A History of Haskell County, Kansas.

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Fort Hays Kansas State College

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A History of Haskell County, Kansas

being

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

by

F. M. D. McLain, B. A.

University of Oklahoma

Date May 20, 1957

Approved

Major Professor

Chairman Graduate Council
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We have dust storms and wind storms
We have cyclones and droughts,
We have hail storms but nothing
Seems to drive Kansans out
There are big green grasshoppers,
The whole summer long,
There are times when the wheat crop
Could be sold for a song.

Our winters are cold,
There is snow on the ground
Our summers so scorching
All the kids become brown
But what one of us living here,
Would trade wind and heat
For life in some city
With its crowded long streets?

In the spring here in Kansas
When the pastures are green,
No where on earth
Can such beauty be seen
Then in summer comes harvest,
With fields golden brown
And the children go swimming
In the pools near the town.

We have here our own town
In Kansas, Sublette
Where you know everybody;
Even strangers have met
For Kansans are friendly
And loyal and true
Who would trade our flat prairie
For mountains--Would you?

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1By Joe Ellen Bale, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bale, Sublette, Kansas.
Figure 1.

A view of Haskell County from atop the McCoy Grain Company, Sublette, Kansas
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

From atop the McCoy Grain Company in Sublette, Kansas, one hundred fifty-four feet above the ground, one can see a great portion of the political unit known as Haskell County, Kansas. There is nothing on the horizon to block the view, the entire region is strikingly characterized by the absence of native trees and by the level nature of the country. "The most level county in Kansas," claims the Chamber of Commerce at Sublette, and this allegation is confirmed by William E. Winter, the regional engineer with the Kansas State Highway Department. Viewiing the panorama in early June, when the wheat is headed out one gets the sensation of being at sea because the wind blowing the wheat resembles the tossing of waves.

The concept held by the majority of people concerning this area has been derived over the years primarily from three sources, all three have given an adverse picture of the real situation. Haskell is part of the great American desert as described by Louis and Clark and subsequent explorers. This term got into the geography books and made such an imprint upon the minds of young America that it has lasted for over a hundred years. The Santa Fe Trail crossed Haskell County, but this too resulted in adverse publicity to the region because here is the middle leg of the dreaded La Jornada Del Muerta or Journey of Death, across the Cimarron Desert. In the middle of the nineteen-thirties Haskell was in the middle of the now-famous Dust Bowl. From

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2William E. Winter, personal interview, February 2, 1957.
these three sources is derived the general concept of the land west of Dodge City, Kansas. On the other hand this is part of the fertile short grass country of southwest Kansas. It furnishes a way of life markedly different from that of other parts of the state and exhibits cultural differences that are quite apparent. The people are exceptionally homogeneous in character. The portion of those foreign born is almost negligible. There are no Negroes, Mexicans, Indians or any other minority group. The people are better educated than those of the state as a whole.\(^3\)

The altitude and the dry climate makes the area a healthy and stimulating place in which to live. It is part of a region which has many aspects of newness and vigor, for it is closer to the frontier than many other regions in the state. The term "short grass" is derived from the fact that originally the country was covered by a solid mat of close curled buffalo and grama grass which grew to the exclusion of any other vegetation. The topography is ideal for farming, the soil is rich and deep, and the frost-free period is sufficiently long for most crops. These are all the elements for successful farming except one--water.

Haskell County is primarily an agricultural community having no important industries except those dependent more or less upon farming. The history of Haskell County is therefore the story of the struggle of people against climate; the story of settlers from a humid region whose entire knowledge of farming was derived from practices under humid conditions. These people came west, settled, and started farming

by these methods brought with them from the humid east. After many failures and heartbreaks, due to cycles of wet and dry years, they began to make adjustments. This study is concerned with these adjustments.
CHAPTER II

THE HIGH PLAINS

The level characteristic of Haskell County is caused by the fact that it is part of one of the many high plateaus that are found at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, which are known as the High Plains. The High Plains, according to Walter D. Johnson, lie in an irregular belt from about midway across the long western slope of the larger area that is known as the Great Plains. The Great Plains, in a broad sense, are a plain, but actually they present, in the main, an erosion surface. The High Plains do not. They have practically no drainage, the rain being disposed of by absorption. Because there is no drainage, there has been comparatively no erosion; therefore their surface has a general effect of being "dead level." They are sometimes called "The Flats." At the same time they are upland or plateau flats and they are upland flats of survival. They are virtually unscored by erosion. Some of these flats are of great size, and when one is out there it is recognized immediately that they constitute the real plains.

Johnson gives an interesting theory as to how these flat plains were formed. He says that the mountainous region west of the High Plains supplies moisture as rain or snow. Within the mountains the grade of the streams are steep. They are loaded with silt and debris that has been washed down from the mountains. Once the streams pass

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out of the mountain region into the arid land, they dwindle, fail, and deposit their load. This depositing of their load is due to rapid evaporation into the dry air, and to the absorption into the dry porous earth. At some of the places the streams are strong enough to carry through, as in the case of the Cimarron and the Arkansas. But even in these cases the streams fluctuate in volume and in rate of flow, with the result that the streams deposit part of the load. When in a dry climate a stream issues from a mountain range, it spreads an apron of debris that extends from the mountain's base. This process is almost identical with that of delta formation by which coastal plains are built up. Thousands of years ago almost all of the surface of this vast area was almost flat. Erosion has been more rapid on both sides of the High Plains.

In the region to the east of the High Plains the rainfall was so heavy that the grass gave way and erosion began and goes on at a rapid rate. In the region to the west of the High Plains there was not enough rainfall to get a good covering of grass. The turfed growth of bunch grass and light bushes fail almost completely to constitute an adequate cover, so the soil gives way when a flash shower comes. The High Plains lie in an area where there is sufficient rainfall to sustain buffalo grass. This sod of buffalo grass is completely effective in preventing erosion because it prevents the initiation of drainage, not because it resists the erosional work of a well-developed drainage system. The High Plains then is a survival belt, set in the middle of the larger Great Plains, as an undisturbed fragment of the original debris apron. They are a slightly raised platform built upon a more extended lower plain.
Nearly all the soil in the county is sufficiently fertile to produce abundant crops if the weather is favorable. The top soil is mainly a dark brown loam with a heavy subsoil; it varies, however, to a sandy loam in the extreme northern and southwestern parts of the country, and there are even a few sand dunes in the northwest. Soil blowing is an ever-present menace during the spring months when high winds are prevalent. This danger is not confined to the light sandy soils as it is sometimes assumed, for the clay loams of fine texture are also susceptible to erosion. The dust clouds normally subside when the spring rains come and the new crops start to grow.

It is impossible to understand the history of Haskell County without reference to the cyclic nature of the climate. The climate of Haskell County is described as subhumid. This term subhumid has come to signify a climate in which the normal moisture supply, from rain and snow, falls a little short of what is necessary for agriculture without irrigation. Twenty inches of rainfall is considered the minimum annual rainfall for normal agriculture. The annual rainfall at Sublette, in Haskell County, over the years 1914 to 1956, has been computed to average 18.03 inches. Thus, the average deficiency would be approximately two inches. However, in fifteen of these forty-two years,

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6 Johnson, op. cit., p. 45.

7 Data compiled by Dr. L. D. Wooster from Reports of the Kansas Climatological Section Center, Topeka, Kansas.
the rainfall was well above twenty inches. Also, as is pointed out by Dr. L. D. Wooster, the precipitation records show that rainfall falls into definite cycles of about twenty years of length.

The writer asked him what caused these cycles and he believes that spots on the sun come and go in cycles and these spots effect the weather. The drouth periods, like the wet periods, have come about every twenty to twenty-two years and last roughly six years. They are followed by what he terms as mixed years of ten to twelve years. This would be interpreted to mean that farmers in Haskell could expect to raise a crop about one out of every three years. Another characteristic of the rainfall there is its spotty distribution. They say in Haskell County that "a rainfall reading is good for that particular tin can."

The most effective rains are those which fall slowly and are followed by lingering cloudiness. There is then a maximum of ground absorption and a minimum of evaporation. The rains of the High Plains are rarely of this character. Most summer rains have the character of abrupt, heavy and brief downpours, are local and have short and erratic courses.

Summer rains are sometimes accompanied by hail, and often do damage to crops. The rate and amount of evaporation also are important in Haskell County. The effective precipitation is only the actual precipitation minus the evaporation and the runoff. The amount of evaporation is aggravated in the summer time by the great number of cloudless days and the constant wind which blows predominately from

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the southwest—hot and dry. Nowhere in the world, perhaps, has the wind done more effective work than on the High Plains. As compared with the humid East, the High Plains country is a region of high wind velocity. The level surface and the absence of trees give the air currents free play. On the whole, the wind blows harder and more consistently than it does in any region of the United States.9

Haskell County, located at least six hundred miles from any large body of water, unprotected by any mountain range, north and south, would naturally have high winds. Another local saying is that the wind may blow fifty miles an hour and there is nothing between them and the north pole but a barbed wire fence and it is usually down. One day a lady in a big, long automobile stopped at Roy Nelson's filling station. Condescendingly, she asked him if the wind always blew like this. Roy answered, "No ma'am, sometimes it blows from the other direction." In the winter time these winds are apt to bring, what is called in Texas, a "Norther" or in Western Kansas a "blizzard." It is a severe cold wave accompanied by wind, sleet, and snow.

J. W. Berryman described southwestern Kansas before the coming of the settlers. He said that it was covered with a solid mat of buffalo grass. There were no weeds of any kind, and only in the sandy ground were there any other grasses. The appearance of the country in its primitive state was therefore striking. The even height of the buffalo grass afforded the appearance of a well-kept and closely clipped lawn

and would have put to shame the best kept and well appearing golf
course of today. 10 The grass was succulent and very nutritious and
very much enjoyed by the native grazing animals. It cured upon the
ground where grown, and became as good for winter grazing as summer use,
and animals were always found there, summer and winter, where they
throve and waxed fat. One of the characteristics of buffalo grass is
that it can enter a growth rest stage during periods of drouth and
recover in a remarkably short time when the moisture becomes available. 11

Buffalo grass is a fine-leaved native sod-forming perennial. It spreads rapidly by surface runners
and forms a dense matted turf. During the growing season the foliage is grayish-green, which turns
to a light straw color when the plant ceases growth. Growth begins in late spring and continues through
the summer. Livestock likes its foliage. Its palatability, prevalence, and adaptation to a wide
range of soil and climatic conditions make it an important forage species of the Great Plains. It
withstands long, heavy grazing better than any other grass native to that region; consistently subjected
to severe use it often survives as a nearly pure stand. Because of its excellent ground cover,
aggressive spread under use, wide climatic adaptation, and relative ease of establishment, buffalo grass
is ideally suited for erosion control on range and pasture lands where the soil does not contain too
much sand. 12

With its beautiful mat of buffalo grass it was only natural that
this area would be the home of vast herds of grass eating animals,
particularly the buffalo. Early Spaniards found buffalo in California

10J. W. Berryman, "Early Settlement of Southwest Kansas," Kansas
Historical Collection, 17:561-570, 1928.

11Walter P. Webb, The Great Plains (Boston: Ginn and Company,
1931), p. 31.

12United States Department of Agriculture, Yearbook of Agriculture,
pp. 661-62.
and as far south as the Gulf Plains. French trappers encountered them along the Saskatchewan in Canada, and during the eighteenth century the Anglo-Americans had killed them as far east as the Mississippi River. But by the close of the Civil War their range was confined to the Great Plains; and there, while on their spring and fall migrations, they moved in two great herds—a northern and southern one. It was the southern herd that generally ranged in western Kansas. The vast number of the herd stagers the imagination. Records show that from 1870 to 1885, more than ten million were killed on the plains. Their importance to the history of southwest Kansas is the fact that this unwieldy, sluggish and stupid animal sustained the Plains Indian, and when they were eliminated, so went the nomadic Indians.

When settlement began in Haskell County the buffalo was gone and all that remained was their bleaching bones scattered over the broad plains. Albert Schnellbacher told me that his father made grocery money for a few years after settling in Haskell County by collecting the bones of the buffalo that were there in abundance. He said that he collected three wagonloads off his claim alone. The early settlers hauled these bones to Dodge City, some fifty miles away, where they were shipped east to be converted to fertilizer. This practice seems to be a common way for a hard pressed early settler to get ready cash. The tremendous number of these bones indicate that Haskell County must have been a favorite habitat for the buffalo. Another indication

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14Albert Schnellbacher, personal interview, December 26, 1956.
that this area was a region for thousands of buffalo is the many buffalo wallows that one can still find all over the county. One writer has given an account concerning the process by which these wallows were formed.

Finding in the low parts of the prairies a little stagnant water amongst the grass, and the ground underneath soft and saturated with moisture, an old bull lowers himself upon one knee, plunges his horns into the ground, throwing up the earth and soon making an excavation into which water trickles, forming for him in a short time a cool and comfortable bath.\(^{15}\)

Sometimes the buffalo would wallow in the dust and throw the dust over his body to drive off mosquitos. As these processes were repeated over and over, the wallows sometimes become quite large. There is one two miles north of Sublette on W. O. Kelman's farm that covers over thirty acres.

\(^{15}\)Rister, op. cit., p. 227.
Figure 2.

A collection of Indian arrow-heads belonging to Warren and Toy Moore found in Haskell County.
Figure 3.

Stone Implements used by Indians found in Haskell County by Warren and Toy Moore.
This early history of southwest Kansas, which includes Haskell County is unique and quite interesting because this area has been claimed by six nations. Until 1885 there was no permanent white settlement so that this story is primarily one of land and boundary disputes and of boundary treaties which settled these issues.

The English claim was based on the fact that in 1497 an English ship, commanded by John Cabot, was first to sail along the eastern shores of what is now Canada and the United States. Cabot claimed not only the coast he saw but all the land lying west of it which would include Kansas. Before the discovery of North America by Cabot, Columbus had discovered islands in the West Indies and had claimed not only the islands, but all the adjacent continent in the name of the King of Spain. Spain soon improved her claim. She established a colony in Mexico and in 1541 sent Coronado from Mexico to explore the Plains. Later, a colony was founded by the Spaniards in Mexico with Santa Fe as the capital. The boundaries of New Mexico were never surveyed by the Spaniards, but they claimed that it included all of the Plains east of the Rockies.

