

Possibility on the Frontier

Opportunities abound but not without hard work

The West provided a range of new possibilities. Agriculture was not initially successful because herds of bison trampled crops. Instead, many early settlers hunted bison for food and hides or gathered bison bones to sell. Other early business efforts included a group near the Salt Marsh that tried organizing a salt manufacturing company. Eventually, farming and ranching became the primary livelihood. The cattle trade especially boosted Great Bend, but when trade shifted to other markets, the city transitioned into a regional commercial center. Industry eventually thrived too. In 1886, local speculators began to fund petroleum explorations. By 1930, over 3,000 wells operated in Barton County and the oil and gas industry brought in over \$20 million each year. The new workers also boosted their population.

Possibilities of the Railroad

Much of the frontier's possibility only happened with the help of the railroad. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (AT&SF) Railway was especially significant. Great Bend incorporated working with AT&SF in 1872, and the railroad ensured that it prospered as a cowtown. Ellinwood was also created with the AT&SF in mind, named for an AT&SF engineer to attract the railroad. Railroad companies even promoted settlement, such as C.B. Schmidt, an AT&SF agent credited with attracting some 15,000 Germans to Kansas from 1873-1885.

The Colorado-Kansas (CK, later Missouri Pacific) was also important to the area. In 1886, the prospects of the railroad led local settlers to found Hoisington. By 1911, the railroad employed some 1,600 men, with Hoisington serving as a shipping point and freight and passenger operating division, complete with a million-dollar shop and round house. The CK railroad drove Claflin's development too. Originally to be named Giles City for a landowner by the depot, but Mr. Giles would not sell his land to the town company. The company promptly bought the land on the other side of the tracks and named it Claflin.



The Santa Fe Railroad Depot in use in Stafford. The Structure no longer exists.



Main Street, Claflin

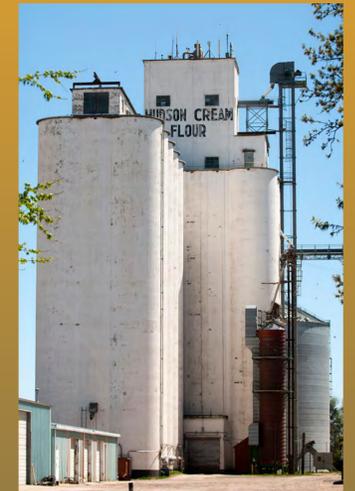
Immigration and Possibility

Possibility attracted immigrants to the area. Around 1872, settlers to Barton County included those of German, Czech, and Bohemian descent. Russian settlers arrived later, followed by other ethnic groups. Germans were an especially important group. Ellinwood was promoted as a German area with streets given German names and the railroad sending out German brochures to German-speaking areas with maps labeling the area "Germania." As a result, Ellinwood attracted many settlers of south German and Austrian descent. The immigrants also brought their culture, founding one of Western Kansas' first breweries in 1875. Claflin attracted Germans too with its "German school" which taught many classes in German starting in 1888.

While most Stafford County settlers were of English, Scotch, or Irish descent, there were some notable exceptions. Most notably, Lutheran German families settled near present-day Hudson, founding the German Evangelical Peace Church in 1885.



Metal Pole Art Installation, Hoisington



Hudson Cream Flour, Hudson

Possibilities Today

Whereas the Santa Fe Trail and railroad brought possibilities to the area in the past, today possibilities are driven by the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms. Eco-tourists look for unique experiences like the Metal Pole Art installations in Hoisington, Great Bend's commerce and entertainment, and Hudson's prime hunting land. Towns also leverage their history and commerce, including the "Hudson Cream Flour," Ellinwood's unique underground stores and tunnels, and Claflin's Main Street completely occupied by a furniture retailer with a block-long façade reproducing its 1890 downtown storefronts.



Unique underground stores and tunnels, Ellinwood



Wetlands Waterpark, Great Bend



German Evangelical Peace Church



Concert on the Jack Kilby Square, Great Bend



Quivira National Wildlife Refuge