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Dust Bowl Dichotomy: Voting trends in Morton and Osborne County during the Great Depression

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DUST BOWL DICHOTOMY: VOTING TRENDS IN MORTON AND OSBORNE
COUNTY DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

Morton County and Osborne County consistently held strong political affiliations with the Republican Party prior to the 1930s. This changed in the 1932 and 1936 presidential elections when Morton County changed political affiliation by voting for the Democratic candidate. Osborne County, however, did not switch political parties and instead voted once again for the Republican nominee. This thesis will examine why Morton County changed political affiliation during this time, whereas Osborne County stayed the same.

In the 1932 presidential campaign, President Herbert Hoover was re-nominated on the Republican ticket and Franklin Roosevelt ran on the democratic ticket. When the Great Depression hit in 1929, Morton County residents suffered a tremendous downfall in their economy, which continued on into the 1932 presidential campaign. This economic downfall weighed heavily on the minds of Morton County citizens and ultimately led them to switch from their Republican affiliation to a Democratic vote in this campaign. Osborne County had not suffered the same drastic economic decline that Morton County had, and therefore their citizens felt confident in holding true to their party, and voted once again for the Republican nominee.

Following his election in 1932, Roosevelt began initiating his New Deal legislation. Morton County remained heavily reliant during this time on federal relief money. Osborne County also accepted relief money, but not as readily as Morton County. Osborne County also had trouble with corruption among their New Deal workers. During the 1936 campaign, Morton County voted for the Democratic ticket in hopes for the continuance of federal aid and New Deal legislation. Osborne County, however, was not

impressed with the New Deal programs and their economy had started to show signs of improvement. Their citizens chose to vote once again for the Republican ticket. The economic conditions in each county determined how their citizens would vote in the 1932 and 1936 presidential elections.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression was a tumultuous period in the United States. It was not only a time when Americans felt weak and powerless, but also a time when Americans pulled together to find solutions to the economic troubles plaguing the nation. These solutions brought about many changes in the United States, including political takeover by the Democrats in the national elections.

Since the Civil War, the Republicans had been the dominant political party, controlling the Senate, House of Representatives and the Presidency. In 1932, however, Franklin Delano Roosevelt would overwhelmingly defeat Herbert Hoover in that year's presidential election and the Democrats also took control of the Senate. The Republicans would only gain a majority in the Senate six times in the next fifty years. And after the 1936 election where Roosevelt would once again win the Presidency, the Democrats would control 331 of the 420 seats in the House of Representatives; in the next fifty years the Republicans would only be able to gain the majority in the House one time.

This political change in the 1930s, as Francis Schruben in *Kansas in Turmoil* writes, "Kansas farm and political leaders helped to form such measures as the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Farm Credit Administration, and the Resettlement Administration."¹ He also stated that Kansas was a good state to study because, "Kansas ... reflected the United States in microcosm. Kansans who lived during this time did represent people everywhere; they became deeply concerned with the economy, social institutions, and politics. They worked with people of those states that tried to alleviate

¹ Francis Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil, 1930-1936* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), vii.

similar problems of agricultural surpluses, intermittent drought, excess oil and flour production, and unemployment.”²

This thesis examines the political change of Kansas from a Republican state into a Democratic state in the 1932 and 1936 presidential election. Through a comparison of two counties with similar economies and populations yet completely opposite political views a better understanding will be gained of the forces that contribute to the kind of voter realignment such as occurred in 1930’s Kansas. For two counties in Kansas it would be the economic hardships more than any other factor that determined voter realignment in the presidential elections. Voter realignment in this thesis will be defined simply as the county changing political parties in the election, no matter how close the voting returns were between the two parties.

In the 1932 presidential election, Morton County surprisingly moved away from their Republican past with the majority of the population voting for the Democratic candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt. On the other hand, the larger part of the population in Osborne County chose to maintain their loyalty to the Republican Party. Given the hard economic situations of the time Morton County decided to change political realignment in hopes that a difference in political parties would help boost the economy and pull people out of the Depression. Osborne County, however, had fared better than most of Kansas during the Great Depression. Osborne County’s improved economic situation gave residents the opportunity to vote once again for President Herbert Hoover in hopes he could eventually pull America out of the depression.

² Ibid., vii.

In 1936, Morton County residents were happy with Roosevelt and were inclined to vote once again for the Democratic President. On the other hand, Osborne County was unhappy with the New Deal programs and with their economy improving in 1936, they were encouraged to vote once again for the Republican candidate, Alfred Landon. By examining the economy of Kansas during the Great Depression and comparing those statistics with how Morton County and Osborne County's economy was faring, it is clear that Morton County shared in the hard times experienced by Kansas. Osborne County's economy, however, was performing better than the average Kansas County. Next by examining how most Kansans felt about the presidential campaign of 1932 and 1936, it will be shown that the majority of the residents were ready for a change in political parties in 1932 and in 1936 they were happy with Roosevelt and his New Deal programs and therefore most counties voted democratic once again. Further by comparing two consistently Republican counties that voted differently in 1932 and 1936, it gives historians an insight into how the economy affected the voting trends of Kansas.

There have been countless historians that have written about the Great Depression and Roosevelt's New Deal policies. One of the most well known histories over this subject is William E. Leuchtenburg's work, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*. Leuchtenburg does not hail the New Deal as a success, but he instead points out flaws in the New Deal programs. Leuchtenburg correctly illustrates that the New Deal never really solved the problem of unemployment and gave interest groups more power. According to Leuchtenburg the power of the New Deal programs were that they brought

people together and gave hope back to the masses.³ This book provided insight into not only the New Deal programs, but also Roosevelt's reasoning behind many of the programs that he picked and the policies he carried out. It not only helped in describing Roosevelt's policies, but also helped understand how accepting most Americans were of the New Deal programs.

Nick Taylor in his book, *The Enduring Legacy of the WPA*, contradicts Leuchtenburg's theory and argues that the New Deal was extraordinary because it put ordinary people to work and left legacies of art work as well as brick and mortar buildings. Taylor's work is more recent, and has followed the recent trend of New Deal historiography. He raves over Roosevelt and his New Deal programs, but he also writes about how the people of the day felt about Roosevelt and how most of the nation supported the President.⁴

There are many books that examine Kansas' economic and social conditions during the 1930s. Peter Fearon's book, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, focuses on Kansas' economy during the Great Depression. This work helped to provide an insight into state agricultural and business conditions and how state and local charities attempted to help citizens cope with the depression. Fearon also examines the willingness of Kansas to accept the New Deal programs and how county legislators dealt with money coming into the state. He also outlines Kansas' agricultural decline and progress throughout the

³ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963), 2.

⁴ Nick Taylor, *The Enduring Legacy of the WPA American- Made: When FDR Put the Nation Back to Work* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008).

depression and how this affected the state.⁵ This book was a tremendous help in understanding the economic condition of Kansas during the 1930s.

A number of works examine the Dust Bowl period, but one of the better books dealing with southwestern Kansas is Paul Bonnifield's book, *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt and Depression*. This book examines the social and economic strains on southwestern Kansas and the Oklahoma panhandle during the dust storms. Bonnefield investigates the health risks and the social strains on the people in this region as they lost their businesses and homes because of the economic depression and the dust storms. These socioeconomic conditions helped to gain an insight into the emotional strains weighing on the citizens of Southwestern Kansas during the national elections.

Many historians have studied the political changes that happened in the United States during the 1930s. Most of these historians have focused only on the 1932 election between Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt, and not on the 1936 election between Roosevelt and Alfred Landon, which is equally fascinating.

Historian Martin L. Fausold, in his biography of President Herbert Hoover, *The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover*, debunks the common theory that Hoover did nothing in his Presidency to combat the Great Depression. Fausold argues that Hoover did try to pass legislation in order to bring relief aid to Americans, but Hoover waited too late for the legislation to be effectual. He also stated that Hoover's inability to connect with the American public led to his downfall in the 1932 election. His book aided in

⁵ Peter Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole and Rehabilitation* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), x.

understanding Hoover's policies in the 1932 election and Hoover's attitude towards the economic situation that had plagued the nation.

Landon of Kansas, from historian Donald R. McCoy is another biography of Landon. McCoy covers Landon's time as governor of Kansas in 1932 and then as the Republican Presidential candidate in 1936. McCoy writes that Alfred Landon, though Republican, had openly accepted New Deal programs into the state of Kansas, and ultimately he could not separate himself enough from the Democrats to win the Republican ticket.⁶

Only a few historians have carried the examination of these elections further by looking at the political elections of the 1930s in one particular state. Francis Schruben is one of these historians who have studied political elections during the 1930s, but he chose to limit his study to the state level elections. In his book, *Kansas in Turmoil: 1930-1936* he describes Kansas during the Great Depression, telling how citizens of the state felt about their state political leaders, and how these feelings also affected the way their attitudes concerning national leaders as well. His opinion is that because Kansans needed economic aid, and they voted Democratic in the national elections. However, he argues that Kansans being so individualistic countered their Democratic vote by voting Republican in the state elections.⁷

No books or articles, however, have looked at Kansas politics in the 1930s on a county level. By looking at a county level, historians could provide a more in depth look

⁶ Donald R. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 262.

⁷ *Ibid.*, viii.

into politics within the state, rather than a look at the state as a whole. This study will fill a void in previous scholarship regarding 1930s political realignment in rural Kansas.

While historians have conducted many state studies and analyses concerning the Great Depression, there have been no works that have compared and contrasted two similar counties in Kansas. This study will examine these two counties and attempt to answer the question of why one county chose to break from its political party in the 1930s, and why one county chose to stay the same.

CHAPTER TWO

REPUBLICAN TRADITIONS OF MORTON AND OSBORNE COUNTIES

Kansas has recurrently had a conservative background. Since the 1880s both in the primary and general elections the majority of Kansans have voted for Republican candidates. The Populist Party had a brief stint of success in Kansas in the 1890s, but had never gained a full majority over the Republican Party; the Populists soon died out after the 1896 presidential election. County politics may, at times, serve as a microcosm for state politics and such is the case with both Morton and Osborne Counties. Prior to the 1932 presidential election, both counties had voted Republican in the majority of the elections. By looking at newspapers and other sources, it is evident that an adherence to Republican ideals led both counties to favor that party in most of their elections. An examination of these counties during the 1932 and 1936 presidential elections provides a better understanding of Kansas' political history. Before looking at the political elections of Morton and Osborne County, however, it is important to understand the history of how these counties began and the type of people who settled there.

Morton County is in the southwest corner of Kansas, near the border of Oklahoma, Colorado and New Mexico (see Appendix A). It is surrounded by Stanton and Stevens county Kansas, Texas county Oklahoma, and Baca county Colorado. The county is about 725 square miles, or 464,000 acres with an elevation of 3,700 feet above sea level.⁷ Ranchers were the first to have temporary settlements there in the 1870s. They would camp out at Point of Rocks, near Elkhart, and pasture their herds of cattle in the summer. In the fall ranchers moved their cattle to the Canadian River north of Amarillo,

⁷ *Morton County: Cornerstone of Kansas, 1886-1986* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1986).

Texas. In 1879, the Beaty Brothers of Manzanola, Colorado arrived with a herd of cattle and established the first ranch in Morton County, the Point of Rocks Ranch.

The federal government first opened up the land to homesteaders in 1885.⁸ The county was organized on February 20, 1886 and was named after the Indiana Governor and U.S. Senator, Oliver P. Morton.⁹ Settlers, pushing westward, came to southwestern Kansas on the Santa Fe Trail, which runs right through Morton County parallel to the Cimarron River.¹⁰ Buffalo grass was the predominant plant in the area, and the soil was “friable and easily worked.”¹¹ The main crops were broomcorn, grain sorghums, and wheat. The area received so little moisture that the crops were grown through dry land farming. Morton County gained the title as the “broomcorn capital of the world.”¹²

The first town established in the county was Richfield, which became the county seat in 1887. That same year on July 14th the county obtained a \$25,000 bond to build a courthouse. The courthouse was finished in 1889 and was built with native stone that came from Bear Creek in Stanton County (see Appendix B). It cost a total of \$75,000 to build.¹³ It was so massive that it was referred to by Kansans as the “Castle on the

⁸ Joe Hartman and Mechele MacDonald, “The Cornerstone of Kansas,” *Wildlife and Parks* (September, 1988): 9.

⁹*Morton County: Cornerstone of Kansas*, 10.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹Thomas Shillinglaw, *Shillinglaw's Guide to Southwest Kansas* (Kansas City: Kansas City Bank Note Printers, 1886), 1.

¹²“Growth of Elkhart Aided by Oil,” *Topeka Capital*, September 10, 1958.

¹³“New \$75,000 Court House in Morton County,” *Topeka Journal*, October 7, 1907.

Plains.”¹⁴ Other towns started in the county around this time were Frisco, Dundiff, Taloga, Westola, Morton Center and Kilbourn. In 1886, the county was reported to have a population of 2,000.¹⁵

Westola was established twelve miles west of Richfield on March 3, 1887. The town soon had a hotel, livery, stable, small one-room school house, four store buildings, a grocery store, post office, and housing. W.C. Calhoun started a town newspaper titled the *Westola Wave*. The families first established in Westola came from Pleasant Plains, Illinois and were the Bitners, Harts, Starrs, Herrons, Sipeses, and Humes.¹⁶

The town of Taloga sprang up in the center of the county. The town had a bank, newspaper, hotel, and a building for the Taloga Fair. The newspaper in the county was the *Taloga Star*. In 1890, it was the second most populous town in the county and the residents had built a school which cost \$3,000, a town hall that was worth \$1,500 and a \$4,000 hotel. There were two hundred people in Taloga in 1890.¹⁷

However, the population of these towns would decline in the 1890s as an economic depression and drought hit the area, leaving only a few hundred people remaining in the county. In 1906, the population of Richfield had declined to only sixty residents. Peter Craddock, a rancher, was the town postmaster, real estate dealer,

¹⁴ *Morton County: The Cornerstone of Kansas*, 158.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

merchant, county attorney, county treasurer, and register of deeds.¹⁸ The population increased again after 1906 when the government started to sell four hundred quarters of land at a tax sale for \$1 per acre. Although the population of these towns never increased as much as the first settlement, the new settlers moved in with more permanence.¹⁹

In 1912 a survey of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was undertaken for the extension of a branch from Dodge City to Morton County. This extension was finished in 1913, and the new towns of Elkhart, Rolla, and Wilburton sprang up along the railway.²⁰ The railroad, however, was built twenty miles south of Richfield. This was a devastating blow to the town as the population and businesses moved to be closer to the railroad. The town was left practically deserted and only a post office, a store, hotel, and the courthouse remained.²¹

One of the towns to emerge due to the railroad was Tice, now named Wilburton, after an official from the Santa Fe Railroad. The town was established in late 1912. It was located between Elkhart and Rolla. The town was renamed Wilburton after Mrs. Nellie D. Wilbur, who was the postmistress. In 1913 the town had two dry-goods stores, a Church, a garage, a grain elevator, a feed yard, a bank, a lumberyard, a florist shop, and a grade and high school that boasted over 100 students.²²

¹⁸ Lorene Lavielle, *Before and After the Railroad Came to Elkhart and Southwest Morton County*, Morton County History Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, 1.

¹⁹ Joe Hartman and Mechele MacDonald, "The Cornerstone of Kansas," 10.

²⁰ *Morton County: Cornerstone of Kansas*, 18.

²¹ "Chronology of the Farmer's Ten Years of Existence in Rolla," *Morton County Farmer*, 1936.

Another town that grew in population due to the railway was Rolla. It was first settled in 1887 by settlers coming from Wilson County, Kansas.²³ The town had a hotel, and in 1910 when smallpox broke out in the county, the hotel was used to quarantine patients. In 1914 the town had thirty-six businesses.²⁴ The *Morton County Farmer* was a newspaper started here in the 1920s and was discontinued in the 1940s.²⁵

The town of Elkhart was said to have “sprung up almost overnight” as soon as the railroad came to a stop in the county.²⁶ The town was established in April 28, 1913 and within ten days contained one hundred business lots (see Appendix D). Many of the pioneers in Elkhart used the back of their businesses as their residence.²⁷ Eugene L. Smith and J. E. Burks started the town newspaper, the *Elkhart Tri State News*, in 1915.

In the 1920s the county was thriving and in four years from 1921 to 1925 the county built four new high schools in Elkhart, Rolla, Richfield and Wilburton. Enrollment in the schools had increased 105 percent during this time.²⁸ Lorene Lavielle Catren wrote in *Before and After the Railroad Came to Elkhart* that her father had bought land in Morton County in 1920. As her family rode into Elkhart the town had “three

²² *Morton County: Cornerstone of Kansas*, 58.

²³ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁴ “Rolla Will Celebrate Town’s Twentieth Anniversary This Year,” *Rolla Farmer*, April 14, 1933.

²⁵ William E. Connelley, “History of Kansas Newspapers,” Kansas State Historical Society, <http://www.kshs.org/research/topics/kansasnewspapers/KansasNewspapersTOC.htm>. (Accessed October 23, 2009).

²⁶ *Morton County: Cornerstone of Kansas.*, 117.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

²⁸ “Morton County has Built Four New High Schools in the Past Four Years,” *Topeka Capital*, December 15, 1925.

livery barns doing a thriving business beside nice stores and homes.”²⁹ However, the population of Richfield was still declining in the 1920s as the town only reported having seventy two remaining residents in 1926. While Morton County was first settled by ranchers, some of Osborne County’s first settlers were Union soldiers looking for new lands to call home.

Osborne County is in northwestern Kansas and is bordered by the counties of Rooks, Russell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Jewell, Smith and Ellis (see Appendix A). The county has two great tributaries, North Fork and South Fork off the Solomon River. Osborne County in 1884 was labeled, “the best watered county in the state.”³⁰ The major crops in the area were wheat, rye, corn, and blue stem and buffalo were the native grasses. The county reported having had 14,777 acres of winter wheat in 1884, producing an approximate yield of around one and a half million bushels of grain. This would be an average of one hundred fifty bushels of wheat for every man, woman, and child in the county.³¹ Vegetables were also grown in great abundance in the county and it was written in the *Handbook of Osborne County*, “Imagine a pumpkin squash of such unwieldy dimensions and ponderous weight as to require to be cut up before it could be

²⁹ Lorene Lavielle, *Before and After the Railroad Came to Elkhart*, 3.

³⁰ *Handbook of Osborne County* (Kansas City, MO: Press of Junction Steam Point, (1884), 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

conveniently moved from the garden where it grew.”³² The average rainfall in the county is around twenty to twenty-five inches.³³

Settlers started migrating to Osborne County in the late 1860s and early 1870s. It gained its name from Vincent B. Osborne, a Union soldier during the Civil War. He had no connection with Osborne County; the county just like many northwestern Kansas counties was named after soldiers in the Second Kansas regiment of the Civil War.³⁴ Charles and William Bullock are reported to have been the first settlers there. They were ranchers who started the Bullock ranch, four miles west of Osborne.³⁵ The first United States census in 1870 showed that there were thirty-three inhabitants.³⁶ In 1878 the population had risen to 6,125 residents and increased the next year to 9,445 (see Appendix C).³⁷

Some of the first settlers to make their way to Osborne County in 1871 were from the Pennsylvania Dutch Colony. There were sixty members in this group comprised of Union veterans from the Civil War, along with one woman and child. They were from Lancaster and Berks County Pennsylvania, and their main objective was to found a

³²Ibid., 6.

