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Urban Ambitions in an Agricultural Economy:
Town-building on the Great Plains, 1870 – 1929

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Erin Leith Brown

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Urban Ambitions in an Agricultural Economy:
Town-building on the Great Plains, 1870 – 1929

by

Erin Leith Brown

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Janice L. Reiff, Chair

This dissertation appraises the role of white, middle-class businessmen as engineers of urban development, assessing the complexity of individual and group reactions to an array of economic, political, social, and environmental stimuli that residents of Kansas faced between 1870 and 1929 using Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City as case studies. I explore the social dynamics that evolved among these local businessmen – as well as with other townspeople and those who lived outside their communities – to consider how these social interactions affected each town’s urban aspirations. This study traces the process of town-building from its inception when Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City became cattle towns; through the towns’ transition into commercial centers during the boom of the 1880s; their struggles to negotiate the agricultural and economic depression of the 1890s; and their resurgence in the early 1900s. Over the period of sixty years, businessmen responded to major shifts in the surrounding agricultural economy; regional and national politics; and evolving transportation systems. In examining how these men negotiated with one another, with other residents, and with their rural neighbors to respond to these changes, I conclude that the communities that proffered the most cogent visions for development – and those which devised the most solid strategies and programs

to achieve these plans – were those where businessmen actively and consistently collaborated with one another. In so doing, I identify local promotional organizations as an important site for sustained collaboration and explore early formal and informal attempts to establish these groups, while examining how collaboration became increasingly institutionalized in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The dissertation of Erin Leith Brown is approved.

Leobardo Estrada

Frank Tobias Higbie

Janice L. Reiff, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

To my mom and to Ryan
(because we never give up)

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While at UCLA I was honored to work with some amazing scholars. My graduate chair, Jan Reiff, has been exceptionally forgiving and patient, especially given her many responsibilities. She has pushed me to become a better writer, thinker, and teacher and I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to work with her. Eric Monkkonen and Jacqueline Leavitt served on my graduate committee initially. Along with Jan, they had a profound effect upon me – as a scholar and as a human being. Eric was not only brilliant, he was also funny and kind and generous. Jackie’s insights into urban development and social justice shaped my research interests and helped define my personal beliefs. With Jan, Eric, and Jackie, I had a graduate committee that any urban scholar would have envied. We lost Eric and Jackie far too early.

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Working on Kansas town-building presented some unique challenges and afforded me some wonderful opportunities. I have traversed the state multiple times with my mother and my son in tow. Dodge City is remote and Abilene is small. Traveling with a squirmy little boy is not easy (thankfully he loved trains and his grandmother). Many of my archives were largely designed for genealogists and people interested in local history, not graduate students. Yet the archivists, museum directors, and staff at each repository were unbelievably welcoming and helpful. They answered countless questions (including where to eat and what to do with a little boy), located thousands of documents, photocopied for hours (and gave me “grad student discounts”), and even recommended additional sources. They stayed through their lunch hours, remained open late, and in one case, even handed me the key to the archive and told me to make myself at home. In Abilene, my son rode a carousel built by C.W. Parker, one of the men I write about. I am confident that no graduate student has ever been treated so well during their research. I cannot recommend the staffs of the following archives more highly: Dickinson County Heritage Center, Abilene; Ford County Heritage Center, Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, and Boot Hill Museum, Dodge City; and Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum, Wichita State University Library, and Wichita Public Library, Wichita.

The Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka is a fantastic place for any researcher to work. Their archivists and research librarians are unbelievably knowledgeable and helpful and their collection is overwhelming. I was honored to be awarded the Alfred M. Landon Historical Research Grant in 2006 to underwrite some of my research. The Kansas State Historical Society has amassed a spectacular collection of newspapers from across the state and I am very grateful to their Interlibrary Loan administrators who sent dozens of reels of microfilm to me at UCLA over the years. I also made use of their online Kansas Memory collection, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/>, which has an especially good collection of maps.

Friends and family supported me through this long journey. At UCLA, I joined a wonderful cohort of Americanists. Three of them – Amy Cox, Marissa DeSiena, and Laura Gifford – have become dear friends. We have weathered a lot together, including the written comps and motherhood. I am so proud to be a part of this group of brilliant, strong-willed women. Along the way, I benefitted from the camaraderie of countless other History graduate students who read my drafts, shared their stories, and indulged me with the kind of dark humor that only other overworked graduate students can appreciate. Outside the department, in my capacity as a writing consultant for the Graduate Writing Center, I enjoyed belonging to UCLA’s community of exceptional graduate students. The director, Marilyn Gray, provided valuable advice and support. Renee Hudson, who lead dissertation boot camps with me each summer, along with so many of my co-workers and clients, provided community during the long, lonely process of writing this dissertation.

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and have been so generous with their time and positivity that I will never be able to properly repay them. They have become family and I am so grateful to have them in my life.

Finally, I am thankful to my family. I have deep Kansas roots and owe both great-grandfathers, my grandmother and grandfather Mabel and Hal Harkins, and my Aunt Kathy Pinnell for my interest in history and in Kansas. Laura Goodale – my oldest, dearest friend – now lives in Kansas, half way between Dodge City and Abilene. Traveling to Kansas was far more palatable because I knew I'd be able to visit her. My brother may not have understood this endeavor but he rooted me on anyway. My dad always insisted that I could accomplish anything I put my mind to and was eager to have a PhD. in the family. I wish he were here to celebrate my accomplishment. My mom deserves my deepest appreciation, however. She has seethed with frustration about the process, but was even more determined than I that I would graduate. Her stubborn support was critical to my success. She has served as my role model in so many important ways. Most of all, I am grateful to Ryan, who has never known his mother to be anything other than a graduate student and who bore our graduate student existence with remarkable patience and good cheer, even when the dissertation threatened to physically overtake our home and appeared to take priority over him. If this process has taught him the value of hard work and tenacity, then it will have been worth it. I'm sorry for the last few months, B.

VITA

- 1991 B.A., History and Economics
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California
- 1995 M.S., Construction Management
California State University, Chico
Chico, California
- 2006 Alfred M. Landon Historical Research Grant
Kansas State Historical Society
Topeka, Kansas
- 2006 – 2010 Teaching Fellow
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California
- 2007 John and LaRee Caughey Foundation Grant
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California
- 2008 WHEATS Conference Grant
Workshop on the History of Environment, Agriculture, Technology, and
Science (WHEATS)
Manhattan, Kansas

PRESENTATIONS:

- Erin Brown. (November, 2005). "Hell Is More Than Sixty Miles Away: Outlawing the Cattle Trade and Its Effect on Abilene, Kansas." Social Sciences History Association Conference. Portland, Oregon.
- _____. (October, 2008.) "In God We Trusted, In Kansas We Busted: The Environment, the Agricultural Depression, and the Resulting Urban Crisis, 1885 – 1897." Workshop on the History of the Environment, Agriculture, Technology, and Science (WHEATS). Manhattan, Kansas.
- _____. (May, 2010). "Notorious: The Life and Death of the Kansas Cattle Town." Docent Education Program, Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, California.

INTRODUCTION

Legislatures make capitals and make towns, God Almighty makes men
and men build cities.

Kos Harris¹

Speaking to the crowd assembled at Wichita's Robert Burns festival in 1888 at the height of the city's most incredible boom, local lawyer and booster Kos Harris exhorted residents to "press forward all together" to build a great city on the Plains. Harris's speech – filled with rhetorical flourishes, fist-pounding enthusiasm, and the ideological fervor of a true believer – was meant to inspire every Wichita resident to "do his duty, according as God has endowed him" by investing all available time, energy, and capital to turn Wichita into the metropolis that many believed to be their city's destiny. Although external forces, including environmental conditions, the national economy, and the decisions of railroad officials also affected town-building, this dissertation appraises Harris's zealous claim that townspeople drive urban development, examining how residents shaped the growth of towns in the American West between 1870 and 1929. To that end, this study assesses the complexity of individual and group reactions to an array of economic, political, social, and environmental stimuli that residents of Kansas faced during this period, and explores the role of these responses in shaping the development of three Kansas towns – Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City. More specifically, this dissertation identifies and analyzes the businessmen who most affected town-building in each community and examines the social dynamics that evolved among these individuals – as well as with other townspeople and those who lived outside their communities – to consider how these social interactions affected each town's urban aspirations.

This dissertation argues that white, middle-class businessmen in each town were largely responsible for how towns grew. They defined what constituted acceptable development and they

¹ *Wichita Eagle*, February 12, 1888.

determined how to measure success. That said, businessmen did not act in a monolithic manner; diverse individual interests and attitudes created friendships, animosities, and cliques, deeply coloring the social dynamics of each business community. This study traces the process of town-building from its inception when Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City became cattle towns; through the towns' transition commercial centers during the boom of the 1880s; their struggles to negotiate the bust of the 1890s; and their resurgence in the early 1900s. In examining how these men negotiated with one another, with other residents, and with their rural neighbors, it concludes that the communities that proffered the most cogent visions for development – and those which devised the most solid strategies and programs to achieve these plans – were those where businessmen actively and consistently collaborated with one another. In so doing, it identifies local promotional organizations as the most important site for sustained collaboration; exploring early formal and informal attempts to establish these groups, while examining how collaboration became increasingly institutionalized in the first decades of the twentieth century.

This dissertation privileges the voices of businessmen living in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City as each community's most influential residents. As historian Blaine Brownell points out in his study of white booster-businessmen living in Southern cities in the early twentieth century, these people did not necessarily represent the views of the entire community, yet they "possessed the requisite power and resources... to determine public policy."² Although other groups certainly shaped the economic and cultural development of these towns, businessmen were the dominant voice in any discussion of what a given town should aim to be and what programs should be undertaken to obtain that goal. They contributed most of the money to fund projects – as taxpayers, the holders of municipal bonds, the venture capitalists who invested in new businesses, and as contributors to campaigns designed to

² Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920 – 1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), xvi – xvii.

achieve ends as diverse as drawing new businesses to town or electing a candidate for mayor. They organized themselves into promotional groups like the Chamber of Commerce that articulated their community's urban ambitions and developed strategies and programs to attain those goals. They owned and edited each town's major newspapers. These men, along with their wives, comprised both the leadership and general membership of almost every civic, cultural, religious, and philanthropic organization in town. Finally, they were the only constituency regularly elected to city and county offices, appointed to municipal commissions, and selected to lead the rank-and-file of the local Republican and Democratic parties. Thus, they set the agenda for city council and county commission meetings, determined who would be awarded municipal contracts, identified which issues would dominate local party politics, and what bond measures would be put before the voters.

These men almost always owned a business and a home in the community; more often than not, they were married with children. Their financial success and their personal status were inextricably tied to the fortunes of the town. They enjoyed prestige and power, locally and regionally, and expected to continue to cultivate and consolidate their power as their towns prospered. If their towns failed, these men and their families stood to lose everything – financially and personally – a loss that would require them to start over somewhere else. As a result, these men became vocal advocates – boosters – for their communities.³

Businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City did not constitute a monolithic, homogenous group, however.⁴ Although they were largely Republicans, some were Democrats, and a few were Populists or Prohibitionists. Their political affiliations helped shape their positions on local issues,

³ Timothy Mahoney identifies a similar connection between the booster ethos and individual desires for increased prestige and profit in *Provincial Lives: Middle-class Experience in the Antebellum Middle West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 83 - 84.

⁴ Robert Wiebe makes this claim in *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1989 ed.), vii-ix.

including enforcement of the state's prohibition amendment; tariffs and other farm support issues; and railroad regulation. Individuals might disagree with a particular platform issue while remaining loyal to their political party. For example, some staunch Republicans opposed prohibition, despite the Kansas Republican Party's tacit support for the prohibition amendment ratified as part of the state constitution in 1881. More importantly, individuals had personal agendas and attitudes that were, at times, at odds with their political party and with one another. Some opposed city debt for infrastructure projects. Others pushed local governments to invest in infrastructure and public services and contributed personal funds to lure new industries to town. Some were quite selective in the kinds of industries they wanted, while others encouraged any firm to relocate to their towns.

And perhaps most significantly, certain businessmen enjoyed greater power than others in shaping their town's development. Age, length of residence, religious affiliation, and familial connections could affect a businessman's authority in any given community. Even more tellingly, a man's profession influenced his position within the community. Not surprisingly, bankers, real estate brokers, and the owners of local factories often enjoyed greater authority and prestige than other businessmen. At the same time, these factors were greatly influenced by an individual's connections with other members of the community. Indeed, one's alliances with other residents – as defined by an individual's social position, familial connections, and business relationships – materially shaped a businessman's ability to assert authority in the town-building process.⁵

⁵ Histories examining the social mobility of individuals and the cohesiveness of middle-class communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include: C. Robert Haywood, *Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877 – 1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760 – 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), John Henry Hepp, *The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876 – 1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Jeffrey M. Hornstein, *A Nation of Realtors: A Cultural History of the Twentieth-Century American Middle Class* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, eds., *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Like the businessmen it studies, this dissertation does not impose a single definition of development upon these towns. Nor does it attempt to measure the growth of these towns using a single set of measures. It acknowledges that development is a concept that comprises the ideas, strategies, programs, and outcomes generated by an individual or a group that would make a given community “better,” while recognizing that individuals and groups might consider “better” to mean more populous, more prosperous, more civic-minded, or more cultured. Accordingly, this study defines development and measures success using the metrics that these residents employed.

Businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City defined development objectives using their own terms – both conceptually and concretely – but strongly emphasized economic development goals over community development goals. As individuals and as members of promotional organizations, these men pushed for new industries, more commercial enterprises, and increased economic activity. Yet they defined the appropriate number and character of these businesses differently. Individual attitudes also changed over time and in response to shifting environmental, economic, political, and social stimuli. Still, most businessmen living in these towns would have insisted that their adopted home towns aspired to be urban centers. For that reason, this study uses the terms town-building and urban development interchangeably, recognizing that while residents may have been busy building a town, they viewed their work as urban development.

Development was not defined solely in economic terms, however. Community development programs first emerged in each town the 1880s and grew increasingly popular in the early twentieth century – the result of sustained economic prosperity and the progressive impulses of local businessmen. This dissertation defines community development as projects which encompass quality-of-life issues, such as the vibrancy of cultural institutions, the number of parks, or a low crime rate, as well as the kind and quality of public services available. Equally important, it describes the bonds by which residents connected themselves to one another and to their cities, both through formal and

informal associations. Businessmen in all three communities increasingly incorporated community development agendas ranging from proposals to create parks, attempts to reduce crime, and support for the construction of lending libraries and hospitals into their town-building plans for Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City.

Community development projects played an important role in defining and advertising the notions of urban development that businessmen in each town hoped to promote and were tied to their specific understandings of class and metropolitanism. Local businessmen increasingly acknowledged the value of community development projects to better the lives of each town's residents and to encourage residents to cement ties to their community. That said, these programs also fostered division by class, race, and gender, explicitly, by carving out spaces like men's clubs that limited membership to middle-class white males, or implicitly, as when businessmen decided to promote a sewer construction or electrification program in a certain area of town.⁶ At the same time, these projects showcased the values and attributes businessmen in each town believed were inherent in the American metropolis. Electrification projects might signify prosperity or municipal beneficence, while the construction of a hospital might reflect the value the community placed upon health or signify enlightened, progressive thinking in general. Ultimately, community development programs were used to advertise Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City as emergent metropolises; in so doing, local businessmen also anticipated community development programs would spur further economic development.

Likewise, businessmen selected the parameters by which they defined growth. Wichita's businessmen frequently defined growth using quantitative data – population, assessed tax valuation, gross domestic product, the total number of businesses and manufacturing concerns – with a secondary

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the ways in which businessmen's rhetoric and programs reinforced notions of whiteness and gender, although race and gender-based constructions certainly influenced how local businessmen understood urban development and shaped the physical layout and deployment of resources in each town.

focus on transportation, the number and caliber of prestigious buildings, and other physical indicators. Businessmen in Abilene tended to define growth as achieving the right mix of size and character, so they appealed to businesses that offered employment to the kind of people Abilene wanted as residents – white, middle-class families, and prosperous farm families. They most often emphasized non-quantifiable attributes as evidence of growth: the values of its residents; the type of businesses located in the city; the architectural aesthetics of prestigious civic buildings and homes; and the kinds of amenities available to residents, including transportation; civic, philanthropic, and religious groups; education; and leisure opportunities. For businessmen in Dodge City, who watched their city struggle through repeated reverses, any indication of growth was celebrated – an increase in population, the increasing variety of local businesses, or the construction of a new school. Though boosters are prone to hyperbole – and even untruths in marketing – for boosters in towns like Dodge City, where growth was often precarious, wishful thinking was sometimes the most effective avenue available to broadcast their urban aspirations.

Growth was also defined and circumscribed by the urban vision boosters of Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City imagined for their hometowns and the regional networks they built to achieve that vision. Early boosters in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City initially believed that their towns would one day be urban metropolises, yet they set about achieving that goal using different methods and with different levels of support from other residents and from their rural neighbors. Successfully negotiating these relationships to secure the support and loyalty they needed materially determined how much these towns could grow in coming years. Growth was also shaped by outside factors – environmental conditions; state and federal laws and programs; and the activities of remote corporations, for example – that might benefit or constrain towns from achieving their goals. A town's position within the emerging urban hierarchy, while not necessarily fixed, could also limit growth.

Early challenges to Abilene's regional authority resulted from increased settlement both within Dickinson County and throughout Central Kansas and required residents of the county seat to use their legislative pull and voting power to defend the town's modestly-defined territory of Dickinson County.⁷ At the same time, the emergence of factions divided the town's business community and led to never-ending, nasty debates about what the town should become. With its business community unable to work together to shape its development, Abilene lost its potential to grow into a major city and grew less relevant as a commercial center for Dickinson County farmers. Conversely, entrepreneurs established businesses in Abilene that grew to be recognized throughout Kansas and the Great Plains in the early twentieth century. Abilene became a paradox – a quiet county seat with regionally recognized industries.

In contrast, Wichita's businessmen never abandoned their quest to become the next Chicago. Their development plan was modeled after Chicago's growth; they proposed to become a metropolis by creating and strengthening linkages to smaller towns and villages throughout their sphere of influence and to continue expanding that sphere by promoting settlement and building additional linkages. These linkages included rail access, roads, and even air routes, and reflected flows of credit, commercial goods, and agricultural produce moving back and forth between Wichita and its hinterland. By pressing for additional railroads and better roads and aggressively promoting Kansas and Oklahoma to potential settlers, Wichita continually expanded its reach throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century until Wichita's businessmen claimed most of Kansas, as well as most of present-day Oklahoma and

⁷ Salina was the major commercial power in central Kansas, supplying remote Kansas towns as far west as the Colorado border and limiting Abilene's economic reach westward. Salina was also home to a federal land office in 1871, managing public land disposition in the western half of the state for three years. Homer E. Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 27 – 28. Located just east of the Dickinson County line, Junction City acted as a rail center for Central Kansas. Junction City established itself as the commercial and industrial center for much of central Kansas and viewed eastern Dickinson County as its market area. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report*, Centennial ed. (Topeka: Geo. W. Martin, 1876), 101 – 111.

northern Texas, as the city's tributary region.⁸ Thus, Wichita created a metropolitan economy like that of Chicago, if not of the same order of magnitude. For while it may have improved its position within the urban hierarchy of cities and towns in Kansas, it remained part of Chicago's metropolitan web – largely reliant upon Chicago for access to credit, goods, and markets – while competing with Chicago and Kansas City for market dominance in its market area. In the early twentieth century, Wichita leveraged these linkages to develop its oil and gas industry and moved away from such a strong connection with Chicago by building an aeronautics industry that did not fit within the hierarchical structure Chicago had established.⁹

Like Wichita, Dodge City early envisioned a large hinterland; including southwestern Kansas, the Indian Territory, the Neutral Strip, and northern Texas as its regional territory. Beginning in the 1870s, Dodge City's earliest residents established transport routes to access remote ranches throughout the region and later developed these routes into rail lines and roads. As Wichita proposed building a metropolitan economy along the lines of Chicago, Dodge City modeled its development after Wichita's. Although dozens of new towns in southwestern Kansas challenged Dodge City's position as the economic center in the region in the 1880s, its businessmen successfully created commercial linkages with small town merchants and area farmers. In the 1890s, Dodge City consolidated its position as a transportation center and enthusiastically advertised southwestern Kansas to potential immigrants to

⁸ At the peak of the boom, Wichita's Board of Trade described Wichita as "THE Southwestern Metropolis," with a "tributary territory" that included most of Kansas, Eastern Colorado, New Mexico, the Texas panhandle, North Central Texas, the Indian Territory, and Northwestern Arkansas. Wichita Board of Trade, *Journal of Commerce* (June 1888), 33, 45 – 46. Wichita's boosters claimed that their businesses controlled these new markets, but the city clearly shared its sphere of influence with Chicago and Kansas City.

⁹ William Cronon's idea of the metropolitan economy frames this study's definition of what a metropolis is. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), xv - xvii.

cement Dodge City's dominance as the region's transportation and economic center in the twentieth century.¹⁰

This dissertation builds upon a small, but significant, body of scholarship that examines town-building and the characteristics of American towns throughout American history. In asserting the critical role of businessmen in shaping the growth of their adopted home towns, it necessarily draws upon and reframes ideas first laid out in Robert Dykstra's *The Cattle Towns*, Page Smith's *As a City upon a Hill*, Don Doyle's *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*, and Timothy Mahoney's *Provincial Lives*. It also extends this previous work in three significant ways. First, by examining the continued evolution of former "frontier" towns after their earliest stages, it offers a more complete explanation of their urban development. Second, it emphasizes the role of local promotional organizations in guiding that development. Finally, this study applies collaborative development theory drawn from the field of organizational management to consider collaboration as an efficacious model for generating urban development plans and meeting urban development goals.¹¹

Towns that dot the Great Plains like Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City, exist in a netherworld of historical study – they are neither major urban metropolises nor rural districts. The work of Lewis Atherton, Richard Wade, Smith, Dykstra, and other historians beginning in the 1950s signaled a turn to urban history and an interest in the development and significance of towns. Yet the study of town-building was largely overshadowed by the work of historians studying the development of large urban centers. Conversely, rural historians take great pains to exclude regional centers like Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City from their work, despite the considerable importance towns played in the lives of rural

¹⁰ Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865 – 1890* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986) and C. Robert Haywood, *Trails South: The Wagon-Road Economy in the Dodge City-Panhandle Region* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).

¹¹ Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983; New York: Knopf, 1968), all citations refer to the University of Nebraska edition; Page Smith, *As a City upon a Hill: The Town in American History* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1971); Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825 – 1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); and Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*.

people.¹² A relatively small group of researchers have examined the history of American town-building. A few, like Smith, explore the characteristics of American towns more generally – without imposing regional or temporal limits. Others have studied town-building in the context of systems of cities.¹³ In contrast, Atherton and Wade focused on Midwestern communities prior to 1865, anticipating Doyle and Mahoney’s research in the last decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Few have considered urban development in the trans-Mississippi west, and those who do have been more interested in emerging western cities, especially San Francisco and Los Angeles. Despite the high incidence of town founding and persistence occurring throughout the Great Plains region in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, surprisingly little has been written about the town-building phenomenon in the Great Plains. Dykstra’s pioneering work on the Kansas cattle towns remains essential reading for any scholar of town-building in the trans-Mississippi west and clearly sets the stage for this study.¹⁵

While a number of historians and aficionados of the western genre have written about Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City, most of these studies – including Dykstra’s – end when these towns lost the cattle trade, although the Great Plains town-building phenomenon was far more pronounced in the later

¹² Others have noted this omission as well. James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 9; Robert R. Dykstra and William Silag, “Doing Local History: Monographic Approaches to the Smaller Community,” *American Quarterly*, no. 3 (1985): 419; and Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870 – 1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xi.

¹³ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*.

¹⁴ Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966); Richard Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*; and Mahoney, *Provincial Lives and River Towns in the Great West: The Structure of Provincial Urbanization in the American Midwest, 1820 – 1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Dykstra’s influence is foundational in later texts that study these towns, including Haywood, *Victorian West*; Craig Miner, *Wichita: The Early Years, 1865 – 1880* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), *West of Wichita*, and *Wichita: The Magic City* (Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988); Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains*; and L. Curtise Wood, *Dynamics of Faith: Wichita, 1870 – 1897* (Wichita: Wichita State University, 1969).

decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century than in the Texas cattle period.¹⁶ Clearly the Texas cattle trade was an important chapter in each town's history. Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City became nationally recognized for the antics of Wild West characters – some actual, some fictional – who spent time in these towns. The cattle trade spurred a population explosion and the towns grew physically to accommodate the needs of both transient and permanent residents. At the same time, because residents were largely focused upon making quick profits from the cattle trade, few attempted to lay the groundwork for sustained urban growth. These towns flourished with virtually no infrastructure, weak city governments, and tacit support of saloons, gambling, and prostitution.

Although this study begins with the founding of these towns, it emphasizes their development after the Texas cattle left. It contends that Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's early development exemplifies Smith's cumulative city paradigm, in which towns founded for economic reasons grow through "the gradual accretion of individuals, or, sometimes, by rapid but disorderly accumulations of fortune seekers." He posits that these towns were frequently chaotic and lawless in their earliest incarnations because residents had no real attachment to the town apart from their ability to extract a profit from it. Smith believes that over time, cumulative cities could become durable, acquiring "the social and institutional forms of the typical town," as residents became increasingly connected to one another and their town, through their membership in local associations, including literary societies, political clubs, and church groups.¹⁷

¹⁶ In brief epilogues, Dykstra and Haywood note that the cattle towns, apart from Wichita, surrendered to their fate as agricultural centers. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 358 – 359 and Haywood, *Victorian West*, 276. The urban development of Wichita has been the subject of several monographs: Miner, *Wichita: The Early Years* and *Wichita: The Magic City*; Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*; Beccy Tanner, *Bear Grease, Builders, and Bandits: The Men and Women of Wichita's Past* (Newton KS: Mennonite Press, 1991); and Glenn W. Miller and Jimmy M. Skaggs, eds. *Metropolitan Wichita: Past, Present, and Future*, (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978).

¹⁷ Smith, *As a City Upon a Hill*, 30 – 32, and 174.

By positioning this study of town-building in the decades following the cattle period, this dissertation aims to more accurately reflect the development of Great Plains towns. Although it recognizes the Texas cattle period as the foundation from which each town evolved, it is more interested in examining how these towns shifted from cumulative cities into enduring communities. After the cattle trade ended, some early residents moved on, while those who remained were joined by newcomers, many of whom hoped to turn these towns into cities, and to profit personally by doing so. Merchants looked to the growing farm population as a customer base, shifting their inventories to stock goods that farm families needed and opening new businesses selling seed, lumber, hardware, and farm equipment. New and established residents bought land in hopes that it would appreciate. Lawyers increasingly specialized in land law. In this sense, these towns remained cumulative cities. Over time, businessmen began to support infrastructure projects and municipal programs. City governments enacted ordinances that restricted the sale and production of alcohol, set curfews for minors, and established dust abatement programs in the business district. City officials laid out streets throughout town and organized sewer assessment districts. Local businessmen replaced wooden buildings with more substantial brick buildings, funded the construction of churches, and joined booster organizations to promote their cities to potential residents and businesses. By the time the Bust of the 1890s hit, Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City had become durable cities, with a base of residents deeply connected to the town through personal connections and economic interests.

In addition, this study emphasizes the contributions of white, middle-class businessmen in urban development, building upon the work of Dykstra, Doyle, Mahoney, and Charles Glaab who also view these residents as instrumental in the town-building process. Other studies have explored the role of external factors in promoting town-building in the American West. Environmental scholars like James Malin have examined the role of winter wheat in fueling town-building in central Kansas. Others have explored the role of water and weather as challenges (or perils) of farming on the Great Plains. In so

doing, they have also demonstrated how town-building suffered when farmers suffered.¹⁸ A number of scholars have examined the role railroads played in town-building in the American West, whether by selecting the routes their roads would traverse, by promoting towns and farming areas along their routes, by offering special rates to home seekers, and, on occasion, by founding towns. The effect of railroad companies' efforts was to increase the population and boost the towns along their routes, often at the expense of those communities they bypassed. And a number of historians have explored how the state and federal government supported or stymied town-building through their allocation of institutions like state colleges, prisons, military bases, and land offices, or through legislation that limited a town's opportunity to borrow money to entice railroad construction, limited mining, or restricted water use.¹⁹ Externalities undoubtedly shaped town growth; yet, this study's perspective illuminates residents' significant role in drawing railroads to their communities, as well as state colleges, federal land offices and other public institutions. It also uncovers the role local businessmen played in locating – and profiting from – coal veins, mineral deposits, oil fields, and prairie land that outsiders later exploited. In examining the discussions, debates, and programs of townspeople in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City, this study seeks to demonstrate the considerable contributions of businessmen in identifying and successfully capitalizing upon opportunities presented by an additional railroad or a nearby salt mine.

¹⁸ James C. Malin, *Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973); Mary W.M. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900 – 1925* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957) and *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains: Years of Readjustment, 1920 – 1990* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); and James E. Sherow, *Watering the Valley: Development along the High Plains Arkansas River, 1870 – 1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990).

¹⁹ Geographer James Shortridge emphasizes the role of externalities, especially railroads and the state and federal government in generating development in *Cities on the Plains*. See also, David M. Emmons, *Garden in the Grasslands: Boomer Literature of the Central Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971); Craig Miner, *West of Wichita; Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854 – 2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), and *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas, 1890 – 1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987).

More specifically, this dissertation examines how businessmen created and manipulated promotional organizations as an institutional space to draw local businessmen together to define town-building objectives and to identify and coordinate economic and community development projects. It details the evolution of booster organizations – from each town’s earliest attempts to direct development through fragile boards of trade (and other promotional groups) in the 1880s to the creation of permanent Chambers of Commerce in first decades of the twentieth century. In so doing, it builds upon Smith, Doyle, and Mahoney’s positions that voluntary associations provided both the means by which new residents developed an attachment to these new communities, and evidence that these communities had moved beyond the cumulative city phase of their development.²⁰ Doyle and Mahoney’s observations on voluntary associations and boosterism anticipate the development of booster organizations in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and substantiate this study’s analysis of the value of booster organizations in supporting Great Plains’ town-building impulses. Doyle observes that boosterism was a partial solution to issues of community division in that it “could effectively link goals of individual opportunity to the collective destiny of the town.” Similarly, Mahoney claims that “boosterism sought to subsume self-interest into cooperative public efforts to draw more people into the network and the town and thus stimulate and promote town development.” These studies – in conjunction with historian Robert Wiebe’s position that promotional organizations in the

²⁰ Doyle and Mahoney see community attachment as unambiguously connected to social mores and community-defined behavior norms, whether adherence to these norms served as the trade-off for the bonds of community or how residents were recognized as full members of a given community. Doyle sees religious, political, and cultural groups as promoting a kind of social order in new towns, offering a sense of belonging to a community in exchange for adherence to both explicit and implicit standards of behavior. Mahoney observes a similar phenomenon in Upper-Mississippi river towns, but he sees these groups as the *outgrowth* of social order – as a means of delineating between members of genteel society and those who were not. Conversely, Wiebe views these organizations as a means to find community within an increasingly impersonal and national society. Smith, *As a City Upon a Hill*; Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*; Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*; and Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform*.

early twentieth century were an outgrowth of a desire to create community and find meaning – indicate the perceived value of these organizations to Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City’s businessmen.²¹

At the same time, this dissertation recognizes that each town’s businessmen could not be characterized as a monolithic or homogeneous group, and that the social dynamics of each business community differed both from town to town and over time. Dykstra previously explored the heterogeneous nature of business communities in early Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City, refuting the Elkins-McKittrick thesis, which posited that frontier settlements were filled with like-minded residents, resulting in homogenous populations. Because of this perception of homogeneity, the Elkins-McKittrick thesis asserted that urban development in these early communities was de facto democratic in that whether many people, or just a few, were involved in the decision-making process, their attitudes and concerns reflected those of the entire community. In contrast, Dykstra presented a conflict model to explain the social dynamics that guided town-building impulses present in each town during the cattle period, which he described as the “politics of factionalism.” He claimed that development programs grew out of conflict – and that these programs better reflected the interests and attitudes of a broader base of residents because they were the result of the negotiation that took place as different factions asserted their positions, sometimes quite forcefully.²²

This dissertation builds upon Dykstra’s conflict model, refining it to reflect the impact of the increasing population and physical size of Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City, and the growing

²¹ Both emphasize the pecuniary benefits local businessmen accrued from being boosters. Mahoney observes: “[boosters] would gradually seek by defining the structure and ideology of the booster ethos to prosper, persist at a higher level than most subsequent newcomers, and establish themselves as the ruling economic, political, and social elite who could impose social order on town life.” Doyle claims that the booster ethos was shared by a relatively small number of residents – specifically those “who stood to gain from the town’s future success; [and it was] tenuous because the bonds of boosterism rested on the inflated hopes of anxious promoters.” While both Mahoney and Doyle identify a connection between the booster ethos and community attachment – and see that this connection could subsume community division – they see boosterism as fundamentally connected to individual profit motives. Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*, 62 and 91; and Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 83 - 84.

²² Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 375 – 376.

sophistication of each town's politics, economy, and business community. After the cattle period ended, the social dynamics of each town's business community grew more complex as the number of people living in town and in neighboring rural areas increased. Over time, the economy of each town expanded and diversified, compounding the array of positions and priorities individual businessmen held when discussing town-building plans. Alliances shifted and relationships among businessmen were constantly renegotiated, yet businessmen continued to manage each community's development throughout the period of this study. Thus, the urban development process of Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City cannot be considered broadly democratic. Local businessmen largely directed each town's development and they considered the positions of other residents and their rural neighbors only when they felt the need – or desire – to do so. Individuals within each business community also formed alliances and dominated other businessmen to control the decision-making process.

Drawing upon models developed by organizational management theorists, this study contends that a collaboration model offers a more nuanced understanding of the social dynamics shaping town-building in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City between 1870 and 1929.²³ Because each town's business community was heterogeneous, collaboration theory can help explain how different groups of businessmen successfully – or unsuccessfully – negotiated their differences to generate coherent visions for future development and to implement programs to carry forward these plans. Most organization

²³ Urban planners like Patsy Healey use collaboration theory as well, but they emphasize reshaping and repositioning public agencies charged with the development of public spaces so that they can conduct more productive dialogue and facilitate conversations with a variety of stakeholders to create a planning process that is more collaborative and inclusive and ultimately more satisfying to all community members. In repositioning public agencies as both stakeholders and spaces for a broad base of public discourse, they attempt to dismantle power hierarchies and tend to deemphasize leadership structures to achieve a more democratic basis in which urban planning decisions are made. Collaboration theory, as defined by urban planners, endeavors to provide the space and means to promote democracy in the generation of an urban development agenda for a given community. While the goals of collaborative planning theory propose to remedy the conditions that Dykstra identified in *The Cattle Towns*, this theory does not explain how collaboration was used by Kansas businessmen between 1870 and 1929. Patsy Healey, *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 34. See also, Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey, *Planning in Divided Cities: Collaborative Shaping of Contested Cities* (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

management theorists believe that the collaborative development process requires leadership – implying an unequal division of power in the relationships between stakeholders. The collaborative process envisioned by organization management theorists does not necessarily aim to reduce existing power differentials, instead acknowledging how good leadership can encourage collaboration. Edward Weber and Anne M. Khademian contend that leaders play a critical role in the collaboration process; they persuade stakeholders to work together, and are expected to use their “authority to promote, protect, and enforce collaborative deals.” In drawing potential collaborators to the negotiation table, guiding the collaborative process, and protecting the collaboration team’s product, they believe good leaders can make the negotiation process more efficient, increase the teams’ odds of producing a viable product, and even inspire buy-in for the goals espoused by the collaborative team. This model better describes the power dynamics existing within each business community; it also explains how Wichita and Dodge City’s most influential businessmen directed development under the banner of a united business community.²⁴

At the same time, other stakeholders must believe that potential leaders possess certain traits to effectively assume the mantle of leadership. Weber and Khademian identify specific characteristics embodied by successful leaders to inspire and accommodate collaboration, including trustworthiness, enthusiasm for the collaborative process, and sensitivity to – and acceptance of – the positions of other stakeholders. Residents in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City considered these characteristics in evaluating whether individuals would be good leaders. Ultimately, it was not the presence or absence of leadership that doomed any sustained collaboration in Abilene, but the quality of that leadership, especially the popular perception that members of the dominant faction were untrustworthy and not good-faith negotiators; and their apparent lack of interest in engaging those residents who were not

²⁴ Chris Huham and Siv Vangen “Leadership in the Shaping and Implementation of Collaboration Agendas: How Things Happen in a (Not Quite) Joined-up World,” *The Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Dec., 2000): 1159-1175; and Edward P. Weber and Anne M. Khademian, “From Agitation to Collaboration: Clearing the Air through Negotiation,” *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 57, No. 5 (Sep. - Oct., 1997): 405 – 406.

part of their exclusive cohort. It also explains how Dodge City and Wichita's leaders used the collaborative process to develop visions for their communities and to draw wide-spread community support for their programs.²⁵

Weber and Khademian claim that leadership defines – and, in turn, is defined by – the structures, the processes, and the people that make up any collaborative project. Thus, the social dynamics of Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City shape, and are shaped by, each town's business leaders. This dissertation assesses the relative inclusivity of both organized and informal groups – in their general membership and in the relative capacity of individuals to make their opinions heard. Perhaps more significantly, it tracks the evolution of these groups, teasing out how their membership and the organizational structures changed over time and what those changes portended for the town-building process. In so doing, it considers the implications of inclusivity – or exclusivity – in generating actionable plans and a coherent vision, and in successfully undertaking programs and achieving the group's goals.

This dissertation examines the process of institutionalizing collaboration in promotional organizations, which provided a permanent physical space, with rules governing behavior, to foster collaboration. Yet Chambers of Commerce did not emerge fully-formed overnight in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City, nor were they the only form of collaboration found in these towns. Apart from promotional organizations, these towns were sites of familial collaboration, socio-political collaboration, and novel forms of economic collaboration. Local families intermarried and the children of local businessmen also married into prominent farm families and into the families of businessmen in Kansas City, St. Louis, and other larger cities. Sons often worked in their fathers' enterprises but also sought employment with their fathers' friends while they were young. And children often joined their parents as members of the same clubs or created new clubs with the children of their parents' associates. These

²⁵ In a sense, efficacious leadership contained a democratic element; to achieve their goals, successful leaders needed to display the characteristics necessary to muster community support. In Abilene, the city's most powerful businessmen did not engender that kind of backing. Thus, individuals promoted their own agendas and the city lacked a cohesive or broadly-supported vision for growth.

strategies had the effect of creating series of interlocking networks of familial connections that facilitated brief and sustained collaborations between families and helped establish connections with larger cities and with area farmers. Socio-political collaborations also occurred when different constituencies came together in support of a common cause, whether it was to oppose the damming of the Smokey Hill River or to establish rail service into the Oklahoma Territory. Economic collaborations between diverse businesses or among municipalities were fueled by visions of increased prosperity for everyone involved.

Chambers of Commerce were the culmination of years of other forms of informal and temporary collaborative ventures by local businessmen working among themselves, and with other residents, area farmers, and businessmen in other towns and cities. Initial attempts at organizing booster groups in the 1880s proved unsuccessful as local businessmen did not build sufficient infrastructure to encourage sustained collaboration or to guard against economic downturns. In the 1890s, informal, but sustained, collaboration in Wichita and Dodge City ensured the cities' survival during the worst years of the depression and provided local businessmen with the scaffolding to effectively capitalize upon the resurgent agricultural economy. Ultimately, all three communities drew upon their experiences in the previous decades when they created new, permanent promotional organizations in the early twentieth century.

Boards of trade, commercial clubs, merchant associations, and Chambers of Commerce institutionalized collaboration by providing a formal arena for local businessmen, espousing a variety of viewpoints, to come together and collectively develop plans and programs to benefit their adopted hometowns. Siobhan O'Mahoney and Beth A. Bechky observe a similar phenomenon in their study of alliances between open-source advocates and software producers. They claim that boundary organizations – their term for institutions created to foster collaboration – can allow even rival stakeholders to work together toward common goals, while permitting each group to continue to

pursue divergent interests, if the collaborative structure is designed appropriately. Promotional organizations in Wichita and Dodge City provided sufficient opportunities for diverse stakeholders to present their positions to negotiate a mutually amenable vision and programs. Moreover, these organizations explicitly identified the potential financial benefits members would accrue by promoting the city's economic development, thereby inspiring local businessmen to set aside political and personal differences and come together as boosters. Ideally, these groups corralled and directed local businessmen, harnessing their energy, ideas, and resources to identify a viable vision for growth, generate actionable plans, and rally community – and even regional – support for their programs, despite individual members' divergent (or competing) interests and beliefs in other arenas.²⁶

To demonstrate the role that businessmen and their promotional organizations played in shaping their towns' development, this dissertation draws upon a variety of sources, including each town's newspapers; the meeting minutes and correspondence of the various promotional groups; promotional literature; and demographic data like censuses and city directories. Newspapers play a critical role – serving as ongoing chronicles of each town's life, as well as valuable promotional organs. As early as 1875, each town was home to at least two newspapers, and often several more. Regardless of their political affiliation or ideological bent, most dutifully reported on the local happenings in town; yet these newspapers provided much more than straight news.²⁷ They proffered residents' positions on items as far ranging as presidential elections and as close to home as proposed city ordinances. As very few of these towns' businessmen left behind personal records, local newspapers offer significant information and insights into individuals' lives, including the rare opportunity to hear their voices when they were quoted in news articles or wrote letters to the editor. And as several of these men owned

²⁶ Siobhan O'Mahoney and Beth A. Bechky, "Boundary Organizations: Enabling Collaboration among Unexpected Allies," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 3, (Sep., 2008): 426, and 448-449.

²⁷ Typically, local newspapers represented one of the major political parties – Republican or Democrat – or one of the smaller parties or political movements. Occasionally, a newspaper reflected a gender-based or religious perspective.

newspapers or served on their publishing boards, these newspapers also espoused their positions – or their group’s positions – on issues related to town-building. Clearly these newspapers reflected the opinions and prejudices of their editors, but their biases expose relationships and cliques, collaboration and factionalism. Taken together, the newspapers for a given town offer tremendous insight into the existing power structure and how it played out in crafting each town’s development.

Whenever possible, this study draws upon promotional club meeting minutes, correspondence and ephemera found in the promotional organizations’ permanent files. Meeting minutes offer valuable glimpses of the debates and negotiations that occurred behind closed doors as members attempted to define developmental objectives and to craft programs to achieve those goals. They also reveal the identity of the power brokers by noting who made the motions, listing who chaired committees, and providing voting results that identified how individuals voted on a given issue. An analysis of voting results can reveal the existence of factions or alliances. Meeting minutes can also illuminate attempts to build bridges between individuals and groups to create a stronger, more cohesive organization, and to ensure that the vision and subsequent programs would be widely supported by the members and presented to the community in a manner that would encourage non-members – other residents and area farmers – to support the organization’s plans.

Other internal documents and ephemera from the promotional organizations shed light into the kinds of opportunities available to these towns and speak to how townspeople assessed and prioritized growth opportunities. Letters from businessmen seeking to relocate their factories to Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City; correspondence to the state legislature and other Kansas-based promotional groups; and ephemera – newspaper clippings, buttons, promotional tracts from other towns, and the like – reveal the sorts of projects businessmen favored, competed against, and discouraged. Covering a vast array of topics, including industrialization, transportation, infrastructure, public health and safety, population growth, and cultural and community events, these sources suggest that businessmen

continually researched and debated to define a vision for their towns' development and actively worked to achieve those goals.

Promotional tracts published by these groups, along with promotional editions of local newspapers, illustrated the vision that each town's boosters consciously pursued. They describe the types of industry and residents they hoped to attract, and showcase the buildings, organizations, infrastructure, and values they believed would draw these individuals and businesses to their towns. Conversely, these tracts also identified the industries and individuals they did not want to relocate in their towns by discussing the towns' values and attitudes. These documents must be interpreted cautiously as they often provided exaggerated demographic data and information about the towns. They cannot be read as reflecting the opinion of every resident as they expressed the development visions of the influential members of the promotional group, not dissenting members nor townspeople at large. Despite these drawbacks, booster publications can provide the best description of what each town's business community wanted its town to become and provide a measuring stick from which to assess the efficacy of the booster organizations in achieving their goals.

Finally, this study relies upon an assortment of demographic data – census results; city directories; state gazetteers; and the annual and special reports of state agencies, including the bureau of agriculture, the state labor commission, and the state banking commission – to understand how these towns grew. The reports from state bureaus indicate the number and size of city and county businesses, including banks, flour mills, and feedyards. Along with the city directories and state gazetteers, these reports also identify what kinds and numbers of businesses were in each town. City directories, state gazetteers, and state and federal censuses indicate changes in population over the course of the study. They also identify when individuals arrived in each town and track their life in the town. Understanding when individuals arrived, what occupations they worked at, where they lived, where their businesses

were located, and when they left, helps identify those individuals who substantively shaped each town's development between 1870 and 1929 and suggests the dynamics of the power structure of each town.

In locating significant individuals, this study considers several factors that might make a resident important to track, including demonstrated leadership, length of residence, financial position and financial commitment to the town. Once identified, research focused on how these men assumed positions of leadership and how they went about promoting their ideas and issues in a manner that inspired others to support them. Their social, economic, civic, and political connections were analyzed as a means of identifying factions and alliances, as well as to locate periods of collaboration, in which seemingly disparate individuals or groups worked together to define their hometown's vision, to generate plans and programs, and to promote their community to outsiders. Perhaps not surprisingly, length of residence and local prominence suggests that early settlers frequently benefitted from their longevity in the town.²⁸ Yet, the arrival of newcomers – as well as the departure of some established residents – could act as the harbinger of changing economic and social dynamics for each town.

