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Article Summary: George Guittard, a French emigrant, had great influence in local affairs in Marshall County, Kansas, beginning in the late 1850s. He built Guittard Station, the first permanent settlement in the area. It served as a stopping place for travelers heading west from St Joseph, Missouri.

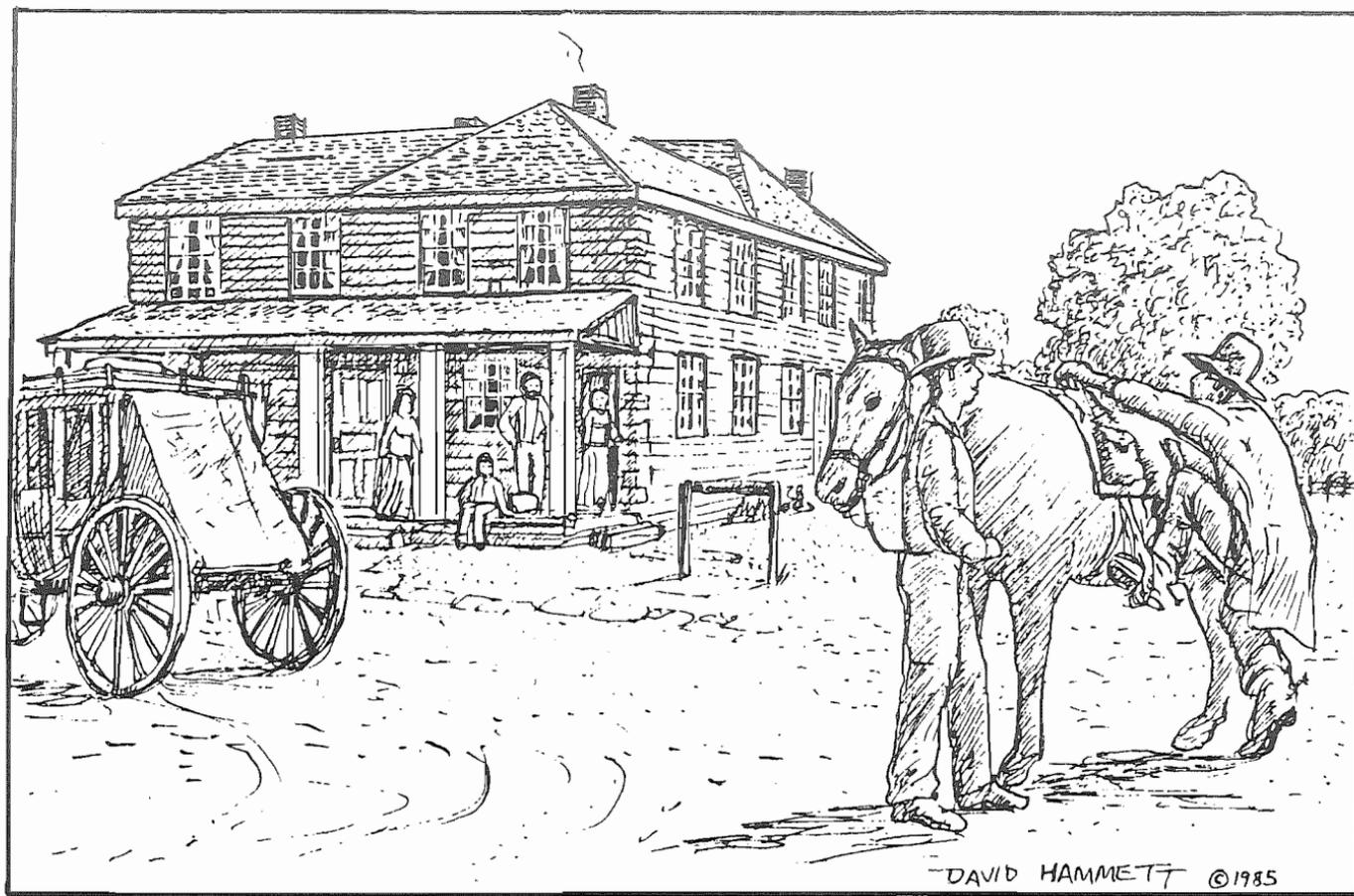
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Photographs / Images: Guittard Station House as it must have appeared in the late 1800s (David Hammett sketch), Guittard Station barn dating to Pony Express days (R L Ellenbecker photo)



