

## A HISTORY of the MCMINIMY RANCH at SITKA, KANSAS

By Eldora McMinimy

The McMinimy Ranch just south of Sitka, Kansas, in Clark County officially originated in 1893 when William Alexander McMinimy purchased the southeast quarter of Section 19, Township 33, Range 21 from a man named Fred Charles. This piece of land was one mile south of Sitka but because a local creek, Day Creek, meandered into the quarter from the northwest corner and continued to wander a little east of south it prevented the road from going straight south. The house and other buildings were on the southern border of that quarter but were on the east side of Day Creek almost an eighth of a mile from of the west boundary of the quarter section.

William Alexander McMinimy, born August 14, 1866, was 18 years old when he came with his family from Arkansas arriving June 6, 1885. Will's father, William Wesley McMinimy, had come to Clark County in the fall of 1884 to pre-empt land that is now on Highway 160 east of Ashland close to the county line between Clark and Comanche. Availability of land was probably one reason that they came to Clark County; another reason may have been that William Wesley McMinimy served in the Union Army during the Civil War which may have caused some tension between his family and people in Arkansas where they were living.

Pre-emption was the term used for acquiring land from the "Osage Trust and Diminished Reserve Lands" which included most of Clark County and all of Sitka Township. The land had never become an Indian Reservation but the proceeds of any sale of pre-emption lands went to the Osage Indians. The pre-emption laws for the Osage Trust lands restricted each adult in a family to acquiring 160 acres. The purchase price, usually \$1.25 per acre could be paid off in four payments and the pre-emptor had to live on the land for at least six months. (There are similarities to "Homesteading" so many assume the land was homesteaded but it technically was not.)

Since William Alexander McMinimy was not yet of adult age he was not allowed to pre-empt; he purchased his first quarter of land later. Meanwhile he worked for his father. One of Will's children, Mabel (McMinimy) Schram, recalled: "Will worked with his father and raised 3,000 bushels of wheat one year. With the money this wheat brought they bought cattle. This was how Will got his start. He also helped build railroad track." Another of William Wesley's children. Will's younger brother, Tom McMinimy, recalled: "I think it was 1891 or 1892 that we raised a big wheat crop. We had 3112 ½ bushels and that was a big crop at that time. For years after that everything was dated from the year that old man McMinimy raised that big wheat crop. We plowed all that summer with four good mules and a gang plow, put out 200 acres of wheat and got nothing the next harvest." Thus, the young William A. McMinimy was learning about farming in southwest Kansas and developing a good work ethic after his arrival in Clark County.

Other early settlers came to acquire land. The Kansas State Board of Agriculture in their 1889 Biennial Report gave the population of Sitka Township as 275 in 1888. That seems to have been the highest population for that century, by 1894 it was 132—over one-half of the people had left. The exodus was due to several factors including the challenges of coping with settling in an area quite unlike where they had previously lived—a treeless prairie with limited rainfall. Precipitation in 1890, 1893 and 1894 was less than 13" each year. Someone planning to stay who had worked hard and saved

money could at that point buy land from someone who was leaving. That is what William Alexander McMinimy did. Will did have another reason for taking this step, he had met the daughter of a recent arrival who was living a few miles southwest of Sitka.

Edward Vernon and Sarah (Allen) Randall came from Iowa. The January 30, 1889, *Clark County Clipper* noted: "Mr. E.V. Randall is here making preparations to receive his family. They are moving from Iowa and are financially well fixed. They own a half section in Day Valley and a quarter section between town and Judge Kennedys." The family that joined Edward Vernon consisted of one daughter (a married daughter remained in Iowa and later she and her husband moved to California) and five sons. The daughter who came to Clark County was Mary LeBarron Randall who was born September 20, 1866. (Some of the legal documents list her as "Mary A. McMinimy; perhaps later she used her mother's maiden name "Allen" as her middle name or initial.)

Mary Randall had attended Grinnell College in Iowa before coming to Clark County and had thought about becoming a lawyer. After her arrival in Clark County she taught rural schools—"Pleasant Valley School" in 1895 and perhaps at the "Broadie School" for a time. There were two different stories handed down in the family about how Will and Mary met. One was they met "at a community picnic down on the river;" the other was that they met when both families were at the "Salt Plains on the Cimarron River between Fort Supply and Woodward, Oklahoma, to get salt for their cattle." (At least both versions include a river.)

Will McMinimy and Mary Randall were married December 22, 1895, they were both 29 years old. The *Ashland Journal* newspaper reported: "The groom is the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. W.W. McMinimy, of Sitka township and is a young man of good habits and excellent character, while the bride is a lady much respected by all who know her." A reception was held the following day at the home of the groom's parents and the *Journal* observed that every one of the guests present were ardent Republicans.

The married couple moved into the house a mile and a half south of Sitka on that first quarter of land that Will had purchased. It is unknown when that house was built, it may have been built by those who lived on the land earlier. The house that Will and Mary lived in was recalled by their daughter, Mabel (McMinimy) Schram: "They first lived on the south border of the ranch by Day Creek in a three-room house. Butter and cream were kept in buckets down in the well to keep them cool. Later, when the windmill was put up, they used a make-shift milk house. The main house was not large and it was plastered with gypsum from the banks of the Cimarron River."

Will bought the first piece of land in 1893 and according to his son, Vernon, (*Clark County Clipper* May 21, 1953) "moved there about that time." The records at the Register of Deeds indicate that Will bought the quarter in February 1893, sold it to his father in June 1894, bought it back in August 1895 and was married that December. It is unknown what buildings other than the house were there. Mabel mentions a "make-shift milk house" for the butter and cream, so they were obviously milking a cow or cows. This quarter of land was grass land; it was rather hilly with some gullies and cuts but would have provided pasture for cattle, mules and horses. What other out-buildings or corrals that might have been there is unknown. Will and Mary set about buying more adjoining land as it became available to accommodate additional livestock.

There is a record for a "Chattel Mortgage" in July 1898 when Will and Mary borrowed \$2,100 from his father (the older couple, William Wesley and Mary Burgess

McMinimy had moved to Wichita in 1896) for “58 cows, 2 bulls and 2 yearling steers” bought from W.W. McMinimy and also “59 head of cows, steers and bulls and 50 head of cows.” In subsequent years—1900, 1901 and 1905—Will and Mary borrowed from the Stockgrowers Bank/J.W. Berryman in Ashland with their cattle as collateral.

W.A. and M.A. McMinimy registered the “T T” brand for their cattle, to be used on the left side hip, with the Office of the Clark County Clerk February 20, 1903. (Note that Will and wife, Mary, were both registering the brand.) This brand continued in use on the McMinimy Ranch for almost 100 years—in later years it was registered with the state of Kansas.

Will and Mary made the little three-room house their home for several years; they had three daughters, Anna, Ella and Mabel, born in 1896, 1898 and 1900. On February 11, 1903, they had a son and named him Vernon Wesley (middle names of both of his grandfathers), another son, Wendell, in 1905, and a third son, Marvin, in 1907.

Will and Mary continued to buy more land--three and one-half quarters in 1899; six quarters in 1900; one and one-half quarters in 1901; one in 1903, two in 1906; two in 1907; and two and one-half in 1910. All 19 ½ quarters were in six adjoining sections west, south and east of Sitka. It appears some were purchased with family help. There were some land purchases made by Will and Mary which then were mortgaged to his father, W.W., with the mortgage payed off later. There were other instances of land bought by Sarah Randall (Mary’s mother) and then sold to Will and Mary. It is possible that when an adjoining piece of land became available, Sarah was willing to help with the purchase if Will and Mary did not have the resources at that time. Sarah Randall was, apparently, very independent. She had her own income and financial resources, a bank account and was willing to loan money to her children—and charged interest for it. From a small red “Memorandum” notebook with “Mrs. S.A. Randall Account Book” written on the inside of the cover are these notations on one page: “1903 March 29 Lent Will and Mary five hundred dollars to buy land for them which is in my name” and “Oct. 19 1905 Will McMinimy paid me \$195.00 interest money.”

