

**Russell County**, in the northwest section of the state, is in the third tier from the Nebraska line, and is the sixth county east from Colorado. It is bounded on the north by Osborne county; on the east by

Lincoln and Ellsworth; on the south by Barton, and on the west by Ellis. The railroad was built through the central part of the county in 1867, about the time the boundaries were first defined, and before there was a single settler. In 1868 the legislature again defined the boundaries and named the county in honor of Avra P. Russell of the Second Kansas cavalry. In July, 1869, A. E. Mathews settled near the eastern edge of the county for the purpose of mining coal. Early in that year a party of seven section hands working 3 miles west of Fossil were attacked by 25 Indians. The Indians were armed with native weapons and the white men had but two guns. They tried to escape on a hand-car, but two of their number were killed and all but one wounded. The five were saved by a man named Cook, who came to their aid with a gun.

In 1870 a number of men came into the county on a hunting expedition, selected claims and returned to their homes. In April, 1871, a large colony from Green Lake, Wis., settled upon the site of Russell. Shortly afterward a colony from Ohio settled east of Russell and started the town of Bunker Hill. In 1872 a colony from Pennsylvania settled near Dorrance. Up to this time the county had been attached to Ellsworth for judicial purposes. In 1872 Gov. Harvey issued the proclamation organizing the county, naming Russell as the temporary county seat, and appointing the following temporary officers: County clerk, J. L. V. Himies; commissioners, J. B. Corbett, John Dodge and E. W. Durkey; justice of the peace, Stillman Mann. The first election was held on Sept. 9, 1872, and the officers chosen were: Commissioners, John Fritts, John Dodge and Benjamin Pratt; county clerk, E. W. Durkey; sheriff, John Hemminger; treasurer, L. Langdon; probate judge, H. J. Cornell; superintendent of public instruction, H. C. Hibbard; register of deeds, R. G. Kennedy; surveyor, James Selling; coroner, J. W. VanScyoc. The candidates for county seat were Russell and Bunker Hill. The latter had the majority of the votes, according to the count of the commissioners, and was declared the permanent county seat.

This was the beginning of a two-year fight between the towns. The people of Russell never admitted the change of the seat of justice to Bunker Hill, and although the records were taken there, the people of Russell and about half of the county officials, including one commissioner, considered Russell the county seat. When the time came to canvass the vote at the November election this one commissioner and the clerk met at Russell, and the other two commissioners met at Bunker Hill. The county was so evenly divided on the matter that half of the returns were sent to Bunker Hill to be counted and half to Russell. Neither recognized the action of the other. The matter then was taken to the courts and after considerable delay the supreme court decided in favor of Russell. Another county seat election was held on April 23, 1874, and by scheming and plotting Russell succeeded in getting the more votes.

Meanwhile the settlers were steadily coming, and in 1877 a large colony of Russians located about 12 miles southwest of Russell. The next year they were followed by another colony of the same nationality. The first school was taught at Russell in 1871 by Mrs. A. H. Annas. The first newspaper was the *Western Kansas Plainsman*, established in 1872 by A. B. Cornell. The first flour mill was built at Russell in 1875. The county has always been remarkably free from debt.

There are 12 townships, viz: Big Creek, Center, Fairfield, Fairview, Grant, Lincoln, Luray, Paradise, Plymouth, Russell, Waldo and Winterset. The postoffices are Bunkerhill, Dorrance, Fairport, Gorham, Lucas, Luray, Milberger, Paradise, Russell and Waldo. The main line of the Union Pacific R. R. passes through the center of the county from east to west. A branch of the same road enters in the east and crosses northwest into Osborne county. There were 66 organized school districts in 1910.

The general surface of the county is rolling and there are high bluffs along the Saline and Smoky Hill rivers. Bottom lands average three-fourths of a mile in width and comprise 20 per cent. of the area. The soil is mostly clay loam with some Benton and sandy loams. Thin belts of timber line the streams. The Saline river enters on the western border near the northwest corner, crosses east and a little south into Lincoln county. The Smoky Hill river flows east across the southern portion. There are a number of creeks tributary to these two rivers. Soft and hard limestone, potter's clay and salt are found.

The early occupation of settlers was stock raising rather than farming. Up to 1880 sheep were the principal kind of stock, and at that time there were about 30,000 head in the county. Cattle were found to be more hardy and profitable, and in the course of 10 years they were raised more exclusively than sheep. In 1910 there were less than 1,000 sheep and about 33,000 cattle. The first farming was done in 1872, when 600 acres were cultivated. Ten years later the number of acres under cultivation was 214,260. In 1910 there were 433,063 acres out of a total of 576,000 under cultivation. There were then about 50,000 bearing fruit trees. The total value of farm products in that year was \$3,355,929. The amount received from animals sold for slaughter was \$395,143; for corn, \$607,851; wheat, \$1,716,048; oats, \$45,680; tame grasses, \$85,689; wild grasses, \$79,905; poultry and eggs, \$99,424; butter, \$39,686; milk, \$55,515.

The population in 1870 was 156 (all coal miners); in 1875 it was 1,212; in 1880 it had grown to 7,321. There was a slight decrease during the '80s, followed by an increase so that the figures of 1890 were 7,333. In the next decade there was an increase of 1,156, and in 1910 the population was 10,800. The assessed valuation of property in 1910 was \$24,920,442, the average wealth per capita being \$2,308, which is several hundred dollars above the average for the state.