The French established settlements in Canada, occupied the Great Lakes region, and explored the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to the Gulf of Mexico. In 1682 La Salle set up a cross at the mouth of the Mississippi and claimed all the land drained by the Mississippi River and her tributaries in the name of the King of France. France became
involved in the French and Indian War against England in which she was assisted by Spain. At the end France was forced to give Canada to England and all of Louisiana lying west of the Mississippi to Spain.

Since Spain owned both Louisiana and New Mexico, she should have been able to establish a boundary between the two colonies. The colonies continued to be jealous of each other. Louisiana was governed by Spanish officers, but the people continued to be French in language and customs, and they continued to take the trade of the Plains Indians from the New Mexicans whenever they could.

While Spain was occupying Louisiana, the United States gained her independence from England. It was not long until the United States and Spain were in controversy over the navigation of the Mississippi. While the dispute was going on Napoleon Bonaparte became ruler of France. By a treaty dated April 30, 1803, the United States purchased all of Louisiana from France. Concerning the boundaries of this newly acquired land, Livingston wrote as follows:

I asked Tallyrand what were the boundary of the territory cedes us? He said he did not know; we must take it as they had received it. I asked his how Spain meant to give them possession? He said he did not know. I can give you no direction; you have made a noble bargain for yourselves, and I suppose you will make the most of it. 16

The treaty stipulated that the boundaries were, "The colony or province of Louisiana with the same extent that it now has in the hands of Spain and that it had when France possessed it." Napoleon was just

as vague as Tallyrand. When someone expressed regret at the obscurity relative to the boundaries Napoleon remarked, "If an obscurity did not already exist, it would be perhaps a good policy to put one there."

This boundary dispute with Spain was not settled until the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty of February 22, 1819. By this treaty the international boundary followed the western bank of the Sabine river from the Gulf to the thirty-second parallel; thence it ran due north to the southern bank of the Red River, which it followed to the meridian of 100° west longitude; thence by that meridian to the south bank of the Arkansas River and along that bank to the source of the river; from the source of the Arkansas River it ran north to the forty-second parallel, which it followed to the Pacific Ocean.17

By this treaty of 1819, Spain retained an area embracing what is today the southwest one-sixteenth of Kansas lying south of the Arkansas River and west of the one-hundredth meridian. The northeast corner of this area is just east of Dodge City. Spain continued to own southwest Kansas until 1821 when Mexico won her independence. Then the region became part of Mexico.

In 1836 Texas revolted against Mexico, and, in May of that year Santa Anna, while a prisoner in the hands of the Texans, concluded a treaty with them. It provided for the conclusion of a subsequent treaty by which the limits of Texas were to be fixed, but were not to extend beyond the Rio Grande River. This agreement the Mexican government

refused to regard as binding because it was made under duress. The Texas congress, however, approved the treaty and by an act in December, 1836, defined their western boundary as follows:

Beginning at the mouth of the Sabine River and running west along the Gulf of Mexico, three leagues from land, to the mouth of the Rio Grande River—Thence up the principal stream of said river to its source, thence along the boundary line, as defined in the Treaty between the United States and Spain to the beginning. 18

There followed a period in which both Texas and Mexico claimed southwest Kansas. For the next ten years Texas clamored for admittance to the United States. By a Joint Resolution of Congress of March, 1845, the annexation of Texas took place. The resolution reads:

RESOLVED: That Congress doth consent that the territory properly included within, and rightfully belonging to the Republic of Texas, may be erected into a new state, to be called the State of Texas—

Said State, when admitted into the Union, after ceding to the United States all public edifices, fortifications, barracks, ports and harbors, navy and navy yards, docks, magazines, arms armament, defence belonging to said Republic of Texas, shall retain all the public funds, debts, taxes, and dues of every kind, which may belong to or owing said republic; and shall also retain all the vacant and unappropriated lands lying within its limits. 19

By this Joint Resolution Texas was to retain all her public lands which included southwest Kansas. Mexico had never given up her claims to this territory. However, the war between the United States and Mexico resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by which the boundary line was


made the Rio Grande River, so that Mexico no longer had an interest in southwest Kansas.

In the meantime Texas, having difficulty with her debts, was willing for the United States to take her lands. A solution to her problem presented itself as a part of the much debated Compromise of 1850. By the Texas and New Mexico Act of September 9, 1850, the Texas' debts contracted previous to annexation were to be paid by the United States, and the territorial claims of the territory of New Mexico and north of the Missouri Compromise line should be given up.

The state of Texas will agree that her boundaries on the north shall commence at the point at which the meridian of one hundred degrees west from Greenwich is intersected by the thirty-six degrees thirty minutes north latitude, and shall run from said point due west to the meridian of one hundred and three degrees west from Greenwich.²⁰

From the time of the passing of the Texas and New Mexico Act until the Kansas Nebraska Act of May 30, 1854, Southwest Kansas was left unorganized. It was part of the United States but not under any territorial laws; however there were no dire consequences resulting from this period because the only people that could be affected would be the nomadic Indians and the caravans crossing this territory enroute to Santa Fe over the Santa Fe Trail.

The last act in the story was the passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act of May 30, 1854, which provided that the southern boundary of the newly created territory of Kansas should be as its southern boundary the thirty-seventh parallel of north latitude. This act, at last,

²⁰Ibid., p. 320.
brought the area comprising southwest Kansas into the same territorial jurisdiction as the rest of the state and made it possible for the State of Kansas to be created six years later.
Figure 4.

A photograph from the air of the Santa Fe Trail near the center of Haskell County. This photograph was taken in 1939. Courtesy of the Haskell County Soil Conservation Service.
Figure 5.

A view of the Santa Fe Trail north of the Arkansas River. This photograph was taken in February, 1957.
CHAPTER IV

FORERUNNER TO PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

A news item in the Sublette Monitor noted the following incident:

A skeleton of an Indian was uncovered by a land machine this morning about a mile southeast of Forest Cox’s home. The body was about two feet under the surface. The State University has been notified. 21

The body was subsequently identified as one belonging to the Woodland Culture. 22 Sometime before this an Indian skeleton had been found along the Cimarron River in Haskell County. This body was identified as one belonging to a recent tribe who may have been killed by a buffalo hunter or some member of a caravan going over the Santa Fe Trail. 23

The finding of these two bodies substantiates the belief that the Great Plains were inhabited by primitive Indians long before the white man came to the region. It is impossible to determine at what time and by what Indian tribes the Great Plains were first occupied. We do know that the Plains Indians were a nomadic people and that they lived on the plains by following and killing the thousands of buffalo, deer and elk which wandered about over the area grazing on the native grasses. The buffalo, in particular, was very valuable to the Indians, serving as food, shelter, weapons, clothing and tools.

21 The Sublette Monitor, April 21, 1955.


The presence of the Indians in southwest Kansas first became significant after the opening of the Santa Fe Trail, one of the great historic highways of America. Various treaties with eastern Indians had made the trail relatively safe as far as the Arkansas River. The land south of the Arkansas and west of the one hundredth meridian, claimed by both Mexico and Texas, was Kiowa and Comanche country. It was after the caravans crossed the Arkansas River that the majority of their trouble with the nomads of the plains occurred, and until after 1845 there was very little that the United States Government could do about it.

At one time the Kiowas lived at the head of the Missouri River at the junction of the Jefferson, Madison, and the Gallatin Rivers. They migrated from the mountains and drifted south. About 1795 they reached the Arkansas River, and, after a war with the Comanches, they were allowed to cross over to the south side where they formed a confederacy with the Comanches. They were noted for being blood-thirsty. They probably killed more white people in proportion to their number than any other plains tribes.24

The Comanches were mentioned as living in what is now western Kansas in 1719, however, at that time they roamed over Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. They made war on the Spaniards, Mexicans and later the Texans, but were generally friendly to the people of the United States.25 They were close allies with the Kiowas after 1795.

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25Frederick Hodge, Ibid., pp. 327.
and claimed with them the land south of the Arkansas River in Kansas.

The Kiowas and Comanches habitually waited in the vicinity of what is now Haskell County and attacked the trains of wagons which made up the commerce of the Santa Fe Trail. Their attacks became so successful that the Cimarron cut-off was actually abandoned for a time during the Civil War. Finally, on October 18, 1865, at a camp in the banks of the Arkansas River somewhere in Kansas, the Kiowas and Comanches ceded that portion of Kansas and Colorado south of the Arkansas River and west of the one hundredth meridian to the United States.26 This eliminated the danger as far as the Santa Fe Trail was concerned, and, with the elimination of the buffalo the following decade, the Indians problem was permanently solved.

The Cimarron Branch of the Santa Fe Trail entered Haskell County near the northeast corner and passed southwest between the "ghost" towns of Ivenhое and Santa Fe, and out of the county midway of its western border.27 There were no important stopping places along its twenty-seven mile course through the county, however, this section was well known because here was the middle leg of the dreaded Jornada Del Muerto or Journey of Death across the Cimarron desert. William Becknell, called the father of the Santa Fe Trail, was the first man known to attempt to cross the Cimarron Desert. On his first trip with


wagons in 1831, after arriving at the Caches, approximately five miles west of the present Dodge City, he decided to find a shorter route to Santa Fe. He crossed the Arkansas River and headed straight for Santa Fe. He soon regretted his action for after a few miles of sand hills he found himself on the high level plains. There were no streams to furnish water and his men and horses were soon suffering. For several days they wandered without a drop to drink. The men cut the tips of the ears of their horses and drank the blood, but that only served to increase their thirst. The dogs of the train were killed and their blood was eagerly swallowed.28 The agonized men saw lakes before them which vanished as they advanced toward them. They saw a solitary old buffalo approaching slowly toward them and they succeeded in killing him and found that his stomach was filled with water. This lucky encounter probably saved the train. Renourished they were able to make their way back to the Arkansas River. So ended the first attempt to cross the Cimarron Desert. Most of the works on the Santa Fe Trail say that Becknell returned by way of the Cimarron shortcut.29

In the early autumn of 1828, both sections of the Santa Fe caravans ran into Indian trouble. The larger lead caravan, which numbered such prominent men as William L. Sublette and M. M. Marmaduke, had proceeded for quite a distance. Two traders, Daniel Monroe and John C. Edwards,

28 The account of Becknell’s journey is given in almost every book that deals with the Santa Fe Trail in substantially the same form. Gregg gives his terminus as Taos rather than San Maguel and does not mention wagons.

29 Stanley Vestal gives the credit for the first to cross the Jornada Del Muerto to a party under Marmaduke in 1824.
and a young man by the name of McNees rode some miles ahead of the main party. On the banks of a small stream they went to sleep. Some wandering Indians shot Monroe and McNees. McNees died immediately and Monroe shortly after the caravan arrived at the Cimarron River. 30

Just as the funeral ceremonies were about to be concluded six or seven Indians appeared on the opposite side of the Cimarron. Some of the party proposed inviting them to a parley, while the rest, burning for revenge, evinced a desire to fire upon them at once. It is more than probably that the Indians were not only innocent but ignorant of the outrage that had been committed, or they would hardly have ventured to approach the caravan. Being quick to perception, they very soon therefore wheeled and attempted to escape. One shot was fired, which wounded a horse and brought the Indian to the ground, where he was instantly riddled with balls. Almost simultaneously another discharge of several guns followed, by which all the rest were either killed or mortally wounded, except one, who escaped to bear to his tribe the news of their dreadful catastrophe. 31

This act and others precipitated warfare. On the Arkansas River the caravan was robbed of nearly one thousand head of mules. The second caravan had its stock stampeded by a party of Indians and they were forced to send to Santa Fe to purchase a supply. Near the upper Cimarron Springs this group found a Comanche camp sprawled across the trail. The caravan was forced to go directly through the camp. When they were relatively safe on the other side of the camp, one of the rear guards was killed and scalped. For the next few days the traders

31Ibid., pp. 17-18.
advanced under intermittent attacks by the Indians. At some place between the Cimarron and the Arkansas the Comanches succeeded in running off their entire stock. The party was now faced with the very disagreeable task of crossing the desert on foot, surrounded with hostile Indians and without adequate water supply. They left their wagons and had not gone far when they could see the smoke from the recently abandoned caravan. The suffering of the party was very great. They marched due north in order to strike the Arkansas as soon as possible. They traveled night and day for forty-eight hours and finally arrived at the Arkansas River.

As a result of the Indian trouble, a military escort went with the caravan the next year as far as Chouteau's Island on the Arkansas River. The traders pursued their journey alone from there. They had hardly advanced more than six or seven miles when a vanguard of three men riding a few hundred yards ahead, and who had dismounted for the purpose of satisfying their thirst, were rushed by a band of Kiowas. The three men sprang on to their horses. Two of the men were able to escape but the third, mounted on a mule, was overtaken and slain. The military escort had to come and rescue the train.

Jedediah Smith lost his life while attempting to cross the Cimarron Desert. In the year 1831, the Journada was worse than usual, for there had been scant rainfall to fill up the water holes. Smith, experienced in the ways of the desert, advised his men to fill everything possible with water at the Arkansas River and then he turned his caravan into the desert. 32

Across the land ran buffalo trails crisscrossing one another in a confusing maze. The wagon trail was entirely obliterated by the herds of buffalo frantically seeking water.\textsuperscript{33} This time Smith had no mountains to guide him and he steered his course as best he could toward the Cimarron River. For three days the caravan wandered ahead, their water all used up, their food supply practically exhausted, lost on the desert somewhere in the present Haskell County. Smith decided to leave the wagons and find water. He rode out along and eventually found a stream. He was surrounded by Comanches and killed. All that we know of his death is what the Comanches told some Mexican traders, to whom they sold his weapons.

