A HISTORY OF STEVENS COUNTY, KANSAS

by

SEONAID L. EATON

B.A., University of Houston, 1973

A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1977

Approved by:

Homer E. Socolofsky

Homer E. Socolofsky
Major Professor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THIS BOOK CONTAINS NUMEROUS PAGES WITH PICTURES THAT ARE CROOKED COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE INFORMATION ON THE PAGE.

THIS IS AS RECEIVED FROM CUSTOMER.

THIS BOOK CONTAINS SEVERAL DOCUMENTS THAT ARE OF POOR QUALITY DUE TO BEING A PHOTOCOPY OF A PHOTO.

THIS IS AS RECEIVED FROM CUSTOMER.

THIS BOOK
CONTAINS
NUMEROUS PAGES
WITH THE ORIGINAL
PRINTING BEING
SKEWED
DIFFERENTLY FROM
THE TOP OF THE
PAGE TO THE
BOTTOM.

THIS IS AS RECEIVED
FROM THE
CUSTOMER.

ILLEGIBLE DOCUMENT

THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENT(S) IS OF POOR LEGIBILITY IN THE ORIGINAL

THIS IS THE BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LIST OF MAPS

Mueller Scholarship

This study was made possible through the generous assistance of the INA BELLE (WILSON) MUELLER SCHOLARSHIP FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH IN HISTORY established by Colonel Harrie S. Mueller (1892 - 1975) of Wichita, Kansas, for the purpose of facilitating research activity in the preparation of a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation in studies related to Kansas history in order to enlarge the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the state's heritage.

PREFACE

Stevens County, Kansas, is a prosperous agricultural community located in the heart of the world's largest natural gas field. The history of the county, unlike most American farming communities, is not one of steady, constant evolution. On the contrary, Stevens County's past is filled with extremes. A period of land speculation and rapid settlement in the 1880's was followed by drought and depression in the 1890's. In the first two decades of the 1900's, resettlement and a wheat boom returned prosperity to the county; by 1933, depression and dust engulfed the area. A bloody county seat fight, the struggle for a railroad, and the discovery of natural gas further complicated the historical development of the county.

Much of Stevens County's erratic history can be explained by its geographical location. The county is located in southwestern Kansas, on the southern Great Plains. The land and the climate of the plains dictated the way the area developed. The flat, treeless prairies and the climatic cycles have been tempered somewhat by human resourcefulness. However, limited water supplies, reoccurring droughts, constant winds and the semi-arid climate remain uncontrollable. The physical characteristics of the land made the county's history a story of human efforts to adapt to the environment. Stevens County's story also parallels the general development of the southern plains region and reflects the history of the entire area.

This history of Stevens County is a general account of the community from pre-settlement to 1970. Set in a chronological framework, the eight chapters deal with the major events in the county's history. The narrative begins with a description of the land and its first inhabitants, the Plains Indians. The other topics covered are the settlement of the county, the county seat fight, and the affects of the drought and depression on the rural community. These are followed by the coming of the railroad, resettlement of the county in the first

decades of the 1900's, and the development of natural gas resources in the county. The history also includes a study of the dust bowl years of the 1930's and the 1950's, and the changes made in the agricultural system. The final chapter describes the modernization of the county and suggests what will be the future course of the community. The text of the history is followed by a series of appendices with additional information on the county.

In writing this history of Stevens County, the author relied on several different sources of information. These included general accounts of the Great Plains, special studies on the southern area, newspapers and some interviews. The Kansas State Historical Society provided most of the specific material and all of the pictures used in the text. Government studies, soil surveys, and state agricultural records were also valuables sources of information. Mrs. Edith C. Thomson's history of the county was extremely helpful. Her book, a county history being compiled by the Stevens County Historical Society, Harry Chrisman's new family history of a county pioneer, and this thesis should provide a thorough study of the community. There is a scarcity of material on the southwest Kansas region and the High Plains; it is hoped by the author that the bibliography included in this study will help other researchers in their quest for material on these areas.

From this study of Stevens County several conclusions can be made about the community and the surrounding region. First, the land and its climate dictated the lifestyles of the people. The settlers had to adjust from the forested, humid lands of the east to the treeless, semi-arid plains. Secondly, the cycles of drought and wet weather created a speculative attitude toward the land; most people took advantage of the good years and left the county during the bad years. Thirdly, it was not until the dusty 1930's that a search for a more suitable system of agriculture began. Since that time, with the development of natural gas resources and irrigation facilities,

southwestern Kansas has attained more stability and is an important agricultural area. Finally, this study of Stevens County highlights the need for a more detailed history of southwestern Kansas and the southern Great Plains. The area and its agriculture, the history of irrigation, and the story of the natural gas industry are neglected subjects. More extensive studies of these topics would provide a better understanding of the region and perhaps help people make future adjustments to the land and its climate.

The author would like to thank several people for their assistance in preparing this study. The librarians at the Kansas State Historical Society gave much time and effort to finding material on Stevens County. Russell Smith, Mrs. Horner and other people of Stevens County also supplied personal information on the county which proved very helpful. Dr. Homer E. Socolofsky, of the Kansas State History Department, gave many hours of his time guiding the progress of this history. Finally, the author's husband provided much appreciated help, suggestions and moral support so that this history could be finished.

CHAPTER ONE - The High Plains - The Land of Stevens County and Its First Inhabitants

Treeless, undulating prairie stretches for miles in every direction, interrupted only by the shallow valley running along the dry Cimarron River. Short grasses cover the sandy soil except for places where the farmer's plow has worked, and there, wheat, sorghum, or corn stand waving with the wind, waiting for the harvest. Much of the small wildlife still makes its home among the grasses, safe now from the footsteps of the buffalo, but still wary of the steady plod of cattle. The climate seems hospitable with the clear blue sky reaching down to meet the golden, level plains; but the farmer remembers how fickle the weather can turn, denying the much needed rain or bringing him the unwanted hail or dust storm. This is the High Plains country of the United States, where physical boundaries of Stevens County have been mapped out and where the history of the county begins.

Stevens County is located in the southwest corner of Kansas, bordering Oklahoma in the south and one county east of the Colorado State line. The county has a semi-arid climate, characteristic of the southern Great Plains, and averages eighteen inches of rain per year, with seventy-five per cent falling during the spring and summer months. The climate gives the county an average growing season of 178 days, which has varied from 148 days to 204 days. The mean annual temperature in the county is 57 degrees, but the area has experienced Fahrenheit temperatures as high as 116 degrees and as low as -22 degrees. As reported in a state geology survey, "The summer days generally are hot, but due to the movement of the wind and the low humidity, the nights are relatively cool. The winters are moderately cold, but generally are free from excessive snowfall and damp cloudy days."[1] The area experiences alternating cycles of dry and wet periods which affect crop production and settlement in the county.[2] The area

is also subject to natural hazards as are other regions of the country, though here dust storms, prairie fires, hail and thunderstorms have inflicted the worst damage.

The land of Stevens County is characteristic of the High Plains region of the United States. The whole area is a gradual upward sloping prairie, with the elevation at Stevens County approximately three thousand feet. Seas covered the area during the Paleozoic Era, approximately forty-five to fifty-five million years ago.[3] This left a subsurface soil of marine rock and sandstone. The top soil of the land is primarily sand and gravel; debris deposited for thousands of years by streams flowing eastward from the Rocky Mountains. This surface material is fairly level, except for two areas of sand hills running east-west across the county. The land is generally good for agriculture and the majority of the land today is used for crop production, with irrigation or dry farming techniques employed to counter moisture deficiency of the land and the high evaporation rate of the climate. The lack of surface water in the county, discounting the normally dry Cimarron River in the northwest corner, makes the people dependent upon ground water for all their needs.

The native flora of the land, still visible in some areas of the county, consists of buffalo and blue stem grasses, and a variety of wild flowers.[4] Cottonwood trees are the only type of timber native to the area, and survived only along the Cimarron River until permanent settlement of the region. With the coming of the white man, other trees were planted, but the climate was too harsh for most to survive. Today, both towns of the county have trees lining the streets, and a few hardier trees still can be seen standing in the midst of crops, around farm yards, or among the prairie grasses.

The native animals of Stevens County are typical of those inhabiting the High Plains. These creatures are noted for their mobility and the way they have adapted to the treeless prairie. Antelope, prairie dogs and coyotes all survived in the grasslands region. Some prairie dog towns remain in the native pasture areas, and on occasion, antelope or coyote may still be

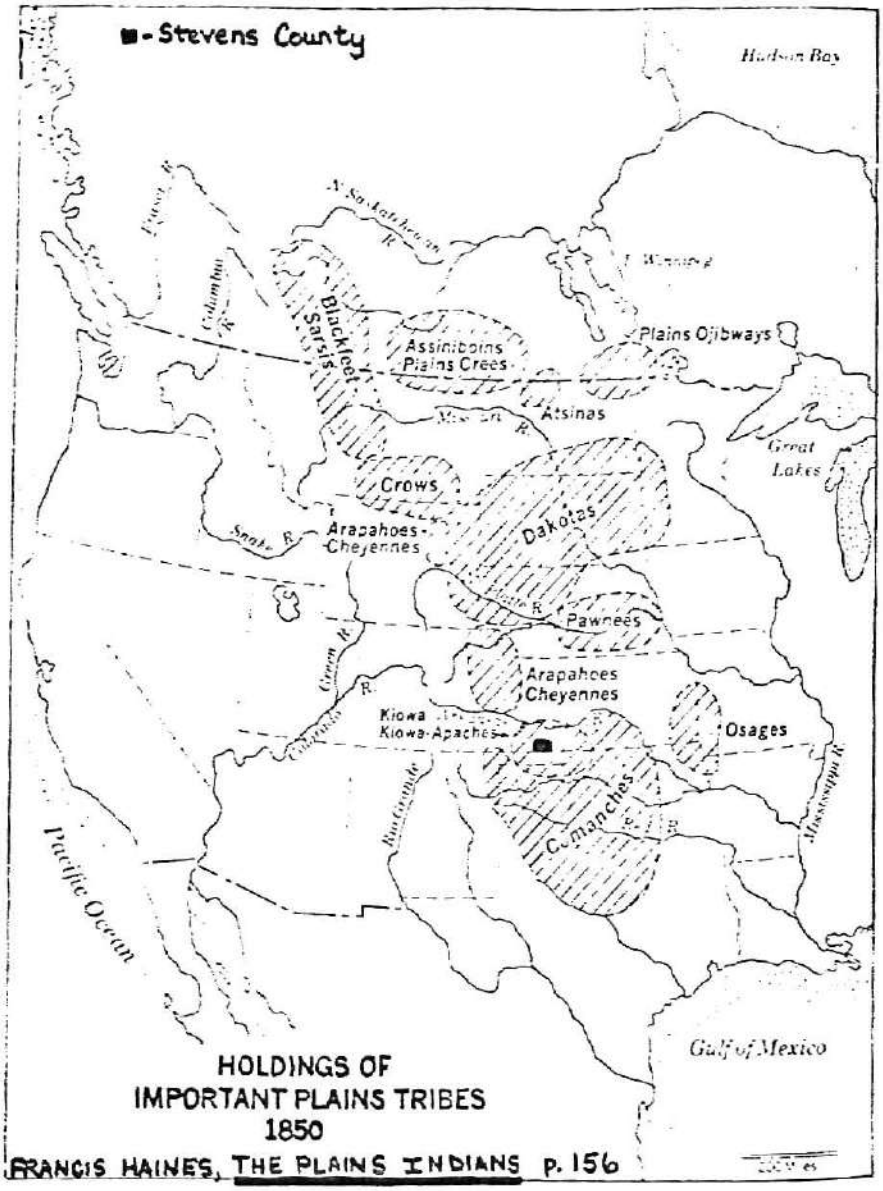
seen today. Jack rabbits were another species that inhabited the area and often found themselves the victim of mass hunts by settlers who found the creatures annoying or destructive to crops. County-wide hunts are still held today, with the proceeds from the kill often going to charitable organizations. There is also an abundance of game birds in the county, especially ring-necked pheasants. The birds have provided good hunting for residents throughout the county's history.[5] Perhaps the most noteable animal of the county was the American Bison. The land of Stevens County was part of the grazing grounds of the southern buffalo herd which occupied the High Plains.[6] The buffalo were ideally suited for the level, grassy prairies and occupied the area until the 1870's, when buffalo hunters quickly exterminated the herd.

Just as the animals adapted themselves to the prairie, the first people living in the Stevens County area also adjusted their lifestyles to suit the land. No significant information is available on the prehistoric inhabitants of the county. The nomadic Plains Indians are the first known people to use the land as a home and hunting ground. In The Plains Indians, Francis Haines outlines the migration of certain tribes into southwestern Kansas. The Comanche had moved from southern Arizona into the mountains of Colorado and around 1700 they obtained horses and pushed eastward on to the High Plains. Haines explains that "By 1780 they held most of eastern Colorado, western Kansas, western Oklahoma, and a large part of northern Texas. Estimated population in 1780 was 12,000."[7]

The Comanche Indians dominated the area around Stevens County, but they shared the land with a smaller group of Kiowa and Kiowa-Apache. These Indians migrated to the area in the early 1800's and allied themselves with the Comanche.[8] Both groups used the area of western Kansas until 1867, when the Treaty of Medicine Lodge assigned them lands in the Oklahoma Territory.[9]

The Comanche, Kiowa, and Kiowa-Apache had the general characteristics of the Plains Indians. They were hunters and

INDIANS OF STEVENS COUNTY



their main food source was the buffalo. The Indians followed the movement of the herds and rarely had permanent settlements, though staying in one particular area of the region at certain times of the year was not uncommon. The tribes had no agriculture, but traded or stole other foods or materials they needed from neighboring village Indians. The horse was an important element in their lives, providing more mobility to follow the buffalo as they moved across the plains.[10]

Though the Indians did claim the Stevens County area as part of their territory, and undoubtedly used it as hunting and camping grounds, they tended to concentrate more in the Oklahoma panhandle and down into Texas. By the late 1870's, with the buffalo gone and the U.S. Army enforcing treaty regulations, except for an occasional reservation Indian who might pass through the area, the tribes no longer roamed the Stevens County area.