³³Ibid., 10.

³⁴“Vincent B. Osborne,” *Osborne County Farmer*, December 13, 1934.

³⁵“Old Settlers,” *The Downs Times*, May 28, 1896.

³⁶*The People Came: Osborne County Genealogical and Historical Society* (Osborne: The Osborne County Farmer: 1977), 1.

³⁷“Osborne County: Its Population, Products and Resources,” *The Farmer*, August 29, 1879.

colony in Kansas and then secure one hundred sixty acres of land in order to establish a county.³⁸

After the arrival of the Pennsylvania Colony to Osborne County, there were enough inhabitants residing there to take steps in establishing the region. On September 12, 1871 Governor James Harvey petitioned to organize the county and ten days later county commissioners and county officers were elected. The county at this time had six townships, Ross, Bethany, Sumner, Liberty, Bloom and Penn. In 1879 the Pacific Railroad entered through the town of Downs, while the Union Pacific railroad ran through the southwest corner of the county by 1888 (see Appendix E).

In 1872, the town of Mt. Ayer was formed by Quakers from the Midwest around Iowa and Indiana. In 1874 they built the Mt. Ayer Friends Church where the settlers met regularly for worship. The first families that settled in this area were the Stanfields, Gregorys, Edwards, Newts, Hackneys, and Bales.³⁹ The families settled along the Little Medicine Creek in northeastern Mt. Ayer Township. In 1888 the regular Quaker spiritual meetings reported 243 residents in the town.⁴⁰

The town of Alton was formed in 1870 by General Hiram C. Bull and Lyman T. Earl. The town gained its original name, Bull City, when General Bull won a coin toss over who would get to name the new settlement. General Bull became the town's first Probate Judge and Second Representative to the State of Kansas. He owned a park east of

³⁸F.R. Gruger, "The Pennsylvania Colony," in *A History of the 1871 Pennsylvania Colony of Osborne County, Kansas*, ed. Von Rothenberger (Apollo, PA: Closson Press, 1998), 4.

³⁹ Homer Smuck, *Mt. Ayer: A Kansas Quaker Community* (Mt. Ayer: Mt. Ayer Friends Church, 2000), 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

the town where he had kept elk and deer. Hired hands fed the animals, however, one day the workers refused to go inside the fence because the elk were stomping their feet and were restless. Fearless, General Bull went into the park to feed the animals and was immediately trampled to death. The elk's horns are still on display at the Osborne County Courthouse. After General Bull's death, a few of the citizens thought the name "Bull City" was vulgar and therefore changed the name to Alton after the city in Indiana.

The town of Natoma was formed in 1888 when the Union Pacific Railroad reached the area. The first train came through the town on August 15, 1889 and people came from miles around to watch the event. At this time there was no station or agent, so men would throw their mail at the train as it went rushing by. In 1900 the Natoma State Bank was established, and then a year later the printing office was built, in 1901 the first newspaper was printed, *Currier*. In 1912 the first doctor moved into town.

Osborne County would eventually grow to have nineteen townships: Grant, Hawkeye, Lawrence, Bethany, Ross, Sumner, Tilden, Penn, Corinth, Mount Ayr, Kill Creek, Independence, Winfield, Bloom, Round Mound, Victor, Covert, Liberty, Valley, Jackson, and Delhi.⁴¹ Most of the settlers in Osborne would come from Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Ohio and would include a representative from almost every state in the United States.⁴² As settlers moved westward into these counties they brought with them their political ideals. These ideals would shape their Republican voting affiliations.

⁴¹ *Handbook of Osborne County*, 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

In the 1888 presidential campaign the *Elkhart Tri State News* wrote numerous articles regarding the issue of prohibition in the election. The paper reported that it was better to vote for William Harrison because as a Republican he would be against liquor.⁴³ The county voted for Harrison in the 1888 election, with sixty-two percent of the population voting Republican.⁴⁴ In 1892, the *Monitor-Republican* urged residents to vote for the Republican nominee because the Republicans supported the prohibition bill and the Democrats did not.⁴⁵

In 1914 the *Morton County Star* printed an article taking up most of the front page titled, “An Open Letter to the Republicans of Kansas.”⁴⁶ This article was written by W.H. Mackey, an ex- United States Marshal, and he encouraged readers to help end the quarrel between two Republican political figures before it split the party apart. Though he was not a citizen of Morton County, what he said in the article obviously appealed to many Morton County residents since it was printed on the first page.⁴⁷ Also in 1914 the county reported having voted for the majority of Republicans in the primary elections.⁴⁸

The *Elkhart Tri-State News* in 1920 praised the Republican vice-president Calvin Coolidge by saying that:

⁴³ *Elkhart Tri-State News*, 1887-1888.

⁴⁴ Walt Bucher, *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952* (Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952), 54.

⁴⁵ “Water on One-Shoulder and Whiskey on the other,” *Monitor-Republican*, July 29, 1892.

⁴⁶ W.H. Mackey, “An Open Letter to the Republicans of Kansas,” *Morton County Star*, June 31, 1914.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “Official Election Returns,” *Morton County Farmer*, November 13, 1914.

No man now conspicuously before the public has lived a more industrious life, farther removed from the limelight than Calvin Coolidge. His life is a record of steady, purposeful, application from which the blare of trumpets and the pounding of tom toms is entirely absent... a man who is so eminently the product of the common people.⁴⁹

The paper also stated later that year that the Republican President, Warren Harding had won by a landslide in Morton County.⁵⁰ The primary election that year had also gone Republican in the county.⁵¹

The publishers of the *Osborne County Farmer* often strongly expressed their Republican beliefs. On March 21, 1907 the paper wrote that the Democratic Party in Kansas was trying to destroy the Republican Party. It stated that “as far as we are concerned the Republican Party is good enough for us a while longer. The Republican Party can and will fix the wrongs just as quickly and effectively as the Democratic organization.”⁵² The paper also reported in another article that neighboring residents had accused the paper of defending the actions of the Senate. The paper wrote back to assure the people that they were not defending the Senate. They simply wrote that, “If refusing to surrender our Republicanism, refusing to go crazy, refusing to help disrupt the party in the interests of the Democrats, in refusing to make an all around eighteen karat ass of ourselves, is defending the senate, then we are guilty.”⁵³

⁴⁹ “Gov. Calvin Coolidge For Vice President,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, June 17, 1920.

⁵⁰ “Republican Landslide, Harding Wins,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, November 4, 1920.

⁵¹ “Primary Election,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, August 5, 1920.

⁵² “Democratic “Support,” *Osborne County Farmer*, March 21, 1907.

⁵³ “Defending the Senate,” *Osborne County Farmer*, March 21, 1907.

In 1906, the *Osborne County Farmer* stated that the Democrats were running a ridiculous campaign for the primary elections.⁵⁴ They also stated that no one should believe anything that was said in the *Kansas City Star* because “The Star is a Democratic paper” and “people should not be fooled by the political unfairness this year.”⁵⁵ The paper said that the Republicans were offering to have a debate between the two candidates, but the Democrats had declined the offer. The reason that they stated for the Democratic candidate declining the debate, was that the Democrats were just not qualified enough to debate with the Republican nominee.⁵⁶

The paper also blamed the Democratic nominee for Governor, Colonel Edwin S. Harris, as trying to gain support from the Republicans by currying favor with Theodore Roosevelt.⁵⁷ Another article later that year, titled, “All is Republican,” declared that Osborne County had elected an “entire Republican ticket by a majority ranging from 500 to 800.”⁵⁸ Later on, the paper stated that the Republicans voted in to office that year would be wonderful and stated that everyone in the county supported the Republican ticket.⁵⁹

⁵⁴“The Farmer,” *Osborne County Farmer*, November 1, 1906.

⁵⁵ “Bug Under the Chip,” *Osborne County Farmer*, July 5, 1906.

⁵⁶“The Democrats Evade it,” *Osborne County Farmer*, September 6, 1906.

⁵⁷ “He Smoked Out Harris,” *Osborne County Farmer*, September 20, 1906.

⁵⁸“All is Republican,” *Osborne County Farmer*, November 8, 1906.

⁵⁹“Immense Republican Majorities,” *Osborne County Farmer*, August 16, 1906.

Before the Great Depression, these two counties had voted for the Republican ticket in the majority of the national elections. Osborne County voted eleven times for the Republican ticket out of the sixteen Presidential elections held, and Morton County eight times for the Republican ticket out of eleven presidential elections.⁶⁰ Therefore, even though the two counties did not always vote Republican in all the presidential elections, the fact that they did a majority of the time indicates the two counties followed a Republican affiliation. As the Great Depression began, however, Morton County started voting on the Democratic ticket in the 1932 and 1936 presidential elections. Osborne County, on the other hand, continued to vote for the Republican nominees. What was it that made Morton County change political affiliations, while Osborne County stayed the same? Through the examination of county documents, newspapers, and voting records this study will investigate the course of this dramatic voter realignment.

⁶⁰ Refer to Appendix H through Appendix T to see how each county voted in the presidential elections from 1888 to 1936.

CHAPTER THREE

1932 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The 1932 presidential campaign came amidst one of the worst times in American history. Starting in 1929 with the stock market crash, the United States entered the Great Depression. Therefore, with this ongoing crisis, there was a great deal of importance put on what candidates should be chosen for the presidential campaign in 1932. The Republican Party nominated incumbent Herbert Hoover to represent their party and the Democrats eventually selected New York Governor, Franklin Roosevelt.¹

In the 1932 presidential election Morton County surprisingly moved away from their Republican past with the majority of the population voting for the Democratic candidate Roosevelt. On the other hand, the larger part of the population in Osborne County chose to maintain loyal to the Republican Party. Given the hard economic situations of the time, Morton County decided to change political realignment in hopes that a difference in political parties would help boost the economy and eventually pull people out of the Great Depression. Osborne County, however, had fared better than most of Kansas during the Great Depression. Osborne County's improved economic situation gave residents the opportunity to vote once again for President Hoover in hopes he could solve America's economic woes. By examining the economy of Kansas during the Great Depression and comparing those statistics with how Morton County and Osborne County's economy was faring, it is clear that Morton County shared in the hard times experienced by Kansas. Osborne County's economy, however, was performing better

¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, ed., *The Election of 1932 and the Administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2003), 18.

than the average Kansas County. Next by examining how most Kansans felt about the presidential campaign of 1932, it will be shown that the majority of the residents were ready for a change in political parties. Further by comparing two consistently Republican counties that voted differently in 1932, it gives historians an insight into how the economy affected the voting trends of Kansas.

Kansas has always been a state dominated by agriculture. In the 1930 *Fifteenth Census of the United States* there were a reported 1,880,999 Kansas citizens and of that total, sixty-one percent of them were living in rural areas. Rural areas at that time were classified by the U.S. Census Bureau as settlements with a population of 2,500 or less. In 1930 Kansas had 1,292 acres of farmland, more than any other state reported in the census, even Texas and Oklahoma.² Farming was the main industry in Kansas in the 1930s.

In 1917 farmers experienced a dramatic increase in prices for their crops due to World War I.³ With the rise of technology during World War I, farmers also bought expensive machinery purchased on easily obtained credit.⁴ By 1928, however, agricultural prices began to plummet.⁵ In 1929 farmers were receiving on average, 73 cents a bushel for corn. By 1932 the price for corn had dropped to 27 cents, the lowest price since the 1890s.⁶ The price for wheat also fell significantly. Between 1924 and

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930s: Agriculture*, Vol. II, Part 1, Kansas, 13, 68.

³ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 12.

⁴ Craig Miner, *Harvesting the High Plains: John Kriss and the Business of Wheat Farming, 1920-1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 48.

⁵ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 12.

1927 the average price Kansas farmers received for a bushel of wheat was \$1.27. In 1928 and 1929 the price dropped to 99 cents a bushel, and in 1930 the price fell to sixty three cents per bushel. Farmers who had bought their machinery on easy credit found themselves heavily in debt.⁷ The immediate reaction of most farmers was to clear more acres of grassland and plant more wheat in hopes to increase their income. In 1930, Kansas farmers planted over 13.5 million acres of wheat, in 1931 they increased their acreage to nearly 14 million acres, and in 1932 they once again planted nearly 13 million acres.⁸ The continued plowing of the soil in the southwest left the land subject to wind erosion and would later help contribute to the Dust Bowl that swept across the Great Plains in the mid-1930s.⁹

Kansas in the 1930s also consistently ranked fourth in production of oil in the United States. However, Kansas went from pumping 42.8 million barrels of oil worth \$62.5 million to only pumping 34.8 million barrels worth around \$31.7 million in 1932. This was an all time low for the state. The *State Geological Survey of Kansas* reported in 1932 that the overproduction of oil and gas in Texas and Oklahoma had depressed the industry throughout the United States and unstable conditions in the southern states had caused prices for oil and gas to fluctuate even more. These unfavorable conditions caused the early abandonment of small wells throughout Kansas that had not made a profit

⁶ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 27th Biennial Report; 28th Biennial Report.

⁷ Miner, *Harvesting the High Plains*, 48.

⁸ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 47.

⁹ R. Douglas Hurt, *An Agricultural and Social History of the Dust Bowl* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1981), 29.

because of the aforementioned events.¹⁰ The fluctuating oil prices went from 69 cents in July, 1931 to \$1.04 in October, 1932, and then fell to 69 cents at the end of 1932. In the fall of 1931 a rumor circulated throughout Kansas that “crude oil brought about half the price of a sirloin steak in Wichita or Tulsa restaurant, and considerably less than five gallons of drinking water.”¹¹

Kansas residents were suffering, and many people chose to try their luck in another state. The state lost approximately eighty thousand people, mostly young men, in the 1930s. Most of the population loss occurred in rural areas, where desolate people gave up on farm life and moved to more urban areas in hopes of finding work. Many people simply left their farm due to mounting debts and foreclosures.¹²

Morton County had suffered much of the same fate as most of Kansas. Morton County’s wheat revenue earned per acre dropped eighty three percent from 1929 to 1930. Also in 1930, Morton County only produced four bushels per acre of corn, a devastatingly low number for farmers.¹³ The southwest region of Kansas increased their acreage of farmland more than any other region in Kansas by plowing up 700,000 more acres of land.¹⁴ For example, Morton County from 1910 to 1915 had only planted an average of 1,177 acres of wheat; the county from 1930 to 1935 increased the acreage of

¹⁰ State Geological Survey of Kansas, *Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of Kansas in 1931 and 1932* (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1934): 9-10.

¹¹ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 71.

¹² Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 150-151.

¹³ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 27th Biennial Report.

¹⁴ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 11.

wheat to 96,454 acres.¹⁵ Morton County also increased the acreage of land in corn from 1929 to 1930 by forty-three acres and increased the acreage of broomcorn by thirty-percent.¹⁶ The *Elkhart Tri State News* reported that “section after section of the hard land in Richfield and Westola townships has been broken out the last three or four years and at the very least 200 sections or 128,000 acres are in wheat this year.”¹⁷ The *Morton County Farmer* also speculated about the increase in farm acreage, “It was thought by many that since wheat was at such a low price that the wheat acreage might be reduced. However, farmers must have either been optimistic over the price outlook or expected the other fellow to do the cutting down of his acreage.”¹⁸ Farmers’ were terrified at the drastic decrease in crop prices and tried to compensate this loss by adding on acreage to their farmland. This increase in acreage would prove devastating for southwest Kansas later with the advent of the Dust Bowl.

The increase of the county’s acreage, however, failed to bring the farmers an increase in revenue. This was most evident in the corn market where farmers lost thirty-four percent more of their income that year per acre.¹⁹ Those farmers who planted wheat fared little better. Favorable weather in 1931 led to high yields and the largest wheat crop to date. This occurrence, however, led only to further depressed surpluses.²⁰ Morton

¹⁵ Hurt, *The Dust Bowl*, 25.

¹⁶ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *27th Biennial Report*, 1929-1930.

¹⁷“State Forecast of Morton Acreage Fifty Percent Off,” *Elkhart Tri State News*, May 14, 1931.

¹⁸ “All Wheat Looking Fine Now,” *Morton County Farmer*, March 27, 1931.

¹⁹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *28th Biennial Report*, 1931-1932, 350.

²⁰ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 11.

County reported the price of wheat on July 2, 1931 as having dropped from twenty-eight cents a bushel to twenty-six cents on Monday and then slipped back to twenty-five cents on Tuesday.²¹ Later that month it was reported in the *Elkhart Tri-State News*, “with the market on a downward trend, farmers generally are piling and storing all wheat they can afford to hold with the result that the elevators are seeing a slump in the sale from the combine. Farmers continue to pile a large bulk of the crop which runs from twenty to twenty-five cents bushel with a peculiar consistency.”²² The *Morton County Farmer* wrote that:

Millions of bushels of wheat are being dumped on the ground in the big wheat area of Kansas and Oklahoma, which may be hauled to the market later if the price improves. The real wheat farmers of this locality are not marketing more than enough to pay their harvest expenses. Wheat cannot be produced even in this section for thirty three cents per bushel and it is certain that when the grower must actually take a loss he is going to get out of the game, whether he wants to or not.²³

The price of wheat was so low, farmers’ were unable to sale their wheat and make a profit, and being unable to afford to store their wheat in the grain elevators, wheat was left to lay waste on the ground.

Newspaper headlines in the 1930s screamed of business after business in Morton County failing or being sold to creditors. The Elkhart Poultry and Egg Company failed, and the *Morton County Progress* newspaper of Elkhart was sold to creditors. The *Morton County Farmer* in 1931 wrote that bankers, merchants, money-lenders, and professional men all had piles of debts and were convinced that they would never be able to gain their

²¹“Row Crop Curling and Wheat Market Off Again,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, July 2, 1931.

²²“Wheat Market Continues Weak,” *Elkhart Tri- State News*, July 9, 1931.

²³“Wheat Goes Down With Vast Receipts,” *Morton County Farmer*, July 3, 1931.

money back since all the prices of goods had dropped. They were afraid their businesses were going to bottom out.²⁴ As more and more businesses failed unemployment increased. In 1930, .29 percent of the population in Morton County was unemployed.²⁵ Even the hospital in Elkhart in 1932 was struggling to keep its doors open. The *Elkhart Tri State News* reported in January, 1932 that the Tucker Hospital was on the verge of closing due to a shortage of patients.²⁶ It was not until later in March that the citizens of Elkhart finally heard in the paper that the hospital would be able to stay open for at least one more year.²⁷

Though Morton County was suffering agriculturally, there was a big oil boom in the county in the early 1930s. John Brown, an oil man, leased thousands of acres of land in Morton County and eastern Colorado for oil and turned most of the leased land over to Argus Gas Company of Hugoton. As agriculture continued to suffer in the 1930s, the county became reliant on the gas industry to boost their economy. Gas was discovered in Morton County by the Argus Gas Company with the first gas well completed April 24, 1930. By the end of that same year Morton County had twenty-seven new gas wells. Lack of profit from these wells in 1930, however, caused the gas company to abandon their efforts and the *State Geological Survey* reported that no gas was produced in Morton

²⁴“How are they Going to Pay them off,” *Morton County Farmer*, July 10, 1931.

²⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Population*, Vol. 1, 385.

²⁶ “Hospital Board Works to Keep Its Doors Open,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, January 7, 1932.

