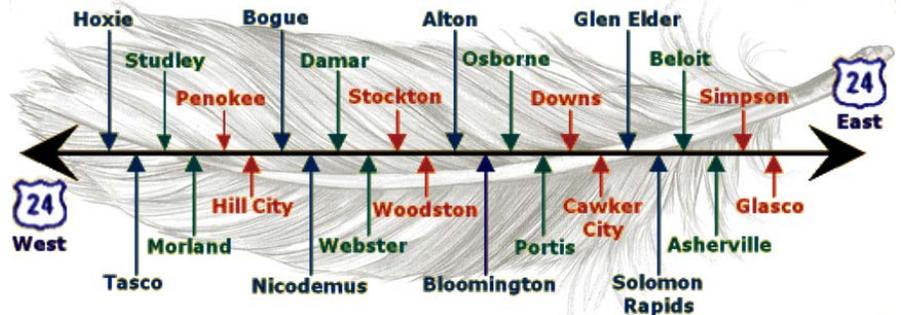
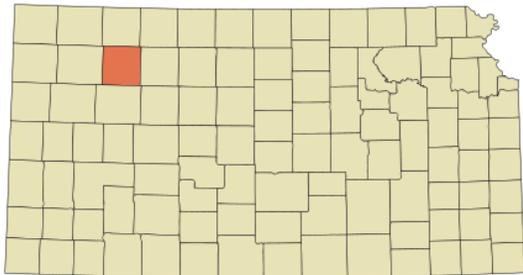




Hoxie, Kansas

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History of Hoxie

by Marilyn Carder

With news of a promised railroad, the homesteaders and business men of Sheridan County became very excited. Several railroad surveys would be made through the center of the county to determine the most efficient site. Yet the citizens of Kenneth felt they would see the appearance of a train within a year as a railway survey was made through Kenneth. Everyone knew the railroad was the only way the town could continue to grow.

Kenneth, located two and one-half miles north of Hoxie, was the first county seat, founded by Hon. E. J. Turner in 1879 and named for his son Kenneth. Its growth had been rapid during its first several years as four stores, a hotel, livery barn, blacksmith shop, land office and several residences had been built by the first fall. A post office had been established in May 1879, followed by a bank in 1885. The only downfall was surviving the drought conditions which destroyed crops and the lack of water. The unreliable hand-dug well at Kenneth was 135 feet deep.

The news came from the Missouri Pacific Railway that the railroad would be a short distance south of Kenneth. In the January 1, 1886, issue of The Kenneth Democrat, it was announced that a new town site located two miles south and one-half mile west next to Sand Creek would be laid out that week. The survey of the railroad passed through the center of the new town site and several people forming the town company had already bought 2,000 acres of land around the proposed town of Hoxie, named after the Missouri Pacific Railroad official who was promoting the Stockton branch extension. With the disappointing information, the Kenneth residents began worrying about the future of their small town.

After some discussion the Hoxie Town Co. held a public meeting at the Kenneth school house where it was proposed that an equal number of lots would be given in the new town to owners of Kenneth lots and that the buildings and homes of Kenneth would be moved free of charge. They also stressed that well water could be found at 40 to 80 feet at Hoxie. In early March 1886 the citizens of Kenneth voted unanimously to accept their offer. George H. Diamond, believed to be from Cawker City or Osborne, was offered a \$2,000 contract by the Hoxie Town Co. to move the buildings to the new location. On March 22, 1886, his teams and apparatus arrived to begin the huge relocation task with the hopes of the town being moved by April 15, weather permitting. By the end of March fourteen buildings had arrived in Hoxie

on skids being pulled by spans of horses. The Central Hotel building was the largest challenge of all. After several failed attempts to move it, the Hotel finally arrived, drawn by 23 teams of horses and one yoke of oxen.

By the end of May 1886 all that remained of Kenneth was the county courthouse and a few residences. The courthouse had to stay there until an election could be held to relocate the county seat.

The Hoxie Town Co. proposed to pay for all election expenses for the relocation of the county seat from Kenneth to Hoxie. They agreed to deed all of Block 8 in Hoxie to be used for courthouse purposes and to pay for all moving expenses. The election was held July 27, 1886, and Hoxie was named as the county seat. The courthouse was moved to Hoxie soon after that.

The new little city was suddenly booming. A lot of building was done in the first few months. On July 5 a petition to incorporate the town of Hoxie was presented to the county commissioners by 250 legal voting citizens for the purpose of setting the organization of the city in place. The first election was held July 16. Sam Davidson was elected mayor, and N. F. Morrison, O. C. Harris, J. S. Turner, O. F. Ellithorpe, and J. K. Winkleman were elected councilmen.