Whereas Indians inhabited the area of southwestern Kansas until the mid-1800's, white explorers claimed the region as early as the 1540's. The Spanish, after establishing themselves in Mexico, looked northward for possible riches. Coronado made his famous trip into the Great Plains in the early 1540's, but failed to find the mineral wealth he sought. Instead he found grasslands similar to his native Spain; good for farming, but of little interest to the gold-hungry conquistadors. Coronado and his men explored the Kansas area, but it is unlikely they passed through Stevens County. Yet, the explorers claimed the entire area for Spain and for the time the future Stevens County became Spanish territory.[11]

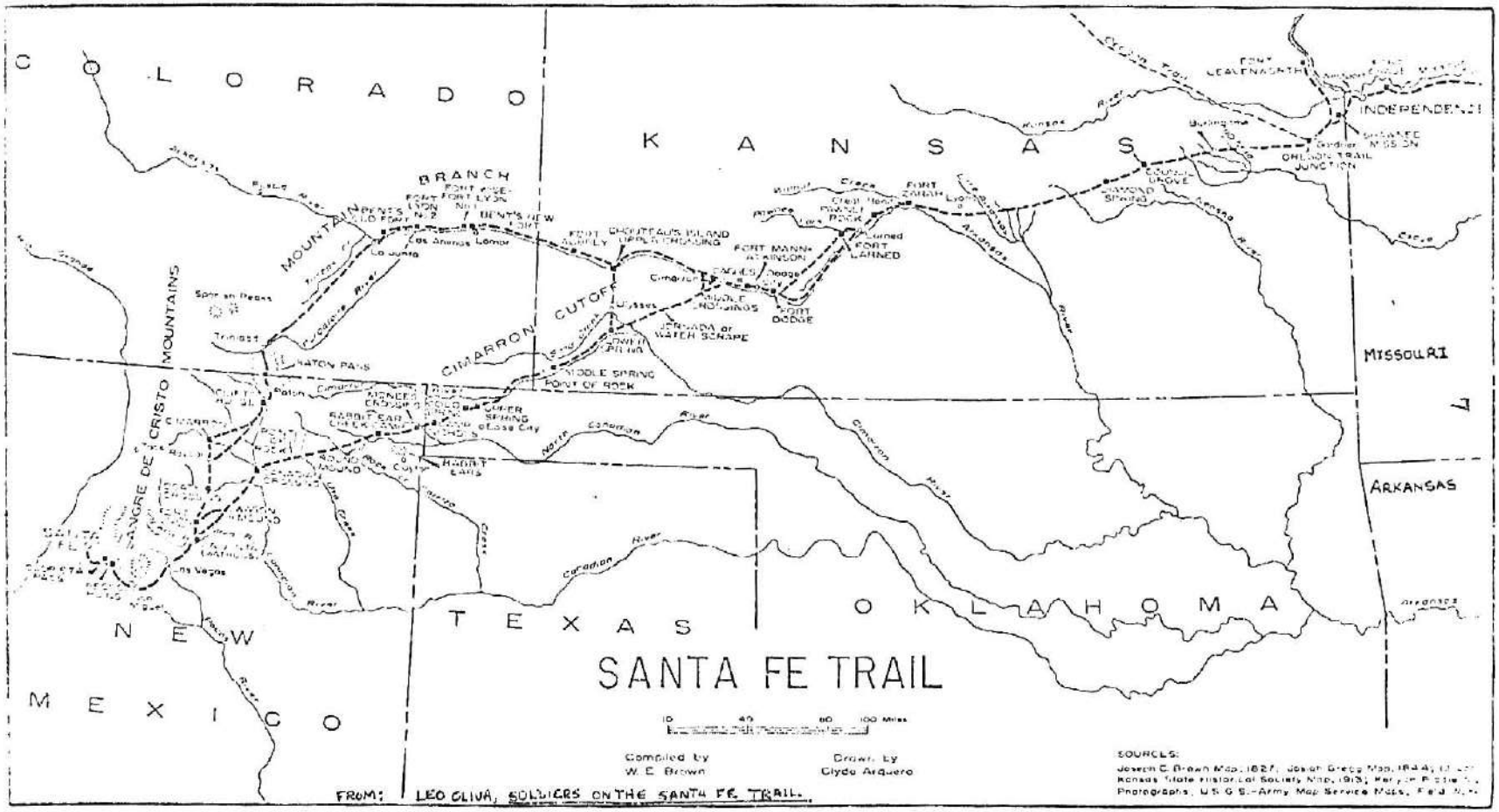
The French also explored the Plains region, but they arrived almost two centuries after the Spanish. The French trappers and traders, like the Spanish, had little use for the prairies. The French were more interested in the fur trade along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Some trading between the French and the Plains Indians did go on, but it is doubtful the foreigners reached the Stevens County area. However, just as the Spanish placed the plains region within their jurisdiction,

the French also laid claim to the area, and continued holding title to the land intermittenly until the early 1800's. [12]

The Americans were the next group of whites claiming the Great Plains. President Thomas Jefferson negotiated the monumental Louisana Purchase from the French in 1803, which established United States jurisdiction over a large portion of the land west of the Mississippi River. It was not clear whether this purchase included southwest Kansas until the Onis Treaty with Spain in 1819. At this time the southern boundary of the purchase was clarified and it excluded the Stevens County area. It was not until the Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848 that southwestern Kansas became United States territory.[13]

When the Louisana Purchase established United States claim over the western area, several explorers were sent into the territory to learn more about the region and its usefulness. Zebulon Montgomery Pike, in 1806, was leader of the first American party to explore the plains. He reported the area was uninhabitable and would serve as a satisfactory barrier to keep Americans in the eastern region of the country. Fourteen years later Major Stephen Long headed a mission similar to Pike's. Long explored the plains extensively and developed conclusions comparable to his predecessor. More importantly the Long expedition gave the plains the label the "Great American Desert," because of their arid character. Long described the area and foreshadowed the difficulties future settlers would face: "Although tracts of fertile land considerably extensive are occasionally to be met with, yet the scarcity of wood and water, almost uniformly prevalent, will prove an insuperable obstacle in the way of settling the country." Long then echoed Pile's sentiments that the area would impede westward expansion as well as keep enemies from easily attacking America's frontier.[14]

The label "Great American Desert" remained with the area until settlement began in the 1860's. Meanwhile the plains were used by traders and travelers as a road to the west coast


COLORADO
KANSAS
NEW MEXICO
TEXAS
OKLAHOMA
MISSOURI
ARKANSAS
INDEPENDENCE
FORT LEAVENWORTH
SANTA FE TRAIL
MOUNTAIN BRANCH
CIMARRON CUTOFF
RATON PASS
SANGRE DE CRISTO MOUNTAINS
FORT MANN
FORT LANNED
FORT DODGE
MIDDLE SPRING
POINT OF ROCK
UPPER SPRING
Compiled by W. E. Brown
Drawn by Clyde Arquero
SOURCES:
FROM: LEO OLIVA, SOLDIERS ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL.

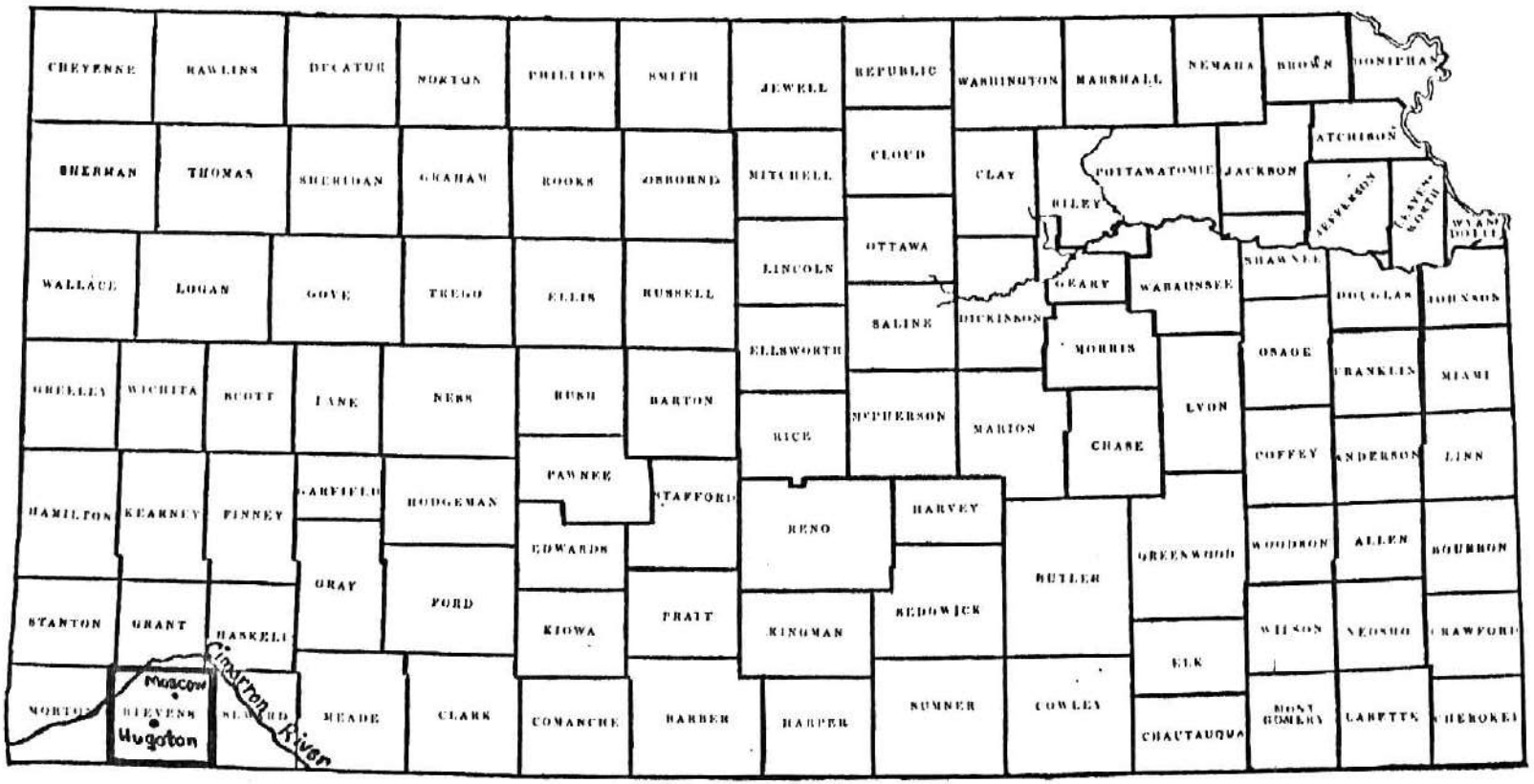
or the Mexican territory. In the early 1820's, the Santa Fe Trail was opened, going from central Missouri to Santa Fe, and cutting through the northwest corner of present day Stevens County. The trail started when word that a profitable trade with Mexicans existed. Santa Fe was far from supply depots in Mexico proper and Americans found a great demand in the town for goods and materials for which Spanish gold, silver or furs would be paid. After gaining independence from Spain, Mexicans openly welcomed American traders to Santa Fe.[15]

The portion of the Santa Fe Trail running through Stevens County was first used by the famous trapper and Indian trader William Becknell.[16] In 1822, on his second trip to Santa Fe, Becknell sought a smoother route for his trade wagons than the rough Raton Pass. Instead of continuing west, he turned southwest near present day Dodge City and headed down to the Cimarron River. This route became known as the Cimarron or Dry route because the traders traveled fifty-eight miles before reaching water at Lower Springs or Wagon Bed Springs on the Cimarron. From the springs the traders followed the Cimarron River through Stevens County into Colorado, then Oklahoma and on to Santa Fe.[17]

In addition to traders using the trail, military personnel also traversed the route, first to provide protection for travelers and later in campaigns against the Plains Indians. In Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail, Professor Leo E. Oliva identifies the various troop movements and suggests that soldiers traveled along the Stevens County portion of the trail. There were also numerous skirmishes along the route between soldiers and Indians, and it is probable such incidents occurred on the land later known as Stevens County. The activity along the trail continued until the 1880's, when a network of railroads replaced the need for the route. Today the portion of trail running through Stevens County is marked, but the route is no longer a major road for travel in the area.[18]

With the growth of the Santa Fe trade American interest in the High Plains also increased. At first the area continued

LOCATION OF STEVENS COUNTY IN KANSAS *



*Helen G. Gill, "Establishment of Counties in Kansas," Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society. Vol. 8, Map 15, 1886-92.

to serve as a highway for travelers to the far west, but by the 1850's enough interest in the area had arisen for establishment of a territory. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of May 30, 1854, created the territories of Nebraska and Kansas, which included Stevens County.[19] In 1855 the first territorial legislature began setting county lines, and with its second act it formed Washington County which encompassed Stevens County.[20]

Following the first establishment of counties came a series of revisions as the Kansas area became more settled. In her master's thesis, "The Establishment of Counties in Kansas," Helen G. Gill outlines the various changes made until county boundaries of today became permanent.[21] In 1860, Peketon County was organized and again this included the Stevens County territory. By 1866, Marion County was enlarged to include Peketon County so southwest Kansas once more was under new jurisdiction. Stevens County first appeared on the map under its own name in 1873, when all of western Kansas was organized into smaller counties. The county was named after Thaddeus Stevens, a United States Representative from Pennsylvannia and an ardent abolitionist.[22] In 1883, settlement of the area was not extensive enough for Stevens County to remain a separate entity and it was incorporated into Seward County. This situation lasted only until 1886, when enough settlers moved to the county to warrant its reestablishment. The county was laid out along the old boundary lines, with the exception of a three mile wide strip added to the western border. This last jurisdictional change made Stevens County 729 square miles or 466,560 acres, the size the county retains today. With permanent boundaries now established, a new phase in the history of the county began.

CHAPTER TWO - BOOM DAYS - SPECULATION AND SETTLEMENT

Permanent settlement of Stevens County did not occur until twelve years after the county was first established in 1873. During the period 1873 to 1885 the only white men found within the county's boundaries were transients. Travelers along the Santa Fe Trail rarely camped in the county, but rather pushed on along the route to better grounds. One group that stopped in the county was recorded in the federal census of 1880. Presumably the census taker found the group at their camp and included them in the report for that year. The twelve men all listed various occupations dealing with the freighting business and it is a fair assumption that they were on their way to or from Santa Fe when recorded as residents of the county.[23]

Buffalo hunters also traversed the Stevens County area during this period. By 1873, these hunters were traveling through southwest Kansas in pursuit of large herds of buffalo. In Lost Trails of the Cimarron, Harry Chrisman suggests these men scoured the Cimarron River region looking for the bison.[24] The hunters were generally successful at finding big herds and killing hundreds of buffalo for the hides. The hunters played an important role in opening the Stevens County area to settlement. Just as Santa Fe travelers reported on the land and its possibilities, these hunters spread similar stories. In addition, the hunters cleared the land of buffalo and left the area open for cattle ranchers and farmers.

The cattlemen were the first group to take advantage of the vacated prairies. By the late 1870's the open range system of ranching replaced the long cattle drives of the previous decade. Cattlemen brought large herds onto the plains to graze on the native grasses. The area of Stevens County was among the land used by various ranchers during this period. Twice a year roundups were held by the ranchers to brand the cattle and drive a certain portion to the closest railhead,

either Trinidad, Colorado or Dodge City, Kansas.[25] This system lasted until the mid-1880's, when a blizzard and the coming of the farmer put an end to the open range system.

The cattlemen had ranch headquarters scattered through southwest Kansas. No information is available as to whether such headquarters existed in Stevens County during this period. Since the 1880 census included no listing of cattlemen or ranchers, it is probable no ranch headquarters were in the county. However, cattle were pastured within the county's boundaries until the farmers closed off the open range with their barbed wire fences.

