

FORSYTH SCOUT - BEECHER ISLAND

Newsletter # 4, May 2008

I hope everyone received their # 3, April newsletter. I had a problem with the group e-mail only sending the letter to some people. Some of you probably received at least two copies as I tried to get it re-sent.

Any comments on the pdf format that the last letter was sent in?

I should have included this link on the last newsletter, as it has photos and other links to the Beecher Island monument. About half way down the page are links to the memorial stones around the large monument to Beecher, Mooers, Culver, Farley and Wilson.

<http://www.usgarchives.org/co/yuma/costones/beecher.htm>

I should have also included a link to General P. H. Sheridan, who authorized the formation of the Forsyth Scouts. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=949>



Calendar

Fort Harker Days will be coming up in July at Kanopolis, Kansas. This is where the Scouts left from on their expedition that would make them famous. Jim Gray, The Cowboy, at Drovers Mercantile in Ellsworth, Kansas, can provide details. He can be contacted at www.droversmercantile.com or kansascowboy@kans.com, or 785-472-4703

In September, the 109th **Beecher Island Reunion** will be held at the battleground near Wray, Colorado on September 13 & 14, 2008. For contact information check here: http://www.wrayco.net/museum_beecher.html;

If anyone has an event that you would like to have included in the newsletter, please feel free to submit it to me. It should have some historical tie to the Scouts, Beecher Island or Great Plains Indian Wars or settlement of the mid-west.



The following article was provided for your reading pleasure by Mike Nelson, formerly of Tescott, Kansas, home of some of the Forsyth Scouts, and a distant relative of Scouts Andrew J. Eutsler and Chalmers Smith. Thank you Mike!

THE BATTLE OF BEECHER ISLAND: THE WEAPONS

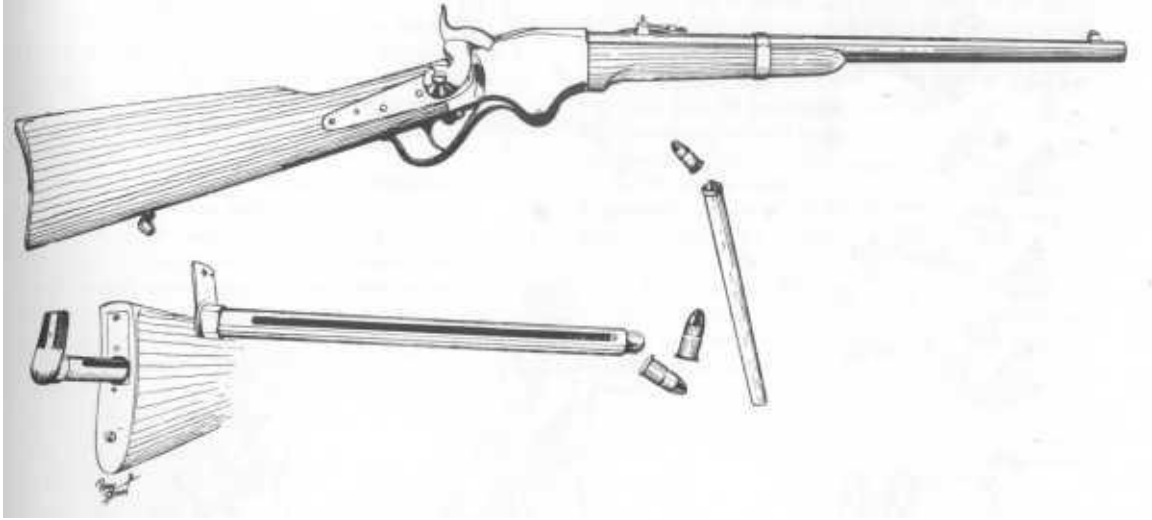
THE BATTLE OF BEECHER ISLAND: THE WEAPONS

Mike Nelson, Colorado Springs (csrockguy@yahoo.com)