This dissertation is organized around three major chronological periods in Great Plains history: the settlement and early town-building period (roughly 1870 – 1888), the bust period (roughly 1888 – 1898), and the golden age of agriculture (roughly 1898 – mid-1920s). And while it is largely concerned with the role of each town's businessmen in promoting growth, it necessarily intersects with three established threads within Kansas history, specifically the state's evolution as an agricultural center for the United States; the role of railroads – and later automobiles – in shaping how the state grew; and shifts in Kansas political ideology, each of which loosely coincide with the periodization laid out above. Businessmen in all three communities attempted to leverage the burgeoning agricultural economy to finance their towns' development. And they all recognized the significance of the technological

²⁸ Mahoney identifies a similar phenomenon in *Provincial Lives*, 63 – 84.

advances in regional transportation as they affected their towns' fortunes. Finally, they were all influenced by popular political rhetoric, be it prohibition, populism or progressivism.

The history of town-building in Kansas is inextricably intertwined with the development of agriculture in the state and frames the chapters for this dissertation. Even towns ostensibly founded to serve some other purpose – to trade with area indigenous populations; to supply forts or buffalo hunters; or to act as centers for the Texas cattle trade – relied upon area farmers to provide crops that could be sold and early merchants in these towns recognized farmers as valued customers. In the 1880s boosters in most Kansas towns eagerly promoted their corner of Kansas as an ideal place to farm, in concert with the State Board of Agriculture and major rail lines. Their efforts incited a tremendous population boom in the mid-1880s, in which hundreds of thousands of people flooded the state to set up farms and triggered a corresponding town-building boom. Businessmen in every town attempted to capitalize upon the flood of newcomers; merchants sold farm supplies and groceries, while others opened hardware stores and lumberyards. Some became grain buyers or opened flour mills. Realty firms, mortgage companies, and banks mushroomed in every town as most residents participated in land speculation. Land became a commodity that could be used instead of cash to expand a home or business, to invest in new industries, and to invest in still more land.²⁹

Given Kansas towns' strong dependence upon area farmers to fuel their growth, the protracted agricultural depression occurring between 1888 and 1898 deeply affected their prospects for growth in the 1890s and led to a national financial crisis in 1893. In Kansas, the Bust began as a series of crop failures after 1885. Crop failures, combined with low prices for wheat, corn, and beef, and the high cost of starting up a farm in Kansas, led to widespread rural destitution. Farmers fled the state and the debts they had incurred, while those who remained behind often cut spending completely, stopped paying property taxes, and defaulted on loans held by townspeople. By 1898, the western two-thirds of the

²⁹ Miner, *West of Wichita; Kansas; and Next Year Country*; and Emmons, *Garden in the Grasslands*.

state had lost more than 150,000 people. Local merchants lost their customers, county governments lost their tax base, the real estate market crashed, and banks failed. As land prices collapsed, townspeople lost their paper fortunes, and the businesses they had funded using land as collateral.³⁰

The resurgence of the agricultural economy after 1898 was fueled by the emergence of grain varieties better suited for the Plains' environment; technology that made planting and harvesting easier; and increased education to improve farming practices, in addition to an improved market for agricultural products. By 1900, Kansas farmers regularly produced over sixty million bushels of wheat per year. By 1920 yields were trending towards 120 million bushels per year.³¹ Towns that survived the bust clearly benefitted from farmers' newfound prosperity, but their attitudes about how to build upon their improved economic positions varied. Some towns determined to become regional commercial centers for area farmers. Larger towns grew their wholesale sector to supply smaller towns and villages with groceries and other goods. Most towns attempted to establish an agricultural processing sector by storing and milling wheat, and some attempted to develop a more diverse set of agricultural processing industries, including meat-packing, sugar-beet processing, and broom manufacturing. Some moved into new industrial sectors unrelated to agriculture, including oil and gas exploration, rural electrification, automobile manufacturing, and even the manufacturing of carnival rides. Thus, while town-building throughout the Plains in the first decades of the twentieth century appeared as a set of diverse

³⁰ Miner, *Next Year Country* and *West of Wichita*; Allan G. Bogue, *Money at Interest: The Farm Mortgage on the Middle Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955); Malin, *Winter Wheat*. In *West of Wichita*, Miner posits that land values, which were built on nothing more than the fragile speculative hopes of residents – new and old – and fanned by local boosters, inevitably plummeted once investor confidence was shaken by crop failure and the lack of available credit. Miner, *West of Wichita*, 212 – 215 and 218 – 221.

³¹ State Board of Agriculture, *Twenty-Second Biennial Report*, vol. XXVII (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture, 1921), 528. Miner, *Next Year Country*, 154 – 162; George Ham and Robin Higham, *The Rise of the Wheat State: A History of Kansas Agriculture, 1861 – 1986* (Manhattan KS: Sunflower University Press, 1987); David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); and R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

practices, these practices initially stemmed from a town's connection to the surrounding agricultural economy, and for many communities, it remained their economic foundation.³²

While agriculture served as the economic base for each town's economy from 1870 - 1929, Kansas town-builders also viewed railroads and automobiles as integral to their future development. Railroad construction played a major role in the growth of Kansas's population in the late nineteenth century. The Kansas Pacific and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (Santa Fe) railroads provided parts of Kansas with access to the rest of the country by the mid-1870s and railroad construction surged in the 1880s, with thousands of miles of rail lines crisscrossing the state by 1888. Town promoters founded hundreds of towns along the new rail lines or in anticipation of a line being built. Businessmen in already established towns – who were well-aware of the constraints that came with being a one-railroad town – aggressively worked to attract additional railroads to build through their towns in the 1880s. Municipalities financed almost every railroad project with bond measures to subsidize construction or to encourage the railroad company to build a line through that community. By 1888, many towns enjoyed service by a major line and at least one regional line. Larger towns, like Wichita, were serviced by multiple lines, including several major rail lines and multiple branch or regional lines.³³

During the bust, the railroads struggled with the consequences of overexpansion. As people abandoned the state and poor crop yields and low prices reduced grain and cattle shipments, many lines became financially untenable. Railroads suspended or limited service in attempts to stave off bankruptcy or merged with other lines. Some rail companies cut wages or laid off workers, triggering national strikes that brought rail traffic to a standstill. Towns throughout Kansas experienced the

³² Miner, Danbom and Ronald Kline all claim that as American farmers prospered, they became major consumers and were particularly interested in consuming new technology. Miner, *Next Year Country*, 154 – 162; Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 161 – 162; and Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

³³ Craig Miner, *Kansas*, 100 – 105, 130 – 135, and 140 – 148; Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854 – 1890* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954); and Leslie E. Decker, *Railroads, Lands, and Politics: The Taxation of the Railroad Land Grants, 1864 – 1897* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1964).

railroad crisis in a myriad of ways: townspeople faced reduced service from the rail lines they had financed; in railroad towns, rail workers were laid off or had their wages cut; and because so many rail lines declared bankruptcy or were consolidated, residents complained of price setting by the railroads. Some towns turned to the state's Railroad Commission for relief, while others appealed to the railroads themselves. Ultimately, the 1890s led to a significant contraction of rail service throughout the state, leaving businessmen in every Kansas town grappling with shipping problems.³⁴

The early twentieth century brought further transportation advances that dramatically remapped how Kansans would move through their environment. Although municipalities shied away from financing additional railroad construction after the 1880s, they continued to push railroads officials to build additional rail lines through their communities to access new markets. Typically branch lines built by major railroads, new railroad construction extended into newly-settled areas in Oklahoma and southwestern Kansas, allowing the towns serving as their hubs to further cement their positions as regional centers in a given area. The automobile also played an increasing role in Kansas residents' life. Although Kansas lagged behind the rest of the country in road construction, automobiles were popular among both townspeople and farmers. Automobile dealerships, service stations, repair shops, and even manufacturing offered businessmen new economic opportunities. New roads connected farmers to more towns in ways that the railroads did not (or had connected only in very circuitous ways), allowing farmers the opportunity to more easily travel to towns other than their county seat, thereby providing farmers with opportunities to sell their farm goods to those grain dealers offering the best prices and to patronize merchants of their choosing.³⁵

Railroads and automobiles, in addition to the emergent agricultural economy, concretely shaped the economic development of Kansas towns. In contrast, trends in political ideology more obviously

³⁴ Miner, *Next Year Country*, 47 – 51.

³⁵ Ibid, 145 – 154, 81 – 84, and 104 – 106; *Kansas*, 262 – 266; Mary Rowland, "Kansas and the Highways, 1917 – 1930," *Kansas History* 5 (Spring 1982): 33 – 51.

reflected the culture of each town and framed community development impulses, indirectly inciting economic development. Political ideologies also revealed divisions among residents of a town or among residents of the county. In 1880, Kansas became the first state to pass a constitutional amendment outlawing the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol, yet prohibition was hotly debated in Kansas towns for decades following its passage. The state's small population of Democrats opposed prohibition and led a protracted resubmission movement to put the prohibition amendment before the voters one more time. In contrast, members of the Republican Party were deeply divided over whether to include prohibition as a plank in the Party's official platform, leading to some splintering as devoted prohibitionists joined the Prohibition Party and Resubmission-Republicans voted for Democratic candidates pushing for resubmission. Enforcement of the prohibition amendment substantively defined the culture of these towns and spoke to far more than just residents' religiosity; Kansans often described communities as wide-open or dry based upon the existence or absence of saloons. These labels had both positive and negative connotations that businessmen firmly believed affected economic development. Thus, prohibition had the potential to divide businessmen and derail collaborative ventures.³⁶

While prohibition continued to divide townspeople through the 1890s, the Populist movement of the 1890s illuminated divisions between townspeople and area farmers. The People's Party spread throughout the South and the Great Plains in the 1890s, but Kansas was its epicenter. Kansans elected two Populist governors, two Populist United States Senators and several Populist Congressmen, including "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, who represented the "Big Seventh" Kansas Congressional District that included Wichita and Dodge City. Populist presidential candidates James Weaver (1892) and William Jennings Bryan (1896) also succeeded in winning the state. Rural Kansans' embrace of Populist

³⁶ Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986); Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 250 – 259 and 274 – 292; Miner, *Kansas*, 156 – 158.

politicians signaled more than just a temporary shift in the political power structure in western Kansas. It spoke to an increasing awareness – by Kansas farmers and Kansas businessmen – that rural Kansans identified as being economically and culturally distinct from those residing in Kansas towns. Thus, Populism not only threatened Kansas businessmen’s political authority, but also challenged towns’ economic foundation by giving voice to farmers’ feelings of alienation. This dissertation draws upon sociologist Scott McNall’s examination of the People’s Party in Kansas, which characterizes Kansas Populists as a class movement composed of aggrieved farmers who remained supportive of the capitalist system, but opposed “monopolists, middlemen, and parasites – people who would not play by the rules of the capitalist game.”³⁷ Businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City loudly repudiated the People’s Party and actively worked to maintain farmers’ loyalty to the Republican Party, to defeat Populist candidates, to keep working-class townspeople from joining the Populist movement, and to fold Populists into the Democratic Party under the guise of fusion.³⁸ Yet they also attempted to empathize with – and respond to – the economic conditions affecting Kansas farmers to bridge the gap with their rural neighbors. Thus, Populism affected the state’s towns and cities in a more convoluted way, exposing divisions between townspeople and area farmers while threatening businessmen’s hegemony in local and state politics.

³⁷ Scott G. McNall, *The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865 – 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), xiv. Historians have long debated whether to characterize Populism as a reaction to the omnipotence of the Republican Party in Kansas, a class movement against the indifferent dominant culture of local businessmen, or an explicit response to the economic depredations of the period. Good historiographies on Populism include: William C. Pratt, "Historians and the Lost World of Kansas Radicalism," *Kansas History* 30, Winter (2007 - 8): 270 - 291 and Miner, *Kansas*, 171 – 174. Some frame it as the outgrowth of the failed Union Labor Party or the result of an anemic Democratic Party in Kansas. D. Scott Barton, "Party Switching and Kansas Populism," *The Historian*, vol. 52, no. 3 (May 1990): 453 – 467. Jeffrey Ostler, "Why the People’s Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa," *Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 4 (November 1992): 451 – 474; and Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). Others see it as a more direct response to the economic dislocation of the Bust. Charles Hoffman, *The Depression of the Nineties: An Economic History* (Westport CN: Greenwood Publishing, 1970), 38.

³⁸ McNall claims that “the actions of Kansas farmers resulted in the mobilization of powerful probusiness groups against the farmers, groups whose image of what America should become was bolstered by a national ideology encouraging growth and development.” McNall, *The Road to Rebellion*, 16.

In contrast, in the twentieth century Kansas businessmen eagerly embraced progressive political tenets that substantively shaped their attitudes towards town-building. Although progressivism was expressed in a variety of ways, followers of this ethos were largely middle-class whites who generally attempted to resolve economic and social disparities through government intervention and private philanthropy.³⁹ Kansas businessmen generally identified themselves as progressive, although as historian Robert La Forte has observed, Kansas progressives were generally considered more conservative, and their proposals were more pragmatic, than progressives living in other parts of the country.⁴⁰ Progressives restructured local and state government to minimize the opportunities for corruption and graft and to create bureaucracies that promised to be more efficient and responsive to the needs of residents. Frequently, these reforms included changing municipal governments from councils to commissions and hiring commissioners and other government functionaries to regulate and oversee various facets of community life, including construction, public health, and local infrastructure. Some municipalities also operated local utilities companies.

Progressives eagerly joined civic organizations and private charities that undertook projects to better their communities.⁴¹ Chief among these groups were businessmen's organizations, including

³⁹ Historians have debated what it meant to be a Progressive and have disagreed about the goals and central tenets of this movement. This study relies upon Michael McGerr and Robert Wiebe's interpretations of the movement: Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870 – 1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003) and Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform* and *The Search for Order*. Other perspectives include: Daniel Rogers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982): 113 – 132; Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987); Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); and Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s – 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ Robert La Forte, *Leaders of Reform: Progressive Republicans in Kansas, 1900 – 1916* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), 6 – 7.

⁴¹ Civic-minded groups like Rotary and Lions clubs sprang up throughout the United States, targeting projects specific to the needs of its community. Most focused on some combination of educational reform, acculturation, and charity. These groups also provided camaraderie and a sense of belonging. Wiebe sees this trend as "derived from the regulative, hierarchical needs of urban-industrial life," in *The Search for Order*, xiv. McGerr believes that it

commercial clubs, merchant associations, and chambers of commerce that drew businessmen together to locate a common vision for urban development and to create programs in pursuit of their goals.

Unlike the promotional organizations of the 1880s, these groups evolved into permanent organizations with institutional structures to promote collaboration and a professional bureaucracy to efficiently administer the group's programs. Their popularity reflected the status-anxiety that middle-class Kansas businessmen increasingly felt in reaction to Populism and a world that had grown too large, too impersonal, and too corporatized. In joining businessmen's clubs, local businessmen became part of a like-minded group dedicated to defending their status, their security, and their prosperity.⁴²

Using the chronology of Kansas's emergent agricultural economy as a framing device, Chapter One moves from each town's founding through 1888, covering both the Texas cattle period and the population boom of the 1880s. In so doing, it provides the origin story for each town's business community and considers how the social dynamics that defined each town's businessmen affected their ability to locate a vision for future growth and to implement programs to achieve their goals. It explores how local businessmen reinvented their towns to capitalize upon the state's growing population of farmers; how they negotiated with railroad officials, area farmers and other residents to pursue additional railroads; and how they responded to the intensifying temperance movement and to the state's newly-passed prohibitory laws. Drawing upon Smith's cumulative city paradigm, Chapter One argues that by focusing almost entirely upon their own financial betterment, and by tying their towns' economic growth to their individual financial aspirations, businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City succeeded in creating economic centers, but they did not necessarily create communities, nor did

was a response to the dogma of individualism espoused by very wealthy Americans that had perverted individualism into social Darwinism. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 64 – 69.

⁴² The national Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1912. Earl O. Shreve, *The Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America* (New York: Newcomen Society of North America, 1949). Wiebe also links the popularity of these clubs to middle-class businessmen's desire to be a part of a like-minded community that could protect a hard-won "relative security and a moderate prosperity;" Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform*, 41.

they establish conditions for sustained growth. Moreover, by identifying historically significant actors and analyzing the interpersonal relationships that emerged in the particularly dynamic formative years of these one-time cattle towns, this chapter considers how collaboration came about and what its limits were.

Chapter two examines how Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City survived the agricultural depression and subsequent financial panic known as The Bust. It considers how local businessmen responded to the effects of the depression, especially rural depopulation; municipal retrenchment; railroad consolidation and strikes; and the rising popularity of the People's Party. Although each town's population and fortunes decreased between 1888 and 1898, Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City survived the Bust because local businessmen identified and implemented strategies to sustain their communities through the economic downturn and to position them for an eventual recovery. During this period, three leadership models emerged from the business communities of Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City, which shaped town-building during the 1890s. In all three cases, promotional organizations established in the 1880s – boards of trade, commercial clubs, and improvement companies - collapsed. In Wichita and Dodge City, local businessmen continued to identify and use informal and organized channels to collaborate with one another and with other stakeholders. In contrast, Abilene's businessmen's few attempts to collaborate failed, setting up a paradigm where individuals funded ventures that would shape the town's economic and cultural development.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City enjoyed a period of prolonged economic prosperity. Chapter Three examines each town's emergence from the Bust after 1898 and evaluates their continued development through the 1920s, tracking two town-building trends: the increasing economic and cultural distinctiveness of each city alongside the establishment of permanent promotional organizations. Between 1898 and 1929, each town's businessmen negotiated among the opportunities created by the growing agricultural economy,

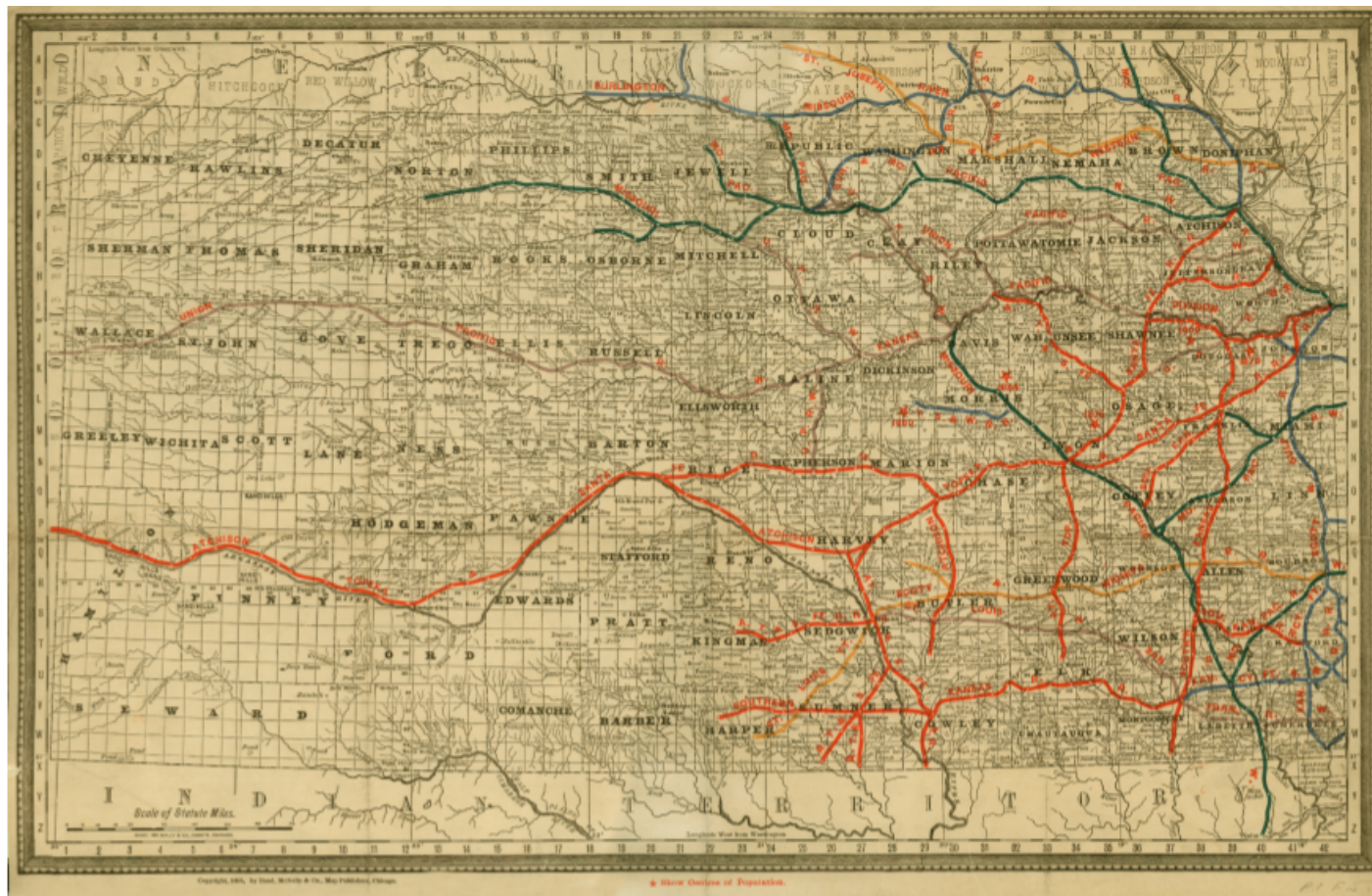
expanding railroad infrastructure, and the increasing popularity of automobiles, while employing progressive ideals to achieve their goals. Chapter Three explores how multiple iterations of promotional organizations established in each town responded to these opportunities and led to the creation of permanent promotional clubs that were stronger, better organized, and with a wider reach than any that existed in the 1880s. It argues that promotional organizations reflected a desire for connection and order to effectively manage an increasingly complex world.

After 1929, the Dust Bowl, Great Depression, and World War II would fundamentally alter the economy, politics, and culture of the Great Plains once again. Low prices for farm goods and the severe environmental damage wrought by the dust storms of the 1930s drove thousands of residents from Western Kansas. After World War II, farming grew increasingly corporatized and further hastened the region's depopulation. Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City adapted to these shifts, and their economies reflected these structural changes. At the same time, many of the physical improvements – and some of the social structures – put in place by early businessmen remain intact today and continue to shape how each town operates and what it hopes to become. Dodge City has fully embraced its cattle town roots, renaming streets to honor famous cattle town residents, and opening a museum dedicated to the period. Wichita continues to be an aviation center for the United States and an economic center for the Great Plains. And while Abilene is no longer headquarters for any its early twentieth-century businesses, it has retained the gracious homes and tree-lined streets that made it a city of homes. Perhaps most significantly, each town continues to rely upon its Chamber of Commerce to generate appropriate development programs and to rally local businessmen to support their goals.

In examining the development of Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City from their founding in the late 1860s through the 1920s, this dissertation demonstrates the essential role middle-class businessmen played in town-building – by identifying a vision for future development and in pursuing projects to achieve their goals. Businessmen responded to shifts in the surrounding agricultural

economy; regional and national politics; and evolving transportation systems. In analyzing the relationships between individual businessmen, as well as with other stakeholders, this dissertation highlights the significance of relationships in town-building. It demonstrates the importance of promotional organizations as an institutional space to encourage collaboration and to amass and direct the resources and energies of individual businessmen. Finally, this dissertation presents collaboration as a compelling lens in which to explain how town-building decisions are made; one that simultaneously recognizes the heterogeneous nature of each town's business community, while demonstrating the benefits of consensus-building in generating economic growth and a sense of community.

1885 Rand, McNally & Co. Railroad Map⁴³



⁴³ Rand, McNally & Co., Kansas Railroad Map showing railroad lines, counties, and towns (1885). <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/209282>

Chapter One

From Cattle Town to Metropolis: Town-building during the 1880s Population Boom, 1870 - 1888

Cities are not the result of chance, nor do they make themselves. Their prosperity and greatness are in large measure due to the sagacity and enterprise of their founders and early settlers in reaching out and drawing to them the channels of commerce and trade.

James R. Mead⁴⁴

Between 1870 and 1888, thousands of aspiring businessmen set out to make their fortunes on the plains of Kansas, echoing the general restlessness of Americans after the Civil War. They claimed land, platted townsites, organized city governments, opened businesses, and attempted to steer newcomers to their towns and farmers to the surrounding countryside. As James R. Mead, one of Wichita's earliest settlers observed, the success of these towns was largely due to the enterprise of these early residents who assessed the opportunities presented to them – and often created their own – to further their economic interests and those of their adopted home towns. In less than twenty years, businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City founded their communities, oversaw their development as cattle towns, and directed their transition into commercial centers.

This chapter charts the evolution of business communities in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City and evaluates how the social dynamics emerging within and around these groups affected their ability to generate a cohesive vision for growth and actionable plans to achieve their goals. It demonstrates how businessmen attempted to capitalize upon the emerging farm economy as merchants, grain buyers, and millers; and as land speculators who bought land in town and in the surrounding countryside with the expectation that they would later sell it for a profit to newcomers amid the state's greatest population boom. It considers how the emergence of a national network of railroads and massive

⁴⁴ James R. Mead, *Hunting and Trading on the Great American Plains, 1859 – 1875* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 30.

railroad expansion through the state fueled each town's economic development by examining how businessmen negotiated with railroad officials and area residents to draw additional railroads to town. And it appraises the role of prohibition in town-building, not just as a cultural and political issue, but as a strategy businessmen used to achieve economic outcomes.

This chapter contends that businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City were initially self-interested individuals whose engagement with town-building extended only as far as any initiative might personally enrich them. As a result, town-building between 1870 and 1888 was largely limited to economic initiatives that expressly benefited the individuals involved. In laying out the complex social dynamics that defined each business community during the early years of each town, this chapter demonstrates how collaborative ventures could benefit individuals and their adopted hometowns and it explores how social fractures could derail collaboration. In Abilene, a powerful clique of businessmen emerged in the aftermath of the cattle trade. This group dominated the city's economy, politics, and society, and alienated other townspeople and residents of Dickinson County, thwarting the possibility of sustained collaboration and limiting the town's growth. In Wichita, early settlers hatched ambitious plans to promote the economic growth of their city and worked together to achieve their goals. Unlike Abilene's settlers, Wichita's pioneers successfully absorbed newly-arrived businessmen into their fold – presenting the business community as a united front – and built a promotional organization that harnessed local businessmen's enthusiasm and resources to pursue those goals. Dodge City's pioneer businessmen were divided throughout the cattle period, but they came together to effect a transition amid the state's greatest population boom. Local businessmen had only begun their appeal to farmers when the boom ended, but they leveraged their position as a railroad center to encourage area settlement. In all three cases, the social dynamics that emerged and played out in each community after 1870 substantively shaped what these communities would look like and achieve by the time the agricultural economy collapsed in 1888.

Abilene: "The City on the Plains"

1875 Map of Dickinson County⁴⁵



In Abilene, the long transition from cattle town to commercial center came about concurrent with the emergence of an increasingly powerful cadre of local businessmen. As the first cattle town,

⁴⁵ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report*. Centennial Edition (Topeka: Geo W. Martin, 1876), 107.

town-building slowly traversed the economic depression of 1873 and the grasshopper plague of 1874, before gradually picking up speed as farmers from across the United States moved to Central Kansas. The city's dominant faction, the Courthouse Ring, was established while Abilene was still a cattle town and its members persistently influenced the regional economy, municipal politics, and local community feeling throughout the 1870s and 80s. The existence of this powerful clique alienated other townspeople and Dickinson County farmers and led to protracted battles over enforcement of the state's prohibition amendment enacted in 1881; stymied opportunities to collaborate to create sustained, or more ambitious, development programs; and hindered efforts to draw additional railroads to town. Instead, development programs were largely put together by self-interested individuals for short-term profit, rather than long-term community gain.

More than either Wichita or Dodge City, Abilene sprang into being as a cattle town, and its earliest residents and businesses reflected that status. When Joseph McCoy, an enterprising young cattle buyer from Illinois, arrived in Abilene in 1867 to organize the first Texas cattle drive to Abilene, he found it "a very small, dead place" – little more than a collection of a dozen log huts with mud roofs. Commerce consisted of one small general outfitter and a dark, dank saloon. Just two short years later, the cattle trade had transformed Abilene into a bustling, rowdy town with streets lined with saloons, dance halls, brothels, and outfitters.⁴⁶

While Abilene bloomed as a cattle town, farmers increasingly settled Central Kansas, especially Dickinson County, as part of a national demographic shift facilitated by the rapidly expanding network of railroads throughout the United States in the decade following the Civil War and the availability of relatively good, cheap land in Kansas. Before 1873, Dickinson County's new residents came largely from three states: Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Many were German-Americans or Germans who had

⁴⁶ Joseph G. McCoy, *Historical Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest* (Kansas City MO: Ramsey, Millet & Hudson; Columbus OH: Long's College Book Co., 1951), 44. Citations refer to the Long's College Book edition.

immigrated to the Midwest before moving west. A number were former Union soldiers who found it was too expensive to purchase farmland in the Midwest. Colonies, organized by the Kansas Pacific railroad or by individuals, brought surprising numbers of settlers to Dickinson County; more than 200 people made up the Buckeye Colony in central Dickinson County while fifty Illini, led by their minister, established the Illinois Prohibition colony in northern Dickinson County.⁴⁷

Even at the height of the cattle trade, many of Abilene's businessmen relied upon farmers as customers; their economic interests put them at odds with saloon owners, cowboys, and dance hall operators. Theodore C. Henry, Alfred W. Rice, John Johntz, Vear P. Wilson, and John E. Bonebrake all moved to Abilene during the cattle period to set up businesses catering to farmers who were beginning to settle in Dickinson County. Initially, those who profited from the cattle trade and those who relied upon the patronage of area farmers coexisted without conflict. Henry moved to Abilene in 1867 at McCoy's urging and set up a land brokerage company that dominated land sales in Dickinson County until his departure in the early eighties.⁴⁸ McCoy and Henry persuaded Wilson, a brash, ambitious Ohio newspaperman, to move to Abilene in 1869 to found the county's first newspaper, the *Abilene Chronicle*. Rice, Johntz, and Bonebrake arrived around the same time as Wilson. Rice initially served as the agent of a Chicago-based lumber company, while Johntz opened a dry goods store. Bonebrake opened the county's first hardware store.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 72-138. There were a few colonies from other places, including Canada and Tennessee.

⁴⁸ Henry's partners were James B. Shane, a Civil War veteran already selling land in Dickinson County, and James H. Mahan, then the county attorney. Henry bought out Shane, although it is unclear how long he partnered with Mahan. Stuart Henry, *Conquering Our Great American Plains: A Historical Development* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1930), vii; James B. Shane, *Not Guilty: The Story of a Life* (Abilene KS: Reflector Publishing, 1903), 94.

⁴⁹ Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983; New York: Knopf, 1968), 11 – 30 and 100 – 101. All citations refer to the University of Nebraska edition. Occupations are those identified on the 1870 federal census available at Ancestry.com.

Divisions emerged in Abilene as area farmers grew increasingly opposed to the cattle trade. Given their shared economic interest in the rise of local agriculture, Henry, Rice, Johntz, Wilson, and Bonebrake joined forces and sided with area farmers to protest the cattle trade. Henry, the city's first mayor, emerged as the charismatic leader of the anti-cattle movement. He served as the chair of the committee charged with assessing and paying for Texas cattle-related damage out of a fund established by Abilene's businessmen. More significantly, he chaired the Farmers' Protective Association, a group that galvanized Dickinson County farmers to protest the trade, and wrote the petition that demanded Texas drovers stop driving cattle to Abilene. Wilson became an indispensable soldier in the anti-cattle campaign, using the pages of his newspaper to incite anti-cattle feeling and to urge farmers and anti-cattle townspeople to mobilize. He became known for his exceptionally partisan, deeply-opinionated characterizations of regional politics, a brand of journalism that offended many in Dickinson County.⁵⁰ In 1870, Henry led a coalition of townspeople and area farmers to successfully lobby the Kansas state legislature to extend a quarantine that effectively ended the importation of Texas Longhorn cattle into Dickinson County.⁵¹

As Abilene transitioned from a cattle town into a farm town, Henry and his allies coalesced into a powerful group that would dominate the political landscape of Abilene and Dickinson County into the twentieth century. Although McCoy was the city's mayor in 1871, Henry was clearly the city's most recognized and powerful citizen, whose close friends included city council members, the leading

⁵⁰ As part of the anti-cattle campaign, Wilson repeatedly attacked McCoy – then Abilene's mayor – branding him a drunkard and a whoremonger. McCoy, *Historical Sketches of the Cattle Trade*, 229 – 236 and Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 257 – 263.

⁵¹ Robert Dykstra provides the most comprehensive account of the rise and fall of the cattle trade in Abilene. See Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*. Other accounts offer a more romantic interpretation of the Texas cattle period. See, McCoy, *Historical Sketches of the Cattle Trade*; J.B. Edwards, "Early Days in Abilene," Edwards, J.B. Papers, 1869 – 1871, Kansas State Historical Society; Henry B. Jameson, *Heroes by the Dozen: Abilene – Cattle Days to President Ike* (Abilene: Shadinger-Wilson Printers, 1961), 1 – 86; and Henry, *Conquering Our Great American Plains*, 29 - 290. There are also fictional accounts of the cattle period, most notably Emerson Hough, *North of 36* (New York: D. Appleton, 1923).

businessmen in town, and the editor of the *Chronicle*. Understanding the importance of political activism for protecting and furthering their economic interests, Henry and his friends increasingly dominated local politics, both as office holders and as leaders in the local Republican Party. Those excluded from this clique viewed their growing political monopoly with apprehension, labeling them the Courthouse Ring.⁵² In 1872, area Democrats and disaffected Republicans formed a coalition to challenge Henry and his cronies in the upcoming election led by McCoy and Jacob Augustine, a rival land agent who had come to Abilene with Wilson. The coalition – which Wilson characterized as the Lib-Dems – did not have any clearly-defined organizing principles other than an opposition to the clique and did not pose a serious threat. Their efforts, however, highlighted both the players and the stakes playing out in Dickinson County. In the ensuing campaign, both sides savaged one another in the pages of rival newspapers. Yet the coalition failed to unseat their adversaries and voters elected Wilson State Senator. Members of the Courthouse Ring won almost every other county and city position.⁵³

Before 1888, factions in Abilene and Dickinson County were both reactionary and fluid. The Courthouse Ring remained a constant presence, but other factions like the Lib-Dems emerged in response to specific threats, usually in opposition to the Ring, and faded away or reorganized as new issues emerged. The membership of factions changed – and their allegiances shifted – over time as well. Ring members fought townspeople and farmers over a town-building scheme. Townspeople sided with the Ring against area farmers over the location of the county courthouse. And residents of Abilene split

⁵² Augustine, Dr. James M. Hodge, and William S. Hodge appear to have come up with the moniker. *Abilene Chronicle*, September 19, 1872.

⁵³ *Abilene Chronicle*, September 19 and October 31, 1872. *Dickinson County Chronicle*, November 7 and 14, 1872. Wilson's attacks were so vicious that the opposition established a second newspaper to counter his charges. There are no extant copies of the 1872 *Abilene Gazette*, but Wilson quoted the opposition newspaper copiously in his newspaper. Henry not only served as the city's first mayor, but also served terms as the county Register of Deeds and was later elected State Senator, while his partner James Shane served on the city council and as the County Treasurer. Johntz also served as the County Treasurer. Wilson served first as the county's probate judge before being elected State Senator. Mahan served multiple terms as the County Attorney. Rice and Bonebrake both served terms as council members, and Rice served multiple terms as mayor, beginning in 1879. Moreover, their friends were elected as city councilmen, county commissioners, and filled other county and state offices.

into factions to battle over prohibition and promotional campaigns. During the 1870s and 80s, the Courthouse Ring consolidated its power in Dickinson County, benefitting from the disorganized and myopic nature of the opposition.⁵⁴

While the Courthouse Ring may have been characterized initially as a political clique, the group was fueled by economic aspirations. Henry, Rice, Johntz, and Bonebrake and their friends capitalized upon the emerging agricultural economy. Henry's firm acted as the sales agent for the Kansas Pacific, establishing Henry as the most powerful land broker in the region. Rice and Johntz moved into the grain business, first as grain dealers and later as mill owners. And Bonebrake expanded his hardware business to include farm implements and seed. By 1883, Henry realized that his economic opportunities had grown as much as they could in Abilene and he began to look for investments outside of Dickinson County. He invested in irrigation and mining projects in Colorado, sold his land in Dickinson County, and moved to Denver. In so doing, he extracted a significant amount of capital from Dickinson County's economy.⁵⁵

As Henry began to divest himself of his investments in Dickinson County, Rice and Johntz emerged as the dominant figures in Dickinson County. The two men formed the most enduring – if unlikely – relationship throughout the course of this study. Rice and his wife were ardent prohibitionists, leading Rice to bolt the Republican Party in support of the Prohibition Party. In the pages of the city's newspapers, Rice's tone was paternalistic; he often appeared to be lecturing residents when he was interviewed. Apart from church and prohibition-related activities, he

⁵⁴ The membership of the Courthouse Ring was relatively fluid before 1888; Dr. James Hodge had been a fierce critic of the Ring in the 1870s but he became a member of the Ring after Henry moved to Colorado. Wilson later became a pariah, disliked by Ring members and area farmers.

⁵⁵ Henry's later life is well-chronicled in James C. Malin, *Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas: A Study in Adaption to Subhumid Geographical Environment* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), 92 – 95; Stuart Henry, "Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas: A Reply and Critique by an Eyewitness," *Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka*; Stuart Henry, "A Moral Lapse in Bureaucracy," *Pamphlets*, v. 4, no. 6, *Kansas State Historical Society*; and Frank Hall, ed., *History of Colorado*, vol. 4 (Chicago: Blakely, 1895), 464 – 5.

participated only in select endeavors, typically on booster-related committees. He also became increasingly active in local politics, serving as the city's mayor several times over the course of the next thirty years. Despite his electoral success, Rice was a controversial figure in Abilene and throughout Dickinson County. Area farmers grumbled about poor treatment in their dealings with him as a grain dealer. Moreover, his uncompromising positions on temperance and fiscal economy, in addition to his patrician demeanor, irritated other residents. Johntz, in contrast, appeared to be well-respected, even well-liked, by other businessmen and area farmers. He repeatedly served as the executor of local estates and as the trustee of bankrupt businesses. He abandoned the Republican Party as well, and became a Democrat, although he engaged in a brief flirtation with the People's Party in the 1890s. Moreover, Johntz joined several fraternal and agricultural organizations and served on several promotional committees.⁵⁶

Despite these differences, Rice and Johntz forged an unbreakable alliance founded upon shared economic interests; a business partnership that flourished until Johntz's death in 1909 and served as the central union around which the rest of the clique was organized. The pair first partnered as grain dealers in 1871. In 1882, they opened the city's largest flour mill. They frequently invested in the same projects – including real estate ventures, an insurance Company, and multiple banks. Both men led groups to push specific development initiatives. Johntz chaired a committee to negotiate with Missouri Pacific Railroad officials to build a line through Abilene, while Rice sat on the board of the Abilene Improvement Company. Moreover, each one invested in businesses with other members of the Ring that further cemented their economic ties. Some of their most successful collaborations were with Bonebrake, who

⁵⁶ Although no one mentioned Rice by name, the *Gazette* noted that farmers were traveling to Morris County to get decent prices for their grain. *Gazette*, January 27, 1882. The editor of the *Dickinson County Chronicle* criticized those who were signing the petition to move the courthouse to Abilene because they felt that they had been wronged by individuals living in Abilene. In the next issue, several correspondents complained that area farmers were choosing Enterprise simply because “two or three grain buyers [in Abilene] fail to do their duty...” *Dickinson County Chronicle*, February 5 and 10, 1882. Most of these remarks implied that Rice was the problem for area farmers, given that he was one of the few grain dealers in Abilene.

invested in Rice and Johntz's flour mill. Rice also partnered in Bonebrake's hardware and farm implement business. Rice and Bonebrake also purchased several area businesses in 1888, including a hardware store in nearby Chapman and an undertaker's business in Abilene. In 1879, Bonebrake, Rice, and Johntz, along with Henry, founded the First National Bank of Abilene, creating the county's largest bank. By 1888, Bonebrake, Rice, and Johntz, along with fellow Ring members, controlled three of Abilene's banks; all its utilities; the city's largest mill and elevator; a newspaper; several land realty and mortgage firms, and some of the Abilene's busiest retail establishments. In the cash-poor environment of nineteenth century Kansas, bankers and realtors provided farmers and merchants with access to eastern capital, which could be used to buy land or finance the purchase of farm equipment, seed, and other merchandise. In Abilene, members of the Courthouse Ring controlled much of the access to capital and owned many of the town's businesses by 1888.

The Courthouse Ring used their political power to found a new town in Dickinson County called Enterprise, shortly after Wilson was elected to the Kansas legislature in 1872.⁵⁷ A bald political opportunist, Wilson used his new position to introduce legislation that would have allowed Christian Hoffman, a partner in the Enterprise Town Company (ETC), to build a dam across the Smoky Hill River to power a proposed mill. The legislation died on the floor of the House, in large part because Dickinson County farmers loudly protested what they viewed as a traitorous conflict of interest in that the mill would boom the town of Enterprise – thereby benefitting Wilson and his fellow investors – while destroying surrounding farmland. In Abilene, residents railed against the bill, the Courthouse Ring, and Wilson, who acted as the public face of the ETC in addition to serving as the county's State Senator. Although the opposition succeeded in halting construction of the dam, they were unable to halt the

⁵⁷ Before the election took place, Wilson began to signal the Ring's intentions to found the new town, renaming his newspaper the *Dickinson County Chronicle*. Less than a month after winning the election to become State Senator, Wilson published the first announcement of Enterprise Town Company (ETC). Wilson was listed as the president, Johntz was the vice-president, and Henry was the organization's secretary. Rice was a trustee who held title to the land until it was sold. Edward G. Nelson, *The Company and the Community* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1956), 187 - 188.

development of Enterprise or the flour mill. Wilson decamped to Enterprise for a few years to continue to sell town lots but Henry, Rice, and Johntz did not abandon Abilene; rather, they continued to consolidate control over the politics and economy of Abilene and Dickinson County.⁵⁸

In an odd twist, Enterprise attempted to steal the county seat from Abilene after the courthouse burned in 1882. Allegiances dramatically shifted; Dickinson County farmers largely supported Enterprise, in part to weaken the Courthouse Ring's hold over Dickinson County. Residents of Abilene rallied around Ring members who successfully spearheaded a campaign to protect Abilene's position as county seat. Ring members drew upon their superior financial reserves and presented Dickinson County voters a plan to rebuild the courthouse without cost to the county while the Ring lawyers successfully fought to discredit Enterprise's petition to relocate the courthouse. In the end, the Courthouse Ring leveraged the larger population of Abilene and its surrounding townships to overwhelm the smaller population of county residents who wanted to move the county seat to Enterprise. In so doing, they further alienated county residents who saw the Courthouse Ring as unscrupulous bullies using their money, lawyers, and voters to subjugate other residents of Dickinson County.⁵⁹

Although Abilene's Courthouse Ring won the county courthouse contest, they could not convince county residents to support their plans to draw more railroads to Abilene. The Ring's inability to garner countywide support for railroad bonds – or to support any bond measures promoted by

⁵⁸ The beleaguered newspaper editor tried to defend both his investment and his reputation in the pages of his paper. Claiming that everyone had the right to invest in other towns, Wilson attempted to situate Enterprise as a different type of town – a city of mills – that would not compete with Abilene because the towns would not share the same economic base. He also insisted that he had done nothing wrong when he introduced SB 151; he claimed that he would have done the same thing for any of his constituents. Unable to withstand the criticism, Wilson sold his newspaper and moved to Enterprise for a time, working as that town's first realtor. Nelson, *The Company and the Community*, 198 – 201 and McCoy, *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade*, 232 – 235. Although he returned to Abilene in 1878 as the editor of the *Gazette*, he remained ostracized and moved to Colorado in 1882. Stewart Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," 1878 – 1, Dickinson County Heritage Center.

