

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH CENTRAL KANSAS

Part Ia

**An Economic History
1500-1900**

Richard Sheridan

**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS—BUREAU OF BUSINESS RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

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PREFACE

During recent years the Bureau of Business Research has been engaged in the preparation of a series of area reports designed to shed light on the significant characteristics of the Kansas economy. In this connection ten volumes dealing with the economy of the 19 counties in Southwestern Kansas were prepared and distributed in the period 1951 to 1955.¹

This volume by Dr. Richard Sheridan is Number Ia in a similar series covering South Central Kansas. Because of the wealth of data pertaining to this area, it appeared advisable to divide the subject into two parts. Accordingly, Volume Ia traces developments to 1900; Volume Ib, yet to be prepared, will begin at this point and continue to the present.

A penetrating analysis of economic events such as Dr. Sheridan has made provides an excellent foundational structure upon which the more specialized reports relative to the area may be structured.

The Bureau is grateful to Dr. Sheridan for his willingness to undertake the laborious job of ferreting out and skillfully assembling the many pieces of material necessary to build this comprehensive statement concerning the development and growth of one of the important agricultural and commercial sections of the State.

Paul E. Malone
Director

¹ *Economic Development in Southwestern Kansas*, Part I, "The Economy of Southwestern Kansas"; Part II, "Population and the Labor Force"; Part III, "Mineral Resources and Industries"; Part IV, "Water Resources and Irrigation"; Part V, "Agriculture"; Part VI, "Manufacturing"; Part VII, "Trade and Service Industries"; Part VIII, "Financial and Capital Facilities"; Part IX, "Government"; Part X, "Social and Cultural Features."

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Section I

INTRODUCTION

The story of how man has gone about the task of providing for his material needs and wants is an intriguing one. Broadly conceived, it concerns the complexity of man's relationships with his fellow beings and his struggle with the forces of nature. A truism of the modern age is that the world is an indivisible and interdependent economic unit and that a famine in India, for example, may have world-wide repercussions. Revolutionary economic changes in recent centuries have posed many problems for which solutions are being sought. Many branches of knowledge, including economic history, have contributions to make towards the solution of these problems. According to Professor Bogart,

Economic history is a study of causes and tendencies, not a mere narration of observed facts; it supplies a reasoned interpretation of human progress. It is an economic analysis and causal explanation of men's action in their most absorbing pursuits. It is an attempt to describe the origin and development of economic and social institutions, and to explain present economic problems by setting forth the historical background.¹

Economic institutions are influenced and shaped by numerous factors, no one giving the key to an understanding of the complex economic development process. On the other hand, while these factors are not of equal importance, it is possible to measure them with some degree of accuracy and to show that some have relatively greater influence than others. Of fundamental importance to an analysis of economic developments are three sets of factors: (1) the physical environment; (2) the equipment and knowledge available, sometimes called the technological environment; and (3) the social environment. "The movement of economic history," writes Professor Heaton, "is the result of interplay between 'physical resources, the technologies developed for the use of resources and social institutions.'"²

¹ Ernest L. Bogart, *Economic History of the American People*, p. vii.

² Herbert Heaton, *Economic History of Europe*, pp. 1-2.

The physical environment needs to be considered first because it consists of nature's contribution to man's economic welfare and more or less sets the limits for working out the problems of material existence. Man, however, is able within limits to mold his environment to meet his needs, and the extent that this is possible depends upon "the stage of development of equipment, skill and knowledge of what to do and how to do it."³ Thus it is necessary to give careful attention to the physical and the technological environment in tracing the economic development of a country or a region. Lastly, it is necessary to know something of the social environment consisting of the social attitudes of the people and such social institutions as the family, the church, and the school. The social environment is significant because, like the physical environment, it "may impose limits or may present opportunities for economic change."⁴ If, for example, the people of a particular nation favor technological change, they will probably include a number of scientific and technical courses in their school curriculum. Social attitudes may thus be translated into action through social institutions and have widespread repercussions on the economy.

Numerous economic histories of the United States and other countries have been written in recent years, but more regional and area studies are needed to supplement the more general works. To see the over-all picture, it is necessary to understand the structure of the parts and to see how they function in terms of the whole.

Economic historians generally divide the United States into the following regions: New England, the East, the South, the Midwest, the Southwest, the Northwest, and the Far West. Within each region there is substantial diversity in agriculture, manufacturing, and other economic activities; but, as a study in another series points out, "there is in most cases a marked similarity or interdependence in the economic problems confronting the people in any one of them."⁵ Even more manageable units of study are the subregions or districts within these larger regions where common characteristics in natural resources, climate, soil conditions, and river basins are found.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴ Harold F. Williamson (ed.), *The Growth of the American Economy*, 1951 ed., p. 6.

⁵ Robert S. Eckley and Jack Chernick, "The Economy of Southwest Kansas," *Economic Development of Southwestern Kansas*, Part I, p. 17.

The present study is one of a series attempting to analyze the Kansas economy according to areas of the state that exhibit certain common natural and economic characteristics. In the introductory volume of the Southwestern Kansas series six areas are delineated; with reference to South Central Kansas, the area under consideration, it is pointed out that

The South Central area embraces the primary trading territory of Wichita, and a major portion of the producing oil fields in the state. The chief agricultural crop is wheat, although the Flint Hills counties in its eastern portion are largely pastoral.⁶

It is necessary to describe in some detail the physical, technological, and social environment of South Central Kansas, an area of 21,185 square miles comprising 24 counties and approximately one fourth of the state's land area.⁷ This will provide background for analyzing the economic development of this area in subsequent sections.

The Physical Environment

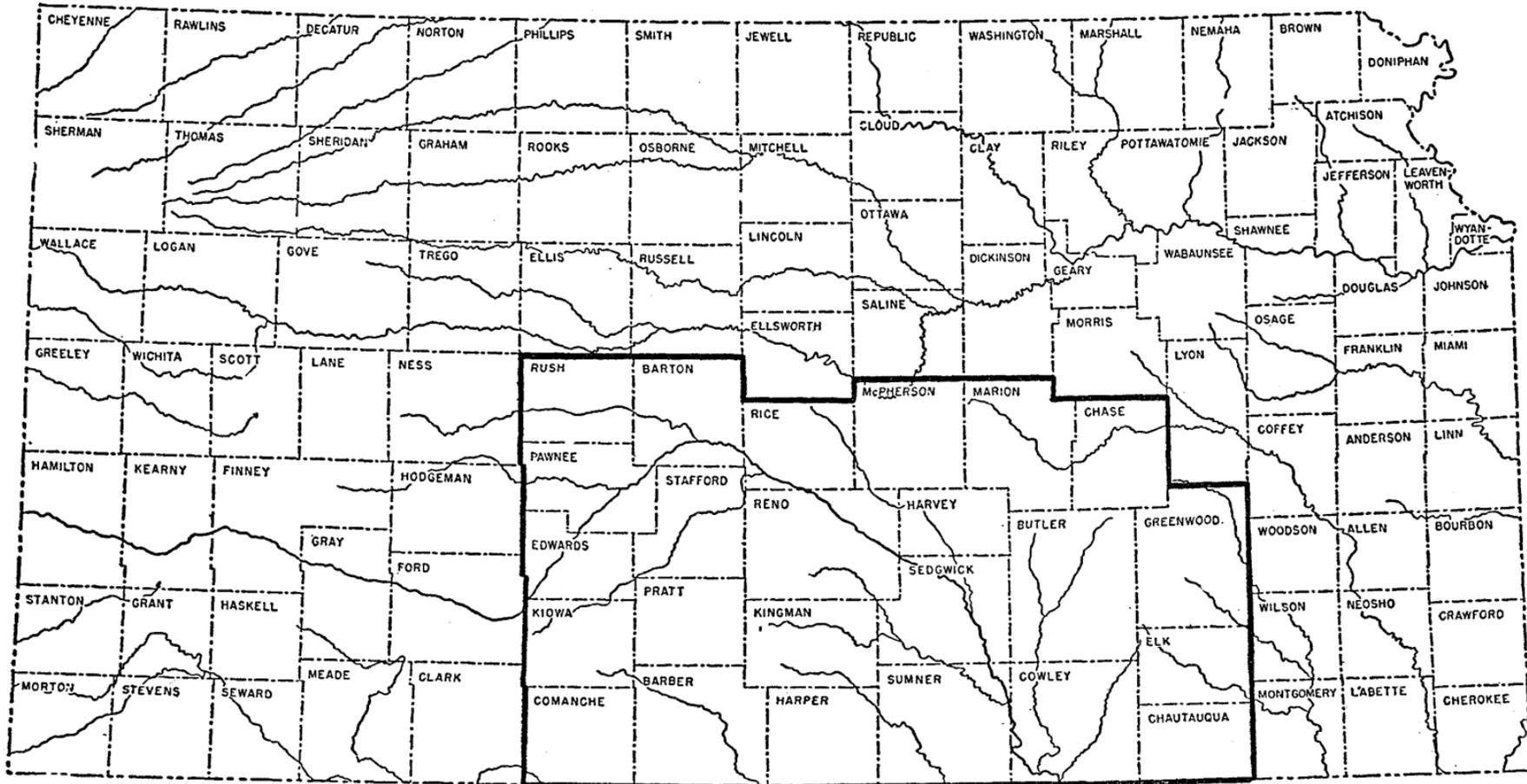
Generally speaking, the colonization of the United States can be divided into two periods; before about 1850 settlers were engaged in colonizing the Great American Forest; after that time they pushed westward into the prairies and the Great Plains. Professor Schmidt relates, "The first period is symbolized by the rifle, the axe, the log cabin, the ox, and river transportation; the second, by the covered wagon, the sod house, the windmill, barbed wire, the horse, farm machinery, railroad transportation, the gasoline tractor, and the motor truck."⁸ In a broad sense this study is concerned with the colonization and the development of the prairies and the Great Plains, an area including a large portion of the upper Mississippi valley and extending southward in a broad belt of territory west of the Mississippi valley to the Rio Grande. More particularly, however, attention will be focused on the South Central Kansas area and its economic development.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁷ The counties of South Central Kansas and their areas in square miles are as follows: Barber, 1,146; Barton, 892; Butler, 1,445; Chase, 774; Chautauqua, 647; Comanche, 800; Cowley, 1,136; Edwards, 614; Elk, 647; Greenwood, 1,150; Harper, 801; Harvey, 540; Kingman, 865; Kiowa, 720; McPherson, 895; Marion, 959; Pawnee, 749; Pratt, 729; Reno, 1,255; Rice, 721; Rush, 724; Sedgwick, 999; Stafford, 794; Sumner, 1,183.

⁸ Louis B. Schmidt, "The Agricultural Revolution in the Prairies and the Great Plains of the United States," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 8, No. 4, October, 1934, p. 169.

Figure 1
Location of South Central Kansas Showing River Systems



From a geographical and topographical point of view, South Central Kansas is of interest because it is a transitional area; the eastern three fifths lies in the Prairie Plains while the western two fifths lies in the Great Plains. Roughly speaking, the ninety-eighth meridian marks the boundary between these regions; here the well watered interior lowlands merge into the semiarid plains.

The area east of this line is known as the "garden" of the United States. According to Professor Van Hise, "This province is one of sedimentary rocks, largely limestone; it is of moderate latitude, being below 100 feet in elevation. It is an area of neither too abundant nor too scanty rain; for the most part the annual precipitation being between twenty and forty inches. Originally it was largely covered with grasses, the trees being confined mainly to the borders of the streams."⁹ The soils of the Prairie Plains range in depth from eight to 12 inches and in some localities are 10, 15, 20 or more feet deep.

The Great Plains area is similar to that of the Prairie Plains in that a deep and fertile soil is underlaid with sedimentary rocks, but it is different as far as rainfall is concerned. This is an area of deficient rainfall; the annual average is under 20 inches; and, unless a farmer has access to irrigation facilities, his crops are likely to be "burnt out" every few years. Rainfall appears to follow a cyclical pattern in this area, and agriculture alternates between periods of dearth and plenty. Prior to its settlement, the Great Plains area was known as the "Great American Desert."

It might be thought that the distinction between the Prairie Plains and the Great Plains is largely an academic one and that it had little or no influence on the settlers of the region. Some evidence tends to refute this conclusion. James R. Mead, an old Indian trader and a prominent pioneer of Wichita, had the following to say about the Little Arkansas river that flows southeast from about the ninety-eighth meridian in Rice county and joins the Arkansas river at Wichita in Sedgwick county:

The Little Arkansas was the dividing line between the plains proper, the range of the wild Indians, and the country to the east, the home of the reservation Indians, and was near the eastern limit of the main range of the buffalo at the

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

time of which I write [1863]. It was the dividing line between the limestone formations, with their black, heavy, waxy soil, and the sandy, loamy soil to the west. It was the western limit of the oak in this part of the state, some fine oak timber growing in the wooded bends near its mouth, and was the last heavily timbered stream in Kansas as the traveler proceeded directly west, and south of the big river.¹⁰

So far in this discussion the boundary between the Prairie Plains and the Great Plains has been regarded as relatively stationary. This, however, is misleading because in actuality the boundary shifts east and west of the ninety-eighth meridian with climate fluctuations. Rainfall is by far the most important climatic factor in Kansas. Instead of its being spread evenly throughout the years, records show that there have been "alternately recurring wet and dry periods, with no regularity in intervals between and no apparent clues to suggest when they will occur in the future."¹¹ Periods of severe drought, such as those in 1860, 1874, 1901, 1911, 1913, 1917, 1918, 1930, 1934, and 1936, mean crop failure over large areas of the state, especially the western portion. It is obvious that farmers in the western counties of South Central Kansas would feel the effects of drought most severely. In discussing the adaptation of agriculture to this region, it will be important to note the rainfall fluctuations.

Several other climatic characteristics need to be noted. Kansas is well suited to agriculture because most of the rain falls in the crop growing season. "From 70 to 77 per cent of the annual total falls during the six crop growing months, April to September, when it is most needed."¹² The average for these months in the middle third of the state is 19.49 inches; this compares with 24.64 and 14.70 inches for the eastern and the western thirds of the state, respectively.¹³ While the seasonal distribution of precipitation is favorable to agriculture, the frequent heavy downpours and the excessive rate of evaporation are handicaps. Heavy downpours often result in flash floods and serious soil erosion while little moisture penetrates the soil. The high rate of evaporation, especially in the summer months, means that the soil's moisture content is greatly reduced.

¹⁰ James R. Mead, "The Little Arkansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1907-1908*, Vol. X, p. 8.

¹¹ Snowden D. Flora, *Climate of Kansas*, p. 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

Mention should also be made of the moderate to high wind velocity, the relatively mild winters with occasional cold waves, the wide variation in mean temperature, and the large number of sunny days. Mr. Snowden D. Flora, meteorologist of the United States Weather Bureau and the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, sums up the climate and agriculture of central Kansas as follows:

The middle third, with an elevation generally between 1,200 feet and 2,000 feet, has an average annual precipitation of 26.45 inches. It has drier and more bracing air, more sunshine, a better wind movement, and a greater range between day and night temperatures than the eastern third. Spring and the advancement of crops, including harvest dates, are often earlier in the south-central counties than in the south-eastern part of the State. This is the heart of the hard winter wheat belt, producing in the ten-year period ending with 1945 an average of 86,516,000 bushels annually, which is more than 50 per cent of the State's total yield. Many counties produce abundant crops of corn, alfalfa, and grain sorghums. Fruit and truck crops are grown in favorable locations.¹⁴

Animal Life

Another aspect of the physical environment of considerable economic importance in the early period was the native animal life. Before the white man penetrated the area, millions of buffaloes grazed on the prairie grasses. The Plains Indians depended on these animals for food, clothing, and shelter. Then, with the arrival of the white man the great slaughter began, and for a few years there was a flourishing commerce in buffalo hides and bones. By the time the settlers arrived, the herds were greatly diminished; but sufficient numbers remained so that the settlers were able to supplement their rations with buffalo meat and to raise a little cash by selling hides. They also used "buffalo chips" (dried dung) for fuel, gathered up the bones, and shipped them to eastern markets. The plains antelope, prairie chicken, quail, and other wild fowl were other sources of meat for early settlers.

Other animals, now extinct, served as the basis of a valuable fur trade. Along with the buffalo (in reality the American bison) and the antelope, they consisted of the beaver, the deer, the lynx, the bear, and the wolf. To these must be added animals surviving today, such as the muskrat, the raccoon, the mink, the skunk, the opossum, and the badger.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

The above mentioned animals were of economic importance; but others, such as the jackrabbit, the prairie dog, and the coyote, were economic pests for which bounties are paid to encourage their extermination.¹⁵

Mineral Resources

Not all of nature's bounties lie on the surface of the globe. The bowels of the earth hold the minerals essential for an industrial civilization; South Central Kansas is abundantly endowed with some of these minerals. Petroleum and natural gas are the area's most valuable mineral raw materials. With the exception of Harper and Comanche counties, producing oil and gas wells were in all counties of the area in 1948. The greatest concentrations in that year were in Greenwood, Butler, and Cowley counties in the eastern subarea; Sumner and McPherson counties in the central subarea; and Barber, Pratt, Stafford, Pawnee, Barton, and Rush counties in the western subarea.¹⁶ Helium, a noninflammable gas used in balloons and dirigibles, is present in small amounts in the Dexter-Otto district of Cowley county.

In addition to petroleum and gas, South Central Kansas has rich deposits of salt and gypsum. Salt is present in the subsurface rocks of the western half of the area, and important producing areas are located near Hutchinson, Lyons, and Anthony. The greatest reserves of easily accessible gypsum in Kansas are in Barber and Comanche counties, where mines are located. This mineral has also been produced in Marion county, part of the second largest reserve area in the state. Gypsum is used in cements and plasters, as fertilizer, and as building blocks and wallboard.¹⁷

Arkansas River

Giving the area unity, the Arkansas river rises in the Colorado mountains and eventually flows into the Mississippi river after passing through Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Entering South Central

¹⁵ Carroll D. Clark and Roy L. Roberts, *People of Kansas, A Demographic and Sociological Study*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶ W. A. Ver Wiebe, J. M. Jewett, and E. K. Nixon, *Oil and Gas Developments in Kansas During 1948*, pp. 34-46, 51-60, 63-66, 88-93, 97-99, 103-109, 120-121, 126-137, 144-147, 153-157, 160-167, 169-173.

¹⁷ J. C. Frye, J. M. Jewett, and W. H. Schoewe, *Glimpses of Resource-Full Kansas*.

Kansas at the boundary between Edwards and Kiowa counties, the Arkansas flows northeast through Edwards, Pawnee, and Barton counties, where it bends in a southeasterly direction and passes through Rice, Reno, Sedgwick, Sumner, and Cowley counties. Several branches of the Arkansas need to be mentioned because they form a part of this river system and its watershed. These include the Medicine Lodge, Chikaskia, Ninnescah, Walnut, Verdigris, and Little Arkansas rivers, Walnut creek, and Pawnee fork. Practically all of South Central Kansas is in the Arkansas river watershed. The only exceptions are the northwestern part of the area drained by the Smoky Hill river, part of the Kansas river system; and the northeastern part drained by the Cottonwood river, part of the Neosho river system.

Uplands

Roughly four fifths of South Central Kansas is outside the flood plains of the major streams. This land presented many problems to the early settlers. While settlers did not have to clear the land of forests and stones and drain marshes and bogs, they faced other problems unique to the area. In the first place, hostile Plains Indians depended on the buffalo and resented the infiltration of the white man. After the Indians were defeated and herded into reservations, there were the problems of obtaining sufficient water, fuel, and building materials and of finding crops adapted to a region with marginal or deficient rainfall. The absence of natural barriers made the area readily accessible to wagon immigrants, but this means of transportation was slow and costly. Not until the railroads pushed westward into the prairies and plains was the area made sufficiently attractive to encourage widespread settlement and economic development.

Subareas

The layman is likely to regard Kansas as a featureless plains area of one vast wheat field. This description most nearly fits the western part of the state, but it is hardly accurate as applied to much of the eastern and central portions of Kansas. Even in South Central Kansas there is sufficient diversity in geological structure, topography, rainfall, and other climatic conditions so that the area may be roughly divided

into three parts: the Flint Hills grazing area to the east; the central area of cash grain, livestock, and dairying; and the western area, where wheat is the most important crop.

Flint Hills Grazing Area

The seven eastern counties of Chase, Marion, Greenwood, Elk, Chautauqua, Butler, and Cowley are largely in the bluestem or Flint Hills grazing area. This subarea has the lowest elevation of South Central Kansas, from 1,000 feet above sea level in Chautauqua county to 1,400 feet in Chase county, and it has the heaviest average annual rainfall, from 31 inches in Chase county to 37 inches in Chautauqua county. The topography of these counties varies from the gently sloping land and the rolling and hilly country of Butler county to the distinctly rugged hills of Chase county. The upland soils in the greater part of the subarea have been formed from the weathering of flinty and cherty limestone and are relatively shallow and stony. On the other hand, the bottom lands are very fertile and capable of producing high yields of grain and forage crops.¹⁸

The native grasses of Kansas can be separated into two general classes: (1) tall or prairie grasses, and (2) short grasses. The bluestem grasses of the Flint Hills region are in the former category. Because of the broken topography and the shallow soils, most of the uplands of this subarea are better adapted to the growing of grasses for pastures than to any other purpose. The grazing of beef cattle is thus the chief industry of the subarea, although some farmers grow cash grains and engage in general farming.¹⁹

Central Subarea

West of the Flint Hills the elevation rises, the rainfall diminishes somewhat, and the country is predominately a gently sloping and rolling plains area with occasional low hills. Eight counties in the central subarea are McPherson, Rice, Harvey, Reno, Sedgwick, Kingman, Sumner, and Harper. The elevation of this subarea ranges from 1,250

¹⁸ Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station and Kansas State Planning Board, *Agricultural Resources of Kansas*, Vol. XXI, No. 10, pp. 24-30, 45-47, 60-62, 86-88, 129-131.

¹⁹ A. E. Aldous, "Economic Value of Native Kansas Grasses," *Grasses in Kansas*, Frank C. Gates, editor, p. 13.

feet in Sumner county to 1,700 feet in Reno and Rice counties while the average annual rainfall varies from 25 inches in Rice county to 32 inches in Sumner county. The other seven counties have an average rainfall of from 27 to 30 inches, slightly above the state average of 26.65 inches during the years that records have been kept.

Two main soil types are found in this subarea. The soils in a triangular area, including the greater part of Reno county, the south and southwest portions of Sedgwick county, and the north and west portions of Kingman county have been formed from the weathering of outwash plains materials. "They vary in texture from loamy sands to silty clay loams with sandy loams and silt loams predominating. The surface soils are brown and relatively deep in most localities."²⁰ The remainder of the subarea, with the exception of western Sumner and Harper counties, has been formed from the weathering of limestone, sandstone, and shales, with limestone and shales predominating. "These soils are dark brown to black in color, deep, and consist of silt loams and silty clay loams."²¹ Most of the soils in western Sumner and Harper counties "are residual from Permian Redbed material, are quite deep, have a brown to reddish brown surface soil with reddish brown to red subsoils."²²

The central subarea is intersected by the ninety-eighth meridian and is more truly transitional than the other subareas. This is indicated by the native grasses, such as mixed bluestem and short grass. Due to such factors as the sloping to rolling topography, the fertile soil, and the moderate rainfall, the central subarea has a much higher percentage of land adapted to the production of grain and forage crops than the eastern subarea. While wheat production is characteristic of this subarea, oats and alfalfa are fairly important crops, and some corn and grain sorghums are grown. Livestock is more important here than in the area farther west, and dairying assumes considerable importance. The agriculture of this subarea is more diversified than that of the other subareas.²³

²⁰ Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-94, 109-111, 127-129, 169-172, 174-176, 188-190, 206-208.

In comparison with the other subareas, the central subarea is more highly urbanized. The growth of towns and cities in mid-America is conditioned by many factors, but of primary importance are the agricultural resources of the surrounding area. Urban centers play a vital role in the development of these resources by providing markets, agricultural processing industries, financial institutions, and other essential services. This is not the place to discuss the pattern of urban development, but it is important to point out that Wichita and Hutchinson, the largest cities in South Central Kansas, are located in the border area between the Prairie Plains and the Great Plains and that the physical environment helps to explain the growth of these cities. In this transitional area the rainfall is sufficient to support a relatively diversified type of agriculture; this, in turn, gives stability to the economy and makes it possible to support cities of considerable size and importance. These cities serve not only the surrounding countryside but their trade territories extend south and west into the areas of deficient rainfall and unstable agricultural conditions.

Western Subarea

Nine counties in South Central Kansas—Barton, Rush, Stafford, Pawnee, Pratt, Edwards, Kiowa, Barber, and Comanche—are on the eastern fringe of the Great Plains and exhibit many characteristics common to this region. The elevation of these counties varies from 1,500 feet in Barton county to 2,200 feet in Kiowa county, with an average of about 2,000 feet. Rainfall averages 21 or 22 inches in the western tier of counties (Rush, Pawnee, Edwards, Kiowa, and Comanche), and 24 or 25 inches in the eastern tier (Barton, Stafford, Pratt, and Barber). Topographically speaking, the western subarea is much the same as that of the central subarea with sloping to gently rolling plains. Along the Arkansas river are local areas of sand dune material having a hummocky topography, and in Barber and Comanche counties there are distinctly rough and broken areas. North and west of the Arkansas river the soils have been formed from the weathering of soft limestones and calcareous shales while south of the river, except for parts of Barber and Comanche counties, the soils have been formed from the weathering of outwash plains materials. Generally speaking, the soils of the

subarea are relatively deep and fertile and capable of absorbing much moisture. Exceptions to this generalization are found in southern Barber and Comanche counties, where most of the soils have been formed from Permian Redbed material.²⁴

Native grasses provide a clue to the type of agriculture adapted to a particular area. In the western subarea mixed short grass and bluestem predominate, although the proportion of short grass to bluestem is greater than in the central subarea. The yield of the short grasses predominating in the northwest corner of the subarea is relatively low; for this reason livestock is less important there than in the other subareas. On the other hand, the western subarea, except for parts of Barber and Comanche counties, is extremely well suited to the growing of wheat. While wheat is by far the leading farm crop, some corn and sorghums are grown. Owing to the broken topography and shallow soils in a considerable portion of Barber and Comanche counties, the grazing of livestock assumes considerable importance.²⁵

Technological Environment

The physical environment sets limits on man's economic activity; however, man is unique in that he can mould this environment to a considerable extent. It is common knowledge that man's ability to harness the forces of nature has increased tremendously in recent centuries. For several thousand years western man was poorly equipped to cope with nature and labored with crude tools to wrest a bare living from the soil. Only within the past two centuries have new sources of power been developed to make possible a comfortable standard of living for many. In accounting for this radical change, historians generally refer to the agricultural and the industrial revolutions commencing in England during the eighteenth century and later spreading throughout most of Europe and America.

For purposes of this study it is significant that these revolutions were well under way in the United States by the time settlers began to pour into South Central Kansas.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-19, 43-45, 58-60, 111-113, 160-162, 166-167, 179-181, 200-202.

²⁵ Aldous, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Railroads

One technological innovation making possible the rapid settlement and development of the area was the railroad. There were a few frontier settlements in the pre-railroad era. Not until the area was linked to the East by railroads did it attract settlers and capital on a sufficient scale to develop the natural resources. The first railroad, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, was built across the area between 1870 and 1872. The contributions of the Santa Fe were manifold. In addition to its function of common carrier, it had agents in eastern states and foreign countries encouraging settlers to occupy land along the railroad; it conducted experiments to discover the agricultural products best suited to the region; it provided employment for many of the inhabitants, and in general it worked diligently to populate and to develop the area.

Farm Machinery

Other technological innovations that shortened the premier phase of settlement were those making possible the mechanization of agriculture. Professor Schmidt points out that the "epoch-making machines—notable among which were the plow, the corn planter, the two-horse cultivator, the mower, the reaper, and the steam thresher—had been invented in the period ending with 1860," but he further observes that "it was not until the decade which witnessed the Civil War that agricultural machinery was popularized and brought into widely extended use."²⁶

Mechanized farming on an extensive scale was first adopted by farmers in the eastern states, but after the Civil War this type of agriculture was gradually extended westward. Farm machinery and railroad transportation revolutionized agriculture by enabling farmers to grow surplus foodstuffs that were exchanged for eastern manufactures. Subsistence farming soon gave way to a commercialized and mechanized form of agriculture that made farming a business as well as a way of life.

²⁶Louis B. Schmidt, "Some Significant Aspects of the Agricultural Revolution in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 3, July, 1920, p. 377.

Internal Combustion Engine.

Railroads and improved farm machinery played a vital role in the early development of the area, but in subsequent years other technological innovations had widespread repercussions. The invention of the internal combustion engine not only revolutionized agriculture and trade by the introduction of automobiles, trucks, tractors, and combine harvesters but also increased the demand for gasoline and other petroleum products. The area was rich in these natural resources, and by the third decade of the present century the petroleum industry was second in importance only to agriculture in value of products.

Aviation

Even more spectacular has been the growth of the aviation industry in the Wichita area. Beginning with the production of light planes on a small scale after World War I, this industry grew moderately during the 1920's, received a sharp blow during the depression of the early 1930's, and expanded on an unprecedented scale during World War II, when Wichita supplied the military services with planes valued at a little more than a billion and a half dollars or 2.8 per cent of the major aircraft supply contracts of the United States.²⁷

Corporation

Mention should also be made of innovations in banking, marketing, and types of business organization. The effects of these innovations have probably been as revolutionary as those of a technological nature; this is particularly true of the corporate form of business organization. William Allen White writes in this connection,

Two inventions hastened the growth of civilization, and in the western United States speeded up progress more than elsewhere. The two inventions were the steam engine and the unlimited corporation. The one was useful in getting power out of fuel. The other multiplied the power of man's brain.²⁸

The corporate device makes possible the aggregation of capital on an unprecedented scale; and, together with technological advance, it is

²⁷ William G. Cunningham, *The Aircraft Industry, A Study in Industrial Location*, p. 223.

²⁸ William Allen White, *The Changing West, An Economic Theory About Our Golden Age*, p. 20.

responsible for the mammoth industrial and financial empires dominating most aspects of American economic life.

Social Environment

The social environment of South Central Kansas is hardly distinguishable from that of the larger region, the Middle West. The inhabitants of the area are almost entirely American born, are descended from settlers who came mainly from the Middle West, and are largely Protestant in their religious faith.²⁹ This common background made for uniformity in the social environment that has been characteristic of the area to the present day. While these generalizations apply to the bulk of the area, there are some exceptions in several counties, such as Harvey and McPherson, where a substantial proportion of the people are descended from Germans, Swedes, and other nationalities emigrating directly to the area from Europe and attempting to preserve their Old World religious practices and ways of life.

Since space does not permit a complete discussion of the customs, mores, and institutions forming the social environment, only those social attitudes of the inhabitants that have influenced the economic development of the area will be discussed. Two prevailing ideas having had widespread economic effects are the beliefs in material progress and individualism.

Material Progress

The belief in material prosperity and progress is understandable when one considers that a continent rich in resources awaited the European colonists who came to our shores. For about 260 years after the landing of the Pilgrims in 1620, the land and other resources were regarded as inexhaustible. America was the land of opportunity; and, though a man be born poor, his chances for material success were assured if he exhibited the traits of self-reliance, diligence, frugality, and personal aggressiveness. One of the chief conditions for success was the willingness to "pull up stakes" and move west to the land of opportunity. Here there was cheap land for the farmer, precious metals for the miner, virgin timber for the lumberman, open range country

²⁹ Clark and Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

for the cattleman, and, in addition, opportunities for the gambler, the outlaw, and the promoter of spurious business ventures.

In a broad sense Kansas is similar to other states in that settlers were attracted by the possibility of improving their social, political, and economic status; but the unique political history of the state has made for peculiarities in the social environment. During its early history Kansas was the battleground of proslavery and antislavery forces, and the victory of the latter under the leadership of emigrant Puritans from New England has had a significant influence on the people's attitudes. One of the tenets of the Puritan faith was to labor hard at one's earthly calling; to this was added such economic virtues as sobriety, frugality, and honesty. The Puritan was a firm believer in material progress, and there was little in his religious or political thinking that conflicted with his desire to amass wealth.

Although the Puritan ethic was dissipated to some extent when settlers from midwestern states began to arrive in increasing numbers after the Civil War, the attitudes of the New Englanders remained dominant for many years. Economic waste was rampant on the frontier with its saloons, gambling dens, outlaws, prostitutes, fly-by-night promoters, and robber-barons. Under these conditions it was difficult to establish the law-abiding society that was necessary if there was to be an orderly development of natural resources. Kansas was not immune to these undesirable influences, but the interesting thing is that a hard core of Puritan reformers waged a relentless crusade against economic evils and created a relatively ordered society. First came prohibition in the 1880's; in the next decade the Populists put through laws guaranteeing bank deposits, restricting sale of stocks and bonds to projects that had state approval, and tightening the grip on public utilities operating in the state. William Allen White records that the Populists "passed the long line of legislation, once referred to as socialistic and now merely sneered at as laws of Meddlesome Mattie, but accepted by most of the progressive States of the Union and loudly bewailed by those who believe in the laissez-faire theory of morals and economics."³⁰

³⁰ William Allen White, "These United States—Kansas, A Puritan Survival," *The Nation*, Vol. 114, No. 2963, April 19, 1922, p. 461.

Interest in legislation to curb economic abuses lagged during periods of prosperity, but in its place were substituted laws to enforce a strict code of morals. Before 1922 laws were passed to censor movies and prohibit them on Sundays, to stop gambling and the sale of cigarettes, and to make commercialized prostitution illegal. Later many of these attempts to legislate morality were abandoned after bitter struggles; but, in the main, Kansas lived up to its reputation as the last stronghold of Puritanism.

The close relationship between attempts to legislate morality and economic progress is not always realized. By passing laws to make certain vices and abuses illegal, the temptations standing in the way of amassing wealth were minimized. The Puritan was after the "main chance," as William Allen White points out, and

He is an idealist planning a great democratic civilization; but one wherein a dollar will travel further, work harder, and bring in more of the fruits of civilization than any other dollar in the world. The waste of slavery, the social expense of the saloon, the venereal disease, the crooked stock seller, the purveyor of expensive school-books or impure food, or the dishonest banker—each immediately becomes a check to the Puritan scheme of things and automatically is invested with evil!⁸¹

Individualism

The second social attitude with a profound influence upon the economy of South Central Kansas is the belief in individualism. Pioneers pitted their strength and ingenuity against the forces of nature, hostile Indians, and unscrupulous promoters. Those qualities making for survival, namely self-reliance and personal aggressiveness, were at a premium. At first the settlers banded together for mutual protection; but, when the Indian menace subsided, they dispersed to take up individual claims and to commence farming. On the frontier every homestead was largely a self-sufficient unit, and its success depended upon the initiative, the resourcefulness, and the judgment of individual members.

Individualism is probably more deeply rooted in Kansas than elsewhere because of the many hardships encountered by its early citizens. In addition to the ordinary hardships of the frontier, Kansans were subjected to a succession of reverses and disasters in the form of border

⁸¹ *Idem.*

wars, Indian raids, droughts, grasshopper plagues, and economic depressions.

The result, [Professor Becker points out], has been to give a peculiar flavor to the Kansas spirit of individualism. With Kansas history back of him, the true Kansan feels that nothing is *too much* for him. How shall he be afraid of any danger, or hesitate at any obstacle, having succeeded where failure was not only human, but almost honorable? Having conquered Kansas, he knows well that there are no worse worlds to conquer. The Kansas spirit is therefore one that finds something exhilarating in the challenge of an extreme difficulty.²²

Individualism, like the belief in material progress, has been strongest in periods of economic well-being. This was the case during the decade of the 1880's, the period from 1897 to 1920, and during and following World War II. On the other hand, serious doubts have been entertained as to the validity of these ideas during the agricultural depressions of the 1870's, the early 1890's, and the 1920's and 1930's.

Until the severe depression of the early 1890's, the assumptions of economic individualism were seldom questioned. It was generally believed that the economy would function smoothly if the individual was left to his own devices without undue interference from the government. The economy was regarded as a self-regulating mechanism, and the forces of competition would soon eliminate any abuses creeping into the system. However, certain governmental functions were necessary. Property rights had to be protected before individuals could be expected to produce and amass wealth in any quantity. In addition to providing such protection, the government was permitted to extend aid to farmers and businessmen in the form of subsidies, tariff protection, public lands, and the like. The government was conceived of as an umpire who enforced "the rules of the game, but who took no active part in the economic process itself."²³

The principles of economic individualism and laissez-faire were considered valid so long as the economy was composed of farmers and small businessmen, but the growth of giant business concerns after the Civil War led to abuses that caused many people to question certain basic assumptions. Protest movements, such as the Patrons of Hus-

²² Carl L. Becker, "Kansas," *Essays in American History Dedicated to Frederick Jackson Turner*, p. 91.

²³ Williamson, *op. cit.*, 1944 ed., p. 15.

bandry, or Grange, the Farmers' Alliance, and the Populist Party, sprang up during the depressions of the 1870's and 1890's and demanded such measures as regulation of railroads, antimonopoly laws, land reform, and cheap money. Another period of economic crisis occurred in the 1930's; again there was a clamor for economic reforms conflicting with some of the principles of economic individualism. These protest movements were particularly strong in South Central Kansas during the 1890's and to a lesser extent in the 1930's. It will be interesting to trace in subsequent sections the effect of economic fluctuations and structural changes upon the people's attitudes.

Section II

PRE-SETTLEMENT ERA

White men were acquainted with South Central Kansas three centuries before settlers moved in after the Civil War to cultivate the soil and to develop the mineral resources. Three hundred years is a long time for an area to remain undeveloped, and in this section an attempt will be made to account for this fact. A number of factors delayed the development of the area, but two seem to be of primary importance. In the first place, the area was inhabited by Indians, who became increasingly hostile and warlike as the white man pushed westward and robbed them of their lands and other means of subsistence. Secondly, the early American explorers, such as Pike and Long, reported that the plains area was unfit for human habitation; they disseminated the "Great American Desert" myth so widely that settlers by-passed the area for many years before discovering its potentialities.

Early Indian History

Although settlement was long delayed, one should not conclude that the area held no attraction for the white man. Very early it was discovered that the wildlife of the prairies and the plains would sustain a lucrative trade in furs and hides. Traders and trappers moved in to exploit these resources. Indians, who depended upon this wildlife for food, clothing, and shelter, were encouraged to trade furs and hides for the white man's firearms, horses, whiskey, trinkets, and other products. Thus armed and mounted, the red man was a much more effective hunter and trapper; at the same time these accouterments of civilization made him a formidable warrior, who for many years successfully resisted the westward advance of settlement.

There is little or no reason to believe that the Indians were innately hostile toward the white man. Explorers and traders commented at some length on the friendliness and the cooperation of various tribes they met. This relationship appears to have existed as long as there were only a few white men in the area and the Indian's way of life remained relatively undisturbed. Later, however, many pressures were

brought to bear upon these indigenous peoples. These they naturally resisted.

Outside Pressures

What were these pressures? In the first place, eastern Indian tribes, forced beyond the fringe of white settlement, came into conflict with indigenous tribes. Most of this pressure was from the East, but later, with the settlement of Texas and the discovery of precious metals in Colorado, tribes were forced from those areas into South Central Kansas, where they increased the pressure on natural resources and came into conflict with tribes already living in the area. The increasing number of traders, miners, and settlers who passed through this region on their way to the West brought additional pressure on the Indians. Several trails including the most important one, the Santa Fe, crossed South Central Kansas. The Indians were hostile to the thousands of migrants who passed through some of their best hunting grounds. Somewhat later railroads pushed westward into the plains country, and the Indians felt threatened by this invasion of their territory. Even more threatening were the buffalo hunters, who deprived the Plains Indians of their chief means of subsistence. These threats of physical violence were supplemented by the white man's diseases and vices which killed thousands of Indians. Little imagination is needed, therefore, to comprehend the explosive situation existing in South Central Kansas before the area was safe for settlement.

Conflict Over Hunting Grounds

The interesting thing about South Central Kansas is that it was in the heart of the buffalo grazing region. Here the Indians waged a relentless but eventually unsuccessful struggle to hold their hunting grounds. Lieutenant Zebulon Pike wrote the following account of this region during his explorations of 1806:

The borders of the Arkansaw may be termed the paradise terrestrial of our Territories for the wandering savages. Of all the countries ever visited by the footsteps of civilized man, there never was one, probably, that produced game in greater abundance, and we know that the manners and morals of the erratic nations are such (the reasons I leave to be given by ontologists) as never to give them a numerous population, and I believe that there are buffalo, elk and deer sufficient

on the borders of the Arkansaw alone, if used without waste, to feed all the savages of the United States territory for one century.¹

These hunting grounds naturally attracted many tribes before the white man set foot in the area; but, when alien tribes were forced into this region and the white man moved in to slaughter the buffalo, it became a seething caldron. This tense atmosphere prevailed during the period immediately before and during the early years of settlement, but for nearly three centuries there was relatively little friction between the red and the white man.

Spaniards First White Men

Coronado, the Spanish explorer, was the first white man to reach South Central Kansas. The route of his famous exploration of 1541 has been quite definitely established by Professor Bolton, who says that Coronado crossed the Arkansas river near the present town of Ford, then swung northeast and followed the river to the present town of Great Bend, and thence to the vicinity of the present towns of Lyons and Lindsborg.² Lured on by an Indian guide who told of fabulous gold mines in Quivira, which most scholars believe was in Kansas, Coronado and his men marched north and arrived in Kansas in the summer of 1541. Jaramillo, one of Coronado's captains was favorably impressed with the country and the profits to be made from the buffalo. He reported that,

This country [Quivira] presents a very fine appearance, that which I have not seen a better in all our Spain nor Italy nor a part of France, nor, indeed, in the other countries where I have traveled in His Majesty's service, for it is not a very rough country, but is made up of hillocks and plains, and very fine appearing rivers and streams, which certainly satisfied me and made me sure that it will be very fruitful in all sorts of products. Indeed, there is profit in the cattle ready to the hand, from the quantity of them, which is as great as one could imagine. We found a variety of Castilian prunes which are not all red, but some of them black and green; the trees and fruit is certainly like that of Castile, with a very excellent flavor.³

Coronado, however, was looking for gold; and, when he discovered no gold or other precious metals, he returned to his base at Tiguex in the Rio Grande valley in October, 1541.⁴

¹ William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, p. 52.

² Herbert E. Bolton, *Coronado, Knight of Pueblos and Plains*, pp. 289-293.

³ Walter P. Webb, *The Great Plains*, p. 107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

About 60 years elapsed before the next Spanish explorer arrived in South Central Kansas. Don Juan de Onate, the governor of a Spanish colony, became interested in the strange tales of Quivira and in 1601 set out from Santa Fe with about 80 well mounted horsemen to satisfy his curiosity.⁵

Pawnee Indians

This exploration is interesting because of the accounts of the Quiviran (or Pawnee) Indians, who were indigenous to the area. The Pawnee tribe was said to occupy in Kansas and Nebraska an intermediate and strategic position between the Mississippi river and the Great Lakes toward the east and northeast and New Mexico toward the southwest. Other tribes recognized the Pawnees, not without hostility, as the "suzerains of the fairest hunting grounds of the plains, extending essentially from the Missouri river to the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains and from the Niobrara to the Arkansas."⁶

Living in a transitional area, the Pawnees combined agriculture with hunting. Reporters say they grew corn, beans, and squashes in the river valleys and supplemented their diet by hunting buffaloes and other game. By nature, the Pawnees were said to be peaceful and reluctant to give offense to other tribes. When Onate traveled through their country, they "preferred to vacate their villages and withdraw to a distance, rather than to engage in hostilities."⁷

Horse Culture

About two and a half centuries after Governor Onate's expedition, James R. Mead became well acquainted with the Pawnees along the Arkansas river in central Kansas; his account of this tribe is in marked contrast to that of the Spaniard. By this time (1859 to 1867) "there were no more skilful or brave warriors on the plains than the hated Pawnees."⁸ Instead of being a pacific agricultural people, they had acquired horses and a few firearms and relied chiefly on the buffalo

⁵ John B. Dunbar, "The White Man's Foot in Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1907-1908*, Vol. X, p. 89.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 94.

⁸ James R. Mead, "The Pawnees As I Knew Them," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1907-1908*, Vol. X, p. 107.

for their sustenance. The Pawnees also gained notoriety as horse stealers and were frequently engaged in warfare with other Plains Indian tribes.

The revolutionary change in the culture and the economy of the Pawnee tribe was due primarily to the horse. Prior to the coming of the Spaniards, Indians roamed the plains afoot in search of game. Because of their limited mobility, obtaining a bare subsistence was difficult. In his account of Onate's expedition, Dunbar points out that in contrast with the Pawnees, "other tribes met seem to have been constantly roaming, many of them without shelter, in whatever direction there were indications of game." He further relates, "The primeval law of existence, 'what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed,' seemed to absorb most of their thought and control their voluntary efforts."⁹

"Then came the horse;" writes Professor Webb, "and overnight, so to speak, the whole life and economy of the Plains Indians was changed." Commenting further, this writer points out,

Steam and electricity have not wrought a greater revolution in the ways of civilized life than the horse did in the savage life of the Plains. So important was the horse in the Plains culture that the anthropologists have named the period extending from 1540 to 1880 the horse-culture period. Practically all that scholars know about the Plains Indians comes from this period. The pre-Columbian time is one of conjecture; the reservation period after 1880 is little else than a story of imprisonment. It has already been stated that the Plains Indians maintained their integrity against the white man much longer than any other group. It was the horse and the buffalo, but primarily the horse, that enabled them to hold out; without the horse they would have been easily disposed of, but in possession of this animal they were both uncontrollable and formidable.¹⁰

The immediate effect of the horse was to plunge the Indian tribes into internecine warfare. Mead records that the Indians gained possession of horses sometime after Coronado's expedition and that these animals made "marauding warfare far more worth while, furnished means of speedy retreat as well as transportation, and enabled them to traverse the boundless plains with ease, speed, and without fatigue."¹¹ Southern Plains Indians, who were the first to become mounted,

⁹ Dunbar, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹⁰ Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹¹ Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

ranged far and wide in search of game and encountered few obstacles in plundering and decimating other tribes not yet mounted. Gradually, however, horses became more widely dispersed, and tribes in the Arkansas valley became mounted. Du Tisne, a French explorer, visited two Pawnee villages near the Arkansas river in 1719 and found 300 horses "which they value very highly and could not do without."¹²

According to Professor Webb, "the dispersion of horses which began in 1541 was completed over the plains area by 1784. This dispersion proceeded from south to north and occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."¹³

Although the Pawnees had horses by the early years of the eighteenth century, they were unable to defend their choice hunting grounds against warlike Plains Indians and other tribes who were also mounted. The Pawnees were attacked on the northeast by the Dakotas and on the southwest by the Cheyennes, Comanches, and Kiowas. This warfare, Dunbar relates,

... was relentlessly waged from both directions for nearly a century. . . . Against such unequal odds—as it were between the upper and nether millstones—the [Pawnee] tribe was gradually worn down to scarcely more than a remnant of their former selves. To this issue the designing whites upon the frontier materially contributed.¹⁴

It might be thought that, when the Plains Indians became mounted and in some cases armed, white men could not safely venture into the area. This was not true, however, because relatively few hunters, traders, trappers, and missionaries were found in the area before the middle of the nineteenth century.

French Succeed Spaniards

It is necessary to relate briefly the explorations and economic activities of the French, who were in possession of the area during most of the period from 1682 to 1803. La Salle explored the lower Mississippi river in 1682, but several decades elapsed before French explorers ventured west of the Missouri river into the Kansas area.¹⁵

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 107, n. 1.

¹³ Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁴ Dunbar, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁵ Louisiana, of which South Central Kansas was a part, remained a part of the Dominion of France from 1682 to 1762, when it passed into the possession of Spain. Spain held the territory until October 1, 1800, when it was retroceded by treaty to France. The United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France on April 30, 1803. Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Du Tisne was probably the first Frenchman to reach South Central Kansas, for he was reported to have explored the country west and south of the Missouri river in 1719.¹⁶ A few years later the French established trading posts in what is now northeastern Kansas and commenced trade with the Indians. In this trade, probably extending into the Arkansas river valley, the French offered the Indians "guns, sabers, axes, knives, combs, awls, kettles, bells, beads, cloth, rings, and vermilion in exchange for furs and buffalo robes." It is interesting that the newcomers also made contact with the Spanish civilization to the southwest and in 1739 commenced trade along the Santa Fe Trail.¹⁷

Americans Succeed French

A new era was ushered in when the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803. President Jefferson was eager to know about the topography, the climate, and the resources of the territory he had purchased. In 1804 the Lewis and Clark expedition was sent out to explore the newly acquired region. Since this expedition ascended the Missouri river to the northwest, it merits only passing mention. Other explorers followed, and some of them ventured into South Central Kansas. Two of these explorers, Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike and Major Stephen H. Long, are of particular interest because their reports of the country were so unfavorable that for many years settlers were discouraged from moving to the area.

Pike's Explorations

After exploring the headwaters of the Mississippi in 1805-1806, Pike went westward from St. Louis in 1806-1807 to the Rocky Mountains, where he viewed the peak now bearing his name. He traveled through central Kansas "as far as the Pawnee village upon the Republican River in northern Kansas; thence southwest to the Arkansas, westward to the Rocky Mountains, and finally south into New Mexico, till he was arrested and conveyed to Santa Fe and soon thereafter to Chihuahua."¹⁸ Pike described the prairies and the plains of Kansas in some detail and wrote in his journal,

¹⁶ Carl C. Rister, "The Great Plains," *The Growth of the American Economy*, Harold F. Williamson, editor, p. 413.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

¹⁸ Dunbar, *op. cit.*, p. 54, n. 1.

From these immense prairies may rise one great advantage to the United States, viz., the restriction of our population to certain limits, and thereby a continuation of the Union. Our citizens, being so prone to rambling and extending themselves on the frontiers, will, through necessity, be constrained to limit their extent on the west to the borders of the Missouri and Mississippi, while they leave the prairies, incapable of cultivation, to the wandering aborigines of the country.¹⁹

Long's Explorations

In 1820 the United States Government sent Major Long to explore and gather scientific data on the region between the Mississippi river and the Rocky Mountains. After a year's thorough exploration of the region, he returned to St. Louis to make a report; part of it follows:

In regard to this extensive section of country, I do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture for their subsistence . . . commencing near the sources of the Sabine, Trinity, Brazos, and Colorado [all in Texas], and extending northwardly to the forty-ninth degree of north latitude . . . [it] is throughout of a similar character . . . This region, however, viewed as a frontier, may prove of infinite importance to the United States, inasmuch as it is calculated to serve as a barrier to prevent too great an expansion of our population westward.²⁰

Professor Paxson says that this report was printed in the *North American Review*, and that many readers were left with an unfavorable impression of the region.²¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that settlers occupied much of the Pacific coast region before they ventured into the treeless prairies.

Santa Fe Trade

The reports of Pike and Long were largely responsible for delaying settlement, but they did not discourage traders, trappers, and hunters who came to the area in increasing numbers after 1803. It has been mentioned that the French were the first to trade with the Spanish colonies to the southwest. After the Louisiana Territory came into possession of the United States, concerted efforts were made to revive this trade. For a time prohibitive duties were put on trade between the United States and her American colonies by Spain, but these restrictions were lifted when Mexico declared her independence of the

¹⁹ Anna E. Arnold, *A History of Kansas*, p. 24.

²⁰ Frederick L. Paxson, *History of the American Frontier, 1763-1893*, p. 216.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

mother country in 1821. A year later pack trains began to pass through South Central Kansas on their way to the southwest. As this trade expanded, wagon trains replaced pack trains, and the Santa Fe Trail became an important artery of commerce and migration. The trail's eastern terminus was at Independence, Missouri; the trail proceeded in a southwesterly direction, passing through the northern part of Marion, McPherson, and Rice counties to the great bend of the Arkansas river in Barton county; then it followed along the north side of that river through Barton, Pawnee, and Edwards counties.

Once the Santa Fe Trail was opened, individuals were encouraged to set up trading posts and "ranches" at points along the trail to supply the needs of the wagon trains. It is not known how many trading posts and ranches were located in South Central Kansas, but there were ten camping sites along the Trail in this area; most of them probably served as trade centers from time to time.²² These "ranches" had no connection with the livestock business but generally consisted of a crude hotel and a store that were in some cases enclosed by a stockade. Typical border characters operated the ranches. At these points "the wearied wagoner could rest himself and renew his store of provisions if he so desired, or could perhaps have necessary repairing done to his wagon."²³ The Indian trade was also stimulated when the area became accessible to wagon trains. Records show that the area around Fort Zarah in Pawnee county was a "frequent point of contact between trappers and traders on the Santa Fe Trail."²⁴

Some idea of the business volume that passed over the Santa Fe Trail can be gained from Table 1 compiled by Josiah Gregg, who traded with Santa Fe for a number of years.

Gold Rush

The Santa Fe Trail was pushed westward to the Pacific in 1846; three years later gold was discovered in California. For several years

²² Camping sites along the Santa Fe Trail in South Central Kansas were located at Lost Springs and Cottonwood creek in Marion county, Turkey creek in McPherson county, the Little Arkansas river and Cow creek in Rice county, the Arkansas river and Walnut creek in Barton county, Ash creek and Pawnee fork in Pawnee county, and Coon creek in Edwards county. Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²³ Arthur F. Bentley, "The Condition of the Western Farmer," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, p. 298.

²⁴ *Wichita Eagle*, March 24, 1937 (Victor Murdock, "Eras in the Development As They Have Appeared in One Section of Kansas").

thousands of miners and adventurers passed through the area on their way to the gold fields. According to Cutler, "It was estimated that as many as ninety thousand persons passed through Eastern Kansas on their way to the far West during the years 1849 and 1850."²⁵ About a decade later, in 1858, there was another mad rush to the newly discovered mining area in Colorado, and thousands more made the trek across Kansas. In addition to the Santa Fe Trail, a number of migrants followed the California Trail originating in Arkansas and entering Kansas east of Cowley county. From this point it proceeded to a crossing on the Walnut in Butler county two miles below the present site of El Dorado, thence to a crossing on the Whitewater ten miles above Towanda, and then westerly up the Arkansas river.²⁶

Reservation Indians

The years after 1821 thus witnessed a growing traffic over the western trails. At the same time more and more Indians were pushed into the area as the line of settlement moved westward. Under these conditions it was almost inevitable that the tension between the two races should increase to the point of physical violence and that settlers would be reluctant to move into the area until the tension had subsided. The period of widespread conflict lasted only a few years, but the tension had been building up over a long period.

Table 1
Santa Fe Trail Trade

Years	Amount of merchandise	Wagons	Men	Years	Amount of merchandise	Wagons	Men
1822	\$ 15,000	....^a	70	1833	\$180,000	105	185
1823	12,000	....^a	50	1834	150,000	80	160
1824	35,000	26	100	1835	140,000	75	140
1825	65,000	37	130	1836	130,000	70	135
1826	90,000	60	100	1837	150,000	80	160
1827	85,000	55	90	1838	90,000	50	100
1828	150,000	100	200	1839	250,000	130	250
1829	60,000	30	50	1840	50,000	30	60
1830	120,000	70	140	1841	150,000	60	100
1831	250,000	130	320	1842	160,000	70	120
1832	140,000	70	150	1843	450,000	230	350

^a Pack animals only used.

Source: Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies; Or The Journal of a Santa Fe Trader*, Vol. II, p. 160.

²⁵ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. 1, pp. 305-307 ("The Chisholm Trail," *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 1, 1890).

The Spanish explorers, Coronado and Oñate, found the Pawnee tribe in undisputed possession of the Kansas region when they explored this part of the country in the sixteenth century; there appears to have been little change in this situation until the eighteenth century. During the latter century, however, mounted Plains Indians from the southwest threatened the Pawnees; there was also some pressure from eastern tribes. One of these tribes, the Kansa or Kaw, originally lived along the Wabash and far up the Ohio but gradually moved westward and finally settled along the Kansas river during the last quarter of the eighteenth century.²⁷ Another tribe that invaded the Pawnee country was the Osage. In 1808 this tribe ceded nearly all of its land in Missouri to the United States and received a large reservation in what is now southern Kansas.²⁸

By the third decade of the nineteenth century the Indian problem had become acute, and proposals were made to remove eastern tribes to the West. Rev. Isaac McCoy, a pioneer missionary to the Indians, visited Washington in 1824 and submitted to the Secretary of War a scheme to move eastern tribes west of the Mississippi river. His proposal was favorably received, but not until 1830 was a law passed to organize the Indian Territory. Later, in 1834, Congress passed the Intercourse Act setting aside the Great Plains area for Indian reservations and providing for the removal of eastern tribes.²⁹ In the meantime, tribes already in the Indian Territory gave up or sold part of their land to the government to make room for immigrant tribes. In 1825 the Kansa Indians were reported to have "bartered away their imperial patrimony—almost one half of the state of Kansas—for a mess of pottage."³⁰ In the same year the Osage tribe relinquished title to all lands in Missouri and Arkansas and retained a reservation embracing 8,000,000 acres extending from the Neosho river westward, with a width of 50 miles.³¹

Eastern tribes were rapidly removed to western reservations after the area was surveyed by Rev. McCoy in 1837. By 1840 "the new Indian land was full of red men, and a line separating the white man from his

²⁷ George P. Morehouse, "History of the Kansa or Kaw Indians," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1907-1908*, Vol. X, p. 329.

²⁸ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-68.

³⁰ Morehouse, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

³¹ Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties*, p. 299.

brother was maintained by troops of marching soldiers who patrolled the border."³² Commencing about 1832, 17 tribes were located on reservations in the eastern one fourth of the area that was later to become the State of Kansas.³³

It is scarcely necessary to point out that the opportunities for conflict were greatly increased. One of the chief areas of conflict was South Central Kansas, for here the reservation Indians came into contact with the warlike Plains Indians during the buffalo hunting season. According to Mead,

All of Kansas west of these reservations, comprising about three-fourths of the state, was the best hunting-ground on the continent; contained no permanent villages or settlements; was the common hunting-ground of all the Kansas Indians and the roving tribes of the plains, who outnumbered the reservation Indians and were usually at war with them.³⁴

The reservation Indians were scarcely adjusted to their new environment before they were again pushed westward. In 1854 Congress introduced a bill to create the territories of Kansas and Nebraska and open the land to settlers. The problem of removing the reservation Indians was quickly disposed of, for Cutler records,

Within the three months immediately preceding the passage of the Kansas bill . . . treaties were quietly made at Washington with the Delawares, Otoes, Kickapoos, Kaskaskias, Shawnees, Sacs, Foxes and other tribes whereby the greater part of the soil of Kansas, lying within one or two hundred miles of the Missouri border, was suddenly opened to white appropriation and settlement.³⁵

In the period after 1854 the Indian reservations of Kansas were further diminished. In 1865 the Osage tribe ceded to the United States government a tract, 30 by 50 miles, off the east end of their reservation.³⁶ During the same year a treaty was made on the little Arkansas river whereby most Indians of South Central Kansas agreed to move to the Indian Territory in what later became the State of Oklahoma.³⁷

³² Percy S. Miller, "Pioneer History of Medicine Lodge," Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wichita, 1937, p. 6.

³³ James R. Mead, "The Wichita Indians in Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903-1904*, Vol. VIII, p. 172.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

³⁵ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁶ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

³⁷ Orsemus H. Bentley, *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas*, Vol. I, p. 127.

Inter-Tribal Warfare

Between 1854 and 1865 many of the reservation Indians thus moved into central and western Kansas, where they came into conflict with the warlike Plains Indians. Prior to this time there had been frequent conflicts, but not until 1854 did the Plains Indians of Kansas feel sufficiently threatened to combine against their invading brothers from the East. In that year the Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Osages assembled on the Pawnee fork at the Santa Fe crossing "for the purpose of forming a war party to wipe out all the frontier Indians they could find on the plains."³⁸ This was reported to have been the largest body of Indians ever known to assemble, and an attack was made on a band of Sacs and Foxes about 100 miles west of Fort Riley.³⁹

While the main pressure was from the East, the Plains Indians were also forced to share their hunting grounds with tribes from the West and South. In 1858 a rich mining region discovered in Colorado drew a crowd of adventurers. Cutler relates that these adventurers, "against the protests of the Indians, occupied the land, established mining camps, started cities, and effectually drove the tribes from the mountains to the valleys and plains of the Arkansas and Republican rivers."⁴⁰

Southern Indian tribes were forced northward at the time of the Mexican War, and more came during the Civil War. James R. Mead explored the Little Arkansas river valley from 1859 to 1862; he commented on the numerous tribes then inhabiting that area as follows:

There were pretty lively times along the Little Arkansas after the Wichitas came [in 1863]. The Osages were here part of the time. Parties of Kaw Indians occasionally came. The plains Indians came here visiting their friends, the Wichitas. The writer met here Black Kettle, the great war chief of the Comanches, and Heap of Bears, the great medicine man and warrior of the Arapahoes.⁴¹

Mead also mentions the Waco, Caddo, Ioneye, Towakony, and Kechi tribes from the South, who, along with the Wichitas, "were scattered along down the river to the junction." These tribes combined agricul-

³⁸ Pryor Plank, "The Iowa, Sac and Fox Indian Mission and Its Missionaries, Rev. Samuel M. Irvin and Wife," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1907-1908*, Vol. X, p. 324.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁴⁰ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁴¹ James R. Mead, "The Little Arkansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1907-1908*, Vol. X, p. 11.

ture with hunting and were said to have cultivated extensive gardens, "and had scaffolds covered with sliced pumpkins, beans and corn drying for winter use, with plenty of melons in their gardens, which were a feast to visiting brethren."⁴²

The Indian trade also thrived in this locality. Three traders played a prominent part in the area's history. James R. Mead, whose writings have proved so useful in this study, had a trading post at Towanda in Butler county. William Greiffenstein, "father of Wichita," came to Kansas in 1850 and established trading posts on Walnut and Cowskin creeks.⁴³ Jesse Chisholm, for whom the great cattle trail was named, will be referred to in a later section.

Buffalo Slaughter

The Plains Indians not only resisted the immigrant tribes crowding in on them but soon organized into war parties to resist the growing number of white invaders. There had been only a few attacks against the whites on the plains up to 1849, but beginning with the California gold rush there was increased conflict. Hostility continued to mount during the Colorado mining boom of 1858 and reached the combustion point with the slaughter of the buffaloes in the period from about 1850 to 1880. Warren K. Moorehead, an eminent archaeologist in close contact with the Plains Indians during this period, says that among the many adventurers and miners who crossed the plains there

. . . were men who regarded an Indian no higher than a dog, and fired upon peaceful parties of hunting Indians without the slightest provocation The white people introduced whisky and small pox. It is therefore not surprising that all the plains Indians soon assumed a hostile attitude toward any being with a white skin.⁴⁴

The slaughter of the buffaloes took place during the 60 years from 1820 to 1880, but the period of greatest activity came after the Civil War, when the area was beginning to attract settlers. As the focus of attention in this section is the pre-settlement period, the following remarks will be confined to the effects of the buffalo slaughter upon

⁴² *Idem.*

⁴³ Kirke Mechem (ed.), *The Annals of Kansas, 1866-1925*, Vol. I, 1886-1910, p. 293.

⁴⁴ Warren K. Moorehead, "The Passing of Red Cloud," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1907-1908*, Vol. X, p. 296.

the Indians. The great trade in buffalo hides, meat, and bones will be discussed in the next section.

The buffalo range extended east of the Mississippi river and west to the Rocky Mountains during the eighteenth century, but by 1850 it was largely restricted to the Great Plains. At the latter date the buffaloes were estimated to number fifteen million; they were divided into two great herds, a northern and a southern herd. The Arkansas river valley was one of the chief grazing areas for the southern herd, and explorers and soldiers who passed through this area were impressed by the large number of buffaloes they witnessed. In 1852 Colonel Alexander Doniphan traveled through South Central Kansas on the Santa Fe Trail, and "his chief hunter, Thomas Forsythe, standing on top of Pawnee Rock, calculated the number of bison he could see at 300,000, and others with him estimated them at 200,000 to 800,000. But in no direction could they see the outer edge of the herd."⁴⁵

Three fairly distinct stages of buffalo hunting may be detected. The first may be described as the pre-commercial stage existing before white traders and hunters moved in to tap the wealth that could be realized from buffalo hides and bones. In another sense this was a subsistence stage because the Plains Indians killed buffaloes merely to supply their own needs, and there was no incentive to kill in order to exchange hides for the products of the white man's civilization. Under these conditions the Indians never killed wantonly, and there is little or no reason to believe that the herds were at all diminished.

The second stage came with the white hunters and traders who encouraged the Indians to kill in excess of their needs and to exchange the surplus hides for various products. Both red and white men were engaged in the trade during this stage, apparently beginning in the early years of the eighteenth century, when French traders and trappers moved west of the Missouri river. For about a century there were relatively few hunters in the area, and traders dealt principally with the Indians. After 1820, however, hunters came in increasing numbers, and before long they were killing more buffaloes than the Indians.

The third stage dates roughly from 1869, when the Plains Indians were herded into reservations. Thenceforth the hunting and trading in

⁴⁵ Rister, *op. cit.*, 1944 ed., p. 417.

buffalo hides were carried on exclusively by white men. This stage coinciding with the early years of settlement will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

For purposes of this study the second stage, particularly the period from 1850 to 1869, merits attention. During these years hundreds of men flocked west to hunt buffaloes solely for their hides, and the slaughter increased to such a pitch that the Indians went on the war-path to defend their hunting grounds against the invaders. It is not always realized how dependent were the Plains Indians upon the buffaloes. Professor Moorehead says that this animal was used for 22 separate purposes as follows:

His meat sustained life; it was cut in strips and dried, it was chopped up and packed in skins, its tallow and grease were preserved—all for winter use; its bones afforded material for implements and weapons; its skull was preserved as great medicine; its hide furnished blankets, garments, boats, ropes, and a warm and portable house; its hoofs produced glue; its sinews were used for bowstrings and made a most excellent substitute for twine. Were there no other game but an abundance of buffalo, the people continued happy and contented.⁴⁶

War Between Indians and White Men

A combination of factors was thus responsible for the war that broke out on the plains in 1864, but by far the most important was the slaughter of the buffaloes. Professor Moorehead wrote in 1907 of his talk with many Sioux Indians,

. . . and they have agreed that the destruction of the buffalo was the greatest calamity ever brought upon their race. They could forgive the whites for attacking their villages, and for the disregard of treaty promises, and overlook the seizure of their lands, but they could not forget that the Americans made useless and unnecessary slaughter of that grand, majestic animal, typical of the "spirit of the plains."⁴⁷

The building of railroads across the buffalo hunting grounds also antagonized the Indians.

