

A History of Meade County, Kansas

By

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FORWARD

In presenting this History of Meade County to the public I am timidly conscious that it will meet the full approval of none. In the preparation of this work I have talked with five hundred people, and received five hundred suggestions as to what the book should contain. Being anxious to please, but realizing my inability to carry out the ideas of the many well-meaning people and confine the work to one volume, I have discarded much that is interesting, but it has been my intention to include all that is important or valuable.

The personal experience of every old settler would be interesting reading; the achievements of those who settled upon the frontier in the days "that tried men's souls," who battled with the elements, subdued the wilderness and made the desert fruitful, is a story worthy of the mightiest pen; the exploits of "Hoodoo" Brown, the activities of George DeCow, the eccentricities of Pat Mulligan, the unconscious humor of Pete Hotz, the martial dignity of Captain Osgood, and the characteristics, freaks and foibles of many others who might be mentioned, would, if properly

preserved, afford a source of never-ending amusement and entertainment; but it would not be history.

The inside history of county politics as the game was played in former days, the plans and schemes, the plots and counter plots, the maneuvers by which tricks were taken and lost, would read like a story by George Randolph Chester, but I could not go into these matters without violating the confidence of such eminently good fellows as Bob Painter, Doug Adams, Fred Fick, Tom Johnston, Frank Fuhr, Mose Black, Fred Judd, et al., and the public would certainly not expect me to do that.

The history of Meade County reads almost like a fairy tale. Organized in 1885, the country was widely advertised and hailed as an El Dorado by people all over the East, who flocked here in great numbers, eager to secure homes in this modern Eden. Cities and towns sprang up as if by magic; railroads were surveyed, manufacturing establishments planned for, and in a few months the country had the appearance of an old-established community. But, alas for the good of the country! So many who settled here were not the kind to develop a new country. They came mostly from the old-settled States of the East, and knew nothing of the hardships incident to pioneer life. They became dissatisfied as soon as the novelty of the situation wore away, and longed for their Eastern homes. To get away was no difficult matter; the entire

country was enjoying an era of prosperity, money was easy to obtain, and many, perhaps a majority of the homesteaders preempted their claims, mortgaged them the next day for from \$500 to \$1000, and left the country, better off financially than when they came. So many farms being deserted, business suffered and laxed for a time, depression ensued, and then came the fall, the awful, calamitous, tumultuous financial crash that buried under its ruins the wrecked hopes and shattered ambitions of so many. Meade County was not alone in this crisis; the entire West was affected, and great was the havoc throughout all. But business adapted itself to changed conditions; business assurance was just being restored when occurred the memorable opening of Oklahoma. All eyes were now turned toward "The Land of the Fair God," and western Kansas was practically forgotten by the outside world. Meade County, being in such proximity to the Territory, suffered her proportionate loss of citizens. Nor was the lost population soon regained, as for years practically all emigration was toward the "Red Land."

Being deserted by the farmer, the country was naturally given over to the cattlemen, who for years held full sway, and gathered immense wealth from their herds. The thousands of acres of rich, succulent buffalo grass fed thousands of cattle. The usual mild winters and light snows made it practicable for cattle

to graze the entire winter and come out in good condition in the spring, having consumed little or no feed save that which Nature had so bountifully provided.

But in time the glitter and glare of Oklahoma vanished to a great extent. Land there, and elsewhere eastward, had advanced in value so that a poor man could not own his home; landlords became so exacting that tenants could not pay rent and live; the poor man commenced to look for a home, the man with money to look for investments. Western Kansas presented her smiling prairies to the world and attracted the attention of home seekers and of investors. A few of the more venturesome came west, and those who visited Meade County viewed with wonder the rich soil, were delighted with the climatic conditions, enjoyed the pure water, breathed the exhilarating, health-giving ozone, gazed with rapture on the transcendental beauty of the plains, and located here. They were eminently successful in tilling the soil, and accounts of their success written home caused friends to come, who in turn induced others to follow. This encroachment on the range was "viewed with alarm" by the cattlemen, who did all in their power to discourage immigration by circulating stories of the poverty of the soil, the uncertainty of crops by reason of insufficient rainfall, the terrors of tornadoes, and other named and nameless evils. But in spite of

