

Geary County, originally called Davis, is located in the northeastern part of the state, being in the third tier of counties south of Nebraska and in the fifth west from the Missouri river. It is bounded on the north by Riley county, east by Riley and Wabaunsee, south by Morris and Dickinson, and west by Dickinson and Clay. It is irregular in shape, contains 407 square miles, and is one of the 33 counties created by an act of the first territorial legislature in 1855. It was organized at the time of its creation and named "Davis" in honor of Jefferson Davis, who was at that time secretary of war. By act of the Kansas legislature of Feb. 28, 1889, the name was changed to Geary, in honor of John White Geary, third territorial governor of Kansas. An attempt was made by the act of March 11, 1893, to change the name back to Davis, provided a majority of the people of the county favored the proposition, but the majority was against the change and the name Geary remains.

It is generally believed that the first white men to visit Geary county were Coronado and his associates in their search for the unknown provinces of Quivira and Harahey. (See Coronado.) The Bourgmont expedition (q. v.) is supposed to have traveled along the south bank of the Kansas river through the present county of Geary. John C. Fremont, in his report of the expedition to the Rocky mountains, says, "we arrived on the 8th (June, 1843) at the mouth of the Smokyhill fork, which is the principal southern branch of the Kansas, forming here, by its junction with the Republican, or northern branch, the main Kansas river."

In 1853 settlers began to come into the territory now embraced within the bounds of Geary county. One of the first to locate permanently was Thomas Reynolds, who settled near Ogden. When Kansas was organized as a territory, there were only 20 voters in the region now embraced within the county. The Pawnee town association was organized on Nov. 26, 1854. Col. W. P. Montgomery was president of the association and William Hammond was secretary. Many of the officers stationed at Fort Riley took an active part in the management of local affairs. The first election, in what is now Geary county, was for the election of a delegate to Congress. It was held in Nov., 1854, and the voting place was at the house of Thomas Reynolds. The free-state candidate was R. P. Flenniken, and the pro-slavery candidate was J. W. Whitfield. The

judges of election were all officers of the army, and of the 40 votes cast, Flenniken received 31 and Whitfield 9. In Dec., 1854, the town of Pawnee was started on the north shore of the river not far from Fort Riley. Some trouble arose in its establishment, as a few settlers had already located on the land. It is said that Col. Montgomery, the president of the town company, had the settlers driven off by a squad of soldiers, in Jan., 1855, and the association was assured by Gov. Reeder, the first governor of the territory, that if the necessary buildings were completed in time he would convene the first territorial legislature at Pawnee. In March a second town company was formed of which William Hammond was president, and a town was laid out and called Chetolah (q. v.). Before the close of March a third town company was organized, which laid out the town of Ashland on McDowell's creek and made a settlement.

On March 31, 1855, the first election for members of the territorial legislature was held, and Pawnee was the only voting precinct in what is now Geary county. It formed a part of the eighth representative and the sixth council district. M. F. Conway was the free-state, and John Donaldson the pro-slavery candidate for the council; S. D. Houston was the free-state and Russell Garrett the pro-slavery candidate for the house of representatives. The free-state candidates were elected by a vote of 53 to 23.

In 1855, according to the promise made by Gov. Reeder, the executive office was removed to Pawnee, and in July the first territorial legislature convened there, but soon after adjourned to the Shawnee Mission in Johnson county. The resolution to adjourn was vetoed by the governor, but the territorial court sustained the measure and Pawnee lost the capital. This was a hard blow to the town company.

Gov. Geary visited the county in 1856, and the same year the county was represented in the Topeka legislature by J. H. Pillsbury in the council and Abram Barry in the house. An act to complete the organization of Geary county as a separate corporation was passed on Feb. 20, 1857. The legislature elected two county commissioners, a probate judge, who was ex-officio chairman of the board, and a sheriff. These officers were to hold office until the first Monday in October, when a county election was ordered, for county officers and to decide the permanent location of the county seat. The first commissioners were Robert Reynolds, C. L. Sandford, and N. B. White and the first meeting was held on March 16, 1857, but only Reynolds and Sandford were present. G. F. Gordon acted as clerk but E. L. Pattie was later regularly appointed to that position. H. N. Williams was elected sheriff; P. M. Barclay, treasurer, and G. F. Gordon, justice of the peace. At the election of Oct. 5, 1857, for members of the legislature, the voting precincts were Ashland, Ogden, Chetolah, Clark's Creek, Riley City and Montague's. At the election 126 free-state and 30 Democratic votes were cast.