²⁷“Guarantee Assures Hospital Future,” *Elkhart Tri- State News*, March 14, 1932.

County.²⁸ As production of gas in Morton County came to a standstill it became obvious that the gas industry would not help save Morton County's economy.

In 1931, there was one gas well and one dry hole drilled which produced 155,061,091 cubic feet of gas. This production was fairly good for Morton County; however the following year the *State Geological Survey* reported the county as having had no gas production.²⁹ While gas production in Morton County decreased, oil and gas prices also continued to slump in 1931 and 1932. This slump in prices was due to labor strikes that were happening all over the United States in the oil industry and the overproduction of gas and oil in Texas and Oklahoma. Fluctuating oil and gas prices prevented the county from earning any significant profit from those two industries.

As Morton County's economy worsened, many people chose to leave. In 1931 it was reported in the *Kansas State Board of Agriculture Biennial Report* that Morton County had a population of 4,053 citizens. However, in 1932 the county reported only having 3,703 citizens still living there, a loss of 350 people.³⁰ As the economy continued to suffer the population continued to drop off, creating a downward spiral of population loss and economic decline.

Osborne County suffered far less agriculturally in the 1930s than Morton County. In 1930 Osborne County produced sixteen bushels per acre of wheat, which was five

²⁸ Edward A. Koester, "Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of Kansas in 1931 and 1932," *State Geological Survey of Kansas* (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1934), 71.

²⁹Ibid., 162.

³⁰Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *28th Biennial Report*, 1931-1932, 350, 378-379.

times the amount of Morton County's production of only four bushels per acre.³¹ Also Osborne County only lost twenty-two percent of their money per acreage from 1929 to 1930, but Morton County at this same time had lost eighty-three percent of their money per acreage. While most people could still manage to make a living from just losing twenty-two percent of their money from last year, not many people could continue to survive when they lost eighty-three percent of their revenue in one year.

Other differences included the fact that Morton County residents plowed up land in hopes of increasing their bushels per acreage, Osborne County did not plow up nearly as much acreage. Morton County had plowed up forty-three percent more acres of land from 1929 to 1930 for their corn crops. Osborne County, however, did not increase their acreage in corn at all in those years. In fact Osborne County actually decreased their acreage in corn by nineteen-percent. Also in those same years, Morton County increased their acreage in broomcorn, their third largest income producing crop, by thirty-percent. Osborne County, however, once again decreased their acreage in their third largest income producing crop, sorghum, by seven-percent.³² This decreased acreage in land would be even more significant in the mid-1930s when the dust storms hit. While Morton County suffered tremendously at this time, Osborne County would fare better once again.

Osborne County's population also rose in 1932 and even though the county only gained one person, gaining one person was a lot better for their economy than losing 350 people, like Morton County.³³ The *Fifteenth Census of the United States* also recorded

³¹Ibid., 350, 378-379

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

Osborne County only having nine people that were unemployed in 1930. This, once again, was less than Morton County. While Osborne County had a population of 11,508 people, they only had nine people unemployed as opposed to Morton County who had a population of 4,092 people and had 12 people that were unemployed.³⁴

Osborne County also seemed to have a better system for helping the poor in their county. It was reported in the *Osborne County Farmer* on September 29, 1932 that a temporary county wide welfare organization has been created by Reverend Ludwig Thomsen of the Congregational Church of Osborne. This welfare program was presided over by Dr. J. C. Montgomery, who had been a representative from Hoover's Farm Board Program, modeled after the Kansas State Board of Health. One, Reverend Funck, also collected donations from citizens of Osborne County to help needy families in the winter and received double the quota of which he had asked for, the total amount being \$1,029.50.³⁵ It is also reported in the *Osborne County Farmer* on April 14, 1932 that the Osborne Women's League Club and the United Charities Committee of Osborne County had offered to help any women who wished to find work in housework, sewing, washing, and cooking.³⁶ Morton County reported very little relief aid that had been raised in the county, while Osborne County actively asked for its citizens to participate in helping the needy families in their county who were out of work. As the Great Depression continued with no end in sight, President Herbert Hoover sought ways to improve the economy.

³⁴U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Population*, Vol. 1, 385

³⁵ "Form County Unit," *Osborne County Farmer*, September 29, 1932; "Make Relief Quota," *Osborne County Farmer*, October 13, 1932.

³⁶ "To Help Unemployed Women," *Osborne County Farmer*, April 14, 1932.

When the stock market crashed, President Hoover believed that the economy would correct itself and that it was the American spirit of individualism that would get people through the hard times. As the depression continued unabated, however, Hoover eventually tried to provide aid to the agriculture industry by passing the Agriculture Marketing Act in 1929. This act created the Federal Farm Board which would help the agricultural industry by loaning large amounts of money to support the layers of farm cooperatives that in turn would help the farmers control the production of their crops theoretically avoiding costly surpluses and low prices. In this way the government could give assistance to farmers without being too overbearing.³⁷ Hoover did not want to have governmental control of agriculture, but instead, as Fausold wrote in *The Prsesidency of Herbert C. Hoover*, Hoover wanted the Federal Farm Board to assist the agricultural industry and have it be “controlled by its own members, organized to fight its own economic battles and to determine its own destinies.”³⁸

The federal farm board was given \$500 million of a revolving fund to organize and strengthen cooperatives which would then allow farmers to produce and market their crops more proficiently and at less cost. Hoover, however, failed to explain his act well enough to farmers who were powerful spokesmen in interest groups and in Congress. Farmers and Congress did not understand Hoover’s cooperative approach to the agricultural problems. They were therefore suspicious of Hoover’s plan. Smith Brookhart, Iowa’s Republican Senator, thought that the president would support the

³⁷Martin L. Fausold, *The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

direct control by the federal government over surpluses.³⁹ The Farm Bloc and Senate remained in confusion, and though usually not prone to seek the president's direction, were forced to do so in this case. Kansas Senator Arthur Capper rushed to Washington in order to plead with the president, "to make the federal farm board announce a definite policy on wheat."⁴⁰ However as congress convened to create policies for the Farm Board, Hoover, because he wanted Congress and the Farm Bloc to take the initiative in creating their own policies refused to draft the legislation outlining specifically the Farm Board's objectives.

When Hoover finally did send a message to Congress on April 12, he did little to explain what the role of the government would be in stabilizing farm production. Hoover finally stated that he would not put any direct control on surpluses. This upset the Senate, and thirteen Republicans joined thirty-four Democrats to overrule the President. The upheaval in Congress against the President was caused in part by Hoover's unwillingness to cooperate.⁴¹ The two houses of Congress remained deadlocked for weeks on the agriculture bill, but on June 12 an agreement was made to support the President.⁴²

As the upcoming presidential election neared, New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt was named as the Democratic nominee in June of 1932. While Hoover sought reelection in 1932, Roosevelt's nomination came simply by popular majority.⁴³ Roosevelt

³⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁰ "Bleeding Kansas Again," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, July 30, 1931.

⁴¹ Fausold, *Herbert C. Hoover*, 51.

⁴² Ibid., 51, 52.

⁴³ Ibid., 198.

in his campaign for the 1932 election would run under many of the same relief efforts that the Republican government had been pushing through Congress in 1930 and 1931. On issues of labor, foreign policy, public works, economy in the government, prohibition, and tariffs, Hoover and Roosevelt were often more in agreement than disagreement.

The two candidates did, however, differ on specific issues in agriculture. For example, when Roosevelt gave a speech in Topeka, he described having twenty-five experts searching for a solution to the agriculture problems. One of the experts was Milburn Lincoln Wilson, the creator of the domestic-allotment plan.⁴⁴ Historian Francis Schruben writes in *Kansas in Turmoil* that Roosevelt's speech was widely accepted by Kansans "as the most marvelous discussion of the present day situation, and the remedies suggested were given the public in plain Kansas language and in a manner none can doubt his sincerity of purpose."⁴⁵ Hoover thought this domestic-allotment plan was just a disguise for price fixing, a policy he had opposed during his presidency.⁴⁶

Roosevelt also cooperated and fostered loyalty with his party, whereas Hoover's party did not feel close to the president at all. In fact, many times throughout his presidency Hoover had alienated his own party members. Also Roosevelt talked to the people in more inspiring and simple terms.⁴⁷ This was in contrast to Hoover who disliked crowds, and whose lack of communication would ultimately lead to failure in the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁵ Schruben, *Turmoil in Kansas*, 85.

⁴⁶ Fausold, *Herbert C. Hoover*, 206.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 199.

presidential campaign. Hoover could not connect with the American people during the hard times of the Great Depression.⁴⁸ In Kansas, the 1932 gubernatorial campaign had controversial political figures running as well: Harry Woodring, Alfred Landon, and Dr. John R. Brinkley.

In Kansas, Harry Woodring, who won the election for governor in 1930, ran again under the Democratic ticket. The Republicans nominated Alfred Landon, an oil producer from Independence, who had been state chairman and campaign manager for politician Clyde Reed in the 1928 and 1930 primary elections.⁴⁹ The unusual candidate in the state elections, however, was Dr. John R. Brinkley, the goat-gland doctor.⁵⁰ He was nicknamed the goat-gland doctor after he became infamous in the nineteen-teens for using goat glands to restore men's sexual vitality.⁵¹ Dr. Brinkley ran in the 1930 election for governor, but he entered the race too late to have his name on the ballot. Brinkley's name was forced to be a write in and he blamed this for his loss of the election in 1930.⁵²

In 1932, Dr. Brinkley ran again for governor, but this time on the independent ticket. Brinkley was charismatic and traveled around Kansas in a custom built sixteen cylinder Cadillac to preach his plan for flat line tax, free textbooks for students, hundreds

⁴⁸ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁹ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 86; Landon would later run in the 1936 presidential election on the Republican ticket.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 79.

⁵¹ Eric S. Juhnke, *Quacks and Crusaders: The Fabulous Careers of John Brinkley, Norman Baker and Harry Hoxsey* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 1.

⁵² Clement Wood, *A Biography of John R. Brinkley* (Kansas City: Goshorn Publishing Company, 1934), 274.

of miles of paved road, and an artificial lake in every county.⁵³ Brinkley drew in a large crowd of supporters, although ultimately he would lose the election in 1932 for his inability to connect to the Kansas farmers.⁵⁴ Even though Brinkley lost the election, he was able to draw many votes from the Republicans.⁵⁵ In fact, Morton County in 1930 had voted Republican, but in 1932 when Brinkley was put on the ballot, the county voted for him. Osborne County, however, remained Republican in the 1932 election.⁵⁶

In the 1932 Presidential campaign, most of Kansas openly opposed Hoover and his creation of the Farm Board. The Wichita paper, *Publicity*, called Hoover a murderer and a big failure stating that “not for many years has a man from who so much was hoped proved so single and elementary a failure.”⁵⁷ Westerners were also not widely receptive of the bill passed for agricultural relief funds, even though the bill was passed mainly for their benefit. To most Kansans the Farm Board had become a “bureaucratic monster.”⁵⁸ They believed the bill was too vague and had no strong governmental role.⁵⁹ In the summer of 1930 it was apparent that farm production would have to be reduced in order for crop prices to go up significantly. Secretary of Agriculture Arthur M. Hyde and Farm Board Chairman Alexander Legge traveled west encouraging farmers to voluntarily

⁵³ Ibid., 291.

⁵⁴ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 95.

⁵⁵ Wood, *John R. Brinkley*, 294.

⁵⁶ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 17.

⁵⁷ “Hoover a Big Failure,” *Publicity*, May 8, 1931.

⁵⁸ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 60.

⁵⁹ Fausold, *Herbert C. Hoover*, 52.

reduce their crop acreage by ten to twenty-five percent. Wheat farmers, however, viewed reductions in acreage as a reduction in their gross income.

Kansas farmers protested the Farm Board's plan, and even Kansas Senator Henry Allen, Hoover's good friend, could not believe the administration was actually serious about wanting farmers to voluntarily reduce their acreages. Legge eventually told Kansas farmers to "solve their own problems, that it was not his job."⁶⁰ He also told a Wichita reporter, who voiced complaints about the administration, "to go to hell."⁶¹ In 1931, the Farm Board held 257 million bushels of wheat, which it continued to sell on the open market. Within one month the price of wheat fell to 36.3 cents a bushel. After this disaster chairman Legge resigned.

Secretary Hyde also spoke to a crowd of people in Manhattan, Kansas in 1931. Kansans were angered, however, when Hyde talked about the American farmer needing to gauge his standard of living with a Russian farmer, and to make sure that the American always stays on top.⁶² Hyde avoided talking about the American farmers' situation and failed to offer any solutions to the agricultural problems of the time. Hyde's speech represents how out of touch the government was with the American farmers' situation and attitude during the Great Depression. By 1932, most Kansans were fed up with the Farm Board and demanded that it be abolished. Mrs. Ida Watkins, the "Wheat Queen of Kansas," when asked where she drew the line on cooperative marketing said, "I draw the line on the doggone damnable Government interference with our affairs and in our

⁶⁰ Ibid., 109.

⁶¹ Ibid., 110.

⁶²"Must Meet Russian Living Standards," *Elkhart Tri- State News*, June 13, 1931.

business. If the Farm Board stays with us we will soon be through producing.”⁶³ As Kansas openly opposed President Hoover, they threw their support behind Roosevelt.

On September 15, 1932, Roosevelt traveled to Topeka, Kansas where he gave his famous farm address speech. In his speech Roosevelt outlined his points for agriculture. This speech was widely accepted and praised by many Kansans. The Wichita newspaper, *Publicity* proclaimed, “The address was accepted as the marvelous discussion of the present day situation, and the remedies suggested were given the public in plain Kansas language and in a manner none can doubt his sincerity of purpose.”⁶⁴ After hearing Roosevelt’s speech, many Kansans were thrilled by him.⁶⁵ An article in the *Elkhart Tri-State News* newspaper reported that around the country people were predicting Kansans would be back in the Republican fold again in 1932. In the same article Kansans responded by saying that Kansas had voted Democratic in the 1916 elections and just might very well vote Democratic again:

Kansas has elected Populist governors and senators in the past. When Kansas starts to bleed anything political can happen in the Sunflower state. And Kansas is bleeding right now, don’t think it isn’t. With 30 cent wheat, 10 cent oil and other commodities in proportion, Kansas is doggone hard. And when Kansas gets hard up the natives recall the advice of Mrs. Lease about corn and hell. Right now Kansas can’t see any profit in raising corn.⁶⁶

Morton County residents were ready to give Franklin Roosevelt a chance at the Presidency.

⁶³ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 60.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁵ “Roosevelt at Topeka,” *Publicity*, September 15, 1932.

⁶⁶ “Bleeding Kansas Again,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, July 30, 1931.

Residents in Morton County were fed up with Hoover's lack of solutions for pulling farmers out of the Great Depression. In an article in the *Morton County Farmer* on July 3, 1931, it is reported that, "Public opinion seems to be almost unanimous for a reduction in federal expenses. The only thing to disagree about is where to apply the ax-whose pie to chop off. The president blames congress for building up a costly government, and congress tries to lay the blame on someone else."⁶⁷ Residents also complained in the *Morton County Farmer* that since the U.S. government had extended more time to Germany to pay off its debts than many farm organizations are demanding the federal government should extend farm loans, so that farmers could hold their wheat at a higher price.⁶⁸

William C. Durant, an automobile manufacturer and a long time Republican, issued a public statement in the *Elkhart Tri-State News* titled "Wherein Mr. Hoover Failed." Durant was quoted as having said, "I am a Republican. I voted and worked for the election of Herbert Hoover in 1928. I shall not vote for Hoover next November, nor will hundreds of thousands of Republicans who like myself, are interested in his retirement to private life. Hoover has been a great disappoint to his friends and the people generally." He went on to attack Hoover's inefficient administration, and said that Hoover's failure was of his own making.⁶⁹ This shows that Republicans in the county were fed up with Hoover, and prepared to vote for Roosevelt in the 1932 election.

⁶⁷"The Man on Our Back," *Morton County Farmer*, July 3, 1931.

⁶⁸"Would Extend Farm Loans," *Morton County Farmer*, July 3, 1931.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Morton County also protested Hoover's Farm Board organization. In the *Elkhart Tri-State News* Congressman Clifford Hope of the Seventh Kansas District was quoted as saying, "I am opposed to the farm board. I feel that its administration of the federal marketing act has been a failure. The board should be abolished. I am absolutely and unequivocally opposed to further farm board activity. I have introduced a bill to abolish the board and I feel sure this question will receive attention early in the next session."⁷⁰ Congressman Hope's opinions were also obviously well respected in Morton County since he had a weekly column in the *Elkhart Tri-State News* titled "Washington Window" in which his political opinions were expressed.

Secretary Hyde's speech was also not received well in Morton County. Hyde's speech was described in the *Elkhart Tri-State News* as:

A disappointment to those expecting some kind of practicable plan by which the farmer might emerge from the evil days into which he has fallen. Mr. Hyde offered little comfort to those who seek an early emergence from the farm depression and talked in terms of ultimate needs and tendencies of the American farmer rather than the things that are hedging him in today with the new crop of wheat facing sale at thirty-five cents a bushel. Many times in his address he adverted to the subject of wheat, the Kansas wheat grower, he said needs to know today what is happening thousands of miles away in Soviet Russia, in the Argentine, in Australia. He touched upon the duties of other countries, telling how France, in 1878, when a franc was a franc, pushed the duty from five to seven francs a bushel with the result that the average net import of wheat dropped from 1/7th of the home production to 1/17th.⁷¹

As Morton County residents expressed their dislike of President Hoover, they adamantly support Roosevelt. After Roosevelt's nomination the *Elkhart Tri State News* started a weekly column titled, "Democratic Doctrinism." The Young Democratic Club

⁷⁰ "Hope Lambasts Farm Board," *Elkhart Tri- State News*, July 21, 1932.

⁷¹Ibid.

of Morton County was formed in October 20, 1932 at the Democratic rally in Elkhart and the Democratic headquarters was opened in an old furniture building in Elkhart. The paper reported that nearly fifty people were present at the rally, some even being Republican.⁷² The “Democratic Doctrinism” of the paper reported that fifty-two women attended another Democrat Rally for women voters. Mrs. E.L. McNeil addressed the women at the rally and reviewed the Hoover administration and the Farm Board’s policy which had led to three years of falling commodity market prices. She then went on to attack the Farm Board’s policy and blamed president Hoover for its failure. She recalled Hoover’s “oft-repeated” phrase that “Better times are around the corner.”⁷³ She then pointed out the general unemployment rate, and the distressed people abounding in Morton County, and said “the blame [should be laid] at the Republican door.”⁷⁴ Several Republican women were also reported to have been at the rally.⁷⁵ Another article in the *Elkhart Tri-State News* reported two Democratic women had come to Elkhart to speak on behalf of the national Democratic ticket. The paper reported that the two women spent most of the time demoralizing President Hoover. They also described Roosevelt as a man “of vision and action, competent to meet the problems of the country.”⁷⁶

Osborne County, however, adamantly supported President Hoover and made no effort in their papers to cover up their dislike of Roosevelt. Osborne County citizens

⁷² “Young Democrats Organize in Morton,” *Elkhart Tri- State News*, October 20, 1932.