The influx of farmers to the area in the mid-1880's gave Stevens County its first permanent settlers. These people were participating in a land boom which swept over southwest Kansas in 1884, and was part of a larger state-wide period of high prices and land speculation. J.S. Painter, in a paper presented to the Kansas State Historical Society in 1888, dramatically, but fairly accurately, describes how this transition from cattleman to farmer came about. "Five years ago that portion of southwestern Kansas known as the Garden City land district, which embraces fourteen counties, was a treeless, unproductive waste, a solemn, expansive wilderness of unbroken prairies, windswept, storm-bent and uninhabited, save by a few hardy, enterprising stockmen, who for the most part, led a roving, pastoral life and grazed their growing herds, without let or hindrance, upon the native grasses of the public domain." Painter goes on to discuss the area and then continues: "But in 1884 a change came, and immigrants from all parts of the East began to settle on the bottom lands of the Arkansas and lesser streams. They came slowly at first, increasing in numbers each successive month until in April, 1885, a boom commenced that never before was equaled in the settlement of any country."[26]

The land boom attracted many different people to the open lands of Stevens County and southwestern Kansas. They all shared a common trait; they wanted a part of the prosperity

and profits of the area. The farmers were looking for inexpensive land or land available for homesteading. Most of these people came from the Midwest or cornbelt region. The farmers believed the climate had changed in southwest Kansas and the wet years of the mid-1880's were there to stay. The rich soil of the area promised to produce large crops which would make these settlers more prosperous than they had been elsewhere. Initially, if they homesteaded, their only investment was their labor and the cost of improvements for the land. This meant a good profit could be realized on the 160 acre homesteads, which could later be sold or mortgaged.[27]

Speculators or boomers were the first people into the county. They quickly established town and land companies to deal with the incoming farmers. These speculators, more often from Kansas than elsewhere, were out to make the maximum profit for the least investment of time and money. Stevens County's first permanent town was established by just such a group of men hoping to benefit from the land boom prices.[28]

The last group of people who came to the area were those who provided the services for the growing population; the hotel keepers, the grocery store owners, the newspapermen and other businessmen. These people, as well as the hangers-on which materialize around any boom area, helped settle the towns. They also provided materials or goods for the settlers, while realizing a good profit because of boom prices.[29]

Stevens County, though further from the railroad than many of the other counties in southwest Kansas, experienced the full affects of the land boom. Transportation facilities to the county were limited to stage lines bringing people from the railheads at Hartland and Dodge City. The Panhandle Stage Company was incorporated in January, 1886, and ran from Hartland to Stevens County.[30] This brought settlers from the Santa Fe Railroad into the area. By 1888, a stage line also ran from the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad at Liberal to Stevens County. Other shorter stage routes connected the various cities in Stevens County with each other and

with Garden City, Meade Center and towns in Colorado and New Mexico. The stage fare usually ran $3.50 to Garden City, $4.00 to Hartland, and more or less for other cities depending upon the distance.[31]

If settlers did not use the stage to reach Stevens County they employed their own means of transportation. Many farmers simply loaded their goods into their wagons and took the long ride across the flat plains to the county. This was less expensive, but more time consuming for the settler. However, they could use their wagons for temporary shelter until they built housing for their families.

Once people reached Stevens County they faced several problems before they could settle permanently. The lack of wood and surface water in the county meant other resources had to be used for housing, fuel, and water supplies. The buildings erected in the early days of Stevens County were of two types: wood and sod. Town structures were made of wood freighted in from the railhead at Hartland. Though expensive, the wide-spread use of these buildings reflected the boom atmosphere, when credit was used extensively by settlers. Most farmers could not afford the wooden structures at first and they utilized the only building material native to the county - the prairie sod. These houses were cheap, cool in the summer and warm in the winter; however, leaky roofs and an occasional snake tainted some of the better qualities of the "soddies." For fuel, some people could afford to freight in wood or coal. Other settlers used cow chips, corn or knots of dried grass for cooking and for heating homes. Wells were hand dug for water, usually eighty to one hundred and twenty feet deep, and windmills became the common method for pumping the water to the surface.[32]

The first people to establish a town in Stevens County were a group of men from McPherson, Kansas. In 1881 they looked over the area and chose a townsite near the center of the county. They formed a town company, with sixteen members, and began planning development schemes. It was

not until 1885, however, that they started actual work on their new town. In the summer of that year, as the land boom was reaching a peak on a larger scale, the McPherson men built the first shanties on the townsite.[33] Jeremiah Evarts Platt, a Congregational minister traveling in southwest Kansas during this time, came upon the townsite as these first developments were taking place. In a letter published in the Manhattan Nationalist, Platt described what he found in Stevens County after his long ride from neighboring Seward County. "Thirty miles west of this, on a beautiful level prairie, fifteen miles from any human dwelling, I found a dozen men from McPherson trying to build a town which they called Hugo, and which they hoped would soon become a great city, the county seat of Stevens County. They had three small box houses and a tent, and were digging a well, then down only sixty feet, but they had no water except what they hauled in wagons fifteen miles, were then reduced to half a pailful, and expecting no more until the next day." Platt explained that he had to ride the fifteen miles to the Cimarron River to get water for his horse. He then continued his description of the area: "There is not a tree in the county and only three families of actual settlers, yet a large portion of the best claims are filed on, either as tree claims, homesteads, or preemptions, and people seem to think the county will be full of settlers in a year, and that the land ere many years will be worth twenty to fifty dollars an acre."[34] Platt finished by questioning whether the climate would continue favorable and crops would continue to do as well as in 1885.

The McPherson group finished digging the public well and continued putting up buildings and making improvements in the townsite. In August, the town was platted on 640 acres (section 16, T 33 S, R 37 W) and officially named Hugo, after the French writer Victor Hugo. The name was later changed to Hugoton because of a post office conflict with Hugo, Colorado, and the label has remained with the town since then.[35]

As more people moved into the area, additional towns were formed, businesses established and community activities started. Most towns grew along the same pattern as Hugoton, with activities directed by a town company. When a townsite was chosen, the first buildings up were a real estate office or a hotel, often one in the same. James Dappert remembered coming to Hugoton in October of 1885 with his father to look over the land. There was no hotel in the town yet, but there was a 14 by 18 frame building serving as a real estate office. There also was a small general store and four or five other buildings which made up the entire town.[36]

In addition to the building of towns, churches and schools were established as soon as a community formed. In Stevens County the first permanent school house was built in Hugoton in 1886, and was soon followed by schools erected in the different towns. Both Hugoton and Woodsdale built large, elaborate two-storied schools; Hugoton's later served as the county courthouse until 1952 while Woodsdale's was abandoned and razed in the 1890's. By 1887, there were twenty-one school districts in the county, with eight regular school houses. This number of districts grew to thirty-four in 1893, and by the next year thrity-six school buildings existed. This number did not increase until the early 1900's when more settlers entered the county.[37]

Most of the early school houses were one room buildings and the schools had an average enrollment of twenty or thirty pupils. With one or two teachers for each school, the children were taught the basic subjects of writing, reading and arthimetic.[38] The county school records of 1888 list textbooks such as the Barnes' readers and the Harpers' primers as being used in many of the county's schools.[39] In the first years of the boom period, the schools were in session about thirteen weeks, but by 1890 they averaged twenty week sessions. The county school superintendent also directed a normal school in the summer.[40]

New communities in the county often organized churches

at the same time schools were created. Many times a church building would serve as a school or vice versa, and if neither structure was available, a courthouse, community building or farm house served the purpose. Jeremiah Platt visited southwest Kansas to organize Sunday schools in the newly settled area. Though there were not enough people to establish church activities when he went through Stevens County, as soon as more people came, churches sprang up throughout the country. The immediate need for a church reflected the strong religious faith of the settlers. Both Hugoton and Woodsdale had Methodist Episcopal churches early in their settlement. The Hugoton church was organized in 1886, by a group of settlers who first started a Sunday school. In October of that year they received a charter for the church and by Christmas, 1887, they had their own building. The church cost over $2,200, with wood and other materials freighted in from Hartland. The church was struck by lightning twice, and in 1891, after Sam Wood was murdered on the doorstep, the congregation abandoned the structure.[41] Many other churches were deserted when the boom collapsed, yet congregations continued services despite the exodus of people. The emphasis on religion never faded and today, with a population of little over 4,000, the county boasts eighteen organized churches.[42]

Both schools and churches were formed so quickly and successfully because of their important function in the community. Beyond the mere educational and religious training they provided, these institutions gave the people opportunities to socialize. Spelling bees, literary contests, religious pageants, and other activities served as a creative outlet. School and church functions also provided isolated farming families with a chance to enjoy the companionship of their neighbors.

From the very beginning Stevens County residents organized numerous other social activities. Various holidays were marked by special celebrations and dances. As early as New Years Day, 1886, a party was held at the Hugo Hotel to mark the occasion.

Numerous social groups were formed, including various lodges, political organizations and women's clubs. Woodsdale even organized a brass band for the advancement of the art of music. Baseball teams were formed in the larger towns, and other sporting events such as races and hunts were yearly events.

Two important services which appeared when a town was established were post offices and newspapers. Thirteen post offices were in operation during the boom period in Stevens County.[43] As soon as a group of people settled in one part of the county, they established a post office. Not all post offices had daily service and the smaller communities received mail only tri-weekly. However, the post office served an important function. It gave official status to the town and kept the people in touch with the outside world. Many of these post offices were abandoned during the 1890's or the resettlement period, with the reduction of population and later better transportation facilities eliminated the need for so many offices.

Almost as numerous as the post offices were the newspapers in the early period of Stevens County's history. In the 1887 report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, two newspapers were listed for the county. By the next report, four more had started in business, including the Hugoton Hermes, the only paper still published in the county.[44] Between the years 1886 and 1897, twelve different newspapers were printed in Stevens County.[45] There were usually five or six newspapers printed concurrently up to 1890, while the population of the county never exceeded 2,500. Today only one local newspaper services the county whose population is just over 4,000.

The large number of newspapers during the early settlement period was due to the boom atmosphere. In an article about southwest Kansas, Jay Baugh explains the reasons for the multiplicity of newspapers. He points out that each town desired to attract people. The easiest way to advertise the community was through a newspaper. Besides this function, newspapers were needed for publication of official notices and

homestead filings. Finally, as illustrated by the Stevens County papers, any person with a cause or particular political affiliation could easily set up a newspaper.[46] The Hugo Herald not only was a Democratic paper, it also opposed the Woodsdale Democrat during the county seat war. The newspapers served as the primary means for settlers to get local news and learn about national and world affairs. Though only one paper remains in print in the county today, it still fulfills the same needs its predecessors did in the boom days.

When not visiting town or enjoying community activities, the majority of settlers in the county were busy farming the land. The prosperity of the area rested on the agricultural potential of the land. In the years from 1885 to 1887, rainfall was plentiful and the virgin soil yielded bountiful crops. The people believed that the climate had undergone a permanent change with the extension of farming into the area. J.S. Painter reflected on this belief as he described the area in his 1888 paper: " It is not only a wonderfully varied and fertile soil, adapted to the production of all kinds of cereals, vegetables and fruits that can be grown in the temperate zone, but has a superb climate, not surpassed, taking everything into consideration, and only equaled by a few places on the American continent."[47] This false notion about the permanent change of climate was widespread and led people into greater agricultural production.

The settlers of Stevens County who cultivated the land faced many hours of hard work. After establishing a farmstead, digging a well, and locating the boundaries of his land, the farmer tackled the tough prairie sod with his plow. The use of a steel plow and a sturdy team of horses, mules or oxen were the best combination for cultivating the soil. The first year little was done other than turning over the sod and cutting holes in it for the seed. With each successive year cultivation was easier and the soil could be prepared better for planting crops. Eventually new machinery such as a grain drill, a reaper, and a thresher helped to ease the hard

job of plains farming.[48]

The major crops planted in the early years of Stevens County were corn, sorghums, and broomcorn. Corn did well the first four or five years, but by 1890 it was replaced as the dominant crop by the sorghums, broomcorn, and winter wheat. The reason corn did so well at first was the fertility of the soil and the wet weather of the mid-1880's. However, by 1890 dry conditions returned and corn crops suffered because of the lack of moisture. Other crops did better, but by 1894, drouth and the lack of people severely reduced the production of crops in the county.[49]

During the boom period a number of settlers established orchards. Apple trees were the most popular, followed by peach, plum, cherry and a few pear trees. Out of a total number of 16,224 fruit trees palnted in 1888, only one apple tree bore fruit.[50] In the next few years other trees produced fruit, but the advent of dry weather killed any chance of orchards being productive or profitable. Today, only a few of those original trees remain and orchards of the ambitious nature of the early days are nonexistent.

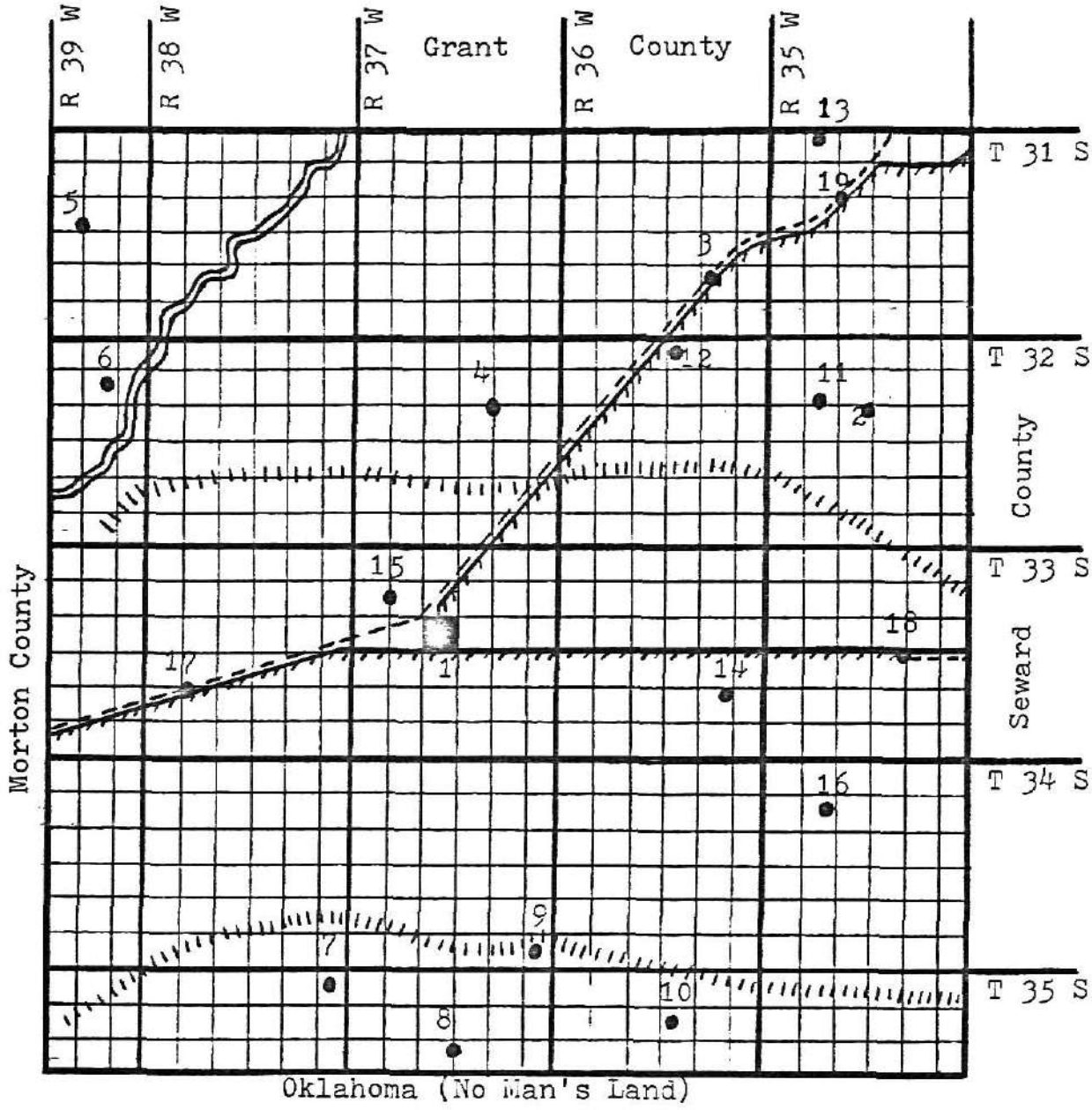
Livestock was also an important agricultural commodity for the farmers during the boom period. Horses, oxen and mules were the major power supply for the farmer's plow, as well as necessary for transportation and freighting. Milk cows were also important in this era, but not on a large scale. The cows provided the milk for dairy products which the settlers needed. The agricultural reports show this period was a low point for the cattle industry, with fewer than one thousand head in the county in 1889.[5] This statistic reflects the dominance of the farmer over rancher, and the wet weather conditions over dry. It will be shown later that the cattle again increased during the 1890's when farming proved less successful.

