

Montgomery County, located in the southern tier of counties, is the third west from the Missouri line. It is bounded on the north by Wilson county; on the east by Labette; on the south by the State of Oklahoma, and on the west by Chautauqua and Elk counties. It was settled to some extent before 1870, though the lands still belonged to the Osage Indians until the treaty of Drum Creek in September of that year. However, there was a narrow strip, 3 miles in width, extending along the eastern side, belonging to the "ceded lands," which was opened to settlement in 1867. In that year the first settler, Louis Scott, a negro, located in the Verdigris valley. In Dec., 1867, Zachariah C. Crow, P. R. Jordan and Col. Coffey located in the same neighborhood. In Feb., 1868, R. W. Dunlap established a trading post near the mouth of Drum creek, and about the same time a post was established by John Lushbaugh at the junction of Pumpkin creek with the Verdigris. The next winter Moses Neal opened a store at the mouth of Big Hill creek, and in 1869 Maj. Fitch began a similar business on the north side of Elk creek near the mouth of Sycamore. Among the settlers of 1868, all of whom located along the river and creek valleys in the eastern part of the county, were John A. Twiss, T. C., J. H. and Allen Graham, J. H. Savage, Jacob Thompson, E. K. Kounce, William Fain, Green L. Canada, W. L. and G. W. Mays, John L. McIntyre, Joseph Roberts, John Russell, J. B. Rowley, Patrick Dugan, William Reed, Christian Greenough, John Hanks, Mortimer Goodell, D. R. B. Flora, R. W. Dunlap, Mrs. E. C. Powell, Thomas C. Evans, Lewis Chouteau, George Spece and James Parkinson.

In order to obtain a "squatter's claim" the settler had to secure the consent of the Indians, which, by a treaty made in the Upper Elk valley in 1869, was to be had on payment of \$5 for a prairie claim and \$10 for one in the timber. Considerable trouble was experienced between the settlers and the railroads over the title to the lands in the eastern part of the county. The matter was finally settled in favor of the settlers, by the supreme court of the United States. The unreliability of the early surveys caused no little trouble as to ownership of certain tracts of land after the authorized survey had been made. Unwilling to await the tedious and often expensive process of law on these matters there were formed in different parts of the county what were called "Settlers Claim" clubs, to which all disputes of this character were referred. A code of laws was drawn up to cover all points liable to arise in any case of disputed land title. All cases were settled according "to law and evidence" and whenever a decision had been reached, the party against whom such decision had been rendered was given notice to move from the claim within a certain length of time. Upon failure to obey he was ejected forcibly from the premises and his buildings and other property destroyed. Occasionally these clubs took a hand in criminal cases, as in the punishment of the three murderers of John A. Twiss, who were hanged to an oak tree after a trial by the club.

The county was organized in 1869 by proclamation of Gov. Harvey. Verdigris City was named as the temporary county seat and the following officers were appointed: Commissioners, H. C. Crawford, H. A. Bethuran and R. L. Walker; clerk, E. C. Kimball. The commissioners divided the county into three townships, Drum Creek, Westralia and Verdigris. An election for county officers and to locate the county seat was held in November of the same year. The returns from Drum Creek were thrown out on technical grounds, and the remaining vote gave a majority for Liberty. A board of commissioners favorable to that place were elected. Independence filed a notice of contest and the matter was taken before the court of Wilson county, to which Montgomery was at that time attached for judicial purposes. The court decided that there had been no election. The old board of commissioners continued to serve, but the county seat, in face of great opposition was removed to Liberty. The Independence men sent Charles White to Topeka to lay the matter before the state authorities. He succeeded in getting a new board of commissioners appointed, which was composed of W. W. Graham, Thomas Brock and S. B. Moorhouse. The new board went to Verdigris, City where they organized and appointed the following officers: County clerk, J. A. Helpingstine; treasurer, Samuel Van Gundy; register of deeds, J. K. Snyder; superintendent of schools, R. B. Cunningham. They selected Independence as the county seat and, finding it useless to dissent, the old board gave up the fight. At a hotly contested election in Nov., 1870, Independence received the largest number of votes and became the permanent county seat. The court-house, erected shortly afterward, was the first brick building in the county.

