

**Wabaunsee County**, in the eastern part of the state, is located a little north of a central line running east and west and about 75 miles west of the Missouri river. It has an area of 804 square miles; is bounded on the north by Riley county and the Kansas river which separates it from Pottawatomie and Jackson counties; on the east by Shawnee and Osage counties; on the south by Lyon and Morris, and on the west by Morris, Geary and Riley counties. The northern boundary is extremely irregular, following the winding course of the Kansas river, the northeast corner being 6 miles south of the northwest corner. Wabaunsee was one of the 33 counties created by the first territorial legislature in 1855, and at that time was named Richardson, but as such never had any officers and was attached to Shawnee county for all revenue and judicial purposes. In 1859 the legislature changed the name from Richardson to Wabaunsee in memory of the Pottawatomie chief "Wabonsa," signifying "The Dawn of Day."

It is hard to determine who were the first white men to visit this section of Kansas. It is claimed by some that Coronado's expedition passed through what is now Wabaunsee county in the winter of 1541-42, but it is hardly probable. (See Coronado's Expedition.) French, in his Louisiana Historical Collections, says that during the first quarter of the 17th century French traders went among the Pawnees, who hunted along the Kansas river. It is claimed by some historians that the French explorer Dutisne passed west through the valley of the Kansas in 1720, and four years later the Bourgmont expedition followed the

south bank of the Kansas beyond the junction of the Republican and Smoky Hill rivers. In 1842, the Fremont expedition passed up the Kansas valley on its way west. Fremont says, "we crossed at 10 a. m. (June 20) the Big Vermilion."

The earliest permanent settlements were made about 1853-54. One of the first settlers, a few miles north of the present town of Wilmington, was Henry Harvey, who came into the county with his family in 1854. The settlement there prospered and by the close of the war so many settlers had come that in 1869 a postoffice was established and named Harveyville in honor of the first settler. Newbury, on the west bank of Mulberry creek, was started by Dan Horne of Topeka, Col. Allen Phillips and three men named Lakin, Kellum and Bartling. John P. Gleich settled in what is now Farmer township and soon after Peter Thoes, Frank Schmidt, R. Schrader and a man named Schranke entered land. These early settlers located in different parts of the county and the first collective settlement was made in the Mill creek valley, in what is now Wabaunsee township, by Robert Banks, D. B. Hiatt, Peter and Bartholomew Sarra, J. H. Nesbit, J. M. Bisby, Joshua Smith, Clark Lapham and a minister named Leonard.

In 1856 the population of the county was increased by the Beecher Bible and Rifle company, a body of people from Connecticut who organized for the purpose of coming to Kansas to aid in making it a free state. Sixty-five of the colony, exclusive of women and children, each with a Bible in his pocket and a rifle on his shoulder, encamped on May 1, 1856, in the northwest part of the county on the south bank of the Kansas river, where Wabaunsee now stands. The colonists proposed to locate a town site and secure a farm for each member. On the way west, one of the members of the company purchased a sawmill in Kansas City. It was brought to the settlement and as there was a good supply of timber in the vicinity, log cabins were soon built and the mill kept busy supplying lumber for the pioneer homes. The members of the colony were all Congregationalists, and soon erected the first church in the county as well as a two-story school building. In time the church was replaced by a fine stone structure. Soon after their settlement the men organized a military company known as the "Prairie Guards," one of the first organizations in the territory to be armed with Sharp's rifles. This company took part in the border warfare of 1856.

A second colony was formed by a party of Germans in Cincinnati, Ohio, who upon their arrival in Wabaunsee county, selected a site near the two branches of Mill creek and laid out the town of Alma. These people were poor and within a short time the Alma Town association broke up, the site being preempted by individuals. In 1857 many settlers came directly from Germany. The following year Gottlieb Zwanziger built the first grist mill and John Hankammer a sawmill. In 1857 Wabaunsee colony was increased by S. H. Fairfield, S. R. Weed, Enoch, L. H. and J. E. Platt, men from Mendon, Ill., who volunteered to go to Kansas to aid in securing its admission as a free state. The white population of Wabaunsee county at the close of 1857 was about 400.