By the spring of 1886, Stevens County was well on its way to being completely settled. Four towns in addition to Hugoton were established and six more would be located in

the next year. Referring to the map on page 22, the location of the different towns and dates of organization are illustrated. Not all the names of the towns have their origin identified, but some can be explained. Lafayette, founded by a group of Quakers, was presumably named after the Marquis de Lafayette, of American Revolution fame.[52] Moonlight and Voorhees were named for politicans; the one for Thomas Moonlight of Leavenworth and the other for Senator Voorhees of Indiana. Woodsdale was also named after a politician, Sam Newitt Wood, who founded the town.[53] Niagara, according to Kansas Place Names by John Rydjord, was named after the famous falls in New York, though two more contrasting places would be hard to imagine. Valparaiso is a Spanish word meaning "valley of paradise" and first used to describe the lush valleys of central Chile.[54] Zella or Pearl City may have been named after a sweetheart of an early settler. Moscow had no connection to its Russian counterpart, but instead, like Hugoton, resulted from a post office change. The town was originally labeled Mosco after a member of Coronado's expedition, but a post office clerk added a "w".[55] For the remaining towns of Macon, Dermot, Waterford and Znojmo there is no available explanation of their names.

Despite the growth of these various towns, Hugoton continued to dominate the county. The only town which challenged Hugoton's control was Woodsdale, established in June of 1886. Located seven miles north of Hugoton, across a line of sand hills, the town was started by Sam Wood, a Kansas politician, free-stater, and fiery newspaperman. Wood established his town with high hopes for its future in the area and had his eye set on getting the county seat located in his community. In a manner similar to his counterparts in Hugoton, Wood realized the local government position would insure his town more stability as well as increasing land values and the growth rate of the community. Unfortunately, Wood began his enterprise a little later than he should have, for Hugoton residents had already started on the first steps to making their

TOWNS OF STEVENS COUNTY



1. Hugoton 1885
2. Moscow 1887
3. Moscow 1913
4. Woodsdale 1886
5. Dermot 1887
6. Moonlight 1887
7. Niagara 1887
8. Macon 1886
9. Voorhees 1887
10. Lafayette 1886
11. Valparaiso 1886
12. Zella 1886
13. Waterford 1888
14. Znojmo 1880's
15. Indianapolis 1885?
16. Ematon 1905
17. Feterita 1918
18. Woods 1922
19. Cave

---- Railroad
~~~~ Highway
|||||| Sandhills
═══ Cimarron River
~~~~

town the county seat.

Stevens County, though reestablished in 1885, was still an unorganized county without its own government. Hugoton residents, early in 1886, petitioned Kansas Governor John Martin to declare the county organized. Their stated motivation was the need to institute a herd law for protecting farm lands from unfenced cattle. Undoubtedly these people realized the other benefits which organization would bring the town and the county. Not only would more settlers be attracted to the area, but with organization they hoped Hugoton would be made the county seat, and the town's residents would then control the local government.[56]

Hugoton residents sent a memorial to Governor Martin in May, 1886, stating their belief that the required number of 2,500 residents for organization were in the county; they asked the Governor to order a census taken to verify the count. On May 24, 1886, Governor Martin ordered J.W. Calvert, a Hugotonian, to prepare a census of the county. On August 3, the Governor received the census showing 2,662 people living in the county. He declared the county organized the same day and appointed H.O. Wheeler, John Robertson and J.B. Chamberlain county commissioners, John Calvert county clerk, and named Hugoton as the temporary county seat.[57] Martin also ordered the commissioners to hold a special election for selecting permanent county officers and the county seat.

The new county commissioners decided the special election for officers and the county seat would be held on September ninth. The commissioners then established precincts and polling locations for the county. Whether by lack of foresight or on purpose, all three voting places were in the central area of the county. For some residents in the northern area, where Woodsdale was located, the polls were difficult to reach because of the sandhills. This arrangement and the dominance of Hugotonians in the organizing the election outraged Sam Wood, who protested against the plans. This started what

can aptly be called the most embarrassing and notorious event in Stevens County's history.

The residents of Hugoton, in their attempt to make their city the county seat, touched off what historians call the "Stevens County Seat War." Whether "war" is the correct term is still being debated, especially by the county residents who prefer the term "controversy." Perhaps a more appropriate nomenclature would be "fight," for though the Stevens County affair numbered more deaths than similar controversies of the day, there was never a massive outbreak of violence. The conflict was primarily a clash between the strong personalities of the major participants and the uncontrolled, speculative nature of the times.

Stevens County was not unique in experiencing a county seat fight. During this boom period, several of the counties in southwest Kansas had trouble locating their county seats. These political struggles reflected the speculative character of the boom, when a county seat was more likely to prosper economically and attract more money, business, and a railroad. Usually the problem was settled legally and peacefully, though vicious mud-slinging and underhanded political practices were common. All together, including the four deaths in Stevens County, only nine people died in three county seat fights during this period. Though not usually bloody in any respect, the county seat fights often retarded the development of the region, making settlers and railroad companies both leary of establishing themselves in a county with an unstable local government.

Stevens County became immersed in controversy when Sam Wood protested the election plans. Wood's outrage was probably a product of fear that he might lose the county seat and lingering hope he could prevent Hugoton from gaining it. Believing that his town would soon be in a position to challenge Hugoton, Wood sought to delay the election. Besides his usually strong verbal denunciations of his enemy, he gathered information showing the census taken in Stevens County had been

falsified. Forging census documents was not an unusual practice in that day, and it seems that many of the so-called residents of Stevens County did not exist except on old hotel ledgers or other records. Wood knew that no more than thirteen hundred people were settled in the county and he hoped to use the information to get the census declared invalid.[58]

Wood was arrested on August 25, 1886, for criminal libel and taken to Hugoton where he was released after putting up bond. Following this arrest, the first major "event" occurred in a series taking place over the next two years. Wood, with I.C. Price, was "kidnapped" by Hugoton men on his way to Topeka with information about the census. He was taken into No Man's Land for a "hunting trip."[59] Two divergent stories are told by the opposing factions as to what actually occurred; Hugoton residents declared Wood arranged the kidnapping, and Wood stated he was spirited away to stop his protests. Whichever is correct, Governor Martin was notified of the occurrence and sent the Larned Sheriff and state militia commander, General McCarthy there to investigate the situation. Wood had been "rescued" by Woodsdale residents by the time McCarthy arrived and the General saw no need for remaining in the county.

Despite the incident, and Wood's desire to call the National Guard to the county, the election was held and the results made official. Hugoton became the county seat, John Calvert county clerk, A.P. Ridenour sheriff, J.L. Pancoast county attorney, O.W. Kirby county treasurer, and J.E. Hunt, J.B. Chamberlain and W.A. Clark county commissioners. It looked as if Sam Wood was beaten, but he refused to give up the fight.

Wood started two projects during the following months that helped keep the controversy alive: a law suit, and a newspaper. The law suit was initiated by Wood's law partner A.M. Mackey in Topeka. It called for the Kansas Supreme Court to review the laws organizing Stevens, Morton, and Seward Counties and declare them invalid, because of certain legal technicalities. The Supreme Court took the case, but it did not reach a decision until January, 1889, when it ruled against Wood.

In March, 1887, Wood started his newspaper, the Woodsdale Democrat, and he began lambasting Hugoton and its residents. Wood was an editor most of his life and was known for his outspoken opinions. Of course, Hugoton, with two newspapers, the Herald and the Hermes, responded in like manner to Wood's attacks. This continual bombardment between newspapers, including the Moscow and Voorhees gazettes, kept the dissension alive in the county and helped ally people with different groups. The papers were the primary means of communication for many settlers, who often did not venture beyond their communities. The newspapers played an important role in stirring up the people against their neighbors in opposing parts of the county.

In spite of the inflammatory newspaper reports, the county got through the election of November, 1887, with a normal amount of controversy. As Joseph Snell remarks in his master's thesis, "The Stevens County Seat Controversy," this was an "interesting interlude" during which only two occurrences affected the county seat controversy.[60] Of later importance in the county seat fight was the move Sam Robinson made during this election from Woodsdale to Hugoton. Robinson was a rather shady character who had wanted the nomination for county sheriff but was not chosen by the Woodsdale caucus. Thus snubbed, he moved down to Hugoton with his hotel, and became marshal of that town. The second outcome occurred when John Cross protested the close election, called for a recount, and was declared county sheriff by two votes. The significance of these two incidents became apparent later when the "Stevens County Seat War" ended in murder.

The next episode causing trouble was Sam Wood's call for a railroad bond election. Railroads were an important guarantee for the economic security of an area and every town in the boom period made some effort to attract a railroad. There was an attempt by Hugoton residents to get the Denver, Memphis and Atlantic Railroad, known as the "Darling Mary Ann," to run a track through the county by way of Hugoton. Wood fought the call for a bond election, but failed to stop it and Hugoton won the vote in January, 1887. Unfortunately the railroad failed to meet

its deadlines and nothing came of the scheme. This time, however, Sam Wood proposed a bond election to raise money for one of two railroads. Wood and some of his business associates formed the Wichita, Springfield and Trinidad Railway Company. They wanted to offer the bonds to either the Chicago, Kansas and Western Railroad (a Santa Fe subsidiary) or the Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railroad (a Rock Island Company) to lay a track from Wichita through Woodsdale to Trinidad, Colorado, with a spurline down to Voorhees. Hugoton residents were opposed to the idea, for it would give Woodsdale the economic advantage of the railroad and lure people away from Hugoton. They also believed Wood's "paper" railroad would never materialize, yet it would stop any other railroads from building through the area. Hugoton residents realized they must prevent Wood from winning the election or Hugoton might become a ghost town. The importance of the bond election to both factions made the issue highly emotional and created a head-on conflict between the towns. Not only were the results of the clash deadly for four men, they also proved harmful for the community as a whole.

By 1888, much of Stevens County's land was homesteaded and the many communities were thriving with the influx of new people. While the wet weather lasted, eastern farmers adjusted quickly to the open, fertile land. Many of the towns now resembled those the pioneers had left to come west. The people were getting comfortable with the flat, treeless prairies and many residents settled down to enjoy their good fortune. Few people realized, however, that 1888 would bring an end to the rains and the start of Stevens County's first historic drouth.[61]

CHAPTER THREE - DEATH AND DROUTH - 1888-1905

The year 1888 is the turning point in the land boom period in Stevens County. The county seat war came to a violent conclusion and was followed by a period of drouth. Both circumstances caused wide spread disillusionment within the county. People left the area for better land and more peaceful conditions.

62

MAP OF STEVENS COUNTY, KANSAS, 1888.

The county seat war reached its climax as the railroad bond election approached. The election was planned for June 1, 1888, and both factions worked hard to get support for their side.[63] At one meeting of a series held in the county to "discuss" the bonds, the first violence broke out. During a meeting taking place on May 27 at Voorhees, Woodsdale supporters became restless as the different factions started arguing with

each other. While trying to calm down the crowd, Deputy Sheriff Gerrond was struck by Sam Robinson and suffered a scalp wound. Though the blood-letting acted to disperse the crowd, it also stirred up resentment against Robinson and his compatriots.

On June 1, the election took place, but two county commissioners from Woodsdale refused to canvass the vote in Hugoton, fearing they would be attacked. They, and Sheriff Cross, wrote Governor Martin explaining the situation and notifying him that Hugoton had armed itself and stood ready to fight Woodsdale.

While waiting for the Governor's response, Gerrond, Woodsdale's Sheriff Ed Short, and a William Houseley, went to Hugoton with the idea of arresting Robinson for his previous attack on Gerrond. What happened next both factions explained differently, each accusing the other of firing the first shot. Someone started shooting when the Woodsdale group entered the town and after an exchange of thirty shots the three men fled the premises. No casualties resulted from the confrontation, unless a bullet bruised foot of a farmer is counted. However, the event caused even greater animosity between the towns and on June eighth, Governor Martin ordered National Guard Brigadier General Murray Myers and Lieutenant Howard M. Davis to the county to make a full investigation of the situation.

The two men found Hugoton armed and Woodsdale supposedly the same way. The men interviewed several people and reported their findings to Governor Martin. The governor had Attorney General S.B. Bradford obtain a writ of mandamus from the state Supreme Court ordering the county commissioners to canvass the election. With two companies of National Guard in the county keeping things quiet, the commissioners, after several attempts, finally determined that the bond election had been defeated. By July 19, the National Guard started home and most people hoped that matters were settled in Stevens County.

What happened two days later ended any chance for peace in the county. Deputy Sheriff Short started the chain of events which led to the murder of four Woodsdale men. Short, learning

that Sam Robinson had gone to "No Man's Land" on a hunting trip, decided to try to arrest Robinson while he lacked support from the Hugoton faction. Short and a posse went after Robinson and cornered him. Thinking he would need assistance to flush Robinson out, Short sent for help from Woodsdale. Sheriff Cross, with Robert Hubbard, Rollin Wilcox, Cyrus Eaton and Herbert Tonney responded to Short's request and set off for "No Man's Land."

Before the Woodsdale party reached Short, Robinson escaped and Short started on his way back to Stevens County. Sheriff Cross, failing to locate Short, also started back to the county. Their horses being tired, Cross and his party halted at Wild Horse Lake, the site of a haymakers camp, to rest before going further. It was here that Robinson, now accompanied by a group of Hugoton men, found the five Woodsdale residents. Again two contradicting stories are told about what happened, but this time four eye-witnesses refuted the Hugoton account.

According to nineteen-year-old Herbert Tonney, one of Cross's men and the only survivor of the posse, Robinson and his group caught the Woodsdale men unarmed. Robinson then started shooting, first killing Cross, then Hubbard and Eaton. J.B. Chamberlain shot Tonney, but only wounded him in the shoulder. Tonney feigned death while Robinson found Wilcox and shot him. After making sure they had killed all the men, or so they thought, Robinson and his group rounded up the haycutter and his son who had witnessed the murder and headed back to Hugoton.

The haycutter, a Mr. Haas, had sent one of his sons for help, and a group of Voorhees men responding to the call met Tonney on his way back from the lake. The group took the boy to Voorhees and there he told the story of the murders. Several men went out and recovered the bodies, and as they passed near Hugoton on their way to Woodsdale, Chamberlain rode out to look at the dead men and then forced the wagons to go through the town. Mrs. Christiana Smith, who lived just outside of Hugoton at the time, saw the incident and knew the Hugoton men must have been shocked when they found only four bodies

in the wagons.[64]

On July 25, 1888, after hearing the reports of the murders, Governor Martin sent General Myers, Attorney General Bradford, and Captain John Wallace to the county. On their arrival they found the towns armed and awaiting attacks from the opposing forces. On the advice of the three men, Governor Martin sent the entire Second Regiment of National Guard to the county, along with a band and Section B of the First Light Artillery. Both towns were disarmed and all weapons confiscated. Deputy U.S. Marshal Charles Jones arrested the Hugoton men accused of the slayings. After thirty days the National Guard went home and the county seat fight was considered settled, with Hugoton the victor and Woodsdale doomed to obscurity.

The arrested men, Charles E. Cook, Orrin J. Cook, A.M. Donald, Sam Robinson, J.B. Chamberlain, James Wrigley and J.W. Calvert, were indicted and to be tried in April, 1889. However, jurisdiction problems caused the case to be thrown out of the courts. Sam Wood finally arranged for the accused men to be tried at Paris, Texas, since the district court there had jurisdiction over "No Man's Land." Six men were found guilty and sentenced to hang on December 19, 1890. They appealed the case to the United States Supreme Court and finally, in 1895, the case was taken off the court docket and the men were cleared of all charges.