Records show that on October 24, 1899, William A. and Mary A. McMinimy bought the east one-half of the southwest quarter of section 18/33/21. This is the east half of the quarter just to the south of Sitka on the east side of the road (highway) through Sitka. A “Special Warranty Deed” on October 28, 1899, indicates that Will and Mary bought the southeast quarter of section 18/33/21 which was mortgaged to W.W. McMinimy and released in 1904. Then a Warranty Deed shows on July 20, 1903, W.A. and Mary A. McMinimy bought the west one-half of the southwest quarter of section 18/33/21 (referred to as Lots 3 and 4 in the record.) That same year, 1903, they bought the piece of land across the road (highway) west of section 18/33/21.

These purchases are important because the oldest daughter of Will and Mary McMinimy had reached the age to begin school plus the three—room house a mile and a half south of Sitka was becoming a little small for their growing family. A decision was evidently made to move and make their ranch headquarters in the northwest corner of the land they had bought just south of Sitka. It is unknown exactly when the move was made but was probably around 1904.

Mabel (McMinimy) Schram remembered “the day they moved our 3-room house from the south side of the pasture to the north just across from what is now Sitka. We children and Mama rode in the house as it was moved about 1 ½ or 2 miles. We moved

because the school house would not be so far away. We usually crossed the Sitka Ranch pasture (to the east), went under the railroad bridge and through another pasture and crossed the road and there was the school house. In those days the grass in the pastures often was nearly as tall as we were, especially in the lower places." That first school was not in Sitka (a two-room school house was built on the east side of Sitka for the 1914-1915 school year.) The school Mabel Schram referred to in her memories was known as the "Brown School" and was located one-half mile north and one-half mile east of the McMinimy home. (It was called the "Brown School" because it was in the southwest corner of the quarter of land that Isaac Brown bought in 1899 and lived on.) Will McMinimy was a member of the Brown school board in 1905.

The "Kansas Agriculture Census" for the year ending March 1, 1905 listed the statistics for the McMinimy Ranch: a total of 1569 acres, 170 of those "improved" (under cultivation.) The farm was valued at \$7,000; the value of the buildings \$400; and the value of implements and machinery was \$100. They had 50 acres of winter wheat; 25 acres of corn; 35 acres of rye; 50 acres of sorghum for livestock; and 10 acres of kafir corn. The value of animals slaughtered or sold was \$700. They owned seven horses, three mules, four milk cows, 168 other cattle and one hog according to the Census.

Will McMinimy kept an account book for a brief time—in a small notebook from "Cable & Reed," a Kansas City, Missouri, livestock commission company. His daughter, Mable recalled that "One time Papa went to Kansas City with several car loads of cattle. This special time he came back with a beautiful black beaver plush coat with rose brocaded satin lining for Mama." And, evidently, a small notebook from Cable and Reed. The records in Will's small notebook begin with: "Oct. 17, 1905 in bank \$623.49." There is a list of "Checks given" (written) that included the following: Bank \$408.00; land 155.00; lumber 58.25; Binder 170.00; twine 86.00; store bill 14.00; Mother Randall 195.00 (her account book likewise had shown that he paid her \$195 interest October 1905;) wheat 58.20; Coal 11.55; Self 25.00; taxes (sic) 74.13; Bull 30.00; Self 10.00; and Bull 60.00.

The purchase of a binder and twine is significant. Kansas ranching proved to have some special challenges as evidenced by a record-breaking blizzard beginning early on January 6, 1886, with freezing rain that turned into a full-blown blizzard continuing for the next two days—nearly 40 hours—without letting up. It remained extremely cold for the rest of the month and was devastating to livestock herds as they drifted with the wind, crowded together for warmth against a fence or in a low area where the wind covered them with snow. Thousands were trampled, suffocated or frozen. Some of the cattle that survived then starved as ranchers were unable to reach them to replenish their food supply and many ranchers had no extra food supply for their cattle. This had been "open range" land with cattle left to survive the winter on their own; a practice that was to change. Thus, Will McMinimy bought a binder and twine to harvest a sorghum "cane" forage crop to provide feed for his cattle during the winter months.

Two pages of Will's account book had these entries: "May 28, 1906 Cattle 182. Sep. 14, Cattle on hand 176. Branded Cattle 1906, Oct. 1. Cattle on hand 171. Sold five steers. Sold 8 yearlings. Sold 120 calves delivered Oct. 1, 1906." It is unknown what kind of cattle were raised, typically at first it could have been longhorns and at some point, it was probably Herefords; milk cows were probably some dairy breed.

A couple pages in the back of the book are devoted to egg production and income beginning September 2, 1906 with 3 ½ doz. for .35 (10 cents a dozen); number and price in October the same. In November production of eggs went up to 10 doz. every two weeks (price same); December production was 16 doz. eggs every two weeks for \$4.00 (price up a little); January and February production went down to about 11 doz. eggs every two weeks with income about .15 per dozen. That's a total of \$36 income from eggs from September 2, 1906 to February 12, 1907 and indicates the diversity of the farm and food raised for the family and to sell.

The following page had this note: "doll bread May 28, 1906." This was probably a horse or mule named Doll that was bred on that date. The last page of the notebook has a list of numbers totaling 193 that follows this information: "Spring 1906 May 23 Shipped from Sitkey Cars." Sitka had one of the larger stockyards of the Englewood Branch of the Santa Fe Railroad. Spelling seemed to be a problem for Will and some of his descendants. A notation on one page read: "Mr. Orval Right (that was probably Orville Wright) began work for me April 1, 1908." This was an indication that the size of the ranch had increased enough that additional help was needed with the work.

Wanda Fredrick, daughter of Annie (McMinimy) Chadwick recalled that her grandfather Will loved horses with spirit. Annie had told her daughter that her dad, Will, would drive around the yard to calm the horses before the rest of the family got into the buggy. Sometimes as he passed where they were standing, they would jump into the buggy while it was still in motion; sometimes he had to make several passes before the horses were calm enough for all the children to get into the buggy. Mable Schram remember that at one point the two-seated buggy was drawn by Old Mollie and Jack and was their means of going to Sunday School—at first at the Brown School and later in Sitka.



Back row: Mabel, Ella, Anna McMimimy Middle row: Will, Vernon, Mary McMimimy Front: Marvin (held by Will), Wendell (held by Mary) about 1908



Mary McMinimy's parents, Edward Vernon and Sarah Randall moved to Ashland sometime after 1905. Whether it was before or after E.V. began to have problems with a tumor/cancer of his lower jaw is unknown. Edward Vernon Randall, died in 1907 after a painful battle with the cancer. After his death Sarah went to live with her daughter, Mary, and family. Will and Mary's sixth child was born in 1907 so there were six children and three adults living in the "three-room house" that had been moved closer to Sitka.

Will and Mary then made plans to build a new house with the help of Will Foncannon, an Ashland carpenter and building contractor of excellent reputation and skill who built many houses, barns and other buildings in the area. Construction of the two-and-one-half story house was completed by the end of 1910 or early 1911. The January 16, 1911, *Clark County Clipper* reported: "Wm. McMinimy was in town yesterday loading furniture at McKown's with which to furnish his new residence at Sitka."



House built by Will and Mary McMinimy in 1910 On porch: Will, Ella, Sarah Randall (Mary's mother), Mabel, Wendell, Marvin, Anna, Mary and Vernon McMinimy. Sitka in the background.

Sarah Randall wrote some comments in February 1912: "Will has got moved into his house and been in it for some time, good large house, so much more pleasant. He has got a larger Ranch than some about here and has got along well with cattle. Will is within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of the Station." (That probably refers to the Sitka train station.)

Will was to enjoy a year in his new home including a "McMinimy Reunion" of 32 people May 4 when his parents came from Wichita for the funeral of a grandchild. A photographer was hired to take photos of the family indoors and outside of the house to document the occasion.