For about six years, 1864 to 1869, the white inhabitants of South Central Kansas lived in mortal fear of the Plains Indians. Before this time there were only sporadic raids on wagon trains and frontier settlements, but in 1863 the Sioux tribe assumed the initiative in form-

⁴⁶ Moorehead, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*

ing an alliance with the Cheyennes, Kiowas, Apaches, Comanches, and Arapahoes for the purpose of general war.⁴⁸ This alliance, though comparatively weak at first, grew rapidly into a powerful army well organized, armed, and equipped. The Indians were supplied with arms and equipment from two sources. During the Civil War Confederate authorities armed and equipped the Plains Indians and incited them to war against the white inhabitants of central and western Kansas. Later the United States Indian agents and licensed traders supplied the Indians with food, clothing, arms and ammunition.

The first organized attack came in the spring of 1865, when many depredations were committed on the Santa Fe and Smoky Hill overland routes. According to Governor Crawford, the Indians captured emigrant trains and trains loaded with merchandise for New Mexico and other western territories and killed a number of people.⁴⁹

The frontier was quiet during the winter of 1865-1866, but in the spring the Indians left their haunts in the western part of the Indian Territory and resumed the attack. Governor Crawford sent a battalion of state troops that was successful in protecting the frontier settlements, but the overland trails and construction parties on the Kansas Pacific railroad sustained heavy losses.⁵⁰

In the spring of 1867 Governor Crawford went to Washington, D. C., to complain to the Secretary of the Interior about the Indian agents and licensed traders who "had supplied these hostile Indians with food and clothing during the past Winter, and with arms and ammunition to be used against the frontier people of Kansas during the Spring and Summer." He also called on the Secretary of War and asked for more federal troops to defend the frontier.⁵¹

Upon his return from Washington in April, 1867, the Governor was informed that "General Hancock was in the field with a handful of U. S. troops, and the plains of Kansas were swarming with blood-thirsty Indians." South Central Kansas was the scene of much military activity that year. General Hancock stationed a company of cavalry at Fort Larned to patrol the surrounding countryside, and there was

⁴⁸ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

another company of cavalry on the Little Arkansas "to patrol the line of that stream for the security of that region of the country."⁵²

In spite of military preparations, the Indians continued to attack the whites. In May of 1867 a number of petitions were received from the citizens of Marion, Butler, Greenwood, and other counties "detailing murders and robberies committed by the Indians all along the border, and asking for military protection."⁵³ The situation grew rapidly worse, and on July 1, 1867, the Governor issued the following call for state troops:

Whereas the central and western portions of the State of Kansas are now, and have been for some time, overrun with roving bands of hostile Indians; and whereas these Indians . . . have, without cause, declared war upon the people of this State; they have indiscriminately murdered, scalped, mutilated and robbed hundreds of our frontier settlers and other parties in Western Kansas who were quietly attending to their own legitimate affairs . . . General Sherman and other United States officers are doing all in their power to suppress hostilities, but they have not a sufficient force of United States troops to execute their design, and have called upon me for a battalion of cavalry to aid in the work. I shall, therefore, as speedily as possible, organize eight companies of volunteer cavalry, to be mustered into the United States service for a period of six months, unless sooner discharged . . .⁵⁴

In the fall of 1867 the federal and state troops gained the upper hand, and the Indians began to fall backward to the southwest. During this retreat contact was established with the leading chiefs, and a general council on Medicine Lodge creek was planned for early in October. The council met as scheduled, and treaties were concluded whereby "the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches received a large reservation north of the Red River . . . and the Cheyennes and Arapahoes received a reservation of about three million acres on the Cherokee outlet, in what is now the State of Oklahoma, in exchange for all the lands owned or claimed by them in Kansas and Colorado."⁵⁵

Although these treaties were solemnly signed and sealed and the customary pipe of peace was smoked, the Indian wars were not at an end. Hostilities commenced again in the spring of 1868, when it was reported,

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

A wide area of country stretching from the Arkansas River to the Republican and westward to Colorado was swarming with roving bands, here to-day and elsewhere tomorrow, committing murders and other horrible crimes with perfect impunity.⁵⁶

The Indian menace became so acute that Governor Crawford resigned as chief executive of the state in November, 1868, and personally led a regiment of 1,200 state troops who came to the aid of federal troops under the command of General Sheridan. Space does not permit a detailed description of the campaigns of 1868 and 1869; it is sufficient to say that the Kiowas, Comanches, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes were pursued into the Indian Territory, defeated in battle, and finally forced on to their reservations.

After 1869 there were a few sporadic Indian attacks in South Central Kansas; but, in general, the settlers had little to fear from this quarter. With the Indian menace removed, settlers began to flock into the area and made rapid strides towards developing the resources. In summarizing the presettlement era, a quotation of Governor Crawford's is appropriate:

Our Indian troubles having thus been brought to a close and permanent peace assured, Central and Western Kansas soon became a paradise for the home-seekers. But few of the well-to-do farmers and others now residing in that lovely country, have even a remote idea of the trials and tribulations endured by the pioneer settlers. Many of them had been soldiers in the Civil War, and when they formed in line on the frontier they were there to stay.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

Section III

BUFFALO AND CATTLE TRADE

The decade following the Civil War was one of increasing economic activity in South Central Kansas. After the Indian menace was removed, the area began to attract settlers who made rapid strides in developing the available resources. To the economic historian, the most important event of this decade was the coming of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad in the early 1870's. Commencing at Topeka in 1868 and following the path of the old Santa Fe Trail over much of its route, the line reached Chase county in the northeastern corner of the area by the spring of 1871, the area's western border by July of the following year, and the state's western boundary on December 28, 1872. During this period a branch line was built from Newton to Wichita, and the main line was extended in a northeasterly direction from Topeka to Atchison.¹

The interesting thing about the Santa Fe railroad is that it arrived in South Central Kansas when there were only a few scattered settlements in the eastern part of the area. Except for a small number of traders, hunters, and settlers, the central and western portions of the area were as yet uninhabited. Since so much of the road was built through uninhabited territory, the promoters were faced with the problem of making the railroad a paying proposition. Their solution to the problem was both short run and long run. The long run solution was to encourage settlers to move into the area, buy the company's land, and grow a surplus of agricultural commodities to be transported to eastern markets and exchanged for needed manufactures and other products. Several years would elapse, however, before surplus farm commodities could be grown; in the meantime the railroad needed some commodity to carry to the East. During the early period when settlers were becoming adjusted to a strange environment, the railroad found a partial solution to its problem by transporting buffalo hides, meat, and bones. Even more important was the driving of Texas cattle

¹ Herbert James, "The Relationship of the Building of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad to the Development of Kansas," Unpublished Master's thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Pittsburg, 1938, pp. 29, 46-49.

north to railroad terminals in central Kansas. From an economic standpoint the trade in buffalo hides and Texas cattle was of greater importance than that of agricultural commodities during the early years of settlement.

Buffalo Slaughter

Causes

The unprecedented slaughter of the buffalo in the late 1860's and early 1870's can be attributed largely to three factors. In the first place, the forcing of hostile Plains Indians into reservations made the area safe for buffalo hunters who arrived in increasing numbers after 1869. Secondly, American and English tanneries discovered in the early 1870's that buffalo hides could be used to advantage in the manufacture of shoes and harnesses, and this greatly stimulated the demand.²

John R. Cook, who hunted buffalo in western Kansas during this period, wrote that one company with whom he had dealings shipped all of its hides to Europe and that the "English accouterments of a leather kind were being replaced with buffalo leather, on account of its being more pliant and having more elasticity than cowhide."³

The third factor stimulating the trade in buffalo hides, meat, and bones was the building of railroads into the plains area. The Kansas Pacific railroad began running excursions for buffalo hunters in 1868. When the Santa Fe reached Dodge City in 1872, this town became an important center for the buffalo trade.⁴

Declining Herds

Although the herds had been declining for several decades, a number were still in the area by 1870. According to one authority who wrote in 1869, "The best hunting-ground at present will be found between the Republican and Arkansas rivers." The writer points out, however, that "The buffalo is certainly decreasing since 1858. They have been pressed more than a hundred miles west in Kansas and Nebraska."⁵

² Rister, *op. cit.*, 1944 ed., pp. 417-418.

³ John R. Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo*, p. 134.

⁴ E. Douglas Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo*, pp. 129-199.

⁵ Theodore R. Davis, "The Buffalo Range," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. CCXXIV, January, 1869, pp. 148, 152.

Colonel Richard I. Dodge, who viewed the great herd of the Arkansas river valley from Pawnee Rock in 1871, estimated it to number 4,000,000 head, "which I believe is more likely to be below the truth than about it."⁶

The amazing thing is that in four or five years after Colonel Dodge made his calculation the southern herd had been virtually exterminated.⁷ In Kingman county, for example, at the time of the first settlers' arrival in 1873, the prairies were roamed by the buffalo and the antelope in countless herds, but by 1877 the last buffalo in the county had been killed.⁸

Hunting Buffaloes Big Business

The buffalo slaughter usually brings to mind the exploits of Buffalo Bill (William F. Cody), who is said to have killed 4,280 in an 18-month period.⁹ It is sometimes difficult to realize how many hunters were engaged in the slaughter, the volume of hides, meat, and bones shipped to eastern markets, and the profitable nature of the trade. When hides sold on an average from \$1 to \$3 each and a party of six men could kill and skin more than 100 buffaloes in a day, it is not surprising that large numbers of hunters came to the area.¹⁰ Several thousand hunters in the Kansas field in 1871, it was estimated, killed from 3,000 to 4,000 buffaloes daily.¹¹ Colonel Dodge wrote, "When in the West in 1872 I satisfied myself by personal inquiries that the number of buffalo then being slaughtered for their hides was at least 1,000,000 per annum."¹² The total number of buffalo killed in the early 1870's was 4,373,730 according to General Nelson A. Miles, who witnessed much of the slaughter during these years.¹³

The destruction of so many buffaloes made a substantial volume of traffic over the newly constructed railroads. Colonel Dodge said that

⁶ Private letter from Colonel Dodge to James N. Baskett, dated September 21, 1887, appearing as a footnote in James N. Baskett, "Prehistoric Kansas, A Study of the Route of Coronado Between the Rio Grande and Missouri Rivers," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1911-1912*, Vol. XII, p. 221, n. 1.

⁷ According to Blackmar, the southern herd had been exterminated by 1875. Frank W. Blackmar (ed.), *Kansas, A Cyclopaedia of State History*, Vol. I, p. 248.

⁸ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 1526.

⁹ Blackmar, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

¹⁰ Rister, *op. cit.*, 1944 ed., p. 418.

¹¹ Blackmar, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

¹² Baskett, *op. cit.*, p. 222, n. 3.

¹³ Rister, *op. cit.*, 1944 ed., p. 418.

he and his partner shipped over 200,000 buffalo hides the first winter the Santa Fe reached Dodge City, "and I think there were at least as many more shipped from there, besides 200 cars of hind quarters and two cars of buffalo tongues."¹⁴ Another authority states that "Within the two years, 1872 to 1874, 1,378,359 hides, 6,751,200 pounds of meat, and 32,380,850 pounds of bones were shipped to Eastern markets over the Santa Fe, the Union Pacific, and the Kansas Pacific Railroads. . . ."¹⁵ This same authority estimated that in the 15-year period from 1870 to 1885 a total of 10,000,000 buffaloes were killed, and their hides were valued at \$25,000,000.¹⁶

Bone Trade

In South Central Kansas the traffic in hides and meat came to an end about 1875, but during the next few years there was an important trade in buffalo bones. Thousands of carloads of these bones selling on an average from \$4 to \$6 a ton were shipped to the East, where they were ground into fertilizer for use on impoverished farms.¹⁷ Many settlers claimed that, if it had not been for buffalo bones, they would not have survived the early years of hardship. In Reno county, for example, buffalo bones were said to pass as legal tender in exchange for meat and provisions. According to J. W. Young, a pioneer resident of that county,

The winter of 1874-1875 was a blue time for us, but things brightened up for us in the spring of 1875, when a man by the name of Potter, living in Hutchinson, advertised for buffalo bones, and as these bones were plentiful in this part of the country, we concluded that this would be a good way to help us buy our bacon, corn meal, coffee and feed for our horses. We went to hauling bones for the small sum of \$4 per ton. This was a means of livelihood for many of the early settlers, and many could not have stayed here had it not been for the use of buffalo bones as legal tender and buffalo chips for fuel.¹⁸

"In Kansas alone," wrote Colonel Henry Inman, "there was paid out, between the dates specified [1868 to 1881], *two million five hundred thousand dollars* for their bones gathered on the prairies, to be utilized by the various carbon works of the country, principally in St. Louis."¹⁹

¹⁴ Baskett, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

¹⁵ Rister, *op. cit.*, 1944 ed., p. 418.

¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷ Blackmar, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

¹⁸ Kansas State Historical Society, *Reno County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 115 ("Debts Once Paid in Buffalo Bones," *Topeka Capital*, June 11, 1911).

¹⁹ Henry Inman, *The Old Santa Fe Trail, the Story of a Great Highway*, p. 203.

Consequences of the Slaughter

Before leaving this discussion, some of the broad economic consequences of the buffalo slaughter need to be pointed out. In the first place, the extermination of the buffalo deprived the warlike Plains Indians of their chief means of subsistence; after the early 1870's they were content to live in a dependent status on government reservations. Secondly, the extermination of the buffalo opened the range lands of the West to the cattleman and later, with the advent of mechanized farming, to the wheat grower. In the third place, buffalo hides, meat, and bones were an important source of capital for early settlers.

Conservation

Another aspect of the buffalo slaughter is its relation to the problem of conserving natural resources. The post-Civil War period was one of uninhibited exploitation of natural resources, and few men were concerned with the broad social consequences of their actions. As a result, the public domain was plundered by self-styled empire builders, and the present generation has inherited many conservation problems that might have been avoided. It might be argued that the economic development of the area was not compatible with the buffalo and the open range. While the validity of this argument may be granted, the slaughter of countless numbers of buffalo merely for their hides and the virtual annihilation of these animals is hard to justify. A few lone critics were shocked and angered by the ruthless exploitation of the "King of the Prairies." One of the critics was Horace Greeley, who wrote in 1869: "Nowhere is the blind, senseless human appetite for carnage, for destruction, more strikingly, more lamentably evinced than in the rapidly-proceeding extermination of the buffalo."²⁰

Range Cattle Industry

The second industry bringing wealth to South Central Kansas was the range cattle industry. After the Civil War railroads were pushed west across the Prairie Plains into the Great Plains. It is significant that at the boundary between these regions in central Kansas the

²⁰ Horace Greeley, "The Plains, As I Crossed Them Ten Years Ago," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. CCXXVIII, May, 1869, p. 793.

cattle industry of the southwest was linked to the growing industrial centers of the northeast.

Texas Cattle

The antecedents of this industry are found in the old Spanish civilization to the southwest, where for several centuries cattle had been grazed in what is now Texas and New Mexico. In 1830 it was estimated that there were 100,000 head of cattle in Texas, the bulk of them Spanish; but during the War of Texas Independence in 1836 these cattle were claimed by Americans. Some Texas cattle were driven to markets in gulf ports, California, Ohio, and Illinois from 1836 to 1865, but this accounted for only a negligible proportion of the vast herd. Due largely to transportation difficulties, little development took place in the industry, and cattle grew wild in Texas where they "multiplied at a rapid and constant rate."²¹ From 1830 to 1860 Texas cattle increased from about 100,000 to 3,535,768 head.²²

Growing Markets

At the same time that Texas cattle were multiplying by leaps and bounds, forces were at work to create a market for vast quantities of meat. A remarkable population growth increased the demand for meat products. In the last half of the nineteenth century the population of the United States more than trebled, increasing from 23.2 million in 1850 to 76.0 million in 1900.²³ The population growth was responsible for a general increase in meat consumption, but at the same time a movement from the farm to the city increased the demand for dressed meat. Manufacturing industries expanded at a rapid rate during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and more and more people moved to cities, where they obtained employment in factories and commercial establishments. Only 6.1 per cent of the American people lived in urban areas in 1800, but in 1850 the urban percentage was 15.3 and by 1900 it was 39.7 per cent.²⁴ The predominantly agricultural and

²¹ Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-211.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

²³ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945*, p. 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

self-sufficient economy of the early nineteenth century was becoming an urbanized, industrial type of society where an increasing proportion of the people depended on the market for the commodities they consumed.

Technical and Marketing Innovations

In addition to the above factors, a number of technical and marketing innovations introduced after the Civil War lowered the cost of processing and transporting meat. These included the introduction of mass production techniques in the slaughter and the dressing of meat, the utilization of by-products, the refrigerator car, branch houses to facilitate the distribution of meat, and the establishment of stockyards and organized livestock exchanges.²⁵

Abilene's Cattle Trade

The equating of demand and supply was delayed by the Civil War, but in the summer of 1865 the first long drive was made from Texas to the railroad terminal at Sedalia, Missouri. Two years later a railroad was built westward to central Kansas, where the drives terminated for several years. Abilene, the first important cow town in Kansas, was on the Kansas Pacific railroad running through the tier of counties just north of the area. The railroad was built to Abilene in 1867; in the same year 35,000 head of Texas cattle were driven over the Chisholm Trail to this terminal, and about 1,000 cars of stock were shipped to the East.²⁶ During the next four years Abilene was a rip-roaring cow town, where drovers and herders let off steam after disposing of their herds to shrewd cattle buyers. The heyday of the Abilene cattle trade was from 1867 to 1871, when about a million and a half Texas longhorns were driven to that point and sold at a price five or six times the original cost in Texas. A fat 2-year-old steer costing only \$6 or \$7 on the Texas range sold for about \$40 in Kansas.²⁷

Abilene was unable to hold its monopoly when the Kansas Pacific built westward and the Santa Fe pushed its line into South Central

²⁵ Charles B. Kuhlmann, "Processing of Agricultural Products after 1860," *The Growth of the American Economy*, Harold F. Williamson, editor, pp. 432-437.

²⁶ Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

²⁷ Rister, *op. cit.*, 1944 ed., p. 419.

Kansas. The officials of the Santa Fe, eager to take the cattle trade away from the Kansas Pacific, succeeded to a large extent during the decade of the seventies.

Newton, a Cow Town

Newton became the first cow town in the area when the Santa Fe arrived there in July, 1871. For one season it did a thriving business. The Newton cattle boom not only attracted solid businessmen but also gamblers, prostitutes (or "soiled doves"), and saloon keepers who provided entertainment for transient cowboys in what has been described as "the wickedest and bloodiest town in the state."²⁸ Popular historians are inclined to emphasize the exploits of drunken cowboys and the riff-raff to the neglect of less colorful, law abiding citizens who assumed leadership in the fields of agriculture, trade, industry, and finance. In Newton one of these leaders was Joseph G. McCoy, who had made Abilene famous as a cattle market. He was responsible for designing and erecting the stockyards, representing an investment of \$10,000; they were said to be "the most complete and convenient of any in the state."²⁹

Once the railroad and the stockyards were completed, Newton began to take the cattle trade away from Abilene 65 miles north. In the summer of 1871, there were at least two thousand drovers and buyers in Newton, and thousands of cattle grazed on nearby prairies awaiting their turn to be shipped to market. McCoy wrote that he "set about stopping the incoming cattle herds near the town of Newton, and succeeded in locating more than one hundred thousand head."³⁰ The Santa Fe soon began operating a daily express stock train from Newton to Topeka, where connections were made with other railroads; by September of 1871 it shipped from 18 to 50 carloads of Texas cattle east daily.³¹

Wichita Cattle Boom

Even before the Santa Fe reached Newton, the leading citizens of Wichita met to organize a branch line that would enable them to

²⁸ Floyd B. Streeter, *Prairie Trails and Cow Towns*, p. 143.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁰ Joseph G. McCoy, *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest, 1874*, p. 228.

³¹ James, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

corner the Texas cattle trade. In June of 1871 the Wichita and Southwestern Railroad Company was organized, municipal aid bonds for \$200,000 were voted in August of the same year, and construction was commenced soon afterward.³² While the railroad was being constructed, the town started providing the necessary facilities for drovers and cattle buyers. Building was started on the stockyards that were to have a capacity of about 2,500 cattle or 125 carloads.³³ In addition, hotel accommodations increased, business buildings went up in haste and were stocked with goods. Like all other cow towns, Wichita attracted the less desirable element that entertained the free spending cowboy for a price.

Tension mounted as the railroad neared completion. "This is May 3, 1872," said the *Wichita Eagle*, "and the railroad is only twelve miles away. The town is boiling like a seething caldron."³⁴ The great day finally came on May 11, when the first train pulled into Wichita; the inhabitants quit work to join in the celebration. With the stockyards completed and a committee of leading citizens riding down the Chisholm Trail to lure drovers and their Texas longhorns to the new railroad terminal, Wichita was on its way to becoming the greatest cattle shipping point in the country during the next three or four years.³⁵

"The Texas cattle trade is prodigious," exclaimed a Wichita newspaperman in October, 1872.³⁶ In typical boomer language this newspaperman says that 350,000 head of cattle had been driven into the Wichita area, 2,500 carloads had been shipped, "and the expectation is that a thousand more car loads will be shipped this year, making the total shipments from this point this year seventy thousand head."³⁷

McCoy's history gives a much more sober account of the cattle trade during the early seventies. He points out that the year 1871 witnessed the largest influx of Texas cattle ever known in the history of the trade. During that year "Fully six hundred thousand head of cattle arrived

³² Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 28, ("The Early Settlement of the Arkansas Valley," *Wichita Eagle*, April 6, 1876).

³³ Streeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

³⁴ Earl V. Long, "The Wichita Real Estate Boom," Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wichita, 1931, p. 20.

³⁵ McCoy, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

³⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 7 ("Wichita, 'the Metropolis of the Southwest,'" *Commonwealth* (Topeka), October 17, 1872).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

in Western Kansas." Because of such factors as unfavorable weather, that made it difficult for cattle to put on weight, increased freight rates, and the large supply of cattle on hand, prices sagged; and relatively few cattle went to market. During the unusually severe winter that followed, thousands of cattle pastured in western Kansas perished in the blizzards.³⁸

The year 1872 was more favorable for interests engaged in the cattle trade. Due to widespread losses in 1871, Texans were reluctant to send cattle to Kansas; and only about 350,000 arrived in the state during 1872. With a reduced supply on the one hand and an increased demand on the other, cattle prices were sufficiently high enough to make the trade reasonably profitable. Wichita was the center of the cattle trade in 1872; during that year local shipments amounted to almost 4,000 cars, containing nearly 80,000 head of cattle.³⁹

The financial panic came in 1873. All types of businesses in the West suffered during the panic and the subsequent depression but none quite so much as the cattle trade. Nearly 450,000 head of Texas cattle went to central and western Kansas that year and about 50,000 head to Coffeyville. Due to a short corn crop in the Middle West, the number of cattle buyers was reduced about 50 per cent as compared with the previous year, and drovers were forced to borrow heavily to hold their cattle in anticipation of a better market. Then when the panic struck in mid-September, the banks called in their loans, and drovers had to dump their cattle on the market at sacrifice prices to pay their debts. According to McCoy, Texas drovers went into debt in Kansas \$1,500,000 and were said to have lost \$2,000,000 during the panic.⁴⁰

Wichita was at the height of its boom in the summer of 1873. While business was somewhat curtailed in the fall and the winter by the panic, one authority says that the extraordinary stimulus of the cattle trade "counteracted the depression, and pushed Wichita ahead a year at least."⁴¹ Cattle shipments increased from 10,200 head in July to 25,000 head in October, and during the year total shipments from Wichita

³⁸ McCoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 248.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-252.

⁴¹ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

were nearly 4,000 cars, a figure nearly equal to that of the previous year.⁴² After 1873 Wichita declined as a cattle shipping center, and by 1876 the many settlements south of the town cut off the drives from Texas.

Up to this point only casual reference has been made to the factors responsible for the growth of Wichita as a cattle shipping point. One obvious factor was the railroad's pushing south from Newton to Wichita and shortening the cattle drive about 25 miles.

Chisholm Trail.—Wichita's close proximity to the Chisholm Trail might be considered another factor in its growth as a cattle shipping point. Since this was the most important trail for Texas cattle and it passed through South Central Kansas, a brief account of its history seems warranted. Jesse Chisholm, for whom the trail was named, was a mixed-blooded Cherokee, the foremost Indian trader of his day. A network of trading posts owned by Chisholm in southern Kansas and the Indian Territory were supplied with goods from Westport (now Kansas City) and Leavenworth. From 1865 to 1868 Chisholm transported large quantities of goods from his post on Chisholm creek (now within the corporate limits of Wichita) to another post in the vicinity of the present location of Anadarko, Oklahoma. The trail he established between these two points later became part of the 800 mile cattle trail extending from San Antonio, Texas, to Abilene, Kansas, and known in its entirety as the Chisholm Trail.⁴³ The trail reached the south line of Kansas about two miles south and slightly east of the present town of Caldwell in Sumner county and passed a short distance west of the present city of Wellington. From this point it bore north, crossed the Arkansas river a mile or two west of Wichita, and then proceeded almost due north, passing close to Newton and finally terminating at Abilene. Later a branch trail was built westward to Dodge City. When it is considered that between five and six million head of cattle passed over the Chisholm Trail during a period of over 20 years, the economic significance of the range cattle industry can be comprehended.⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 28, and McCoy, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

⁴³ Sam P. Ridings, *The Chisholm Trail, A History of the World's Greatest Cattle Trail*, pp. 20, 27.

⁴⁴ John Rossel, "The Chisholm Trail," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. V, No. 1, February, 1936, pp. 12-13.

Other facilities.—In addition to the railroad and the cattle trail, the Wichita area had all the necessary facilities to take care of the trade. The natural resources and climate included an abundant water supply, relatively mild winters, and an almost limitless, unfenced grasslands where cattle could graze until they were ready for market. Man made facilities included stockyards, banks, hotels, and other business establishments. McCoy, impressed with the facilities provided by Wichita, wrote in 1874,

Every needed accommodation exists in the way of able banking institutions, hotels and large business houses, to accommodate an immense cattle trade, and the railroad is thoroughly equipped with superior rolling stock, motive power, and all the needful facilities to transport more than one hundred thousand head of cattle annually To the liberal policy pursued by Wichita bankers, as much as to any other source, is that point indebted for its wonderful success.⁴⁵

With such splendid facilities, some might think that Wichita would automatically attract the cattle trade. At the beginning this was not the case, however, because buyers experienced in the trade were lacking. On the other hand, older cattle towns like Abilene and Newton had experienced buyers and well organized markets compensating to some extent for their longer distances from Texas. Soon people realized that Wichita would not attract drovers unless there were sufficient buyers to take their cattle. To remedy this situation, the citizens employed Joseph G. McCoy, one of the most prominent men in the trade, who visited eastern states to draw buyers to Wichita.⁴⁶

About the same time the citizens sent a delegation of four men to intercept the drovers on the Chisholm Trail and to divert them and their cattle to Wichita. The Wichitans met a similar delegation from Ellsworth, a new shipping point on the Kansas Pacific railroad, and found it necessary to pay the leader of the cattlemen a "handsome consideration" to persuade him to drive his cattle to Wichita.⁴⁷

Town growth.—Another aspect of the cattle trade was the stimulus it gave to towns that served as shipping points. The effects of the trade were multifold, particularly in Wichita. Not until April of 1870 was

⁴⁵ McCoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 333, 413.

⁴⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I. p. 7 ("Wichita, 'the Metropolis of the Southwest,'" *Commonwealth* (Topeka), October 17, 1872).

⁴⁷ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 252-253 ("The Four Horsemen and the Cattle Trail," *Wichita Eagle*, February 28, 1884).

there a house on the Wichita townsite, but soon after that the town began to boom in anticipation of the trade that the railroad would bring. By early July of that year 50 houses had been built and "about that many more contracted to be built."⁴⁸ Moderate growth gave way to a boom when Wichita became a cattle shipping point. The above quoted article in the *Commonwealth* predicted that the cattle business of the town would exceed \$2,000,000 in 1872, and it went on to point out,

There is probably more money in circulation at Wichita than in any town of three times its size in Kansas. The bulk of the circulation is due to the Texas cattle trade, though the business of this and contiguous counties, which is done here, is sufficient of itself to give a town of this size a handsome support.⁴⁹

The boom attracted people of all sorts and descriptions. By October of 1872 the population of Wichita was said to be between two and three thousand. Much of the population was floating, "consisting of cattle drovers and herders, cattle buyers, land speculators and sporting men; but doubtless it had a resident population of at least two thousand."⁵⁰

The influx of so many people in the space of a few months put an unbearable strain on existing business facilities. Times were prosperous, however, and the building boom commencing in 1870 accelerated during the summer of 1872. The first Wichita business buildings were constructed of wood without much thought as to architectural style, but with the coming of the cattle trade more permanent and stylish buildings of brick and stone were demanded by prosperous businessmen. In the latter category was the Eagle block with a frontage of 100 feet on Douglas Avenue. It was a 2-story building of brick and stone; a contemporary said it "would be an ornament to any town in the state."⁵¹ Joseph G. McCoy followed the cattle trade to Wichita and commented on the mushroom growth of business buildings as follows:

So great a commerce thrust suddenly upon the town created an unprecedented demand for business accommodations, store rooms, banks, hotels, &c. The town soon grew to the proportions of a city, and imposing brick and stone buildings

⁴⁸ James, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 7 (Wichita, 'the Metropolis of the Southwest,' *Commonwealth* (Topeka), October 17, 1872).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵¹ *Idem.*

arose upon all hands to accommodate the increased business, among which the Occidental Hotel, an edifice which would do credit to rebuilt Chicago.⁵²

Saloons and bordellos.—A considerable proportion of the new buildings in Wichita were used for what later generations would consider illegitimate business. One of the most popular spots was the famous Keno hall at the corner of Douglas and Main, where the popular game of keno was a great attraction. Saloons and bordellos were common, and two notorious dance halls were located in a tough district at the west end of Douglas Avenue bridge. Among the people who invaded Wichita during the cattle boom were a number of colorful, and not too respectable, characters.

Here may be seen people of every class, shade and character. The sleek and well dressed speculator, with airs suggestive of genteel living and plethoric purse; the independent, money-making, money-spending, somewhat don't-care-a-cuss-ativeness cattle drover; the rollicking, reckless, free-and-easy herder; the substantial citizen; the professional gambler, and the long-haired desperado of the plains, are here brought together of necessity.⁵³

With such a motley collection of individuals, it is not surprising that respectable citizens found it difficult to establish a regime of law and order. The lawless element soon gained the upper hand. To restore a semblance of order, large signs were posted at the four main entrances to Wichita reading, "Everything goes in Wichita. Leave your revolvers at police headquarters, and get a check. Carrying concealed weapons strictly forbidden."⁵⁴ Enforcement of this ordinance was difficult, and in the tough dance hall district shootings, stabbings, and fist fights were common. In 1873 at least six people were killed and five wounded in gun fights. For several weeks in 1874, Wichita was terrorized by a desperado, William (Hurricane Bill) Martin, and his "Texas gang." Later in the year a vigilance committee was formed; the famous frontier marshal, Wyatt Earp, was hired, and under his leadership order was soon restored.⁵⁵

⁵² McCoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 412-413.

⁵³ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 10 ("Wichita, 'the Metropolis of the Southwest,'" *Commonwealth* (Topeka), October 17, 1872).

⁵⁴ Streeter, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-169.

Settlers Versus Cattlemen

At the same time that the cattle trade was booming, South Central Kansas attracted settlers in increasing numbers. Conflict was inevitable between the men who were engaged in the range cattle industry and the settlers who came to till the soil. The former were dependent upon open and unfenced country to graze their cattle. They held no legal title to the land but merely "range rights," generally recognized by other cattlemen but not by settlers.⁵⁶ The settlers, on the other hand, brought another system of land tenure to the West. Coming from settled agricultural regions to the East, they transplanted the institutions essential to their way of life. The institution of private property in land, the keystone of the settlers' legal system, threatened the cattlemen's livelihood. Immediate causes of friction consisted of such things as Texas cattle's destroying the settlers' crops and spreading disease among domestic livestock. On the other hand, settlers incurred the wrath of the cattlemen when they fenced in water holes and cattle trails. The basic conflict, however, was one of two distinct ways of life with little or nothing in common.

During the early years of the cattle trade settlers were too few in number to offer much opposition. In time, however, they gained the upper hand and forced the cattlemen to move their shipping terminals farther west. Several factors were responsible for the victory of the settlers over the range cattlemen. In the first place, the settlers came in a steady stream after the Civil War and soon outnumbered the cattlemen. The settler's mode of living also gave him an advantage. He came to cultivate the land; as his tenure was relatively permanent, he was interested in establishing an ordered way of life. He was instrumental in establishing schools, churches, governments, and, in short, the basic framework of society. Law and public opinion were thus on his side. The range cattleman, on the other hand, was migratory and seldom stayed in one place long enough to have any influence on local institutions.

Barbed Wire

Settlers were also aided in their struggle by a series of technological innovations making possible the agricultural development of the plains

⁵⁶ Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

country. These consisted of the steel prairie breaker in the seventies, followed by the sulky and the gang plows in the eighties and the nineties. Other farm implements lowering costs and encouraging extensive methods of farming in the plains country were the field cultivator, the adjustable straight-tooth harrow, the disc harrow, and the lister.⁵⁷ A much more revolutionary innovation contributing to the decline of the range cattle industry was barbed wire fence. After numerous experiments, Joseph F. Glidden patented a relatively cheap and effective barbed wire fence in 1874; during the next decade it spread throughout the West. "The advent of barbed wire," says Professor Webb, "was an important factor in the decline of the cattle kingdom." He points out,

It brought about the disappearance of the open, free range and converted the range country into the big-pasture country. It sounded the death knell of the native longhorn and made possible the introduction of blooded stock. With barbed-wire fences the ranchman could isolate his cattle and, through segregation, could introduce blooded stock. Barbed wire put an end to the long drive, made the cattle trail a "crooked lane," and forced the cattleman to patronize the railroads whether he would or not. Barbed wire has made stock-farming rather than ranching the dominant occupation of the Great Plains.⁵⁸

Barbed wire, however, was essentially a farmer's product; and, as fences crept westward cutting off cattle trails and water holes and curtailing the domain of the open range, cattlemen in self defense had to acquire legal title to their range lands and enclose them with barbed wire fence.

Cattle Trade Moves West

The settlers of Kansas gained their first important victory over the cattlemen when the optional herd law was passed by the state legislature in 1871. Adoption of this law was left up to the separate counties; it required the rancher to herd his cattle or to fence his pastures and to pay damages if his cattle destroyed other people's property. Commencing with Abilene and Dickinson county in 1871, this law was soon adopted by the counties in the eastern half of the state.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Leo Rogin, *The Introduction of Farm Machinery in Relation to the Productivity of Labor*, University of California Publications in Economics, Vol. IX, Part 1.

⁵⁸ Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-313.

⁵⁹ James C. Malin, "Beginnings of Winter Wheat Production in the Upper Kansas and Lower Smoky Hill River Valleys," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. X, No. 3, August, 1941, p. 254.

Newton's cattle trade was of brief duration partly due to the influx of settlers. In this connection McCoy records, "The rapid settlement of the county necessitated its re-establishment, which was done at Wichita and at Great Bend."⁶⁰

For a year or more Wichita carried on the cattle trade without interruption from the settlers. However, by 1874 settlements extended 20 miles south of the Arkansas river, "and only by an amicable arrangement made with the settlers before the cattle arrived in the spring, can they be brought through the settlements to the shipping yards, of which the [railroad] company has most excellent ones."⁶¹ The cattle drives to Wichita came to an end after 1876, when it was reported that "the settlements in southern Kansas cut off the cattle drives from Texas, as they could not enter or cross the cultivated farming country."⁶²

When the settlers occupied the land of east central Kansas, the railroads had to move their cattle shipping points to the West. For a time Great Bend and Ellsworth were shipping points. After the Santa Fe reached Great Bend in July of 1872, the place became a bustling cowtown for three or four years. According to Cutler,

The years 1873, '74 and '75 were interesting years in the history of Great Bend, as these were the years during which the cattle trade centered at that point. This trade would usually commence about the first of June, and continue till towards the middle of October. A natural consequence of this trade was lively times for the merchants while it lasted, and for the orderly and peaceably disposed of the community, a constant dread.⁶³

As with other cattle towns, a struggle was waged between the farmers and the cattle interests of Great Bend and Barton county. Cutler points out that the citizens of the county were relieved when, in 1876, a law was passed by the state legislature fixing the "dead line" 30 miles west of the west line of Barton county. This "dead line," he says, "is a line beyond which Texas cattle can not be brought, unless they have wintered one winter in the State."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ McCoy, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁶² Ridings, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁶³ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 765.

⁶⁴ *Idem.*

Livestock Pools and Associations

The Texas cattle trade moved westward to Dodge City and Ellis in 1876, and for the next four years there were no shipping points of any consequence in South Central Kansas. Then in 1880 the Santa Fe built a branch line to Caldwell, and for nearly a decade this town was an important shipping point. The cattle trade of Caldwell differs markedly, however, from that of other Kansas cow towns. Whereas earlier cow towns shipped Texas cattle driven north over the Chisholm Trail, the greater part of the cattle Caldwell shipped was reared in southern Kansas and the Indian Territory and owned by members of the Cherokee Livestock Association.

Livestock pools and associations were characteristic of the eighties. Mention has been made of the chief forces altering the nature of the cattle trade, such as the westward movement of farmers, technological innovations, and the like. The interesting thing is that the rate of change was much more rapid in the prosperous eighties. During most of this decade money was plentiful in the country, as a whole, and capitalists were seeking profitable investments. Western railroad securities appealed to investors; and, when new lines reached the ranch country of the southwest, the cattle drives to Kansas came to an end. Heavy investments were also made in cattle pools and associations advertised as extremely profitable ventures. In accounting for the growth of these pools and associations, Professor Pelzer lists such factors as "Increasing numbers of cattle, the invasion of the farmers, larger investments, new business methods, and the inevitable tendency towards cooperation."⁶⁵

Cherokee Livestock Association

The West had numerous cattle pools and associations, but in this study attention will be focused chiefly on the Cherokee Livestock Association, that included among its members a number of cattlemen from South Central Kansas. For several years prior to 1880, southern Kansas cattlemen had been grazing livestock in that part of the Indian Territory known as the Cherokee Outlet and paying so much a head

⁶⁵ Louis Pelzer, *The Cattleman's Frontier, A Record of the Trans-Mississippi Cattle Industry from Oxen Trains to Pooling Companies, 1850-1890*, p. 73.

to the Cherokee Indians for grazing privileges. Because it was difficult to keep an accurate check on the number of cattle held by any particular owner, there was much dissatisfaction among the cattlemen and between the cattlemen and the Indians. To improve this system, the cattlemen called a meeting in 1880 and drew up a plan of organization. According to Ridings, "Committees were appointed and rules established to govern the affairs of the cattlemen among themselves."⁶⁶

While the organization of 1880 was an improvement on the old haphazard system, many agreed that a more formal organization was needed. Accordingly, another general meeting convened at Caldwell in 1883. At this time the group agreed to form a corporation, and soon afterward the Cherokee Livestock Association received a 40-year charter. Its principal office and place of business was at Caldwell. The purpose and object of the association, according to its charter, was "The improvement of the breed of domestic animals by the importation, grazing, breeding, sale, barter and exchange thereof."⁶⁷

The following statistics give some idea of the association's extensive operations. The Cherokee Outlet contained approximately 6,000,000 acres of land that the association leased from the Cherokees for five years at an annual rental of \$100,000. To raise money to pay the lease, it made subleases to over 100 cattlemen at a rate of 2.5 cents per acre per annum. The old system of charging according to the number of cattle thus gave way to a rental charge on each acre of land; this entailed a careful survey and the fencing of each parcel of land subleased. When the Cherokee Outlet was opened for settlement in 1893, enough barbed wire was said to have been removed "to construct barbd wire entanglements in four World Wars."⁶⁸

Other Pools and Associations

Three other area associations deserve brief mention. The Pawnee Valley Stock Breeders Association, organized in 1882, held 2,800 acres of land and was capitalized at \$100,000.⁶⁹ Several prominent cattlemen

⁶⁶ Ridings, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-272.

⁶⁹ Cutler, *op. cit.*, pp. 1352-1353.

of Sumner county organized The Southern Kansas Border Live Stock and Land Company in 1882. It controlled 150,000 acres of land, had a capital stock of \$200,000, and planned to fatten 5,000 to 6,000 head of Texas steers in 1883.⁷⁰

The Comanche Live Stock Pool, with headquarters at Medicine Lodge, is interesting because of its tie with eastern capitalists. Mr. Payne, the treasurer and one of the directors of this association, was a banker, stock dealer, and grower at Medicine Lodge. In April of 1880 he associated himself with Messrs. Hunter, Evans and Company of St. Louis, R. W. Phillips of Chicago, and several other men for the purpose of ranching cattle. The pool controlled 1,250,000 acres of land in southeast Comanche county and the Indian Territory. In 1882 the whole tract of land was fenced at a cost of \$33,000, making 160 miles of barbed wire fence, four wires high. The 12 members of the pool owned 50,080 head of cattle and employed 48 men and one superintendent.⁷¹

The cattle business boomed during the early eighties but soon after that time came upon evil days. The range was overstocked by speculative pools and associations; before long the markets were glutted with cattle. The period of easy money also came to an end, and ranchers were unable to borrow except at high rates of interest. Then there was the protracted drought and the severe winters of 1886 and 1887, when thousands of cattle died on the prairies of South Central Kansas. It was estimated that 80 per cent of the cattle in the path of the blizzard of January, 1886, were killed,⁷² and both the Smoky Hill pool and the Comanche pool here were practically wiped out by the storm.⁷³

The terrible winter of 1886 thus marked the end of the range cattle industry of the West. Except for the southern and western counties, this industry had been on the decline in South Central Kansas since about 1876. In its place was substituted the rancher who owned or leased his property, enclosed his pastures with barbed wire fence, and

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1498.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1353, 1523.

⁷² Kirke Mechem (ed.), *The Annals of Kansas*, January 1, 1886, p. 1.

⁷³ Kansas State Historical Society, *Pawnee County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 187-188 ("Pioneers Tell of Experiences in the Terrible Blizzard of First Week of 1886," *Larned Chronoscope*, January 9, 1936).

imported Shorthorns, Polled Angus, Herefords, and other improved breeds of cattle. Since much of the range land was adapted to mechanized farming, a number of ranches were broken up into smaller tracts and sold to farmers.

Section IV

FARMERS' FRONTIER

By the late sixties and the early seventies conditions were very favorable for the settlement of South Central Kansas. This was the period when the Santa Fe railroad was pushed westward to link the area with eastern markets; when indigenous Indian tribes were herded into reservations and the land formerly occupied by them in the area was opened to settlement; when the nation was generally prosperous and obtaining credit and loans to buy land, farm implements and other necessities was not too difficult; and when the prices of such basic farm products as cattle, hogs, and wheat were rising. Furthermore, there was abundant rainfall; this, in conjunction with fertile prairie soils, brought forth abundant crops and led early settlers to believe that the climate of the "Great American Desert" was undergoing a permanent change. During this period the area began to attract settlers¹ in large numbers, and this movement continued at an uneven pace until the mid-eighties, when settlers occupied practically all of the area. As evidence of rapid settlement, the decennial census shows that in 1860 there were only 2,651 people living in South Central Kansas, 2.5 per cent of the total population of the state. Little or no change was observed during the Civil War, but in the late sixties there was a rapid influx of settlers, and by 1870 the population was 15,272, 4.2 per cent of the state's total. Over 200,000 people migrated to the area in the seventies, the decade of greatest growth, and by 1880 the census reported 222,315 inhabitants, 22.3 per cent of the state's total. After a period of decline from 1880 to 1882, immigration increased rapidly to a peak population of 411,258 in 1887. Then another period of decline set in, and in 1890 the area's population was 365,182. In 1887 and 1890 the area accounted for 27.2 per cent and 25.7 per cent, respectively, of the total Kansas population.²

¹ The term "settlers" in this section refers to farmers, merchants, and professional people who obtained legal title to the land, and it excludes hunters, trappers, Indian traders, cattle drovers and other migrants who did not put down roots in the area.

² See Table 2 and Figure 2 for population statistics.

The migration of so many people to the area in such a comparatively short period raises many questions. Why, it may be asked, were individuals and families willing to leave their homes in more settled regions and move to the frontier with all its hardships and uncertainties? From what states and foreign countries did the settlers emigrate? How important to the economic development of the area were such factors as cheap and fertile land, favorable climatic conditions, improved transportation facilities, easy credit, and opportunities in agriculture, trade, industry, and the professions? How did the settlers go about earning a livelihood in the new country, and what were the chief problems they encountered? How did economic and climatic fluctuations affect migration and the adaptation of agriculture to the environment of the area? These appear to be the questions of paramount interest to an economic historian. Fortunately, considerable source material is available, and it is possible to answer the questions in a fairly adequate manner.

The same forces that caused Europeans to move to the New World in earlier centuries caused emigrants to come to South Central Kansas after the Civil War. In any migration there are three primary elements affecting a decision to move: (1) reasons for leaving the old home, (2) reasons for going to a new home, and (3) cheap and practical transportation.³ These elements are often referred to as push, pull, and transport. Recorded interviews suggest that the first two were uppermost in the minds of settlers. In Kingman county, for example, early settlers gave the following reasons for coming to that county:

"It was a good place for a young man to get a start"; "We were in search of health and wealth"; "There was not enough land in Indiana to divide among our children, so we came to Kansas to get more land for them"; "Father had gone on another man's note and lost our home so we came to Kansas to start again"; and "We got the Kansas Fever."⁴

Although these interviews do not mention the transportation factor, it was a necessary element if the pull of the new area and the push of the old were to be effective. A cheap and practical means of transportation

³ Richard C. Overton, "Westward Expansion Since the Homestead Act," *The Growth of the American Economy*, Harold F. Williamson, editor, p. 340.

⁴ Jessie H. Lowe, "Pioneer History of Kingman," Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wichita, 1933, p. 14.

was indispensable in getting pioneers and their possessions from old to new homes and in carrying surplus agricultural products to market.

Area's Possibilities and Limitations

It is axiomatic that the economic development of South Central Kansas has been determined by the possibilities and limitations of the land. This has been true not only of cattle raising, agriculture, and mining, but also of trade, industry, transportation, and professional services. Since the general physiographic characteristics of the area have already been discussed in Section I, it will not be necessary to repeat this information. It does seem important, however, to summarize briefly the occupation of the area and record the impressions of old settlers and other contemporaries as to its possibilities and limitations. These impressions, it should be noted, varied somewhat from individual to individual, from one part of the area to another, and from year to year owing to variations in rainfall, prices of farm products, and other factors.

Pre-Civil War Settlements

Although immigration on a widespread basis did not commence until the late sixties, there were a few isolated settlements in the eastern part of the area as early as the middle fifties. While probably subordinate to the economic factors, political motives played some part in the settlement of this region. In the spring of 1856 five families from Mississippi settled along the Verdigris river in the eastern part of Greenwood county. They came with the avowed purpose of helping to make Kansas a slave state.⁵ Anti-slavery settlers arrived in considerable numbers the next year, and during the Civil War some fighting took place between the rival settlers.⁶ The eastern counties were sparsely populated before and during the War. According to the Census of 1860 a total of only 2,651 people lived in eight area counties.⁷

The interesting thing about these early immigrants is that they settled along wooded streams in the eastern part of the area where

⁵ Kansas State Historical Society, "Political History of Greenwood County," *Manuscript Collections of Greenwood County*.

⁶ Cutler, *op. cit.*, pp. 1198-1199.

⁷ United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, Population of the United States*, Vol. I, p. 165.

many of them found conditions similar to what they had left in the East. Along these streams there was fertile and well watered bottom land and plentiful supplies of building material, fuel, fish, game, acorns, walnuts, and fur-bearing animals. An old settler of Greenwood county said that a number of Norwegian families emigrated from Minnesota and Wisconsin to that county in 1858 and that "Indians were here in great numbers and the woods and plains abounded in buffalo, wolves, wild turkeys and almost all kinds of game."⁸ Edwin Tucker, another settler who arrived in 1859, said, "The fine valley lands along Fall River and adjoining grazing lands, with a chance to have first choice instead of taking what others had left, determined the location here."⁹

Butler county, first colonized in 1857 by a group of families from Lawrence, Kansas, had about 50 families in the two communities of El Dorado and Chelsea by 1859. Miss Perrine records in her history of Butler county, "Although the two new settlements were far away from other settlements and forts, it is not surprising that so many people had arrived at this early date, for the valleys of the Walnut and Whitewater rivers with their many tributary streams, were among the best remaining locations for settlement in the Kansas territory."¹⁰

The early settlers in the area's eastern part were largely self-sufficient. The settler and his family consumed practically all that they produced in the form of wild game, fish, berries, nuts, domesticated animals and plants. Corn was the principal crop grown for many years, and practically all of the bread was made of cornmeal. Sugar, butter, and coffee were unattainable luxuries to most settlers because they had to be hauled 75 miles or more by wagon. Substitutes were found in the form of cane molasses and honey, pumpkin butter, and cereal "coffee" made from parched or burnt corn and bread crusts. The settler and his family generally lived in a one-room log cabin with dirt floors and handmade furniture. Men's clothing was made at home from grain

⁸ Ellen A. Kenner, "Settlement on Fall River," *Manuscript Collections of Greenwood County*, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁹ Kansas State Historical Society, "History of Greenwood County," *Manuscript Collections of Greenwood County*.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Perrine, "The History of Butler County, Kansas," Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wichita, 1932, p. 16.

sacks or heavy drill, and in the warm months wear and tear on shoes were saved by everyone's going barefooted.¹¹

One should not conclude that settlers were entirely self-sufficient. A few manufactured articles, such as firearms and ammunition, farm tools, shoes, and cloth, were indispensable; and some money was needed to procure them. Most settlers had only a few acres planted in crops; and, even if they produced a surplus, the cost of transporting bulky farm commodities 75 or more miles to market would have been prohibitive. Furs and hides, on the other hand, had a high value in proportion to bulk and could bear the heavy transport charges. Hunting, trapping, and trade with the Indians thus assumed considerable importance in the early years because they provided the settlers with badly needed money. At times settlers traded trinkets with the Indians for furs; but Vol. P. Mooney, a Butler county pioneer, pointed out that trading was not always profitable, "therefore the farmer to be sure of a small amount of money, did well to do some hunting and trapping for himself, even after the game became less plentiful."¹²

The pioneer stage was relatively short, however, and not too many years elapsed before the self-sufficient pioneer gave way to the settled rancher and farmer. The future of the Flint Hills region lay to a greater extent in cattle ranching than farming, and quite early the settlers realized the grazing potentialities of the region. E. W. Thiall, a pioneer cattleman of Greenwood county, said that a herd of Durham cattle was brought to the county as early as 1858 or 1859, and he pointed out the grazing possibilities of the county as follows:

The natural advantages that Greenwood County offered from the first, attracted the attention of stock men, superbly watered and with a wealth of blue stem grass, growing on a limestone soil, and much of it land that seemingly, by its rolling character would forever prevent its being used for farming purposes, it has from the first made the Live Stock industry the overshadowing one of the County.¹³

Beginning in the late sixties, Texas longhorns were driven to Kansas, and a few years later some of these cattle were bought and fattened

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-86.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹³ E. W. Thiall, "Livestock in Greenwood County," *Manuscript Collections of Greenwood County*, Kansas State Historical Society.

by settlers in the Flint Hills counties for market. It became the general practice to fatten Texas cattle in Kansas. One of the best feeding grounds was the Flint Hills region, where the grass was said to have much better fattening qualities than Texas grass. Somewhat later improved breeds of cattle were introduced, and grass feeding was supplemented with grain and cottonseed cake feeding by many of the ranchers. This gave local farmers a superior market for their grain and led to the growth of diversified farming as a subordinate economic activity.¹⁴

Central and Western Subareas

Compared with the Flint Hills region, the central and western subareas were settled later, the pioneer stage was shorter, and, owing to their physiographic characteristics, the growing of wheat gradually became the leading economic activity. The rolling prairie country to the west of the Flint Hills had many possibilities. The agricultural potentialities of the area were exceedingly great; and, in addition, there were mineral resources in the form of salt, gypsum, petroleum, and natural gas. Prairie grass covered nearly all the land, the soil was fertile, the climate, temperate; the rainfall, generally adequate; and practically all of the land was capable of producing agricultural products. Early settlers were aware of these advantages. *The Hutchinson News* stated in July, 1872,

Here is a breezy temperate clime, 1,500 feet above the sea, in the heart of this mighty nation, we have level fertile lands of great extent and well watered, where the farmer may rip the earth as deep and as far as he pleases without any obstruction, and where the herder may graze his cattle the livelong year on pastures such as can't be fully imagined by those east of the Mississippi.¹⁵

On the other hand, several serious limitations delayed settlement. Miss Emily Combes, an 18-year-old girl who went with her father from Thurman, Ohio, to settle in Rice county, Kansas, in 1871, mentions several of these limitations as follows:

Indians and buffalo are only two of the "Bugbears" that await me on the frontier. They tell me there are no trees and almost unbearable heat on the high plains,

¹⁴ Perrine, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁵ *Hutchinson News*, July 18, 1872 ("Woods vs. Prairie").

myriads of mosquitoes, plenty of rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, coyotes and occasionally a cyclone thrown in by way of variety—but, I am not afraid.¹⁶

Timber shortage.—Many settlers who came from wooded regions in the East were unfamiliar with the treeless prairies of Kansas and had difficulty adapting long established economic patterns to the new country. Having been dependent upon timber for building material, fencing, and fuel, they had to find substitutes for these necessities after the few groves and narrow fringe of timber along the streams and rivers were exhausted.

Early settlers, however, were not daunted by the shortage of timber and soon found reasonably satisfactory substitutes. The first houses were dugouts consisting of holes dug in the ground, covered with poles and sod. A half-dugout with partially built sod walls followed; then came the real sod house or "soddie" immortalized in song and story. An interesting account of the building of a "deluxe model" sod house in Rice county was written by Miss Combes as follows:

It was interesting to watch men build a house out of comparatively nothing. They first marked the size of the house 20×14 , making two rooms—one 12×14 , the other 8×14 . Then they dug about a foot and a half into the ground. After the ground was dug sufficiently deep, they laid pieces of sod cut into brick a foot wide and foot and a half long, eight inches thick, and then thoroughly sun baked. They were placed one above the other as real bricks are laid, making walls two feet thick and eight feet high. Frames for the two doors and three windows were put in.

The partition between the two rooms is also of sod with a doorway between where we will hang a portier made of an Indian blanket. We are very fortunate indeed as we have a board roof over one room. This gives us the benefit of rain water as the water here is very hard. The other room has a thatched roof, boughs of trees covered with sod. Even with plenty of money one could not find other material for a house in this region as lumber must be hauled forty-five miles and is exorbitantly high. These one-storied, sod houses, although they are not pre-possessing in appearance, they are cool in summer, warm in winter.¹⁷

Natural stone was sometimes used as a building material for houses and barns, and in parts of the central and western subareas some native timber was available to the first settlers, but it was soon exhausted. In the northeast corner of Reno county the sand hills were originally

¹⁶ Emily Elizabeth Combes, "Letter from an Eighteen Year Old Kansas Girl Written from Manhattan and Rice County to Her Fiance in Ohio," *Manuscript Collections of Rice County*, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, June 18, 1871, p. 13.

covered with a heavy growth of cottonwood trees, some nearly eight feet in diameter and 50 feet to the limb. Since this was the only belt of timber for miles around, it was cut off rapidly and by the winter of 1872-1873 was almost entirely exhausted.¹⁸ Settlers often arrived in the area to find the timber already cut away by the railroads for ties and bridge timbers. In 1872 it was reported that "The railroads of Kansas have consumed nearly every stick of timber on their lines."¹⁹

Buffalo chips.—Fuel was another problem of the pioneers. As in the case of building material, several substitutes were found. Buffalo chips made good fuel while they lasted, but it took a great many of them to supply the needs. Corn stalks, corn cobs, twisted grass, and soapweed were also used. Some firewood and coal were imported from outside, but until railroads were built into the area and freight rates reduced considerably, the price of imported fuel was virtually prohibitive. Before a railroad was built to the town of Kingman, red cedar was hauled a distance of 45 miles from Medicine Lodge and sold for fuel at \$1.50 a load, a price few people could afford. Kingman settlers could haul in coal from Hutchinson and Wichita, but it was very expensive.²⁰

Hedge fences.—With buffaloes roaming the prairies and Texas cattle driven across the area, the pioneer farmer had the problem of keeping stray animals off his growing crops. The herd law was a partial answer to this problem; but, as it was not always enforced, the farmer had to protect his crops with some kind of fence. A few prosperous settlers enclosed their farms with wooden or stone posts and barbed wire, but this was out of the question for most people. One writer estimated that it cost \$800 to fence in a 160-acre farm with barbed wire in 1872.²¹ The most common solution to the fencing problem was to plant Osage Orange trees as a hedge. The *Wichita Eagle* for April 6, 1876, commented on the advantages and widespread use of hedge fencing as follows:

¹⁸ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 1370.

¹⁹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Transactions of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1872*, p. 61.

²⁰ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²¹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Transactions of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1872*, p. 59.

For fencing, the Osage Orange as a hedge will in time be the universal fence. Cheap, sure and efficient as a fence, a wind-break for stock and a relief to the eye, most of our farmers are already growing such fences, notwithstanding the "herd law," which compels every man to take care of his own stock.²²

Water.—In addition to building materials, fuel, and fencing, settlers often encountered difficulty in finding water for drinking, washing, and other purposes. Water presented little or no problem along the larger streams and rivers, for even if they were dry part of the year, water could be obtained by digging a shallow well. Even in the driest years the bottom land for several miles on either side of the Arkansas river was more or less moist because of the underground flow, and so tapping this water was a simple matter. "Drive wells" or tube wells were said to be in universal use along the bottoms of Sedgwick county in 1876, and water was reached at a depth of from six to fifteen feet.²³ On the other hand, the water problem was often quite serious on the uplands. The depth for sinking wells ranged from 20 to 40 feet in Harvey county to from 50 to 80 feet in Kingman county and as much as 100 feet in parts of McPherson county.²⁴ Digging wells 40 and 50 or more feet in depth was an expensive and difficult undertaking; this was a factor of some importance in delaying the settlement of the high prairies. Only a few windmills for pumping water were in the area in the early years, but by the late seventies and the early eighties they were quite common. Cutler relates, for example, that every stock farmer in Stafford county had a windmill in 1883.²⁵

Prairie sod.—A further obstacle to farming the fertile lands of the area was the thick turf that had to be broken before crops could be planted. In some cases the first settlers cut the sod with an axe and planted a small patch of "sod corn" and melons. Contemporary sources indicate that a number of settlers arrived without "sod busting" plows and draft animals and had to hire their land plowed. The work was slow, difficult, and expensive; during the first years of settlement only

²² Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 30 ("Timber, Lumber, and the Herd Law").

²³ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 32 ("The Early Settlement of the Arkansas Valley,") *Wichita Eagle*, April 6, 1876).

²⁴ Cutler, *op. cit.*, pp. 771, 810, 1525.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1270.

a fraction of the land was put under cultivation. "One good team can break from one to two acres of prairie per day, price \$3.00 to \$3.50 per acre," said the *Hutchinson News* on November 21, 1872. Henry Schultz, an early settler in Barton county, had trouble at first with buffaloes that wallowed on his plowed land, but he succeeded in raising five or six acres of fair sod corn and two acres of oats in 1870. He was also reported to have broken the following amount of prairie; "in 1870, ten acres; 1871, twelve acres; '73, sixty acres; '77, forty acres, '78, ten acres; '79, thirty-five acres."²⁶

Natural disasters, a serious limitation at times, will be discussed later in this section. Other limitations meriting treatment in separate sections are the government's land policy and the inadequate transportation system.

Occupation of the Area, 1865-1880

Settlement was certainly delayed by the above limitations, but by the late sixties and the early seventies some of the most serious ones were removed when the railroad was built across the area, and the Indian menace subsided. At the same time the settlers were learning how to cope with other limitations, such as the paucity of timber. On the other hand, the possibilities of the area were enhanced by favorable climatic conditions and business prosperity in the years prior to the Panic of 1873. The Surveyor General of Kansas reported in September of 1869, "The climate of Kansas and the entire west has been undergoing vast changes. Every year there has been a noted increase in the fall of rain The crops of the present year are the best and by far the most abundant ever raised in Kansas."²⁷ Although serious drought conditions prevailed in western Kansas during the early 1870's, there is some evidence that the central and the eastern parts of the area did not suffer a great deal. According to the *Hutchinson News* of July 12, 1873, "The most reliable statistics show that the annual rainfall in Kansas is considerably greater since 1865, than the average of the thirty-five years previous. We will yet be called 'rainy' instead of 'droughty' Kansas."

²⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Barton County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 56 ("Buffalo Township," *Great Bend Register*, January 22, 1880).

²⁷ United States Department of the Interior, Commissioner of the General Land Office, *Annual Report, 1869*, p. 311.

Crops were abundant during most years of the wet cycle, and the newspapers of the area commented at some length upon the prosperous conditions. "The present year promises to be one of unparalleled prosperity and progress in Kansas," said the *Hutchinson News* on April 17, 1873. The paper went on to point out, "The prospects for abundant crops were never better at this time of the year. The winter wheat generally came through well and the spring opens in a most encouraging way."

Financial channels were full and well lubricated in the early seventies. Farmers, cattlemen, and businessmen found it fairly easy to buy goods on credit and obtain loans on the security of real estate. An invention, known as the "real estate mortgage," was said to have been introduced in the Wichita area about 1870, "which proved to be of great convenience to many of the people, and was used to ornament a majority of the farms in the County."²⁸ According to the *Hutchinson News* of April 17, 1873, "Money is plentier than it has been for two years past, and those needing funds for legitimate investments find no difficulty in getting such accommodations."

Immigration Statistics

The first great wave of immigration thus rode in on a wave of prosperity. Approximately 13,000 settlers arrived during the late sixties, and in 1870 the population of the area was 15,272. Then during the seventies the periods of greatest immigration came before the Panic of 1873, when approximately 51,000 arrived, and in the period from 1878 to 1880, when the influx amounted to roughly 71,000. The business depression that followed the Panic of 1873 coincided with the disastrous grasshopper plague and the drought of 1874. In the latter year immigration almost came to a standstill, and many families had to leave the area. Then immigration increased slowly in 1875, picked up momentum from 1876 to 1878, when approximately 37,500 settlers arrived, and reached a peak of about 71,000 during the last two years of the decade.

In contrast with the seventies, when there was no net population decline, the decade of the eighties was characterized by two periods

²⁸ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 25-26.

of declining population and a longer period of rapid growth. Largely due to a severe drought, the area lost about 14,000 inhabitants between 1880 and 1882. This was followed by a very prosperous period culminating in a boom in 1886 and 1887. The influx of people from 1882 to 1887 amounted to the remarkable total of 203,266. A very severe depression followed the boom, and between 1887 and 1890 the area lost about 46,000 inhabitants (Figure 2).

One should not think that immigrants spread evenly over the area and that one part was just as desirable as another. On the contrary, there was much more concentration in some parts than others. The eastern subarea's percentage of total area population declined almost steadily from 1870 to 1890 while that of the central and western subareas increased almost constantly. In 1870 the eastern subarea contained

Table 2
Area and Subarea Population, South Central Kansas, 1860-1900

Year ^a	Eastern subarea	Central subarea	Western subarea	Total
1860 ^b	....^c	....^c	....^c	2,651
1870 ^b	13,231	1,860	181	15,272
1873	36,871	26,341	2,776	65,988
1874	31,968	30,931	3,360	66,259
1876	55,689	46,975	11,832	114,496
1878	66,781	64,373	20,247	151,401
1880	90,911	98,224	32,920	222,055
1880 ^b	90,901	98,123	33,291	222,315
1882	87,723	91,157	29,112	207,992
1884	108,369	134,339	34,080	276,788
1886	133,422	181,302	60,723	375,447
1887	135,986	203,627	71,645	411,258
1888	130,237	201,505	69,557	401,299
1890	128,772	179,371	57,039	365,182
1890 ^b	128,127	179,731	59,213	365,071
1892	119,347	172,059	56,416	347,822
1894	114,439	164,611	53,482	332,532
1896	110,794	155,182	47,676	313,652
1898	115,908	159,307	48,157	323,372
1900	120,717	169,262	53,362	343,341
1900 ^b	121,884	173,425	56,176	351,485

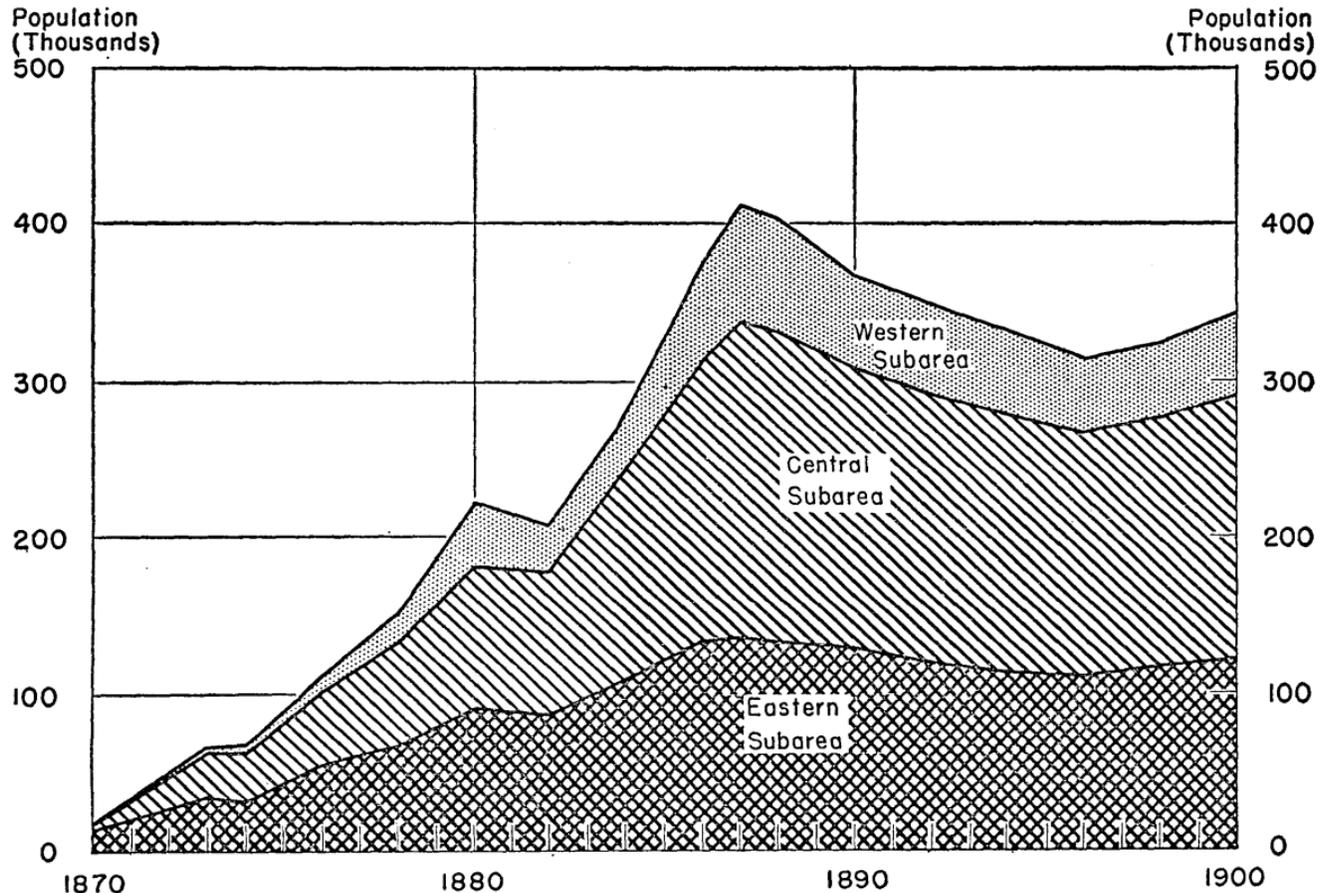
^a Unless otherwise indicated, state census figures are used.