droughts, tornadoes, and evil reports, the settlers came on. 'The large ranches shrank away before the increasing tide of immigration, until finally "free range" was no more and the ranchman was forced to buy his range or go out of business; and finally, recognizing the futility of resistance, or realizing that they had been mistaken, the stock-men joined with the farmer in boosting the country, and they now work harmoniously together.

It is a singular fact that, in nearly every instance, the man who came to Meade County in the early days with money, lost it, while the man who came with nothing and was either too poor or too obstinate to leave, but remained through all the trials and vicissitudes, has amassed a competence. And it is to such men as these, such men as Farmer Bisbee, A. V. Angel, Lou Parsons, Ed Dahmer, Joe Brannon, R.T. Worman, Linn Frazier, Frank Sourbeer, and others of their ilk, that Meade County owes its present condition of development and prosperity.

The old order changeth. Where a few years, ago could be seen, like the patriarch's herd, cattle on a thousand hills, now appear homes and schoolhouses and churches, and where once the seared buffalo-grass alone turned its bronzed bosom to the sky, smiling fields of waving wheat fling their banners to the heavens, and acres of verdant alfalfa greet the

delighted eye, and render odorous, as with sweet incense, the surrounding air.

FRANK S. SULLIVAN.

Meade, Kansas, July, 1916.

A HISTORY OF MEADE COUNTY, KANSAS

ACQUISITION

In the early days of discovery, exploration and settlement, three European nations, England, France, and Spain, claimed the territory out of which Meade County was finally carved. Basing its claims upon the explorations of the Cabots and others, in 1606 the English Crown granted to the London Company and to the Plymouth Company that vast area of land lying between the 34th and 45th parallels of latitude and extending from ocean to ocean. The English made no attempt to explore the country so far inland, and their claims upon this territory were early abandoned.

The claims of the French were more substantial. In 1673 Marquette explored a considerable portion of the Mississippi Valley; his explorations were continued and extended by LaSalle in 1682; in 1719 Dutisne explored a part of the interior, including a portion of the territory of the present State of Kansas; these explorations were continued in 1724 by DuBourgmont, who also entered and explored a part of Kansas. As a result of these various expeditions France claimed the

GENERAL HISTORY

Long prior to permanent settlement the territory now comprising Meade County was frequently visited by hunters, traders and adventurers. Prominent among these was Jedediah Strong Smith, a great-uncle of our esteemed fellow-citizen E. D. Smith, who visited this territory as early as the year 1818. Just who the first permanent settler was, and the date of settlement, are matters of much conjecture, but it is generally conceded that the first permanent settlement was at Meade City, about twelve miles north of the present town of Meade, and was in the year 1878. In 1879 a colony consisting of sixteen families from Zanesville, Ohio, settled at Pearlette. The original Pearlette was near the site of the town afterwards surveyed and platted, but not the identical location. John Jobling was president of the company responsible for this settlement, and his son, William Jobling, still a resident of Meade County, is perhaps the "oldest citizen," considered from a standpoint of continuous residence. Andor Eliason, who resided in

CITIES

Soon after the settlement of the county commenced, and prior to its organization, cities and towns sprang up as if by magic, although many of them existed only on paper and in the promoter's vision. Various townsite companies were organized and incorporated. The first of these was The Meade Center Townsite Company, incorporated May 25th, 1885, with E.M. Mears, C.G. Allen, Henry H. Rogers, Alex. Bailey, I.N. Graves, James A. Morris, and A. D. McDaniel, directors.

The Belle Meade Town Company followed, incorporating June 6th, 1885, with J. M. Brannon, Robt. P. Cooper, John Schmoker, James H. Elmore, and H. Chaney, directors.