Josiah Gregg heard of the death of Smith before the caravan with which he was traveling reached Santa Fe.\textsuperscript{34} The caravan with which Gregg was associated came over the \textit{Journdada} about a month later than did Smith's, and he reported that it rained on them almost every day.\textsuperscript{35}

After about 1830 the caravans began to use the Cimarron crossing in preference to all other routes, although it was four years later that a route across the desert was definitely marked. Before that time, caravans crossed at any place between Malberry Creek and Chautauqua's Island. In 1831, Gregg wrote after arriving on the Arkansas, nothing

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\textsuperscript{34}Josiah Gregg, \textit{The Commerce of the Prairies} (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1926), p. 84.
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\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 82.
\end{flushright}
like a regular ford had ever been established, nor was there a marked trail anywhere across the famous plains.\footnote{36}{Ibid., p. 40.}

In the year 1834 there were heavy rains in southwestern Kansas and the wet ground permitted the wagons to make deep ruts which marked the trail. Gregg, returning that fall from Santa Fe, said:

"On our passage this time across the prairie ocean which lay before us, we ran no risk of getting bewildered or lost, for there was now a plain wagon trail across the entire stretch of the route, from the Cimarron to the Arkansas River."\footnote{37}{Ibid., p. 161.}

There is some question as to where the Cimarron crossing was located. Many writers, and certainly the town of Cimarron, claim that it was near that western Kansas town. Gregg states that the caravans left the Arkansas about twenty miles above the Caches, and this was the regular route. From the Historical Marker, locating the Caches, to Cimarron is only thirteen miles. If the crossing was twenty miles above the Caches, it was nearer the present town of Ingalls. D. W. Barton stated that the famous Cimarron Crossing was at Ingalls, and the old ruts were still visible at points on the hills a long time after he came to the country.\footnote{38}{D. W. Barton was the first man to establish a ranch west of Dodge City. He arrived there in 1872. See also Leona H. Blanchard, Conquest of Southwest Kansas (Wichita: The Wichita Eagle Press, 1931), p. 35.}

In 1843 an interesting battle occurred between the Mexicans and the Texans, probably in what is now northeast Haskell County. Very early in May of that year, Colonel Snively organized a small force, comprising

\begin{footnotes}
\item[36] Ibid., p. 40.
\item[37] Ibid., p. 161.
\item[38] D. W. Barton was the first man to establish a ranch west of Dodge City. He arrived there in 1872. See also Leona H. Blanchard, Conquest of Southwest Kansas (Wichita: The Wichita Eagle Press, 1931), p. 35.
\end{footnotes}
of about two hundred men, which he led from his home in northern Texas, with the intention of attacking and robbing the Mexican caravans on the Santa Fe Trail. These caravans usually crossed in May or early June. When he arrived at the Arkansas River he was reinforced by a small contingent of Texans under Colonel Charles A. Warfield.

The Texans now advanced south along the Santa Fe Trail, beyond the sandhills where they discovered a party of Mexicans had passed toward the river. They soon came upon them and a skirmish ensued. They killed eighteen Mexicans and wounded twenty-two. The Texans suffered no injuries, though there were a hundred of the Mexicans. The rest of the Mexicans were taken prisoners except two, who escaped and bore the news to the Mexican Army at Cold Springs, about one hundred and forty miles away. The Mexican army immediately retreated in the direction of Santa Fe. 39

After 1861 and until the close of the Civil War, the Cimarron cutoff was practically abandoned, principally because of Indian activities. One unfortunate man accompanied by his wife and child ventured over it in 1863. Near McNees Creek they were overtaken by Indians and all three were butchered. After the Civil War trade again returned by way of the Cimarron crossing because it was over one hundred miles shorter than the mountain route. 40


Except for the Historical Markers it is now difficult to locate the Santa Fe Trail across the country. The only influence that it has is in the production of the wheat where the wheels packed the soil.

Santa Fe Trail crossed my land. The wheat that grows on the trail has a different shade of green from the rest of the field. It ripens a day or two later, and in dry years it is the first to burn out.11

The real occupation of Haskell County began with the cattle which were first driven over the trails from Texas. Those drives marked the beginning of a brief period during which the cattleman reigned supreme. The firm of Barton Brothers introduced the cattle industry into southwestern Kansas. They left southern Texas with three thousand head of long-horned cattle in the late winter of 1872, and headed for the Arkansas River. Because there were many tribes of Indians between them and their destination, they decided to follow the western trail up the Pecos River, arriving at the Arkansas in the vicinity of Pueblo, Colorado. They followed the Arkansas River down its course to the present town of Garden City. They remained at that location until fall, when they established headquarters in dugouts at Pierceville. From that time on, their cattle ranged south of the river from the Arkansas to the Cimarron Rivers, covering the entire area of what was later to become Haskell County.42

D. W. "Doc" Barton was there with his cattle before the first

11 Edwain Hawes, personal interview, November 2, 1956.

structure of any kind was built in Dodge City or Garden City. He gradually built his herd up until he had a good grade, but he was nearly ruined by the great blizzard of 1886. At that time he lost eleven hundred cattle, of which eight hundred were registered.

Soon after the Barton Brothers came to the country, other ranchers followed. The Hardesty Brothers were among the very earliest to graze cattle in the territory. During the 1870's they ranged from Dodge City west to the Colorado line. Later they had their headquarters on the Beaver Creek in the Panhandle of Oklahoma. Their brand was the Lazy Bar S on the left hip.43

One of the first cattle ranches to be established was by Fred Harvey. His brand was the X Y. His roundup covered the territory between the Arkansas and the Canadian rivers. Several other ranches were in Haskell County. The S. A. Bullard Ranch ranged on the south side of the Arkansas River between Pierceville and Garden City. The cattle were branded a double cross on the left shoulder. The John O'Laughlin ranch was at Wagon Bed Springs on the Cimarron with its brand "Pig Pen" on the left side.44 Ernest Elliott related that this ranch was still in operation when he came to Haskell County at the turn of the century.45 R. E. Steele was manager of the Crooked Creek Ranch in Haskell County.

44Ibid., pp. 51-53.
45Ernest Elliott, personal interview, November 3, 1956.
Cattle Company which ranged all along the Cimarron River. Their brand was the crooked L on the left shoulder. Laban Lemert established a ranch on Crooked Creek in 1879 and later moved his headquarters to the Cimarron, a few miles south of the Haskell County line. These headquarters were directly south of the present town of Sublette. The ranch immediately east of the Lemert ranch was owned by the Harwood Cattle Company. Robert Davies and T. J. Price Ranch was located at the crossing of the Adobe Walls Trail on the Cimarron River. This ranch has been in operation continuously since it was started in 1883. Sam Rinehart had a ranch southwest of Sublette. He dug a well by hand and ran cattle on open range over most of Haskell County.

For several years Haskell County had no population except the cattlemen. They had no interest in developing it; their only concern was for this area to provide grass for their stock. They ranged their cattle over thousands of acres without restrictions of a single fence. The cattle intermingled and had to be rounded up and separated twice a year. The last blow to the free range cattle industry was the blizzard of 1886, which destroyed thousands of head of cattle and financially ruined many of the large cattle dealers. The blizzard occurred about the same year that the tremendous wave of immigrants began to settle in Haskell County.

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Figure 6.

Population of Haskell County, Kansas, and the Annual rainfall recorded at Sublette, Kansas.

Sources. Population Data from the Biennial Reports of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture. Rainfall from the U. S. Weather Report of the Kansas Climatological Section Center.
Figure 7.

A sod house that served as a general store at Colusa, Haskell County, Kansas. Photograph taken in 1869.
Nearly the entire area of Haskell County, at the time of settlement, was public land and could be secured by filing on school land, a preemption, a homestead, or a timber-culture claim. Under the Preemption Act of 1841, title to 160 acres of land could be obtained by submitting proof of having actually resided on the land for six months, constructed a dwelling house, and made certain improvements, and by paying for the land at the full legal price of $1.25 per acre. This act was repealed in 1891.

By the Homestead Act of 1862, any citizen, or applicant for citizenship, who was the head of a family or twenty-one years of age, could acquire a title to 160 acres of land by living upon it and cultivating it for five years. This land was free of all charges except a minor fee to be paid when filing the claim. The settler could not be absent from his homestead for more than six months without subjecting his claim to a contest on a charge of abandonment. If the settler did wish to remain for five years on his land, he could, after six months of continuous residence, commute his entry to cash by paying for the land at the rate of $1.25 per acre. This provision practically


51Public Land Policies, op. cit., p. 386.

52Ibid., pp. 386 ff.
changed a homestead into a preemption. The length of residence required for commutation was extended to fourteen months in 1891, but six months were allowed to elapse before term of residence was actually begun, only eight months had to be spent on the land. After 1911, fourteen months of actual residence were required for commutation. An amendment to the Homestead Act in 1912 reduced the length of residence on homesteads from five to three years, but as all the land in the county had been filed on, this ruling affected only a few homestead claims on which final proof had not been made.

The Timber Culture Act, as amended in 1878, enabled settlers to get 160 acres of land by planting ten acres in timber and keeping it in good condition for eight years, but only one quarter in any section could be obtained in this manner. When this act was repealed in 1891, provisions were made for persons with pending entries to secure their titles if they had complied with the law for five years. However, residents of the state in which land had thus been obtained could, after complying with the law for four years, secure title to their claims by paying $1.25 per acre. After both the Preemption and the Timber Culture Acts had been repealed in 1891, a person could secure

53Section 6, Act of March 3, 1891, United States Statute, Ibid., p. 1098.

54Act of June 6, 1912, 37 United States Statute, Ibid., 123.

55Act of June 14, 1878, 20 United States Statute, Ibid., 113.

56Act of March 3, 1891, 26 United States Statute, Ibid., 1095.
public land only under the Homestead Act. Further modifications have
been made to this act but as all the public land in Haskell County had
been disposed of before their enactment, they were not operative there.

On March 7, 1873, a county of Araphoe was created in southwest
Kansas out of the unorganized territory. By an act of the state
legislature, this county was dissolved and made a part of Finney County
on March 8, 1883. Haskell County was created by an act of March 5,
1887. Its boundaries were the same as those that were given Araphoe
County in 1873. On July 12, 1887, pursuant to an act of the previous
legislature creating the county of Haskell and describing its meets and
bounds, Governor John A. Martin appointed J. E. Marlow, C. H. Huntington
and Joe Comes as commissioners of the county; Lowery G. Gilmore as
county clerk, and J. B. Shumaker as sheriff. These officers met in a
room of the office of O'Brien and Manuel and took the oath of office.
Haskell County was thus started on its career. A census had been
previously taken and two thousand eight hundred forty-one people were
found within the newly formed county, five hundred and eighty-six of
them being voters.

59Blackmar, op. cit., p. 826.
60Supplement to the Satanta Chief, June 12, 1930.
61Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1887-1888, p. 213.
In 1885 a circuit rider reported that within a two-hour period along the Kingman to Dodge City road, he met seventeen immigrant wagons bound for settlement in the western counties. A resident along this same road reported having seen fifty such pioneer families pass in a day, many of whom were going to homesteads of which they had filed several months previously. Why this sudden belief that the desert would blossom as a rose? One of the answers seems to be found in a prevailing belief that the rain would follow the plow. It was said that the climate had changed, that cultivation of the soil had favored the retention of moisture and thereby increasing the evaporation, which in turn, promoted further precipitation. It was argued with all earnestness that the amount of sod newly turned had, within a year or two, produced a miraculous revolution of physical conditions. The optimism west to the extreme that schemes for irrigation were frowned upon because they might tend to frighten investors away by advertising a distrust in the sufficiency of natural rainfall.

Haskell County received its first settlers mainly from the middle western states. There was a small sprinkling of foreign immigrants from Germany, England, and Ireland. The first enumeration made in the county by the Kansas Agricultural and Population State Census in


63 Willard O. Hainline, personal interview, February 9, 1957.

64 Henry F. Mason, "County Seat Controversies in Southwest Kansas," Kansas Historical Quarterly, 1933, 11:45-6.

1895 shows that none of the farm operators of that time were native Kansans. Most of them were born in Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and Iowa.66

The history of the settlement of Haskell County is a record of man's attempt to extend the culture of a subhumid region to a subarid region. The key to the understanding of its history is the recognition of the marginality of the region. Although it is classified as subarid, there have been many years when the rainfall was sufficient to give it the characteristics and agricultural potentialities of the subhumid areas. The productivity of the land during the abnormal moist years led people to believe that it was capable of stable production. The average annual rainfall, although it is a valuable description of rainfall probability in the subhumid regions, is practically meaningless on the southwest Great Plains. The range in the rainfall is so great that the average is meaningless. The average is so close to the marginal moisture requirements of a farm crop that a slight fluctuation toward the lower end of the scale brings failure. The period of the late eighties was one of those abnormal moist years. (Figure 6). From 1885 to 1887 the settlers swarmed into the county and by 1888 practically all the lands in the entire county were filed upon and homesteaded. Towns sprang up almost over night and soon boasted of populations they have never attained since. The phenomenal growth of the area is almost

incomprehensible to one who has not personally experienced such a boom period.

The only guide the settlers had in making a living was compounded from the agricultural crops, science and folklore of another area, which was unsuited to this new one. They were a diverse group. A good percentage were made up of real farmers seeking to establish homes, but a large percentage were adventurers and speculators who never intended to till the soil longer than was necessary to establish their claims. They came from all walks of life. The few old settlers tell of women school teachers who came out for a lark while establishing their claims. Such people sold their land immediately upon getting title or, lacking a buyer, mortgaged it for all they could get and left the country with their profit. The early settlers came because opportunity had become scarce and land prices were high at home. Free land in the west and the opportunities there were was a major subject of conversation and newspaper editorials. Stories of the wealth and good crops, when they occurred, were headlined in eastern newspapers. Railroads, newspapers, and real estate salesmen dangled the wealth and opportunity of the west before everyone who would listen. Loan companies believed in the prospects of the west and offered to loan amounts on the new land as soon as a settler had

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67 Ernest Elliott, personal interview, November 2, 1956.

68 The bulk of the advertisements in the very early newspapers were furnished by loan companies.
established his claim. One newspaper observed the westward movement thus:

Santa Fe has been thronged with visitors all week, and every stage brings a fresh invoice. Everyone is anxious to gain a new home in the new west.69

At the first commissioners meeting the three townships of Lockport, Haskell and Dudley were formed and justices of the peace appointed in each township as follows: A. P. Heminger and W. P. Fallon in Lockport; J. N. Kite and J. P. Marshall in Haskell and J. E. Strain and Mr. Cannon in Dudley. The Haskell County Review, later to become the Santa Fe Monitor, was appointed the official county paper. Temporary county offices were established in the room they then occupied at a rental of $20 per month. The governor had also named Santa Fe as the temporary county seat. A table and six office chairs were purchased as the first furniture.70

As indicated above, Haskell County was quite well settled before it was organized, having a population greater than it had in 1955. The first settlers probably came in the early part of 1885, and while it is not positively established, J. Kinser Rheuby was likely among the very first.71 Indicative of the westward trend of immigration at this time, V. L. Bethel came to Haskell in the spring of 1885 with a

69The Santa Fe Trail, June 11, 1886.
70Supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930.
71Ivanhoe Times, June 13, 1888.
party of sixteen settlers, all from one community in Dade County, Missouri. They shipped their household goods and stock to Kingman, the end of the railroad on which they lived and came the rest of the way overland, passing up many rich tracts of government land in Kingman and Pratt counties, preferring the level stretches in Haskell County.72 Included in this party were two Bethel brothers, V. L. and Bob; John Layman, V. L. Bethel's father-in-law; John Layman, Jr. and men by the names of Wheeler, Smith, Dunn and Dinwiddie. They settled on claims in the southern part of the county. Mr. Bethel never used his homestead right, filing on the east half of section ten, township thirty, range thirty-three, as a preemption and a timber claim. There were no roads to Garden City and Mr. Bethel, with the aid of a surveying outfit, helped plow the first furrow to make a road on the township line running directly north of the Cimarron River to the Arkansas River south of Garden City. This road is now a part of U. S. Highway 83. The only house in this entire stretch of more than fifty miles was on the Bullard Ranch south of Garden City.