⁵⁹ *Gazette*, January 27; March 10, 17, and 24, 1882; *Solomon Sentinel*, February 8; March 15 and 29, 1882; and *Dickinson County Chronicle*, February 5 and 10; March 2, 24, and 31; and April 7 and 14, 1882.

residents of Abilene – spoke to the deeply-held resentment many county residents felt toward Ring members. Most of Abilene’s businessmen agreed that the city needed additional railroads to remain competitive with other Kansas towns, despite its position on the country’s first transcontinental railroad. As early as 1872, Abilene’s businessmen agitated for the construction of additional rail lines through Abilene, but were repeatedly rebuffed by county and city residents. When the mania for railroads reached a fever pitch in latter half of the 1880s, Abilene’s Courthouse Ring eagerly promoted multiple railroad projects, all of which were to be funded by county bond measures, but were voted down by Dickinson County voters. In 1886, Johntz made a long, reasoned pitch in the *Abilene Reflector* to Dickinson County farmers to support a proposed railroad bond issue, claiming that multiple rail lines through Abilene would help the farmers “at least as much as” townspeople because railroad competition would lead to lower prices in Abilene’s stores and reduce the cost of shipping grain to Chicago and other markets, yet he could not sway county voters.⁶⁰

The Courthouse Ring’s inability to persuade county residents to support railroad construction through Abilene signaled the end of Abilene’s rail dominance in Dickinson County. In 1885, M.D. Herington, who had recently organized the town of Herington in the southeastern corner of Dickinson County, single-handedly enticed the Topeka, Salina & Western (TS&W) Railroad to build through his town. When the Missouri, Kansas & Topeka (MK&T) Railway Company purchased the TS&W shortly thereafter, Johntz and other Ring members attempted to negotiate with company officials, but were unable to mount a serious play for the rail line because they could not persuade Dickinson County residents to approve the necessary bond issue to subsidize construction. Thus, Herington became the

⁶⁰ *Chronicle*, March 14, 21, 28, and May 2, 1872; *Dickinson County Chronicle*, December 24, 1880. *Abilene Reflector*, November 25, 1886. The Kansas railroad phenomenon of the 1880s has been well-studied: Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854 – 1890* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1954); Leslie E. Decker, *Railroads, Lands, and Politics: The Taxation of the Railroad Land Grants, 1864 – 1897* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1964); Lloyd J. Mercer, *Railroads and Land Grant Policy: A Study in Government Intervention* (New York: Academic Press, 1982); and James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

MK&T's most important stop in Dickinson County. When the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (Santa Fe) railroad proposed to build through Dickinson County, Abilene's businessmen fought with the village of Carlton to ensure that the Santa Fe ran through Abilene. A year later, Herington further weakened Abilene's position as the county's railway hub by luring the Chicago, Kansas & Nebraska (Rock Island) railroad to locate its regional division point in Herington. Abilene's businessmen subsequently succeeded in building a branch line of the Rock Island to run through Abilene using a city bond to underwrite construction, which allowed boosters to crow that Abilene was a three-railroad town, but it had clearly surrendered its position as the rail center of Dickinson County to Herington. The railroads made minimal investments in Abilene – the Santa Fe did not even have a proper depot – and offered relatively few stops in town. Herington began to boom as a railroad town – by 1888 the town had grown to two-thousand residents with a municipally owned electrical plant and its own streetcar line. Moreover, its assessed valuation was already half that of Abilene's, in no small part because of the significant investment the railroads made in Herington.⁶¹

Dickinson County farmers' distrust of the Courthouse Ring – and Abilene more generally – limited the ability of Abilene's business community to push for any larger economic development projects like railroads. Similarly, townspeople's opposition to the Ring limited businessmen's ability to successfully coordinate any development programs in Abilene despite sharing a common, broadly-defined vision for their town. Wilson first articulated it in 1872, envisaging Abilene as a “substantial, prosperous, and moral town – relying upon a large and well-populated county for permanent growth and improvement,” that would become “more desirable as a residence for families, and children will grow up surrounded by the influences of true civilization, refinement, and religion.” Insisting that “Dickinson County [was] already sufficiently settled up to support a flourishing county town,” Wilson

⁶¹ Helen Dingler, *Past and Present Towns of Dickinson County, Kansas* (Abilene: Dickinson County Historical Society, 1999), 123 – 124. *Reflector*, July 15 and 22, August 8, and December 16, 1886. State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1889), 117. The assessed value of railroad property in Herington was \$145,079; railroad property in Abilene was only \$37,581.

contended that Abilene would become “one of the finest and best towns in the great Central State.”⁶² This prophetic statement spoke to several key tenets of growth that most businessmen in Abilene supported; specifically: that the town’s growth would be predicated upon the prosperity of Dickinson County farmers who would serve as customers for the city’s shopkeepers and as the suppliers of raw materials for future industries; that the town would attract area farmers because it would be the epitome of a moral, temperate community; and that it would be peopled by good, civilized, middle-class families who would continue to work toward attaining these goals. At the same time, it suggested that Abilene would remain a town, both because of its self-determined market area and its definition of appropriate residents reflecting middle-class values.⁶³

The amorphous quality of this vision – it existed without any consensus on the details – contributed to its durability and popularity; not all businessmen shared a common vision for how to achieve it. In 1885 local businessmen founded a Board of Trade to consolidate, facilitate, and direct promotional efforts for the entire city. Early reports suggested that the Board of Trade enjoyed broad support; in fact, Ring members served alongside other local businessmen on early committees. A year later, however, Bonebrake, Rice, and other Ring members founded the Abilene Improvement Company, a rival booster organization to fund and promote select economic ventures that would benefit Abilene.

In reality, it provided a separate, exclusive space in which Ring members who contributed money and land to subsidize ventures could more completely control decisions made about how to draw manufacturers that they deemed appropriate to Abilene. The Improvement Company subverted

⁶² *Abilene Chronicle*, December 12, 1872.

⁶³ In its vision of Abilene as a bastion of middle-class values, Abilene’s businessmen spoke to many of the popular middle-class tropes of the day, including respectability, morality, and a belief in the superiority of the American capitalist system. Historian Robert Haywood describes the prevalence of these values in *Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

the role of the relatively more egalitarian Board of Trade in spearheading development initiatives by siphoning off the capital necessary to fund larger projects and undermining the Board's authority.⁶⁴ The existence of rival booster groups exacerbated existing tensions between the Courthouse Ring and other businessmen. As a result, neither the Board of Trade nor the Improvement Company contributed much to the long-term development of Abilene. The Improvement Company was not particularly proactive in drawing new employers to town, apart from recruiting the L.B. Johns Carriage Company to relocate to Abilene from Indiana in 1886. The Improvement Company provided 80 acres of land adjacent to the city and more than \$25,000 to finance the carriage company's relocation.⁶⁵ Notably, the *Gazette* and *Chronicle* – published by men who were members of the Board of Trade – carried stories about the arrival of the carriage manufacturer but they downplayed, or even ignored, the contributions of the Improvement Company in drawing the factory to town, further emphasizing the city's social fracturing.⁶⁶ The economic impact of the carriage factory was short-lived; it only operated for two years before declaring bankruptcy. The Improvement Company's only other contribution to Abilene's development was a booster pamphlet published a year later, in which the Improvement Company offered "\$100,000 in capital to be given as bonuses to responsible manufactories." There is no evidence that the Improvement Company ever financed another industrial concern in Abilene.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Dickinson County Directory, 1886*, 57, Dickinson County Directories, Dickinson County Heritage Center. D.R. Gorden, one of Rice and Johntz's close companions, served as the Board of Trade's first president and Rice served on an early committee. *Abilene Reflector*, December 22, 1886.

⁶⁵ Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," 1886 – 2.

⁶⁶ The *Abilene Gazette* was founded by Wilson in Enterprise. He brought the newspaper to Abilene when he moved back in 1881. The newspaper changed hands several times before it was purchased by a consortium of Democrats, including Governor George Glick, largely for the purposes of promoting Abilene as a Democratic stronghold in Kansas. It failed after the capital removal campaign, in large part because there were not enough Democrats to support the newspaper. The *Abilene Chronicle* was purchased by George Rohrer in 1888. It was a Republican newspaper, but was opposed to prohibition.

⁶⁷ *Reflector*, July 22, 1886. Abilene Improvement Company, "Abilene: A Gem." Dickinson County Heritage Center, Abilene, Kansas.

Because the Board of Trade lacked the financial wherewithal to undertake any large scale or sustained projects like drawing additional railroads to town, they engaged in projects that required little capital or long-term management. The Board's largest promotional campaign, a day-long capital removal convention held in 1888, invited delegates from western and central Kansas to rally to relocate the Kansas State Capitol from Topeka to Abilene. It was a proposal so implausible that its allure for delegates existed largely to publicly protest the political and economic dominance of the northeastern corner of Kansas over the rest of the state. Abilene's organizers hoped that the convention would draw regional attention to the town and encourage people to relocate or visit. Instead, convention planning illuminated social divisions in the town. The *Gazette* and the *Chronicle* proudly detailed plans for the convention in almost every edition. Conversely, the *Reflector* was silent on the plans. The Courthouse Ring did not throw its support behind planning or carrying out the convention in any real way, suggesting that this group did not buy into a vision of Abilene as the political center of Kansas, nor did they approve of creating a spectacle simply to draw attention to their community. Without broad community backing, the organizers of the capital removal convention were unable to fulfill promises to provide sufficient lodging, food, or entertainment for convention delegates and the convention failed to achieve its multiple goals.⁶⁸

Prohibition further fractured Abilene's business community. Businessmen fought over temperance since its days as a cattle town. Abilene's city council was quick to enact high license fees to profit from

⁶⁸ Malin claims that a series of central Kansas towns attempted to shift the state capital west from Topeka. In his analysis of the Abilene Capital Removal campaign, he posits that the Democratic owners of the *Gazette*, including former governor George W. Glick, engineered the convention, but acknowledges that many viewed the convention as nothing more than an attempt to boom Abilene. He misinterprets the *Chronicle's* complaints about rings and political chicanery, unaware that many of Rohrer's complaints were about local, not state-level politics. James C. Malin, *Power and Change in Society with Special Reference to Kansas, 1880 – 1900* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1981), 56 – 114. *Abilene Chronicle*, February 16, March 8, and 22, April 5, 12, 19, and 26, 1888. *Gazette*, January 5, April 2, 19, 26, and May 3, 1888. The only coverage the *Reflector* provided came two days after convention, when the newspaper complained that Glick's speech was offensive to almost everyone. *Reflector*, April 19 and 26, 1888.

saloons while controlling the liquor trade.⁶⁹ When voters approved the state prohibition amendment in 1880, prohibitionists – led by Rice – insisted it be strictly enforced. In his two terms as mayor, Rice directed the marshal and city attorney to close saloons and prosecute saloon operators. In so doing, Rice acted as a prohibitionist, not as a member of the Courthouse Ring. Although some of his cronies were also prohibitionists, none were as vehement about enforcing the prohibition amendment as he was and there is no indication that Johntz supported or opposed temperance. In insisting that the prohibition amendment be enforced in Abilene, he not only alienated Democrats, who largely opposed prohibition, but also exposed deep fractures in the local Republican base. Many Republicans were prohibitionists but some wanted to allow saloons to remain open so that the city could earn revenue from regularly fining them. Others opposed prohibition and were part of an ongoing bipartisan resubmission movement to allow voters to reconsider the prohibition amendment. George W.C. Rohrer, a saloon keeper and wholesale liquor dealer who arrived in Abilene in 1877 led the local resubmission movement. He was an active Republican who assumed a major role in the local Republican Party when Rice bolted for the Prohibition Party. To further his campaign against prohibition, Rohrer purchased the *Abilene Chronicle* and turned it into a Resubmission-Republican news organ. Yet Rohrer also claimed that the *Chronicle* would “denounce political chicanery and bosses.” He relentlessly attacked the Courthouse Ring for its political machinations, and took specific delight in targeting Rice, who Rohrer insisted was abusing his authority in his tenure as mayor.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ McCoy, *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade*, 229 – 236 and Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 257 – 263.

⁷⁰ Rice was elected mayor in 1879 and 1886. *Reflector*, July 22, 1886. Although Rohrer owned several businesses while living in Abilene, his saloons appeared to be his only financially-remunerative. In 1882, Rohrer paid a total of \$837 in liquor violations, the result of three citations. Verckler, “Newspaper Notes,” 1882 – 2. The Ring frequently complained that Rohrer controlled the local Republican Party. *Reflector*, July 19, 1888. Rohrer criticized Rice as a mayor who abused his power. *Abilene Chronicle*, March 29, 1888. Malin considered Rohrer to be a valuable observer to recount and analyze the political and cultural shifts occurring in central Kansas. Malin, *Power and Change in Society*, 94. For more on prohibition in Kansas, see Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

Because factionalism limited any opportunities for businessmen to come together to develop larger, long-term development programs for Abilene, individuals undertook the city's most significant development programs. Thus, development in Abilene in the 1870s and 80s remained piecemeal and driven by personal financial incentives. Henry acted as Abilene's most vigorous booster in the city's early years, repeatedly traveling to the Midwest to sell Dickinson County land to potential settlers. He published promotional pamphlets – *Henry's Advertisers* - which explained what crops to plant and how to best plant them, as well as detailed information on the climate, soil, and availability of building materials. He explained how to purchase land – whether through cash sales; loans that Henry arranged with Eastern capitalists; or a kind of share-cropping arrangement in which the purchaser moved onto unimproved land, broke it, and gave the Henry the proceeds of the first two crops in return for the deed to the land.⁷¹ In 1873, Henry undertook what may have been the county's most effective marketing campaign, planting 500 acres of winter wheat alongside the Kansas Pacific railway. After his first crop flourished, Henry expanded his acreage until his fields of golden wheat stretched as far as the eye could see on either side of the rail line. Railway conductors regularly announced Henry's wheat fields as the trains moved through his acreage. In 1877, a journalist for the *New York Herald* who visited Abilene lavishly praised Henry's wheat fields as the "Golden Belt of Kansas."⁷² Henry's wheat fields, along with his *Advertisers*, offered a powerful inducement to encourage people to move to Dickinson County to farm. Although no statistics explicitly link his marketing plan with Dickinson County's population growth

⁷¹ "Henry's Advertiser," Spring 1878, (Topeka: Geo. W. Martin, Kansas Publishing House, 1878). Dickinson County Pamphlets, v. 1, no. 7, Kansas State Historical Society, 15, 21 – 22.

⁷² Although Henry was not the first to plant winter wheat in central Kansas, he popularized the crop and became a vocal promoter of winter wheat production in the region. Malin, *Winter Wheat*, 92 – 95. Stuart Henry, T.C.'s younger brother, angrily refuted Malin's account in two self-published pieces: Henry, "Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas," and Henry, "A Moral Lapse in Bureaucracy," Pamphlets v.1, no. 13 and 14, Kansas State Historical Society. Contemporary newspaper articles and T.C.'s own account appear to support Malin's interpretation, however. See Theodore C. Henry, "An Address to the Old Settlers Re-Union at Enterprise Kansas," Dickinson County Pamphlets v.1, no. 9, Kansas State Historical Society.

between 1873 and 1880, the population clearly grew. Between 1875 and 1880, the population of Dickinson County more than doubled from 6,841 residents to 14,973. Area farmers' investment in winter wheat increased even more dramatically in the same period, from just over 32,000 acres to more than 100,000 acres.⁷³

Henry continued selling land to farmers from the Midwest and northern states like Wisconsin and Michigan. In the late 1870s, Henry successfully negotiated the sale of several thousand acres of Dickinson County farmland to a large group of Pennsylvania German farmers known as River Brethren who were contemplating moving west in hopes of locating good, affordable farmland. Beginning in 1878, hundreds of River Brethren established homes and farms in Dickinson County. As successful farmers, who sold valuable land in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania to buy land and set up farms in Dickinson County, they reportedly injected more than \$300,000 into Dickinson County's economy and added more than 2,800 residents by 1885. Clearly Henry's general and targeted publicity campaigns drew immigrants to the region, expanded its agricultural base, and provided Abilene's businessmen with an expanded customer base to the benefit of Abilene's businessmen. Members of the River Brethren also came to play an increasing role in Abilene's economy and culture in coming years as they moved to town and opened some of the city's most important businesses.⁷⁴

⁷³ The value of Dickinson County's winter wheat crop in 1875 was estimated at \$698,000. By 1880 the value of the crop was more than \$1.2 million. State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report* (Topeka: Geo. W. Martin, 1876), 106 and 110; and *Second Biennial Report* (Topeka: Geo. W. Martin, 1881), 167 and 517.

⁷⁴ Dickinson County newspapers and local historians frequently conflate three closely-related sects of Dunkards - Brethren in Christ (River Brethren), German Baptists, and United Brethren - who arrived in Dickinson County in the late nineteenth century. These sects differed over doctrine, but were culturally similar. Each group built a church in Abilene. Most of the Pennsylvania Germans were River Brethren who traveled to Abilene together on a single train arriving in March, 1879. More than 300 people made up that colony. Dwight Eisenhower's family was a part of that colony. *Dickinson County Chronicle*, March 29 and November 14, 1879. Cleyson Brown, the founder of Brown Telephone (which later became Sprint), is commonly assumed to have been a member of the River Brethren, but he was a part of the German Baptist church. When speaking broadly of all three sects, I refer to them as Pennsylvania Germans. When I speak of individual members, I refer to the sect specifically. For more on the Brethren in Christ, see: A.W. Climenhaga, *History of the Brethren in Christ Church* (Nappanee IN: E.V. Publishing House, 1942) and Carlton O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ* (Nappanee IN: Evangel Press, 1978). For more on the migration of the River Brethren to Dickinson County, see:

Bonebrake's private enterprises also acted as a marketing tool for Abilene. While Henry's efforts drew new farmers to Dickinson County to increase Abilene's customer base; Bonebrake's opera house, water works, and electric company encouraged potential residents to move to Abilene and area farmers to visit. Opened in February 1880, the opera house drew praise from newspaper editors in the surrounding communities and visitors from central Kansas. The *Junction City Union* jealously claimed that the opera house "will add much to the attractions of [Abilene]. Such a hall in Junction City would insure the holding of two to three conventions of state dimensions every year."⁷⁵ The opera house emerged as a space where major cultural and political events were staged, providing the town with a veneer of culture and a feeling of permanence and respectability that contributed to Abilene's reputation in central Kansas and beyond.

The construction of the waterworks and electric company in the mid-1880s reinforced the message that Abilene was affluent enough to afford public utilities and large enough to require them, encouraging potential residents and manufacturers to consider Abilene as a good place to locate. The *Reflector* pointedly applauded larger towns on either side of Abilene who "followed in Abilene's footsteps" when their electric plants opened. Promotional literature and newspaper articles explained how the waterworks provided fire protection for Abilene's central business district and certain residential districts. Bonebrake's electricity contract with the city stipulated that he provide and maintain electric street lights for the business district – a civic improvement boosters used to advertise

John R. Hertzler, "The 1879 Brethren in Christ Migration from Southeastern Pennsylvania to Dickinson County, Kansas," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* (January 1980): 11 – 18; George R. Beyer, "Pennsylvania Germans Move to Kansas," *Pennsylvania History* 32 (1965): 40 – 46; and Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains*, 127.

⁷⁵ Reprinted in the *Dickinson County Chronicle*, November 14, 1879.

Abilene as a safe community. The boosters of the Board of Trade and the Improvement Company emphasized the value of the water works and the electricity company to potential manufacturers.⁷⁶

Although both Henry and Bonebrake's projects clearly benefited Abilene, they were first and foremost, private enterprises designed to financially benefit Henry and Bonebrake. Marketing to farmers made Henry the county's largest land broker. As historian James C. Malin has persuasively argued, Henry was fundamentally a speculator. He purchased thousands of acres of land throughout the 1870s, which he sold to newcomers for a profit. Henry's wheat fields were an explicit attempt to drive up the price of his land. Similarly, Bonebrake's opera house and utilities companies clearly benefited the community, but they were also financially lucrative. His franchise agreements with the city awarded him a monopoly to supply water and electrical services in the city. The opera house promoted the city, as well as his hardware store, bank, and other businesses.⁷⁷

Clearly, the political, economic, and social domination effected by Rice, Johntz, and other members of the Courthouse Ring drove the city's development following the demise of the cattle trade. Given the inability of the rest of Dickinson County to mount a sustained opposition to them, they consolidated their power during the 1870s and 80s. They largely controlled local politics and represented Dickinson County at the state level. Their ownership of the city's most significant financial institutions and its largest mill and elevator helped shape the development of the local economy. They used the newspapers they owned or controlled to promote themselves, their friends, and their agendas to other residents. At the same time, divisions between the Courthouse Ring and other residents, as well as divisions among Dickinson Country residents more generally, limited their ability to carry out many of their plans. Because of this social fracturing, Abilene's development appeared disjointed and was largely the result of individual profit motives. Abilene grew – by 1888 the city had almost 5,200

⁷⁶ *Weekly Reflector*, January 1 and 28, and July 29, 1886. *State Gazetteer* (Chicago: R.L. Polk, 1888), 98. Abilene Improvement Company, "Abilene: A Gem."

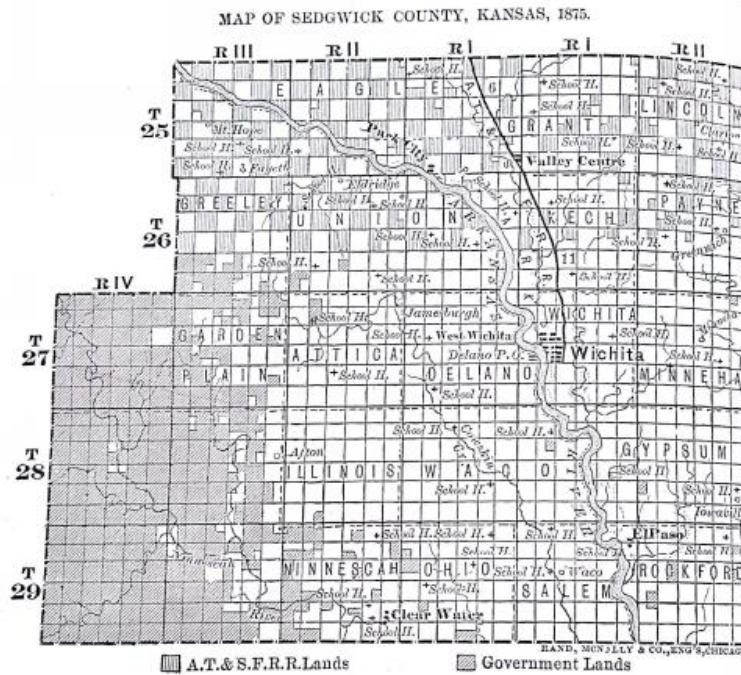
⁷⁷ Malin, *Winter Wheat*, 95. *Dickinson County Chronicle*, May 14, 1880.

residents and an assessed valuation of \$815,000 – but it did not grow as quickly as Wichita or Dodge City and was facing increasing competition from nearby Herington, which was only two years old but already had 2,000 residents and an assessed valuation that was half that of Abilene’s.

Wichita: “The Next Chicago”

Like Abilene, Wichita’s early settlers formed the nucleus of the town’s leadership through the 1880s. Unlike Abilene, Wichita’s businessmen quickly coalesced into a broad united front that invited all businessmen, including newcomers, to work together for the benefit of the town. The pioneers shared many similarities that allowed them to build connections with one another in the city’s early development – they were relatively young and largely Midwesterners who had been born in the United States. Most moved to Wichita with their families. No one arrived with a large personal fortune and none were paupers. Each one quickly established a business in town; no one seemed interested in farming as a vocation. With few exceptions, they were Republicans and their economic perspectives appeared to be an outgrowth of a shared political ideology. Most importantly, Wichita’s early businessmen shared certain beliefs about town-building that would remain in place through 1888 – they defined development entirely in economic terms. They encouraged a diversified economy. They were deeply committed to fueling railroad construction through Wichita. Conversely, they opposed municipal taxation, except to underwrite railroad construction. They viewed real estate – both in the city and in surrounding rural areas – as a viable investment and an effective means to grow both their city and their personal fortunes. Prohibition was the one issue that divided them; yet most couched their position on prohibition in economic terms. These beliefs both inspired and undergirded the metropolitan ambitions of Wichita’s businessmen and enabled Wichita to grow from an isolated trading post before 1872 into one of the state’s largest and most economically powerful cities sixteen years later. They also set up Wichita for a terrible crash after 1888.

1875 Map of Sedgwick County⁷⁸



1875 Map of Sedgwick County

To be clear, these men often disagreed and some businessmen enjoyed more authority than others. As at Abilene, pioneers tended to wield more power than newcomers. As at Dodge City, those who were willing to invest the most in local ventures spoke with a louder voice than those who did not. Kos Harris, an early attorney and local historian, described Wichita's Board of Trade as "a school where matured men learned the power, worth, and genius of each other; where opinions were weighed by enemies and deliberately adopted as the course of wisdom and business sagacity. The majority ruled and the minority submitted." He claimed that Wichita's most prominent booster-businessmen employed a philosophy of "'come along,' not go along." Local businessmen made major financial contributions to fund projects before they asked anyone else to donate, lending both credibility and import to initiatives that made it easier for others to join. Moreover, established residents generally

⁷⁸ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report*, 264.

encouraged newcomers to join their ranks. Thus, Wichita's business community typically presented a common front in which the leadership enjoyed widespread support from other businessmen.⁷⁹

Early settlers James R. Mead and William Greiffenstein personified many of the common values of local businessmen. Their business interests were diverse; both opened trading posts and served as government contractors, supplying area forts and Indian reservations with buffalo meat and beef. They both invested in land early and used it as collateral to underwrite other investments. Greiffenstein founded the city by platting a large parcel of his land and jumpstarted the development of its downtown by selling lots along Douglas Avenue to prospective merchants for virtually nothing and offering free rent in his Douglas Avenue buildings. Although he was initially challenged by a rival group who attempted to create a second business district at the north end of Wichita, the business community quickly became established at Douglas Avenue and pioneer businessmen regularly joined Greiffenstein on his porch on Sunday afternoons to discuss shared economic interests.⁸⁰

Wichita secured the cattle trade in 1872, after the Kansas state legislature quarantined Texas cattle south of Dickinson County. Its evolution into a cattle town was no small feat; other towns were vying for the cattle trade as well, and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (Santa Fe) railroad bypassed Wichita. Greiffenstein, Mead, and other early businessmen fought a nasty battle to become the county seat of Sedgwick County, privately financed a spur line to hook up to the main line, and sent riders out to intercept herds being driven north along the Chisholm Trail. At the same time, they wanted Wichita to have a diversified economy, and strongly supported the parallel development of a regional farm

⁷⁹ Kos Harris, "Chronicles," in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County*, O.H. Bentley ed. (Chicago: C.F. Cooper, 1910), 205 and 216.

⁸⁰ Greiffenstein was considerably older than other businessmen and had emigrated to the United States from Germany. Robert Hugh McIsaac, "William Greiffenstein and the Founding of Wichita," (Master's thesis, University of Wichita, 1937) and Mead, *Hunting and Trading on the Great American Plains*.

economy.⁸¹ Wichita's pioneer businessmen all arrived during the cattle period. Two of the city's most prominent real estate agents arrived in 1871, and four of the city's bankers arrived by 1875, including H.W. Lewis, and J. Oak Davidson. Lewis and Davidson would become two of Wichita's most generous boosters, drawing upon their personal fortunes, as well as the assets of their banks, to finance local development initiatives. Alfred W. Oliver and Hiram Imboden opened the city's first flouring mill in 1874. Oliver would also become one of the city's most committed boosters, serving as president of the city's Board of Trade until 1892.⁸²

As at Abilene, Wichita's early businessmen quickly recognized that they needed to induce a newspaper editor to move to Wichita to "boom" their town. Marshall M. Murdock was not the first editor to publish a newspaper in Wichita, but he was certainly its most recognized – and one of the most

⁸¹ Craig Miner, *Wichita: The Early Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 1-75; and *Wichita: The Magic City* (Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Museum, 1988), 9-19; Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 41-55; and L. Curtise Wood, *Dynamics of Faith: Wichita, 1870 – 1897* (Wichita: Center for Management Development, College of Business Administration, Wichita State University, 1969), 1-8.

⁸² This study defines pioneer businessmen as those who arrived by 1875 when the cattle trade ended. J.M. Steele and N.A. English were the city's first realtors. M.W. Levy and N.F. Niederlander were among the first bankers. Davidson was arguably Wichita's most enthusiastic booster during the 1880s. He arrived in Wichita in 1872 from New York state, with his parents, his wife, and young son. Oak and his father S.L. were essentially land speculators, operating a real estate and loan firm while buying and selling land for their own account throughout Sedgwick County. The pair went on to open Citizen's Bank in 1883. Davidson personally underwrote much of the funding necessary to draw manufacturers to Wichita in the 1880s, in addition to constructing the city's first street car lines and the Union Stock Yards, both of which were designed to support new industries the Board of Trade drew to Wichita in the latter 1880s. Considered "sociable and companionable", as well as extremely generous, Davidson moved at the heart of the city's social and economic circles. "J.O. Davidson" in Edwin J. Kistler, A.G. Allen, and Charles Bigelow, *Wichitans in Cartoon* (Wichita: E.E. Gilfillan, 1909), Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum; and *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County*, 687 – 692 and 757 - 759. Lewis was a deeply religious man, and more fiscally conservative than Davidson, but he also became a major booster for Wichita. Arriving a couple of years later than Davidson, Lewis opened Farmers' and Merchants' Bank and began to purchase land. He helped organize the Board of Trade and served on several committees. He was also an early philanthropist who founded one of the city's most prestigious schools. Lewis was one of the city's most prominent prohibitionists, but remained well-respected by most businessmen. Frederick Wheeler Lewis, *Hiram Wheeler Lewis: A Partial Auto-biography and Life-Pictures from Other Sources* (Albion NY: Eddy Printing, 1941). Per Kos Harris, Lewis put up a sign in the front window of the bank when the liquor law was enacted stating: "\$100 reward for the conviction of any man violating the liquor law. H.W. Lewis." No one removed their accounts from the bank – including "three pronounced liquor men" who claimed that they were "not depositing with Lewis, the prohibitionist, but with Lewis, the banker." Bentley, *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County*, 45.

well-known editors in the state.⁸³ Mead enticed Murdock to Wichita in 1872 to establish the *Wichita Eagle*. Flamboyant, loudly opinionated, and deeply loyal to both his adopted home and the Republican Party, Murdock differed from Wilson in one important way: he refused to engage in, or report upon, the sort of petty squabbles and pot-stirring that so delighted Wilson. Not averse to conflict, Murdock inevitably disagreed with the editors of Wichita's Democratic newspaper, the *Beacon*, and he frequently rebutted attacks upon Wichita published by newspapers in rival cities. Yet Murdock was no mud-slinger and would not report on personal disagreements between residents. He became a powerful and popular booster of Wichita, as well as a well-connected and respected member of the business community.⁸⁴

In many ways, Murdock was integral to defining what businessmen wanted their town to become. Like so many early Kansas newspaper publishers, Murdock used his newspaper as a promotional tool, advertising the city to farmers and residents of smaller towns throughout southern Kansas, while printing special editions to advertise the city to potential residents living throughout the United States. As early as 1872, Murdock's *Eagle* described Wichita as a metropolis and often referred to it as the "Metropolis of the Southwest" or the "queen city." These assertions grew from Wichita's budding presence as a commercial center in the region, and its emergence as an early agricultural processing center in a period when agriculture was becoming southeast Kansas's dominant economic engine. It spoke more broadly of a vision of Wichita following in Chicago's footsteps to build a metropolitan economy by establishing and cementing links to smaller towns and villages throughout Wichita's market area and to continue expanding that market area by promoting railroad construction

⁸³ In fact, the *Wichita Eagle* remains among the state's most recognized papers, having benefitted from the continuity of ownership – and perspective – provided by Murdock's son, Victor, and wife, Victoria, who took over upon Marsh's retirement. Miner provides a good description of Murdock in *Wichita: The Early Years*, 71 – 73.

⁸⁴ Murdock claimed that "long experience has taught us that personal squabbles invariably detract from the influence and usefulness of a journal, and that such doctoring only makes the sore the worse and in the end the editor gets all the blame and loses the friendship of both parties." *Eagle*, May 10, 1872.

and settlement. Rail access may have been the most tangible link between Wichita and other towns and villages, but flows of credit, commercial goods, and agricultural produce created additional links between Wichita and its hinterland.⁸⁵

Wichita's population grew slowly but steadily between 1873 and 1880, as land in southern Kansas was increasingly settled by farmers and aspiring merchants from the eastern United States who moved to Wichita to open shops catering to the growing farm population in Sedgwick county and adjacent counties. Nevertheless, as a one-railroad town situated in a region with poor rail access, Wichita's position remained tenuous and local businessmen consistently voted against increasing taxes to allow for municipal spending. The city hall and county courthouse were located in rented rooms, and residents repeatedly opposed plans to build a waterworks or sewer system. Despite the prohibition amendment, the city council allowed saloons to operate and taxed saloon keepers to cover the cost of basic city services.⁸⁶

Like the boosters in most Kansas towns, Wichita's businessmen were keenly aware of the rapid expansion of railroads through Kansas and across the country in the 1870s and 80s. A town with multiple rail lines had access to more of the country and most Kansas boosters expected that competition between railroads would keep freight rates low. Wichita's businessmen believed that if the city had multiple railroads they could entice merchants, wholesalers, and manufacturers to relocate to take advantage of reasonable shipping rates and direct routes to suppliers and customers. In 1880 they organized the city's first Board of Trade and persuaded officers of the St. Louis & San Francisco railroad (Frisco) to build through Wichita. They conducted a multi-faceted campaign spearheaded by pioneer

⁸⁵ *Eagle*, August 30, and October 8, 1872. The metropolitan economy is a concept drawn from William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), xv - xvii.

⁸⁶ Miner claims that local businessmen viewed the city council as a "Chamber of Commerce," where the only projects that were acceptable were those that spurred economic development. Miner, *Wichita: The Early Years*, 142 – 149. Wood disagrees with Miner, claiming that the city council did encourage the creation of city services like a waterworks, however these projects were always expected to be funded privately – not with tax dollars. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 53 – 54.

businessmen. Greiffenstein led a group to negotiate with rail officials. Murdock used the *Eagle* to celebrate the advantages of a second rail line to Sedgwick county voters. Still others lobbied Sedgwick County residents to vote for a municipal bond to pay for the rail line at railroad rallies and at local farmers' meetings.

In large part, Wichita succeeded in obtaining a second railroad (and several more), because early residents actively conferred with area farmers rather than lecture to them as Abilene's Ring members did. Wichita's boosters spoke in concrete terms about how the second railroad would lower fuel costs because the line would run through the coal fields of southern Kansas. They promised that farmers would earn better prices for their crops from competitive freight rates. Working with farmer-representatives, they successfully negotiated for the construction of two spur lines into rural Sedgwick County from the main line before the bond election, a move which undoubtedly influenced area farmers to support the bond issue. Their efforts paid off; the bond issue passed with an overwhelming majority (2,782 to 402). Only two townships in Sedgwick County voted against it.⁸⁷

The Board of Trade provided an organizational structure that businessmen could utilize in future campaigns. Between 1880 and 1886, Wichita's businessmen, operating under its auspices, successfully negotiated for several more railroads, hoping to end St. Louis and Kansas City's stranglehold of Kansas markets. In 1883, the Board petitioned the city council to subscribe \$40,000 to purchase capital stock in the St. Louis, Fort Scott, and Wichita railroad. Wichita residents overwhelmingly voted for the bond issue – only five voters opposed it. A year later, businessmen successfully spearheaded another bond issue campaign to fund construction of the Wichita, McPherson & Denver railroad. In 1885, the Board of

⁸⁷ Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 31 – 34 and *The St. Louis – San Francisco Transcontinental Railroad: The Thirty-fifth Parallel Project, 1853 – 1890* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1972), 103 - 126. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 61 – 62 and 183 – 184.

Trade attracted four more regional lines to Wichita; local businessmen served as directors on their boards.⁸⁸

Wichita's aggressive pursuit of multiple rail lines fueled population growth as residents and newcomers hoped to profit from the construction of each new line. Between 1880 and 1888, the city's population exploded from 4,900 to 34,000, and included a fresh crop of businessmen-boosters.⁸⁹ These newcomers shared many of the core characteristics that had brought together the city's pioneers: they were family men who moved to Wichita with a wife and children; they were overwhelmingly Republican; and they arrived in Wichita with plans to open a business. Yet these men were typically younger than the pioneers and more aggressive in their plans to create a city on the Plains. As a group, they complained that the current Board was not sufficiently ambitious regarding the city's industrial development and increasingly demanded to be involved in planning Wichita's future development. Unlike Abilene's Courthouse Ring, Wichita's early businessmen incorporated the newcomers and provided space for collaboration. In 1886, more than five hundred young businessmen challenged the old guard by meeting to create a rival organization to the city's Board of Trade. Arguing that "time was money; money was power; power was what we needed; that a corporation with such purposes as we were attempting needed cash; that an empty treasury could do nothing," those in attendance donated money to a fund to entice manufacturers to relocate to Wichita. Oliver, the president of the Board of Trade, moved quickly to meet with the new group's leaders and successfully negotiated the

⁸⁸ The Board of Trade coordinated the financing of these lines. Pioneer bankers Levy and Niederlander became officers of the Omaha, Abilene & Wichita line, along with newcomer G.H. Blackwelder. The two also joined Harris and two newer residents, J.W. Miller and N.S. Woods to become charter members of the Wichita & Colorado. The Board of Trade also negotiated the construction of the Wichita & Arkansas Valley and the Chicago, St. Joseph and Wichita rail lines. Miner, *The St. Louis – San Francisco Transcontinental Railroad*, 120 – 125. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 74 – 89.

⁸⁹ Among these newcomers was J.B. Carey, who opened a lumberyard, and later built the Carey Palace hotel; G.W. Clements, a real estate broker who later served as the city's mayor; and G.W. Rouse, the president of Western Mortgage-Security Company. State Board of Agriculture, *Second Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House), and *Sixth Biennial Report*, (Topeka: Clifford C. Baker, State Printer, 1889), 445.

consolidation of the two groups under the aegis of the existing Board of Trade. Parity was critical in this negotiation. The two groups agreed to increase the number of directors of the Board to twenty-three – twelve from the old board and eleven from the new group. Oliver remained the president, but newcomers became the organization’s vice-president and secretary. The newcomers turned over the subscriptions recently raised and the reorganized Board of Trade adopted a new organizational motto: “Harmony. Unity. Strength. Success.” While pioneers continued to hold important positions throughout the 1880s, their control increasingly required the support and consent of the newcomers. Together, members laid out a coherent vision that was broadly supported by Wichita’s business community.⁹⁰ Wichita’s Board of Trade became a comparatively well-financed organization with commodious offices in the heart of the central business district. Ten standing committees, composed of both pioneers and newcomers, prepared promotional materials, negotiated with railroads, appealed to manufacturers to locate to Wichita, lobbied the state legislature on Wichita’s behalf, and monitored construction in town. Enjoying strong support from the business community and a solid organizational structure, the Board of Trade effectively directed most of the promotion and development activities in Wichita.⁹¹

Board members positioned Wichita to become “The Next Chicago” – a gateway city through which goods from the eastern and western United States would flow, enroute to smaller cities and towns throughout the region. Maps published by the Board of Trade, speak to both their achievements

⁹⁰ Harris claims that despite this consolidation of the two groups, the pioneers continued to maintain control over the Board of Trade. Kos Harris “The Board of Trade of Wichita and Herein” and “Chronicles,” in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas*, 180 – 187, 200 – 205, and 211. Miner has noted, prior to 1880, Wichita’s business class consistently opted to preserve unity, even if it meant deferring projects that could lead to dissention. *Wichita: The Early Years*, 177 – 180. Although Miner claims that this unity disappeared when the city grew exponentially during the population boom of the 1880s, an examination of Harris’s writing, Murdock’s editorials, and promotional materials published by the Board of Trade suggest that the desire for unity (or at least the appearance of unity) continued to drive development efforts, even at the height of the boom. As Harris explained, “the fusion of the new blood and the old blood was a guarantee of success.” Kos Harris “Chronicle II,” in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas*, 187 – 193.

⁹¹ Wichita Board of Trade, *Journal of Commerce* (June 1888), Papers and Periodicals, Wichita-Sedgwick County Museum, 66, and *Journal of Commerce* (December 1887), Papers and Periodicals, Wichita-Sedgwick County Museum, 105 – 106. Wood describes the Board’s continuing transformation in detail. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 100 – 101.

and their ambitions. Presenting Wichita as the center of the trans-Mississippi western United States, with rail lines radiating as far as New Orleans, Chicago, and San Diego, these maps reflect Wichita's purported reach and its potential influence, showing how the various rail lines could readily access wheat and corn in Kansas and transport it throughout the nation, while bringing timber, coal, and other commodities to Kansans. Local businessmen foresaw the development of large-scale agricultural processing in Wichita, which would draw upon the rich agricultural bounty – corn, wheat, cattle, and hogs – they predicted the Great Plains would one day produce. The product of these new manufacturing concerns would be shipped to cities throughout the United States. And they viewed Wichita as a natural conduit for Eastern manufacturers to access the smaller cities and towns of the West, mediated by the wholesalers and jobbers who had set up businesses in Wichita.⁹²

The accomplishments of the Railroad Committee and the Immigration Committee, as well as the creation of a Shippers' Bureau, allowed Wichita to grow into one of the largest wholesale and distribution points in Kansas by 1888. Three transnational railroads ran through Wichita – the Santa Fe, the Missouri Pacific (MP) and the Rock Island – in addition to several regional lines, enabling wholesalers to press their goods into the stores of smaller towns throughout Kansas, eastern Colorado, Indian Territory, and northern Texas. Claiming that Wichita's location and superior railroad connections allowed its salespeople to be "on the ground and offer... inducements that cannot be given by more remote cities [namely Chicago and Kansas City]," Wichita's Board of Trade asserted that the city's wholesale base would continue to grow as new towns "sprang into existence," ensuring that Wichita would "eventually be recognized as the great jobbing center of the west." The Board's Immigration

⁹² "Wichita Kansas 1887." Wichita: Herbert L. Pierce, 1887. Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum. William Cronon's gateway city model posits that the metropolis not only spurs on the development of a large, tributary region, but also acts as the "entrance and exit linking some large region with the rest of the world." Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 263-309. Wichita Board of Trade, *Journal of Commerce* (November 1887), Papers and Periodicals, Wichita-Sedgwick County Museum, 86-87 and *Wichita Journal of Commerce* (June 1888). Malin assesses Murdock's claims that Wichita would become a gateway city in *Power and Change in Society with Special Reference to Kansas, 1880 – 1900* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1981), 516-22.

Committee published immigration guides and worked with railroad officials to offer excursion rates to these new towns to fuel immigration. The Shippers' Bureau secured more competitive freight rates with the city's railroads, hoping to claim "an advantage over Kansas City and other cities east... which will give Wichita control of [its] tributary territory." In 1887, The Board of Trade claimed that Wichita's sixty-three wholesalers sold over ten million dollars in merchandise as diverse as pumps, cigars, spices, saddles, furniture, groceries, and ice, employing almost one hundred fifty traveling salesmen, and outstripping every other town in the state of Kansas – with the notable exception of Kansas City.⁹³

Wichita was the only former cattle town to develop an industrial sector by 1888. New residents pressed for the Board of Trade to subsidize efforts to industrialize when they held their rally in 1886 and they dominated the Board of Trade's Manufacturing Committee. Yet newspaper accounts indicate that pioneer businessmen directed most of the negotiations with potential manufacturers, suggesting that behind the egalitarian façade of the Board's committee structure, the pioneers continued to direct the city's economic development. Moreover, the pioneers, especially Davidson, largely funded the subsidies used to induce the city's most valued manufacturers, Burton, Dold, and Whittaker, to relocate to Wichita. Businessmen were particularly eager to "land a whale" – a major manufacturer who might inspire other manufacturers to relocate as well. Burton Stock Car Works, a manufacturer from Boston that specialized in the construction of custom rail cars for pedigreed livestock, epitomized that whale. Davidson purchased \$200,000 of Burton's stock to ensure that Burton would come to Wichita rather than Kansas City, which was rumored to be pursuing the rail car manufacturer as well. In return, the Board of Trade provided Davidson with a guaranty of \$50,000 to insure his investment, which they raised after a well-orchestrated subscription campaign. Burton's arrival proved that, to some degree,

⁹³ State Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Decisions of the State Board of Railroad Commissioners* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1889). Wichita Board of Trade, *Journal of Commerce* (June 1888), 45-48. Wichita Board of Trade, *Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Wichita: Eagle Job Printing Office, 1888), Papers and Periodicals, Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum.

local boosters were right. Other companies followed, all lured to Wichita with cash subsidies and free land raised by Board members.⁹⁴

Boosters also wanted agricultural processing plants to build factories in Wichita. Harris observed that, “the Burton Car Works would not, directly, consume cattle, hogs or sheep, corn, wheat, or oats. These things were germane to our soil and we reasoned as follows: that to ship all this out in a raw state, and pay two or three profits, and two freight bills, to get part of it back, was nonsense. Hence, our needs were [agricultural-processing] industries.” By 1888, the first broom factory, a cracker company, three soap factories, and two vinegar works had opened in Wichita, but all of Chicago’s major meat-packing houses rejected Wichita’s offers. Determined to lure meatpackers to Wichita, boosters reached out to two smaller packers: Jacob Dold, a Rochester-based meat packer; and John Whittaker, who operated a lesser Chicago-based plant. Dold demanded \$150,000 to open a plant in Wichita, which the Board raised, but not without significant arm-twisting. As the owner of Union Stock Yard, Davidson contributed \$100,000. Whittaker demanded \$150,000 in subsidies as well, but businessmen in Wichita were overextended and fundraising was considerably more difficult. In the end, the Board took all kinds of collateral – even second mortgages – to raise the funds necessary to bring Whittaker to Wichita. Davidson again donated more than any other businessman.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Harris, “Chronicles,” in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas*, 196-229. In 1888, Lewis claimed that the Board of Trade was in communication with 110 factories interested in relocating to Wichita. H.W. Lewis, “Secretary’s Report,” in *Wichita Board of Trade, Annual Report*, 7-11. For a short time, Burton Stock Car Works was one of the largest private employers in the state. Kansas Bureau of Labor and Statistics, *Fourth Annual Report* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1888), 99-111; Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 75-76; Harris, “Chronicles,” in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas*, 206-210; and Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 110-111. As with other statistics from this period, it is unclear how many people Burton employed. Some accounts suggest only 300 men worked there; others claim 2,000 employees.

⁹⁵ Harris claims that the money given to Whittaker was immediately spent to pay off debts in Chicago. He notes that the trustees of the fundraising scheme for Whittaker assumed that some of the land contributed would be over-valued so they proposed to raise \$200,000 on behalf of Whittaker. Harris, “Chronicles,” in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County*, 211-224.