^b Federal census.

^c Not available.

Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, Population of the United States*, Vol. I, p. 165; *Ninth Census of the United States: 1870, Statistics of the Population of the United States*, Vol. I, pp. 20-30; *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Statistics of the Population of the United States*, Vol. I, pp. 60-61; *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Report on Population of the United States*, Vol. I, p. 20; *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Population*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 20; Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Second Annual Report, 1873; Third Annual Report, 1874; Fifth Annual Report, 1876; First Biennial Report, 1877-1878, to Twelfth Biennial Report, 1899-1900, inclusive.*

Figure 2
Population by Area and Subareas, South Central Kansas, 1870-1900



Source: Table 2.

86.6 per cent of the people in South Central Kansas while the central and western subareas lagged far behind with 12.2 per cent and 1.2 per cent, respectively. The population distribution then changed considerably during the seventies, when the central subarea grew more rapidly than its neighbor east of it. By 1880 it was the most populous subarea with 98,123 inhabitants, 44.1 per cent of the area's population. On the other hand, the most sparsely populated counties were in the western subarea. In this region some growth was observed during the early seventies; then a period of stagnation set in during the middle years of the decade; after this the region attracted settlers in substantial numbers.

During the decade of the eighties the area had a net population loss from 1880 to 1882 and from 1887 to 1890, amounting to 14,323 and 46,076, respectively. The intervening period from 1882 to 1887 was one of phenomenal growth, and the population increased 203,266. During this period the central subarea more than doubled in population, the western subarea had a two-and-a-half-fold increase, and the eastern subarea had a 15.5 per cent increase. The growth of the central subarea, both absolutely and relatively, during these two decades was most remarkable. Between 1870 and 1890 its population increased from 1,860 to 179,371, and its proportion of the total area population increased from about one eighth to one half. On the other hand, the eastern subarea, accounting for about seven eighths of the area's population in 1870, could claim but one third in 1890. In the latter year the remaining one sixth of the area's inhabitants were in the western subarea that two decades earlier had been occupied by only a handful of people.

A brief description of the occupation of each subarea and the fluctuations in the rate of population growth will be confined to the decade of the seventies since separate sections will be devoted to the boom of the eighties.

Generally speaking, the eastern counties were settled first. When no more land was available, immigrants pushed on west. This generalization must be qualified, however, by pointing out some of the variables that enter into the complex equation of land settlement. Some of the most important factors influencing the pattern of settlement

were the climate, the fertility, topography and price of land; the availability of water and timber; and the distance of land from railroads. Several of these factors have already been discussed briefly; others, such as the important factors of land policy and transportation, will receive separate treatment in subsequent sections. At this point it will suffice merely to describe the occupation of the area and to account for the major fluctuations in immigration.

First Great Wave, 1869-1873

"Settlers are pouring into Kansas by carloads, wagon-loads, horse-loads, daily . . .," wrote Horace Greeley from Topeka in October of 1870. He went on to explain that this was ". . . because of the fertility of her soil, the geniality of her climate, her admirable diversity of prairie and timber, the abundance of her living streams, and the marvelous facility wherewith homesteads may here be created."²⁹ Statistical sources and contemporary accounts indicate that South Central Kansas attracted a large proportion of these settlers. Immigration commenced on a large scale after the Civil War; in the three years from 1870 to 1873 the influx amounted to about 51,000.

Most of these early settlers occupied land in the eastern subarea. One old settler wrote, "From the close of the war until 1871 Greenwood County had a rapid growth, people flocked to the County from all directions," and they were said to have begun the occupation of the uplands.³⁰ Butler county, according to Miss Perrine, ". . . was practically all settled by 1873, with the exception of the grazing district bordering the Flint Hills. Much land had been brought under cultivation and the settlers had become practically self-supporting, for they were becoming fairly well supplied with cows, hogs, and chickens."³¹ Population statistics suggest that the other Flint Hills counties—Chase, Marion, Cowley, Howard, and Chautauqua—were quite well settled by the close of 1873.

The next most important region of settlement was the central subarea, accounting for nearly 40 percent of the area's inhabitants in

²⁹ Daniel W. Wilder, *Annals of Kansas, 1541-1886*, p. 529.

³⁰ Kansas State Historical Society, "History of Greenwood County," *Manuscript Collections of Greenwood County*.

³¹ Perrine, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

1873. Here the first settlements of any consequence were located along the Smoky Hill river in northern McPherson county in 1866.³² A few years later settlers pushed south and west to occupy lands along the Arkansas river and its tributaries. Among the choice locations were the valleys of the Little and Big Arkansas rivers in Sedgwick county. The *Wichita Eagle* for April 6, 1876, said, "During the fall and winter of '69 immigration was brisk, . . . and in January, 1870, a census was taken and it was found there were six hundred and seven souls in the county, and the people still kept coming." They came in such numbers that Sedgwick county had a population of 8,766 in 1873; in the same year Sumner county reported 5,690 inhabitants.³³

Settlers pushed west along the Arkansas river and began to settle in the northeastern part of Reno county and the southern part of Rice county in 1870 and 1871. With the coming of the railroad in the summer of 1872, settlers literally flocked into these counties. "The number of people settling in the Arkansas Valley and Great Southwest is something stupendous. The tide of immigration to Kansas is evidently in this direction," said the *Hutchinson News* on July 4, 1872.

Comparatively few immigrants ventured into the less hospitable western subarea in the early seventies; those who did settled mainly along the Arkansas river in Barton and Pawnee counties or along the numerous wooded streams in Barber and Comanche counties. These were the only organized counties of the subarea in 1873, and their populations in that year were reported as follows: Barton, 860; Pawnee, 674; Comanche, 634; and Barber, 608.³⁴

Depression, Drought, and Grasshoppers

A period of abundant rainfall and general prosperity thus encouraged settlers to move into areas hitherto considered unsuitable for permanent occupation. These favorable conditions did not last, however, and the Panic of 1873 and, more particularly, the drought and grasshopper plague of 1874 caused many settlers to regret their coming to the area. The financial panic received considerable attention in area

³² Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 811.

³³ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Report of the State Board of Agriculture, 1873*, p. 67.

³⁴ *Idem.*

newspapers after the failure of Jay Cooke and Company on September 18, 1873. An editorial in the *Hutchinson News* on October 25 said that several banks in northeastern Kansas had suspended currency payments and that in the Hutchinson area, "Currency is yet scarce and in great demand, still the season of recuperation has commenced, and in a short while business will again be flush, and in a more healthful condition than ever before."

Although many people predicted that prosperity was just around the corner, the unpleasant fact was that a severe business depression was commencing and would continue until the late seventies. The latter part of 1873 marked the beginning of hard times, but the following year witnessed the two dreaded scourges of drought and grasshoppers. South Central Kansas lived up to its title of "The Great American Desert" in 1874, and in a large portion of the area no rain fell from spring until fall. The story of the catastrophic plague of grasshoppers that swooped in like the rushing of mighty waters and destroyed practically all of the vegetation of the state in July and August of 1874 has been told many times so the details need not be recounted here.

While hoards of insects visited all of the counties in the area, the frontier settlements in the central and western counties felt the brunt of the attack. By December of 1874 a total of 3,250 destitute persons were reported in nine central and western counties of the area, about one sixth of the total population of these counties.³⁵ The County Commissioners of Edwards county reported on conditions as follows:

Our crops are totally destroyed; not one bushel of vegetables or grain being saved for man or beast. Our people are mostly poor people, without wealthy relatives or friends to assist them in their extremity. We are the furthest west of any agricultural settlement in the State. We have personally and carefully investigated each case and find six families, containing twenty-two persons, totally destitute; five families containing eighteen persons, partially destitute. The above are the only persons in the county that will need aid to carry them to another crop.³⁶

Several measures were taken to relieve the distress. Some aid was provided by issuing state and county relief bonds, but the greater part

³⁵ The number of destitute people by area counties was reported as follows: Barber, 200; Barton, 300; Edwards, 100; Harvey, 300; McPherson, 600; Pawnee, 150; Pratt, 100; Reno, 1,000; Rice, 500. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Third Annual Report, 1874*, pp. 14-15, 52-53.

³⁶ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 1367.

was private charity. Through the agency of a Central Relief Committee, successful appeals were made to people in eastern states. Large quantities of food, clothing, and other necessities, some given by the United States Army, were supplied to needy settlers. One writer estimates that the total relief in Kansas amounted to about \$500,000.³⁷

Good Times, 1876-1878

After the disaster of 1874 the tide of immigration began to roll again, and by 1876 there was a rapid influx of settlers. This movement accelerated during 1877 and 1878, when agricultural conditions were extremely favorable. During this second great wave of immigration, areas hitherto unoccupied attracted settlers for the first time, and old areas of settlement became more densely populated. One old settler who witnessed the occupation of Sedgwick, Kingman, and Harper counties between 1870 and 1878 wrote:

In the years between 1870 and 1874 the settlements pushed steadily west and southwest, uniformly possessing all the land as they advanced until they reached, in 1874, the eastern confines of Garden Plain, Afton, and Viola townships. But the misfortunes of that year, drought first and then the locust invasion, brought the movement partially to a stand-still, for a year or more, but in the autumn of 1875 and spring of 1876 the tide had again turned, and in the latter half of 1876 and 1877 was at full flood, and swept over all the remaining lands of Sedgwick County and into Harper and Kingman, both of which counties are now as well settled as western Sedgwick was two years since.³⁸

The above account suggests that the eastern and central subareas recovered rather quickly from the drought and the grasshopper invasion of 1874. The recovery was much slower, however, in the western subarea. Medicine Lodge, for example, fell into a period of stagnation after its organization in 1873, and for five or six years the town scarcely moved, ". . . except as its cottonwood shanties were shaken by the wind."³⁹

The year 1878 was one of peak prosperity, and immigration was comparable to that of 1873. A brief history of Reno county in the *Topeka Capital* in 1911 said,

³⁷ Charles C. Howes, *This Place Called Kansas*, pp. 168-169.

³⁸ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 165 ("The Oldest Settler on the Ninnescah, Writes a Letter," *Wichita Eagle*, January, 1879).

³⁹ Percy S. Miller, "Pioneer History of Medicine Lodge," Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wichita, 1937, pp. 40-41.

1878 is a year well remembered in the history of Kansas, as that year the people fairly flocked to the country. All the crops were good and the old settlers almost forgot the hard times of former years and began to think that Kansas was surely a land of prosperity.⁴⁰

Hard Times Again, 1879-1880

Drought, crop failure, and a minor invasion of grasshoppers plagued the area again in 1879 and 1880; settlers in the central and western counties suffered considerable hardship. In Reno county, where the corn crop was a total failure and the wheat was scarcely worth cutting, "many of the settlers had to go to Wichita and Hutchinson to get corn for their horses."⁴¹ Acute suffering was reported in several western counties. While conditions may not have been as distressing as in 1874, by the late seventies there were about 30,000 more people in the western subarea to put up with the harsh conditions. In an article entitled "Destitute Settlers," the *Great Bend Democrat* reported in July of 1879,

The effects of the drought in the adjoining Counties are just now being felt by our citizens to a most aggravating degree. Citizens of Rush, Pratt and Stafford Counties, whose crops have completely failed, throng our streets every day asking assistance for themselves and helpless ones at home. During the past week we have noticed a number of young men and boys from Pawnee County begging for bread, and expressing a willingness to work for their board . . .⁴²

Summary

So far attention has been focused upon the occupation of South Central Kansas, but the movement into this area was only part of a much larger movement. The Director of the Census of 1880, "in examining the map showing the areas of settlement at this date, as compared with previous ones," was greatly impressed by "the great extent of territory which has been brought under occupation during the past ten years." He observed that settlements had spread westward over large areas of Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Texas, ". . . thus moving the frontier line of the main body of settlement westward

⁴⁰ Kansas State Historical Society, *Reno County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 115 ("Debts Once Paid in Buffalo Bones," *Topeka Capital*, June 11, 1911).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴² Kansas State Historical Society, *Barton County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 48 ("Destitute Settlers," *Commonwealth* (Topeka), July 19, 1879).

many scores of miles” He went on to point out that “The settlements in Kansas and Nebraska have made great strides over the plains, reaching at several points the boundary of the humid region, so that their westward extension beyond this point is to be governed hereafter by the supply of water in the streams.” In Kansas he noted that “the settlements have followed the Kansas River and its branches and the Arkansas nearly to the western boundary of the state.⁴³

⁴³ United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Statistics of the Population of the United States*, June 1, 1880, pp. XIX-XX.

Section V

LAND POLICY AND SETTLEMENT

The common belief is that practically all settlers who came to Kansas after the Civil War obtained free, or nearly free, land under the provisions of the Homestead Law of 1862. According to this law, any American citizen or alien who had filed his or her intention papers, if 21 years of age or over, if the head of a family, or if he had served as many as 14 days in the Army or Navy, had the right, upon paying a \$10 fee, to file a claim to as many as 160 acres of unappropriated public land subject to entry at a United States land office. (Until 1879 only 80 acres could be homesteaded in the even numbered sections along land grant railroad lines.) The homesteader was required to make certain improvements and live on the land for five years. At the end of that period, if by that time a citizen of the United States, the homesteader could get a final patent after paying fees and commissions ranging from \$18 to \$36 in Kansas. The law also provided that a homestead could not be seized for any debts contracted before the issuance of the patent.¹

The adoption of this law appeared to mark a complete break with the past. It was generally believed that public lands had ceased to be considered as a source of government revenue and were now to be given free to settlers, that land speculation was outlawed, and that full expression had been given to demands of underprivileged classes whose slogan was "land for the landless, homes for the homeless." Senator Plumb of Kansas believed that the Homestead Law was one of the wisest provisions ever made by a nation; in a speech delivered in the Senate on July 16, 1890, he said:

There is another policy and a wiser one, which says that wherever the Government has land which any citizen wishes for the purpose of making a home thereon, for the purpose of developing it and making it fruitful, we will let him have it. It gives opportunities for enterprise, a field for the energies and aptitudes of our people. It gives them something to do on American soil, enables them to change their occupation, operates to relieve congestion which comes in our great cities; it is our perpetual safety-valve.²

¹ Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*, pp. 53-54.

² William E. Connelley, *The Life of Preston B. Plumb, 1837-1891*, pp. 359-360.

Despite this eulogistic statement and the hopes of a land hungry people, the truth is that the Homestead Law did not completely change our land system. Professor Gates, one of the leading land policy historians, writes that, "its [Homestead Act] adoption merely superimposed upon the old land system a principle out of harmony with it, and that until 1890 the old and the new constantly clashed." He goes on to point out that this law did not end the auction system or cash sales, that speculation and land monopolization continued after its adoption as widely perhaps as before, that "actual homesteading was generally confined to the less desirable lands distant from railroad lines, and that farm tenancy developed in frontier communities in many instances as a result of the monopolization of the land."³

Since Professor Gates' conclusions are based upon a carefully documented nationwide study, it might be asked whether they apply equally to South Central Kansas? In answering this question, it will be well

Table 3
Land Disposition, South Central Kansas

	Total acres	Percentage of total area	Average price per acre
Railroad land			
Santa Fe land grant	2,007,708	14.82	\$3.82
Kansas Pacific land grant	278,669	2.06	3.94
Missouri, Kansas & Texas land grant	143,739	1.06	4.00
Leavenworth, Lawrence & Galveston land grant	61,440	0.45	7.62
Total railroad land	2,491,556	18.39	
Indian land			
Osage Indian reservation	6,396,000*	47.22	1.25
School land			
Common school land	752,491	5.56	4.00
Other land			
Land available under the Pre-emption, Homestead, Agricultural College, Timber Culture and other land acts	3,904,822	28.83	....
Total land in South Central Kansas	13,544,869	100.00	

* Approximate. Included in this total is a narrow strip of land running along the entire southern boundary of the area and known as the Cherokee Strip.

Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *First Biennial Report, 1877-1878*, pp. 607-608, 611; *Third Annual Report, 1874*, p. 329; *Builer County Deed Record*, Vol. A, pp. 486-489; Vol. B, pp. 521-529; *Marion County Tax Roll, 1868-1873*; *Chase County Tax Roll, 1868-1869*; Anna H. Abel, "Indian Reservations in Kansas and the Extinguishment of Their Title," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903-1904*, pp. 77-107.

³ Paul W. Gates, "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. XLI, No. 4, July, 1936, pp. 654-655.

to show statistically how the land in the 24-county area was disposed of under different acts of the Federal Government. Then it will be necessary to consider each act separately and show how it affected the area's settlement and economic development.

The main land act classifications, together with the number of acres, the percentage of total area, and the average price per acre, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the high hopes held out by proponents of the Homestead Act were only partly realized. Over two thirds, 71.04 per cent, of the area was sold to settlers at prices ranging from \$1.25 to \$7.62 or more an acre. The remaining 28.96 per cent was disposed of under several land acts; the most important of these were the Homestead, Timber Culture, Pre-emption, and Agricultural College Acts. These different classifications of land and the laws pertaining thereto will now be considered in more detail.

Railroad Land and Its Disposition

Land grants to railroads amounted to 2,491,556 acres, more than one sixth (18.39 per cent) of the total area. This land belonged to four railroad companies: the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe; the Kansas Pacific; the Missouri, Kansas and Texas; and the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston. Only passing mention needs to be made of the last three railroads since their main lines ran through counties adjacent to the area, and only a small fraction of their land grants was situated in the counties under consideration. The Santa Fe, on the other hand, received a land grant in Kansas amounting to 2,944,788 acres,⁴ with 2,007,708 acres (68.18 per cent) in South Central Kansas. Its land constituted 80.58 per cent of all railroad land in the area.

Santa Fe Land Grant

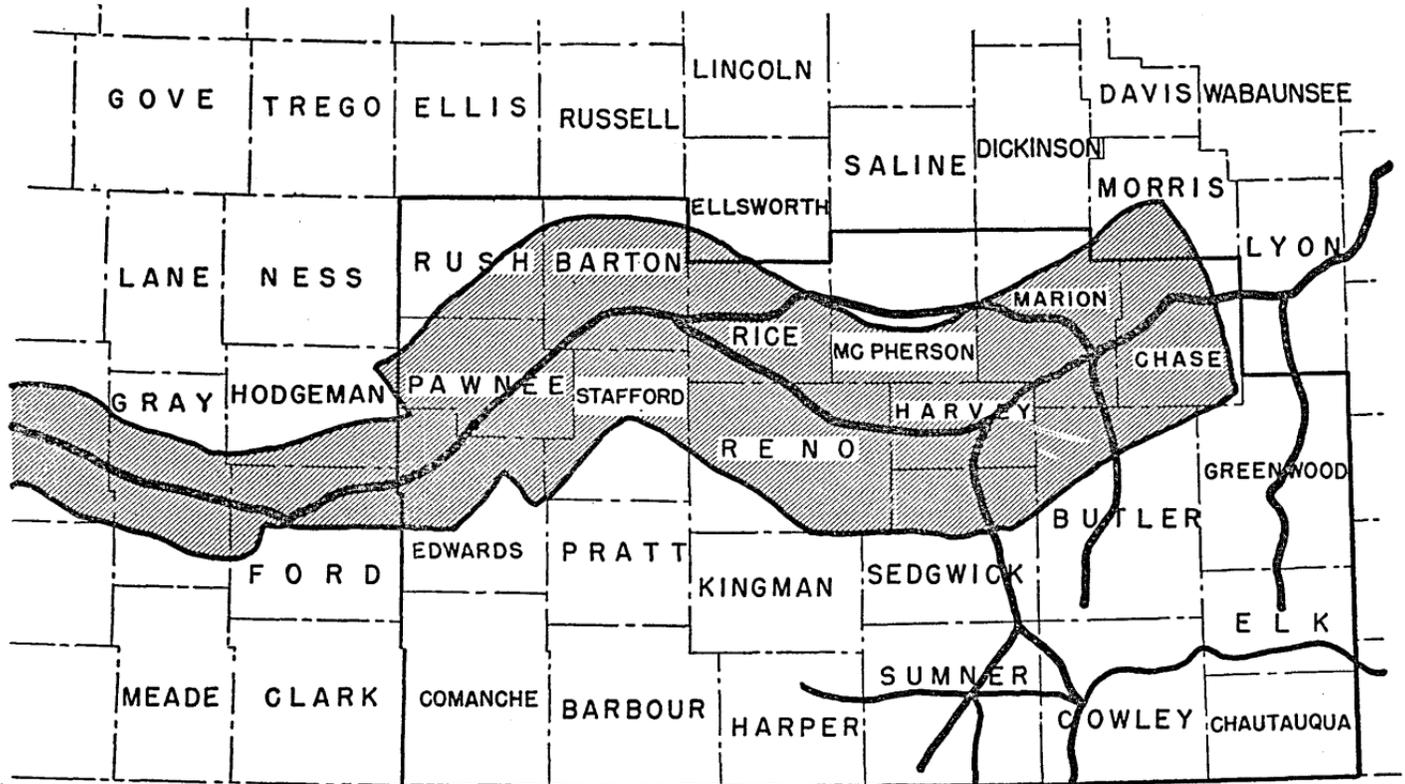
This land grant is of particular significance in two respects. In the first place, by far the greatest proportion of the company's land was located in the south central part of the state (Figure 3); and, secondly, much of this land remained unoccupied for a decade or more because

⁴United States Department of the Interior, Commissioner of the General Land Office, *Annual Report, 1897*, p. 230.

Figure 3

The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Land Grant,^a South Central Kansas

[84]



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH CENTRAL KANSAS



LAND GRANT

RAILROAD —

^a The Santa Fe received the alternate sections of land.

Source: Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, Land Commissioner, *Fresh Facts About Kansas, the Star of the West* (with map showing railroad route and lands), 1882. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

settlers were unable or unwilling to pay the price charged by the railroad. In explaining why the company owned so much land in South Central Kansas, it is necessary to review briefly the land grant law. According to the Act of Congress, approved March 3, 1863, the State of Kansas was granted public land for the purpose of aiding in the construction of a railroad from Atchison via Topeka to the western line of the state. This grant, which the state transferred to the Atchison and Topeka Railroad Company, consisted of every alternate section of land, designated by odd numbers, for ten sections in width on each side of the line or 6,400 acres per mile. Moreover, an indemnity clause authorized the railroad to select lands within 20 miles on either side of the road, in lieu of granted lands sold or otherwise disposed of between the date of the grant and the date of the definite location of the road.⁵ Since the land along the line west to about the Chase county boundary was already occupied before the building of the road, the Santa Fe took advantage of this clause to claim indemnity land farther west. Figure 3 shows that the Santa Fe claimed alternate sections for about 20 miles on either side of the road in the more desirable central counties and that the grant narrowed down to about ten miles on either side in the subhumid western counties.

The practice of granting large tracts of public land to railroads came under severe criticism during the early seventies, and in Kansas several political parties incorporated planks in their platforms giving expression to popular feeling on this issue.⁶

While railroads received no further land grants after the early seventies, almost a decade elapsed before the administration of these grants was thoroughly investigated in Kansas. During the administration of Governor Glick in the early eighties, numerous complaints came to him from settlers along the line of the Santa Fe, "to the effect that the railroad contracts for the sale of lands covered very many

⁵ "Report of Honorable Samuel J. Crawford, State Agent, to the Governor of Kansas, Relative to the Claims of the State against the United States, and Adjustment of Railroad Land Grants, 1886," *Public Documents, Kansas, 1886*, p. 12.

⁶ Wilder, *op. cit.*, pp. 526, 575, 579.

⁷ James Humphrey, "The Administration of George W. Glick," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1905-1906*, Vol. IX, p. 412.

tracts of land which were not included in the grant to that road.” Governor Glick referred the matter to the legislature, and on March 6, 1883, an act was approved authorizing and empowering ex-Governor Crawford to represent the state before the executive departments and committees of Congress in Washington, “in all matters pertaining to grants of land made by Congress to aid in the construction of railroads within the State of Kansas.” Crawford said he “spared no labor and shirked no duty or responsibility” in carrying out this disagreeable duty.⁸ Among other things he was successful in “restoring to the public domain 1,300,000 acres of land which the [Santa Fe] company was claiming and selling.”⁹ Other companies, such as the Kansas Pacific, possessed more land than the law permitted, and Crawford concluded that the railroad land grants had been administered by the Department of the Interior in “reckless disregard of law and the rights of settlers.”¹⁰

When it is considered that business and political morality was at a very low ebb in the post-Civil War period, it is not surprising that these and other questionable practices were commonplace.

Santa Fe Land Prices

Although the price of Santa Fe land was relatively high in the early seventies, it declined during the next decade and a half. From a peak average price of \$5.91 an acre in 1871, the price fell to a minimum average of \$2.44 in 1886; the over-all average was \$3.82.¹¹ This tendency can be explained largely in terms of the quality and the location of land. A broadside printed by the Santa Fe railroad in 1882 said, “The prices are regulated by the quality of the land, distance from a railroad station, access to running streams, timber, building stone, etc.”¹² Since the most valuable lands were situated in the eastern and central sub-areas, they were generally sold before the less desirable lands west of these areas.

⁸ *Public Documents, Kansas, 1886*, pp. 11-12.

⁹ Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

¹⁰ *Public Documents, Kansas, 1886*, p. 14.

¹¹ Henry V. Poor, *Manual of the Railroads of the United States, 1871-1886*.

¹² Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, Land Commissioner, *Fresh Facts About Kansas, the Star of the West*.

Santa Fe Land Avoided by Poor Settlers

Few settlers were able or willing to pay between \$4 and \$6 an acre for land even on the easy credit terms offered by the Santa Fe.¹³

As long as it was possible to homestead or pre-empt government land, the Santa Fe had difficulty disposing of its grant. County maps in the State Agricultural Reports for the seventies show a checkerboard pattern of settlement within the confines of the Santa Fe land grant in central Kansas. The even numbered sections open to pre-emptors and homesteaders were practically all taken up while only a few odd numbered railroad sections were occupied. In Chase county, for example, 408,203 taxable acres were reported in 1875, and the Santa Fe, owner of 131,331 acres in the county, had sold only 11,868 by October 31 of that year.¹⁴ A resident of Halstead wrote to the *Newton Kansan* on November 15, 1872,

Almost every quarter section and some eighty acre lots of government land have neat little residences upon them and nothing but the liberality of the government with the lands in favor of the railroads hinder this place from being thickly settled.¹⁵

In the same year an article in the *Hutchinson News* said,

Capital is timid and it is never invested largely in a sparsely settled country. After the government lands are all taken up in this county, which will be done next year, then the railroad lands will begin to sell to farmers of more means than the greater part of the homestead settlers . . .¹⁶

Railroad land grants forced most early settlers to locate many miles from the right-of-way, thus necessitating long hauls over roads full of ruts in dry seasons and nearly impassible when muddy or covered with snow. Furthermore, the transition to commercialized agriculture was delayed, for settlers without ready access to rail connections were forced to live a relatively self-sufficient existence.

¹³ According to a booklet published in 1874, the buyer of Santa Fe land had the choice of five methods of payment. The most liberal terms were as follows: "For the benefit of people with even less capital the second plan required no principal payments for four years and then one-eighth annually. Interest was at 7 per cent, 10 per cent reduction in payments if one-fifth were cultivated in four years." Lawrence L. Waters, *Steel Trails to Santa Fe*, p. 238.

¹⁴ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875*, pp. 314, 338.

¹⁵ *Newton Kansan*, November 21, 1872.

¹⁶ *Hutchinson News*, November 7, 1872.

Santa Fe's Desire for Well-To-Do Buyers

The Santa Fe directed its appeal mainly to well-to-do settlers who could afford to buy railroad land. The company issued a pamphlet in 1879 saying:

We cannot advise any married man to come here with less than \$800 to \$1,000, to make a start on a farm, or a single man with less than \$500 to \$600, and then it will require plenty of grit, hard work and rigid economy to get through the first year or two If you are happy in the East stay there Living costs are moderately high. A house 16 × 28 of 1½ stories can be erected plainly for \$375, neatly for \$450 Steaks are 8 cents to 10 cents per lb.¹⁷

Professor Waters writes in this connection, "Although the lands were lavishly praised, almost every publication cautioned people not to try Kansas unless they had a nest egg of several hundred dollars."¹⁸

To attract the most prosperous settlers, the Santa Fe established an elaborate propaganda and sales organization. Under the direction of Land Commissioner A. E. Touzalin and his successor, A. S. Johnson, an army of land agents set to work in eastern states and foreign countries to recruit buyers for the company's lands. A system of effective newspaper advertising was inaugurated, and literally millions of pamphlets, broadsides, and maps were printed in English and several foreign languages and distributed on a widespread basis. This promotional activity gave rise to a flood of inquiries, and before long the headquarters of the passenger and land departments at Topeka "became a veritable beehive of clerks, correspondents, land-agents, newspaper reporters, advertising solicitors and land-seekers."¹⁹

Advertising the land by word of mouth or printed matter was not enough. Like the proverbial Missourian, the prospective land buyer had to be shown. The Santa Fe, therefore, offered reduced rail fares to prospective buyers. One company broadside said that land exploration tickets could be obtained at all the principal railroad ticket offices in the United States at "greatly reduced rates," and it went on to point out, "The amount of fare paid over this Company's line will be refunded if a purchase of 160 acres or railroad land is made, or half the amount if

¹⁷ Waters, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁹ Carl B. Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work for Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society, 1905-1906*, Vol. IX, p. 487.

eighty acres are purchased."²⁰ Thousands of potential buyers took advantage of these excursion rates, and, among other things carefully inspected the six experimental plots where the Santa Fe carried on demonstration work in the culture of different crops and trees.²¹ The railroad also transported the personal effects of land buyers at reduced rates or free of charge.²²

In spite of all this activity, the evidence indicates that the Santa Fe's promotional efforts were rather slow in yielding fruit. The Mennonite purchase, it is true, was a notable exception, but it should not be overly magnified. Only about one third of the company's land was sold during the first ten years (1871-1880) as compared with about two thirds during the next six years, when boom conditions prevailed.²³

Indian Lands

Settlers were not only denied free access to nearly two and a half million acres of railroad land. They were also unable to take advantage of the Homestead Act in claiming land in the old Osage Indian Reservation, having more than six million acres located in the southern part of the area. This vast tract of land, comprising 47.22 per cent of South Central Kansas, has a history that illustrates the land grabbing propensity of our forefathers. In 1825 the Federal Government entered into a treaty with the Osage tribe whereby the latter agreed to move to a new reservation in southern Kansas. This reservation 50 miles wide and 125 miles long in part comprised what was later the area counties of Chautauqua, Elk, Cowley, Sumner, Harper, Kingman, Barber, Comanche, Kiowa, and parts of Pratt, Sedgwick, Butler, and Greenwood.²⁴

Little pressure from the white man was felt by the Osages until the close of the Civil War, but during the next five years they were harried by land hungry settlers and speculators who prevailed upon the

²⁰ Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Land Commissioner, *Fresh Facts About Kansas, the Star of the West*.

²¹ Waters, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

²² Carl B. Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work for Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1905-1906*, Vol. IX, p. 493.

²³ Poor, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Berlin B. Chapman, "Removal of the Osages from Kansas," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 3, August, 1938, p. 287.

Federal Government to get rid of the Indians. By a treaty of September 29, 1865, the Osages agreed to a division of their reservation into four distinct tracts. In the eastern part of the reservation a tract 30 x 50 miles was ceded to the Federal Government for \$300,000. Another tract 20 miles wide extending along the northern part of the reservation for its entire length was to be held in trust and sold for the tribe's benefit at \$1.25 an acre. The deeded lands comprising the third tract, were scattered sections that had been usurped by squatters. They were to be sold in 160-acre tracts at \$1.25 an acre. The remaining tract, known as the Diminished Reservation and comprising over 7,000,000 acres, was reserved for the Osages. The treaty provided that, if the Osages should agree to remove from the Diminished Reservation and settle in the Indian Territory on terms agreeable to the United States and other Indian tribes, then the reservation should be disposed of by the United States in the same manner and for the same purpose as the trust lands, "except that fifty per cent of the proceeds of the sale of the diminished reservation might be used by the United States in the purchase of lands for a suitable home for the Osages in the Indian territory."²⁵

Diminished Reservation

This Diminished Reservation, located mainly in South Central Kansas, became a political football between 1865 and 1870. Exercising their right of "squatter sovereignty" that respected no law or treaty, more than 10,000 white settlers were reported to have moved into the Osage reservation by June of 1868.²⁶ As immigration continued, conditions became almost intolerable for the Osages. A special Indian commissioner found them "in a state of almost complete destitution" in 1869, and another agent said, "Their crops were destroyed by herds of cattle and other stock belonging to white settlers; and lawless white men stole their horses and robbed their corn cribs."²⁷

Faced with an impossible situation, the Osages decided to sell their lands in the Diminished Reservation and move to the Indian Terri-

²⁵ *Ibid.*; Anna H. Abel, "Indian Reservations in Kansas and the Extinguishment of their Title," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903-1904*, Vol. VIII, p. 107.

²⁶ Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties*, p. 304.

²⁷ Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

tory. The squatters naturally assumed that the Federal Government would negotiate a new treaty with the tribe and that after it the usurped land in the abandoned reservation could be purchased according to the terms of the Pre-emption Act in quarter-section tracts at \$1.25 an acre.

Near Steal

A treaty was negotiated, it is true, but instead of the squatters getting first right to the land, it was agreed that the entire Diminished Reservation should be sold to the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston railroad company at a price not to exceed 25 cents an acre.²⁸

The commissioners appointed to negotiate with the Osages were officials of the Indian Office and were subject to orders from the Secretary of the Interior. The unratified treaty signed on May 20, 1868, was, in Governor Crawford's words:

... an audacious attempt on the part of the Secretary of the Interior and his confederates to transfer to a railroad company by unheard of methods seven million acres of land for a mere bagatelle in comparison to their real value.²⁹

This early version of the Teapot Dome Scandal came as a shock to the squatters, and they sought to arouse public opinion on their behalf. Among other supporters, the Republican Party of Kansas came to their aid; and in a resolution of September 9, 1868, it condemned "the policy of disposing of Indian reservations to railroads or land monopolies, and insist that such lands be immediately opened to actual settlers."³⁰ Previous to this resolution Governor Crawford sent a personal letter of complaint to the President of the Senate and the Chairmen of the House and Senate Committees on Public Lands. A memorial bearing the signatures of the Governor and five state officials was sent to the Senate. The Attorney General of Kansas hurried to Washington to defeat the treaty when it was presented to the Senate for ratification; he was ably assisted by Congressman Sidney Clarke of Kansas. Governor Crawford, who regarded the treaty as "one of the most infamous outrages ever attempted in this country," says that its chief opponents were George W. Julian of Indiana, Chairman of the House

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.

²⁹ Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties*, p. 300.

³⁰ Wilder, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

Committee on Public Lands, and Judge Lawrence of Ohio, who "opened with Gatling guns and riddled the treaty until it became a stench, and was finally withdrawn from the Senate."³¹ Finally, on July 15, 1870, Congress provided for the removal of the Osages, and their reservation was thrown open to settlement.³²

Late Settlement of Indian Lands

The fact that settlers had to pay \$1.25 an acre for former Osage lands helps to account for the slow development of this region, especially the southwestern counties of Kingman, Harper, Pratt, Barber, Kiowa, and Comanche. The annual reports of the Commissioner of the General Land Office show that the bulk of former Osage lands was sold from 1880 to 1886.

School Lands

A third class of land not open to homesteaders was the Common School Land. This was granted to the state by the Federal Government for educational purposes and consisted of the sixteenth and thirty-sixth sections in each township in the state. This meant that one eighteenth of the area, 752,491 acres, was reserved for school purposes. According to an act of the State Legislature of February, 1867, none of the Common School Land was to be sold for less than \$3 an acre.³³ Actually, the price obtained in the area was well above this figure in the period up to 1880. Between December 1, 1876, and June 30, 1878, the average price in the 15 area counties reporting sales was \$4.74. These high prices naturally discouraged buyers, and from 1866 to 1880 only 8.2 per cent of all the Common School Land in the area was sold. On the other hand, the decade of the eighties witnessed a significant price decline accompanied by a marked increase in sales. The average price had declined to \$3.31 by 1885, and 44.3 per cent of the area's school lands were sold during this decade. Sales in the nineties amounted to only 10.8 per cent of the total, and the remaining 36.7 per cent was sold after 1900.³⁴

³¹ Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties*, p. 307.

³² Wilder, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

³³ Perrine, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

³⁴ Auditor of State, *State Auditor's Report, 1866-1870*, Vol. I; *Annual Report, 1871-1879; First Biennial Report, 1877-1878 to Seventeenth Biennial Report, 1909-1910*.

Land Speculation

What, then, of the homesteader, the little man who was promised a quarter section of land where he could establish a family sized farm? After the Civil War these people by the thousands streamed westward, seeking free homesteads under the Act of 1862. One observer of this movement was Miss Emily Elizabeth Combes, who wrote of the land hungry migrants at Kansas City in 1871 as follows:

When I look around the depot now I think every nation under the sun has contributed to its occupants—judging from their appearance and babel of tongues. Most of them are land hunters and the main talk of all these people is about land! Listening one can catch the words—"Homestead, timber claim, section, stakes, corner lots," etc. There is a strange, repulsive, foreign look upon most of the faces in the crowd—Scandinavian, Irish, Germans, Swedes, Americans—and oh! the fumes of whiskey and tobacco!³⁵

If these land hunters decided to settle in South Central Kansas, they would find that over two thirds of the area was not open to homesteaders. What were their possibilities of getting free land in the remaining one third or less of the area?

In answering this question, one must remember that the adoption of the Homestead Law merely superimposed upon the old land system a principle out of harmony with it. In other words, old land acts and practices making it possible for speculators³⁶ to amass large holdings were kept in force after 1862, and new laws of a similar nature were enacted. Old laws and practices included the Pre-emption Act of 1841, the cash sales system, and the practice of issuing military land warrants. New laws included the Agricultural College Act of 1862 and other special acts creating Indian land scrip and other compensatory scrip.³⁷

Agricultural College Act

Of the above acts, the Agricultural College (or Morrill) Act of July 2, 1862, was most widely used by speculators in acquiring large tracts of land in the area. According to this act, each state or territory

³⁵ Combes, *op. cit.*, April 21, 1871, p. 2.

³⁶ In this chapter the word "speculator" refers to large-scale land operators, and it does not include actual settlers, many of whom speculated in a small way.

³⁷ Paul W. Gates, "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. XLI, No. 4, July, 1936, pp. 664-665.

to become a state was given 30,000 acres of public land for each Senator and Representative in Congress for establishing an agricultural and mechanical college. States or territories having public lands within their borders received the land outright while states without public lands received scrip for the land they were entitled to have. These landless states, located mainly in the East, were required to sell the scrip to assignees who could use it to enter "any of the unappropriated lands to the United States subject to sale at private entry at one dollar and twenty-five cents, or less, per acre."³⁸ This act was severely criticized by western Congressmen. According to Professor Gates,

Thoughtful westerners, no matter how much they wanted agricultural colleges, could not bring themselves to support a measure which would further land monopoly by giving speculators the chance to acquire nine or ten million acres of public lands at substantially less than the government minimum price.

These western critics argued that it was inconsistent for Congress to promise free homesteads to actual settlers while at the same time facilitating land monopolization by the grant of scrip to the eastern states.³⁹

Kansas was one of the western states with a large quantity of unappropriated land; here a total of 684,143 acres were located with agricultural college scrip between January 1, 1865, and June 30, 1870. This compares with a total of 1,439,367 acres taken up under the Homestead Act during the same period.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, it has not been possible to inspect the land office records at Washington, D. C., and determine the amount of land taken up under the Agricultural College Act in South Central Kansas, but an inspection of the tax rolls and deed records in several eastern counties of the area suggests that it was fairly substantial.

Area Land Speculators

Table 4 shows the landholdings in excess of 5,000 acres in four area counties between 1863 and 1873.

Several of these large landholders have been identified. Amos A. Lawrence, a resident of Boston, Massachusetts, prominent among the

³⁸ Paul W. Gates, "Western Opposition to the Agricultural College Act," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. XXXVII, March, 1941, No. 1, pp. 109-110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁰ United States Department of the Interior, Commissioner of the General Land Office, *Annual Reports, 1865-1870*.

promoters of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, was the largest landholder in the area with a total of 64,140 acres. According to Gates, he located 58,360 acres in Kansas in 1866 with agricultural college scrip.⁴¹ Lawrence is also referred to in R. H. Fisher's *Biographical Sketches of El Dorado Citizens*. This book says that the first taxes were collected in Butler county in 1867 and that they

. . . came principally, from non-residents, who had located land warrants, or scrip, on certain lands, received patents therefore from the government and thus subjected such lands to taxation. There were 29,700 acres of land assessed in Butler County for the year 1867. The heaviest taxpayer on real estate was a party by the name of A. A. Lawrence, who owned at that time, 21,100 acres of the 29,700 assessed.⁴²

Lawrence and other speculators acquired additional land in Butler county. A deed record shows that 27,840 acres were located in that county with agricultural college scrip between September of 1869 and November of 1870 and that the three largest holders were Jerome Thompson, Francis A. McCarty, and Amos A. Lawrence with 6,080, 3,680, and 1,920 acres, respectively.⁴³ The significant thing is that this land was located with scrip that had depreciated in value to less than half of the maximum price of \$1.25 an acre. Out of 27,840 acres, 12,160 were located with Pennsylvania scrip costing an average 52 cents an

Table 4
Landholdings in Excess of 5,000 Acres, Chase, Marion, Greenwood, and Butler Counties, 1863-1873

Name	Chase	Marion	Greenwood	Butler	Total
Amos A. Lawrence	11,840	11,840	17,440	23,020	64,140
William Scully	21,960	....	....	21,960
John Niccolls	15,880	....	....	15,880
Teleg C. Caneby	9,280	....	9,280
Walter B. Beebe	6,880	....	....	6,880
Jerome Thompson	6,080	6,080
William J. Barney	5,680	....	....	5,680
J. K. Finley	5,360	....	....	5,360
Q. S. Crookham	5,323	....	5,323
A. S. Kimball	5,314	....	....	5,314
Total	11,840	72,914	32,043	29,100	145,897

Source: Tax rolls and deed records of above mentioned counties, 1863-1873.

⁴¹ Paul W. Gates, "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. XLI, No. 4, July, 1936, p. 665.

⁴² R. H. Fisher, *Biographical Sketches of El Dorado Citizens*, p. 16.

⁴³ *Butler County Deed Record*, Vol. A.

acre, 5,920 with Ohio scrip at 54 cents an acre, and 4,160 with Massachusetts scrip at 56 cents an acre.⁴⁴ The tax rolls of Chase, Marion, and Greenwood counties show that Lawrence had sold most of his land by 1873 so it may be inferred that he was merely interested in speculative profits.

Lawrence and other speculators acquired large tracts of some of the best land in the above mentioned counties with agricultural college scrip, and their speculative profits must have been considerable. Actual settlers registered protests against this act, and Congress amended it on July 27, 1868, to the effect, "That in no case shall more than three sections of public lands of the United States be entered in any one township by scrip issued to any state under the act approved July 2, 1862, for the establishment of an Agricultural College therein."⁴⁵

William Scully, who in 1873 owned 21,960 acres of land in Marion county, was the second largest landholder in the area. The fifth son of an Irish Catholic landlord, he came to America about 1849 or 1850 to invest the money he obtained from the sale of part of his Irish estate. Scully, who first purchased prairie land in Logan county, Illinois, continued buying real estate until by 1900 he had amassed 220,000 acres of farm land in Illinois, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. The total cost of this land was reported at \$1,350,000.⁴⁶

Coming to Kansas in June of 1870, Scully traveled by wagon over the unoccupied public domain collecting samples of soil and marking on a map the places he secured them. After these samples were analyzed by a chemist and the best lands selected, Scully went to the Junction City Land office and purchased of the Federal Government 14,060 acres in Marion county and 1,160 acres in Dickinson county.

Between 1870 and 1886 Scully more than doubled his holdings in Marion county and also made considerable purchases in Butler county. In the former county his holdings increased from 21,960 acres in 1873 to 55,666 acres in 1886. Large and small parcels of land were purchased

⁴⁴ Samuel D. Halliday, *History of the Agricultural College Land Grant of July 2, 1862*, pp. xvi, xvii.

⁴⁵ Kansas State Historical Society, Letter from Department of the Interior to Register and Receiver of United States Land Office, Humboldt, Kansas, dated Washington, D. C., August 12, 1868, United States Land Office, Humboldt, 1868.

⁴⁶ Homer E. Socolofsky, "The Scully Land System in Marion County," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, November, 1950, pp. 337-338.

from numerous individuals, a considerable proportion of whom were absentee owners, and a total of 8,622 acres were purchased from the Santa Fe Railroad Company at a cost of \$38,012. Altogether Scully paid \$179,-197 for his 55,666 acres in Marion county, an average of \$3.22 an acre. His lands in Butler county, amounting to 8,605 acres in 1886, cost him a total of \$77,410 or \$9 an acre.⁴⁷

Unlike Amos Lawrence, who sold his land quickly for a speculative profit, Scully generally held on to his land and leased it to tenants. His leases usually ran five or six years and were renewable if the tenant proved satisfactory. Rent was payable in cash, taxes were the obligation of tenants, and improvements, such as fences, houses, barns, and other buildings, were constructed by tenants who were responsible for their removal or sale at the termination of the lease.⁴⁸

Tenancy was becoming quite common in Kansas and other mid-western states by the eighties, but small farmers continued to regard it as an alien form of land tenure to be exorcised at all costs. Under these conditions it was only natural that the name "Scully" should become anathema in Marion county. With public opinion on its side, the Marion county *Register* carried on a rabid anti-Scully campaign, referring to this absentee landlord as "Tyrant Scully," "Scully the 'Bum,'" "Skinning Scully," and condemning him for introducing the European feudal system into the county.⁴⁹ Legitimate grounds for complaint certainly existed. Among other things the tenant had to pay the cash rent before selling his crops and these fixed payments seldom allowed for poor crops and low prices.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Professor Socolofsky writes,

William Scully softened as a landlord in his last few years. [He died in 1906.] Those in close contact with him spoke highly of his character. Most of his tenants were so sure of his honor and generosity that they trusted him implicitly . . . In later years much of the antagonism against him died out.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 339-341.

⁴⁸ Paul W. Gates, "Frontier Landlords and Pioneer Tenants," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. XXXVIII, 1945, pp. 185-191.

⁴⁹ Socolofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

⁵⁰ Paul W. Gates, "Frontier Landlords and Pioneer Tenants," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. XXXVIII, 1945, pp. 185-191.

⁵¹ Socolofsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 339, 343-344.

Pre-emption Act

Two other land acts need to be considered briefly before the Homestead Act. One is the Pre-emption Act of 1841, mentioned in connection with the Osage lands; and the other is the Timber Culture Act of 1873. The Pre-emption Act continued in force after the passage of the Homestead Act. In brief, it allowed the squatter to have first right to purchase his holding at the minimum price an acre up to a maximum of 160 acres. The price was fixed at \$2.50 an acre for the alternate, even numbered sections within the land grant boundaries of railroads and \$1.25 an acre for other surveyed or unsurveyed public lands.⁵²

The Pre-emption Act allowed settlers to claim choice lands before they were surveyed and opened to homestead entry. This, together with the fact that pre-emptors could get possession of their land in a short time, led many settlers to take advantage of this act. Miss Combes wrote in this connection,

To pre-empt a claim one must be in *actual* possession six months in a year, build a house, adobe, dug-out, sod house, anything so it is big enough to turn around in. Dig a well and make a few improvements. It costs \$416.00 to pre-empt a claim but then one has possession in six months. Father is going to pre-empt a claim for me.⁵³

While it has not been possible to compute the amount of land taken up under the Pre-emption Act in the area, a total of 90,454 acres was pre-empted in the Wichita Land District, that comprised 42.7 per cent of the area, between January 1, 1872, and June 30, 1888. This was land pre-empted outside the Osage reservation, and it amounted to nearly one tenth of the quantity of land entered under the Homestead Act in the Wichita Land District during the same period.⁵⁴

Timber Culture Act

The Timber Culture Act of March 3, 1873, probably contributed less to the growth of speculation and monopoly than any land law passed after 1862. This law was introduced by Senator Phineas W. Hitchcock of Nebraska, who reasoned that, since trees tended to retain

⁵² Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875*, pp. 328-329.

⁵³ Combes, *op. cit.*, June 24, 1871, p. 14.

⁵⁴ United States Department of the Interior, Commissioner of the General Land Office, *Annual Reports, 1872-1888*.

moisture in the soil, it would be possible to change the subhumid climate of the West by planting a large number of trees. Professor Shannon summarizes the provisions of this act as follows:

The law, applying to the same classes of persons as did the Homestead Act, permitted any of them, even if they already had a Homestead and a pre-emption claim of a quarter section each, to take out papers on another 160 acres of relatively treeless land. The original law required the planting of one fourth of the area in trees within ten years. This proving too much, an amendment of June 14, 1878, limited the amount to one sixteenth and reduced the time to eight years. But for every year that the young seedlings or sprouts were destroyed by grasshoppers, drouth, or other calamity, a year's extension of time was allowed. In not less than eight years, when proof was given that at least 2,700 seeds or slips had been planted for each required acre and that 675 or more trees to the acre were still living and thriving, the settler could get a deed to the tract.⁵⁵

Settlers took advantage of the Timber Culture Act in considerable numbers largely because it enabled them to increase the size of their holdings with nearly free land. This was of particular importance in the subhumid western part of the area, where it was difficult to make a decent living on a quarter section of land.

Amount of Homestead Land

We come now to the central problem of determining how much land was taken up under the Homestead Act. It has been shown that homesteaders were unable to claim land in 71.17 per cent of the area; this part included the railroad land grants, the former Osage reservation, and the Common School Lands. We have also seen that land in the remaining 28.83 per cent of the area could be obtained by a number of methods; it could be purchased outright for cash, it could be located with agricultural college and military land scrip, and it could be taken up under the Pre-emption, Timber Culture, and Homestead Acts. The question is naturally raised as to what proportion of the area was homesteaded. Shifting land district boundaries make it difficult to arrive at an accurate figure, but a rough computation, based upon the Wichita Land District statistics, shows that only about 2,700,000 acres or one fifth of the total land in the area was taken up under the Homestead Act.

⁵⁵ Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture 1860-1897*, pp. 58-59.

Claim Jumpers

With such a small fraction of the area open to homesteaders, it is not surprising that settlers grabbed quickly the nearly free land and that latecomers should try, by fair means or foul, to take the land from the original claimants. Settlers were frequently engaged in bitter struggles for homestead and pre-emption claims. This is borne out in numerous contemporary accounts; two are worthy of mention at this point. Miss Combes who in 1871 pre-empted a quarter-section of land in Rice county close to the proposed line of the Santa Fe railroad, was approached by several individuals who urged her to sell her claim. When she refused, they tried to "jump" her claim. She wrote as follows in this connection:

The very next day after Mr. Brown [a land buyer] was here a "squatter" with his family moved there and began another house. That makes *three* houses on my claim. This "Squatter" is a regular western desperado and would just as soon shoot you if you tried to get him off. I could go to law but I do not know which I fear most—the desperado or the law.⁵⁶

This was merely one instance of claim jumping, but the practice appears to have been fairly widespread. The travails of the homesteader, particularly his troubles with claim jumpers, was the subject of the following letter in the *Hutchinson News* of March 6, 1873:

Most men who come here to seek homes are poor. The fact of their coming is *prima-facie* evidence to this effect, because rich people seldom emigrate. In a limited financial condition they file on a homestead. In a short while their small stock of money gives out. They have no crop, no credit, nothing to live upon. Unless they go to where there is work they must starve. In preference of course they go. Their families are often left with friends or brought to town for protection. The men go forth leaving their claims in a poorly improved state, but still in such condition as to plainly show that they are intended as the parties homes.

In this condition many a claim is "jumped." Often the owner has means scarcely sufficient to pay his expenses to the land office, to say nothing of lawyers' fees, etc. Sometimes the defendant knows nothing of the contest waged against him, and when he comes home to go ahead with his improvements, is surprised to find trouble on his hands. Homesteaders and pre-emptors have enough battles to fight without the addition of unnecessary ones, and the man who would "jump" . . . a claim under such circumstances, is no better than a highway robber. When I say this I admit there are two sides to every question, and that there are many cases in which "claim jumping" is justifiable, as where parties have filed without ever going to their claims, or intending to do so; or

⁵⁶ Combes, *op. cit.*, November 12, 1871, p. 37.

where they file simply for speculation; but where the parties are trying to comply with the *land laws* so far as circumstances will permit, for *humanity's sake* do not embarrass them by pouncing on their claims, using technicalities against them and putting them to serious expenses. With these views I say to claim hunters, be cautious as to facts before you "jump" claims.

[signed] Vincent V. Ijams.

Conclusions

It should be pointed out that, while nearly free land was relatively scarce and most of the land had to be purchased at prices ranging from \$1.25 to \$6 or more an acre, the fact remains that land was cheaper in the area than it was in neighboring states to the east. Settlers were, therefore, attracted by the cheaper land, but many who expected to obtain homestead land were disappointed. In subsequent sections we shall see that the heavy farm mortgage indebtedness of the eighties and the nineties was partly attributable to defects and loopholes in the government's land policy. Poor settlers mortgaged their farms to make land payments, and many of them eventually lost their property. Professor Shannon writes that "Two thirds of all homestead claimants before 1890 failed at the venture, and the great majority of all these were persons who had spent their earlier lives on the land."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*, p. 54.

Section VI

RESERVOIRS OF IMMIGRATION

We come now to a description of the regions that were left behind and the people and conditions prevailing there. Histories of Kansas often give the impression that the state was populated mainly by New Englanders who came to win the territory for the free state cause. Immigrants from New England, it is true, played a vital role in the struggle against slavery and left an indelible mark upon the political and the social institutions of the state. It is misleading, however, to believe that a large proportion of the Kansas settlers came directly from New England and other seaboard states. On the contrary, migration statistics show that most of the settlers came from midwestern states north and east of Kansas. Table 5 summarizes these statistics for the area in 1875 and 1885.

Table 5
Population Showing Place of Origin, South Central Kansas, 1875 and 1885

Origin	1875	Per cent of total area population	1885	Per cent of total area population
United States	77,898	92.68	318,407	95.07
Five leading states	50,224	59.75	179,930	53.72
Illinois	19,169	22.81	63,638	19.00
Missouri	10,044	11.95	36,313	10.84
Iowa	9,847	11.71	28,594	8.54
Indiana	6,396	7.61	30,907	9.23
Ohio	4,768	5.67	20,478	6.11
Next five leading states	9,008	10.72	31,844	9.51
Kentucky	2,147	2.55	8,030	2.40
Michigan	1,947	2.32	5,739	1.71
Wisconsin	1,870	2.23	4,353	1.30
Pennsylvania	1,549	1.84	8,344	2.49
New York	1,495	1.78	5,378	1.61
All other states and territories	5,715	6.80	23,430	7.00
Kansas	12,951	15.41	67,932	20.28
United States (state of origin unknown)	....	....	15,271	4.56
Foreign countries	4,550	5.41	16,516	4.93
Origin unknown	1,608	1.91	....	....
Total	84,056	100.00	334,923	100.00

Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875*, pp. 516-521; *Fifth Biennial Report, 1885-1886*, pp. 22-27.

According to Table 5, about one half of the area's population came from the five neighboring states of Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Indiana, and Ohio. Illinois, the leading state, supplied approximately one fifth of the inhabitants while Missouri, Iowa, Indiana, and Ohio each supplied between 5.67 and 11.95 per cent. The next five leading states of Kentucky, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and New York supplied in the aggregate about 10 per cent of the inhabitants while only about 7 per cent came from the remaining states and territories. An expected increase is observed in the proportion of inhabitants born in Kansas. The percentage was 15.41 in 1875, but by 1885 it rose to 20.28 per cent. One of the most striking facts emerging from this table is the very large proportion of settlers who came from other states and territories within the United States; and, conversely, the very small proportion coming from foreign countries. Between 92 and 95 per cent of the area's inhabitants came from other states and territories from 1875 to 1885 while in the same period only about 5 per cent were of foreign origin.

Immigrants from Other States

Why did so many settlers come to the area from neighboring states to the east? In answering this question, it is necessary to understand the problems of the prospective emigrant. Most settlers came to the new country to farm; in order to succeed, they obviously needed some knowledge of agriculture. The pioneer farmer also needed capital in the form of a team and a wagon, agricultural tools and implements, seeds, and some food and cash to tide him over until his first crop was harvested.

If you have nothing, [warned the *Boston Traveler* in 1876] don't go to Kansas expecting to get rich the first year. You will have to exercise economy and industry there as elsewhere. To commence, you want a team, farming implements, and something to live on the first year, as you cannot expect to raise much on sod.¹

While some free land was available under the Homestead Act, much of the land in the area had to be purchased from railroads, speculators, and the government; and additional capital was often needed for this

¹ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 100.

purpose. Furthermore, the settler had to bear the cost of transporting his family and possessions to the new home; this might be large or small, depending upon the distance and the mode of transport employed.

Considering all of these factors, it is not difficult to see why such a large proportion of the settlers came from neighboring states to the east. Transportation was not a very serious obstacle because of the relatively short journey to Kansas; if rail transport was too expensive, as it was for many settlers, there was cheaper water transport for part of the journey and the ubiquitous prairie schooner and ox team. Moreover, the inhabitants of Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, and other neighboring states were in the main experienced farmers. They generally had teams, farm implements, and other necessities for pioneer farming. As most of them were already seasoned migrants, having moved to earlier frontiers, severing local attachments and striking out for a new promised land was not difficult. On the other hand, the eastern factory worker lacked knowledge, skill, and means for such an undertaking. For the most part, these factors prevented him from taking advantage of the "safety valve" that the Homestead Act was intended to supply.²

There were also strong elements of push to be reckoned with in explaining the sources of emigration. On each succeeding frontier the first settlers generally found cheap and fertile land that they exploited to advantage under primitive conditions. In the course of time, however, settlers arrived in such numbers that they occupied all but the uninhabitable land, and pioneer farming gave way to a settled, commercialized form of agriculture. During this transition, land values rose, the soil lost some of its original fertility, and the growth of mechanized agriculture made it necessary to cultivate larger holdings. Under these conditions it was inevitable that some people would leave the area if they could obtain good land on easy terms farther west.

Land speculation was another factor of considerable importance in explaining emigration from areas that had been settled for a number of years. From 1830 to 1870 many eastern speculators acquired large tracts of prairie land in Indiana, Illinois, and parts of Iowa, Minnesota,

² Fred A. Shannon, "The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus," *American Historical Review*, July, 1936, Vol. XLI, No. 4, pp. 637-651.

Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Kansas. Individual holdings ranged from a few thousand to more than 100,000 acres. According to Professor Gates, speculators first made a mass attack upon these prairie lands in the boom years from 1835 to 1837. The Panic of 1837 brought speculation to a standstill for several years, but after the middle forties eastern capitalists once again made large acquisitions. Gates writes that these speculators

... soon "entered" the balance of the prairie lands and brought to an early close the era of the public domain in Indiana, Illinois, eastern and central Iowa, southern Wisconsin and southern Minnesota, and the eastern parts of Kansas and Nebraska. Princely domains were acquired by individuals and groups who thereby forestalled and subsequently took tribute from actual settlers.³

From the standpoint of actual settlers, large landholdings and absentee ownership were unmitigated evils. Settlers who moved into eastern prairie states faced the alternatives of paying high prices to speculators for choice land, entering poor land that had been passed over, becoming tenants, or moving on west. For many, the only alternative was tenancy; the Census of 1880 showed that "Illinois had the highest rate of tenancy in the North—31 per cent—with Indiana and Iowa coming next, each with 24 per cent."⁴

A decade or more before 1880, however, new areas of settlement began to open up in the western prairie states of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. This made it possible for many tenants and small farmers to escape from conditions they regarded as servile and oppressive. A mass migration which was on foot by the early seventies continued until the late eighties. During this period South Central Kansas was occupied. While it should not be implied that land speculation and tenancy were foreign to the area, these evils were much less pronounced than in neighboring states to the east. The reasons for leaving states to the east were well summarized in the *Kingman County Democrat* of November 11, 1886, as follows:

In the eastern states land is high. The soil is old and worn and hard to cultivate. Rents are high and the farmer who rents stands but little show of even a good living. People there realize this and they need only to look back a decade

³ Paul W. Gates, "Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie States," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. I, No. 1, May, 1941, pp. 66-70.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

or two to see how the wealthy farmers then acquired their homes and wealth. They did it when the country was new, when they could buy land for less per acre than they now pay rent each year.⁵

Foreign Immigrants

Though they constituted a small minority, foreign immigrants made important contributions to the economic and the social development of the area. The countries of origin and the number of people from each country in 1875 and 1885 are shown in Table 6.

Two facts standing out in Table 6 are the many different countries contributing to the area's population and the predominance of northern Europeans. The Russian immigrants were almost entirely Mennonites, who came originally from the German speaking canton of Switzerland; for practical purposes they should be classed as northern Europeans. These immigrants from northern Europe were largely skilled farmers and artisans who came to the area seeking homes. For the most part, they did not differ radically in blood and characteristics from native born settlers.

Mennonites

The German-Russian Mennonites, the largest group of foreign settlers, merit considerable attention because of the important role they played in the area's economic development. In tracing the origin of these people, one must go back to the Protestant Reformation in Switz-

Table 6
Foreign Immigrants, South Central Kansas, 1875 and 1885

Country of origin	1875	1885
Russia (Mennonites)	2,674	6,559
Germany	222	2,869
Sweden, Norway, Denmark	703	2,000
British America	493	1,325
England, Scotland, Wales	312	1,156
Austro-Hungary and other South of Europe	2	1,010
Ireland	54	368
France	54	111
Other foreign immigrants	36	1,118
Total	4,550	16,516

Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875*, pp. 516-521; *Fifth Biennial Report, 1885-1886*, pp. 22-27.

⁵ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

erland. During the religious ferment of the early sixteenth century a group of Protestants established a church in Zurich, Switzerland. The tenets of their faith included rejection of infant baptism, non-resistance, and refusal to swear oaths. Although adult baptism on the profession of faith was part of their creed, they became known as "Anabaptists" because infant baptism was rejected. Constituting a religious minority in an age of religious intolerance, the Mennonites were vigorously persecuted. Thousands suffered martyrdom. One group fled to Holland, where they came under the leadership of Menno Simons and became known as "Mennonites." Another group found temporary refuge in the Augsburg and Strassburg areas of southern Germany; but, when persecution broke out, they fled to Moravia, where they greatly increased until the beginning of the Thirty Years War in 1618.

The Mennonites were persecuted intermittently during the next century and a half, but in 1873 they were invited by Catherine II of Russia to settle in her newly acquired southern province of Taurida north of the Crimea. To encourage their immigration, Catherine guaranteed them certain privileges for 100 years. These included immunity from military service, religious freedom, their own local administration, and a land grant of about 160 acres to each family. These terms were so liberal that large numbers emigrated from east Germany and formed a colony that in time constituted 56 villages along the Molotschna (Milk) river in southern Russia. Even before coming to Russia, the Mennonites had acquired a reputation for thrift and industry and were known throughout Europe as excellent farmers. These qualities, in combination with freedom from persecution and the rich soil of the Crimea, enabled them to prosper. In their new home they engaged mainly in agriculture and sold their staple crop, wheat, at the Black Sea ports of Odessa, Kherson, Berdiansk, and Taganrog to agents of English grain importers.⁶

Persecution and martyrdom had been the centuries long plight of these people. Although they enjoyed a respite for many decades in Russia, it gradually became apparent that powerful forces were lining

⁶ Carl B. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 488-489.

up against them. During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, the Mennonites were given the choice of emigrating or becoming Russian subjects at the end of a 10-year waiting period. Faced with these alternatives, it was to be expected that large numbers should choose emigration. Many voices were heard concerning possible places to emigrate. Cornelius Jansen, a prominent Mennonite, came to the United States in 1872. After visiting members of his faith in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Canada, he made a tour of the midwestern states in search of a new home for his people.

Jansen arrived in this country about the same time that the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad came into possession of nearly 3,000,000 acres of land in central and western Kansas. The Santa Fe was eager to sell its land; and Carl B. Schmidt, foreign immigration agent of the railroad, records that he contacted Jansen in the summer of 1873, "and together we traveled for a week over the company's land."⁷ The government of Kansas was also encouraging immigration at this time; and as a special inducement to the Mennonites, passed an act in 1874 exempting Mennonites and Friends from military service.⁸

Schmidt then made a visit to the colony in southern Russia, taking with him about 100 letters of introduction written by a group of Mennonites who had come to Marion and Reno counties from Pennsylvania in 1870 or 1871. People came from all directions to hear this agent tell of the bountiful lands they could buy from the railroad in central Kansas. "As I proceeded on my journey," Schmidt wrote, "I became more and more convinced that the emigration fever was very strong, and that thousands of families were arranging their affairs with a view to leaving as soon as possible."⁹

In August of 1873 five Mennonite leaders visited Harvey, Sedgwick, Reno, Marion, and McPherson counties to select railroad land, and in September of the following year the first large group of immigrants arrived in Kansas.