Sam Robinson, who escaped the second trial, went to Colorado and was later convicted of attempted robbery of a store and post office, and was sentenced to the Colorado State Pententiary. Ed Short left the county about the same time as Robinson and was later killed in Oklahoma. Sam Wood also met an untimely death. While in Stevens County in response to criminal libel charges against him, Wood was shot as he left the Methodist Church where court was being held. James Brennan was charged with the murder, but never came to trial because an impartial jury could not be found. In 1895 charges were dropped against Brennan. This meant none of the deaths resulting from the county seat fight were ever legally avenged.

In the summer of 1888, when the four Woodsdale men were murdered, the county experienced the first failures of the boom period. Several of the other newspapers in the county expressed the fear that the county seat fight was driving people away. However, as the "Stevens County Seat War" came to a close, a period of unfavorable weather and crop failure descended on the southwest region of Kansas. The boom in Stevens County lost its rosey color as people became disillusioned with the land. They now understood that the climate change in the mid-1880's was just another phase in the wet-dry cycles which continually plague the area. The people realized that the county was financially insecure and that without stable agricultural production the boom would collapse.

The land boom had been based on false speculation and the belief that a railroad could be attracted to the county. Without the services of that transportation facility, land values would drop and businesses fail. This knowledge, together with the dry weather and the opening of Indian Territory in 1889, convinced many people to leave for better homesteads elsewhere.

Population statistics show that the migration out of the county was slow at first.[65] The rush into the Oklahoma area accounted for the first outward wave of settlers, with a second set following them when the Cherokee Outlet was opened in 1893.[66] Also in that year, a general depression struck the nation, which further lowered farm prices and land values. Discouraged by the worsening drouth, approximately five hundred settlers left the county between 1893 and 1894. From this date there was a steady, slow decline until 1898, when the population began a long, gradual rise as prosperity and better weather conditions returned to the county.

From a prosperous, booming land the county declined into an indebted, drouth-ridden area. The effects of the land boom were felt for many years after the collapse. The overspeculation of those few years left Stevens County with many different interest payments on municipal bonds it could not

meet. The loss of income from the decrease in population left the county with more liabilities than assets. Without railroad taxes the county had no regular and reliable source of revenue and it defaulted on most of its monetary committments. The problem reached bankruptcy proportions, forcing the county commissioners to hire two Wichita lawyers in 1897 to defend the county against bond indebtedness charges.[67] The county helped relieve some of the pressure by selling tax delinquent lands. This helped keep the county solvent and got more land under taxation to assure future revenue for the county.[68]

While all the southwest region of Kansas experienced financial problems, it also underwent adjustments in agricultural production. In the relatively wet years, farmers primarily produced wheat and corn. The drouth made these crops no longer feasible and broomcorn and sorghums replaced them. This change in the type of crops produced was the first of many made throughout the county's history. The modification also marked the beginning of several attempts of the inhabitants to cope with the semi-arid climate.

Besides producing different crops, the settlers who remained in Stevens County also considered irrigation as a solution to their problems. Irrigation was not a new idea to this area, but it had been ignored for several reasons. Some settlers felt irrigation was against God's will, believing He used the drouth to punish sinners. Other people, primarily investors, tried to muffle any talk of irrigation because they felt such ideas would scare away potential customers and destroy land values. Finally, people were unfamiliar with the techniques of irrigation and feared the high costs of any watering operation.[69]

Concerned citizens in Stevens County toyed with the idea of irrigation but nothing came of the flirtation. The Hugoton Hermes, now the only newspaper in the county, constantly pushed irrigation in early and mid-1890's. The newspaper felt once irrigation was started, people would return to the area and

land values would go up. The pages of the weekly paper suggested various methods of collecting water (including using buffalo wallows), in the belief that "conservation of water over a large area would increase the rainfall and prevent the hot winds."[70] The paper even published a short poem directed at stimulating interest in irrigation:

MORAL

If you live in the great southwest,
Oh! Never, never stop to rest,
Nor wait until it is too late.
Right now commence to irrigate,
By flooding or by percolation
Be prospered now by irrigation.[71]

In addition to printing items on irrigation, the paper reported on different meetings held in the county and surrounding area to develop an irrigation program. The county commissioners even went as far as trying to get an irrigation experimental station in Stevens County, with the full blessings of the newspaper.[72]

Before irrigation had enough time to become established in the area, the rains were starting to return. In 1896, Stevens County farmers still suffered because of the low prices for grains, especially wheat, but they were now growing bountiful crops. The growth in production forced the farmers to look for a new outlet for their crops if they wanted to make a profit. Since the national market was depressed and transportation facilities limited, they turned to a local market: the cattle rancher.[73]

Stevens County, during this transitional period, once again experienced a growth in its cattle industry. The drouth, by making crops hard to grow and discouraging farmers in the area, had reopened the prairie for grazing purposes. The number of cattle grew slowly until 1897, and more rapidly thereafter. At first affected by the drouth and the depression, the industry recovered slowly as the population steadily decreased. The deserted homesteads became the grazing pasture for cattle as the remaining settlers increased their

herds and other ranchers entered the area. Sorghums and even broomcorn were used or sold for forage, thus creating a beneficial situation for both the cattlemen and the farmers.[74] By 1900, the industry was well established in the area and five years later it peaked at 14,046 cattle in the county. Though no railhead was close by, the cattle were easily driven to Liberal for shipment on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway.

The complementary production of cattle and crops gave Stevens County a way to weather its financial difficulties. This change from crop production to diversified farming and ranching gave the settlers more flexibility to deal with the unreliable weather and the isolated position of the county. Despite the fact that recovery was slow for the county the settlers who remained during this period never lost hope. Again, the Hugoton Hermes must be used as an indicator of the society's temperment in the drouth period. The newspaper reported the numerous activities of the community now slowly concentrating itself in the county seat. Many of the boom towns, including Woodsdale, were deserted, and the settlers traded and socialized mainly in Hugoton. During this period many of the regular social events continued, despite the loss in population. Hugoton's baseball team kept its schedule, losing a game to one of its arch rivals, Ulysses, in August 1895.[75] The social calendar remained jammed with parties and celebrations on all the important holidays. The Hugoton Literary Society held recitals and musical programs, while groups such as the Odd Fellows and Knights of Pythias continued their organizations. Not to be out done by the rest, the different political groups in the county, such as the Populists and Republicans, also kept the people involved in activities.

The schools reflected the degree of stability in the community during the hard times. Stevens County's schools remained open and active, though school enrollment decreased

with the general decline of population.[76] Also, the county continued their normal school to attract teachers, people, and money to the area. The teachers in the county also held a meeting in October 1895, to form a Stevens County Teachers Association, lending permanence to the school system and the society as a whole.[77]

By 1895, the county had reversed its downward progress and was steadily improving. While agriculture recovered, the community continued to make itself appealing to outsiders. The people who remained were determined and capable, such as the Smiths and the Currys. They could see a future for the county that other disheartened settlers could not picture. Opportunity existed for those who stayed in the county, for they could consolidate their holdings and supplement them with land now at lower prices.[78] By 1900, the county was financially stable and it, as well as the rest of southwest Kansas, was once more luring people to the area.

Stevens County lagged behind other counties in this resettlement period because it still lacked a railroad and was farther than most counties from a railhead. The county did not experience an appreciable increase in its population until after 1905, when the area regained its rosey complexion of the boom days. However, this time the county had a solid economic foundation and could cope with the rapid growth. Prices were not inflated and development progressed more normally than the first boom. By 1908, the population had almost doubled and the Hugoton Hermes, in an article entitled "Stevens, The Queen of Counties", reported the remarkable growth of the area.[79] Now, all that remained to secure permanent prosperity for the county was a railroad, and that, the Hermes predicted, would not be long in coming.

CHAPTER FOUR - THE RAILROAD COMES TO STEVENS COUNTY

Stevens County successfully weathered the rough years and by 1908 was quickly becoming a major agricultural producer. This, with the continued good weather, gave the county an increased measure of financial stability. Stevens County needed only one more item to quarantee its new economic status: the railroad. With that transportation facility connecting Stevens County to outside markets, the inhabitants could look forward to a more secure future.

The struggle to bring a railroad to Stevens County was hampered for many reasons. The land and climate were natural barriers against rails being laid through the area. Not only was the county isolated from major centers of trade, it also relied upon two unsteady industries. Both cattle raising and crop production fluctuated with the wet and dry years, and railroad companies had to consider what would happen to their investments during the drouth years. Along with this, railroads made more money if the area was more heavily populated than Stevens County. These factors made the drawing power of the county on railroads not as great as if it was located in a less isolated area or in a more favorable climate. As K.L. Bryant explains in his history of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, "In the 1870's, when the Santa Fe was still trying to decide how to get out of Kansas and on to New Mexico, A.A. Robinson sought to persuade the board to build along the Cimarron cut-off to the Santa Fe Trail... the Atchison management decided against the topographical advantages the route offered because of the sparse population in the area and the almost desert-like terrain." [80]

Though the railroads may have been reluctant to build through the county, during the first boom period many were willing to take a chance. Most towns along the proposed route voted bonds for the building of the railroad, making it less of a financial risk for companies to build through

the area. Unfortunately, as already discussed in the previous chapters, the county seat fight prevented the rails from materializing in Stevens County. Both Hugoton and Woodsdale failed in their attempts to get railroads to build through their respective location. By the time the county seat controversy was settled, the land boom was over and railroads were no longer willing to invest in the area.

During the drouth and recession of the 1890's, Stevens County had no economic advantages that could possibly attract a railroad. By 1908, however, the county was again financially appealing to railroads wanting to make a good investment. The population of the county was growing rapidly, which meant more money and markets in the area to support a railroad. The farmers were doing well, producing large crops of broomcorn, sorghum, and wheat; these men were looking for a railroad to take over the hard job of freighting their harvests to the railhead at Liberal in the neighboring county. Cattle ranchers were also prospering, having greatly increased their herds over the last few years, and they could benefit from a local railroad by which to ship their cattle east.[81]

On March 20, 1908, another bond election for a railway was held in Stevens County. The people voted in favor of aiding the Kansas and Texas Railroad if it would build through their community. With the bonds passed and the survey already made, Stevens County residents expected daily to hear about the railroad's construction. However, the Kansas and Texas failed to get the project underway and the people started looking for another solution to their railroad problem.[82]

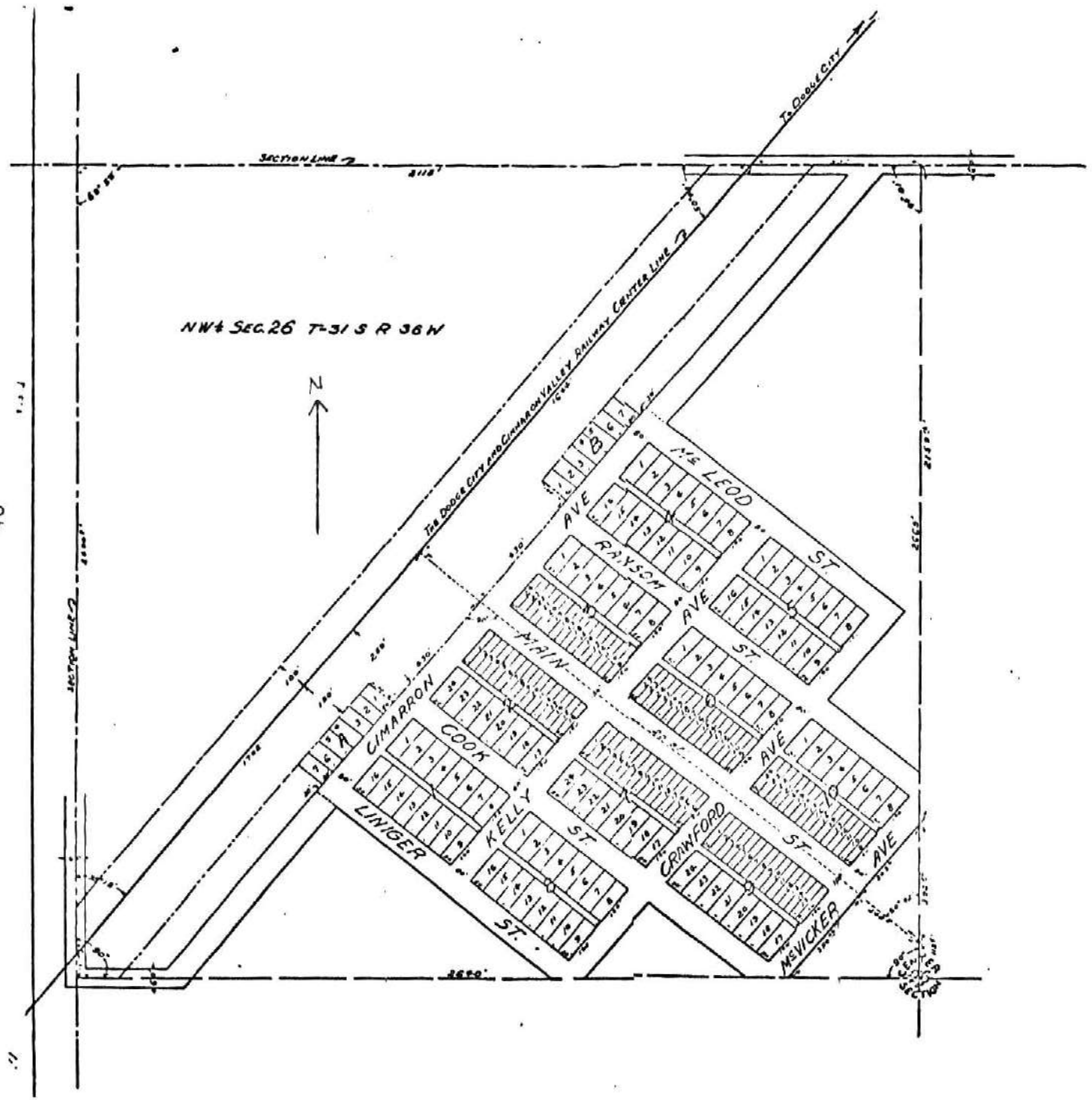
At this time several rumors were reported of other companies planning to build through the county. One proposal called for an electric railway to be built through Hamilton and Stanton counties into Stevens County, and on to Liberal.[83] The second possibility was for the Rock Island Railroad to build from Liberal, through Stevens County, and on westward

to Richfield in Morton County.[84] There were also hopes that the prospects of gas and oil in the county would bring a railroad into the area.

The people of Stevens County were still wondering whether any of these plans would bring a railroad when, in November of 1911, they received news of another development. At that time it was reported the Dodge City and Cimarron Valley Railway had been chartered. This company was to start immediately on the Colmar cut-off of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, and would run its tracks through Stevens County on its way southwestward.

Apparently this line of the Santa Fe had been on the drawing board since the proposal of A.A. Robinson in the 1870's. However, it was not until the broomcorn and wheat markets of the area prospered that the few men who had remained convinced of the route's feasibility could get the line surveyed and built. In 1910, the route was finally laid out, running "south and west from Dodge City some 228 miles through Elkhart, Kansas, to Clayton, New Mexico, and on to the Atchison main line at Colmar between Las Vegas and Raton."[85]

With the confirmation of the railroad actually coming to Stevens County, the area began to prepare for it. Two major developments took place in the community in anticipation of the railroad. They were the founding of the town of Moscow in the northeast corner of the county, and the improvements made in the town of Hugoton. Moscow was built on the line of the railroad, taking its name from a post office six miles away. The town was established around the railroad's depot and water plant. By the time railroad tracks were laid, Moscow had a stockyard, two grain elevators, two implement houses, two dry goods and grocery stores, one hardware store, a resturant, and two houses. And the town kept on growing, creating Sunday schools, baseball teams, and other community organizations.[86] Today it is the second largest town in the county and continues as an important grain shipment



N

MOSCOW

STEVENS CO. KANSAS

Scale 1"=200'

PLAT OF MOSCOW
ESTABLISHED 1913

point for farmers.