As we were dressed and our revolvers and cartridge boxes buckled on and our carbines lying by our sides we were ready for action (Scout Eli Ziegler describing the action at the Battle of Beecher Island)[1]. So, what were the revolvers and carbines used by Forsyth and the Scouts? In *Thrilling Days in Army Life* [2] Major Forsyth described the U. S. Cavalry's issue of arms as *a Spencer repeating rifle (carrying six shots in the magazine, besides the one in the barrel), a Colt's revolver, army size, and 140 rounds of rifle and 30 rounds of revolver ammunition per man—this carried on the person. The pack train of four mules carried 4000 extra rounds of ammunition.*

The Spencer repeating rifle was first used by the U. S. military in 1863 and was one of the first rifles to employ a copper rimfire cartridge. These early Spencers (Military-1863 or M-1863), used in the Civil War, were chambered for the 56-56 cartridge (early designations referred to the diameter of the case at the head and at the mouth; the actual caliber was .52) and had a profound effect on battles and perhaps helped the Union forces to several victories (such as Hoover's Gap, Tennessee). After the conclusion of the War the Spencer Military-1865 (M-1865) was the standard carbine issued to the U.S. Cavalry in the west (and continued as such until about 1873 when it was replaced by the Springfield Model 1873 chambered for a .45-50 caliber cartridge). The new Spencer had a reduced cartridge size (down to .50 caliber), a reduced barrel length (20 inches from 22 inches) and was chambered for a 56-50 cartridge (about 45 grains of black powder and a 370 grain bullet). The Smithsonian Institution [3], in describing the carbine, noted that its butt-fed magazine held seven metallic rimfire cartridges (note that Forsyth incorrectly said the magazine held six cartridges) that were fed to the breech by a compressed spring. When the lever-action (trigger guard) was operated the breechblock dropped down and the cartridge case was ejected. As the trigger guard moved back into position it grabbed a fresh cartridge and inserted it into the breech. The Spencer then had to be manually cocked and the copper casings were sometimes prone to jamming (due to black powder residue). A soldier could reload by dropping individual cartridges into the butt, or could use a pre-loaded tube held in a Blakeslee Cartridge Box. I am uncertain if the Scouts had access to the Blakeslees.

A general consensus among Spencer aficionados is that a good soldier could fire, if needed, up to 30 rounds per minute with a maximum effective range between 200-500 yards. In contrast, the older muzzleloaders could be fired at perhaps 3 rounds per minute. The Spencer Arms Company of Windsor, CT manufactured the Spencers.



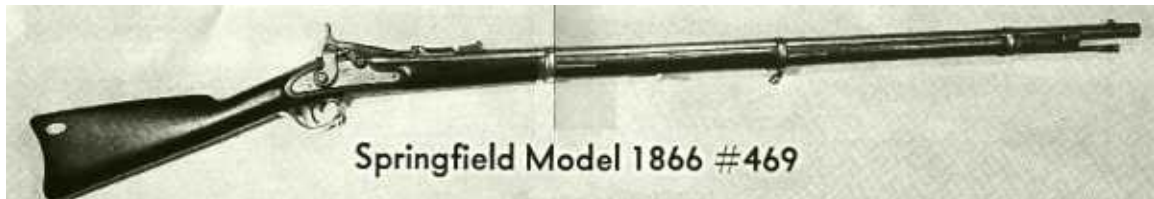
U.S. National Park Service illustration [4]: Spencer Carbine Model 1865 showing butt magazine.



Smithsonian Institution illustration [5]: Blakeslee Cartridge Box

Major Forsyth [2] also noted that *we had in our command three Springfield breech-loading rifles which I knew would carry several hundred yards farther than our Spencer rifles. I accordingly directed that the men using these guns should sight them at their limit—1200 yards* (although 600 yards was probably more realistic in most cases). These weapons