The first arrival of Mennonites in Kansas the same year [1874] consisted of 400 families, 1900 people, who brought with them two and a quarter million

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁸ Wilder, *op. cit.*, March 10, 1874, p. 642.

⁹ Carl B. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

dollars in gold, and purchased 60,000 acres of land in the counties of Marion, McPherson, Harvey, and Reno. They arrived simultaneously with the grasshoppers, but outstayed them . . . By the year 1883 about 15,000 of these people had settled on the lands of the Santa Fe road, and since then they have increased to at least 60,000.¹⁰

Mennonite Contributions

Adapting the agricultural system to the environment of the area was one of the difficult problems that confronted early settlers. The Mennonites, probably more than any other group, contributed to the solution of this problem by demonstrating the advantages of hard Russian or "Turkey" red winter wheat. To appreciate the Mennonite's contribution, it is necessary to trace briefly the early agricultural development of the area.

Corn, rather than wheat, was the staple crop of the pioneer farmer, and this was true even in the westernmost counties of the area. In the area, as a whole, the corn acreage in 1872 was more than five times that of wheat; not until 1876 did farmers plant more wheat than corn.¹¹ In explaining the early predominance of corn, several factors must be considered. Many settlers from the corn growing states of Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, and Iowa naturally attempted to grow the same crop when they came to Kansas. Corn was also well adapted to the subsistence economy of pioneer days. Its flour could be made into more varieties of food than wheat, it was excellent food for livestock, its growing and maturing season was short, and its yield was large in proportion to the seed.¹² Moreover, the settler with a few hand tools could grow a patch of sod corn the first year at little expense, but to grow wheat in any quantity he had to have several expensive implements and draft animals to break the sod, prepare the seedbed, drill the seed, and harvest the grain.

Marketing and milling difficulties also helped to explain the early predominance of corn. Many parts of the area were not accessible to railroads; in these districts it was more economical to use corn to fatten cattle to be driven to market later. Corn, in other words, trans-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 495-497.

¹¹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Transactions of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1872; Report of the State Board of Agriculture, 1873; Third Annual Report, 1874; Fourth Annual Report, 1875; Fifth Annual Report, 1876.*

¹² Edward C. Kirkland, *A History of American Economic Life*, p. 50.

ported itself to market in the form of beef. Milling presented a dilemma at first because it was not economical to build an expensive flour mill until large quantities of wheat were grown locally; on the other hand, farmers were reluctant to grow wheat before local mills were constructed. Then, too, grist mills were much less expensive to construct than flour mills. Abnormally heavy rainfall in the years before 1874 also encouraged the growing of corn in areas where the moisture was normally insufficient.

Corn was well suited to the bottom lands along the streams of the eastern and central subareas, but on the uplands, the largest part of the area, it proved to be a precarious crop except in years of abundant rainfall. On the other hand, the small grains, such as wheat, oats, barley, and rye, were much better adapted to the uplands for the reason that they generally matured before the dry weather set in.

Many problems had to be solved, however, before small grains, especially wheat, could be grown to advantage on the uplands. Several of these, such as the lack of transportation and milling facilities and the relatively heavy capital outlay for draft animals and implements, have been mentioned. Another serious problem was finding the variety of wheat best suited to the area. Experiments were made with several different varieties of spring and winter wheat without much success. Don Dodge, a Barton county pioneer, wrote the following account of his experiences:

Even when they built their dam and mill [1878] there wasn't such an awful quantity of wheat raised around here and what we grew was all soft spring wheat.

Just the same, people began to believe this was going to be a great wheat country. Early May and Lily White were the two favorite varieties, although there were others.

Rio Grande, Walker, Amber and Odessa were four of them. Rio Grande, a heavily bearded wheat, grew too tall on a weak stalk and fell down too easily.

Odessa wheat had short straw. Canada Club was the first wheat of any kind ever grown in Barton County. As I have already said with some pride, I am the fellow who raised the original patch of it.¹³

Farmers in the Wichita area were said to have favored spring over winter wheat in the early years of settlement. They later discovered

¹³ Kansas State Historical Society, *Barton County Clippings*, Vol. II, p. 262 ("Along the Pioneer Years with Don Dodge," *Great Bend Herald*, January 27, 1939).

that the hot, dry summers frequently burned out spring wheat before it matured, so a shift was under way to winter wheat.¹⁴

Even after it was generally agreed that winter wheat was better suited to the area than spring wheat, there was a difference of opinion over varieties of winter wheat. Some favored the soft variety; others, the hard.

During this controversy the Mennonites introduced Turkey hard red winter wheat into South Central Kansas and proved conclusively its adaptability to the area.¹⁵ Here they found soil and climatic conditions similar to those of their old home on the steppes of Russia—a cool growing season, a hot harvesting one, and fertile soil. In fact, conditions were so similar that Turkey wheat did not have to be acclimated to central and western Kansas, as had been the case when it was introduced into the Milk river colonies in Russia.¹⁶ The precious seed was brought over in strong earthenware jars. After purchasing sod busting plows and oxen in Topeka, the Mennonites quickly took up their land in central Kansas and prepared the ground for the first crop. One Mennonite wrote in his diary, "The Lord in Heaven has presented us with our first harvest in America. From eighteen acres wheat, 140 bushels."¹⁷

Like most innovations, Turkey red wheat met with a stormy reception at first. In addition to the innate conservatism of farmers, milling machinery had to be adapted to the new grain. When it was first introduced into Barton county about 1878, Don Dodge relates, "For quite a long time the settlers here didn't think much of this new wheat." He went on to point out,

The millers didn't want it. In fact, their machinery couldn't take it. Milling equipment then was designed to grind soft wheat only.

Turkey red was so hard and flinty, in comparison with the varieties familiar to us, that nearly everybody laughed at the idea of using such stuff for flour.¹⁸

¹⁴ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 39 ("The Paradise of Wheat Growers").

¹⁵ Hard Russian or "Turkey" winter wheat was grown in Marion county on a small scale by a colony of French settlers a year or two before the Mennonites arrived, but Hugh P. Coultis records that "the Mennonites were perhaps most largely instrumental in introducing this variety into the state and the greatest factor in its early development . . ." Hugh P. Coultis, "The Introduction and Development of Hard Red Winter Wheat in Kansas," *Fifteenth Biennial Report, 1905-1906*, Kansas State Board of Agriculture, pp. 945-948.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 947-948.

¹⁷ William B. Bracke, *Wheat Country*, p. 89.

By the early eighties the milling industry of Kansas was changing from the buhr to the roller system of grinding, and "with this change the problem of grinding the hard wheat—which could not be done satisfactorily by the buhr system—was solved."¹⁹

The Mennonite's contribution was not confined to the introduction of Turkey red wheat. In a period when prairie agriculture was undercapitalized and conducted on a slipshod basis, these immigrants supplied much needed capital and knowledge of intensive farming. An English observer noted as early as 1882 that "the virgin soils of the western prairie are wasting under a false system of agriculture and would eventually give out . . ."²⁰ The Mennonites had acquired invaluable knowledge in farming the semiarid region of Russia. When they came to Kansas, they continued to practice the care and the economy found indispensable in their former home. Instead of the common practice of a single shallow plowing, they plowed deep the first time over and followed this with two or three shallower plowings. They even went so far as to plow at dawn to take advantage of the moisture from dew.²¹

Successful wheat farming required a considerable outlay of capital, and in this respect the Mennonites were at an advantage. Generally speaking, they were in good circumstances financially, and some individuals were reported to have had as much as \$40,000 or \$50,000.²² In addition to buying some of the best wheat land in central Kansas, they had a heavy investment in farm implements—some brought over from Russia and others purchased in this country.

Wheat farming and milling are interdependent, and it is not surprising that one of the pioneer millers of the area was a Mennonite. In the summer of 1874 Bernard Warkentin, who is credited with being the first man to introduce Turkey red wheat into Kansas, built at Halstead the first flour mill in Harvey county at a cost of \$18,500.²³ Later

¹⁸ Kansas State Historical Society, *Barton County Clippings*, Vol. II, p. 262 ("Along the Pioneer Years with Don Dodge," *Great Bend Herald*, January 27, 1939).

¹⁹ Coultis, *op. cit.*, p. 948.

²⁰ Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*, p. 170.

²¹ Bracke, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

²² Coultis, *op. cit.*, p. 948.

²³ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 784.

he purchased mill property in Newton and also engaged in importing from Russia seed wheat, that he sold to the farmers of central Kansas.²⁴

The economic contribution of the Mennonites can thus be summed up as consisting of Turkey red wheat, agricultural knowledge and technique, capital, and flour milling.

German Immigrants

Germany ranked next to Russia as a source of foreign immigrants during the seventies and the eighties. In 1885 immigrants from Germany were in every county in the area, with the greatest concentration in Harvey, Sedgwick, Barton, Marion, and Butler counties. The circumstances that caused these people to leave their native land is not so well documented as that of the Mennonites and Swedes, but it appears that many of them were agricultural laborers and small farmers who migrated from eastern Germany when the Junker class of large landholders refused to break up their estates.²⁵ A number of Mennonites also came to the area from Germany. The mass movement of these people from Russia was said to have "had the effect of starting a Mennonite emigration also from South Germany, Switzerland, and West Prussia."²⁶

Swedish Immigrants

The Swedish settlers in central Kansas have a history as interesting as that of the Mennonites. Thousands of Swedes came to the United States in the late sixties to escape a severe famine in their homeland. They settled mainly in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, but a number came to Kansas and occupied land in Republic, Jewell, Cloud, Mitchell, Ottawa, Lincoln, Saline, and McPherson counties. The largest colony in the state was located along the Smoky Hill valley in southern Saline and northern McPherson counties.

The Swedish settlers in central Kansas were unique in that they formed a company, drew up a constitution, and for a time had a communal form of organization. Coming over to America on a steamer,

²⁴ Richard L. Douglas, "A History of Manufactures in the Kansas District," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1909-1910*, Vol. XI, p. 151.

²⁵ Shepard B. Clough and Charles W. Cole, *Economic History of Europe*, p. 575.

²⁶ Carl B. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 495.

Sven Lindell discussed with some other young Swedes the possibility of organizing a colony and buying land in Iowa. In America Lindell talked with his countrymen in Galesburg and Chicago, Illinois, in Ohio, and wherever he could find an audience. Largely as a result of his agitation, the First Swedish Agricultural Company was organized at Chicago in April of 1868. The company was to consist of 100 persons, each of whom should buy 160 acres of land.²⁷

About this time the Kansas Pacific Railroad Company came into possession of approximately 4,000,000 acres of Kansas land, and the Swedish Company decided to abandon its plans for a colony in Iowa and purchase about 16,000 acres of land from the railroad. Three representatives inspected the land, and Rev. Alfred Bergin, the historian of the Swedish settlements, records,

They decided on a tract nine miles north and south and six miles east and west in the southern part of what is now called Saline county and the north part of what is now McPherson county. The plan was to buy the railroad land and homestead the intervening government land. They did not get all the land they applied for, but the homestead land in between gave them sufficient territory for their colony just the same.²⁸

The company had a number of members in Sweden; and when they received word that land had been purchased from the railroad, some 80 families, numbering 250 persons, set out for the New World under the leadership of Rev. Olof Olsson and arrived in Kansas in May, 1869.²⁹

The organization of the Swedish colony is of interest historically because in some ways it resembled that of early English colonies in Virginia and New England. Having escaped from a severe famine, the Swedish immigrants were poor and realized it would be necessary to work hard and save if they were to secure a foothold in their adopted country. Furthermore, they knew that in numbers there is strength and that as a temporary expedient a communal form of organization would be justified because it would result in greater social and economic discipline and speed the accumulation of capital. According to Rev. Bergin, "The plan was, that as all were poor, some could go

²⁷ Rev. Alfred Bergin, "The Swedish Settlements in Central Kansas," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1909-1910*, Vol. XI, pp. 22-23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

away to seek work, while others stayed at home and broke open the soil, etc."³⁰

The constitution of the company called for the common ownership of all property for five years. Then it was to be distributed to the members according to a prearranged plan. Moreover, a definite sum of money was to be contributed to the company by each member at periodic intervals, and shirkers were to be disciplined. Since the company had no capital stock, this form of organization enabled it to raise funds to pay for land and equipment. Debts of approximately \$75,000 were incurred for 13,168 acres of railroad land and "divers and numerous articles of personal property, goods and chattels, consisting of domestic animals, horses, cattle, sheep, and swine, and agricultural and farming utensils, machines and implements . . ."³¹

A second Swedish company, the Galesburg Company, was organized in the fall of 1868 with about 300 members under the leadership of Rev. A. W. Dahlsten, pastor of the Lutheran Church at Galesburg, Illinois. Although this company did not adopt the communal form of organization, it was similar to the other company in that it purchased 22 sections of land from the Kansas Pacific railroad located northwest, west, and southwest of the land bought by the Chicago Company. According to Rev. Bergin,

This purchase served only as a nucleus for a larger settlement, however, for not only was the intervening homestead land taken possession of, but all available land in the whole neighborhood, and within only a couple of years there was no land to be had in the valley. One of the largest settlements of Swedes in the United States had been formed, and central Kansas was no more a *terra incognita* or a grazing ground for the buffalo or the Texas herds.³²

By 1885 there were 995 Swedes in Saline county and 1,391 in McPherson county; these thrifty, hard working, and culturally minded people were well on their way toward making the Smoky Hill valley one of the Kansas garden spots.

Summary

Other foreign settlers were so widely dispersed over the area, and, as a rule, accepted the customs and traditions of their adopted country

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

so readily, that they soon became almost indistinguishable from native born settlers. This was particularly the case with the immigrants from Canada, Great Britain, and Ireland, who had no language obstacle to overcome and were soon at home in the cultural milieu of the area. Non-English speaking immigrants, on the other hand, were inclined to settle in colonies where, for a time at least, they spoke their native tongues and attempted to preserve their Old World customs and traditions. Speaking of this class of immigrants, Professor Clark and Mr. Roberts state,

In the main these communities continued their native customs in the home and church but in community and business affairs they soon began to follow American folkways and traditions. As the years have come and gone, and the second and third generations have established homes of their own, there has been a gradual merging of cultures. Some of the American customs have been accepted in full, while others have been accepted only in part. The immigrants' own native customs, traditions and beliefs have undergone gradual transformations.³³

³³ Clark and Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Section VII

EARLY RAILROAD HISTORY

The history of South Central Kansas is in a real sense the history of transportation and communication. In the course of three centuries men have traveled through the area on foot and horseback and by means of prairie schooner, stagecoach, railroad, automotive, and air transport. Communication has evolved from Indian smoke signals and army semaphore to telegraph, telephone, radio, and television. Before the white man's face was seen in the area, buffaloes had worn across the prairie dusty trails connecting one grazing district with another and taking advantage of intervening waterholes and shallow fords. Indians followed these trails in search of game; so did white trappers, hunters, and traders. Migrants hurrying west to seek fortunes in Santa Fe trade, California gold, and Colorado silver wore other trails. Cattle-men followed in the wake of buffalo hunters, and finally came the settlers who were the first men to put down roots in the area. Thus, the age old history of westward expansion was repeated with minor variations.

So long as the area served merely as a way station or temporary hunting and grazing ground, primitive means of transportation sufficed. The case was different, however, when settlers arrived with the intention of developing the agricultural resources. Improved transportation was needed to hasten settlement and advance beyond subsistence agriculture. This need was met substantially in the early seventies, when the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad was built across the northern part of the area. Briefly, the history of this road is as follows.

Santa Fe Railroad

Cyrus Kurtz Holliday was one of the farsighted men who saw the need for railroads in the West. A lawyer by profession, he came to Kansas in 1854 with \$20,000, his share of a successful railroad speculation in his home state of Pennsylvania. In Kansas Holliday first took a leading part in the founding of Topeka; he was its first mayor. Later he turned to the promotion of railroads. Enthusiastic with the eco-

conomic possibilities of Kansas and the Southwest, Holliday proposed building a railroad to serve the region. He selected Santa Fe, New Mexico, the terminus of the old wagon trail, as an objective to the west and, after some debate, decided that Atchison, Kansas, was the most promising point to the east. In February of 1859 a special act of the Territorial Legislature of Kansas granted a charter to the Atchison and Topeka Railroad Company (the word "Santa Fe" was added later).¹

Securing the charter was a minor obstacle compared with the problem of recruiting capital. Eastern financiers refused to come to the company's aid at first. They reasoned that, since the road was to be built into largely uninhabited country, even under the most favorable circumstances investment returns would be small until the area was occupied and developed. Private capital would be forthcoming, however, provided the company received a large grant of land from the Federal Government. This land would enable the railroad to borrow money on mortgage security, and later settlers could buy the land. Holliday worked diligently to get such a grant, and his efforts met with success. An Act of Congress dated March 3, 1863, granted public land to the State of Kansas for aiding in the construction of various railroads and telegraph lines. It provided for one railroad to be constructed "from the City of Atchison via Topeka . . . to the western line of the State, in the direction of Fort Union and Santa Fe, New Mexico" This road was to receive "every alternate section of land designated by odd numbers, for ten sections in width on each side of said road and each of its branches."²

An act of the Kansas Legislature in February of 1864 then conferred this land grant upon the Atchison and Topeka Railroad Company. After that Holliday went to work recruiting capital. Professor Waters writes, "Holliday tapped local financial founts more successfully than those in the East."³ This situation changed a few years later, however, and by 1870 the Santa Fe was said to be "guided almost wholly by

¹ Waters, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

² John Bell Sanborn, "Congressional Grants of Land in Aid of Railways," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin*, No. 30, p. 117.

³ Waters, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

Massachusetts interests."⁴ After sufficient capital was recruited, surveys were made, construction contracts were let, and actual construction was commenced at Topeka on October 30, 1868. By July of 1870 the line was opened for operation as far west as Emporia, and soon afterward was extended west into Chase county, the northeastern corner of the area under consideration.

Santa Fe construction activity in the area fell into two distinct periods during the decade of the seventies. The first extended from July, 1871, to June, 1872, when approximately 230 miles were constructed; and the second from June, 1879, until October, 1880, when approximately 325 miles were constructed. In the former period rail connections were established at the larger area towns of Newton, Wichita, Hutchinson, Great Bend, and Larned; in the latter period, at Eureka, Florence, Wellington, Winfield, Arkansas City, McPherson, and Harper. In the intervening period only one branch line was built from Florence to El Dorado, a distance of nearly 30 miles.⁵

Economic Effects of the Railroad

"The projection of the railroad was like the opening of the gates to a fair, or the discovery of a rich gold field, being followed by a great rush of peoples," said the *Wichita Eagle* in a brief history of the Santa Fe published on April 6, 1886.⁶ The same thing might be said of other towns that owed their existence to the railroad. During this first period of railroad construction the area underwent an economic transformation. People flocked to new towns hastily established at strategic locations along the line and to the surrounding countryside. The towns attracted merchants, cattle buyers and drovers, professional people, speculators, gamblers, and prostitutes. Drovers of Texas cattle were diverted from Abilene and Ellsworth, to new cow towns at Newton, Wichita, and Great Bend. The more prosaic settler moved in to occupy the surrounding countryside and commenced upland farming for the first time on a fairly widespread basis. Gradually the settlers accumulated capital, brought their land under cultivation, and, despite numer-

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵ James Leslie Marshall, *Santa Fe, The Railroad that Built an Empire*, pp. 396-400.

⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 47 ("The A. T. & S. F. Railroad," *Wichita Eagle*, April 6, 1876).

ous obstacles, made the transition from subsistence to commercialized agriculture. The railroad was largely responsible for this transformation because it speeded up settlement by providing a superior means of reaching the area and a channel of trade and communication after the settlers arrived.

New Railroad Towns

One of the most spectacular developments in the early seventies was the growth of new towns along the Santa Fe railroad. Before the coming of the railroad, only a few towns were in the area; these were usually located some distance from the line surveyed for the railroad. Shrewd town promoters were the first to see the need for towns; and, as the railroad pushed west, they made a mad rush to secure the most favorable locations. Thriving towns were soon established at Cottonwood, Florence, Peabody, Newton, Wichita, Hutchinson, Great Bend, Larned, and Kinsley. These, along with smaller railroad towns, are indicated in Figure 4.

In considering this promotional activity, Newton, Hutchinson, and Great Bend will be singled out for special mention.

Newton.—This county seat town in Harvey county has been closely identified with the Santa Fe railroad from the beginning. Not only is it a division point on that railroad, but the city and the railroad grew up together. The following account of Newton's origin was written by a correspondent to the *Emporia News* on June 26, 1871.

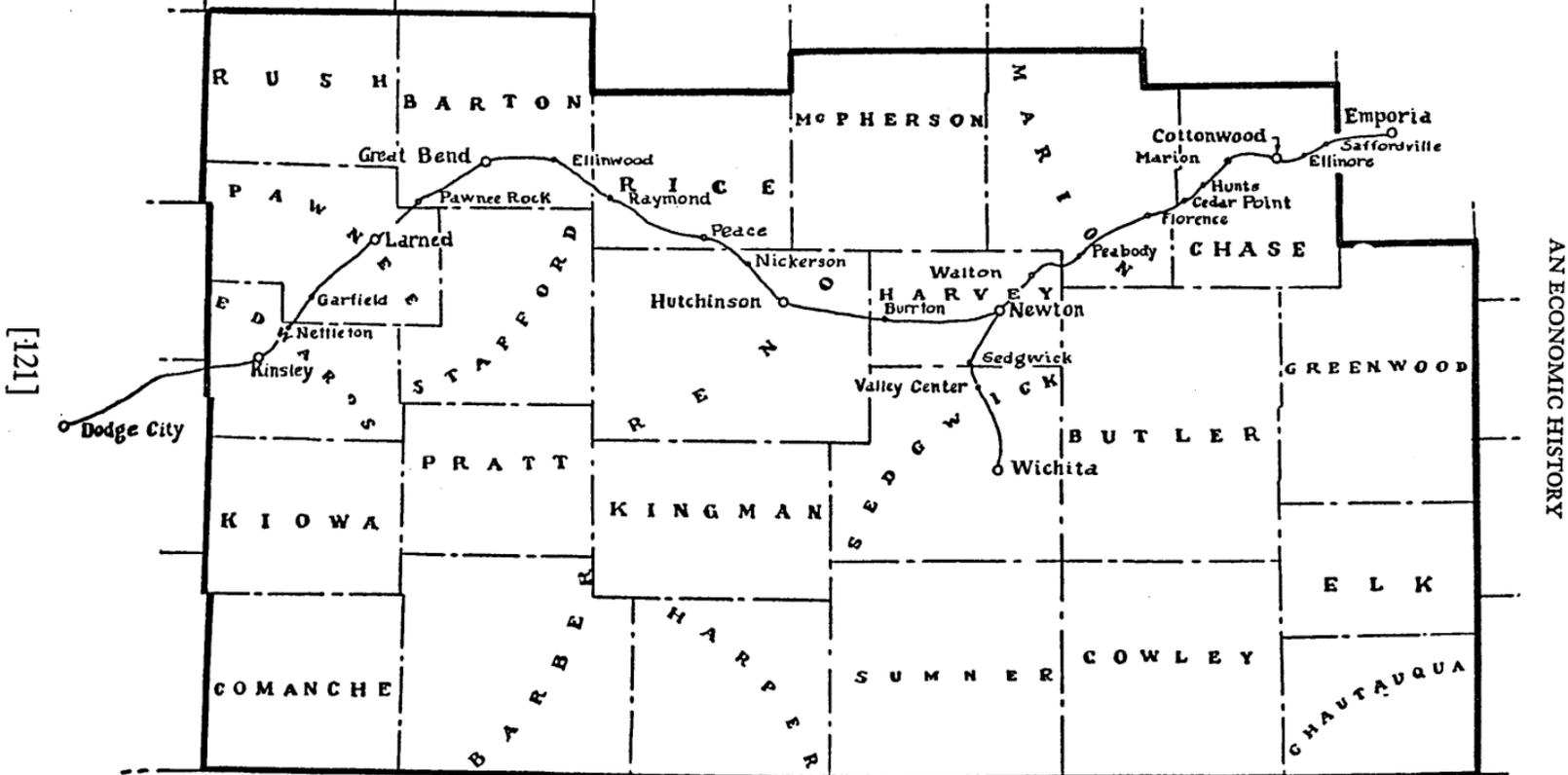
But for the A. T. & S. F. R. R., running to and stopping for a short time on Sec. 17, Township 23, range 1, east, seventy four miles west of Emporia, no set of extravagant speculators would ever have thought of laying a town where Newton now stands. But such is the power of the railroad, that far out upon a sandy upland soil, and that rather thin, ten miles from a stick of timber even large enough for a switch, quite a lively town of several hundred people and upwards of fifty houses closely compact, and some quite respectable buildings, full of all sorts of wares and merchantables, looms up, even in advance of the cars.⁷

[Signed] R. M. O.

Hutchinson.—Second only to Wichita, this county seat town in Reno county owes its existence largely to the foresight of one man,

⁷ *Emporia News*, July 7, 1871.

Figure 4
Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, South Central Kansas, 1876



Source: Rand, McNally and Company, *Map of the State of Kansas, 1876*; Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Annual Report, 1876*, November 30, 1876.

Clinton C. Hutchinson, a prominent town promoter of early Kansas. He came to the state in the late fifties and played an important part in the early history of Lawrence. Somewhat later, in 1864, he formed the company founding the town of Ottawa in Franklin county.⁸ Like other town promoters, Hutchinson saw a need to publicize the state to attract settlers, and in 1871 he wrote a small book entitled *The Resources of Kansas*. The State Legislature considered this publication so valuable that it authorized the purchase of 2,500 copies. When promotional opportunities became fewer in eastern Kansas, Hutchinson turned to the promising central region of the state. Cutler relates,

During the building of the A. T. & S. Fe road westward from Topeka, he watched its progress carefully, and when the grade stakes of the present line were set prior to October, 1871, he closed a contract with the company for the purchase of Section 13, Township 23, Range 6, in Reno County. At that time the terminus of the road was at Newton, and when Mr. Hutchinson came out there was no wagon road, and to reach the site of this embryo city he followed the line of stakes set by the railroad engineers. On his arrival he found a few families in the immediate vicinity of the prospective town site.⁹

Hutchinson, in partnership with his brother William, owned eleven twelfths of the 640-acre townsite of Hutchinson. These brothers also laid out the town of Castleton in Reno county. William, who was in the real estate and banking business in Hutchinson, was interested in laying out Medicine Lodge in Barber county. These brothers also served as Santa Fe land agents in central Kansas.¹⁰

Great Bend.—In 1871 a group of people from Quincy, Illinois, founded Great Bend in Barton county. The following account of its founding is taken from the files of the Kansas State Historical Society:

In 1871 a party of people in Quincy, Ill., decided to locate a town in Kansas and formed what was called the Quincy Town Company. Lute Morris was sent here as representative. The Santa Fe railroad had built as far west that summer as Newton and Morris went to Salina to get some one to guide him to a place west of there so they could locate ahead of the railroad. He went west up the Saline river valley to the camp of some buffalo hunters who knew all the western and southern part of the state and got them to pilot him across the country to the vicinity of Fort Zarah. This fort was three miles east of where Great Bend now stands and had been abandoned by the government two years before, in 1869.

⁸ Blackmar, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 423.

⁹ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 1371.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1374.

It was known that the Santa Fe would pass there though and it was thought to be the place for a town.¹¹

Markets.—Each railroad town became a market for local and imported products and a shipping point for surplus agricultural commodities. In Wichita, for example, a local newspaper pointed out in 1876,

The settler can depend upon finding a market for all his surplus produce. He has a line of road running directly to the east and west, where a higher rate for all he can produce will be given than can be afforded even by an eastern market. The immigration coming into the country will absorb everything that can be produced by the resident settlers for the next two or three years at least. With the single exception of corn, the Wichita market has never been dulled or overladen with staple products.¹²

Wagon Transport

Railroad building came to a halt in the autumn of 1872; not until the early part of 1879 was it resumed on a fairly large scale. It is significant that the first building boom brought the railroad to only nine counties in the area. The other 13 had to depend upon primitive means of transportation until the late seventies or eighties.¹³ This undoubtedly helps to account for the uneven development of the area. Pratt county, for example, did not have a railroad until 1885, and Cutler recorded in 1883 that "Another drawback to the settlement of the county was the long distance from the railroad, the nearest railroad point being forty miles away."¹⁴

Wagons and stagecoaches were the chief means of transport over much of the area, and in the nonrailroad counties all vehicles were drawn by cattle, oxen, or later by horses. As the country became more thickly populated, regular mail and stagecoach services were established. By the spring of 1871, Eureka had such a service with several towns. An old settler said that "Four horse coaches left Emporia at 4 a.m. and Humboldt at about the same time and arrived here [Eureka]

¹¹ Kansas State Historical Society, *Barton County Clippings*, Vol. II, p. 79 ("Early Days of Great Bend," February 19, 1898).

¹² Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 34 ("Our Markets").

¹³ Until 1879 there were 22 counties in the area. Stafford was organized in 1879 and Kiowa in 1886.

¹⁴ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 1268.

at 1 p.m. The two lines united here and after dinner one coach continued on until it reached Wichita at 10 P.M."¹⁵

Wichita became the hub of an important stagecoach and wagon freighting business. In 1873 the Santa Fe railroad at Wichita was connected by stage with Caldwell, Sumner City, Arkansas City, Wellington, Turkey Creek, the Cheyenne, Wichita, and Cherokee Agencies, and Fort Sill.¹⁶ Wichita also profited from an extensive wagon freighting business to the Indian agencies, forts, and military posts in the Indian Territory. According to material obtained from *Sedgwick County Clippings*,

No less than 5,000,000 pounds of freight are annually started for the Territory by wagon. For the transfer of these goods several thousand dollars are paid by contractors to a number of regular freighters and numerous teamsters, and farmers with idle teams throughout Sedgwick and adjoining counties, the proceeds of whose earnings are naturally and necessarily distributed among the various dealers of Wichita.¹⁷

Farther west the towns of Hutchinson and Larned were connected with outlying towns by stage and wagon roads. The trip by stage from Hutchinson via Kingman to Medicine Lodge required from ten to 12 hours, the fare one way was \$3, and 14 persons constituted a capacity load. It is interesting that the coach trail between these two towns was marked with a furrow planted on either side so that the driver would not get lost in a snowstorm.¹⁸ An old settler of Larned related that in the early eighties, "Supplies in great quantities were freighted out of here all the time. Covered wagons left Larned by the dozen, freighting food to more westerly settlements."¹⁹

Summary

Sole dependence upon horse drawn vehicles came to an end in most parts of the eastern and central subareas by the end of 1880. From 1877 to 1880 the Santa Fe Railroad Company built branch lines to El Dorado, Eureka, Winfield, Howard, and Arkansas City in the eastern

¹⁵ Kansas State Historical Society, "History of Greenwood County," *Manuscript Collections of Greenwood County*.

¹⁶ *Hutchinson News*, March 6, 1873.

¹⁷ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 72-73.

¹⁸ Percy S. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 21; Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁹ Kansas State Historical Society, *Pawnee County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 159-160.

subarea and Hillsboro, Mulvane, Wellington, McPherson, Lyons, Caldwell, Hunnewell, and Harper in the central subarea. Two other railroads, the Union Pacific and the St. Louis and San Francisco, were built into the area during this period, but not until the boom of the mid-eighties were lines built into the two westernmost tiers of counties south of the Santa Fe line.

Section VIII

SMALL FARMER BOOM OF THE EIGHTIES

"Into three periods may be divided the business history of the western Mississippi Valley—settlement, extravagance, and depression," observed Charles M. Harger, the Abilene, Kansas, editor, in 1898.¹ The word "extravagance" is certainly descriptive of the years from 1880 to 1887, when South Central Kansas experienced a succession of booms in farm mortgages, railroads, town lots, mining, and manufacturing.

Cause of the Boom

The transition from pioneer to commercialized agriculture is fundamental to an understanding of the boom. As long as the area was inadequately served by railroads, agriculture was conducted on a semisubsistence basis. Attracting outside capital on a scale sufficient to generate a widespread boom was difficult. Short-lived booms were the rule and were generally confined to towns and farming districts accessible to railroads. These early booms coincided with the building of the Santa Fe railroad but were not long under way when the scourges of grasshoppers, drought, and depression visited the area. Then as economic and climatic conditions improved, immigrants literally swarmed into the area to occupy the remaining lands. Land values rose as a result of growing population pressure and abundant crop yields; rising land values, in turn, provided a basis for credit. Eastern capital became accessible, and farmers began to borrow on mortgage security to buy land and equipment. Railroad companies tapped the fount of eastern capital and built roads into parts of the area hitherto unserved. Eastern capital also came to the aid of ambitious town promoters, and embryo towns sprang up along the new rail lines to serve adjacent farm communities. Thus, the groundwork was gradually laid for a prosperous agricultural society dependent upon imported capital and upon distant markets for the sale of surplus farm products and the purchase of manufactures.

¹ Charles M. Harger, "New Era in the Middle West," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XCVII, June, 1898, to November, 1898, p. 276.

Business Prosperity

In newly settled areas the transition from subsistence to commercialized agriculture was a logical economic development, but the rate of change varied within rather wide limits. The interesting thing is that a combination of favorable circumstances in the late seventies and early eighties speeded this transition. General business prosperity following the depression from 1873 to 1878 hurried it. There was a noticeable recovery in business toward the end of 1878, and in the country as a whole prosperous conditions continued until late in 1882. According to Professor Somers, "The recovery may be traced largely to an exogenous factor—the coincidence of record wheat and corn crops here with European crop failures in 1879 and 1880."² With a thriving export trade, in addition to growing domestic consumption, farm prices rose and agriculture prospered and expanded. "Railroad building and general manufacturing were stimulated. The country entered upon a period of exhilarating prosperity."³ A sharp, but short-lived financial panic occurred in May of 1884 with only minor repercussions on the economy as a whole; by the second half of 1885 business was again on the road to recovery. The revival developed into general prosperity by 1887, and railroad construction was resumed on such an unprecedented scale that by 1890 the mileage operated in the United States was twice that of 1878.⁴ These were years of "Widespread activity with higher prices; tremendous railroad construction; western real estate booms; larger imports."⁵ A moderate recession took place in 1890 and 1891, and in May of 1893 there was a violent panic followed by a severe depression continuing with slight interruption until the beginning of the Spanish American War in April, 1898.

Although adverse climatic conditions delayed recovery, the period from 1880 to 1887 was also one of general prosperity in South Central Kansas. During this period the area population and the number of

² Harold M. Somers, "The Performance of the American Economy, 1866-1918," *The Growth of the American Economy*, Harold F. Williamson, editor, p. 651.

³ *Idem*.

⁴ Chester W. Wright, *Economic History of the United States*, p. 705.

⁵ Willard L. Thorp and Wesley C. Mitchell, *Business Annals*, p. 135.

acres in farms nearly doubled, the assessed valuation of all property more than trebled, and the railroad mileage increased more than five-fold. Prices of wheat, corn, and cattle increased markedly during the late seventies and early eighties, rainfall was above average in the years just after 1880, crop yields were generally high, and declining railroad freight rates were a stimulus to agriculture and trade.

Speculation

Prosperity thus rested upon a solid foundation; but, as is so often the case in frontier communities, prosperity soon gave way to rampant speculation in farm land, town property, and railroad, manufacturing, and mining companies. Not only in this area were booms and speculation the order of the day. According to Henry J. Fletcher, they were a characteristic phenomenon from 1880 to 1887 or 1890 in "Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, in all the states and territories farther west and in some parts of Iowa, Wisconsin and Missouri . . ." In these states and territories there was "a fever of speculation in real estate which affected the whole population, destroyed all true sense of value, created an enormous volume of fictitious wealth, infected with its poison all the veins and arteries of business, and swelled the cities to abnormal proportions."⁶

What caused this fever of speculation poisoning all the veins and arteries of business? It cannot be explained entirely in terms of prosperous business conditions because there have been other periods, equally, if not more, prosperous when prosperity did not degenerate into wild speculation. It is significant that prosperity in the eastern part of the United States was not accompanied by rampant speculation in the eighties.

The unique feature of the boom of the eighties was the coincidence of general prosperity with a growing scarcity of good land in the West. Improved business conditions made it possible for people to get together a nest egg and strike out for the frontier. Opportunities in the West were given wide publicity. In the frontier states the supply of "good" cheap land was dwindling, and people were eager to stake

⁶ Henry J. Fletcher, "Western Real Estate Booms and After," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. LXXXI, 1898, p. 689.

out a claim before it was all gone. Soil exhaustion, land monopolization, and tenancy disillusioned the inhabitants of long settled states in the Midwest. Improved transportation facilities made the westward journey less time consuming, less expensive, and less burdensome. These are the most important factors explaining the unprecedented immigration of the eighties.

By the mid-eighties the forces of push, pull, and transport were exerting their maximum influence. Particularly noteworthy as a pulling factor was the well organized campaign to recruit settlers. Railroads were not the only agencies engaged in this work. Newspapers played a very important part in enticing people to the area. Between 1880 and 1888 the newspapers in the area increased from 71 to 202.⁷ In the latter year Wichita had 13 newspapers; Wellington, six; and Hutchinson, Newton, and Winfield each had five.⁸ Almost every newspaper advertised the merits of its community in regular and special editions that were widely circulated in eastern states. People were urged to come to a Garden of Eden in central Kansas. The boom in Kingman, for example, was said to be "mostly due to the efforts of her citizens through her [four] newspapers. The newspapers publish the advantages of the town and county and the citizens are enterprising enough to purchase the papers and send them abroad. They do not do it on a small scale either, for at one time they ordered twenty thousand copies."⁹ Towns and cities also advertised the merits of their localities through chambers of commerce, real estate boards, and similar organizations.

The Board of Agriculture was the chief immigration agency of Kansas. It exhibited farm products at eastern fairs, published fat volumes of its Biennial Reports, and issued annual pamphlets that were "intended to supply information concerning the resources and capabilities of the State to those seeking homes in the West." The law required the publication of 60,000 copies of each pamphlet, "divided into 20,000 English, 20,000 German, 15,000 Swedish, and 10,000 Dan-

⁷ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Second Biennial Report, 1879-1880*, pp. 386-400; *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, pp. 28-494.

⁸ *Idem.*

⁹ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

ish."¹⁰ Abandoning its propaganda policy in 1897, the board admitted that it had previously sought to persuade "the millions of less fortunate strangers that the mere fact of coming hither with unalterable ready-made views of Kansas people and Kansas agriculture means a life of ease, perpetual June weather, a steady diet of milk and honey, monotonous political harmony, and tireless pursuit of lucrative offices of everybody whomsoever."¹¹

Last Wave of Immigration

A bountiful harvest rewarded these promotional efforts for settlers literally swarmed to the area. From 1882 to 1887 the population increased over 203,000, almost 100 per cent; about two thirds of this increase came after 1884. Writing from Wichita in the spring of 1885, a newspaper correspondent described this colorful and vast movement of people as follows:

The immigration to Southern Kansas is tremendous. They are coming in droves, by prairie schooner and railroad, from near and from far, with families and grub baskets, dogs, farm implements and mules. The Southern Kansas and Santa Fe passenger trains leave Kansas City daily with scarcely standing room in the coaches, while the tracks are nearly blockaded with long trains of freight cars containing horses, wagons, household goods and farming outfits. The Calebs and Joshuas sent to spy out the prospect, have returned with samples of corn and wheat, and are now leading the children to the promised land.¹²

These latecomers found nearly all of the best land already occupied. Hence they were forced either to buy out original owners or to settle on less desirable unclaimed lands. After a 2-week drive over Clark, Comanche, Pratt, and Barber counties in the spring of 1885, two Wichita men reported that immigrants were pouring into those counties so rapidly "that nearly all if not all of the choice claims are now taken, leaving but the uplands and high plateaus unoccupied."¹³ By this time demand was running ahead of supply; and with land values rising at an accelerated rate, the situation was ripe for an era of frenzied speculation.

Speculation in rising land values has been characteristic of frontier communities since colonial times. The pioneer by choice left his settled,

¹⁰ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Biennial Report, 1883-1884*, p. 6.

¹¹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Tenth Biennial Report, 1896-1897*, p. vii.

¹² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 11, 1885.

¹³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 4, 1885.

civilized community and struck out for the wilderness. There the veneer of civilization wore thin as he struggled for a living in a hostile environment. The comforts of civilization, although foregone for a time, were not forgotten; an attempt was made to regain them as soon as possible. The pioneer had an inordinate desire to make a fortune, build an empire, and establish a family dynasty. He was impatient of any obstacle in his path. Easily extracted forms of wealth such as precious metals, furs, and hides, first occupied his attention. When these were exhausted, he turned to cattle ranching and farming. For these occupations land was indispensable, and he wanted to be in the vanguard so as to get first choice. He took what he saw and found ingenious reasons to justify his aggrandizement. He was hungry for land, partly for its agricultural potentialities but primarily as a speculative venture. The firstcomer realized that many would follow after him and that choice locations might later command phenomenally high prices.

Land speculation thus became the chief occupation of the pioneer. After traveling in the West, an Englishman shrewdly remarked in 1862,

Speculation in real estate . . . has been the ruling idea and occupation of the Western mind. Clerks, labourers, farmers, storekeepers, merely followed their callings for a living, while they were speculating for their fortune . . . The people of the West became dealers in land, rather than its cultivators.¹⁴

William Allen White wrote that a primary factor of western change and growth was "the gorgeous economic fact that cheap land, when it was occupied by pioneers, was constantly becoming more and more valuable."¹⁵

By the mid-eighties an explosive situation developed when thousands of freedom loving, aggressive, and resourceful pioneers made a grab for the remaining lands of the West. No longer was there an abundant supply of relatively cheap and productive land to serve as a safety valve in checking excessive speculation. The frontier as a distinguishable unbroken line was disappearing. For the first time the American pioneer was being shut off from the great open spaces. Pres-

¹⁴ D. W. Mitchell, *Ten Years in the United States: Being an Englishman's Views of Man and Things in the North and South*, pp. 325-328.

¹⁵ William Allen White, *The Changing West, An Economic Theory About Our Golden Age*, p. 15.

sure mounted as he attempted to control his curbed impulses and the restrictions on his land hunger. Eventually the inevitable explosion occurred. "He broke those bonds that tied him to civilization; and he then showed an unsublimated mob psychology in such phenomena as the great Wichita boom.. There was seen nature in the raw."¹⁶

The closing of the land frontier marked a fundamental change in the course of American history. This is the thesis that Frederick Jackson Turner, the historian, first drew attention to in 1893.¹⁷ Like most historians, however, he merely elaborated and delved more deeply into a change that was evident to many people at the time. The following passage indicates that one area resident was aware of the implications of the closing frontier.

Government lands has always been more than adequate to meet the demands of the increase [in population], but that day is past . . . America has always been a new country, but she is now on the eve of a gigantic change. She is about to make the transit from the new to the old. Consider a moment and you will see that this will be a great, a terrible change. It will make the holder of the soil turn wild and take away his health. It will cause his head to whirl and his eyes to burn like fire. It will turn his heart to stone and his hands to claws after gold . . . It will send the speculative price of land away up, up far beyond its real worth, and he, who has it not cannot obtain it. Then the tenant will become the landlord's slave . . . The price of land will raise all over the country, but it must advance proportionately faster all over the west, and the western cities must grow proportionately faster.¹⁸

[signed] Human. Greensburg, (Kiowa county), December 6, 1886.

Phases of the Boom

For a more detailed analysis of the boom it is necessary to differentiate clearly its phases. The first phase, the small farmer boom, was characterized by a transition from subsistence to commercialized agriculture, greater use of mechanized equipment, rising crop yields, rising profits, and an increasingly heavy mortgage debt burden. The railroad boom, the second phase, was characterized by the building of competing trunk and branch lines, the completion of roads linking all 24 area counties with the outside world, a substantial reduction in freight and passenger rates, and a rising municipal debt burden as bonds were

¹⁶ Earl V. Long, "The Wichita Real Estate Boom," Unpublished Master's thesis, Wichita University, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*.

¹⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 9, 1886 ("How Would She Look").

voted to encourage railroad construction. Town lot booming followed on the heels of the railroad boom. New towns sprang up along newly completed roads, and older towns became important trade centers with competing trunk and branch lines to serve their transportation needs. Mushroom growth characterized most towns, and real estate dealers had a heyday booming town lots and additions. Finally, after the town lot boom subsided, the boomers turned to the possibilities of manufacturing and mining. Already established agricultural processing industries, such as flour milling and meat packing, expanded; in addition, such metal fabricating manufactures as farm implements, wire fencing, railroad livestock cars, and others started. Salt mining and the drilling of natural gas wells commenced during this phase of the boom. Before discussing these phases in more detail, one must understand that they were mutually dependent and that one phase merged into another without any clear-cut boundary lines.

Small Farmer Boom

These booms had their origin in the agricultural prosperity of the early eighties. During this period rising farm prices in conjunction with above average rainfall and heavy crop yields brought about a substantial rise in farm incomes. Rising incomes, in turn, accentuated the trend toward commercialized farming, crop specialization, and a market interdependence on a regional, national, and international level. This period of prosperity needs to be considered against the background of such major movements in the area's agriculture as changes in production, acreage, total value, and prices of farm products.

Rising Farm Prices

During the long period of generally declining price levels characterizing the American economy from the Civil War to the Spanish American War, the years from 1879 to 1882 were notable for rising prices. The index of wholesale prices of farm products increased about 25 points from 1879 to 1882, compared with an increase of 18 points for all commodities.¹⁹ In addition to expanding domestic markets, farm prices rose in response to a growing export demand. European agri-

¹⁹ Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*, p. 294.

culture met with a series of misfortunes, described by Heaton as "a tragedy of rain and mud, of rotting crops and dying animals, or of drought and parched earth. Between 1874 and 1882 only two good crops were reaped [in England] . . ." ²⁰ American wheat and flour exports experienced a remarkable growth during this period. From an annual average of 73.4 million bushels from 1873 to 1878, they increased to an annual average of 157.6 million bushels from 1879 to 1883. A similar comparison shows that wheat and flour exports as a percentage of the total crop increased from 24.6 to 34.9 per cent. ²¹

Due largely to the growing demand, the price of wheat increased considerably. Figure 5 shows that average wheat prices received by Kansas farmers increased from 76 cents a bushel in 1875 to \$1.05 a bushel in 1881, the latter being the highest price received from 1873 to 1915. Wheat prices were destined to fall, however, with the recovery of European agriculture and growing competition from other producing countries. A sharp break occurred in 1882 and continued until 1884, when the average price in Kansas was 45 cents a bushel. Then a partial recovery took place from 1884 to 1888, a sharp drop occurred in 1888, and another upturn came in 1889. After 1890 a steady decline set in. This continued to 1893, when Kansas received an all time low of 42 cents a bushel for its wheat.

Corn price movements were similar to those of wheat. After remaining fairly steady at about 20 cents a bushel from 1875 to 1878, the price rose to a peak of 58 cents in 1881 and then declined to 22 cents in 1884. Several price fluctuations occurred from 1884 to 1896. These included a decline to 18 cents in 1889, a sharp rise to 51 cents in 1890, and a drop to 31 cents in 1893; after a rise to 43 cents in 1894, a decline brought the price of corn to a 66-year low of 18 cents a bushel in 1896.

Even more remarkable than rising wheat and corn prices was the rise in the price of cattle. In Kansas cattle prices rose steadily from the mid-seventies, but they were unique in that they continued to rise after corn and wheat prices turned sharply downward. Whereas corn and

²⁰ Herbert Heaton, *Economic History of Europe*, p. 421.

²¹ Louis B. Schmidt, "Some Significant Aspects of the Agricultural Revolution in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 3, July, 1920, p. 385.

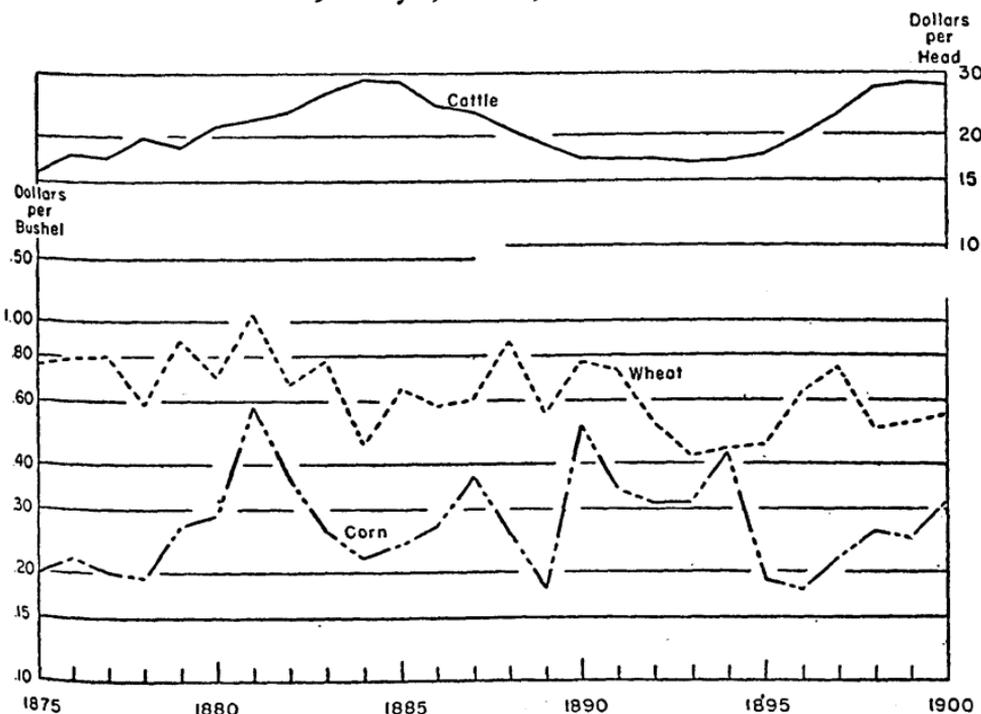
wheat prices declined after 1881, cattle prices continued to rise to 1884, the year of the highest price from 1867 to 1900.

Acreage and Production Trends

Farmers generally fattened their cattle with corn and in the decade of the eighties these two commodities played a much more important role in the agricultural economy of the area than wheat. This is borne out by the following figures comparing corn and wheat with respect to total acreage planted (Figure 5) and total number of bushels produced (Figure 7). Figure 6 shows both wheat and corn acreage tending upwards from 1875 to 1880, when there was a parting of the ways. Corn acreage then continued its upward trend to 1889 while that of wheat tended downwards to 1887. In all but one year from 1882 to 1889 the acreage planted in corn was from two to three times that of

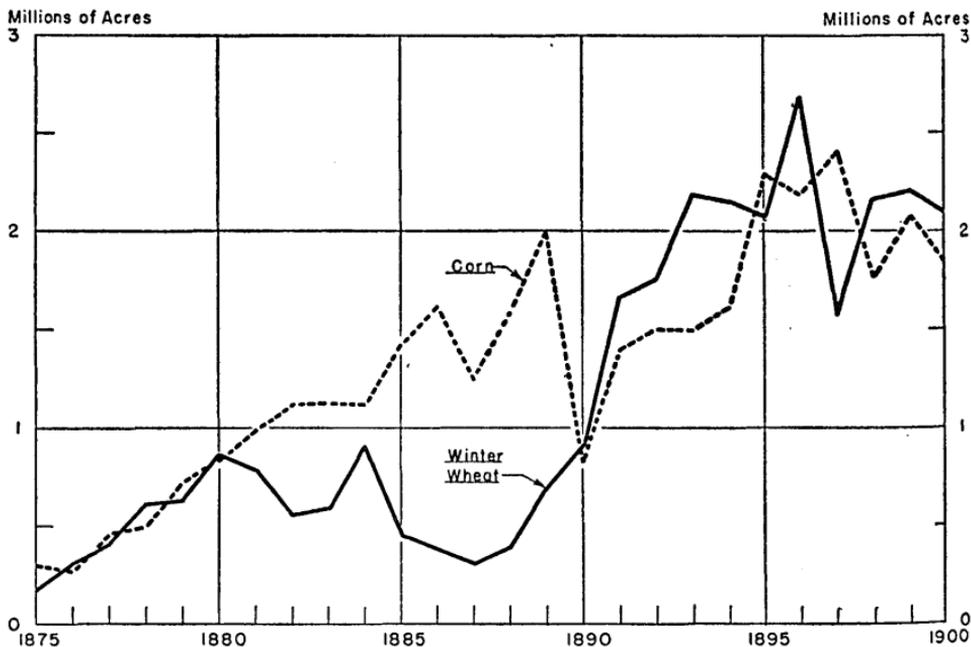
Figure 5

Average Annual Prices Received by Farmers for Corn and Wheat as of December 1, and Average Annual Inventory Value of Cattle Per Head as of January 1, Kansas, 1875-1900



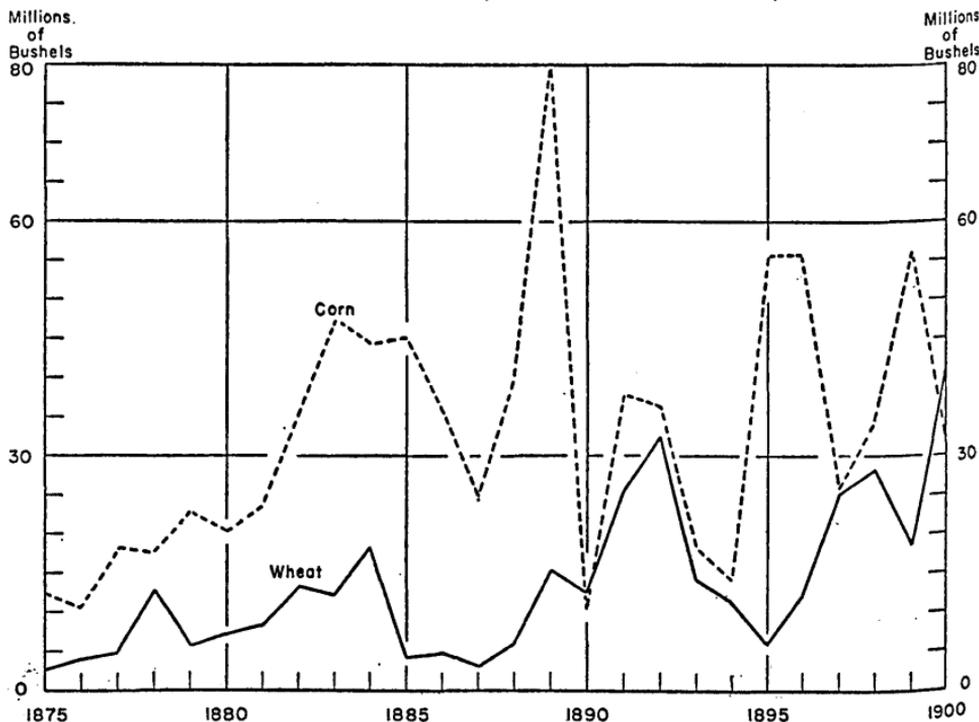
Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Price Patterns Through the Years That Have Had Direct Influence upon the Economy of Kansas Agriculture*, February, 1950, Vol. LXIV, No. 295, Topeka, pp. 27, 37.

Figure 6
Wheat and Corn Harvested, South Central Kansas, 1875-1900



Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875*; *Fifth Annual Report, 1876*; *First Biennial Report, 1877-1878 to Twelfth Biennial Report, 1899-1900*, inclusive.

Figure 7
Production of Wheat and Corn, South Central Kansas, 1875-1900



Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875*; *Fifth Annual Report, 1876*; *First Biennial Report, 1877-1878 to Twelfth Biennial Report, 1899-1900*, inclusive.

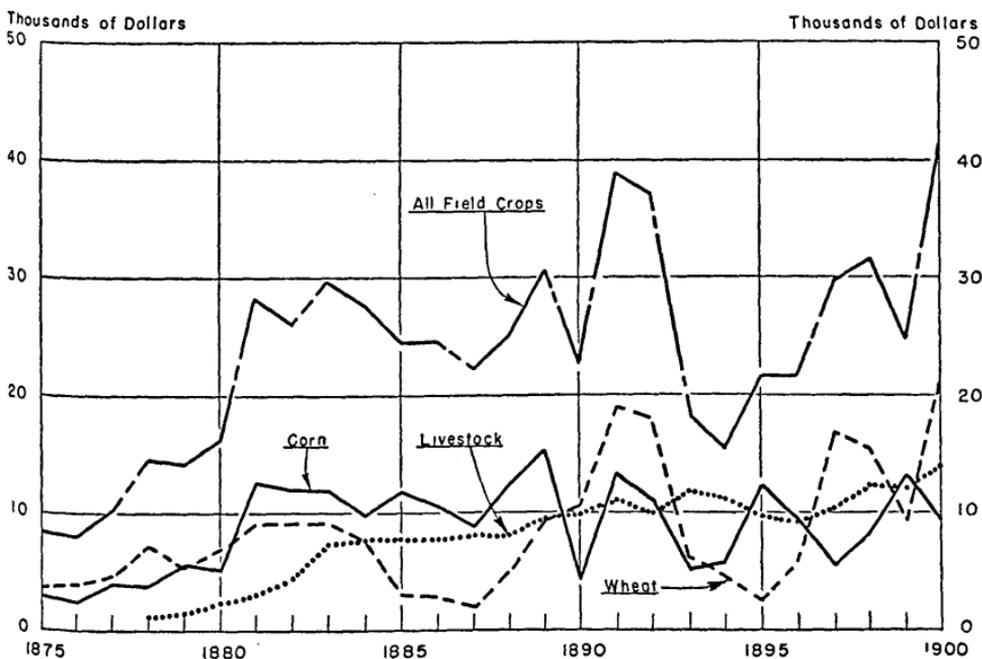
wheat. On the other hand, wheat acreage exceeded that of corn in all but one year from 1890 to 1895. As for fluctuations in output (Figure 7) corn production remained well above that of wheat from 1875 to 1890; there was a tendency for the gap to widen from 1881 to 1885. The rising trend in production reversed for wheat after 1884 and for corn after 1885; an upward movement did not commence again until 1887.

Cattle Boom

Further evidence of the growing importance of corn and cattle, on the one hand, and of the declining importance of wheat, on the other, is shown in Figure 8. It gives area totals of the farm value of corn, wheat, and all field crops and the value of animals slaughtered and sold for slaughter. According to the figure, wheat remained slightly above corn in all but one year from 1875 to 1880. Then corn forged to the front and held the leading position from 1881 to 1889. Animals slaughtered and sold for slaughter showed a remarkable rise. The

Figure 8

Value of Corn, Wheat, All Field Crops, and Animals Sold for Slaughter,
South Central Kansas, 1875-1900



Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875; Fifth Annual Report, 1876; First Biennial Report, 1877-1878, to Twelfth Biennial Report, 1899-1900, inclusive.*

value of these products increased over ten times between 1878 and 1891 and was well above that of wheat from 1884 to 1889. While the value of corn and wheat tended downward from 1881 to 1887, animals slaughtered and sold for slaughter had a reverse trend.

Good Times for Farmers

Agricultural prosperity thus depended, in the first instance, upon rising wheat and corn prices. When these commodities later declined in value, rising cattle prices prolonged prosperity for several years. Under these conditions farmers were encouraged to increase their herds of livestock and corn acreage and to feed cheap corn to cattle, hogs, and sheep.²²

Prosperity and growing material wealth speeded the transition from pioneer to commercialized and mechanized agriculture. In 1883 it was reported that primitive sod houses and "dug-outs" were disappearing in Kingman county, "and good comfortable frame houses taking their place." Special mention was also made of "the high state of improvement that many of the farms throughout the country had reached . . ."²³ With reference to mechanized farming, the *Wichita Eagle* observed in 1886,

Farm machinery in Kansas is almost universal. The labor is principally done by horse-power while the farmer rides at much of his work. He breaks his sod, stirs his fallow, drills his wheat, reaps and binds the same, plants and plows his corn, mows and rakes his hay, all with machinery upon which he rides, often shaded with canvass, and then threshes with steam. Our level, smooth prairies without stone or stump afford a splendid field for the employment of all the improved machinery and the farmers of this valley have not been slow to avail themselves of their benefit. Thus farming is losing much of its drudgery and becoming a much more intellectual pursuit than it still is in the east, to say nothing of our fathers and grandfathers.²⁴

The use of improved labor saving machinery revolutionized prairie agriculture by making possible the cultivation of a much larger area

²² Commenting upon the farm prosperity of the early eighties, the Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture said that "While the harvest of 1881 fell a little below that of 1880, and the wheat crop of 1885 was the lightest for many years, the period from 1880 to 1885 was one of general prosperity, and the State maintained her former well-earned rank among the great corn and wheat-producing States of the nation." Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report, 1885-1886*, p. 10.

²³ Cutler, *op. cit.*, 1527.

²⁴ *Wichita Eagle*, April 6, 1886.

of land, and adding greatly to the productivity of each unit of land and labor. It is estimated that the productive capacity of an individual farmer multiplied more than twelvefold from 1830 to 1880. Machinery also contributed to the commercialization of agriculture. Products were raised primarily for the market and only incidentally for the use of the farmer and his family.²⁵

Capital Needs

Obviously, settlers needed capital if they were to engage in commercialized agriculture. Quite a little money was needed to convert raw prairie into a hospitable and income producing farm. One contemporary estimated that a homesteader needed \$1,000 for the following items: registerings, etc., \$50; horses and implements, \$500; furniture, small stock, etc., \$200; a sod house, stables and seed, \$150; and \$100 for breaking 40 acres of sod. "To this must be added the cost of sustenance for self and family during the year, or perhaps two years, which intervened before regular crops could be raised."²⁶ Another contemporary commented on the farmer's need for capital as follows:

A man does not go West for free land because he has plenty of money to spend, but because he lacks money. Settlers locating on unimproved land, more or less remote from towns and railroads, find that everything they have to buy costs a great deal and what little they have to sell (if indeed they have anything to sell) brings a very low price. For two or three years, as a rule, there is nothing of consequence coming in, unless the settlers find work for themselves and their teams. In the meantime they are subjected to constant expenses for building purposes, fencing, farming implements, etc., and until they get something like proper returns from their farms, their outlay is much greater than their income. The balance being against them, they soon make away with what little money they have brought with them . . .²⁷

The above quotations apply to settlers who occupied nearly free homestead land. This type of land was soon taken up, however, and additional capital to buy other land was needed by newcomers. Practically all of the settlers who came to the area in the mid-eighties had to buy land. A contemporary who witnessed the mass migration to the

²⁵ Louis B. Schmidt, "Some Significant Aspects of the Agricultural Revolution in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 3, July, 1920, p. 378.

²⁶ Arthur F. Bentley, "The Condition of the Western Farmer," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in History and Political Science*, Parts VII, VIII.

²⁷ W. F. Mappin, "Farm Mortgages and the Small Farmer," *Political Science Quarterly*, September, 1889, pp. 436-437.

southwestern part of the area in 1885 said that most of the settlers were pre-emptors, "but some claims were being bought up. Good claims sell from \$800 to \$1,200."²⁸

Newcomers were forced to buy land that was increasing in value by leaps and bounds. One authority says that farm land values in Kansas increased from four to six times as a common thing between 1881 and 1887, "and in rare instances the price of land rose as high as \$200 an acre."²⁹ With land values rising so rapidly, it was impossible for a newcomer of limited means to buy a farm without recourse to borrowing.

The typical settler was in desperate need of a loan; but, if he turned to his local banker, he was apt to be rebuffed. In general, the commercial banking system was unable or unwilling to supply his credit needs. Western banks often had difficulty raising capital as surplus funds that could be used for this purpose were limited in newly settled communities. Bankers also realized that their solvency might be threatened if they made many long-term loans upon the security of real estate. National banks were forbidden by law from lending upon real estate security. State and private banks, even though less restricted in their operations than national banks, were not inclined to invest heavily in farm mortgages, preferring instead the more remunerative short-term loans backed by chattel or personal security. On the other hand, commercial banks of all types were indirectly engaged in the mortgage loan business. A number of banks in the area established mortgage company affiliates, and most bankers acted on their own account as agents of eastern investors.³⁰

While there was a shortage of capital in the West, this was not true of all parts of the country. Surplus capital was accumulating in the East. One authority states that following 1879 there was "a more rapid accumulation of capital than had ever before occurred in this country."³¹

²⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 21, 1885 ("The West").

²⁹ Raymond C. Miller, "The Background of Populism in Kansas," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XI, No. 4, March, 1925, p. 474.

³⁰ Glenn H. Miller, Jr., "Financing the Boom in Kansas, 1879 to 1888, With Special Reference to Municipal Indebtedness and to Real Estate Mortgages," Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Kansas, May, 1954, pp. 85-90.

³¹ Edward Atkinson, "The True Meaning of Farm-Mortgage Statistics," *The Forum*, Vol. XVII, May, 1894, p. 313.

In the East the opportunities for profitable investment in trade and industry were limited. On the other hand, quite a different situation existed in the newly opened western states. Here the rate of return on capital was high, and money lent on the security of agricultural land returned a handsome rate of interest. "Moreover, the security, if wisely selected, tended to appreciate in value, thereby guaranteeing that the lender would not experience loss if forced to assume ownership."³²

Land Mortgage Companies

The problem was to direct the flow of capital from the East to the West. While the commercial banking system was unable or unwilling to perform this function except on a limited basis, there was a solution in the form of specialized land mortgage companies (a category used here to include individual brokers, private mortgage companies, and incorporated companies issuing their own debenture bonds backed by mortgages).

Early middlemen were individual brokers and unincorporated mortgage loan companies. The former accepted money from eastern investors and lent it to midwestern farmers, "with the broker taking the difference between the interest rate the farmer could pay and the rate the investor would accept."³³ A broker could handle successfully only a limited volume of business. He had to maintain contacts in the East and the West; this necessitated frequent trips to visit borrowers and lenders, in addition to the handling of voluminous correspondence. The company type organization with a home office and agents in the field could transact a much larger volume of business. Mortgage loan companies accepted money deposited with them by eastern investors and lent it to farmers or speculators through their agents in the West. G. H. Miller says that company policies and procedures varied within rather wide limits.

The company received for its efforts a commission, as did its local agent. The mortgage was sometimes made out to the company and assigned to an investor and sometimes made out directly to the lender. It was sometimes guaranteed, sometimes not. Interest was usually payable semi-annually and represented by

³² Allan G. Bogue, "Farm Land Credit in Kansas and Nebraska, 1854-1900," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1951, p. 584.

