

# World's Largest

# Hand-Dug Well

THE  
**BIG WELL**

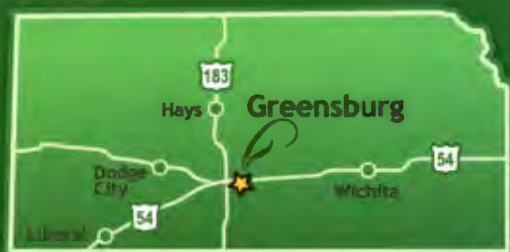
Greensburg, Kansas



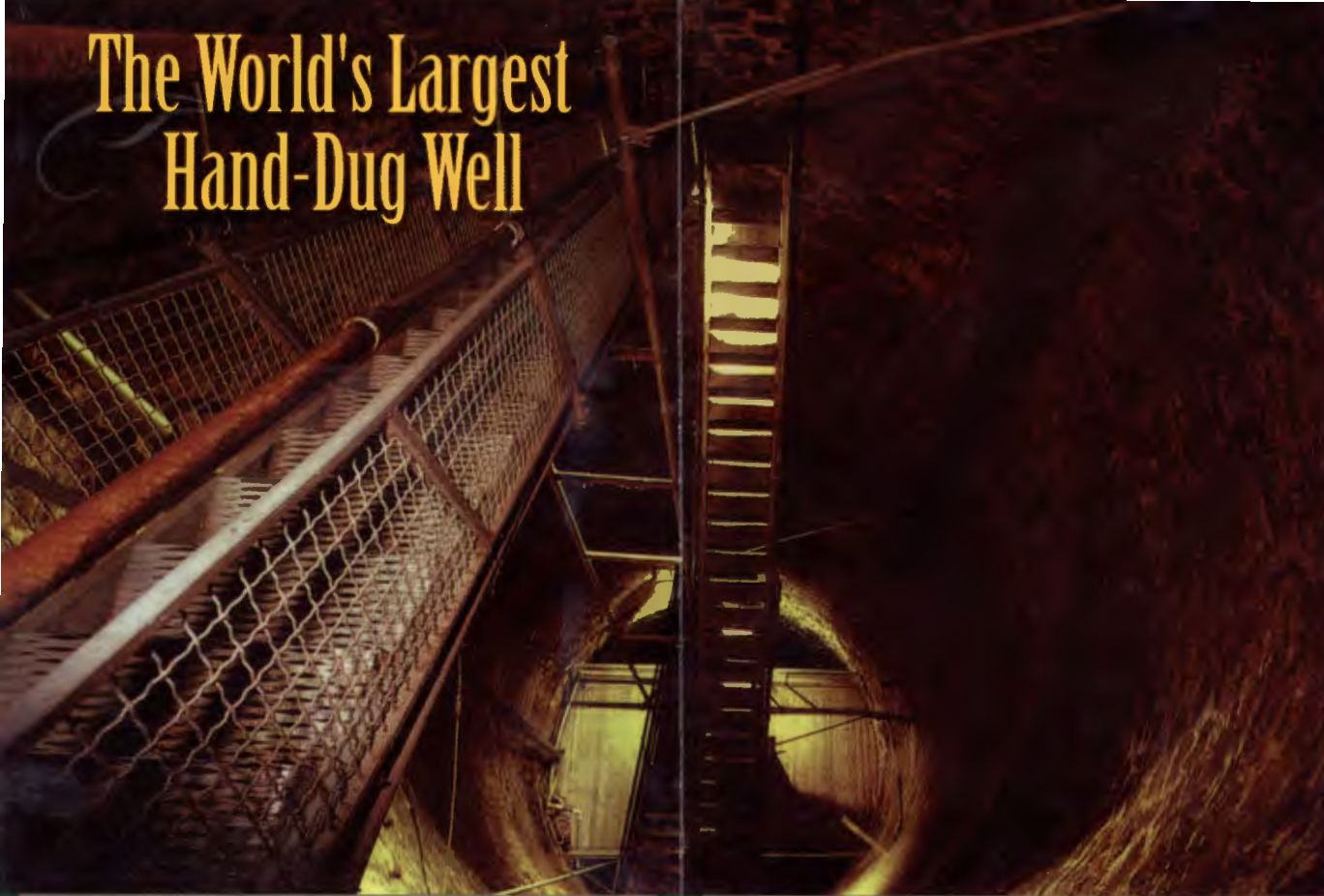
Home of the



"Space Wanderer"  
Pallasite Meteorite



# The World's Largest Hand-Dug Well



## An Engineering Marvel of the 1800's...

The story of the World's Largest Hand-Dug Well began in the 1880's when both the Santa Fe and Rock Island Railroads were laying tracks across the plains of Kansas. A large supply of water was needed for the steam locomotives and for the people of the area. The only dependable source of water was from a well. In 1887, the city granted a franchise for a water works system to cost approximately \$45,000.00, a huge sum of money in those days. But the Rock Island line won the rail laying race and Santa Fe used the water for only a short time. However, the well served as a source of water for the city until 1932.