essentially were “sniping rifles” and most likely were used to shoot at targets that were out of range for the Spencers. I believe the Springfields were the Model 1866, a retooled Model 1863 rifled musket chambered for a .50/70 metallic cartridge. The Springfield Armory (home of Erskin Allin, the inventor of the trapdoor conversion) converted several thousand of these .58 caliber 1863 muskets (by brazing a sleeve in the bore and installing the trap door breech system) to .50 caliber breech loading cartridge rifles (450 grain bullet with 70 grains of black powder, considerably larger and more powerful than the Spencers). The rifle was a “single shot” model and trained soldiers could fire about 13 rounds per minute. My guess is that Scout Hutch Farley maintained one of the Springfields since Forsyth [2] noted that he was one of the two best shots in the troop (his father Lewis Farley being the other). In addition, Scout Murphy [6] noted that Scout Farley (probably Hutch as Lewis was mortally wounded) gave a group of Cheyennes (on a ridge about a mile away) a parting shot and that his “aim was true even at that range”. That distance, about 1760 yards, certainly was beyond the “normal maximum range of 1200 yards”.



U.S. National Park Service illustration [7]: Springfield Model 1866, Second Allin Conversion

There must have been other personal rifles with the Scouts since Scout Peate [8] noted that Scout Pierre Trudeau broke the leg of an Indian at a range of half a mile (880 yards) with a Henry rifle. The addition of a second long gun would not be unusual since the Scouts were frontiersmen and usually carried a number, and variety, of weapons. The Henry most likely was a lever action, .44 caliber rifle shooting rimfired metal cartridges loaded with about 28 grains of black powder and a 210-grain bullet. The breech loading, 15 rounds in the magazine under the barrel Henry had a fearsome reputation in the west and were favored, over the Spencers, by a large number of former Civil War soldiers. The Henry and the Spencer were extremely innovative weapons (rapid firing) and probably changed the course of history, especially in the frontier west.



Rare Winchester Society photograph [9]: Traditional Henry rifle Model 1866.

Forsyth [2] stated that each Scout was also armed with a “Colt’s revolver, army size”. Scouts most likely carried a New Army Model in .44 caliber (M-1860 Army). The

original models were introduced in 1860 and were single action percussion revolvers using about 35 grains of black powder and a .44 caliber ball or bullet. They were manufactured with an eight-inch barrel. Since these were percussion revolvers, the caps, powder, and balls had to be individually loaded into the cylinders although some pieces used paper or linen cartridges. Whatever the use, this loading action demanded a substantial time commitment. The first Colt revolvers to use self-contained metal cartridges were not manufactured until 1872, well after the Beecher Island Battle. However, in the years just prior to the issue of this new revolver, thousands of percussive Colts were converted to use a front-loaded, center-fired cartridge [10]. I have no proof that any of the Scouts carried the modified .45-caliber Army revolver; perhaps all carried the standard issue .44-caliber percussion sidearm as Scout Murphy: "I myself had ... a Colt .44 pistol" [6]. In addition, it appears that some Scouts packed along personal side arms since Scout Murphy noted that "each man ... carried a revolver, and in some instances, two". One can only assume that the "extra" revolvers were non-Army issues but most likely shot a .44 caliber ball or Minie ball (to take advantage of the Army's ammunition).



U.S. National Park Service photograph [11]: Colt Army revolver M-1860

I have found at least one reference to mountain howitzers traveling with Captain Louis Carpenter and elements of the 10th Cavalry when they reached Forsyth's command on Beecher Island [12]. However, that may be erroneous since Carpenter [14] noted that his entourage consisted of thirteen wagons carrying forage, rations, ammunition and tentage; there was no mention of howitzers. And, in a letter delivered to Carpenter on the trail (dated September 22, 1868) from the command at Fort Wallace, the Acting Post Adjutant stated *Captain Bankhead will leave here in one hour with one hundred men and two mountain howitzers* [13]. Therefore, it appears that Bankhead, who arrived at Beecher Island later than Carpenter, had the artillery. In fact, these heavy guns may have slowed down Bankhead's advance to the Battle.