The next to incorporate was the Spring Lake Town Company, receiving its charter July 6th, 1885. The directors of this company were D.G. Stratton, L.K. McIntyre, J.C. Marts, J. F. Shore, O. Norman, J.W. Hotz, Frank Sourbeer, Geo. W. Winder, Al Wirt, Geo. B. Allen, and N.B. Clark.

POLITICAL

While the political complexion of Meade County has always been strong Republican, with the exception of a brief period of time during the days of Populism, in local affairs the people have generally exercised their best judgment and voted without regard to party lines, considering the general fitness of the candidate as of more importance than his party affiliations. As a result there has never been a time when all of the county officers were of the same political faith, and the public has been unusually fortunate in securing capable officers.

In the tables which follow, the name appearing first is the one elected to the designated office, and the names following are the unsuccessful candidates. The party affiliation is indicated by the abbreviation following each name, and the year of election by the figures preceding each list.

*In September, 1888, Mr. House resigned, and R. W. Griggs was appointed to fill the unexpired term

BANKS.

Meade County has not been lacking in financial institutions. The first bank to incorporate was the Meade County Savings Bank, incorporated July 30th, 1885; Isaac N. Graves, R.R. Wells, H.H. Rogers, C.W. Adams, A.H. Heber, E.F. Seeberger, E.L. Mead, and L.E. Steele, Directors. This bank, however, never opened for business.

The first bank to do business in Meade County was The Meade Deposit Bank, a private bank, which commenced business in Meade Center in the fall of 1885: M.J. O'Meara, President; B.F. Cox, Vice-President; M.H. Ewart, Cashier. About a year later it nationalized, and became The First National Bank of Meade Center. It operated as a national bank for a couple of years, when it went into involuntary liquidation, with John C. Fry as receiver.

The Meade County Bank, Meade Center, was incorporated Feb. 26th, 1886, with a capital stock of \$50,000. Directors, A.H. Heber, M. Wightman, Ed. Dool, C.S. Rockey, and Chas. P. Woodbury. It afterwards nationalized under the name of The Meade County National Bank, but in 1890 it again became a

CHURCHES

The history of civilization shows that the missionary followed closely the discoverer, and so we find the early settlers of Meade County active in the organization of religious societies, long before the organization of the county.

The first organized church in the county was the First Congregational Church of Crooked Creek, organized in 1879. On October 1st, 1879, Geo. S. Emerson deeded to Silas E. Ayres, W.D. Ayers and H.M. Fordes, Trustees of said church, a plot of ground in the southwest corner of the southwest quarter of Section 6, Township 30, Range 26, described in the deed as follows: "After allowing for the road on section line and extension four hundred feet, and three and a half feet east and west, and two hundred and sixteen and one quarter feet north and south."

A church building was erected on this grant and a cemetery provided for, which cemetery still marks the spot. Rev. Mr. Feemster was the first pastor. This church was regularly organized, but was not incorporated.

The first incorporated church was Pleasant Prairie Congregational Church, incorporated March 18th, 1881, more than four years prior to the organization of the county, with John Schmoker, Peter Blair and

Christian Schmoker as trustees. Services were held at the old Belle Meade schoolhouse.

Next to incorporate was the Meade Center Methodist Episcopal Church, incorporated March 26th, 1886, with George W. Evington, Samuel D. Huffman, David Truax, Sam Lawrence and Geo. Wallace as trustees. This church was organized by Rev. J. N. Stamper, who was its first minister, and, it is said, preached the first sermon in Meade.

Closely following this was the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Fowler City, incorporated June 18th, 1886, with James B. Brewer, George Fowler, Smith S. Pine, Alfred V. Carpenter and Alexander A. Major as trustees.

Then came the Church of Christ of Meade Center, incorporated Aug. 9th, 1886, with F. P. Scott, A.D. McDaniel; A.J. Davis, M.B. Peede and C.G. Allen as trustees. This church prospered for a time, but later languished, and the church building was afterwards secured and used by the First Baptist Church, organized in 1899.