Wichita's united front of businessmen was so strong that no one in Wichita publicly challenged the wisdom of these subsidies or the municipal bonds raised for the railroads. Yet their sheer volume financially overextended the Board, the city government, and many of the city's boosters. Because the Board structured these industrial relocation subsidies using land deeds and mortgages as collateral, the industrial sector – and the economy - relied upon continued inflation in land prices to establish its value, in addition to a robust regional and national economy that would provide a market for these manufacturers' goods. Although there is some evidence that businessmen debated how these subsidies should be structured, dissent did not appear in the public record. Harris recalled that Lewis once "left a meeting where Burton car works were under discussion, in great disgust, because there seemed to be an inclination to make the contract too favorable to the company," but newspaper accounts and Lewis's introduction to the Board of Trade's *Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* offer no hint that Lewis ever disagreed with plans to subsidize the relocation of Burton to Wichita. Publicly, the business class presented a unified front that energetically and optimistically promoted economic development, which ultimately concealed serious structural issues in Wichita's local economy and precipitated the city's crash at the end of the decade.⁹⁶

Rampant land speculation shaped the character of the city. Although land speculation characterized most Western towns, the level of resident participation set Wichita apart. Most townspeople, as well as those in the surrounding countryside, bought and sold land for investment purposes – with every socio-economic group participating to some degree. Land speculation created a myriad of business opportunities for realtors, loan brokers, mortgage bankers, insurance agents, lawyers, and appraisers. It subsidized the development of most businesses and acted as wealth signifier in a region that lacked cash reserves. Investors like Davidson used proceeds from the sale of land, along with mortgages and deeds, as collateral to finance new commercial and industrial enterprises, expand

⁹⁶ *Wichita Beacon*, February 15, 1912, quoted in Lewis, *Hiram Wheeler Lewis*, 46.

existing businesses, construct new buildings, and fund other projects. Despite claims to the contrary, historian Craig Miner has demonstrated that land speculation in Wichita was largely a local business; most town-lot transfers in Wichita in the 1880s occurred among residents and did not result in a net inflow of cash to the economy. More significantly, the predominance of land transfers between residents indicated an insular market that could easily become destabilized in response to relatively minor shifts in the local economy.⁹⁷

Businessmen's firm opposition to any kind of taxation also shaped Wichita's development by severely limiting the city council's ability to maintain any city services or finance municipal improvements. Wichita's street car lines were privately financed by Davidson and largely drew the city's workers to and from local factories and their homes in newly developed working-class suburbs, and into the central business district to shop. The city also franchised rudimentary utility services – water, electricity, and gas – to local investors. City and county offices continued to be located in rented rooms. Public health officials identified serious public health concerns because city ordinances did not limit waste disposal. As the city did not spend money to pave roads, build sewers, or create parks, Wichita

⁹⁷ Land speculation accompanied the development of most major cities and smaller towns. See, Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 28-34; and Gilbert C. Fite, *The Farmer's Frontier, 1865 – 1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 123. Other scholars have demonstrated that real estate speculation in and around Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City constituted a powerful economic engine that energized each town's economic development during the 1880s. See, Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 52-64 and *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865 – 1890* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 203-211; Woods, *Dynamics of Faith*, 99-107; James C. Malin, "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties (Part I)," *Kansas Historical Quarterly IV* (February 1935): 23-49, and "The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties (Part II)," *Kansas Historical Quarterly IV* (May 1935): 164-185; and Allan G Bogue, *Money at Interest: The Farm Mortgage on the Middle Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955). Wichita's residents desperately tried to dispel rumors that the "real estate craze" had damaged the city, while simultaneously encouraging land speculation, arguing that "lots have never been as high as represented, and are still so low that there will be a large advance in the next two years." Wichita Board of Trade, "Journal of Commerce," (June 888), 26; and Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 53-55.

appeared to visitors to be sacrificing community development, and even endangering public health, for the sake of private profits and economic development.⁹⁸

Prohibition was the one issue that threatened to fracture the business community's united front. From its inception, Wichita's city council licensed or fined saloon keepers to fund city services in lieu of collecting other taxes. When the prohibition amendment passed, many of Wichita's businessmen lobbied to preserve saloons because they saw taxing liquor sales as a valuable form of municipal revenue and because they suspected saloons might help attract workers to Wichita. Others, especially Lewis, supported prohibition and agitated for Wichita to comply with the state's constitutional prohibition amendment.⁹⁹ Political loyalties played a role in defining the parameters. As in Abilene, Wichita's small population of Democrats opposed the state's prohibition amendment, and local Republicans were divided, reflecting a state-wide division in the Republican Party.

By 1887, some of the city's biggest boosters believed that the city's lax enforcement was detrimental to Wichita's interests. Worrying that Wichita's reputation as a rough and tumble town might discourage people and businesses from relocating there, Davidson, Mead and several other prominent businessmen appealed the state government for assistance through the new Metropolitan Police Law (MPL), which allowed the state to take control of police departments in cities where residents petitioned for intervention. By June, the state had installed a police commission in Wichita, taking control of Wichita's police force out of the hands of the city's mayor and council.¹⁰⁰ Not surprisingly, the Democratic *Beacon* loudly decried the imposition of the Metropolitan Police

⁹⁸ Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 43, 50 – 52, and 64 – 65. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 99 and 106 – 107.

⁹⁹ One opinion piece claimed that the best course of action would be to require high license fees to saloons. This compromise measure would limit the number of saloons to a handful, but they would provide Wichita with a good source of revenue. *Eagle*, June 14, 1883.

¹⁰⁰ More than 230 residents signed this petition, including Imboden and Oliver. For more background on the Metropolitan Police Commission, see Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas*, 125 - 127. *Beacon*, February 22; April 1 and April 27; and June 8, 1887.

Commission as an infringement on personal freedom and the rights of local municipalities to govern themselves. The *Eagle* also opposed this incursion of state authority, and in a rare moment of open hostility directed at residents, Murdock denounced those who had signed the petition as “cranks” and men “who had never done anything to build up the interests of Wichita.” He sparred with Lewis in the pages of the *Eagle* after publishing a letter Lewis wrote in support of the police commission. Both Lewis’s letter and Murdock’s response were remarkably restrained however, and repeatedly acknowledged each one’s respect for the other. Lewis emphasized the problems that accompanied the saloon trade and Murdock’s response spoke only to the seeming contradictions in Lewis’s argument. More tellingly, the *Beacon* immediately interceded to suppress any continuation of the debate, asking that these two “honorable and highly esteemed gentlemen” “keep cool” because any personal attacks would clearly “be regretted by all the people of Wichita.”¹⁰¹

The Board of Trade did not weigh in on prohibition enforcement officially but the spirit of collaboration and conciliation that the Board embodied clearly encouraged the city’s businessmen to find common ground to allow the business community to move forward as one. Murdock and Lewis’s exchange de-escalated as quickly as it began. The *Beacon* and the *Eagle* refocused their wrath upon the state executive committee who approved the petition and subsequently selected the city’s commissioners; and at newspaper editors in Kansas City, Topeka, and Atchison who mocked Wichita’s position. Murdock later came to the defense of Wichita’s police commissioners, who included Lewis and future governor William E. Stanley, claiming that Wichita’s commissioners “constitute a police commission no more to be bribed than the Supreme Court of the United States,” and noting that “Stanley and Lewis are both pronounced temperance men of the prohibition stamp, and both members of prominent churches.... All of these men are men of iron nerve, who cannot be intimidated; are men

¹⁰¹ The *Beacon* also took the opportunity to ridicule Lewis and Murdock as self-proclaimed great men of Wichita, noting, “If Colonel Lewis and Colonel Murdock should tear off and trample in the mud each other’s crowns of glory, who then would be responsible for Wichita?” *Eagle*, July 15, 1887 and *Beacon*, July 14, 1887.

with minds of such clearness of conviction as not to be balked by pretense or subterfuge.” As with other potentially divisive issues, Wichita’s businessmen – as represented by their largest newspapers – remained united and pressed forward together.¹⁰²

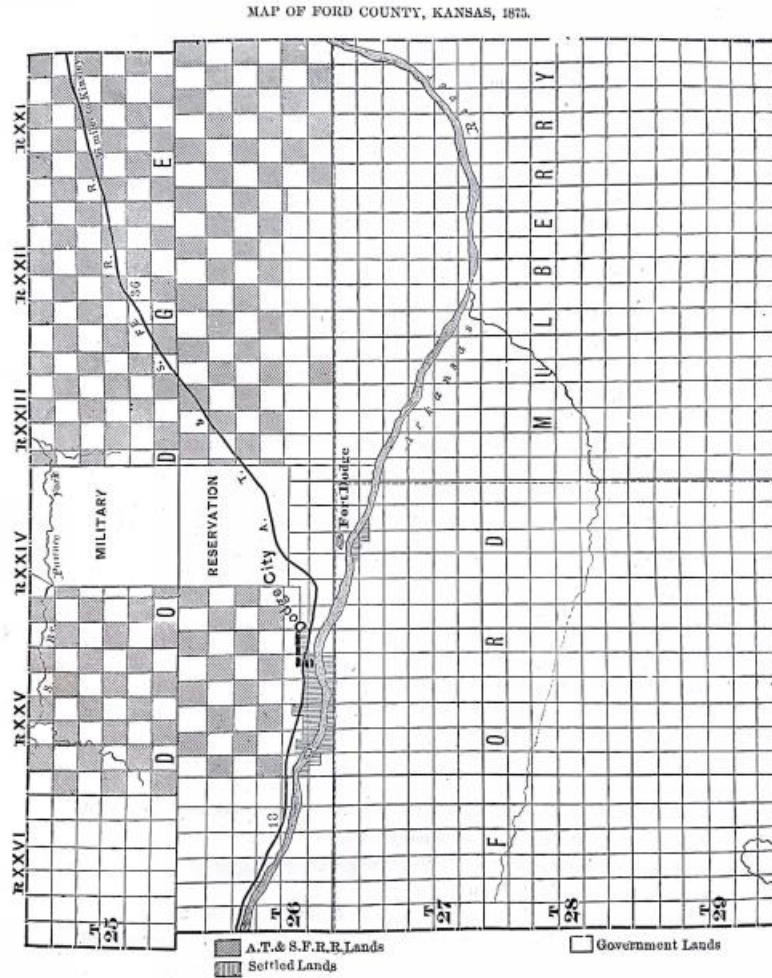
The land boom of the 1880s collapsed in a spectacular fashion after 1888. In Wichita, few businessmen recognized the signs of impending collapse. Looking back on the period, Harris concluded that “enthusiasm is the temporary idiocy of a man who, on ordinary occasions, has horse sense.” Wichita’s spectacular growth between 1870 and 1888 was largely built upon the enthusiasm of its businessmen and was institutionalized in the city’s Board of Trade where members churned out a pro-growth agenda and suppressed anything that might dampen that message. Together businessmen took Wichita from a frontier outpost without a railroad and turned it into a city of almost 34,000 people serviced by eight railroads. They created a major wholesale and an incipient manufacturing center for the state of Kansas. By 1888, the city’s assessed valuation was \$10.7 million dollars. They may not have built a city to rival Chicago, or even Kansas City, but their ambitious pursuit toward such goals propelled Wichita to an enviable position as the second largest city in the state. That the coming economic disaster would wipe out many of their gains should not obscure their many achievements. Through collaboration and drive the businessmen of Wichita built the foundation for the city that Wichita would one day be.¹⁰³

¹⁰² *Beacon*, July 16, 1887 and *Eagle*, September 23; October 14 and 28, 1887; and November 9, 1889.

¹⁰³ Surprisingly, Murdock did warn residents that the frenzied real estate market would not continue unchecked, but his editorials cautioning residents against land speculation not only went unheeded, they were later blamed for the collapse of the boom. Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 69-71. Harris, “Chronicles,” in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas*, 219.

Dodge City: “The Next Wichita”

1875 Map of Ford County¹⁰⁴



1875 Ford County Map

The last of the notorious Kansas cattle towns, Dodge City also enjoyed the longest tenure – almost ten years – until the state legislature outlawed the importation of Texas cattle to Kansas in 1885. Unlike Abilene and Wichita, which experienced long transition periods between the end of their cattle period and the population boom of the 1880s, Dodge City reinvented itself in the midst of it. After 1883, railroad expansion into western Kansas, combined with years of good rainfall and good prices for wheat

¹⁰⁴ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Fourth Annual Report*, 131.

and corn, drew farmers back to western Kansas. By 1885, the promotion schemes of the railroads, the state, and local town promotors inspired a flood of immigrants to homestead in the western half of the state.¹⁰⁵ Economic and social conditions shifted so quickly in southwestern Kansas that many of the decisions Dodge City's businessmen made appeared reactionary rather than visionary. Nonetheless, they profited from the opportunities the boom presented and crafted a vision for future growth for Dodge City modeled upon Wichita's growth. They reached out to farmers throughout the southwestern corner of the state, worked with railroad officials to position Dodge City as a nascent metropolis, and overhauled their reputation to entice farmers and travelers to visit Dodge City. The business community's capacity to effectively rebrand Dodge City as a commercial center evolved as residents moved beyond the factions formed during the cattle period. While Dodge City's businessmen had only begun to implement these programs before the boom burst in 1888, they demonstrated the value of collaboration in spurring town-building as the city transformed – almost overnight – from a cattle town to a commercial center.

Dodge City began as a frontier outpost. Founded in 1874 by Robert Wright, George Hoover, Richard Evans, and other like-minded residents, the town became the Santa Fe railroad's most important stop in southwestern Kansas. When the state legislature moved the quarantine line southwest of Wichita in 1875, Santa Fe railroad officials advertised Dodge City as the next center for the Texas cattle trade. Early residents welcomed the cattle trade – too few farmers lived in southwestern Kansas to support local businesses and Texas cowboys were not unlike the buffalo hunters, soldiers, and railroad workers who already shopped there. The town flourished as the herds arrived and were pastured on the plains south of town. Western luminaries like William "Bat" Masterson, James "Dog" Kelley, and Alonzo B. Webster opened saloons, dance houses, and restaurants. Famous sheriffs and gunfighters like Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and Mysterious Dave Mather moved to Dodge City. At the

¹⁰⁵ Craig Miner, *West of Wichita*, 203 – 211.

end of its first full-fledged season as a cattle center, the editor of the *Dodge City Times*, mockingly complained: “the town is relapsing into morality. At this writing there are only seventeen saloons and dance houses, sixty prostitutes, thirty gamblers, and eighty cowboys in the whole town.” Dodge City’s reputation as the most disreputable of the cattle towns was a title residents appeared to relish.¹⁰⁶

The social dynamics of Dodge City’s business community between 1875 and 1888 exemplify shifting factionalism in response to changing economic conditions and opportunities. In the first years of the cattle trade, the city’s businessmen divided into three factions: the Gang – which fully supported the cattle trade, represented the liquor interests, and wanted Dodge City to be a wide-open town; businessmen who wanted to keep the cattle trade but wanted some restrictions on the saloons and brothels; and German businessmen and farmers who wanted to promote farming in Ford County. As at Abilene, one group emerged as the dominant political and social clique, with the other factions organized in opposition to it. The Gang, Dodge City’s dominant clique, was led by Kelley and was committed to continuing the cattle trade. They advocated for unregulated saloons, brothels, gambling dens, and dance halls to draw cowboys to town. Michael W. Sutton, a recently-arrived lawyer from New York, became their chief strategist and legal counsel.¹⁰⁷ As historian Robert Dykstra observes, the Gang consistently dominated municipal affairs before 1885, with Kelley serving four terms as mayor, and Gang members routinely elected to the city council and to other municipal offices.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *Dodge City Times*, September 15, 1877. Cattle town Dodge City’s has been the subject of any number of books – both fiction and non-fiction including, Stanley Vestal, *Dodge City: Queen of Cownowns* (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1952); Samuel Carter, *Cowboy Capital of the World: The Saga of Dodge City* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1973); Ida Rath, *Early Ford County* (Newton KS: Mennonite Press, 1964); Haywood, *Victorian West*; and Robert Wright, *Dodge City: The Cowboy Capital of the Great Southwest* (Wichita: Wichita Eagle Press, 1913).

¹⁰⁷ Dykstra considers Sutton to be a political opportunist. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 216-217 and 274-276.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 214-225.

Although Wright was never a leader of the Gang, he certainly shared their attitudes and supported their efforts to preserve the town's cowboy culture. A grizzled frontiersman, Wright arrived in Ford County in 1866 from Missouri, having won a government contract to supply Fort Dodge with firewood, while under contract with an overland stage company to open and outfit new stations in southwestern Kansas and in the Neutral Strip south of the Kansas border (now the Oklahoma Panhandle). An experienced hunter and trader, Wright later reveled in recounting his adventures with the Plains' early residents. He opened the largest general goods store in the region, which served informally as the region's first bank. As the town's founder and a pioneer businessman with a wide network of friends and associates, Wright's approval of Gang activities encouraged Gang members to conduct their businesses and politics as they wished.¹⁰⁹

In contrast, Hoover, Webster, Evans, and others envisioned a Dodge City that appealed to newly-arrived farmers and families while still promoting the cattle trade. If Wright is remembered as a spirited representative of Dodge City's frontier past, Hoover is considered its founding businessman; a reserved, well-respected man who committed his life and fortune to building up Dodge City. In 1872 he opened a wholesale liquor emporium and saloon in anticipation of railroad workers building the Santa Fe's main line. He made a small fortune selling to saloons and businesses throughout western Kansas, the Neutral Strip, and northern Texas, but he supported moral reform efforts in Dodge City. By the summer of 1885, Hoover had closed his saloon and wholesale liquor business, having moved into real estate and an array of other investments. He owned Dodge City's most prominent bank, as well as its first grain elevator and flour mill. His close friend, Evans, a former Union soldier and miner who had previously lived in Missouri and Colorado, partnered with him in many of these ventures and often

¹⁰⁹ Wright, *Dodge City*; C. Robert Haywood, *The Merchant Prince of Dodge City: The Life and Times of Robert M. Wright* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); and Betty Braddock and Jeanie Covalt, *Dodge City: Cowboy Capital...Beautiful Bibulous Babylon... Queen of the Cowntowns... Wicked Little City... the Delectable Burg...* (Dodge City: Kansas Heritage Center, 1982), 17 - 18. Dykstra notes that Wright also reined in the Gang's behavior when he found it unacceptable. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 93 – 96, 215.

served as a director on the same promotional projects. These men continued to support the cattle trade, but also hoped to build up the town as a commercial center. They were instrumental in establishing a city government and unsuccessfully pressed for ordinances that outlawed dance houses and set high license fees for saloon keepers, among other things.¹¹⁰

A small but strong-willed group of German immigrant merchants emerged as a third interest group in Dodge City. They worked to stimulate increased German immigration to Ford County, hoping to establish a viable agricultural economy in southwestern Kansas. By 1877, the group had organized the German Immigration Society of Ford County and was actively recruiting German farmers, with the cooperation of the Santa Fe railroad, to move to Spearville, a newly-founded community in northeastern Ford County. The existence of such a close-knit community bound together by their shared ancestry lent factionalism in Dodge City an ethnic dimension. It also shaped debates over prohibition in Ford County as most of these newcomers opposed temperance. Because most early residents opposed prohibition, factionalism in Ford County was framed around land use issues and economic development, not prohibition enforcement.¹¹¹

After 1880, local, open-range cattle ranchers emerged as a new faction to further divide Dodge City's business community. Investing in cattle grew increasingly popular after an extended drought between 1878 and 1881 drove farmers to abandon their homesteads leaving plenty of free land available to pasture herds. Cattle ranching seemed a logical extension of the cattle trade, but ended up competing with it. Existing infrastructure – trails, stockyards, and railroads – facilitated local ranch

¹¹⁰ Hoover was Canadian. He was married at Evan's home and later purchased it. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 102-103; *Dodge City Journal*, July 24, 1914 and August 8, 1929; Gerald Gribble, "George M. Hoover, Dodge City Pioneer," (Master's Thesis, University of Wichita: 1940), n.p; and Braddock and Covalt, *Dodge City*, 39.

¹¹¹ Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 218 – 219. J. Neale Carman, "German Settlements Along the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. 28, No. 3 (Autumn, 1962): 310 – 316.

development and most new ranchers started their herds by purchasing longhorn calves at Dodge City.¹¹² It was a relatively cheap enterprise to start up, and Chicago meatpackers were paying high prices for cattle, further fueling local investment. Newly-minted local cattle ranchers included members from all the earlier factions. As the size of local herds grew, prime pasture space became more difficult to obtain, however. Several small outbreaks of splenic fever heightened fears that the Texas cattle would infect entire domestic herds with the disease, an accusation vehemently denied by Texas cattlemen.¹¹³

Renewed agricultural settlement further complicated open-range ranching. Several years of good rainfall and strong harvests encouraged farmers to move back to western Kansas. After 1882, the state, the railroads, and regional booster organizations enthusiastically promoted the region as a viable location to homestead and farm.¹¹⁴ Between 1881 and 1885 the Kansas state legislature approved the organization of five new counties and the population in southwestern Kansas jumped from 8,825 to 25,281. Cattle ranchers who had been pasturing herds on vacant land in the unorganized counties south of Ford County began to lose ground to homesteaders, while Texas cattle drovers continued to move through these areas with herds destined for Dodge City. By 1885, farmers had settled much of the county, including the area south of the Arkansas River where Texas cattle drovers pastured herds

¹¹² Local newspapers and educational tracts advocated cross-breeding longhorns with blooded stock as a way of up-breeding herds. *Times*, May 17, 1879 and James S. Brisbin, *The Beef Bonanza; or, How to Get Rich on the Plains being a description of cattle-growing, sheep-farming, horse-raising, and dairying in the West* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959; Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott, 1881), 52. All citations from University of Oklahoma edition. Miner, *West of Wichita*, 174 – 178 and Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 200- 206 and 331-40.

¹¹³ Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 331-335. Local ranchers did have some reason to fear splenic fever as the USDA uncovered several cases where the disease had infected local herds. M.R Trumbower, "Outbreak of Southern Cattle Fever in Kansas," and H.J. Detmers, "Investigation of Southern Cattle Fever," *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Animal Husbandry for the Year 1884* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885): 393 – 436.

¹¹⁴ David Emmons, *Garden in the Grasslands: Boomer Literature of the Central Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971).

awaiting sale. The 2,145 residents of Dodge City were now the minority in a county where 5,633 rural residents made their home.¹¹⁵

In January 1886, Dodge City's factions were repeatedly reordered as economic and social conditions dramatically shifted. In 1885, open-range cattle ranchers and newly-arrived farmers protested the Texas cattle trade and succeeded in extending the Texas cattle quarantine to include the entire state.¹¹⁶ For a short time, it appeared that cattle ranching might become an important industry for southwestern Kansas. Dodge City's businessmen divided into two camps – those who supported cattle ranching and those who backed area farmers. Many Gang members joined the cattle-ranching faction; this group also loudly opposed prohibition enforcement. The farming faction – made up of men like Hoover and a few former Gang members like Sutton – was divided on prohibition enforcement, although they increasingly advocated temperance. In January, 1886 a severe blizzard killed thousands of cattle, destroying the domestic cattle ranching industry, however. When crop-based agriculture became the region's major economic engine, residents again realigned themselves into factions to debate prohibition enforcement; remaining Gang members joined forces with German immigrants and Democrats to oppose enforcement while businessmen like Sutton joined newly-arrived farmers and pressed for enforcement.

¹¹⁵ In the 1880s, this region included the following counties: Greeley, Hamilton, Stanton, Morton, Wichita, Kearny, Grant, Stevens, Scott, Finney, Haskell, Seward, Lane, Gray, Meade, Ness, Hodgeman, Ford, Clark, Edwards, Kiowa, and Comanche. State Board of Agriculture, *Fifth Biennial Report* (Topeka KS: Kansas Publishing House, 1887), 224-225.

¹¹⁶ Farmers complained that Texas herds were trampling their fields, just as Dickinson and Sedgwick County farmers had previously argued. Open-range ranchers grew increasingly concerned about splenic fever infection. In the summer of 1884, several states threatened to embargo shipments of Kansas cattle when splenic fever broke out in stockyards at Kansas City, Chicago, and St. Louis; in response, Governor George W. Glick quarantined the state against the continued importation of Texas cattle for the rest of the year. The following winter, the state legislature barred all cattle pastured south of the Kansas state line. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 333 - 342.

Dodge City's pioneer newspaper editors were emblematic of factional shifts in early Dodge City. Nicholas Klaine's *Dodge City Times* initially served as the Gang's pro-cattle trade organ.¹¹⁷ Klaine arrived in Dodge City in 1877, having been recruited by Sutton from Missouri where he had published a Republican newspaper. Like Abilene's Wilson, Klaine entertained political ambitions, serving as the city's police judge and Ford County's postmaster; and he used his position to further his interests and those of the Gang.¹¹⁸ Klaine supported the Texas cattle trade until 1882 when it became clear that the Kansas Republican Party was supporting the prohibition movement, at which point he became a prohibitionist and tried to ingratiate himself with Republican farmers moving into Ford County. Given his early support for the Gang, critics found his exuberant defense of the prohibition amendment disingenuous, nicknaming him "Deacon." Klaine and Sutton led the local temperance movement, igniting violent debates over prohibition.¹¹⁹

Frost's allegiances also shifted over time. He arrived in the summer of 1874 and worked as a lawyer and real estate agent before founding the *Ford County Globe* in 1878. He, too, became active in local Republican politics, elected first as a state representative for Ford County, then as the president of the city's Board of Education, and was appointed Registrar of the federal Land Office in nearby Garden City in 1889.¹²⁰ His rivalry with Klaine and Sutton grew out of an on-going battle over control for the

¹¹⁷ Klaine was the *Times* second editor. Walter Shinn and his brother, Lloyd, founded the paper in 1876. Klaine bought out Walter in 1877. As the voice of the Gang, Klaine insisted that area farmers did not need help during the drought. In the winter of 1880, rural residents surrounded the *Times* newspaper office, and demanded he retract his comments. *Times*, January 24, February 7, 14, 1880. *Spearville News*, January 31, 1880.

¹¹⁸ In 1885, Klaine was replaced as postmaster because of "offensive partisanship." *Dodge City Globe Livestock Journal*, July 15, 1885.

¹¹⁹ Klaine became a founding member of the Dodge City Baptist Church. *Dodge City Democrat*, July 11, 1885 and *Times*, July 16, 1885.

¹²⁰ *Times*, April 11, 1889.

local Republican Party and regularly played out on the pages of both newspapers.¹²¹ As Klaine moved away from the Gang and supported the reform-minded municipal ticket in the 1883 election, Frost began lobbying for the Gang-backed mayoral ticket. When the reform ticket won, new mayor Larry Deger and the city council enacted several ordinances to regulate vice in Dodge City, igniting a battle known as the Dodge City War between some of the West's most notorious saloon owners, gun slingers, and peace keepers.¹²² Frost defended the Gang position during the Dodge City War, and subsequently joined Wright to negotiate rights-of-way for Texas drovers driving herds to Dodge City. Yet Frost also supported the development of a local ranching industry, changing the name of his newspaper to the *Globe Livestock Journal* in 1884 and regularly publishing the brands of local ranchers. When the blizzard of 1886 destroyed the domestic cattle ranching industry, Frost shifted allegiances again, renaming his newspaper *The Ford County Republican* to promote anti-prohibition Republican positions.¹²³

Debates over prohibition grew increasingly strident after 1885 as Dodge City's businessmen attempted to reinvent the town as a commercial center for area farmers. Frost and Wright's faction stubbornly attempted to protect saloon keepers, insisting that the prohibition amendment was impossible to enforce and provided a valuable revenue stream for the local government. Klaine and Sutton's group argued that saloons were deterring farmers from shopping in Dodge City. In 1885, Dodge City's prohibitionists organized a local chapter of the Kansas State Temperance Union (KSTU). In June, they invited KTSU organizer Albert Griffin and State Attorney General S.B. Bradford to Dodge City to

¹²¹ When Republican delegates at the state senatorial nomination convention for the Thirty-Fifth District nominated Frost, Klaine and Sutton protested the results and rallied a second nomination convention in a neighboring county. The fighting grew so severe that Frost withdrew his name as a candidate to preserve the party from splitting. Klaine described Frost as a drinker and a street tough. Haywood, *The Merchant Prince of Dodge City*, 125. *Ford County Globe*, August 1, 1882. *Times*, April 17, 1880. Frost responded in kind – calling out Klaine as a hypocrite, a political operator, and even accusing him of “certain dark and damning practices relating to sisters of his church at his former home.” *Ford County Globe*, March 23, 1883. *Globe Livestock Journal*, October 20, 1885.

¹²² Nyle H. Miller and Joseph W. Snell, *Why the West Was Wild: A Contemporary Look at the Antics of Some Highly Publicized Kansas Cowntown Personalities* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 519-565.

¹²³ *Globe Livestock Journal*, July 22, 1884. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 334 – 335.

close Dodge City saloons operating in violation of the state's prohibition amendment. When Griffin and a deputy attorney general arrived to serve injunction papers, an anti-prohibition mob forced them to flee. The Attorney General and local KSTU members petitioned Governor John A. Martin to send the militia, but Mayor Wright convinced Martin to allow him to resolve the situation, reminding him that "our situation is diferent [sic] from that of other Towns in the Eastern part of the State.... We have always been a frontier town, where the wild & reckless sons of the Plains have congregated, [and] their influences are still felt here." He asked that the Governor "let us alone & we will work out our own salvation in due season." In November, when Bradford returned to Dodge City to close the saloons, he found them temporarily shuttered. Although their guilt was never conclusively proven, frustrated local prohibitionists set fire to a Front Street saloon, gutting a full block of businesses, including Wright's emporium. Believing that Sutton was behind the fire, Wright stormed over to the attorney's home and fired several shots at his house. Less than two weeks later, arsonists set another fire in a brothel that destroyed additional saloons and several unconnected businesses.

Ultimately, the desire for stability trumped partisanship. Like Wichita, local businessmen attempted to find common ground and move beyond factionalism driven by escalating debates over prohibition. Frost and Klaine attempted to reduce factionalism by playing down these tensions. Both refused to speculate about the causes of the fires and instead encouraged all residents to think and act rationally. Two hundred twenty-seven local businessmen, including prohibitionists and saloon keepers, petitioned the city council to remove Mayor Wright and replace him with Webster, who most considered a reform-minded former saloon owner. Once he became mayor, Webster acted as a moderator between the two groups, reducing tensions until Dodge City's factions largely dissipated.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 278 – 285. Significantly, Haywood offers a different interpretation of the transition from Wright to Webster. He claims that Wright no longer wanted to be the mayor as he had been elected county treasurer and that Wright encouraged Webster to take over as mayor. Drawing upon letters written by Sutton to

When the cattle trade ended in 1885, Dodge City's population grew and changed. Some Gang members left and new businessmen arrived, eager to take advantage of the opportunities the rural population boom offered towns like Dodge City. Many were nothing more than speculators who invested in land throughout southwestern Kansas with hopes of selling it for a profit to new farmers; they viewed Dodge City as nothing more than a base of operations and had little interest in town-building projects. A few, like patent-medicine magnate Asa Soule, invested in more than land, however. Soule was first drawn to Ford County from Rochester, New York by friends who persuaded him to buy land and invest in an irrigation canal.¹²⁵ With his partners, he purchased land in Ford County and in adjacent Gray County, founded the town of Ingalls, built an irrigation canal that ran through Gray County all the way to Dodge City and funded a rail line to run from Dodge City to Ingalls. Soule also invested in Dodge City, opening a bank, funding the establishment of a Presbyterian College, founding the city's first water works, and building a street car line that connected the college to the city's business district. By 1887, Soule and his partners were rumored to have invested almost two million dollars in Ford County.¹²⁶

Governor Martin, Haywood claims that Sutton was opposed to Webster becoming mayor because he saw Webster as nothing more than a tool for Wright. Haywood, *The Merchant Prince of Dodge City*, 128 – 147. Yet Sutton was married to Webster's niece and Webster died at his home shortly after he was elected to his fourth term as mayor. By the time Webster was elected mayor, he had shut down his saloon and opened a drug store.

¹²⁵ The canal project originated with brothers G.G. and J.W. Gilbert who had lived in Rochester, but moved to Ford County in 1878 to raise sheep. They appealed to Soule to help underwrite its construction and were responsible for initially drawing him to Dodge City. *Times*, January 18, March 29, and June 7, 1883. *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 29, 1886. "Kansas Water Works and Irrigation Company," *Historical and Descriptive Review of Kansas* (Topeka: J. Lethem Publishing, 1890), in Asa Soule Vertical File, Ford County Heritage Center. "The Soule Canal," *Dodge City and Ford County, Kansas, 1870 – 1920: Pioneer Histories and Stories* (Dodge City: Ford County Historical Society, 1996), 3 – 4. *Times*, May 26, 1887. Garden City was the first town to construct a series of irrigation canals to promote farming in the surrounding countryside and was Dodge City's major rival in the region. Miner, *West of Wichita*, 182 – 184 and *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas, 1890 – 1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 86 – 87.

¹²⁶ Ford County Immigration Society, *Dodge City, Ford County Kansas*, (Chicago: Burch Publishing Company, 1887), in Ford County Immigration Vertical File, Ford County Heritage Center, 13. *Times*, February 3, 1887. *Globe Livestock Journal*, March 2 and May 18, 1886.

While Soule's investments were invaluable to Dodge City's reinvention as a commercial center, local boosters were also eager to organize and push forward a development agenda to take advantage of the region's population boom. Between 1880 and 1888 the population of Kansas grew by more than 500,000 people; between 1885 and 1888, the population increased more than twenty percent.¹²⁷ Most were farmers looking to homestead or purchase cheap land in which to farm but a number were aspiring businessmen who founded towns and opened businesses in western Kansas. Caught up in the mania of the boom and feeling pressured by the sheer volume of new towns popping up throughout western Kansas, Dodge City's boosters organized three promotional groups to further the economic interests of their city. None of the groups were as organized as Wichita's Board of Trade but they were well-supported by the business community and included former Gang members, reformers, and newcomers within their ranks. Several businessmen, including Hoover, Evans, and Sutton, belonged to all three. In February 1886, Dodge City businessmen organized a Board of Trade.¹²⁸ A year later, the newly-formed Ford County Immigration Society began to promote both the town and the county to potential residents, publishing a promotional booklet sent to Midwestern farm communities areas of Europe to encourage immigration to southwestern Kansas.¹²⁹ A few months later, local businessmen founded the Phenix Club, a social club for local businessmen designed to encourage networking across the business community through dinners and dances and in the club rooms where members met casually over billiards and cards. The popularity and longevity of the Phenix Club shaped Dodge City by

¹²⁷ Miner, *Kansas*, 146.

¹²⁸ The Board of Trade's directors included Evans, Hoover, and Frost. *Democrat*, February 27, and March 20, 1886. *Globe Livestock Journal*, March 30, 1886.

¹²⁹ Evans served as the president of the board of the Immigration Society; Hoover and several pioneer German businessmen served on the Society's committees. *Times*, March 3, 1887.

promoting solidarity and communication, especially during the 1890s when the Board of Trade and Immigration Society folded.¹³⁰

The business community eagerly promoted Dodge City as an emergent western metropolis, built upon an expanding network of railroads make remote areas accessible and a mushrooming population to fuel Dodge City's growth. Businessmen appear to have looked instinctively to Wichita as a model for future growth and even linked the growth of Wichita to that of Dodge City. Local newspaper editors and the Ford County Immigration Society generated promotional materials, each of which promoted a vision for Dodge City as the next Wichita and clearly emulated Wichita's development model. In 1887 Klaine even recommended that Dodge City's businessmen follow Wichita's example and create a committee charged with "looking up business prospects, securing locations for manufactories, and showing strangers the city." The Ford County Immigration Society did not expressly identify Dodge City as the next Wichita in its 1887 promotional booklet, but the developmental trajectory it laid out for Dodge City matched that of Wichita, proposing that Dodge City become "the commanding central city of Western Kansas," serving as a commercial and rail center, with plans to become a jobbing and wholesale center, and ultimately a manufacturing center. The authors prophesied that Dodge City would soon be "a city of half a dozen railroads and 20,000 people."¹³¹

Increasing immigration to the region was critical to local businessmen's strategy. Competition for new residents and for new farmers was fierce among western Kansas towns and counties and critical

¹³⁰ Local historians claim that the Phenix Club served as the city's earliest booster organization and was the precursor to the Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, but the club served a purely social function in the 1880s. Cindy Malek, "How It All Began – Chamber Sees Changes through the Years," Dodge City Chamber of Commerce. *Times*, October 20, 1887. The *Times*, December 2, 1892, describes the founding of the club in 1887 and its original social orientation. An undated, but early photograph of Phenix Club members reprinted in *the Dodge City Globe*, November 20, 1954 offers some insight into the membership. A good mix of pioneers and newcomers are represented.

¹³¹ Klaine insisted that Dodge City enjoyed "the same advantages as Wichita had... and the prospects are as good as those Wichita had in her early history." *Times*, April 1, 1886; January 6 and March 3, 1887; and April 5, 1888. Ford County Immigration Society, *Dodge City, Ford County Kansas*, 18 - 19.

to businessmen's plans to develop a metropolitan economy. Attracting additional farmers to Ford County and adjoining counties would swell agricultural production and add to Dodge City's customer base, benefitting individual merchants while furthering the town's claim to be the commercial center of southwestern Kansas. They believed that a thriving agricultural economy would spur the development of agricultural processing facilities, creating an agricultural sector for Dodge City. Moreover, it would inflate local land values by increasing demand for farm land. As at Wichita, land speculation was rampant among Dodge City's businessmen, who invested heavily in town lots and farmland. Many of the city's newest residents were realtors, mortgage brokers, or real estate attorneys. The organization of the Immigration Society suggests the value community members placed upon drawing new settlers to Dodge City's market area. The city's most respected residents served as its directors. Wright and Frost represented the society in meetings with Wichita's Immigration Committee to coordinate joint promotional immigration activities.¹³²

Like Wichita's boosters, local businessmen were determined to draw multiple railroads to Dodge City to become transportation center for the region. They knew that railroads stimulated settlement in areas that had previously been inaccessible. They reasoned that the construction of regional lines running through Dodge City would expand the town's sphere of influence because farmers who settled near these railroads would come to Dodge City to shop and conduct other business. Their wheat, corn, and other farm goods, would come through Dodge City, either to be sold to Eastern cities, or to be processed and sold locally at one of the agricultural processing plants residents hoped to procure. Leveraging its position as a division point for the Santa Fe railroad, Dodge City boosters propped to build nine additional railroads through Dodge City. Between 1886 and 1888, residents voted on four railroad bond issues and approved all but the Dodge City, Montezuma & Trinidad (DCM&T) railroad, which was subsequently privately financed by Soule and his partners. As at Wichita, prominent businessmen –

¹³² *Times*, March 3, 10, and 17, 1887. Ford County Immigration Society, *Dodge City, Ford County Kansas*.

especially Hoover, Frost, Wright, and Evans – typically served on the boards of the regional railroads and were heavily involved in their promotion.¹³³

The construction of the DCM&T railroad highlights the ways in which railroad construction shaped the development of rural Kansas and how individuals and communities expected to benefit from additional railroads. Ford County voters rejected a bond measure to build the DCM&T line to newly-organized Gray County, questioning how the project would benefit them – despite claims that the railroad would reach a recently discovered source for coal that promised residents a cheaper source of fuel. Yet Soule and his partners underwrote its construction and Dodge City businessmen supported the construction of the line. Soule needed the railroad to profit from land he had already purchased in Gray County. He and his partners had recently platted a new town, Ingalls, which was the starting point for Soule’s Eureka Canal – a hundred-mile irrigation system running from Gray County through Ford County and into neighboring Edwards County that would provide water to subscribers to irrigate their fields. Soule needed the railroad access to encourage merchants to buy town lots in Ingalls and farmers to move to Gray County, where he could sell them farmland and access to his irrigation system. Without access to a railroad, few people would settle in Gray County, endangering Soule’s investments.¹³⁴

The DCM&T was also expected to benefit Dodge City’s businessmen, including Soule and his investors. The railroad and the canal promised to stimulate development in and around Ford County, as well as Gray County, promising settlers rail access and a guaranteed supply of water for their fields.

¹³³ *Times*, March 10, 1887. Ford County Immigration Society, *Dodge City, Ford County Kansas*, 14 and 17. *Globe Livestock Journal*, May 26, 1885; August 3 and November 23, 1886; April 5 and 26, and May 24 1887. *Democrat*, July 4, 1885 and October 27, 1888. *Times*, April 29, 1886. *Ford County Republican*, March 16 and June 29, 1887. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains*, 96 – 172.

¹³⁴ Three towns were initially platted in Gray County and were engaged in a three-way battle to become the county seat. In agreeing to finance the railroad’s construction, Soule’s representatives promised to provide the small community of Montezuma with its first railroad but asked that Montezuma drop out of the county-seat battle support Ingall’s bid for county seat. Montezuma’s voters complied and Soule’s town became the county seat. George Martin, ed., “Some of the Lost Towns of Kansas,” *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1911 – 1912* (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1911): 463 – 467.

Dodge City's businessmen expected to benefit from an expanded and increased market base, profiting from the new farmers who would necessarily shop and sell their produce in Dodge City because of its position as the nearest – and largest – commercial center in the area. Because the DCM&T was the only railroad in Gray County, and it connected with the Santa Fe in Dodge City, the town was expected to become a gateway city for Gray County. Soule and other businessmen expected that the DCM&T railroad would further increase town lot prices in Dodge City, encourage the development of agricultural processing facilities, and inspire more businesses to relocate to Dodge City.

Following in Wichita's footsteps, Dodge City anticipated using proposed rail lines to become a wholesale and industrial center for southwestern Kansas. They actively recruited mechanics and investors to create a skilled working class and build a pool of capital to fund new enterprises. Dodge City's boosters seemed willing to attract any industry, offering "fine openings for manufacturing industries in almost all lines," and contending that as the region's population increased, the demand for locally-produced goods would also increase, giving manufacturers and wholesalers a market hungry for their goods. They believed that their town would be the ideal location to set up wholesale operations and manufacturing facilities because its established position as a jobbing center and its future as a rail center would provide the best access to the residents of southwestern Kansas. The authors of the 1887 promotional booklet claimed that by the end of the year, Dodge City wholesalers would sell two million dollars' worth of "ranch supplies, hardware, lumber, coal, hay, grain, and general merchandise" and anticipated higher numbers in coming years.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Residents were far more selective regarding prospective town dwellers than they were with county residents. They discouraged "[h]igh-toned, fine-haired Eastern people who are self-conscious enough to believe they can come to Ford county [sic] and put everyone in their shadow," and claimed that Dodge City had more than enough doctors, lawyers, and clerks. Ford County Immigration Society, *Dodge City, Ford County Kansas*, 17 – 19, and 27. C. Robert Haywood, *Trails South: The Wagon Road Economy in the Dodge City-Panhandle Region* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).

Yet, local boosters struggled to persuade newcomers to relocate or even visit Dodge City. More than other former cattle towns, Dodge City had a national reputation as a wild, lawless place, populated by gunslingers, prostitutes, and con men. During the 1886 blizzard, a Santa Fe train became snowbound just outside of Dodge City. Dodge City residents and rail workers dug them out, but passengers declined to leave the train, fearful that the town was too dangerous. Competing towns capitalized Dodge City's unsavory reputation to discourage potential residents from relocating there and area farmers from patronizing Dodge City businesses by publicizing Dodge City's continuing struggle to enforce the prohibition amendment, providing lurid descriptions of crimes occurring in the city, and persistently reminding readers of the city's notorious past.¹³⁶ To counter its reputation, Dodge City boosters cultivated alternative visions of the city for residents and visitors. The Ford County Immigration Society dismissed claims that Dodge City was still dangerous in its 1887 booklet, insisting that while the city had previously received "an unenviable reputation" for violence, the "breaking up of the trade... and the rapid growth of the city in trade, wealth, population, social, moral, and educational advancement" led to a "new city" that "bears the impress of moral, social, intellectual, and commercial thrift." Joining in the effort, the *Dodge City Times* regularly detailed the city's transformation and eagerly reprinted accounts from other newspapers when they acknowledged that Dodge City's improvements.¹³⁷

The 1887 immigration booklet did more than simply refute claims that Dodge City was dangerous. It offered readers graphic proof that the city had changed. The cover prominently displayed

¹³⁶ *Globe Livestock Journal*, January 19, 1886. As the population boom heated up in 1885, newspapers throughout southwestern Kansas reported on the battle to enforce prohibition in Dodge City. The *Topeka Daily Capital* recommended the law-abiding citizens of Dodge City lead efforts to clean up the city. *Daily Capital*, August 2, 1885. See also, *Barbour County Index*, October 9, 1885; *Junction City Union*, January 16, 1886; and *Kinsley Mercury*, March 5, 1887. A particularly vindictive piece suggested that Dodge City was hell, recounting the story of a dying prostitute's final words, in which she claimed, "and if the Bible is true, I reckon I'm going straight to Dodge City again." *Lakin Advocate*, October 16, 1886. During the Texas cattle period, stories of lawlessness in Dodge City were reported in national newspapers like the *New York Times* and popularized in dime novels. *New York Times*, May 11 and September 3, 1883, and July 23, 1884.

¹³⁷ Ford County Immigration Society, *Dodge City, Ford County Kansas*, 12. See, for example, *Times*, March 3, 1887.

the new county courthouse, built of locally-quarried stone and bricks made in Dodge City. Additional images included the Santa Fe depot's library and reading room, four churches, newly-constructed school houses, an imposing new city building and park, and the facades of particularly elegant brick and iron business blocks in the city's central business district. The cumulative effect of these illustrations was to replace fears of lawlessness and disorder with images of stability, civility, and prosperity, demonstrated by churches and schools as physical representations of "high discipline, efficiency, and scholarly standards." From there, the reader might "determine the temper of the present population of Dodge."¹³⁸

Boosters also organized special events designed to draw farmers to town, including the county's first agricultural fair in 1886. County fair speakers and exhibits educated farmers about new practices and crops; races and other events entertained farm families; farm exhibits allowed farmers to showcase the bounty of their farms and to compete for prizes; and local businessmen advertised farm supplies, seed, equipment, or services, as well as items for the home. The 1886 fair – a multi-day event that featured a speech by the Democratic candidate for governor, a mule race, exhibits from area farms and local merchants and an extensive display of local arts and crafts – appeared to be well-received by area farmers and was publicized in other regional papers in addition to Dodge City's. The organizing committee included some of the city's most prominent businessmen, reflecting both the importance of this event to local boosters, and their ability to successfully come together to organize this event.¹³⁹

Despite these efforts, Dodge City was less successful than Abilene or Wichita in drawing new businesses and manufacturers to town. In part this failure stemmed from poor timing; Dodge City's

¹³⁸ Ford County Immigration Society, *Dodge City, Ford County Kansas*, 12 and 18.

¹³⁹ Hoover served as the fair's vice-president and Frost was secretary. The executive committee that included Klaine, Ham Bell, Bill Tilghman, Adolph Gluck, T.J. McCarty, and Morris Collar. *Globe Livestock Journal*, September 7 and 21, October 12 and 26, and November 2, 1886. *Times*, September 23 and October 21, 1886. *Democrat*, September 25 and October 23, 1886.

businessmen attempted to lure industry to town even as the last vestiges of the cattle town era were still in place. Boosters had to counter a widespread belief that their town was dangerous while constructing the infrastructure necessary to lure potential residents and businesses. Before they could complete their transformation to a commercial center, the economy crashed. Equally important, Dodge City's inability to draw new business to town reflected larger regional problems. Outside investors wisely questioned whether the environment of western Kansas was suitable to grow crops and whether western Kansas farms would consistently produce enough grain to make it worthwhile to open flour mills. They doubted that farmers would have sufficient money to purchase their goods. In short, they were skeptical that western Kansas would be a profitable place to open a business.

