

**Clay County**, in the northeastern part of the state, is in the second tier of counties south of Nebraska, and its eastern boundary is about 100 miles west of the Missouri river. It is bounded on the north by Washington county; east by Geary and Riley; south by Dickinson, and west by Ottawa and Cloud, and has an area of 660 square miles. By an act of the first territorial legislature in 1855, the territory embraced within the present limits of Clay county was attached to Riley county for all revenue and judicial purposes. Subsequently Clay was attached to Geary county. In 1857 Clay was created and named in honor of the great compromise statesman, Henry Clay.

The first white men to visit this part of Kansas were the French, who about 1724, passed up the rivers seeking to open up trade with the Indians. In 1830, David Atchison, an adventurous pioneer, penetrated as far west as the present county of Clay. Col. John C. Fremont, in his expedition to the Rocky mountains in 1843 crossed what is now the southwestern part of the county, and in his report on June 11, 1843, says, "For several days we continued to travel along the Republican . . . on the morning of the 16th, the parties separated, and bearing a little out from the river . . . we entered upon an extensive and high level prairie."

Among the first permanent settlers were the Younkins brothers from

Pennsylvania, who in April, 1856, entered land on Timber creek. Within a short time they were followed by J. B. Quimby and William Payne, who took up land on the west side of the Republican near the present site of Wakefield. The first actual settler on the site of Wakefield was James Gilbert, who located there in 1858. Mrs. Moses Younkins and Mrs. Quimby were the first white women in the county. In 1857 John Gill, Lorenzo Gates and a man named Mall located on Deep creek farther up the river, where Gatesville and Mall creek commemorate them. During the fall of 1857 and the spring of 1858 immigration was steady, some of the best claims being taken up by the new settlers. The first wedding occurred on Dec. 18, 1859, when Lorenzo Gates married Lucinda Gill. The first white child born in the county was Edward L. Younkins, whose birth occurred on Dec. 2, 1858.

The drought of 1860 almost entirely stopped immigration and the population of the county increased little until the close of the war. Then a second era of progress opened and many settlers entered land for permanent homes. When these pioneers came to Clay county, they found the land in the possession of the Kaw Indians, who were comparatively peaceful, but the settlers were so alarmed by reports of depredations in adjoining counties, that they left their homes and fled to places of safety. During the war between the Pawnees and Delawares, in the Smoky Hill valley in 1857, many of the pioneers sought refuge in Riley county, but returned when they were assured that the Indians would not wage war in their locality. Late in the summer of 1864, Indian troubles in Nebraska again frightened the settlers in Clay county from their homes. In the Historical Map Book of Clay county the following statement is made: "In Aug., 1864, the Indians made a raid on the settlers living on the Little Blue, in Washington and Marshall counties. The settlers from the northern part of Clay and the southern part of Washington county, fled from their homes and gathered at Huntress' cabin, where about 200 of them encamped for a month. . . . During the month the mail went no farther than the encampment; the postmasters took their respective mails and distributed them there." In 1868 the Indians left their reservations, committed depredations in Cloud, Washington and Republic counties and the frightened settlers hastened into Clay county from all directions.

At the outbreak of the Civil war Clay was still an unorganized county, with but few inhabitants, hence but 47 men responded to the calls for volunteers and enlisted in the Union army. The settlers, few as they were, were much depleted by the troublous times of the Civil war. In 1860 there were eleven families in what is now the Wakefield district, but by 1863 only two men were left, J. M. Quimby and Edward Kerby, while the only men left on Mall creek were Lorenzo Gates and John Butler.

Dr. Burt, who came to Kansas in 1868, gives the following description of the early settlements in Clay county: "In coming from Milford, the first house after leaving Mr. Hopkins' this side of the river, was Mr.



Quimby's log cabin, then Mr. Todd's stone house, then an old fashioned log cabin where Mr. Payne's house now stands, then a log house at what is now Wakefield. The next house to the north was, I think, Harvey Ramsey's, and the next ones were in the Avery district, which seemed well on toward Clay Center. In Jan., 1870, there were no houses between Clay Center and Fancy creek, between Clay Center and Chapman's creek, nor between the head of Chapman's creek and Wakefield."

Prior to 1870, nearly all the settlements were made along the streams, as the early settlers did not believe farms would be opened on the upland during their lives. But in the fall of 1869, a party of English colonists located on the prairie between the Republican river and Chapman's creek, where they entered land and soon developed prosperous farms, the settlement becoming known as the Wakefield colony. (q. v.) The first blacksmith shop in the county was opened there in 1859. The first mail route in Clay county was established in 1862. The route ran from Manhattan to Clifton along the river valleys. The first postoffice was on Mall creek, and the first postmaster was Lorenzo Gates. The second was at Clay Center, with Orville Huntress as postmaster, and the third at Clifton, near the northern boundary, was kept by James Fox. The first carrier was James Parkinson, who made his initial trip on July 1, 1862. At first the service was weekly but soon changed to tri-weekly, and Junction City became the southern terminus.

