

Ness County, in the central part of the western half of the state, is the fifth county from Colorado, the fourth south from Nebraska, and the fourth from the Oklahoma line. It is bounded on the north by Trego and Gove counties; on the east by Rush and Pawnee; on the south by Hodgeman, and on the west by Lane. It was created in 1867 and named for Noah V. Ness of the Seventh Kansas cavalry. The boundaries were defined as follows: "Commencing where the east line of range 21 west intersects the 3d standard parallel, thence south to the 4th standard parallel, thence west to the east line of range 26 west, thence north to the 3d standard parallel, thence east to the place of beginning." The legislature of 1873 changed the western boundary so that it extended to the east line of range 27 west, thus adding 180 square miles and making the area 1,080 square miles.

Prior to the spring of 1873 no one but two or three cattle men lived in the county. At that time Dr. S. G. Rodgers came from Chicago with half a dozen families. He made up a fraudulent census showing a population of 600 and sent a petition to the governor which he had signed with a lot of names taken from a Kansas City directory. The petition was granted and on Oct. 23, 1873, the governor proclaimed the county organized, named Smallwood City as the temporary county seat, and appointed Charles McGuire, county clerk; Dr. S. G. Rodgers, O. H. Perry and Thomas Myers, county commissioners. As chairman of the board of commissioners Rodgers proceeded to issue bonds, this being his object in organizing the county, and had himself elected to the legislature. He took his seat on Jan. 13, 1874, and remained there for 30 days, when John E. Farnsworth, one of the cattle men, not being in favor of county organization, exposed the frauds of Rodgers to the legislature. He took a census which showed but 79 inhabitants and gave it as his opinion that the legal voters of the county did not exceed 14. An investigating committee appointed by the legislature found these claims to be true and upon presentation of a petition to

Gov. Osborne, signed by 20 citizens, the county was promptly disorganized. Rodgers was unseated in the legislature and he took the money which had accrued from the sale of bonds and left the country. The families which he had induced on false representations to come to Ness county nearly starved before they could get away.

The county was without officers of any kind until June, 1878, when Gov. Anthony appointed Alfred Page notary public. Settlers had been coming in gradually and in 1879, J. W. Miller, deputy county superintendent of public instruction, organized 22 school districts. In Nov of that year the citizens of Ness City petitioned Gov. John P. St. John for county organization, with that place for temporary county seat. A meeting was held at Sidney about the same time, and another in Jan., 1880. That town sent in a petition asking that it be named the temporary county seat and making recommendations as to who should be appointed as county officers. On April 14, 1880, the governor issued a proclamation reorganizing the county, designating Sidney as the county seat and appointing the following officers: County clerk, James H. Elting; county commissioners, John E. Farnsworth, L. Weston and L. E. Knowles.

The commissioners selected June 1 as the time for the election, when Ness City was made the permanent county seat, and the following officers were chosen: County clerk, James H. Elting; treasurer, B. F. Garrett; register of deeds, J. A. Taylor; sheriff, Gilmore Kinney; coroner, Dr. B. F. Crosthwaite; surveyor, L. E. Knowles; superintendent of public instruction, F. A. Goodrich; attorney, Cyrus Corning; clerk of the district court, N. W. Shaw; probate judge, J. K. Barnd; commissioners, John S. Lightner, William Harding and Samuel C. Kagrice.

The first newspaper was the Ness County Pioneer, established at Clarinda in 1879 by Henry S. Bell. A number of fraternal orders and a Farmers' Alliance were organized about 1880. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe R. R. was begun in 1886 and reached Ness City early in Jan., 1887.

The number of acres under cultivation in 1880 was about 20,000. The number in 1910 was 380,330. The value of farm products in the latter year was \$1,514,924, of which winter wheat, the largest crop, amounted to \$361,000; corn, \$250,000; sorghum, \$110,000; oats, \$95,661; tame grasses, \$176,197; Kafir corn, \$78,177; live stock sold for slaughter, \$138,779; eggs, \$61,869; and dairy products nearly \$100,000.

The county is divided into 10 townships: Bazine, Center, Eden, Forrester, Franklin, High Point, Johnson, Nevada, Ohio and Waring. The postoffices are Arnold, Bazine, Beeler, Brownwell, Francis, Laird, Manteno, Ness City, Nonchalanta, Ransom, Riverside and Utica. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe R. R. crosses east and west in the center through Ness City, and the Missouri Pacific crosses the northern part east and west.

The general surface is nearly level, the rise from the streams being
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so gradual that the bottom lands are not clearly defined. The timber belts along Walnut creek and its south fork are from 30 to 40 rods in width and contain ash, cottonwood, elm, hackberry and box-elder. Walnut creek, the principal stream, flows east through the center of the county, its north and south forks uniting near the center. The Pawnee fork of the Pawnee river enters on the south central border, flows northeast a short distance, thence east and southeast into Hodgeman county. Magnesian limestone of the best quality and sandstone are abundant. Gypsum exists in small quantities.

The assessed valuation of property in 1910 was \$10,835,619. The population in the same year was 5,883, which was an increase of 1,348 over the population of 1900.