

Wilson County, the fifteenth on the list of the original 33 counties formed by the first territorial legislature, is located in the third tier of counties west from Missouri, and in the second tier north from Oklahoma. It is bounded on the north by Woodson county; on the east by Neosho; on the south by Montgomery, and on the west by Elk and Greenwood. The original boundaries as fixed by the legislature included all that is now Montgomery county, and extended west 24 miles, making it 24 miles square. The free-state legislature altered these boundaries, making them include an area 50 miles north and south by 24 wide. In the adjustment, which took place in 1867, the county assumed its present form.

This county was named in honor of Col. Hiero T. Wilson, a man of prominence in territorial days, who settled at Fort Scott in 1843. The territory was included in the reservation of the Osage Indians, and was not subject to white occupation until 1865 by the treaty of Canville. However, settlement was begun as early as 1857 by the more adventurous who were anxious to secure homes in the rich valleys. Henry H. Opdyke, G. J. and William Caven located in that year at a point near Coyville, and David Johnson and David Pointer on Buffalo creek. The next year a settlement was made in Webster township on Sandy creek, John Circle settled on the forks of east and west Buffalo creeks

in the spring, and was followed by Peter Welsh and sons, George Gould, Philip Hedrick and L. F. Woodruff. Lewis F. Davis located on the Verdigris, and was joined by his brother, Moses, the next year. The colony near Coyville was increased during the summer and fall of 1857 by N. S. Pigg, Gaston Reeves and his son Max, John Ross, Jacob Miller, W. W. Wolverton, Frank Sellers and P. B. Sweet. The next year John Foreman, James and William Ross, Thomas Sylvester, M. H. Sprague and Anderson Jones took claims in the same vicinity. By 1860 the census showed the population to be 27, but it is probable that the number of white settlers at that time exceeded 100. During the war very little was done in the way of settlement or of making improvements.

Wilson county was in an exposed position on the breaking out of the Civil war. To the south lay the Indian Territory, with red marauders ready to take advantage of the turmoil; not far beyond lay Texas, full of the southern enemy; to the west hostile tribes were awaiting an opportunity to wipe out the settlements, and a few miles to the east were the border ruffians of Missouri. And, worst of all, the settlers of the county were merely intruders on the holdings of the Osages and were merely tolerated by rightful owners. During the first year of the war the rebels twice sacked Humboldt and the settlers about Coyville, thinking it would be best to be ready, raised a company of 80 mounted men under the command of Capt. John R. Row. That fall fortifications were built 3 miles south of town on land owned by John Shaffer, and named Fort Row. One side was protected by the insurmountable bank of the river, and the other 3 sides by blockhouses, each 16 by 24 feet, constructed of heavy logs. Embankments were thrown up on all sides and the company went into winter quarters. The next spring the company disbanded and most of them joined the Ninth Kansas volunteers. The wholesale appropriation of property, especially live stock, during the war led to thousands of head of stolen cattle, which had been driven from Texas, being quartered in Wilson county.

Before the war was over the county was organized. There seems to have been nothing to call forth such a step in the midst of the turmoil except the ambition of Daniel C. Finn, who came there from New York in 1864. There was no taxable property and very few inhabitants. Yet an election was called, in which Finn was chosen delegate to the Republican state convention—not the Lane convention, but what was known as the Union state convention. His efforts resulted in a petition of 30 names being presented to Gov. Carney for the organization of the county. The petition was granted and a full roster of county officials appointed, but most of them failed to qualify. The county commissioners were George M. Cottingham, W. M. Asher and William Brown. A mythical point called Syracuse, supposedly in the center of the county, was designated as the county seat. Finn and a town company, numbering 17 men, among whose names appeared that of the governor, made an attempt to found the town of Syracuse. A log cabin was built at the base of West Mound and a street laid off. In April,

1865, Finn was notified by the agent of the Osages, on whose land the site was located, to discontinue operations. The first election was held in Nov., 1864, and, it being a presidential year, a full vote might have been expected. Of the 600 alleged inhabitants of the county only 26 voted.