*David Hammett of Marysville, Kansas, has sketched the two-story Guittard Station House as it must have appeared during the late 1800s.*

## Guittard Station on the St. Joe Road

*By Sister Mary Mark Orr, S.C.L. (1900-1982)*

George Guittard (1800-1881), a French-speaking Alsatian, was a prime mover in the organization of Marshall County, Kansas, in 1858 and a familiar figure along the trails from St. Joseph westward into Nebraska. For the next 20 years he had great influence in township and county affairs. The writer of the Axtell-area section of Andreas' *History of Kansas* (1882) said with some hyperbole, no doubt: "[He] aided in subduing the fierce and turbulent spirits who at the time ruled the frontiers and knew no higher power to appeal to than the revolver and the bowie knife." A second more measured statement comes closer to describing him: "It may well be said of him that he did more than any other man for the advancement of the interests of Marshall County."<sup>1</sup>

On September 13, 1858, Kansas Territorial Governor John W. Denver issued "commissions . . . to the following officers of Marshall County by virtue of their appointment to fill vacancies: Jacob McCloskey and George Guittard, supervisors, and Harrison Frazier, as sheriff."<sup>2</sup> Smaller now than at the time of organization, a Marshall County township still bears the Guittard name after more than a century. It is located six miles below the Nebraska line. At first it comprised the northeast quadrant of the county, and its northern extremity was the Kansas-Nebraska border.

In 1857 the Guittard family, emigrants from the Colmar area of Alsace, France, some 20 years earlier, were living on the East Coast. That year George Guittard and his wife Madeline Otilie Thomann Guittard felt the siren song of the West. With sons George Jr., Francis, Joseph, and Xavier, they traveled by rail from Philadelphia to St. Louis; by Missouri River steamer to St. Joseph, Missouri; and by ox team to "the wilderness in advance of civilization." (George Guittard Sr. had visited the country previously in 1856 to spy out the land.) At St. Joseph they purchased an ox team and wagon and

traveled westward on the trail into Kansas to the north crossing of the Vermillion River.<sup>3</sup> Here in the spring of 1857 on the left bank, they set up a tent for shelter while building a log cabin.

This, the first permanent settlement in northeast Marshall County, became a stopping place for travelers heading westward from St. Joseph, Missouri, toward Ft. Kearny, where several trails merged into the Great Platte River Road. To meet the increasing needs of travelers by wagon train, coach, horseback, even on foot, George Guittard constructed a large station house and barns in 1859-1860. Ben Holladay, the stage line entrepreneur, gave it the name Guittard Station.<sup>4</sup>

Huge logs were squared by axe to form the foundation. Had masonry been used in the foundation, the station house might still be standing. Because the logs had rotted by 1910, and also because the numerous chimneys took fire easily, P. C. Reilly razed the Guittard Station house and used the lumber to erect the present residence on the site.<sup>5</sup>

The two-story Guittard Station was 38 by 43 feet, with a wide 8-foot corridor dividing the six large rooms on each floor.<sup>6</sup> Rooms were about 14 by 15 feet each. A broad open stairway filled part of the main hall. Mail was distributed through pigeonholes patrons found just inside the main or west entrance. Beyond was the waiting room, which held both a ticket office and hotel desk.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the earliest description of Guittard hospitality appears to have been written in 1860 by Richard F. Burton:

We spanned the prairie to Guittard's Station, . . . on the far side of a shady, well-wooded creek—the Vermillion, so called from its red sand-stone bottom. For dinner, the host was a young Alsatian [Guittard] . . . The house and kitchen were clean, the fences neat; the ham and eggs, the hot rolls and coffee were fresh and good, and although drought had killed the salad, we had abundance of peaches and cream, an offering of French to American taste.