⁷³ “Democratic Women Rally at Afternoon Tea; Hear Address,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, October 20, 1932.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Democratic Woman Speaker Discusses Hard Times,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, October 27, 1932.

blamed the Democrats for getting the United States into debt in the first place that had then led to the Great Depression. In their county paper, *Osborne County Farmer*, the residents continually praised Hoover for trying to pull America out of the Great Depression and reiterated that it was not President Hoover's fault that he was failing, it was the Democrats who would never let Hoover get any bills through Congress. The *Osborne County Farmer* reminded their readers three more times that it was the Republicans who had inherited the national debt from the Democrats and it was also the Republicans who had attempted to pull the nation out of that debt. The *Osborne County Farmer* asked its readers:

If Hoover is wrong why is it the Democratic majority in the house is following his suggestions and voting for every plan he offers? If his plans are wrong why should the Democrats join with him in perpetrating these wrongs? If he is right, as their votes for his measures would indicate, then why be dishonest and abuse him in public speeches in which no other remedies are offered? It should also be remembered that the tremendous debt which the country is now staggering was placed upon the people by a Democratic administration which was elected by the people who were told that "he kept us out of war," but which proceeded at once to get us into the war. It should also be remembered that ten billion dollars of that debt was paid in ten years by Republican administrations from Harding to Hoover. Wouldn't it be well to study the history of the country pretty thoroughly in the next few months before voting to make a change?⁷⁷

Osborne County also continued to mock the Democrats in their paper as well. On March 31, 1932 the *Osborne County Farmer* wrote that "the most outstanding news feature of the past two weeks is the complete breakdown of the Democratic leadership in the national House of Representatives." The paper accused the Democrats of taking over the House of Representatives and assuring the public that they would start a program that would convince the people the Democrats could cope with the world's economic

⁷⁷ "Down Near the Short Grass," *Osborne County Farmer*, Jan. 14, 1932.

condition. However, the Democrats did nothing for the first six weeks except for “very patriotically followed the program laid down by the President Hoover.”⁷⁸

Not only did Osborne County blame the Democrats for their inactivity, but they also blamed the party for Hoover’s inability to get any of his plans passed. On May 5, 1932 the *Osborne County Farmer* reported that “Democrats were going to have quite a bit of explaining to do when the voters found out what the party was doing in the House.”⁷⁹ The paper stated that Hoover sent a request to Congress to make readjustments in the salary of government employees which would save taxpayers sixty-seven million dollars. The Democrats slashed the bill until taxpayers were only going to save twelve million dollars. Also Democrats cut a provision out of the bill that would have stopped government employees from getting paid for all leaves of absences for the next two years. This provision could have saved taxpayers another ten million dollars. The paper said of the Democrats, “Instead of being a constructive economic force, the lower house looks more like a wrecking ball to us.”⁸⁰ The paper asked how the public could expect Democrats to know anything about the economy, for it was up to the Democrats they would drive America into the ground. It was only through the power of President Hoover’s ability to veto, that the American public was saved.⁸¹

Osborne County also praised the Republicans for the creation of the Farm Board and all the money that was poured into the organization. The *Osborne County Farmer*

⁷⁸ “Down Near the Short Grass,” *Osborne County Farmer*, March 31, 1932.

⁷⁹ “Down Near the Short Grass,” *Osborne County Farmer*, May 5, 1932.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

reported on July 7, 1932 that the federal government had poured nearly one million dollars into the agricultural industry through the Farm Board and other allocated loans in an effort to stabilize the prices of wheat and cotton; plus another 500,000,000 for the benefit of farmers in the form of seed loans and aid in overcoming the drought. The *Osborne County Farmer* pointed out that all this money came from the Republican administration and the paper went on to say that it “testified most eloquently to the solicitude of the Republican party... for the promotion of agriculture.”⁸² The paper stated that though the agricultural industry had not yet recovered it was of no fault to the Republican Party whose every effort to bring about the revival of the industry could not be denied.

The *Osborne County Farmer* also ridiculed Roosevelt in their newspaper by saying:

Governor Roosevelt made quite a hit here when he told the people of Kansas that he is a real farmer...he certainly has to work like heck to keep the farm going. There is a fine polo field and it is some job to play polo every day. Then a swimming pool and a golf course- any farmer knows they are needed. He has a mere cottage- only twenty bedrooms... but is a farm, and the governor who is a millionaire, will inherit other millions from his mother... his slap at Hoover as being wealthy hardly comes with good grace. Hoover worked his way through college... he never inherited anything.⁸³

Osborne County residents chose to vote for Hoover and the Republican Party.

At the end of the 1932 election, Roosevelt won the election overwhelmingly in Kansas with 424, 204 residents voting Democratic, and only 349,498 Kansans voting for

⁸² “Farmers Read the Record,” *Osborne County Farmer*, July 7, 1932.

⁸³ Ibid.

Hoover.⁸⁴ In Morton County Roosevelt captured 1,091 of the residents' votes, to Hoover's 620 votes.⁸⁵ Osborne County voted in support of Hoover by giving him 2,545 votes over Roosevelt's 2,227 votes.⁸⁶ In the gubernatorial election, Kansas voted in Alfred Landon, who would become one of the few Republican Governors elected in 1932. Morton County's economy had continued on a downward spiral in the 1930s, leading residents to vote Democratic in the 1932 presidential election in hopes that a new President would bring changes to their economic plight. Osborne County had suffered far less economically than Morton County, and therefore the residents voted for President Hoover a second time. They believed that the President had not let the nation down, but instead that Hoover was the only one in the government trying to improve the nation's economic situation.

⁸⁴Walt Bucher, *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1954* (Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952), 54.

⁸⁵“Official Tabulated Vote of Morton County, Kansas,” *Morton County Farmer*, November 18, 1932.

⁸⁶ Kansas Secretary of State, *28th Biennial Report, 1931-1932*, 119.

CHAPTER FOUR

1936 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Franklin D. Roosevelt took office on March 4, 1933 quickly calling Congress into special session and declaring a national bank holiday. This period would be dubbed by journalists as the First Hundred Days during which time Congress would pass fifteen pieces of legislation.¹ Among other things, this legislation took the United States off the gold standard and created agencies to help combat the depression and the growing unemployment rate. Some of the first agencies created during this period were the Civil Works Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the Federal Emergency Relief Committee.²

As the Great Depression wore on, Kansans eagerly awaited Roosevelt's New Deal programs. Republican Governor Alfred Landon worked tirelessly to get New Deal legislation into Kansas and remained active in addressing depression related emergencies, even sending a telegraph to Roosevelt urging the President to create an "honest stabilized dollar."³ Landon felt that the New Deal experimentation should at least be given a chance, and he lobbied to receive the maximum possible amount of federal aid for the state of Kansas. These New Deal programs had a tremendous impact on the economy of both Osborne and Morton Counties. Morton County was especially eager to have New Deal legislation coming into the county. The *Elkhart Tri-State News* urged residents in

¹ David E. Hamilton, ed., *Problems in American Civilization: The New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company: 1999), xiii.

² *Ibid.*, xiv.

³ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 118.

1933 and 1934 to work together to bring as much federal relief into the county as possible.⁴

The agency having the biggest impact on Kansas was the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). The agency was formed in 1933 to establish a national system of crop controls and offer subsidies to farmers who would agree to limit their production of specific agricultural commodities. The specific commodities were cotton, wheat, field corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, milk and its by-products.⁵ These subsidies were meant to give farmers the same purchasing power they had had during World War I. However, in order to reduce production in 1933, American farmers agreed to plow under crops in the fields and to destroy 8.5 million piglets as well as other livestock. Though the reduction did raise agricultural prices, it received some criticism from Americans who found it difficult to understand the economic theory behind the waste of food when so many Americans throughout the U.S. were starving.⁶ In 1936, the Supreme Court found the AAA to be unconstitutional. Farmers and businessmen in Neosho and Russell counties in Kansas protested the Supreme Court's decision.⁷ Since the AAA was popular enough among Americans, instead of getting rid of the agency, legislation was rewritten to meet the Supreme Court's objections.⁸

⁴ *Elkhart Tri State News*, 1933-1934.

⁵ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 156.

⁶ Mary Beth Norton and others, *A People and A Nation*, 8th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), 717.

⁷ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 189.

⁸ Norton and others, *A People and A Nation*, 718.

In Kansas the AAA achieved a reduction on about eighty-nine percent of the base acreage crops from 1933 to 1935. Many Kansas farmers who had raised wheat from 1930 to 1932 chose to participate in the AAA program because of the financial hardships they had faced in those years.⁹ Kansas would, eventually, surpass every other state in the number of wheat contracts that were requested as 51,000 applications were filed. There was not one county in Kansas that did not participate in the AAA.¹⁰ Wheat farmers in Kansas welcomed the program and the AAA benefits. In Finney County, in southwestern Kansas, the wheat crop in 1933 only averaged three bushels per acre. This looked grim for the 650 wheat farmers in the county, but the \$325,000 scheduled payment of AAA benefits gave them some hope for the future while allowing them to reduce their debt and pay for their families essential needs. In Finney County, ninety-five percent of farmers participated in the AAA, and all were eligible to receive checks averaging around five hundred dollars each for reducing their crop acreage by fifteen percent.

In Hodgeman County, in Southwestern Kansas, wheat farmers in 1934 accepted \$286,248 in AAA benefits. Seward County, also in Southwestern Kansas, had eight hundred farmers receiving benefits from the AAA totaling \$460,889. In each of the counties, AAA funds were the major source of income for wheat farmers in 1933 and 1934.¹¹ A nationwide study done by the AAA on May 25, 1935 would show that Kansas farmers were strongly in favor of the AAA; Kansas had 82,059 farmers who voted, and

⁹ R. Douglas Hurt, "Prices, Payments, & Production: Kansas Wheat Farmers and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, 1933- 1939," *Kansas History* vol. 23 no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2000): 79.

¹⁰ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 111.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

of this, 71,768 supported the continuation of the AAA, whereas only 10,291 opposed it.¹² The AAA wheat program in 1933 and 1934 were giving farmers much needed financial support at a time when it was critical for their survival. The biggest relief act passed by Congress in the First Hundred Days was the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA).

The FERA placed \$500 million in unspent Reconstruction Finance Corporation funds in the hands of a federal administrator who would then distribute the funds among the states. Harry Hopkins was elected as the relief administrator. The Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) would be started under the Federal Emergency Relief Committee.¹³ The KERC distributed federal funds only to needy, qualified clients. Various projects under the KERC were drought relief, transient service, and the distribution of food services through the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation.¹⁴

The KERC oversaw the allocation of federal funds and surplus commodities to counties so they could be distributed to the needy. These counties were fully responsible for handling the distribution of federal funds to the needy in their communities.¹⁵ In Kansas the average amount of county funded work relief provided by the KERC in 1934 to a family was \$7.56, and single people were given \$5.04.¹⁶ The KERC was also one of the few New Deal programs that provided work and relief for women. By December

¹² Ibid., 82.

¹³ Taylor, *American Made the Enduring Legacy of the WPA*, 100.

¹⁴ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 130-131.

¹⁵ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 99.

¹⁶ Ibid., 117.

1934, there were 6,302 women employed on relief and administrative duties under the KERC. The KERC employed women on sewing projects; women would sew clothes that would later be given to relief clients. Classes were given to women who lacked the skills necessary, so that eventually they could find employment in one of the sewing rooms.

Women under the KERC were also working in canning plants that processed surplus food later given to the needy, and in thirty-three Kansas counties women worked in library projects set up by the administration. The KERC also funded the Public Works Art Project which provided work for unemployed artists. Under this program the KERC provided employment to sixteen painters, three sculptors, and one photographer.¹⁷

Kansas received a total of \$23 million in federal relief in 1934. Relief jobs in the state under the KERC reached 68,301 in December 1934 and reached a peak of 77,193 in February 1935.¹⁸

One of the relief programs under the AAA and the KERC was the cattle purchasing program which began in Kansas in July 1934. This program bought starving cattle that farmers were unable to feed anymore because of the drought and feed shortages. The KERC purchased a total of 521,176 animals in Kansas and of this number 506,565 were cattle. Of the 506,565 cattle bought, 14,197 were condemned unfit for use and were killed on the farms. Every Kansas county, except Allen County, sold cattle to these programs and received relief checks. There were some counties in Kansas that sold over half of their cattle. The KERC cattle purchasing program gave a total of \$66,072.15

¹⁷ Ibid., 119.

¹⁸ Ibid., 128.

in relief, and of this amount \$28,068.62 was paid to relief workers that were hired to load, unload and care for the cattle. There were 5,059 people employed under the cattle relief program.¹⁹ Another relief act passed by Congress was the Civil Works Administration (CWA).

The CWA was a radical step made by the Roosevelt Administration in order to do away with dole payments and provide a variety of work at fair wages to the unemployed. The government hoped that this would give a boost to the economy as the newly employed would spend their money and businesses would hire more staff workers. Although the CWA only lasted a year, under the agency five hundred thousand miles of road would be paved and forty thousand schools, 3,500 playgrounds and athletic fields, and one thousand airports would be improved. It also employed fifty thousand teachers so that rural schools could remain open and hired three thousand artists and writers. Overall the CWA pumped a billion dollars of purchasing power into the depressed economy.²⁰

In Kansas the CWA was run by the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee.²¹ At the start of the program, Kansas received 45,000 CWA positions. On the first CWA payday, November 25, 1933, thirty-two thousand Kansas employees were paid \$267,000 altogether. By December 7, 1933 forty-five thousand men and women from Kansas were at work for the CWA, and in January of 1934 that number peaked to 64,500; of that

¹⁹ *Kansas Emergency Relief Committee Bulletin* No. 355, July 1, 1936, "Public Welfare Service in Kansas, 1935," 4.

²⁰ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 121-122.

²¹ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 77.

64,500 Kansans, 4,500 of them lived in the Southwestern part of the state.²² From the years of 1933 to 1934 Kansas workers on this agency received \$11 million cash payments. The federal government funneled \$12.2 million funds into the state through the CWA. Most of the CWA projects in the state were road oriented and thus provided work for many unskilled workers throughout Kansas. Obviously, the CWA was a great benefit to Kansas since it provided many unskilled workers with jobs and injected a significant amount of funding into the state. The majority of Kansans were therefore, eager to continue the program for as long as possible.²³

In 1935, Roosevelt passed his additional New Deal legislation. The Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, passed in 1935, provided \$4 billion in deficit spending to create a massive public works administration for those still out of work. The largest and most well known program to come out of the Emergency Relief was the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This administration employed 8.5 million people who built dams, highways and roads, irrigation systems, sewage treatment plants, parks, playgrounds, and swimming pools throughout the United States.²⁴ The Resettlement Administration, also formed in 1935, helped resettle destitute families and also organize rural homestead communities and suburban greenbelt towns for low income workers. These two big programs would have a significantly positive impact on Kansas by putting a great deal of

²² Ibid., 78.

²³ Ibid., 81.

²⁴ Norton and others, *A People and A Nation*, 722.

the population back to work and by helping the rural population in Kansas find new hope and new homes.

The WPA had mostly positive impacts on Kansas. It employed 41,366 Kansans in 1935 and then 41,784 in 1936.²⁵ The most important work relief job in the state was construction, which made up eighty percent of the WPA projects. WPA workers paved 19,747 miles of roads, built 94 new schools and helped refurbish 134 schools, and made 174 new parks. They also built new bridges, lakes, viaducts, playgrounds, athletic fields, sanitary sewers, water mains and privies. Not only were people employed by the WPA, but these new projects also improved the health, education, and public safety of Kansas citizens, as well as making it easier for them to travel.²⁶ The economy, however, was not the only problem for the United States in the 1930s; environmental problems were also taking a hold of the Midwest.

During Roosevelt's presidency the Great Plains were ravaged by severe dust storms and drought. These conditions on the plains greatly affected Congressional legislation during the first one hundred days, as Congress moved to try and help the people in Kansas, Texas, and Oklahoma that were hit hardest. The land that farmers had continually plowed during the Great Depression began to blow as the region continued to suffer from a severe drought. These dust storms started in 1932 and peaked in 1935.²⁷ In April 1934 most western counties in Kansas received less than one inch of precipitation

²⁵ Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 262.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 263.

²⁷ R. Douglas Hurt, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 49.

and the extreme southwestern counties failed to get even one quarter of an inch.²⁸ The dust was disastrous not only for the crops, but also for the health of the people. In southwestern Kansas people were suffering and dying from dust pneumonia and other bronchial diseases due to the dust. Numerous people also became trapped outside during unexpected dust storms, lost their way and suffocated from the blowing dust.²⁹

Morton County was one of the counties in Kansas that was hit hardest by the Dust Bowl (see Appendix F). From 1932 through 1936 the *Morton County Farmer* had an article in almost every newspaper detailing the effects of the drought and dust storms on the county.³⁰ One such article on April 12, 1936 was simply titled, “Dust, Dust, Dust, Dust, Dust” and stated that, “we can see nothing out our windows but dirt, every time our teeth come together, you feel dirt and taste it; haven’t heard a thing for hours, my ears are full, can’t smell, my nose is full, and can’t walk, my shoes are full but not of feet.” They reported in the same newspaper that due to the dirt storms “everything had come to a standstill” as people had a reluctance to go anywhere, school had been dismissed during some of the worst storms, businesses had seen no activity, and even the newspaper had decided to print only half of their paper that week due to a dust storm that had swept through the county and lasted the whole week.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 35.

²⁹ Paul Bonnifield, *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt and Depression* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 74.

³⁰ *Morton County Farmer* and *Elkhart Tri-State News*, 1933-1936.

³¹ “Dust, Dust, Dust, Dust, Dust,” *Morton County Farmer*, April 12, 1935.

The dust storms and drought often had detrimental effects to the crops in Morton County. On January 26, 1933 the *Elkhart Tri-State News* wrote an article titled “Sand Storm Blasts Remaining Hope for ’33 Wheat Crop” describing some of this crop failure:

Lingering hopes for a wheat crop in this section were blasted out by the roots Saturday by another day of fierce Southwest winds. The farmers are not discouraged about the crop having sensed several months ago that the chances were all against it; they are merely philosophically forgetting it, still willing and receptive for crop miracles, but hardly believing in it.³²

On April 13, 1933 it was reported that nearly half of the planted wheat acreage was abandoned. The paper also stated that wheat in southwestern Kansas never had a chance that year since moisture was 5.4 inches below the normal average.³³ The Kansas State Board of Agriculture, in 1933, recorded Morton County as having only 6,855 acres of wheat harvested.³⁴ Later that year on June 1, another article from the same paper reported that Elkhart’s chances for a row crop for the next year were growing slimmer every day with no moisture in sight in order to plant crops for the following year.³⁵

The Kansas State Board of Agriculture recorded 1934 as the worst year for crop failure in Morton County during the Great Depression. According to their records Morton County farmers farmed almost eight thousand acres of corn and had all of their crop fail.

³² “Sand Storm Blasts Remaining Hopes for ’33 Wheat Crop,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, January 26, 1933.

³³ “Wheat Losses Greater As Spring Advances,” *Elkhart Tri- State News*, April 13, 1933.

³⁴ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 28th Biennial Report, 1931- 1932.

³⁵ “Need for Rain Becoming Desperate as Season Advances,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, June 1, 1933.

