

Pratt County, in the south central part of the state, is the second county from the southern line of the state and the seventh from the west line. It is bounded on the north by Stafford county; on the east by Reno and Kingman; on the south by Barber, and on the west by Kiowa and Edwards. It was created in 1867 and named for Caleb

Pratt, of the First Kansas infantry. The boundaries fixed at that time were as follows: "Commencing where the east line of range 11 west intersects the 5th standard parallel; thence south to the 6th standard parallel; thence west to the east line of range 16 west; thence north to the 5th standard parallel; thence east to the place of beginning."

The east and west boundaries have not been changed, but the north and south lines have both been moved one tier of townships to the north. Pratt was one of the counties which experienced a fake organization before it had a single inhabitant. In 1873 a party of men from Hutchinson accomplished a complete organization of the county, bonds were issued and a nonentity elected to the legislature. The organization was never recognized, and as the first settler did not come until the fall of that year it was 1879 before there were sufficient inhabitants to organize. The first actual settler was A. J. Johnson, who located in the vicinity of Springvale. He was followed by J. W. Black and A. Kelly, who came to the same neighborhood, and I. M. Powell came in 1875. These men all brought their families, except Kelly.

One of the noted characters of the early times was "Skunk" Johnson, who in 1874 selected a spot at the headwaters of the Ninnescan river, where he made a dugout, which became known as "Skunk" Johnson's cave and was for a long time one of the curiosities of the county. At one time Johnson was besieged by the Indians in this cave for 15 days, during which time he killed several of their number. It was said that during the siege he subsisted on skunks. After Johnson left it was a favorite camping place for freighters.

There were a few settlers in 1876, but in 1877 over 100 families came, many of them from Iowa. The county was attached to Reno that year as a municipal township. The bogus organization was set aside in the fall of 1878, and in the spring of 1879 the citizens petitioned the governor for organization. A census taker was appointed and upon receiving the returns Gov. St. John issued a proclamation organizing Pratt county, with Iuka as the temporary county seat and the following temporary officers: County clerk, L. C. Thompson; commissioners, John Sillin, Thomas Goodwin and L. H. Naron. The election was held on Sept. 2nd, when the following officers were elected: County clerk, L. C. Thompson; clerk of the district court, Samuel Brumsey; probate judge, James Neely; treasurer, R. T. Peak; sheriff, Samuel McAvoy; county attorney, M. G. Barney; superintendent of public instruction, A. H. Hubbs; register of deeds, Phillip Haines; surveyor, J. W. Ellis; coroner, P. Small; commissioners, John Sillin, L. H. Naron and Thomas Goodwin. For county seat there were three candidates, Saratoga, Iuka and Anderson. In the count the commissioners threw out three townships on account of irregularities. This gave the election to Iuka, but caused so much dissatisfaction that a recount was taken, including the votes previously thrown out. No candidate then had the majority and a new election was ordered. Anderson withdrew. The election was held Aug. 19, 1880. An attempt on the part

of Saratoga to buy votes became public before the election, Iuka received an overwhelming majority and was declared the permanent county seat.

The next year some of the county officials were found guilty of swindling the county by issuing scrip illegally. In the two years after the county was organized they had taken nearly \$75,000 or about \$40 for every man, woman and child in the county. They were prosecuted and new officers elected. In the fall of 1885 there was another county seat election. The candidates were Iuka, Saratoga and Pratt. It was one of the most bitterly contested county seat elections ever held in the state. Saratoga had 546 votes and Pratt 324. As the total number of voters at Saratoga was but 200 fraud was charged, the commissioners sustained the charges and declared Pratt the county seat. The matter was taken into the courts, and pending the decision the feeling ran high. The Saratoga and Pratt partisans were all armed and trouble was hourly expected. The Pratt men went to Iuka and forcibly removed the county records. On the way back they were attacked by the Saratoga men, who succeeded in capturing the treasurer's safe, which they took to their town. The next day Saratoga made an attack on Pratt in a fruitless effort to get the other county property. By this time the more peaceable citizens asked the governor to send militia to restore order. Gov. Martin sent Adjt.-Gen. Campbell and Col. W. E. Hutchinson to the county. They stationed guards at both towns and allowed no one to carry arms. Finally the supreme court handed down its decision and ordered the records taken back to Iuka. Matters quieted down, but the county seat contest was not yet forgotten, and in Feb., 1888, a petition was presented to the commissioners asking for a special election to relocate the county seat. The election was held on Feb. 29 of that year, and Pratt was the winning candidate. The question was settled at last.

The first newspaper was the Pratt County Press, established in 1878 by M. C. Davis and J. B. King. The first school in the county was taught in Iuka in 1878 by Miss Laura Long.

The county is divided into 18 townships: Banner, Carmi, Center, Elm, Gove, Grant, Haynesville, Iuka, Lincoln, Logan, McClellan, McPherson, Naron, Paxon, Richland, Saratoga, Springvale and Valley. The postoffices are Caro, Coats, Croft, Cullison, Iuka, Lawndale, Olympia, Pratt, Preston and Sawyer. A branch of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe R. R., which runs west from Wichita, enters on the eastern border and terminates at Pratt. Another line of the same road enters in the southeast and crosses the southern part of the county running west into Kiowa county, with a branch south from Springdale into Barber county. The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific enters in the northeast and crosses southwest to Pratt, thence into Kiowa county, and a branch of the Missouri Pacific enters in the northeast and terminates at Iuka.

The surface is gently rolling prairie, practically all tillable land.

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Bottom lands average one-fourth to one mile in width and comprise about 8 per cent. of the area. Thin belts of timber line the streams. The Ninnescah river has its source in the central part of the county and flows east. The Chikaskia has its source in the south and flows southeast into Barber county. Gypsum and sandstone are found in the south and southwest.

In 1882 there were about 16,000 acres of land under cultivation. In 1910 the acreage was 371,041, and the value of farm products was \$5,279,294. Corn, the largest field crop, brought \$1,693,629; tame grasses, \$357,943; wild grasses, \$256,925; oats, \$174,773. The animals sold for slaughter brought \$2,196,761; poultry and eggs, \$162,266.

The population in 1880 was 1,890; in 1890 it was 8,118. During the hard times of the '90s the population fell off and in 1900 it was 7,085. In the last decade the increase was about 57 per cent., the population for 1910 being 11,156. The assessed valuation of property in that year was \$25,705,667. The average wealth per capita is \$2,313, which is several hundred dollars above the average in the state.