Late in 1912 a very tragic event occurred. The December 5, 1912, *Clark County Clipper* reported: "William A. McMinimy, one of the Clark county pioneers was killed almost instantly last Friday morning while hauling oil cake from the train to his home near Sitka. He breathed his last as he was being taken into his home after the

accident.” It seems that Will and his brother Tom were hauling sacks of oil cake from the train at Sitka to the Will McMinimy farm. (The Protection newspaper said the wagon was pulled by a team of mules.) They had piled a very heavy high load and when almost to the farm, the sacks on top began to slip and both men were thrown to the ground. Tom fell clear of the wagon but Will landed in front of the back wheel which passed over his body presumably breaking his back. He never regained consciousness after the fall. “Deceased was a good citizen honest, hardworking and industrious. By reason of his industry and economy he had amassed a very snug competence and did not leave his family destitute or a charge on relatives.” The obituary said that William Alexander McMinimy had died November 29, 1912, at his home in Sitka, age 46 years, 3 months and 15 days old. His son, Vernon Wesley, born in February 1903 was not quite 10 years old.

This fatal accident had to have been a devastating blow to Will’s wife and children but Mary was a strong independent woman. With the assistance of her family, especially her youngest brother Bentley, and Will’s brother Tom, Mary continued to live on the ranch and operate it, raise her family and take care of her mother. (She never remarried.) Tom McMinimy and his family had moved to a smaller house that had been built one and one-half miles south (built to replace the three-room house that had been moved) in the spring or summer of 1912. They lived there and Tom worked for Mary for three years before moving to his own place.

Mary kept a “Day Book” ledger of expenses for a short time after Will’s death; it indicated she paid off some debts, paid monthly for hired help (Tom McMinimy and another man), bought three bulls and paid the lumber yard for lumber for repairing the granary and for the henhouse—all within three or four months following Will’s death.

In addition to the responsibility of operating the farm/ranch another problem had arisen for Mary—her mother, Sarah Randall, was gradually becoming more mentally incompetent. (She probably had Alzheimer’s.) The family had to watch her carefully because she would try to “walk home.” The task of following her to make sure she got back to their house was given to the younger boys. Sarah died December 16, 1919. Her obituary said “During the last eight years of her life Mrs. Randall was an invalid, requiring constant care and attention.” A year later when over five sections of land belonging to E.V and Sarah Randall was partitioned Mary then acquired more land, including the house and farm buildings southwest of Sitka where she and her parents had lived when they first came to Clark County.

Before his death Will had been planning to build a barn; Mary made this happen within a few years after his death. The large red barn had a hay loft with stables and stanchions on the ground floor for livestock and milking cows.

Mary McMinimy continued raising her children and operating her farm and ranch. The 1915 Kansas Census lists her, her six children and her mother living there; she had 60 acres of winter wheat, 10 acres of corn, 100 acres of sorghum for livestock and 10 acres of kafir corn. She owned six horses, four mules, two milk cows, 250 other cattle and 15 hogs. There was 2,560 acres of grass fenced for pasture.

Ten years later the 1925 Kansas Census lists Mary and her six children with the following: total acres 2940; winter wheat 280 acres; sorghum for livestock 50 acres; native grass pasture 1500 acres; 4000 bushels of wheat raised in 1924; 100 lb. butter produced; value of milk/cream sold \$75; 36 hens/chickens on hand March 1, 1925; eight

horses; ten mules; two milk cows; and 168 other cattle. They had no tractor or combine but that was to change later that year.

The May 21, 1925, *Clark County Clipper* reported in the Sitka News column: "Mrs. Mary McMinimy has purchased a new tractor. Also, a new combine will arrive in due time for harvest." This early combine did not have a "grain bin" to hold the shelled wheat grain—the tractor had a double hitch to pull the combine with a wagon beside it to hold the threshed grain. Mary had hired a man, Mr. Slaven who had recently come to Clark County. He and his family moved into the house one and one-half miles south of Sitka in the spring of 1925. The family had a 7-year-old son, Winfield, whose first job was with the 1925 McMinimy wheat harvest. His responsibility was to keep the wheat raked down in the wagon that was pulled alongside the combine. Winfield said it was summer, it was warm, he went to sleep in the wagon and lost his job.

Another story Winfield related was that Mary McMinimy at that time had some Galloway cattle—and they were kind of mean. Winfield's dad would not get off the wagon when feeding them. One day Winfield and his sister walked to Sitka from their house one-and-one-half miles south and on the way they kind of teased a Galloway bull in the pasture to the west of the highway. On the way back home, the bull had gotten into the pasture on the east side of the highway and they ran home afraid that it might get out of the pasture onto the road—where they were! They ran the rest of the way home.

No one in the family recalls hearing there were Galloway cattle on the ranch. It could be that Mary did have some for a time—Winfield Slaven certainly had a vivid memory of them. Originally longhorns brought up from Texas grazed the open range ranches. In an effort to improve her beef herd Mary may have tried Galloway cattle for a while but like many other ranchers in the area then turned to the Hereford breed.

The fact that Mary McMinimy bought a tractor and combine in 1925 indicates that she had continued to manage a financially successful farm/ranch and that she kept informed of new equipment and methods. The July 8, 1926, *Clipper* reported: "A piece of wheat belonging to Mrs. Mary McMinimy averaged about fifty-five bushels to the acre." Having a combine for that harvest rather than stacking the wheat and waiting for a "threshing crew" to make its rounds must have added peace of mind with the anticipation of a good crop.

Another instance of her interest in the newest equipment was reported in the March 4, 1929 *Clipper*: "Monday a passerby casually remarked that by the number of good looking cars parked in Mrs. Mary McMinimy's yard a family reunion must be taking place; but was told that the Agricultural class of Ashland High were taking notes on the modern equipment of Mrs. McMinimy's poultry and brooder houses installed last year."

After Mary McMinimy's sons had graduated from high school and each had attended some college she was ready for them to carry on the ranching and farming operations. Vernon W. McMinimy had attended grade school at the Brown School until the two-room school was built in Sitka in 1914. He was one of the more than 50 pupils enrolled in the Sitka school for the next five years. He then graduated from Ashland High School in the spring of 1923 but it seems that he waited a year before going to college. The September 6, 1923, *Clipper* had this report: "Vernon McMinimy, who has spent several weeks in North Dakota returned home and reports a good time." The next summer Vernon bought a new Ford car in Ashland in June, 1924, and then left Sitka in



September for the fall semester at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas. He made the cross-country track team that fall having had no previous track experience and ended up in third place on the team. After that one year of college he stayed in Sitka to help with farming.

Mary evidently decided to take advantage of having her son home to be responsible for the ranching and farming. During the summer of 1927 she and two of her daughters drove to California to visit Mary's only sister, Annie Wilson. Annie had married before the Randall family came to Clark County and she and her husband, Jim, had moved to California. The September 10 1927, *Clipper* reported: "Mrs. Mary McMinimy and daughters, Miss Anne and Miss Ella, returned Thursday after several weeks touring such interesting places as Estes Park, the Yellowstone and California." Women at that time rarely traveled without a man—another indication of Mary's independence and capabilities. The three-some took a tent and used it for overnight camping along the way. Annie (McMinimy) Chadwick told her daughter Wanda that there were "turn outs" on the roads so if/when their car over-heated they could pull off to let it cool down.

Now that Vernon was back in Sitka he began dating a young woman from Protection. Vernon married Naomi Lee Pile from Protection, Kansas, on January 16, 1927, at the home of the Ashland Christian Church minister, A.B. Ingram. Their Certificate of Marriage was signed by witnesses: Wendell McMinimy, Mrs. W. Clyde Pile Mrs. Mary McMinimy W. Clyde Pile and Mrs. A.B. Ingram.

