property. Mr Young did rather extensive remodeling, replacing the wooden porch and steps with stone, and making apartments in the building.

During Mrs. Metzger's lifetime (and while I was growing up), the families often gathered there-- especially at Christmas time. There were some 20 grandchildren, including the following who are still (1975) living in Council Grove: Mrs. Phil Bolton (Gladys Metzger), Mrs. Clarence Kirkpatrick (Mildred Metzger), Mrs. Glen Schoof (Louise McCardell), Marry McCardell, and Mrs. Lindsay Rochat (Tillie Hebrank).

During the 1903 Flood, water covered the porch and was about a foot deep on the first floor of the home. Mr. Metzger had taken his cow over to the East Side to get it out of the flood. In the meantime, Mrs. Metzger and a granddaughter (Iva Mullen) were upstairs ready to climb out the dormer window onto a limb of the big oak tree, in case of danger.

The Old Brewery holds many pleasant memories for me.