

Barton County, nearly in the geographical center of the state, is bounded on the north by Russell county, east by Ellsworth and Rice, south by Stafford and Pawnee, and west by Pawnee and Rush counties. It is exactly 30 miles square and contains 900 square miles. The county was created by an act of 1867, and was named in honor of Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross association. The southern half of Barton county lies in territory that was erected as Washington county by the act of 1855, while the northern portion includes part of the unorganized territory attached to the counties lying east of it. It is supposed that the first white men who saw this part of Kansas were the Spaniards under Coronado (q. v.). The first American to visit Barton county was Lieut. Zebulon Pike, who led an exploring expedition to the Rocky mountains in 1806. On Oct. 13 of that year, Pike reached the most northerly bend of the Arkansas river, about 6 miles east of the present site of Great Bend, where he encamped for several days. (See Pike's Expedition.) The McKnight party, with a train of pack mules, followed the trail along the Arkansas in 1812, and in 1820 Maj. Long's expedition passed along practically the same course. This early route later became the historic "Santa Fe Trail."

As far as can be learned, the earliest settler in Barton county was a man named Peacock, who located his ranch on Walnut creek about 3 miles east of the big bend of the Arkansas. His residence was an adobe hut, and in the fall of the year 1860, he and five other men were killed by Kiowa Indians, who drove off the stock and committed other depredations.

In 1868 the Indians created considerable trouble by attacking ranchmen and wagon trains, running off cattle, and in some cases killing settlers and travelers. In October they attacked a provision train near Ellinwood, and in his report of the affair Gen. Hazen stated that "about 100 Indians attacked the fort at daylight, and were driven off; then they attacked a provision train; killed one of the teamsters, and secured the mules from four wagons; then attacked a ranch 8 miles below and drove off the stock."

The first cemetery in the county was the old grave yard laid out about 300 yards northeast of Fort Zarah (q. v.), in which the graves made at the time of the occupation of the fort by troops may still be

seen. In some cases they were marked by stones, but are nearly all overgrown with buffalo grass.

The United States census of 1870 found two people who declared themselves residents of Barton county. They were John Reinecke and Henry Schultz, natives of Hanover, Germany, who came from Illinois in March, and after searching for land near the present site of Ellinwood got the Ellsworth surveyor to accompany them to Walnut creek, where they selected a location, and had it surveyed. The settlement they established was about 6 miles northwest of the present city of Great Bend. Others who came to the county in 1870 were W. C. Gibson, Gideon F. Mecklem, William Jous, Antone Wilke, George Berry and Mike Stanton, who settled along the Walnut in what are now Buffalo and Walnut townships. Most of the pioneer homes were rude dugouts and sod houses. The first log house was built late in the year 1870 by Mr. Mecklem, and was provided with loopholes and small windows as a means of defense against the Indians. The principal occupation of the early settlers was killing buffalo. They used the flesh and tongues for food, in some cases selling the meat at the nearest settlements, while the hides were tanned and sent to the markets in the east. A few tried farming, but were unsuccessful, as the buffalo tramped out the crops and wallowed in the soft plowed ground. The first settlements in Great Bend township were made by E. J. Dodge, who made a homestead entry on Jan. 23, 1871, and D. N. Heizer, who entered land in May of the same year. Some of the other settlers of that year were John Cook, W. H. Odell, Thomas Morris, George Moses and Wallace Dodge.

For about five years after its creation Barton county was attached to Ellsworth for judicial and revenue purposes, but in 1871, it had the required number of voters and population to entitle it to a separate organization. Accordingly, a petition was presented to the governor asking that the county be organized, and on May 16, 1872, Gov. Harvey issued a proclamation for the organization of the county and declared Great Bend the temporary county seat. The officers appointed by him at that time were Thomas Morris, John H. Hubbard and George M. Berry commissioners, and William H. Odell, clerk. The board held its first meeting at Great Bend on May 23, 1872. At this meeting the commisisoners divided Barton county into three civil townships, Lakin, Great Bend and Buffalo, and declared each township to be a commissioner district. An election for township officers, and to decide upon the location of the county seat, was ordered for July 1. The election was held and resulted in the selection of M. H. Halsey, John Cook and L. H. Lusk, commissioners; William H. Odell, clerk; Thomas L. Morris, register of deeds; J. B. Howard, clerk of the district court; E. L. Morphy, treasurer; D. N. Heizer, probate judge; J. B. Howard, county attorney; A. C. Moses, superintendent of public schools; John Favrow, surveyor; George W. Moses, sheriff, and D. B. Baker, coroner. Upon the question of a permanent location of the county seat, Great Bend received 144 votes, Ellinwood 22 and Zarah 33.