There was a little house just across the highway west of the large home that Will and Mary had built in 1910. (The "little house" may have been the three-room house moved years earlier from one and one-half miles south.) Vernon and Naomi made it their home for the first year or more of their marriage. Their first child, William Lee, was born November 15, 1927, while they were living in the "little" house. Sometime after that first year Mary moved out of the larger house and the younger couple moved into the larger home east of the highway. Vernon later said in an interview that he began farming in 1930; until then he may have been working with or for his mother.

The October 30, 1930, *Clipper* said; "Tuesday of last week Mrs. Mary McMinimy and son Wendell moved into their new modern home recently completed which is located on the site of Mrs. McMinimy's old home at the Randall place southwest of Sitka." (Marvin may have been at college at that time.) This was to be a short-term solution because Wendell was dating a young woman, also from Protection. Wendell and Madeline Bean were married on September 17, 1931. The "Randall" place then became their home.

It seems that perhaps Mary McMinimy felt a need to provide a farming opportunity for all three of her boys. The May 28, 1931, *Clipper* reported: "Mrs. Mary McMinimy and son Marvin are at Beaver, OK, looking after their farming interests." Grandson Vernon Randall (Ranny) McMinimy recalled a Thanksgiving in the mid-1930s when they went to the Oklahoma place for Thanksgiving when he was five or six years old, His Grandmother Mary, Uncle Marvin and Aunt Ella McMinimy all were living there. Ella McMinimy had never married and was teaching school in Denver in 1930. She had an illness which resulted in severe loss of hearing so she could no longer teach and had also moved to the place in Oklahoma.

If the purchase of the land on the Beaver River in Oklahoma early in the 1930 decade was an attempt to provide a place for her youngest son, Marvin, it was ill-timed with the Depression followed by the Dirty Thirties. Grandson Bill McMinimy always said his grandmother decided she had to sell the Oklahoma land to be able to keep the Kansas land. Mary and her grown children, Ella and Marvin, moved back to Kansas in December, 1937, first living in the Methodist parsonage at Sitka and then to their home south of Sitka (the house one and one-half south of Sitka) in April 1938.

Mary lived in that house and participated in Sitka community and church activities until she died at her home May 4, 1946. She would have been 80 years old that September. Her grandchildren recall that she was an avid reader and she was an amazing woman having managed a farm and raised a family of six after her husband died. She was definitely a resilient, capable person who earned the respect and admiration of family and friends.

Ella continued to live in the "south house" until 1962. She farmed and ranched the adjoining land she had inherited (with help from her brother Vernon and nephews) until she moved to Ashland in the spring of 1962. She then leased her land to the McMinimy Ranch, operated by her brother Vernon W. and his son William L. McMinimy.

By the end of July, 1946, Mary McMinimy's children had reached a settlement agreement of how to deal with her will. It divided her property equally among her children (except for Marvin who was given three specific quarters.) Vernon was to have and to buy out the interest of two of his sisters for about 1687 acres in Township 33 east of the highway. Wendell and Ella inherited and bought out the interest of the sisters for other pieces of land west of the highway. There were some "good farm years" with better-than-normal farm production and farm income during the years immediately following Mary's death. Vernon W. McMinimy paid off what he owed to his two sisters for their share of the land fairly quickly, and the McMinimy Ranch continued with much of the land his father had accumulated.

Vernon and Naomi McMinimy had begun their married life south of Sitka in January 1927. The *Clipper* indicated that wheat yields were not that good in 1927 due to the dry weather. However, the following year was a major disaster; the May 31, 1928, *Clipper* said, "The storm of Monday evening played havoc with the wheat crop which never looked more promising for a bountiful harvest." The hail storm on the afternoon of May 27, 1928, covered an area from the Ford County line to the Cimarron River with the heaviest loss in the Sitka vicinity—a huge disappointment for the newly married couple. In spite of the poor wheat crop the young married couple went on a "belated honeymoon." Naomi wrote in the *Ashland Centennial Book* history: "In August 1928 we left Bill with his grandparents Pile, packed a tent and went to Yellowstone Park via Salt Lake City. What fun! It was many years before we traveled again."

Vernon kept busy with farming and ranching. Naomi in addition to helping her husband joined the Farm Bureau Club that later became Extension Home Demonstration Units. Naomi was a member of the Sugarloaf HDU named for a small hill/peak east of Sitka. In 1931 the *Clipper* reported that "Mrs. Vernon McMinimy gave a reading" at a literary event held in Sitka. She and a couple of other women in Sitka also formed an organization in 1931 which they named "Circle of Friends" and remained active for more than 50 years. Naomi had a beautiful voice and later in the 1930s

formed a trio, the Sitka Trio, with two other women in the community who sang at various events for several years.

The Vernon W. McMinimy family had increased on December 14, 1930, with the birth of their second son, Vernon Randall McMinimy so Naomi was participating in those activities while being a mother to a baby and a toddler. On July 1, 1933, a daughter was born, Connie Carol McMinimy. These births both took place after the beginning of the Great Depression and during the beginning of the Dirty Thirties. Vernon and Naomi's last child, Milton Wesley McMinimy, was born July 24, 1941.

Even though Sitka was toward the eastern edge of the area actually considered to be in the Dust Bowl these were definitely not good farm years. One of the worst dust storms was on Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, with 50-mile-per-hour wind from the north. Sitka was playing a baseball game against Protection that afternoon on the Sitka ball field which was on the east side of the highway just north of the railroad tracks. Four and one-half-year-old Vernon "Ranny" remembered that about the third or fourth inning the catcher who was facing north stood up and pointed northwest to the approaching dust cloud. Ranny and Bill (seven and one-half-years old) ran south, reaching the Urban grocery store before the darkness of the dust arrived. They waited there for awhile before going on south to their home when visibility improved. Like many other households Vernon and Naomi would hang wet sheets over the windows to try to keep the dust out.

The 1931 wheat crop was, apparently, a very good one—good enough that it drove the price of wheat down considerably. It made for a happy and optimistic attitude among farmers. However, the large crop may have been responsible for worse times. It definitely increased the supply of wheat when there was already a surplus and the price of wheat went below the cost of production. But perhaps even worse it encouraged farmers to continue breaking out more land and using questionable farming practices. The year 1934 in southwest Kansas is considered by some to be the most severe drought in the history of the United States.

Although the McMinimy Ranch had some cultivated land most of it was grassland pasture. It was, of course, also affected by the drought; the number of cattle per acre would have been seriously reduced to prevent over-grazing. In addition, the drought meant that there would have been less of a "cane" crop to provide winter feed for cattle. There is no information about the specifics of this—how many cattle the ranch usually had and how many less they had during those dry years.

It is known that they did continue to raise chickens and gather eggs. Bill (8-years-old) wrote a letter to his Grandmother Pile on April 19, 1935 and told her: "We have 350 little chicks." Chickens didn't need pasture and the feed for them could be purchased; they furnished meat when young and pullets laid eggs when they matured. The McMinimys also continued to milk cows so they had their own milk and cream and could sell cream and eggs.

Vernon still had some cattle. The April 16, 1936 *Clipper* said: "Vernon McMinimy shipped a car of cattle to Kansas City Friday" and "Mr. and Mrs. Vernon McMinimy went to Kansas City Friday for a combined business and pleasure trip."

An item in the June 4, 1936 *Clipper* indicated the grass was recovering from the 1934-35 drought. It said: "Grass is growing nicely since the rains but is thin in places." Prospects for a wheat harvest must have definitely looked better because a July 2,

1936, *Clipper* Sitka news column had this item: "Vernon McMinimy purchased a Holt Combine last week." From a letter written by Naomi to her mother on November 2, 1936: "Vernon is cutting feed and Mr. Crane is stacking it up. The Jersey cow gives lots of fresh milk and butter." It appeared the weather was improving for the southwest Kansas farming and ranching business.