At Guittard I saw for the first time, the Pony Express rider arrive . . . Beyond Guittard's, the prairies bore a burnt-up aspect. In the rare spots where water then lay, the herbage was still green, forming oases in the withering waste.<sup>8</sup>

Guittard Station greeted and served nationally known travelers—Jim Bridger, the scout; William F. (Buffalo Bill)

Cody, ubiquitous frontiersman; Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, and his Civil War correspondent, Albert D. Richardson; Mark Twain, author, who probably registered as Samuel L. Clemens; William G. Fargo of Wells, Fargo Express Company; Bishop E. S. Janes, nationally known leader of the Methodist Episcopal Church; stage line owners, Russell, Majors, Waddell, and Dave Butterfield; diplomats from China and Japan; prominent Mormon leaders from Utah; senators from the new state of Kansas, Samuel Clark Pomeroy, James Henry Lane, and John J. Ingalls; Army officers; and doubtless many others whose names were not recorded.<sup>9</sup>

George Guittard's youngest son Xavier (1831-1924) became a public servant like his father. Over a period of three decades he served as commissioner, trustee, treasurer, clerk, and school director at county, township, and school district levels. He was a Democrat in politics and master of Guittard Grange, No. 539.<sup>10</sup>

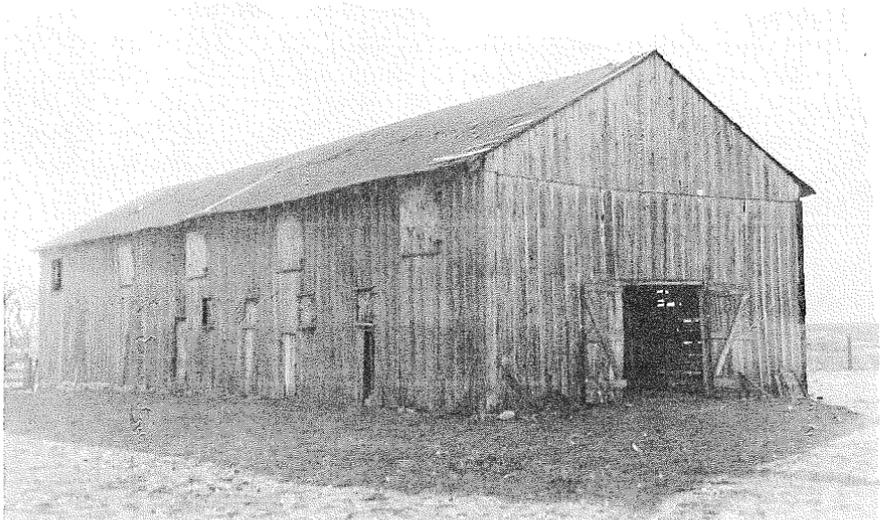
When in 1861 a United States Post Office was established at Guittard Station, the postmastership fell to the youngest of George's three sons, Xavier, who was the most fluent in English. For more than 40 years he filled this office, a record for tenure at the time. Even after 1871, the founding date of the Beattie Post Office three miles distant on the railroad Guittard continued to serve the farmers until Rural Free Delivery displaced it in 1902. Federal records do not tell the exact date of its closing. Robert W. Baughman, author of *Kansas Post Offices*, 1961, said in an interview that year, that the last record in Washington, D.C. of a salary check paid to Postmaster Guittard was October 5, 1900.<sup>11</sup> Other local sources give 1902 and 1904 as closing dates. Possessors of letters postmarked in 1901-1902 have been reported.