Many improvements were made during the first few months after the city councilmen took office. Their first priority was setting up the city ordinances. By October of that year it seemed that a jail would be needed. The first "culprit hotel" was built and stood on what now is the courthouse square. W. H. Batchelder was appointed at that time to serve as the marshal. He was also instructed to oversee construction of sidewalks along Main Street.

The threat of fires was perhaps the biggest danger in those days. Fires were fought with a "bucket brigade." Fire breaks were made around the town for further protection. The Ellithorpe Hotel, a 3-story hotel on the west side of the 900 block of Main Street, was an early casualty. On June 27, 1896, the courthouse burned to the ground, destroying records of all county officials. It was reported in the local newspaper, "The way books were opened and papers scattered proved the fire was of incendiary origin." Although there is no record of accusation, the belief was that a county official set the fire to cover his misappropriation of funds. Another theory was the suspicion of only one other set of official land records which were hand-copied by a local land office.

The second courthouse was a two-story frame house, bought and moved to the grounds, which served until 1917 when the present structure was built at a cost of \$60,000. The building is still in use today.

The first school in Hoxie was built immediately after the move from Kenneth. On August 24, 1886, the citizens voted for \$3,000 bonds to erect a two-story, four-room school house. The Hoxie Town Co. again donated an entire block. The present grade school stands on the same lot today. A. F. Beechy was the first teacher at the "Select School of Hoxie." The enrollment at that time was 35 students. The first Teachers' Institute was held in 1887. For many years the summer Normal Institute, which teachers and would-be teachers referred to as "going to Normal," was an important educational-training event and an annual social highlight. The Institute was conducted over a 4-week period.

In 1903 the Sheridan County High School was established and an addition was built to the existing school for the 21 pupils enrolled. As more students attended high school each year, a new high school was erected in 1910, leaving the grade school just for the younger children. Located on the east side of town where the present high school stands now, a brick three-story building faced west. The students from the country lived with town relatives or boarded with a local family. Some students went together and rented a room and "batched" during the school terms. On November 16, 1921, a fire destroyed the school building. It was replaced by the first unit of the present structure.

A simple frame building was built near the courthouse in 1886 which served as the church for Hoxie. It was known as the Presbyterian Church and was organized by Rev. James Griffes. The first services were held on November 23, 1886. The Methodist and Christian congregations also used the church until they could build another facility. No group had enough money for full-time pastors for the next several years, but Sunday School was held regularly.

In a short time the booming town had a railroad. The Salina-Oakley Branch of the Union Pacific arrived in Hoxie in the year of 1888. Hoxie had a passenger train each way during the night and a mixed train each way during the day. A hack was used to take passengers up the hill into town. In the early 1900s a dray was added to haul the incoming freight from the depot.

The city grew with a good economy for the next few years. A telephone system was installed and a small fire-fighting outfit was organized in 1903. New businesses were opening and established businesses were expanding. The center of entertainment was the Opera House above the Beers' Store. Many school plays, graduation exercises, and company road shows were held for the entertainment of the Sheridan County people. Chautauquas were held during the summer months.

In 1916 progress was at a high level as the economy was stimulated with news of a great war. Then the city decided to make some major improvements. An election was held and it was clear that the citizens were in favor of building a light plant.

Another election was held in 1921 to build an up-to-date city water system and to change the existing council form of government to the commission form. The following year they voted to install a sewer system. In 1929 the city commission decided to make an improvement with sand, curbing, and gutters in parts of the city. The light plant was sold to the Kansas Light and Power Company.

All progress was slowed with the Dirty 30s and 1940s. The economy dropped and many people were living in very hard times. Many were giving up their land and leaving for other states where they had relatives or jobs waiting. Others waited for times to turn, surviving by being thrifty. Again, the announcement of a war slowly boosted the economy.

The 1950s brought another building spurt to Hoxie. Businesses were added, some remodeled, and others torn down and replaced with a new store. A hospital was built in the eastern part of town. The Wheatridge Addition was added for homes in the northeastern section of Hoxie. Streets were improved and county commissioners leased the current fairground. The community was growing once again.

We can now boast of a home-owned carnival, a new 20-room retirement community, low-rent housing, and numerous churches that serve our community. A wide-variety of recreational opportunities such as golfing, swimming, tennis, and basketball courts to fishing and hunting are offered as well.

Like many small towns in northwest Kansas, Hoxie's population is slowly declining. It is hard to compete with the larger cities when it comes to inviting new businesses into our area. Agriculture is the key to our present economy. Semi-trucks now haul the grain to market since the railroad tracks have disappeared. The history of the community may be seen at the local museums.

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