Also due to the lack in precipitation, farmers were not even able to plant any milo that year.³⁶

The *Morton County Farmer* reported more crop failure on February 14, 1936 when the paper stated that the worst storm yet had swept over the plains. This dust storm had left low visibility and travel on the roads impossible. The paper stated that farmers in the area had had one-half to the entirety of their winter wheat crops destroyed because of the dust storms and that “hopes for crops in that section have been almost wholly abandoned.”³⁷ On May 22nd of that same year the newspaper declared that there had been rain and hail all over Morton County all week, but yet despite the moisture, they still reported having plenty of dust. They stated that for the town of Rolla there had been a total of five days of south wind and dust, and that it was everywhere both day and night.

The paper relayed that:

We have one thing we admire in this county and that is its consistent weather. Dust, not only six, but the full quota of seven days of the week. We know now where the expression of "the Captain loves the sea" came from. In fact, we really believe that this county should produce some fine sailors and seamen. They will know how to appreciate the sea anyway.³⁸

In February and March 1935 Morton County also saw a drastic increase in violent acts due to the stress and anxiety brought on by the dust storms. Some such acts of violence were reported in the *Morton County Farmer*: a woman who had been caring for her elderly father for years suddenly decided to take his life and then to commit suicide, a

³⁶ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 28th Biennial Report, 1931-1932, 350.

³⁷ “Cold and Strong Wind and Dirt Bring Worst Storm,” *Morton County Farmer*, February 14, 1936.

³⁸ “Rain, Hail, and We Still Have Plenty of Dust,” *Morton County Farmer*, May 22, 1936.

drunken father beat his adopted son to death and then took his own life, and a drunk man attempted to shoot his wife while she sat in a cafe.³⁹

As the economy continued to suffer and the constant dust storms kept people indoors and unable to travel, businesses in Morton County suffered. Newspaper after newspaper told of businesses throughout the county closing. One such business was the Cheathan grocery store, which closed its doors for good in February 1936. This was the only grocery store left in Rolla and was the second one to shut down in the last six months.⁴⁰ After seven years in business, the Maricle Department Store in Elkhart also closed its doors in August 1935.⁴¹ Other stores that closed were Showers Pharmacy in Rolla and the Morton County State Bank.⁴² There seemed to be no end in sight for the dust storms and drought in the Midwest, therefore the federal government moved quickly, under the KERC, to bring relief to residents throughout Kansas, especially those in the Southwestern region.

The Land Utilization Division of the Resettlement Administration was given \$275,000 to buy acres of land from Morton County and Stevens County. The job of the administration was to use land conservation to try and combat the dust storms by “restoring good strands of grass to weed infested pastures, protect lands from overgrazing, protects lands against severe wind damage to light soils, adjust farm and

³⁹ Hurt, *The Dust Bowl*, 75.

⁴⁰ “Cheathan Grocery is Closed by Creditors on Tuesday,” *Morton County Farmer*, February 28, 1936.

⁴¹ “Maricle Dep’t Store Holding Close- Out Sale,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, August 22, 1935.

⁴² *Morton County: Cornerstone of Kansas, 1886-1986* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1986).

pasture units in this section so that each acre may provide the greatest possible income to residents of the area and to that state.”⁴³ The administration also worked in close relation with the State Agriculture College at Manhattan to help demonstrate to citizens of Southwest Kansas the proper use of native plants to help prevent further soil erosion.⁴⁴ This program gave money to farmers by buying their lands and also helped educate citizens in Morton County on ways to prevent future dust storms. This program along with the AAA, because they helped spread erosion control methods, was hailed by the *Morton County Farmer* as an “agricultural revolution” that would bring an end to the dust storms.⁴⁵

While the Dust Bowl hit all of Western Kansas, Osborne County was not nearly as affected by the drought and dust storms as Morton County. This is evident in the *Osborne County Farmer* when they reported in an article titled “Great Dust Bowl is Soaking Up” that the county had received an inch to two inches and that these rains were going to cause the “pastures to be revived which would cause great ease on the worry over the food shortage situation and would stop the constant shifting wind with the their dust accompaniment.”⁴⁶ Later that month the paper told of heavy rains in late May that had forced farmers delay planting for the next year. They also said that the county ponds were full and the creeks were “raging rivers.”⁴⁷

⁴³ “\$275,000 for Land Projects,” *Morton County Farmer*, October 25, 1935.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Sees End of Dust Storms,” *Morton County Farmer*, November 8, 1935.

⁴⁶ “Great Dust Bowl is Soaking Up,” *Osborne County Farmer*, May 16, 1935.

⁴⁷ “Heavy Rains Hold Farm Work Back,” *Osborne County Farmer*, May 30, 1935.

Due to the rains that Osborne County had received in 1935, the county reported in 1936 that they had the largest sown wheat crop since war times, and the crop harvested was in the greatest condition since 1931. The *Kansas City Star* estimated that the value of Osborne County's wheat crop was \$1,878,000 on the market, and with this added to the wheat allotment due in September of the total value would be \$2,089,000.⁴⁸ The Kansas State Board of Agriculture listed Osborne County as having 134,059 acres of wheat in 1936, which was a large acreage compared to the 33,710 acres planted in 1935. The county between 1935 and 1936 saw an almost 300 percent increase in their acreage for the winter wheat crop.⁴⁹ This large wheat harvest would have benefited farmers tremendously and it was reported that on average every farmer in Osborne County would receive around \$1,254.53.⁵⁰

The *Osborne County Farmer* also reported in their paper on April 9, 1936 that "In spite of depression and short crops the city of Osborne is gradually whittling down its bonded indebtedness and is approaching the day when the city will be out of debt." According to the paper the debt had been reduced by one half since 1928 and the total now stood at \$137,593.31.⁵¹

While Osborne County's economy fared better than Morton County during the depression, Osborne County did have trouble. In 1936, Osborne suffered one of the worst

⁴⁸ "Kansas Wheat Crop Worth Big Money," *Osborne County Farmer*, August 13, 1936.

⁴⁹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *29th Biennial Report*, 1933-1934.

⁵⁰ "Kansas Wheat Crop Worth Big Money," *Osborne County Farmer*, August 13, 1936.

⁵¹ "Down Near the Short Grass," *Osborne County Farmer*, April 9, 1936.

fires that they had had in a decade. The flames had started at a car repair shop in the Boldon Building. Due to the oil and grease in the building the store was quickly engulfed in flames. A total of five businesses were destroyed before the fire department could contain the blaze. The other businesses destroyed were the Singleton Café, the Gambles store, L. Zimmerman Plumbing, and Ed Conn Radios and Washing Machines. Most of the business owners had building insurance and were able to rebuild after the fire, however the buildings destroyed were some of the oldest buildings in Osborne.⁵²

Morton County became heavily reliant on federal assistance during the 1930s. In 1934 the county spent \$70,420 on relief and of that money eighty- two percent of this was provided by the federal government and only thirteen percent by the county. In 1935, when about seventeen percent of the population was receiving relief, the federal government gave them \$73,300 to assist them.⁵³

One of the first relief programs to come to the county was the CWA. Morton County first received aid from the federal government in July 1933 when the county got \$1,500 allocated to them for funds for CWA work on highways and roads.⁵⁴ It was reported later that month that the federal projects were in full swing and that fifty to sixty men were from the county were put to work on the projects. County officials expected that even more men would be hired by the end of that week.⁵⁵ In 1934, Morton County

⁵² “Great Fire Destroys Five Business Places,” *Osborne County Farmer*, April 9, 1936.

⁵³ *Kansas Emergency Relief Committee Bulletin* 289, November 1, 1935, “Public Welfare Service in Kansas, 1934,” 483-488.

⁵⁴ “Work Relief to Start Monday,” *Elkhart Tri- State News*, July 4, 1933.

⁵⁵ “Federal Project into Full Swing,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, July 20, 1933.

received \$1,446 more in federal funds under the CWA.⁵⁶ The *Elkhart Tri-State News* wrote on January 11, 1934 that the CWA had been graveling miles of roads in Morton County and the “the advantages that are noticeable are not only the improvements that are taking form on the roads in various parts of the county but the fact that the wages are being paid to the local men employed in doing the work are being put into circulation and causing an appreciable change in business conditions.”⁵⁷

The *Elkhart Tri-State News* also reported that the CWA was approving funds for the building of a new airport in Elkhart. This project placed Elkhart on a direct flight path between Dodge City and Amarillo, translating into more business, more money and more jobs for the city.⁵⁸ The CWA also built a new city park for Elkhart, which citizens named the Glenn Cunningham Park after the Olympian star athlete from Elkhart. The program planted trees in the park and built a small shelter house.⁵⁹ The CWA, the few months that it was in operation in the county, contributed \$52,325, most of this coming from the federal government.

Morton County was allocated many WPA projects as a form of relief by the federal government; much of this relief work came in the form of city beautification for both Elkhart and Rolla. The *Morton County Farmer* reported on September 6, 1935 that plans were in progress for city improvements in Rolla under the WPA. These

⁵⁶ “Work Progresses on Unemployment Projects,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, 1934.

⁵⁷ “Highway Projects in Morton, Baca & Tex. Counties Under Way,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, January 11, 1934.

⁵⁸ “Elkhart Airport Approved by Gov’t Representative,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, January 18, 1934.

⁵⁹ “CWA Park Project Planned for Elkhart,” *Elkhart Tri-State News*, February 8, 1934.

improvements included re-graveling the streets, building a new curb and gutter on the three blocks of Main Street, and building an adobe wall around the city park. The paper stated that most of the money would come from the government and it would put many men back to work.⁶⁰

The WPA also helped repair and improve the schools in Elkhart. On December 6, 1935 the *Morton County Farmer* reported that inside the high school the desks had all been sanded and were ready for a coat of varnish and that work on the school yard was coming along nicely. The workers also helped fix up the athletic facilities and the outside of the building. They built a new track and fenced in the football field.⁶¹ There was also an adobe wall built around the school yard, as well as the city park.⁶² The school's improvements by the WPA were said to make the high school "outstanding among schools in this section of the country."⁶³

Other WPA Projects in Morton County included the swimming pool built in the new Glenn Cunningham Park, Elkhart's city hall, and the masonry arch bridge built on the North Fork creek near Richfield. Work on the city hall began on July, 1936. It was built out of adobe bricks and cost \$17,723.00, of which \$11,665.00 was paid by the federal government relief funds.⁶⁴ The new city hall held the city offices, a public

⁶⁰ "City Improvements Planned," *Morton County Farmer*, September 6, 1935.

⁶¹ "CWA Funds Bringing Notable Improvements to H.S. Grounds," *Elkhart Tri State News*, March 15, 1934.

⁶² "The School Relief Project," *Morton County Farmer*, December 6, 1935.

⁶³ "CWA Funds Bringing Notable Improvements to H.S. Grounds," *Elkhart Tri State News*, March 15, 1934.

⁶⁴ "Work Begun on City Hall Project," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, July 30, 1936.

auditorium, a public library, and the city fire department (see Appendix G).⁶⁵ The WPA started construction on the masonry arch bridge on September 6, 1936. It was a five arch bridge made of limestone and employed twenty men who were paid \$.29 per hour.

The WPA also helped women in Morton County obtain jobs through sewing room projects. Elkhart was so proud of the skills displayed by these women employed by the WPA that they displayed blankets sewn by women in the sewing rooms in businesses throughout the city. These exhibits were also used to help sell the blankets and give money to the women making them. These women also sewed clothes for poor people throughout the county.⁶⁶

Another program, like the WPA, the National Youth Administration put young men and women back to work in Morton County. They employed many youths in the county to work on recreation projects. Around twenty-five young men and women were employed on these various projects. The young women helped organize vocation classes for children in Elkhart and Rolla. These classes were well attended and helped to teach the young women leadership and direction skills.⁶⁷

Desperate farmers from Morton County eagerly awaited relief from the AAA. The *Elkhart Tri-State News* reported on December 28, 1933 that allotment checks were expected in the county soon. The paper reported that Washington, D.C. had received 729 contracts out of the 871 filed in Morton County. The 729 contracts represented 145.691

⁶⁵ "Bonds for City Hall Carry by 6 to 1 Vote," *Elkhart Tri State News*, July 2, 1936.

⁶⁶ "Display of Articles Made By Women in Sewing Room Sponsored by City of Elkhart," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, January 30, 1936.

⁶⁷ "NYA Projects in Morton County Keep Boys Busy," *Morton County Farmer*, July 10, 1936.

acres and would bring the first payment of up to \$149, 927 to county farmers.⁶⁸ Morton County farmers who had agreed to cut down their wheat acreage received their allotment checks from the AAA on January 11, 1934. The first shipment of checks only covered forty-five percent of the contracts received, but the *Elkhart Tri State News* reported that the people were rejoiced to get these checks.⁶⁹

The AAA was widely accepted in Morton County. The *Morton County Farmer* reported on June 7, 1935 that Kansas Wheat Farmers had voted 7 to 1 in favor of continuing production control under the AAA, and in Morton County 578 farmers had voted in favor of the AAA, while only 27 had voted against the program.⁷⁰ In 1933 and in 1934, the AAA under the wheat allotment program gave \$370,000 to county farmers and \$249,000 in 1935.⁷¹ As Morton County praised the AAA, the KERC worked hard at bringing relief to Osborne County.

The KERC was one of the first relief administrations to come to Osborne County. Osborne County had the most cattle disposed of with over 17,000 head being turned over to the KERC under the cattle dispersion program.⁷² This was forty percent of the cattle in Osborne County.⁷³ The *Osborne County Farmer* reported that \$15,000 had been

⁶⁸ "Allotment Checks Expected Here Soon," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, December 28, 1933.

⁶⁹ "Allotment Checks Received in Morton County Monday," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, January 11, 1933.

⁷⁰ "Wheat Vote Heavy for New Program," *Morton County Farmer*, June 7, 1935.

⁷¹ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *29th and 30th Biennial Report, 1933-1936*.

⁷² *Kansas Emergency Relief Committee Bulletin 289*, "Purchases of Cattle under AAA Drought Relief Service Program," 4.

⁷³ "Farm Animals Decreasing Because of the Drought," *Osborne County Farmer*, March 14, 1935.

allocated to farmers in the county for cattle that had been bought by the KEREC so far, but it was thought that even more cattle and horses were in such poor condition that they would have to be bought by the KEREC and then slaughtered.⁷⁴

On March 14, 1935 the *Osborne County Farm* reported that all the animals that had been purchased last year by the KEREC, now needed to be replaced. According to the paper, the county's horse population had been declining by four percent in the last year and that there needed to be a replacement plan in order to keep up the horse and animal population.⁷⁵ Therefore, though the county had received some relief money from the cattle bought, there were still not enough animals in the county to bring in any profit.

The *Osborne County Farmer* reported that the WPA was building nine farm ponds in the county and employed a large number of men for most of the year. It was believed in the county that this type of work was the most constructive work done by the WPA because it would be a "permanent benefit to the county at large, and it is expected that this type of work will be continued for many years until there are enough ponds in the county to hold most of the flood waters that come and run off every spring."⁷⁶

Another WPA project in the county was a dam approved for the city of Osborne. This project was estimated to cost \$69,000 and would "forever insure the city of Osborne with an ample supply of water."⁷⁷ Most of the money for the project was to come from

⁷⁴ "Buy More Cattle From This County," *Osborne County Farmer*, December, 1934.

⁷⁵ "Farm Animals Decreasing Because of the Droughts," *Osborne County Farmer*, March 14, 1935.

⁷⁶ "Nine Farm Ponds Approved Here," *Osborne County Farmer*, February 20, 1936.

⁷⁷ "Big Dam Project is Now Approved," *Osborne County Farmer*, November 15, 1934.

federal funds, but the city would pay for \$26,000 of the project.⁷⁸ The WPA also built a twenty foot stone arch bridge in Kill Creek Township that was to cost approximately \$10,000. It was estimated that it would employ about twenty-five men. Another WPA bridge built in Osborne County was in the Winfield Township. It was a sixteen foot stone arch bridge with a twenty-four foot roadway. The estimated cost of this bridge was \$2,630.⁷⁹

Osborne County, however, also had trouble with the WPA program. In 1936 the *Osborne County Farmer* reported that WPA funds that had amounted totaling \$77,490 were allocated to the county for various road projects. The money had not been approved yet due to the city failing to complete the dam at the filtration plant. The paper wrote that:

It looks like we might go into another winter with this project uncompleted. Had the city been able to put up the money for this proposition and let it to private contract it would have been completed and forgotten about a year ago. Such is the “efficiency” of federal government in private business.⁸⁰

It was also reported in the *Osborne County Farmer* in 1936 that at the present time the quota of WPA workers had been filled. It was expected that the quota might increase by a small portion, but that it would not increase enough to take care of the one hundred clients who were eligible for WPA assignments.⁸¹

The county, however, had trouble with the State Emergency Committee out of Topeka. In an article in the *Osborne County Farmer* titled, “Relief Plans Will Increase

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “New Winfield Township Stone Arch Bridge,” *Osborne County Farmer*, October 10, 1935.

⁸⁰ “Blanket Project is Now Approved,” *Osborne County Farmer*, October 10, 1935.

⁸¹ “W.P.A.,” *Osborne County Farmer*, November, 1936.

Expenses,” the paper described the troubles. The State Emergency Relief Committee demanded that the county hire another case worker and a case supervisor and the money to pay them, which was \$50 per month, would come out of county funding. The two new people also could not be local people, but instead had to come from Topeka. They also demanded that the county board had to provide more furnished office space for the new officers, even though the paper reported that the court house was already completely crowded with county officers and that those officers barely had room to perform their own duties. The building of more office space would cost the county another \$1,000. Though the Osborne County officers obviously disliked these changes, the paper stated that the county had no choice but to acquiesce to the demands of the State Emergency Committee or to do without federal aid.⁸²

Osborne County also had trouble with their county poor commissioner, county supervisor, and case workers. It was reported on March 28, 1935 in the *Osborne County Farmer* that the poor commissioner, James Brown, had resigned. The paper stated that the reason for his resignation was that the State Emergency Committee had sent investigators to the county and they had reported back to the state that Brown was “too young and inexperienced to be charged with so large a responsibility.”⁸³ The county reported that the state investigators had written up eighty-three pages of complaints against the poor commissioner, who had held a job as the county commissioner for

⁸² “Relief Plans Will Increase Expenses,” *Osborne County Farmer*, February 7, 1935.

⁸³ “Poor Commissioner Files Resignation,” *Osborne County Farmer*, March 28, 1935.

eighteen years.⁸⁴ Charges had also been filed by the investigators against two case workers, Miss Hazel Wilson and I.W. Funck, and the county work supervisor, H.R. Hillman. The investigators had cited all four workers for inefficiency. The State Emergency Committee sent out a trained worker from Topeka to fill in for James Brown until a replacement could be found.⁸⁵ Even though Osborne County experienced difficulty with the relief programs, most of the New Deal programs were widely accepted throughout the United States because people needed the relief aid provided.

However, even with the overall acceptance of the New Deal programs, business activity in 1936 was still far below 1929 levels as only thirty percent of the unemployed returned to work. The United States still had 11.7 million people in 1935 with no jobs.⁸⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that the presidential election in 1936 weighed heavily on the public's mind. As expected Roosevelt would run once again under the Democratic ticket, but the question of who would run as the Republican nominee for president was undecided. The Republicans opted to nominate the only Republican governor who had managed to make it back into office in 1934, Alfred Landon from Kansas.⁸⁷

The 1936 campaign was one of the most strongly contested presidential campaigns in United States history. Many people felt that a vote for Roosevelt would mean the end of a constitutional government and possibly the beginning of communism

⁸⁴ "A Move to Oust Local KERC Heads," *Osborne County Farmer*, March 21, 1935.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 262.