Next was the First United Presbyterian Church of Meade Center, incorporated Jan. 14th, 1887, with H.I. Stevens, Edward Tring, E.D. Smith, M.E. Huston and M.W. Milligen as trustees. As an organization this church never obtained a permanent foothold, and most of its members united with the First Presbyterian Church of Meade Center, which was incorporated Jan.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The public schools of Meade County compare most favorably with those of other counties of the State. The county is divided into 44 school districts, having a school population of 1,738, and employing 72 teachers.

Both Meade and Fowler maintain well-equipped accredited high schools, the former employing 14 instructors and the latter 12. Plains employs 5 teachers.

Of the teachers employed in the public schools, 24 hold State certificates, 9 hold Normal Training certificates, 13 have first-grade county certificates, 12 second-grade, and ,14 third-grade.

Each of the towns has splendid modern school buildings, and many of the country districts have schoolhouses that would do credit to any community.

The average wage paid teachers for the year 1915-16 was \$90 per month, for high-school teachers, \$70 per month for teachers in the grades, and \$55 per month in the rural schools.

FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Meade County is noted for its Fraternal Societies, and probably, in proportion to its population, has more fraternalists than any other county in Kansas.

The M.W.A. have a camp at Plains, organized in 1904. Plains Lodge No. 367, A.F.&A.M., was organized in February, 1912.

Fowler Lodge No. 519, I.O.O.F., received its charter on Oct. 10th, 1901; Fowler Rebekah Lodge No. 406 was chartered Jan. 21st, 1902; Fowler Camp No. 1768, M.W.A., received its charter on March 3rd, 1898; and Friendship Camp No. 1768, R.N.A., was chartered Dec. 5th, 1908.

The city of Meade is especially distinguished as a fraternal center.

Of the lodges still active, the oldest is Webb Lodge No. 275, A.F.&A.M., its warrant bearing date Feb. 16th, 1887; Webb Chapter No. 304, O.E.S., was chartered on May 14th, 1908; and on Feb. 16th, 1909, the 22nd anniversary of the blue lodge, a warrant was issued for Meade Chapter No. 46, R.A.M.

A charter was issued for Meade Lodge No. 523, I.O.O.F., Oct. 10th, 1901; for the Meade Rebekah Lodge No. 422, on Sept. 19th; 1902; for Meade Encampment No. 138, on Oct. 10th, 1907; and a warrant was issued for the Canton of Patriarchs Militant No. 8, on Nov. 6th, 1907.

Meade Lodge No. 22, K. of P., was organized in November, 1911.

Meade Center Lodge No. 247, A.O.U.W., was granted a charter on Sept. 4th, 1902.

A charter was issued to Meade Camp No. 1738, M.W.A., on Aug. 12th, 1892; and to Middlemarch Camp No. 622, R. N. A., on April 10th, 1902.

Meade Council No. 225, Sons and Daughters of Justice was organized in February, 1906.

Meade Center Post No. 388, while previously existing, was reorganized in 1909.

Artesian Camp No. 201, W.O.W., was organized in July, 1915.

Meade also has an organization of the A.H.T.A. Three members of the Meade organizations are at present the heads of three great orders, viz.: R.M. Painter is Department Commander of the G.A.R. of Kansas; O.R. Stevens is Grand Patriarch of the Grand Encampment, I.O.O.F.; Frank S. Sullivan is Grand Chancellor of the Knights of Pythias, Grand Domain of Kansas.

BONDED INDEBTEDNESS

On March 15th, 1888, Meade County issued one hundred twenty bonds of one thousand dollars each, bearing six per cent and due in twenty years, in aid of the Chicago, Kansas & Nebraska Railroad. These are the only bonds ever issued by the county as an original obligation, all subsequent issues-and there have been several-being for the purpose of taking care of these original bonds, and other accrued indebtedness.