The first house to appear on the townsite of Santa Fe was on the hack line, but, as this house was never used for any purpose, some of the settlers called it "Star City," in derision.73 Santa Fe received its name from that historic trail which crossed the county a few miles north of the townsite and which still plainly shows the wagon tracks.

72 Mamie E. Bethel, personal interview, January 19, 1957.
73 Supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930, p. 8.
up to the time the trail was plowed a few years ago. Arrow heads, bits of trace chain, lead bullets and other momentoes of the westward trek on this trail were found in abundance. Wallace Orth, who now owns the section immediately east of old Santa Fe, relates that after a strong windstorm he still occasionally plows up some souvenir of the bygone days. A few years ago this route was marked by suitable monuments, and Haskell County has four of these markers placed there by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Mack Highfall erected the first store building on the townsite early in 1887. A Mr. Cain and a Mr. Robinson were quick to follow, as was W. V. Marshall. S. Rinehart built his store building in the summer of 1887, V. L. Bethel being one of the carpenters. Mr. Casey was his first clerk. Son L. D. Meredith came out from Iowa and bought an interest in the store, which was thereafter known as S. Rinehart and Company. Mr. Rinehart also filed on a homestead adjoining the town on the northeast and both the store building and this claim house were moved to Sublette in 1912.

Soon after the county was organized the question of a permanent county seat had to be settled. There were two contenders for the honor, Santa Fe and Ivanhoe. A meeting of the citizens of both towns was held at Ivanhoe, where the participants indulged in some barbequed beef and listened to oratory. Lowery Gilmore was the leader of the Santa Fe crowd and J. M. Kite seemed to be the principal moving spirit

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74 Wallce E. Orth, personal interview, December 26, 1956.
75 The Santa Fe Trail, July 2, 1887.
at Ivanhoe. F. E. Murphy was also affiliated with the Ivanhoe group. They had a hilarious time that day and although spirits ran high there is no record of any disturbance.

On the day of the election, October 13, 1887, the Ivanhoe boosters, hoping to intimidate the electors, induced a crowd of men to come out from Dodge City. Among the men were D. C. Arnold, Bat Masterson and other warlike characters, together with a band. The Santa Fe boosters came up to Ivanhoe and bought off the townsite company and after that had little opposition. When the votes were counted, Santa Fe had 647 and Ivanhoe only 381. 76

Santa Fe was organized as a city of the third class on January 2, 1888, the petition for incorporation having been signed by a sufficient number of householders. 77

Santa Fe's prosperity was of brief duration. The town's inhabitants as a general rule had no visible means of support. Those who brought money with them from the east under the lure of quick profits, sank it in town lots. Lots that were sold at figures in excess of a thousand dollars in some instances were soon found to have no value at all. 78 There were no industries of any kind to help support the population. The farmers had no income either. Mass meetings were held and the

76 G. A. Tyler, "Haskell County in the Making," The Santa Fe Chief, June 12, 1930, p. 16.


78 Ibid., p. 18.
question of what to do was seriously debated. The people began to leave the county in droves and it lost a large number of the settlers in a short time.

Contrary to the popular belief, the people who settled in Haskell County in the early days were far more law-abiding than they are given credit. J. B. Shumaker, the first sheriff, who received his office by appointment, spoiled his chances for reelection by dumping out a barrel of whiskey which had been brought in with an overland circus. He said that he was sworn to do his duty and was going to do it regardless of political ambitions. 79

A man by the name of Padgett, arrested on a charge of arson, was the only inmate of the Santa Fe jail during all the years the county seat was located there, with the exception of a couple of outlaws who were arrested while passing through the country and turned over to another sheriff. 80 Padgett was later released with the understanding that he would leave the country. Only one man has ever been charged with murder and this proved to be a case of justifiable homicide.

The county had been organized only a short time before there was considerable demand for relief. When the corn crop failed in 1887, "poor" relief was given to all families who requested it by the county.

79Ivanhoe Times, June 6, 1888.

80Supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930.
The need continued through 1888, and by the spring of that year the people were in such hard circumstances that they petitioned their commissioners to send out a call for aid to the Christian people and the charitable inclined of Kansas and Kansas City, mentioning the fact that they did not want to appeal to people outside the state.\textsuperscript{81} Their request was soon heralded for and wide. A carload of flour, bought by the county, was distributed among the needy, and during three of the first six months of 1888, one thousand dollars was paid out to paupers by the trustees of the various townships who were overseers of the poor.\textsuperscript{82} In the summer of 1888 the corn crop again failed but the small wheat acreage produced a good yield and nearly every settler wanted to plant a crop of wheat for the following year. The local paper reported that farmers were willing to give one-fourth or even one-third of the crop to anyone who would furnish wheat seed for sowing, commenting, "wheat is a sure crop in this country and there is a good opportunity for speculation here offered."\textsuperscript{83}

As it was impossible for all families to get seed wheat, a petition was circulated by the settlers asking the county commissioners to buy wheat for seeding purposes and in return to collect a share of the crop.\textsuperscript{84} This petition was not granted but the demand for assistance continued.

\textsuperscript{81}A. G. Tyler, "Haskell County in the Making," supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930.

\textsuperscript{82}Santa Fe Monitor, July 20, 1888.

\textsuperscript{83}Santa Fe Trail, August 27, 1888.

\textsuperscript{84}Santa Fe Monitor, August 3, 1888.
The most extensive relief and assistance was provided during 1889 because of the complete failure of the corn crop and a very light wheat crop. On January 14 of that year, a petition was sent to the board of county commissioners, signed by 346 resident taxpayers, requesting assistance as follows:

We, the undersigned, taxpayers and bona fide residents of said county, to retain our residence and to put in crops the coming season, find it necessary to have employment.

Therefore, we petition your honorable body to make the following order, to wit;

That for each acre of sod broken in said county by actual settlers between January 15, 1889 and June 30, 1889, you pay to the party or parties, as a compensation for said work, the sum of one dollar ($1.00) per acre.85

This petition to pay themselves for breaking sod on their own land was passed and they were called plow warrants. These plow warrants finally paid only forty cents on the dollar. The local paper reported that some families were not strictly honest in claiming payments for broken sod. In one case, the acreage plowed was less than the amount of the claim filed, and in another, the farmer secured two sets of witnesses and filed twice for the same land.86 These practices occasioned one county commissioner to request the local paper to warn those so disposed to be careful in the future.87

By the authority of the state legislature, roads were established on each section line and damage to the amount of $25 was allowed for
each quarter section of the deeded land, $20 for homesteads and tree claims.\textsuperscript{88} As the payments for section lines and for breaking sod were not considered in the same light as direct relief, nearly all residents of the county availed themselves of these subsidies.

With the aid of city bonds a flour mill was built in Santa Fe in 1888, although fuel for operating the mill had to be hauled from Garden City, twenty-eight miles distance. After the mill was built there was scarcely enough wheat raised in the entire county to supply the miller's family with flour and it soon fell into disuse.\textsuperscript{89} The basement and some of the foundation of the old mill may still be seen in the ghost town of Santa Fe. A few years ago one of Ernest Elliot's calves disappeared and was found a few days later in the old basement. She was alive and healthy but a little weak from hunger.

The scarcity of water was one of the problems that loomed largest in the minds of the early settlers; however, an extensive supply of underground water was available at a depth of from one hundred to two hundred feet. All that was necessary to obtain a never failing supply of excellent water was to dig down after it. Two wells were soon dug in the county, one in Santa Fe and the other in Ivanhoe. One resident reported that he had seen at least half of the population of the county around those two wells waiting for water. Settlers would line up around the wells, waiting their turn, as they now form a line waiting to dump their wheat at an elevator. To prevent any dispute over turns

\textsuperscript{88}A. D. Edwards, op. cit., p. 82.

\textsuperscript{89}Santa Fe Trail, June 25, 1888.
at the well, a book was kept for registering each man upon his arrival. The old well at Santa Fe has never been filled and still may be seen, although it is covered over to prevent cattle and other stock from falling into it.

Needless to say, very little water was wasted in those days. The stock had to go on a short ration and the family was very conservative in their use of the precious fluid. The whole family washed in the same pan of water, the rule being for the cleanest to wash first. "Pat" Murphy relates that his father and uncles made trips to the Cimarron River with four barrels to obtain water for the family. The trip took two days and they had to make a trip at least once each week. Many of the first settlers were without stock and had to walk many miles after their supply of water. Probably the first well on a farm in the county was dug in 1887 by Bob and V. L. Bethel. It was not long until every family had a cistern to catch rain water and a water barrel at home, but additional water had to be hauled from one of those wells or from either the Arkansas River or the Cimarron River to supply the household and stock. This took a great deal of labor and time.

The introduction of windmills began shortly after settlement. By 1888 one well driller reported an average of one sale daily.

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90 Topeka Capitol, July 7, 1907.
91 Lester W. "Pat" Murphy, personal interview, February 2, 1957.
92 Supplement to the Satanta Chief, June 12, 1930.
93 Mamie Bethel, personal interview, January 19, 1957.
94 Santa Fe Monitor, June 29, 1889.
drills made it possible to reach underground water at a considerable depth without great expense and windmills furnished a relatively cheap and reliable means of utilizing the prevailing high winds to do the pumping. As cheap as a windmill was, it was more than many of the farmers could afford; so sometimes three or four neighbors shared the expense and the water. Regardless of price it was the utilization of the windmill that made permanent settlement possible in Haskell county.

Droughts, dust storms, high winds, blizzards, and hail storms visited the settlers. It is reported that the early dust storms were nearly as serious as the one in the spring of 1935, but the dirt did not pile up so much because most of the land was covered with the native grass. If there was sufficient rain for crops to grow, a hail storm might come before harvest and destroy the crop. Blizzards were feared in the winter even more than the dust storms and high winds in the summer. A big blizzard occurred in January of 1886, the first winter that the settlers were in the county. An early settler reported that he was snow-bound for three days in his half-dugout and that the temperature reached twenty-five degrees below zero.95 The snow remained on the ground for thirty-five or forty days and the prairie was littered with dead cattle that had broken away and perished in the storm.96

Prairie fires were a source of danger from the time of the first settlement until almost all of the land was broken out. The broad

95Lester W. "Pat" Murphy, personal interview, February 2, 1957.

96The Topeka Capital, March 10, 1929.
sweep of the prairies, covered with grass which became dry as timber after a short period of dry weather, was very susceptible to such fires. If accompanied by high wind, a fire was extremely dangerous. Even in itself it would tend to create air currents which would facilitate its spread. Burning tumbleweeds borne along by the wind sometimes carried the fire across a considerable space of plowed land.\textsuperscript{97} The flames were fought at each end by using wet feed sacks in an attempt to narrow it down to where it could be entirely extinguished. A water wagon and a large group of people were needed, so most of the residents joined forces in fighting fire. Farmers lost buildings, grain and livestock and sometimes all the improvements on the place were destroyed. The local paper cautioned the people to protect themselves from prairie fires by plowing fire guards around their farmsteads.\textsuperscript{98}

Speculation in land, which has played an important part in the settlement of all the Great Plains, had its effect on the agricultural development of Haskell County. During the early period of settlement loans were easily obtained from mortgage companies, and farmers holding title to land could borrow as much as five to six hundred dollars, on a quarter section. This was enough to pay for the land at the rate of \$1.25 an acre and to make some improvements. Most of the preemptions and homesteads commuted to cash in Haskell County were probably financed by such loans. Some mortgages were taken out by bona fide settlers

\begin{footnotes}
\item[97]\textsuperscript{97} Mrs. Toy Moore, personal interview, February 16, 1957.
\item[98]\textsuperscript{98} Santa Fe Monitor, March 16, 1893.
\end{footnotes}
for improving their homes, but others were taken out by speculators who intended to leave the area and wished to realize as much as possible on the land. Since the rate of interest was high and few of the borrowers could meet their obligations when payments were due, the mortgages were frequently foreclosed. 99

The first settlers in Haskell County were compelled to forego many comforts they had known and were forced to adapt their way of living to frontier conditions. As there was no timber of stone in the county or the surrounding area, it was expensive to erect frame houses. Most of the early settlers built dugouts or sod houses. In The Sod-House Frontier, Everett Dick describes the building of a sod-house as follows:

The sod bricks were made by turning over furrows on about half an acre of ground where the sod was thickest and strongest. Care was taken to make the furrows of even width and depth so that the walls of the cabin would rise with regularity and evenness.

A spade was used to cut the sod into bricks about three feet long. These bricks were then carried to the building site by wagon or by a float made of planks or the forks of a tree. For the first layer of the wall the three foot bricks were placed side by side around the foundation except where the door was to be made. The cracks were then filled with dirt and two more layers were placed on these. The joints were broken as in brick laying. Every third course was laid crosswise of the others to bind them together. This process was continued until the wall was high enough to put a roof on the structure. A door frame and two window frames were set in the wall and the sod built around them at the proper time. Sometimes the builder drove hickory withes into the wall as a sort of reinforcement. The gables were built up of sod or frame according to the means of the settler. 100

99 A. D. Edwards, op. cit., p. 36.

The sod house had many faults. The ventilation was bad and they were rather dark because of too few windows, and were very hard to keep clean. Another disagreeable feature was the leaky roof. There were, however, some advantages of the sod house. It was cool in summer and warm in winter. When the writer was a very young boy he visited in a home made of sod on a hot summer day. The cool comfort of the interior of that pioneer house is still a vivid memory. Another advantage of the sod house was that there was no danger of destruction by prairie fires, then too there was no fear of the wind blowing it over.