⁸⁷ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 155.

or socialism in the United States. To Democrats, however, a win for the Republicans meant a return to the 1932 economy. People felt uneasy about the future of the United States in 1936, and each party fought hard for the past that they wished to regain and the future which they hoped to reshape.⁸⁸

The Republicans had high hopes for winning the 1936 campaign. The *Literary Digest* poll had reported in the 1930s that most of the public was opposed to the New Deal and that many organizations, such as the National Chamber of Congress and the National Association of Manufacturers were also against Roosevelt's administration. Though Landon was less optimistic, he quietly began preparing for the campaign, scheduling national speaking tours daily meetings with news representatives.

Despite his earlier optimism regarding the New Deal, Landon believed that the constitutional government of the United States was threatened as long as Roosevelt was President. He disliked the quasi- legislative powers that Congress had handed over to the executive branch and thought the nation needed "clear-cut, definite, and vigorous administrative leadership."⁸⁹ In his acceptance speech in Topeka on January 29, 1936 he reiterated his feelings for constitutionality, "Let me make this emphatic, the Constitution of the United States is not an obstacle to progress. It is the balance wheel of Progress. No flaunting of the Constitution, whether by execution evasion, loose legislation, or insidious

⁸⁸ McCoy, *Landon of Kansas*, 262, 263.

⁸⁹Ibid., 264, 265.

propaganda can destroy our safeguard so long as courage and common sense are cherished in the hearts of the American people.”⁹⁰

Landon felt the New Deal programs had failed by saying, “I cooperated to the fullest with the New Deal legislation, as far as our state was concerned, without endorsing any of it. I simply took the position that we should give every opportunity for the experiment to work. Now it becomes our duty to examine the record as it stands. The record shows that these measures did not fit together into any definite program of recovery.”⁹¹ He believed that the economy had not made any significant improvement since the New Deal legislation had been created. Instead he stated that many liberal objectives had been discredited by “careless thinking, unworkable laws and incompetent administration.”⁹² He also criticized Roosevelt for boasting about his recovery of the unemployment problem in the United States by pointing out that there were still 11 million people unemployed in 1936, as there had been in 1932.⁹³

Landon also blamed the Roosevelt Administration for taking the American farmer out of foreign markets and putting foreign farmers into the American market. He advocated for the family-sized farms and said that individual benefits should be no higher than the amount that could be produced by a family-sized farm. Landon further criticized Roosevelt for pouring so much money into the economy and in his acceptance speech he

⁹⁰ Ibid., 265.

⁹¹ Ibid., 210.

⁹² Alfred Landon Acceptance Speech for Presidential Nominee [ca. 1936], Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

⁹³ McCoy, *Landon of Kansas*, 334.

said he feared that for every dollar borrowed in 1936, two more would eventually have to be paid back.⁹⁴

Landon was painted as a candidate who was unglamorous, sound, homely and forthright. *The New York Times* described Landon as a “readily accessible” governor and a budget- balancer, a preserver of the Constitution, and a leading exponent of the American way.⁹⁵ Landon, in an effort to make himself sound more homely, even announced that he preferred the name “Alf” as opposed to the more formal “Alfred,” which some thought gave him more dignity as a national candidate.⁹⁶

Roosevelt campaigned as a leader who knew no party lines, only mentioning the Democratic party by name maybe three times during the whole campaign.⁹⁷ He ran under the campaign that he would bring America back together and unite the urban working class, organized labor, the South, and Northern African Americans. He counted on the New Deal programs to bring these diverse classes together.⁹⁸

He also appealed to the Progressive voters in the campaign. Roosevelt's New Deal programs fulfilled the hopes of Progressives, such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelley. PWA housing projects in Chicago were given the names of Jane Addams and Julia Lathrop.⁹⁹ Roosevelt's chief theme for the campaign was "Four Years Ago and Now." In

⁹⁴ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 198.

⁹⁵ “Close- Up of the Landon Boom,” *New York Times*, June 6.

⁹⁶ Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 197.

⁹⁷ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 190.

⁹⁸ Norton and others, *A People and a Nation*, 724.

⁹⁹ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 191.

his platform speeches he would tell the crowd that they looked happier today than they had four years ago.¹⁰⁰ He further reminded Americans of the improvement that had taken place during his last four years in office, improvements such as, healthcare benefits and the six million jobs that had been created in the last three years and the industrial output of the U.S. had doubled since his election. Roosevelt's central argument for his reelection was the past achievements made over his last four years as president.¹⁰¹ Although Landon gained much attention in the Kansas newspapers, the state widely supported Roosevelt for president.

This support of Roosevelt was shown in Kansas by the three thousand people that gathered on that State House lawn to listen to the radio broadcast of Roosevelt's acceptance speech. The Wichita newspaper, the *Advocate-Democrat* also callously stated that Landon was the best choice for the presidential nominee from the Democrats standpoint. Roosevelt also traveled around Kansas in early October 1936 where he stopped in Syracuse, Garden City and Dodge City in western Kansas. In Dodge City he was surrounded by a crowd of twenty thousand people where he talked of the drought and increasing the price of wheat. He traveled throughout Kansas without once mentioning Landon by name.¹⁰² The Wichita newspaper *Publicity* stated that "a vote for Landon on November 3rd is a vote for Hooverism."¹⁰³ Residents in Southwestern Kansas

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 193.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 194.

¹⁰² Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil*, 209.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 212.

in drought stricken areas were also more accepting of New Deal programs since they were in such desperate situations that they needed financial assistance from the federal government in order to survive. Also, many farmers in the area remembered Hoover's attitude that charity was a local matter. They were, therefore, not eager to return to a Republican administration.¹⁰⁴ Morton County was one of the counties in Southwest Kansas who supported Roosevelt in the Presidential campaign.

Like many small county newspapers in Kansas, Morton County newspapers covered the story of Landon's presidential campaign almost every week. The *Elkhart Tri State News* commented throughout the election that Landon spent government money wisely, that he had cut his salary down voluntarily by twenty-five percent, and that Kansas was proud to have a Kansas governor elected as a Presidential candidate.¹⁰⁵ Morton County may have been proud of Landon; however, residents still fully supported the New Deal programs.

Morton County newspapers never came out fully supporting Roosevelt; however the newspapers did strongly support the New Deal programs, which Roosevelt had started and fully endorsed. In August, 1936, before the presidential election, the *Elkhart Tri-State News* praised the work of the KERC, which was helping the homeless and neglected children throughout Kansas. The paper stated that more funds had just been allocated to Kansas to continue the KERC work.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Wilda Maxine Smith, "Reactions of Kansas Farmers to the New Deal Farm Program," (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1960), 114

¹⁰⁵ *Elkhart Tri-State News*, 1933-1936.

¹⁰⁶ "Capitol Comments," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, August 6, 1936.

The paper also printed Roosevelt's acceptance speech for the presidential nominee and stated that since Roosevelt's election in 1932 the administration had created more than fifty additional bureaus, commissions, committee boards, agencies, and business corporations.¹⁰⁷ In 1935, after the AAA had been ruled unconstitutional, the paper wrote that "the agricultural adjustment act has been of immeasurable benefit to the wheat growers of this territory through a period of distress when production was at a minimum."¹⁰⁸ The paper wrote that they hoped Congress would work out a better deal for the AAA and get it back on track.¹⁰⁹ As Morton County's economy continued to suffer, support for the New Deal programs grew, and residents in the county seemed reluctant to return to a Republican president.

As Osborne County's economy slowly recovered due to increased rainfalls, and as the residents continued to have troubles with the federal and state relief programs, their county newspaper reflected the feelings of the residents towards the federal administration. In the *Osborne County Farmer* on January 17, 1935 the paper wrote that the government would be in better condition,

if the president of the United States were to issue a statement of less than one hundred words tomorrow, stating that there would be no further tinkering with the gold content of the dollar; no further government interference in business except of a regulatory nature and that the budget will be balanced not later than June 30, 1936, it is our belief there would be a revival of confidence in the business world that would soon bring back prosperity to this country.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ "Promise and Performance Expenditures up 72 Percent," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, October 15, 1936.

¹⁰⁸ "The Supreme Court Ruling," *Elkhart Tri-State News*, April 11, 1935.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "Down Near the Short Grass Roots," *Osborne County Farmer*, January 17, 1935.

Later that same year the paper once again criticized the administration for pumping billions of dollars into the economy by stating that “every time billions of dollars are borrowed by the government, even for the worthy cause of bringing relief it sets recovery back just that much farther. It seems almost incredible that men entrusted with the reins of government cannot see that every present move and every contemplated action by congress is lessening confidence.”¹¹¹

The paper while attacking President Roosevelt, simultaneously praised Presidential nominee, Alfred Landon. In an article written on October 4, 1934 the *Osborne County Farmer* stated that Landon “in his campaign speeches, confines himself entirely to his record as governor the past year and a half, and does not spend any time abusing his opponent.”¹¹² The paper went on to say that Landon did not need to embellish his accomplishments as Governor because the records of the state spoke for themselves. They contrasted Landon’s campaign with that of Roosevelt by saying that Roosevelt had:

several times been caught grossly misrepresenting Governor Landon and the Topeka Capital has several times called his attention to his misstatements, but he goes right on making them because he has nothing on which to make a campaign, and he hopes to deceive enough voters with misrepresentation to turn the tide in his favor.¹¹³

The paper then stated that, “Kansans are smart enough to see through Roosevelt’s scam.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ “Down Near the Short Grass Roots,” *Osborne County Farmer*, March 7, 1935.

¹¹² “Down Near the Short Grass Roots,” *Osborne County Farmer*, October 4, 1934.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Later that year the paper once again praised Landon for his excellent work in Kansas by saying that, as Governor, Landon has cooperated with the federal government in every measure and has brought as much relief money as possible into the state. The paper stated that even Washington has said that “Kansas has the best relief setup in the entire union.”¹¹⁵ They felt that the Republicans should be put into the office in 1936 to handle the national debt, since the Democrats were only making the debt worse.¹¹⁶ The paper stated that if “Governor Landon is elected president relief to those who actually need it will go on just as long as it is necessary, but every white collared politician who is drawing a salary from the money of the people which I set aside for relief will lose his job, and be compelled to return to his own business for his livelihood.”¹¹⁷ On January 2, 1936 the paper wrote that the people should vote for Landon because he was the man “whose record exactly fits in with the sentiment of the great mass of the people.”¹¹⁸

The *Osborne County Farmer* also claimed that the federal government had only cut down on wheat acreages of American farmers, so that they could open up the gates to foreign farmers. The paper blamed the government for increasing shipments of farm products by foreign markets into the country by several hundred percent and stated that “every bushel of that grain and every pound of that produce replaced products that should have been sold by American farmers.”¹¹⁹ The paper also accused the government of

¹¹⁵ “Down Near the Short Grass Roots,” *Osborne County Farmer*, October 13, 1934.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “Down Near the Short Grass Roots,” *Osborne County Farmer*, September 24, 1936.

¹¹⁸ “Down Near the Short Grass Roots,” *Osborne County Farmer*, January 2, 1936.

¹¹⁹ “Down Near the Short Grass Roots,” *Osborne County Farmer*, October 18, 1934.

favoring big businesses and corporations by saying that Osborne County had received \$600,000 from the AAA over the last three years, but this was a small amount compared to payments given to corporations and banks. The paper stated that,

When consumers were paying the processing taxes they did it with a feeling that they were helping farmers in drought stricken districts to realize something in return for the loss of crops. They had no idea they were putting millions of dollars into the pockets of big corporations, banks, sugar companies and others who were in on the deal on a large scale. Probably it would have never been known to Western Kansas farmers had not Senator Arthur Vandenburg of Michigan probed into the manner and forced some of the publicity out into the open...¹²⁰

The paper gave a list of some of the corporations that had received the biggest government payouts.¹²¹ On December 5, 1935 the *Osborne County Farmer* once again blamed “New Dealers” for handing out relief money to foreign markets, rather than giving the money to Americans on relief. They blamed the government for buying steel from Germany to build the Tri-Borough Bridge in New York City, instead of buying from American steel firms and giving jobs to those unemployed in the steel business.¹²² As the election came to end, both counties continued to fight for the candidate that they thought would be the best in office.

The election came to an end in November and Franklin Roosevelt won with a vote of 27.8 million people to Alf Landon’s 16.7 million votes. Landon ended up winning only two states, Maine and Vermont.¹²³ Morton County had been happy with the New

¹²⁰ “The Big Fellows Profited,” *Osborne County Farmer*, March 26, 1936.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Down Near the Short Grass Roots,” *Osborne County Farmer*, December 5, 1935.

¹²³ McCoy, *Landon of Kansas*, 341.

Deal programs and encouraged by Roosevelt's progress in office the last four years.

Osborne County, however, facing troubles with the New Deal and finding relief in recent rainfalls, voted once again for the Republican ticket. Residents in Morton County voted for Roosevelt with a majority of 855 to Landon's 609 votes. Osborne County citizens voted for Landon by 2,741 over Roosevelt's 2,188 votes.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Bucher, *Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*, 60.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The Great Depression in the 1930s left many people jobless, homeless, and struggling to provide food and other necessities for their families. This economic hard time would help shape the presidential elections of 1932 and 1936. Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt faced off in the 1932 election and in 1936 Alfred Landon of Kansas ran against the re-nominated Roosevelt.

For two counties in Kansas it would be the economic hardships more than any other factor that determined voter realignment. Morton County's economy had continued in a downward spiral forcing many people to move only further depressing the already terrible conditions. As the economy plummeted people in the county decided to change their political affiliation. Once conservative, loyal Republicans, they decided that a different tact was needed to combat the Great Depression and voted for Democrat, Franklin D. Roosevelt. As soon as Roosevelt was elected president, he began passing New Deal legislation.

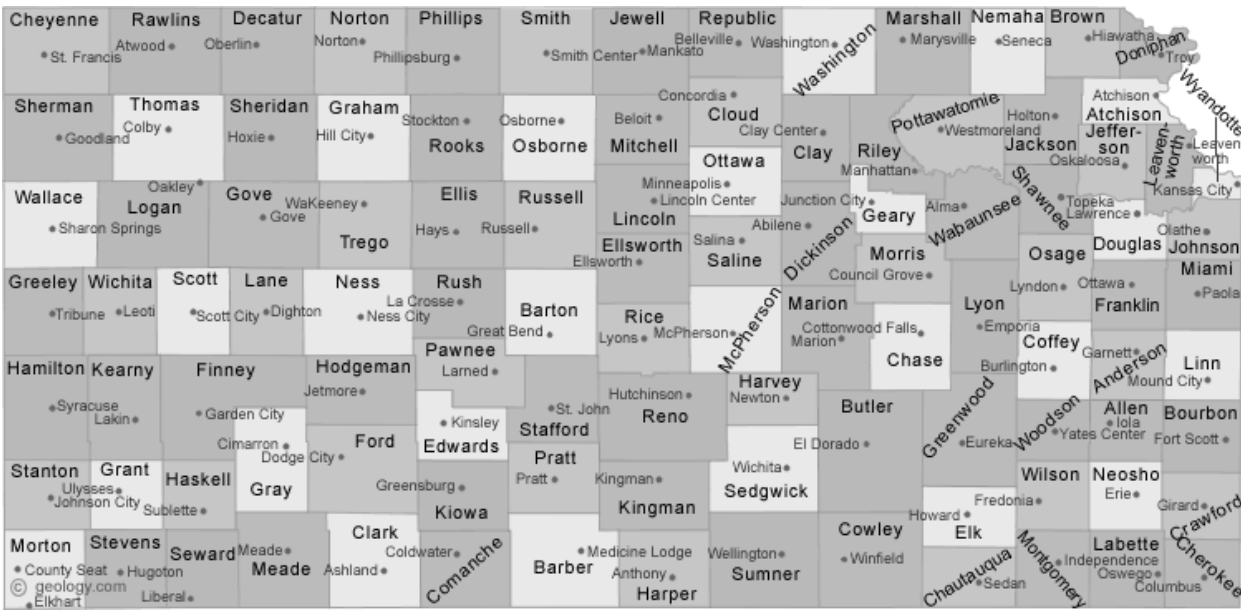
In 1936, Morton County relied heavily on relief money from the federal government. The county's WPA projects were putting men and women back to work, and the AAA was giving Kansas farmers money to live on and new farming techniques to help fight the Dust Bowl. These relief projects brought hope to the citizens, and the county did not want these projects or the relief money to go away. Therefore, in the 1936 presidential election Morton County turned away from their Kansas born candidate and voted once again for Roosevelt.

However, in Osborne County in 1932 the economy was faring better than most of Kansas. The county had an increase in population, had profited a fair amount of money from their crops, and benefitted from a responsive county welfare system that was able to help their citizens. Since the residents were spared from the worst of the depression conditions, they voted Republican once again in hopes that Herbert Hoover could still save the country from the economic woes.

In 1936, Osborne County experienced difficulties with the corruption of their federal relief project administrators and the federal government intervening in the distribution of county funds. Also, the county received a significant amount of rain in 1935 and 1936, which had bolstered the yield of the crops and helped improve their economy. It was the trouble with the federal relief aid and the improvement of the economy that caused Osborne County to once again vote for the Republican candidate, Landon.

Voter realignment can occur for many reasons. In the case of Morton and Osborne counties the economy proved to be the deciding factor for voters. Where the economy was depressed, voters abandoned decades of Republican Party loyalty and solidarity. In Osborne County, a county with a similar population and economic base, a stable or improving economic led to no such voter realignment.

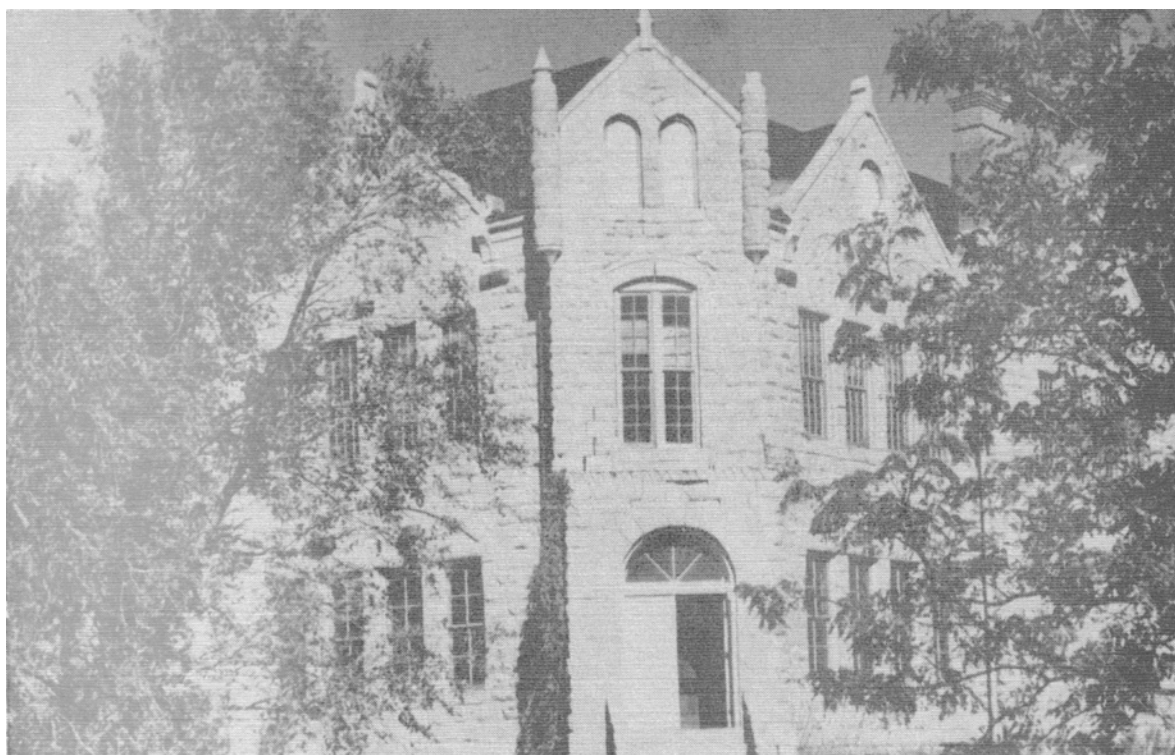
APPENDIX A
MAP OF KANSAS



Source: Digital-Topo-Maps. "Kansas County Map." <http://www.digital-topo-maps.com/county-map/kansas.shtml> (accessed April 20, 2010).