In a letter written by Vernon "Ranny" on November 27, 1937, he states "We have a tennis court." In previous letters there were mentions made of Vernon playing tennis, usually at the Lexington community where there were courts. Apparently Vernon decided he wanted a court for more opportunity to play and practice for himself and family. Vernon "Ranny" said the tennis court was laid out north and south covering the area where the western part of the tin shed was later built south of the big barn. It was, of course a "dirt" court—or perhaps a "clay" court since the soil at Sitka has a high clay content.

According to a letter written by Naomi McMinimy to her mother in November, 1939, it is "Very, very Dry. Very little wheat sown. Last week Vernon bought 100 yearling heifers to be delivered this Saturday." Having made it through the Dirty Thirties the McMinimy family was more optimistic; Vernon was ready to achieve his goal of improving his Hereford cow herd.

An account book kept from 1939 to early 1943 indicates that Vernon paid R.F. Freeman \$1000 down payment for cattle on November 4, 1939, plus \$3000 after delivery to make full payment for the 100 heifers. He also paid \$400 for bulls. In December 1939 and February 1941, he purchased two horses paying Henry Mull \$32.50 for each horse; in June 1941 a \$50 check was written to Chester Bare for a mule; and in April 1942 a horse was bought from Mrs. Henry Mull for \$75. Horses were important for ranching.

The account book records show Vernon paid \$287 for a one-way implement in early July 1941 and \$275 for a binder in September of that year. There were checks to buy more cattle in September to E.E Alexander for \$5800.

Interviews 10 years later (May 14, 1953, *Clark County Clipper*, May 1955 Kansas Stockman) quoted Vernon: "The cow herd I have now are all descendants of heifers that were purchased in 1939 and 1941. I bought the first 100 yearling heifers from the Matador Ranch in 1939 for \$39.50 per head. Two years later I bought heifers from Earl Alexander and they cost me \$58.00 per head so I was lucky in getting the first ones when I did." Vernon had made a decision that he wanted a quality Hereford cow herd but was not interested in the additional paper work involved in having a registered cow herd. He did purchase registered Hereford bulls in his quest for continued quality and was quite proud of his cattle.

Vernon worked with the Greensburg Production Credit Association to borrow the money to finance his farming and ranching and for a time was on the Board of Directors of the Greensburg P.C.A. The Production Credit Associations were created by Congress with the Farm Credit Act of 1933 to provide short and intermediate term to farmers and ranchers to purchase housing, equipment and livestock. At that time credit was either not available or only available at a very high rate of interest because of the Great Depression and also farmland and commodities were not worth as much for borrowing collateral.

The financial situation seems to have continued to be good for farming and ranching. On July 4, 1942, a check for \$744.60 was written for a pickup. It is also interesting to note the account book lists a lot of checks from quite small to slightly larger amounts to boys and young men in the community; Vernon and Naomi apparently tried to help the local men and boys who needed employment and income by hiring them to help on the McMinimy farm.

Some more information about events on the McMinimy Ranch comes from letters written to (and saved by) Naomi's mother, Connie Pile. One from Vernon "Ranny" on March 19, 1944, included: "I have two calves and I am very proud of them. In 4-H I am taking a pig and gardening. When we had an ice storm Bill and Daddy had to go over to Ashland and on the way back Bill counted fourteen telephone poles down." A letter from Bill May 29, 1944, had this information: "We sure got a nice rain here Fri. and Sat. The rain came down just right and we got 5 ½ in., the most around this part of the country. We will be cutting alfalfa very soon, I hope. Our wheat is pretty good this year. The cattle are doing good and the grass is swell, lots of June grass. Please take note that when you come down our house is still the first one south of Sitka although it may look different since we've done lots of painting and planting around the place."

On January 2, 1943, Ranny again wrote his grandparents with this news: "We got a new tractor. And we are expecting our motor for the electric lights. Daddy shot three ducks the other day and that was the best duck we every hand." The "motor for electric lights" was probably a Kohler which was bolted to a block of concrete in the garage and used to generate limited electricity for household and farm use before electricity came to the rural area.

The second half of the 1940s decade seemed to be a continuation of building and improvements for the McMinimys as a result of rewarding years in farming and ranching. Prices for cattle and wheat were good and the weather cooperated in the production of crops and grass.

The Extension Architect of the Department of Engineering Extension of Kansas State College in Manhattan, Kansas, cooperating with the Clark County Farm Bureau drew up a blueprint for a "Suggested Farmhouse Plan Remodeling Project V.W. McMinimy Farm Home Sitka, Kansas" published in a newsletter dated September 14, 1945. Vernon and Naomi remodeled their house, but did not use the plans made by the Extension architect which would have required more extensive work. The original house at Sitka built by Vernon's parents had all of the bedrooms on the second floor. Their remodel moved two bedrooms to the ground floor, moved the living room into the original large dining room and the kitchen into the pantry with a dining area in the previous kitchen. These improvements stood the test of time and remained for the rest of the time McMinimys have lived in the house.

As mentioned before Vernon's mother, Mary (Randall) McMinimy died May 14, 1946. Shortly after that, on May 14, 1946, Bill McMinimy graduated from Ashland High School. That fall, in September 1946 Bill enrolled at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas—the same college his father had attended. During his two years at Southwestern, Bill developed an interest in geology and went on a college geology field trip to New Mexico; Bill always remained interested in geology. He did not return to Southwestern in the fall of 1948, instead staying at Sitka to help with the farming and ranching.

The October 28, 1948, *Clipper* Sitka news made this announcement: "The R.E.A. is turning on the electricity to the home in this community this week."

A major improvement and addition to the farm during 1948 and 1949 was the construction of a large "tin shed" to the south of the barn. The shed had a concrete floor and foundation with laminated wooden support beams that had been stamped "Sept. 24, 1948" to support the curved roof top. The curved beams were covered with corrugated tin; there were large sliding doors on the east and west ends to accommodate entry of machinery and vehicles.

Vernon and Naomi purchased a new car in the fall of 1948 and a new pickup early in 1949. In mid-February Vernon and Naomi took her mother, Connie Pile, to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, to see Connie's beloved brother and only sibling, Naomi's Uncle Luther Duggins. It was a special trip and well-timed so that Connie and Luther had a chance to visit. Connie died May 8, 1949, at Lyons, KS, and was buried in the Protection Cemetery. Clyde and Connie Pile moved several times after leaving Protection (where Naomi was born and grew up) but both were buried in the Protection Cemetery. Clyde Pile died June 21, 1954, after moving to the Masonic Home in Wichita, Kansas.

Changes were taking place in the town of Sitka adjoining the McMinimy farmstead to the north. The two-room school which had had over 50 pupils when Vernon attended in 1914-19 had only 23 students during the 1948-49 year when his son Milton was in second grade. A decision was made at that point to consolidate with the Ashland school system. In 1937 a resident minister was no longer assigned to the Sitka Methodist Church (the Ashland minister came to Sitka each Sunday for services) and the church closed in 1953. The Sitka Catholic Church closed in 1957. The Urban Grocery in Sitka moved to Ashland in 1942. The Sherman Store and Post Office burned in 1959; the post office was moved to the Sherman home and then to the Reed Service Station until the post office was officially closed May 22, 1964. Frank Reed had moved his welding business from Sitka to Ashland in 1964. His mother, Mary Reed, closed the Sitka Reed Service Station in 1965.

The train tracks laid through Sitka in 1887 connected Sitka with the outside world. The train brought in mail, needed supplies, coal for stoves and took out wheat, cattle and people. Over the years blizzards would blow heavy snow into the "cuts" east between Sitka and Protection. The trains could not get through leaving those in Sitka and west feeling isolated. Men would volunteer to dig the train tracks free with shovels. The passenger train made its last run April 5, 1959; the depot closed in 1961 and the last freight train, loaded with wheat, left Sitka in February 1994. The tracks were then removed.

Towns every 10 miles apart on the railroad were great when people had to travel to them by horse and buggy, when cattle had to be herded to the railroad stockyards and when wheat had to be hauled to the elevator in a mule drawn wagon. Improvements in transportation and roads made those small towns no longer so important.