The contracts to transport the mail led to the business of carrying passengers in mail wagons. The first such conveyance went twice a month. In the winter of 1858, Russell, Majors and Waddell established a daily stage line. Stations were erected every 10 to 15 miles and furnished with stables where replacement horses were kept for the four and six-horse teams. The amount paid for carrying the mail to the West Coast was estimated at \$400,000 annually. The line was sold to Ben Holladay, who became the great Overland Stage man.<sup>12</sup> To satisfy Californians, a faster mail service, the Pony Express,

came into being.<sup>13</sup> Already there existed suitable stations for this service between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City, including Guittard Station. Guittard's commodious building, described as the best between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains by Ben Holladay, who entrusted the Frenchman Guittard with his confidential business affairs, was made division headquarters.<sup>14</sup>

While serving as commissioner shortly after the organization of the county, the elder Guittard was instrumental in organizing the first school district.<sup>15</sup> He donated the site for the schoolhouse, the logs to build it, the money to furnish it, and frequently boarded the teacher in order to keep the school open. Few families lived in the nine-mile-square district, which came to be known as Guittard School No. 19. Location of the building was on a hilltop nearly south of the station buildings on the east-west section line. The first teacher was Miss Emma Totten, Illinois born, she had come to the county with her family in 1858 and married another pioneer, Peter Jones, an Englishman.<sup>16</sup> The Guittard schoolhouse burned during the 1886-1887 term.<sup>17</sup>

*Guittard Station barn dating to Pony Express days was photographed in 1935 by R. L. Ellenbecker of Marysville, Kansas. The barn was razed shortly thereafter.*



Near the schoolhouse, land was set aside for a cemetery. In the 1860s, apparently, it fell into disuse, due in some measure to the popularity of the Beattie Union Cemetery near the town of Beattie.<sup>18</sup>

Travelers' accounts and newspaper articles about Guittard Station indicate there were also girls in the household. In addition to Mr. and Mrs. Guittard and their three sons, there were a granddaughter, a niece, and a grandniece of Mrs. Guittard. After his marriage, son Joseph brought his wife there to live; they had a daughter, Magdalen. The elder niece was Amelia Helene Thomann, daughter of Mrs. Guittard's brother, James (Jacques) Thomann Jr. (1806-1864.) The younger girl was the latter's granddaughter, Rose.<sup>19</sup>

Having been a domestic in France until her 19th year, Amelia had mastered the fine art of managing a large house. And that was her career at Guittard Station until Mrs. Guittard's death in 1889. Amelia continued to live at Guittard with her cousin Xavier until her death on April 17, 1902. Amelia's accomplishments ran to flower gardening. Flower boxes decorated the west front porch and either side of the wide steps. Here also perched the colorful peacocks which surprised guests who had come by stage coach and wagon. Under the eaves of the porch were canaries in cages and sometimes bluebirds and other songsters which had been trapped in the woods. Inside the house fine china, even copper lusterware brought from the Old World, adorned marble-topped furniture. To the east or rear of the house were formal gardens. Vegetables grew in the curving areas among the flower beds. This wonderland was recalled by grandnieces 70 years later.<sup>20</sup>

After the railroads had supplanted the trails in carrying settlers westward, Guittard Station's days of service to transients were over. It became a farm of 480 acres. The Guittard family finally sold it in 1906 to Patrick C. Reilly of St. Bridget. The personal effects were scattered around the community through a public sale.<sup>21</sup>

## NOTES

1. A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), p. 931, col. 2.

2. "Governor Denver's Administration," *Transactions of Kansas State Historical Society*, V (Topeka: 1889-1896), p. 509.

3. "The Renaming of Robidoux Creek, Marshall County," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* XVIII (May 1950), pp. 159-163.

4. Andreas, p. 931.

5. The house was razed in the late 1800s.

6. Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Album of Marshall County, Kansas* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1889), p. 617.

7. Interview with Mrs. Pauline Wuester Bell, August 1969, in her home, 2½ miles north of Beattie.

8. George A. Root and Russell K. Hickman, "Pike's Peak Express Companies, Part III— The Platte Route," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XIII (November 1945), pp. 516-517.

9. Chapman, p. 618.

10. Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California* (Topeka, 1901; reprinted 1950), p. 197. "Guittard Station Was One of Busiest Places in Marshall County," clipping, *Marysville (Kansas) Advocate*, January 28, 1960; "Kansas History as Published in the Press," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XXX (Winter 1964), p. 562.