There are several different "weights" of these guns and I can only guess they were 12 pounders Model 1835, the "standard Army issue" for in 1872 the only artillery weapons stationed at Fort Wallace were five 12 pounders. These howitzers, constructed with a brass tube (4.62" bore), were mounted on a single axel two-wheeled carriage and usually pulled by a single mule. However, the howitzer could be broken down and carried on three or four mules. They fired a hollow projectile that was filled with grapeshot, musket balls, or black powder. The projectiles were fitted with a fuse that was trimmed off at range marks before loading, and were ignited by the main charge on firing. The howitzers evidently were accurate for Theodore Talbot of the Second Fremont Expedition (1843-44) stated [14] *our cannonnier was very successful in his practice with the howitzer, striking a*

post 4 feet high at nearly a quarter of a mile with a bomb [shell]. Bankhead's howitzers were not fired in the relief of Beecher Island.



U.S. National Park Service photograph [15]: 12-Pound Mountain Howitzer

I am uncertain about the exact weapons used by the Cheyennes at the Battle. Most likely they were a combination of percussion rifles shooting both round balls and Minie balls, perhaps some retrofitted Springfield cartridge rifles, Henry and Spencer cartridge rifles, percussion revolvers, and hand weapons. Forsyth [2] noted that Roman Nose led the charge *twirling his heavy Springfield... (probably one of those he captured at the Fort Phil Kearney massacre [the Fetterman Massacre])*. Evidence seems to point toward Roman Nose's participation in the 1866 Fetterman fight and accounts indicate the victors picked up numerous weapons. Of Fetterman's 80 men, 49 (the infantrymen) were armed with Springfield percussion rifles, two (the civilian scouts) had 16-shot repeating rifles, and 29 (the cavalymen) were armed with the Spencers. However, I am uncertain about: 1) how the arms were divided between the 2000 Northern Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Sioux participants; and 2) the composition of the Indian warriors at Beecher Island and if they participated in the earlier Fetterman fight. At any rate, there must also have been Henrys and Spencers at Beecher Island since Forsyth [2] noted the Indians had *the Springfield breech-loaders they had captured at Fort Phil Kearny ...as well as Henry, Remington, and Spencer rifles*. Custer [16] stated that *the warriors were armed with the best quality of guns, many of them having the latest pattern breech loaders with fixed ammunition (as proof of this many thousand empty shells of Spencer and Henry rifle ammunition were found on the ground occupied by the Indians after the fight)*. Theodore Davis [17], a reporter for Harper's New Monthly Magazine traveling with Hancock near Fort Larned in spring 1867, reported that Roman Nose of the Dog Soldiers had a Spencer carbine hanging from the side of his pony, four heavy revolvers (probably Navy according to Surgeon Isaac Coates [18]) and a bow and numerous arrows. James Dixon [19], an officer with Hancock, described the Dog Soldiers accompanying Roman Nose as *having bows and arrows (steel pointed and barbed tips), a breech loading rifle, one or more large size Colt revolvers, a tomahawk, a scalping knife, and various other hand weapons of war*. I would think that Roman Nose would have retained his repeating Spencer rather than switching to a single shot, probably percussive, Springfield (as described by Forsyth). And, one must not discount the bows and arrows for McCune and Hart [20] stated that during the 45 minute Fetterman fight approximately 40,000 arrows were fired! At any rate, the Cheyennes, especially individual warriors, may have suffered from a lack of sufficient and/or correctly-sized ammunition, powder, and lead. James Peate [8] noted

that one of the Indians fired five shots from a Colt Navy revolver at them (the relief column heading back to Fort Wallace) before the piece jammed and the young warrior was killed by the Scouts/soldiers. In examining the revolver they found [8] *that the cylinder would not revolve, and the cause was a bullet from a revolver the same size in the hand of Jack Donovan going into the barrel of the Indian's revolver and about half of it passing into the cylinder, thereby stopping its revolving and the Indian could not fire his last load.* The reason for this jamming is that the Colt Navy was a .36 caliber weapon. The type used by Jack Donovan was an Army issued .44-caliber revolver. The larger caliber projectile of Colt Army could not fit into the chamber of the Colt Navy.