Another factor in the disappearance of the smaller towns was the decline in rural population. According to Timothy Egan in his book, *The Worst Hard Time*, it took 58 hours of work to plant and harvest a single acre in 1830; by 1930 it took only three hours. Individuals could farm more and more acres as tractors became more powerful



and machinery became larger. The Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture shows a population peak of 559 for Sitka Township in 1916; by 1950 it had decreased to 202. That trend continued. It resulted in a lack of place for people to gather and visit from about the 1960s forward with no churches, schools or businesses. There was a welcome change in 1980 when The Old Weigh Station restaurant opened in the former port of entry and continued when the two-room school was moved from the east edge of Sitka to just south of the railroad tracks on the west side of Highway 183. Owner Buddy Probst provided a place for people to gather; many of the locals would all sit at a large round table to have their coffee, eat and visit. Many truck drivers made the cafe their regular stop on Highway 183. People from surrounding communities came often. The restaurant also provided an opportunity for employment for some in the community. The Bill McMinimy's children took advantage of that opportunity. Probst also enjoyed planning and implementing community events such as a "Sitka Day" celebration in early May for several years and for a "Branding Barbecue" to which all ranchers were invited to bring their branding iron to burn their brand on a large piece of wood from the old sale barn at Ashland. Later the rancher's names were inscribed on the board by Eldora McMinimy. The Old Weigh Station and The Sitka Social Club (which was in the other room of the school house) gave the Sitka community a gathering place from the time it opened until it closed in 1999. Today there is one business left in Sitka—a grain elevator.

Sometime around 1950 Vernon had a whole new set of corrals built on the farm that included alley-ways for working the cattle and for loading, sorting and to handle cattle more efficiently and effectively. An elevated chute was constructed and filled with dirt to accommodate loading cattle onto semi-trucks. The corrals were planned around the "big red barn" that had been built 35-40 years earlier.



McMinimy farm 1950

The barn had been consistently used during the years for milking cows. The McMinimys usually had up to four Jersey cows for milk production. Vernon, Bill, Ranny and Milton all helped with milking cows. Vernon "Ranny" recalled doing quite a bit of the milking when they had cows name Nell (she gave the most milk), Blackie and Sue. Sue was the ornery one. She would many times attempt to kick and would certainly plant her hoof in the milk bucket whenever possible. A cream separator was used to separate the cream from the milk, the cream was "refrigerated" in cream cans placed in a well-water-cooled tank and then taken to be sold. There was also plenty of cream available for home use including making ice cream.

The complex of corrals that had been built made it easier to feed the calf crop. Ranny fed a steer as a 4-H project according to the report in the September 1, 1948, *Clipper* that "Randall McMinimy had a blue-ribbon beef at the County Fair." Vernon "Ranny" had a 4-H beef project for more than one year; Connie McMinimy also had a beef project at least one year; and in later years when Milton was in 4-H he also exhibited beef animals at the County Fair. Their father, Vernon, took special pride in seeing calves selected from his herd were successful 4-H beef project for various 4-H members from all over the county; there were several years when the Champion 4-H beef animal at the Clark County Fair came from the McMinimy Hereford herd.

Vernon's cow herd earned statewide recognition in the Kansas beef production contest in the feeder calf division for 1950, 1951 and 1952. A photo of Vernon accepting an engraved silver trophy and accompanied by this information appeared in the May 8, 1952, *Kansas City Daily Drovers Telegram*: "Top honor in the feeder calf division of the 1951 Kansas beef production contest was won by V.W. McMinimy of Sitka. Mr. McMinimy produced a 97 percent 1951 calf crop of 155 calves from his herd of 160 Hereford cows which had been bred to purebred bulls. The calves had an average calving date of Jan. 15 and weighed an average of 405 pounds when they were weaned at 240 days. They weighed 517 pounds when they were sold on March 4. Mr. McMinimy's records showed a total yearly cow cost of \$51.90, and a cost of producing each calf at \$53.57. The calves sold for \$35.65 per cwt., a total sale value of \$184.31 per head, and a return per calf of \$130.74."

The following year the June 1953 *Farmer Stockman* had an article about the Beef Production Contest with a photo that named V.W. McMinimy, Sitka, the sweepstakes winner of the Hereford feeder calves division. The article noted that V.W. McMinimy won a special recognition trophy given by the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce for his record of winning a bronze plaque three years in succession in the contest. (Because he won three years in a row Vernon was given the sweepstakes award and was no longer eligible to participate in the contest.) The statistics indicated there was a 95 percent 1952 calf crop; a yearly cow cost of \$51.26 for a cost of \$53.97 to produce a calf that had a sale value of \$121.85; and a return of \$69.88 for each calf. (The 1952 return per calf was less than the year before because calf prices at sale time in 1951 made each calf worth \$60 more than in 1952.) These recognitions were made during the feeders' day program at Kansas State College (later Kansas State University.) The trophy Vernon was awarded in 1953 was engraved: "Outstanding Achievement Feeder Calves Awarded to Vernon McMinimy by Kansas City C. of O."

1952.”



Vernon McMinimy at left, with trophy presented him in 1953 for “Outstanding Achievement Feeder Calves.”

Two years later, the May 1955, *Kansas Stockman* published a feature article titled “Southwest Kansas Rancher V.W. McMinimy, Sitka, believes its drier in his area than it was in 1930’s.” In the article Vernon said if rainfall wasn’t heavier in 1955 than it had been the year before he would have to reduce the size of his cow herd. He was quoted: “The only reason we were able to keep our cowherd through this winter is that we gambled and won, so to speak.” The previous August Vernon had planted about 150 acres of cane for feed. About the only rain that fell came after the feed was planted and then the first killing frost came later than usual that fall so the feed almost reached maturity. “Several of my neighbors thought I was crazy running a drill and planting feed that late in the summer and I thought so too.” The article gave some background and biographical information on the ranch, Vernon, Naomi and their family and then more information on their operation. “Their ranch and farm ground consists of 1990 acres of grass, 240 acres of feed ground and 220 acres of wheat. Grass has now been planted on 278 acres that was formerly under cultivation. Vernon started planting grass four years ago and now has some fine stands of Blackwell switch, Caucasian bluestem and mixtures of native grasses.” Vernon’s success in the feeder calf competition was mentioned and the origin of his cowherd. He also attributed much of his success to using the best registered bulls available to improve his herd. The article adds: “And Mr.

McMinimy is a firm believer in soil conservation. He put in over three miles of terraces on his seeded grassland and has done some fertilizing to get it started. Three pasture stock dams have been built to provide water for the cattle."

This conservation work was probably done over several years and would be the reason that the Banker's Soil Conservation Award was made to Vernon and Naomi McMinimy March 16, 1951. This award was and is made each year in Clark County at the annual Soil Conservation dinner and is sponsored by the Clark County banks to recognize farmers who implemented good conservation practices.

Bill McMinimy, who living with his parents at Sitka to help with the farming received notice to report for his Physical Exam September 7, 1950; after passing the physical he was inducted into the Army October 18 in Kansas City, Missouri, for two years in Co. A, 86<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regl. At basic training in Camp Polk, Louisiana, he was assigned to the Medical Corp of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division. At the end of March 1951, his unit boarded the USS John Pope to go through the Panama Canal, make a stop in San Francisco and then to Hokkaido, Japan, for further training. On December 26 (Christmas Day in the United States) Bill's unit sailed to Korea where he was assigned as a medic for a tank company for the rest of his time in the Army. He left Korea September 1 to travel back by ship to San Francisco and then by train to Camp Carson at Colorado Springs, Colorado, where his parents met him and transported him home to Sitka in early October 1952.