The settlers of Clay county took deep interest in educational matters from the first, and in 1864 the first school house was built at Lincoln creek on government land. It was a rude structure of logs and was nearly completed when Samuel Allen went to the land office at Junction City and filed on the land, thus appropriating the school house as his personal property. This made it necessary to secure another school house and a log cabin was bought of F. Kuhnle. Mrs. Lack was engaged as teacher and opened the first school in 1865 when the first district was organized. The first physician in the county was Dr. J. W. Shepperd, who located there in 1862. Orville Huntress bought a stock of goods and opened a store in 1861, thus becoming the pioneer merchant of Clay county. About the same time he started the first hotel, where the military road crossed Huntress' creek. In 1865 the first sawmill was established on Timber creek by H. N. Dawson, and the same year the Dexter brothers started the first steam sawmill.

Dissatisfaction arose in 1866 in Clay county over the taxes imposed by the authorities of Geary county, and a meeting was held at the school house in Clay Center on July 28 to consider the question of organizing the county. At this meeting Orville Huntress was chosen chairman and George D. Seabury clerk. A committee, consisting of Lorenzo Gates, William Silvers, Joseph Ryan and John G. Haynes, was appointed to draft a petition and affidavit to be sent to the governor as required by law. On Aug. 10, 1866, the governor appointed Lorenzo Gates, William Silvers and Joseph P. Ryan county commissioners;

George D. Seabury, clerk, and named Clay Center as the temporary seat of justice. At the first election on Nov. 6, 1866, the county seat was permanently located at Clay Center. The county officers elected at this time were Thomas Sherwood, Henry Avery and William Silvers, commissioners; S. N. Ackley, clerk; Orville Huntress, treasurer; S. N. Ackley, register of deeds; J. B. McLaughlin, surveyor; Russell Allen, sheriff; James Hemphill, coroner, and Orville Huntress, assessor. Lorenzo Gates was the first man to represent Clay county in the lower house of the state legislature and L. F. Parsons was the first state senator.

A stone court-house was erected by the Dexter brothers in 1868, and used until 1875, when the county offices and records were moved into the Streeter building. For a number of years the building used as a county jail was rented.

The first board of county commissioners divided the county into three civil townships, viz.: Sherman, in the northern part; Clay Center, in the central, and Republican in the southern part, each extending the full width of the county east and west. As population increased the original townships have been divided to form, Athelstone, Blaine, Bloom, Chapman, Clay Center, Exeter, Five Creeks, Garfield, Gill, Goshen, Grant, Hayes, Highland, Mulberry, Oakland, Republican, Sherman and Union.

The first term of the district court in Clay county was opened by Judge James Humphrey, Oct. 26, 1859.

The first railroad to enter the county was the Junction City & Fort Kearney (now the Union Pacific), completed to Clay Center on March 12, 1873, and terminated there until 1878. It crosses the eastern boundary about 7 miles north of the southern boundary and follows the river northwest through Clay Center to Clifton. The Kansas Central, at first a narrow gauge road, was built in 1883. It crosses the county from east to west about the center, passing through Clay Center, and now belongs to the Union Pacific. Since then a line of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific system has been built from southeast to northwest through the county, following the general course of the Republican river. The Missouri Pacific crosses the northern boundary near Vining, and a branch of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe crosses the southwest corner, giving the county over 95 miles of main track railroad within its boundaries.

The first issue of the Clay County Independent, edited by Houston & Downer, appeared on Aug. 20, 1871, being the first paper in the county. On Jan. 11, 1873, it was sold to J. W. Miller who changed the name to the Dispatch, the first number of which appeared March 12, 1873.

Rev. R. P. West of the Methodist church preached the first sermon in the county, but the Baptists were the first denomination to organize a permanent congregation. That was Aug., 1868, and the church was dedicated in Oct., 1874. The Presbyterian church of Clay Center was organized in the school house on April 1, 1871, and the first minister



was J. D. Perring. Father Tichler established the Catholic church at Clay Center in April, 1877. Since then nearly all denominations have organized and erected churches in the county.

The surface of the county is rolling except in the north part of Oakland and the southern part of Five Creeks townships, which are high and rocky. The river and creek bottoms vary from half a mile to a mile in width and comprise about one-twelfth of the area. Timber belts are common along the streams and consist of cottonwood, red and white elm, oak, hackberry and locust. Sandstone and magnesian limestone are abundant, clay for brick and pottery is plentiful and red ochre and gypsum are also found. Agriculture is the principal occupation. Corn, winter wheat and oats are the chief crops, while in 1907 there were 150,000 bearing fruit trees, peach and apple being the leading varieties. The county stands well to the front in stock raising and dairy products.

Clay Center, on the Republican river, a little north and east of the center of the county, is the seat of justice and principal town and is the site of the county high school. Other towns of importance are Green, Idana, Industry, Morganville, Oakhill and Wakefield. The population of the county in 1910 was 15,251, and the value of the agricultural products, including live stock, was over \$4,000,000.