Construction of the well was a masterpiece of pioneer engineering. Workers were engaged at sun-up and paid at sun-down, fifty cents to a dollar a day. Crews of 12 to 15 farmers, cowboys, and transients working for a stake to go on west, dug the well. The only tools that were used were a shovel, pick, half barrel, pulley and rope. Other crews quarried and hauled native stone to be used as casing of the well. The stone was brought in wagons from the Medicine River 12 miles south of Greensburg over roads that were little better than cattle trails. Dirt from the well was hauled away by the same wagons which had slatted beds. By opening the slats, and dumping the dirt in low spots, streets and roads to the quarry were leveled. An air of excitement surrounded Greensburg as the townspeople looked forward to fire protection and

running water to their homes. Visions of a thriving, growing metropolis was incentive for all the hard work that lay ahead.

Harry F. Hall was foreman of the rail company's Bridge and Building Division at that time and was put in charge of the carpentry work necessary for construction of the well. A wide shaft was cribbed and braced every 12 feet with rough two by twelve inch planks that reached from wall to wall in a wagon wheel type support as the digging progressed.

This was done for the safety of the workers as they shoveled soil into barrels and hoisted the barrels to the surface. The braces were sawed off after the stones were fitted around them. When the desired depth was achieved, numerous lengths of perforated pipe were driven horizontally at the bottom of the wall into the water bearing gravel. This served to increase the flow of water into the well basin.

When the well was completed in 1888, it was 109 feet deep and 32 feet in diameter. The well was covered and opened as a historic attraction in 1937.

In 1972, the United States Government designated the Big Well as a National Museum and in February of 1974 it was awarded an American Water Landmark by the American Water Works Association.

Over three million visitors from every state in the nation and many foreign countries have descended the metal stairway into the cavern of the "World's Largest Hand-Dug Well."



# The Space Wanderer



Meteorites or "shoot-  
ing stars" have awed  
humanity throughout history.

The Space Wanderer which was found on the Ellis Peck farm east of Greensburg may be old beyond imagination and from far beyond our solar system.

Archeological and geological evidence from various parts of the world have led scientists to conclude that the Brenham meteorites were known to prehistoric American Indians at the time of the Hopwell era. The Hopwell Mound Builders found the stones to be desirable as religious symbols and excellent material for making useful tools and ornaments.

In February of 1886, Frank Kimberly and his wife Eliza recorded a homestead claim in Kiowa County. Eliza began to find unusually heavy black rocks which she believed to be meteorites. She wrote various colleges in an attempt to interest some knowledgeable person to examine the treasured stones. Professor Cragin from Washburn University finally risked his money and time to travel the miles with his farm wagon and returned with stones that he was confident were a rare type of meteorite sure to arouse excited interest in the scientific community.

In 1949, H. O. Stockwell, with the aid of a modern metal detector and equipment rigged at the Peck farm, uncovered the largest pallasite found to date, the Space Wanderer, weighing 1000 pounds. A number of local persons expressed the desire to keep the meteorite in the vicinity and through the urging of a member of the Greensburg Chamber of Commerce, the organization made an offer of a reasonable price for the stone. The pallasite was placed in the Greensburg Big Well Museum in 1949, where it has been on display and is seen by many thousands of tourists each year.

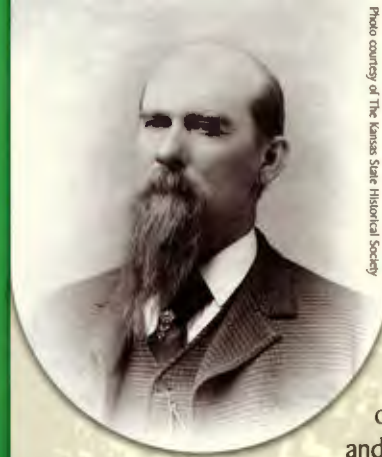


Photo courtesy of The Kansas State Historical Society

# How Greensburg Began...


In 1886,  
Governor John Martin  
organized Kiowa County  
and named it after after

the native Indians of the area. Small settlements were springing up across the plains. Donald R. Green "Cannonball Green" was instrumental in the organization of Greensburg, the town that would bear his name. Green was elected Kiowa County's first representative in the Kansas legislature in 1889.

Colonel Green was a flamboyant, boastful character. He liked to dominate a crowd while twirling his diamond-studded watch chains. He owned and operated "Cannonball Stageline" His fine stage-coaches and speeding broncos blazed trails which railroads and highways later followed.

He took great pride in the speed of his coaches and advertised that even "Father Time" couldn't keep up with the "Cannonball." His stageline brought stability and prosperity to the towns it served as he helped his passengers become acquainted with prairie life. But his stageline was upstaged when the railroad came to Kiowa County.

## Open Daily

 **Summer Hours:** Memorial Day - Labor day  
8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

**Winter Hours:**  
9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday - Saturday  
1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sunday

**Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas**

Free Admission to Gift Shop, Museum  
and Pallasite...Donations Accepted.  
*Tickets available to explore the well.*

## The Big Well

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Greensburg, KS 67054  
phone (800) 207-7369  
[www.bigwell.org](http://www.bigwell.org)