Originally, I thought the Indian warriors might have used a preponderance of percussion weapons. I based this supposition about the arms on the following accounts: 1) Jenness [21] stated in the August 1867 Beaver Creek Battle the Indians *were promiscuously armed with Springfield and Mississippi rifles, shotguns, and bows and arrows;* 2) Jenness [20] described the wounds of Pliley and Towell at Beaver Creek as coming from balls; 3) Stanley [22] writing about Medicine Lodge in 1867 said the Indians received *a pile of revolvers, caps...and ammunition;* 4) many of the metallic artifacts recovered from the Summit Springs Battle site [July 1869] were balls, Minie balls, and percussion cap boxes [23]; 5) a lack of cartridges found by metal detector enthusiasts in the ravines and hills surrounding the battle site; 6) a band of Cheyennes led by Turkey Leg, armed mostly with bows and lances, engaged Major Frank North near Plum Creek in late summer 1867; and 7) Forsyth's leg wound was caused by a Minie ball [16]. Since my original draft was constructed, I found out that: 1) Jeff Broome had correctly located the Beecher Island Battle site approximately four miles from where the detectorists had been searching; that fact would account for the lack of cartridges; 2) the term ball, as used by Jenness, may be generic and refer to any flying lead object; 3) traders selling \$15 Spencers to the Cheyennes were probably active in 1867-68. And, perhaps most importantly, one should only present the facts as known; therefore, I have chosen not to challenge the current dogma of a group of warriors armed with the latest edition of repeating rifles. I do, however, continue to have questions.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this entire discussion on weapons is that the Scouts were very disciplined, were experienced frontiersmen, and had the newest repeating rifles. These Spencer repeating rifles were capable of stopping frontal charges that seemed to be the standard military tactics of the day. That aspect, plus the death of Roman Nose in the heat of the battle, secured Beecher Island until the arrival of a relief force.



Smithsonian Institution photograph [24]: Colt M-1861 Navy revolver (non-conversion). This article was greatly improved by conversations with Jeff Broome and Bill Davis.

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On page 147, about 1/3 of the way down in Orvel Criqui's "Fifty Fearless Men", he quotes a April 8, 1907 letter from Louis McLoughlin/ McLaughlin/ Elijah Gilbert to George Martin, then the Kansas State Historical Society President. It states "I expect to bring up and donate to the society the gun I had on the Arickaree."

I recently wrote to the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka, Kansas, asking if they still had the rifle. I received the following response:

Good morning!

I'm responding to your e-mail question that came into the Kansas Museum address, regarding a gun that Louis McLaughlin supposedly offered to the Historical Society.

Indeed, McLaughlin (our records also show the spelling "McLoughlin,") presented the gun to the KSHS in 1907. But rather than a Spencer, the rifle is a Henry. Not only is it still in the possession of the Historical Society, but it is on exhibit in the Main Gallery of the Museum. What I don't have readily available is any markings and the serial number.

As for other artifacts, there are the remains of the two Colt revolvers you have seen on our website. (<http://www.kshs.org/cool3/sparks.htm>)

There is a saber that came to us in 1923 from Forsyth's estate, among with other items related to his military career. The saber is identified as having been with Forsyth at Beecher's Island, and is the only item in the accession that has that claim. It, too, is on exhibit in the Main Gallery.

I hope this is of some use to you.

*Sincerely,
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Jack Peate's Henry rifle it is also still around too, but was not at the battle. Here is an article about it.

Lincoln Sentinel
Lincoln Kansas
Thursday, July 21, 1932

A Fine Old Gun

Jack Peate's Rifle, a Henry Repeater now owned by S. C. Page

An old 1860 model Henry lever-action repeating rifle, owned by Jack Peate from about 1867 until the time of his death about a month ago, is now in possession of Mr. Peate's nephew, S. C. Page, of Lincoln.

The gun resembling the modern lever-action carbine in shape, shoots a rimfire cartridge of about 45 caliber, shaped like a pistol cartridge.

The breech of the old rifle is of solid brass, and in the stock is a chamber for carrying the jointed cleaning rod.

The rifle is in fine condition, considering the age, the shoulder strap still being on it and most of the original polish still on the stock.