Instead, Dodge City's promotional campaign – in conjunction with campaigns organized by other towns, the railroads, and the state of Kansas – was most successful in encouraging land speculators, loan agents, and other investment firms to set up shop in Dodge City. Like Wichita, the number of real-estate related firms in Dodge City grew exponentially in the latter part of the 1880s. The cattle town was home to just two real estate brokers in 1880; by 1888, nineteen firms were operating in Dodge City. Early residents owned some of these companies; others were owned by newcomers hoping to profit from the population boom. Businessmen organized syndicates with local businessmen and with Eastern investors to pool their resources, invest in land, and offer loans. Hoover, Evans, and Sutton, and others organized the Pioneer Loan and Trust Company in June 1886 to capitalize upon the influx of new farmers buying land. Nine months later a mix of new and established residents opened the Dodge City Real Estate and Investment Company to invest in land adjacent to the city and within Ford County, as well as in towns and counties throughout southwestern Kansas.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ This study defines real estate-related businesses as land agents, brokers, and realtors, insurance agents, mortgage brokers and bankers, abstracters, loan agents, collection agents, rental agents, town-site promoters, investment companies, and lawyers who explicitly declared that they specialized in real estate. R.L. Polk &

By 1888, Dodge City was well along in its transformation from rowdy cattle town into a commercial center for southwestern Kansas. As early as 1887, newspapers editors from neighboring towns were conceding that Dodge City was evolving; the *Fowler Graphic* even reported that “Dodge City is fast assuming metropolitan proportions.” The fires that decimated the vestiges of the cattle era made way for modern brick storefronts. Most of the saloons were closed; gambling dens and brothels were largely eradicated. Instead new schools and churches dotted the landscape. Major thoroughfares had been graded. Although only 2,700 residents called Dodge City home in 1888, middle-class families now made up the majority of residents and its population had almost tripled between 1880 and 1888. Three railroads ran through Dodge City and plans were in place for four more railroads to reach the city by the end of the year. The factionalism that characterized the cattle period had largely disappeared, replaced by a spirit of camaraderie among businessmen that grew from their shared enthusiasm for the opportunities the boom afforded them as individuals.¹⁴¹

Yet Dodge City had failed to become the next Wichita when the boom collapsed in 1888. Of the three towns, Dodge City’s assessed valuation was the lowest at less than \$640,000. Hoover’s Sunset Roller Mill was the only agricultural processing plant in town. The city lost its bid to become a division point for the Rock Island railroad; it was connected to the main line by a spur line to the nearby town of Bellefont. As the division point for the Santa Fe in southwestern Kansas, Dodge City remained the major entrepot to southwestern Kansas, but regional railroad construction and the efforts of tireless town-promoters threatened Dodge City’s position as a regional commercial and transportation center as the emerging rail network increasingly circumvented Dodge City and new towns continued to pop up across the plains.

Company, *Kansas State Gazetteer* (Chicago: R.L. Polk, 1881 and 1889). *Globe Livestock Journal*, June 22, 1886. *Times*, March 17, 1887. Hoover laid out two additions to Bellefont and Spearville. *Times*, December 31, 1885.

¹⁴¹ *Times*, March 3, 1887 and April 5, 1888. State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report*, 158.

In some respects, Dodge City's position in 1888 mirrored that of Abilene and Wichita. All three former cattle towns had successfully transformed into commercial centers for their self-defined regions, while failing to achieve their loftiest ambitions. All three enjoyed tremendous population growth and gained an air of permanence and an infrastructure that would help them to survive the Bust of the 1890s. In each of the towns individual economic desires largely trumped community-centered attempts at town-building. Businessmen in each town continued to define development primarily in economic terms and local businessmen largely came together only when they believed that doing so would also benefit them as individuals.

Just Before the Boom Burst:

Despite these similarities, Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City evolved into markedly divergent communities by 1888. Wichita had become one of the state's largest cities and an embryonic industrial center with a population of almost 34,000, an assessed valuation of almost \$10.7 million, and an ambitious plan to grow into a metropolis like Chicago; Abilene and Dodge City had largely failed to attract industry, even agricultural processing facilities. Although Abilene's population was almost twice as large as Dodge City, Dodge City commanded a larger market presence as the premier town of southwestern Kansas, while Abilene fought to remain the regional center for Dickinson County.¹⁴² Dodge City had also consciously modeled itself after Wichita and proposed to become a metropolis along the same lines as Wichita did. The social dynamics of each town's business community and its ability to connect with other townspeople and area farmers substantively shaped how each town grew. Abilene's inability to transcend factionalism derailed any attempts by local businessmen to collaborate on local economic development projects and created an antagonistic relationship with area farmers that further limited the town's economic development. In contrast, Dodge City and Wichita's businessmen

¹⁴² Dodge City cannot be compared to the other cities; it provided incomplete assessed valuation data for 1888.

found common ground that allowed them to collaborate on economic ventures that would benefit their communities and themselves. Because Wichita enjoyed a longer transition period than Dodge City, its businessmen could set up the kind of organizations and infrastructure that allowed them to better capitalize upon the state's population boom. Wichita's businessmen also shared the ambitious vision that the Board of Trade enunciated. Thus, most supported the programs that the Board of Trade identified, helping their plans to come to fruition.

By 1888, Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's economies were largely built upon the region's agricultural economy and fueled by escalating land prices. When a series of crop failures, combined with falling prices for wheat, corn, and other commodities triggered a severe agricultural depression, the booming economies of each town collapsed. The effects of land speculation escalated the depression in Kansas towns and triggered a national financial crisis. The resulting bust would test businessmen's connections to Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City and would demonstrate the weaknesses inherent in emphasizing individual financial betterment at the expense of community development.

Chapter Two

“In God We Trusted, In Kansas We Busted:” Town-building During the Depression of the 1890s

“[We need] men of the active, energetic and public spirited disposition... and the more we can have of them, the better for future growth and prosperity.”

Dodge City Globe-Republican, March 10, 1893

This chapter explores the effect of the agricultural depression and subsequent financial panic of the 1890s on Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City and examines how the social dynamics existing among local businessmen in each town shaped their reaction to poor economic conditions. In the economic dislocation that defined the 1890s, the fragile businessmen’s associations created in the boom of the 1880s collapsed. Yet connections among businessmen continued to shape the economic and community development of each town and set the stage for how each community would respond to the opportunities presented once economic recovery began after 1898. The agricultural depression triggered a series of demographic and financial consequences – including rural depopulation, a reduced tax base, and a crashing land market – that decimated local businesses and derailed economic development programs in each town. In combination with the nationwide financial panic of 1893, it led to a significant contraction in rail service as rail companies consolidated lines, reduced or cut service, halted the construction of new rail lines, and even tore up the track for some existing lines. Businessmen in each town needed to identify new revenue streams, negotiate with other stakeholders, and manage the symptoms of economic distress to lessen its effects upon area residents. In so doing, they necessarily responded to the growing popularity of the People’s Party.

Three leadership models emerged from this period: Wichita’s united front, Dodge City’s cadre of pioneer businessmen, and Abilene’s independent entrepreneurs. In Wichita, businessmen continued

to work together to lay a foundation for long-term development while attempting to stimulate a recovery, drawing upon a strong collaborative network located in their promotional and social organizations. Dodge City's business community rallied behind its most prominent pioneers to locate other revenue-generating streams to ensure their hometown's survival. Abilene, in contrast, remained beset by factionalism, which curtailed any real possibility of identifying a more broadly-supported vision for future growth. Instead, the city's development was uneven and predicated upon the ambitions of individuals, who imparted their particular, and frequently contradictory, visions upon the town. How businessmen in each community interacted with one another and with other stakeholders in the region shaped how these towns responded to the environmental and economic depredations of the 1890s and how they positioned their communities for economic recovery.

Wichita: "They Fought for No Country Town, but a City"

Residents of Wichita keenly felt the impact when the boom burst in 1888. Most businessmen were overextended. They had gambled too heavily on real estate, they had invested too deeply in new industries and railroads, and they had expected too much of the new settlements dotting western Kansas and the Indian Territory. With fortunes largely built upon extensive portfolios of overvalued real estate, when the land market collapsed Wichita's businessmen were wiped out. Only two of the nine banks operating in Wichita in 1888 survived the Bust; five closed before the Financial Panic of 1893.¹⁴³ The Bust almost completely wiped out Wichita's embryonic industrial base. By 1889, Burton Stock Car Works, Peabody Watch Company, and Gilbert Plow Works closed, and their newly-constructed factories

¹⁴³ By 1889, three banks had failed. Wichita banker L.S. Naftzger claimed that between 1887 and 1897, deposits at Wichita banks dropped from \$4 million to \$437,000. L.S. Naftzger, "The Banks of Wichita," in *O.H. Bentley, ed., History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas: Past and Present* (Chicago: C.F. Cooper, 1910), 101. Wichita's most spectacular bank failure occurred in 1894 after Whittaker declared bankruptcy. M.W. Levy, president of Wichita National Bank, was appointed the receiver. Levy's disposition of Whittaker's assets, including the sale of the company back to Whittaker, encouraged rumors that Levy was mismanaging his bank. Depositors, including the Sedgwick County Commissioners, triggered a bank run that destroyed the bank. L. Curtise Wood, *Dynamics of Faith: Wichita, 1870 – 1897* (Wichita: Center for Management Development, College of Business Administration, Wichita State University, 1969), 162 – 3.

sat abandoned. Wichita's recently established meat-packing plants struggled to remain solvent. Jacob Dold Packing Company continued to limp along throughout the 1890s, open only when there were sufficient hogs to butcher. In 1893, Whittaker Packing Company declared bankruptcy and closed permanently.¹⁴⁴ Wichita's total assessed valuation plummeted from \$10.7 million – largely the result of inflated land values – to \$4.4 million by 1898. Working class residents fled the city when the factories closed, and many speculators abandoned their now worthless investments. The city's population dropped precipitously; from almost 34,000 residents in 1888 to 23,500 in 1890. By 1896, Wichita had fewer than 20,000 residents. Even some of Wichita's most venerated citizens moved away, including the city's founder, William "Dutch Bill" Greiffenstein.¹⁴⁵

Despite these significant setbacks, Wichita's businessmen remained committed to the city's metropolitan aspirations. They continued to present a united front throughout the depression and a strong sense of camaraderie continued to pervade the business community. Although some business leaders left, others like wholesale druggist Charles E. Potts stepped up to fill the gap in leadership.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ *Wichita Daily Eagle*, August 1 and 20, 1889, in Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 135 and 162. O.H. Bentley claims that during the 1890s there were periods where "there were not enough hogs and cattle offered on the Wichita market to keep the house running full time one day a week." O.H. Bentley, "History of the Wichita Union Stock Yards," in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas: Past and Present*, ed. O.H. Bentley (Chicago: C.F. Cooper, 1910), 698. Kos Harris ruefully observed that after securing Dold, "Wichita suspended all rules relating to business principles, and took a day off that lasted quite a spell." When recruiting Whittaker, Board of Trade members did not thoroughly investigate the meatpacker's financial condition and were unaware that the firm was "on the 'ragged edge.'" When the meatpacker ran out of cash, it drew upon the real estate the Board had provided as a relocation subsidy, only to find "that lands and lots appraised by fair men at near a half million dollars" were worth less than a quarter of their supposed value, forcing Whittaker to close. Kos Harris, "Chronicles," in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas*, 211 – 221.

¹⁴⁵ The State Board of Agriculture claimed that most of those who fled Kansas between 1888 and 1890 were either land speculators or laborers. In an urban area like Wichita, this claim was undoubtedly true, though no study has determined what percentage of those who abandoned Wichita were laborers. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1889), 445; *Seventh Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1891), vii; and *Eleventh Biennial Report* (Topeka: State Department of Agriculture, 1899), 714. William "Dutch Bill" Greiffenstein moved to Oklahoma, along with early realtor, J.M. Steele. *Wichita Daily Beacon*, November 24, 1894.

¹⁴⁶ Potts arrived from Cincinnati in 1890 to open the city's first wholesale drug company. He quickly immersed himself in the city's business culture, becoming the president of the Board of Trade in 1892. He also led the call to

Prominent among these new leaders were younger men, many of whom had arrived during the boom and who enjoyed familial or business connections with the older generation of leaders. The old leadership and the 1880s newcomers shared a common vision and similar attitudes, suggesting that business leaders were interchangeable to a degree. Wichita's Board of Trade remained active longer than Dodge City's or Abilene's, and businessmen continued to come together even after it stopped holding meetings by creating and joining new business organizations – first the Coronado Club, and later the Commercial Club. Maintaining avenues for collaboration proved crucial because it allowed businessmen to respond proactively to Bust conditions and to plan for future development once economic conditions improved. Working together, Wichita's businessmen attempted to preserve the infrastructure necessary to rebuild their industrial sector – including maintaining its rail capacity – and continued to build and consolidate Wichita's trade territory throughout Kansas and Oklahoma through immigration campaigns and playing upon Populist rhetoric to develop a rural customer base. Although the city did not enjoy appreciable economic growth for almost a decade, local businessmen positioned Wichita to benefit optimally from improved agricultural and economic conditions in the early twentieth century.

Just as they had in the 1880s, local businessmen continued to look to business organizations to foster a spirit of camaraderie and collaboration within the business community, and to further Wichita's development. The Board of Trade continued to provide a space to develop promotional schemes until 1894, but it was hamstrung financially by massive debts incurred during the boom period. By 1889, the Board of Trade had their hands in so many failing projects that historian L. Curtise Wood claims: "only

organize the Commercial Club. Potts was deeply committed to the economic advancement of working- and middle-class residents of Wichita. In 1893, he founded the Perpetual Building & Loan Company with a group of pioneers and newcomers, and served as its president until his death in 1922. Perpetual helped working-class and middle-class residents purchase homes in the aftermath of the financial markets collapse that destroyed the local mortgage-lending industry. In 1903, Potts incorporated his wholesale drug company and sold the shares to his employees, insisting that the success of the firm was due in large part to their talents. In so doing, he created the first employee-owned business in the city, a business type so novel that newspapers throughout the state reported upon it. *Eagle*, February 3, 1901 and August 21, 1922.

the most routine functions of the Board could be executed without incurring new debt.” Many of Wichita’s senior businessmen continued to be members of the beleaguered Board, including Marshall Murdock, the publisher of the *Wichita Eagle*, one of the state’s most recognized newspapers; Hiram Lewis, one of the city’s most respected bankers; and James “Oak” Davidson, a banker and prolific investor in Wichita’s early industries. Albert W. Oliver, a lumberman and flour mill owner, remained the Board’s president until he turned it over to Potts in 1892. Yet its membership began to drop. Its meetings grew increasingly infrequent; by 1894 the Board ceased holding meetings altogether. That said, the Board of Trade made important contributions to Wichita’s development during its last years, including advising the city council about the benefits of public construction and promoting these projects to ensure their completion, developing a statewide immigration bureau to promote immigration to Kansas, and serving as plaintiff in several cases brought before the State Railroad Board of Commissioners.¹⁴⁷

Pioneers and the 1880s newcomers jointly founded the Coronado Club in 1890 to provide a space for businessmen to interact socially.¹⁴⁸ Although both clubs were designed to promote Wichita and to encourage networking among local businessmen, they clearly viewed their functions as distinct and separate. When groups like the Kansas City Commercial Club visited Wichita, typically they were first met by the Board of Trade – where members discussed possible business partnerships with their guests – and then brought to the Coronado Club for a social hour with Coronado Club members where

¹⁴⁷ Harris, “Chronicles,” in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas*, 206 – 225. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 132.

¹⁴⁸ Early lumberman John Carey rallied local businessmen to organize the club, but he did not serve as an officer. George Pratt, the manager of the local franchise of the Chicago Lumber Company, who had previously been a member of the Board of Trade’s Transportation Committee, became the organization’s first president.

these discussions could continue informally but general conviviality was emphasized.¹⁴⁹ Fifty businessmen became founding members and a number were initially members of both clubs, including pioneers like Davidson and Oliver.¹⁵⁰ The 1880s newcomers filled most of the directors' positions; however, these new men shared important similarities with Wichita's more established residents. As with Wichita's earlier boosters, all were family men. Almost everyone was a staunch Republican. They tended to be younger than the original pioneers, making them contemporaries of Davidson.¹⁵¹ Most arrived in Wichita between 1884 and 1887 and shared in Wichita's economic boom.¹⁵² Unlike earlier pioneers who tended to open their own businesses, almost the 1880s newcomers initially worked for – or partnered with – established Wichita businessmen or had connections with prominent residents. These relationships helped establish them in Wichita's business community and allowed them to move easily into leadership positions within the business community as older leaders stepped back.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ *Eagle*, November 28, 1890. A similar hand off occurred when Representative Jerry Simpson visited. *Beacon*, November 30, 1891.

¹⁵⁰ *Eagle* and *Beacon*, October 8, 1890.

¹⁵¹ Most were born around 1855, including Edward Vail (1854), Charles Aylesbury (1856), S.C. Ashton (1854), C.G. Cohn (1855), J.J. McNamara (1850), and C.E. Smyth (1859). L.M. Cox and Potts were the oldest (born in 1839 and 1845 respectively). T.G. Fitch, H.E. Case, and Arthur Faulkner were younger – born after 1860. Significantly, all of these men remained residents of Wichita until their deaths.

¹⁵² They include: Vail (1884), Case (1884), Cohn (1885), McNamara (1886), Faulkner (1886), and Cox (1885).

¹⁵³ Fitch worked for Davidson at the Davidson Investment Company and Riverside & Suburban Railway. Similarly, Faulkner worked for Davidson at Citizen's bank and later became a director of the Riverside & Suburban Railway. Case first worked for A.W. Oliver at Oliver Brothers Lumber Company, and then opened a lumberyard with Davidson's son. McNamara bought a half interest in pioneer merchant A.S. Munson's dry goods store. Cox and Cohn did not work for long-time Wichita residents, but both had connections that helped establish them. Cox served in the same Civil War regiment as pioneer O.D. Kirk. Cohn opened the Boston Store with his brother-in-law Henry Wallenstein. While both were new to the city, Wallenstein came highly recommended to the editor of the *Beacon* by mutual friends from Cincinnati (their hometown). Potts also drew upon connections between Wichita and Cincinnati. Aylesbury drew upon friendships he developed with Wichita wholesalers while living in Chase County, Kansas. Black was one of the city's pioneer merchants who co-founded the Wichita Wholesale Grocery Company, while Smyth arrived as child who joined the family's Arkansas Valley Agricultural Implement business as an adult, and later became a director of the Arkansas Valley Interurban Railway and the President of the Land Credit State Bank. Ashton's company, R.G. Dun & Co., transferred him to Wichita to open a regional office. Only Vail arrived during the boom and opened his own store, seemingly without previous connections.

The Coronado Club served several important functions for Wichita. With its lavish club rooms, it became a space to entertain prominent visitors to the city.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, Wichita's businessmen proudly recognized the club's value as a place where visiting manufacturers, businessmen, and politicians could be entertained while discussing plans that might benefit Wichita with the city's most important residents.¹⁵⁵ The club also offered an environment to build and strengthen relationships. As the *Daily Eagle* observed after describing one of the club's clam bakes: "the evening was rich in good fellowship and there is no doubt that those present profited highly by it. They were principally businessmen and if they did not get in closer touch with one another it was their own fault."¹⁵⁶ This emphasis on collegiality was not limited to members, however. The Coronado Club also encouraged members to invite guests to the clubhouse, and threw extravagant parties to which prominent non-members were invited. By bringing non-members into the clubhouse they hoped to both expand the club's membership base and to create new partnerships among Wichita's business community.

Although ostensibly a social club, the Coronado Club also served to advance the vision first established in the 1870s of Wichita as a burgeoning metropolis. Opulent parties like the New Year's Day open house, in addition to fantastic descriptions of the club's furnishings, led the *Beacon* to proclaim that "members of the Coronado Club should adopt the monocle, be gad, now that they have taken on

¹⁵⁴ When Kansas City newspapers reported that Wichita's leading women were organizing a literary club, they used it as an opportunity to comment upon the Coronado Club. The *Eagle* reprinted both the *Kansas City Journal's* tongue-in-cheek remark that the literary club "is related by marriage to the Coronado Club, which is decidedly not literary," as well as the *Kansas City Star's* observation that the literary club "will offset the gilded boozing den where their husbands, brothers, and sweethearts spend their time in ribald merriment." *Eagle*, December 20, 1891.

¹⁵⁵ Among other events, the Club hosted parties to celebrate Lewelling's gubernatorial victory, as well as "Sockless" Jerry Simpson's election to the United States' Senate, suggesting that businessmen would work with Populist politicians despite being largely Republicans.

¹⁵⁶ *Eagle*, December 1, 1895.

metropolitan airs in matter of a club house.”¹⁵⁷ For several years, the Coronado Club served as the city’s most visible symbol of its metropolitan aspirations. Unabashedly pretentious, with conspicuous displays of excess, the Coronado Club intimated that Wichita’s businessmen, and by extension the city itself, were more than just solvent, they were thriving. The club also signaled the city’s elite position in a regional hierarchy of cities and towns.¹⁵⁸ Businessmen self-consciously noted that the Coronado Club was a “social businessmen’s organization such as found in nearly every city of importance in the country;” even the *Kansas City Star* claimed that their rooms were the finest in the state.¹⁵⁹ Smaller towns emulated Wichita’s Coronado Club in an attempt to compete with Wichita.¹⁶⁰ In both cases, the implication was the same – outsiders recognized that Wichita’s Coronado Club imbued Wichita with a degree of glamour and prosperity that suggested that Wichita would become THE metropolis in Kansas.

The Coronado Club did not perform the same functions as promotional or businessmen’s organizations, however. In creating an exclusive, elegant environment where businessmen could casually build relationships with out-of-town visitors and one another, the Coronado Club undoubtedly informally facilitated some business deals and local development initiatives. Club members did not coordinate campaigns to draw new businesses to town however, nor did they create fundraising syndicates during club meetings to provide the financial incentives to draw those companies to Wichita. Thus, the Coronado Club provided a space that facilitated networking and strengthened the bonds of friendship, which undoubtedly led to informal discussions about how to fuel Wichita’s development, but

¹⁵⁷ More than 800 guests attended the 1895 New Year’s Day open house, which lasted more than twelve hours. Newspapers throughout the state covered the event, but the *Eagle* offered the most detailed description of the festivities. *Eagle*, January 2, 1895. *Beacon*, January 12, 1895.

¹⁵⁸ *Beacon*, November 29, 1890.

¹⁵⁹ *Beacon*, November 29, 1890 and *Eagle* December 4, 1890. The *Kansas City Star* also agreed that the Coronado Club’s rooms were the most elegant in the state. Quoted in the *Eagle*, October 25, 1891.

¹⁶⁰ Wellington claimed that the Wellington Social Club “was on the order of the Commercial Club” while the Fort Scott Club was “modeled after the famous Coronado Club... which is considered the most successful social organization of this character in Kansas.” *Eagle*, January 12, 1891 and April 20, 1892.

it did not offer the institutional structure – through bylaws, committees, and such – to formalize a vision for Wichita’s future growth; nor could it organize the membership to enact programs that would move toward those goals.

The Commercial Club, organized in 1896 by Potts and several other newcomers, attempted to provide the necessary structure to both generate and support new development in the city as it emerged from the Bust. Potts claimed that there was no space where businessmen could meet “when some measure required harmonious and united action for the good of the whole city;” yet he also recognized that the Coronado Club’s mission of promoting social networking might help frame the new organization.¹⁶¹ Thus, Potts and a small group of former Board of Trade members invited the directors of the Coronado Club to attend early organizational meetings, and together these men became instrumental in the organization of the Commercial Club; many served as its founding directors. The directors of the new club quickly determined to absorb the Coronado Club, hoping to leverage the Coronado Club’s reputation to fuel the Commercial Club’s prominence within Wichita, and throughout the Great Plains region. They also believed that a social-business model would ensure its success.¹⁶² The take-over occurred quickly, and seemingly, without debate. Members of the Coronado Club comprised a strong constituency and base of leadership within the Commercial Club. Approximately one-third of the founding members of the Coronado Club became founding members of the Commercial

¹⁶¹ *Beacon*, January 8, 1896.

¹⁶² The *Beacon* explained the value of this model, noting that “a commercial club without any social features, a mere icy meeting of business interests, would be a hard thing, it was thought, to attract those whose advice and patronage are valuable, if not necessary, to such an organization. Men who would not think of going into a cold dismal looking room to discuss hard facts and dry figures without relaxation, will go to a meeting when it is held in such a place as the [Coronado Club], where they can discuss oysters with their business enterprises or play a game of billiards or a game of whist or smoke a cigar while waiting for the meeting to be called to order.” *Beacon*, January 18, 1896. Interestingly, this model did not appeal to some of Wichita’s businessmen. The *Eagle* reported that a few men withdrew their memberships because they disagreed with the plan to continue certain social functions. *Eagle*, January 18, 1896.

Club.¹⁶³ At the same time, twenty-three former Board of Trade members, who had not been members of the Coronado Club, joined the Commercial Club, suggesting that they, too, supported the new organization and its new leaders.¹⁶⁴

The Commercial Club proposed to continue the work of both the Board of Trade and the Coronado Club in its articles of association. The Coronado Club had provided a space to network and promote collegiality; the Commercial Club's articles emphasize the club's expected role to facilitate collaboration by "[encouraging] good will and cooperation between the members of this association," by "an amicable adjustment of business disputes," and through the "exchange of perspectives to secure concerted action for the upbuilding of all business for Wichita and the vicinity." At the same time, the articles of the new organization were markedly like those of the former Board of Trade and emphasized programs to rebuild the city's industrial sector as well as to increase and consolidate its trade territory. The articles of association included among its goals: securing good transportation rates, disseminating information about Wichita to outsiders who might be persuaded to relocate there, and developing "trade and trade industries of Wichita." The proceedings from the club's initial meetings indicate that the group hoped to continue the work of the Board of Trade by focusing on agriculture and agricultural processing and by developing the city into a wholesale and distribution center that would outfit small town merchants throughout most of Kansas and the southern states that bordered Kansas.¹⁶⁵

Plans to develop an industrial sector for Wichita were first voiced by the city's Board of Trade in the 1880s but would be realized in the early twentieth century. Although the city established an

¹⁶³ This figure is even more significant if you consider that almost 40% of the founding members of the Coronado Club had moved away, or were deceased, by 1896.

¹⁶⁴ Lewis and several other Board of Trade members did not join the Coronado Club because of its liquor policies. Others, like Murdock, seemed to feel that membership in an effete men's club was unnecessary, though they attended club functions frequently.

¹⁶⁵ *Eagle*, January 9 and 25, 1896.

embryonic industrial sector in the 1880s, most of these factories were shuttered after 1888. In the 1890s, local businessmen attempted to maintain and further develop infrastructure that would allow Wichita to be competitive when the economy recovered and manufacturers looked to expand their operations. Beginning in 1888, city officials undertook a massive public construction program, bolstered by the strong support of the Board of Trade, which viewed these construction projects as another way to establish Wichita's position as a major urban center, as well as a way in which preserve a working class in a city that no longer had an industrial base. Wichita's businessmen had previously opposed every civic project unless it offered an immediate economic benefit or could be used to induce industrialists to build in Wichita. Yet, in 1887, Wichita's businessmen determined to build an imposing county courthouse that would physically demonstrate the substance of Wichita and Sedgwick County. Residents voted \$200,000 in bonds to construct it, as well as an additional \$50,000 to erect a jail. Just one year later, Wichita's city council approved plans for a city hall – similar in scale and design to the courthouse. Despite facing a much-diminished tax base, the city council later approved construction of a sewer system so extensive that it would serve the needs of a city of 200,000, almost ten times its current size. And at the urging of the Board of Trade, the city also began paving areas of the business district with asphalt.¹⁶⁶

Local businessmen claimed that Wichita required civic buildings and infrastructure reflective of its aspiration to become a major city. As the Board of Trade committee charged with studying the impact of the paving project asserted: "a dirt road is still a 'country road' though it runs between brick

¹⁶⁶ Businessmen had previously refused to support bond measures to build either a city hall or a county courthouse, claiming that the city's residents could ill-afford the resultant increased taxes. Instead, city and county offices were in rented rooms scattered throughout Wichita. They also opposed constructing a sewer system, despite the recommendations of a national sewer expert who visited Wichita in 1885. Most businessmen seemingly agreed with Murdock's assessment – that Wichita enjoyed sufficient natural drainage and a strong north wind that effectively removed effluent, germs and odors; thus, sewer construction could wait until "we get older, richer, stronger." Wichita's city council took advantage of falling prices during the depression. They paid \$71,000 for their government offices. *Beacon*, March 20 and May 7, 1885; *Eagle*, July 14, 1884; and Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City* (Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988), 50-51 and 79-86.

buildings.” Advocates of both the courthouse and city hall projects insisted that the buildings be sufficiently grand so as to be “commensurate with the importance of this county and this city.” Even Murdock, who had loudly rejected sewer construction and every other public works project, supported these projects, going so far as to suggest that the \$200,000 courthouse might soon be too small for a town with the growth potential of Wichita. Although support for these projects was initially an outgrowth of expectations born from boom conditions, local businessmen continued to publicly support construction once the economy collapsed. In fact, the Board of Trade and local newspapers publicized the city’s extensive building program, and the budget for it, as evidence that Wichita continued to grow despite the effects of the depression.¹⁶⁷

Although local businessmen clearly believed that the construction of elegant city buildings and infrastructure would support their claims that Wichita would become a major urban center, they also realized that these massive construction projects served another important role in positioning Wichita for future economic development: these projects preserved a pool of available labor that could be used as an inducement for industrialists to build factories in Wichita. Construction jobs offered working men a reason to stay in Wichita. This plan could not provide employment for everyone – the sewer project only employed 250 men, for example – but it did offer some laborers a way to make a living at a time when many of Wichita’s employers were cutting back or closing their doors completely. Moreover, Wichita’s consistently pro-business city council appeared relatively solicitous of the challenges working men faced in Wichita and cognizant of their value to the city. When faced with making deep cuts due to budget shortfalls in 1894, the city council decided to maintain the wages of the street laborers, noting: “by the time they have their necessary living expenses paid, without enjoying even an occasional luxury of life, there is nothing left them.” In the latter half of the 1890s, the council acceded to union demands

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 80. *Beacon*, December, 31, 1887, and May 1, 1888. *Eagle*, May 1, 1888. See, for example, *Eagle*, April 22, 1890. Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 78 – 86.

for repeated wage increases on city projects and, in 1899, approved a resolution that required all city construction and maintenance work be performed by union labor. Their efforts encouraged many to stay on, especially as the work paid well in comparison with other regional alternatives. The growing power of local unions coincided with the growing popularity of the Populist movement, which increasingly threatened the current power structure in Wichita.¹⁶⁸

Wichita's businessmen also worked to protect their rail capacity and fought for competitive freight rates to conserve their ability to generate future industrial development and to promote Wichita's position as center for wholesale and retail trade. In 1887, Wichita's boosters claimed that seven railroads ran through the city, with six more "knocking at her doors."¹⁶⁹ These lines offered Wichita's businessmen multiple options to reach major cities like Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, and San Francisco, making the city a viable location for manufacturers, wholesalers, and merchants who benefited from direct connections to major markets while enjoying competitive shipping rates because multiple railroads accessed the same points. By 1896, only four lines ran through Wichita, reflecting the consolidation of independent railroads under the control of larger lines, the financial difficulties major rail lines faced throughout the 1890s, and the pointlessness of operating rail lines to areas that were now abandoned by settlers. Wichita retained a rail advantage over most Kansas towns, however. The Santa Fe, the Missouri Pacific, and the Rock Island continued to run through the city, preserving critical routes to major cities necessary to draw back manufacturers in the early twentieth century. The Wichita & Western, a regional line running through the southern counties of Kansas, continued to operate

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, *Beacon*, August 17, 1888, and *Eagle*, January 8, 1888 and February 28, 1890. Miner and Wood also acknowledge businessmen's seeming concern that working-class residents make a living wage. Miner claims that the sewer project paid skilled labor up to \$6.50 a day. Unskilled labor received a minimum of \$1.50. In comparison, Dold only paid skilled labor \$4.00 per day. Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 79 and 99. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 130.

¹⁶⁹ The 1887 *Journal of Commerce* lists fifteen trunk and branch railroads that were either constructed, under construction, or "projected" to be built. Some of these lines were operated, controlled, or owned by the Santa Fe or the Missouri Pacific. Wichita Board of Trade, *Journal of Commerce* (1887), Papers and Periodicals, Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum, 44 – 47.

throughout the 1890s and the Santa Fe preserved a few branch lines to access some rural areas.¹⁷⁰ The city also claimed to have a direct connection to the Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory by way of a short line connecting the Santa Fe and Rock Island routes. These regional routes gave Wichita's businessmen privileged access to remote markets and positioned the city as a centrally-located wholesale center in the early twentieth century.¹⁷¹

Wichita's emergence as a wholesale and distribution center in Kansas in the twentieth century was predicated in large part upon securing freight rates competitive with Kansas City's. The city began to develop a wholesale sector in the 1880s and even drew in a few new wholesale and distribution companies in the 1890s, in part because the city's businessmen fought aggressively for competitive freight rates. In 1889, the Wichita Board of Trade successfully petitioned the Kansas State Board of Railroad Commissioners for relief from discriminatory shipping rates charged by the railroads, arguing that railroads charged higher shipping rates to Wichita's meatpackers than they charged to Kansas City businesses – at least 16.5% on identically-packed railcars. The commissioners determined that Wichita's meatpackers did face unfair discrimination and ruled that the railroads must modify their shipping rates to place Wichita's meatpackers on an even footing with Kansas City's meatpackers.¹⁷²

Three years later, the Wichita Wholesale Grocery Company – in conjunction with Wichita's Board of Trade and wholesale grocers in Hutchinson, Arkansas City, and Salina – petitioned the Board of Railroad Commissioners to examine freight rates for all items rail companies shipped to the smaller towns of Kansas. Using sugar repackaging as their test case, the commissioners found for Wichita and

¹⁷⁰ The Wichita & Western was owned by the Santa Fe, but operated independent to the Santa Fe, whereas other spur lines owned by the Santa Fe were operated as Santa Fe lines under the direct control of Santa Fe rail officials and sharing the Santa Fe's resources, like depots, freight yards, and machine shops.

¹⁷¹ The Santa Fe ran a branch line to Englewood and to Caldwell. *Daily Eagle*, November 10, 1896.

¹⁷² State Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Decisions of the State Board of Railroad Commissioners* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1889), 8, and 14 – 15. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 131 – 132.

their co-petitioners, arguing that the sugar manufacturer Spreckles could ship sugar to Kansas City from California to be repackaged before redistributing it to smaller Kansas towns, but that the railroads could not charge “a return haul, or any other sum, as a condition or as an incident of such delivery in transit.” Thus, the railroads could not charge Wichita’s wholesalers (or any other wholesaler) to ship that sugar back to Wichita after the trains had passed through the city on the way to Kansas City. The commissioners then extended this argument to other goods that the grocers sold, noting that it was the only way to “put all Kansas jobbers on a footing of successful rivalry with those on the Missouri river.”¹⁷³ These decisions allowed Wichita’s wholesalers to compete with Kansas City firms for the business of small town merchants throughout Wichita’s market area.

Even after the Board of Trade stopped meeting, local businessmen continued to fight for competitive freight rates. In 1895, a group of local businessmen – including Davidson, Carey, and Potts – organized a Committee of Fifty to work with the city council to “use every legitimate means at their command to secure an adjustment of these discriminations.” The Committee of Fifty, working alongside the City Council, did not successfully reduce shipping rates, but they provided yet another strong demonstration of unity within the business community. Moreover, their inability to resolve freight disputes undoubtedly fueled local businessmen’s desire to create a stronger organization to promote Wichita and establish pro-business programs, leading to the development of the Commercial Club shortly thereafter.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ State Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Decisions of the State Board of Railroad Commissioners* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1892), 15.

¹⁷⁴ *Beacon*, April 1, 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 18; May 22 and 27, 1895; and January 31, 1896. The Committee of Fifty was also concerned with municipal retrenchment, serving as a self-appointed citizen’s oversight committee. Their demands to review the city budget and make recommendations for cuts created tension that limited the ability of the Committee to work with the Council to resolve freight rate issues. The Committee was short-lived; after January, 1896 the Committee ceased to be mentioned in the local newspapers, most likely because Potts was already agitating for the creation of the Commercial Club.

Apart from securing competitive freight rates, local businessmen needed to replenish and increase their customer base to keep their businesses afloat and to prepare for the eventual economic recovery. By preserving the city's railroads, Wichita's businessmen protected vital transportation arteries that would shape future migration patterns in the state. They also actively campaigned to repopulate the state and to promote the settlement of Oklahoma Territory, Indian Territory, and northern Texas. Wichita's boosters had always prioritized the settlement of western Kansas as fundamental to the city's economic development, yet the Immigration Bureau, initiated by the Board of Trade in 1890, differed from earlier immigration programs; it was not a Board of Trade committee but the product of a statewide effort, comprised of businessmen from throughout Kansas, including representatives from Dodge City. Wichita's Board of Trade was deeply influential in setting up the bureau and in directing its activities, however. The Board hosted the organizing convention, and its members – especially Oliver – played important roles in determining how the Bureau operated. The Board successfully negotiated to locate the Bureau office in Wichita, and both the Bureau's secretary and treasurer were Wichita residents. Acting upon two initiatives Wichita's delegates had robustly promoted during the convention, the Bureau immediately petitioned the Kansas State Legislature for an appropriation of \$150,000 to staff its offices and underwrite its promotional campaigns. It also began negotiations with the state's railroads to offer cheap excursion rates to potential settlers.¹⁷⁵

Similarly, local businessmen's enduring support for the development of the Oklahoma Territory emphasized the role rural settlement played in their plans for the city's economic development. As the closest city to the Oklahoma Territory, Wichita's merchants and wholesalers viewed the Territory's settlers and small town merchants as a proprietary customer base. Local attorney and historian Kos Harris later observed, "Oklahoma, as a buyer of goods, wares, and merchandise, was to be our

¹⁷⁵ *Eagle*, January 1, 14, 17, and March 1, 1890. Abilene did not send representatives.

commercial solution. It has so proved.”¹⁷⁶ Wichita’s Board of Trade lobbied their Senator and directly addressed Congress to open the Territory to American settlers.¹⁷⁷ In the 1880s and 1890s Wichita’s businessmen prepared and distributed promotional tracts to encourage the settlement of the Oklahoma Territory. The *Eagle* gave away free maps of the Territory with a paid-up annual subscription to the newspaper. By publicly tying their name to the territory and repeatedly advertising their proximity, rail connections, and ability to provide vital goods and services to the new residents of Oklahoma, Wichita’s businessmen attempted to simultaneously populate and secure market dominance in Oklahoma. Indeed, one of the newly-organized Commercial Club’s first acts of business was to invite the directors of the Oklahoma City Businessmen’s Club to tour Wichita and discuss mutual interests. They hired James Mead, one of Wichita’s early traders, to scout the territory and catalog its natural resources, to better assess how Oklahoma could be of economic benefit to Wichita. And, most importantly, Wichita’s businessmen continued to negotiate with railroad officials to build rail lines that would run to Oklahoma through Wichita, succeeding at constructing a southern extension of the Midland rail line and later the Kansas City, Mexico & Orient line, which ran through Wichita into Oklahoma Territory before moving into Texas.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Harris, “Chronicles,” 225 – 226.

¹⁷⁷ Kansans were generally supportive of the creation of the Oklahoma Territory. Ex-governor Crawford travelled to Washington to lobby for the Territory. The state legislature passed a resolution urging Kansas Congressmen to push for the bill’s passage. Senator Preston Plumb met with Wichita’s businessmen to discuss the bill and brought a memorialization prepared by the Board of Trade to present to the House Committee on Territories. *Eagle*, January 25 and 31, and February 3 and 17, 1888.

¹⁷⁸ Promotional materials and newspaper articles and advertisements dating back to the mid-1880s advertise Wichita as the closest city to the territory. A.P. Jackson and E.C. Cole, *Oklahoma!* (Kansas City MO: Publishing House of Ramsey, Millett & Hudson, 1885), 12. An 1895 promotional booklet claimed that Wichita was “the Commercial City of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Indian Territory.” P.B. Dilday, *Souvenir of Wichita: The Commercial City of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Indian Territory* (Wichita: Press of the Wichita Eagle, 1895), Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum. J.R. Mead, “J.R. Mead to the Gentlemen of the Commercial Club,” in Mead, J.R. Papers (Wichita: Wichita State University, Special Collections, 1898). *Eagle*, January 25, 1896.

Given the importance of rural residents as customers for Wichita's wholesalers and merchants, local businessmen's response to the growing popularity of the Populist Party can be seen as an attempt to find common ground with residents of western Kansas and the Oklahoma Territory. As the editor of *Eagle*, and writing as the voice of Wichita's Republican businessmen, Murdock attempted to negotiate this urban-rural disconnect by identifying common concerns Wichita's businessmen and rural Kansans shared. Though Republican newspaper editors throughout the state questioned Murdock's motives, and even his sanity, the editor's anger resonated with a large majority of Kansans. Some of his critics claimed that Murdock's seeming sea-change was nothing more than a bald attempt to stand on the right side of public opinion, and in a sense, it was.¹⁷⁹ Murdock identified common enemies that both Wichitans and their rural neighbors could attack and used his paper, which had the largest circulation in the state, to cement that alliance.¹⁸⁰

The surging popularity of the People's Party can be directly tied to the economic crisis Kansas farmers experienced after 1888. Economic historian Charles Hoffman argues that farmers believed Populist candidates offered "economic relief through political power."¹⁸¹ The Populist platform – the tenets of which included the free coinage of silver, direct election of United States Senators, increased regulation of railroads, and a sub-treasury plan to provide warehouses for farmers to store grain and price subsidies to stabilize prices – offered Kansas farmers a stronger political voice through the direct election of senators, but it more explicitly promised to help debtors through the coinage of silver and to protect farmers from fluctuations in international grain markets through government intervention to

¹⁷⁹ Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 130 and 136.

¹⁸⁰ Sociologist Scott McNall demonstrates the importance that language played in mobilizing farmers to join the Populist movement, claiming that Populists and Republicans often defined their positions in opposition with one another. In contrast, Murdock's rhetoric – for a time – emphasized farmers' and businessmen's common concerns. *The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865 – 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 162.

¹⁸¹ Charles Hoffman, *The Depression of the Nineties: An Economic History* (Westport CN: Greenwood Publishing, 1970), 38.

regulate grain shipping, storage, and prices. Although rural Kansans had largely been stalwart Republicans, their shifting allegiance to the People's Party in the 1890s suggests that farmers were increasingly identifying themselves as economically and culturally distinct from those residing in Kansas towns.¹⁸²

Murdock leveraged Wichita's position within the Seventh Congressional District to posit what historian James Malin has described as the "Seven-Eighths to One-Eighth Ratio," an argument that seven-eighths of the state were politically and economically dominated by the northeastern one-eighth, which included Topeka and most of the state's cities. In so doing, Wichita claimed a political kinship with western Kansas based upon their shared position of political non-representation. Under this logic, even though Wichita voted differently than the rest of the Seventh District during the 1890s, it shared the Seventh District's general frustration with the priorities of the Kansas state legislature and governor, as well as a growing resentment of the political dominance of northeastern Kansas.¹⁸³

He also identified and emphasized those issues where rural Populists and Wichita's Republican businessmen agreed in the pages of the *Eagle*. Although Murdock repeatedly denounced more radical populist ideals, especially the Free Silver movement, Populist proposals to regulate the railroads strongly appealed to the newspaper editor, as well as to local businessmen. In 1889, Murdock declared war

¹⁸² Historians have debated the reasons for the rise of the People's Party in Kansas. Good historiographies on Populism include: William C. Pratt, "Historians and the Lost World of Kansas Radicalism," *Kansas History* 30, Winter (2007 - 8) and Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State* (Lawrence University Press of Kansas, 2002), 171 – 174. Some frame it as the outgrowth of the failed Union Labor Party or the result of an anemic Democratic Party in Kansas. D. Scott Barton, "Party Switching and Kansas Populism," *The Historian*, vol. 52, no. 3 (May 1990), 453 – 467. Jeffrey Ostler, "Why the People's Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa," *Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 4 (November 1992), 451 – 474; and Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). Hoffman sees it as a more direct response to the economic dislocation of the Bust. McNall views populism as a class movement that recognized Kansas farmers as a distinct class that was unrepresented by both the Republican and Democratic parties. He reframes the rise of the People's Party as a class movement in which merchants, farmers, and workers faced different economic realities, which led to different political priorities. McNall, *The Road to Rebellion*.

¹⁸³ James Malin, *Power and Change in Society with Special Reference to Kansas, 1880 – 1900* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1981), 37 - 46.

upon railroad pools and price fixing, inspiring the Board of Trade to petition to the Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners for relief from unfair shipping rates. He also denounced trusts and tariffs which he argued failed to protect Kansans, and instead made area farmers and Wichita businessmen uncompetitive. He railed against corrupt and ineffective politicians and he repeatedly lauded the efforts of laborers and farmers who rose up to fight these injustices. Arguing that “the farmer is getting nothing for his work and nothing for all that he raises and does,” he exhorted Kansas farmers to organize themselves into alliances to demand “a hearing and a settlement” from both politicians and the corporate titans that controlled the economy. Murdock’s Rebellion, as his crusade was known throughout the state, was a tirade against poor economic conditions, but it was also a campaign that drew upon populist themes and unambiguously linked Murdock, his newspaper, and Wichita with discontented farmers throughout the state.¹⁸⁴

Although Murdock would later renounce some of his Populist rhetoric in a short-lived bid to become the next Republican governor, his efforts to align rural Kansans with residents of Wichita was fruitful. Murdock further fueled the division between most of Kansas and its northeastern corner by condemning the behavior of the state’s politicians, who ignored the needs of residents in western Kansas; the state’s largest railroads, which gave Eastern Kansas cities like Atchison and Kansas City better freight rates; and those major industrialists, who paid too little for farm produce and charged too much for consumer goods. And it unequivocally identified Wichita as standing with the rest of the state.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ *Eagle*, December 20, 1889. Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 130 – 148 and Miner, *Wichita*, 90 – 92.

