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## Chapman Posts

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*Chapman Posts Near Lake Kahola*  
Dave Leiker

## CHAPMAN POSTS

If you're driving in the central Flint Hills around Council Grove, you might see an unusual-looking fence post—a large chunk of limestone with a three-foot length of two-inch pipe rising straight up out of the middle.

Holes have been drilled through the pipe and large six-penny nails inserted and bent up at the tip in order to hold barbed wire. Often the top has been capped with concrete, keeping rainwater out so the pipe does not rust out at the bottom.

This unusual-looking post is sometimes referred to as a “pipe-in-rock post”; a “rock-and-iron-pipe post”; a “patent post”; or a “Chapman post,” named after Philip Chapman, who obtained a patent on it back at the turn of the twentieth century. These posts come in three types: a barbed-wire post, a woven-wire post, and a corner post.

Woven-wire posts are maybe a little less than a foot square and a foot and a half high. The front side is flat with a slot cut into it to hold the pipe, which is bolted into the slot. This type of post would have been used in a hog lot or in a pasture where sheep were being pastured so that the woven wire could go clear to the ground, whereas the lowest wire on a barbed-wire post would rest on or near the top of the rock, around fifteen inches off the ground.

A Chapman corner post would be used not only at a fence corner but also on either side of a gate or cattle guard. It is constructed by first placing a large, flat chunk of limestone into the ground, drilling a hole into the middle, and inserting into it a piece of heavy pipe or iron rod. Next, a stone post several inches square and close to four feet long is quarried, a hole drilled into the center of

its bottom end, and then the hole placed over the rod of the ground piece.

From what I have been able to learn, this type of post is unique to the Flint Hills. Today, with modern power tools for drilling holes or pounding steel posts into rocky ground, building fence in the Flint Hills is much easier than it was in the 1880s when digging or punching a hole into ground where rocks lie only a couple of inches below the surface would have been much harder. Thus, a fence that required no hole digging or drilling would have been much easier to install. In essence a Chapman post is actually portable, although it requires great effort to move one.

Who invented this unique type of post? In 1879 Philip Chapman, a white man, moved to Dunlap in Morris County, just over the Lyon County line, the town where in 1878 Benjamin “Pap” Singleton had established a colony for former slaves, called Exodusters. Chapman may indeed have invented the fence post that bears his name (as his grandson, the late A. H. Hermstein of Council Grove, believed), but oral tradition credits its creation to Harrison Fulghum or some other Exoduster (perhaps Levi McCoy or the Tipple brothers), many of whom were listed in the 1880 census as stone masons.

The fact that the only patent I could locate was for the woven-wire post, granted to Chapman in July of 1903, eight months

after he had filed his application in November of 1902, suggests that corner and barbed-wire posts were already in common use in that area of the Flint Hills.

Crews of Exodusters would go out with mules and stone boats (a sort of low wooden sled) a week at a time, sleeping on the ground and eating around a campfire. They would locate a good vein of limestone in or near the pasture to be fenced, then quarry blocks of stone and sled them to the site of the fence they were building. A crew could make and place several barbed-wire posts a day, but corner posts took up to four days from quarrying to final placement.

Fulghum was later hired by the Aye and Chase ranches to build fences in Geary County. He would haul four limestone-rock bases at a time to the site of the fence, hanging them below the running gears of a wagon, placing them in line, then drilling holes in the rocks and pounding pipe into them.

What the charge was for the actual building of a mile of fence, I don’t know, but the cost of a single fence post, from quarrying to placing in the fence line, was twenty-five cents. A corner post cost a dollar and a half.

Chapman set up a kind of factory where in the winter he hired some of the black men in the Dunlap area to make posts. Then in the spring and summer he would take a crew out to set them up and



*Piled Chapman Posts*  
Dave Leiker

string wire. Fulghum is also said to have made posts in the winter for later use in warm weather.

Today steel posts in pasture fences are usually set around twelve to fifteen feet apart, but the gap between Chapman posts was much greater, perhaps not so much from expense as from weight. Many early Chapman posts were set twenty feet apart, some up to three rods. If the latter distance, often a hedge post was placed halfway between them, which meant a post every twenty-five feet, which seems typical of Chapman-post fences.

I have seen a few of these posts still in use today, but more often you will see several discarded Chapman posts lying a few yards inside a new steel-post fence, or used as decorations in someone's yard. (We have two straddling the driveway to our house.) A roadside business along Interstate 70 about halfway between Manhattan and Topeka has 250 of them around the parking lot. When I asked the proprietor about them, he said that his property had originally been part of the old Aye Ranch. He bought the posts for ten dollars apiece (not a bad rate of return on a post for which Harrison Fulghum had originally charged a quarter) and moved them with a backhoe and front-end loader (much easier than with a mule-powered sled or wagon).

One of the most unusual uses of a Chapman post can be seen on the road that leads to Lake Kahola, where there

are a number of ten-foot-high posts. Look closely and you can see a glass insulator at the top of each pipe. These were early-day telephone poles set up by a rancher who wanted phone service and had to install his own line.

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*Descending*  
Matthew Regier