Hugoton also built up its facilities to accommodate the new business the railroad brought. A depot, water plant, section house, grain elevator, and three stockyards were constructed. In addition to the buildings already in town, three lumberyards, two banks, three big stores, a real estate office, a hotel, a pool hall, two blacksmith shops and fifty or sixty houses were built.[87] A poem appearing in the Hugoton Hermes characterizes the change in the town:

> Hugoton took a Van Winkle nap;
> But now she's the best town on the map;
> With hotels and stores, and banks and things;
> And all the good things prosperity brings;
> And the Santa Fe railroad too, by jing![88]

Again there was an increase in new homestead entries, and Hugoton flourished as the population continued to grow in the county.

The railroad made its way to Stevens County quickly after the initial decision to build. By January 17, 1913, the tracks had gone through Moscow and were about to be laid in Hugoton. By April 25, the railroad was within six miles of Elkhart and the Kansas border. By this time the people of Stevens County had almost completed their plans to celebrate the railroad coming to the community. They had vetoed the idea of an earlier ceremony when the railroad first came through because they would not be able to accommodate a large crowd.[89] They also were hoping for a good rain storm to settle the dust. But by the end of April, everything was ready for the railroad celebration and they decided to go ahead with it, despite the lack of rain.

On May 8, 1913, the county held its celebration. Arthur Schultz, a reporter for the Topeka State Journal, wrote a long article about the activities taking place in Hugoton. "Not less than forty of the 105 counties of the state were represented at the Hugoton show. Of the crowd of 5,000, nearly 2,000 were hauled to the picnic in the two special trains operated from Dodge City by the Santa Fe. Probably 500 auto-

mobiles lined the streets of the little town, or were stationed on the fenceless plain at points convenient to the scene of the celebration. Every county in western Kansas sent delegations. Added to the crowd, was the Hutchison band, and the cowboy's band from Dodge City,..." [90] The people of Liberal, in neighboring Seward County, also organized a processsion of automobiles which streamed their way into Stevens County for the celebration. [91]

The Hugoton Committee for Safety held a big barbecue for the people attending the celebration. There were twelve beeves, several sheep and over 20,000 buns used for the feast. [92] Along with the barbecue, baseball games, horse races, bronco busting and other athletic contests took place in the morning. A big circus tent, brought from Dodge City, was set up and the various state officials and other dignitaries orated there in the afternoon. [93]

The celebration day was topped off with a ball held in the circus tent. Approximately one thousand people danced until midnight to the music provided by a ten piece orchestra. [94] Just as the ball was over, and the people were returning to their homes or the waiting trains, rain began to fall. As Schultz described it: "The rain came in big heavy drops and splashed against the windows of the Pullmans, as the tired visitors hunted their berths. From uptown a half a mile away, there came a loud cheer. It was from the residents of the short grass country, expressing their thanks for the blessings of the day and the benediction of rain, the second within the week." [95] The rain was a fitting end to a long awaited day for the people of Stevens County.

The official welcome of the railroad to the community marked the end of isolation for Stevens County residents. They finally had the economic advantages a railroad brings to a region. No longer were they without a direct tie to the agricultural markets of the east. They were freed from the long hauls of crops to Liberal and from freighting manufactured goods back to Stevens County. Even the type of crops

produced could change; now more wheat could be grown and less emphasis on hardier, drouth resistant crops could be made by the farmers. The community profitted immensely from the Santa Fe business and the effects were very obvious. Yet, the people of the county were also going to find in later years that not all their railroad worries were gone. They had the railroad but along with it they had its problems. The need for more cars to ship grain out of the county, high rates, and poor service put a taint on the memories of May 8th, 1913.

The people of Stevens County, as wheat and other crop production increased, found that one railroad did not always solve freighting problems. By the 1920's, farmers not near the railroad line still faced the difficult task of hauling their large crops to the grain elevators at Hugoton and Moscow. One additional town had been built along the railroad in 1918 to ease the freighting burden. Feterita, located southwest of Hugoton, had storage facilities for farmers in that area of the county. However, the establishment of this town did not help farmers in the eastern and southeastern parts of the county.[96] It was in 1922 that the last railroad scheme to involve Stevens County was formed with the idea to reach these isolated farmers.

O.P. Byers, a prominent railroad man in southwest Kansas, established his own company in the early 1920's. His Kansas and Oklahoma railroad, headquartered at Liberal, was organized to build a railroad from Liberal to Baca County, Colorado. The line would provide rail service to a neglected agricultural area, benefitting both Byers and the farmers.[97]

Controversy surrounded the building of the Kansas and Oklahoma through Stevens County. During 1922, the Hugoton Hermes continually reported on the progress of the railroad and the obstacles in the way of its completion. Byers had asked the residents of Center Township in Stevens County to vote bonds for the support of the railroad. The first bonds voted were found to be illegal and not until the summer of 1922 were other bonds approved. Legal technicalities, and the

desire of some people to stop the building of the railroad, slowed the progress of the line even longer. Finally, in November, the Kansas and Oklahoma reached the new town of Woods and stopped.

Woods, presumably named after Sam Woods, was located about fourteen miles east of Hugoton.[98] On November 21, lots were sold on the town location, many of them going to Liberal businessmen.[99] A grain elevator was erected and a new railroad terminus was opened for the farmers in the area. The town and the shipping service did a faily good business until the mid-1930's. Some Hugoton residents complained that more grain cars were available on the Kansas and Oklahoma line than on the Santa Fe. It seems the Kansas and Oklahoma even got the business of these dissatisfied farmers.

The railroad lasted only until 1937, when the rails were abandoned and then removed. Undoubtedly the depression and the dust bowl conditions were responsible for the demise of the Kansas and Oklahoma in Stevens County. The town of Woods refused to die with the railroad, but instead was greatly reduced in size. Today the town consists of two or three buildings and a small grain elevator.

After the abandonment of the Kansas and Oklahoma railroad, no other lines were built through the county. Today only the Santa Fe railroad provides the necessary rail freighting services for the county. More goods and materials are hauled by trucks now, but the grain is shipped by the railroad. The railroad remains an important part of the economy of the county; and despite poor railroad service, May 8, 1913, is still remembered as one of the greatest days in Stevens County's history.

CHAPTER FIVE - RESETTLEMENT - THE PEOPLE, THE COMMUNITY, AND AGRICULTURE

The People

The second wave of settlers into the Stevens County area in the first decade of the 1900's differed slightly from that of the previous boom period. These new settlers were also attracted by the flat, open lands which were relatively inexpensive or still available through homesteading. Many of the people moving into the area were successful farmers who wanted to enlarge their land holdings. They felt southwest Kansas offered the greatest opportunity to do this at the least expense. Others coming into the county had few resources and looked for a chance to better their position in southwest Kansas. Ranch hands, farmer's sons, laborers, and others could homestead the land and establish a lucrative farming enterprise. They could also sell their lands after proving up their homestead and make a tidy profit for their investment.[100]

Unlike the first settlement era, native Kansans dominated the second wave of pioneers.[101] They simply moved from their eastern homes into the promising southwest region. With the majority of the incoming population from Kansas, the remaining numbers came from Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and other neighboring or midwestern states.[102] Foreign born people made up a very low percentage of the influx; they only measured 2.4 per cent and 1.9 per cent of the population in the 1910 and 1920 federal censuses.[103]

During this second settlement period Stevens County experienced a growth in its black population. Southwest Kansas never had a significant number of blacks living in the region, but during the early 1900's a noticeable increase in blacks occurred. Stevens County had no blacks in 1880, nineteen in 1890, and five in 1900. During the next twenty years, the black population grew from 81 in 1910 to its peak at 169 in 1920.[104]

The blacks came to the area for the same reasons as white people: the inexpensive land and the chance for improvement. The few blacks which had remained during the first depression years had done well and were a fine example of the opportunities open for blacks in the area. John Curry had brought his family to the county in 1888 "without a dollar." He and his wife, ex-slaves from Kentucky, had traveled west for health reasons. By 1895, Curry and his family were considered well-to-do by their white neighbors. They owned three-quarters of a section of land, a home in town, a team of horses, a team of mules and two wagons. The family remained in the county until the last of their children died in the 1960's, and were successful, well-accepted citizens of the county.[105]

With this noticeable influx of blacks, the county experienced a period of racial unrest while it adjusted to the change. This was an era of intense discrimination against blacks throughout the United States and the county was not immune from its affects. Segregation had been given legal sanction by the Supreme Court decision in Plessy versus Ferguson (1896) and blacks were being subjected to the "separate but equal" doctrine throughout the country.[106] In Stevens County, blacks such as John Curry, who had been treated very fairly, saw a change come about in many of the white people's attitude toward the blacks. The segregation philosophy, as well as the threatening rapid increase in blacks, stimulated this growth in discrimination and racial unrest.

Agitation against the blacks in the county started when a group of white people began supporting the segregation philosophy. As the Topeka Daily Capital reported, "The foes of the blacks included farmers living all over the county as well as the inhabitants of Hugoton, the county seat. In the principal stores of the town it was a common sight to see signs and placards bearing inscriptions such as these: 'No niggers wanted here, Stayout', 'Trade of Negroes not solicited or desired at this store'." [107] Though this news report may be

slightly overstated, a definite movement against the Negroes developed in the county, and it eventually ended in a court case upholding the civil rights of the black citizens.

The racial unrest in the county found a scapegoat in Major Stokes, a rather outspoken black farmer who had some trouble with his white neighbors. A group of about twenty-five to thirty local citizens assembled on a night in January of 1908, with the purpose of running Stokes out of the area. Fortunately the black farmer was absent from his homestead at the time and avoided bodily harm, though the "nightriders" did destroy some of his property and burned several bales of broomcorn.[108] Stokes did not escape further persecution however, for they soon arrested him for the alleged killing of a white farmer's horse and placed him in jail to await trial. He was sentenced to eleven months in jail and fined fifty dollars by a judge who believed "it would protect Stokes more to have him in jail until the mob spirit cooled down, than it would to turn him loose or give him a light sentence..."[109]

While in jail, Deputy Sheriff Hamby told Stokes if he would sign a relinquishment for his land, he would suffer no further harassment by the nightriders. Stokes finally agreed; he and his step-daughter, with whom he had been accused of living immorally, signed over their land for $100.00 each. They then allowed him to "escape" from the jail and leave the county with his family. The Hugoton Hermes commented on his departure in their February 28 edition, saying:

> He is right in saying that Stevens County does not want him. Neither does the county want any more of his kind. The county is also rid of the dirty wench who posed as Stokes' daughter and whose character is as black as his, and right here is a mighty good place to say that there are more of his class here yet who stand a mighty good chance to land in jail and even the penitentiary.[110]

The incident left the black community feeling insecure about its position in the county. Two black farmers, John

Curry and Stephen Tilford, wrote a former citizen of the county, L.J. Pettijohn, informed him of the Stokes trouble, and asked for help.[111] Pettijohn brought the incident to the attention of U.S. District Attorney Harry J. Bone, who referred the matter to the Secretary of Interior for investigation. Bone replied to the black farmers, detailing the steps being taken on the case and assured them that no one would be allowed to force the blacks from their land or deprive them of their civil rights.

In January 1909, the federal grand jury in Kansas City, Kansas, made indictments against eight members of the night-riders. The men charged were J.T. Moorhead, Joseph E. Hamby, Bruce Hall, Noble Madden, Charles Madden, John Cline, Ed Downey and Floyd Cady. They were charged "with oppressing, threatening and intimidating one Major Stokes on account of his race and color, and of having caused said Major Stokes to relinquish and release and remove from the homestead taken up by him..."[112] The trial, to be held in Wichita, finally got under way in September, 1909.

U.S. District Attorney Bone, a well known and skilled lawyer presented the prosecution's case.[113] Bone based his argument on evidence from the government investigation and the testimony of certain citizens of the county. Colonel William Potter, who had been an actual member of the nightriders, held the limelight. Potter's evidence faced the greatest amount of attack by defense attorneys.

The attorneys for the defendants were Judge David M. Dale and Sam B. Amidon, prominent lawyers from the Wichita area.[114] The attorneys had three lines of defense to support the night-riders' case. They first argued the charges against their clients were unjustified and that it was not illegal to discriminate against blacks. The Judge refused to accept this reasoning and did not accept a motion for dismissal based on these arguments.

The attorneys for the defense had more success with their next two arguments. They presented a large number of witnesses who testified that all the nightriders were "outstanding indi-

viduals." They also declared the defendants were justified in their actions against the "uppity" Major Stokes, an unlikeable individual and a trouble maker. This line of defense proved helpful for the nightriders, for most of them were prominent citizens in the county and had better reputations than Stokes. This fact made the nightriders' actions seem more legitimate than if Stokes had been of better character.

The third line of defense focused on the testimony of Colonel Potter. The attorneys pointed out that the defendants could not be convicted on Potter's testimony alone. They then suggested that Potter's statements were impeachable because he was a "...habitual user of cocaine and opium or either of them..." and his evidence must therefore be viewed with caution.[115] This degradation of Potter's character, as well as "the artful wiles of counsel for the defendants," seemed enough to convince most of the all male jury that the men on trial were innocent. The trial ended in a hung jury, with two of its twelve members voting for a guilty verdict. Judge Philips dismissed the jury and set a new trial date for the next court term in March, 1910.

District Attorney Bone immediately began planning for the second trial. He believed that the defendants were guilty and he wanted another well-organized, thorough investigation done in Stevens County. Bone insisted upon the use of special government agents, in lieu of the local and state authorities, some of which had refused assistance because they were sympathetic to the defendants. Bone also planned to break the "clannishness" of the county by offering immunity to anyone involved in the raid who would testify for the government against Moorhead.

By the time the trial reconvened on March 15, 1910, Bone had been successful with his plans. Five of the accused nightriders turned state's evidence and promised to provide testimony which would help convict the leaders of the mob: J.T. Moorhead, Joseph Hamby, and Bruce Hall. With this new evidence against them, the remaining three defendants pled

guilty to the charges of depriving civil rights. Bone was now assured of a conviction.

On June 7, 1910, the retiring Judge Philips handed down the final sentences. Though the government asked for the maximum fine of $5,000. to be assessed against the defendants, the results were more lenient. The Judge sentenced Moorhead and Hamby to one day in jail and fined them $100.00 each to be paid to the U.S. Government. Judge Philips gave Hall a thirty day jail term and also fined him $100.00. Each of the defendants paid one-third the court costs, which totalled more than $2,000.00.[116]

This case reestablished the rights of blacks in Stevens County. It also relieved some of the racial tension and restored better relations between the two groups. Such people as John Curry and his family could now remain in the county and enjoy a good, prosperous life. The black population continued to grow until 1930, when the depression and dust bowl starved out many blacks and whites.[117] Racial problems between the two groups remained at a minimum throughout the remaining history of the county. The blacks, though having a close community, are well accepted members of Stevens County's society.[118] In a land like southwest Kansas, people look at ability more than color as a basis for acceptance and success.

Besides the black people of the county, no other minority figures significantly in an analysis of the population. Migration into the county continued until the 1930's, but the characteristics of the people remained the same. In the Twenties, a noticeable number of "suitcase farmers" entered the area, but again they were predominantly native Kansans.[119] The post World War II migration also follows this pattern, though fewer blacks entered the area than in previous decades.

The Community

With resettlement, Stevens County again became a bubbling community. New towns appeared, social activities increased, and the county modernized its image. The continual growth

of population stimulated the changes made in the county and by the 1930's, the prosperous community looked toward a bright future.[120]

Hugoton continued as the principal town in the county. As the county seat and the main shipping point on the Santa Fe Railroad, Hugoton remained the center of county activities. The majority of business interests located themselves in the town, making Hugoton the main supplier of goods and materials for county residents. Two out of the three banks in the county, the Hugoton State Bank and the Citizens State Bank, were in Hugoton.[121] This made Hugoton the financial center for county inhabitants. The town expanded when the railroad came through the county. This expansion and modernization of the town continued as the county developed into a major agricultural and natural gas producer.