¹⁸⁵ Murdock continued to push for legislation that would regulate freight rates and break up trusts. In 1895, he claimed that “Wichita has not boasted in the past a single big interest that has not been hampered or destroyed by the tentacles of the octopus Trust.” *Eagle*, July 25, 1895.

While Wichita's businessmen appeared sympathetic to the position of area Populists and to the city's working class, they actively discouraged any kind of Populist-Democrat or Populist-Labor combination and were largely able to quash the creation of a Populist presence within the city. Wichita did not publish a noteworthy Populist newspaper throughout the 1890s. Of the three Populist-leaning newspapers published, none lasted longer than eight months, and none were published around the time of major elections.¹⁸⁶ *The Beacon* remained a solidly Democratic paper, although it certainly supported the Populists when the two parties fused - informally in 1892 and formally in 1896. Yet Wichita's laborers remained Democrats; as a result, the city of Wichita only voted a Populist slate in 1896, when the Populists formally fused with the Democrats.¹⁸⁷

As the economy started to improve after 1897, the Commercial Club's efforts began to yield results. The directors succeeded in their bid to host the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Congress. The *Daily Eagle* insisted that the city was being "signally honored," having been chosen over other "major metropolises" like Los Angeles, and would benefit from hosting a convention "attracting 5000 people from every Western and Southern state" to discuss a variety of economic and commercial "issues of immediate and vital concern, such as traffic rates [and] Gulf exports...." The Transportation Committee, headed by Murdock, entered into negotiations with the Kansas Midland Railroad to extend its road

¹⁸⁶ *The Wichita Independent* (November 1888 – June 1889) was an Alliance paper and acted as a precursor to the People's Party. *The Daily Commoner* published two issues in July, 1892. *The Kansas Headlight*, which began publishing in July 1894, ended its run by September 1894. *Jerry Simpson's Bayonet* began publishing in 1899.

¹⁸⁷ Democrats and Populists' first attempt at fusion in 1892 was different from the formal and more widespread fusion party organized in 1896. In 1892, Populists and Democrats remained separate organizations, agreeing to trade votes in important races. Grover Cleveland was left off the Kansas state ballot and Democrats agreed to vote for James B. Weaver as part of a larger plan to render the Kansas vote for president worthless (it worked). Barton, "Party Switching and Kansas Populism," 461. There was apparently some hard feeling within both groups, however. In 1894, local Populists and Democrats refused to trade votes and, in instances when there was not a Populist candidate, some even went so far as to vote for the Republican candidate. Simpson was defeated in Wichita and in the larger Seventh District. In 1896, the fusionists formally agreed to back the same candidates. Sedgewick County, the Seventh District, and all of Kansas voted for William Jennings Bryan, the fusion party candidate. Simpson was re-elected in the Seventh District and the fusion gubernatorial candidate won as well. In Sedgewick County, the fusion ticket won every race.

through Wichita. And, perhaps most tellingly, by the end of 1898, the Commercial Club drew a boiler manufacturer and Hockaday wholesale hardware company to the city. Hockaday would become one of Wichita's most recognized businesses in the early twentieth century.¹⁸⁸

In 1898, Wichita was a considerably smaller city than it had been in 1888, and one that lacked the factories that early promoters had eagerly championed for their community. It had lost more than a third of its residents and more than half its assessed value. Local businessmen preserved their strong sense of united purpose, however, and continued to band together in businessmen's organizations that facilitated camaraderie and discussion. Although the Commercial Club did not achieve its goal of establishing the city as an agricultural processing center in the 1890s, failing to rally sufficient support from area farmers to finance its first projects, including a much-needed grain elevator, it did provide a space in which to define developmental goals for the city and to propose, organize, and implement plans to achieve those goals.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, the reconstitution of an active promotional organization prepared Wichita to capitalize upon opportunities afforded by the resurgent agricultural economy at the start of the twentieth century. In the first years of the twentieth century, Wichita's Commercial Club would play an important role in locating and pushing through projects that would help the city grow.

Dodge City: "The Future Metropolis of Southwestern Kansas"

Wichita struggled economically, in no small part, because its tributary trade region's population dropped precipitously. Dodge City – and southwestern Kansas more generally – was the site of much of that depopulation. The region was ravaged by years of disastrous weather, beginning in 1886 with a January blizzard that killed most of the region's cattle, and followed by years of drought and bad freezes

¹⁸⁸ *Eagle*, December 5, 1897; and January 16 and 26, February 23 and 27, and November 13, 1898.

¹⁸⁹ Wood, *Dynamics of Faith*, 137 and 171 – 172. Charles H. Smyth, "The Commercial Club," in *History of Wichita*, 79 – 80.

that destroyed the region's crops and drove hundreds of thousands of people from Kansas.¹⁹⁰ Newly-organized counties collapsed and were absorbed by others, while the region's towns and villages struggled to survive. Ford County lost more than half of its residents, dropping from 9,218 residents in 1887 to just over 4,500 in 1898. In 1887, almost 3,400 people lived in Dodge City. A year later, the city had lost more than one-third of its residents. By 1891, fewer than 1,800 residents lived in Dodge City, a number that would not rise appreciably until the turn of the century. In 1888, Dodge City's assessed valuation was \$640,000 (but did not include the valuation for land). In 1898 it was just over \$550,000 (including land).¹⁹¹

The agricultural depression caught Dodge City mid-way through its transformation from cattle town to incipient metropolis. Businessmen had only begun the process of shifting from a cattle-based economy to one built around the agricultural economy after the Kansas legislature banned Texas cattle from entering the state in 1885. By 1888, the city had certain urban pretensions – three rail lines, a municipally-owned utilities company, and a privately-financed college – but it retained much of its frontier feel and reputation. Like the townspeople of Wichita, Dodge City residents were enthusiastic land speculators, buying and selling real estate in town and throughout the region. As at Wichita, when the depression hit, the city was caught unprepared. The land business collapsed, leaving residents with portfolios of real estate that were unsalable. Countless businesses closed; most notably three of the

¹⁹⁰ By 1898, the western two-thirds of the state lost more than 150,000 people. To date, many counties in the southwestern quarter of Kansas have yet to exceed the population figures reached in the 1888. Miner describes this exodus in detail. The WaKeeney land office district, which managed homestead land in six Kansas counties northwest of Dodge City, reported that homesteaders had vacated more than 70,000 acres by 1890. Craig Miner, *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas, 1890 – 1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 11 – 12. More tellingly, Miner claims that “there were two to five times as many canceled homestead and timber-culture certificates at all the western Kansas land offices than there were final certificates issued.” Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865 – 1890* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 212.

¹⁹¹ Dodge City did not provide a land valuation in 1888, most likely because land prices had depreciated so quickly. The assessed property valuation in 1898 is that much more stark because it does include a land valuation. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report*, 158; *Eighth Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1893), 76; and *Eleventh Biennial Report*, 606.

city's four banks. The new college changed hands multiple times, and Ford County's newly constructed irrigation canals dried up. The Dodge City, Montezuma & Trinidad railroad declared bankruptcy before it had even finished laying track, and frustrated Ford County residents watched helplessly as the rails were torn up and sold to satisfy the demands of creditors.

Most of Dodge City's pioneer businessmen stayed on, however, and these men banded together, with the support of most of the city's residents, to ensure their hometown's continued existence. The Board of Trade stopped meeting by mid-1890 and this small cadre of early businessmen became the city's default leaders, but they continually reached out to other businessmen who largely supported their plans, creating a fairly cohesive business community.¹⁹² Although this was a different leadership model than that of Wichita's business community, it effectively identified opportunities to propel Dodge City through the worst depredations of the Bust and to situate the city in the best possible position to capitalize upon the economic recovery after 1898. In large part, Dodge City succeeded where other southwestern Kansas towns failed because this small group acted aggressively to secure state and federal projects that would provide Ford County with additional residents, customers, and jobs; and continually worked with the Santa Fe Railroad to protect Dodge City's position as a division point for the railroad. In so doing, local businessmen focused less on developing an agricultural processing and distribution sector, and instead capitalized upon the commercial traffic the federal Land Office and the Santa Fe provided local businesses. At the same time, they were able to create an economic base for residents that was unrelated to the agricultural economy, but instead based upon jobs created by the location of an Old Soldiers' Home outside of Dodge City and the growing employment demands of the Santa Fe.

¹⁹² Local businessmen founded Dodge City's Board of Trade relatively late in the 1880s, but it was never as organized as Wichita's Board of Trade. The Board of Trade continued to meet sporadically through June 1890 but the group's only major campaign after 1888 raised money to purchase Fort Dodge to create the Soldiers' Home. Both the *Dodge City Times* and the *Dodge City Globe-Republican* exhorted businessmen to reorganize the Board of Trade in the early 1890s, but these calls went largely unheeded. *Times*, May 23, 1889, June 6, 1890; July 10 and 17, 1891; and November 27, 1891. *Globe-Republican*, June 25, 1890; July 22, 1891; and January 27, 1893.

The city's pioneer business leaders – including George Hoover, Richard Evans, Robert Wright, Adolph Gluck, and Michael Sutton – remained Dodge City residents and came together after 1888 to push for programs that might benefit Dodge City and its residents. As a group, they spearheaded development campaigns to further Dodge City's economy, often contributing financially and using their connections with state politicians, bureaucrats, and railroad executives to push their plans forward.¹⁹³ Although these men belonged to different political parties and had been previously divided over prohibition and the cattle industry, they overcame their personal animus and emerged as a powerful, closely-allied unit during the Bust.¹⁹⁴ Wright and Sutton's rapprochement was particularly surprising given that Wright had previously shot up Sutton's home in a dispute over prohibition; yet the former adversaries repeatedly teamed up to support the creation of the statewide immigration bureau in Wichita and to lobby legislators to fund the creation of the Old Soldiers' Home at Fort Dodge.

At the same time, Dodge City's cadre of pioneer business leaders garnered widespread support from the larger business community and drew upon a group of relative newcomers to help carry out their plans. William J. Fitzgerald, L. George Grobety, and others moved to Dodge City around 1885 and persevered through the bust of the 1890s.¹⁹⁵ This second generation of businessmen played a liminal role in Dodge City society. Considerably younger than pioneers like Hoover or Gluck, they were more established than men who would move to Dodge City in the early twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century, they slowly became identified as civic leaders by joining the Phenix Club, running for

¹⁹³ The city's wealthiest patron, Asa Soule, passed away in 1890 but his family and partners remained invested in Ford County. *Globe-Republican*, January 22, 1890.

¹⁹⁴ It can be difficult to locate the rapport existing among Dodge City's pioneer businessmen in newspapers during the Bust. Oftentimes, their negotiations with state legislators and their meetings with other businessmen were only acknowledged in brief blurbs, noting that Sutton and Wright traveled to Wichita for the immigration bureau convention, for example, or with vague references such as, "Wright, Hoover, and the Gilbert brothers met with Santa Fe officials in Topeka on matters of mutual concern." *Globe-Republican*, January 15, and October 1, 1890.

¹⁹⁵ Attached to this group were Lewis Pettijohn and Thomas Scates, who arrived in Dodge City toward the end of the Bust after being appointed the receiver and registrar to the federal land office, but were contemporaries of Fitzgerald and the others.

political office, and growing increasingly active in the local Republican Party. As their businesses grew after the turn of the century and the pioneers became less involved, they emerged as the city's next leaders.¹⁹⁶

Pioneers and newcomers alike were members of the Phenix Club, the city's premier businessman's organization, which, like Wichita's Coronado Club, served as a particularly useful vehicle to further develop social connections with other local businessmen.¹⁹⁷ Organized in 1887, the Phenix Club regularly hosted dances, musical performances, and card parties, in addition to having club rooms where members and their guests could enjoy a game of billiards or smoke a cigar, providing a cloistered space for businessmen to build friendships and network, and informally facilitating discussions among businessmen about how to protect their hometown and how to position it to capitalize upon future opportunities. Dodge City's businessmen also used the Phenix Club's elegant club rooms as a space in which to impress and entertain prominent visitors. When state officials visited Dodge City to ascertain the viability of Fort Dodge as a possible home for indigent and aging soldiers, they enjoyed a social hour at the Phenix Club. Similarly, rail officials and their guests were feted at the Phenix Club when the Santa Fe railroad opened its new depot and eating house at Dodge City. Thus, the Phenix Club became the site at which prominent out-of-town guests could be entertained and discuss business with Dodge City's most prominent businessmen.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Fitzgerald arrived in 1884. He was a realtor and a founding member of the Phenix Club. In the early twentieth century, he served as Lieutenant Governor. Grobety arrived in 1885 to open the Grangers Store, which sold farm basics, including groceries and seed. Grobety was a director of the Phenix Club and later served as a founder of the city's Commercial Club. He was active in county politics, serving as the county clerk in the 1890s.

¹⁹⁷ It remained resolutely apolitical; prominent Democrats like Hoover and devout Republicans like Evans were both welcome.

¹⁹⁸ *Times*, May 25 and December 13, 1888; December 19, 1889; *Globe-Republican*, March 12, 1890; May 4, 1892; December 2, 1892; April 14, 1893; February 9, 1894; June 1, 1894; March 1, 1896; and January 15, 1898. Evans and Hoover served as executive directors and committee members for the Phenix Club for most of the 1890s, along with a number of other prominent early residents, including J.A. Arment, H. Juneau, C.A. Milton, W.J. Fitzgerald, Chalk Beeson, and the Gilbert brothers.

The business community largely set aside their political and personal differences to support the city's pioneer businessmen and their plans to further Dodge City's interests.¹⁹⁹ The mayoral campaigns of Evans (a Republican) in 1890 and Gluck (a Democrat) in 1891 and again in 1893 are illustrative of the broad camaraderie existing among businessmen in Dodge City. Both men became candidates by popular acclamation after other pioneer businessmen drafted petitions asking them to run for office. These petitions were circulated throughout Dodge City and signed by most of the city's businessmen, regardless of their political affiliation. Evans acknowledged this solidarity when he accepted his nomination, observing that as "all classes of people are represented by this call, I feel that, if elected, I shall be the servant for this whole people."²⁰⁰ The cohesiveness of the local business community is further evident in Gluck's history as mayor. In 1891, one hundred businessmen enthusiastically petitioned Gluck to run for mayor, and no one appeared interested in running against him. Months later, he was later arrested for knowingly renting rooms in one of his buildings to a saloon owner. Thirty-six of the city's most influential businessmen – Republican and Democrat alike – came together to furnish Gluck's bond, including Hoover, Evans and Wright. More significantly, although Gluck was

¹⁹⁹ In contrast, local newspaper editors presented Dodge City's residents as deeply divided along political lines. In reality, the editors disagreed over politics, but really fought with one another over city and county printing contracts. These contracts, which the city council and county commissioners awarded annually to one or more newspapers, which were particularly lucrative as they offered a steady revenue stream and ensured a broader readership (and thus more advertisers). Between 1888 and 1898, three newspapers dominated Dodge City's media. The *Times* – the city's oldest newspaper – changed hands repeatedly, although it remained largely under the control of local Democrats or Populists. Unfortunately, the rotating cast of editors offered inconsistent positions with regard to any number of issues, and the *Times* struggled to attract a loyal audience; it folded in 1893. The *Dodge City Democrat* and the *Globe-Republican* both survived the Bust, and provided residents with news coverage reflective of each of the major political parties. Of the two, the *Democrat* was the most consistent in its coverage. W.F. Petillon, a fiery-tempered Democratic loyalist largely controlled the *Democrat* throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Representing the minority position in a county that generally voted Republican, Petillon energetically exposed corruption in almost every program and organization in Ford County. Many of these claims were later proven to be unfounded. Not surprisingly, the *Globe-Republican* expended considerable time responding to the *Democrat's* accusations. The product of the merger of Sutton's *Ford County Republican* and long-time editor Daniel Frost's *Globe Livestock Journal* in 1888, the *Globe-Republican* also changed hands several times, but as the standard bearer for the Republican Party in Ford County, it generally retained its authority as Ford County's most influential newspaper and was frequently awarded both the city and county printing contracts.

²⁰⁰ *Times*, March 7, 1890, and March 21, 1891.

convicted and required to resign his office as a consequence of his conviction, he was re-elected two years later after running unopposed. Perhaps most tellingly, at the end of his second term, grateful residents presented Gluck with a handsome badge to thank him for his service to Dodge City.

Businessmen's desire to unite under a recognized, proactive leader trumped their individual positions on prohibition; they supported Gluck throughout two candidacies and terms as the city's mayor.²⁰¹

After 1888, Dodge City's businessmen downgraded their vision for their city's future development. During the land boom, boosters ardently declared that Dodge City would follow in Wichita's footsteps, growing into a western metropolis with a multi-state reach. As economic conditions grew increasingly dire, Dodge City's businessmen lowered their expectations, describing Dodge City as the metropolis of southwestern Kansas.²⁰² They proposed to make Dodge City the heart of the region's railway system; the home of the federal land office and a center for regional real estate transactions; and the commercial center for the area's farmers. While they supported the struggles of area farmers, they did not promote Dodge City as an agricultural processing center during the Bust, however.²⁰³ Hoover's flour mill closed by 1888, and while there were some short-lived attempts to draw a new mill

²⁰¹ The *Times* (under a Democrat editor) championed Gluck's candidacy as gratifying "a large proportion of the residents," yet the *Globe-Republican* insisted that Gluck only appealed to "certain residents" – inferring that he was backed by the saloon element – and predicted that "there is to be a 'dark horse' brought out who will prove to be a favorite in the race." Gluck handily beat a last minute candidate. All three newspapers took a position as to the mayor's guilt or innocence, and they vociferously attacked one another, in addition to all of the parties involved in the criminal suit. *Times*, March 6 and 20; July 10 and 17; and September 11 and 18, 1891. *Globe-Republican*, March 18 and 25, April 8, July 15, September 10, 17, and 24, and October 1, 1891; February 17, March 3, 10, and 31, and April 7 and 14, 1893; and April 12 and 19, 1894.

²⁰² Dodge City's newspapers continued to call their town a metropolis but were more careful to qualify what the meant, claiming that it would be a future metropolis and that it was the metropolis of southwestern Kansas. *Globe-Republican*, March 11, 1891. *Times*, April 24, 1890.

²⁰³ In the spring of 1888, local businessmen subscribed money to purchase seed for area farmers after a vigorous campaign from the *Times*. Hoover, Wright, and others each donated \$100, raising \$3,000 to purchase seed; farmers were expected to repay them once they harvested their crops. *Times*, February 2, 9, 16, and 23, and March 22, 1888.

to town, Dodge City did not operate a flour mill during the 1890s.²⁰⁴ Moreover, Dodge City's businessmen and editors did not advocate building a sugar beet mill, even while a number of rival towns in southwestern Kansas did take advantage of federal and state subsidies available to promote sugar beet production and processing.²⁰⁵ That said, Dodge City's pioneer businessmen were surprisingly successful in both piloting their town through the upsets of the Bust and in positioning it to become the chief town of the region, drawing in three of the region's most prized projects over the course of ten years: becoming the site of the state's Old Soldiers' Home in 1888, relocating the U.S. Land Office from Garden City when the federal government consolidated land offices in 1894, and persuading Santa Fe officials to greatly expand the line's rail yard and to build a new depot and restaurant in 1895 and 1896.

Dodge City's pioneer businessmen began to create new revenue streams for their city in 1888 when they successfully rallied Dodge City residents and lobbied the Kansas state legislature to open a home for indigent and aging Civil War soldiers and their families at Fort Dodge, four miles southeast of Dodge City.²⁰⁶ At a public meeting to rally support, Hoover explained the purpose of the meeting and then invited Gluck, Evans, Frost, and others to offer suggestions about how Dodge City might obtain the home. When Hoover called for a vote, it was approved by acclamation, without a single dissenting voice.²⁰⁷ Shortly thereafter, several prominent residents, including Sutton and Wright, traveled to

²⁰⁴ It was probably not cost effective to operate a flour mill in Dodge City during the 1890s. Wheat harvests were so poor that few mills could operate regularly. Hoover bought the Dodge City mill in 1884, wisely shifting his money from the wholesale liquor business to milling shortly before Dodge City lost the Texas cattle trade and embraced farming. Local newspapers do not note when the mill officially closed, but they cover a fire, which destroyed the mill in 1890. The *Globe-Republican* noted that the mill had not been in operation for several years. *Globe-Republican*, April 9, 1890. In 1891 residents briefly opened a mill, but there is no mention of a mill after January 1892. In 1897, the shuttered mill was sold to two investors who reopened it, but closed shortly thereafter. In 1903, E. Ballard, a Nebraskan, moved to Dodge City and was successful in opening a flour mill in Dodge City. Betty Braddock, "Betty's Notes," Ford County Heritage Center.

²⁰⁵ Miner, *Next Year Country*, 94-101.

²⁰⁶ The Soldiers' Home at Fort Dodge was not the first publicly-funded home for aging soldiers; similar homes opened in every Union state, and Kansas's first home had already opened in Leavenworth.

²⁰⁷ *Ford County Republican*, August 15, 1888. *Times*, August 16, 1888.

Topeka to lobby for Dodge City. By December, they had secured sufficient support from legislators and Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) officials to organize a meeting in Dodge City to tour the old fort. A committee of thirty businessmen meticulously planned the event. When members of the State Soldiers' Home Committee on Legislation and officials from the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) arrived in Dodge City, they were met by twenty-five decorated carriages. Prominent businessmen gave the visitors a tour of Fort Dodge, but also of the city, including the college, the recently-constructed irrigation canal, and the new city hall. They enjoyed a lavish dinner and an oyster supper, a show at Kelley's Opera House, a concert by Dodge City's famous cowboy band, and a social hour hosted at the Phenix Club. That March, the Kansas state legislature passed a bill authorizing the construction of the Old Soldier's Home at Fort Dodge. According to the *Times*, "considerable opposition manifested... by outside parties" to threaten the bill, but Dodge City's lobbyists, led by Wright, had traveled to Topeka prior to the vote and remained there until after the bill was passed, pressing hard to ensure that legislators recognized the value of the project and Dodge City as the best location for it.²⁰⁸ Hoover, Evans, and other long-time residents then led the ensuing subscription campaign to raise money needed to purchase the old fort and surrounding farmland needed for additional buildings and community gardens – items not covered by the state appropriation.²⁰⁹

Dodge City residents also lobbied the federal government to acquire a federal Land Office.²¹⁰ In the 1880s local businessmen had unsuccessfully attempted to persuade government officials to open an office in Dodge City; the government opened land offices at Larned and Garden City instead. In 1894 federal officials decided to consolidate these land offices and Dodge City's pioneer businessmen sprang into action, pressing for their congressman to intercede and encouraging sympathetic residents in

²⁰⁸ *Times*, December 27, 1888; January 24 and March 7, 1889.

²⁰⁹ *Times*, March 7, May 2, and November 12, 1889; and January 16, 1890. *Globe-Republican*, December 18, 1889 and January 15, 1890.

²¹⁰ Many believed that the city's reputation in the 1880s discouraged bureaucrats from opening a land office there.

neighboring counties to voice their support for Dodge City's request. Angry editorials in the Garden City newspapers suggest how persistent and persuasive Dodge City's lobbyists were in their appeal to acquire the land office. At one point the *Garden City Sentinel* claimed that Dodge City's businessmen were luring political officials to Dodge City under false pretenses, saying: "Your lying to the department there will be found out, and the punishment to be meted out will be a just retribution for your underhanded work."²¹¹ When the decision to locate the new, consolidated land office in Dodge City was officially announced, the *Globe-Republican* celebrated the city's feat and proudly acknowledged their Democratic mayor's perseverance, noting: "At one time, it hung fire, owing to opposition from prominent political influences, but Mayor Gluck succeeded... in our behalf, and he spiked Garden City's last gun."²¹²

Local businessmen expected that both the Soldiers' Home and the Land Office would further solidify Dodge City's position within southwestern Kansas and fuel Dodge City's economy by drawing more visitors to town who could become customers for Dodge City businesses. Residents of other Kansas towns also agreed; Dodge City faced stiff competition for both projects. Other towns continued to lobby the state legislature to open a soldiers' home and even attempted to shutter Dodge City's home in order to get soldiers relocated to their communities. When residents of Larned and Garden City residents learned that their land offices were to be consolidated, they fought tooth and nail to keep their respective land offices open, going so far as to refuse to comply with the executive order to relocate federal documents to Dodge City.²¹³

²¹¹ Reprinted in the *Globe-Republican*, December 30, 1894.

²¹² *Globe-Republican*, January 12, 1894.

²¹³ Residents of Hays City (Ellis County) and Garden City (Finney County) reportedly tried to have the Dodge City Soldiers' Home closed, claiming that the Dodge City home was financially mismanaged and that the soldiers were suffering as a result. *Globe-Republican* June 27, 1892 and January 27, 1893. Land Office employees at Larned refused to move their documents to Dodge City. *Globe-Republican*, December 30, 1893.

The Old Soldiers' Home and the Land Office positively affected the local economy in a number of ways. Local contractors were hired to refurbish the old fort to create the Home and accommodate the new residents, which provided jobs for area workers and injected money into the local economy. After more than a year of fundraising and construction, the Home opened in the winter of 1890. By August, some sixty residents – largely Civil War veterans and their families – lived in a series of two room apartments crafted out of the former fort barracks. The superintendent continued to accept more soldiers as additional funding allowed. Although poor funding limited the Home's further development throughout the 1890s, local merchants were contracted to supply most of their food, clothing, and household goods for the home's commissary.²¹⁴ The Land Office also generated new customers for local businesses. Residents of southwestern Kansas who traveled to Dodge City to prove up a claim or otherwise transact business at the Land Office could be expected to stay in Dodge City for two or three days, which meant that they would spend money at local hotels, restaurants, and shops. And the removal of the Land Office to Dodge City augmented the town's population with the families of the land officers and clerks, as well as attorneys who specialized in land law. These families bought homes in Dodge City and became new customers for Dodge City businesses.²¹⁵

The combined effect of the opening of the Old Soldiers' Home and the relocation of the Land Office was not felt immediately, however. Although these projects certainly helped sustain Dodge City through the Bust, they were expected to benefit Dodge City more over time – as the Home received more funding and was able to house more veterans and their families, Dodge City businessmen would benefit from the increased demand for goods and services. Similarly, as environmental and economic conditions improved, local businessmen expected farmers to move back to southwestern Kansas. The

²¹⁴ The Dodge City Soldiers' Home was considerably smaller than the home at Leavenworth, which housed 2,000 former soldiers, but it was the first Kansas Soldiers' Home to allow soldiers' families to live with them. Interestingly, the Home housed both Union and Confederate soldiers. *Times*, January 30, February 20, and August 22, 1890; and January 2, 1891. *Globe-Republican*, August 13, 1890.

²¹⁵ *Times*, November 29, 1888 and *Globe-Republican*, January 19, 1894.

resulting real estate transactions were expected to draw farmers to the Land Office and increase the commercial traffic in Dodge City more generally.

Dodge City businessmen also recognized the important role that the Santa Fe railroad played in ensuring the city's survival during the Bust and believed that the city's position as a division point for the Santa Fe railroad would increase the city's commercial traffic as the region's environmental and economic conditions improved. From its inception, Dodge City had been a railroad town. Unlike Abilene and Wichita, Dodge City's emergence as a cattle town was due, in part, to the Santa Fe's promotion of the town as a good shipping point for Texas cattle. When Dodge City lost the cattle trade after 1885, it relied upon its connection to the Santa Fe to establish a new identity as an emergent metropolis. Where Wichita and Abilene had multiple major rail lines running through town, the Santa Fe was Dodge City's only major railroad – but as the only rail line providing any access to most of southwestern Kansas, Dodge City's position as the line's division point was enviable.²¹⁶ As the agricultural economy and land market collapsed, the Santa Fe became increasingly important to Dodge City's economic viability as its single largest employer and its greatest source of revenue, as well as an indicator of Dodge City's regional prominence. And businessmen expected to leverage their relationship with the Santa Fe as economic conditions improved to present Dodge City as the transportation center of southwestern Kansas.

In 1888, the Santa Fe made Dodge City a permanent division point for both its mail and passenger service, and shortly thereafter, purchased eight new engines to be assigned to Dodge City. As a division point, Dodge City benefited from housing the Santa Fe's repair shops, roundhouse, and storage facilities, as well as being the railroad's most important stop in southwestern Kansas. Railroad workers –machinists, laborers, and clerks, in addition to conductors, engineers, and the like – created a small working class in Dodge City that was largely protected from the turmoil of the agricultural

²¹⁶ The Rock Island continued to operate a spur line to Dodge City but the main line ran through nearby Bucklin.

economy and comprised an important customer base for local merchants. At the same time, Dodge City's status as a division point ensured that Dodge City remained an important rail destination on the line. Even as the Santa Fe limited or cancelled service at other stops, Dodge City continued to enjoy good service from the railroad. Those wholesalers that remained in business in southwestern Kansas aggregated in Dodge City where the rail schedule was more secure and the number of daily stops ensured that freight and passengers could be moved quickly.

Recognizing the singular importance of the Santa Fe to Dodge City's economy, prominent businessmen maintained close relationships with Santa Fe officials in Topeka while ensuring that railroad workers remained loyal customers and residents of Dodge city. Hoover, Wright, and Sutton, among others, repeatedly travelled to Topeka between 1888 and 1898 to discuss further development of the Santa Fe's facilities in Dodge City. Sutton served as the rail line's general counsel in southwestern Kansas. And local businessmen eagerly entertained rail officials when they visited Dodge City.²¹⁷ At the same time, townspeople also welcomed rail workers as residents. Merchants often advertised their sales by targeting railroad workers in their advertisements and kept their stores open late to accommodate working men. One of the town's largest social functions was the calico ball – a dance hosted by local engineers' wives and the women's auxiliary of Dodge City to benefit a fund for injured railway workers.²¹⁸

Labor strife challenged Dodge City's businessmen to walk a fine line to negotiate with these important stakeholders. In 1893, the Santa Fe's mechanics struck, leaving Santa Fe roundhouses and shops empty throughout the system for almost a month. The following year, American Railway Union (A.R.U.) workers carried out a particularly violent two-week strike to protest the Pullman Company's

²¹⁷ In 1890, for example, Sutton and Wright served on a Board of Trade committee unsuccessfully charged with negotiating for an extension of the Wichita & Western railroad (owned by the Santa Fe) to Dodge City. *Times*, June 6, 1890. *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 9, 1890. Sutton became local counsel for the Santa Fe before 1880. *Globe-Republican*, June 17, 1897.

²¹⁸ *Times*, July 31, 1891.

refusal to let its workers unionize. Santa Fe Railway workers, as members of the A.R.U., refused to handle any trains that hauled Pullman cars. Traffic on almost all rail lines west of Chicago virtually stopped. Dodge City's *Globe-Republican* clearly needed to cover these events, which deeply affected not only local railroad workers, but also the community more generally, yet the editor did not want to be viewed as attacking the Santa Fe, nor did he want to alienate railroad workers who purchased the newspaper and patronized the merchants who advertised in it. As a result, the newspaper's coverage of both events attempted to be neutral, often relying upon dispatches from Topeka to detail events as they unfolded, while appearing simultaneously sympathetic to the plight of the striking railroad workers and supportive of those "prominent citizens" who crossed the picket lines to work as scabs for the railroad.²¹⁹ At the same time, the *Globe-Republican* was quick to counter reports that the strikes were turning violent in Dodge City, and to cast those agitators who threw rocks at trains as men who either were not employed by the Santa Fe or were not Dodge City residents. After the strike ended, the *Globe-Republican* continued to walk that line. Although the newspaper never denounced the Santa Fe's decision against employing former strikers, it did "worry" that these "young married men... who had just begun to become moral, steady, upright citizens," might abandon their families and engage in reckless behavior if they were not re-hired by railroad. The *Globe-Republican* also applauded Mayor Gluck, who met with railroad officials to encourage them to take back former strikers, and happily announced the Santa Fe's decision to take some strikers back.²²⁰

Rail officials' positive relationships with long-time Dodge City businessmen, in addition to the newspapers' measured treatment of the railroad strikes, undoubtedly affected the company's decision to continue to invest in Dodge City. A year after the strikes, the Santa Fe built a new, \$25,000 roundhouse and increased the repair shop track so that it could service more engines. And in 1897, the

²¹⁹ *Globe-Republican*, April 14, 1893; July 6, 13, and 20, 1894.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, August 10 and 31, 1894; and January 2, 1896.

Santa Fe broke ground on a new depot, restaurant, and park, further cementing Dodge City's position as the rail center for southwestern Kansas. The import of these investments was not lost upon the *Globe-Republican*, which insisted that in constructing the new roundhouse the Santa Fe "is not making these arrangements for the facilitation of the immediate handling of business at this station, but with contemplation of the future; and the plan has in view the accommodation of a largely increased business, much greater than is at present done here. Without forfeiting confidence, we say the future is pregnant with prospects of an increased volume of railroad business in Dodge City, and a corresponding increase in the local trade and building of the city."²²¹

As at Wichita, local businessmen also navigated the complex social dynamics of Dodge City workers and Ford County farmers throughout the 1890s to protect their political power by subverting the growing Populist presence and co-opting it through Populist-Democratic fusion. Populism threatened the status quo in the region by encouraging Ford County farmers to break away from the Republican and Democratic Parties, which were dominated by Dodge City businessmen, a move that threatened to upend local businessmen's political hegemony. While Ford County residents may not have always voted for a Republican slate, they historically elected Dodge City businessmen. Although Ford County was more likely to vote Republican than not, it was more politically diverse than many western Kansas counties.²²² A surprising number of businessmen in Dodge City were Democrats, like Hoover and Gluck. Some Republicans supported Resubmission – a movement to place the prohibition amendment before the voters for a second time. Resubmission-Republicans often voted for Democratic

²²¹ *Globe-Republican*, April 5, 1888; January 25, 1889; September 26, 1895; February 25 and April 8, 1897; and February 24, 1898.

²²² Jeffery Ostler contends that Populism became dominant in areas where Republicans overwhelmingly dominated local politics. Ostler, "Why the People's Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa," 451 – 474.

candidates because of their stance on prohibition.²²³ Ford County farmers were also more politically diverse; pockets of German immigrants in eastern Ford County also opposed prohibition and had voted for Democrats for some time.²²⁴ At the same time, local railroad workers, who traditionally voted for Democrats, became an increasingly powerful voting bloc in the 1890s as the voting demographics of Ford County shifted. Despite Ford County's diverse electorate, Dodge City businessmen had consistently dominated the county's Republican and Democratic Parties and were generally each party's candidates for local and state elections.²²⁵

In the 1890s, Dodge City businessmen from both parties attempted to preserve their position as the political leaders of Ford County, either by discouraging area farmers to join the People's Party, or by attempting to subsume their votes through fusion. Local businessmen, running on either ticket, continually presented themselves as advocates for the region's farmers. Hoover, running for Ford County's State Representative as a Democrat in 1890, proposed a solution to Ford County's drought that would provide irrigation canals in a manner that "protected both [farmers] and canal companies." Fitzgerald used the same appeal four years later – proposing to develop effective and affordable irrigation systems for the region's beleaguered farmers – when he ran as the Republican candidate for State Representative. Both men won.²²⁶ Democrats also attempted to co-opt the Populist vote in order to further their candidates. In 1892, when Democrats and Populists across the state swapped votes to combat the Republican Party, Ford County Democrats used the opportunity to advance Democratic

²²³ Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 106 - 132.

²²⁴ McNall emphasizes diversity among Kansas farmers. *The Road to Rebellion*, 144.

²²⁵ Historian Gene Clanton claims that the western counties did not become Populist centers because they were the first hit by the agricultural depression and the least prepared to deal with it, triggering the widespread depopulation of western Kansas. O. Gene Clanton, *Populism: Ideas and Men*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 12.

²²⁶ Some appeals were even more direct. The *Times* endorsed pioneer businessmen A.J. Anthony to farmers as a candidate for the county Probate Judge claiming that he "is a farmer, his opponent is a lawyer." *Times*, October 31, 1890. *Globe-Republican*, November 2, 1894.

Dodge City businessmen as candidates. The Populist-Democrat combination elected four Democrats, but failed to elect any of the People's Party candidates except for Congressman Simpson.²²⁷

Populist candidates demanding seemingly radical railroad legislation found little traction among the city's railroad workers who composed a significant percentage of the rank-and-file Ford County Democratic Party. Many feared that government regulation – or ownership – of the railroads could mean that their jobs or wages were cut. As the *Globe-Republican* observed in its coverage of the 1892 election: "Railroad boys do not... favor a party whose plans contemplate reducing them to the uncertainties of political appointments and whose wages must be fixed by laws made for the purpose of reducing expenses of government to a minimum..."²²⁸ Railroad workers also opposed Populist plans to allow the free coinage of silver because they believed it would depress their real wages, forcing them to spend more to buy goods. In 1896, more than 100 railroad workers signed an open letter published in the *Globe-Republican* denouncing the free silver plan. In the ensuing election, railroad workers appeared divided. Dodge City's second ward – which housed most of the city's working-class residents, including local railroad workers – split its vote between Republican and Fusion candidates, with the Republican candidates winning most contests with small majorities. As at Wichita, working-class residents of Dodge City remained Democrats and were reticent to join the Populists, whose farm-centric positions did not comfortably align with their interests. As a result, apart from the 1896 elections, Dodge City businessmen – typically a combination of Republicans and Democrats – retained control over Ford County's politics.²²⁹

²²⁷ *Globe-Republican*, November 11, 1892. In 1896, Ford County Populists pressed for their candidates to be included on the Fusion ticket. The Fusion ticket won most of the races in Ford County, and three farmers were elected to county positions, including County Attorney, Probate Judge, and County Superintendent.

²²⁸ *Globe-Republican*, November 11, 1892.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, October 25, November 5 and 12, 1896.

The construction of the Santa Fe's new depot, restaurant, and park in many ways signaled Dodge City's emergence from the Bust. That Dodge City survived when so many other southwestern Kansas towns failed points to both the tenacity and creativity of the city's pioneer businessmen who came together to identify new revenue streams for their town and were able to rally the rest of the city's businessmen to support these projects. In fighting to protect their community, these businessmen also consolidated Dodge City's position as the region's most important town by building upon their position as the regional division point for the Santa Fe and in securing the land office. Although Dodge City lost many of the merchants, businesses, and even the public improvements that it had enjoyed in the 1880s, it remained the largest town in Southwestern Kansas, with plans to act as the region's transportation hub and commercial center. Through the efforts of its pioneer businessmen, with the support of most of its residents, Dodge City was poised to capitalize upon a resurgent agricultural economy in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Abilene: "A faith in the city making one of the most substantial and pleasant home-cities in Kansas"

Abilene presents a counterpoint to the developmental trajectories of Wichita and Dodge City. Instead of setting aside old grievances and personal interest, existing divisions among Abilene's businessmen grew increasingly pronounced throughout the 1890s, effectively discouraging collaboration. The Commercial Club may have been poorly supported in the 1880s, but it represented the best means for these disparate groups of men to come together to create a coherent vision for the city and establish development programs. Its closure in the late 1880s meant that local businessmen no longer had a space, or an institutional reason, to work through their differences and to attempt to resolve the challenges their community would face during the depression. Recurring and unresolved debates over the agricultural economy, public utilities, prohibition, and railroads only emphasized rifts among residents, while the emergence of the People's Party further complicated these divisions. Because no group could put forth a vision for future development that represented the consensus of a

majority of businessmen, they could not develop plans and programs that would help navigate the city through the depression and into the twentieth century. The most effective responses to the Bust were provided by individuals, setting up a dynamic that would carry through the early twentieth century when individuals' distinct, and often contradictory, understandings of appropriate economic and community development dramatically shaped Abilene's incarnation as a middle-class residential community in the early twentieth century.

Abilene suffered comparatively less than Wichita or Dodge City during the Bust. Central Kansas had been settled earlier and enjoyed relatively better soil and weather conditions than western Kansas. As a result, it had not been subject to the same unbridled land speculation, although land prices did increase considerably after 1883 and a number of residents did buy and sell land. Although Dickinson County farmers suffered a series of poor harvests and faced the same horrifically low prices for grain, their yields were generally better than those of farmers in western Kansas. They were less likely to abandon their farms and were more likely to remain solvent. Dickinson County's total assessed valuation fell from \$5.1 million to \$4.6 million between 1888 and 1898, suggesting that land speculation was less extreme in Dickinson County and that residents remained generally more prosperous than Ford County's (or other western Kansas counties). As a result, Dickinson County's total population dropped less than ten percent between 1888 and 1898, from 23,365 to 21,282, and represented a net gain of residents between 1885 and 1898. Because area farmers were less affected by drought and crop failures and were comparatively better off than those in western Kansas, Abilene's businessmen did not suffer the same economic pressures to the same degree that Wichita and Dodge City's businessmen did. Abilene's assessed valuation fell from \$815,000 to \$725,000 over the same period, suggesting the that

Abilene's residents were relatively insulated from the depredations of the Bust. That said, Abilene's population did decrease between 1888 and 1898, contracting from 5,187 to 4,017.²³⁰

Yet Abilene did suffer. In 1888, Abilene boasted five banks; ten years later, only Citizen's Bank remained. Two collapsed before 1890 and their presidents – Charles Lebold and John Bonebrake – abandoned Abilene in search of greener pastures. Lebold moved to St. Louis midway through his tenure as the city's mayor, setting up a battle among city council members over the direction of municipal politics. Bonebrake's departure was also problematic given his substantial investment in Abilene. In addition to serving as the president of Abilene's First National Bank, he was the owner of the city's first hardware store, the water works, the electric company, and opera house; and founder of the Abilene Investment Company. When he moved to Oklahoma, the water and electric companies, as well as the opera house, closed.²³¹

Although Abilene lost proportionally fewer residents than Wichita or Dodge City, it struggled with a far more atomized population throughout the 1890s. Members of the Courthouse Ring continued to dominate the town's political, economic, and social structures. Alfred Rice and John Johntz remained the clique's unofficial leaders throughout the 1890s and directed much of Abilene's economic life as owners of Citizen's Bank, a mortgage company, flour mill, and lumber yard.²³² In addition, both actively shaped its political and social climate. Rice served multiple terms as the city's mayor and was

²³⁰ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Sixth Biennial Report*, 117; and *Eleventh Biennial Report*, 592 - 593.

²³¹ Stewart Verckler, "Stewart Verckler's Newspaper Notes," Dickinson County Heritage Center, 1890 – 1. Interestingly, Thomas Kirby's bank survived until 1898. The bank commissioner observed that Kirby's bank failed "by reason of the banker being good to his customers." Bank Commissioner of the State of Kansas, *Fourth Biennial Report* (Topeka: J.S. Sparks, 1898), vi. Bonebrake opened a hardware store in Guthrie with his son. Several other residents moved to the Oklahoma Territory as well. *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*, May 23, 1889. Abilene's embryonic industrial sector also collapsed during the Bust. L.B. John's Carriage factory and the pottery works, both established during the boom, closed before 1890.

²³² The Abilene Mortgage Company, with an Eastern office in New Haven, Connecticut, was owned by several members of the Courthouse Ring: Rice (President), D.R. Gorden (Vice-President), and T.H. Malott (Treasurer). Johntz and W.B. Giles served as directors. *Abilene Weekly Reflector*, January 5, 1888.

Abilene's most recognized prohibitionist, while Johntz was an active member of the local Democratic Party, regularly serving as a delegate for Dickinson County Democrats at state conventions.²³³ They even established a short-lived social club – the Ideal Club – along the lines of Wichita's Coronado Club and Dodge City's Phenix Club. Rice, along with several other Ring members, owned the *Abilene Reflector*, which espoused mainstream Republican opinion, but was roundly denounced by all of the city's other newspapers. Moreover, the *Reflector* regularly won the city and county printing contracts; as the official newspaper of the city and county, it effectively controlled the dissemination of information throughout Dickinson County.²³⁴

Other residents and area farmers publicly criticized Ring members' behavior as being collusive, heavy-handed, and even illegal. Abilene's Resubmission-Republicans fought for control of the local Republican Party against prohibitionists, several of whom were Ring members. George Rohrer, the fiery editor of the Republican *Abilene Chronicle* and a longtime saloon owner, used the pages of his newspaper to attack Rice personally and the Ring more generally.²³⁵ Rohrer grew increasingly prominent in the local Republican Party during the 1890s, pushing a resubmission agenda that marginalized the party's prohibitionists. By 1895 Rohrer had become sufficiently powerful that the

²³³ Johntz's politics – apart from a brief flirtation with Populism, he was a lifelong Democrat – was an anomaly. Every other member of the Courthouse Ring was a staunch Republican. Even Rice, who was a member of the Prohibition Party, supported many Republican candidates. It is not clear why Johntz was a Democrat. He was born in Ohio and moved to Abilene in 1869. He does not seem to have served in the Civil War.

²³⁴ Other Ideal Club members included: J.M. Fisher, C.M. Harger, Gorden, J.B. Edwards, W.G. Cowles, F.L. Parker, J.H. Mahan, and C.H. Lebold. *Reflector*, March 19, 1891. In April 1888, Harger and Richard Waring, two of Rice's cronies, took control of the *Reflector*. Rice was not initially listed on the masthead, but was most likely involved with the paper when Harger and Waring took control.

²³⁵ The *Chronicle* claimed that "the *Reflector* is a gang organ with a ring in its snout that only prints what the bosses direct." *Weekly Chronicle*, July 31, 1896.

Democratic *Dickinson County News* declared him the Party's "political boss," insisting that the Dickinson County Republican central committee and its officials served only to do his bidding.²³⁶

Three other constituencies also contributed to the social dynamics of Abilene during the Bust period: Democrats, Populists, and Pennsylvania Germans (River Brethren). Democrats and Populists were not necessarily business partners or even friends in Abilene, yet both groups disliked the Ring's seeming stronghold over the town. Area Democrats acted as the voice of the town's small working-class and included a small, close-knit cadre of businessmen, who frequently condemned the behavior of Ring members (apart from Johntz, whose allegiance remained with the Ring). Dickinson County farmers were largely Republican prior to 1890, though the Democratic organ, *The Dickinson County News*, attempted to sway rural voters by persistently claiming to represent the interests of the entire county, rather than just its county seat. As such, the *News* opposed both the *Reflector* and the *Chronicle* for both their Abilene-centric attitudes and their shared political position. While the *News* often illuminated the boundaries existing between Abilene's factions, it did not exert significant influence in shaping Dickinson County politics.