³³ Mappin, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

coupons. The borrower had to furnish evidence of a perfect title, pay taxes on the property, maintain it, and insure it. If the mortgagor defaulted on an interest payment or failed to keep any of his agreements the lender had the right to declare the whole amount due.³⁴

Later some mortgage companies incorporated and issued their own debenture bonds secured by mortgages deposited in trust. Although several companies issued debentures after 1880, this type of security was not very popular with investors, and individual mortgages continued to be sold to a greater extent than debentures.³⁵

Charles M. Hawkes.—This resident of Portland, Maine, and New Haven, Connecticut, was one of many individual mortgage brokers who did business in the area and in other parts of Kansas.³⁶ In 1875 he began to act as a middleman for New Englanders who had money to invest in Kansas mortgages. While residing in the East, Hawkes visited Kansas once a year to check on loan applications and mortgages in force and to solicit new business. He also relied on correspondents in various county seats for information, advice, and routine clerical services. He had correspondents in the area towns of Wellington, Sterling, and Howard City.³⁷

Unlike some mortgage brokers, Hawkes was extremely cautious in his business undertakings. He preferred small loans, ranging from \$200 to \$800, and insisted that the property taken as security be three or four times that amount lent. The majority of his loans was made to run from three to five years.³⁸ When Hawkes commenced his mortgage business, the interest rate (exclusive of commissions and premiums) was 12 per cent. In 1876 the rate fell to 10 per cent and continued at that level through most of 1878. In 1879 the rate went to 9 per cent and in 1880, to 8 per cent, where it remained, insofar as Hawkes' mortgages were concerned, until January of 1888.³⁹

³⁴ G. H. Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

³⁶ The Hawkes' letter press books, which include the business (and some personal) letters written between December 11, 1871, and January 20, 1888, are deposited in the Kansas State Historical Society at Topeka. In Glenn H. Miller's thesis there is a chapter entitled "The Hawkes Papers: A Case Study of a Kansas Mortgage Brokerage Business." This chapter deals in a competent manner with such matters as Hawkes' early business history, his reasons for going into the mortgage brokerage business, and his business policies and procedures. G. H. Miller, *Ibid.*, pp. 114-161.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-132.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-36.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-139.

Jabez B. Watkins.—While Hawkes remained an individual mortgage broker, the career of Jabez B. Watkins illustrates all three forms of mortgage business organization.⁴⁰ In 1870 Watkins came to Champaign, Illinois, where he acted as local agent for several firms and individuals lending money to farmers in central Illinois. His base of operations was transferred to Lawrence, Kansas, in August of 1873. Here he found conditions more favorable for his brokerage business. To solicit funds, he advertised extensively in the eastern press, made frequent trips to the East, and later established offices in New York and London. Dr. Bogue says that "By 1880 Watkins' efforts were bringing in a flood of funds for investment in western farm mortgages."⁴¹

The nature of Watkins' business changed during the early eighties. Instead of waiting until money was received from lenders before it was lent on mortgage security, mortgages were negotiated on his own account and then transferred to eastern investors. This practice increased his need for working capital. In October of 1883 Watkins incorporated his business to raise more capital and to give the appearance of greater stability to investors. Prior to this time his business was a personal one, although operated under the style of J. B. Watkins and Company. Another change occurred early in 1887, when he began to sell debenture bonds backed by mortgage paper deposited with a New York City bank as trustee.

In addition to his extensive loan business in Kansas, Watkins expanded his activities into Missouri, Nebraska, Texas, and the territory of Dakota. By 1893 he had supervised the sale of obligations totaling over \$18,000,000; some two thirds of it was lent in Kansas and Texas. During the years of peak business the company employed about 25 full time employees; and, at one time or another, it was represented by several hundred local agents, a number of whom were situated in South Central Kansas. "By no means the largest of the western mort-

⁴⁰ The Watkins' business records are deposited in the Watson Library at the University of Kansas. Dr. Allan G. Bogue has used these records as the basis for the following publications: "Farm Land Credit in Kansas and Nebraska, 1854-1900;" "The Land Mortgage Company in the Early Plains States," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 25, January, 1951, pp. 25-33; and "Farmer Debtors in Pioneer Kinsley," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XX, No. 2, May, 1952, pp. 82-107.

⁴¹ Allan G. Bogue, "The Land Mortgage Company in the Early Plains States," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 25, January, 1951, p. 22.

gage companies," writes Dr. Bogue, "the volume of business entitled the J. B. Watkins Land Mortgage Company to rank well up among the major corporations of its kind."⁴²

Farm Mortgage Boom

The mortgage loan business of the area dates from the period of prosperity prior to the Panic of 1873. In this period mortgages were said to ornament a majority of the farms in Sedgwick county. Business fell off markedly during the disastrous years of the middle seventies but revived in the late years of the decade and reached boom proportions by the mid-eighties.

Prior to the mid-eighties the mortgage business was highly remunerative and at the same time was generally conducted on a safe and orderly basis.⁴³ Cutler mentions several successful mortgage businesses operating in the area during this period. In 1883 T. R. Hazard, a Newton banker, was said to be "engaged in placing money for parties in the East, and since 1876 has loaned over \$250,000 for eastern parties, and has never closed a real estate mortgage."⁴⁴ George W. Shupe of Peabody was also a banker and loan agent. From 1879 to 1883 he "placed over half a million dollars out of which March 1, 1883, there was not a dollar delinquent interest due."⁴⁵

The farm mortgage boom got under way in South Central Kansas during the prosperous years after 1882. For a time sound principles continued to characterize the business. Brokers and investors carefully investigated the character and the property of loan applicants. First liens were insisted upon, the title of security must be found perfect, buildings had to be insured for the amount of the loan, borrowers were required to pay all taxes on the property, and loans represented only a small portion of the value of the security.⁴⁶

By the mid-eighties there was a veritable craze for western mortgages. Surplus funds were building up in the East at a time when investment opportunities in trade and industry were unattractive. The *Wichita Eagle* commented on this state of affairs as follows:

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴³ Mappin, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

⁴⁴ Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 779.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1263.

⁴⁶ G. H. Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-136.

Sixty millions of dollars in cash is held by the New York city banks in excess of the legal reserve. . . . Everywhere are millions of idle capital . . . business men and manufacturers do not want to borrow it at current rates of discount, and, in fact, hardly anybody engaged in trade or industry is a borrower of bank funds. . . . Dullness in speculation, the fact that merchants are getting out of debt and do not want a line of discount at the banks and depression of industrial enterprises are among the causes of the financial congestion at the money centers of the country.⁴⁷

Under these circumstances the high returns on western mortgages were doubly attractive. More and more eastern capital began to flow westward. The Massachusetts Commissioner of Foreign Mortgages reported in 1890 that "the yearly investments of the people of Massachusetts in Western mortgage loans had for several years been from eight to twelve million dollars. Of this amount probably one-fourth has been loaned in Kansas."⁴⁸ The savings banks of Vermont held western mortgages totaling \$9,000,000 in 1890, and the people of other New England and middle Atlantic states probably had equally large sums invested in western mortgages.⁴⁹

Who were these people who invested surplus funds in western mortgages? After the boom collapsed, disgruntled and debt ridden western farmers maintained that the eastern "money-kings," the Wall Street financial sharks, were the villains in this high drama. The records of mortgage loan companies and individual brokers do not support such charges. On the contrary, they show that mortgages were held by educational and charitable organizations and thrifty middle class individuals, many of whom were members of the professions. Dr. Bogue discusses the sources of funds for the Watkins Mortgage Company as follows:

That there was a high percentage of middle class Quakers is undeniable. Letters to investors who bore the prefix of Reverend also occur in considerable numbers throughout the correspondence of the Mortgage Company. At least one eastern college purchased securities from an early date In England the most distinguished of the investors was a lord chief justice. If the total number of investors at September 20, 1893, is divided into the gross sales of securities we find that the average long time investment of the investors stood at just under \$4,000.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, June 11, 1885 ("Too Much Money").

⁴⁸ Kansas State Historical Society, *Clipping Files*, p. 30 ("The Kansas Situation," *Boston Transcript*, March 12, 1891).

⁴⁹ G. H. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁵⁰ Allan G. Bogue, "Farm Land Credit in Kansas and Nebraska, 1854-1900," Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Cornell University, 1951, p. 584.

The Hawkes' papers reveal a similar story. G. H. Miller says,

Hawkes' customers on the lending side fell into two classes—(1) a number of colonies of the "United Society called Shakers" in New York and New England, . . . [who] . . . provided the bulk of his lending funds; and (2) individuals chiefly from the professional classes, often personal friends of Hawkes, sometimes with trust funds to invest.⁵¹

With a flood of money seeking outlets in the West, it was only natural that the mortgage loan business should expand. A multitude of new companies and private loan agents entered the field. The statement is made that 137 companies were incorporated in Kansas and Nebraska alone, besides many foreign corporations and private loan agents.⁵²

Wichita, the center of the loan business of the area, had 26 loan offices and eight banks in September, 1886.⁵³

Given such favorable circumstances, it is not surprising that the mortgage debt of the area increased by leaps and bounds. Figure 9 shows farm mortgage debt of the area and subareas from 1880 to 1889.

The area debt remained fairly constant at a figure of nearly 5 million dollars from 1880 to 1882. It then rose spectacularly from 4.8 million dollars to 22.8 million dollars between 1882 and 1886, more than four-fold. A large part of this debt was held in the central subarea. Here the figure rose from 2.5 million dollars in 1882 to 11.1 million dollars in 1886; during the same period the subarea's percentage of total area debt fell off slightly from 52.0 to 49.0 per cent. In the eastern subarea the absolute increase was from 2.0 million dollars to 6.7 million dollars, and the percentage decline was from 42.4 to 29.3; in the western subarea the absolute increase was from 0.3 million dollars to 5.0 million dollars, and the percentage increase was from 5.6 to 21.8. If the farm mortgage debt of the area is expressed as a percentage of the total state debt, the increase was from 27.5 in 1882 to 39.3 in 1886.

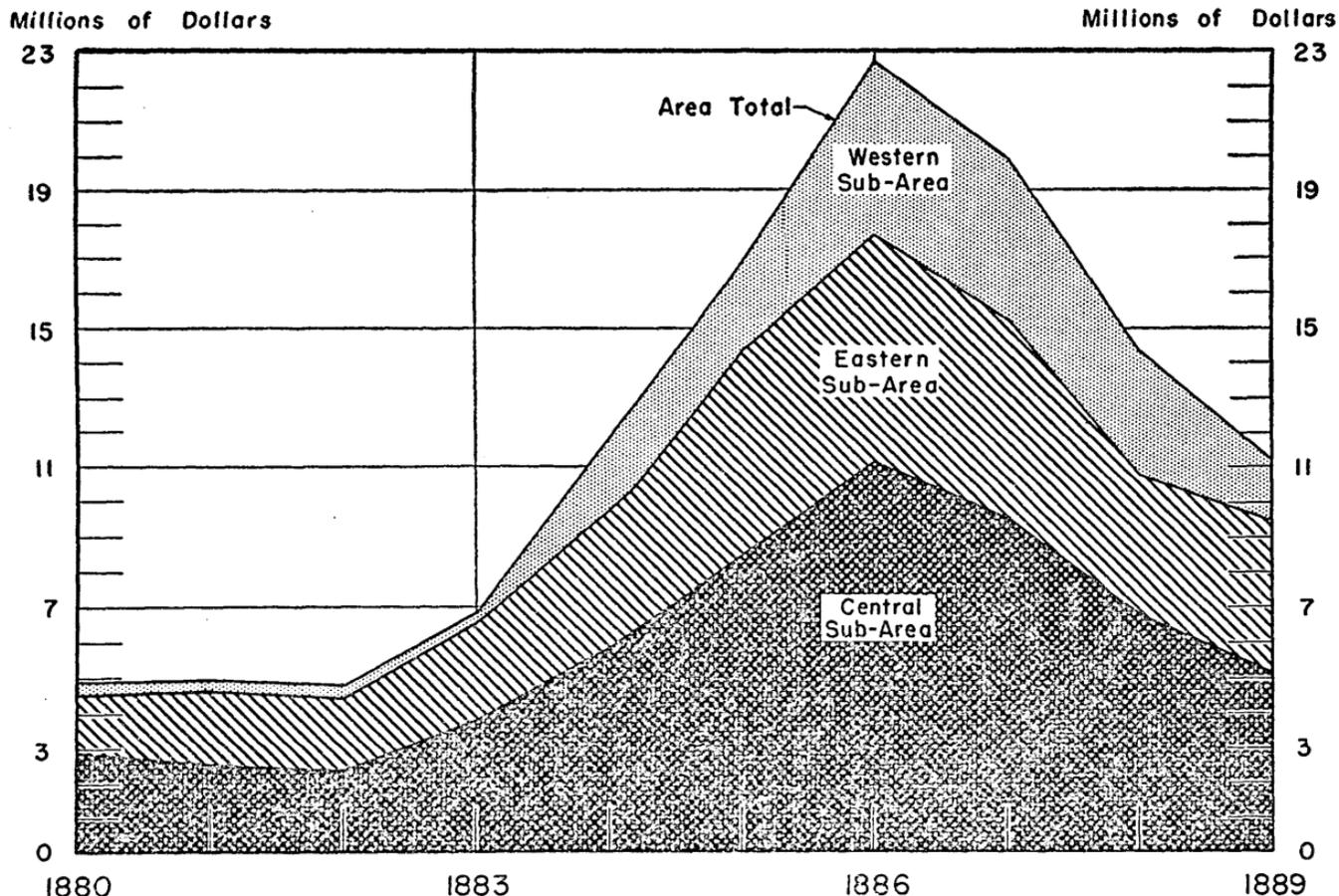
As more and more money poured into the area, sound business principles were abandoned in the competition to place the money on mortgage security. Bogue writes that "Charlatan companies were allowed to survive and by their competition forced sounder companies

⁵¹ G. H. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁵² R. C. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

⁵³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, September 26, 1886 ("Facts about Wichita").

Figure 9
 Farm Real Estate Mortgage Debt by Area and Subarea, South Central Kansas, 1880-1889



Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Report on Real Estate Mortgages*, Vol. XII, pp. 436-450.

into reckless practices."⁵⁴ Loan agents had more money than they could place with safety. "It is a fact," wrote the manager of one large mortgage company, "that during many months of 1886 and 1887 we were unable to get enough mortgages for the people of the East who wished to invest in that kind of security. My desk was piled every morning with hundreds of letters, each enclosing a draft, and asking me to send a farm mortgage from Kansas or Nebraska."⁵⁵ William Allen White said that agents even drove from farm to farm to solicit business.⁵⁶ People were carried away by the intoxicated boom atmosphere. Farmers were urged to borrow more than they needed, and not too scrupulous local agents were often tempted to place a larger loan on a farm than its value warranted. The deterioration of the mortgage business distressed J. B. Watkins, and in February of 1888 he described it as "the most rotten branch of business that I have any knowledge of in this country."⁵⁷

In assessing responsibility for the excesses of the boom, the agent who transacted the local business of the mortgage company cannot be dismissed lightly. He was frequently a jack-of-all-trades who, in addition to his loan business, might be a lawyer, a banker, or a real estate dealer. Western towns literally swarmed with these agents during the boom years, and the pressure of competition forced many of them to make unsound loans and charge exorbitant commissions. The secretary of the Watkins Land Mortgage Company said that "a commission will warp the integrity and judgment of the best of them."⁵⁸

Collapse of the Small Farmer Boom

Several years before the farm mortgage boom reached its peak, its shaky foundation was becoming apparent. From 1881 to 1884 bountiful crops and rising cattle prices more than compensated for declining wheat and corn prices. Beginning in 1885 both elements of support began to give way. Cattle prices fell off markedly, and a period of drought set in. "The meteorological records of 1885-6 . . . tell of the

⁵⁴ Bogue, *op. cit.*, p. 607.

⁵⁵ Harger, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁵⁶ R. C. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 475.

⁵⁷ Allan G. Bogue, "The Land Mortgage Company in the Early Plains States," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 25, January, 1951, p. 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

close of a rainy period and of one year of comparative drought," wrote Professor J. T. Lovewell of Washburn University.⁵⁹ Even more severe was the drought of 1887 that "fell with much force on Kansas, and in common with other States she experienced one of the most disastrous crop years in her history."⁶⁰

In the area the farm mortgage boom collapsed after 1886. The bottom dropped out of the land market; and while everyone wanted to sell at once, no one could find a buyer. Foreclosure sales swept the rural areas like a prairie fire, mortgage companies failed by the score, and many destitute farmers packed their few belongings in a wagon and headed back east "to the wife's folks."

⁵⁹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, "Biennial Meteorological Report for 1885-6," *Fifth Biennial Report, 1885-1886*, p. 166.

⁶⁰ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, p. 6.

Section IX

RAILROAD BOOM OF THE EIGHTIES

A railroad boom followed close on the heels of the small farmer boom. For nearly a decade before 1880 the scarcity of railroads was probably the chief obstacle to economic expansion in the area. Surprisingly enough, this problem was tackled with such vigor that in a few years more miles of railroad were built than the area could possibly support. To a large extent the small farmer and the railroad booms were mutually dependent. Professor Malin states, "Along with the small farmer boom had come the railroad boom, each more or less interacting on the other, as the farmer was dependent upon rails for his market, and the new railroads upon the farmer for their traffic."¹

After recovering from the depression of the 1870's, the United States entered a period of phenomenal railroad growth. From 1880 to 1890 the railroad mileage of the country increased over 70,000, a figure well above that of any other decade. More than 60 per cent of this new construction was in states and territories west of the Mississippi river; in this region the Great Plains states accounted for the largest share, over 40 per cent of the country's total.²

Kansas was thus in the region of greatest expansion. In the decade, 1880-1890, the increase in Kansas' railroad mileage was second only to that of Texas; by 1888 there was one mile of railroad for every nine and two-thirds square miles of land, and five and one-half miles of track for every thousand people in the state.³ Dr. Boyle says that the decade of the eighties "stands out above all others in Kansas history for its pre-eminence in railroad building. It has been variously described as a craze, a mania, and even a delirium of railroad construction."⁴ Within the state, the south central area probably experienced the greatest expansion. Here (in 1888) there was one mile of track for every two and

¹ James C. Malin, "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IV, No. 1, February, 1935, p. 24.

² Kent T. Healy, "Transportation," *The Growth of the American Economy*, Harold F. Williamson, editor, 1951 ed., p. 373.

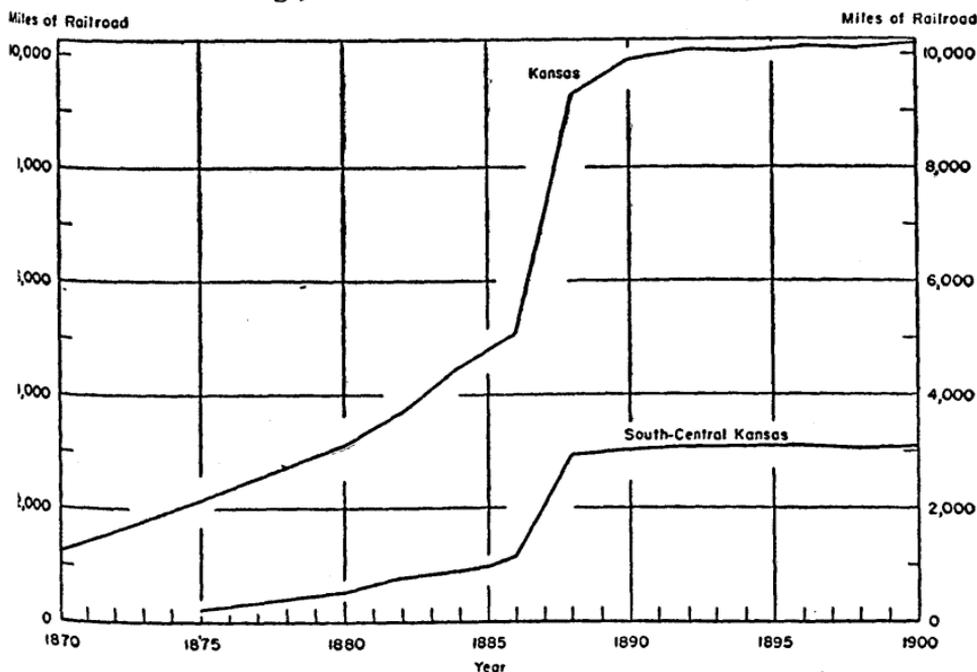
³ James Humphrey, "The Railroads of Kansas," Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, p. 152.

⁴ James E. Boyle, *Financial History of Kansas*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin Bulletin, p. 71.

one-third square miles of land, and four and one-third miles of track for every thousand people.

The spectacular railroad expansion taking place in the state and the area are shown in Figures 10, 11, and 12. According to Figure 10, Kansas added 1,861 miles of railroad in the seventies and 6,801 miles in the eighties as compared with 538 and 2,463 miles, respectively, for the area. A phenomenal increase took place from 1886 to 1888, when the state's mileage increased 4,220 (83 per cent) and the area's by 1,784 (156 per cent). For this study it is significant that the area gained relative to the state in railroad mileage. South Central Kansas, comprising 25.9 per cent of the land area of the state, had only 17.3 per cent of the state's railroad mileage in 1880, but by 1888 the percentage rose to 31.5. Figures 11 and 12 show features of the railroad boom that are not brought out by Figure 10. These include the heavy concentration of rail lines in the central subarea, the growth of Wichita, Hutchinson, Newton, Winfield, Wellington, and Arkansas City as important rail centers, the increased

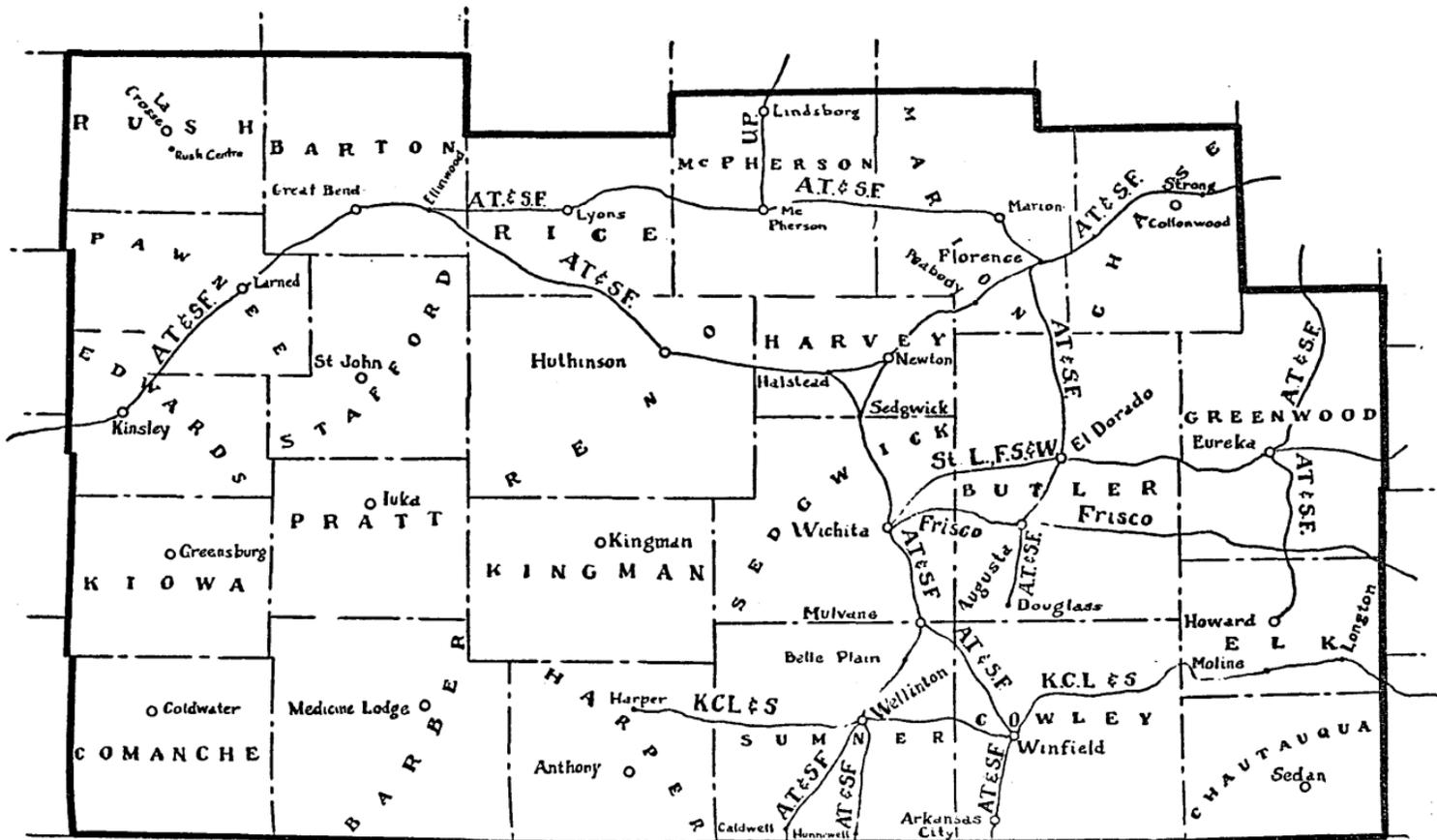
Figure 10
Railroad Mileage, South Central Kansas and Kansas, 1870-1900



Source: O. C. Hull, "Railroads in Kansas," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1911-1912*, Vol. XII, pp. 44-46; Kansas Auditor of State, *Second Biennial Report, 1879-1880*, to *Twelfth Biennial Report, 1899-1900*, inclusive.

Figure 11
 Railroads, South Central Kansas, 1883

[152]

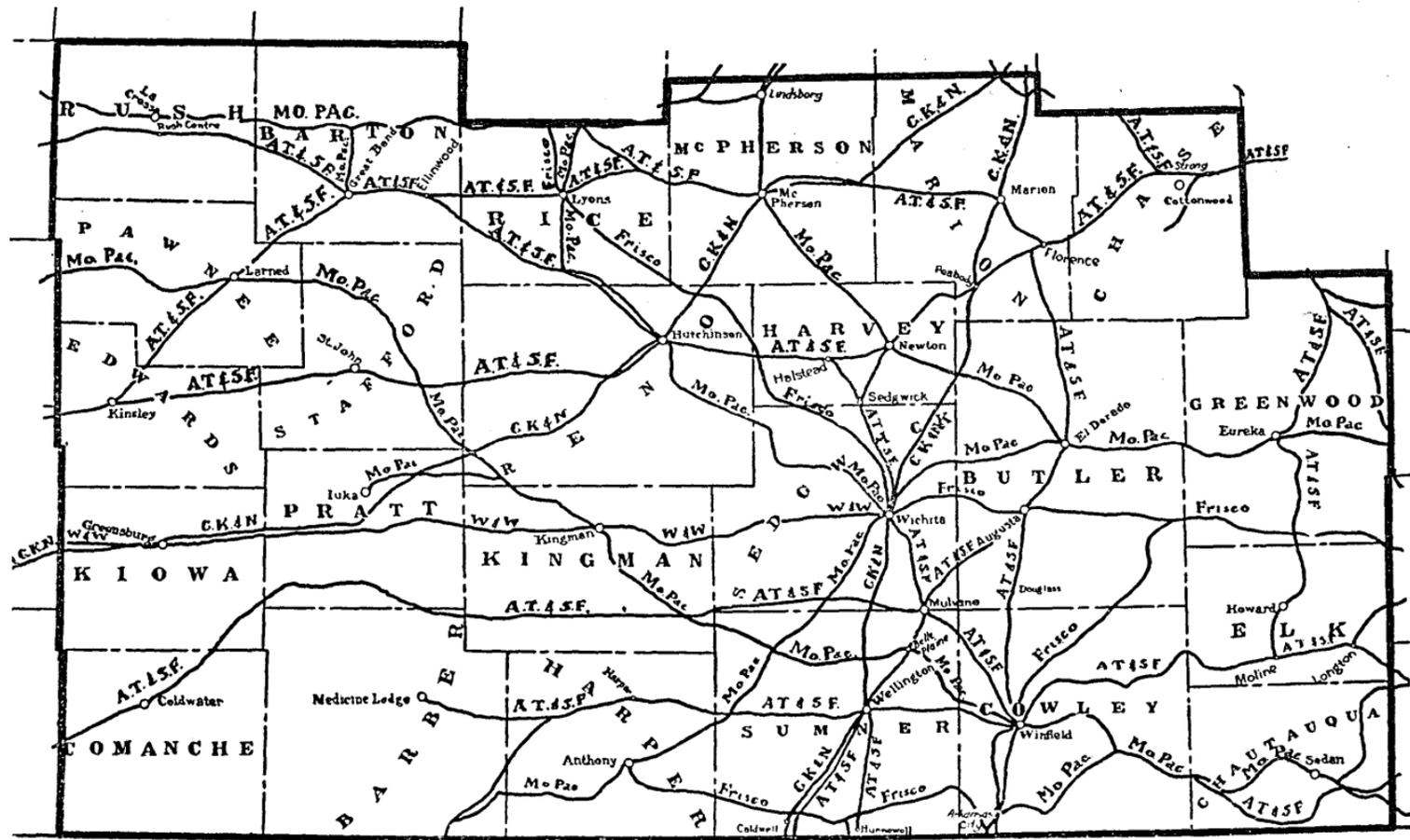


ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH CENTRAL KANSAS

Source: William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1883.

Figure 12
 Railroads, South Central Kansas, 1888

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AN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Source: Kansas State Board of Railroad Commissioners, Sixth Annual Report, December 1, 1888.

number of railroad companies operating in the area, and the construction of roads into parts of the area formerly without rail connections.

Railroad Problem

We have seen that one rail line, the Santa Fe, was projected across the area in the early seventies at a time when most settlements were confined to the eastern counties. Since it was built largely through uninhabited country, little revenue could be expected for several years. Private capital was not forthcoming until the Federal Government came to the aid of the company in the form of a large grant of public land. Although the Santa Fe built a few branch lines in the late seventies, many parts of the area still lacked rail facilities by 1880. Even in areas accessible to the road, conditions were far from ideal. One company had a monopoly of traffic; under these conditions it was customary to charge what the traffic would bear.

The need for more railroads had become acute by the early eighties. Settlers moved into the area by the thousands and occupied land more or less remote from rail lines. They realized that rail transport meant the difference between a primitive and a civilized manner of living—"everybody knew that 'a railroad or no railroad' was simply a new version of 'to be or not to be.'"⁵ The future growth of towns and farm communities depended upon this improved system of transportation. One railroad was scarcely enough. A one railroad town was likely to remain a "one-horse town," because the inhabitants could be forced to pay high rates on the products they exported and imported. On the other hand, a town with two or more roads enjoyed many advantages. It was likely to be connected with several large cities in the East, and its inhabitants could buy and sell in competitive markets. More important, it would have alternative rail facilities, and shippers would be in a position to demand rate concessions from competing lines. A town so favored might attract many merchants, wholesalers, manufacturers, and workmen, not to mention the ubiquitous lawyer and real estate dealer. This would create a demand for more business buildings and houses. Real estate values would rise, and with a little

⁵ S. F. Van Oss, *American Railroads as Investments*, p. 19.

missionary work on the part of local newspapers and the real estate crowd a boom of sizable proportions might develop. Everyone hoped to benefit. Thus it is not surprising that area residents made a concerted effort to secure railroads, even to the extent of organizing railroad companies and voting bond subsidies to attract roads.

Forces outside the area also influenced railroad developments. The late nineteenth century was a period of rapid economic expansion, little or no government regulation of business, and violent fluctuations in economic activity. It was an age when motives of self-interest were given full play and when men gifted in the arts of financial manipulation and business warfare often rose to positions of leadership in railroad and other business corporations.

Intermittent warfare characterized the railroad industry. For a time competing roads would agree to pool traffic or earnings and adhere to minimum tariffs that would insure profits to each member road. Then one or more member roads would break the agreement, and war would resume in earnest. After a time people realized that competition in the railroad industry was destructive. Early attempts to control competition by means of legally unenforceable pooling agreements proved unsuccessful. The problem might be solved, however, if a number of roads were consolidated into one large system that had a monopoly of traffic over a wide area. This technique of control, known as "empire building," was a major factor in the railroad industry after the Civil War.⁶

Empire builders, such as Jay Gould and Leland Stanford, understood that the railroad industry was a high fixed cost industry and that the cost of operating a railroad varied little with the volume of traffic carried. They were eager to carry more traffic because, in most cases, additional tonnage meant so much additional profit. With the expansion of the Great Plains area in the early eighties, many railroad officials cast envious eyes upon the growing volume of traffic in that region.⁷ Here was a rapidly developing region inadequately served by railroads. Prior to 1880 only a handful of land grant railroads traversed the plains region, monopolizing traffic for many miles on both sides

⁶ Healy, *op. cit.*, pp. 377-378.

⁷ Robert E. Riegel, *The Story of the Western Railroads*, pp. 152-153.

of their lines. Moreover, these roads charged much higher rates than those to the east. For a time the Missouri river served as a boundary line for western railroads. East of the river a number of competing lines operated between such cities as Chicago, St. Louis, Omaha, and Kansas City. Water borne traffic competed with that carried by rail in parts of this region. Vigorous competition, the rule for a time, was curbed to some extent when competing roads entered into pooling agreements. Pooling points were established at the Missouri river, and traffic allocation agreements were entered into by roads operating east and west of this boundary.

With the return of prosperity in the late seventies, pooling agreements were subjected in increasing pressure. Railroads terminating at the Missouri river began building west into the plains states with the ultimate objective of reaching the Pacific coast. This threatened the traffic monopoly of western railroads. They retaliated by building a network of roads in the plains states and by extending their systems east and west in order to have independent connections with large cities like Chicago and San Francisco. Wild competitive and promotional building soon became the order of the day. Pooling agreements were broken and were virtually abandoned. In the struggle for survival railroads were forced either to expand or to be swallowed by their rivals. They chose to expand. This entailed enormous outlays for construction at a time when freight and passenger earnings were declining in the face of growing competition for traffic. Railroad companies soon found themselves in a precarious financial situation. Under these conditions they turned to the railroad hungry communities of the West for financial assistance.

Bond Subsidies

While some railroad companies were in a strong enough position to finance their own expansion, the bulk of them were inadequately financed. The latter companies were clamoring for government subsidies and the former not above accepting them. After the early seventies, federal land grants and state aid were no longer available, but subsidies might be obtained in the form of municipal, township, and

county bonds. This was a lucrative source of funds due to the intense desire for railroads by western communities. Moreover, there were few, if any, legal limits on this type of aid. The Constitution of Kansas placed no specific limits on the indebtedness of local governmental units, and subsequent laws establishing such limits were loosely interpreted and amended.⁸ Bonds voted by local government units were sometimes exchanged for stocks and bonds of the railroads and sometimes given outright to the roads. They amounted to a loan or a gift of public credit. "When a railroad received local bonds in return for its stock, it would sell them in New York or in Europe, or wherever a market could be found, and often at a considerable loss from discount and commissions . . ." According to Professor Farmer, "Much of the eastern capital invested in western railroads was invested indirectly through the purchase of municipal bonds."¹⁰

A mania for bond subsidized railroads soon developed. Promoters entered the field "to construct rail lines not because they were needed or could long provide returns, but because of the grants and subsidies which the local government units were so willing to bestow."¹¹ It was easy for railroad promoters to provoke local rivalries over a projected but not definitely located line. Communities were played off against one another, and in some cases a railroad would "survey two or three parallel lines in order to encourage larger competitive local subscriptions."¹² Henry George records in *Progress and Poverty*, "A railroad company approaches a small town as a highwayman approaches a victim: 'Stand up and deliver.'"¹³ Van Oss continues:

When . . . an exceptional town or village was unwilling to "pay up" the railway carried out its threat [to pass a town not acceding to its demands], and the unmanageable township was ruthlessly starved to death while its rivals thrived and prospered; and such a punishment was very effective.¹⁴

⁸ G. H. Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-187.

⁹ Frederick A. Cleveland and Fred W. Powell, *Railroad Promotion and Capitalization in the United States*, p. 208.

¹⁰ Hallie Farmer, "The Economic Background of Frontier Populism," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. X, No. 4, March, 1924, p. 413.

¹¹ G. H. Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-196.

¹² Riegel, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹³ Van Oss, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁴ *Idem.*

Not all the pressure to vote bond subsidies came from nonresident promoters. Town boosters often played a leading role in organizing and promoting local lines subsidized by taxpayers. They also bought railroad securities and granted land and, in some cases, bonds for depots and yards; additional land was sometimes granted for division into town lots. "Most communities, desiring to increase business activity, eagerly gave aid which they looked upon as an investment, and towns were just as eager to obtain a second and third line (and even more) as a first."¹⁵

Railroad Boom in the Area

Railroad developments in South Central Kansas generally conformed to the above pattern. At first railroads were constructed mainly to serve the legitimate transportation needs of farmers and businessmen. In time, however, the nature of construction changed to that of wild competitive and promotional building. Owing to the complex forces and motives entering into railroad expansion, saying precisely when the change occurred is difficult. It appears, however, that the year 1886 marks a change of emphasis from the former to the latter type of construction.

Beginning in 1880, several trunk line railroads invaded the area to challenge the pre-eminence of the Santa Fe. In the period 1880-1885 the St. Louis, Fort Scott and Wichita (later incorporated into the Missouri Pacific system); the St. Louis and San Francisco (or 'Frisco); and a branch line of the Union Pacific from Salina to McPherson were constructed. These lines were built in the eastern and central subareas with Wichita as the chief terminal. Faced with growing competition, the Santa Fe extended its system by leasing, operating, or otherwise controlling several newly constructed lines. These included the Cowley, Sumner and Fort Smith; the Florence, El Dorado and Walnut Valley; the Kansas City, Emporia and Southern; the Marion and McPherson; the Southern Kansas; the Wichita and Southwestern; and the Wichita and Western railroad companies.

Generally speaking, these new roads were built to provide necessary lines of communication so promotional and competitive building was

¹⁵ G. H. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

of secondary importance. Evidence to support this generalization is rather meager, although not entirely lacking. If local government subsidies are used as criteria, Table 7 shows that railroads depended upon subsidies far less prior to 1886 than in the subsequent period. For the area as a whole, bond aid to railroads rose from nearly one-half million dollars in 1878 to slightly more than a million dollars in 1880. It then fell to slightly less than a million dollars from 1882 to 1884 and increased to 1.68 million dollars in 1886. A sharp rise is observed from 1886 to 1887, and in the latter year 5.63 million dollars' worth of railroad aid bonds, one third of the state's total, were voted in the area.

Even after the practice of subsidizing railroads became fairly widespread, the need of such aid was doubtful. This was the opinion of the Kansas Railroad Commissioners in their report dated December 1, 1886.

It must be evident from the number of new lines projected by responsible companies into every portion of Kansas, and the eagerness manifested by these companies to occupy territory in this State, that the voting of bond aid by cities, counties and townships to aid in their construction is rendered wholly unnecessary. Railroads will be built in the future as fast as they will be needed, and much faster than the conditions existing will afford many of them a reasonable support, without the voting of another bond. . . . We think the people of this State should be relieved from any further burdens of this character.¹⁶

Table 7
Municipal Indebtedness, for Railroad Aid Bonds, South Central Kansas and Kansas, 1878 to 1892
(millions of dollars)

Year	South Central Kansas			Kansas		
	Railroad aid bonds	Total indebtedness	Railroad bonds as a percentage of total indebtedness	Railroad aid bonds	Total indebtedness	Railroad bonds as a percentage of total indebtedness
1878	\$ 0.48	\$ 1.82	26.4	\$ 7.22	\$13.35	54.1
1880	1.07	2.53	42.3	8.26	14.34	57.6
1882	0.98	2.59	37.8	8.17	14.51	56.3
1884	0.99	2.70	36.7	8.22	15.95	51.5
1886	1.68	4.04	41.6	9.29	19.15	48.5
1887	5.63	9.43	59.7	17.31	31.11	55.6
1890	5.20	10.34	50.3	18.05	35.99	50.2
1892	5.79	10.77	53.8	19.28	37.86	50.9

Source: Kansas Auditor of State, *First Biennial Report, 1877-1878, to Eighth Biennial Report, 1891-1892, inclusive.*

¹⁶ Kansas State Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Fourth Annual Report, 1886, p. 4.*

The cautious advice of the Railroad Commissioners was scarcely heard above the din of the boomers. All ears were attuned to the cry for railroads and more railroads. The Sumner county town of Belle Plaine was one of many small towns with soaring railroad ambitions; in 1886 the editor of the local newspaper gave his readers the following advice:

Do not be afraid of going into debt. Spend money for the city's betterment as free as water. But judiciously. Too much cannot be spent this year if properly applied. Let the bugaboo of high taxes be nursed by old women. Do all you can for Belle Plaine regardless of money, and let the increase of population and wealth take care of the taxes. Double, treble, quadruple our expenditures, and do it in the right manner, and before the year 1886 is passed Belle Plaine will be able to pay them and much more—and Belle Plaine will boom with a double pica, black face B.¹⁷

Kos Harris, one of Wichita's leading boomers, said it was a common thought that "he who heeds his purse is a Wichita curse."¹⁸

The railroad boom got off to a good start in 1885, picked up momentum in 1886, and reached a dizzy height in 1887 before it collapsed. It was such a widespread phenomenon that only a few highlights can be mentioned before proceeding to the Wichita railroad boom. The above mentioned town of Belle Plaine with about one thousand inhabitants in 1886,

. . . was in that year the general headquarters for one road, was on the main route for another, was voting bonds for a third, was negotiating with a fourth to change its projected route so as to include this town, and had one of three standing committees of its Board of Trade on constant lookout for still other railroads.¹⁹

Kinsley on the western edge of the area had two railroads in operation and the promise of five others by the spring of 1887. Professor Malin writes as follows in this connection:

Many lines were being projected by irresponsible parties into the trade territory of those already built, and primarily for the subsidies voted by counties, townships and towns, or to sell out to stronger roads. The established systems, the Santa Fe, Union Pacific, Rock Island and Missouri Pacific, felt they had to locate branch lines in order to protect themselves from these racketeers, even when the business secured did not in itself warrant construction.²⁰

¹⁷ *Belle Plaine News*, February 27, 1886.

¹⁸ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁹ R. C. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

²⁰ James C. Malin, "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IV, No. 1, February, 1935, p. 25.

Hutchinson was another thriving town that went all out to boom railroads. Voters were kept busy going to the polls to vote bond subsidies. It was recorded that at the election of August 31, 1886,

... eight different railroad bond projects, for eight different railway companies were submitted to the voters of Reno county, aggregating in all more than a million dollars worth of aid bonds

When election day came, Mayor Bigger proclaimed the day a holiday and called on all business to suspend and all business men and their clerks put in their time working for the bonds. Geo. Hern, town marshal, was ordered to see that all complied, and they did.

When the vote was counted and it was found there was only one vote against the bonds, and that in the county outside . . . everybody went wild.

The Hutchinson News issued an extra in which it was announced: "The streets were crowded with men, women and children, all happy, shouting and singing. The Ringgold band was on hand, with cheering strains; the battery of anvils was pounding away for dear life, rockets were flying, and torpedoes and crackers not far behind. In fact everybody was happy and didn't care a continental who knew it."²¹

Voting against a bond subsidy then was almost as unthinkable as voting for a communist would be today. In another Hutchinson bond election, "The one vote against was cast by a man named Fastnot, who operated a greenhouse on First Avenue. It made him famous locally, as 'the Great Objector.' He soon sold out and moved away."²²

Wichita Railroad Boom

Wichita, the budding metropolis of the area, was the "boomingest" railroad town in the state. When western railroad construction resumed on an unprecedented scale in the early eighties, Wichita businessmen capitalized on the situation and launched a major drive to attract railroads. The town's newspapers disseminated railroad propaganda, the residents voted numerous bond subsidies, and delegations of local businessmen went East to contact leading railroad officials. Almost unbelievable success rewarded these efforts. Between 1879 and 1888 the railroad mileage of Sedgwick county increased from 32.0 to 243.7, and the assessed value of all railroads in the county rose from \$206,237 to \$1,254,016. In the latter year Sedgwick county ranked second in

²¹ Kansas State Historical Society, *Reno County Clippings*, Vol. II, pp. 37-38.

²² *Idem.*

the state in mileage and assessed value of railroads (Sumner county ranked first in both respects). Wichita and Sedgwick county had only two railroads in 1879; both of them were branches of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. The number had increased to nine by 1888. Of these, four were branches of the Santa Fe, two of the Missouri Pacific, two of the St. Louis and San Francisco, and one of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific.²³

Wichita's Railroad Problem

Wichita, with nearly 5,000 inhabitants in 1880, was extremely ambitious and wanted to become a second Chicago. To do so, it needed to become a great distribution center with many wholesalers, jobbers, and retail merchants; a great concentration center for wheat, corn, cattle and other agricultural commodities; a great processing center with flour mills and meat packing establishments; and a manufacturing center of some importance in the fabrication of farm equipment. The chief obstacle to the establishment of such a metropolis was the lack of transportation facilities and the discriminatory rate structure.

Prior to May 27, 1880, Wichita's only rail connection with the outside world was the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. By this time the Santa Fe had been built as far as Pueblo, Colorado, on the west; Albuquerque, New Mexico, on the southwest; and Atchison, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, on the northeast. Since Wichita was not connected with the great markets of the East, by any continuous line, shipments had to be transferred from the Santa Fe to several roads running between Kansas City and cities in the east. The latter roads gave large amounts of freight in exchange for the traffic they received from the Santa Fe.²⁴

In addition to dependence upon a single road, the discriminatory rate structure impeded Wichita's growth. Grains and other products were carried from interior points in Kansas to the Missouri river upon what were termed "local" rates, as compared with "through" rates east

²³ Kansas Auditor of State, *Second Biennial Report, 1879-1880*, p. 264; *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, pp. 401-402.

²⁴ Van Oss, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

of the river. Local rates were considerably higher than through rates, due to the fact that they applied to noncompetitive points where a railroad could charge what the traffic would bear. Through rates, on the other hand, applied to traffic between competitive points and were often so low that the carrier made little or no profit. The following situation confronted Kansas wheat growers and grain dealers prior to 1887. Local rates on wheat amounted to 16 cents a hundred pounds for a distance of 200 miles and upwards west of Kansas City. From Kansas City to Chicago, a distance of 517 miles, the through rate was 25 cents a hundred pounds. On a per-mile basis, the local rate amounted to .080 cents a hundred pounds, nearly double the through rate of .048 cents.²⁵ Similar discriminations applied to products shipped from the East to Wichita and other interior points in Kansas.

Competition was further restricted by pooling agreements. In 1876 the Southwestern Railway Rate Association was formed "to adjust the rates on traffic between Missouri river points and Chicago and St. Louis and to distribute the earnings of that traffic among the several competing lines."²⁶

Western towns wanted additional railroads to break the stranglehold of existing lines, but they varied in their ability to do so. A town might adopt any one or a combination of three policies in this respect. It might be entirely passive and let railroads come to the town without any encouragement or assistance. It might encourage railroads to build its way by voting bond aid; or it might charter its own railroads, called "paper railroads," work up local enthusiasm to a point where bond subsidies were forthcoming, and then lease or sell the roads to some of the large systems expanding in the direction of the town. In the booming atmosphere of the eighties the first alternative was out of the question. A majority of towns adopted the second alternative, but several larger towns chartered their own railroads.

Paper Railroads

Wichita was one of the largest and most ambitious towns that passed from the second to the third stage in the mid-eighties. From 1870 to

²⁵ Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Eighth Annual Report, 1890*, p. 109.

²⁶ Emory R. Johnson and Thurman W. Van Metre, *Principles of Railroad Transportation*, p. 291.

1885 Wichita voted bond subsidies to several roads, but beginning in 1885 she chartered her own roads, later transferring them to eastern trunk lines extending their systems into and across South Central Kansas. This course of action was motivated by a desire to attract as many railroads as possible and to get them into operation as soon as possible. The town's bargaining position was enhanced with respect to eastern lines by its ability to offer a going concern backed by local enthusiasm and financial resources. Public opinion was overwhelmingly in favor of railroads; when it was enlisted in behalf of locally chartered roads with the name "Wichita" in the title, it knew no bounds. The fact that townspeople were much more likely to subsidize a local than a foreign railroad was a consideration of major importance.

The business community assumed the leadership in promoting local railroads. Bankers, lawyers, newspapermen, real estate dealers and merchants met together to plan their high strategy. They picked out the best possible route, obtained a charter, elected officers, and went after local subsidies. Armed with a charter and local subsidies, a delegation of local businessmen boarded a train for the East to contact railroad officials who might be interested in the road.

A key role was played by local newspapers in working up enthusiasm for paper roads. Railroad news was big news, and at the height of the railroad boom in 1885 and 1886 the *Wichita Eagle* never let a day pass without at least one boomer article on this subject. Colonel Marcellus Marshall ("Marsh") Murdock, the owner and editor of the *Eagle*, former state senator and chairman of the executive committee of the Board of Trade, was Wichita's leading booster and railroad enthusiast. He wrote the boomer articles, assumed the leadership in promoting local paper roads (known as "Eagle Lines"), and headed the delegations that went to the East to contact railroad magnates. One small town editor wrote in September of 1885, "The EAGLE is doing a great work for Wichita in booming and building railroads into that metropolis. To the pluck, push, vinegar and vim of the EAGLE, Wichita today owes her greatness. Upward and onward the proud Bird soars, ever perching on the highest pinnacle of Wichita's fame."²⁷

²⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, September 29, 1885.

St. Louis Connection

Two competing trunk lines were built to Wichita in the early eighties at a time when local railroads were being promoted by eastern Kansas towns. On May 27, 1880, the St. Louis, Wichita, and Western railroad was opened from Oswego to Wichita, a distance of 145 miles. In March of 1882 this road was acquired by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company under a lease for 999 years.²⁸ The other railroad, the St. Louis, Fort Scott and Wichita, was chartered on February 23, 1880, and built to Wichita on June 27, 1883.²⁹ This road later became a part of the Missouri Pacific System, the cornerstone of Jay Gould's western railroad empire. The date of transfer has not been ascertained, but by June 30, 1887, George J. Gould, son of Jay Gould, was president of the St. Louis, Fort Scott and Wichita, and the head office moved from Fort Scott to Wichita.³⁰ Both of these roads received bond subsidies from several townships in Sedgwick county but none from the city of Wichita.³¹

Railroad building came to a halt in the panic year of 1884, but early in 1885 rumors of renewed building activity circulated widely. The *Wichita Eagle* observed in January of 1885,

If monetary matters should ease up this spring and business generally renews there will be some important railroad developments next year in Kansas, especially in the southwestern counties which are rapidly filling with people. Railroad magnates are on the move from point to point and many incidental and accidental remarks and observations when put together indicate lively work.³²

The anticipated improvement in business was more than realized, and a railroad boom of giant dimensions was soon under way in Wichita. At the beginning of the boom the town had three trunk line connections with the East. The Santa Fe ran to Kansas City and Atchison, and the 'Frisco and Missouri Pacific terminated at St. Louis. Three trunk lines were scarcely ample for an ambitious town like Wichita. It needed more railroads, particularly independent connections with the trunk lines of the East.

²⁸ Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners, *First Annual Report, 1883*, p. 185.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁰ Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Fifth Annual Report, 1887*, p. 316.

³¹ Kansas Auditor of State, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, p. 362.

³² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 10, 1885 ("Railroading and Southern Kansas").

Chicago Connection

Above all, Wichita wanted an independent trunk line connection with Chicago. Colonel Murdock, the author of this scheme, led and skillfully directed it to a successful conclusion. Beginning in July of 1885, scarcely a day passed without a reference to this project. It was the subject of many long articles in the *Eagle* and was first mentioned on July 9; a few days later the editor wrote as follows:

Last Friday's *Wichita Eagle* contains the outlines of a dream by its editor which in a few years would make Wichita the rival of Kansas City and St. Louis. He sees visions of all the important trunk lines now terminating at Kansas City rolling and tumbling over each other in a mad endeavor to reach the queen of the Arkansas Valley. Then follows river rates on all products of the vast region, paying tribute to Wichita, and the same toll on all the necessities and luxuries used by that people until by sheer force of fortuitous circumstances his town stands way above every other in the west.³³

Murdock and his colleagues believed that pooling agreements and discriminatory freight rates were impeding the growth of Wichita. Although the completion of two trunk lines to St. Louis provided some relief, Wichita was still denied direct access to Chicago. The latter city could only reach the traffic of the Wichita area "through the tolls, pools, warehouses and elevators, largely, of Kansas City."³⁴ The *Abilene Gazette* explained the problem as follows:

None of the roads running from Wichita to either Kansas City and St. Louis will make such a rate with Chicago, as to enable Chicago merchants to place their goods in Wichita, because of the fact that both Kansas City and St. Louis are competitors of Chicago in all kinds of business. St. Louis and Kansas City own Kansas, so far as markets are concerned, and they want to keep Chicago out of the state as far as possible; hence the efforts of Wichita people to get an independent line to their city.³⁵

Wichita was determined to break out of this strait jacket. Leverage was needed to break the pooling agreement at Kansas City. Such leverage would be provided if a Chicago trunk line built to Wichita a road by-passing Kansas City. It was reasonable to expect that Chicago interests would eventually build such a road. There might be speedier action, however, if towns like Wichita organized a paper railroad to lure Chicago trunk lines in their direction.

³³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 12, 1885 ("Wichita's Wishes").

³⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 15, 1885 ("Chicago, Omaha, and Wichita").

³⁵ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 17, 1886.

No time was lost in organizing such a road. On July 7, 1885, the Omaha, Abilene and Wichita Railway Company was organized at Topeka, and the charter was filed. Capitalized at \$5,000,000, the company proposed building a line from Wichita northward through the towns of Peabody, Marion, Abilene, Clay Center, and thence to either a connection with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy railroad at Washington, Kansas, or the Northwestern railroad at Omaha, Nebraska.³⁶

Several towns were represented at the Topeka meeting, but the leadership was definitely in the hands of the six Wichita delegates, who were also directors and officials of the O.A.W. (Omaha, Abilene and Wichita) road. Four of these men, M. M. Murdock, N. F. Niederlander, A. W. Oliver, and George V. Blackwelder, merit special mention because of the prominent part they played in all phases of the Wichita boom. Murdock has already been mentioned so we can pass directly to the other three. Niederlander was president of a loan and investment company; vice president of another Wichita railroad; a large real estate dealer, insurance agent, abstractor and addition promoter; a bank director; and he was also interested in two town companies. Oliver was president of the Board of Trade and vice president of a loan and investment company; his directorships included another railroad, a street railway company, and a bank; and he was an incorporator of a town company. Blackwelder was a prominent real estate dealer and addition promoter, a director of two street railway companies, a member of the executive committee of the Board of Trade, and an incorporator of a town company.³⁷ While not exhaustive, this list of activities suggests that promoters of paper railroads came, to a large extent, from the fields of finance, real estate, and journalism. Colonel Murdock said that "the men who had taken hold of the [O. A. W. Railroad] matter were not only representative men of the territory to be benefited, but they were in great earnest and that a careful estimate showed that they represented from a million to a million and a quarter of property, one half of the number being bankers."³⁸

³⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 12, 1885 ("New Railroad").

³⁷ R. L. Polk and Company, *Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1888-1889*, Vol. VI, pp. 1197-1252.

³⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 21, 1885 ("The New Railroad").

The chartering of the new road was the signal for a bitter newspaper war between Wichita and Kansas City. The *Eagle* fulminated at the tribute levied by the Missouri city, pointing out that it was against the interest of the state "to build up a city which does not contribute a cent in taxes, or in anyway else, to the general prosperity of Kansas."³⁹ When the *Kansas City Journal* referred disparagingly to Wichita's paper railroads, the *Eagle* made the following spirited reply:

. . . And we tell that paper now that sneers nor jokes will down the fact that the great fight for commercial supremacy for this section of the world is to be between the windy wonder at the Kaw's mouth and the world's wonder at the mouth of the Little Arkansas. When Wichita secures these three additional railroads, which the *Journal* tries to laugh at, the latter will open with this announcement: "Missouri river freight rates at Wichita! . . ."⁴⁰

Kansas City, on the other hand, maintained that she was the natural gateway to all the commerce of Kansas and the Indian Territory and that Wichita was trying to disjoint the entire traffic system of the West. The Missouri city feared that an independent connection between Wichita and Chicago would break her pooling point, that it would involve her railroads in competitive building and eventual bankruptcy, and that the value of terminal facilities acquired at Kansas City would depreciate markedly.⁴¹

Wichita's attempts to lure competing trunk lines into the area also antagonized the Santa Fe, and the officers of this road were said to have "no particular love for Wichita."⁴²

The O. A. W. paper road was boomed according to the pattern already described. The *Eagle* ran a series of articles emphasizing the importance of a Chicago connection, fanning the flames of rivalry with Kansas City, and urging local citizens to support the road. The groundwork was properly laid, and early in October bond aid to the road of \$65,000 was voted by the citizens of Wichita township and Sedgwick county. Similar bond elections were held in other towns and counties that the road was to run through. There were favorable returns in each instance. The next move was to send a delegation to

³⁹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 14, 1885 ("The Windy Wonder").

⁴⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, August 18, 1885 ("Paper Railroads").

⁴¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 2, 1885 ("Wichita and Kansas City").

⁴² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 19, 1886 ("A Wrong Impression").

contact the trunk line interests of Chicago. In November of 1885, Senator Plumb, Governor Osborn, M. M. Murdock, A. W. Oliver, N. F. Niederlander and M. W. Levy, who was president of the Wichita National Bank, made an unofficial visit to Chicago where "several days were spent in consultation with the representatives of the trunk line interests of that city." Armed with a subsidized paper railroad and an extensive knowledge of Kansas, the delegates "laid the facts before each interest in turn with a view of impressing them with the idea that they must put their roads out to the source of supplies instead of waiting at the Missouri river for such supplies to be brought to them."⁴³

Early the following year the project began to bear fruit. The *Eagle* reported with satisfaction on March 9, "The representatives of three railway lines, with independent Chicago connections, are now in close correspondence with this city, all expecting to reach us."⁴⁴ On April 10, *Eagle* subscribers read the following headlines, "WINNING WICHITA, THE GREAT CITY OF KANSAS. A Straight Through Independent Trunk Line to Chicago, The Rock Island and Pacific Signifies its Desire to Come to the Commercial Metropolis of the Southwest." The article went on to say that Rock Island railroad representatives had met with a number of leading Wichitans the previous evening "to make this city and county a proposition to extend that road to this city and on through the county of Sedgwick . . . the county and city would be asked to subscribe for \$150,000 of stock, to be paid for in bonds."⁴⁵

Actually, the stock, rights and franchises of the Omaha, Abilene and Wichita road were transferred directly to the Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railroad Company, a Topeka paper road organized March 17, 1886. The latter road was consolidated with the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific railroad under an agreement dated May 15, 1886. According to this agreement, the C. K. & N. was to secure aid from municipal corporations by exchanging a portion of its capital stock for municipal bonds. These bonds were then to be delivered

⁴³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 18, 1885 ("Chicago and Wichita").

⁴⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, March 9, 1886 ("What Wichita Will! Sure as Summer Suns Shall Shine! Before the Snows of Another Winter Whiten the Great Valley, Wichita Will Stand the Acknowledged Metropolis of Kansas!").

⁴⁵ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 10, 1886.

to the Rock Island, that assumed financial responsibility for building the road.⁴⁶ By June 30, 1888, total aid received by the C. K. & N. from counties, townships, and towns amounted to \$2,483,800; of this \$150,000 was subscribed by Wichita and Sedgwick county. Two main lines of the Rock Island were built across the area. One ran from Herington to Liberal and passed through McPherson, Hutchinson, Pratt, and Greensburg; the other ran from Herington to Caldwell and passed through Marion, Peabody, Wichita, and Wellington. The line was completed to Caldwell on August 25, 1887, and to Liberal on February 26, 1888.⁴⁷

Western Connection

Meanwhile, the businessmen of Wichita were organizing other paper roads to serve as bait for eastern trunk lines. The *Eagle* was making a desperate fight for more railroads. Colonel Murdock summed up the feeling of his fellow townsmen when he wrote, "Railway men and railway interests can run roads when and where they please. Wichita proposes to tap them all and utilize them all, so far as this section is concerned."⁴⁸ Independent trunk line connections with Kansas City, St. Louis, and Chicago met only part of the city's transportation needs. West of Hutchinson the Santa Fe still enjoyed a monopoly of traffic in 1886, and there was no southeast line to link Wichita with Mississippi river and Gulf ports. Wichita was not content to rely solely upon eastern markets. Sometimes eastern markets were low when western and southern markets were high. If the city had access to alternative markets in the South and the West, she would not only be able to buy and sell to greater advantage but would be in a stronger position to bargain with railroads for reduced rates. "Independent R. R. lines to three points of the compass is what all is necessary for competition that cannot be pooled," wrote an *Eagle* correspondent in October of 1885. He went on to say,

The pressing necessity to-day for Central and Western Kansas, and for Wichita and surrounding cities, is an outlet to the gulf and direct to the Pacific

⁴⁶ Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Fifth Annual Report, 1887*, pp. 419-420.

⁴⁷ Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Sixth Annual Report, 1888*, pp. 451-455.

⁴⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 28, 1885 ("Words and Work").

coast, and one west that will allow a Kansan to ship baled hay without taking it all for freight charges Competition from the west and south with the advantage of those markets, would give us three strings to pull upon that would almost set imposition by pools at defiance.⁴⁹

A project to secure the second "string" was launched soon after the first took concrete form. On July 27, 1885, Wichita's second paper railroad, the Wichita and Colorado, was incorporated. With an authorized capital stock of \$5,000,000, this road was to be built in a northwesterly direction from Wichita to Larned and eventually to Denver, Colorado. At the outset the incorporators, directors, and officers were with few exceptions Wichita men, and the railroad was generally referred to as the "Eagle Line." The report of the company, dated June 30, 1887, shows that seven of the nine directors were residents of Wichita, of whom A. W. Oliver, N. F. Niederlander, and M. W. Levy have been mentioned in connection with the O. A. W. railroad.

The promoters of the Wichita and Colorado Railroad Company expressed the belief that it would "soon quit the environments of paper railways and enter the domain of traffic roads"⁵⁰ Following the usual pattern, the promoters and the *Eagle* boomed the railroad, secured subsidies from three townships in Sedgwick county and the City of Wichita amounting to \$116,000,⁵¹ and contacted eastern railroad magnates. A delegation, consisting of Colonel Murdock, N. F. Niederlander, A. W. Oliver, and M. W. Levy, boarded a train for the East on December 28, 1885.⁵² Returning a few weeks later, A. W. Oliver reported that "Mr. Jay Gould gave them most of his time during two days, and everything is fixed for putting the Eagle Line through to Denver, so also are the shops and other things it will bring to this city." Oliver also said that Colonel Murdock and Mr. Levy went from New York to Washington, D. C., where they had a "medicine talk" with President Cleveland about such matters as a post-office appointment, "an additional \$50,000 for the federal building . . . and the bill dividing the state for judicial purposes and other little matters all for Wichita."⁵³

⁴⁹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 4, 1885 ("The Railroad Question").

⁵⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 28, 1885 ("Upon Its Feet. The Wichita and Colorado").

⁵¹ Kansas Auditor of State, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, pp. 455-456.

⁵² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 29, 1885 ("Gone, Surely Gone").

⁵³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 12, 1886 ("Coming Home").

Gulf Connection

An independent line to the third point of the compass was chartered on August 13, 1885. This was the Wichita and Arkansas Valley Railroad Company, capitalized at \$2,000,000, and intended to be built from Wichita to Fort Smith, Arkansas. The *Eagle* said that it would "put Wichita in direct communication with a Mississippi river and Gulf system of roads."⁵⁴ The subsequent history of this paper road has not been investigated in much detail, but it was apparently never built.

Other Railroads

Three paper roads only served to whet the boomers' appetite for more. Wichita soon became a spawning ground for railroads to nearly every point on the compass. In August of 1885 the *Kansas City Journal* referred to this state of affairs as follows:

If all the roads into and out of Wichita that have been chartered are ever built, that city will be the greatest railroad center in the world; if only half of them are built, then Wichita is destined to be the greatest railroad town west of the Mississippi river. But then paper railroads are not considered dangerous, and do not, as a general thing, cost much money.⁵⁵

The *Eagle* observed on September 23, 1885, "There is scarcely no end to the filing of charters for new railroads of late. While we do not expect that all of them will be built this year, at least, yet we think we see signs that show that the state is to be honey-combed as it were with railroads."⁵⁶ While space does not permit an account of all the railroad projects, it should be mentioned that in June of 1886, the citizens of the city and township of Wichita voted \$150,000 to the Kansas, Colorado and Texas railroad; \$150,000 to the Chicago, St. Joseph and Ft. Worth railroad; \$10,000 to the Kansas and Nebraska terminal facilities, in addition to \$150,000 to the Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska railroad.⁵⁷ By November of 1887 Wichita had railroads radiating in ten different directions, and the Board of Trade confidently predicted that the following continuous lines would be in operation by the end of 1888: three between Wichita and Chicago; four between Wichita and

⁵⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, August 14, 1885.

⁵⁵ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, August 18, 1885 ("Paper Railroads").

⁵⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, September 23, 1885 ("Building Railroads").

⁵⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, June 9, 1886 ("The Bonds").

St. Louis; four between Wichita and Kansas City; three between Wichita and Galveston; three between Wichita and Denver; three between Wichita and San Francisco, and three between Wichita and New Orleans.⁵⁸ Most of these roads had not progressed beyond the paper stage when the collapse of the boom brought them to a quick end.

While Wichita led the state in chartering paper railroads, other towns in the area caught the fever and promoted their own lines. This was the case with Hutchinson, Winfield, Arkansas City, Wellington, Marion, and Kinsley among others.

Generally speaking, the paper road boomers were a sanguine lot who never admitted the possibility of eventual collapse. Occasionally, however, a strong minded individual with deviant tendencies would show how ludicrous and irrational it was to build more railroads than the country could support for many years to come. One such individual criticized municipalities for voting bond subsidies to railroads, pointing out that "much of it is done at the instance of reckless and irresponsible adventurers, for the purpose of floating townsite speculations, etc.; that in other instances it is to tie up counties and townships so that they cannot aid legitimate enterprises; that counties are becoming hopelessly involved, etc.; and that the state may soon be plunged into a sea of litigation, etc."⁵⁹ But this was a minority viewpoint, and the vast majority supported the railroad boom that was to continue for several years before it collapsed along with the town lot and other booms that it spawned.