The first postoffice in the county was established at Fort Riley in 1853, with Robert Wilson as postmaster. The first marriage solemnized in the county was that of Thomas Jenkins and Ella Wicks on Oct. 1,

1855, and the first white child born was John Fleming, whose birth occurred on Dec. 20, 1854. The pioneer merchant of Geary county was John T. Price, who opened a grocery store at Pawnee in 1854.

The legislature of 1859 located the seat of justice at Ashland. In the spring of 1860 Junction City was made a voting precinct, and a petition was presented to the commissioners for a change of the county seat. Accordingly, the question was submitted to the people and an election ordered for June 25, 1860. Ashland, Junction City, Riley City and Union were the contestants. The election resulted in 287 votes for Junction City, 129 for Union, 3 for Ashland and 3 for Riley City, and thus Junction City became the permanent seat of justice. The first meeting of the county board was held there on July 2, 1860.

Upon the outbreak of the Civil war there was much excitement in Geary county over the men who enlisted in the army. On March 10, 1862, some of the soldiers stationed at Fort Riley, dissatisfied with the secession sentiments expressed in the columns of the *Kansas Frontier*, attacked the newspaper office and did much damage. A meeting of the citizens denounced the action of the soldiers, and it is not certain whether this meeting or something published in the *Frontier* stirred the soldiers to a higher indignation, but the same week they again attacked the newspaper office and this time it was demolished. There were then several regiments encamped at Fort Riley, and the outbreaks of the soldiers became so frequent and annoying that the town was placed in charge of Capt. Sylvester of the Twelfth Wisconsin, who acted as provost guard.

About the same time great excitement was created in Geary and the adjoining counties, by a party of Comanche Indians, who entered the Republican valley, committed depredations and drove out the settlers. The people within easy reach of Fort Riley had little to fear because of the troops stationed there, and many settlers from further west sought refuge in Junction City.

Prior to 1866, the county officers were located in the upper story of a stone building at the corner of Sixth and Washington streets at Junction City. This building was destroyed by fire on the night of April 8, and a few days later the town and county were swept by a cyclone that did great damage.

On July 5, 1866, the county commissioners decided to build a bridge across the Smoky Hill river and authorized the sale of \$20,000 of bonds for the purpose. In 1867 bonds were voted by the people to aid in the construction of the south branch of the Union Pacific railroad and the Kansas Pacific, which was the first railroad to enter Geary county, being completed as far as Junction City on Nov. 10, 1866. A great tide of immigration flowed into the county with the opening of the railroads, and most of the desirable land was soon taken up. In 1870, Geary county was sued by the Missouri, Kansas & Texas railroad company for \$165,000 in bonds that the county had voted to aid in the construction of the railroad, but which had never been paid. After being in the courts for some time, the case passed to the supreme court where a decision was rendered in favor of the county.

Geary county constituted one municipal township up to Aug. 7, 1872, when the board of commissioners divided it into two civil townships, Smoky Hill and Jackson. In time these were subdivided to form the eight townships into which the county is now divided, viz:—Blakely, Jackson, Jefferson, Liberty, Lyon, Milford, Smoky Hill and Wingfield. In 1873, the legislature changed the boundaries of Geary county by taking away Ashland township and adding it to Riley county. At the same time Milford township was taken from Riley and annexed to Geary. The first newspaper was the Sentinel, edited by B. H. Keyser. It made its appearance in June, 1858, as the organ of the Democratic party. In 1859 this paper was bought by Samuel Medary and the name changed to Kansas Statesman. The Frontier Guide, started in 1861, was the second newspaper.

Transportation is furnished by the main line of the Union Pacific railroad, which runs across the northwest part of the country, from northeast to southwest, with a branch northwest from Junction City. A branch of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas enters in the south and terminates at Junction City, giving the county nearly 50 miles of main track railroad.

The east and central portions of the county are rough and hilly along the streams but the southeastern and western parts are undulating prairie. The county is well watered by the Republican and Smoky Hill rivers, which unite near Junction City to form the Kansas river.

The population of the county in 1910 was 12,631, a gain of 1,937 during the preceding ten years. The assessed valuation of property was \$16,642,510, and the value of agricultural products for the year was \$1,888,967.