After their first season on the land, the early settlers attempted to raise as much of their own food as possible, buying only indispensable clothing, and staples like coffee, sugar, salt, and spices. Cow and buffalo chips were chiefly used as fuel, for coal was very expensive. George Derby, one of the early settlers of Haskell County, told of an incident that concerns the burning of cow chips. Speaking of cow chips, Derby wrote the author relating the following incident.

Cow chips were clean fuel, they were much cleaner to handle than coal. Around the turn of the century, there was a family from Illinois who moved into the neighborhood. They took up land right in our cattle range at a time when most cattlemen resented the nesters moving in. My father resigned himself to it as coming sooner or later anyway so never got excited about it at all. He got along with the nester neighbor. When they first arrived the man, who as an insurance man, was wearing a derby hat, and that was almost enough to ruin him in that day, and to add to this his wife and daughter balked at burning cow chips. This man was a good mixer and could see the writing on the wall. He
discarded the derby hat for one more in harmony with the prevailing fashion. He told the woman that as they had taken up land and were going to stay here to make their home, and if they wanted to have neighbors they had better come down off their high perch. They could not expect to get along by pretending to be better than the others, but still it was a bitter pill for the woman to take. One day I was on my way home when I saw a family gathering chips. I recognized the outfit as being our neighbors, the girl was a little ways north of the road picking up chips, I turned off the road and headed straight toward her. She started in the other direction. I finally caught up with her; she was the most embarrassed woman I had ever seen.101

Apparently she got over the embarrassment because later she and George were married.

Another human interest episode was related by Wood Patton, whose father, James Patton, was one of the very earliest settlers. He was a very small baby in the early part of 1886, when a severe blizzard came during his father's absence after supplies. The family was living in a tent on their land and cowboys at a nearby ranch on the Cimarron River had noticed the squatter's tent out on the prairie. One of them, thinking perhaps the squatter might not be fareing well, rode out to investigate. Mrs. Patton, having heard wild stories of the escapades of the cowboys, was in mortal terror of them and when she saw this one approaching, she thought her time had come. She barricaded the tent door as best she could and the cowboy was forced to enter against her will. He found the young mother and her small brood huddled around a camp stove, their supplies and fuel exhausted,

101George Derby, personal letter dated October 17, 1956.
and she was burning the furniture, meager as it was, to keep from freezing to death. Even then, she refused to go with the man to the ranch and he had to go back and get a wagon and a companion or two. They returned shortly, and loaded the children and the mother into the wagon and took them to the ranch where they were given the best of care. Mrs. Patton soon got over her fright and afterwards if anyone had anything to say about the cowboys it was best not to say it in the presence of Mrs. Patton. 102

After the settlers had provided shelter for themselves, their thoughts turned toward schools. By 1886 a public school was started in Ivanhoe and soon a number of others were established on a subscription basis in different parts of the county. 103 Twenty-three school districts were organized the following year and the total school enrollment was two hundred and twenty-four. 104

An interesting development throughout the county during this early period was the organization of groups known as industrial schools, to promote propaganda relating to the abuses of the trusts. They pictured the trust as giving the farmer a short price for his products and, through monopoly, selling them to consumers at a huge profit. These industrial schools were active in 1888 but were apparently abandoned within a short time. 105


105 Santa Fe Monitor mentions these activities during 1889.
The crudeness of facilities for schooling during this period is illustrated by the following item written by a retiring schoolteacher.

Her first school was constructed of sod with a dirt floor. There were no desks. Seats were home made. The blackboard consisted of boards a foot wide, nailed to cross pieces and leaned against the sod wall.  

Throughout the period of early settlement when the population was at its height, the social life of the county was lively. The settlers eagerly seized upon every occasion for social contacts. Weddings and birthday parties brought gatherings of neighbors and even funerals attracted large crowds. Sunday schools were organized at an early date and by 1890 there were six churches: Baptist, Methodist, United Brethren, and three Presbyterian, with a combined membership of two hundred and nine persons. Festivities were planned long in advance for eagerly awaited holidays. The celebration of the fourth of July at Santa Fe, in 1888, was attended by practically every resident of the county. It included a procession in the morning, dinner at noon, sports in the afternoon, and fireworks in the evening. The parade included delegations from all over the county, the Grand Army of the Republic Post of Santa Fe, the Knights of Pythias, and a company of ladies and gentlemen on horseback. Memorial Day was another day of planned festivities.

106 Sublette Monitor, September 9, 1937.


108 Santa Fe Monitor, July 6, 1888.
Early Monday morning the people began to arrive from the county and the streets of Santa Fe presented a lively appearance. Shortly after nine o'clock representatives of the Grand Army of the Republic, with other citizens began to form in line preparatory to going to the Ivanhoe cemetery. One of the leading features was a large wagon drawn by four horses containing forty-five misses representing the different states and the Goddess of Liberty.109

109Santa Fe Monitor, June 2, 1892.
Figure 8.

A rig used to drill water-wells in Haskell County. This rig is reputed to be the first one that was used in the county.
Passing from the sod house frontier we will now observe Haskell County during the farmer-stockmen interlude, 1895-1905. The first attempt at small scale agriculture ended in failure during the drought of 1893-1897, and many settlers, having lost all hope, left the country. Those who remained adjusted their farming practices by depending to a greater extend on cattle raising.

The granting of free land under the Homestead Act, so effective in stimulating settlement during the earlier years, was intended to make it possible for each family to own its own farm. The typical farm during the period of early settlement comprised one hundred and sixty acres, representing a unit that the government thought would be adequate west of the one hundredth meridian as it had been in the east. Because the settlers were accustomed to farming even smaller tracts in the more humid states, they did not question the wisdom of this land policy but instead they flocked to the area in large numbers. The productive potentialities of the county were not sufficient to permit the farmer to make a living on such a small unit and the vagaries of nature made it necessary to depend upon cattle as the major source of income.

When the unsuitability of the size of the unit prescribed for this area became manifest during recurrent droughts, there was a trend toward more extensive farming. The abundance of unoccupied territory left by immigration following the dry years enabled many to use some additional land without buying any. In 1888 less than twelve thousand acres of crop land were planted, but there was enough rainfall to
produce an abundant harvest. Encouraged by this yield, the settlers doubled their acreages the following year only to experience complete crop failures because of the extreme dryness. Crop acreage was cut to about fourteen thousand acres in 1890, but an increase in precipitation resulted in a good yield. In 1891 planting was expanded and, as this year was a year of heavy rainfall, the returns continued to be good. The next year a still greater acreage was brought under cultivation and a bumper crop was harvested, but the price was very low. Concerning the harvest of 1892, an early settler wrote:

This crop turned the farmer's heads and they went heavily in debt for machinery. Much of this crop, by the way, rotted in the stacks as it was not worth threshing and hauling so far to market and no more wheat was raised for so many years that they lost count. The big crop resulted in a lot of blasted hopes and busted farmers.\textsuperscript{110}

The year 1893 was marked by further increase in crop acreage but as it was a year of desert-like dryness, there was a complete loss. Although the drought continued, the acreage in crops declined only slowly in 1894. After that year it diminished more rapidly. W. Y. Morgan, editor of the \textit{Hutchinson News} made a trip through Haskell County in 1896, and in telling about the trip he said:

The time was late summer and the buffalo grass on the prairie was dying. There had been no rain, according to the statement of our guide, since the fall before. Occasionally breaks in the soil disclosed evidence that ambitious homesteaders had broken the ground in an attempt to raise crops. "This would be a great country if we only had water," said one of my companions, who had participated in the invasion of the late '80's. "That is what they say about hell," was the response of an accomplice.

\textsuperscript{110}Supplement to the \textit{Sublette Monitor}, June 12, 1930.
The scattered buildings were deserted or nearly so. The prairie dog villages were still populated. The road was a trail across the prairie. A cloudless sky and an over energetic sun filled the county with reflected heat until it rose from earth as well as descended from the Heavens.

That night I walked out under the glorious moonlight, felt the cooling breeze coming from somewhere, grew romantic in the mellow environment and visualized the wagon teams which once floundered their way across the Great American Desert. And then in imagination pictured the Indians of the plains, rushing herds of buffalo, and wondered why it was that the pioneer spirit of America could not let well enough along and concede this country to the original citizens.111

During the first years of settlement most farms had small crop acreage and some livestock. The principal crops were corn, millet and cane. Corn, the most important crop of the three, produced a good yield the first two years but declined in importance thereafter. (See Appendix A).

The first adaptation of the farming enterprise to semi-arid climate, therefore, was the substitution of hard winter wheat for corn as the principal crop.

The first wheat crop of considerable size was grown in 1891 and at harvest time a horse-powered thresher was used. The following year is still spoken of as the best wheat year they ever had in the county. The severe drought beginning the next year caused successive failures of the wheat crop, and production on a large scale was not resumed until after the first World War.

111 Supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930.
Sorghums introduced into the area constituted another adaption of farm enterprise. These drought-resistant crops, producing feed and sometimes grain even during years of extreme dryness, are well suited to conditions in Haskell County. Sorghums commonly grown during the early period included maize, feterita, kafir and other varieties. Sorghums were well established as a part of local agriculture by 1895. (See Appendix A).

The relative depopulation of the county during the drought of 1893-1897 left much vacant land and thus created a situation favorable for cattle ranching. (Figure 6). The natural optimism of the frontier is reflected in the way in which the supposed ranching advantages of Haskell County were played up in contemporary news items. Thus the local editor states:

The cattle thrive the year around on buffalo grass when it is not covered with snow and stockmen frequently do not have to feed at all during winter. There is an abundance of range here for ten times our present population and it is practically free. A man with plenty of pluck and grit can come here and buy one hundred acres of land and ten or a dozen cows, with six hundred or seven hundred dollars, and he is on the highroad to fortune. There are still some desirable quarters in the county subject to entry under the Homestead Act.\textsuperscript{112}

Collection of taxes was extremely difficult between 1895 and 1900. Much land was sold for even less than the amount due for taxes. The journal of the county commissioners for 1900 shows land offered for sale by the county for $25 per quarter section, plus the payment

\textsuperscript{112}Santa Fe Monitor, June 9, 1898.
of one year's taxes. School sections were leased about this time for grazing at $25 a year per section for a five year period.113 Land belonging to absentee owners could be leased for the payment of taxes or used without the permission of the owner. Government land, left vacant by the departure of the homesteaders, could be operated without charge although it was open for homesteading at any time.114 Large acreage in the county was secured by ranchers or land speculators. Settlers who had remained in the county began to raise cattle as an important source of cash income.

Immigrants to the county between 1895 and 1905 included a considerable number who had money enough to take advantage of the grazing land. Among those that came at this time were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Johnson. They arrived in Haskell County in the fall of 1899 from Mondamin, Iowa, with a car load of household goods and six head of horses. They purchased a half section three miles southwest of Santa Fe. Free range was plentiful. There was not a fence between Garden City and the plains. Mr. Johnson was the first man to fence when he ran wires around a four acre tract of pasture land.115

Not long afterwards Dan Woodman fenced a corral with a well in it and charged ten cents for each head of stock that wayfarers might care to place in the corral over night. Mr. Johnson's first crop

113Journal of the County Commissioners, Haskell County, Kansas, 1901.

114William O. Kelman, County Representative, personal interview, December 24, 1956.

115Supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930.
was forty acres of millet which made a fine yield. Gradually he kept adding to his land, buying a quarter at a time and always paying cash. When Mr. Johnson began to plant wheat, he had no intention of marketing his crop because the roads to Garden City were almost impassable for heavy loads. He would have his wheat and barley ground together for stock feed in the winter.\textsuperscript{116} Ernest Elliott is another immigrant who came to Haskell County at the turn of the century. Although he went into the banking business, he bought land at every opportunity and now owns over forty quarters.\textsuperscript{117}

Frank McCoy used to tell about receiving a letter from a resident of Boston asking him how much he would give for a specific hundred and sixty acres. Frank wrote across the top of the letter, "twenty five dollars and take up the taxes." In about four months Mr. McCoy received a quit claim deed. When he examined the title he learned to his surprise that the easterner had shoved off an additional quarter on him.\textsuperscript{118}

The depopulation of the county during the drought of 1893-1897 jeopardized the functioning of local government, economic agencies, schools, churches and organized social life. The local government in particular did not adjust itself readily to changes in size of population. As it was difficult to collect sufficient taxes to meet

\textsuperscript{116}Supplement to the \textit{Satanta Chief}, June 12, 1930.

\textsuperscript{117}Ernest Elliott, personal interview, November 2, 1956.

\textsuperscript{118}Frank McCoy, personal interview, January 10, 1954.
the most necessary public expenses, all expenditures had to be drastically reduced. Business establishments declined from twenty-three in 1890 to two in 1900. In Santa Fe the population declined from an estimated one thousand in 1886 to two hundred and fifty in 1895 and to sixty in 1896. Although the population of the county had declined to four hundred and thirty-four in 1899, no change was made in county boundaries. The number of townships, however, was reduced from nine to three by an act of the legislature in 1897.119

The loss of population was a severe blow to the schools. The number of school districts declined from thirty-three in 1890 to three by 1900.120 Also affected were the large celebrations, such as those that had previously been held on the fourth of July; they were discontinued because of the expense. Lodges were abandoned because of the difficulty of paying dues. The departure of many families also affected such organizations as singing schools, literary societies, and Sunday schools. Informal gatherings and neighborhood visiting had to take their place. When parties were held, mush and milk frequently replaced the usual ice cream and cake.121

Pat Murphy, who was born in Santa Fe in 1892, relates that the thing he remembers about old Santa Fe are the long board walks that were still there when most of the town had been torn down or moved away.

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119Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1897-1898, p. 628.

120Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1889-1890, p. 8, 1899-1900, p. 92.

121Santa Fe Monitor, March 1, 1900.
These board walks were built on both sides of the street. They run both north and south, and east and west for a distance of more than a half mile in both directions. There were made with two by twelves and were approximately ten feet wide. These board walks remained after the entire town had moved away and were finally torn up in the early twenties after Ernest Elliott bought the section and began to farm wheat over most of it.\textsuperscript{122}

Beginning in 1905 a cycle of "wet" years began and with the increase of precipitation there came a corresponding increase in the population of Haskell County. This period of resettlement extends roughly from 1905-1915. The population change was not nearly as violent as the one of 1885-1887 however. In a three year period, 1905-1908, the population increased from five hundred and fifty-eight to one thousand four hundred and eighteen.\textsuperscript{123} The second rush of settlement had much to do with the frequent consolidation of ranch holdings, for claims filed on all remaining government land broke up the range that the ranchers had been occupying. Numbers of disputes over damages to crops accompanied the breaking up of the range. A law was passed prohibiting cattle, horses and other animals from running at large.\textsuperscript{124} Ranchers frequently had to pay damages done by their livestock.