In contrast, the rise of the People's Party in 1890 did substantively reshape Dickinson County's political landscape throughout the 1890s by luring large numbers of Dickinson County farmers from the ranks of the local Republican Party to a party that overwhelmed Republican voters in 1890 and in 1896. Populism in Dickinson County drew upon a well-established, long-standing antipathy county residents felt toward Abilene. It grew out of Dickinson County's well-organized Farmers' Alliance movement, which provided the new political party a space to nurture its ideas and a built-in base of followers.²³⁷ In

²³⁶ Interestingly, at least one of those fundraisers was held at one of Rohrer's restaurants, which the *Dickinson County News* described as a "joint café." *Dickinson County News*, January 10, 1895 and January 17, 1897.

²³⁷ The farmers' Alliance movement was particularly popular in central Kansas making it a hotbed for Populist organizing. Clanton, *Populism: Ideas and Men*, 8.

1890, Dickinson County Alliance members abandoned the Republican Party for the People's Party, which won every race that November. In so doing, it demonstrated a new fault-line in the ongoing divide between townspeople and county residents who had previously remained largely unified behind the Republican Party. In 1890, rural Dickinson Party residents voted Populist, while the two incorporated cities of Dickinson County – Abilene and Herington – voted Republican.²³⁸ The 1890 election results reflected a rebuke by farmers of both the Republican Party as the party of Abilene's business community and of the growing influence of Resubmission-Republicans like Rohrer within the local party machinery. Building upon farmers' feelings of alienation by both parties, the People's Party in Dickinson County gave voice to the county's farmers as a distinct group driven by issues and interests specific to them. By 1892, the Populists were publishing a weekly newspaper, *The Abilene Monitor*, that publicized their demands for railroad legislation, government regulation of grain markets, and tariff reform.²³⁹

At the same time, the People's Party failed to win contests in Dickinson County in 1892 or 1894, despite Populist wins throughout Kansas in 1892, in large part because area farmers did not trust the local Democratic Party enough to trade votes with them. Because Abilene businessmen continued to control the Democratic Party – and continued to support the Resubmission movement – the Dickinson County Democratic Party did not sufficiently reflect farmers' interests or concerns either. Even Johntz, an active Democrat widely respected by area farmers, defected to the People's Party for several years. In 1896, when the Democrats officially fused with the People's Party, it was an awkward arrangement that encouraged the demise of the People's Party in Dickinson County. Dickinson County Populists and

²³⁸ The *Reflector* belatedly claimed that it knew the People's Party would win, but argued that it had expected a cyclone, not an avalanche. *Reflector*, November 5, 1890.

²³⁹ McNall observes that religious values could trump economic concerns. He claims that farmers resisted leaving the Republican Party because it was the party of prohibition. In Dickinson County, Rohrer dominated the Republican Party, which further alienated area farmers. He also examines the language of Populists in creating a movement culture, *The Road to Rebellion*, 142 - 182. As with many Populist newspapers, the *Monitor* was relatively short-lived, starting publication in 1892 and closing in 1898.

Democrats could not agree to unite behind a common Vice-Presidential candidate and some Populists opposed any connection with the Democrats, splintering into their own, Middle-of-the-Road Populist Party option for the ballot. Although most Populists wound up voting for the Democratic combination and the Fusion ticket largely prevailed, the election results revealed how close many races were. Republicans won a few key races, including the State Senator and State Representative races.²⁴⁰

Railroad freight rates were a major point of contention for Dickinson County farmers. Unlike Wichita and Dodge City, Abilene had failed to become a rail center after Herington, in southeastern Dickinson County became the division point for the Missouri Pacific in the late 1880s. In the 1890s, Abilene largely preserved its rail capacity when other cities found their service reduced. It remained a stop on three major rail lines, including the Union Pacific, the Rock Island, and the Santa Fe. Only the Union Pacific reduced service through Abilene in the 1890s, removing two engines from the line in 1893. While businessmen in Wichita and many other central Kansas towns pursued competitive freight rates by appealing to the Board of Railroad Commissioners for relief, Abilene's businessmen did not. Abilene's Republican city council only pressed the Kansas Board of Railroad Commissioners for freight rate relief after more than two hundred Dickinson County farmers petitioned the Board for relief in 1896. And the timing of the council's request was suspect; they wrote their proclamation in late August after it became clear that the People's Party would officially fuse with Democrats, threatening the Republican hegemony in Dickinson County. Lower railroad freight rates became a Republican rallying cry that fall, but after the Populists won the election, Republicans smugly observed that freight rates went up under the Populist state government of John Leedy.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ The Democrats nominated Arthur Sewall, while both Populist Parties nominated Thomas E. Watson. *Reflector*, October 31 and November 4, 5, and 6, 1896. *Dickinson County News*, January 17, 1895 and January 14, 1897; *Abilene Monitor*, March 5, 1896.

²⁴¹ Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," 1893 – 2. *Reflector*, May 25, August 20 and 25, November 9 and 16, 1896.

Not all of Abilene's factionalism can be contributed to politics, however. Dickinson County's population of Pennsylvania Germans was largely apolitical, following the dictates of their religious sects.²⁴² Initially settling in southeastern Dickinson County, these prosperous farmers provided Dickinson County and Abilene with a welcome injection of capital in the 1870s and 80s. In the 1890s, members began moving into Abilene, where they exerted increasing influence over the economic, cultural, and physical development of Abilene as employees of Belle Springs Creamery and other Pennsylvania-German owned businesses. Although they remained insular – socializing largely with other Pennsylvania-German families – they built commodious homes, opened businesses, and founded churches, contributing to Abilene's economy and its urban landscape. Their values, as communicated through their businesses, would have a substantial impact on how Abilene would grow, and what Abilene would look like, in the twentieth century.

Abilene's businessmen could not negotiate these divisions – with one another, with other residents, or with Dickinson County residents. The city's Commercial Club had never been very active, especially after Ring members organized their own, exclusive promotional club. In 1888, the Club's meetings grew increasingly sporadic; by 1890, they had petered out completely. Lacking an organization to draw businessmen together to encourage discussions about the town's development, there was no consensus among businessmen about how to manage the Bust, or even determine the severity of it. Newspapers representing some of the different factions seemed to agree with the *Reflector's* assessment that "it is no more expected... that Abilene will be a great manufacturing or wholesale emporium like Chicago or Cincinnati, but there has grown up a faith in the city making one of the most substantial and pleasant home-cities in Kansas.... The prosperity of the surrounding country is the

²⁴² As noted in chapter one, the Pennsylvania Germans who migrated to Dickinson County in the nineteenth century came from three closely-related sects of the Dunkards: River Brethren, German Baptists, and United Brethren. Commonly identified as members of one sect – the River Brethren – by contemporary local newspapers and later accounts, the sects differed over doctrine, but were culturally similar. Upon moving into town, members of each group interacted comfortably with one another, further blurring the lines between each sect.

prosperity of Abilene...” Yet no one seemed to agree on what it meant to be a home-city, or how to go about achieving that goal. And businessmen were deeply divided over the effect of the rural economic crisis on Dickinson County farmers and how best to capitalize upon rural prosperity once it returned.²⁴³

The *Reflector* was slow to admit that an agricultural depression was affecting area farmers and townspeople when it hit in 1888 and continued to minimize the effects of the depression throughout the 1890s. As late as 1891, the *Reflector* claimed that Dickinson County residents were paying off their mortgages rather than borrowing more money, concluding, “does it look like poverty in old Dickinson?” When the *Reflector* did admit to economic difficulties, it attempted to minimize them, noting at one point that “A slight falling off from last year’s valuation is noticeable.... It will be seen that the chief falling off is in the valuation of city lots [and] parts of additions being removed from the city during the year.”²⁴⁴ The *Chronicle*, *News*, and *Monitor* continually denounced the *Reflector*’s position. In response to an 1895 editorial the *Reflector* ran condemning Dickinson County farmers for taking on “unnecessary” debt, the *Monitor* retorted that no loan agent would loan any Kansas farmer thousands of dollars given the low price of Kansas wheat. Even when the *Reflector* acknowledged problems – as in 1896 when it published the statement of a prosperous farmer claiming that much of his wheat crop was ruined by frost, the *Chronicle* snidely questioned why the *Reflector* did not refer to the farmer as a “a populist, a calamity howler, and a liar,” intimating that the *Reflector* unfairly labeled anyone who spoke of financial difficulties as a complainer.²⁴⁵

There was also considerable debate over what it meant – and if it was possible – to create a town comprised solely of middle-class families. From their differing vantage points, no faction could put

²⁴³ *Weekly Reflector*, January 29, 1891.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, November 5, 1891 and July 5, 1894.

²⁴⁵ *Monitor*, February 7, 1895 and the *Weekly Chronicle*, December 25, 1896.

forth a plan for future development that any other group would actively endorse. In 1892 the Belle Springs Creamery set up their headquarters in Abilene – a move that involved the construction of offices, as well as buildings, to store milk, separate it, and manufacture the creamery’s products – and encouraged dozens of Pennsylvania German families to move into Abilene. The success of the Belle Springs Creamery prompted the *Reflector* to promote Abilene as an up-and-coming dairy center, yet no other dairies opened in Abilene. The newspaper also endorsed other kinds of industrial development, encouraged by the announcement that the Industrial Department of the Santa Fe railroad was offering seed money to develop new industries in towns along its lines. Unlike the businessmen of Wichita and Dodge City, however Abilene’s businessmen did not go in search of new industries. For its part, the *Chronicle* lauded the efforts of Belle Springs Creamery, but never pushed for Abilene to become a dairy capital. Instead, the *Chronicle* proposed to look to the state government for growth, repeatedly urging residents to lobby the state legislature to build an insane asylum in Abilene, but the idea never gained widespread support among residents. The *News* offered an even milder solution, encouraging residents to fix up their homes and patronize Abilene’s merchants.²⁴⁶

When one group did move forward on a plan to benefit the community, they rarely received much support from other factions. When Abilene hosted the 1896 State Populist convention, its organizers insisted that it would showcase Abilene as a city to visiting Populist delegates and newspapermen throughout the state. Yet, preparations only highlighted residents’ inability to overcome their differences as different cliques angrily debated the city budget, electrification, and prohibition. Initially, businessmen appear to cooperate to organize the three-day event; at least one Democrat and several Republicans – including Rohrer and a Ring member – served on the executive

²⁴⁶ *Weekly Reflector*, November 26, 1896 and December 17 and 24, 1896. The *Chronicle* did acknowledge the success of Belle Springs Creamery. See, for example, *Weekly Chronicle*, July 17 and 24, 1896. The *Chronicle* proposed to build an asylum in Abilene twice, *Weekly Chronicle*, June 5, 1896 and January 22, 1897. The *Dickinson County News* repeatedly pushed Dickinson County residents to engage in home improvement and to buy locally. See, for example, *Dickinson County News*, April 16, 1896.

committee.²⁴⁷ The *Chronicle, News, and Monitor* soon complained that the *Reflector* was unsupportive of the convention organizers' efforts, however and a delegation from the convention's executive committee met with the editorial staff of the *Reflector* shortly before the convention began to "secure a cessation of the fool statements that sheet is making concerning the city's ability to take care of the crowd."²⁴⁸

The *Reflector's* criticism of the convention planners exposed the city's social fractures. Just a month before the convention began, executive committee members had not agreed where to hold the convention. Residents were slow to contribute money to fund convention expenses. The *Kansas City Star* and other outside newspapers covering the event complained that the city was disorganized and unprepared; residents did not supply enough rooms for delegates and Abilene's churches never provided the dinners that conventioners had been promised. In the end, hosting the state populist convention did little to promote Abilene to outsiders and only served to underscore residents' inability to come together for the good of their hometown.²⁴⁹

Moreover, the event reignited debates over prohibition and public utilities – especially electrical service – that further fueled local divisions. Although everyone agreed that electrical service was a good thing, Ring members uniformly believed that the city could not afford to pay for electricity given its current expenses. Other residents felt that the city could afford electricity if it located a revenue stream

²⁴⁷ *Monitor* February 27, 1896 and *Weekly Reflector*, July 2, 1896.

²⁴⁸ See, for example, *The Monitor*, March 26, 1896. *Weekly Chronicle*, July 17, 1896.

²⁴⁹ The *Reflector* decried the convention organizers' call for residents to open their homes to house conventioners and to sell dinners, insisting that predictions that the convention would bring more than 5,000 guests to town were overly optimistic. The *Reflector* was correct – only 1,800 visitors arrived for the convention – to which the newspaper sanctimoniously concluded, "there are a score of speculators in lemonade stands and those who have fitted up store rooms with cots who have lost money because the expected crowds were not on hand." *Weekly Reflector*, July 2, 23, 30 and August 6, 1896; *Weekly Chronicle*, June 19 and July 10, 17, and August 7, 1896; *Monitor*, July 2, 1896; and *Dickinson County News*, May 14, July 23, and August 6, 1896. Ironically, all four newspapers offered self-congratulations after the convention. The *Reflector* observed, "When Abilene does things, it does them right." *Weekly Reflector*, August 13, 1896. See also, *Weekly Chronicle*, August 14, 1896.

to cover the associated costs of lighting the city. Anti-prohibitionists supported fining liquor sellers to pay to light the town. Democrats and Populists, who felt that the railroads did not pay sufficient taxes, insisted that the railroads should be expected to shoulder some of the cost associated with lighting the town. Some residents further complicated the debate, arguing that the city should finance its own water works to ensure a cheap and reliable source of water and electricity.²⁵⁰

In anticipation of the upcoming Populist convention, Rohrer presented a proposition to the city council to provide arc lights to light the downtown. In response, the *Reflector* interviewed a broad cross-section of residents to gauge the public's position. Their responses highlight the role factions played in stymying any development-initiative. Ring-member W.B. Giles argued against Rohrer's proposal, claiming that the city needed to pay off existing debts before incurring new costs, asserting that "high taxes are a greater drawback to a town or city than anything else. There is no better argument to a prospective investor than that of low taxes..." Ring members planned to encourage industrialization in coming years by establishing low municipal tax rates. In contrast, the *News* and the *Monitor* promoted Rohrer's plan, arguing that Abilene's unlighted downtown might discourage potential residents from relocating to Abilene and damage its reputation among area farmers and residents of other towns. W.D. Nichols, a real estate broker and prominent Democrat, insisted that "the hundreds who will be here at next summer's convention will laugh at us if we have no lights." The *News* argued that Abilene's rival cities – including Herington in southeast Dickinson County – all had lighted downtowns, and claimed that Abilene would appear to be a lesser town to outsiders. Nichols and others believed that lighting Abilene's downtown would make the town appear both safe and prosperous. In the end, the city council followed the recommendations of Ring members and dropped

²⁵⁰ Bonebrake's waterworks had previously provided Abilene with both water and electrical service. When his bank collapsed in 1889 he sold the waterworks and electrical plant. On November 22, 1889, the city terminated its electricity contract with the new owners and purchased oil lamps and a few arc lights to be placed at city hall and key intersections in town, but the city was effectively without power throughout most of the 1890s. Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," 1889 – 3, and 1890 – 1 and 3.

the matter. The city remained without lights until Cleyson Brown was given the franchise to supply power to Abilene in 1898.²⁵¹

Battles over prohibition further emphasized these divisions and exacerbated existing social fractures. As discussed earlier, resident attitudes were far more nuanced than simply being in support of, or opposed to, the state's prohibition amendment. Republicans remained sharply divided over prohibition throughout the 1890s, although under Rohrer's direction, the Dickinson County Republican Party rejected platform proposals that would have lent support to Prohibition. While he pressed the Republican Party to remain neutral on prohibition, Rohrer's *Chronicle* pushed the local Populists to take a stand, which they gamely avoided doing.²⁵² Although Democrats remained opposed to prohibition, the *News* refused to ally with Rohrer, declaring that it did not condone breaking existing laws although it supported Resubmission.²⁵³ Instead, the *News* attacked Republicans, as represented by the *Reflector* and the *Chronicle*, for being hypocrites. Rohrer was an easy target; he flaunted his opposition to the state's prohibitory laws. Yet the *News* also attacked the *Reflector* and the members of the Ring, contending that the publishers of the *Reflector* – which included Rice – played a major role in facilitating and upholding a reciprocity agreement with area liquor sellers in which the jointists agreed to vote for Republican candidates, in exchange for promises from local officials to “uphold the violation of the

²⁵¹ *Weekly Reflector*, April 16, 1896. Nichols' position was echoed by J. Harding, A. Jeffcoat, and A.S. Davidson, all of whom served as delegates to area Democratic or Populist conventions. *News*, April 23, 1896. *Monitor*, November 7, 1895.

²⁵² *Weekly Chronicle*, August 14, 1896. A review of the *Monitor* reveals that local Populist organizers avoided the debate, viewing it as too divisive for the new political party. In this regard, the Dickinson County Populist position appears to have been consistent with the state Populist position.

²⁵³ *Dickinson County News*, January 17, 1895.

prohibitory law.” Significantly, Rohrer’s *Chronicle* supported the *News*’ claims against the *Reflector*, despite having been attacked by the *News* as one of the Republicans who negotiated this deal.²⁵⁴

Apart from intensifying the social fracturing of Abilene, debates over prohibition highlighted differences among residents’ definitions of what constituted appropriate development and which strategies might achieve growth. As discussed in chapter one, Prohibition supporters argued for enforcement, believing that Abilene needed to enforce prohibition to offer the sort of moral assurance that would encourage farmers to shop in town and to inspire potential residents and businesses to relocate there.²⁵⁵ In contrast, others proposed that the city ignore the laws because they felt that allowing liquor sales would benefit Abilene, either by luring laborers to move to Abilene or by capitalizing upon license fees or fines that could fund municipal projects, like electrification or school construction.²⁵⁶ In 1895, prohibitionists and their adversaries loudly debated whether to uphold the prohibition amendment at a series of city council meetings. Ultimately, the council voted to collect fines from liquor sellers rather than attempt to shut them down and send the offenders to jail.²⁵⁷ A year later, the council again took up the issue in anticipation of the state populist convention, debating whether the city should fine the jointists and if so, how much and how often. Some proposed to use this revenue

²⁵⁴ In a letter to the editor of the *Weekly Chronicle*, then-mayor Lebold (a Ring member) complained that the *Dickinson County News* had wrongly accused him of selling votes as the landlord of a recognized jointist. *Weekly Chronicle*, March 23, 1889. *Dickinson County News*, January 3 and 10, 1895. The *Chronicle* also claimed that “whiskey men had bought a political candidate, which, if “true, and subsequent proceedings indicate that it is, there is absolutely no danger of anyone going to jail in this county for violating the prohibitory law unless individuals proceed to its enforcement.” *Weekly Chronicle*, January 8, 1897.

²⁵⁵ Most of the city’s newspapers made caustic comments about other towns that had not successfully banned liquor. See the *Monitor*, February 7, 1895: “The joints are said to be closing in Topeka because of the sharp competition of the drug stores.”

²⁵⁶ *Dickinson County News*, January 3, 10, and 17, 1895.

²⁵⁷ *Dickinson County News*, January 10, 1895. Rohrer was a member of the Abilene city council during this debate (along with another liquor seller). He claimed that anti-prohibitionists had been responsible for his electoral victory and that he owed it to his constituents to support their cause, yet he did not appear to be the most verbose proponent of fining the town’s jointists. He was laudatory of the points presented by other members of the council in favor of fining liquor sellers, however.

stream to fund the purchase of street lights, while others posited that running a “wide open” town might appeal to visiting Populist delegates. The council’s decision was unsatisfactory to all parties. They decided against purchasing additional lights for the convention, but they agreed to continue to collect fines from area jointists. In an added twist, they decided to collect fines every other month rather than monthly, thereby giving every group something to complain about.²⁵⁸

Lacking any consensus on a vision and programs for local development, individual businessmen, acting out of their own self-interest and desires for the city, created businesses that would effectively direct Abilene’s physical, economic, and community development in the years to come. No single business would shape Abilene’s development more in the 1890s than the Belle Springs Creamery, however. Founded by John Forney, a member of the original River Brethren colony, and managed by his son, Elmer, Belle Springs opened their corporate offices and central plant in Abilene in 1892. The creamery immediately became the city’s largest employer. More than fifty Pennsylvania German families moved into town from their Dickinson County farms as the men took office and operation jobs, creating a demand for construction workers and new customers for the city’s merchants. The directors explicitly connected their business with their religion, employing Martin Hoffman, the preacher for the United Church of the Brethren in Abilene, as a cream tester. He regularly visited every cream station owned by Belle Springs to grade and approve the cream delivered by area farmers. Hoffman’s reputation among farmers for providing an “honest test” was derived, in no small part, from his identity as a co-religionist. Indeed, Belle Springs’ deep connections with area farm families, combined with their reputation for being honest dealers with the county’s farmers, did more to bridge the gap between disaffected Dickinson County farmers and Abilene businessmen than any other single project. Belle Springs Creamery offered farmers struggling with repeated crop failures and facing low prices for their

²⁵⁸ Prohibitionists furiously opposed the council’s plan, insisting that if the council ignored prohibition laws to earn money, they should at least collect the fines regularly. *Dickinson County News*, April 23 and May 21, 1896.

crops the opportunity to make a living. And farmers who brought their cream to Abilene were more likely to do business in town, patronizing local merchants.²⁵⁹

Charles Parker's carnival works presented a strikingly different perspective on what Abilene might look like in the future. Parker began his career as a janitor at the Dickinson County Courthouse, slowly purchasing amusement rides and games that he ferried to adjacent towns for festivals and other public gatherings. In 1894, Parker built and sold his first merry-go-round for \$1,500. A year later he was began building Ferris wheels and animated shooting galleries. Although he only employed a few men during the 1890s, the success of his carnival rides would make him a major employer in Abilene in the early twentieth century. While both Parker and Belle Springs employed a mix of clerical workers and laborers, the dairy's workers were better described as farmers, and most were Pennsylvania Germans with family in Dickinson County. The carnival works, and its work force, predicted a form of manufacturing and urban industrialization where laborers would constitute a distinct working class, living in a segregated neighborhood near factories that would produce the effluent of manufacturing. Some questioned whether this form of economic development was desirable.²⁶⁰

Parker and the Forneys had already begun to imprint Abilene with their own, particular visions of what Abilene could become when Cleyson Brown and his father, Jacob, were awarded a franchise to supply electricity to Abilene in 1898. Brown's electricity and telephone companies would become the city's major employers in the early twentieth century and would come to define Abilene's economy and urban culture. In lieu of a coordinated effort from the rest of the city's businessmen, these three

²⁵⁹ The creamery began operations in 1886 in southeastern Dickinson County. By 1892, butter production had increased from 3,070 pounds per year to almost 492,000 pounds drawn from creamery stations scattered around the county and management decided to consolidate operations by opening a central office and distribution center in Abilene. Paul D. Hoffman, *Chronicle of Belle Springs Creamery Company* (Abilene: Abilene Printing Company, 1975). In 1893, Belle Springs paid area farmers more than \$126,000 for their milk. Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," 1894 – 3 and 5, 1895 – 2 and 1897 – 1 and 3.

²⁶⁰ Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," 1894 – 3.

competing visions for Abilene's future development would jockey to define what Abilene would look like in the twentieth century. By 1898, Abilene had begun to recover from the Bust but local businessmen lacked the vision and community support to suggest what it might become.

Looking Toward the Twentieth Century:

Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's economy rebounded after 1898. Crop yields and commodities prices began a slow, steady increase and new farmers began to trickle back into the state. How each town responded to these economic shifts varied, based in large part upon the leadership models of each business community. Wichita's united front had already re-established a businessmen's organization that had continued the city's original vision to become a metropolis akin to Chicago and was actively pursuing new industries and new railroads. This model would sustain them through the first decades of the twentieth century as it would allow for the inclusion of new businessmen and would encourage collaboration among diverse interests within the business community and with other stakeholders. In contrast, Dodge City's model, which relied upon the leadership of a small group of pioneer businessmen, would evolve as these men aged and younger men came to the fore. In the 1890s, Dodge City's pioneer leaders set their town upon a viable course that a new generation of businessmen would follow in the twentieth century, establishing Dodge City as the commercial and transportation center for southwestern Kansas. Although Abilene's businessmen struggled to come together in the 1890s and could not identify a development plan that achieved any degree of consensus, local entrepreneurs provided several options for later businessmen to consider. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a new generation of businessmen would select from among these opportunities, helping Abilene grow into a novel community type, a residential city on the plains.

1918 Map of Kansas State Roads²⁶¹

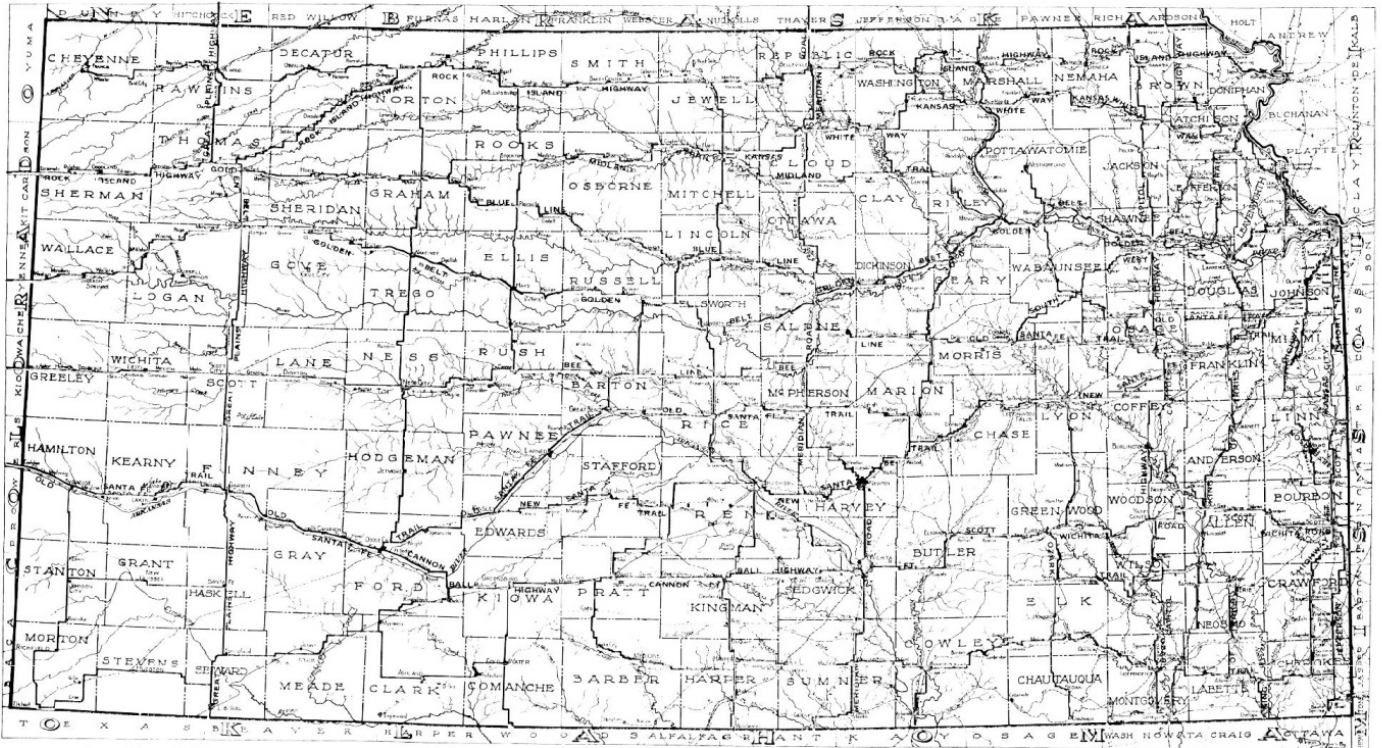
ARTHUR CAPPER GOVERNOR
CHARLES E. OFFICE
E. R. MOSES COMMISSIONER
R. S. TIERNAN COMMISSIONER
W. C. MARKHAM SECRETARY

OFFICIAL MAP



KANSAS STATE ROADS

W. S. GEAPHART
STATE HIGHWAY ENGINEER
M. W. WATSON
ROAD ENGINEER
F. W. EPBS
BRIDGE ENGINEER



²⁶¹ Kansas Highway Commission, Official Map of Kansas State Roads (1918).

<https://www.ksdot.org/Assets/wwwksdotorg/bureaus/burTransPlan/maps/SpecialInterestStateMaps/HistoricalKansas1918.PDF>

Chapter Three

The Golden Age of Agriculture: Town-Building in an Era of Agricultural Prosperity, 1900 – 1929

“Every town is just what its citizens make of it, no more nor no less.”

Dickinson County News, March 25, 1909

In the first three decades of the twentieth century Dodge City, Abilene, and Wichita rebounded from the Bust of the 1890s and steadily grew, fueled by a resurgent agricultural economy and transportation advances that included renewed investment in the state’s railroads and the growing popularity of the automobile. Unlike the boom of the 1880s, community development initiatives accompanied economic development as businessmen in all three towns embraced elements of the evolving progressive ideology to support projects that made their towns healthier, safer, prettier, and more livable. How businessmen in each town capitalized upon the agricultural boom and the opportunities better transportation offered differed significantly, however. And while each town’s businessmen proclaimed their city to be modern and progressive, the social dynamics of each business community substantively shaped how they implemented their progressive tendencies. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Dodge City, Abilene, and Wichita, embarked upon markedly divergent paths that stemmed, in large part, from local businessmen’s decisions about the extent to which they would tether their economies to agriculture and area farmers; how they would utilize and profit from railroads and automobiles; and when they would invest in community development programs.

Businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City worked through many of these decisions as members of businessmen’s organizations like the Chamber of Commerce that proliferated in the early twentieth century. These groups established formal mechanisms to foster a spirit of sustained collaboration among businessmen, allowing them to define a vision for their towns’ development and to

guide the implementation of programs in pursuit of these goals. These clubs did not master-plan each town or even control their development. Yet, they did reflect the broadly-defined will of local businessmen and fostered conditions that would encourage specific kinds of development to occur. They also reflected the concerns and values of middle-class businessmen throughout the United States in the early twentieth century. While they were designed to encourage the business community's participation and buy-in on urban development issues, by the 1920s, these groups were directed by a small, central group of representative businessmen and administered by a professional staff to ensure that these organizations were operated as rational and efficient actors representing the business community's interests. As the twentieth century progressed, Dodge City and Wichita's business communities were no longer led by the larger-than-life pioneers of the nineteenth century; but were increasingly defined by a series of less-recognized business owners and their managers who quietly worked in concert to advance the ambitions of the business community. Conversely, Abilene's business community was directed by a new, idiosyncratic brand of business magnate who combined religious values with progressive concepts of business management. These clubs provided middle-class businessmen with a sense of belonging in a society that felt impersonal and atomized given the nature of an increasingly corporatized, industrial nation. For status-anxious middle-class Kansans, they offered a sense of camaraderie in an unspoken battle to protect the status quo – their position and prosperity – in an uncertain world. Despite their common genesis as cattle towns, the social dynamics of each business community continued to define the role of businessmen's organizations in each town; thus, these groups reflected the relative unity – or division – of each town's businessmen; their connection to other residents and to area farmers; and their vision for what each town should be.²⁶²

²⁶² Historian Robert Wiebe has made similar claims. He claims that businessmen often preferred “efficiency to democracy” when they set up their organizations, centralizing power in a small board of directors with a professional staff to administer their programs. He also links the popularity of these clubs to middle-class businessmen's desire to be a part of a like-minded community that could protect a hard-won “relative security and a moderate prosperity.” Wiebe, Robert H, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement*

The Country Metropolis: Dodge City's Development as a Commercial and Transportation Center

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the 1890s, Dodge City's pioneer businessmen came together with the support of the community and successfully persuaded state officials to open a Soldier's Home in nearby Fort Dodge; lobbied the federal government establish a consolidated land office in Dodge City; and negotiated with Santa Fe railroad officials to expand rail facilities in town. Their successes allowed Dodge City to survive the bust and positioned the town to take advantage of the resurgence of the agricultural economy after 1898.²⁶³ In the early twentieth century, Dodge City flourished. Its business community transformed from one led by a small group of early pioneers largely supported by the rest of the community to one like Wichita's, in which businessmen came together as members of a strong, inclusive businessmen's organization representing a united front to define and direct their town's development. Pioneer businessmen Hoover, Gluck, Wright, Sutton, and Evans joined newer businessmen to found Dodge City's Commercial Club, but then stepped back, allowing these men to direct the city's economic and community development. Although Dodge City's businessmen transitioned through several incarnations of promotional organizations before founding the Chamber of Commerce in 1920, they worked within these organizations to further solidify Dodge City's position as the preeminent town in southwestern Kansas, serving as the region's trade and transportation hub while consciously representing their city as the region's most modern, metropolitan community.

Although the town's elder businessmen helped establish Dodge City's first Commercial Club, the town's most active business leaders during the first decades of the twentieth century were drawn from two distinct groups.²⁶⁴ The first group was composed of older businessmen like William J. Fitzgerald,

(Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1989; Boston: Harvard University Press, 1962), 18, 22, and 41. All citations refer to the Ivan R. Dee edition.

²⁶³ That they survived the Bust was no small accomplishment; dozens of western Kansas towns failed in the 1890s.

²⁶⁴ In the nineteenth century Hoover, Wright, Sutton, Evans, and Gluck largely piloted Dodge City's economic development. By 1900, however, the town's elder statesmen were all over fifty. Most of these men died by 1920.

Walter Locke, and Patrick H. Sughrue who moved to Dodge City around 1885 and persevered through the bust of the 1890s. Attached to this group were Lewis Pettijohn and Thomas Scates, contemporaries of Fitzgerald and the others, who arrived in Dodge City toward the end of the bust after being appointed the receiver and registrar to the federal land office. The second group was made up of men who either arrived in Dodge City in the early twentieth century or were the sons of local businessmen. Ulysses G. Balderston, for example, moved to Dodge City in 1905 to open a laundry. Otto Theis arrived a few years later as manager for Dodge City's utility company, Midland Water Power & Light Company. Jess Denious moved to Dodge City to purchase the *Dodge City Globe* in 1910. Paul Russell and Arthur Scates, on the other hand, were sons of local businessmen who grew into their positions as business leaders. Together, these men represented the future of Dodge City's business community – many lived in Dodge City until their deaths. They often worked for established businessmen for a time or married into their families. Thus, these newcomers were quickly integrated into the business community and, over time, assumed important leadership roles as the city's leading businessmen, politicians, and philanthropists.²⁶⁵

Dodge City's business community was relatively slow to create a promotional organization, although businessmen clearly recognized a need to organize. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Phenix Club remained Dodge City's most recognized business club despite its explicit role as a social club. Younger businessmen repeatedly attempted to create an organization that explicitly

Wright, the grizzled frontier freighter and buffalo hunter, was in particularly poor health, addicted to opium, and almost destitute, having lost his savings in a series of lawsuits over the course of the 1890s. Robert M. Wright, *Dodge City: The Cowboy Capital and the Great Southwest* (Wichita KS: Wichita Eagle Press, 1913) and C. Robert Haywood, *The Merchant Prince of Dodge City: The Life and Times of Robert M. Wright* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998). Until his death in 1914, Hoover remained active as the president of the State Bank of Dodge City, even serving as the city's first mayor after the town adopted commission-style government in 1911. Hoover willed Dodge City \$100,000 to use for civic improvements. He also gave thousands to designated local churches and other Dodge City philanthropies. Gerald Gribble, "George M. Hoover, Dodge City Pioneer," (PhD diss., University of Wichita, 1940).

²⁶⁵ Balderston was the oldest member of this group; he was born in 1867. Theis married Locke's daughter. He and Balderston both invested heavily in agriculture throughout southwestern Kansas. Denious married Pettijohn's daughter. Balderston, Denious, and Russell all died in Dodge City after 1950.

worked on town-building projects but their efforts failed to establish a viable club. In 1910, pioneer businessmen stepped in and lent their support to found the Commercial Club, which was structured similar to nineteenth century promotional organizations. Pioneers served as the directors and work was divided among several standing committees, including transportation, irrigation, immigration, and civic improvement. Directors actively worked to expand the member base, however. They designed a payment schedule targeted at young businessmen; as a result, Theis and several other young businessmen became active members and served on committees (but were not invited to become directors). The membership immediately began debating plans to build a new high school and lobbied Santa Fe officials to build a branch rail line into nearby Haskell County.²⁶⁶

In the second decade of the twentieth century, Dodge City's businessmen reflected larger national trends: middle-class businessmen's mania for establishing clubs with other, like-minded individuals, as well as the opposing tendency to fuse similar, but separate, clubs.²⁶⁷ In 1912, younger members complained that they were unable to take on leadership roles within the Commercial Club, provoking Paul Russell, Denious, and other young businessmen to found the Knickerbockers, a booster organization that they controlled.²⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Dodge City's pioneer businessmen were beginning to die off; those who remained active in business stepped down from the Commercial Club and spent their time at the Phenix club. By 1914, the Commercial Club's board of directors was made up of second-generation businessmen like Locke, and a few younger men like Theis who belonged to the

²⁶⁶ The *Dodge City Democrat* described the first-annual Commercial Club banquet in 1902, but later newspapers complained about the need for a promotional organization, so this club must have been short-lived. Fitzgerald served as president and Hoover was treasurer. *Democrat*, March 28, 1902 and December 25, 1903. *Dodge City Journal Democrat*, December 15, 1905. *Ford County Globe-Republican*, December 21, 1905; January 2 and 9, 1908; January 6, 10, 14, 20 and February 17, 1910. *Dodge City Journal*, July 24, 1939.

²⁶⁷ Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform*, 21.

²⁶⁸ Pioneers continued to dominate the powerful committees of the Commercial Club, especially the transportation committee, which meant that Hoover, Sutton, and Fitzgerald negotiated with Santa Fe officials for a new branch line.

Knickerbockers as well. In 1915, younger businessmen lobbied to combine all three clubs into one organization that could unify businessmen and consolidate the business community's support for select projects. The resulting Phenix Industrial Club's (PIC) board of directors were dominated by young businessmen, although Fitzgerald, Locke, Sughrue, and other second-generation businessmen were well-represented on committees. Unlike the Commercial Club, the PIC's committees were task-based; club members identified specific projects and committees were organized to achieve those goals. Pettijohn's committee attempted to find investors to build a bigger hotel in town; Sughrue and Arthur Scates investigated the city's first automobile advertising trip, a twenty-car caravan that drove east along the Santa Fe railroad line to Wichita, stopping at towns along the route, and returning along a southern route to visit merchants in the smaller towns located in the southern counties of Kansas.²⁶⁹

The PIC successfully bridged the generation gap that had existed between older businessmen like Fitzgerald and younger men like Balderston, yet its members struggled to keep up with the growing volume of projects. In 1917, local merchants proposed opening a credit bureau to establish themselves as credit-worthy with suppliers and wholesalers located in major United States cities, as well as to ensure that they did not extend credit to people and companies who would not honor their debts.²⁷⁰ Maintaining these kinds of records required a paid staff that the PIC was ill-prepared to provide. Instead, Locke, Balderston, and other Dodge City merchants approached Ford County merchants in other county towns to organize the Ford County Chamber of Commerce (FCCC), with the express goal of setting up and managing a credit association for county merchants and a more general plan to unite county businessmen to shape economic development in Ford County. Yet Dodge City's businessmen dominated the FCCC and the organizations overlapped significantly in their responsibilities and goals.

²⁶⁹ *Dodge City Daily Globe*, April 1 and May 20, 1915.

²⁷⁰ Credit bureaus became an important part of transacting business in the early twentieth century as merchants developed increasingly far-flung relationships with both suppliers and customers. With the advent of the automobile, customers could travel further afield to shop, resulting in more impersonal interactions between merchants and customers.

Within a year, the directors of the PIC agreed to share costs with the FCCC to hire a secretary to run the credit bureau and manage the day-to-day operations of both clubs. In 1920, Dodge City businessmen folded the two groups into a new organization, the Dodge City Chamber of Commerce and created the Ford County Merchants Credit Association to manage credit reporting. The Dodge City Chamber of Commerce became the city's permanent and most recognized businessmen's organization.²⁷¹

Dodge City's Chamber of Commerce reflected the growing interest in professional organizations, as well as the desire for efficient and rational administration but also mirrored the collaborative bureaucracy that Wichita's businessmen first adopted in the 1880s. Like Wichita's 1880s Board of Trade, Dodge City's Chamber of Commerce was largely operated by members who served as the organization's president, vice-president, treasurer, and board of directors. The general membership voted annually to fill these positions. The directors appointed members to standing committees – including transportation, finance, trade extension, and rural relations – that met regularly to address pertinent issues and to develop and carry out programs to achieve development objectives for Dodge City and Ford County. In addition, special committees were set up to manage specific short-term projects. In this regard, the Dodge City Chamber differed from the PIC, which only set up ad hoc special committees. Organizers believed that standing committees offered stability; as members stepped down and others replaced them, there would be no interruption in the services that the Chamber provided. Dodge City's Chamber continued to rely heavily upon its members to volunteer for the organization because volunteer labor kept the Chamber's expenses to a minimum, as well as keeping members actively connected to the organization. It also offered a means for new businessmen to become integrated quickly into the existing social dynamics of the city. Yet the Dodge City Chamber also

²⁷¹ The FCCC became a part of a state-wide credit association that tracked people and businesses who failed to pay their bills and served as an institution that provided space for businessmen throughout Ford County to collaborate on projects that would benefit the county more generally. *Journal*, January 17, 1919 and May 5, 1938. *Daily Globe*, January 16, April 21, May 3, 1917. Locke became the organization's first president. Balderston became vice-president.

employed a small professional staff to manage the office and administer ongoing programs. By 1930, Dodge City's Chamber of Commerce was peopled by a diverse mix of businessmen that included (now) established businessmen like Theis as well as relative newcomers like A.V. Emerson, who arrived in Dodge City to manage the telephone company and was elected president of the Chamber in 1927.

In addition to keeping members actively engaged in the work of the Chamber, by-laws and systems were put into place to provide members with avenues to make their voices heard and to resolve disagreements through civil debate within the organization, without arousing public passions. This is not to say that the Chamber was able to unify all businessmen all the time, but that the Chamber presented Dodge City's business community as a united front and effectively worked to represent the business community's interests overall. Petty grievances and personal differences continued to exist, some of which made their way into the Chamber's meeting minutes. Typically, these complaints focused on narrowly-defined issues, as when the owner of Home Bakery demanded that the Chamber "show more interest in the matter of bread being shipped in." Occasionally, they reflected personal animosities, as when the manager of a local café refused to join the Chamber because he disliked a director. And certainly, some members wielded more power than others. When the owner of the Dodge City Wholesale Grocery threatened to pull his membership (and the memberships of eight of his employees) if the Chamber did not take steps to prohibit area farmers from selling their produce in Dodge City "without proper license or tax," the Chamber swiftly responded by drafting an ordinance requiring all businesses operating within city limits to be licensed and lobbying the city to enact it.²⁷² Despite these criticisms, the Chamber continued to grow as businessmen recognized the organization's benefit to the city more generally. For its part, the Chamber continually attempted to build relationships with other stakeholders within Dodge City and with residents in the surrounding area,

²⁷² "The Joys and Sorrows of a Collector," (October 5, 1927) and "Minutes of Chamber of Commerce Directors' Meeting," October 6 and 17, 1927, in Dodge City Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes, 1927, Dodge City Chamber of Commerce.

partnering with other civic clubs to lobby for the establishment of a state normal school on the grounds of the old Soule College, working with area farmers through the local Farm Bureau, and with the city's railroad workers through a standing committee on shop relations.²⁷³

Despite the institutional shifts that occurred between 1900 and 1920, Dodge City's promotional clubs remained remarkably consistent in their goals. In the 1890s, Dodge City's businessmen determined to establish their town as southwestern Kansas's center for transportation and commerce, drawing primarily upon the region's farmers as customers. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Dodge City's promotional organizations continued this work. The Commercial Club's 1911 promotional tract called Dodge City the "Metropolis of Southwestern Kansas," given its position as a division point for the Santa Fe railroad and its location in "one of the best agricultural regions to be found." The PIC continued to emphasize Dodge City's position as the region's commercial and transportation hub, negotiating with Santa Fe railroad officials to build new branch lines into southern Kansas counties and organizing promotional tours to advertise Dodge City merchants and businesses. And the Chamber of Commerce further solidified Dodge City's position within southwestern Kansas, with committees charged with building up Dodge City's trade relationships with other Kansas towns, strengthening its relationship with area farmers, and consistently working with both railroad officials and railroad employees.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ The organizations lobbying for the state normal school included: Rotary, Kiwanis, B & P Women, Council of Clubs, Council of PTA, Real Estate Board, American Legion, Farm Bureau, and U.C.T. Minutes of Chamber of Commerce Directors' Meeting, January 13, 1927. The Chamber of Commerce provided office space for the Farm Bureau in its new offices in the Lora-Locke Hotel. "Minutes of Chamber of Commerce Directors' Meeting," November 30, 1927, in Dodge City Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes, 1927, Dodge City Chamber of Commerce. The Committee on Shop Relations operated for several years but may have been in response to a protracted strike by Santa Fe shop workers in 1922. *Daily Globe*, July 1 and 21, and August 4, 15, 16, 18, and 30, 1922. "Committees" (1924) and (1925) in Dodge City Chamber of Commerce Historical File, Dodge City Chamber of Commerce.

²⁷⁴ Dodge City Commercial Club, *Dodge City and Ford County Kansas: A History of the Old and a Story of the New*, (Larned KS: Tucker-Vernon Publishing, 1911), Ford County Heritage Center, 17 – 18. *Daily Globe*, April 1 and May 20, 1915. Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, *The Southwest Kansas* (September, 1925) and (September, 1926),

The agricultural economy in southwestern Kansas flourished in the first decades of the twentieth century and Dodge City's businessmen were eager to profit from it despite facing competition from businessmen in nearby towns, in cities like Chicago, Kansas City, and Wichita and from mail order companies like Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward.²⁷⁵ Between 1900 and 1920, the population of the nineteen counties that comprise Southwestern Kansas grew more than 160% – from 29,000 people to over 78,000. Ford County's population grew from 5,849 to 14,838. These new farmers put thousands of acres under the plow – by 1920, the number of acres of land devoted to growing wheat in Ford County alone increased tenfold – from 23,000 acres to 237,000 acres, while prices for wheat steadily increased.²⁷⁶ Kansas farmers enjoyed record profits, which they used to purchase a variety of consumer goods and luxury items in addition to basic staples. Like other Kansans, they became eager consumers of new technology, including automobiles, tractors, farm implements, telephones, and radios.²⁷⁷ A new retail sector flourished – by 1920, Dodge City had become the region's automotive center with a major

Ford County Heritage Center. Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, "Committees, 1924" and "The Work of the Dodge City Chamber of Commerce," (1929), Dodge City Chamber of Commerce.