Branch Line Boom

The nature of Wichita's railroad boom changed significantly in the spring of 1886. Prior to that time the town was interested only in independent trunk connections. When the Santa Fe announced in January that it would build a number of branches in Kansas, the *Eagle* affirmed that "Wichita is not hankering after branches. Trunk lines, independent trunklines, are what builds cities. Wichita is after trunk lines."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Wichita Board of Trade, *Wichita Journal of Commerce*, November, 1887, pp. 33, 43.

⁵⁹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 15, 1885 ("Zig-Zag Railroads").

⁶⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 19, 1886 ("A Wrong Impression").

This policy was soon reversed, however, probably because of rumors that the Rock Island would build to Wichita. On March 21, an article in the *Eagle* admitted that one or two more roads from the East would be entirely adequate to furnish Wichita with all the really necessary lines of competition. The article went on to say,

The truth is Wichita to-day is, in this respect, far better off than any city in the state. She is enjoying, and flourishing, by real live competition between the three great systems of the trans-Missouri, while the towns along the Missouri river are tied up by a general pooling rate. Wichita has, in fact, reached that point in her commercial life, where enjoying the best of facilities for getting goods laid down at satisfactory rates by the car load, she now wants "feeders"; that is, roads leading out to the communities whom she would naturally serve as a jobbing point. . . .⁶¹

Wichita was not alone in wanting feeders. The trunk lines of the area were feeling the effects of growing competition. They realized that it was necessary to maximize gains from the development of a volume of traffic rather than from securing the greatest return from existing sources. Feeders, branches, and extensions were needed to expand the volume of traffic even if it meant encroaching upon the immediate traffic field of other lines. Threatened roads had no recourse but to build branchlines into their competitor's traffic field. In mid-October Jay Gould and other Missouri Pacific officials stopped at Wichita while on an inspection tour, and the *Eagle* later observed, "Mr. Jay Gould is extending his Missouri Pacific system into central and southern Kansas regardless of all alleged agreements not to do so, and it is coming to be tolerably well understood that the Chicago railway system will pursue the same policy."⁶² Early the following year the Transcontinental Traffic Association broke down, and the great railway systems were said to be "whetting their blades for more cutting and slashing of transcontinental rates. . . ."⁶³

Overbuilding and Bankruptcy

War was now on in earnest. The building of branch and feeder lines reached epidemic proportions as each railway system sought traffic volume to compensate for declining rates. The following account of the

⁶¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, March 21, 1886 ("Wichita Will Wallop").

⁶² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 31, 1885 ("Railway Movements").

⁶³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, February 26, 1886 ("Plots and Schemes").

Santa Fe's trials and tribulations was written by Charles S. Gleed, who was one of the company's directors:

... So long as the company was permitted to have full possession of its immediate traffic field, it could and did keep up with its debts and pay dividends steadily But the day came when the traffic of the company was everywhere slaughtered by competition In 1885, 1886 and 1887 the Missouri Pacific alone built 1071 miles of road in the Santa Fe's immediate territory. In the same years the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific road constructed about 1300 miles also in the immediate territory of the Santa Fe.

The result of this paralleling and bisecting process was, first, that the Atchison company found it imperatively necessary to protect itself by building a new trunk line from the Missouri River to Chicago, and many branch lines so located that they would "feather" in towards the main line rather than out towards rival main lines, by which construction fixed charges and operating expenses were greatly increased; and, second, that all local rates were cut, particularly at the important points and on all classes of through business.

It was natural, therefore, that the company found itself in financial distress—a distress greatly increased by the prevalence of poor crops and the adverse work of various legislatures, railroad commissioners and courts.⁶⁴

Between 1883 and 1889 the Santa Fe's earnings fell more than 55 per cent in the face of a mileage increase amounting to 66 per cent. Its fixed charges were over \$11,000,000; most of this was incurred for new construction, but a substantial amount was used in substituting steel for iron rails on lines previously constructed. Van Oss says that "Within six years a most prosperous property had become an utter wreck, burdened with debt, and not able to pay a dividend."⁶⁵

The Santa Fe limped along for several years but was unable to survive the Panic of 1893. That year it was forced into receivership along with such overbuilt giants as the Union Pacific, Northern Pacific, and Frisco.⁶⁶

Summary

The railroad boom had a revolutionary impact upon the area's economy. The development and the expansion of facilities for the transportation and the handling of bulky products and the reduction of freight rates transformed agriculture. Between 1874 and 1889, Santa Fe freight

⁶⁴ Charles S. Gleed, "The Great Railway Systems of the United States—Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, Second Paper," *The Cosmopolitan*, Vol. XIV, November, 1892-April, 1893, pp. 471-472.

⁶⁵ Van Oss, *op. cit.*, p. 563.

⁶⁶ Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

rates declined 58 per cent, over half of this decline occurred after 1882.⁶⁷ Although these averages obscure local and regional variations, the fact remains that reduced rates greatly stimulated economic activity. Railroads, on a scale hitherto unknown, opened up distant markets for area products and enabled the inhabitants to exchange their surplus farm commodities for the manufactures and other products of the East.

The immediate effect of the railroad boom was to prolong the prosperous conditions previously based upon agricultural prosperity. Railroad companies pumped millions of dollars into the area for construction purposes. An army of men went to work building new lines and terminal facilities. Canvas towns sprang up overnight to house the workers and their families. As a consequence, real estate values advanced, trade and manufacturing flourished, and businessmen enjoyed a period of unprecedented prosperity.

⁶⁷ The average rate per ton mile on freight carried by the Santa Fe Railroad was as follows: 1874, 3.04 cents; 1882, 2.29 cents; 1883, 1.78 cents; 1886, 1.29 cents; 1889, 1.28 cents. Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Annual Reports, 1874-1889*.

Section X

TOWN BOOM OF THE EIGHTIES

The railroad boom was largely responsible for generating a town boom. Railroads accelerated the trend toward commercialized agriculture; and as the farmer was drawn more closely into the commercial and financial network, he was increasingly dependent upon a host of business and professional men who resided in the town. The farmer came to town to sell his produce; to buy equipment and supplies; to negotiate a loan; to pay his taxes; to consult a doctor, lawyer, or dentist; to get a haircut; to attend religious, political, and social meetings; to see a show; or possibly just to relieve his boredom by seeing the sights. The townspeople, on the other hand, were directly or indirectly dependent upon the outlying farm communities for their livelihood.

One might think that town and country would grow at about the same rate, each performing its necessary function. This would probably be true under conditions of slow and steady growth but not in a wildly fluctuating economy. We have seen that the boom of the eighties started on the farm and later moved to the town. The town boom not only continued for several years after the farm boom subsided but also rose to such dizzy heights that towns far outgrew their agricultural base. In other words, the head outgrew the body. Land hunger was at the root of this phenomenon. Long says that when the proper number of greedy frontiersmen had gathered together in one locality, "a small incident like the coming of a railroad is likely to throw these [land] desires into a mob psychology, and they will all start off like thirsty hogs towards a stream of water, to drown themselves, or like a herd of stampeding cattle, or a bunch of locoed horses. They are then subject to an unreasonable desire for action."¹

New Towns

Many area towns owe their origin to the railroad boom of the mid-eighties. The slightest rumor of a railroad often set wheels in motion for the establishment of towns spaced every few miles along the projected

¹ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

line. The decennial census of 1890 lists 58 area towns that do not appear in the census of 1880; this does not include a number of towns whose short life span was encompassed between these two dates. "A new map must be made every week to keep up with the growth of towns in Kansas," declared the *Chicago Tribune* on May 15, 1887."²

Lerado

There is reason to believe that the infant mortality rate for towns was fairly high. Although statistical evidence is lacking, quite a few accounts of abandoned towns still survive. The town of Lerado in Reno county is probably typical of many. In the summer of 1886 it looked as if the Rock Island and the Denver, Memphis, and Atlantic railroads would form a junction at Bell township in the southwestern part of Reno county. Dr. J. A. Brady of Louisville, Kentucky, who thought there would be a prosperous city at that point, set about building the town of Lerado before either railroad had started construction. By September, 1886, a dozen capitalists were backing the town, and construction started on a \$24,000 brick hotel with 100 rooms. Lerado soon had a brickyard, a waterworks, a bank, and a newspaper. Band concerts were regularly held in the city park. "In fact, it was a regular town. It had everything except a railroad, but Dr. Brady, town boomer, was positive that before spring Lerado would be the junction point of two railroad lines, and a division point on one or possibly both." But poor Dr. Brady's dream soon changed to a nightmare. Both railroads altered their routes, and the neighboring town of Turon became the junction point. "The next March Lerado gave up the ghost. A contract was signed by which most of the business houses moved their stores and homes bodily across country to the new town of Turon. Seventeen buildings moved at one time. Today where Lerado stood is mostly farm land . . ."³

Although Lerado proved to be a colossal mistake, most new towns got one or more railroads and enjoyed boom conditions for several years. The boom was characterized by rapid population growth, intense

² Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

³ Kansas State Historical Society, *Reno County Clippings*, Vol. 2, pp. 21-22 ("Oil May Revive Boom Day Dream," *Hutchinson News*, April 2, 1934).

building activity, a lively real estate market, thriving trade, and an atmosphere of buoyant optimism.

Town Boomers

Calculating men realized that they might make a quick fortune in the new "profession" of town booming. There was a great need for towns in newly settled areas. It was still a horse-and-wagon age insofar as local transport was concerned, and towns were needed every few miles along the newly constructed rail lines to serve adjacent farm communities. The technique of laying out and booming a new town was described by one contemporary as follows:

. . . The way they boom a town out here is: A man locates his town, he thinks it will be the right distance from some other town, to make a city of, with the prospect of a railroad going through it soon. He goes there, lays out his town, gives it a name, puts up a blacksmith shop, gets a postoffice and calls it a town. He lays out town lots, offers them for sale and gives some fellow a lot or two, to build a house on. That fellow of course has to work for the speculator's town; in a short time a railroad passes along that way; then the man's town is on a boom; his lots sell rapidly and at a good price; his next move, if in a new county, is to get the county seat; if he does that, he quietly hides himself away and considers his fortune made, or if he has a great deal of ambition, as the most of these western fellows have, he starts a new town and so on.

How some make and how others get left in buying in booming towns is thus: A railroad comes to a certain point or town, makes it a terminus for say a year or so; that town then has an extraordinary boom, the town is filled with strangers, town lots are sold at fabulous big prices, brick and stone blocks go up, stores, hotels, all kinds of business have a great boom. Look a year later, when that railroad extends a few hundred miles further. That town's boom is no longer heard of in the land; now it is some other man's town that starts a boom. And the poor man, who paid his big money for a lot and built a mammoth store room, sees he is left and wants to sell, generally selling at a sacrifice. This of course is not always the case, but, in many instances is. How to invest and not lose: The man from the east who comes out here and strikes a town on a boom must take in the surroundings, see first if it is a good farming, agriculturing or cattle raising country, that the town will have something to support it after it is built. If it has not those advantages, beware. It's only some man's boom; he reaps the reward, the buyer suffers the loss. Any one coming here to buy land will find those towns besieged with land sharks who will tell all manner of fish stories and sell property without a title.⁴

[Signed] Jasper

⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 17, 1885 ("A Few Pointers. To Those Who Think of Going to Kansas").

Old Towns

The boom in older towns had many features in common with that of new towns; nevertheless, there were several significant differences. While new towns were likely to have a short lived, flash-in-the-pan type of boom, older towns usually had booms of longer duration because they rested upon a more substantial foundation. Elements of strength usually possessed by larger, already established towns included such things as a functioning retail trade and possibly some wholesale trade; a market for farm products; flour mills and elevators; some manufacturing; at least one railroad connection; and the county seat. With such a nucleus to build upon, a town might generate a boom of healthy proportions before it degenerated into a wild speculative orgy. We have seen that competing trunk and branch lines were first required to secure lower freight rates and to expand the town's trade territory. Having secured such lines, the town might attract more retailers, wholesalers, jobbers, millers, and other business and professional men. If the town was favorably situated and its inhabitants sufficiently energetic, it might become the distributing, concentrating, and processing center for a large area. The influx of businessmen would stimulate competition for choice locations, and this situation might lead to a real estate boom. Finally, the town might grow to the point where mining and certain lines of manufacturing would become feasible, and a boom might result from these activities.

The evidence suggests that town booms generally conformed to the above pattern. This was the case at least in Kinsley and Wichita and was probably true of other county seat towns in the area.⁵ A careful reading of the *Eagle* and Mr. Long's thesis indicates that the Wichita boom followed very nearly the same pattern as the Kinsley boom, even though it was on a much larger scale. Broad economic forces probably played a dominant part in the determination of this pattern; however, the role of the boomer cannot be neglected. Colonel Murdock wrote, for example, that the *Eagle* had worked for years to make

⁵ James C. Malin, "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IV, No. 1, February, 1935, p. 24.

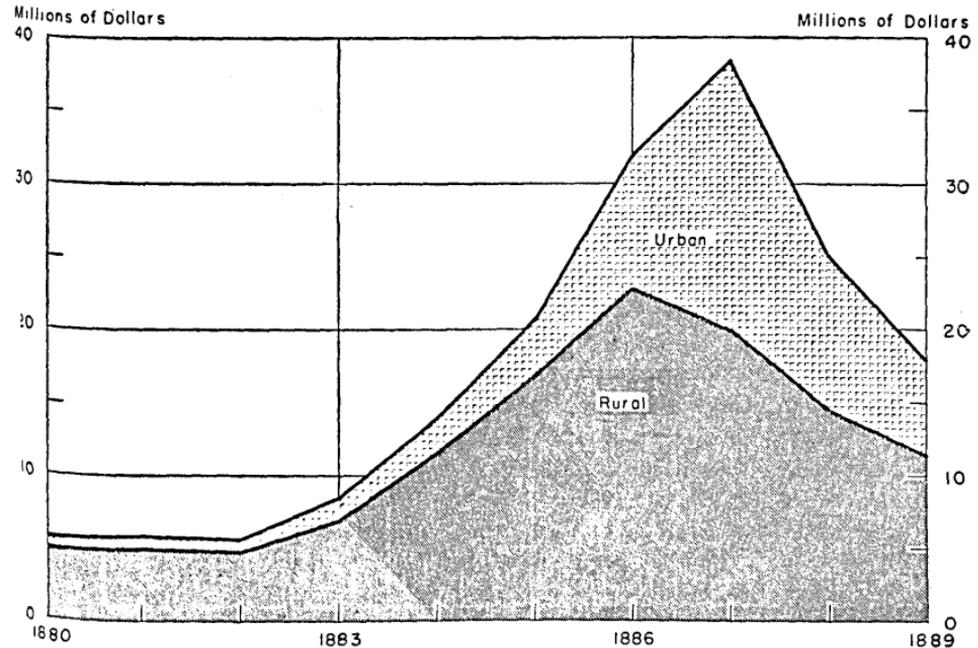
Wichita "a railway center, a wholesaling point, and the commercial entrepot of an agricultural empire . . ."⁶

Some other characteristics of the town boom are revealed by Figures 13 and 14. Figure 13, comparing area mortgage debt statistics for acres and lots, provides a clue to the relationship between the small farmer and the town lot booms. Town lot or urban mortgage debt increased somewhat more rapidly than farm mortgage debt from 1882 to 1885 and much more rapidly from 1885 to 1886. Moreover, while farm mortgage debt reached a peak in 1886, urban mortgage debt continued to rise for about a year before it began a precipitate fall. This evidence lends support to the argument that the town boom continued for a year or more after the farm boom came to an end.

The preponderant part played by the central subarea and Wichita in the town boom of the area is evident from Figure 14, giving a breakdown of urban mortgage debt on a subarea basis. If the urban mort-

Figure 13

Rural and Urban Real Estate Mortgage Debt, South Central Kansas, 1880-1889



Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Report on Real Estate Mortgages*, Vol. XII, pp. 436-450.

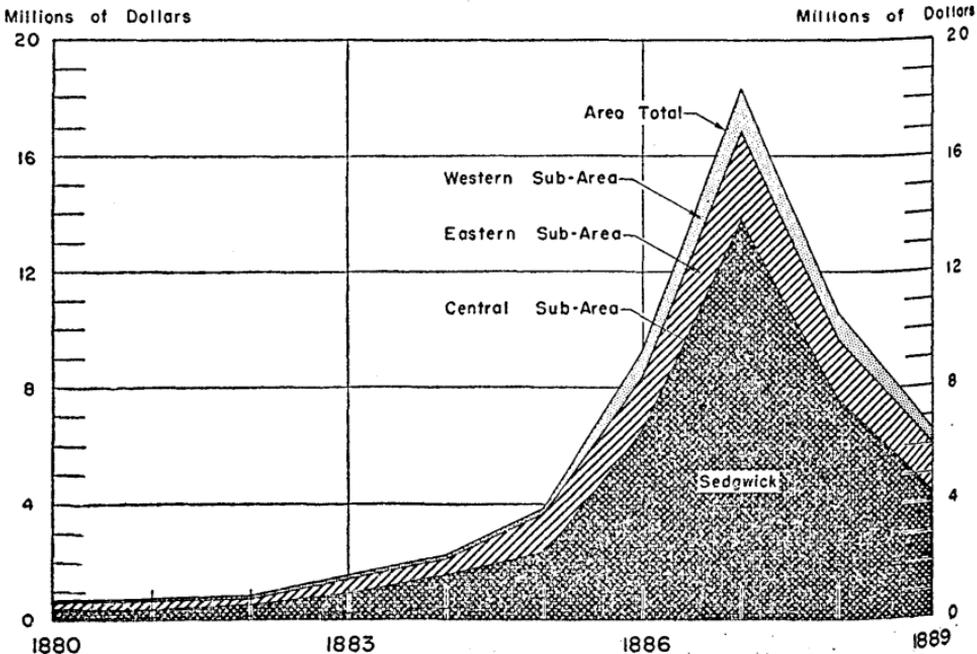
⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, June 13 ("Our Winning Wichita, the Coming City of the West").

gage debt of each subarea is expressed as a percentage of that of the total area, we find that in the central subarea it increased from 56.6 per cent in 1881 to 75.4 per cent in 1887. During the same period the increase in Sedgwick county or Wichita was from 11.5 to 52.3 per cent. On the other hand, the percentage declined in the eastern subarea from 35.6 in 1881 to 16.8 in 1887 while in the western subarea it remained fairly steady, ranging between 5 and 9 per cent.

A comparison of the area with the state is also interesting in this connection. South Central Kansas accounted for only 19.9 per cent of the state's urban mortgage debt in 1881, but at the peak of the boom in 1887 it accounted for 50.4 per cent. Sedgwick county led the state in urban mortgage debt with a total of \$32.7 million for the 10-year period, 1880-1889. Shawnee county (Topeka) ranked second with \$23.4 million, and Wyandotte county (Kansas City) ranked third with \$19.4

Figure 14

Urban Real Estate Mortgage Debt by Area and Subareas, South Central Kansas, 1880-1889



Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Report on Real Estate Mortgages*, Vol. XII, pp. 436-450.

million. Other area counties among the first ten in the state were Cowley, fourth; Sumner, fifth; Reno, sixth; and Butler, ninth.

Further insight into the nature of the town boom is provided by Table 8. It shows the population of the ten leading towns of the area from 1870 to 1900. Among other things, this table shows that Wichita was by far the largest area town and that the large towns were fairly well concentrated in the central subarea—six in the central, three in the eastern, and one in the western. Moreover, the years of peak population varied some. Three towns reached a peak in 1887; four, in 1888; two, in 1889; and one, in 1890. Another interesting fact is that all but one of the above towns were county seats.

Wichita Boom

Of the many western boom towns that attracted the attention of eastern and European newspapers, Wichita was probably the most noted. Van Oss says "it was boomed to an extent which no average European can comprehend."⁷ Its rank in the state rose from seventh in 1880 to first in 1887. Between 1884 and 1888 Wichita's population nearly trebled, increasing over 20,000. Within the same short space there came five railroads, not to mention the many business and manufacturing establishments, street railways, private residences, churches, and colleges. The boom commenced with the revival of business in the spring of 1885 and continued at an uneven pace until the spring of 1888. During this period the town experienced a succession of booms in railroads, retail and wholesale trade, real estate, building construction, and manufacturing. Although these phases of the boom will be discussed in the order named, it should be pointed out that they were mutually dependent and the boom proper was a complex phenomenon.

Only one aspect of the Wichita railroad boom remains to be discussed. That is its role in generating other booms. Prior to 1885 several booms owed their existence largely to new rail construction. These were short lived owing mainly to the fact that not enough lines were built to give Wichita competitive freight rates. The years from 1885 to

⁷ Van Oss, *op. cit.*, pp. 547-548.

Table 8
Population of the Ten Largest Towns, South Central Kansas, 1870 to 1900

Year	Wichita ^a	Hutchinson ^a	Wellington ^a	Arkansas City	Newton ^a	Winfield ^a	El Dorado ^a	McPherson ^a	Great Bend ^a	Kingman ^a
1870	689	....^e	....^e	....^e	....^e	472	797	....^c	....^c	....^c
1875	2,580	1,040	528	....^c	769	....^c	....^e	....^e	....^c	....^c
1880	4,911	1,538	2,694	1,012	2,603	2,844	2,268	1,590	1,648	970
1882	5,779	1,662	1,940	....^c	2,770	2,660	2,500	1,561	1,166	....^c
1884	12,474	2,862	5,797	2,828	4,867	3,617	3,000	2,529	1,412	750
1886	20,129	6,140	7,157	4,301	6,310	6,200	4,917	3,091	2,233	2,891
1887	31,760 ^d	9,912	9,682 ^b	6,066	8,339	6,184	5,733 ^b	3,800	2,958	4,068 ^b
1888	33,999 ^b	13,451	6,367	7,356	8,341 ^b	7,121	5,241	4,417 ^b	3,343 ^b	3,581
1889	....^e	14,028 ^b	5,981	8,639	8,076	7,542 ^b	5,219	3,598	2,223	2,303
1890	23,500	8,524	5,084	9,159 ^b	6,727	6,553	3,616	3,062	2,421	1,808
1892	20,928	8,359	4,703	8,311	5,346	5,444	3,446	3,211	2,566	2,060
1894	21,619	8,797	4,652	7,120	5,529	6,115	3,427	3,025	2,506	1,962
1896	19,892	8,172	3,375	5,623	5,193	4,610	3,528	2,586	2,158	1,681
1898	20,745	8,578	3,637	6,940	6,704	5,957	3,534	2,871	2,514	1,585
1900	23,786	9,135	4,346	7,423	6,477	6,059	3,649	3,204	2,495	2,069

^a County seat.

^b Peak population.

^c Data not available.

^d According to the Wichita Board of Trade, the population was 40,000 on November 1, 1887. Wichita Board of Trade, *Wichita Journal of Commerce*, p. 32.

Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Ninth Census of the United States: 1870*, Vol. 1, pp. 143-146; Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875; Fifth Annual Report, 1876; First Biennial Report to Twelfth Biennial Report, 1877-1900*.

1888 witnessed a radical change in this situation. Railroads were not only overbuilt, but rates were reduced sufficiently to generate a sustained boom of unprecedented dimensions.

Wholesalers and Jobbers

Railroads first brought a greatly expanded volume of trade to Wichita. The town was no longer solely dependent upon local country trade after the construction of competing trunk and branch lines extended her trade territory. Businessmen of all descriptions came to Wichita to profit from the growing trade. Of special importance were the wholesalers and jobbers. A small and growing wholesale business had been carried on since the early seventies, but not until the mid-eighties did Wichita emerge as an important distributing center. The *Eagle* observed in March of 1885, "Besides being a market for the product of a vast area of the richest farming lands in the state, our city within the last year made rapid and substantial progress as a wholesale city" This article lists 23 wholesale firms dealing in such commodities as groceries, dry goods, crackers and confectionery, furniture, hardware, harness and saddlery, fruits, boots and shoes, jewelry, drugs, books and stationery, and cigars.⁸

By the summer of 1885 the wholesale and jobber boom was well under way. Late in June the Standard Oil Company announced that Wichita was soon to become a distributing point for its products in southern and western Kansas, the Indian Territory, and parts of Colorado and New Mexico.⁹ Early in November the *Eagle* reported that Wichita had nearly doubled the extent of her wholesale business during the previous year and the city was well on its way to becoming "the center of supplies for the large territory of Southwestern Kansas, the Indian Nation and contingent territory. Already her merchants have agents on the road soliciting and competing with eastern cities in supplying the country merchant in most of the merchandise which they handle."¹⁰ Wichita mercantile houses were reaching 40 or 50 towns in

⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, March 24, 1885 ("Wholesaling in Wichita").

⁹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, June 27, 1885 ("Winning Wichita. To Be a Distributing Point of the American Standard Oil Company. The Oil to be Brought Here in Tanks and Cooper Shops Established").

¹⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, November 4, 1885 ("Wholesale and Retail").

southwestern Kansas by mid-November, and competition had increased to the point where traveling men for Kansas City and St. Joseph wholesalers were "often compelled to make ruinous cuts to meet Wichita prices."¹¹

The *Eagle* put forth great efforts to boom other towns in southern Kansas. It was pointed out that "The more they grow and prosper the greater will be the opportunities of Wichita as a wholesale center."¹² Much publicity was also given to the arrival of representatives of wholesale and manufacturing concerns. No fewer than 20 such representatives were said to be looking over the field on December 13, 1885,¹³ and a few weeks later it was reported that "About a dozen wholesale men have signified their intention to locate here as soon as they can make arrangements to leave where they are."¹⁴

The cutting of railroad freight rates in the early part of 1886 gave added impetus to the wholesale and jobber boom. According to the *Eagle* of March 9,

The matter of rates for freights, in the bulk, from the east to this point, having been satisfactorily fixed, to reach out in supplying the demand is all that is left her to do. This Wichita is preparing to do. There is sufficient territory of unequalled productiveness tributary to Wichita to make her a city as large as Minneapolis or St. Paul, or Kansas City, within the next two or three years, if she but half way takes care of it.¹⁵

New wholesale and jobbing concerns arrived in such numbers that it was difficult to keep track of them. The city's "commercial fingers kept stretching out farther and farther, bolder and bolder, binding its trade closer together."¹⁶ The fame of Wichita's trade spread far and near. An Ohio newspaper said in December of 1886 that Wichita was "the best advertised city in the country . . . No other city in the State has such a large wholesale trade to-day and the jobbers have all the advantages in freight that are accorded to the Missouri river pooling points."¹⁷

¹¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, November 12, 1885 ("A Pointer for Other Cities").

¹² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, February 7, 1886 ("Wonderful Wichita").

¹³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 13, 1885 ("Railroads and Business").

¹⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 31, 1885 ("The Biggest Boom").

¹⁵ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, March 9, 1886 ("What Wichita Will! Sure as Summer Suns Shall Shine! Before the Snows of Another Winter Whiten the Great Valley, Wichita will Stand the Acknowledged Metropolis of Kansas!").

¹⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 6, 1886 ("The Third City in Kansas").

¹⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 14, 1886 ("City of Wichita").

On January 1, 1887, the *Eagle* printed a boomer article summarizing the town's progress during the previous year. It said that 343 new business interests and mercantile establishments of various types had been established, representing a capital outlay of 4.3 million dollars and sales of wholesale products and manufactures amounting to 15.1 million dollars.¹⁸ By November of 1887 Wichita's wholesale and jobbing firms employed 152 traveling men and had 50 branch houses in towns tributary to the city.¹⁹

Real Estate Boom

Of all the booms that made Wichita famous in the mid-eighties, none was so spectacular as the real estate or town lot boom. Virtually the whole city was caught up in a fever of speculation, and even intelligent and self-contained people lost their heads and became vendors of the soil of Wichita. While in retrospect the boom appears to have been an extremely irrational phenomenon, it nevertheless rested upon the firm foundation stones of economic prosperity and growing population pressure. Property values had been rising since the first settlement of the town, but by the mid-eighties forces previously operating independently or in loose alliance combined for the first time to create a force of explosive potentiality.

The pattern and dimensions of the boom are revealed by Figure 15, showing the value of Wichita real-estate transactions on a monthly basis from January, 1886, to July, 1887. The town lot boom got under way in the spring of 1886. From January to June the value of transactions increased from 0.36 million dollars to 2.45 million dollars. A decline then set in through August, when the figure stood at 1.27 million dollars. An upward trend commenced in September. By November real-estate transactions were shooting upwards and continued to do so until a peak of 9.35 million dollars was reached in February of 1887. A high level of activity continued for several weeks but by late March the end was in sight. The value of transactions plummeted until they amounted to only 0.94 million dollars in July, 1887.

¹⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 1, 1887 ("The Peerless Princess. Why Wonderful Wichita Wins").

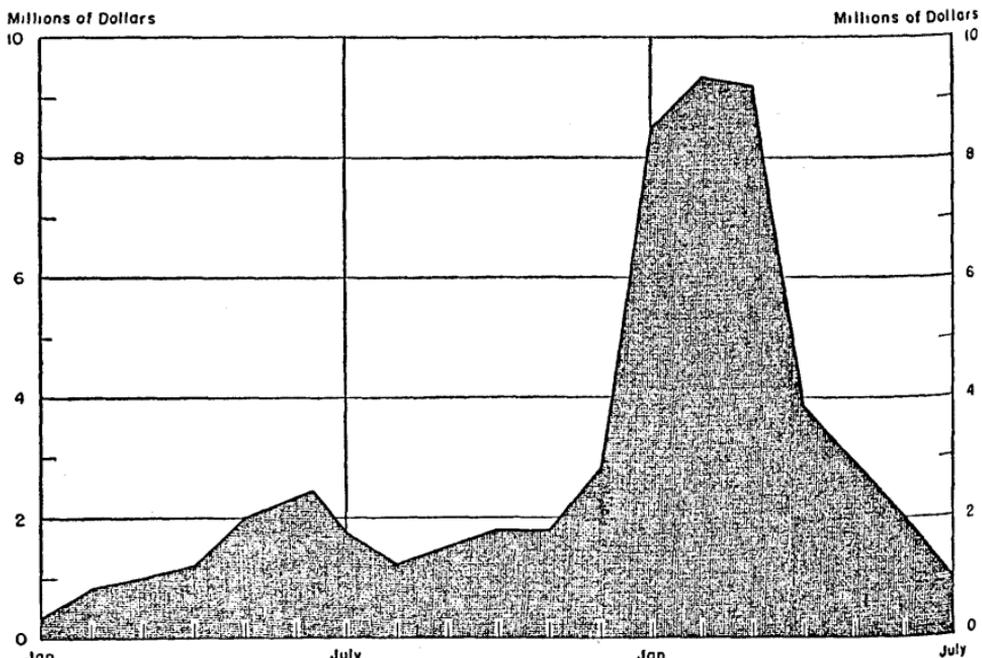
¹⁹ Wichita Board of Trade, "Wichita, the Southwestern Metropolis", *Wichita Journal of Commerce*, November, 1887, p. 34.

While many forces played a part in generating the real-estate boom, none had such an immediate impact as the expansion of Wichita's railroad facilities. It was no mere coincidence that real-estate transactions turned sharply upward when, on March 30, 1886, it was announced that the Rock Island railroad was coming. On several occasions the *Eagle* attributed the boom to the coming of that railroad. "The securing of this great trunk line means not only the doubling of Wichita's population and business in the shortest time, but the adding immensely to the value of all the property and lands of Sedgwick county."²⁰

Addition Craze

Anticipating the boom, real-estate dealers bought up lands adjoining Wichita and began laying out residential additions. In less than two years enough lots were laid out in Wichita and the surrounding countryside to take care of nearly all the people then living in South

Figure 15
Value of Wichita Real Estate Transfers by Month, January, 1886-July, 1887



Source: *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 1, 1887 ("The Peerless Princess"); *Ibid.*, January 2, 1887, to July 31, 1887, inclusive.

²⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 10, 1886 ("Winning Wichita. The Great City of Kansas").

Central Kansas. Miles and miles of stakes appeared where only a few years before were waving fields of corn and wheat.

Before proceeding to this colorful account of Wichita's history, it might be well to define the town's boundaries prior to the commencement of the boom. According to a contemporary, the residential area of Wichita in 1883 was between two and three square miles. Practically all of the 8,000 inhabitants lived inside the following boundary lines: Oak street on the north, English street on the south, the Santa Fe track on the east, and the Arkansas river on the west. The writer said, "The buildings beyond those boundaries are few indeed and in many places within these bounds buildings were somewhat scattering." He named four additions on the outskirts of town where there was not a single building.²¹

Soon the town broke out of its narrow confines. In the spring of 1885 the addition boom got under way with a fast start. It became the subject of frequent articles in the *Eagle*. Subscribers were informed on April 25, "Nearly 500 acres in new additions have been laid out the present year and still they come . . . one would imagine the projectors expected the city to become a place of 50,000 inhabitants in about two years."²² In August a dense population was reported in an area extending a mile in every direction from the boundaries of 1883 and also scattered settlements at a greater distance. "More additions are being laid off and a greater number of fine business houses being built at the present time than at any other time of her existence. . . .", said the same authority.²³

The first half of 1886 witnessed an even greater addition boom than that of the previous year. It became difficult to keep track of all the new additions, or to estimate how many people they would accommodate. Colonel Murdock made an attempt to compute the potential capacity but had to revise his estimate upwards at frequent intervals. On February 28 he said there were enough additions to take care of a population of 150,000;²⁴ but a few days later he wrote, "There is now

²¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, August 28, 1885 ("Suburban Growth").

²² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 25, 1885 ("What Are We Coming To").

²³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, August 28, 1885 ("Suburban Growth").

²⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, February 28, 1886 ("Big Real Estate Sales").

enough ground laid out in lots to accommodate three hundred thousand people, without crowding."²⁵ By mid-June five or six thousand acres of prairie had been laid out in 25-foot lots, "and loaded on the public at from one to five thousand dollars per acre."²⁶

Practically all of the leading Wichita businessmen promoted additions. Two former Indian traders, William Greiffenstein and James R. Mead, owned additions close to the center of town that had probably been in their possession since before the founding of Wichita. A. A. Hyde, who was later to found the Mentholatum Company at Wichita, had a large addition of 14 square blocks immediately south of Douglas Avenue and three blocks east of the Santa Fe tracks. It is of interest that Hyde named the new streets that passed through his addition after his daughters—Ida, Laura, Pattie, Lulu, Ellis, and Fannie. Hyde was also president of the Frisco Heights Addition Company that laid out an addition of 50 acres.²⁷

Another large addition, the Riverside Addition situated on the east side of the Little Arkansas river, was the subject of a short article in the *Eagle*. J. O. Davidson, the promoter of the addition, was, among other things, president of the Davidson Investment Company, president of the Citizens Land Company, and treasurer of the Board of Trade. He organized the Riverside Addition Company, that purchased 500 acres of woodland and prairie. This location was described as a "beautiful spot . . . which they have gone to work to systematically improve and to render beautiful. Fifty teams and a hundred or more men have been employed steadily since last January, grading, filling, cutting down, etc." The addition was opened for inspection upon completion of the iron bridge across the Little Arkansas, and the public was invited "to drive over and view the new suburban addition laid out with especial reference to home building."²⁸

Real-estate promoters continued to lay out additions early in 1887. From January to May of that year 42 sections of land were plotted into

²⁵ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, March 3, 1886 ("Those City Additions No Boom").

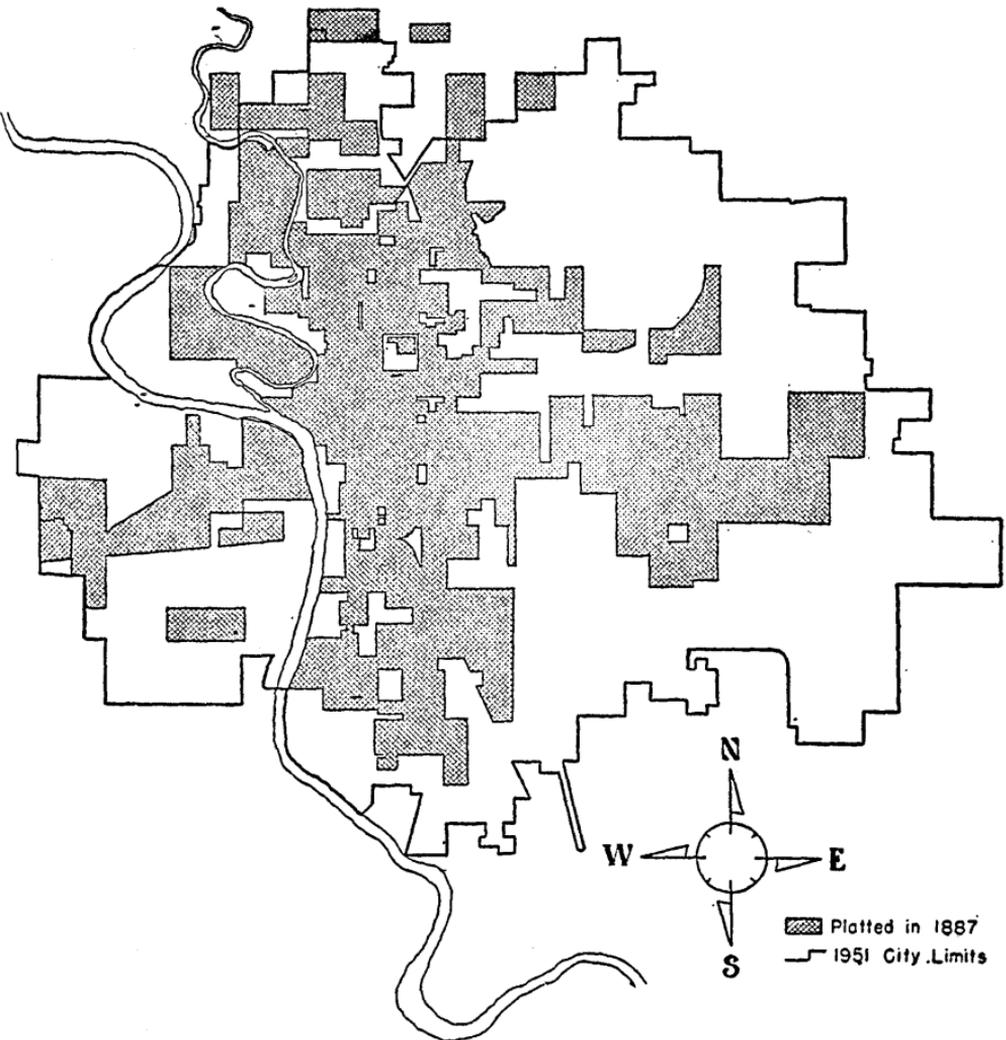
²⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, June 12, 1886 ("Inside vs. Outside").

²⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, August 30, 1885 ("Frisco Heights").

²⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, May 13, 1886 ("The Opening Day. An Addition Which is a Revelation").

lots.²⁹ By this time town lots had been staked off in areas destined for 50 years to be under farm cultivation. In 1893, long after the boom had collapsed, a \$6,000,000 assessment figure was placed on 104,494 lots in Sedgwick county, of which only 14,427 were improved.³⁰ The vast area laid out in lots and additions is shown in Figure 16 that superim-

Figure 16
City Limits of Wichita, Kansas, 1887 and 1951



Source: L. H. Everts and Company, "Map of Wichita, Kansas, 1887," *The Official State Atlas of Kansas*; Kansas Blue Print Co., *Wichita Kansas Street Map, 1951*.

²⁹ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt, A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, p. 26.

³⁰ Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, p. 714.

poses a map of 1887 upon a present-day map of Wichita. It is difficult to believe that in 1887 a population of approximately 35,000 occupied an area about half as large as that occupied by over 200,000 people in 1951.

Vending the Soil

Having laid out lots for miles around Wichita, real-estate promoters were eager to sell them and realize large profits. All the techniques in the boomer's thick book of tricks were trotted out and adorned in dazzling raiment. Advertisements in the *Eagle* not only became more numerous but increased in size until quarter-, half-, and even full-page advertisements became commonplace. Posters, handbills, the Board of Trade's *Journal of Commerce*, and other media of communication advertised the wares of the soil vendors. Like Pavlov's dogs, the public became conditioned to an environment where everyone from servant girls to bank presidents and ministers of the gospel speculated in real estate. A piece of property might change hands several times in the same day, each transaction bringing a speculative profit to the seller. The dizzy speculation was much like that of the Florida real estate boom of the 1920's. While Wichita did not have swamp land to sell at fabulous prices to gullible investors on a sight unseen basis, most other manifestations of the boom were shared in common.

The spring of 1885 witnessed the beginning of the boom. "Real estate agents report business booming and prices flying high. The man who don't buy property he is after to-day will have to pay a hundred or two more for it to-morrow," warned the *Eagle* on April 29.³¹ After some slowdown during the summer months, the boom picked up momentum in late 1885. The real estate craze and the addition fever were said to be raging with renewed fury in late November, and fabulous prices were being offered and refused for land extending a mile or more in any direction beyond the city limits.³²

The real estate boom of 1885 pales into insignificance by comparison with the big boom of 1886 and early 1887. The location of the \$200,000 Federal Building created a real estate flurry just as the year 1886 opened.³³ Transactions continued to mount, and in mid-February

³¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 29, 1885 ("Wichita Booms").

³² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, November 27, 1885 ("Real Estate Craze").

³³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 31, 1885 ("The Biggest Boom").

the mania for speculation was said to have become epidemic. "Everybody is affected—business men of all classes, clerks in stores and offices, servant girls, all; all want to speculate in real estate. Even Sunday is not exempt from this species of trade."³⁴ Real estate commanded the major part of the people's attention, and it was recorded on March 11, "The investment of forty thousand dollars per day in real estate speaks in louder tones than are ever employed in the *EAGLE*."³⁵

The first major boom commenced in mid-April and continued until mid-July. During this period the monthly value of real-estate transactions increased from 1.21 million dollars to 2.45 million dollars. The completion of negotiations for the Rock Island railroad set off this boom.³⁶ As the boom gained momentum, it became the subject of many colorful articles in the *Eagle*. Several excerpts from these articles merit quoting at this point.

(May 2nd) *The City Yesterday*. Yesterday was one of the usually live Saturdays. The streets were crowded with people all day and there was a rush of business all round. The real estate boom boiled red hot all day and the agents report nearly \$100,000 . . . There never was a time in the history of the city when there was such a demand for real estate.

(May 6th) "THE RAMBLER'S RACKET." . . . Few people have been more successful in keeping busy of late than the vendors of the soil of Wichita. You may see them at all times driving some one out in a buggy to look at property and almost every man you meet has a deed in his hand rushing for the county building. There is an immense corps of clerks in the register office and yet so great is the rush that one has to wait two or three days to get a deed recorded.

During the later part of June real estate sales fell markedly owing to severe drought conditions. The decline continued through August, but on September 4 it was reported, "The cool weather of the past few days has started off business at a great pace in Wichita."³⁷ Rising from 1.27 million dollars to 1.80 million dollars from August to October, the monthly value of transactions remained fairly steady through November. This was only a temporary lull, however, and from December of 1886 to February of 1887 transactions shot upward at an amazing rate. In the latter month the figure stood at 9.35 million dollars, nearly four

³⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, February 16, 1886 ("Speculation and Speculation").

³⁵ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, March 11, 1886 ("What It Means").

³⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, April 11, 1886 ("A Big Real Estate Day").

³⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, September 4, 1886 ("The Fall Boom Begun").

times that of the previous peak in June of 1886 (Figure 15). Forty-two square miles of land around the city were sold as town lots during the first five months of 1887. During the same period Wichita's real-estate transactions amounted to 34.89 million dollars; in this respect the city ranked third in the nation with New York, first; Kansas City, second; and Chicago, fourth.³⁸

Eastern Capital

A heavy influx of capital made possible a record volume of real estate sales. "Eastern capital is being literally 'dumped' into this county by the thousands of dollars," said the *Eagle* in July of 1886.³⁹ Early in December of that year whole brigades of eastern capitalists were said to be in Wichita,⁴⁰ and the Editor of the *Eagle* waxed eloquent on the subject when he wrote,

Where a volume of money pours into a town at the rate of from twenty-five to one hundred thousand dollars per day, for weeks, and months and years, incessantly, pours in from the bank vaults and old women's stocking legs of the east, to be invested in lots at from \$50 to \$500 per front foot, which lots were but a short dozen years since cut up out of lands that cost \$1.25 per acre, and which aggregate profit and immense volume of money is but so much added capital that is immediately employed in erecting imposing and magnificent business houses and in building attractive and palatial homes by the dozens, fifties and hundreds, all constitute a sure indication of a genuine boom.

Wichita has been experiencing this kind of thing for years.⁴¹

Boom times.—During this phase of the boom the trade of the town was in real estate. Wichita had 140 real estate agents in late September of 1886, "all of whom have regularly established offices, besides at least two hundred more who are connected with these offices and make this their chief business . . ."⁴² Polk's business directory for 1888-1889 lists 197 real estate dealers with offices in Wichita; the figure was probably much higher at the peak of the boom in early 1887. One dry goods merchant with a choice corner location boxed up all his merchandise, stored it in a barn, and divided his single storeroom into stalls that became real estate offices. His 24-foot room earned him \$600 a month.⁴³

³⁸ Wichita Board of Trade, *Wichita Journal of Commerce*, November, 1887.

³⁹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 30, 1886 ("Wonderful Wichita").

⁴⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 8, 1886 ("We Gather Them In").

⁴¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 5, 1886 ("Born Booming").

⁴² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, September 26, 1886 ("Facts About Wichita").

⁴³ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 331 ("A City That Recovered From the Wildest of Booms, Wichita, the Sedately Thriving," *Kansas City Star*, October 16, 1904).

While boom stories probably grew with the telling, they may be difficult to believe because truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. When one real estate dealer dropped a \$20 gold piece on the street, he did not stop to pick it up for fear he would lose too much time away from the speculation.⁴⁴ It was rumored that the *Wichita Eagle* got so hot printing booster editions that it was necessary to buy a new press.⁴⁵ The boom attracted so many people that hotel and restaurant accommodations proved inadequate. Eating houses and restaurants had to be improvised with sleeping annexes to accommodate and feed the crowds. In December of 1886 Wichita was described as a place

... where men jostle you on the streets and crowd you from the sidewalks in their haste and eagerness, and where you no longer know more than one individual in a dozen whom you meet . . . , and even those few with wild demeanor and hungry eye only stopping you to ask you what you will take for your homeplace or what are your figures on that business lot? . . .

Where the greatest regret for the death of his neighbor is that it will take up too much time to attend the funeral; where the brightest men cannot be persuaded to run for office through fear that the campaign might lose them a chance for a profitable investment; where the average hired girl asks ten or fifty dollars in advance that she may make another payment on her last speculation, and where wives and daughters use their bonnet and hat money in carrying options on corner lots, and where your hired man of today can buy you out tomorrow, paying cash down, there is a town that is reveling in a boom.

Wichita sits for that picture regularly every day in the year!⁴⁶

At the peak of the boom in mid-February, 1887, one observer said that Wichita was "the liveliest city in Kansas. The streets are full of people, the hotels and boarding houses overrun with them, and every train brings in additional scores to swell the boom . . . everybody is talking real estate and shouting for Wichita."⁴⁷ By this time the craze had been fanned to fever heat, and the price of lots had risen to unbelievable heights. Speculators made money right and left. According to Professor Hicks, "A clerk who put his \$200 savings into a lot sold it two months later for \$2,000. A barber who dabbled in real estate made \$7,000. Real estate agents, many of whom made much larger fortunes swarmed over the place by the hundreds; they were so numerous that

⁴⁴ Orsemus H. Bentley, *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas*, Vol. I, p. 207.

⁴⁵ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 5, 1886 ("Born Booming").

⁴⁷ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt, A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, pp. 25-26.

the city derived a considerable revenue from the license fees they had to pay."⁴⁸

At the beginning of the boom a large proportion of the lots were bought for actual use as homesites, but at the height of activity in 1886 and 1887 the main objective of the buyer was to sell again at a profit. Thousands of persons were led by the boom psychology and the persuasive tactics of real-estate dealers to investigate their savings in town lots whose value was inflated to astronomical heights.

Murdock's warning.—While the majority was caught up in the speculative mania, a few conservative men warned of impending collapse. Colonel Murdock was one of these men who saw only misrepresentation in the sale of lots in distant cornfields and became increasingly critical of the "outside lot craze." In June of 1886 he wrote that the *Eagle* would continue to boom Wichita

. . . in a sensible, reasonable way, in a way that her surroundings and opportunities will warrant, but when every other business house is turned into a real estate office, and every other man, boy and loafer becomes a real estate broker, no paper, however strong and influential, no city, however gloriously bright her prospects, can long stand up under such unwarranted speculation.⁴⁹

He warned his readers,

Some of these fine mornings, owing to some financial stress or other, two or three dozen of the owners of these outside craze lots, in speculative additions, will suddenly find it necessary to unload. When that morning comes with its unloading there will be precipitate, within a few hours, on this market two or three millions of dollars of totally unproductive property, without bottom or hope, and valueless. Somebody will be caught, and his name will be fool, his number scores and hundreds If the pretended Christians, who are playing this confidence game were the men to be finally caught, it would be all right, but they are the fellows whose cold dollars will be lying in the bank vaults.⁵⁰

Collapse

Murdock knew that local speculators operated on borrowed capital and that financial stringency in eastern money markets would stop the flow of capital to Wichita. Moreover, he knew that Wichita was not alone in this respect, for eastern capital was underwriting land speculation in towns and cities throughout the West.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, June 12, 1886 ("Inside vs. Outside").

⁵⁰ *Idem.*

The death knell was sounded in late March of 1887. The *Eagle* said that wild speculation in San Francisco, Chicago, and other cities "caused heavy failures which shook confidence generally throughout every city, town and village in the whole country. It at once caused the severest conservatism amongst the banks and the highest general rate of interest which has probably ever prevailed in any country."⁵¹ With the flow of capital reduced to a trickle, the people of Wichita found themselves with a dead real estate market on their hands. Many sustained heavy losses in the panic to convert real estate into liquid assets while the few who withdrew from the speculation in time made sizable fortunes.

Other Booms and Boomlets

Construction Boom

Wichita had other booms and boomlets from 1885 to 1888. These included construction, street railway, bridge, electric light, and manufacturing booms. The construction boom commenced in 1885 and continued through the first half of 1887. Nearly 700 buildings were constructed in the city during the first seven months of 1886, and on July 30 of that year it was recorded that "Forty eight three or four story business blocks have been or are now being built."⁵² Building activity continued at a high tempo in late 1886 and early 1887. "The great army of artizans, of masons and carpenters, of contractors and laborers, who came to us the past year, will be reinforced, doubled and quadrupled in numbers," said the *Eagle* on January 11.⁵³ The period of peak building activity was from June, 1886, to June, 1887, when a total of 2,600 buildings was erected in Wichita at a cost of over \$6,000,000.⁵⁴

Street Railway Boom

The mushroom growth of the city also created a demand for municipal services and public utilities. Existing facilities were far from ade-

⁵¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 16, 1887 ("Great Is Wichita").

⁵² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 30, 1886 ("Wonderful Wichita").

⁵³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 11, 1887 ("Bound To Bloom! Boom! Fortuitous Figures For Fortune's Favorite City").

⁵⁴ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 16, 1887 ("Great Is Wichita").

quate, and emergency measures were taken to provide such things as police and fire protection, water, electric lights, streets, bridges, and public transportation. During the real estate boom people were said to be so busy buying and selling that they could not waste the time hitching up to the buggy or walking so street cars were essential. This means of transportation was also considered necessary to attract buyers to suburban additions. The first horse drawn car line was organized in 1883, and by November of 1887 over 60 miles of street car and motor lines were built in Wichita and environs.⁵⁵ One of the first electric lines in the country was built in Wichita. In addition to local lines, an inter-urban line was built to Valley Center, a "suburb" 12 miles distant.⁵⁶ Local transport was impeded by the lack of bridges for a time, but by December of 1886 thirteen bridges were said to span the streams within the corporate limits of the city.⁵⁷ Wichita's first electric light blazed over the intersection of Douglas and Topeka avenues on December 18, 1885, and by July of the following year there were two rival electric light companies in the city.⁵⁸

Culture Boom

The leaders of Wichita were quick to see that promoting educational and cultural activities was good business. The newly rich class was determined to improve upon their coarse frontier manners by supporting opera houses, colleges, lyceums, and the like. Colleges and universities became all the rage in 1886 and 1887. One authority says that at one time there were 12 of these institutions in and about the city and that "A college or university became a popular central feature of a real estate addition."⁵⁹ Probably the most notable surviving building that was erected during the boom is the one now housing Friends University. After President Garfield's death his old pastor at Mentor, Ohio,

⁵⁵ Long, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-56; Wichita Board of Trade, *Wichita Journal of Commerce*, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 331 ("A City That Recovered from the Wildest of Booms, Wichita, the Sedately Thriving," *Kansas City Star*, October 16, 1904).

⁵⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, November 27, 1886 ("She Spreads So").

⁵⁸ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 19, 1885 ("Electric Lights"); *Ibid.*, July 30, 1886 ("Wonderful Wichita").

⁵⁹ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 331 ("A City That Recovered from the Wildest of Booms, Wichita, the Sedately Thriving," *Kansas City Star*, October 16, 1904).

came to Wichita to establish a Garfield Memorial University. The building completed in early 1887 at a cost of \$260,000 for many years was reputed to be the largest single college building in the United States. Later the building, plus 300 lots around it, was purchased by the Friends Church of America, and the University became known as Friends University.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Idem.*

Section XI

MANUFACTURING AND MINING BOOMS

Prior to 1887 manufacturing followed with fair consistency the development of the area's natural resources. We have seen that these developments fall into three main periods or stages—pastoral economy, subsistence agriculture, and commercialized agriculture. Pastoral economy, as exemplified by the Indian trade, buffalo slaughter, and range cattle industry, gave rise to a few small handicraft manufactures. Blacksmiths were needed to shoe horses, repair wagons, and fashion crude tools used by traders, trappers, hunters, and herders. Leatherworkers found employment making harness and saddles that were indispensable on the frontier.

Subsistence agriculture changed the nature of manufacturing in some respects. Pioneer farmers, no matter how self-sufficient, sometimes needed the services of skilled craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, leatherworkers, and millers. Sawmills and gristmills sprang up along the more thickly settled streams where water power and timber were available. Owing to the scarcity of money and the lack of markets, these mills were generally operated on a custom basis. Part of the farmers' corn was kept by the miller as payment for his services, and the corn was then fed to cattle that were driven to market and sold for cash.

Manufacturing assumed greater importance when the crude subsistence economy gave way to commercialized agriculture. Farmers began to produce a surplus for the market, and their money income bought manufactures and other products; many of these items were formerly made at home or dispensed with altogether. One might think that inhabitants of the area would employ their labor and capital almost exclusively in agricultural pursuits and depend upon the industrial East for their manufactures. To a considerable extent this generalization held true, but there were obstacles interfering with the exchange of products between the West and the East. The chief obstacle was the high and discriminatory railroad rate structure of the period.

Operating in much the same manner as a protective tariff in international trade, the rate structure protected many inefficient western manufacturers against their more efficient competitors in the East. There was discrimination not only on a geographical basis but also between different types of products. Douglas says that "Freight rates were high—much higher as a matter of course, on most manufactured articles than on the materials from which the articles were made."¹

Several other factors favored local manufactures. There was close proximity to raw materials, such as farm crops and livestock, building materials, and some mineral resources. Skilled craftsmen still played an important part in manufacturing, and small shops were not at the disadvantage that they were later when mass production methods were introduced. Moreover, skilled labor and capital were highly mobile, and the new manufacturer had all the advantages of local spirit and reputation.

How was manufacturing modified by the practice of commercialized agriculture? In the first place, the processing of farm products assumed considerable importance. When farmers began to grow wheat as a cash crop, flour mills rapidly supplanted gristmills. Elevators were erected along rail lines to facilitate the concentration and the storage of small grains. The growth of local markets made it feasible to establish other processing industries, such as pork packing plants, creameries, cheese factories, cracker and candy factories, soft drink plants, breweries, sorghum syrup and sugar works, and cigar factories.

Secondly, the farmer had to employ labor saving equipment if he was to succeed under the new regime. The manufacture and the repair of farm equipment was thus stimulated. While most of the heavy equipment came from distant manufacturing centers, a number of small factories in the area manufactured such things as plows, carriages, wagons, wire fencing, and windmills. The blacksmith and harness business was greatly expanded, and a few foundries made light and heavy castings.

Thirdly, commercialized agriculture made possible higher living standards and a market developed for improved building materials and

¹ Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

home furnishings. This gave rise to such local manufacturing enterprises as furniture factories, cabinet works, planing mills, broom factories, stone dressing works, and brick and pottery works.

Manufacturing was closely linked with the growth of towns and railroads. Railroads brought trade to a town; trade, in turn, attracted manufactures. The bulk of the manufactures was concentrated in the older towns. These places were generally the first to have competing railroads and, hence, an advantage in freight rates. Railroads brought in raw materials and fuel and carried out the finished products. Other requisites for manufacturing usually possessed by older towns included some surplus capital that had been accumulated in agriculture and trade, some skilled and unskilled labor, water power, enterprising businessmen, and a market for locally manufactured products.

Like other branches of the economy, fluctuations in economic activity affected manufacturing. In depression periods farmers had to become as self-sufficient as possible, and local manufactures suffered as a consequence. On the other hand, prosperous times accentuated the tendency toward commercialized and mechanized agriculture so manufacturing thrived. If prosperity gave way to boom conditions, manufacturing might be artificially stimulated in much the same manner as railroads, that is, local subsidies might be offered.

Manufacturing History of the Area

Pastoral Stage

Manufacturing in the area began on a limited scale during the era of pastoral economy. During this period it was confined largely to blacksmithing and harness and saddle making. It was carried on in connection with the Indian trade, the Santa Fe trade, the buffalo slaughter, and the range cattle industry. Space limitations permit only one example of manufacturing in this period. Probably the most important center for the Indian trade was at the juncture of the Little and Big Arkansas river, later the site of Wichita. Here a number of trading posts were established before and immediately following the Civil War. At one of these posts a harness maker by the name of Vigus resided in the late 1860's. He was said to be "well skilled in the art

of distributing brass tacks and red flannel over a saddle and bridle, [and] a valuable man in the Indian trade"²

Subsistence Stage

Other manufactures appeared soon after the relatively self-sufficient settler occupied the area. A sawmill was built near Wichita in 1870.³ In 1875 the town had two gristmills, one soda water factory, one wagon factory, one cigar factory, one brewery, and four saddle and harness shops.⁴

By 1878 the area was in a transition stage between subsistence and commercialized agriculture, and the manufactures listed by the State Board of Agriculture in that year reflect this situation. The absence of cigar factories, blacksmith shops, and elevators suggests that the list is not exhaustive, but it gives a general view of manufacturing in 1878. In the area, as a whole, there were 32 flour mills; 14 were powered by steam; 18, by water; and two of the latter were combination flour mills and sawmills. The capital investment of these mills, according to those 25 supplying data, ranged from \$1,200 to \$11,700, the average being \$5,384. Gristmills numbered 27 in 1878; two were powered by steam; two, by wind; and 15, by water. There were also eight saw and gristmills; one was powered by water and steam; two, by water; and five, by steam. The capital investment of the 24 gristmills reporting ranged from \$500 to \$30,000, the average being \$6,696. In addition to the combination saw, flour, and gristmills, there were 22 steam sawmills and one waterpower sawmill whose capital investment ranged from \$275 to \$2,000; the average was \$1,088 for the 20 reporting.

Other area manufactures reported in 1878 were as follows: five sorghum mills, four cheese factories, four broom factories, four cabinet works, two breweries, two plow factories, two feed mills, two stone dressing works, and one each of the following: furniture factory, harness and saddle shop, brick works, and potter works. In addition to the

² Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 13-14 ("The Early Settlement of the Arkansas Valley," *Wichita Eagle*, April 6, 1876).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report, 1875*, pp. 405-406; Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 150 ("A Chronological Personal, and Statistical Review, A Brief Historical Sketch of Sedgwick County and Wichita," *Wichita Eagle*, January, 1879).

relatively small amount of capital invested in manufactures other than the flour and gristmilling industries, the report shows that most of these establishments were situated in the eastern and central subareas. Only Barber, Barton, and Pawnee counties in the western subarea reported manufactures in 1878.⁵

Commercialized Stage

In the central wheat and corn growing counties, manufacturing assumed considerable importance in the late seventies and early eighties. Within this region Sedgwick county and Wichita played a leading role. Agricultural processing industries ranked well above other branches of manufacturing. As the wheat acreage expanded, more and more elevators and flour mills were needed. In 1879 Wichita had nine grain elevators where wheat, corn, and other grains were weighed, cleaned, elevated into bins, and discharged into railroad cars. The *Eagle* proudly pointed out in April of that year that "while Kansas is the greatest wheat State of the Union, Wichita is the great wheat market of Kansas . . . Wichita is the principal market and shipping point for a golden wheat belt seventy-five miles square."⁶ For several months after wheat harvest long lines of wagons converged on Wichita from the west, the south, and the east; it was reported that "From three to six hundred wagons, loaded with wheat, awaiting their turn at the several scales and elevators, have been no unusual sight."⁷

In 1878 it was estimated that 3,000,000 bushels of wheat were shipped from Wichita and that another 1,000,000 bushels were used for seed, bread, and conversion into flour by local mills.⁸ Milling facilities were expanded to take care of the wheat reserved for that purpose. By 1882 Sedgwick county had ten flour mills, seven of them in Wichita township; these ten mills represented a capital investment of over 150 million dollars.⁹

Other agricultural processing industries in Wichita were on a much smaller scale than those concerned with the grain business. These con-

⁵ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *First Biennial Report, 1877-1878*, pp. 107-434.

⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 42-43 ("Pictures of Wichita Wheat Market," *Wichita Eagle*, April 6, 1879).

⁷ *Idem*.

⁸ *Idem*.

⁹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Third Biennial Report, 1881-1882*, p. 447.

sisted of a pork packing plant, a brewery, a soft drink plant, and a corn mill. The pork packing plant was established in 1874, and by 1882 it was capitalized at \$20,000. Between 1874 and 1879 the number of hogs packed annually increased from about 100 to 2,000, and in the latter year it was reported, "The business is continually advancing in progress and encouraging results, doubtless to become one of the leading industries of the city within a short space of time."¹⁰ The brewery established in 1872 was capitalized at \$15,000 in 1882. The soft drink plant, known as The Wichita Soda Factory, opened in 1878 and in 1881 transacted a \$33,300 business. On a much smaller scale was the corn mill capitalized at \$2,000 in 1882.¹¹

The manufacture of farm equipment and vehicles commenced during the same period. In 1879 an iron foundry was established at Wichita, "where all kinds of machinery is repaired and every description of castings, especially for mills and heavy machinery can be manufactured."¹² This establishment was capitalized at \$15,000 in 1882. In the same year a carriage factory was reported to have a capital of \$5,000. The town also had a printing and binding establishment capitalized at \$15,000; in other parts of Sedgwick county there was a broom factory with a capital of \$100 and a brickyard with capital of \$900. The total capital invested in manufacturing concerns in Sedgwick county in 1882 amounted to \$236,000; Wichita's share was \$182,000.¹³

Manufacturing Boom

It has been pointed out that while the boom may be considered as a single phenomenon, it was characterized by a succession of booms in agriculture, railroads, town lots, construction, and trade. During these phases manufacturing expanded in response to the economic needs of the area. A significant increase was observed in the number and the size of establishments concerned with the processing of agricultural commodities and the manufacture of farm equipment, building materials, and consumer goods. While businessmen were eager to secure more

¹⁰ *Wichita Beacon*, March 12, 1879.

¹¹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Third Biennial Report, 1881-1882*, p. 447; Cutler, *op. cit.*, p. 393.

¹² *Wichita Beacon*, March 12, 1879.

¹³ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Third Biennial Report, 1881-1882*, p. 447.

manufactures, little, if any, attempt was made to foster manufactures without a natural basis.

Not until the early months of 1887 was a change of emphasis observed. Town boomers began a concerted drive to secure manufacturers, even going so far as to offer substantial subsidies as bait. Towns vied with one another for factories of all descriptions. Newspaper editors whipped up enthusiasm to such a pitch that their readers believed that great industrial cities would soon grow up in their midst. It was not enough to attract manufactures adapted to the resources and needs of the area. Subsidies were granted on an indiscriminate basis, and factories with little or no chance of survival were sought with the same fervor as those that offered some possibility of permanence.

Causes

What forces were responsible for the boom in manufacturing? Probably the chief motivating factor was the desire to prolong the general boom that rested upon a very precarious foundation. The boom had diverted capital and labor from productive enterprises into speculation, it had inflated property values to unbelievable heights, and it had led to mushroom growth of towns at a time when farmers were beginning to feel the effects of hard times. Since towns had outgrown their visible means of support, there was a need for some new economic activity that would secure present gains and insure continued growth. When it became apparent that the town lot boom could not last indefinitely, businessmen turned to manufacturing as a means to prolong the boom. They reasoned that, if enough factories were established, many benefits would be derived. Jobs would be created for workingmen, and the town's rapid gains in population and wealth might be retained. Workers would have money to spend for food, clothing, and shelter; and all lines of local business would benefit. Above all, it was hoped that factories might be the means of prolonging the real estate boom. Since land would be needed for factory sites and the homes of workers, its value might be expected to rise.

Industrial Growth

The remarkable growth in area manufacturing between 1886 and 1888 is shown in Table 9. It shows that, while the number of factories in the area increased only 21.7 per cent from 1886 to 1888, the capital investment increased 130.8 per cent, the number of employees increased 146.1 per cent, and the value of product increased 58.4 per cent. Most remarkable was the concentration of manufacturing in the central subarea, particularly in Wichita and Sedgwick county. In 1888 Sedgwick county had 30.5 per cent of the area's manufacturing establishments, 61.4 per cent of the capital invested in area manufactures, 60.3 per cent of the manufacturing employees, and 63.7 per cent of the value of products manufactured in the area. Sedgwick county ranked third in the state in number of establishments, fourth in capital investment, fourth in number of employees, and second in value of product.