Another very interesting relic Mr. Page now has is the silver finger ring which was taken from Roman Nose, the Cheyenne Chief, after he was killed at the battle of Beecher's Island.

The ring is somewhat crudely made in the fashion of a signet ring, and is of unusually small size for a man's ring although Mr. Peate wore it for over forty years.



Some time back I ran across an article that stated that Lt. Beecher's Henry rifle was brought back from the battle and it was in a museum, somewhere. I failed to bookmark or make a note of this article. Has anyone ran across this article, or does anyone know where Beecher's Henry rifle is? If you do, please let me know.

In the Beecher Island Annual, Peate says on the way back to Fort Wallace, about a day south of the battleground they observed three horses, and as they approached four Indians jumped up from the ground and three mounted the horses and one ran on foot. After a

chase a shot was fired, breaking the Indian's leg. The shot is credited to Pierre Trudeau who was also carrying a Henry rifle. (Trudeau had gone with Scout Stilwell, for relief at Fort Wallace, and returned to the island with the relief).

There are apparently few documented arms that were in the Beecher Island battle. If the Spencer carbines and Colt revolvers were "issued" by the army, were they then turned back to the armory at the end of the Scout's employment with the government and the Henry and Springfield rifles, personal arms?

This and That

On another note, according to their website, Orvel Criqui's "**Fifty Fearless Men**" is again available from the **Fort Wallace Museum**, Wallace, Kansas. It is a hard back for \$50.00 plus \$2.50 shipping. A very good deal. <http://www.ftwallace.com/Shop.html> If you have not read this book, it is very much worth your time. It contains a biography, some long and some short depending on available information, on each of the fifty scouts that fought at Beecher Island. A great research tool, in my opinion.

From the Fort Wallace site: "**Fifty Fearless Men--By Orvel A. Criqui**---This is the first collection of short biographies of Major Forsyth, Lieutenant Frederick H. Beecher, and fifty-three of their scouts to be published. Each biography honors a scout and represents extensive research. Each biography is a story in itself, but together they present extensive records and accounts of Fort Wallace, the Battle of Beecher Island, the Beecher Island Memorial Association, the development of frontier Kansas, and interwoven throughout is a unique social history of the time. 334 pages. HARDBACK"



In the first newsletter, I made a comment about how long it would have taken to send out the original field and newspaper reports of the Beecher Island fight by telegraph, in Morse Code. Reader Gary Bathurst sent a comment about his experience as a military telegraph operator. "The range of proficiency would likely be somewhere between 15 and 25 words per minute, depending on the operator. At 15 wpm, it would take an operator 20 minutes to send a standard page of 300 words. A benchmark that most people never met was 30 wpm." Thank You, Gary!



In the first newsletter I stated that I had read somewhere that General Custer had said that the Battle of Beecher Island was the greatest Battle ever fought on the plains. Custer author and reader, Jeff Broome sent the following:

"Your remembering that Custer wrote positively about Beecher Island is correct. He devoted Chapter 10 of his 1874 book, *My Life on the Plains* (from earlier monthly installments to *Galaxy Magazine* in 1873) to describing in remarkable detail the Beecher Island battle. Knowing the facts as well as we do today he was amazingly accurate, and worth reading today. In the last paragraph of Chapter 10

he says this: "... this fight was one of the most remarkable and at the same time successful contests in which our forces on the plains have ever been engaged; and the whole affair, from the moment the first shot was fired until the beleaguered party was finally relieved by Colonel Carpenter's command, was a wonderful exhibition of daring courage, stubborn bravery, and heroic endurance, under circumstances of greatest peril and exposure." Thanks Jeff!

The complete book is on-line here: <http://www.kancoll.org/books/custerg>;



It has been a busy month, and I am late in sending out the Newsletter, so I close for now, and get it on it's way.

So, all for this month.

Happy Trails, until next month.