\textsuperscript{122}Lester W. "Pat" Murphy, personal interview, February 2, 1957.

\textsuperscript{123}Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1905-1906, p. 1072, and 1907-1908, p. 833.

\textsuperscript{124}Santa Fe Monitor, March 5, 1895.
The most significant event which occurred during this period was the building of the Santa Fe Railroad through the county missing the town of Santa Fe by six miles, and, as a result, Santa Fe slowly died and two towns, Sublette and Satanta, were established on the Santa Fe Railroad. During all those early years, the one topic of conversation sure to gain an audience was the latest railroad prospects. As early as the spring of 1888 the Dodge City, Montezuma and Trinidad Railway headed straight for Santa Fe and the county voted Aid Bonds to the extent of two thousand five hundred dollars per mile.\textsuperscript{125} The road, after reaching Montezuma, was discontinued because of the lack of capital and the bonds were never issued.

Rumors concerning a railroad continued to be circulated. The Santa Fe Railroad made several surveys across the county but years elapsed between surveys and nothing much was expected from that source. The following article appeared in the Santa Fe Monitor:

\begin{quote}
The railroad meeting in this place was largely attended by representative citizens and a large majority of them seemed enthusiastic for the road. J. Patrick was elected chairman and J. Miller, secretary, the president of the road presented the proposition as follows:

The proposition as amended is that the county shall issue \$48,000 in bonds and furnish the right of way across the county, the road to be built and in operation within two years from date. No bonds to be issued or delivered until after the road is built and in operation.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{125}Supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930.

\textsuperscript{126}Santa Fe Monitor, April 15, 1905.
Two years later the Garden City, Gulf and Northern Railroad Company tried to promote a railroad through Haskell County. This road would have run north and south. This scheme was not successful, although the people of Haskell County decided by a vote of more than five to one in favor of bonds for this railroad.

By 1910, hardly a week passed that the newspaper did not carry some news of prospective railroads. One of these noted with understanding disappointment that the line as proposed would follow an old railroad grade from Dodge City due southwest and miss Santa Fe by a few miles. Finally, in October of 1911, it was announced officially that the line would pass through Haskell County six miles south of Santa Fe. A final article read:

The trains are now making regular runs to Sublette and are doing quite a freight and passenger business. Let the good work go on, and in the meantime remember Santa Fe will be doing business at the same old stand.

It was hard for Santa Fe to give up the idea of a railroad because she would lose much of her business. The exodus began immediately. In the summer of 1912, J. Frank Rutledge, who ran a hotel in Santa Fe, bought a huge tent from the Santa Fe Railroad Company, put it up along the railroad where the future Sublette would be located, and began to serve meals to the men working on the construction of the railroad. This

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127 Santa Fe Monitor, August 15, 1907.
128 Santa Fe Monitor, February 27, 1908.
129 Santa Fe Monitor, October 19, 1911.
130 Santa Fe Monitor, September 12, 1912.
was the first business establishment in Sublette. That fall he moved his forty foot square hotel south over the six mile stretch by placing it on sleds and pulling it by mules.\textsuperscript{131}

Steven Cave was the first to move his dwelling house. Anticipating the move, he sent to Quincy, Illinois, and had four sets of steel wheels made with rims two feet wide at a cost of four hundred dollars. He placed the house on these four wheels and in two hours was moved to Sublette.\textsuperscript{132} The first tractor purchased in the county by Bob Davis was used to move people's property from Santa Fe to either Sublette or Satanta. The first building actually built in Sublette was built by Steven Cave. The basement was started before the railroad came into Sublette and the building was completed soon after.\textsuperscript{133} This building still stands and is today occupied by the T. M. Deal Lumber Company.

The advent of the tractor marked the beginning of a new era for Haskell County, the period of mechanical crop farming, 1915-1930. From 1915 on, the farmers world enlarged. Power machinery brought a greater emphasis on wheat, which made the farmer more conscious of national markets and national problems. During the 1920's he completed this transition. In a short time he became a production specialist. He sold everything he could produce and bought all that he consumed. He was completely involved in a market-and-money economy and easily dropped the rural self-sufficient economy.

\textsuperscript{131}A. C. Rutledge, personal interview, February 2, 1957.

\textsuperscript{132}Topeka Journal, June 5, 1912.

\textsuperscript{133}Supplement to the Sublette Monitor, June 12, 1930.
A street scene in old Santa Fe. This town was for many years the county seat of Haskell County. It is now a ghost town.
Figure 10.

A crown watching a baseball game in old Santa Fe, Haskell County, Kansas around 1910.
The trend toward the predominance of wheat farming during this period received its initial emphasis by the completion of a railroad through the county in the summer of 1912. Before its completion farmers had to haul their farm products to the railroad station in Plains or Garden City, a distance of 30 miles; so the cost of marketing absorbed a good part of their profits. The building of the railroad provided not only a convenient outlet for crops grown in the county, but a cheap and rapid means of transportation as well.

Another factor in the trend to wheat farming was the extraordinary high price for wheat during and following World War I.

Haskell County underwent a drought period from 1913 until 1917. The impact of those years lacked the severity of the drought of 1893 to 1897 and the stimulus of wartime demands for agricultural products was at hand to insure rapid recovery. The return of adequate rainfall in 1918 saw the completion of the trend toward one crop farming.

The most important single factor governing the change to wheat farming was the introduction of power machinery. This period produced new methods and machinery for large scale farming. Summer fallow practices for conserving the moisture in the soil for crops was introduced and gradually gained favor among the farmers. In addition to the tractor, the duck foot plow and the one-way disc plow appeared at this time. They were designed to leave the stubble on top of cultivated land rather than turning it under as the mold-board plow had done. The one-way disc plow, with its wide sweep, made possible a much faster and more efficient method of cultivation of the soil. It had the drawback
of pulverizing the soil and contributed to the problem of soil blowing, its major disadvantage.

In the early period of the 1920's most farmers in the area harvested their wheat with headers. This process required hauling the freshly cut grain to a location in the field for stacking, where it was ultimately threshed with a custom threshing machine. This threshing took place after it had "sweated" and became dry. Percy J. Gheen relates that many farmers delayed using the new fangled combines because they felt that wheat had to go through the "sweat" before it could be successfully handled. Very little binding and shocking were done in Haskell County. Both harvesting and threshing required large amounts of seasonal labor. In addition to the header operator, men were required for driving, loading and unloading the wagon barges, which carried the wheat to the wheatstack. With the help needed for stacking, a header crew normally consisted of six to eight men, not to mention the added burden placed on the women in preparing meals for the entire crew. Obviously, if available labor was inadequate for harvest season requirement, the whole process was proportionately delayed. In the 1920's the introduction of the "combine" harvester and thresher spread rapidly through the area. The first combines were pulled by horses. Late in the decade, however, they were pulled by tractors. An article in the local newspaper noted:

D. Frank Birney, living a short distance north of Sublette, is feeling pretty good over his wheat crop this year. He had two hundred fifteen acres and cut it with a new combine harvester and thresher and had 5,700 bushels making 26½ bushels to the acre. He pulled his combine with horses and it worked fine.135

In the early days of the combine the threshed grain was channeled into a wagon that drove along beside the machine. Later a bin for catching the grain was installed on the combine, which made it possible to dump the grain directly into the wagon or truck for movement to the farmer's bins or to the local elevator. Later the combines were made self-propelled and could be operated by a single man. Mounted on rubber tires, the whole process moved much more rapidly. The tremendous reduction in labor needs brought about by these changes is apparent.

The use of mechanical power greatly increased the speed and reduced the labor needed for plowing. This is an especially important improvement in the high plains region where large cultivated acreages could then be included in the customary operating units. Tractors made possible quick cultivation of fallowed land after rains to retain moisture in the soil. The decline of the horse and mule population released both crop and pastureland formerly used for feed for wheat farming. By the end of this era a farmer needed, for efficient operation, a large tractor, a large combine, a one way plow, seed drills, a ton-and-a-half truck, a pickup truck, a chisel type implement, harrows and other miscellaneous equipment.136 The cost of farming


Figure 11.

Cutting wheat before the days of the combine, a header and barge crew cutting wheat in Haskell County during the '20's.
had gone up drastically during the period.

The production of winter wheat in Haskell County in 1918 was 29,946. The next year it increased to 354,000; this exceeded the famous bumper crop of 262,000 bushels in 1892. To quote figures to illustrate the extent of the boom in wheat production, the production in 1929 amounted to 3,837,000 bushels.137

Native grass pasture was broken out at a rapid rate during the decade of the 1920's. As non-resident owners insisted upon having all available land planted to wheat, the demand for wheat land made it increasingly difficult for newcomers to obtain pasture or for the older resident operators to keep land they rented, from being plowed up. This trend made it difficult to keep cattle and as a result cattle ranches disappeared by the end of the period. The average size farm has remained about the same because the farm unit for large scale wheat farming remained about the same size of the ranches of the previous period.138

The mechanized production of wheat makes it possible for an operator to raise a crop by being present only a few months of the year during planting and harvest time. This gave rise to the development of the so-called suitcase farmer. This non-resident farm operation, or suitcase farming, became more common with the introduction of the combine and the tractor. The majority of these suitcase farmers never

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138The average size of the farm unit in 1905 was 1,238. See A. D. Edwards, op. cit., p. 47. According to County Agent's Annual Report, 1955, the average size of the farm in 1954 was 1,129.5.
lived in the county, but had begun suitcase farming because of the chance for quick profits. Few of these farmers made a practice of summer fallowing any of their land and they had no general disposition to follow moisture-conservation practices. Many of the business men farmed in addition to their other occupation. Businessmen who do farm are considered as unfairly competing with the legitimate farmers. Some farmers point out that these men are to blame for the small population of the county, for a landlord can rent his land to a businessman and tear down the improvements, thus reducing his taxes but taking away the opportunity of a real farmer to make a living and have a place to live.

Most farmers still resent the suitcase farmers, who contribute little in taxes, community welfare, or business and who, they believe, were chiefly responsible for the wind erosion because they are never close enough to the land to know when to take precautionary measures when they were needed. When their land begins to blow, it may do severe damage before they can stop it.

The overall feature of farm life in Haskell County was that the standard of living for the farmers went up during the period of the 1920's. In western Kansas men became rich on a single crop and freely spent the easy money. Big new houses, stores and schools were built. Not only tractors but automobiles became standard farm equipment. Part of the change was made possible by the building of hard roads. Even small farmers drove better automobiles than some of the bankers
Butchering, canning, soap making, and other practices which had traditionally enabled farmers to live well now began to fall out of use as dependence on town merchants came into general practice. With great wealth coming from wheat, a person was considered foolish to produce his own butter, eggs, milk, and vegetables. He did not have to, and besides, it was considered cheaper to buy them. The thinking of the time is reflected in an editorial of a neighboring city newspaper.

No other section of Kansas has such a splendid acreage of tillable soil. For mile after mile one can see only the most fertile of lands, laid down by the Almighty as a bread basket for the benefit of the universe. None but a power of that character laid aside and held in reserve such vast expanse for the present and future ages as the great great plains area, of which Haskell County is one of the very choicest spots. As America was held by him in reserve for the building of a great nation, so He held this wonderful eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains in reserve until such time as the tractor and combine should make it come into its own.

Endowed with a wonderful climate, blessed with a great soil fertility, tilled by the finest, most progressive of farmers who have wrested wealth from the earth, Haskell County will continue to go forward to still bigger and greater things, because this portion of Southwest Kansas is just commencing to come into its own. 140

The population of Haskell County had dropped down to 995 in 1915. By 1925 it had steadily increased to 2,026. The change of population increased the competition for wheat land and accelerated the speed at which it was broken out. Newcomers with small resources usually rented


140 Warren Zimmerman, Liberal News, June 12, 1930.
land at first and tried to acquire holdings later if they were successful with their wheat crops. Besides having smaller resources than the farmers already in the county, these newcomers were largely without experience in dry-land farming. Land was bought not only by bona fide farmers but also by speculators further east. Small shopkeepers, bankers and lawyers saw an opportunity for an excellent financial venture. During this period they swarmed out to buy western land and prices soared as their speculation got under way.  

The local newspaper carried the following observations.

"At least from 50 to 60 per cent more ground is being broken in Haskell County than ever before. Very little sod is left."  

And in the following year:

"50,000 acres of sod were broken out to put to wheat last fall."  

During this period the county seat was moved from Santa Fe to the new town of Sublette after a long fight. The first election was held on February 25, 1913. Sublette failed to carry the three-fifths majority necessary to move the county seat by nine votes. The law at that time stated that five years must intervene before another election on the same issue may be held. After waiting the necessary five years, the people held the second election on June 25, 1918, and in this

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142 Sublette Monitor, August 6, 1925.

143 Sublette Monitor, January 21, 1926.

144 Topeka Capital, August 11, 1915.
election Sublette failed to gain the three-fifths by only five votes.

The *Topeka Capital* commented:

In the election held in Haskell County yesterday to determine the relocation of the county seat, Santa Fe, the county seat for twenty-five years, won over Sublette. This is the second time Sublette has tried for the county seat within the past five years.\footnote{Topeka Capital, June 26, 1918.}

That fall Clarence Dennis of Sublette was elected to the state legislature on the platform that he would secure a law that would permit a special election. Upon being elected Mr. Dennis presented House Bill No. 161, which read:

In counties having a population of less than two thousand and having a county seat not located on any railroad, and where at an election for the purpose of relocating the county seat the vote heretofore cast in favor of the removal of the county seat was less than a majority of the votes cast, then in that event another election may be called any time within two years after the date of such former election, and it shall only require a vote of the majority of the electors voting at such election to relocate the county seat.\footnote{Excerpt from House Bill No. 161, 1919. From the files of Clarence Dennis, Attorney at Law, Sublette, Kansas.}

This bill was eventually passed by the Kansas legislature in the election which it authorized, Sublette won, but Santa Fe carried the fight into the courts and the legal proceedings finally came before the Kansas State Supreme Court. In the meantime Santa Fe obtained a restraining order which prevented the removal of the court house records to Sublette pending the decision as to the legality of the election.\footnote{Clarence Dennis, personal interview, February 16, 1957.}

The outcome was carried in a newspaper in the state capital.
Santa Fe is to continue as county seat of Haskell County. Sublette's long fight to move the court house met with failure yesterday when the Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Haskell County district court and declared the special law passed by the 1919 legislature unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{148}

The Kansas State Supreme Court held the election unconstitutional because it was authorized by a special law where a general law could have been made applicable.\textsuperscript{149}

In the next meeting of the legislature Mr. Dennis introduced another bill which simply provided that in counties having a population of less than two thousand, an election may be called any time within two years from the last legal election.\textsuperscript{150}

In the special election authorized by this act of the legislature, Sublette won but Santa Fe again carried her fight into the courts. This time she questioned the legality on the grounds that one of the County Commissioners who had called the election was not living in the county at the time. The Supreme Court held that acts of one who is a County Commissioner, either de jure or de facto, are binding on the people of the county.\textsuperscript{151} The provisions of the new law permitted the county seat to be moved.\textsuperscript{152} The records were moved that month and for a Christmas present in 1920, Sublette received the long sought county seat.