Kinsley

Since every area town of any consequence had a manufacturing boom, only a few highlights from selected towns can be mentioned here. In Kinsley the boom campaign for manufactures began in the late summer of 1887 after the railroad and town lot booms had subsided. By this time the town had a small brick plant, a sorghum mill, a mattress factory, and a bottling works. According to Professor Malin, at least 18 other manufacturing enterprises were projected in the late summer and fall of 1887, "with a grand total of estimated capital invest-

Table 9
Manufacturing, South Central Kansas, 1886 and 1888

	Number of establishments		Amount of capital invested (millions of dollars)		Average number of workers		Value of product (millions of dollars)	
	1886	1888	1886	1888	1886	1888	1886	1888
Eastern subarea	53	40	\$ 0.7	\$ 0.8	292	380	\$ 2.1	\$ 1.4
Central subarea (Sedgwick co.)	66 (11)	116 (57)	1.3 (0.3)	4.5 (3.4)	520 (179)	1,933 (1,473)	3.6 (1.1)	8.6 (6.8)
Western subarea	24	18	0.4	0.3	181	131	1.0	0.7
Area totals	143	174	\$ 2.4	\$ 5.6	993	2,444	\$ 6.7	\$10.7

Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report, 1885-1886*, pp. 79-552; *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, pp. 27-493.

ment placed at over two million dollars." The products to be manufactured were "twine, meat packing, leather, glue, oleomargarine, canning, tin cans, printing of labels, paper and paper boxes, gloves, strawboard, tobacco, crackers, sugar, sashes, doors and blinds, churns and washing machines, harrows, and papier maché."¹⁴ One of the chief projects was a packing plant supposed to employ 500 workers and have a monthly payroll of \$20,000. The *Kinsley Banner Graphic* led its readers to expect the rapid completion of these projects, but they were scarcely beyond the paper stage when the boom collapsed in the summer of 1888.¹⁵

Kingman

In the central subarea the town of Kingman in 1887 had two flour mills, a gristmill, a broom factory, a foundry, and a planing mill. A packing house, known as "the packing house that lived but a day," slaughtered only one hog and depleted the bank accounts of most of the citizens. The town's largest factory was the Agricultural Works that was intended to manufacture all kinds of farm implements. It employed from 40 to 50 men and for a time was actually engaged in the manufacture of plows and fire extinguishers. The first plow was auctioned and sold for \$2,000 at a celebration that attracted a large crowd of well wishers. Kingman also had a salt boom that will be described later.¹⁶

Hutchinson

While the salt mining boom in Hutchinson overshadowed the manufacturing boom, the latter cannot be dismissed as unimportant. The town had three flour mills, a foundry, a candy factory, and a bakery in the early part of 1888.¹⁷ Later in the year several large meat packing plants were established. Believing that Kansas products should be manufactured upon Kansas soil, the people of Hutchinson went out to attract manufactures, especially packing plants. The coming of Tobey

¹⁴ James C. Malin, "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IV, No. 1, February, 1935, p. 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39; Vol. IV, No. 2, May, 1935, pp. 170-171.

¹⁶ Lowe, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, p. 402.

and Booth, the great English packers, was said to be the opening wedge in drawing three other concerns—Underwood & Company, Fowler Brothers, and Fairbanks & Company. In the same year the Hutchinson Salt and Live Stock Company, a stockyard concern, was organized by a syndicate of capitalists including several prominent Chicago businessmen. According to one authority, this was, “without a doubt, the strongest corporation, from a financial standpoint, doing business in the State of Kansas.”¹⁸

Wichita Manufacturing Boom

There was a steady growth in manufacturing during the early part of the Wichita boom. While the energies of town boomers were concentrated upon railroad and town lot speculation, considerable interest was shown in manufacturing. The *Eagle* published frequent articles dealing with the arrival of new factories and the general progress of manufacturing. “Wichita stands second to no town in the state in the line of manufactories and jobbing interests,” said the *Eagle* in an article announcing the coming of a bologna sausage factory in October, 1885. To back up this statement, the article listed the following manufacturing concerns in the city:

- One plant of Standard Oils works with tanks, transfers, wagons, cooper shops.
- One wholesale fruit and vegetable canning factory
- One fanning mill factory
- Two wire-picket fence factories
- Five flouring mills
- Four steam grain elevators
- One steam hay baling house
- Two bed and mattress factories
- Two iron-cornice and window cap works
- Two wagon and carriage manufactories
- Two sash, door and blind manufactories, and the building going up for another
- Two wholesale and retail candy manufactories, etc.

The article went on to say,

These enumerated are exclusively confined to their different lines and do not include at least fifty concerns, interests and enterprises which might properly come under the head of manufactories, such as furniture shops, a fifty horse-power

¹⁸ Kansas State Historical Society, *Reno County Clippings*, Vol. I, pp. 79-80 (“The Salt Center,” *Commonwealth* (Topeka), October 28, 1888).

steam brick making machine, blank books, saddles and harness, tanners, blacksmiths, gas works, cigars, etc., etc.¹⁹

Continued progress was observed during the late months of 1885 and during the year 1886. New concerns that were the subject of special articles during this period consisted of a pork packing plant, a clothing factory, a wagon factory and a "straw lumber" factory. In September, 1886, the town had among other concerns, eight printing establishments, ten blacksmith shops, eight carriage makers, five iron foundries and machine shops, and five planing mills.²⁰ "Manufactures are getting a good start and will rapidly follow the railroads and commerce," observed the *Eagle* in early December, 1886.²¹ At the beginning of the new year it was recorded that "Wichita has 177 manufactures, little and big, employing 1,288 people, the payrolls aggregating \$16,735 per week, or five hundred and seventy thousand dollars paid out annually in Wichita to hands employed by manufacturers."²²

Subsidies

Although manufacturing concerns were generally required to be financially self-supporting prior to early 1887, pressure was mounting to grant them subsidies. For a time the pressure was checked by the editor of the *Eagle*. When a businessman asked Colonel Murdock why he "opposed the giving or offering of bonuses to private enterprises," the latter replied, "The reason for such an attitude was one of principle, and not a personal one. Any merely private enterprise which cannot succeed in the absence of a subsidy, cannot succeed with one."²³

All criticism of subsidized industry was silenced by the collapse of the real-estate boom. Frantic businessmen turned to manufacturing as the only panacea for their ills. A cry arose for factories and more factories. The Board of Trade was commissioned to search out the highways and the byways for prospective concerns. Fat subsidies were offered as bait in enticing manufactures to Wichita. Many people believed that Wichita's "rapid gains in population and wealth could

¹⁹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 3, 1885 ("A Bologna Sausage Factory").

²⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, September 26, 1886 ("Facts about Wichita").

²¹ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, December 10, 1886 ("Winning Wichita").

²² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 1, 1887 ("The Peerless Princess. Why Wonderful Wichita Wins").

²³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, March 20, 1886 ("Why Not a Bonus").

be best retained by anchoring the community in manufacturing."²⁴ Mr. Earl V. Long, the historian of the Wichita boom, describes this movement in the following words:

In the early part of 1887, we see the maddening crowd infected with a new kind of speculation bug. This was the idea that the town must have great factories and great packing plants, and the thing that was done was to get them with little regard for the promotion expense or the inefficiency of future management. It was felt that if Wichita could only get factories the town was assured permanency and the laboring man work.²⁵

With respect to leadership and promotional tactics, the manufacturing boom was similar to other phases of the boom. The Manufacturing Committee of the Board of Trade directed the campaign under the leadership of N. A. English, George H. Blackwlder, George L. Rouse, Pat Healy, N. F. Niederlander, and A. W. Oliver. This committee corresponded with eastern manufacturers who might be interested in moving their plants to Wichita. When these communications met with a favorable response, prominent boosters hurried east to try to close the deal. On the home front newspapers boomed manufactures, and businessmen and hired spellbinders harangued the public. One spellbinder was a revivalist preacher who was successful in convincing the townspeople that their "salvation" depended on digging deep in their pockets to subsidize new industries.

Car Works

The first factory subsidized on a large scale was the Burton Livestock Car Company, originally a Boston concern that built its hopes on a patent improvement in livestock cars. Lacking capital, this concern was attracted by the tempting bonuses and subsidies then offered by western boom towns. For a time it looked as if Kansas City would be the highest bidder with its offer to donate 27 acres for the plant and to subscribe \$150,000 in stock. Not to be outdone by their rivals at the Kaw's mouth, the businessmen of Wichita upped the bid to 80 acres and \$200,000 in stock.²⁶

²⁴ *Wichita Evening Eagle*, May 12, 1941 (Victor Murdock, "Most Important Period for Future of Wichita Appeared Fifty Years Ago").

²⁵ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 19, 1887 ("Kansas City vs. Wichita").

July 4, 1887, was an exciting day in Wichita. Not only was there the usual celebration of Independence Day; but, in addition, the coming of the Burton Car Works was announced. O. H. Bentley records that, as he was going to town on that day, "he saw an excited crowd in front of Levy's bank; I think there were at least fifty men. A. W. Oliver was talking, and in a moment it was learned that J. O. Davidson had sent a telegram [from Boston] to the effect that he had secured the location of the Burton Stock-Car Works."²⁷

The enthusiasm subsided quickly when it was announced that the company wanted the citizens of Wichita to subscribe \$200,000 of capital stock. Oliver then launched into a high-pressure sales talk, telling his listeners that the car works would eventually employ 2,000 workers, thus insuring a full dinner pail and that by adding 10,000 people to the city it would revive the real estate boom. He warned his listeners that, if Wichita did not grasp this opportunity, the concern would go to Kansas City. Oak Davidson finally came to the rescue and said that, if the Board of Trade would make him a guaranty of \$50,000, he would subscribe the \$200,000. This offer was accepted, and 16 committees of three men each were appointed by the Board of Trade to contact every resident of the city. In a single day these committees obtained subscriptions amounting to \$50,000.²⁸

The Burton Car Works soon left the realm of a paper scheme and became a reality. In 1888 it was capitalized at \$2,000,000, the average number of hands employed amounted to 304, the annual wage bill was \$120,000, the value of raw materials used was \$3,000,000, and the value of the product was \$3,840,000.²⁹

Apparently everyone believed that the car works would be a great success. Little or no thought was given to the economics of business location. Prior to 1887 Wichita attracted resource oriented industries that offered a strong possibility of success if they were adequately financed and managed. The Burton Car Works represented a radical departure from this tradition. Wichita not only lacked the basic raw materials for heavy industry, such as coal, iron ore, and lumber but was deficient

²⁷ Bentley, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 206.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, p. 448.

in skilled labor, capital, and markets. Therefore, it is not surprising that, after limping along for several years, the car works closed in the depression years of the mid-nineties. Fifty years later the old car factory was occupied by an airplane company.³⁰

Watch Factory

After securing the Burton Car Works, the businessmen of Wichita went after such other concerns as watch factories, packing houses, elevators, glucose and starch factories, strawboard factories, and canning factories.³¹ One authority says that in one week the boomers created a fund of \$1,000,000 to be used in buying factories and packing houses. "This fund did not consist of subscriptions, but was either in cash or in real estate appraised by a committee."³² One concern probably receiving assistance from this fund was the Peabody Watch Company. After examining the merits and claims of a new watch movement patented by R. L. Peabody of La Porte, Indiana, the Manufacturing Committee on July 16, 1887, submitted a unanimous report favoring the encouragement of this concern to the Board of Trade.³³ The company received a handsome subsidy from the townspeople and erected an impressive stone structure. In 1888 the watch factory was capitalized at \$250,000.³⁴ About 50 years later Victor Murdock said that the watch factory made a poorer showing than the car works. "No watch was ever made in it, but it stood for years on the evening skyline as a symbol of the community's subscription to an industrial career. Its material eventually ended up in the walls of the church at St. Marks."³⁵

Packing Plants

In the fall of 1887 pork packing plants became all the rage. On October 23 the *Eagle* declared that "Wichita lacks but that one single feature or element as a center to put her on an equal proportionate

³⁰ *Wichita Evening Eagle*, May 12, 1941 (Victor Murdock, "Most Important Period for Future of Wichita Appeared Fifty Years Ago").

³¹ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³² Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 331 ("A City That Recovered from the Wildest of Booms, Wichita, the Sedately Thriving," *Kansas City Star*, October 16, 1904).

³³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 17, 1887 ("The Peabody Watch").

³⁴ Kirke Mechem (ed.), *The Annals of Kansas*, p. 43.

³⁵ *Wichita Evening Eagle*, May 12, 1941 (Victor Murdock, "Most Important Period for Future of Wichita Appeared Fifty Years Ago").

footing with Kansas City."³⁶ The great meat packers, Armour, Swift, Morris, and Fowler were interviewed, but they stated bluntly that packing west of the Missouri river was impracticable.³⁷ Unwilling to accept defeat, the boosters turned to two of the smaller concerns—Francis Whitaker and Sons and Jacob Dold Packing Company. According to one authority, these concerns were each given \$200,000 and land valued at \$50,000.³⁸ By this time the boosters were getting short of cash and decided to take property for subscriptions to the packing plants. Long writes that the subscriptions took the following forms:

(1) Outright subscriptions of money; (2) Deeds to property with and without conditions; (3) Mortgages or contracts with and without conditions; (4) Conditional location subscriptions.

A man could make the grand gesture. He would give perhaps, \$10,000, and he would sing it out at a public meeting. Perhaps he did not have ten cents in real cash, but he had an inflated piece of property that he could call worth \$10,000. In other words it was getting to be a farce, with each trying to fool the other; but if a man skinned the Board of Trade in these deals, there was compensation, for he was in turn skinned by the decline and deflation of the boom.³⁹

With this sort of financial aid it is not surprising that the Whitaker Packing Company failed to survive the depression after 1887. On the other hand, the Dold Packing Company weathered the storm and is doing business in Wichita today.

Unsubsidized Industry

The reader should not be left with the impression that all of the boom time factories were subsidized. On the contrary, a large proportion of the new concerns were self-supporting. The *Eagle* remarked on this fact in October of 1887 as follows: "So wonderful has been the commercial growth of Wichita, so many her advantages as a distributing point, that she is getting almost without effort, more manufacturing interests than any if not more than all of the other cities of the state combined."⁴⁰

³⁶ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 23, 1887 ("And Now for the Hog. What Kind of a City Wichita Will Be!").

³⁷ Bentley, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

³⁸ Kansas State Historical Society, *Sedgwick County Clippings*, Vol. I, p. 331 ("A City That Recovered from the Wildest of Booms, Wichita, the Sedately Thriving," *Kansas City Star*, October 16, 1904).

³⁹ Long, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁴⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 23, 1887 ("And Now for the Hog. What Kind of City Wichita Will Be!").

Summary

Once again a reaction followed the efforts towards forced expansion. Manufacturing concerns failed by the dozen in the depression years after 1887. Especially vulnerable were the subsidized and non-resource oriented industries. On the other hand, a number of concerns adapted to the resources and needs of the area managed to survive the lean years. Victor Murdock wrote,

. . . after the collapse of the realty boom Wichita held valiantly to a sizeable list of manufactures, making among other things, crackers, confectionery, baking powder, cornice, carriages, overalls, shirts, paper boxes, tents and awnings, trunks, vinegar, cigars, books, extracts, feeds, tin products, lithographs, harness, fencing, pumps, blank books, boots and shoes, hair goods, spring-beds, mattresses, sash and door, roofing, fertilizer, printer's rollers, coopering, horseradish, hominy.⁴¹

In spite of reverses and hardships, the townspeople did not lose their faith in the industrial potentialities of Wichita. Twentieth century descendants of these pioneers know that this faith was not misguided.

Sorghum Sugar Boom

The cultivation and manufacture of sorghum sugar was another speculative fad that invaded the area in the late eighties. This industry had its beginning in the early fifties, when the United States Patent Office began to encourage farmers to plant Chinese sorghum to produce sugar for home consumption.⁴² In Kansas this crop was grown first for its molasses by-product rather than for processing into sugar. Owing to the high cost of domestic and imported cane sugar, early settlers were encouraged to grow sweet sorghum; from it molasses could be extracted for home consumption and sale in local markets. Since this was the only kind of sweetening most people could afford, its production was expanded, a number of small mills were constructed, and by 1882 over 6,000,000 gallons of molasses were produced in Kansas.⁴³

Sorghum sugar became of real importance to the area in the late eighties and early nineties. Several factors played a part in this develop-

⁴¹ *Wichita Evening Eagle*, May 12, 1941 (Victor Murdock, "Most Important Period for Future of Wichita Appeared Fifty Years Ago").

⁴² Clarence H. Danhof, "Agriculture" *The Growth of the American Economy*, Harold F. Williamson, editor, p. 138.

⁴³ Howes, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

ment. In the first place, the price of traditional staples declined after the early eighties, and farmers were eager to discover new crops and new methods that would help to maintain their incomes. They were aided in this search by land-grant colleges, state boards of agriculture, private research agencies, farmers' organizations, and agricultural journals. Moreover, the Hatch Act of 1887 provided for the establishment of agricultural experiment stations, and the first station in Kansas was established in February of 1888.⁴⁴

Largely as a result of these efforts, several new crops were introduced into the area; of these cotton, peanuts, alfalfa, saccharine sorghums, and nonsaccharine sorghums (Kafir, Feterita, Milo, and Broom-corn) are most frequently mentioned in the literature of the period. The sorghum plant, both saccharine and nonsaccharine, was especially well adapted to the soil, climate, and length of the Kansas season. It resisted drought effectively, owing to its deep root structure and ability to withhold its sap from excessive evaporation, and it was not as susceptible to attack by insect pests as corn and wheat.

Sorghum sugar also received much attention because of monopoly in the refining of imported cane sugar. The sugar trust was one of the most notorious monopolies that came under public condemnation in the later part of the century. In July of 1888, for example, this trust was said to have "bought up all the refined sugar and contracted for more. Spreckles has cornered the West India crop of sugar . . . Sugar has gone up about 1¾ cents a pound on the average within the last three months."⁴⁵ Many Kansans hoped that the monopoly might be broken if sufficient encouragement was given to the sorghum sugar industry. Nationalistic arguments were also used in support of the industry. According to one writer, "Every pound of sugar made in the United States means a pound less to import, but also means a greater demand for farm labor, fuel, machinery, etc., for which there is a new home demand."⁴⁶

Government subsidies played an important part in the growth of the industry. Liberal contributions were forthcoming from federal,

⁴⁴ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 26, 1888.

⁴⁶ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Seventh Biennial Report, 1889-1890*, p. 141.

state, and local governments. In Washington Senator Plumb was an able spokesman for the sorghum sugar industry of his state; he worked diligently to secure appropriations from Congress to carry on manufacturing and cultural experiments at Fort Scott, Ottawa, Medicine Lodge, and other localities in Kansas. From 1884 to 1889 the Federal Government "expended on these experiments probably between a quarter and a half-million dollars, a large part of which was spent at Fort Scott and Medicine Lodge."⁴⁷

State aid commenced in 1887, when the legislature passed "An Act to Encourage the Manufacture of Sugar." This provided for the payment of a bounty of 2 cents a pound on all sugar manufactured in the state from beets, sorghum, or other sugar yielding canes or plants grown in Kansas. A state sugar inspector was appointed; his detailed reports appearing in the *Biennial Reports* of the State Board of Agriculture show that bounties totaling \$48,889.91 were paid to nine Kansas sugar companies from 1887 to 1892.⁴⁸

On the local level there was much enthusiasm for sugar factories, and farmers and townsmen not only brought pressure upon their legislators and congressmen for state and federal subsidies but voted local subsidies and subscribed private capital to the new industry.

The above forces conspired to generate a sorghum sugar boom. In 1883 the State Board of Agriculture reported sugar factories in the following area towns: Hutchinson had a \$125,000 factory with 160 workers; Sterling had a \$100,000 factory; at Kinsley there was a factory formerly located at Larned; and Liberty in Barber county had one. Outside the area there was a large factory at Ottawa. Sharply declining sugar prices reduced the number of operating factories from five to three by December, 1885.⁴⁹

Conditions improved in the following years, however, and from 1887 to 1889 at least ten factories were built in the state; four were situated in the South Central area. A \$50,000 factory with a daily capacity of 120 tons of cane commenced operations at El Dorado (Butler

⁴⁷ William E. Connelley, *The Life of Preston B. Plumb*, p. 380.

⁴⁸ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, p. 164; *Seventh Biennial Report, 1889-1890*, p. 135; *Eighth Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, p. 243.

⁴⁹ Howes, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-153.

county) in September, 1888.⁵⁰ In the same year the Conway Springs (Sumner county) factory began processing 150 tons of cane daily.⁵¹ In the western part of the area the citizens of Pratt voted \$100,000 for the erection of the Pratt Sugar Refining Company in December, 1889.⁵²

One of the largest and best equipped sorghum sugar factories in the United States was located at Medicine Lodge (Barber county). After much agitation from local farmers, construction got under way on The Medicine Lodge Sugar Works and Refining Company plant in the spring of 1887. Mr. Percy S. Miller, the historian of Medicine Lodge, describes this plant in some detail as follows:

The main building was forty-eight by one-hundred sixty feet, three stories high. The boiler and pumping house was fifty by ninety feet, fire proof, and iron clad A large office and laboratory was maintained; also, a copper shop and a syrup cistern with a capacity of a million gallons. The cost of the plant was one hundred thousand dollars, the city putting up thirty-three thousand in order to secure the mill. The water supply came from a seven acre lake supplied by an irrigation ditch from Elm Creek.⁵³

In 1890 the mill had 60 employees and processed 5,972 tons of cane into 599,893 pounds of sugar and 54,208 gallons of molasses; profits amounted to \$8,906.14. In the same year 1,500 acres of cane were grown by farmers on a contract basis and delivered to the mill, that usually commenced operations in August and ran for about eight weeks. State bounties received by the Medicine Lodge factory amounted to \$11,997.86 in 1890 and \$3,987.00 in 1892.⁵⁴

Misfortune plagued the sorghum sugar industry from the beginning. Suitable markets were difficult to find partly because consumers disliked the sorghum taste of the sugar and partly because the price was often high in relation to cane sugar. There were also many production problems. Unfavorable crop conditions sometimes made it difficult to get enough canes to keep the factories running. Much coal for fuel was needed, and production was sometimes held up by delayed shipments. Poor management, inadequate capital, faulty machinery, scarcity of skilled sugar makers, and danger of total destruction by fire were

⁵⁰ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), September 20, 1888, p. 11.

⁵¹ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁵³ Percy S. Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

⁵⁴ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Seventh Biennial Report, 1889-1890*, pp. 135-141; *Eighth Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, p. 243.

other handicaps. The chief difficulty lay in the fact that the percentage of sugar in the sap of the sorghum plant was far below that in the sap of sugar cane. With government funds at their disposal, chemists experimented with different varieties of sorghum and different extraction processes in an effort to increase the sugar yield. In 1885 a new process, known as the "Diffusion Process," was said to extract the entire sugar product of the sorghum cane in a successful and a cheap manner. While yields per ton of sorghum cane increased from about 35 to 100 pounds of sugar between 1883 and 1890, the product was still not competitive with cane sugar.⁵⁵ To compound the difficulties, experiments were made in Kansas with beet sugar in 1889 and 1890, and beets were found to have a higher percentage of sucrose than sorghum.⁵⁶

Most of the area factories were in operation for only a few years before they were forced to close. In May of 1890, the El Dorado factory, that had originally cost \$50,000, was sold at a sheriff's sale for \$1,000. Outside the area the factories at Topeka and Ness City were destroyed by fire. The Medicine Lodge factory was sold at public auction for \$40,000 in March, 1892, but it continued operations on a reduced scale for two or three years.⁵⁷ The removal of state and federal bounties in 1894 struck a death blow to the industry, but by that time the Medicine Lodge plant was the only one operating in the state.

Silk Boomlet

In addition to sorghum sugar, other experiments attempted to combine processing or manufacturing with the cultivation of new crops. One of these was the cultivation of castor beans and the production of castor oil. Another combined the growing of broomcorn with the manufacture of whisk brooms.⁵⁸

Of some importance for a time was another combining the growing of mulberry trees with the culture of silkworms and the spinning and the weaving of silk cloth. The commercial production of silk in Kansas dates back to 1868, when a Frenchman named Ernest Valetton

⁵⁵ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁵⁶ *Idem.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 108, 109, 136, 185.

⁵⁸ Howes, *op. cit.*, p. 202; Kirke Mechem (ed.), *The Annals of Kansas*, August 1, 1898, p. 275.

de Boissiere established a socialist colony at Silkville (Franklin county) of silkworm experts and farm operators from France. About six years later the Mennonites brought silkworms, together with hard red Turkey wheat, from southern Russia to their new home in central Kansas. The silkworms were fed on the leaves of Osage Orange trees, and some silk was produced.⁵⁹

Although successful for a time, both experiments were later abandoned, and not until the mid-eighties was an attempt made to revive the silk industry. In 1885 the legislature appointed a special commission to study the silk industry of Kansas and to determine whether it needed state aid. After making a thorough investigation, the commission reported that the production of raw silk could be made into one of the largest farm enterprises in the state. Since farmers were finding it difficult to obtain silkworms and mulberry seed, it was decided to establish a state experimental farm, where mulberry seedlings and silkworms could be grown for distribution to interested farmers.⁶⁰

After the legislature appropriated \$13,000 for such a project in 1887, the Silk Commission began to look for a likely location for an experimental farm. Several area towns were interested in the farm, and it was reported that Larned, Peabody, Hutchinson, Newton, and McPherson all wanted the silk station.⁶¹ Larned was first selected; but, after negotiations for land there broke down, Peabody offered the state ten acres of land and secured the station. In January of 1889 a correspondent wrote to the *Wichita Eagle*, "I recently visited the silk station at Peabody. They have ten acres of mulberry of two years growth in a thrifty condition, forty ounces of eggs of the yellow variety of silk worms well cared for As far as I can see they have made a success of growing and reeling silk."⁶²

For a time area newspapers gave the industry enthusiastic support, and a number of farmers planted mulberry trees and raised silkworms. One man wrote that "the people are longing impatiently to engage in this light and pleasant calling."⁶³ In 1886 hundreds of women and

⁵⁹ Howes, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁶¹ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁶² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 9, 1889 ("Kansas in the Cabinet").

⁶³ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, July 26, 1888 (H. E. Birwell, "Silk Culture").

children were said to be engaged in the silk cocoon industry in Marion, Harvey, Sedgwick, and Reno counties.⁶⁴ Silk culturists met at Wichita in April of 1889 and it was reported that Kansas had raised one fifth of the country's cocoons in 1888.⁶⁵

Although Kansas produced high quality silk, it was difficult to keep the worms alive during the cold winter months. Moreover, much labor was required, and it soon became apparent that the Chinese and the Japanese could produce silk much more cheaply than Kansas people. Although the legislature of 1889 appropriated \$9,700 "for silk culture and forestry work," succeeding legislatures failed to continue the support, and the industry was gradually abandoned.⁶⁶

Mining Boom

Natural Gas Boom

Closely linked with other phases of the boom was the mining boom. The growth of towns, railroads, and manufacturing industries created a demand for cheaper sources of fuel, power, and illumination. There was dawning a new industrial era which demanded coal to raise steam under boilers in industrial establishments or railroad locomotives, and petroleum, and natural gas to generate power and heat and to illuminate homes, shops, and factories. One area resident drew attention to this need when he wrote, "The cost of running machinery by steam power is so great that unless a cheaper power can be successfully substituted Kansas must ever remain but an agricultural state."⁶⁷

The inhabitants of eastern Kansas first tapped the cheaper sources of fuel, power, and illumination that lay hidden in the bowels of the earth. Coal was discovered in northeastern Kansas during the Territorial period, and after the Civil War the important mining district of southeastern Kansas began the commercial development of coal, lead, and zinc.⁶⁸ In the search for coal, gas and oil were discovered. The first commercial gas wells were drilled near Paola in 1882 and 1883; the

⁶⁴ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁶⁶ Howes, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

⁶⁷ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, May 28, 1886 ("Cheaper Power Demanded").

⁶⁸ Blackmar, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 376-380.

following year Paola achieved the distinction of being the first Kansas town to have gas lights.⁶⁹

Real-estate speculators soon realized the potentialities of natural gas. As a cheap illuminant, it could light the streets, homes, and business establishments of the community. As a cheap source of fuel and power, it could generate a gas fired industrial boom. The possibilities were unlimited. The boom might be prolonged indefinitely. Ambitious town boosters began drilling holes in the ground in search of coal, oil, and especially natural gas. In October of 1887 the *Wichita Eagle* commented upon "The mania for boring into the earth for natural gas that has pervaded the country for some time"⁷⁰

Salt Boom

The curious thing is that salt was discovered in the search for natural gas. On September 27, 1887, a 300-foot vein of high quality rock salt was discovered in south Hutchinson by Ben Blanchard.⁷¹ A real estate speculator by profession, Blanchard had been having difficulty selling his property in south Hutchinson. While drilling for gas as an inducement to emigrants, he discovered salt.⁷²

Other area towns had a similar experience. Natural gas prospectors at Anthony found rock salt in May, 1888,⁷³ and in August of the same year a Kingman company discovered salt while drilling for gas.⁷⁴ Lyons, Great Bend, Pratt, Nickerson, Sterling, Caldwell, and Wellington were other area towns where salt was discovered in the search for gas, oil, or coal in 1887 and 1888.⁷⁵ Salt discoveries were made outside the area at the towns of Ellsworth, Kanopolis, Rago, and Wilson.⁷⁶ Unsuccessful wells were drilled in the area counties of McPherson, Harvey, and Sedgwick. These counties lay beyond the great rock salt deposits of central Kansas which are embraced in the territory included

⁶⁹ Angelo Scott, "How Natural Gas Came to Kansas," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, No. 4, Winter, 1954, pp. 238-239.

⁷⁰ *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 29, 1887 ("Natural Gas Theories").

⁷¹ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁷² Carl R. Zerger, "Historical Notes on Kansas Salt," Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Kansas, Lawrence, August, 1945, p. 82.

⁷³ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁷⁴ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁷⁵ Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁷⁶ Robert Hay, "Geology and Mineral Resources of Kansas," *Eighth Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, Kansas State Board of Agriculture, p. 139.

in the counties of Ellsworth, Rice, Reno, Kingman, and Harper.⁷⁷ Geologists have estimated that if the salt supply of this territory "were built into a solid prism 5 miles square, the prism would reach to a height of 23 miles—about four times higher than Mount Everest, the highest known mountain in the world."⁷⁸

While these were the first large scale salt developments in the area, two earlier ventures merit brief mention. Salt produced from Big Marsh in Stafford county was marketed in the surrounding area as early as 1867, but the venture was not a financial success. Another salt marsh was discovered ten miles south of Raymond in Rice county in 1875. A company was formed in Hutchinson to develop the mineral by pumping brine to the Santa Fe station at Raymond. The project was later abandoned when the brine proved too weak to make evaporation profitable.⁷⁹

After the discovery of 1887, the mining of salt soon reached boom proportions, and it remained for a later generation to develop the more lucrative oil and gas resources of the area.

Although Hutchinson was destined to become the salt capital of Kansas, other area towns were in the running for a time. Kingman was one town that pinned its hopes to salt. Within two years from the discovery of a 150-foot vein of rock salt on August 19, 1887, the town had six salt companies and many more unincorporated companies with an estimated capital investment of \$100,000. There was so much activity in the town that the *Wichita Eagle* was led to remark: "In Kansas Corn is King, Sugar and Silk rival for Queenship, Salt is Jack and Kingman holds the Joker."⁸⁰ The salt discovery prolonged the boom for a time, for Lowe writes that "People moved to Kingman to share the benefits of the salt discovery. Additions to the town were laid out. Fairly large sections of the town were built around the shafts and evaporating plants. To connect the sections of the town a street car line was started."⁸¹

⁷⁷ Frank Vincent, "History of Salt Discovery and Production in Kansas, 1887-1915," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1915-1918*, Vol. XIV, p. 358.

⁷⁸ Howes, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁷⁹ Zenger, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 81-82.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

⁸¹ Lowe, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

In Wellington eight salt mining companies had been organized by January 10, 1889, and a local newspaper declared, "The grandest era in Wellington's history is just dawning. The discovery of an immense vein of salt at a depth which makes it easily accessible has interested everyone and enlisted the attention of capitalists."⁸² During this period salt was also mined and processed on a commercial basis at Anthony and Sterling.⁸³

The infant salt industry was dealt a heavy blow by the depression after 1887. Most of the companies were in operation for only a few years before they were forced to close. At one time or another nine area towns produced salt; but only two, Lyons and Hutchinson, developed lasting salt industries.⁸⁴

Hutchinson, The Salt Capital

Hutchinson's leadership in the salt industry can be attributed to several factors. In the first place, salt was reached at a depth of about 500 feet at Hutchinson, whereas deeper wells generally had to be drilled elsewhere in the area. Secondly, the town had an abundant water supply that was of vital importance in the wet mining process. This process called for the boring of holes to the bottom of the salt bed, pouring water into the holes, pumping the saturated solution to the surface, and extracting the salt by boiling and evaporation.⁸⁵ Thirdly Hutchinson had certain advantages that any large town had over smaller towns in the development of a major resource. These included superior railroad facilities and more adequate supplies of capital, labor, and managerial talent. Moreover, three local packing plants were of some importance as they were heavy users of salt. On the other hand, local citizens lacked adequate capital and technical knowledge to develop the industry.

Eastern capital and know-how.—Necessary outside assistance was soon forthcoming. Within a month from Ben Blanchard's discovery, Dr. Gouinlock, a salt manufacturer from Warsaw, New York, arrived in Hutchinson and began putting down a salt well. He and his partner,

⁸² *Wichita Morning Eagle*, January 17, 1889.

⁸³ Vincent, *op. cit.*, pp. 370-371.

⁸⁴ Zerger, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁸⁵ Hay, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140.

Mr. Humphrey, produced the first salt on March 24, 1888.⁸⁶ The industry attracted other eastern capitalists, the most notable of whom was Jay Gould, the railroad magnate. In 1890 he bought a salt plant and property near the Missouri Pacific railroad in south Hutchinson to protect the freight traffic of this railroad.⁸⁷ One Populist newspaper in the area remarked, "Since Gould has secured control of the Hutchinson Salt Works it is reasonable to presume that his victims will be well seasoned hereafter."⁸⁸

Mushroom growth characterized the Hutchinson salt industry in the early years. Within one year from the date of discovery, 13 plants had been erected. They represented an aggregate investment of about \$600,000 and an annual production of 900,000 barrels.⁸⁹ Corporation charter records provide another measure of growth. Since 1886, a total of 75 companies have been incorporated to manufacture Kansas salt. Of this total, 30 were Hutchinson companies, and 36 were organized in the 6-year period from 1887 to 1892.⁹⁰

Michigan rival.—Although they enjoyed certain advantages over their rivals in neighboring towns, Hutchinson salt producers were at a serious disadvantage in competing with out-of-state producers. The salt producers of Michigan, who were the chief rivals, had an association using its power to secure lower freight rates from the railroads of the Midwest than those paid by Hutchinson salt producers. Vigorous complaints were made against this discriminatory rate structure. The Hutchinson producers in May of 1891 asked the Interstate Commerce Commission for protection against unfair railroad rates, pointing out that the rates then in force virtually shut Kansas salt out of Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska. In May of 1892, the Hutchinson Salt Company complained that low salt rates from Michigan to Kansas were unfair.⁹¹

The market for Hutchinson salt was thus restricted by discriminatory freight rates. Moreover, the industry was plagued by such problems as experience, cost of production, selling and oversupply. The over-

⁸⁶ Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

⁸⁸ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), December 26, 1890.

⁸⁹ Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

⁹⁰ Zenger, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 85.

⁹¹ Mechem, *op. cit.*, pp. 120, 136.

supply problem was especially acute. With a dozen or more producers in the field and a limited market to supply, more salt was produced than could be absorbed by the market at a profitable price.

Pools and mergers.—To remedy this situation, a meeting of salt producers was called at Hutchinson in the early nineties. Twenty-one men representing companies from Hutchinson, Sterling, Wellington, and Kingman were present. Frank Vincent, one of the pioneer salt producers of Hutchinson, attended. He later recalled, "The proposition to be discussed was the curtailing of production at least one-half. It soon developed that not one producer was willing to curtail his production a single barrel, but was strongly of the opinion that his competitor should." Vincent also observed, "the meeting was not of the 'peace and harmony' kind. Some of the language used during the discussion was not of a Christian type, nor would it look good in print."⁹²

Meanwhile, a more effective way was discovered to restrict output and insure profitable operations. Instead of a loose pooling agreement, companies began to merge or amalgamate by the outright purchase of one organization by another. Competition thus gave way to a condition approaching monopoly, as was the case with so many industries in the late nineteenth century. The consolidation movement began in August of 1890 with the merger of Gouinlock & Humphrey and the Riverside Salt Company. The new company was called the Kansas Salt Company in March of 1891 the Gould plants were merged with the Hutchinson Salt and Manufacturing Company. The two giants competed vigorously with one another for several years, but in May of 1899 they joined forces in a new company known as the Hutchinson-Kansas Salt Company.⁹³ Zerger says that 16 plants operated in Hutchinson in 1899. "Of these, nine mills were dominated by the Hutchinson-Kansas Salt Company and these were designated as the 'trust' group. The remainder were the property of independent producers."⁹⁴

At the same time that mergers were taking place among local companies, steps were being taken to effect a marriage between the Michigan and Kansas salt industries. Officers of the Michigan Salt Associa-

⁹² Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 361-362.

⁹⁴ Zerger, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

tion had shown an interest in the Hutchinson field as early as 1888, but because of the chaotic state of the industry, they decided it was an inopportune time to participate in the manufacture of Kansas salt. This decision was not adhered to for long, however. In 1891, Joy Morton, a member of a prominent Michigan salt family, became active in the Hutchinson salt industry. He operated the Diamond Salt Plant under a lease from 1891 to 1893 and as full owner from 1893 to 1897. In the latter year he expanded his operations by building a large salt plant in South Hutchinson.⁹⁵

All of the earlier consolidations were dwarfed on January 1, 1900, when an eastern syndicate purchased all the stock, interests, and plants of the Hutchinson-Kansas Salt Company and merged them with the Morton plants. Joy Morton was the prime mover in this consolidation and became president of the new company known as the Morton Salt Company; the general office moved from Hutchinson to Chicago, Illinois.⁹⁶

Not all of the Hutchinson salt companies came under the domination of the Morton interests. Several independent companies managed to survive the period of cutthroat competition, merger, and depression. Two of these of considerable importance to the present day are the Barton Salt Company, organized in 1892, and the Carey Salt Company, organized in 1901.⁹⁷

The freight rate problem was remedied by linking the two great salt fields of the Midwest. Soon after Joy Morton entered the Hutchinson industry, freight rates were adjusted more favorably for Kansas producers. Douglas described the circumstances under which this adjustment was effected as follows:

It is generally understood that the concessions were secured by Mr. [Joy] Morton through his brother, Paul Morton, then traffic manager of the Santa Fe railway, but this cannot be definitely confirmed. The fact remains that the Santa Fe made the first concession, and a general advantage of rates resulted to the Kansas plants.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Vincent, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-362.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

⁹⁷ Zerger, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁹⁸ Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

The market for salt was thus expanded, and by 1910 Kansas salt was distributed anywhere to the west of the Mississippi river.⁹⁹

With the removal of major bottlenecks, the salt industry expanded and production figures mounted. This is indicated by Table 10 showing production, price, and value statistics of Kansas factories by 2-year periods from 1889 to 1905. From 1888-1907 Kansas produced between 8 and 10 per cent of the nation's salt. We shall see in a later volume in this series that the percentage rose appreciably in later decades.

Gypsum Boom

It has been pointed out that the greatest reserves of easily accessible gypsum in Kansas are found in Barber and Comanche counties. Not until the boom years of the late eighties, however, was this mineral resource developed on a commercial basis. As in the case of salt, the resource remained untouched until outside capital and technical skill were forthcoming.

There are two accounts of the pioneer gypsum venture at Medicine Lodge. According to Mr. Percy S. Miller,

In 1887 Thomas J. Best arrived in the United States from England to look over the gypsum beds. After inspecting the beds in Michigan, Kansas, and California, he decided on Medicine Lodge as the best location. Mr. Best returned to England and in 1889, with his brother, W. C. Best, came to Medicine Lodge and started the gypsum mill. The Santa Fe Railroad had offices in London that helped advertise the great gypsum beds of the West, and that was where Mr. Best first heard of the locality.¹⁰⁰

Table 10
Salt Production, Average Price Received, and Value of Product by Two-Year Periods, Kansas, 1889-1905

Year	Barrels (280 lbs.)	Average price	Value
1889	450,000	\$0.45	\$202,500
1891	855,536	.36	304,775
1893	1,277,180	.37	471,543
1895	1,341,617	.36	483,701
1897	1,224,980	.34	417,626
1899	2,172,000	.35	760,200
1901	1,271,015	.60	762,609
1903	1,455,582	.50	800,731
1905	2,123,109	.39	837,739

Source: Richard L. Douglas, "A History of Manufactures in the Kansas District," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1909-1910*, Vol. XI, p. 181.

⁹⁹ *Idem.*

¹⁰⁰ Percy S. Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

Another account, written by Mr. Robert Hay, a geologist, says that capitalists in England learned of the gypsum beds in Barber county through an article in *Harper's Magazine* in June, 1888, describing these beds. Hay writes that these English capitalists "came and examined the Barber county deposit, and seeing the quality of the raw material, its extent and accessibility, they began, at Medicine Lodge, the manufacture of products that before were supposed impossible out of England or France."¹⁰¹ Although these authorities differ regarding the source of information, they agree that the Best brothers first developed the gypsum beds of Barber county.

The mill at Medicine Lodge constructed in the latter part of 1889 started to produce in 1890. Gypsum was mined or quarried from the great hills to the southwest of town and hauled about five miles by ox cart and mules to the mill. Miller says, "From 1890 to 1900 the mill did not have much business and only employed six to eight men."¹⁰² This was due partly to competition from foreign countries, partly to high freight rates, and partly to competition from gypsum beds in Texas. After a time, however, the high quality product of the Medicine Lodge mill acquired a reputation among builders in eastern cities. The chief product of the mill was a fine white plaster known as Keene's cement. Business expanded after Thomas J. Best secured a contract to furnish gypsum to a Irish contractor in St. Louis; according to Miller, The Best brothers' gypsum was so good a product that they could undersell the foreign material, and had the advantage of the short distance to St. Louis. The St. Louis contractor built fifty per cent of the fine buildings of St. Louis, including the Union Station and Jefferson Memorial, with Medicine Lodge gypsum. This one contract made the Best brothers' mill one of the greatest in the world.¹⁰³

Although raw gypsum was secured from the Medicine Lodge area for a number of years, the beds were gradually depleted. By 1907 it was necessary to go farther afield to secure the mineral, and in 1920 the mines moved to Sun City, about 25 miles northwest of Medicine Lodge.¹⁰⁴

The mill remained at Medicine Lodge, however, and over the years expanded its operations. In 1928 John Best merged his company with

¹⁰¹ Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

¹⁰² Percy S. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

the National Gypsum Company and became a vice-president of the company. The building boom after World War II found existing capacity inadequate, and in 1951 the National Gypsum Company completed a \$4,000,000 wallboard plant at Medicine Lodge. In that year the plant employed some 250 persons, paid wages and salaries amounting to \$18,000 a week, and spent \$3,500,000 annually for other goods and services.¹⁰⁵ In addition to wallboard, gypsum is used for plastering in the best buildings and in the manufacture of plaster of Paris, cement, tooth pastes, powder, and other commercial products.

Gypsum was also mined and manufactured at Mulvane in Sedgwick county. The American Cement Plaster Company, organized at Lawrence, Kansas, in 1898, opened its mill at Mulvane the following year. The subsequent history of this concern has not been investigated, but apparently it was in operation only a few years.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ National Gypsum Co., "Dedicates Medicine Lodge Wallboard Plant," *Kansas Business Magazine*, November, 1951, pp. 56-58.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

Section XII

COLLAPSE OF THE BOOM

The most of us crossed the Mississippi or the Missouri with no money, but with a vast wealth of hope and courage . . . Haste to get rich has made us borrowers, and the borrower has made booms, and booms made men wild, and Kansas became a vast insane asylum covering over 80,000 square miles. Allah be praised, the season of insanity is over! Common sense has returned and become a resident of Kansas. We had our spree, our delusions, our headaches, our heart-breaks, our convalescence. We are badly disfigured but still on earth. We have learned something. The man who is whipped knows more than the other fellow. He has had more fateful experience. We had too much credit, and abused it. We borrowed too much money and wasted it. We flew too high, and fell in hard spots. We have learned what all the world has known for a thousand years: that wealth is the creation of the land when touched by the wand of labor . . .¹

The economic history of South Central Kansas is replete with examples of sudden change, with reversals and exaggerations, and with movement from one extreme to another. There have been alternating periods of drought and flood; bountiful, overflowing crops and crop failure; high prices and low prices; debt contraction and debt repayment; immigration and emigration; boom towns and ghost towns; prosperity and depression. These swings of the pendulum have been accompanied by swings in the people's attitude toward problems of a social, economic, and political nature. During prosperous times the prevailing attitude has been one of conservatism regarding social experiments and the role of government in economic affairs. Conversely, prolonged depression weakened the influence of the prevailing business community, and the people clamored for political measures to bring relief, recovery, and reform.

A decade of depression followed the period of great prosperity that reached a peak in 1887. This was a period of deficient rainfall, low crop yields, falling prices, debt liquidation, bankruptcy, mortgage foreclosure, financial panic, and population decline. Distressed farmers first tried to cope with the situation on an individual basis by reducing costs of production, expanding cultivation, experimenting with new crops and new techniques, and becoming more self-sufficient. Confronted

¹ A. J. Felt, "Kansas, Her Farmers and Prosperity," *Tenth Biennial Report, 1895-1896*, Kansas State Board of Agriculture, pp. 468-469.

on all sides by powerful aggregations of capital, farmers soon realized that collective, not individual, action was the only possible hope of survival. Farmers' organizations began to grow by leaps and bounds. Collective economic measures, such as consumer and producer co-operatives, first enlisted their enthusiasm and support; when these measures proved inadequate, farmers sought to achieve their goals by means of political action.

Farm Depression and Its Causes

Deficient Rainfall

Probably the immediate cause of depression was drought, resulting in widespread crop failure. In the middle division of Kansas, the rainfall fell below the normal average in six of the ten years from 1887 to 1896, and crop failure was widespread in five of the dry years when rainfall was far below the average.² The drought was even more severe in the area's western counties. At Ellinwood (Barton county), the rainfall was below the 50-year average (1875-1924) of 25.61 inches in eight of the ten years from 1887 to 1896.³

Drought conditions characterized three of the four years from 1887 to 1890. The first two years were extremely dry with rainfall deficiencies of 4.39 and 8.49 inches, respectively. "Such a drouth it has never been my misfortune to experience during an active life of fifty years," wrote a Rice county farmer in 1888, "there can be no doubt as to the fact that two-thirds or three fourths of the counties of the State have suffered severely in one or more staple crops from the combined forces of drouth, hot winds and chinch bugs."⁴ A change for the better occurred in 1889, when the rainfall was nearly four inches above the average. This was a year of "abundant—in some cases excessive—rainfall during the entire crop growing season, and as a result, harvests of all kinds were extremely bountiful . . ."⁵ Extreme drought returned in 1890 (the

² The variation from the normal rainfall (59-year average from 1887 to 1945) in inches was as follows: 1887, -4.39; 1888, -8.49; 1889, +3.90; 1890, -7.33; 1891, +6.87; 1892, +1.89; 1893, -7.87; 1894, -5.20; 1895, -1.57; 1896, +4.37. Computed from Flora, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

³ United States Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau, *Climatic Summary of the United States*, p. 40-11.

⁴ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), August 30, 1888, p. 6.

⁵ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Seventh Biennial Report, 1889-1890*, p. vi.

rainfall deficiency was 7.33 inches), a year "remarkable for being the driest and hottest season in twenty years, almost destroying the corn crop in many portions of the State, and shortening it elsewhere."⁶

In 1891 and 1892 the rainfall was above average amounting to 6.87 and 1.89 inches, respectively, and crop yields were well above the 10-year average. Then another period of drought set in. The record shows a severe rainfall deficiency of 7.87 inches in 1893, 5.20 in 1894, and 1.57 in 1895, together with reports of crop failure in western Kansas. Conditions improved generally, however, during the last five years of the century, when the rainfall was above average in all but one year.⁷

The area's inhabitants were not content to let nature take its course, however, and several reports of rain making experiments occur in the record of the dry years. On July 9, 1891, the Department of Agriculture selected Medicine Lodge as a station for rain making experiments.⁸ Nearly two years later, on May 25, 1893, the air was bombarded with cannon, guns, and explosives for two hours at Wellington, Winfield, South Haven, Arkansas City, Caldwell, Newton, and Hutchinson. This man made assault on nature was carried on simultaneously in the above towns, and it was reported that "The heaviest rain in the area for eight months fell."⁹ Irrigation was another means of alleviating the problem of deficient rainfall, and a number of irrigation companies were organized in the area during the drought years.¹⁰

Rainfall was not the only factor affecting crop yields during these years. Hot summers, wind, cold winters, prairie fires, tornadoes, dust storms, and chinch bugs took a heavy toll. Especially destructive were the hot winds that quickly evaporated the scarce moisture in the soil and then withered the crops. Wheat and other small grains harvested in June and early July often escaped the hot winds but suffered from winter killing, drought, and chinch bugs. The late maturing corn, on the other hand, was especially vulnerable to the blistering attacks of hot wind. Dust and sand storms were not infrequent during the drought

⁶ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Eighth Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, p. viii.

⁷ Flora, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁸ Kirke Mechem (ed.), *The Annals of Kansas*, p. 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁰ "In 1893 there were 55 irrigators in the western half of the state; in 1894, 224; and in 1895 there were 1,241. Of these, 98 per cent reported success. Wind power was used by 96 per cent." *Ibid.*, p. 198. See also pages 155, 158, 184, 185, and 194.

period. According to Professor Malin, "The years 1894 and 1895 appear to have been the climax of the 1890's in the dust storm department and the frequency and severity of the dust storms led to scientific studies of their behavior."¹¹

Declining Farm Prices

The general decline in farm commodity prices aggravated the farmers' distress. Expressed in terms of average prices received by Kansas farmers, wheat declined from a high point of \$1.05 a bushel in 1881 to 55 cents in 1888. Then after several years of somewhat higher prices, a low point of 42 cents a bushel was reached in 1893. Corn was 58 cents a bushel in 1881 but was down to 18 cents in 1889. The price increased measurably for a few years after 1889 and then declined to 19 cents in 1895 and 18 cents in 1896.¹² As for beef cattle prices in Kansas, there were three distinct periods of unequal length in the 20 years ending with 1898. These are divided as follows:

1879 to 1886, eight years, average value per head	\$26.50
1887 to 1896, ten years, average value per head	18.00
1897 and 1898, two years, average value per head	25.25 ¹³

Since much of the corn was marketed in beef, the low price of beef from 1887 to 1896 was a cause of distress to both the grain farmer and the cattleman.

Average prices obscure seasonal variations. The lowest prices of the year were generally recorded at harvest time, when debt ridden farmers were forced to sell their products to pay interest, taxes, and other obligations. This situation was described by a McPherson county farmer as follows:

In 1889 I raised 2,300 bushels of wheat, I was, as well as all my neighbors, compelled to sell it for 55 cents a bushel. When the bulk of the crop was moved prices also moved up to 80 cents per bushel. Then the speculator made a clean profit on my year's labor of \$575. I thought then, as I think now, that I was entitled to this profit, consequently when I can not get what I am entitled to I feel offended.¹⁴

¹¹ James C. Malin, "Dust Storms, Part Three, 1881-1900," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, November, 1946, p. 403.

¹² See Figure 5.

¹³ H. R. Hilton, "Twenty Years of Kansas Agriculture Analyzed," *Eleventh Biennial Report, 1897-1898*, Kansas State Board of Agriculture, p. 548.

¹⁴ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), October 14, 1891.

High Transportation and Marketing Costs

Furthermore, farm commodity prices declined relative to transportation and marketing costs. In contrast with the sharp decline in farm commodity prices, transportation and marketing costs dropped very little during the period under consideration. In 1893 the freight per bushel to Kansas City from the area ranged from 5.9 to 8.3 cents (average 7.5 cents) for corn, and from 7.5 to 10.6 (average 9.4 cents) for wheat. To this must be added about 2 cents a bushel on corn and 5 cents on wheat to cover shipper's profit, elevator charges, etc.¹⁵ If the grain were shipped to Chicago, another 10 or 11 cents must be added for corn and 13 or 14 cents for wheat.¹⁶ A rough computation shows that the freight on corn to Chicago was about equal to average corn prices received locally in 1895 and 1896, while the freight on wheat amounted to about one half of the local price in 1893 and 1894. This is in marked contrast with conditions in the early eighties, when these charges took a relatively small share of the prices received by farmers.

High Cost of Purchased Goods

Farmers also complained of the high cost of manufactures and other imported products. Farm implements and parts, binder twine, hardware, and numerous other products were indispensable for farm operations, and it was discouraging to find that many more bushels of corn and wheat were needed to buy a farm implement than had been necessary in former years of prosperity. In some years the cost price structure was such that farmers burned corn rather than buy imported coal, or they fed wheat to hogs rather than ship it to market. "Corn is only worth 13c a bushel delivered," observed a Barber county newspaper in 1889, "and soft coal sells at \$5.40 a ton for the cheapest, and \$9.00 for the best, while anthracite sells for \$14. It does look sinful to burn corn, but it is being done."¹⁷ In January of 1893 farmers in Rice county were

¹⁵ Kansas State Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report*, 1893, pp. 14, 681-682, 690-691.

¹⁶ H. T. Newcomb and E. G. Ward, *Changes in the Rates of Charge for Railway and Other Transportation Services*, United States Department of Agriculture, Division of Statistics, Bulletin No. 15, Revised, Miscellaneous Series, Table 34, pp. 51-52.

¹⁷ R. C. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

reported to have fed wheat to hogs rather than sell it at 40 cents a bushel.¹⁸

Farming Unprofitable

The farmer's distress was so acute by 1893, a year of drought, crop failure, low farm prices, and financial panic, that the Populist administration by legislative direction investigated the agricultural industry of Kansas. The Bureau of Labor and Industry published a comprehensive and exhaustive report containing much testimonial data and many statistical tables compiled from federal, state, and county records, correspondence, personal visits, and questionnaires.¹⁹ The chief purpose of the study was to find out whether farming was being conducted at a profit or a loss. One or more prominent farmers in each township were asked the question, "Taken as a whole, does farming pay?" In the 24 south central counties, 305 replies were received; 252 were negative; 8, negative with some qualification; 29, affirmative; 15, affirmative with some qualification; and one, undecided. In other words, about 85 per cent of the farmers said that farming did not pay.

To verify this verbal testimony, detailed statistical tables were drawn up showing farming costs and income in 1893. For the area these tables show that the cost of production exceeded the local price paid farmers by 8.2 cents a bushel for corn, and 7.2 cents a bushel for wheat. The aggregate loss on these two commodities during the 5-year period ending in 1893 amounted to 25.6 million dollars for the area and 71.1 million dollars for the state.²⁰ The United States Department of Agriculture made a similar study in 1893. It discovered that, on an acre basis, the cost of producing corn in Kansas (\$8.60) exceeded the selling price (\$6.60) \$2 an acre while for wheat the discrepancy was much larger—cost, \$9.04; selling price, \$3.53; deficit, \$5.51.²¹

¹⁸ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹⁹ Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*. The bitter struggle between the Populists and Republicans in the early 1890's may provide grounds for questioning the accuracy and reliability of this report. John F. Todd, Labor Commissioner, was in charge of compilation. Raymond C. Miller, the historian of Kansas Populism says that "He was of course a Populist, but the writer was assured by an acquaintance of Todd of his honesty and the general accuracy of his work." Raymond C. Miller, "The Populist Party in Kansas," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1928, p. 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 681-684, 690-693.

²¹ United States Department of Agriculture, *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1893*, pp. 296, 298, 515-516; Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

Heavy Debt Burden

Plagued by drought, crop failure, and low prices, the farmer was truly in a difficult situation. On the basis of past experience he might be expected to turn to the loan companies that had been so eager to force money upon him in the boom years. This, however, was hardly possible because money was hard to secure in depression years, and farmers who were heavily burdened with payments of interest and principal on debt contracted in former years were poor credit risks. The collapse of the boom meant a sharp contraction in the number and value of mortgage loans. Between 1886 and 1889 the real estate mortgages placed on farm property in the area declined in number from 25,319 to 10,312 and in aggregate value from 22.8 million dollars to 11.3 million dollars. For town lots the decline from 1887 to 1889 was from 21,466 to 6,729 and from 18.3 million dollars to 6.5 million dollars, respectively.²²

Although fewer mortgages were made in these years, the mortgage debt burden in force did not decline; in all probability it rose substantially owing to lagging interest payments. Mortgage debt in force January 1, 1890, is shown in Table 11. In 1890 the per capita mortgage debt of the area was \$234.87, compared with \$170 for Kansas and \$96 for the United States. In Kansas there was one mortgage for every two adults; this means more than one for every family; and over 60 per cent of the taxed acres in the state were encumbered with mortgage, a proportion unequaled in any other state.²³

Table 11
Value of Real Estate Mortgage Debt in Force, Kansas, January 1, 1890
(millions of dollars)

Area	On acres	On lots	Total
Eastern subarea	\$ 18.6	\$ 5.1	\$ 23.7
Central subarea	27.1	20.7	47.8
Western subarea	12.0	2.2	14.2
Area total	\$ 57.7	\$28.0	\$ 85.7
Kansas total	\$174.7	\$68.4	\$243.1

Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Report on Real Estate Mortgages*, p. 735.

²² United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Report on Real Estate Mortgages*, pp. 436-450.

²³ R. C. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

Compared with other parts of the state, the farm mortgage problem affected a considerably larger proportion of the people of the area. The Census of 1890 shows the percentage of families occupying encumbered farms in each Kansas county. It is significant that of the 11 counties with percentages ranging from 70 to 75, eight were in the area; of the 33 counties with percentages ranging from 60 to 69, ten were in the area. Five area counties had percentages ranging from 40 to 59; and one, from 20 to 39.²⁴

Chattel Loans

When the farmer could no longer borrow from the land mortgage company, he turned in desperation to the chattel mortgage dealer, who made short term loans secured by unencumbered personal property. "The borrower who dealt with the chattel mortgage man," writes Dr. Bogue, "was often in dire financial straits and therefore in a weaker bargaining position than was the borrower who dealt with the land mortgage companies."²⁵ Chattel mortgage men took advantage of this situation by charging excessive rates of interest. In 1889 the state law lowered the maximum legal interest rate from 12 to 10 per cent; but, according to Dr. Miller, "the law was more honored in the breach than in the observance."²⁶ On chattel loans, the rate was from 18 to 24 and sometimes as high as 40 per cent. A Pawnee county farmer said that farming did not pay because "Crops have been poor, prices low, and interest on money 24 per cent."²⁷ This was in marked contrast with rates of 8, 10, or 12 per cent prevailing earlier.

In 1893 the Bureau of Labor and Industry investigated the amount and the character of chattel mortgages in four counties; two of these, Cowley and Reno, were in the area. Table 12 shows that there was a large number of such loans, that in amount they were nearly equal to or slightly in excess of the assessed valuation of all personal property in the county, and that a substantial proportion of the livestock in each county was under mortgage.

²⁴ United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Report on Farms and Homes*, p. 258.

²⁵ Allan G. Bogue, "The Land Mortgage Company in the Early Plains States," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 25, p. 31.

²⁶ R. C. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁷ Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, p. 466.

Foreclosure

Farmers sometimes used chattel mortgages in an effort to meet the interest on long term obligations; and a number succeeded, not without a desperate struggle, in holding on to their farms. On the other hand, a considerable proportion found themselves going deeper and deeper into debt until the dreaded day came when their property was foreclosed. In the newspaper columns formerly devoted to advertisements of loan companies and real-estate dealers there appeared notice after notice of foreclosure sales. Buggies formerly carrying loan agents through the country to peddle mortgages now carried the sheriff with his foreclosure summons.

It is difficult to get an accurate measurement of mortgage foreclosures. "The figure of mortgage foreclosures are absolutely untrustworthy," Dr. Miller writes, "and cannot show even an approximation of the rural disasters."²⁸ This writer points out that many farmers who were able to pay their debts preferred foreclosure when the unpaid portion of the mortgage exceeded the real value of the farm. "On the other hand, many real cases of economic disaster do not appear on the records as foreclosures, for they were compromised out of court and appear as cancelled."²⁹ One foreclosure study that bears the mark of scholarship was made by Dr. Bogue of Kinsley township (Edwards county). He found that some 11,200 acres, 40 per cent of the agricultural land in the township, was surrendered from 1876 to 1905.³⁰

So many accounts of foreclosure and sheriff sales appear in contemporary newspapers and other records that it is hard to doubt but

Table 12

Chattel Mortgage Debt, Reno and Cowley Counties, Year Ending September 1, 1893

	Number of mortgages	Amount of mortgages	Assessed value of all personal property	Percentage of horses and mules under mortgage	Percentage of cattle under mortgage	Percentage of hogs under mortgage
Reno	2,400	\$ 735,357	\$ 703,826	37.1	29.2	19.2
Cowley	1,660	1,163,393	1,061,214	21.2	79.9	12.6

Source: Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, p. 702.

²⁸ R. C. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²⁹ *Idem.*

³⁰ Allan G. Bogue, "Farmer Debtors in Pioneer Kinsley," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XX, No. 2, May, 1952, p. 106.

that the incidence was heavy. Typical of the many letters that appeared in area newspapers was the following written by a farmer of Burrton (Harvey county) in 1889:

Our Western farmers need not think that a failure of crops is all that ails them. Here in this county where I write, corn and all other crops were good, oats especially so, and the farmers are in the greatest distress. One of my neighbors was sold out yesterday on chattel mortgage. His cows brought \$11 apiece; corn, 11 cents a bushel; oats, 10 cents a bushel; horses, \$20 to \$36 each; an imported Norman stallion that four years ago he paid \$1,000 for at 2 years old, brought \$84. All this property was sold on time, as there is no money in the country to pay cash for anything.³¹

Population Decline

What happened to farmers whose property was foreclosed? Contemporary sources give several answers to this question. Some stayed on their farms as tenants; some made the run to the Oklahoma Territory in 1889,³² and to the Cherokee Strip in 1893.³³ Others moved back East, some moved to nearby towns, and not a few took to the road as tramps. For a clearer analysis of this problem, population statistics are needed. Table 13 shows the decline in area and subarea population between the peak year, 1887, and the year of lowest population, 1896. A distinction is also made between rural and urban population. The first fact derived from Table 13 is that the area population dropped nearly 100,000 during the decade or 23.7 per cent of the peak population in 1887. The percentage decline by subareas was 18.5 for the eastern, 23.8 for the central, and 33.5 for the western. The percentages thus increased from east to west. For the area as a whole the urban loss exceeded the rural loss by

³¹ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), February 21, 1889, p. 4.

³² Oklahoma Territory was opened on April 22, 1889. A colorful account of this event appears in the *Annals of Kansas*, as follows: "At the signal, thousands of men and a few women, afoot, on horseback, in wagons, buggies, hacks, carts, and on Santa Fe trains which ran in sections at 15-minute intervals, bolted for the 'promised land.' Racing horses, careening vehicles and jolting white-topped wagons, 'like a mass of moving snow,' made a memorable scene which was punctuated by the shouts and curses of the men who made the run. The mob, since the President's proclamation, had been camping along the roads and rivers and in southern Kansas towns which were patrolled by the U. S. Army. A number had eluded the patrol and had surveyed and squatted on land, and even erected buildings before the run. Those who 'beat the gun' became known as sooners. Thousands were disappointed, and being unable to get food or shelter, headed back to Kansas the next day. Border towns profited. Arkansas City estimated that 50,000 landseekers spent \$300,000 in the town." Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³³ According to the *Annals of Kansas*, September 16, 1893, "A signal from guns of the U. S. Cavalry opened the Cherokee Strip. Persons who had assembled along the border had been required to register and swear they were 'half white and fully free.' The heat was intense, and the air dense with smoke and dust. Water sold at fabulous prices. The sound of men yelling, wagons rattling and horses running was described as the 'Cry of the Wild West.'" *Ibid.*, p. 156.

15,736. The urban population as a percentage of the total area population fell from 32.4 in 1887 to 24.4 in 1896.

Wide variations appear in the urban-rural loss of the three subareas. In the Flint Hills grazing area to the east the rural loss exceeded the urban loss by 4,266. This can be attributed, in a large measure, to the decline of the cattle business and, in part, to the existence of relatively few large towns and town booms. A reverse situation existed in the central subarea, where the urban loss exceeded the rural loss by 26,831. This was the region of greatest town booming, and these booms reached greater heights and sank to lower depths than the small farmer booms. Wichita lost about 14,000 people during the decade, about two fifths of the total urban loss of the subarea. On the other hand, farmers in the central region were better able to "stick it out" during the lean years. Although heavily in debt, they were more able to diversify their productions and practice subsistence farming than their neighbors east and west of them.

In the western subarea the rural loss far exceeded the urban loss, the former being nearly double the latter. Agriculture was unstable in this region, and nearly one third of the farmers migrated because of drought, crop failure, low farm prices, and mortgage foreclosure. Migration was well under way by the late 1880's, and a resident of Coldwater (Comanche county) wrote in 1890,

Table 13
Rural and Urban Population Decline by Area and Subarea, 1887 to 1896*

Year	Eastern subarea	Central subarea	Western subarea	Area total
1887				
Rural population	102,563	116,991	58,351	277,905
Urban population	33,423	86,636	13,294	133,353
Total population	135,986	203,627	71,645	411,258
1896				
Rural population	87,854	106,184	42,932	236,970
Urban population	22,940	48,998	4,744	76,682
Total population	110,794	155,182	47,676	313,652
1887-1896				
Rural loss	14,709	10,807	15,419	40,935
Urban loss	10,483	37,638	8,550	56,671
Total loss	25,192	48,445	23,969	97,606

* Towns and cities of 1,000 or more inhabitants are considered urban.

Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, pp. 24-490; *Eleventh Biennial Report, 1896-1897*, pp. 572-742.