APPENDIX B

MORTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE



Source: Elkhart Post Card Printers Company.

APPENDIX C
OSBORNE IN THE 1890S



Source: Kansas State Historical Society. "Kansas Memory."
<http://www.kansasmemory.org/>. (accessed April 23, 2009).

APPENDIX D

MAIN STREET IN ELKHART, 1916



Source: Source: Kansas State Historical Society. "Kansas Memory."
<http://www.kansasmemory.org/>. (accessed April 23, 2009).

APPENDIX E

MISSOURI PACIFIC DEPOT IN DOWNS



Source: Source: Kansas State Historical Society. "Kansas Memory."
<http://www.kansasmemory.org/>. (accessed April 23, 2009).

APPENDIX F

DUST STORM IN MORTON COUNTY



Source: Source: Kansas State Historical Society. "Kansas Memory."
<http://www.kansasmemory.org/>. (accessed April 23, 2009)..

APPENDIX G

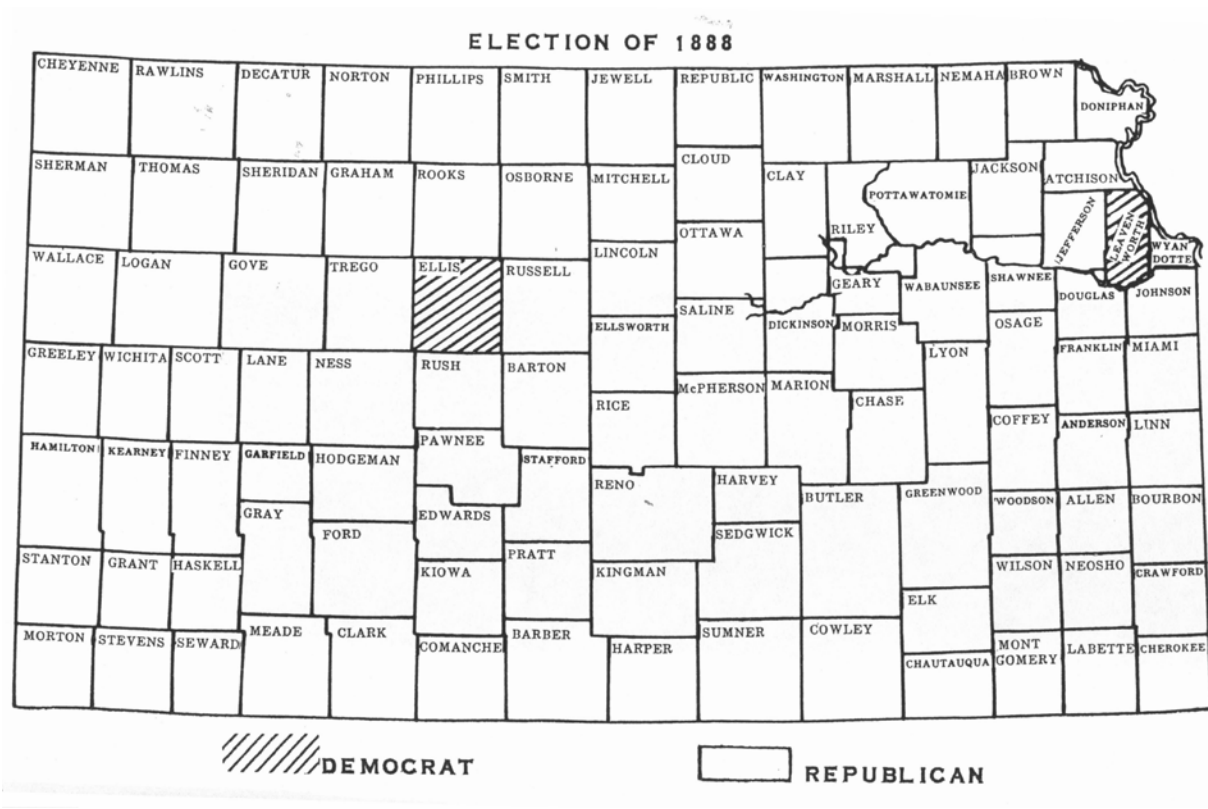
WPA CITY HALL IN ELKHART



Source: Elkhart Post Card Printers Company.

APPENDIX H

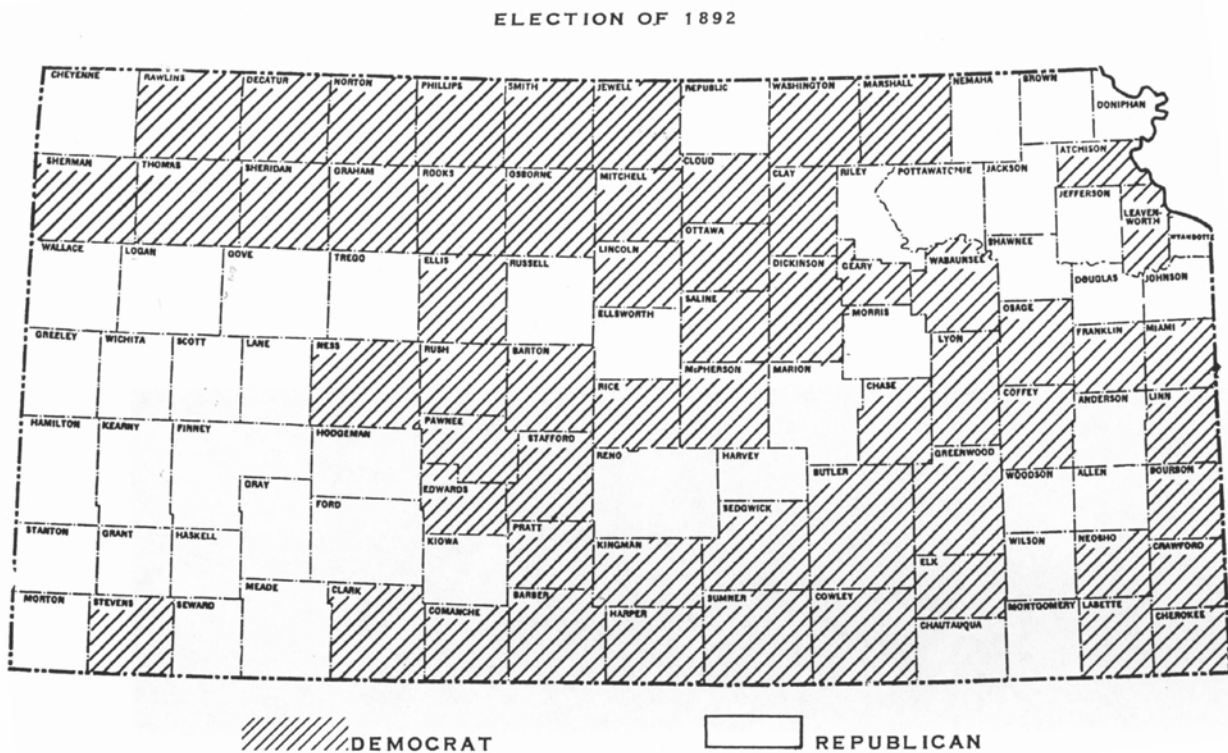
ELECTION MAP OF 1888



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

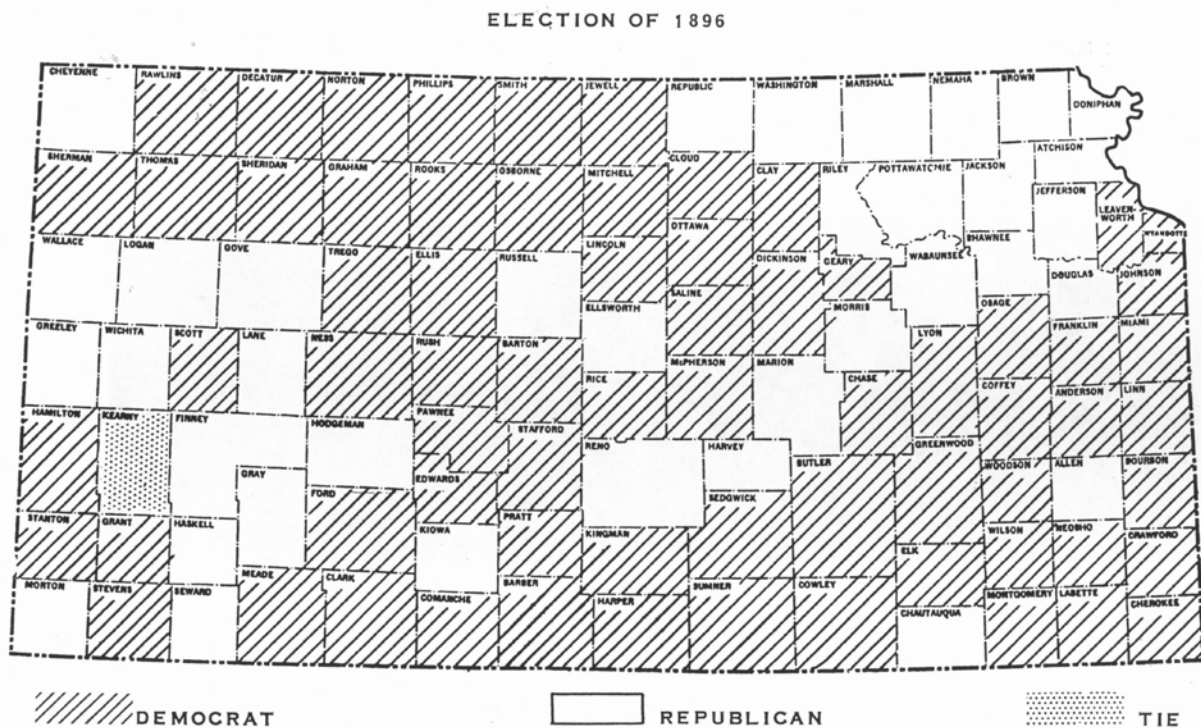
APPENDIX I

ELECTION MAP OF 1892



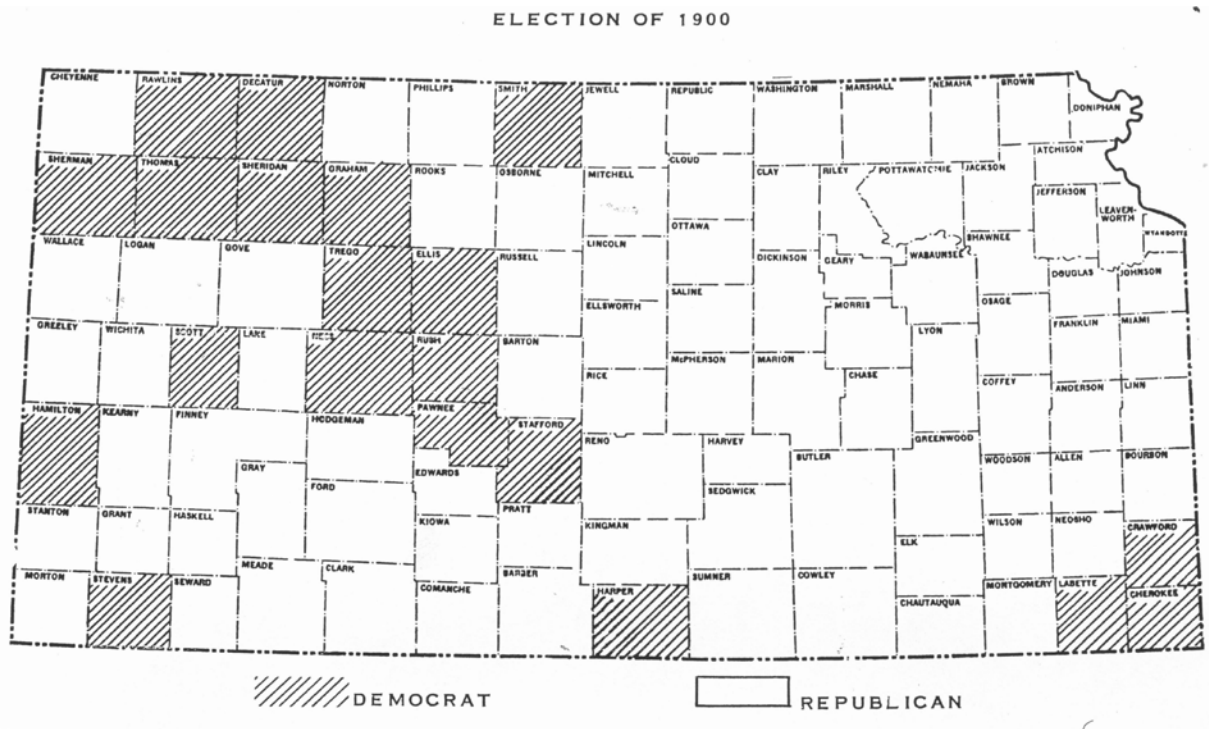
Source: Bucher, Walt. The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