An especially important honor bestowed upon Vernon and Naomi was announced in an article in the March 6, 1954, *Kansas Farmer* with the title: "Six Farm Families Named for High Honors." Vernon and Naomi were one of the couples honored February 24, 1954, at Manhattan when they were named members of the 1953 class of Master Farmers and Master Farm Homemakers. Until that year only a Master Farmer was recognized, the year Vernon and Naomi were named was the first time the "Homemaker" was included. A couple was (and still is) selected annually from each of the five Extension districts in the state for the award. (*Kansas Farmer* was one of the sponsors of the Master Farmer-Homemaker project.) Highlights of the farm, home and community achievements as noted on the worksheet Vernon and Naomi filled out were listed. It included the farm acreage, use of that acreage and soil conservation (same as listed above.) It also said: "The farm carries 153 beef cows of breeding age with an annual calf crop of 135. Some steers are also carried on a wintering program. Most of the fences on the farm have been replaced in recent years or are in the process of being replaced. A new set of working pens and corrals recently was completed for better handling of livestock. Activities of Mr. McMinimy include deacon in his church, past member of the school board and member of the PTA, past township PMA committeeman, past treasurer of Extension council, former 4-H leader, former president of the Farm Bureau, former director of PCA, former director of the Ashland Oil Company and member of Masonic Lodge. Mrs. McMinimy has served as Sunday school teacher and president of the missionary society, is a member of PTA, YWCA, former officer in her Home Demonstration Unit, member and former officer of Circle of Friends and Twentieth Century Club."





Vernon and Naomi McMinimy named Master Farmer Homemaker 1954

Not only was the 40s decade one of building and improving the home and farm but it was also one of raising children to be ready to embark on their own lives. William Lee graduated from Ashland High School in 1946; attended one year at Southwestern College in Winfield; was inducted into the Army October 18, 1950. After discharge he moved back to the farm to work with his father; and married Eldora McReynolds on August 26, 1962. Vernon Randall graduated from Ashland High School in 1949. After a time at Washburn University in Topeka he enlisted in the Navy in January 1951 and married Phyllis Crosby on August 26, 1952. He continued his education after discharge; and pursued a career as an agricultural economist. Connie Carol graduated from Ashland High School in 1951 and after a few months at business school she married George Vernon O'Bleness December 27, 1952. Milton Wesley graduated from Ashland High School in 1960, enlisted and served in the Navy, and continued his education at Kansas State University. He and Barbara Runkel were married March 19, 1973. Milton owned an accounting business in Garden City, Kansas, until his retirement.

Vernon and Naomi McMinimy celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary January 16, 1952. The most notable celebration was a party organized by the Circle of Friends group (which Naomi had helped to organize.)

During 25 years of marriage and a strong partnership Vernon and Naomi had raised a family (although Milton was still a work in progress). They had given time and talents to their church and community, made improvements in their home and farmstead, farmed responsibly with attention to soil conservation and built an

outstanding herd of quality cattle. Their work and achievements had resulted in some public acknowledgements as has been noted. They continued their efforts during the 1950s to maintain the farm and keep making improvements. However, the weather again presented problems.

In the May 1955 *Farmer Stockman* feature article Vernon was quoted as saying it was drier than it had been in the 1930s and he would only be able to keep his cowherd if it rained. It did not rain. Vernon did have to sell the cattle in either 1956 or 1957. The 1956 season was so dry there was no wheat—not even enough harvested to have seed for planting that fall. The rains finally came. The grass did grow again and Vernon could again buy heifers. This time he bought heifers in New Mexico; however they were not the quality he had previously owned. Vernon never had the “fashionable” short, blocky cattle, he was independent enough in his thinking to realize what others later did—there was more muscle and meat on a rangier, taller animal. He continued to purchase purebred bulls for his herd.



Vernon McMinimy on horse behind some of his cattle

Vernon was elected to be a member of the Ashland District Hospital Board of Directors when a new hospital was built with an open house December 3, 1956. Ironically when Vernon had a heart attack in 1958 it was while they were visiting Naomi's brother in Lyons, Kansas—so he was hospitalized in Lyons. After the heart attack Vernon made some changes in his life—he slowed himself down to work at a more measured pace and he quit smoking. (In early years Naomi said he practically ran from place to place to get his work done.) Bill was on the farm to keep it going until Vernon's recovery and afterwards which gave Vernon and Naomi the freedom to take



some trips. Some of these trips were to see the country; some were to visit children and other relatives.

Vernon and Bill also became quite interested in fishing and purchased a small outboard motor fishing boat and trailer in order to fish some larger ponds and lakes. They went to Table Rock in Missouri a time or two and to Conchas Dam in New Mexico once. Vernon was willing to fish for anything—Naomi liked to eat catfish—but he really did enjoy fishing for bass. Several years later Vernon and Naomi went a few times to Aransas Pass in Texas to fish in the Gulf of Mexico bringing home a nice amount of frozen fish from their success there. They were giving more space and responsibility to the next generation, their son Bill, and made the partnership legally official in 1962.

Bill married Eldora McReynolds August 26, 1962. Eldora grew up on a farm in Scott County, Kansas; graduated from Kansas State University in 1959 and was hired to be the Home Economics Agent in Clark County. After a wedding trip to Niagara Falls and a visit with Bill's sister Connie and her family at Norwich, New York, they returned home to live in the house one and one-half miles south of Sitka. (His Aunt Ella had moved from that house to Ashland during the spring of 1962.)



Bill and Eldora McMinimy in front of McMinimy house at Sitka, 1962

In September 1962 Bill and Eldora went to the State Fair where Eldora and her co-worker, the county agricultural agent, were recognized for being the top team of county agents in the state. They came home from that event to find a major storm including large hail had hit Ashland broken a lot of windows and resulted in the Christian Church being burned down. That was the church Vernon and Naomi had been members of since their marriage so it was a personal loss to them. The hail was not quite as bad at Sitka (no broken windows) but with the hard rain they had to drill a lot of the wheat again.

On October. 2, 1962, Naomi wrote in a letter: "Vernon is busy training his young horses to go into the horse trailer. What patience he has! About two weeks ago he backed the trailer up to the corral alley, shut the horses in the alley, put feed in the trailer and tried to encourage them to go eat. For three days he encouraged and for three days they refused. He decided the step up to the trailer was too high so he built it up a bit and it wasn't long before they were going in nicely. Now, of course, every day he shuts them in the trailer and they take a ride." Vernon had been around horses all his life and thoroughly enjoyed working with and riding horses. He trained them to come when he let out a loud whistle—and rewarded them with some protein cow cake pellets. He was gentle in his treatment of his horse (and other animals) but also firm.

Mention has been made that Vernon usually "wintered over" some of his steers; this was keeping the weaned calves and feeding them during the winter. The next spring some of the heifers could be sorted out as replacement animals for the herd and the remainder and the steers would be sold. Winter feed, as said previously, was bound feed bundles early on and then small rectangular bales by the '50s and '60s which could be lifted onto a pickup bed for feeding to the cattle. In 1963 Vernon and Bill decided to try silage for feeding the weanling calves over the winter (still feeding baled feed to the cows.) To increase the nutritive value of the silage for the calves it was mixed with grain—so they purchased a truck and had it converted into a "chuck wagon." The truck bed was fitted with chain driven paddles, the silage was loaded into the bed by a lift on the front of a Ford tractor. Ground grain was augured on top of it and then the chuckwagon paddles stirred the mix and pushed it out a short chute into the feed bunks. Vernon and Bill put up silage for about five years—it took at least a crew of four to do the job and it was sometimes difficult to find available help.

Large round bales were the next improvement in forage handling making it possible for one man to bale the feed in the field and one man in a pickup with a "bale handler" on the back to pick up the huge roll of feed and unroll it in the pasture for the cattle and calves.

Vernon and Bill had been using a gas-powered Allis Chalmers tractor for their farm work. With the availability of larger machinery and the increased use of hydraulic implements they decided to purchase a larger John Deere diesel-powered tractor with a cab and front-end blade during the 1960s. Cultivation of farm ground had increasingly focused on leaving some cover on the surface of the ground using "sweeps"—implements that were formed in a flat "V" shape to run under the surface of the ground to uproot weeds resulting in less moisture loss than turning the ground with a disk.