Fully one half of the population of about all the southwestern Kansas counties have left this country during the past twelve months, and fully one-half of the remainder will leave as soon as the Cherokee strip or outlet is opened for settlement, which will be next fall. The reason for all this is very apparent, the result of several causes, viz: The agents of various loan and trust companies who did business in this section, being fired with a boomer's zeal that this is the Garden of Eden, or with a desire to make hay while the sun shines, or both, overvalued rather than undervalued as they should have done, the lands they loaned money on, and the result is that the borrowers got in many instances almost full or fair value for their land in the loan, and the agent's percentage for getting the loan averaged fully 10 per cent. Add to this three bad crop years in which nothing was raised, the payment of interest semi-annually, and the fact that all these people are homesteaders, with little or no money to begin with, and you have a fair knowledge of why this is thus.³⁴

Farm Tenantry

What happened to farmers who remained in the area after they lost possession of their farms? The evidence suggests that a surprisingly large number became tenant farmers. The farm tenure statistics in Table 14 help to analyze the trend:

According to Table 14, in 1880 tenants cultivated only 13.2 per cent of the farms, but the percentage more than doubled by 1890, and in 1893 the Bureau of Labor and Industry report shows that tenants cultivated over two fifths of the farms. Farmers were asked by the Bureau, "Is the number of tenant farmers in your township greater or less than five years ago?" "Why?" Of the 298 replies received from area farmers, 245 answered greater; 31, less; and 22, about the same.³⁵ The following are typical reasons given for the growth of tenantry: "More than one-half of the land here is owned by speculators and land com-

Table 14
Growth in Farm Tenancy, South Central Kansas, 1880-1900

Year	Number of farm homes	Number of farms cultivated by owners	Number of farms cultivated by tenants	Percentage of farms cultivated by tenants
1880	35,670	30,948	4,722	13.2
1890	43,714	29,209	14,505	33.4
1893	49,066	27,621	21,445	43.7
1900	44,680	27,699	16,981	38.0

Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Agriculture*, Vol. III, pp. 52-55; *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Agriculture*, Vol. V, pp. 142-145; *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Agriculture*, Vol. V, pp. 80-84; Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, pp. 666-667.

³⁴ *Bradstreets'—A Journal of Trade, Finance and Public Economy*, May 3, 1890, p. 282.

³⁵ Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, pp. 50-607.

panies and is rented to tenants"; "Mortgage companies took the farms and put renters on"; "On account of mortgage foreclosures"; About half of the tenant farmers are former owners."³⁶

Larger Farms

The period of forced liquidation, absentee ownership, and tenantry also witnessed a movement toward farm consolidation. Farmers who came to the area prior to the early eighties generally occupied a quarter section of land and proceeded to develop it. After much trial and error, they learned that a quarter section was too small a unit for economical cultivation in many parts of the area. This was partly because of the mechanization and commercialization of agriculture and partly because of subhumid climatic conditions. During the boom years a number of farmers accumulated or borrowed capital to add acreage to their farms. Then with the collapse of the boom much land fell into the hands of mortgage companies or some of the more prosperous farmers, who proceeded to consolidate it into larger and more economical units. According to one area farmer, tenantry increased because of "The fact that one man owns several farms in this township that formerly had separate owners." The former owners were said to have lost their farms "by mortgage."³⁷ Table 15 shows the trend toward larger farm units.

Collapse of Town Boom

The depression inevitably spread from the farms to the towns. In a predominately agricultural region the townsman's livelihood depended in a very material sense upon the economic well being of his

Table 15
Average Size of Area Farms, 1880-1900

Area	1880 (acres)	1890 (acres)	1900 (acres)
Eastern subarea	153	210	273
Central subarea	164	187	232
Western subarea	187	239	676
Total area	170	213	410

Source: United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Agriculture*, pp. 52-55; *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Agriculture*, pp. 142-145; *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Agriculture*, Vol. V, pp. 81-84.

³⁶ *Idem.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

country neighbor. Valiant attempts were made to prolong the town boom after the rural base began to give way, but they proved to be futile gestures. Once ambitious burghers gave up the struggle and reconciled themselves to the fact that they had cast their lot with a sleepy country town rather than a second Chicago. Many townsmen, like the proverbial Arab, folded their tents and left behind the oasis that had turned into a mirage. Those remaining faced a long period of high taxes, foreclosure, bankruptcy, bank failure, unemployment, and bread lines, not to mention the constant reminder of unfulfilled hopes in the form of empty store buildings and houses, abandoned real estate additions, and grass grown streets.

Debt Burden

The towns were in an extremely vulnerable position because of their heavy debt burden. In boom years citizens had been encouraged to spend money as freely as water for the town's betterment. Bonds were voted to attract railroads, sorghum mills, cheese factories, and other industries and to build court houses, waterworks, schools, and other public improvements. While a few diehards complained that taxes would have to be raised to meet these debt charges, little thought was given to the problem as long as the boom continued. The story was quite different after the boom collapsed. While population and property assessment figures fell off markedly, the bonded debt burden tended to increase as a consequence of lagging interest payments. Fewer people were thus compelled to shoulder an augmented debt that was reflected in higher tax rates. Dr. Boyle described in some detail the sad experience of Anthony in Harper county. He says that during the boom years "this little city lavishly voted aid to each promising enterprise that seemed likely to ensure her prosperity." Then came the collapse. From 1889 to 1897 the town's population declined from 2,252 to 1,074 and the assessed valuation from \$512.7 million to \$171.1 million. By 1896 the tax levy "had reached the absurd limit of 13.4 per cent of the total valuation," and a year later the town's debt was almost equal to the assessed value of all property in the town. Finally, in 1897, "a humiliating compromise was granted by the state legislature."³⁸

³⁸ Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Economic Fluctuations

Towns were also vulnerable because they were linked so closely with the business and the financial system of the nation. In periods of financial panic and depression the farmer who managed to hold on to his property could revert to a subsistence and a barter economy and at least grow most of his food requirements. The case was quite different with the townsman who depended upon money payments in the form of wages, profits, rent, and interest. If the wellsprings of money and credit dried up, he might find himself without a job, a business, a tenant, a dividend, or an interest payment. Savings carefully accumulated in anticipation of a rainy day might be deposited in a bank that had closed its doors. If worse came to worse, the townsman might find himself waiting in line at the Salvation Army soup kitchen.

We have seen that in Wichita the influx of capital came to an end during the spring of 1887. Nationally, business was generally prosperous from 1887 to 1893, but residents of the area failed to share in this prosperity. Then in June, 1893, there occurred one of the worst financial panics in the nation's history. Following this was a severe depression continuing to 1896. For the area, as well as the nation, these were years of widespread commercial failure, unemployment, and distress.

Banking failures were especially numerous. John W. Breidenthal, Populist Bank Commissioner of Kansas, said the panic "affected banks and bankers throughout the nation to a greater extent than any other class, and . . . for a time threatened all our financial institutions with bankruptcy."³⁹ The same authority reported on September 1, 1898, that since 1892, 76 Kansas banks representing a capital of \$2.15 million had closed; 157 representing a capital of \$3.35 million had gone into voluntary liquidation; and 65 had reduced their capital to \$1.16 million.⁴⁰ In the area the number of state and private banks declined from a peak of 161 in 1888 to a low of 97 in 1897,⁴¹ while in the same period the number of national banks declined from 52 to 24.⁴² Years of peak

³⁹ Bank Commissioner of Kansas, *Second Biennial Report, 1894*, p. iii.

⁴⁰ Bank Commissioner of Kansas, *Fourth Biennial Report, 1898*, p. x.

⁴¹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, pp. 24-490; Bank Commissioner of Kansas, *Fourth Biennial Report, 1897-1898*, pp. 2-183.

⁴² Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report, 1887-1888*, pp. 24-490; United States Treasury Department, Comptroller of the Currency, *Annual Report, 1897*, Vol. II, pp. 270-304.

national bank failure in the area were 1890 and 1893 with four failures each; there were three failures in 1891, two each in 1894 and 1896, and one in 1895. The Comptroller of the Currency, in accounting for the failure of the Kingman National Bank in September, 1890, said:

Continuous failure of crops, reaction to business and decrease in values following a so-called "boom," capital invested in nonconvertible real estate, and the payment of high rates of interest on county deposits and on certificates representing borrowed money were the principal causes of failure. The immediate cause was a sudden withdrawal of the county deposits and a determined run on the bank by depositors.⁴³

These were years of failure for other commercial and financial businesses. Railroads, manufacturers, mortgage companies, realtors, wholesalers, and retailers failed by the score. The business directories of the larger area towns are testimony to this fact. The thick volumes of 1887 and 1888 had become very slim indeed by 1893 and 1894.

Unemployment

Statistics of unemployment and accounts of soup kitchens and tramp conventions reveal other evidence of hardship and depression. According to the Bureau of Labor and Industry, the unemployed actually reported in Kansas numbered 74,345 in 1893. Of this total, the area accounted for 15,415. The subarea of heaviest concentration was the central with about one half, followed by the eastern with one third, and the western with one fifth. Sedgwick county led the area with 1,695 unemployed; most of this number was reported from Wichita.⁴⁴

By the winter of 1893-1894 the unemployed were in desperate circumstances, and in December the Salvation Army was conducting a soup house at Wichita.⁴⁵ Towns and cities were not only burdened with their own unemployed residents but with thousands of men who tramped the country looking for work. Hobo jungles began to appear on the outskirts of town, and in December of 1895 some 1,500 men were reported in attendance at a convention of The Tramps of the Southwest held on the Arkansas river between Wellington and Winfield.⁴⁶

⁴³ United States Treasury Department, Comptroller of the Currency, *Annual Report, 1890*, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, pp. 548, 666-667.

⁴⁵ Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Local authorities who put these migrants to work on rock piles or incarcerated them in jail drew a stern rebuke from Governor Lewelling, the Populist Governor from Wichita. He declared in an Executive Circular issued to the metropolitan police commissioners of various cities in Kansas that these migrants were "guilty of no crime but poverty, intent upon no crime but seeking employment The right to go freely from place to place in search of employment, or even in obedience to a mere whim, is part of that personal liberty guaranteed by the constitution of the United States to every human being on American soil."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ W. J. Costigan, "Lorenzo D. Lewelling," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1901-1902*, Vol. VII, p. 125.

Section XIII

FARMERS' ALLIANCE AND POPULIST PARTY

When men turn their minds persistently to social and economic questions; when labor is dissatisfied, and capital alarmed; when the price of food and the mystery of supply and demand occupy their thoughts by night and by day; we may be sure that some cog is out of place in the machinery we call civilization.¹

The farmer, like the sensible physician, made a diagnosis of the disease, and discovered the cause before he prescribed a treatment. Obviously, past experience and considerations of class interest influenced his diagnosis. By nature, the farmer was a rugged individualist who had left behind the comforts of civilization to seek a fortune on the frontier. The early years of taming the wilderness taxed his energy and left little time for contemplation of larger social issues. As he worked toward his goal of commercialized farming, there developed a conflict between his desire for independence and his desire for material success. This conflict forced him to think about the larger issues of the age. He realized that the agrarian democracy of the age of Jefferson and Jackson was rapidly being transformed into an industrial and financial plutocracy. The new era called for specialization and economic interdependence. Men in all walks of life found themselves being drawn more closely into a complex network of commercial and financial relationships. In periods of prosperity the conflict was less evident because material success carried with it a feeling of independence. With the advent of depression, on the other hand, the farmer faced the dreaded prospects of economic dependence and penury.

Farmers' Explanation of Depression

Modern historians tend to explain the distressed state of the late nineteenth century agriculture in terms of overproduction resulting from westward expansion. They point to such factors as the governments' land policy, the expansion of the railroad system, the use of mechanized equipment in agriculture, the westward flow of capital, and speculation. Western farmers found other reasons for their dis-

¹This is an excerpt from an address by George R. Peck, General Solicitor of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad company, at the Emporia Normal School. *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), June 22, 1892, p. 4.

tressed condition. They focused attention upon the abuses that had crept into the economic and political system. Undoubtedly, both analyses have merit, but this study will attempt to view the problem from the standpoint of western farmers, in particular the farmers of South Central Kansas.

Eastern and Foreign Capitalists

While there is an occasional note of self-criticism in the literature of agrarian protest, farmers in the main found the cause of their troubles in eastern and foreign capitalists. They believed that a few wealthy men were conspiring to monopolize the entire business and political system of the country and rob the farmer of his home. The "London Money Kings" were behind the conspiracy according to one inhabitant of the area. "All nations bow down before this God of Mammon, this imperialism of capital, greater than any empire the earth ever held. They, the London Money Kings, own the debts of nations . . . [they] are crushing the farmers, and will soon be ready to swallow all our farms."² "There is an overproduction of millionaires on the one hand, and paupers on the other," declared a farmer from Harper county.³ Another farmer from Edwards county wrote that "the banker's trust, the railroad combine, the coal combine, the Jewish money combine, are fast crushing us out."⁴

Railroads

The railroad was probably the chief capitalist enemy of the farmer. "Transportation is the great question of the day," said the *Elk City Eagle* in 1890. Our farmers, merchants and stockmen are at the mercy of the railroad companies, who by combinations and extortionate rates swallow up almost the entire product of the country."⁵ Although railroads had been encouraged and heavily subsidized in boom years, they were criticized bitterly by farmers during the depression. Farmers could not understand why it was necessary to pay the money equivalent of one bushel of wheat or corn to ship another bushel to market; why it

² *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), May 23, 1890.

³ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), June 7, 1888, p. 3.

⁴ Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report*, 1893, p. 173.

⁵ *Industrial Educator* (Winfield), May 9, 1890.

cost more to ship products a short distance than a long distance over the same line; and why railroads could overcapitalize their assets and issue fictitious or watered stock enabling them to charge higher freight and passenger rates.

The last mentioned abuse was the subject of much discussion among area farmers. One writer said, "if the government should control the railroads in the interest of the people, the first step would be to squeeze the water out of them and base charges on actual cost and running expenses only and not on false or watered stock. In short, do away with the whole robber system of transportation charges as at present."⁶ C. Wood Davis, a farmer at Goddard (Sedgwick county), Kansas, and former freight and passenger agent of a railroad, wrote a lengthy article which appeared in a national magazine on the overcapitalization abuse. After citing several examples from railroads that ran through the area, he said that many auxiliary lines had been built in Kansas "at costs ranging from \$8,000 to \$15,000 per mile, and capitalized at two, three, four and five times their cost." He also wrote that while the railroads of the state were "capitalized at \$52,155, they are assessed for purposes of taxation of \$6,595 per mile."⁷

In addition to oppressive freight rates, farmers complained of the close tie up between the railroads and the grain elevators. "The railroads own all the elevators and the railroads are owned by the Money Kings of London," declared one area resident.⁸ This was undoubtedly an exaggeration, but there was an element of truth in the charge. The grain buying monopoly of railroad owned elevators was the subject of bitter complaint. It was charged that railroads protected other elevators by not permitting grain to be loaded directly into cars or by refusing to grant sites to build rival elevators. Farmers also objected to the low grading of wheat and to the railroad's practice of overcharging freight on grain shipped from points where no scales were available to weigh the grain.⁹

⁶ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), December 12, 1890.

⁷ C. Wood Davis, "The Farmer, the Investor, and the Railway," *The Arena*, Vol. 3, No. 15, February, 1891, pp. 297, 301.

⁸ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), May 23, 1890.

⁹ Hallie Farmer, "The Railroads and Frontier Populism," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, June, 1926, p. 390.

Railroads were also charged with having too much political influence. By means of free passes, lobbyists, and campaign contributions, railroads were able to dominate a number of state governments and prevent the passage of legislation hostile to their interests. An interesting account of the role of railroads in Kansas politics is found in William Allen White's autobiography. In the late 1880's and early 1890's, White worked for Thomas Benton Murdock, who was owner and editor of the *El Dorado Daily Republican*, a Republican state senator from Butler county, and a brother of Marcellus M. Murdock of the *Wichita Eagle*. The following paragraph is in White's words:

Looking back at the campaign which made him [T. B. Murdock] a state senator, I can see that it was symptomatic of the economic and social change that had come into the country. He was supported in his candidacy by the Santa Fe Railroad and opposed by the Missouri Pacific. . . . Kansas was veined by railroads running for the most part east and west—the Union Pacific, the Rock Island, the Santa Fe, and the Missouri Pacific. And each railroad had become, in its own territory, a political overlord. When two railroads crossed a county, often in those days the railway overlords struggled for domination, which was both unethical and wasteful The system spread pretty well over the Mississippi Valley and the South. New England may have had its own way of political life; but we—in the vast rural areas—we still were a rural people. With us, the great public service corporations, which of course included the railways, the telephones, the banks, the insurance companies, and the packing houses, took charge of politics.¹⁰

Financiers

Eastern and European financiers ranked second only to the railroads as the chief capitalist enemies of the farmers. The source of this hostility lies in the age old struggle between debtors and creditors. For purposes of this study the struggle commenced during the Civil War. The North financed the war to a large extent by borrowing and issuing fiat or inconvertible paper money known as greenbacks. The National Banking System was also established during the war. National banks were given the exclusive right to issue bank notes when the note issues of state banks were taxed out of circulation in 1865. A serious inflation resulted from the wartime expansion of money and credit, and for a time debtors benefited and creditors suffered.

Then after the war the tables turned. Conservative Republican administrations retired a portion of the greenbacks and a large part of the

¹⁰ *The Autobiography of William Allen White*, pp. 177-178.

national debt. This meant that not only fewer greenbacks remained in circulation but also fewer National Bank Notes that the law required to be backed by government bonds.

Another issue of paramount importance was the money standard. Debtor farmers wanted a bimetallic standard or the free coinage of both gold and silver while eastern creditors favored a monometallic or gold standard. To a large extent the latter group won the day on this issue, and the supply of coins was not so large as it might have been under a bimetallic standard.

The period of conservative monetary, banking, and fiscal policy continued with little abatement from the close of the Civil War until near the end of the century. A generally declining price level and a rise in the value of money also marked this period. Western farmers who had borrowed to buy land and equipment at inflated prices during the Civil War or the boom years of the eighties had to pay their debts in money of increased purchasing power. Naturally, they blamed eastern financiers who were thought to be in control of the government's financial policy. An article in one area newspaper said: "More money means prosperity for the masses. We want prosperity. The Government has the power to give us more money. Why do they not do it? Because what means prosperity for the masses is against the interest of the money power, who control our government."¹¹

Eastern capitalists who held the debt of western communities were the chief target of attack. According to the western farmer, the greedy eastern capitalist received the interest on his mortgage and the taxes that were used to pay interest on his bonds. The capitalist, farmers thought, manipulated the government's financial policy so as to make it almost impossible for them to pay the principal and free themselves from debt.

Reasons Farm Commodity Prices Low

It has been observed that the low price of farm commodities and the high price of purchased goods was a problem of much concern to the farmer. "There is too much discrepancy between what will buy a dollar and what a dollar will buy," observed one area farmer.¹² Although a

¹¹ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), June 20, 1890 ("Alliance Notes").

¹² Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, p. 371.

few farmers explained the low prices of the things they sold in terms of overproduction, a majority were positive that the chief causes were underconsumption, the shortage of money and credit, and overgreedy middlemen. By underconsumption, the farmer meant that the laboring masses were held down to a subsistence level and were able to consume only a fraction of the food and other products that they needed and desired.

Speculation and monopoly in the leading farm commodity markets were held in great opprobrium by the farmer. The markets for grain and meat, the two leading agricultural products of the area, were said to be dominated by monopolists. Farmers and stockmen "are being deliberately and wrongfully injured by the dressed beef barons of Chicago and Kansas City," declared one farm newspaper.¹³ Another area farmer quoted a speech of Senator Plumb's to the effect that Kansas had been "fleeced by the Chicago Cattle trust out of \$40,000,000 on its cattle and hogs sent to market."¹⁴ As for the grain buying monopoly, one area newspaper warned its readers that the largest grain dealer of St. Louis was forming a combination in Kansas "to knock down the price of the coming new crop of wheat."¹⁵ Speculation in grain futures was also frowned upon; and C. Wood Davis, the Sedgwick county farmer, castigated this alleged evil in an article which appeared in a national magazine.¹⁶

Reasons Farmers Paid High Prices

The farmer felt that the monopolist held him in a vise and was slowly crushing him to death. Not only did the monopolist depress the price of the products he bought from the farmer, he also raised the price of products he sold to the farmer. The late nineteenth century was a period of rapid business combination and consolidation, and the farmer viewed the growth of monopoly business with alarm. On all sides he saw the old competitive order of small business give way to the new era of industrial capitalism with its corporations, pools, trusts, holding companies, and mergers. One area farmer said, "the farmers are being

¹³ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), February 5, 1890, p. 4 ("Beef Combine").

¹⁴ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), June 7, 1888, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), June 13, 1890 ("Farmers Read This").

¹⁶ C. Wood Davis, "When the Farmer Will Be Prosperous," *The Forum*, Vol. 9, March, 1890, p. 348.

pressed on all sides by these pools and rings, which are giving them about as heavy a burden as they can bear; and if they are pressed much closer, it will create within them a malicious feeling towards the oppressors."¹⁷ More specifically, the farmer objected to monopolies that supplied products indispensable for farm operations, such as farm implements, barbed wire, and binder twine.

Other Complaints

Farmers also attributed some of their troubles to the government's land policy. Envious eyes were cast upon the vast tracts of land held by the railroads, and Professor Shannon writes, "The railroad land monopoly, looked on by the farmers as sheer theft, could not be forgiven."¹⁸ Alien landlordship was vigorously attacked, and in the area there was the notorious example of William Scully to attract attention to this issue. Lastly, there was some opposition to the tariff, but in the main the farmers were indifferent to this issue.

In conclusion, it might be well to summarize the investigation of the Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry in 1893. The Bureau asked Kansas farmers why farming did not pay. Out of a total of 252 replies received from area farmers, the reasons given were as follows: low prices, 80; drought and crop failure, 37; money scarcity, 23; railroads, 22; high taxes, 19; high interest rates, 19; high cost of purchased goods, 9; middlemen, 2; other reasons, 3; no reason given, 38.¹⁹

Farmer's Economic Program

Having diagnosed the cause of his distress, the farmer set about to devise a course of action that would restore his industry to a state of health and vigor. His response was both individual and collective. He might grow more food for his family's needs and plan his farm operations on a more rational basis. Individual measures of this sort might alleviate his distress, but for effective action he needed to band together with other farmers. An organized group of farmers might accomplish a number of things. It could pool the knowledge, experience, and resources of its members and draw upon outside sources of information

¹⁷ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), June 28, 1888, p. 6.

¹⁸ Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*, p. 302.

¹⁹ Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industry, *Ninth Annual Report, 1893*, pp. 50-607.

and support. It could strengthen the farmer's bargaining position in the market by organizing cooperative buying and selling agencies. Above all, it could be an instrument of political action in an attempt to reform the economic and social framework of society.

The action program of area farmers progressed through several stages from 1887 to 1896. Although farmers resorted to individual measures throughout the period, the trend was toward collective action. Farmers' organizations first appeared on a local basis but soon confederated into county, state, and national organizations. Moreover, a change took place in the nature and objectives of these organizations. Founded originally as educational and social agencies, they soon became involved in problems of immediate concern to their members. Farmers demanded direct economic action, and by working through their local organizations they were able to boycott businessmen and establish buying and selling cooperatives.

In time it was realized that the cooperative program was little more than a palliative and that the central economic issues were political in nature. The farmer reasoned that, if he could not succeed by casting his dollar vote in the market place, another possibility was to use his political vote to elect governing authorities who would implement his program. Farmers' organizations that had once remained aloof from politics now entered the political arena to battle for their cause. At first they attempted to win over the two major political parties to the farmer's cause; when this effort failed, farmers' organizations joined forces with other reform movements to form a new third party. With this instrument the farmers battled the defenders of the old order in what is now regarded as one of the most controversial struggles of American history.

Individual Action

The depression challenged the farmer to make the best possible use of his limited resources. His first concern was to provide a bare minimum of food, clothing, and shelter for himself and his family. Since money was scarce, he economized on its use by living a relatively self-sufficient existence. Farmers generally kept chickens, hogs, and cows to supply eggs, meat, lard, milk, butter, and cheese. Vegetable gardens,

fruit orchards, and watermelon patches were carefully cultivated. Surplus eggs and butter might be bartered at the general store for such articles as sugar, coffee, and cloth.

In spite of discouragements, commercialized farming continued on a limited scale. It was usually possible to market one or more crops at a small profit that might be increased substantially by adopting a system of rational farm planning. Farmers experimented with new crops and new techniques; they varied the proportion of land planted to different crops in response to climatic changes and relative price changes.²⁰

Collective Action

The individual farmer soon discovered that he needed help if he was to adapt successfully his system of agriculture to conditions of depression and subhumid climate. Local farmers' organizations began to grow out of this need. Although these organizations usually date from the early years of settlement, they became very numerous and influential in the years of drought and depression after 1886. Professor Malin described in some detail the activities of the Wayne Township Farmers' Club of Edwards county from 1886 to 1893. He says that these farmers "were necessarily engrossed in the question of what crops to grow and how to grow them." They discussed such things as the relative merits of corn and wheat; the possibility of introducing new crops, such as Kafir corn, broomcorn, and other sorghums; and the problems of processing and marketing their crops.²¹

Since local organizations were limited in the help they could give their members, there was a demand for larger organizations. Township clubs began to confederate into county, state, and national organizations. An example of a large-scale organization was a farmers' convention held at Wichita in December, 1888. In attendance from the southwestern counties of Kansas were a large number of farmers who "took counsel with one another in relation to the best crops to raise and how to raise them." Among the subjects discussed were corn growing, sugar making, silk culture, cotton growing, and irrigation. A resolution was

²⁰ James C. Malin, "The Adaptation of the Agricultural System to Sub-Humid Environment Illustrated by the Activities of the Wayne Township Farmers' Club of Edwards County, Kansas, 1886-1893," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, January, 1936, pp. 125-139.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-141.

adopted urging farmers in all the counties of southwestern Kansas to form associations to be known as Farmers' Institutes.²²

The years after 1886 witnessed the growth of a number of farmers' organizations in the area and the state. In addition to the "Patrons of Husbandry," or "Grange," which had been a significant movement during the early 1870's; there was the Farmers' Trust Association of America; the Kansas Farmer's Loan and Trust Company; the Farmers' and Laborers' Union of the State of Kansas; the Mutual Protective Association; the United Farmers' Association; the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association; and the Farmers' Alliance.

Farmers' Alliance

By a process of natural selection the weaker organizations began to disappear or merge with the stronger organizations until there emerged one dominant organization, the Farmers' Alliance. The Alliance was organized to raise the farmer to a higher plane—to forward his development mentally, morally, and financially. Only farmers, their wives, sons, and daughters over 16 years of age were eligible for membership.²³

There is some dispute regarding the origin of the Farmers' Alliance in Kansas. Miss Barr, one of the historians of Kansas Populism, says the organization dates back to the Settlers' Protective Associations or Settlers' Alliance of the early 1870's. This Alliance was formed to protect the land claims of settlers against those of railroads in the Osage ceded lands.²⁴ Professor Hicks and Dr. Miller believe that the Kansas Alliance movement was the outgrowth of the National Farmers' Alliance or Northern Alliance organized at Chicago in October, 1880.²⁵ Soon after the Chicago meeting, the Farmers' Alliance of Butler county issued a call for a farmers' convention to consider a state organization. At the convention held at Topeka on January 12, 1881, a permanent organization was formed; and, according to Dr. Miller, "During the course of the year, the Alliance grew rather surprisingly, and reported as high as 171 local Alliances."²⁶

²² *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), December 20, 1888, p. 11 ("Farmers' Convention At Wichita").

²³ *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 15, 1890 ("The Alliance").

²⁴ Elizabeth N. Barr, "The Populist Uprising," *History of Kansas*, William E. Connelley, editor, Vol. II, p. 1158.

²⁵ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt, A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, pp. 96-102.

²⁶ Raymond C. Miller, "The Populist Party in Kansas," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1928, p. 8.

Meanwhile, the movement had been growing in the southern states after the farmers of Lampasas county, Texas, organized an Alliance in 1874 or 1875. Both the Northern and Southern Alliances were active in Kansas and the area after 1886, but the latter organization rapidly supplanted the former organization.²⁷

Prosperity in the mid-eighties dampened the ardor for the Alliance movement, but with the collapse of the boom the movement experienced a phenomenal growth. The post-boom movement started in 1887 with the organization of several sub-Alliances in Cowley county. By May of 1889 this county had 46 sub-Alliances with a total membership of 2,300.²⁸ The movement spread rapidly to other parts of the area and the state and reached a climax in 1890, when there were 2,886 sub-Alliances in the state with an estimated membership of 140,000.²⁹

In a few years the Farmers' Alliance evolved from a predominately educational and social organization to an active participant in politics. In the intervening period its efforts were concentrated upon direct economic action in the form of cooperative buying and selling.

Alliance Cooperative Movement

Embattled farmers were not content to let their Alliances become debating societies. They demanded swift action to redress their grievances. While farmers talked politics and turned out at the polls to punish their enemies and reward their friends, they realized that it would take time to change the political order of the day. In the meantime, they could work at home to correct some of the economic abuses. Buying and selling monopolies might be opposed by boycotts and farmers' cooperatives, and to this course of action they turned with a vengeance.

We need to unite to improve our financial condition and prevent ourselves from being made the prey of all other branches of industry [wrote a Cowley county farmer in 1890]. Unorganized, we become the prey of all; organized we become the equal of any. . . . The most difficult problem that presents itself to the farmer is, "How to get a fair and reasonable profit for a season's honest labor?" We would answer, by co-operating for financial benefit and becoming a sharer in its profits.³⁰

²⁷ Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²⁸ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), May 9, 1889, p. 6 ("Farmers' Alliance Notes").

²⁹ *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 15, 1890 ("The Alliance").

³⁰ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), January 22, 1890, p. 12 ("Farmers Should Attend to Their Own Business Affairs").

The Alliance cooperative movement got under way in January of 1889, when societies in Cowley and Harvey counties obtained charters. During that year 17 societies secured charters in the area. The movement reached a climax in the following year when 30 charters were granted in the area and 101 in the state. In 1890 more charters were issued to cooperatives and Farmers' Alliance organizations than to any other type of business in Kansas.³¹ From 1889 to 1893, 59 charters were granted in the area and 182 in the state. Table 16 gives a breakdown by subareas and by local and county cooperative organizations.

Local Cooperatives

Alliance cooperatives were generally organized on a local basis before an attempt was made to form county and state organizations. After agreeing on the need for a cooperative, the farmers of a community would meet together to reach decisions on such matters as the type of business to be conducted, the amount of capital to be subscribed, the election of directors, and the securing of a charter. After selecting a business manager and securing a store and a stock of goods, the society was ready for business. Most of the cooperatives in the area combined buying and selling in a general merchandising type of business. For example, the Farmers' Alliance Store Company of Norwich (Kingman county) was authorized by its charter "to conduct a general mercantile business, to purchase and sell all kinds of farm implements, to deal in coal, to buy and ship all kinds of grain and stock and engage in such other enterprises as may be found advisable or profitable to the members of the Alliance."³² On the other hand, several local societies car-

Table 16

Number of Charters Granted to Cooperative and Farmers' Alliance Organizations, by Subareas and by Local and County Organizations, 1889-1893

Area	Local	County	Total
Eastern subarea	13	6	19
Central subarea	22	10	32
Western subarea	7	1	8
Area total	42	17	59

Source: Secretary of State, Kansas, *Corporation Charter Books, 1889-1893*.

³¹ Kirke Mechem (ed.), *The Annals of Kansas*, p. 114.

³² Secretary of State, Kansas, *Corporation Charter Book No. 36*, p. 306.

ried on more specialized activities. Charters were granted in the area for two flour mills, one loan association, one grain elevator, one printing and publishing association, one creamery, one cheese factory, and one labor exchange.

For a time, at least, the local cooperatives achieved some measure of success. A number of them were able to buy and sell in carload lots, purchase supplies at wholesale rates, and absorb some of the middle-man's profit. One area farmer wrote as follows in this connection:

Valley Alliance No. 15, Reno county, is in a flourishing condition. . . . We are buying and selling our commodities on the cooperative plan . . . and we have found out that by thus doing we can go to the banks (if need be) and hire money at bank rates and pay cash for what we get and save money. We have also found that wagons, plows, wire and even lumber, have come down wonderfully in price in our local market since the organization of the Alliance. . . . What we are doing is being done throughout the State wherever the Alliance is organized, and I am pleased to say that the organization is spreading very rapidly. . . . Farmers, make the calculation of how many middle-men you could dispose of in your own little town by attending to your own selling and purchasing.³³

Even though they accomplished some of their objectives, local societies labored under a number of handicaps. They had difficulty raising capital among depression ridden farmers; without capital, they could not make savings on bulk buying and selling. Cooperatives threatened local businessmen who often retaliated by refusing to buy from wholesalers and manufacturers who sold to cooperatives.

County Cooperatives

Rather than accept defeat, farmers organized county and state associations that would perform certain functions beyond the capacity of local societies. The farmers of Harvey county organized the first county cooperative association in January of 1889. During the next five years similar associations were formed in 16 area counties. Table 16 shows that over half of the local and county societies were in the central sub-area, where the Alliance movement was especially strong.

County cooperatives were generally capitalized at a much higher figure than their local counterparts. The authorized capital stock of the 42 local societies ranged from \$200 to \$100,000, with an average of \$18,434. On the other hand, the 17 county organizations had a range

³³ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), March 28, 1889, p. 6 ("Alliance Matters").

from \$20,000 to \$500,000 (both Cowley and Rice counties had cooperatives with an authorized capital of \$500,000), and the average was \$113,600.³⁴

Although the amount of capital actually subscribed was probably well below the authorized figure, county cooperatives generally had sufficient resources to handle a fairly large volume of business. The Farmers' Alliance of Cowley county reported in May of 1889 that their county exchange was "organized with a capital of \$500,000; it is doing a splendid business—far exceeding our expectations."³⁵ While most county societies carried on a general mercantile business, a few branched out into such other lines as milling, elevators, printing and publishing, manufacturing, and banking. In March of 1890 the Harper County Alliance was said to have an exchange store "which is doing a fine business, and are thinking of establishing a flouring mill and a few grain elevators soon."³⁶

It is interesting that two cooperative loan associations were established in the area. The Farmers' Cooperative Loan and Trust Association of Sumner county was chartered on December 11, 1890, to transact business at Wellington with an authorized capital of \$100,000.³⁷ An article in the *Kansas Farmer* told of a similar organization in Rice county.

In view of the disposition of many loan companies not to renew maturing loans, a number of leading farmers of Rice county organized the Kansas Alliance Loan Association, the object of which is to loan money on first mortgage real estate security. . . . To make this association valuable to farmers it will be necessary for all farmers' organizations to co-operate and take shares in order to handle the mortgages falling due.³⁸

County cooperatives were more successful in dealing with private businessmen than their local counterparts. In a sense the farmers were at war with the merchants of the town. The combatants employed shrewd tactics in an effort to win the struggle. The merchants of Winfield, for example, formed The Merchant's Protective Association "to boycott all wholesale merchants who sell to 'Alliance' or 'Lodge'

³⁴ Secretary of State, Kansas, *Corporation Charter Books, 1889-1893*.

³⁵ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), May 9, 1889, p. 6 ("Farmers' Alliance Notes").

³⁶ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), March 19, 1890, p. 6 ("Harper County Alliance").

³⁷ Secretary of State, Kansas, *Corporation Charter Book No. 35*, p. 426.

³⁸ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), March 11, 1891, p. 11.

stores.”³⁹ Alliances in other parts of the area reported similar boycott action.⁴⁰ In retaliation, farmers passed resolutions similar to the following: “Resolved that they [Payne Alliance, Sedgwick county] would patronize no manufacturing firm that refuses to sell direct to farmers through their Exchanges, and pledges their patronage and support to their County Co-operative Association.”⁴¹

State Cooperatives

Once local and county societies were functioning, it was logical to go one step farther and organize a state cooperative exchange. Farmers saw the need for a central organization to handle the sale of farm commodities at terminal markets, to co-ordinate the purchase of equipment and supplies, and to provide other specialized services. Action was taken accordingly. At the State Alliance Convention in Newton during August of 1889, a committee of three was appointed to draft a plan for a state exchange.⁴² Plans were quickly completed, and in October of the same year a charter was granted to The Kansas Alliance Exchange Company with headquarters at Topeka. About a year later the organization was moved to Kansas City, Kansas, and capitalized at \$500,000.⁴³ The exchange at Kansas City made arrangements with two commission companies to handle the grain and cattle received from Alliance members. It also made contracts with manufacturers enabling it to supply its members with binder twine and “hundreds of car loads of farming implements and machinery” at a substantial reduction in price. One area newspaper said, “Notwithstanding all opposition the State Exchange grew and prospered, and in less than one year’s time the business transacted amounted to one million dollars.”⁴⁴

³⁹ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), May 28, 1891 (“The Merchant’s Protective Association”).

⁴⁰ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), March 12, 1890, p. 7 (“Organization Notes”); *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), March 19, 1890, p. 6 (“Harper County Alliance”); *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), May 28, 1890, p. 4 (“Sedgwick County”).

⁴¹ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), May 28, 1890, p. 4 (“Sedgwick County”).

⁴² *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), January 16, 1891 (“The Kansas Alliance Exchange Company”).

⁴³ Secretary of State, Kansas, *Corporation Charter Book No. 36*, p. 282.

⁴⁴ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), January 16, 1891 (“The Kansas Alliance Exchange Company”); *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), May 6, 1891, p. 4 (“Kansas Alliance Exchange Company”).

Decline of Movement

The cooperative movement grew and prospered for several years but eventually fell upon evil days. It was plagued by such things as the shortage of capital, the lack of capable business managers, and the opposition of private businessmen. The movement also had a serious psychological obstacle to overcome. Even with the best of intentions, farmers had difficulty suppressing their individualistic temperaments and cooperating in a collective enterprise. These were, no doubt, serious handicaps; but, when the scourge of nationwide depression was added to them, the cooperatives were dealt a mortal blow. The number of charters issued to these organizations declined from 101 in 1890 to nine in 1895; during the next four years not a single charter was granted in Kansas.⁴⁵

Farmers' Political Program

Meanwhile, farmers had begun to take an active interest in politics. They believed that their hardships were largely due to political causes and could be cured by legislation. One area resident described the political ferment of the period in the following words:

On every hand the cry of hard times, low prices, high interest, and oppressive taxes can be heard. These remarks have become so general and the idea itself has become so prevalent, that the farmers can be seen on every street corner, road crossing and even in the fields discussing the present situation. They have become aroused to a full sense of their duty and instead of discussing partisan politics in a wild unfriendly manner, they are talking over a system of government, that would give them the necessary relief.⁴⁶

Informal street corner discussions led to more formal consideration of political issues at Alliance meetings. Farmers and farmers' wives turned out in mass to hear the discussions, and the country school houses reverberated with the sound of oratory and pointed debate. The questions of finance, money, transportation, interest, mortgages, taxes, monopoly, political graft, etc., were discussed from every possible angle.

Propaganda

In preparation for the discussions, farmers spent long hours reading reform literature. They received a veritable avalanche of newspapers,

⁴⁵ Mechem, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-128, 145, 161, 187, 202.

⁴⁶ *Industrial Free Press* (Winfield), June 13, 1890 ("The Farmers' Aroused").

tracts, and pamphlets published by Alliance and other reform organizations. By 1891 a total of 150 newspapers belonged to the Kansas Reform Press Association; of this number, 42 were published in the area.⁴⁷ All but two of the area counties had at least one reform paper, and 13 counties had two or more. Cowley county, which led the state with five reform papers, was an important propaganda center for the reform movement. At Winfield the Vincent brothers published the *Non-Conformist*, one of the leading reform papers of the state. They also published numerous tracts and pamphlets and supplied patent inside, or boilerplate, for many of the less flourishing papers of the reform faith.⁴⁸

Besides printed matter, lecturers were employed to spread the doctrine of the Alliance. Each level of organization—local, county, congressional district, state, and nation—had its lecturer who was skilled in organizational matters and in spreading the political doctrines and arguments that were most effective.⁴⁹

Reforms

From the grassroots discussions there emerged a clearly formulated set of objectives, methods, and reform measures for the guidance of the national organization. One authority wrote that the prime object of the Farmers' Alliance was:

. . . to better the condition of the farmers of America, mentally, morally, and financially; to suppress personal, sectional, and national prejudices . . . to return to the principles on which the government was founded, by adhering to the doctrine of equal rights and equal chances to all and special privileges to none; to educate and commingle with those of the same calling, to the end that country life may become less lonely and more social; to assist the weak with the strength of the strong, thereby rendering the whole body more able to resist; and to bequeath to posterity conditions that will enable them, as honest, intelligent, industrious producers, to cope successfully with the exploiting class of middlemen.⁵⁰

To implement these objectives, three methods were adopted—social, business, and political. With respect to the political methods, it was stated:

⁴⁷ *Populist Hand-Book for Kansas*, 1891, p. 283.

⁴⁸ Raymond C. Miller, "The Populist Party in Kansas," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1928, p. 57.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵⁰ Washington Gladden, "The Embattled Farmers," *The Forum*, Vol. X, November, 1890, p. 319.

All questions in political economy will be thoroughly discussed, and when the order can agree on a reform as necessary, they will demand it of the government and of every political party; and if the demand goes unheeded, they will find ways to enforce it. The most essential reforms must come from legislation, but that does not necessarily compel the necessity of choosing candidates and of filling the offices. Such a course may become necessary, but it will not be resorted to under any other circumstances.⁵¹

Numerous reforms were demanded. They consisted of such measures as government ownership and control of railroads and telegraphs, the Subtreasury Plan, free coinage of silver, abolition of national banks and the substitution of legal-tender treasury notes for national bank notes, prohibition of gambling in stocks, prohibition of alien ownership of land, and direct election of United States Senators.⁵²

The Subtreasury Plan, the leading reform measure of the Farmers' Alliance, called for the establishment of government warehouses in each county where demanded. Farmers were to deposit cotton, wheat, corn, oats, or tobacco in the warehouses and receive in turn treasury notes for 80 per cent of the market value of the deposited produce. Interest at 1 per cent per annum was to be charged on these crop loans. Furthermore, farmers were to receive for deposited produce warehouse receipts that were negotiable by endorsement. If the products were not redeemed within 12 months the government was to sell them to satisfy the debt. This plan was intended to accomplish two major objectives: to make it unnecessary for farmers to dump their products on a depressed market and to expand the currency.⁵³

Reform newspapers devoted much space to the Subtreasury Plan, and it received widespread support from area farmers. One farmer forced to dump his wheat on a depressed market said this plan "is a panacea to my offended feeling, because it intends to cure the ills of a suppressed market in the fall, and a flushed market some other time of the year, an evener of conditions insuring to the producer the full benefit of his products."⁵⁴ Although Congress defeated the Subtreasury Plan in the 1890's, a similar plan, known as the Ever-Normal Granary, was passed during the 1930's.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

⁵³ Carl C. Taylor, *The Farmers' Movement, 1620-1920*, pp. 243-246.

⁵⁴ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), October 14, 1891, p. 4 ("The Sub-Treasury Plan").

Political Strategy

Once the program was adopted, the Farmers' Alliances sought to translate it into law. At first an attempt was made to work with the old party organizations and to win them to the Alliance cause. When this attempt failed the Alliance broke party lines and resolved not to vote for any man who refused to endorse its program. Typical of the many resolutions passed by local Alliances was the following: "As the old parties have not been working for the interest of the masses—the great common people—but against them, Payne Alliance [Sedgwick county] also resolved that they will not support either of the old parties, and favored an independent, non-partisan movement."⁵⁵

Meanwhile, efforts were being made to win the Alliance membership to the support of a new third party. While Kansas was predominantly a Republican state, several third party movements had been gaining strength since the early 1870's. These were the Greenback, Anti-Monopoly, and Union Labor parties. The interesting thing is that leaders of the old third parties who lived in the area were instrumental in forming the new third party that was soon to sweep the state. Early in 1888 leaders of the Union Labor Party in Kansas formed a secret, oath-bound society known as the Videttes. Its purpose was to prevent fusion with the Democratic or Republican parties. After the defeat of the Union Labor Party in 1888, the Videttes met in Wichita, where they disbanded their order and the state committee of the Union Labor Party and organized in their place a State Reform Association. Judge W. F. Rightmire of Chase county was elected president; other area leaders in attendance were John R. Rogers, publisher of the *Newton Kansas Commoner*, and Henry Vincent, one of the brothers who published the *Winfield Non-Conformist*.⁵⁶

The Videttes realized that, if the Alliance movement could be won to a new third party allegiance, there was a strong possibility of electing reform governments on county, state, and national levels. They also realized that the Southern Alliance was better suited to their purposes than its northern counterpart. According to Mr. Rightmire, the south-

⁵⁵ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), May 28, 1890, p. 4 ("Sedgwick County").

⁵⁶ W. F. Rightmire, "The Alliance Movement in Kansas—Origin of the People's Party," *Transactions of the Kansas Historical Society, 1905-1906*, Vol. IX, pp. 2-3.

ern organization "held secret meetings, had a ritual, secret work, grips, and passwords . . . and was a close organization, obeying the directions of its general officers." The northern organization, on the other hand, "held open meetings, and was of the nature of a cooperative society."⁵⁷

To speed the growth of the Southern Alliance in Kansas, Rightmire, Rogers, and Vincent went to Texas in 1887 and were initiated into the order. Upon their return they were successful in persuading Benjamin H. Clover, state president of the Northern Alliance, to swing over to the southern organization. A farmer from near Cambridge, Cowley county, Clover had been a Greenback and Union Labor Party man. He was an early leader of the Farmers' Alliance and served as president of the local, county, and state Alliance before he was elevated to vice-president of the national organization in 1890. Clover was also a Populist United States Representative from 1891 to 1893.⁵⁸

Clover used his influence to change the northern sub-Alliances into secret southern sub-Alliances. His efforts met with great success. In March of 1889 it was reported, "The Southern organization is known as the Farmers' State Alliance and Co-operative Union of Kansas, and is especially strong in the counties of Reno, Cowley, Chautauqua, Sumner, Jackson, Jefferson, Shawnee, Harvey, Butler, Kingman, Sedgwick, Rice, Labette, Marion, McPherson, Marshall, Ford and Clark."⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that 11 of the 18 counties were in the area.

Populist Party

The next step was to organize a third party. It was logical that the party should be organized in Cowley county, where the Alliance was probably stronger than in any other county in the state. In the summer of 1889 disgruntled farmers withdrew from the ring dominated Republican convention in that county. Under the leadership of Henry Vincent, Benjamin Clover, and others, the farmers joined forces with the Union Labor and Democratic Parties to form the People's or Populist Party on September 31, 1889. In the November election the People's ticket won an overwhelming victory. The *Winfield Courier*, a Republican paper, reported the victory as follows:

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Blackmar, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 375.

⁵⁹ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), March 21, 1889 ("Farmers' Alliance Notes").

It was known that the Farmer's Alliance was a growing organization and would in all probability cut some figure in the result. But the unanimity with which it supported the People's ticket was not looked for. The cause of the "disturbance" is plainly shown by reference to the table of returns. In every locality where the Alliance was strong, the People's ticket had large majorities, and in every township where there was no Alliance, the usual vote was cast. The Alliance for this year at least has been handled as a very compact and orderly political machine. Whether this is to continue as its policy is not known.⁶⁰

The new party spread like wildfire after its initial success in Cowley county. In January of the following year a state People's party was organized at Topeka. While the Farmers' Alliance was the dominant organization in the new party, other reform organizations played an active part in the movement. Participating in the organization of the state party were delegates representing the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, the Patrons of Husbandry, the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, the Knights of Labor, and Single Tax clubs.

Once started, the movement continued to grow until a national People's party was organized at Cincinnati in May, 1891. The Vincent brothers were among the leaders who took the initial steps in forming the national party; Judge Rightmire called the Cincinnati meeting to order, and Judge William A. Peffer, Populist United States Senator from Kansas and former editor of the *Kansas Farmer*, made the opening address.⁶¹

Crusade of 1890

In Kansas the new party mustered its forces in preparation for the election campaign of 1890. Years of hardship and want had prepared the ground for momentous changes. The people were hungering for a Moses to deliver them from the shackles of bondage. When the Moses appeared in the form of a new party, there was a great emotional upheaval. It was not so much a political campaign as a "religious revival, a crusade, a pentecost of politics in which a tongue of flame sat upon every man, and each spake as the spirit gave him utterance."⁶²

During the summer and fall a camp meeting atmosphere pervaded the countryside. Picnics, barbecues, and Fourth of July celebrations be-

⁶⁰ Barr, *op. cit.*, pp. 1160-1161.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1164, 1174-1175.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 1164-1165.

came occasions for great political conclaves. Picnic lunches were prepared by farmers' wives while the menfolk finished the chores and hitched up the wagon to carry the family to the meeting. Long parades of vehicles proceeded down the mainstreet of town on the way to the picnic grove. Games and frivolity were not lacking, but the main event of the day consisted of numerous political speeches continuing for hours on end.

Mary Elizabeth Lease

Among the many farmers and farmers' wives who "spoke up in meeting" for the first time there were a number who discovered latent oratorical powers. Foremost among them was Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Lease of Wichita. At the age of 17 she had come to Kansas from Pennsylvania to teach school. After marrying, she and her husband took up a claim in Kingman county, where five of her six children were born. Life on the farm was unrewarding, and in 1877 the Lease family moved to Wichita. Here Mary not only reared her family but found release for her driving energy by studying law. She passed the bar examination and was admitted to the Kansas bar in 1885. Three years later, while attempting to escape from the rain, she dropped in on a union labor meeting. Before the meeting was over, she had made a rousing speech that brought her political potentialities to the forefront.⁶³

For the next decade or more Mary Lease was in great demand as a public speaker. After joining the Knights of Labor and taking an active part in the Union Labor Party movement, she became a member of the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist Party. For a time she was editor of the *Wichita Independent*, a reform paper which gave her a medium for reaching the people. In the election campaign of 1890 she was the stormy petrel who blasted away at the foundations of the Republican party and urged the farmers of Kansas "to raise less corn and more

⁶³ She was described as "an Irishwoman by birth . . . typically fervid, impulsive and heroic. All the hatred of oppression and scorn of oppressors, which every true son and daughter of Erin feels, found vent in Mrs. Lease's public utterances as she denounced the greedy governing class which has grown rich and powerful at the expense of the impoverished and helpless multitude." Annie L. Diggs, "The Women In The Alliance Movement," *The Arena*, Vol. VI, July, 1892, p. 165. Among the causes which Mary Lease supported during her lifetime (1853-1933) were: women suffrage, prohibition, socialism, birth control, and evolution. Although social questions were her main interest, there was a lighter side to her nature. Taking up bicycling in 1895, she "threatened to call on M. M. Murdock of the *Wichita Eagle*, who was 'anti-new woman,' in a fancy bloomer suit." Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

Hell.”⁶⁴ She was variously known as “Mary Ellen,” “Mary Yellin,” “The Greatest Living Stateswoman,” and “The American Joan of Arc.” In one of her most famous speeches she said:

This is a nation of inconsistencies. The Puritans fleeing from oppression became in turn oppressors. We fought England for our liberty and put chains on four millions of blacks. We wiped out slavery and by our tariff laws and national banks began a system of white wage slavery worse than the first. Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street. The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East. Money rules, and our Vice President is a London banker. Our laws are the output of a system which clothes rascals in robes and honesty in rags. The parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us. We were told two years ago to go to work and raise a big crop, that was all we needed. We went to work and plowed and planted; the rains fell, the sun shone, nature smiled, and we raised the big crop that they told us to; and what came of it? Eight-cent corn, ten-cent oats, two-cent beef and no price at all for butter and eggs—that’s what came of it. Then the politicians said we suffered from over-production The main question is the money question There are 30,000 millionaires in the United States. Go home and figure out how many paupers you must have to make one millionaire with the circulation only \$10 per capita We want money, land and transportation. We want the abolition of the National Banks, and we want the power to make loans direct from the Government. We want the accursed foreclosure system wiped out. Land equal to a tract thirty miles wide and ninety miles long has been foreclosed and brought in by loan companies of Kansas in a year. We will stand by our homes and stay by our fireside by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the Government pays its debts to us. The people are at bay, let the blood-hounds of money who have dogged us thus far beware.⁶⁵

Jerry Simpson

If Mary Lease was the woman of the hour, the man of the hour was Jerry Simpson of Medicine Lodge. Simpson was born in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1842 of Scots-English ancestry. As a boy he moved with his family to Michigan. After a common school education he served for about 20 years on Great Lakes steamers, rising to the rank of captain. He came to Kansas in 1878; after living in Jackson county for a time, he took up a claim near Medicine Lodge in 1883. Success rewarded his efforts in the cattle business for several years, but the terrible winter of 1885-1886 killed his herd and wiped out his lifetime savings.

⁶⁴ Betty Lou Taylor, “*Mary Elizabeth Lease: Kansas Populist*,” Unpublished Master’s thesis, University of Wichita, May, 1951, pp. 1-20.

⁶⁵ Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 1167.

In the years of adversity Simpson turned to politics. He joined the Greenback and Union Labor parties and became a convert of Henry George's single tax scheme. He was an unsuccessful candidate for the state legislature on the Greenback and Independent tickets in 1886 and 1888.⁶⁶

The growth of the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party was instrumental in changing Simpson's political fortune. His campaign for Congress as a Populist in 1890 was one of the most colorful in the state's history. A remarkable speaker, Simpson drew large crowds as he campaigned throughout the "Big Seventh" District of 37 counties, more than one third of the entire area of the state. The colorful character of his campaign is illustrated by the following contemporary account:

The big meeting held at Medicine Lodge, September 27, was by far the largest gathering ever held in Barber County. Over five hundred teams and a large number of persons on horseback formed in procession and marched through Main street to the beautiful grove on the outskirts of town. Flags and banners decorated nearly every vehicle. Old politicians stood aghast, and were heard to remark: "We didn't know there were so many people in Barber county." There were several good speakers, and close attention was given to all that was said. When our "Jerry" stepped on the platform such cheering was never heard in those woods before; men, women and children stood on the seats, waved their hats and handkerchiefs and gave cheer after cheer. If the whole "Big Seventh" could have witnessed the reception given Mr. Simpson, they would have known whether or not he is popular at home. To say that we are proud of him does not half express it; and then we have not the slightest doubt that he will be our next Representative in Congress.⁶⁷

During the course of the heated campaign the rival candidates indulged in a little name calling. In one speech Simpson referred to his Republican opponent, Colonel James R. Hallowell of Wichita, as "Prince Hal" whose "tender feet are encased in fine silk hosiery." Simpson then lifted his trouser leg and exhibited a naked leg and foot. He declared that under the high tariff the Kansas farmer "can't have no drawers, and ain't got no socks." It was here that Victor Murdock, a young reporter for the *Wichita Eagle*, gave him the title "Sockless Jerry." Sometime later William Allen White referred to Simpson as the "Sockless Socrates."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Percy S. Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-97.

⁶⁷ *Kansas Farmer* (Topeka), October 8, 1890, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Percy S. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 98; Mechem, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

Sizable Victory

In other parts of the area the campaign of 1890 was waged with fiery zeal. At El Dorado, T. H. Murdock exclaimed to W. A. White, "By Godfrey's diamonds, something's happening, young feller! These damn farmers are preparing to tear down the courthouse!"⁶⁹ Years later White recalled, "In those El Dorado years we attempted to paralyze the Farmers' Alliance, and were ridden in effigy through the streets of town; a boycott was declared on the paper, and the candidate for county attorney on the Alliance ticket bought a gun to answer our charges."⁷⁰

Election day, November 4, 1890, witnessed a mass movement of farmers to the polls. When the ballots were counted, the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party had won a sizable victory. Jerry Simpson and Ben Clover went to Congress with large majorities. In other parts of the state John G. Otis of Topeka, John Davis of Junction City, and William Baker of Lincoln won congressional seats. In the State House of Representatives the Populists won 92 seats as against 26 for the Republicans. The victory was not clear cut, however, for all but one of the Republican state officers were re-elected, and the Republicans remained in control of the state senate.⁷¹

After the election, the Populist House of Representatives was handicapped by Republican control of the Senate and the state offices. Although most of the cherished measures—transportation, money, and land—were defeated, a bank control bill was enacted into law, and Judge W. A. Peffer was sent to the United States Senate to replace John J. Ingalls, the Republican Senator of many years' standing.

Election of 1892

Partial success only whetted the appetite for total success. All efforts were concentrated upon winning the election of 1892. On June 15, 1892, the Populist Party convention met at Wichita, where a new leader of the movement made his appearance. Lorenzo D. Lewelling, a Wichita produce commission merchant, was chairman of the Sedgwick County

⁶⁹ *The Autobiography of William Allen White*, p. 184.

⁷⁰ William Allen White, *Forty Years on Main Street*, p. 11.

⁷¹ Mechem, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

People's Party committee. He so impressed the delegates by his brief and ably prepared address of welcome that he was nominated as the party's candidate for Governor of Kansas.⁷²

The Populist campaign of 1892 was waged in much the same manner as that of 1890. It was characterized by all day picnics, parades, and hours and hours of political oratory. Mary Lease, Jerry Simpson, L. D. Lewelling, and Judge Rightmire were prominent area leaders who campaigned vigorously throughout the state. Mary Lease joined General James B. Weaver, the Populist candidate for President of the United States, in a nationwide campaign tour. Judge Rightmire toured the state asserting that in 1892 the Kansas farmers had raised wheat worth 39 million dollars and oats worth 10 million dollars and had paid out over 59 million dollars in freight rates, interest, and taxes. Mary Lease also joined Jerry Simpson for a time; in one speech she declared in her inimitable manner,

Farmers all; ye men with "hayseed in your hair," tax receipts in your moneyless purses, despair in your hearts, and unsocked feet, "stand up and be counted," for the emancipation of the 'sockless' wealth producers of your country from their vassalage to the monopolists of money, transportation, communication and exchange. Take a firm hold of the plow of progress and hang on, and never let go until the setting sun on the evening of presidential election day in November, 1892 shall gild the victorious banner of Independent People's Party.

⁷² Lorenzo Dow Lewelling was born December 21, 1846, near Salem, Henry county, Iowa, of Quaker parentage. His father was a Quaker minister. Lorenzo was left an orphan at the age of seven, and at an early age was forced to make his own living. At the outbreak of the Civil War he enlisted in the Union Army, but soon after his relatives secured his release on the grounds that war was against the tenets of the Quaker faith. Lorenzo then worked as a bridge builder. At the close of the War he entered Eastman's Business College, at Poughkeepsie, New York. Upon graduation, he came west, and for a time taught in a negro school in Missouri. In 1868, Lewelling entered the newly founded Whittier College at Salem, Iowa, where he received a degree. While in school he desired to become a man of letters. He corresponded with John Greenleaf Whittier, the Quaker poet, seeking advice as to a career. Whittier advised a life of service to mankind rather than that of a secluded man of letters. Lorenzo acted on this advice. For a number of years he was superintendent of the Iowa Industrial School for Girls. He was also the founder and editor of the *Des Moines Capital*, an anti-ring Republican paper; and he served as a member of the board of directors of the State Normal school at Des Moines. In 1887, he moved to the booming city of Wichita, where he was engaged in the produce business until his elevation to Governor of Kansas in 1892. He received his party's nomination for governor in 1894, but was defeated by the Republican nominee. In 1896, Mr. Lewelling was elected to the state senate, and in the following year he was appointed a member of the Board of Railroad Commissioners of Kansas. He died at Arkansas City, September 3, 1900. W. J. Costigan, one of Lewelling's closest political and personal advisers, wrote that, "No man in Kansas embodied more humanity, fellow-feeling, and goodness When seated in the executive chamber and burdened with business, the humblest negro in Kansas was sure of a respectful audience from him. Whether as governor or private citizen, he was always one of the most accessible of men." Costigan, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-126; *Kansas City Star*, November 9, 1954 ("Whittier Advised A Future Governor of Kansas Against a Literary Career").

Off hats! Give it with a will! Be heard from the mountains to the sea! Three times three cheers and a tiger for 'Sockless' Jerry Simpson.⁷³

The election returns on November 8 showed an even greater victory than two years previous. The entire Populist state ticket was elected, and Lorenzo D. Lewelling became the first Populist Governor of Kansas. Jerry Simpson was sent to Congress, as were John Davis, William Baker, and T. J. Hudson. General Weaver carried the state by a majority of nearly 6,000. In the state legislature, however, the victory was divided between the Populists and the Republicans. The Populists gained a majority of 23 in the State Senate while in the House the returns showed a slight majority for the Republicans.⁷⁴

The inauguration on Monday, January 9, 1893, proved to be a gala event. Topeka was crowded with farmers and other well-wishers "who felt that this was the day of their salvation, and of their deliverance from the clutches of the money power."⁷⁵ In the vanguard of the elaborate victory parade rode Mrs. Lease in a new silk dress and bonnet. Governor Lewelling made an inaugural address and defined the functions of government in the following words: "Government is a voluntary union for the common good. It guarantees to the individual life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. The Government must make it possible for the citizen to live by his own labor. The Government must make it possible for the citizen to enjoy liberty and the pursuit of happiness."⁷⁶

Disappointment

The great hopes held out for the "first people's government of the world" proved to be unfounded. Governor Lewelling's administration was torn by dissention and conflict. Civil war was barely averted in the struggle over contested Republican seats in the House of Representatives. During the greater part of the session there were two lower houses of the legislature—one Republican, one Populist, each insisting it was the legally constituted body. The legislative war diverted atten-

⁷³ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁷⁴ W. P. Harrington, "The Populist Party in Kansas," *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society*, Vol. XVI, 1923-1925, pp. 423-424.

⁷⁵ Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 1181.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1182-1183.

tion from other issues, and no reform measures became law.⁷⁷ To this crisis was added dissention within the ranks of the Populist Party. Governor Lewelling and Mary Lease became bitter enemies as a consequence of Mrs. Lease's removal from the State Board of Charities.⁷⁸ Ben Clover, who had been refused the Congressional renomination in 1892, publicly recanted and went over to the Republican Party.⁷⁹

Defeat in 1894

Discredited by the legislative war and torn by internal strife, the Populists were in a weak position to fight the campaign of 1894. They also lost the support of the Democratic Party, an element of strength in the elections of 1890 and 1892. In view of these handicaps, it is not surprising that the Republicans carried the state in November, "electing the entire state ticket and every member of Congress except in the sixth district, where William Baker survived—the lone Populist representative."⁸⁰

Armageddon

The election campaign of 1896 was not the first great battle fought by the farmers against the industrial sector of the economy, but it was the last. On the national level it was a "battle of the standards." The Populists joined forces with the Democrats to support William Jennings Bryan ("The Boy Orator of the Platte") for President on a free silver plank. The Republicans, on the other hand, nominated William McKinley as their standard bearer and worked for a gold standard.

Although the national crusade met with defeat, the state campaign was the most successful the Populists had yet waged. The party captured all branches of the state government. The new Populist Governor, John W. Leedy of Coffey county, had the Supreme Court, both houses of the legislature, and the state officers on his side. No impediments seemed to stand in the way of the long deferred reform program. Some reform measures, such as regulation of stockyards, the weighing and inspection of grain, and state uniformity of textbooks, became law. But

⁷⁷ Harrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 424-431; Barr, *op. cit.*, pp. 1184-1198.

⁷⁸ Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-46.

⁷⁹ Harrington, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

an important part of the program, including such things as the bill to reduce interest rates, the initiative and referendum, and the railroad bill failed. A railroad bill finally passed at a special session of the legislature, but later the Supreme Court of Kansas declared it unconstitutional.⁸¹

Decline of Populist Party

The Populist Party faded out of the political spotlight after 1896. Several factors were responsible for its demise. In the first place, the party was torn by ideological disputes. Some of the leaders wanted to turn the clock back to the simple agrarian economy of the pre-Civil War period. Others, realizing that there was no possibility of turning back, were committed to government intervention in business and limited experiments with state socialism as a means to combat the evils of monopoly capitalism. Professor Nevins points to the glaring lack of a true intellectual basis for the Populist Party in Kansas. "Their movement," he says, "was too much a horny-handed blow at intolerable hardships, too little a hardheaded probing of their social and economic predicament."⁸²

Secondly, the leaders could not agree upon what political tactics to employ. Some favored fusion with the Democratic Party; other refused to compromise the party's principles, believing that the Populist Party would eventually become one of the two major parties in the nation. In Kansas, Governor Lewelling and Mary Lease represented the fusionist and antifusionist factions of the party respectively. Mrs. Lease broke with the party over this issue in 1894 and in 1896 went so far as to campaign for the Republican presidential candidate, William McKinley.⁸³

Thirdly, there were the problems of lack of experience and chicanery. As with all parties, the Populists attracted their quota of politicians who were only interested in the prestige, spoils, and emoluments of office. Commenting upon the Populist legislative session of 1897, one sympathetic newspaper remarked, "One of the greatest disadvantages in the way was that too many of the members were inexperienced. They knew nothing of the difficulties and hindrances which must be

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 443-446.

⁸² Allan Nevins, *Kansas and the Stream of American Destiny*, p. 17.

⁸³ Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-52.

overcome before anything could be accomplished. Too many members were devoting their attention to matters which would give them notoriety and prestige. Others occupied valuable time looking after patronage for themselves and friends."⁸⁴

Fourthly, the rank and file membership was undependable. There was a mass of farmers whose allegiance to the Populist Party waxed and waned in accordance with their economic well-being. The economic recovery after 1896 found the farmers abandoning the radical third party program and returning to the old party fold.

Populist Contribution

In spite of their meager accomplishments, the Populists did make a notable contribution to the tradition of American liberalism. They alerted the mass of middle class Americans to the danger of monopoly capitalism. William Allen White was typical of many middle class leaders who jeered and ridiculed the Populists in the nineties but later incorporated many of their principles and program into his personal philosophy and worked for the regeneration of American business and politics. According to Professor Nevins, "What Kansas Populism did was to help throw a bridge from Jeffersonian liberalism to the Progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson."⁸⁵ In 1914, Mary Lease looked back at her political career and said proudly:

In these later years I have seen, with gratification, that my work in Kansas in the good old Populist days was not in vain. The Progressive party has adopted our platform, clause by clause, plank by plank. Note the list of reforms which we advocated which are coming into reality. Direct election of senators is assured. Public utilities are gradually being removed from the hands of the few and placed under the control of the people who use them. Women suffrage is now almost a national issue. Prohibition, thank God, is spreading across the country like wild-fire. Brother, the times are propitious. The seed we sowed out in Kansas did not fall on barren ground.⁸⁶

Better Times, 1897-1900

Populism and prosperity did not go well together; and while the one declined, the other became more apparent. After the long years of

⁸⁴ Harrington, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

⁸⁵ Nevins, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ *Kansas City Star*, March 29, 1931 ("Advise to Raise 'Less Corn and More Hell' Still Good, Says Mary Ellen Lease at 78.").

depression and hardship the clouds lifted in 1897. On the national level there was an expanding volume of money and credit, due largely to the discovery of gold in Alaska and South Africa. The Spanish American War was another factor of some importance in stimulating business recovery. A combination of factors was encouraging to the agricultural economy of the area. Rainfall was above average in three of the four years from 1897 to 1900. Crop yields were more abundant, and there was a noticeable improvement in the prices of various farm commodities. Debts had been reduced in the years of economy to reasonable proportions. People returned to the area in growing numbers. Those who remained during the long years of settlement, extravagance, and depression learned many lessons that were to contribute to a more orderly development of the area in years to come.

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