

**Ellis County**, located in the third tier of counties south of the State of Nebraska and the sixth east of Colorado, was created by the act of Feb. 26, 1867, with the following boundaries: "Commencing where the east line of range 16 west intersects the second standard parallel, thence south to the third standard parallel, thence west to the east line of range 21 west, thence north to the second standard parallel, thence east to the place of beginning."

The boundaries as thus established are the same as at the present time, giving the county an area of 900 square miles. Popularly speaking, it is bounded on the north by Rooks county; on the east by Russell; on the south by Rush, and on the west by Trego. It was named for Lieut. George Ellis of Company I, Twelfth Kansas infantry, who was killed at the battle of Jenkins' Ferry, Ark., April 30, 1864. The surface of the county is practically the same as that of all western Kansas—one broad stretch of prairie, with but little natural timber growth, though some artificial groves have been planted, and there are about 25,000 bearing fruit trees in the county. Across the northern portion the Saline river flows in an easterly direction, and the southern part is watered by the Smoky Hill river and its tributaries, the largest of which is Big creek. Along some of the streams there is a natural growth of maple, cottonwood, black walnut, ash, box-elder and hackberry, but these belts do not average more than 200 feet in width. Magnesian limestone is plentiful; limestone of a finer quality is found along the Smoky Hill river; clay suitable for brick making is abundant near Hays; gypsum is known to exist in some localities, and there are a few salt marshes in the county.

Fort Fletcher (later Fort Hays, q. v.) was established in the fall of 1865, but the first settlement was made in the latter part of May, 1867, by the Lull brothers of Salina. They located on the west side of Big creek, a little north of the railroad, and by the middle of June several houses had been erected. The town was called Rome and its founders expected it to become the metropolis of the county. Early in June, Bloomfield, Moses & Co. established a general supply store there, and

later Joseph Perry built a two-story frame hotel. A little later, however, the "Big Creek Land company" platted the town of Hays, or as it was at first called, "Hays City," on the east side of the creek. A rivalry at once sprang up between the two places, but the railroad company threw its support to Hays and the town of Rome passed out of existence. Some of the buildings, including Perry's hotel, were removed to Hays.

In Oct., 1867, a memorial praying for the organization of the county was presented to the governor. The petitioners recommended Pliny Moore, William Rose and Judson E. Walker for commissioners, James G. Duncan for county clerk, and Hays City as the temporary county seat. W. E. Webb, H. P. Field and U. S. Thurmond were appointed to take a census of the county. The census showed a population of 633—a few more than the minimum number required by law for the organization of the county—and Gov. Crawford issued his proclamation declaring the county organized, with the officers and temporary county seat recommended by the petitioners. At a special election in April, 1870, for the location of the permanent county seat, 59 votes were cast, all in favor of Hays. On the question of erecting county buildings, there were 58 votes in favor of the proposition and 1 opposed. Consequently, on April 22, the commissioners issued an order for the erection of suitable buildings, but it was some time before the financial condition of the county would justify the execution of the order. At the present time (1911) Ellis county has a fine stone court-house, two stories high with basement, containing sufficient room for the transaction of all the county business.

The settlement was slow for a time. In 1872 a small colony from Ohio located near Walker, in the eastern part of the county, and was soon followed by two others—one from Pennsylvania and one from New York. The same year an Englishman named George Grant purchased 50,000 acres of land from the railroad company, intending to colonize it with English farmers, and during the next two years some 300 Englishmen, several of them with their families, located on the purchase. The grasshopper scourge of 1874 caused a large number of the settlers to leave the county, but in the three years beginning with 1875 a large number of Russian emigrants came to take the places of those who had left.

The first white child born in the county was John Bauer, whose birth occurred on Jan. 29, 1868, and the same year witnessed the first marriage, the contracting parties being Peter Tondell and Elizabeth Duncan. The first court was held soon after the county was organized, Judge Humphrey presiding. The county has but one line of railroad—the Union Pacific—which crosses it from east to west near the center, giving it a little over 32 miles of main track.

In 1910 the population of Ellis county was 12,170, a gain of 3,544 during the preceding decade. The county is divided into the following civil townships: Big Creek, Buckeye, Catherine, Ellis, Freedom, Hamil

ton, Herzog, Lookout, Pleasant Hill, Saline, Smoky Hill, Victoria, Walker and Wheatland. The assessed value of property for 1910 was \$18,938,312, and the value of farm products, including live stock, was \$2,867,960. The five leading crops, in the order of value, were: wheat, \$1,718,900; corn, \$261,882; hay, including alfalfa, \$119,702; Kafir corn, \$110,160; barley, \$40,760. The value of dairy products for the year was \$94,718. According to the report of the state superintendent of public instruction, there were 53 organized school districts, with a school population of 4,138.