

Coffey County, in the third tier of counties from the Missouri line, and the fourth tier from Oklahoma, is bounded on the north by Osage county; on the east by Franklin and Anderson; on the south by Woodson, and on the west by Greenwood and Lyon. Its area is 648 square miles, and it was named for Col. A. M. Coffey, a member of the first territorial legislature.

The first known settlement of white men within the county was made in the Neosho valley in 1854 by Frederick Troxel, who built a log cabin on the old Indian trail about three-fourths of a mile south of the present town of Le Roy and moved there with his family. Mrs. Troxel's brother, Gen. John B. Scott, the founder of Le Roy, was at that time an Indian trader at the Sac and Fox agency. The Indian trail extended from the agency southwest through Coffey county, crossing the Neosho river where Burlington now stands, where the Indians had a burial ground, and continuing to the Buffalo hunting grounds in the Indian Territory. A small colony from New York, including Ahijah Jones and his son, George, William R. and Alban Saunders, settled at the present location of Le Roy in Dec., 1854. They brought their families the next year. Washington Vickery and Levi Heddens (who is said to have been the first man to cross the Neosho river in a wagon) were here in 1854, but did not locate until 1855. Others who came in 1855 were, Dr. Hamilton Smith, a free-state man prominent in territorial struggles, Morgan Dix, Simpson Despain, Hiram Hoover, Judge Strawn and Joe Lebo, all of whom settled near the present site of Ottumwa, and Mr. Crall on Lebo creek, also the "Hampden Colony" consisting of 100 men and women from Hampden, Mass.

This colony founded a town across the river from the present city of Burlington. Its promoters expected to make it the leading commercial center of southeastern Kansas. They put up business establishments and organized a county court, but the founding of Burlington was a serious check to it, and with the permanent location of the county seat at the latter place in 1865, Hampden faded from view entirely. Le Roy and Ottumwa were located in 1855, and the county was pretty well settled by the end of 1856.

The boundaries of the county were fixed by act of the legislature in July, 1855, as follows: "Beginning at the southeast corner of Weller (Osage) county, thence south 24 miles; thence west 24 miles; thence north 24 miles, and thence east 24 miles to the place of beginning." Although the county was not yet organized a court was established at Hampden under Judge Cato, which the next year was moved to Le Roy. When the legislature officially organized the county in 1857 Le

Roy was made the temporary county seat, and the following officers were appointed: E. C. Amsden, sheriff; John Woolman, probate judge; Richard Burr and Samuel Lock, commissioners. An election for commissioners was held in September and resulted in the choice of John Evans, John Wooster and Enos Strawn. Efforts were made by the Burlington town company to secure the county seat, but Wooster and Evans being favorable to Le Roy it was located at that place. The legislature of 1858 changed the seat of justice to Burlington and provided for an election on the matter in Oct., 1858. In the meantime the board of supervisors met at Hampden, where the county clerk, Silas Fearl, lived, the other officers retaining their offices at Le Roy. The first meeting of the supervisors to be held at Burlington was on Oct. 5, the next day after the election. Although Le Roy received the largest number of votes for county seat, it was never officially recognized. The county officers were retained there until Judge Rush Elmore came to Burlington to hold a session of court for Coffey county. He ordered the county recorder to move his office to Burlington, and court was held at that place.

In 1861 another election was held to decide the county seat question. Le Roy received the largest number of votes, but not a majority, and the county seat was still maintained at Burlington. Considerable trouble was experienced in getting the county officials to move from Le Roy, and in some instances legal proceedings were instituted to compel removal. In May, 1863, another county seat election was called in which Hampden received a majority of all votes cast and was declared the county seat. Another election for the same purpose was held in Nov., 1865. After two ballots Burlington was finally successful and was declared to be the permanent judicial seat by the commissioners at their meeting in Jan., 1866. However, the people were not yet satisfied and a final election was held in October of that year, which resulted in a majority for Burlington.