\textsuperscript{148}Topeka Capital, June 20, 1919.

\textsuperscript{149}Kansas State Supreme Court, decisions, No. 22428, from the files of Clarence Dennis.

\textsuperscript{150}Excerpt from 1920 House Bill No. 106. Files of Clarence Dennis.

\textsuperscript{151}Kansas State Supreme Court decisions, No. 23250.

\textsuperscript{152}Topeka Journal, November 11, 1920.
The post-World War I period of prosperity so stimulated the production of wheat that surpluses began to accumulate and flood the market. With the increase of the surpluses the price of wheat began to drop rapidly, the great depression (1930-1940) was on.

During the period of one crop farming, the business of farming had become a very expensive operation. To raise revenue to meet fixed charges for interest and taxes, expensive machinery, gasoline, and repairs, the farmers of Haskell County attempted to counterbalance low prices by increasing wheat production. A bumper crop resulted. In 1931 Haskell County produced 5,204,000 bushels of wheat.153 The price continued to go down, and the wheat sold for as little as twenty-five cents per bushel. This low return to the producer was almost equivalent to a crop failure.154 In 1933 the drought set in and was to last for five years. Many farmers stored part or all of their wheat, hoping to sell it the following year at better prices. But the price remained down for several years, and the result was that storage absorbed the equity which they had in the wheat. A complete loss resulted.

In addition to the world wide depression and the extended drought, the people of Haskell County had to undergo the very unpleasant experiences of the dust storms. These started in the early spring of 1932 and


continued periodically through the spring of 1939. Dust storms usually occur with greatest severity in the spring of the year. The normal low precipitation during the winter months makes the soil especially dry and susceptible to blowing by March or April winds. Winds during these months are usually stronger in the spring than during the rest of the year. Dust storms usually last for several hours and it is not unusual for them to last for a day or two. They vary in their intensity from purely a localized blowing of dust to towering clouds of dust which sweep up from and across the plains and carry tons of soil particles several hundred miles. Visibility is greatly reduced and travel made hazardous. Until one actually experiences one of these storms, it is difficult to believe their intensive nature. The writer has witnessed dust storms so bad that it was impossible to see the road from inside of a car, huge neon signs across the street were completely obliterated and people walking down the street stumble into the curbing. Many farmers caught in their barns had difficulty getting to the house a few yards away. Breathing becomes difficult for people and animals, and they must ordinarily seek shelter. The Kansas State Board of Health made the following report.

There is no evidence that any pathogenic organisms were carried by the dust and therefore the direct cause of the respiratory infections could not be attributed to this factor. The dust, however, was exceedingly irritating to the mucous membranes of the respiratory tract, and, in our opinion, was a definite contributory factor in the development of untold numbers of acute infections and materially increased the number of deaths from pneumonia and other complications.155

Figure 12.
A dust storm, February, 1935, in Haskell County, Kansas.
Soil made dry by a long drought is more likely to blow if the grass has been removed by cultivation or other means. Crops are damaged by having the soil blown away from their roots or by smothering deposits of drifting dust. Wheat is especially vulnerable to damage from unattended neighboring lands from which the soil may blow. Soil frequently piled up in drifts against obstacles such as fences or hedge rows and the fields would have to be worked to remove the roughness after a bad storm.

The damage from wind erosion is difficult to ascertain accurately. The topsoils in Haskell County are several feet deep in most places, and after the return to ample moisture it does not seem that wind erosion has adversely affected soil fertility, although a considerable amount of soil has been removed in some places.

During the first of these years the farmers did not know what to do and let the land blow. Later they began to take preventative steps to keep the land from blowing. It was discovered that clod-mulch cultivation after rainfall would help to retain the top soil intact and help prevent soil pickup by the wind. Crop residue and stubble left on the land after harvest also would help reduce soil blowing, therefore the practice of burning the stubble was discontinued. Another important practice recommended by some farmers was a method known as strip farming. Strip farming never became very popular in Haskell

\[156\] W. James Forman, Agriculture, p. 50.

County, although it was used in Sewerd, the county immediately south, quite extensively. Another method of control of wind erosion was listing the land at right angles to the prevailing winds. The major preventative measure developed in Haskell County in the late thirties was the working of the land by lister and field cultivators to break up the crust. This gave a cloddy, rough surface which resisted wind erosion. Most of the farmers watched their fields closely and worked them as soon as they got in condition to blow, or immediately after the blowing started.

Blowing became a community problem. It was apparent to most farmers that soil conservation practices were of no avail if their neighbors failed to take similar measures. With the exception of the "suit-case" farmers very few farmers failed to take appropriate action when conditions presented themselves. The pioneer background of the community became apparent in the direct action taken by farmers to protect their own fields. In one case a suit-case operator, informed of the deplorable condition of his fields, failed to take corrective measures to prevent wind erosion. His neighbors went out in a body with various types of implements and proceeded to work his land. This effectively stopped the soil blowing, but because the tractors operated at different rates of speed and went around each other, the ground was left in a rough condition.

In the spring of 1937, a Haskell County farmer listed about one hundred acres of land adjacent to his farm without obtaining authority
from the non-resident owner. The owner sued him for trespassing.

The case aroused widespread interest and was expected to set a precedent as to the legality of one farmer working another's land without permission. The jury declared in favor of the farmer who worked the land to halt soil blowing and assessed no damages. 158

Another case was reported in which a farmer, without advising the owner, worked land to prevent soil blowing. The owner arrived just as he was leaving the field, hired him to work more land and paid him for what he had already done. 159 Two expressions of public opinion helped enforce the effort to prevent soil blowing. The first was a ruling of the local Agriculture Conservation Committee that farmers who failed to control soil blowing were not eligible for benefit payments, and the other was a state law empowering the County Commissioners to work the land of such owners and charge the cost to their tax bills. 160

The population decrease during the great depression was from 2,804 in 1930 to 2,086 by 1940. 161 There appears to be every evidence that the bulk of this outward migration during these days was from the non-agricultural families. 162 The lack of mass evacuation of the farm population is in contrast to the drought period of 1893-1897.

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158 Sublette Monitor, March 11, 1937.

159 Sublette Monitor, March 18, 1937.

160 Sublette Monitor, May 6, 1937.


The explanation lies in the Federal relief program.

As the problems arising from the depression, drought, and subsequent dust storms were too great for the local government to handle, cooperation from larger units became necessary. The Federal program that played the most important part in Haskell County was that of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration because it affected directly or indirectly nearly everyone living in the county. From its beginning in May, 1933, it received almost unanimous support. Payments sent to Haskell County amounted to an average of more than $450,000 for the years 1933-1936. The spending of this money benefited all local business establishments and was largely responsible for the fact that nearly all taxes were paid on time. Funds were thus provided for the salaries of local officials, school expenses and other local needs.

The Agricultural Conservation program of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration succeeded the A.A.A.'s production control program when the later was declared invalid. Payments were continued to farmers on the basis of soil conservation practices but Haskell County received somewhat less under the new program.

With the development of Federal relief, the functions of the county were altered and it became, to a large extent, an instrument for the administration of state and national programs. Relief was dispensed with the cooperation of the county commissioners and required only a slight adaptation of the local government. The farm programs,

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however, were established outside the existing county set-up and were not responsible to the local authorities. The Agriculture Adjustment Administration, the Farm Credit Administration and the Farm Security Administration worked directly with the farmer or with committees of farmers and not with the county commissioners. The only connection with the county government was through the county agricultural agent.

Federal assistance to farmers in Haskell County runs counter to individualistic tendencies and such a program which involves regulation might be expected to incur strong resistance. The farm program was accepted partially because of the desperate circumstances in which the farmers found themselves and partially because of an indication of the rapid change in fundamental attitudes that were taking place throughout the entire country.

Nothing discourages a farmer more than to watch his crops dry up when there is nothing he can do except to wait and hope for rain. The writer has heard farmers say, "one hopes for rain out here so much that it hurts." Even when there is a single crop failure, the morale of the farmers is severely taxed. They become pessimistic and this is intensified when the drought continues for several years. With the coming of rains everyone becomes optimistic regarding the prospects for a crop the next year. In the spring of 1937 the local paper carried the following statement.

"Southwestern Kansas doesn't have a chicken in every pot and a
car in every garage but it does have a gleam in every eye this year.  

The ability of these people to rise from despair to enthusiasm at what seems to be a light excuse probably explains why they are able to stay in the county when the odds seem to be greatly against them. This feeling is expressed in an editorial of the local paper.

Here on the high plains the spirit of confidence and hope and well being is reflected, although we have been without a major crop for five years. The irrepressible determination of the people is by way of justifying itself; there is no longer a question of defeat. There is, instead, some planning of how to spread the income from a promising wheat crop over the gaps of the last five years. No widespread splurging is included in these plans. A wheat crop will launch a new era of self-financed systematic management of the high plains--because since the last crop the farmers have done a lot of reading and the government has been doing a lot of organizing.

The prospects of a good wheat crop has about as much effect on the attitude of the people as a good harvest.

We're always long on wheat prospects, J. F. Moyer of Dodge City told a Kansas crop-weather seminar in Topeka. We're always talking prospects. When we have a bad crop, we forget about it and start discussing the next one. In fact, business is much better out there in the fall and winter when prospects are good than it is after a bumper crop harvest.

In other words, southwestern Kansas illustrates the old adage, 'hope springs eternal in the human breast', we ourselves are glad this is so. We'd rather be buoyed up by hope year after year even if the incentive must be next year's crop than be smug and content over this year's profitable crop. This Pollyanna faith may seem childish to people who are always sure of returns every year, but out here it's as logical and matter-of-fact as the quirks of the weather.

164 Sublette Monitor, March 18, 1937.
165 Sublette Monitor, December 31, 1936.
166 Sublette Monitor, November 19, 1936.
Figure 13.

A view of good farming practice. Contour farming on the Warren Moore farm.
Figure 14.

Drilling the first irrigation well in Haskell County on the Warren Mo farm.
As good as hope and faith may be, the farmers of Haskell County looked for other means of making "next year's crop" more predictable. The soil of Haskell County is rich and deep. It requires no fertilizer and the application of manure or green manure would be a little value, as there is not enough moisture to rot it. In fact, such practices at first sharply reduced the productivity of the soil.\textsuperscript{167}

The next period in the history of Haskell County is the era of irrigation and diversified farming, 1940-1955. The three major problems of land management confronting the dry land farmers of Haskell County are moisture preservation, run-off prevention, and the prevention of wind erosion.\textsuperscript{168} As the county lies on the margin of the area of sufficient rainfall for crop production, the average rainfall is enough to produce a moderate crop providing it falls at the right time or is preserved when it falls. The wide variation from the average makes the production of a crop hazardous. The problem is to flatten out the effects of the variation through run-off control and storage in the ground.

The first attempt to store moisture took the form of summer fallowing. It was initiated about 1911 and apparently was adopted rather rapidly and generally. The better farmers fallowed about one-third of their wheat land. The results were very beneficial at first and the local farmers thought they had solved most of their

\textsuperscript{167}Bell, \textit{Rural Life Studies}, No. 2, p. 43.

problems. However, summer fallowing did not prove effective during the drier years of the 1930's and added to the wind erosion. The fact that government benefit payments were computed on the basis of the wheat acreage planted by each operator for the three years, 1930-1932, worked to the advantage of those who had not been complying to soil conservation practices and greatly discouraged the practice of summer fallowing.

During the period of the late '30's, other methods of preserving moisture were developed in the experiment stations and have proven to be effective. These measures were primarily designed to reduce the run-off from the hard beating rains and thus store the water evenly on the land. The practices included basin listing, and other damming practices, contour cultivation, terracing, and strip farming.¹⁶⁹

One of the first farmers to begin soil conservation practices was Warren Moore. A neighboring newspaper carried this account.

Several years ago Mr. Moore sighted eye level contour lines on his field, and began farming along them. They helped to hold moisture and cut down on the amount of water than ran off the field following rains and melting snow. Last spring, he entered a five-year cooperation agreement service and they helped him in running lines and building terraces. He used terraces, strip cropping, pasture furrows and farming on the contour.¹⁷⁰

On the whole, moisture conservation methods developed rather slowly. When one has raised ten to fifty thousand bushels of wheat

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁷⁰Southwest Daily Times, Liberal, Kansas, February 26, 1938.
and sometimes piled it on the ground, it is difficult for him to see the necessity for saving a little water which runs into ponds. On one occasion a farmer said:

In the dry years I didn't have anything except in the low spots. If I'd kept the water from running down there, I would not have raised anything. What would I have done for seed?171

The common Adult Education programs of speeches by specialists has not been very successful in Haskell County. Most of the time the farmers have been given the feeling that the specialists were "cocky" and have been so antagonized that the information was unpleasantly associated with the personality of the specialist. This has had a tendency to slow up the changeover to more scientific methods of farming. Generally speaking, the older farmers have been slowest to change their methods of operating and the younger, especially those who have attended Kansas State or some other agriculture college, have pioneered in the more accepted methods. With the introduction of irrigation most all farmers utilize all the trained advice that they can obtain because this is an entirely new field to them and they are willing to take advice. At any rate, since the serious blows of the late 1930's, little spectacular damage has been permitted in recent years.