APPENDIX J
ELECTION MAP OF 1896



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

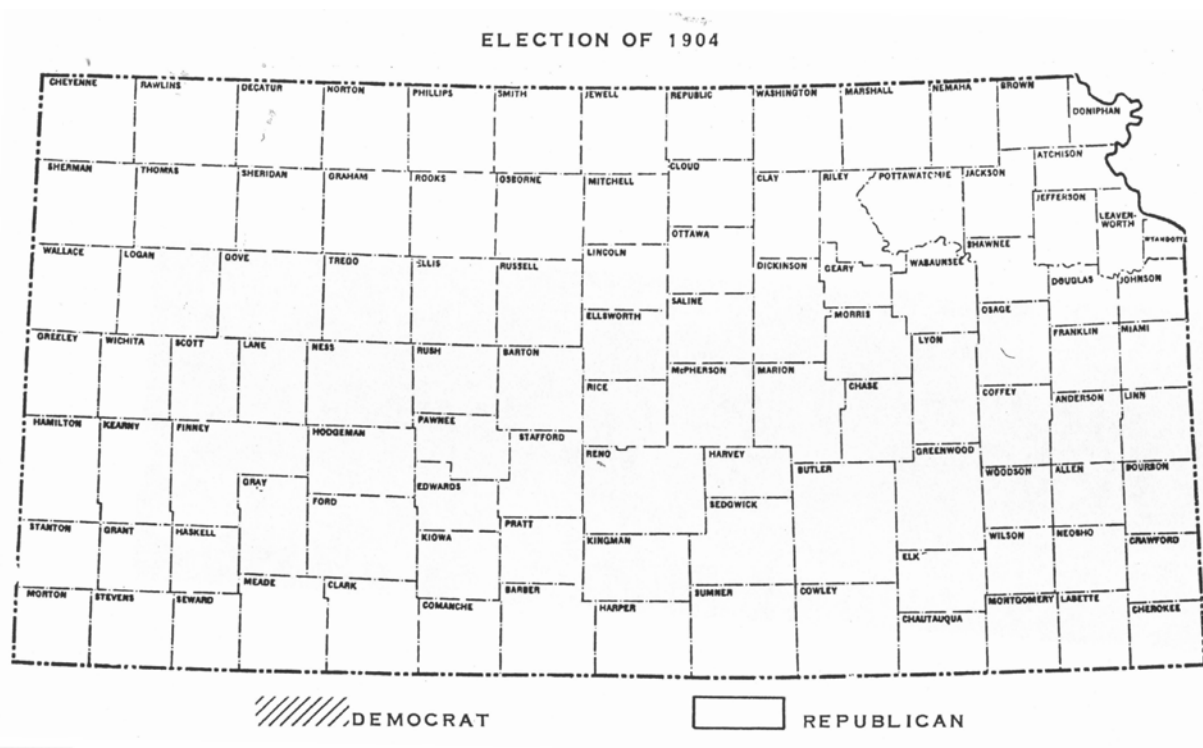
APPENDIX K
ELECTION MAP OF 1900



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

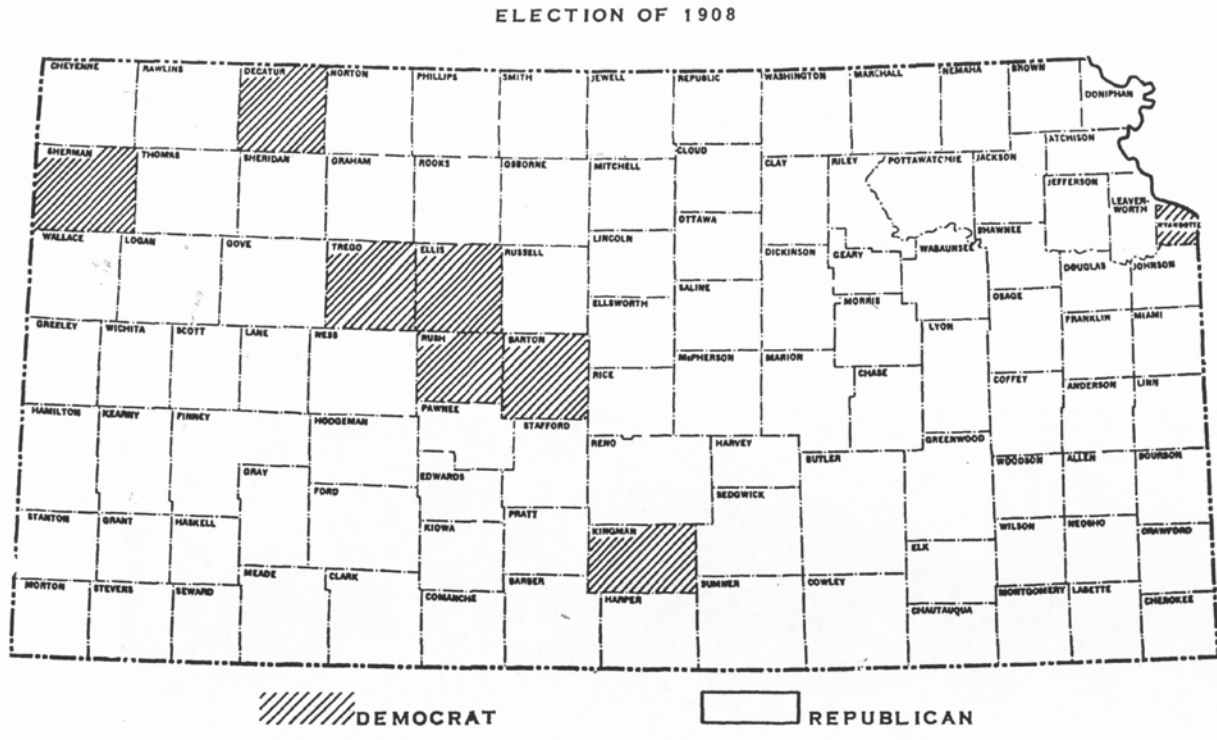
APPENDIX L

ELECTION MAP OF 1904



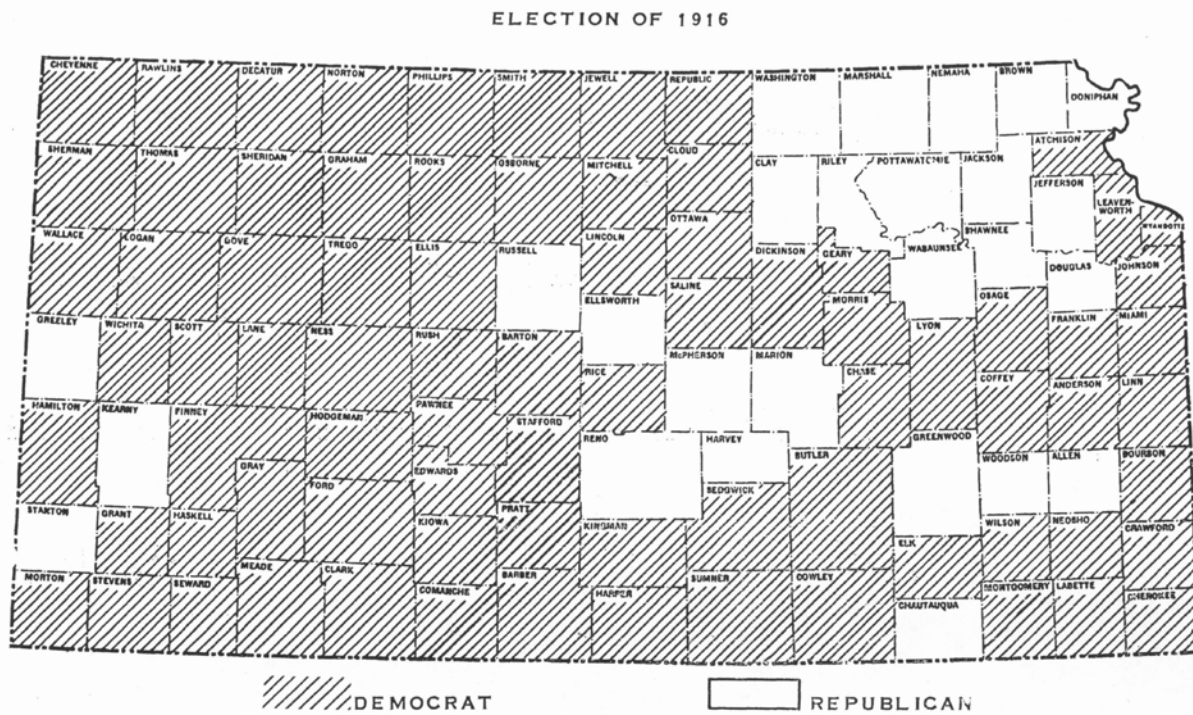
Source: Bucher, Walt. The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

APPENDIX M
ELECTION MAP OF 1908



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

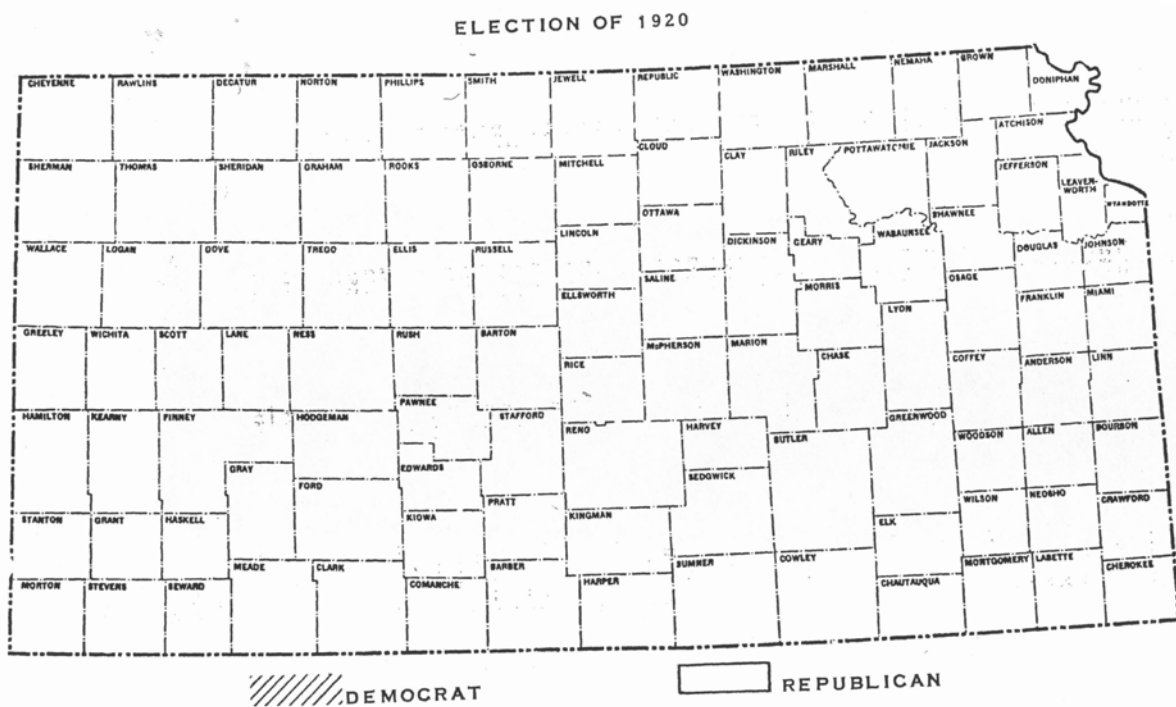
APPENDIX O
ELECTION MAP OF 1916



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

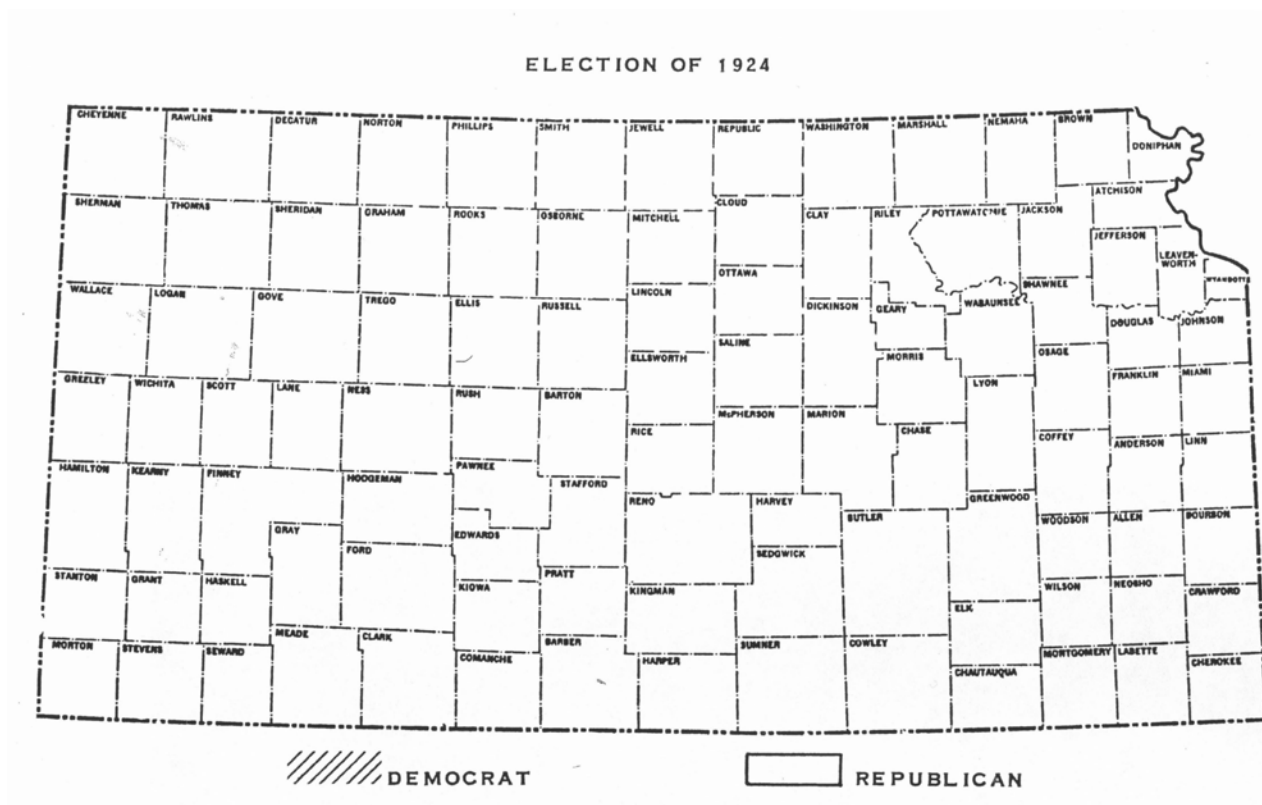
APPENDIX P

ELECTION MAP OF 1920



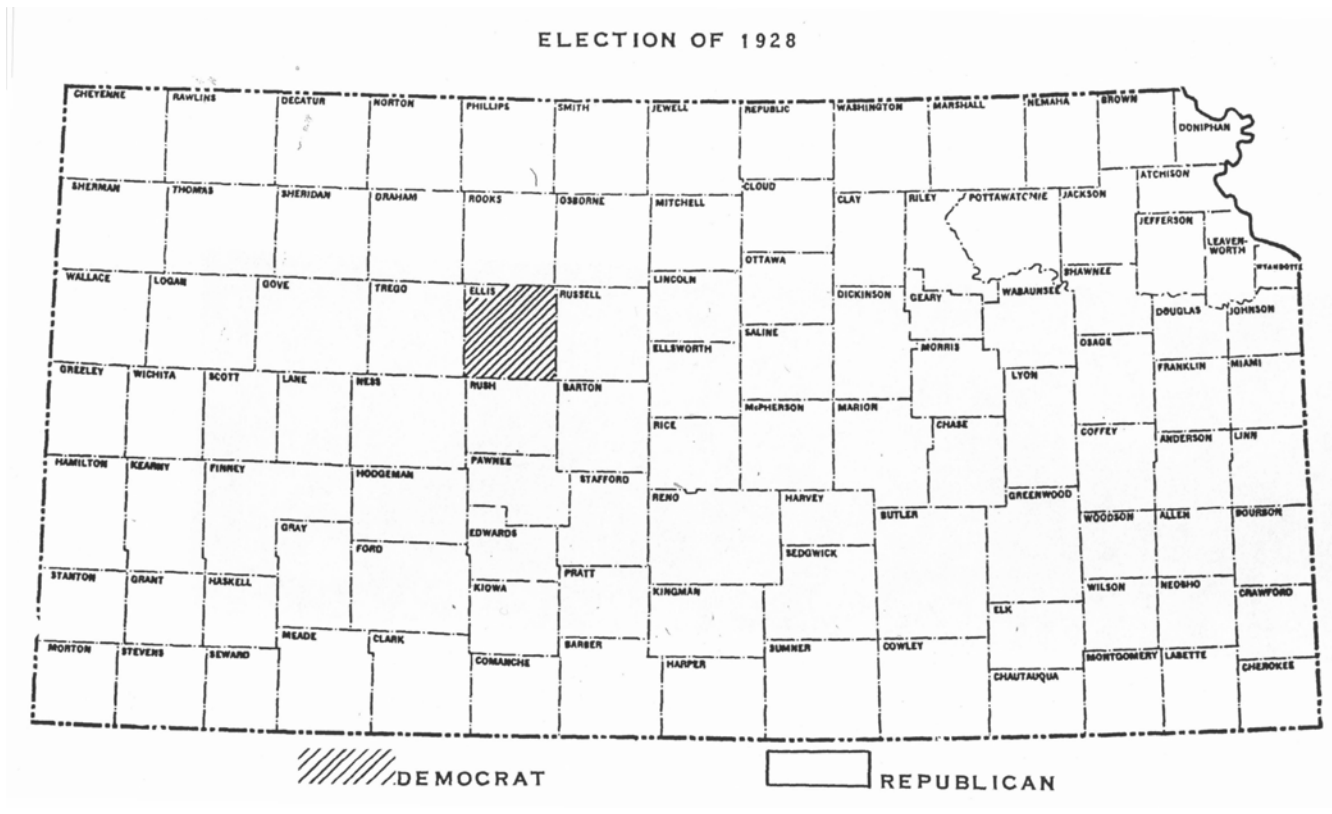
Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

APPENDIX Q
ELECTION MAP OF 1924



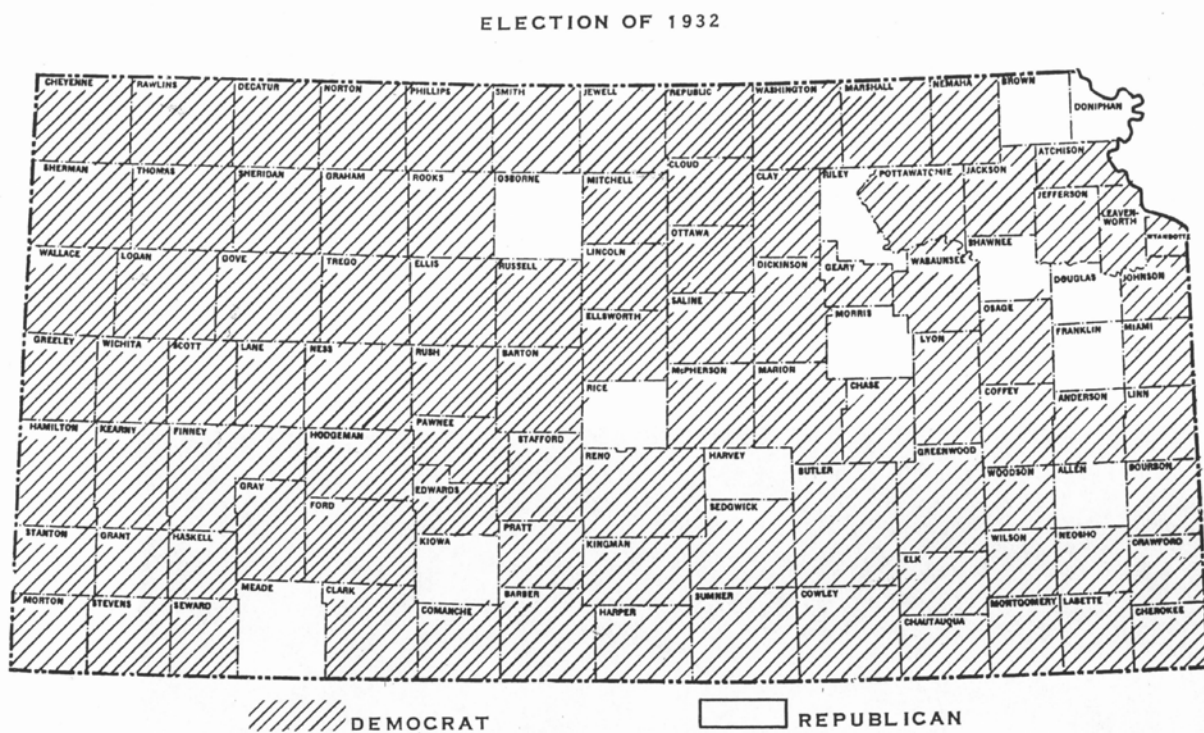
Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

APPENDIX R
ELECTION MAP OF 1928



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

APPENDIX S
ELECTION MAP OF 1932



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.

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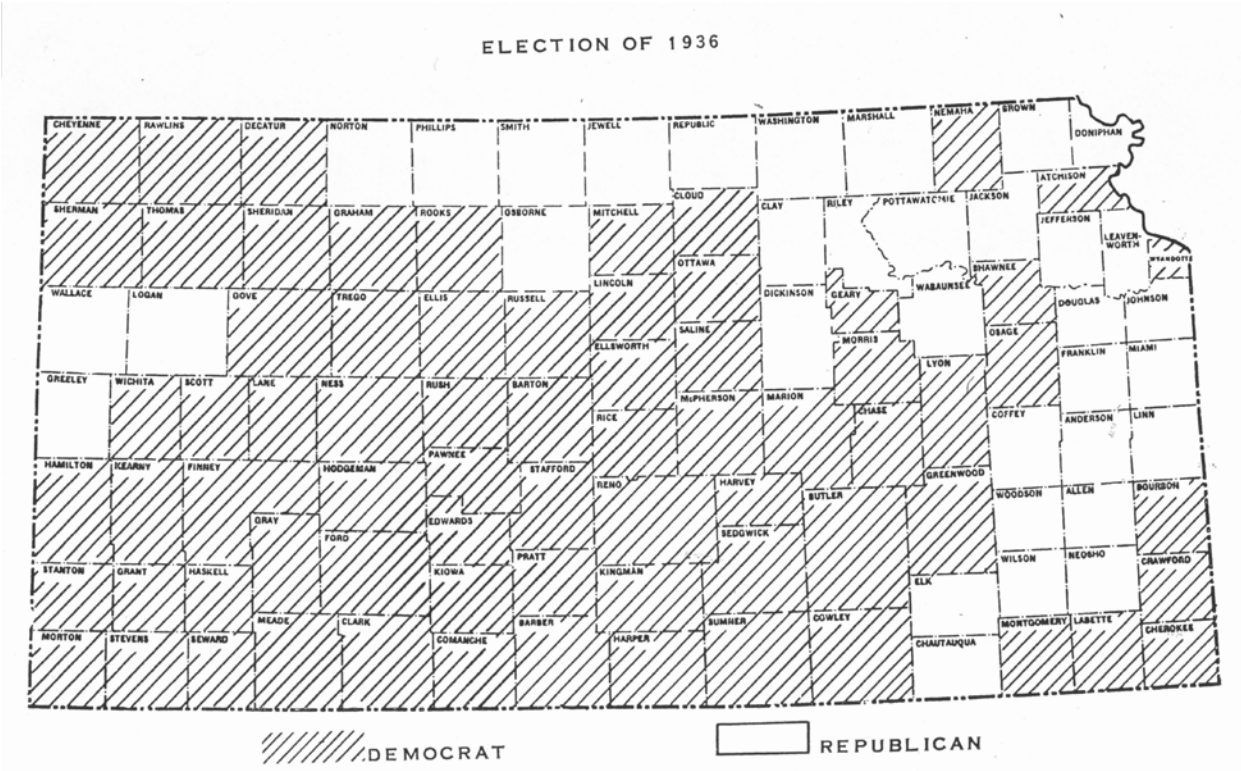
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APPENDIX T
ELECTION MAP OF 1936



Source: Bucher, Walt. *The Emporia State Research Studies: Presidential Election Returns for Kansas, 1864-1952*. Emporia: Emporia State Normal School, 1952.