



Manning's Hardware in Gypsum, Kansas, 1912

Soft-Spot for an Old Hardware Store

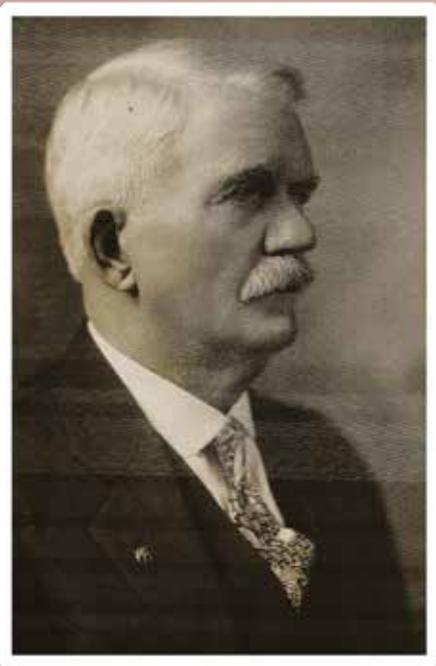
By Dan R. Manning

I was born in Seattle, Washington where my dad worked at the Boeing Aircraft Company building B-17 Flying Fortresses to fight America's enemies during WWII. Six months later, my grandmother asked Dad to come back to Gypsum, Kansas and help her run the hardware store. Her husband, my Grandpa Roy, had died suddenly of a heart attack, and she knew that operating the business alone was more than she could handle.

Charles "Charley" Burnham Manning had been born in Dover, Kentucky, in 1854. His parents were abolitionists who smuggled runaway slaves across the Ohio River to freedom. After the Civil War they'd settled north of Kansas City near Smithville, a pro-Confederate district. I'm sure they were very low-profile, as neighbors were the family of Frank and Jesse James.

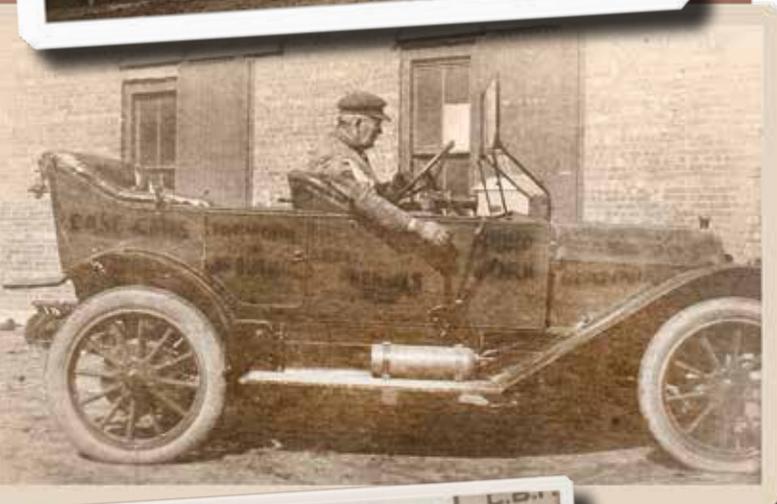
Charley left home when he was 19, and walked 150 miles beside his brother-in-law's covered wagon to Saline County, Kansas. His first morning in the new location was very cold. He grabbed a shotgun to go hunting. When he stepped out the door there was nothing but another "soddy" and a frame house in the distance. Returning from the hunt with one skinny jackrabbit, Charley remarked that he'd never seen "such a desolate place." His sister said, "It would look a lot better in the spring when the grass greened-up and the trees had leaves."

To change his mind that spring, Charley found a pretty Belgian girl, and after dating a short while they were married. Her father's sod house was already shared with her sister and husband. They moved in, and then the children began to arrive for both young families. They eventually built a frame house on the property.



Charles Burnham Manning, when he was running for Commissioner in Saline County, KS January, 1930





(top left) Partners, Caleb Hall and Charles Manning between 1897 and 1900 at their hardware store in Gypsum, KS. (above) Charles and Marie Manning with their children: Pauline, Roy and Robert. (bottom left) Farmer and wife, who had come to Gypsum in their buggy (hitched in the rear) and bought a new IHC manure spreader at Manning's Hardware. (above left) 1911 Case automobile. If you look closely you can see the writing on the side of the car.

Charley raised mostly wheat and corn on the homestead. One day the milk hauler said a plaster company was being erected near Gypsum about 20 miles south, and he thought they could find work there. The partners received a contract to excavate and haul raw stucco from surface beds two miles to the plaster mill, and ended up with 14 head of draft horses and mules to pull heavy-duty wagons.

The company's largest contract was supplying plaster for buildings at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. But, at that same time the Gypsum stucco beds played out, and the worst financial panic ever seen in America caused them to sell all of their harness, animals and wagons before closing the excavation business.

With intentions of farming again, Charley was on his way to buy a new team of work horses when he heard about a store being up for sale in Gypsum. In 1897, he bought half interest of Caleb Hall's hardware business, and by 1900 he owned the whole thing. All kinds of farm machinery could be purchased at C.B. Manning's Hardware, from steam engines to manure spreaders. They even sold garden seeds and buggy whips.

Roy, the oldest son of Charley Manning who had been a traveling salesman in Western Kansas for Lee Hardware out of Salina, returned to work for his father at the hardware store in 1912. That was the same year my father, Robert "Bus," Manning was born.

In 1903, Roy sold the first car in Gypsum (a new Cadillac) to his brother-in-law, Thomas Tinkler the bank president. J.I. Case Threshing Machine Company of Racine, Wisconsin, was Manning Hardware store's main implement supplier. They wanted Case automobiles sold there. The first one sold, a 1911



(below left) CB Manning & manure spreaders lined up the street. (right) 1908 Buick Roadster owned by Roy Manning (driver when he was a traveling hardware salesman in Western, KS from 1907 to 1912. (below left) The first combine in Saline County, KS was this 12-16 case sold from Manning Hardware in Gypsum in June of 1926.



Case, came back in trade in 1917, and was used as the store's service vehicle. The "Chuck's" back seat was removed to make room for tools and equipment, and eventually became the Manning family's porch swing.

Although Dad and my grandma worked hard to prevent it, the store went 'belly-up' in 1950, mainly because local folks were shopping in Salina, a much larger town.

From 1950, the hardware store's owners were Vernon Stevens, Tom Sellards, Lloyd & Mary Moline, and Tom & Judy Scanlan. The building was sold in 2014 at auction, and today, Nicole Birkes operates the Gypsum Flea Market, Antiques & Vintage in the former Manning Hardware store on Maple Street.

I was invited to do a book-signing in the old hardware store at last year's Gypsum Pie Festival and Car Show. It was wonderful to hear stories from childhood playmates I hadn't seen for seventy years. My Aunt Joan (Manning) Sams and her husband Larry showed up to support me. She had not been in the store since her mother sold it in 1950. We all shared many good memories.

The interior of Manning's Hardware with Charles Burnham Manning (owner) on right.



This October I will be signing books at the Gypsum Fall Festival, and hope to see old friends and meet new ones.

Mule Kisses is a book of true stories about Dan Manning's equine adventures and memories of Gypsum. In Whippet Kisses, Dan tells about his automotive experiences that began in Gypsum and include his first car that he still owns, a 1928 Whippet that he bought near Gypsum, and Fish Kisses are Dan's stories about fishing that started in street puddles in Gypsum.

These books are available at Amazon.com or by writing to him for a signed copy (\$25.00 to cover cost and shipping) at P.O. Box 115, Fair Grove, MO 65648.