

Ellsworth County, located nearly in the geographical center of the state, was created in 1867 with the following boundaries: "Commencing at the southeast corner of the county of Lincoln, thence west 30 miles; thence south 24 miles; thence east to the west line of McPherson county, thence north to the place of beginning." It was formed out of unorganized territory and has an area of 720 square miles. The county was named in honor of Allen Ellsworth, a lieutenant in the army, who built Fort Ellsworth on the Smoky Hill river in 1864. At the present time it is bounded on the north by Lincoln county, on the east by Saline and McPherson, on the south by Rice and on the west by Barton and Russell counties, and is divided into the following townships: Ash Creek, Black Wolf, Carneiro, Clear Creek, Columbia, Ellsworth, Empire, Garfield, Green Garden, Langley, Lincoln, Mulberry, Noble, Palacky, Sherman, Thomas, Valley and Wilson.

The surface of the country is diversified and may be divided into "bottom" land, upland or rolling prairie and bluff land. The "bottom" lands or valleys are from a quarter of a mile to a mile in width and aggregate about one-eighth of the entire area. The bluff land is found near the rivers and creeks, while the south half of the county is nearly all undulating prairie or table land. The principal water course in the Smoky Hill river, which enters the county about 6 miles south of the northwest corner and flows in the southeasterly direction, leaving the county about 5 miles north of the southeast corner. Its main tributaries

are Blood, Buffalo, Turkey, Ox Hide, Oak, Ash, Clear, Thompson's, Elm, Bluff and Mule creeks. Plumb creek crosses the southwest corner. The soil is well adapted to grains and the most important crops are corn and winter wheat, but oats, Kafir corn and prairie hay are also extensively raised. The county ranks high in live-stock raising and there are over 50,000 bearing fruit trees. Magnesium limestone is abundant in the northeastern portion and red sandstone in the central and southwestern parts. Mineral paint of a good quality and excellent potter's clay are found in many localities. Large quantities of gypsum exist in the high lands and in the central part are vast beds of rock salt which is extensively mined at Ellsworth and Kanapolis. Coal is the chief mineral product, however, three mines having been opened in the early '80s, near Wilson, south of the Smoky Hill river.

One of the earliest settlements in the county was made late in the '50s by P. M. Thompson. Others who came about this time were Adam Weadle, D. H. Page, D. Cushman and Joseph Lehman. They all settled in the same locality. In 1860 a settlement was made on Clear creek north of the Smoky Hill by S. D. Walker, C. L. and J. J. Prater and Henry and Irwin Farris. Late in the same year H. Wait and H. P. Spurgeon came to Ellsworth, the former settling on Thompson's creek and the latter with the Walker party on Clear creek. All of these men were unmarried or without their wives. T. D. Bennett moved to the county in Aug., 1861, and his wife was the first white woman in the settlements.

In the summer Indian troubles began, when a settler on Cow creek and S. D. Walker of the Clear Creek settlement were killed. Fearing another attack, the settlers in the county took refuge at the stage station on the Smoky Hill, where all the people of the surrounding country gathered, but learning that the Indians were coming in great numbers they left for the east. In June, 1864, Lieut. Allen Ellsworth and forty men were stationed at Page's old ranch, where they built a blockhouse, and in July Gen. Curtis named it Fort Ellsworth (q. v.)

On April 2, 1868, the first marriage was solemnized in the county when George W. Hughes married Rusha Maxon. For some years immigration was slow, and it was not until 1873 that rapid settlement began by foreigners. The Swedes located in the southeastern part of the county, some Bohemians in the west, and the Germans were scattered, but were especially numerous in the south. A large colony arrived from Pennsylvania in the spring of 1878 and located near the present town of Wilson. In the early '80s large tracts were bought up for ranches, some of them containing as many as 18,000 acres, and this had a tendency to keep the population down. In time, as the land increased in value, these large ranches were broken up and sold as farms so that today Ellsworth is essentially a farming country.

When the county was organized in 1867, the following officers were appointed by the governor: J. H. Edwards, V. B. Osborn and Ira Clark, commissioners; E. W. Kingsbury, sheriff; M. O. Hall, clerk. At their

first meeting on July 9, 1867, the commissioners ordered an election to be held on Aug. 10, for the election of county officers to serve until the next general election. There were to be four polling places, Ellsworth, Merriam's house on Elkhorn creek, Clark's house on Thompson's creek and Farris' house on Clear creek. At the election V. B. Osborn, W. J. Ewing and J. H. Blakē were elected commissioners: E. W. Kingsbury, sheriff; M. O. Hall, clerk; J. C. Hill, probate judge; Thomas Delacour, register of deeds; M. Newton, treasurer; J. H. Runkle, attorney; C. C. Duncan, superintendent of public schools; J. C. Ayers, surveyor; M. Joyce, coroner, and J. E. New, assessor. They perfected the county organization on Aug. 24, 1867. Prior to that time it had been attached to Saline county as a municipal township. The town of Ellsworth was made the seat of justice. In 1871 agitation was begun for the erection of a county court-house. Bonds to the amount of \$12,000 were issued for its construction on July 30, 1872, two lots had already been donated the county for a site, and a fine two-story brick building was erected. A stone jail, also two stories in height, was built.

The Ellsworth County Agricultural and Mechanical Fair association was organized in 1877, "for the purpose of advancing the agricultural, horticultural and mechanical interests of the county." It has become one of the well known institutions of the county. The first paper in the county was the Ellsworth Reporter. The second was the Wilson Echo, published by S. A. Coover, and made its initial appearance in Aug., 1879. The first railroad in the county was the Kansas Pacific, built in 1868, which followed the general course of the Smoky Hill river, while today five lines of railroad, with a total of 88 miles of main track, afford excellent transportation and shipping facilities.

The population of the county in 1910 was 10,444, a gain of 818 during the preceding ten years. The assessed valuation of the property was \$25,103,723, and the value of agricultural products for the year, including live stock, \$3,458,260.