The first election for county officers was a special one held in Dec., 1864. Syracuse received 15 votes for county seat. The first meeting of the county commissioners of which there is any record was held early in 1867. On March 2 of that year a petition was presented to the board, signed by 113 voters, asking that an election be called to select a county seat. Accordingly the election was held in April, in which Kalida, a mere name, received the majority of the votes. Irregularities were discovered in the canvass of the vote and another election was held on April 30, in which Twin Mounds was chosen county seat. A third county seat election was held in May, 1869, in which there was no majority. In consequence another was held in June. The contest lay between Fredonia and Coyville, the former being successful. The question then lay dormant for two years. The growth of several new towns, Neodesha and Altoona in particular, called the matter forth again. A ballot was taken on May 6, 1871, which resulted in no choice, and another on May 25, in which Fredonia received the majority of the votes. Fraud was detected, which gave the county seat to Neodesha. Fredonia would not give up and carried the matter into the courts, where she lost. While the case was pending another election was called in Jan., 1873, which resulted in no choice, Neodesha this time voting for Center. The choice in the second ballot lay between that town and Fredonia, which place was finally triumphant.

The first school in the county was taught by P. B. Sweet in Verdigris township in 1859. The first marriage was between Abijah Hampton and Miss Cooper in the spring of 1859. The first white child born in the county was Ella Reeves, daughter of Gaston Reeves, in 1857. The first postoffice was at Coyville, established in 1866 with Oscar Coy as postmaster.

The suggestion that oil and gas were to be found in Wilson county was first made by George W. Chase, a semi-mute who in 1888 endeavored to interest the citizens of Neodesha in prospecting. In 1892 W. M. Mills, who had developed the gas fields about Osawatomie, secured a franchise and drilled two good paying wells. He formed a company, from which he later withdrew. But the drilling went on and now there are numerous wells in the county. They average over 800 feet deep. Both oil and gas are found in abundance.

The earliest efforts to supply the county with railroads were made in 1871, when the bonds were voted in Center and Cedar townships to the amount of \$50,000 and \$35,000 respectively, to aid the Fort Scott, New Chicago & Fredonia R. R. to build through these townships. The road was never built. Bonds were voted the next year for the Humboldt & Fredonia and the Missouri & Kansas Southern, neither of which

were built. The first road to attempt a fulfillment of a contract was the Memphis & Southern, which constructed a roadbed from the east line of the county as far as Fredonia. In 1877 bonds were voted for the St. Louis & Kansas Central, but the road was not built. The first road to be built in the county was the St. Louis & San Francisco in 1879. It enters the county near the southeastern corner and runs in a northwesterly direction through Neodesha, Fredonia and New Albany. The Missouri Pacific line enters on the north and crosses to Roper, where it branches, one line going into Montgomery county by way of Fredonia and the other by way of Neodesha. It was built in 1886. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe R. R. enters near the northeast corner and crosses west and southwest through Fredonia into Elk county. This line was built in 1885. A branch of this road from Benedict Junction into Greenwood county was built in 1886.

Wilson county is divided into 15 townships: Cedar, Center, Chetopa, Clifton, Colfax, Duck Creek, Fall River, Guilford, Neodesha, Newark, Pleasant Valley, Prairie, Talleyrand, Verdigris and Webster. The towns and villages are Fredonia, Altoona, Benedict, Brooks, Buffalo, Buxton, Coyville, Dildine, Dun, Guilford, LaFontaine, Neodesha, New Albany, Rest, Roper, Vilas and Ward.

The general surface is undulating prairie in the eastern portion, broken with mounds and bluffs in the west, and with timbered hills and canyons in the northwest. Bottom lands, which constitute 20 per cent. of the total area, average one mile in width. Springs are abundant and well water is found at a depth of 25 feet. The principal river is the Verdigris, which enters near the northeast corner and flows southwest and south into Montgomery county. Fall river crosses the western border in the central part and flows southeast, emptying into the Verdigris near the southeast corner. Two of the principal creeks are Buffalo and Sandy. Occasional disastrous overflows have occurred on the Verdigris, the latest of these in 1908, when a cloud burst caused a rise of 38 feet in the depth of its waters, resulting in considerable destruction of property. Limestone, sandstone, Portland cement, graystone, beds of clay and salt springs are plentiful in different parts of the county.

The area of the county is 576 square miles, or 368,640 acres, of which more than 300,000 acres have been brought under cultivation. The value of the farm products for 1910 exceeded \$2,000,000, of which sum corn contributed \$500,000. Other leading crops are winter wheat, oats, Irish potatoes, flax, and Kafir-corn. Swine and cattle are extensively raised, and there are more than 120,000 bearing fruit trees, three-fourths of which are apples. The total assessed valuation of property in 1910 was thirty-one and a half millions. The population was 19,810.