Soon after Barton county was organized some difficulty arose between the authorities of Ellsworth and Barton counties with regard to the payment of taxes. Some of the settlers had already been placed on the tax rolls by the assessor of Ellsworth county before Barton was organized, and had paid their taxes to the Ellsworth county treasurer. For a time the Ellsworth county officers refused to pay over to Barton county the taxes thus collected, but matters were finally amicably adjusted.

The settlement of Barton county was both rapid and steady. A number of Germans located around Ellinwood, where a store was opened in 1874 by F. A. Steckel, who also started a grist mill. The following year the first brewery in the county, and the first in this part of the state, was erected at Ellinwood. About this time a number of Russians entered land about 7 miles west of Great Bend. One of the points of great interest in the county is Pawnee Rock (q. v.) in the southwest corner. In early days of travel along the Santa Fe it was a noted landmark.

The first school in the county was a private one established in 1872 by James R. Bickerdyke. In December of that year bonds were voted for the first school house. A number of the early settlers were Catholics, who erected the first church building in the county in Lakin township in the fall of 1877. The second church was built by the Methodists the following winter. Prior to this time services were held by traveling preachers. The first postoffice was established at Zarah in 1871, with Titus J. Buckbee as postmaster. The first record of marriage is that of Jonathan F. Tilton and Addie Eastey in Nov., 1872. Judge W. R. Brown presided at the first term of court in April, 1873. George A. Housher, whose birth occurred on Oct. 2, 1871, was the first white child born in the county.

On Oct. 8, 1872, a special election was held to vote on the question of issuing \$25,000 of county bonds for the erection of a court-house and jail. The proposition was carried, and on March 26, 1873, the bids were opened. The contract was awarded and the building, located in the county square at Great Bend, was completed and accepted that year. G. L. Brinkman was elected to the state legislature on Nov. 5, 1872, and was the first person to represent Barton county in the general assembly of the state. In 1874 the limits of Barton county were enlarged by the addition of a part of Stafford county. This territory was held until 1879, when the matter, after being fought through the courts, was decided against Barton county, for the reason that Stafford, by the act of division, was reduced to an area less than that required by the state constitution. The original bounds of Barton were therefore restored.

The county is divided into the following townships: Albion, Beaver, Buffalo, Cheyenne, Clarence, Cleveland, Comanche, Eureka, Fairview, Grant, Great Bend, Homestead, Independent, Lakin, Liberty, Logan, Pawnee Rock, South Bend, Union, Walnut and Wheatland.

The southern part of the county is level, the northern portion higher and somewhat broken. The valleys of the Arkansas river and Walnut creek are from 2 to 7 miles in width, with a sandy loam soil, which is very fertile and productive. Narrow belts of timber, principally cottonwood, elm, ash, box-elder, hackberry, willow and walnut, are found along the streams, and many artificial groves have been set out. Barton county is one of the "banner" wheat counties of Kansas, but corn, Kafir corn and oats are extensively raised. Limestone of a good quality is found in the northern portion, and sandstone in the southern half of the county. Clay is found in the north, and a vein from 15 to 18 feet thick lies about 3 or 4 miles north of Great Bend. A rich bed of rock salt has been discovered about 3 miles northeast of Great Bend and has been drilled 100 feet.

The Arkansas river is the principal stream. Its course through the county is in the form of a crescent, or great bend, from which the town of Great Bend takes its name. There are several tributary streams, Walnut and Little Walnut creeks being the most important. The main line of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railroad follows the course of the Arkansas river, passing through Ellinwood and Great Bend, while a branch of the same system runs east from Ellinwood into Rice county. A second branch runs northwest from Great Bend into Rush county. The main line of the Missouri Pacific railroad traverses the county almost directly east and west through the center and has a branch south from Hoisington to Great Bend. There are about 95 miles of main track road within the limits of the county, furnishing ample shipping facilities to the central and southern parts.

The U. S. census for 1910 reported the population of Barton county as being 17,876, which showed a gain of 4,092 during the preceding decade. According to the report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture for the same year, the value of all farm products was \$4,203,193. The principal crop was wheat, the value of which was \$2,897,283, and the corn crop was valued at \$739,400. During the year 1910 live stock of the value of \$244,159 was sold.