When the Civil war broke out nearly all the able bodied men in the county enlisted, leaving only about 100 to protect the homes and to act as a reserve in case of border troubles. Company G, Fifth Kansas cavalry, was mostly made up at Ottumwa and Le Roy, and Company E of the same regiment was made up at Burlington and vicinity. In 1861 Gen. Lane sent out horsemen over the territory of eastern Kansas for help to repel the Price invasion in Bourbon county, which was threatening some of the valuable Federal supplies. The word reached Ottumwa on Saturday afternoon, and the next morning early 104 men left that point to reinforce Lane's command at Fort Lincoln. Here they defended the fort and labored on the earthworks while Gen. Lane was at the front. In May, 1862, the First and Second Indian regiments were organized at Le Roy from refugee Indians. Col. Coffin, who was at that time superintendent of Indian affairs for that section of the country, including the Indian territory, had his headquarters removed from Tallequah to Le Roy on account of the turbulent conditions in

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the Indian territory. Here he received the Indians who were driven from their homes, numbering some 8,000 persons belonging to the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw, Uchee, Quapaw, Keechi, Southern Shawnee and Southern Delaware tribes. It was from these that the Indian regiments were organized and officered by white men. (See Indian Brigade.) From lack of military discipline over one-half of the first Indian regiment deserted and came back to Le Roy, but were induced by Lieut. Proudy to reënter the service.

As a pioneer country and a border district a good many tragedies and disasters of various kinds happened, but there was only one hanging, and that was of a semi-legal nature, being ordered by an improvised court of citizens. Just south of the old Indian cemetery at Burlington lived a family by the name of Claywell. Different members had been repeatedly arrested but there being no jails, they always managed to escape. Horse stealing was the particular offense of the two grown sons, and the citizens decided that the next time any of them committed a crime they would take things into their own hands. A short time after this conclusion had been reached one of the young men stole a horse from Le Roy and was arrested. Word was sent out and the citizens formed a court, with judge, jury, attorney for the defendant and attorney for the state. He was found guilty and, on vote of the mass who attended the trial, was hanged at Le Roy in presence of a vast throng of witnesses. This happened in 1858. Numerous murders were committed in the first ten years of the county's existence.

The first postoffice was established at Le Roy, the mail being carried from the Sac and Fox agency by private conveyance until postoffices were established at Burlington and Ottumwa, when a mail route was put in operation. The first marriage was between John Bowen and a Miss Crail in 1856. The first birth was that of John Whistler. The first school was Burlington district No. 1, organized in 1858.

The history of the railroads of Coffey county begins with the construction of the Neosho division of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas in 1870, though several roads were projected before the war. This road enters the county on the west and runs in a southeasterly direction into Woodson county, passing through Burlington and Le Roy junction. The Missouri Pacific, which runs through the southern part of the county from east to west, was built in 1880. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe was built in 1878. It extends from the northeast corner of the county southwest to Gridley. Another branch of this road crosses the county in the northwest corner.

The county was originally divided into 7 townships, Pottawatomie, Ottumwa, California, Avon, Burlington, Le Roy and Neosho. This division was made by the county commissioners in 1858, who the next year reduced the number to four, Avon, Le Roy, Burlington and Ottumwa. In 1860, the original 7 were reëstablished, Rock Creek was added in 1870, Pleasant, Hampden and Liberty in 1871, Spring Creek in 1872, Key West and Star in 1874. Lincoln has been added since.

The towns and villages of Coffey county are as follows: Burlington, the county seat, Agricola, Aliceville, Crandall, Hall Summit, Kong, Lebo, Le Roy, Ottumwa, Patmos, Pottawatomic, Sharpe, Strawn and Waverly.

Coffey is an agricultural county. The general surface is rolling prairie, and the bottom lands, averaging one to two miles in width, comprise one-eighth of the total area. The native trees are oak, hickory, hackberry, elm, black walnut, sycamore, soft maple, box elder, ash, locust and pecan. Sandstone, red ocher and clay for brick and tile are found in commercial quantities. Salt springs and marshes are plentiful along the Neosho. The county is underlaid with natural gas.

The Neosho river, the principal stream, enters the county on the west several miles below the northwest corner, crosses in a southeasterly direction, leaving near the southeast corner. Its tributaries from the north are, Lebo, Hickory, Wolf, Long, Crooked and Spring creeks, and from the south, Duck, Turkey, Big, Rock, Otter and Eagle creeks.

The total value of farm products for 1910 was \$5,000,000. The wheat and corn crops went considerably over \$1,000,000 each. Other important products are oats, hay, poultry, dairy products and live stock. The population in 1910 was 15,205, and the assessed valuation of property was \$23,082,616, making the wealth per capita average over \$1,500. This shows Coffey county to be in the first rank among the wealthy counties of the state.