The bonds standing against the county at the close of the fiscal year, July 1st, 1915, are as follows:

- \$26,000 due in 1929, bearing 5 per cent interest.
- \$95,000 due in 1936, bearing 4 1/2 per cent Interest.
- \$50,000 due in 1938, bearing 4 1/2 per cent Interest.

The present bonded indebtedness of the different townships is as follows:

Meade Center	\$7,500
West Plains	6,000
Sand Creek	2,000

Apperson, Partin-Palmer, Glide, Detroit, Wescot, Metz, Paige-Detroit, Chevrolet, Dort, Mason, Carter, King, Auburn, Anchor, Jones, and Coey.

At the same time there were 73 motor-cycles, of the following makes: Harley-Davidson, 41; Indian, 16; Excelsior, 9; Henderson, 2; and one each of Thor, Apachem, Sears Leader, Light, and Pope.

Dealers' licenses were in effect for the Harley-Davidson motor-cycle, and for the following cars: Empire, Halliday, Moon, Maxwell, Hudson, Overland, Saxon, Buick, Dodge, Studebaker.

THE COURTHOUSE

During the county-seat fight it was generally understood that if the county seat were located at Meade Center the city would dedicate a block in the center of the town, designated on the official plat as "Block A," to the county, and would erect for the county a courthouse.

But, "the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley." Meade Center was designated as the county seat, but the proposed dedication of "Block A" to the county was never made, and neither was the courthouse ever built for the county.

The building originally used as a court House was a frame building on the south side of the alley of the block in which now stands the Southern Hotel, facing east. This building was rented by the county, and while some of the county officers maintained offices uptown, this was officially the court house, although court was held in the second story of a building located back of the present site of Fick's store, and facing north.

expense of upkeep and insurance, but the danger of damage or destruction of records would be eliminated, and such a building would add to the value of every tract and parcel of real property in the county.

Not only as a matter of pride, not only as a matter of convenience, not only as a matter of “safety first,” but as a matter of dollars and cents, Meade County should have a new court house, and one that will meet the requirements of the future as well as the needs of the present.

THE SALT WELL

One of the natural curiosities of Meade County is the salt well, about two miles south of Meade, the history of which commences at about the time of the first settlement.

The Jones & Plummer trail was the route of practically all travel between Fort Dodge and Fort Elliott. This trail passed east of the present site of Meade about a mile, extended south for several miles, and then turned westward. It was the practice of travelers, and more especially of freighters, to camp on Spring Creek the second night out of Fort Dodge. To reach this favorite camping-ground they would branch off of the main trail a mile or so south of the present city of Meade, and angle across the prairie in a southwesterly direction to the waters of Spring Creek, and a well-defined trail across this prairie had been established. On March 16th, 1879, a Mexican freighter passed along this accustomed route, and camped on Spring Creek. All was as usual at that time. On the 19th of March an American freighter, probably returning from Fort Elliott, discovered an immense "cave-in" on this branch trail to Spring Creek. One side

THE OLD CALABOOSE

(I have not been able to find anyone who would vouch for the historical accuracy of this chapter. This story was suggested by the old calaboose itself, and if the incidents related did not actually occur, no doubt a true recital of the facts would be even more interesting and more startling.)

Standing in the rear of a modern building facing Main street, and used as a storeroom for various odds and ends, is a small old weather-worn building of peculiar construction, a glance at which excites one's curiosity and impels a closer examination. In dimensions it is about twelve by sixteen feet, eight feet high in front and sloping to six feet in the rear. It is built of pine boards, or planks, two inches thick and eight inches wide, commonly known as 2x8's, laid flat-wise one upon the other and spiked together, forming a solid wall eight inches thick. In one end is a window about twelve by fourteen inches, iron-barred, giving the structure the appearance of a prison. And a prison it is—or was. In the early days, when the city

THE AUTHOR'S BEST PRODUFCTONS



MADGE KATHLEEN LENORE JOHN P.



"THE MISSUS"



"ME"