Bill bought another pickup in 1966 at the farm machinery sale held by his Aunt Madeline McMinimy. Wendell McMinimy, beloved brother and best friend to Vernon, had died on September 21, 1965. Vernon, Naomi and Madeline bought two adjoining plots in the Ashland Cemetery where they are all buried.

Vernon and Naomi continued to take trips to visit sister, brothers, sons and daughter—and also places they wanted to see. The absence of “fishing trips” was noticeable from the mid-60s on—because fishing was no longer the sport hobby of choice for Vernon and Bill. Golf replaced fishing, first on a challenging “sand green” nine-hole golf course a few miles west of Ashland and then a nine-hole grass green golf course on the north edge of Ashland. Vernon—and other family members—practiced golfing at the Sitka home by hitting golf balls from between the garage and chicken house toward the south lawn and pasture lot to the south. The practice seemed to have paid off—two score cards were saved with Vernon making a 36 each time on the par 35 Ashland course. Interest in hobbies evolved. Tennis gave way to fishing and fishing gave way to golfing.

Vernon continued to improve the farmstead. In the late 1960s he ordered cedar trees and planted them in a gap between trees in the shelterbelt at the north of the corrals. He then took care of watering them. A year later he ordered more cedar trees to plant on the north side of the aging shelterbelt directly north of the house—again taking care of them after planting.

Vernon, ever the farmer, also started a “vegetable garden” in the late 60s, making large “cages” of five-foot-wide reinforcing wire fastened into circles three-to-four foot in diameter. The tomatoes planted in the center of those cages filled them up, grew to the top and produced bumper crops of tomatoes. During the late 60s and early 70s he decided to plant watermelons and cantaloupes west of Day Creek about a half a mile west of the house. He raised plenty to share with others—and even for the racoons and coyotes that raided the patch.

During that same time period Vernon hired a couple of neighbor college students during their winter semester break to tear down the big barn. The barn had been built about 50 years earlier, had deteriorated and was in danger of falling. As they tore down the building the young men saved the good dimensional lumber which was then “recycled” into the construction of a smaller “nursery barn.” The new barn included a tack room in one corner and interior swinging gates and a cattle head catch gate for working with and housing cows during calving.

A couple more improvements were made to the house in the late 1960s. The screened porch on the east side of the house was removed and a twelve-foot square utility room was added to add storage space and to accommodate a shower, washer, dryer and water heater. The other improvement was to install central heating and air using an outdoor unit placed north of the house with the duct work in the crawl space under the house.

Vernon officially “retired” in 1968 to begin collecting his Social Security but never retired from working with the land and animals and helping son Bill with the farm

whenever and however he could. His brother Marvin wanted to sell his three quarters of land, so Vernon and Naomi bought it November 9, 1972.

A storm called by some “the worst blizzard of the 20th century” began on February 21, 1971. Bill McMinimy had become well acquainted with weather patterns and their specific effects. He was continually checking weather forecasts because weather had an immediate and important impact on farming and ranching. It was, indeed, a bad storm with an estimated 16 to 20 inches of snow blown into huge drifts by the 25-to-40-mile-per-hour driving wind. The storm lasted at least 36 hours. After the snow ceased Bill wanted to get to his parent’s house at Sitka but the highway was blocked with a huge drift (the road was not opened for a week or more after the storm.) Even though there were large drifts there were areas where the wind had blown the ground fairly clear of snow so Bill decided to go north through the pasture. His finding a way through the pasture was evidence of his familiarity with the lay of the ground. He got to his parent’s house, checked on them and then got the tractor—which had a blade on the front—out of the tin shed. He could then deal with some of the drifts in their drive. Next came the task of getting feed to the cattle. In subsequent days Eldora drove the pickup trailing along behind Bill in the tractor to get large feed bales and cake from the cake feeder on the pickup to the herds. Once again, Bill’s knowledge of the terrain in his pastures made it possible for him to weave his way to the cattle with the tractor. School had been cancelled so the children stayed with Vernon and Naomi while the cattle feeding took place. Fortunately, the electricity and telephone remained in service during the storm and afterwards. There were some “emergency air drops” of feed for cattle organized and made after the storm but none of those took place on the McMinimy Ranch. Many ranchers and farmers put in long hours during and after the storm. The sun came out and a warming trend continued. The melting snow provided moisture for the fields and pastures that spring—as evidence by the fact that the first grass to green up was where the drifts had been.

Vernon and Naomi were anticipating a visit from their son Vernon “Ranny” and his family for Christmas in 1973. Their daughter Linda was being married in Lawrence, Kansas, soon after Christmas. While Vernon was moving a large propane gas tank (used for heating the branding irons when branding calves) he had a massive heart attack and died the morning of December 13, 1973. The obituary, written by Vernon’s children, included this paragraph about their 70-year-old father: “To most it was not only what Vernon did, but how he did it that they remember. His contribution to family and community were enhanced by patience, honesty, fairness and sensitivity of others. His faithfulness to the Lord, the love and honor which he afforded to his family and fellowman, the life of integrity and service which he lived were an inspiration to his family and all those whose lives he touched.”

The loss of her beloved husband of 46 years was felt deeply by Naomi McMinimy. Within a couple of years, she bought a house in Ashland and moved into it; Bill, Eldora and their family were the third generation to occupy the large house south of Sitka.



McMinimy farm 2007, a reunion was held of children, grandchildren, great grandchildren of Vernon and Naomi McMinimy

Bill continued the farming and ranching operation on the pattern he and his father had established, leasing the land from his mother and from his Aunt Ella. He, also, endeavored to maintain the quality of his Hereford cattle by purchasing registered bulls. He was careful in selecting replacement heifers to pick those that not only had good confirmation but also had calm dispositions—a good trait when working with cattle. One change he did make was in purchasing Angus bulls for pairing with the heifers. It had been noted that this resulted in smaller calves at birth and less problems with calving.

“Working the calves” which included using horses to gather the herd into the corral, sorting off the calves, catching them in the working chute, dehorning them, giving them a vaccination shot and branding them was done by a consortium of neighbors who all helped one another. It made for a full day with the noon meal prepared and served to the men by the wife of the host. That mealtime was always accompanied by great stories shared by the men at the table.

On September 14, 1988, Ella McMinimy died. She still owned 710 acres of the original McMinimy ranch at her death; the land was sold at auction December 14, 1992, to a neighbor west of it.

In 1992 Bill made a decision to enroll most of the farm’s cultivated land in the Conservation Reserve Program, sell his cow herd and take early retirement. He enjoyed two years of retirement. In May-June 1994 he was diagnosed with glioblastoma, an inoperable brain tumor.

Bill’s daughter Vera (McMinimy) Bothner wrote about a conversation she had with her father after the diagnosis. They were in the house at Sitka, sitting at the kitchen table and he told her he was glad that she, her sister and brother were happy and living

fulfilled lives. But it was obviously weighing on his mind that this would be the end of the McMinimy Ranch. While he was at peace with knowing his children were happy he could not hold back the tears when he thought about the farm not being there and how he wanted that for his father. Bill McMinimy died November 1, 1994. He was buried in the McMinimy plot on the west side of the Ashland Cemetery.

His mother, Naomi McMinimy, died December 2, 1998, and was buried in the Ashland Cemetery beside her husband, Vernon.

The land Vernon and Naomi had inherited and land they had bought from the other heirs in the late 1940s was sold a little more than a year after Naomi died. The McMinimy Ranch ceased to exist in early 1999. The land had been in the McMinimy family since it was purchased before the turn of the century, from 1895 through 1910.

It may not have been one of the larger ranches in Clark County but it supported three generations of McMinimys. They lived, raised families, worked and farmed there which included the ongoing struggle with weather and the ups and downs of agricultural economics. Even though the ranch/farm no longer exists what endures are the collective stories and memories, some related here, as well as the heritage and values the people of the land, the McMinimys, passed on.