11. Robert W. Baughman, *Kansas Post Offices, May 29, 1828-August 3, 1961* (Topeka: Kansas Postal History Society, 1961), pp. 54, 204.

12. William E. Connelley, *History of Kansas State and People*, I (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1928), p. 163.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

14. Andreas, p. 931.

15. Chapman, p. 618.

16. Interview with Mrs. Robert (Mary Crisp) Keller, August 1969, in her home at Beattie, Kansas.

17. Ruby Schafer, "The Reunion, October 9, 1949, and Memories of Barklow School, District 113, Richard Township, Marshall County, Kansas" (Burbank, California: Mimeographed, 1952), pt. I, p. 7.

The last teacher was Nellie Orr (aunt of the author), third of six children of Nicholas and Johanna Brown Orr, pioneer settlers on land adjoining Guittard's. Interview with Sister Mary Nicholas (Lizzie) Orr, R.S.M., October 20, 1948, Mercy Hospital, Denver.

The school was first built east of Vermillion River, but a population shift later caused its removal across the river. Land was procured from pioneer Abraham Wuester and named Orr School, District 107. The previous number, District 19, was reassigned to O'Neill School several miles north-east. Interview with Glen Wuester, August 1969, in his home 2¼ miles north of Beattie, just west of the Guittard farm. Glen is a brother of Pauline Bell.

18. The writer first became familiar with the cemetery in 1915. Its high barbed wire fence even then contained, or rather restrained, a bit of wilderness. Pine and oak trees towered above prairie grass, plum bushes and hawthorne, with iris and peonies near almost hidden tombstones. The

writer's second visit came 40 years later. The fence was gone and cattle had cleaned away the growth. Stones were aslant, some were broken, and some burials had been transferred to other cemeteries.

In 1964, 11 marked graves remained. In a letter from Mrs. Forrest (Viola Wagner) Tegethoff, Beattie, Kansas, January 22, 1964, to the author, she listed these legible inscriptions:

"Josie, daughter of J. and E. Guittard, died January 22, 1881.

"Joseph Thomann—Mary Ann, wife of Joseph Thomann, born August 12, 1830, died June 28, 1863, age 33 years.

"Jacques Thomann—58 years. Victoria, wife of Jacques Thomann.

"Larkin: Albert; Edgar, 5 years; Walter, 6 years.

"Ayres."

(Several small markers could not be identified.)

Mr. and Mrs. George Guittard Sr. and Xavier died in 1924 at St. Joseph, Missouri, and are buried in Beattie Union Cemetery.

19. Interview by telephone and letter with Imogene Chase, Topeka, Kansas, July 1970.

20. *Ibid.*; J. Neal Carman, *Foreign-language Units of Kansas; Atlas and Statistics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1962), Sec. IV, Remarks, p. 197.

21. "PUBLIC SALE—At the *Guittard* farm, 4 miles north of Beattie, Kansas, beginning at 10 o'clock sharp, on Tuesday, February 20, 1906, the following property:

"13 Head of Horses, 2 Milk Cows, Implements, etc. 3 sets of work harness; 2 sets single buggy harness; 1 set double buggy harness; 2 buggies; 1 road cart; 3 wagons; 1 dump cart and harness; 1 horse hay fork and pulleys; 1 Pitts threshing machine and power; 1 truck wagon and hay rack; 2 hay racks; 1 feed cooker;

"A lot of cook stove and a lot of heating stove wood; 1 six-hole Charter Oak cook stove with reservoir; 2 heating stoves; 1 Kimball organ; 1 Fairbanks sewing machine; Household goods too numerous to mention. 320 fence posts Oak and Walnut; 1 cider mill; 1 self hog waterer;

"1 set blocks and tackle, A stack of millet straw; A lot of other articles; 383 feet of pine lumber good as new; 1 gasoline 4-burner stove with oven; 12½ dozen chickens; 500 or 600 bushels of seed oats; A lot of prairie hay under roof.

"Terms: 12 months at 10 per cent. Harry Jones, Auct. Joe Baer, Clerk. X. *Guittard*."

*Beattie Eagle*, February 9, 1906, p. 1.