World War II ushered in another complete reversal of economic and climatic conditions in Haskell County. In addition to a demand that absorbed at profitable prices all of the wheat a farmer could produce,

171 Frank Stoops, personal interview, August 10, 1956.
the rains returned to make bumper crops possible. Production of wheat for the county in 1936 amounted to only 117,000 bushels. The years from 1941-1949 saw the total yearly production of 2,000,000 bushels. The best year was 1947 when the production amounted to 5,618,000 bushels and with the good price the farmers realized $12,584,000 for their crop.172

A good wheat year also meant a good year for cattle in Haskell County, for a good stand of winter wheat provided pasture for feeder cattle brought in for wintering. The war years brought a tremendous increase in the number of cattle being fattened. Since 1941 the number of cattle has been in excess to the number maintained on grassland during the days of the cattle empire around the turn of the century when extensive rather than intensive ranching practices were followed.173 (See Appendix A).

The increased agricultural incomes in the prosperous years provided an indirect aid to irrigation by making available to farmers the funds necessary for putting down wells to obtain ground water. Irrigated land in Haskell County tended to be used for wheat and sorghums rather than the traditional sugar beets and alfalfa, because of the possibility of using available machinery, and the problem of high cost of labor.

With the increase in total income has come an increase in capital funds required for carrying on farming operations in Haskell County.

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In the first place, the number of farms decreased from 429 in 1935 to 306 in 1955. The average acreage per farm has increased from 629 in 1935 to 1,129 in 1955. Another factor has been the progressive addition of more and costlier machinery. Linked with these forces has been a very rapid increase in land values in the area.

While these developments were making it increasingly more difficult for the potential farmer to accumulate the funds needed to engage in farming, other developments were lessening the acuteness of the problem of credit to those already engaged in agriculture. When the cycle of dry years returned, most of the farmers could find ways and means to raise the necessary capital to put down a well and start a program of irrigation. With the coming of the dry cycle, 1952-1956, came the tremendous development of irrigation, a development that has greatly changed the entire method of farming in Haskell County.

If the supervisors of the Haskell County Soil Conservation District could have looked ahead a dozen years when they were writing their first annual report, they might have rubbed their eyes in disbelief. In 1948 they wrote:

The majority of those who are irrigating are doing so with the idea of raising feed crops and tying in with a livestock program. They feel that it will be livestock insurance and add greatly to the stability of the farming in this section of the state. 175

174Willis L. Blume, County Agent, County Agent’s Annual Report, 1935-1955.

That seems to have been the theme the next six years, but little did they realize the irrigation boom that was to take place from September, 1954 to March, 1956. At the start of this period there were fifty wells irrigating ten thousand acres. By March of 1956 the number had shot up to one hundred and fifty wells with a potential of 50,000 acres that might be irrigated. In January, 1957, there were 167 wells and the Soil Conservation Office told the writer that the figure was good for only the day given because more wells were being brought in all the time.

The history of this development might be divided into three phases. The first phase dates back to late 1939 when Warren Moore, of northeast Haskell County, decided that a few acres under irrigation might be a good project. He got pretty lonesome those first few years as others had not awakened to the possibilities of pumping water from the underground. Others decided to wait and see before investing several thousand dollars in a hole in the ground. In the early 1940's a few more venturesome farmers began to see possibilities in this type of a program for their farms. By August, 1948, when the Haskell County Soil Conservation District started operations, there were twenty irrigation wells and a scant two thousand acres under irrigation.

The second phase of development might be termed the trial and

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176 Warren Moore, personal interview, December 1, 1956.

177 Sublette Monitor, January 27, 1949.
error period. For some of the thinking during this period, let us turn to the district annual reports and see what the supervisors had to say. In 1949, they had the following to report:

We think that the judicious use of land leveling with a minimum amount of excessive cuts has been the most advantageous practice in the connection with the irrigation projects. It has enabled the irrigator to get more even penetration and more efficient use of the water. One of the important practices that will continue to need stressing in connection with irrigation, is the use of legumes, such as alfalfa and sweet clover, to help maintain the fertility of the soil. It is recognized the fertility of the soil is somewhat like a bank account in that you can't continually take out without eventually having to put something back.178

The 1950 annual report stated:

The value of irrigation which was the project that took most of the Soil Conservation Service technician's time, the first year and one-half of the program is showing the payoff in increased dairy and other livestock production. The thinking of many is that with an insured feed supply they can be safe in building up a high producing herd since they won't have to sacrifice it at the next dry period.179

By this time most of the earlier wells had been in operation long enough for the operators to demonstrate that irrigation, if properly managed, could insure crop production and help stabilize agriculture in the area. Although the average cost of a well amounts to approximately $16,000, including the digging of the hole, the pump and the engine, several of the old operators had put down the second well.


179 Ibid., 1950.
The cycle of dry years in which dryland crops failed completely started a steady development of irrigation farming which developed into an avalanche of unprecedented proportions.

The Soil Conservation Service Office was swamped with applications for preliminary surveys. Approximately 30,000 acres were surveyed by a forty rod grid system of surveying during the period between September 1, 1954, and March 1, 1956. The farmers staked their fields prior to the survey and furnished pickups and manpower to aid with the survey.

Dorsey Elliott, John Garetson, Charles L. Giles were among those putting down irrigation wells in 1950 to insure feed and pasture for permanent cow herds already established. They felt it was risky business to have a high quality herd without an insured pasture and feed supply. Noah Nichols was probably the first farmer in the county to use brome grass pasture for his dairy herd. Brome grass was later planted on the farm of Orville Tunis, Ortha Garrison, A. B. Sherwood and others. However, unfavorable cattle prices of 1951 and too close grazing of the brome grass discouraged the use of brome grass and delayed the utilization of the irrigated pasture program.

Orville Tunis pioneered a system of land leveling known as bench leveling in early 1949. This system has since been used on over 3,000

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180*Early J. Bondy, Haskell County Soil Conservationist, personal interview, January 12, 1957.

Figure 15.

An irrigation well on the Wallace Orth farm in Haskell County.
Figure 16.

Warren Moore admiring the flow of water from his irrigation well.
acres of land in Haskell County. According to Mr. Tunis the leveled land was easier to farm. He irrigated the first year by farming out furrows from the well.

When I turned the water loose, I would get in my jeep and the water would beat me to the other end of the field. Chasing water with a jeep or a shovel is not the way to irrigate.

By March, 1956, irrigation had trebled over an eighteen months period, and the end does not seem to be in sight. When the price of milo maize and other cash crops appeared unfavorable several farmers, who had previously had surveys made, decided to wait and see what was going to happen. A frequently asked question to both the county agent and the soil conservation personnel was what other crops might be grown under irrigation. During the summer of 1956, sugar beets were grown for the first time in the county. A. B. Sherwood had very good luck with the crop he put out. The sugar content was 17.48 and this was reported to be the highest in the state. An earnest attempt to successfully irrigate wheat was attempted. The local newspaper commented:


Some farmers now are beginning to reappraise the value of irrigation on wheat, heretofore accepted as rather impractical, extravagant use of water. Whether the practice is advisable will be more clearly defined next year. Success with irrigated wheat this year will lead to a larger acreage in 1957.

Irrigated wheat varied widely in yields this year. Lloyd Lambert reported a fifty bushel yield from Concho, a new variety recommended for irrigation. Harold Lower,


183 Hutchinson News Herald, November 2, 1950.

184 Grover Feight, Haskell County P.M.A. Committee Chairman, personal interview, February 2, 1957.
southeast of Sublette, had a forty acre yield of the same variety that averaged forty six bushels. Howard Bobbitt, eleven miles south of Sublette, had an average of twenty bushels on irrigated lands, and Wallace Orth, who had ten combines cutting at the same time, said his average was fourteen including both dryland and irrigated wheat.185

What is the future of irrigation in Haskell County? Can it be made to stabilize agriculture during the cycles of extreme drought? How many acres will be eventually irrigated? It appears that the answer hinges on the ultimate amount of underground water available for pumping without materially lowering the static water table. Potentially Haskell County has more than 300,000 acres of land that lies such that it could be irrigated.186 Natural gas is generally available over the territory, which should be a great asset to further development, therefore, water will be the only limiting factor.

It has been said that it takes three generations to make an irrigation farmer. If that is so, then it will take a few more years of trial and error before the pattern is established in Haskell County. Most observers agree that slow, steady development, coupled with a properly designed system and sound management, including proper maintenance of fertility, will make irrigation the paramount factor in the overall economy of farmers and businessmen alike in Haskell County.

For many years most of the farms have been leased to oil companies at an annual rate of about $1 an acre. With the development of the

185 Sublette Monitor, June 28, 1956.

186 Earl J. Bondy, personal interview, January 12, 1957.
Hugoton gas field, many farms in Haskell County acquired a gas well. The Kansas State Commerce Commission reported 364 gas wells in Haskell County in operation on January, 1956. However, these wells are a very minor source of income to the farmers; quite often the wells pay less than the lease. Their importance is in the use of the gas as a source of power to pump water for irrigation. With a cheap source of power, irrigation will continue to develop at a rapid rate.
Figure 17.
An irrigated milo maize field in Haskell County.
Figure 18.

The corn is as high as an elephant's eye. A corn field in Haskell County.
Figure 19.

A milo maize field in Haskell County.
Figure 20.

A lot of feeder calves in Haskell County. With irrigation such scenes are becoming common-place.
CONCLUSION

Instability has been the dominant theme in the history of Haskell County. The population, the institutions, and the agriculture itself have fluctuated widely between wealth and poverty, success and failure, hope and despondency. This instability is the natural corollary of the shifting nature of the economic base. Before any degree of stability is attained, it will be necessary to develop agricultural techniques which will minimize the effects of the wide fluctuation of the rainfall. The opportunistic and exploitative agricultural attitudes and practices have actually magnified the effects of the wet and dry years.

In the good years optimism dominated. The people founded institutions, took on obligations, and established ways of living which taxed the capacity of the county to support them even in the best years. Many people came into the county in the belief that the rich productivity which they see about them is the whole nature of the country. The optimism of the good years inhibits the memory of the poor years. Wishful thinking makes it easy to believe that something has permanently ended the hard times of the past. When the lean years come, there is usually complete failure of crops. Many are discouraged and leave, in the belief that the country is unfit for agriculture and can be used successfully only for range land. Those who remain call the period subnormal and speculate as to when the country will "come back."

None of these ideas of the country are correct. The development of a stable life must await the recognition that good years and bad
years are both to be expected, that eventually bad years are sure to follow good ones. When this is recognized, the basis for a stable agricultural life may be developed.

The value of the clod mulch is generally recognized, but the trashy mulch has not been adapted generally. A shift to a diversified livestock feed economy would eliminate the peaks of prosperity brought about by the occasional coincidence of good wheat crops and high prices but it would stabilize incomes and reduce the severity of the poor years. The development of irrigation in recent years will do much to bring about diversified farming methods.

Haskell County is not an Eden, but neither is it an impossible land in which to develop a stable society of people with a decent level of living. Its tragedy is the result of general misunderstandings of its real nature, plus a system of values brought from an entirely different area. The prospects of growth in Haskell County are good, in spite of several crop failures in recent years. Irrigation wells are being drilled almost daily, and with improved methods of dry farming, Haskell County will continue to grow in population as well as in productivity of agricultural products.
Figure 21.

The McCoy Grain Company, Sublette, Kansas. Storage is 985,000 bushels. Storage capacity is from the Kansas Grain and Feed Dealers Association.
Figure 22.

The Co-operative Grain Dealers Union, Sublette, Kansas. Storage 500,000.
Figure 23.

Riffe Brothers Grain Company, Sublette, Kansas. Storage 770,000.
Figure 24.

The Haskell County Grain Company, Sublette, Kansas. Storage 770,000.
Figure 25.

Farmers Elevator and Merchandising Company, Satanta, Kansas. Storage 750,000.
Figure 20.

Satanta Cooperative Grain Company, Satanta, Kansas. Storage 765,000.
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From the personal files of Clarence Dennis, Sublette, Kansas.

Kansas State Supreme Court Decisions No. 22428 and 23250. A Syllabus of the Court Decisions. From the personal files of Clarence Dennis, Sublette, Kansas.

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Bethel, Mamie, January 19, 1957, Sublette, Kansas.
Daughter of one of the first settlers in Haskell County.

Haskell County Agriculture Agent.

Haskell County Soil Conservationist.

Associate Professor of History at Fort Hays Kansas State College.

Dennis, Clarence, February 16, 1957.
Attorney at Law, Sublette, Kansas.

Derby, George, October 17, 1956, Sublette, Kansas.
Pioneer settler of Haskell County and for many years served as County Clerk.

Pioneer Banker and rancher in Haskell County.

Feight, Grover, February 2, 1957.
Chairman of the Haskell County Production and Marketing Administration.

Manager of the McCoy Grain Company.

President of the Haskell County State Bank.

Hawes, Edwin, November 2, 1956.
Prominent farmer of Haskell County.

County Representative from Haskell County for many years.

Lindeman, Walter F., November 2, 1956.
Mayor of Sublette and former sheriff of Haskell County.

McCoy, Frank, January 10, 1954.
Pioneer resident of Haskell County and one of the largest land owners.
Moore, Warren and Toy, February 16, 1957.
Mr. Moore's father was one of the original settlers in Haskell County. The Moore's love for collecting historical data and arranging it into scrap books provided a reservoir of information for this study.

Miner, Loring V., March 2, 1957.
Son of the only doctor in Haskell County for many years. He is now postmaster at Sublette, Kansas.

Murphy, Lester W., February 2, 1957.
Son of one of the earliest pioneers in Haskell County.

Orth, Wallace, December 26, 1957.
Prominent farmer in Haskell County.

Son of one of the earliest pioneers in Haskell County.

Rutledge, A. C., February 2, 1957.
Son of one of the earliest settlers in Haskell County.

Schnellbacher, Albert W., December 26, 1956.
Son of an early settler in Haskell County and for many years the Probate Judge of Haskell County.

Stoops, Frank, August 10, 1956.
A long time resident of Haskell County.

Resident engineer for the Kansas State Highway Department.

Wooster, Lyman D., December 7, 1956.
Former president of Fort Hays Kansas State College and now Secretary for the Western Kansas Development Association.
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APPENDIX
# APPENDIX

Listing of the Yearly Agriculture Production in

Haskell County, Kansas

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Milo $</th>
<th>Broomcorn in Lbs.</th>
<th>Cattle</th>
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Source:

*The Biennial Reports of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture.*