Hugoton also had the first modern conveniences in the county. In 1903, the first telephone line was run along barbed wire fencing from Liberal to the Hamby Hotel in Hugoton. In 1908, W.B. Crawford established the first switchboard in Hugoton, serving thirty telephones, and he made his wife the first "hello girl" in the county. In 1920, after several changes in the system, Southwestern Bell took over the 160 telephones. The system expanded with the gas industry in 1930, but experienced a leveling off period in the worst years of the dust bowl. Today the telephone network is a modernized version of the early barbed wire system and it serves the whole county.[122]

The first automobile also came into the county during the resettlement period. R.M. Crawford and Ed Joslin traded a quarter-section of land for a one cylinder "Winton" with a teller stick. They got the car sometime in June, 1905, and it lasted about thirty days.[123] The first automobile to carry the mail from Liberal was a Reo, driven by Guy Kimzey in 1908. The service only continued until 1912, when the railroad replaced the need for it.[124] However, county inhabitants now had the mail delivered to them by car. Automobiles, trucks and motorized farm machinery grew in popularity and usefulness as

manufacturers improved the equipment. As the vehicles increased in use, they created numerous changes in the lifestyles of the residents. The country post offices were needed less; people could now travel more and be less isolated on their farms; and freighting and farming operations were made easier. Today, most freighting of materials is done by trucks, and automobiles remain an essential part of the inhabitants' lives.

Hugoton also had the first light and power plant in the county. In January, 1920, the city made a contract for an electric and water installation to be built in Hugoton. By October, the plant was finished; by the end of 1920, the city had continuous light service and a more modern water system.[125]

These civic improvements increased after natural gas was discovered in Stevens County. On November 23, 1930, the Topeka Daily Capital reported that Hugoton and the county needed many changes to accommodate the gas business. The desire for a new courthouse to replace the old frame building erected as a school in 1887, was overshadowed by the problems of paving streets, supplying more building space, and enlarging water and power systems. In the end, all these improvements were left undone until the county shook off the affects of depression and the dust bowl.

Though most of the activity during resettlement took place in Hugoton, several other communities experienced changes. A number of small towns or settlements were established in the county from 1905 to 1930.[126] The number was not as large as the first boom period, but the communities were similar to their predecessors. The small settlements usually consisted of a post office and a few building (except for Moscow, Feterita and Woods.) Most of these small communities vanished from the map as the automobile became more popular. When the postal service motorized its rural mail system, it also discontinued many of the small post offices. Cars made it easier to shop and socialize in Hugoton and people had less need for the country store or small town. By the 1930's, only Hugoton,

Moscow, Feterita and Woods remained in existence.

Social activities, now contentrated in Hugoton and Moscow, increased as the population grew in the county. The importance of social organizations and gatherings in the county has already been stressed. During the resettlement period, community activities continued playing an essential role in the lives of county residents. Visiting neighbors, dinner parties, dances, masked balls, special celebrations and observances of important holidays remained popular social activities. Many groups and organizations established in the previous boom period continued and flourished. Different lodges, such as the Masons and the Odd Fellows, enlarged their memberships while other organizations founded new chapters in the county. Women's groups also grew; these included the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Red Cross.[127] The Woman's Club of Hugoton was founded in 1913 and federated in 1914.[128] This group, one of the first Woman's Clubs organized in southwest Kansas, had an outstanding record of community achievements, including founding the county's public library during this period.[129]

Church and school activities remained important to the people of the county. Revivals and similar religious gatherings were common place. More churches were built and others enlarged to accommodate the increased population. During this time, the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Hugoton moved out of the courthouse into a new edifice. Between 1906 and 1930, the congregation expanded and moved twice, finally into a larger church on south Main Street in 1923.[130]

Schools also were expanded or new buildings erected for the additional children in the county. The first high school opened in 1911; this allowed county children to continue their education beyond grade school without having to move to Liberal. The first year the school operated, fourteen students attended classes. In 1915, the first group to graduate consisted of only three women: Mary Stoner, Gertie Helfrich,

and Zana Madden. All three ladies went on to become teachers in the county.[131]

The county schools supplied many of the community's activities. Included in these were the old standards: the spelling bee, debating clubs, literary societies and sports teams. The first group of high school students had two literary societies around which they organized most of their activities.[132] In addition to the town of Hugoton's athletic teams, the schools had basketball and baseball teams which competed against other schools in the area. These athletic competitions always were popular with the residents and rivalries were apt to develop between towns.

Inhabitants also enjoyed the various political activities going on in the county. Stevens County has been a stronghold of the Republicans throughout its history. However, other political groups always have been present to offer opposition for the Republicans. During the first boom period, rivalries between Democrats, Republicans, and Populists kept the political scene lively. The People's Alliance, or Populists, and Republican Party dominated this early period, with the Prohibitionists having a small representation. By 1910, the Republicans controlled the political scene in the county. Stevens County residents helped elect Harding and Coolidge in 1920 with 876 Republican votes; opposition in the county cast 346 votes for Cox and Roosevelt, and 39 votes for Debs and Stedmen. The Prohibitionist and Socialist party, as well as other third party groups, always had a small following in the county. However, the Republicans continued as the strongest political party and remain so today.[133]

In addition to the activities of individual groups, the community held functions of interest to all people in the county. Thus, people with musical talent, literary experts or other interesting people came to entertain the community. Lyceums and chautauquas were held once or twice a year. In August, 1920, a chautauqua had five days of concerts, lectures, operas, plays and a picnic.[134] The county fair held each year

also offered a varied program of entertainment for people in the county and the surrounding area. While emphasis was on the agricultural related events, it was also a highlight of the social season in the county.

The community's development and activities altered very little during World War I. Only 114 men out of the county's population of about 3,000 served in the armed forces; not all of them saw active duty.[135] Russell Smith, a native son and resident of the county since 1906, said little changed in the community during the war. Most men had agricultural deferments and they remained home to produce crops. County residents stepped up farming and cattle ranching slightly during the war, but besides the added work the county continued along its previous course until the 1930's. Then the depression and dust brought a drastic reduction of community activities.

Agriculture, 1905-1930

In the period from resettlement of Stevens County to the "Dirty Thirties," southwest Kansas developed into an important agricultural area. It was during this time wheat farming became a big business in Stevens County and cattle ranching again diminished in significance. Farm size increased, mechanization of agriculture occurred, winter wheat became the dominant crop, and the "suitcase farmer" came into existence. These factors, coupled with a period of wet weather extended farming throughout the county and helped bring on the dusty conditions of the 1930's.

Agriculture, from the establishment of the county, was the main activity of its inhabitants. The first settlers, unable to adapt their humid climate farming techniques to the dry conditions, were forced to leave the area to the cattlemen. During the transitional period of the 1890's most people believed the High Plains could be used only for ranching. Willard Johnson, who prepared a government study in 1901 on the utilization of the High Plains, echoed these sentiments. Johnson pointed out that the problem of how to productively

use the plains was complicated by their cycles of arid and humid weather. He called the plains "the most alluring body of unoccupied land in the United States because of their flat, fertile land and the periods of humid weather which attracted farmers to the area. Yet, for the farmers to make agriculture productive over a long period of time they needed additional water sources to weather dry spells. Johnson concluded, however, that "the High Plains, except in insignificant degree, are non-irrigable, either from streams, flowing or stored, or from underground sources, and that therefore, for general agriculture, they are irreclaimable; but that on the other hand water from underground is obtainable in sufficient amount for reclaimation of the entire area to other uses..."[136] Cattle ranching and similar pursuits constituted these uses.

Johnson's study failed to consider the character of the settlers coming into the plains. This new wave of farmers, like their predecessors, also speculated on the land in an effort to improve their financial status. However, these farmers had a more tenacious attitude and they had a better understanding of the climate. The farmers knew reoccurring dry spells were a part of the plains climate; but they had two things which convinced them drouth could be weathered: optimism and scientific farming. The people of Stevens County and the surrounding area realized no rainfall and prolonged drouth meant poor crops; it also meant that the rains would return the next year or soon after. They recognized the weather cycles and always held a hopeful attitude about the rain. Perhaps their speculative nature made the farmers so confident. They knew the land was highly productive and profitable; that knowledge could keep the farmer optimistic during years of low rainfall. This optimism was not severely tested until the 1930's, and then it never completely disappeared.

Dry farming techniques and drouth resistant crops also made the new farmers less fearful of dry weather. Dry farming developed out of the new scientific approach to agriculture which emerged around the turn of the century. The general

principles of dry farming showed how to preserve more moisture in the soil for crops.[137] Though the drouth of the 1930's would prove the use of a dust mulch over the soil as disastrous to the land, the basic ideas of dry farming did improve crops. Not all farmers used the techniques; wheat speculation and suitcase farming in the 1920's caused many people to ignore the methods for quicker procedures. Initially, however, dry farming did alleviate some of the fear of dry weather on the plains.

Along with better farming methods, drouth resistant crops gave farmers a better chance for success. In Stevens County, until wheat acreage took over in 1920, broomcorn and varieties of sorghums were the dominant crop.[138] The county harvested the largest crop of broomcorn in Kansas for 1910. Though this crop involved a large amount of work to harvest, it was extremely profitable for farmers who sold it for brushes or forage. Sorghums, in particular milo and kafir corn, replaced broomcorn as the major crop in 1913. A reconnaissance soil survey report on western Kansas, issued in 1912, explained why sorghums became more popular. The survey concluded that "No other crops have done so much to put the agriculture of this area on a safe basis as the non-saccharine sorghums of which the most valuable are kafir, milo maize, and sorghum or cane. The great value of these crops is due to the fact that they have their growing season in time of the greatest probability of rain and also that they withstand drought and hot winds more successfully than any other crops of the region."[139] These crops did exceptionally well in Stevens County when the rainfall was low in 1910, 1916, and 1919. Sorghums were mainly for forage or grain and they sold at a good profit.

The history of wheat production in Stevens County is one of ups and downs until the 1920's. L.J. Pettijohn brought the first wheat to the county in 1892. He served as an agent for an eastern loan company which held title to a large amount of land in Stevens County. The company gave Pettijohn the wheat

seed and he planted it on the loan company's land. He harvested about 4,000 bushels of the grain and hauled two loads of wheat to the railhead at Liberal. Pettijohn was paid fifty-six cents a bushel and fifty-eight cents a bushel for the two loads, which did not cover the cost of freighting the grain to Liberal. He kept the rest of the seed, gave it to settlers on credit and figured to collect after the harvest. However, the dry weather prevented the crops from growing, no seed was obtained, and the first phase of wheat production in the county ended. [140]

Wheat acreage in the county was below 10,000 acres until 1915, even after the railroad came through. In 1916, wheat went up to 21,454 acres and then fell to 3,617 acres the next year. By 1920, however, county acreage in wheat grew to 29,043 and until 1931, it continued to increase. The expansion of wheat in Stevens County acreage occurred for several reasons. First, the coming of the railroad cleared the way for more wheat production in the county. Arthur Schultz, in his report for the Topeka State Journal on the Hugoton railroad celebration remarked on the difference the railroad made to the county's agriculture. [141] The transportation facility reduced high freighting costs and the farmers no longer needed to grow crops for the local livestock markets. Farmers could reap the advantages wheat had over the other crops: higher prices, a better market and easier harvesting.

Secondly, wheat acreage increased because World War I stimulated farmers' interest in the crop. Both the demand for wheat and the price went up during the war when it was "considered a patriotic duty to raise as much wheat as possible." [142] Stevens County farmers planted more wheat in 1916, but the lack of rainfall brought and kept the acreage down until 1919. Instead of wheat, farmers planted more sorghums to supply feed for the increased number of cattle in the county.

The improvements of farm machinery also stimulated the increase of wheat acreage in Stevens County. With the introduction of tractors around 1915 and combines in the early

1920's, the production process of wheat was simplified. The machinery easily adapted to the flat plains and allowed planting and harvesting to be done faster and with less labor. With the extra time and money, farmers expanded their land holdings and planted more wheat. The machinery also replaced the need for horses and mules; this meant fewer acres of forage were grown and more land was available for wheat. [143] In Stevens County, both the number of tractors and combines increased rapidly in the 1920's. The county had 140 tractors in 1924; by 1930 there were 334. Combines increased at an even faster rate; there were 40 in 1924, and 239 in 1930.

Favorable weather, a good market, high prices and the better farm machinery created a period of agricultural speculation in southwest Kansas.[144] During the 1920's, more land was cultivated in Stevens County than previous years, and the 1931 figure of 270,309 acres was not equaled until 1954. Wheat acreage in Stevens County went from 19,043 acres in 1920 to the peak of 166,989 acres in 1931, a figure which has not been surpassed. At that time, about sixty-one per cent of the land under cultivation was planted in wheat.[145]

With more land under cultivation, farm size increased in Stevens County. A comparison of figures from the 1920 and 1930 federal agricultural censuses illustrates the change. In 1920, the average farm size was 471.0 acres, while in 1930 it was 573.3 acres. Along with this increase in size, the number of farms decreased in the county. In 1920, there were 666 farms reported, and this number decreased to 634 farms in 1930. Both these trends were a result of farmers wanting to benefit from the good wheat prices. More land meant more profits to the farmer who had machinery and land bills to pay and who wanted to make a quick fortune. Those farmers who could not afford machinery or lost money on their crops usually sold out to the more successfull farmer. This trend to fewer farms of larger acreage continued into the 1930's when it accelerated dramatically.

Agricultural expansion and the wheat speculation of the

1920's brought the farmers' cooperative to Stevens County.[146] This agricultural organization helped farmers market their grain and get agricultural supplies at lower prices. Farmers' cooperatives built their own grain elevators and other facilities to eliminate middle man payments and arbitrary storage rates. The town of Feterita, southwest of Hugoton, was established in 1918 by a farming organization. A grain elevator and a farmers cooperative store were built, along with a railroad siding for grain cars.[147] Hugoton and Moscow also had farmers associations created during this time. These cooperatives were important developments for the farmers in the county and remain so today.

Stevens County and southwest Kansas experienced side affects of the wheat speculation which later caused the "Dirty Thirties." First, the suitcase farmer, and his cousin the sidewalk farmer, entered the area. These suitcase farmers were predominantly eastern Kansans and they came to take advantage of the wheat prices. They bought or rented land in the county and visited it twice a year, for sowing and harvesting the wheat. Their speculative attitude about agriculture harmed the communities in which they farmed. The suitcase farmer abused the land to make the highest profit possible. They planted continuously, without summer fallowing, and they ignored conservation techniques. The farmers took advantage of the wet years to make maximum profits, then abandoned the land when drouth came. Their misuse of the land proved a terrible burden for local farmers during the 1930's.[148] Stevens County never had a large number of suitcase farmers as compared to neighboring counties; however, the twenty per cent among this group did contribute to the blowing conditions in the 1930's.[149]

Finally, wheat speculation resulted in the cultivation of land which never should have been used for crops, or used only with conservation practices. Farmers, in the interest of profits, cultivated areas of the county which were very susceptible to wind erosion. Soil surveys made of the county

after the 1930's showed that much of the land should be cultivated only when using intensive conservation practices. The remaining areas had soil which should not be cultivated, but used only for limited grazing. These acres had the most severe wind erosion in the 1930's, while much of the other land experienced moderate erosion.[150] It was the cultivation of these lands without care for the soil which made Stevens County a part of the dust bowl.