To perfect the organization of Wabaunsee county an election was held in March, 1859. There were two voting precincts, one at Alma, the other at Wabaunsee. One hundred and eleven votes were cast and the following officers were elected: Henry Harvey, J. M. Hubbard and Gottlieb Zwanziger, commissioners; J. M. Hubbard, probate judge; J. M. Harvey, clerk of the court; John Hodgson, sheriff; Moses C. Welsh, register of deeds; Henry Harvey, treasurer; Gottlieb Zwanziger, surveyor; R. G. Terry, county attorney; S. F. Ross, auditor; J. E. Platt, superintendent of schools, and August Brasche, coroner. Prior to this time Wabaunsee had consisted of one civil township, but at the meeting of the board of commissioners they divided it into Alma, Wabaunsee, Mission Creek and Wilmington townships. When the Pottawatomie reservation was thrown open in 1870, the territory embraced within its limits was called Newbury township. From this time as the population increased the first townships were divided to form the thirteen civil townships into which the county is now divided, viz: Alma, Farmer, Garfield, Kaw, Maplehill, Mill Creek, Mission Creek, Newbury, Plumb, Rock Creek, Wabaunsee, Washington and Wilmington.

When the county was organized Wabaunsee was made the seat of justice, as it was the only town in the county. Its location, however, was not central and it was felt at the time that as the county settled up efforts would be made to change the county seat to a point nearer the geographical center. No permanent county buildings were erected and on Nov. 22, 1866, the question of a permanent location was submitted to the people, Alma and Wabaunsee being the contesting points. The result was a majority of 28 votes for Alma, and in December the county records and offices were transferred to that place, where a small frame building had been erected for county and court-house purposes. Still the permanent location of the seat of justice hung in the balance, for Alma was a town in name only, there being only two buildings on the site in 1869. In 1870 the question of a change again arose and excitement ran high. The contesting points were Alma, Newbury and Eskridge. At the election held on Feb. 7, 1871, Alma received 369, Newbury 217 and Eskridge 256 votes. As there was no choice another election was ordered for Feb. 21. Circulars were scattered all over the county, each town setting forth the advantages it offered. Alma pledged to give the county "a safe, well-built, handsome stone building worth from \$6,000 to \$10,000." The result of this election was 465 votes for Alma and 429 for Eskridge. According to the promise made, the people of Alma soon erected a stone court-house at a cost of \$8,000.

In 1870 the legislature took the greater part of Zeandale township, then the northwest township of the county, and annexed it to the reservation.

The Underground Railroad (q. v.) was successfully operated in Wabaunsee county during the last few years of slavery. There were two stations in the county—one on Mission creek in the southeast and one at Wabaunsee near the northwest corner—and runaway negroes who ar-

rived at Mission creek were taken in charge by a conductor, who took them to Wabaunsee, where they were placed in charge of another conductor to be taken to the next station, etc.

At the outbreak of the Civil war the population of Wabaunsee county was about 1,050. The voting population, however, was only 250, but as nearly all the settlers were from New England they loyally responded to the call for volunteers, and 112 men enlisted for service, giving Wabaunsee a long roll of honor in the military history of the nation.

The Wabaunsee County Herald, the first newspaper in the county, made its initial appearance on April 1, 1869. It was owned and edited by Sellers & Bertram. On Oct. 1, 1869, a half interest in the paper was sold to S. H. Fairfield, who in 1871 became sole proprietor and changed the name to the Alma Union. On May 1, 1872, Fairfield resold to Sellers, and the name of the paper was again changed to the Wabaunsee County News. The Landmark was started by E. H. Sandford in the spring of 1871, but the publication was discontinued in 1874.

The first railroad to enter the county was a branch of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, running from Burlingame northwest to Alma, which was built in 1880. Since then the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific has been built, entering near the northeast corner and crossing the county in a southwest direction to Alta Vista. A branch of the same system leaves the main land at McFarland and runs northwest through Manhattan. There are over 75 miles of main track railroad in the county.

The east and west portions of the county are undulating prairie, but the central and northern portions are hilly, breaking into bluffs along the streams. The valleys, ordinarily, are about a mile wide and cover about one-fifteenth of the area. The timber belts along the streams vary in width from a few rods to half a mile, and consist of walnut, cottonwood, white and burr-oak, mulberry, dog-wood and locust. Corn is the principal cereal, though winter wheat, potatoes, millet, Kafir corn and alfalfa are raised. The county leads in the production of sweet potatoes and ranks high in live stock. In 1907 there were 70,000 bearing fruit trees. Thick ledges of limestone underlie the whole county; cement rock of good quality is found near Alma and thin veins of coal have been found in different places. The northern and central portions of the county are drained by the Kansas river, which forms the northern boundary, Mill creek and its branches, while the southern and eastern portions are drained by Rock, Elm, Dragon and Mission creeks.

Alma, on Mill creek, in the northwestern part of the county, is the seat of justice and the principal town. The population of the county in 1910 was 12,721.