The organization of the county government was followed by reckless and extravagant bond issues. Before 1872 the people had for various purposes voted a debt upon themselves to the amount of nearly \$1,000,000. Money loaned to private parties drew from 25 to 50 per cent. interest. The people were very anxious for a railroad and in 1870 they voted \$200,000 in bonds to the Leavenworth, Lawrence & Galveston company, which built a line through the eastern part of the county terminating at Coffeyville. Independence, indignant at being deserted by the railroad company, after being foremost in securing the bonds, yet over-zealous for a road, paid the company an immense bonus to build a branch. This was called "Bunker's Plug," and was in use from Jan., 1872, to 1879. In the latter year the South Kansas & Western built a line across the county connecting with the main line at Cherryvale, and the next year the St. Louis, Warsaw & Western built a line across the northeastern part of the county. At that time there were 65 miles of railroad in the county. At present there are 160 miles. The early companies have since sold out and the names of the roads have been changed. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe enters in the northeast corner, passes southwest through Cherryvale and Coffeyville and continues on into Oklahoma. A branch of this line diverges at Cherryvale, runs southwest through Independence and into Chautauqua county. There are three lines of the Missouri Pacific. One enters in the north and runs south through Independence to Dearing, where it united with a second line that crosses the southern part east and west, and the third line crosses the northwest corner. The St. Louis & San Francisco enters near the northeast and runs to Cherryvale, where it diverges into two branches, both running to the Joplin-Galena lead and zinc district. The Missouri, Kansas & Texas crosses the southeast corner.

The county is divided into 12 civil townships as follows: Caney, Cherokee, Cherry, Drum Creek, Fawn Creek, Independence, Liberty, Louisburg, Parker, Rutland, Sycamore and West Cherry. The post-offices in the county are, Bolton, Caney, Cherryvale, Coffeyville, Dearing, Elk City, Havana, Independence, Jefferson, Liberty, Sycamore, Tyro and Wayside.

The general surface of the county is prairie. The bottom lands along the creeks and rivers average over a mile in width and comprise 25 per cent. of the area. The timber belts on the streams average a few rods in width and contain walnut, cottonwood, hickory, oak, pecan, hackberry, ash, mulberry, sycamore, elm, maple, box-elder and locust. The Verdigris river enters from the north and flows south into Oklahoma. The Elk river enters in the northwest and flowing east joins the Verdigris. Big Hill, Drum, Pumpkin, Sycamore and Onion are important creeks.

The best quality of limestone and shale are found in abundance. Sand for glass, coal and building stone also exist in commercial quantities. The entire county is a great natural gas and oil field. This gas enables the county to be one of the foremost manufacturing districts in the state.

While not strictly an agricultural county, the yearly product of the farms bring over \$2,000,000. In 1910 the wheat crop was worth \$200,000; corn, \$650,000; Kafir corn, \$112,000; oats, \$250,000; and prairie grass, \$150,000. There are 150,000 bearing fruit trees. Live stock is raised to considerable extent.

The population according to the census of 1910 was 49,475, which was an increase of more than 20,000 in ten years. The assessed valuation of property in that year was \$60,650,000.

A number of disasters in the way of fires and floods have occurred in the history of Montgomery county, but perhaps none was so picturesque as the prairie fire of 1868. A long spring drought was followed by an exceptionally wet summer. The rivers and creeks were swollen so that they were impassable and the ground was soaked so that no crop could be raised. Wild grass grew rank all over the county, and when this became dry a terrific but magnificent conflagration swept the county. While it lasted it kept the skies bright at night, so that ordinary handwriting could be read by the light of the fire at a distance of a mile or more. Live stock, utensils, settlers' cabins and whole villages were destroyed, and a number of lives were lost. In 1874 this section suffered in common with the whole state from the grasshoppers. The next most disastrous occurrence was the flood in the valleys of the Elk and the Verdigris in 1885, when homes were inundated and a number of lives lost.