Agriculture, from 1905 to 1930, underwent great changes in Stevens County. The area became a major producer of broomcorn, sorghums and wheat. Cattle diminished in importance and remained so until World War II stimulated a growth in livestock production. Meanwhile, both crops and cattle suffered from the speculation and intensive farming of the 1920's. Depression and drouth ended the prosperous years and replaced them with dust. However, Stevens County was luckier than many of its neighbors; for along with the dust came natural gas to make the "Dirty Thirties" a little more tolerable.

CHAPTER SIX - "THE BUBBLE BENEATH THE PLAINS" [151] - NATURAL GAS DEVELOPMENT IN STEVENS COUNTY

"Crawford #1 gas well, southwest of Hugoton, caught fire on June 17, 1927, and burned about a week before it was extinguished." Thus starts a caption describing a picture of the well fire in the centennial edition of the Hugoton Hermes.[152] The fire threw flames forty to sixty feet in the air, which could be seen for a great distance across the prairie; people from the surrounding area flocked to the well for a close-up look at the spectacular fire. The blaze continued burning until June 23, when Tex Thornton, a renowned well fire fighter, put out the fire with a blast of nitroglycerin. This fire was the first of several blazes which occurred as more gas wells were drilled in Stevens County. Crawford No. 1 marked the beginning of natural gas development in the county and the first inkling that a much larger gas field existed in the region.

As more wells were drilled, the boundaries of the gas reserves were established and the world's largest natural gas field was mapped out. The gas field, with Stevens County at its heart, covers approximately two-and-one-half million acres in southwest Kansas, and continues down through the Oklahoma panhandle a few miles into Texas.[153] The area in southwest Kansas, named the Hugoton gas field by the Kansas Nomenclature Committee, refers to the gas produced from a specific layer of permian rock.[154] Geologists determined that the area was a huge monocline, sloping upward to the west. The monocline left room for the gas to collect under its structure in the porous rock and a fault at the upper end of the monocline prevented the gas from escaping.[155]

Though Crawford No. 1 marked the start of production in the Hugoton field, the first gas was discovered earlier just outside of Liberal, in neighboring Seward County. A well drilled in 1920 by the Traders Oil Corporation on the

Boles farm (section 3, T 35 S, R 34 W) struck gas while the company searched for oil. They found a gas zone between 2,600 and 2,800 feet, but the Traders Corporation had no interest in any fuel but oil and they had the well plugged.[156]

This interest in finding oil, rather than gas, continued through the 1920's in most of southwestern Kansas and the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas. In 1926, the Independent Oil and Gas Company hired Walter L. Sidwell to drill a well on land leased from R.M. Crawford in Stevens County. Sidwell began drilling Crawford No. 1 in December, and by May,1927, he struck gas at approximately 2,600 feet. Sidwell had discovered a gas zone about 200 feet wide, later named the Hugoton pay zone. The Independent Oil Company wanted Sidwell to continue drilling for oil, while he wanted to produce the gas. Sidwell agreed to drill further for oil on the condition that if he found none, he could have the rights to the gas. Sidwell drilled down to 3,500 feet, discovered no oil, and plugged the well back to the gas zone. He then contracted with two men, Arthur K. Lee and Gus Hardendorf, to market the gas from Crawford No. 1.[157]

Lee and Hardendorf, combining parts of their first names, established the Argus Gas Company and opened the first gas distribution system in Stevens County, with the intention of supplying gas to certain towns in the southwest region of Kansas. In August 1928, the company began furnishing gas to the town of Hugoton from the Crawford well. By 1930, the company owned or controlled the five existing wells in the county and started an expansion of their distribution system.

Argus Company established contracts with the Missouri Valley Gas Company and the Missouri Pipe Line Company, who arranged to buy and distribute the gas as far as Omaha, Nebraska. These contracts were the first of a series which eventually brought the gas into the hands of two major companies. The Missouri Valley Gas Company and Argus became the Republic Natural Gas Company, while Missouri Valley

Pipe Line Company changed to the Northern Natural Gas Company. The Republic Natural Gas Company and the Northern Natural Gas Company increased drilling operations and expanded the distribution systems, making the gas available to more profitable markets. Operations slowed after the initial activity in the field and business almost halted from 1932 to 1935 because of the depression and dust bowl conditions. Development increased gradually after 1935, with the major activity starting in 1944, when World War II stimulated production. The scarcity of materials during the war sometimes limited the number of new wells which could be drilled. However, with the return of peace, gas production began a steady climb. The peak year for drilling wells was 1949, and by 1953 the gas reserves of the county and field were known and 415 wells were in operation.[158] By this time, other major companies, pipeline corporations, and independent operators entered the gas field. Gas activity continued, with a renewed interest in finding oil. In 1966, a report of gas and oil production in Stevens County listed 816 gas wells and 15 oil wells producing fuel in that year.[159] Today, the county remains the largest producer of natural gas in the state, with a possible future in the oil industry.

The most important step taken in developing the Hugoton gas field was establishing a market for the fuel. Both the Northern Natural Gas Company and the Republic Natural Gas Company and their subsidiaries started pipelines to local and regional areas. However, the Panhandle Eastern Company first linked the gas field, and Stevens County's reserves, to a larger market. The company, under its subsidiary the Missouri Kansas Corporation, started a line from the Texas gas field up through Kansas to the Illinois-Indiana border in 1931. Stevens County did not get hooked to this line until 1938, when a new pipeline brought the county's gas to the main line near Liberal. By World War II, gas from Stevens County and the surrounding area traveled along the

1,300 mile pipeline to points as far east and north as Michigan.[160]

Experts found the natural gas of the Hugoton field sweet, or sulfur free, and rich in minerals.[161] The good quality of the gas, as well as the large quantity, made the field extremely profitable. Stevens County benefitted before many other counties because it had land available for lease when the initial gas discoveries were made.[162] The economic potential of the county increased as producers sought to tap the rich gas reserves there.

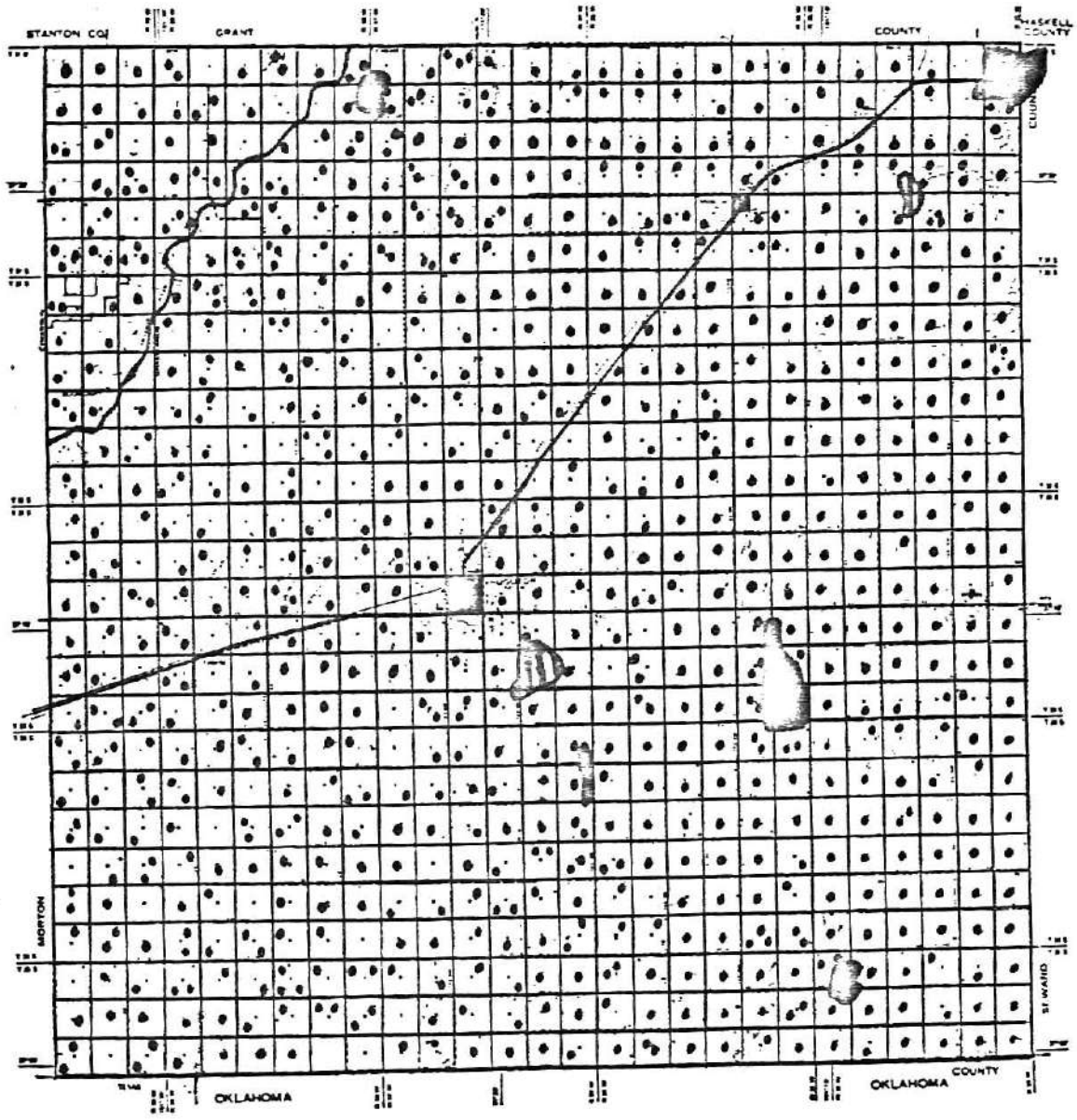
The development of gas in Stevens County followed the pattern established in earlier oil production. At first one well was drilled per 160 acres, but in the late 1930's, the Kansas Corporation Commission changed the regulation to one per 640 acres.[163] The company drilling the well leased the right to the section of land from its owner, usually a farmer in the county. The owner received a royalty payment of one-eighth the value of production in addition to use of the gas for domestic purposes and for irrigation pumps.[164] The company's activities came under the regulations of state and federal agencies as soon as they established a well site and drilling started. Though controls on the gas industry by government authorities were slow in developing, by 1940, authorities instituted and enforced regulations which restricted production, prices, and the shipment of gas. The state agency, the Kansas Corporation Commission, monitored the activities of the companies in the state: specifically they dealt with pricing, the amount each well could produce, and helped protect the rights of property owners. The Federal Power Commission, with the Natural Gas Act of 1938, had control over companies transporting gas across state lines. The federal agency regulated the price of gas, the amount available for shipping, and the operation of interstate pipelines. The controls of each commission are still in effect today, though they are continually being reworked according to the needs of the gas field, the con-

sumer, and the gas companies. [165]

The drilling methods used in Stevens County and the Hugoton field changed as the industry expanded and new techniques developed. The rig which drilled the Crawford No. 1 was a cable tool or sputter, and it involved a long procedure utilizing a large amount of water, not readily available in Stevens County. This system was replaced by the more efficient rotary rig, introduced to the county by Walter Kuhn. He and his brother Howard, expert drillers, played an instrumental role in developing the gas resources of the county. This innovation in drilling was followed by improved equipment and better processing techniques, such as adding acid to the well, to create larger production amounts and a better quality gas. [166]

The discovery and development of natural gas in Stevens County was an important event in the history of the county. Economically, gas placed the county in a better situation and it could now weather bad agricultural years more easily. The people were skeptical at first about the future of the gas industry in the county. They had heard about and seen other discoveries of gas and oil dissipate before they could amount to anything. However, as various companies expanded drilling operations and they discovered the true extent of the field, the county residents were convinced of their good fortune. The fact that every section in the county had gas resources confirmed the optimism of the people. While still new, gas producers told county residents that the field would last two hundred years. This estimate continually diminished as reserves were scientifically measured and confirmed. By the 1950's, the more realistic number of thirty to forty years was being given. [167] However, the people of the county to this day believe it will last longer. New discoveries of gas at the 4,000 feet plus level, and the continual drilling and capping of supposedly "dry" wells by gas companies, have worked to reconfirm the belief of Stevens County residents in the future of their gas field.

GAS AND OIL RESERVES IN STEVENS COUNTY



- OIL

- GAS AND OIL

- GAS WELLS

The development of the natural gas resources of the county began slowly. The first benefits came to the county when companies piped the fuel into Hugoton and when they used gas for more drilling. The depression and the dust bowl hindered operations but with the late 1930's and then World War II, the gas industry in the county grew rapidly. It was at this time the county also started changing and improving. Much like the affects of the railroad when it came to the county, the communities of Hugoton and Moscow adjusted their life-styles to the new business of the gas industry.

Hugoton, as the principal community of the county, experienced the most changes. The city now had to meet the demands for additional facilities such as housing, food services, retail stores and public services. Buildings were needed and built to house the various gas companies and other new businesses attracted to the county. A building boom hit Hugoton in late 1945 when more materials were available for housing. Hugoton and the county began improving the streets, installing better sanitation facilities and generally building itself up to fit its new role as a modern, wealthy city.[168]

Hugoton also applied to the Kansas legislature for their right to drill its own gas well. In 1945, the Kansas legislature passed House Bill No. 175, which allowed Kansas towns to drill municipal gas wells.[169] The people of the county then voted to drill the well and the city made a contract with the Northern Natural Gas Company to start the well. Walter Kuhn and Dewey Price were in charge of the drilling and they hit the Hugoton Pay Zone on August 8, 1945. The town now had its own well and it paid off the cost of drilling by 1947. After the city made these payments, the yearly royalty payments went into the general fund of the city and provided Hugoton with a more stable economy and a more secure future.

The people of Stevens County wanted their naturual gas resources developed, but they also wanted to preserve the quality of life in the area. They fought against the building of a carbon black plant in the county because of its air pol-

lution and inefficiency; they successfully blocked its establishment.[170] Cleaner industries, however, they welcomed. The Panhandle Eastern Pipeline Company, in 1945, and the Northern Natural Gas Company, in 1951, built compressor stations in the county. The Hugoton Plains Gas and Oil Company established a gasoline plant in the county in 1950. All these industries were acceptable to the people of the county, for they brought more jobs and added income without harming the environment.[171]

Besides the financial benefits the gas brought the land owners and the county, the new industry also provided twenty-five per cent of the jobs for the area. Though most of the drilling crews and well builders were not local people, many of the jobs in the plants and more permanent administrative positions were filled by county residents. This gave the county an outlet for its excess population created by land consolidation and the increased birth rate.[172]

The economic benefits of gas for the county became a counterweight to the fickle climate of the area. With the additional revenue, the people could survive harsh dry years and the loss of crops without suffering as much as other non-industrial counties. In the 1950's, when dust storms and dry weather returned to the county, the people had their natural gas interests keeping them solvent until rain returned. The natural gas revenue, and the fuel itself, also allowed farmers to irrigate their crops.[173] The extra money helped pay for the equipment, while the cheap fuel powered the irrigation pumps. Though irrigation will be discussed at a later time, it is enough to say now that the amount of irrigation done today would not be feasible without natural gas resources.

An indirect contribution made by natural gas to the county was the building of its Natural Gas Museum. With Hugoton being called the natural gas capital of the world, people expressed interest in the history of natural gas development in the county. During the centennial year of Kansas, the Stevens County Hitorical Society opened the gas

museum. The facility houses information on the gas industry, in addition to material on the history of the county. With the aid of the historical society and other people, the museum is destined for a good future, preserving the heritage and relics of the county and its gas industry.

The drilling of Crawford No. 1 in 1927 greatly affected the future of Stevens County. The gas provided additional income to county residents and helped stabilize the economy. More industry and the development of irrigation were a direct result of the gas discovery. Finally, the county weathered the dusty Thirties and Fifties more easily with the help of the gas industry.