

Decatur County.—About 1870 there was a great tide of immigration to the western part of Kansas, which at that time was unorganized and a large portion of it unsurveyed territory. Within two years the population in that section had increased to such an extent as to justify the establishment of a number of new counties. Accordingly, the legislature of 1873 passed an act creating 22 new counties and providing for their organization. Section 1 of that act reads: "The county of Decatur is bounded as follows: Commencing where the east line of range 26 west, intersects the fortieth degree of north latitude; thence south, with the range line, to the first standard parallel; thence west with said parallel to the east line of range 31 west; thence north with said range line to the fortieth degree of north latitude; thence east with said parallel to the place of beginning."

Decatur county is therefore in the northern tier, and is the third county east of the State of Colorado. It was named for Commodore Stephen Decatur; is exactly 30 miles square, with an area of 900 square miles; is bounded on the north by the State of Nebraska, on the east by Norton county, on the south by the county of Graham, and on the west by the county of Rawlins. The surface is generally undulating prairie, breaking into bluffs along the streams. The northern part is watered by Beaver creek; the central by Sappa creek, and the southern by Prairie Dog creek and the north fork of the Solomon river, all of which flow in a northeasterly direction. The belts of timber along the streams are narrow, less than five per cent. of the entire area being wooded land. Ash, white elm, box-elder, hackberry and cottonwood are the most common varieties. Fine limestone is found in the bluffs along the creeks, and in fact good building stone is found in all parts of the county. Clay suitable for the manufacture of brick and tile is abundant.

A few settlers located within the limits of the county before the passage of the act of 1873 defining its boundaries. Among these early comers were J. A. Hopkins, who came in Sept., 1872, and in December

located a claim, the land having been surveyed the previous summer, and S. M. Porter, John Griffith, Henry M. Playford and a few others, who came about the time the county was created. Henry P. Gandy brought his wife with him, and she was the first white woman to become a resident of the county. A child born to them in 1873 was the first white child born in the county, and the first death was that of a man named Austin who settled on Sappa creek in that year and died soon afterward. In April, 1874, a postoffice called Sappa was established where the city of Oberlin now stands, with J. A. Rodehaver as the first postmaster. The first marriage was that of Calvin Gay and Margaret Robinson in the fall of 1875, and the same fall George Worthington taught the first school, in what is now Oberlin township, not far from the present county seat.

The experiences of the early settlers in Decatur county were not materially different from those in other frontier localities. Roads had not yet been opened; the pioneer residences were either dug-outs, sod houses or log cabins of the most primitive type; markets were far distant, and the trusty rifle had to be frequently depended upon to furnish food for the family. Fortunately game was plentiful. Buffalo hunts were common and seldom failed to provide a supply of meat, which was "jerked"—that is partially smoked and then dried in the sun—after which it would keep for an indefinite period. The country abounded in antelope, jack rabbits and wild turkey, with an occasional elk or deer. But the hardships of frontier life, the loss of crops by drought, grasshoppers, etc., caused a number of the early settlers to abandon their claims and turn their faces eastward. The discontent was heightened by the Cheyenne raid of 1878 (q. v.), when on Sept. 30 Dull Knife's band killed 17 white men in the county. The victims were William and Freeman Laing, John Laing, Jr., J. G. Smith, E. R. and John Humphrey, Moses F. Abernathy, John C. Hutson, George F. Walters, Marcellus Felt, Ferdinand Westphaled and his son, Edward Miskelley, Frederick Hamper, and three men named Lull, Wright and Irwin. At the legislative session of 1909, J. D. Flanigan, the member of the house from Decatur county, introduced and secured the passage of a bill, of which, after giving the names of the victims, the preamble and section 1 were as follows:

"Whereas, Said citizens were buried near Oberlin, Decatur county, and their graves are unmarked and the location thereof is almost lost; therefore,

"Be it enacted by the legislature of the State of Kansas: That the sum of \$1,500 is hereby granted to the board of commissioners of Decatur county, Kan., in trust, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1911, to be by said board expended in the erection of a suitable monument at the last resting place of the persons above named. Said sum to be taken from any money not otherwise appropriated."

The monument was unveiled with appropriate ceremonies on Sept. 30, 1911, the 33d anniversary of the raid. This monument is historically important, not so much because it pays a justly deserved tribute to men

who died in defense of their homes as because it commemorates the last Indian raid in Kansas.

After the Indian scare had abated, other settlers began to come into Decatur county, and by the close of the year 1879 the population was over 1,500, the number required by law for the organization of the county, which prior to that time had been attached to Norton for judicial and revenue purposes. A memorial signed by 250 householders, duly attested, was presented to Gov. St. John, who on Dec. 11, 1879, issued his proclamation declaring the county organized. The governor appointed Frank Kimball, John B. Hitchcock and George W. Shoemaker as commissioners, E. D. Stillson as county clerk, and designated Oberlin as the temporary county seat. At their first meeting (Dec. 15, 1879,) the commissioners divided the county into six townships, viz: Grant, Beaver, Bassetville, Oberlin, Prairie Dog and Jennings; defined the boundaries of each; designated voting places, and ordered an election for county and township officers to be held on Feb. 3, 1880. At that election the following officers were elected: Commissioners, Henry Claar, H. C. Johnson and Frank Kimball; representative, M. A. Conklin; county clerk, N. G. Addleman; clerk of the district court, W. A. Colvin; treasurer, George Metcalf; sheriff, W. A. Frasier; county attorney, E. M. Bowman; probate judge, Luther Brown; register of deeds, George W. Keys; superintendent of schools, D. W. Burt; surveyor, S. L. Bishop; surveyor, Dr. — Street. At the same time the question of a permanent county seat was voted on, Oberlin winning over all competitors by a majority of 181 votes, and officers were elected in each of the several townships.

On March 8, 1887, Gov. Martin approved an act of the legislature authorizing the commissioners of Decatur county to levy a tax of two mills on the dollar for the erection of a court-house, and by the act of March 8, 1907, the commissioners were authorized to purchase a site and erect a court-house, the cost of which was not to exceed \$50,000, and to levy a tax of not more than three mills on the dollar to pay for the same.

On June 12, 1879, Humphrey & Counter issued the first number of the Oberlin Herald, the first newspaper in the county. In 1909 there were six weekly papers published in the county—three in Oberlin and one each at Dresden, Jennings and Norcatat.

Decatur has three railroads. The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific crosses the southeast corner; a line of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy crosses the northwest corner, following closely the course of Beaver creek, and a branch of the same system runs eastward from Oberlin. These three roads give the county over 56 miles of main track and afford fairly good transportation facilities.

The educational opportunities are good. In 1909 there were 101 organized school districts in the county, with a school population of 3,294. The estimated value of school property in that year was over \$124,000. By the act of March 4, 1903, the county commissioners were

authorized to establish a county high school on receipt of a petition signed by a majority of the electors. A petition was filed and the school was established at Oberlin, the county seat.

The county is divided into the following townships: Allison, Altory, Bassettville, Beaver, Center, Cook, Custer, Dresden, Finley, Garfield, Grant, Harlan, Jennings, Liberty, Lincoln, Logan, Lyon, Oberlin, Olive, Pleasant Valley, Prairie Dog, Roosevelt, Sappa, Sherman and Summit. The population in 1910 was 8,976; the value of taxable property was \$12,659,175; the value of field crops for the year was \$1,162,021, and the value of all farm products was \$1,682,032. The five leading crops, in the order of value, were: Wheat, \$397,421; corn, \$255,980; hay, \$209,427; Kafir-corn, \$73,308; barley, \$66,104.