Mike

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Readers

Mike Nelson, historian and related to Scouts Eutsler and Smith
Chris Bernard, descendant of Scout George B. Clark
Sam Geonetta, descendant of Scout George B. Clark
Mrs. Arliene Matthews, Tescott, KS museum
Madrene White, descendant of Scout Charles C. Piatt
Dr. Jeff Broome, western historian & author
Donna Tauber, Farley family historian
Donna Watters, descendant of Scout Thomas Alderdice's step-son Willis Daily
Jim Grey, Drovers Mercantile, Ellsworth, KS - historian
Gary Bathurst, historian, descendant from Alverson -Alderdice -Zigler line
Ginny Kane, descendant of the D.C. Skinner was with Peate in the relief
Jack Neely, descendant of Scout Allison Pliley
Jean Roen; Tucker family historian
Judy Lilly, historian, Campbell Room, Salina, KS Public Library
Vic & Kelly (Tucker) McCallay, descendant of Scout Henry Tucker
Kerry and Jane Petersen, descendant of Scout Howard Morton
Mary Smith, descendant, by marriage of Scout Chalmers Smith
Noel Bourasaw, historian, Sedro Woolley, WA, later home of Scouts Green & Farley
Orvel Criqui, author & historical researcher "The old Scout on the Kaw".
Sarah Ingram, Zeigler (Zigler) and Norton family historian
Sherry Witt, Herington family historian, cousin of Scout Frank Herington
The Glenn's, Beecher Island historians
Tracee Hamilton, Lincoln county, Kansas historian
Marilyn Helmer, Village Lines, Lincoln, KS & local historian
Wendy Ratnavale, descendant of Scout Sigmund Shlesinger
John Greenwald, descendant of Scout Sigmund Shlesinger
Kathy Atkins, Jewell County, KS, historian - researching Scout Vilott
Linda Olds, researching Scout George Green
Patsy Vinson, Scout Allison Pliley, researcher & cousin
Gill Donovan, cousin of Scout John "Jack" Donovan
Bill Anderson, descendant of Scout Chauncey Whitney
Bill Sutton, descendant of Scout Chauncey Whitney
Tod Sutton, descendant of Scout Chauncey Whitney
Bill Davis, western history researcher
Jim Sechrist, descendant of Christian Bernhardt, writer of the 1910, "Indian Raids in Lincoln County."
Bernard Kitt. Great grandson of Scout John Donovan
Larry Shirkey, historical researcher
Charlene Hagus, great granddaughter of Scout John Donovan
Dorothy and Ted Kitt, great grandson of Scout John Donovan
Jerry Mitchell, western history enthusiast
Chris Horn, western history enthusiast and former Civil War and frontier re-enactor
James Shaw, his great grandmother was Mary Isabella Beecher, sister of Lt. Beecher.

Leo Oliva, historian & author
Kathy Lupfer-Nielsen, Lincoln County Historical Society
Marge & Alfred Aufdemberge, Lincoln County Historical Society
Richard & Brenda Peterson, Lincoln County Historical Society
Jack & Kathie Crispin, Lincoln County Historical Society
Kerry Isbell, Lincoln County Historical Society
Leigh Geyer (great, great neice of Tom Boyle), Lincoln County Historical Society
Pam Morgan, Lincoln County Historical Society
Fort Wallace Museum
John Baetz, editor, Lincoln Sentinel-Republican, Lincoln, Kansas
Vic McCallay, Hammon, OK History Teacher
Cody Wolting, Historian
Mike Baughn, Historian
Patrick Sullivan, descendant of Scout George B. Clark
Patrick Bernard Kitt & Family, descendants of Scout John Donovan
Bridget Kathryn (Kitt) Parsh & Family, descendants of Scout John Donovan
Les Richards,
Lori Graff, descendant of Scout Tom Boyle
Diane Stump, interested reader
Terry Kruse, Field Explorer of Lincoln History,
Ricci Flaherty, Great, Great Niece of Mrs. J. J. Peate,
Gene Bird, Lincoln County Historian,
Dennis Clark, Researcher
Jeanette Lyon, descendant of George Weichell, victim of 1869 Spillman Creek Raid.
Arlie Parrish, interested reader