²⁷⁵ Hal Barron offers a good background of the role of mail-order catalogs in subverting small town business: Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870 – 1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 155 – 192. Miner views opposition to mail order catalogs as a phenomenon that began in the 1920s, but farm families began shopping from mail order catalogs much earlier. Craig Miner, *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas, 1890 - 1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 214 – 217.

²⁷⁶ In the 1890s, wheat sold for less than fifty cents a bushel. By 1914, wheat prices were at eighty-four cents a bushel. World War I further increased wheat prices as European fields were destroyed and the international market looked to American wheat farmers for flour. By 1920, wheat was valued sold for \$1.86 a bushel (down from a war-time high of \$2.06 per bushel). State Board of Agriculture, *Twelfth Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture) and *Twenty-Second Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture, 1921), 528. After 1920, crop prices and yields dropped, but this shift did not affect Dodge City merchants until after 1929.

²⁷⁷ David Danbom, Ronald Kline, and Craig Miner make this claim. Kline feels that farmers initially resisted the charms of the automobile, but Miner refutes that position regarding Kansas. Danbom, David B., *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 161 – 162; Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 55 - 57; and Miner, *Next Year Country*, 82 – 84 and 154 – 162.

thoroughfare lined with dealerships, gas stations, and repair shops.²⁷⁸ The construction and building supplies sector also proliferated.²⁷⁹ A number of wholesale firms set up operations in Dodge City, selling dry goods and groceries or automotive parts and gasoline, to merchants in smaller southwestern Kansas towns.²⁸⁰

Businessmen organized fairs, conventions, and agricultural-education meetings to entice farmers to shop in Dodge City. Yet, early events were unsuccessful, in large part because local businessmen rarely solicited area farmers' input but couched the design and value of these programs upon a premise of a shared camaraderie, or brotherhood, with area farmers. In 1907, Dodge City businessmen planned a county fair, which they envisioned as an opportunity for farmers to showcase crops and livestock while providing a venue for local merchants to advertise their wares. Although the fair was intended to be representative of all Ford County residents, only Dodge City businessmen served on the fair board. Not surprisingly, fair turnout was low and the enterprise was deemed a failure. Afterwards, the editor of the *Dodge City Globe-Republican* observed that "the fellows in town wanted to start something that would benefit the fellows on the farms, and thought that if they would start it the other fellows would take hold and make a success of it. Some of the fellows in the country did not take it that way...." He suggested that future fairs "should be started by an organization made up of men from the various parts of the county, from the farms and ranches. It is these men who must furnish the

²⁷⁸ R.L. Polk, *Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory* (Chicago: R.L. Polk, 1900) and *Ford County Directory*, 1920, Ford County Heritage Center.

²⁷⁹ At the turn of the century, Dodge City had just one lumberyard, five carpenters, a plumber, and one stone mason. By 1920, the city boasted five lumber yards including a branch of Wichita-based Anawalt Lumber Company and the headquarters of C.C. Isely Lumber Company, which had yards in seven smaller towns in the region. Thirteen general contractors and almost thirty-five carpenters, in addition to a battery of cement workers, painters, plasterers and plumbers, lived and worked in Dodge City. Moreover, by 1920 four of the city's twelve self-identified manufacturers fabricated building materials, including sheet metal, cabinets, and cement blocks. Polk, *Kansas State Gazetteer* (1900); *Ford County Directory*, 1920, 21 - 29.

²⁸⁰ By 1920, five Dodge City wholesale firms sold a mix of produce, ice cream, and other groceries. Two wholesalers sold oil and gasoline, while another sold tires. Only the Dodge City Alfalfa Mill acted as an agricultural wholesaler, supplying feed and seed to smaller feed and grain stores throughout the region. *Ford County Directory*, 1920, 31.

exhibits, and the great part of the attendance.... The townspeople will do their part in swelling the attendance each day." In so doing, he clearly acknowledged the differences between the two groups and the power dynamic necessary to make the fair a success.²⁸¹

In a similar vein, Dodge City businessmen attempted to direct the Ford County Farmers' Institutes, although farmers had already begun the process of setting up institutes in smaller towns throughout Ford County. After hosting several meetings with disappointing attendance, local businessmen conceded that Dr. C.A. Milton, a wealthy, pioneer businessman of Dodge City, was a poor choice to head the group, despite earlier claims that his "enthusiasm in the agricultural future of Ford County will do much to get people interested in the Institute." Only after Dodge City businessmen ceded control of the Institute to area farmers did Ford County farmers evince any real interest in the Ford County Farmers' Institute.²⁸²

Area farmers did not acknowledge a kinship with Dodge City's businessmen but they appeared to recognize Dodge City as the region's commercial center. The PIC brought conventions, chautauquas, veteran reunions, large-scale revival meetings, and county-wide farm auctions to Dodge City - events that required a larger population base and facilities like opera houses, parks, cafes, and hotels that smaller towns could not offer.²⁸³ The city built a motorcycle track and became nationally known for its

²⁸¹ *Globe-Republican*, August 22, 29; September 5, 12, and 19, 1907.

²⁸² Farmers Institutes were an outgrowth of the agricultural extension program directed by the Kansas State Agricultural College (today known as Kansas State University) and the precursor to the Farm Bureau program. Miner, *Next Year Country*, 195-199. Thomas D. Van Sant, *Improving Rural Lives: A History of the Farm Bureau in Kansas, 1912 – 1992* (Manhattan KS: Sunflower University Press, 1993). As historian Hal Barron observes, farmers did not appreciate programs being imposed upon them by area businessmen, government, or even national advocacy groups. Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, 141-149. Farmers rarely supported Farmers' Institutes, county fairs, or the Farm Bureau if the programs were dominated by outsiders. Farmers' Institutes were popular in many parts of Kansas, despite being administered by the Agricultural College, when local farmers organized. *Globe-Republican*, January 7 and 14, 1909; January 13 and 27, 1910. *Daily Globe*, January 12, 1913 and December 12, 1914.

²⁸³ Barron examines the complex relationship between farmers and towns, *Mixed Harvest*, 204-209.

racers. In 1917, the PIC organized the first automobile show in Western Kansas, drawing almost 18,000 visitors in three days. Unlike previous tent revivals or the annual veteran's reunion, it did so with the express purpose of inspiring these visitors to purchase goods from Dodge City merchants. Similar shows had been held in larger cities like Kansas City and Wichita, and this event promised to offer the same kinds of exhibits and programs, but organizers limited participation to Dodge City dealers, mechanics, and merchants. The event surpassed even the most optimistic expectations. The PIC correctly identified the farmers' growing desire for automobiles and organized an event that could not have been replicated at any of the smaller towns in the region.²⁸⁴ When the Chamber of Commerce was established, the directors pressed this advantage, actively pursuing conventions. In 1927 the Chamber hosted more than eleven conventions, drawing more than 10,000 people to Dodge City and providing the city with an estimated \$92,000 in additional revenue.²⁸⁵

Dodge City's position as a regional rail center played a critical role in facilitating the town's position as a commercial center for southwestern Kansas. The Santa Fe's extensions into southwestern Kansas and Oklahoma in 1914 and in 1922 were a direct outgrowth of the relationships early businessmen had nurtured with Santa Fe rail officials and were financially beneficial to both parties.²⁸⁶ In 1910, the Commercial Club successfully negotiated with Santa Fe officials to build a rail line from Dodge City into the state's most southwestern counties, extending all the way to Elkhart, the new county seat of Morton County. Although the Santa Fe largely funded this extension through a land speculation scheme, Dodge City's businessmen successfully lobbied Ford County residents to pass a

²⁸⁴ *Daily Globe*, January 9; February 5, 7, 17, 23, 24, and 26, 1917. At this point, Dodge City was the only town in southwestern Kansas with multiple car dealerships. Car dealers from other towns, including Wichita, asked to be represented at the show, but the PIC limited participation to Dodge City dealers.

²⁸⁵ Unlike the hyperbolic estimates provided by newspaper editors and promotional organizations in the 1880s, revenue estimates in 1927 were calculated using an explicit algorithm laid out in the Chamber's annual report. *Journal*, November 18, 1920. "Committees, 1924" and "Committees, 1925." Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, *Year-End Report*, 1927.

²⁸⁶ The Santa Fe even named a station west of Dodge City after Sutton. *Globe-Republican*, February 22, 1906.

bond measure to finance a portion of the construction. In 1922, the Santa Fe built another extension from Dodge City into southern Kansas and western Oklahoma. These lines opened vast areas of Kansas and Oklahoma prairie to agricultural settlement and gave Dodge City privileged access to farmers and the growing rural centers located along the rail lines, making Dodge City a gateway city for nine Kansas counties. Dodge City merchants and wholesalers exploited the city's advantage, marketing directly to these residents. Annual "Get Acquainted Trips" took more than 150 Chamber members, along with the Dodge City Municipal Band, a glee club, and a troupe of clowns, to visit towns along these lines to meet residents and area farmers. Although Dodge City's businessmen purportedly "left their order books at home," they eagerly boosted their hometown, advertised their businesses, and built connections with potential customers. Dodge City also reinvented its county fair as the Great Southwest Fair, an event broadly conceived to encompass any farm or community within access of the Santa Fe or Rock Island railroads, both of which offered special excursion rates to Dodge City so that everyone could participate.²⁸⁷

Similarly, local businessmen were quick to capitalize upon the growing popularity of the automobile, working with county and state officials, Good Roads Association lobbyists, and businessmen in other Kansas towns to develop a network of roads that would draw farmers and tourists to Dodge City. Local merchants, including pioneer businessman Ham Bell, were early automobile owners and became among the first auto-related business owners in southwestern Kansas. Bell, for example, owned a livery stable when Dodge City was a cattle town; he turned it into one of the city's first garages. In 1916, he opened one of the first car dealerships in southwestern Kansas, selling Oakland automobiles.

²⁸⁷ *Daily Globe*, January 6, 8, and 10, 1912. The 1912 extension originated in Dodge City and moved southwest through Gray, Haskell, Stevens, and Morton counties. A branch line at Sublette extended the Santa Fe's reach into Grant and Stanton counties. The 1922 extension originated in Dodge City and traveled south into Oklahoma, through Meade, Clark, and Seward counties before connecting with several Oklahoma cities. Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, *The Southwest Kansan*, (September 1925) and (September 1926). Miner explains the Santa Fe's land promotion scheme in detail; Miner, *Next Year Country*, 150 – 153.

In addition to promoting their businesses by organizing the region's first automobile shows, several car dealers served on the Chamber of Commerce's Roads committee. Through the Chamber and as representatives to the Kansas Good Roads Association they lobbied the state for road construction and improvement, as well as permanent signage and better maps to direct motorists to Dodge City. The Chamber promoted the development of tourist camps to house motorists and an automobile race track. Dodge City was fortuitously located along the Santa Fe Trail Road (later designated U.S. Highway 50), an early highway that ran from Kansas City to Los Angeles, but Bell and other automobile merchants negotiated with other stakeholders to ensure that Dodge City was included in plans for additional roads moving through Texas and a more direct route to Wichita, as well as an extensive network of local roads designed to draw area farmers to Dodge City. In so doing, these men made Dodge City an automobile center for southwestern Kansas; they also ensured that motorists would inevitably drive through Dodge City, fueling another economic sector – tourism – to diversify Dodge City's economy.²⁸⁸

Dodge City businessmen drew upon their progressive impulses to entice outsiders to Dodge City. Progressivism was a marketing tool; community development projects pursued by local businessmen presented Dodge City as a modern, progressive community, qualities they believed would impress outsiders. In the first decades of the twentieth century, businessmen's organizations successfully petitioned the city government to pave city streets, construct sewers, open a park, and light the streets of the central business district to create a "White Way" like the lighted boulevards in other major

²⁸⁸ *Daily Globe*, January 24, 1912; June 8 and 15, 1914; August 30, 1924; July 30, 1925; August 7, 1926; April 9, 1927; and April 12, 1928. *Journal*, May 13, 1915 and August 3, 1916. The 1927 meeting minutes for the Chamber of Commerce described tourist guides published and efforts to add gravel and sand to county roads. Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, "Committees, 1925." The Chamber's year-end report for 1929 explicitly recognized good road's value in advancing trade. Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report* (1929), Dodge City Chamber of Commerce. Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, 198-204.

cities.²⁸⁹ By 1911, Dodge City residents could boast of a reorganized commission-style city government, a municipally-owned waterworks, and a Carnegie library. The Commercial Club's promotional pamphlet highlighted these improvements, claiming that a commission-style government "means progress, honesty, and economy," while noting that Carnegie libraries are only established "in cultured communities and prominent cities." When the city first illuminated its White Way, the editor of the *Daily Globe* proclaimed it to be "a great improvement... the town is to be congratulated upon the metropolitan airs it is able to put on." Dodge City newspapers eagerly reported others' reactions to these improvements, noting with pride the number of county residents on hand when the street lights came on and reprinting the reports of the event provided by newspapers representing other towns in Southwestern Kansas.²⁹⁰

Dodge City's businessmen explicitly used progressivism to set their town apart from rural settlements and small towns in southwestern Kansas and to underscore Dodge City's singular status as the region's commercial and transportation center. This positioning was a shift from businessmen's previous narrative of a shared kinship with area farmers. Despite businessmen's attempts to reclaim that kinship in the first years of the twentieth century, Populism appeared to have irrevocably destroyed any illusion that businessmen and farmers shared a common political philosophy, economic interests, and values. Instead, progressivism celebrated businessmen's middle-class status and emphasized their cultural distinctiveness within western Kansas. In so doing, progressive programs also attempted to ease middle-class fears of a loss of status, identity, or prosperity in a changing world. If a vibrant, relatively affluent customer base ensured businessmen's prosperity, Dodge City's businessmen's clubs,

²⁸⁹ Stories covering decisions to construct sewers, pave streets, open a park, and create a White Way are scattered throughout Dodge City newspapers, including: *Daily Globe*, January 16 and 27, and March 5, 1912, October 14 and 31, 1912, January 20, 21, and 30, February 10, 11, 14 and 28, October 15, and November 10, 1914; *Journal*, September 12, 1913, November 28, 1913, and May 6 and 13, 1915.

²⁹⁰ *Daily Globe*, December 27, 1913 and May 18, 1915.

civic groups, philanthropies, and cultural organizations offered a sense of belonging in a town that was distinct from the rural areas surrounding it and increasingly populated by new residents. The reorganization of the city government reflected middle-class values of professionalism, efficiency, honesty, and economy and promised to provide stability and security. Thus, while the visible manifestations of progressivism were expected to reinforce notions of Dodge City as the premier city in southwestern Kansas and to inspire outsiders to visit Dodge City, progressivism also served to define status-anxious middle-class residents as a group and to provide them with the kinds of programs and systems to protect their position and ease their fears.

Between 1900 and 1929, Dodge City's businessmen consolidated their position as the center for transportation and trade in southwestern Kansas. Under the aegis of a series of businessmen's organizations, Dodge City's business community continued to cultivate relationships with Santa Fe railroad officials to extend the railroad into remote areas of Kansas and Oklahoma. They were quick to exploit the popularity of the automobile and enthusiastically promoted the development of local roads and highways to draw travelers into Dodge City. These efforts turned Dodge City into a gateway city for much of southwestern Kansas – a location through which most of the region's travelers, area farmers' produce, and goods from around the country passed. Dodge City's businessmen benefited enormously from this status and further capitalized upon their position by organizing and hosting any number of meetings, conventions, races, revivals, reunions, and exhibitions that drew even more visitors to town. In 1929, the Dodge City Chamber of Commerce reported that the city earned more than \$334,000 in revenue from these events that year.²⁹¹ By 1929, Dodge City was not only the largest, most prosperous town in southwestern Kansas, it had also outpaced Abilene; growing to more than 10,300 residents and

²⁹¹ Dodge City Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report* (1929).

an assessed valuation of almost \$10 million. Dodge City's businessmen had accomplished their goal to establish their town as the commercial and transportation center for southwestern Kansas.²⁹²

The Residential City: Abilene as a Middle-Class Community Archetype

Unlike Dodge City and Wichita's business communities, Abilene's businessmen did not come together to guide their city through the economic dislocation of the 1890s. Instead, factions established in the 1870s grew more and more entrenched; any economic development that occurred was the result of individuals acting out of their own self-interest. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Abilene's factionalism finally cooled, but it was not accompanied by a show of unification. Local businessmen attempted to establish businessmen's organizations several times before finally creating a viable Chamber of Commerce in 1925, but these groups never appeared to enjoy the same broad level of support and members did not collaborate like those in Dodge City or Wichita. Instead, individuals largely directed Abilene's economic and community development. Rice and fellow Ring members continued to dominate local politics and influenced the local economy and businessmen's organizations for the first decade. Cleyson Brown and John and Elmer Forney, who drew upon their upbringing as Pennsylvania Germans in developing their business practices, grew increasingly influential as they dramatically expanded businesses they established in the nineteenth century, becoming the city's major employers.²⁹³ Indeed, as Brown's business conglomerate continued to grow, his brand of welfare capitalism, strongly colored by his German Baptist upbringing, spread out through the community and substantively affected Abilene's economy and culture. Brown directed the city's economic and cultural development in no small part because Abilene's business community failed to articulate a coherent

²⁹² Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Twelfth Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture, 1901), 722, and *Twenty-Seventh Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1930), 378.

²⁹³ Both the Forneys and Brown were Pennsylvania Germans; the Forneys were members of the River Brethren congregation and Brown was a German Baptist.

vision that was widely supported by local businessmen. Without clear goals, Abilene was a paradox; a quiet country town dominated by several companies with a large regional reach.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the social dynamics of Abilene's business community evolved as the Ring's influence dissipated and newcomers arrived. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Ring members Alfred Rice and John Johntz, continued to exert control over the city's commercial, social, and political affairs.²⁹⁴ Rice's last three terms as mayor – in 1908, 1909, and 1911 – were his most contentious. Despite having loudly insisted that the city could ill-afford to pay for electricity throughout the 1890s, Rice and a city council stacked with Ring members voted to fund an expensive street paving project in 1908. In 1909 Rice was re-elected but townspeople also elected three former farmers to the city council; the council was largely composed of men who opposed Rice.²⁹⁵ Council members immediately began fighting with Rice over the city budget, arguing that the mayor "overdrew the funds [from the street and alley committee] last year in making the street improvements, many of which were contracted for without the consent or knowledge of the council..." Rice responded to these charges with a letter published in three of the city's papers, arguing that the streets and alleys committee made the contracts and expended the money after having received the approval of the previous council.²⁹⁶ In response, the newly-elected council approved an ordinance to do away with the marshal position, ostensibly to save the city money. Residents were outraged. The city council's action

²⁹⁴ Johntz died in 1909; Rice died in 1925.

²⁹⁵ Rice ran as an independent and beat out T.R Conklin, the Republican candidate.

²⁹⁶ *Abilene Weekly Chronicle*, May 12, 19, June 9, 23, 30, July 7, August 18, September 15, and October 6, 1909; *Abilene Democrat*, June 24, July 8, August 19, September 2 and 9, 1909; *Abilene Weekly Reflector*, June 10, 17, 24, July 8, 15, August 12, 19, September 9, and October 7, 1909; and *Dickinson County News*, May 13, 1909.

coincided with the arrival of migrant laborers looking for work at area farms during the upcoming harvest and residents claimed that the hoboes had infested the town.²⁹⁷

Although the city council ultimately relented and rehired the city marshal, the rancor displayed by the mayor and the city council was destructive. Newspapers in other communities gleefully recounted the political drama playing out in Abilene, making Abilene appear simultaneously ridiculous and dangerous.²⁹⁸ While this incident was the most spectacular case of factionalism played out in local politics, it was hardly an isolated incident. Rice continued to fight with the city's prominent Democrats over prohibition. The Ring fractured and former member Charles Harger, the editor of the *Abilene Reflector*, publicly charged Rice with cronyism during his tenure as mayor.²⁹⁹ As a result, Abilene's business community remained mired in factionalism for the first decade of the twentieth century. The *Abilene Democrat* complained that "the petty jealousies and petty revenges... are making Abilene the butt of criticism for miles around the town." The *Abilene Weekly Chronicle* referred to unidentified residents, who had personal grievances with Mayor Rice. Even the *Dickinson County News*, which attempted to stay out of the fray claiming that the newspaper "is opposed to such city fights and never was able to figure out what was really gained by such a scrap," circumspectly denounced the behavior of

²⁹⁷ The *Weekly Chronicle* laid the blame squarely on the doorstep of the city council claiming, "the tramp nuisance, which owes its existence entirely to the refusal of the council to give the city a marshal, has grown to such proportions that women are not only afraid to leave their homes in the evening, but also insist that their husbands or grown sons remain at home." *Weekly Chronicle*, June 23, 1909.

²⁹⁸ The *Chapman Advertiser* quipped that "it is a never-ending source of wonder why the officials of Abilene will not work in harmony with each other and with the tax payers of the city. It appears to the casual observer that Abilene wants to go back to forty years ago when every man carried a six-shooter for self-protection and where another 'Wild Bill' would be necessary." Quoted in *Weekly Chronicle*, June 30, 1909.

²⁹⁹ Richard Waring and Charles Harger, publishers of the *Reflector* fell out with Rice in the late 1890s. In a tongue-in-cheek piece about Rice, they observed that Rice had been tied to several schemes over the years, including a "gas bond steal, a waterworks steal, a city hall bond steal, a city scrip steal, and various other transactions charged to be illegal." *Daily Reflector*, March 30, 1897.

Abilene's factions, noting that "there are things happening in this town every day that if published would cause an awful stir."³⁰⁰

The factionalism that had divided the town since the cattle period began to fade after 1910 as members of the Courthouse Ring and their detractors aged and loosened their grip on civic affairs. Unlike their fathers, J. "Ed" Johntz, Michael H. Malott, and Jesse T. Nicolay were less partisan than their fathers as their influence over Abilene's economic, political, and social systems grew. Nicolay, the son of a Courthouse Ring supporter, partnered with Rice and Johntz to open the region's largest lumberyard in 1900. In 1907, the trio opened a large wholesale grocery. They also continued to operate the city's oldest bank along with M.H. Malott and his father, Thomas. Although these men clearly benefitted as the second generation of pioneer businessmen, they were less divisive than their fathers, in part because they were less involved in civic affairs. They joined many local organizations, and occasionally led local groups like the Commercial Club or the Lions Club, but tended to eschew politics.³⁰¹

Over time, they were joined by a host of businessmen who came to Abilene as adults. George Rogers arrived in Abilene to assume the position of manager for the city's Bell Telephone exchange and later became the vice-president of United Light & Power. He also became a longtime leader for the city's Commercial Club. Rogers and others were unaffected by the factionalism of earlier decades and were more willing to work with others. Like Rogers, they were more likely to be managers than

³⁰⁰ *Democrat*, August 19, 1909. The *Weekly Chronicle* alleged that "one man has a personal grievance which is known to everyone. At least one man's vote is in the pocket of a man not on the council," *Weekly Chronicle*, June 23, 1909. *Dickinson County News*, April 8 and June 24, 1909. The most vocal critic of Rice in the nineteenth century, G.W.C. Rohrer, moved to Oklahoma by 1902.

³⁰¹ J.T. Nicolay's father Mathias relocated the family to Abilene in 1866, but he spent his twenties working for lumber dealers and moved throughout the state of Kansas before settling back in Abilene in 1900. In the 1910 booster pamphlet, Rice, Johntz, and Nicolay are "numbered among the most influential of Abilene's citizens. Their fair dealing with the trade and integrity of purpose have won for them a name of high standing which is without a peer. They have long been identified with the growth and prosperity of the city and are always willing to support any movement which would in any way add to the general welfare of its people." *Abilene, Kansas: Past and Present Progress and Prosperity* (Abilene: Freeman Publishing Company, 1910), 8 – 9. Thomas H. Malott partnered with Johntz and Rice to found Citizen's Bank in 1885.

merchants and tended to view themselves as professionals. As such, they were interested in establishing an efficient system of administration and later iterations of their businessmen's associations reflected their concerns. Apart from a few, like Rogers who remained active in Abilene until his death, they were only active in the city's civic improvement organizations and municipal politics for short periods of time, effecting only short term influence over Abilene's development.

At the same time, the sons of Pennsylvania German farmers who had migrated to Dickinson County beginning in 1879 increasingly moved into Abilene. As increasingly influential members of Abilene's business community, they discouraged factionalism by refusing to engage with it. They worked at Belle Springs Creamery, founded by John Forney, a member of the original River Brethren colony, and managed by his son, Elmer. They also worked at Cleyson Brown's telephone and electric companies, which rapidly expanded over the course of the first decades of the twentieth century. The sons of these early pioneer farmers were not as devout as their parents but they shared many of their cultural values. As such, they were successful, self-sufficient businessmen who went quietly about their affairs and were deeply committed to operating them efficiently and ethically. These values were antithetical to factionalism and as their businesses grew, their principled and conservative fiscal and cultural tenets permeated Abilene's business community. Although they remained socially insular and largely avoided joining political campaigns or running for elected office, they did become active in local businessmen's organizations and their involvement influenced how members of the business community worked with one another.³⁰²

Abilene's Commercial Club reflected the shifting demographics of the local business community. Organized in 1899, it initially drew support from all facets of the business community, suggesting that

³⁰² Emerson Coulson was an exception; his parents were members of the United Brethren church but he became a Methodist. He was elected to the city council, where he became a vocal opponent of Rice. Both John and Elmer Forney, as well as Brown, served on the executive committee of Abilene's Commercial Club for many years.

the business community might finally come together. T.H. Malott publicly backed it; as did several Pennsylvania German businessmen. Even critics of the Courthouse Ring approved, although they were quick to add that a commercial club would only benefit Abilene if it were “properly managed.”³⁰³ The organizational meeting was lightly-attended, but inclusive, and the subsequent committee appointments reflected different factions of Abilene’s business community. John Johntz, when called upon to talk about the club’s organization, emphasized that this club should be for all businessmen, noting: “we want it to be for the city, not for any particular clique.”³⁰⁴

Although conditions appeared ripe for Abilene’s businessmen to overcome decades of factionalism to work together, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the club became mired in debates over the selection and funding of specific projects, including how to draw a wholesale grocer to Abilene and whether to support the library association. Club presidents repeatedly asked for businessmen to present a united front to the outside world, despite arguing within meetings. Battles over specific projects – and funding for them – divided, alienated, and exhausted members. By 1904, the membership had significantly declined and meetings were infrequent and poorly-attended. Two years later, businessmen expressed renewed interest in the Commercial Club, elected a new slate of officers, and worked with the city and library association to successfully secure a Carnegie library for Abilene. Despite this success, the Commercial Club again lost momentum. In 1910, under the direction of Nicolay, the club was informally reorganized with standing committees like Dodge City’s PIC. For a short time, the club was active, but by 1912, club meetings were intermittent. Businessmen formed splinter groups to better respond to specific issues. Young businessmen founded the On Comers Club because

³⁰³ Jacob G Landes and his son Otis, both active members of the River Brethren, were interviewed, as well as D.E. Snider and C.E. Funk, both of whom were long-time critics of the Courthouse Ring. *Daily Chronicle*, May 17, 1899.

³⁰⁴ Johntz, E.H. Forney, and J.B. Case served on the first executive committee. *Daily Chronicle*, May 23, 1899. Most of the city’s major businessmen were early members, including Rice, Johntz, and Nicolay. Rice never took an active role, but Johntz and Nicolay both served several terms as president of the Commercial Club and were active on committees. Critics of the Ring and Pennsylvania German businessmen were also active members.

they felt that they were not heard at Commercial Club meetings, while merchants organized a merchants' association.³⁰⁵ In 1915, the leadership of five different booster groups agreed to merge and become the Abilene Chamber of Commerce. Yet by 1918, it became clear that the other groups had been subsumed by the Commercial Club when the group officially reverted to the Commercial Club. Cycles of activity and torpor continued through the early 1920s when it reorganized as the Chamber of Commerce and started holding regular meetings.³⁰⁶

The Commercial Club tended to approach Abilene's development in a piecemeal way. The club's approach Abilene's to railroads was a prime example of club members' inability to collaborate to promote development. Having failed to become a division point for the Rock Island railroad in the 1880s, businessmen abandoned their hope of making Abilene a rail center. Nonetheless, several club members argued that Abilene would benefit from being located along the route of a north-south rail line. Yet, the club did not actively pursue a north-south road until 1909 when the Executive Committee was approached by representatives from Arkansas Valley Interurban (AVI), who proposed to build a rail line from Wichita, through Abilene, north to Nebraska. While the club expressed support for the project, members debated paying for preliminary survey work. Some refused to support the project without first receiving assurances that other counties would pay their share. In the end, the Commercial

³⁰⁵ The Executive Committee of the Commercial Club asked members to refrain from any discussions that might be used to paint a negative picture of Abilene. The On Comers' Club is described in the *Weekly Chronicle*, May 12, 1909. Abilene Commercial Club Meeting Minutes, April 10, 1909, Dickinson County Heritage Center. *Daily Chronicle*, April 2, 1918.

³⁰⁶ After 1910, the Commercial Club continued to have standing committees but many, like the transportation committee, lay dormant. A few committees, namely Good Roads and Reception, appeared to be more active, but may have reflected the goals and aspirations of individuals, rather than the business community. By 1918, the Commercial Club was holding meetings infrequently and appeared to abandon the practice of appointing members to standing committees, going back to creating committees only when the need arose. Abilene Commercial Club Meeting Minutes, Dickinson County Heritage Center. The January 16, 1923 minutes refer to "some of the former committees which were still in effect." The Commercial Club began holding regular meetings in November 1922, organized members into committees in 1925, and officially became the Abilene Chamber of Commerce in 1925, reflecting the club's increasingly bureaucratic structure.

Club did not pursue the AVI and, in 1915, AVI officials decided to run the line through Salina instead.³⁰⁷

Unable to organize its members to pursue larger projects, the Commercial Club worked toward smaller goals. The Club hosted a banquet for railroad officials to lobby for the restoration of passenger service on one of the Union Pacific (UP) routes. The club secretary corresponded with rail officials to press the rail lines to build bridges and culverts, to construct a park, and to open a ladies' waiting room. Some of these appeals proved successful; the UP opened a ladies' waiting room and constructed several culverts. They did not restore passenger service, however and avoided constructing the park they promised to build for many years.³⁰⁸

Members were more unified in their support for the Good Roads movement and the construction of good county roads, but ceded most of the responsibility for road development to the Abilene Automobile Club after 1909. Although Abilene never became associated with automobiles in the ways that Dodge City or Wichita did, local businessmen were active in the state Good Roads movement and established one of the state's early automobile clubs. Organized by a small group of Dickinson County automobile enthusiasts, the Abilene Automobile Club successfully lobbied the state legislature to be located along the Golden Belt Route – a state highway running between Kansas City and Denver, now known as Interstate 70 – and was one of the first counties along the route to have the road paved (from Abilene east to Junction City). The club also pushed county commissioners to improve and mark county roads for local traffic. Merchants in the automobile club posited that good roads were the best way to draw tourists, area farmers, and their agricultural products to Abilene's businesses. Some of the biggest proponents of good roads were Pennsylvania Germans who saw the roads as a means to reach their kin

³⁰⁷ The executive committee appointed a standing committee on railroads in 1910, but never reinstated it. In the end, the Arkansas Valley Interurban Railroad was never built farther north than Hutchison. *Daily Chronicle*, February 18, 1910; January 11, 1915. "Resolution," Abilene Commercial Club Meeting Minutes, June 9, 1910. *Daily Reflector*, July 29 and September 14, 1915; and February 1, 1916. *Newton Evening Kansan-Republican*, February 1 and June 8, 1916.

³⁰⁸ *Daily Chronicle*, February 18, 1910. Abilene Commercial Club Meeting Minutes, August 20, 1903 and May 21, 1909.

networks located throughout Dickinson County. Pennsylvania German businessmen like the Forneys and Brewer lobbied for good county roads to facilitate access to their suppliers.³⁰⁹

At its heart, the Commercial Club struggled to define what constituted proper growth for Abilene, to identify appropriate developmental goals, and to rally its members to find effective solutions to larger town-building problems. Lacking the kind of clear goals that Dodge City or Wichita had, it was difficult for club members to rally strong support for proposed rail or road programs. As creamery owners, the Forneys lobbied for competitive rail rates and to protect freight service, as did the city's wholesalers. In contrast, merchants appeared more concerned about roads programs to draw farmers to town. Most of Abilene's businessmen-boosters spoke in support of drawing in new industry; yet in practice, many only encouraged economic development that would employ middle-class residents to create a community that was sufficiently homogenous to inspire middle-class community development, or, as they described it, "a community of homes." Although boosters in other cities, including Los Angeles and Philadelphia, advertised their cities as "cities of homes" or "residential cities," those who promoted Abilene as a residential city proposed to create a middle-class community bereft of any industry that would require a substantial working-class population.³¹⁰ As the editor of the *Abilene Democrat* observed, local businessmen-boosters appeared to be operating with mixed motives: claiming to push for industrialization, but in practice promoting the city's development as a middle-class residential center.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ *Daily Chronicle*, March 7, 1900; May 8, 1908; September 5 and December 7, 1911; and December 29, 1916. *Daily Reflector*, August 3, 1904; August 4, 1909; November 22 and December 6, 1911; March 28, 1912; November 12, 1915; January 7, 1918; and January 7, 1919. Kansas Good Roads Association, *Annual Report* (Topeka, 1918), 3. Pamphlets vol. 1, Kansas State Historical Association.

³¹⁰ Dana Bartlett, *The Better City: A Sociological Study of a Modern City* (Los Angeles: Neuner Company Press, 1907), 71 and Charles Belmont Davis, "The City of Homes," *Harper's Monthly* 89 (June, 1894), 4.

³¹¹ Mary Bowman, the short-lived editor of the *Democrat*, wrote a series of editorials challenging the vision of Abilene's businessmen. She observed that "the custom of working out a destiny for a town or city seems to be rather a popular idea and appeals to us as being along the line which means something for the future welfare and

The actions of the Commercial Club support her claim. The club published two promotional booklets between 1900 and 1920 advertising Abilene as a residential city, detailing the buildings, organizations and civic amenities “that [make] a city beautiful and a good place in which to live.” The 1915 pamphlet claimed that residents are “especially proud of [Abilene’s] standing as a residence city.” Unlike Dodge City and Wichita’s promotional pamphlets, Abilene’s brochures did not speak to amenities that would appeal to industrialists, they did not include information about the Commercial Club or local realtors, and offered no information on city policies with regard to opening factories or other businesses.³¹² Yet businessmen frequently vowed to be in favor of drawing in new industries, even going so far as to claim that the mission of the Commercial Club was “to promote the progress and growth of the industries and establishments of Abilene, to invite factories and industries to the city, [and] to acquire and disseminate valuable commercial, economical and beneficial information....”³¹³ In practice, the Commercial Club received a number of requests from manufacturers to locate in Abilene, but the club’s meeting minutes suggest that they responded to relatively few of these proposals.

In 1908 a Chicago manufacturer proposed opening a canning factory in Abilene. President Nicolay appointed a committee, which he led, to visit multiple canning factories, including a facility in Lawrence. Ultimately, committee members rejected the manufacturer’s proposal, despite pleas from area farmers and local businessmen eager to industrialize. In a carefully worded letter in the *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, the committee explained that such factories were open only a few months out of the year and relied

prosperity of the place. Some places have selected as their destiny - a residence town - placing their schools in such high standard as to induce people there to live and make their home. This class of towns discourages factories and industries and builds on geographic location, water, and schools. Other towns are destined to be manufacturing or commercial towns.... What is Abilene’s destiny? If it is to be a factory town, why not encourage what industries we have and endeavor to establish new ones? If a residence and school town is to be the destiny, would it not be well to let it be known and put energies and money to that end?” *Democrat*, August 5, 1909.

³¹² Abilene Commercial Club, *Abilene, Kansas* (1915), Dickinson County Heritage Center. Similar descriptions can be found in *Abilene, Kansas* (1910). Abilene Commercial Club Meeting Minutes, May 7, 1908.

³¹³ *Abilene, Kansas* (1910), 37.

upon women as employees. They claimed that the Lawrence factory produced most of its own vegetables because factory owners reported that independent farmers were unreliable suppliers. Yet their most telling argument against the factory was the issue that had led to so many debates during the meetings: the factory was expensive to build and operate and was a high-risk investment subject to variable crop yields and high fixed costs. Although the committee's assessment appeared well-founded, it did not sit well with Dickinson County farmers and men like the Forneys who were interested in developing Abilene's agricultural processing capacity.³¹⁴

Soon after, Elmer Forney organized his own short-lived canning factory with a group of Abilene businessmen, which failed shortly after it was constructed, supporting the committee's claims that canning factories were too expensive to operate. Yet Forney and his partners stubbornly persisted in trying to develop an agricultural-processing sector in Abilene. As a member of a pioneering River Brethren family, Forney represented an important bridge between Dickinson County farmers and Abilene's business community, a position he took seriously. In the early twentieth century, Belle Springs Creamery grew into the largest independent creamery in Kansas in the early twentieth century, with plants in Salina and Emporia, in addition to the company headquarters and plant in Abilene. The Forneys constructed a cold storage space to rent to other agricultural distribution companies, including Jacob Brewer, an egg, ice, and produce wholesaler, and Pioneer Produce Company, another egg supplier. By 1909, Brewer was shipping more than seven rail cars of eggs valued at more than \$14,000 each week. Pioneer Produce was shipping eight carloads of eggs each week, and building a nearby egg freezing plant as well as a chicken feeding facility. If Abilene's Commercial Club was unwilling to

³¹⁴ Abilene Commercial Club, Meeting Minutes, October 15, 1903; November 13, 1905; March 27 and June 11, 1908. *Dickinson County News*, April 1, 1909. *Daily Chronicle*, April 20, 1909. *Weekly Chronicle*, April 13, 1910.

promote the development of agricultural-processing facilities, the city's Pennsylvania Germans were willing to sponsor that development.³¹⁵

The battle over Charles W. Parker's carousel works and carnival company further illustrates the business community's ambivalence to industrialization, especially as it might affect Abilene's desire to become a middle-class city. During the depression of the 1890s, Parker began building amusement attractions, including shooting galleries, merry-go-rounds, and ferris wheels. By 1908, Parker employed over 250 men at his Abilene factory, building merry-go-rounds and other amusement rides that were sold worldwide. In addition, Parker operated and leased eight carnival shows that toured throughout the United States and Canada.³¹⁶ By 1909, Parker could legitimately claim that his company was the "world's largest manufacturer of amusement devices." As demand for Parker's amusement rides increased, so did the size of his factories. His largest building encroached onto Olive street, a little-used thoroughfare on the outskirts of town. In the spring of 1909, the city council demanded that Parker clear Olive street, despite the carousel manufacturer's insistence that he had previously received approval from the city to expand onto the street. Parker moved much of his factory out of the street, but the council was adamant that it all be removed. In response, Parker announced plans to move his entire operation to Leavenworth, which had offered him land and money to relocate his factories. The council stood firm, unwilling to vacate their removal order.

Although local newspapers had previously applauded Parker's business acumen and success, they were slow to come to his defense and strangely accepting of his decision to leave Abilene. The

³¹⁵ "John K. Forney," *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*, ed. William E. Connelley (Chicago: Lewis, 1918), 228. *Daily Reflector*, May 22, 1909. Brewer was a Lutheran, but his family joined the Pennsylvania German migration to Dickinson County in 1879 where his father established a farm. Brewer worked at the Belle Springs Creamery for a short time before opening his egg business.

³¹⁶ "Charles W. Parker," in *Kansas and Kansans*, ed. William E. Connelley (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1918), 2361 – 2362. "The Romance of the Old Tea Pot and the Carry Us All," *The Bedouin* 3, no. 1 (1917), 37, in C.W. Parker Papers, Dickinson County Heritage Center. Carolyn McKinney and Robert J. Vahsoltz, *Mansion of Dreams: A Story of Dreamers Who Made History* (Arroyo Grande CA: King Midgets West, 1997), 114 – 115, 117, and 120 – 122. *Weekly Chronicle*, May 5, 1909.

Commercial Club also appeared reluctant to stand up for Parker. The *Weekly Chronicle* and the *Weekly Reflector* asked the city council to reconsider their position only after Parker declared he was leaving Abilene. The *Dickinson County News* did not even cover the story. The *Abilene Democrat* initially appeared resigned to the loss, but later claimed that Parker should stay because he employed so many laborers. The *Democrat* also claimed that the Commercial Club pushed the city council to go after Parker but after meeting with Mayor Rice and President Nicolay, she retracted that statement. The Commercial Club eventually circulated a petition in support of Parker. Yet when that petition was rejected by the council, club members neither continued to fight for Parker, nor did they identify alternate solutions, like offering Parker an alternate parcel of land better suited to a factory, or a subsidy to build on another parcel in Abilene. Apart from the motion to draft a petition, the club's meeting minutes are silent on the matter, suggesting that the Commercial Club did not support Parker's businesses enough to make these offers.³¹⁷

In 1910, Parker moved his entire operation to Leavenworth. Residents accepted Parker's departure in part because his enterprise did not conform to the middle-class identity that many in Abilene hoped to achieve. Newspapers initially touted Parker's achievements and residents celebrated new acts and new shows, most of which premiered in Abilene. As Parker's operation grew – and more and more carnival workers wintered in Abilene – the newspapers gave less coverage to Parker's shows and only publicized the “straight” theatrical acts “appropriate for ladies” over the freak shows and vaudeville acts. Carnival folk must have appeared nomadic and strange to residents - they were, after all, working-class individuals who typically did not own homes, did not work consistently, and did not

³¹⁷ *Weekly Chronicle*, May 9; June 9 and 23; July 7; August 18 and 25; September 8; and December 1, 1909. January 12; April 13, 20, and 27, 1910. *Weekly Reflector*, February 11; April 1; June 17 and 24; July 1, 8, 15; August 5, 12, 19, and 26, 1909; September 2 and 9; January 13, and April 10, 1910. *Dickinson County News*, June 10, 1909. *Democrat*, June 10, 17, and 24; July 1; August 26; and September 9, 1909. Abilene Commercial Club Meeting Minutes, June 15, 1909. Interestingly, the first – and one of only a few – committees on manufacturing was composed of A.B. Seelye (a patent medicine manufacturer), E.H. Forney, Johntz, Parker, and Rice. Abilene Commercial Club Meeting Minutes, April 13, 1903.

otherwise conform to middle-class cultural norms. His factory workers were assumed to frequent Abilene's illegal saloons. Some believed that Parker's employees deterred farm families from shopping in Abilene. Although Parker's workers represented a customer base for local merchants, they were distinct from the farm families the merchants regularly served, who shared townspeople's religious convictions and moral positions.³¹⁸

While Parker built his carnival empire, Cleyson L. Brown was busily creating a utilities conglomerate that would provide electricity and telephone service to rural communities throughout Kansas and southern Nebraska. Whereas Parker would abandon Abilene by 1910, Brown continued to use Abilene as his corporate and operational headquarters throughout the period of this study. Like Forney and Brewer, Brown's family was part of the 1879 migration of Pennsylvania Germans to Dickinson County. He grew up on a farm south of Abilene. In 1898, Brown and his father outfitted a former grist mill to generate electricity to power Abilene's street lights. A year later, he organized Brown Telephone Company and successfully negotiated franchise rights previously held by the Missouri and Kansas Bell Telephone Company. In 1906, Brown incorporated the electric company as Riverside Power and Gas Company. By 1916, Riverside supplied power to more than twenty Kansas communities. In 1902 he incorporated Brown Telephone Company; in 1911, he renamed it United Telephone Company. United quickly became the second largest telephone service provider in the state, behind Bell Telephone. Capitalizing upon the increased spending power of Kansas farmers, rural electrification, and the rapidly developing popularity of telephones in homes and businesses, United Telephone organized new exchanges and bought existing rural exchanges throughout Central Kansas. By 1918 United Telephone operated forty-six exchanges, with 25,000 subscribers, and employed more than 400 people

³¹⁸ Local historian Carolyn McKinney notes that "townspeople complained that some of his carnival employees who wintered in Abilene were of poor moral character." McKinney and Vahsoltz, *Mansion of Dreams*, 120. Parker remained involved in community activities as late as August 1910; he helped found the Abilene Automobile Association before he left.

as bookkeepers, managers, engineers, linemen, and telephone operators. By the end of 1922, United Telephone owned sixty exchanges with more than 45,000 subscribers. In 1925, Brown combined the power and telephone companies, creating United Telephone and Electric Company.³¹⁹

Brown's investment in Abilene was tremendous. The electric and telephone companies' headquarters were housed in a cluster of modern three-story office buildings in downtown Abilene, while the power plants and fabrication yards were located on an industrial parcel adjacent to the Union Pacific tracks. Not only was he the city's largest employer, he offered the kind of employment that would allow Abilene to become a middle-class residential city. His office buildings were filled with office workers – from top executives to file clerks and typists – while his yards and field crews were largely composed of highly-skilled workers who installed and serviced electrical plants and the companies' electrical and telephone lines.

Brown engaged in a form of welfare capitalism colored by his German Baptist upbringing that extended beyond the walls of his office to the larger community.³²⁰ He was a paternalistic employer who exercised strict control over his employees. Both United Light & Power and United Telephone self-

³¹⁹ Sondra Van Meter McCoy, "The Patriarch of Abilene: Cleyson L. Brown and the United Empire, 1898 – 1935," *Kansas History* (Summer 1982), v. 5, no. 2.: 107 – 119. Dickinson County Heritage Center, *C.L. Brown and Kansas Independent Telephony*, filmed 2012, YouTube video, 15:02. Posted October, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MbKNw07740>. Stewart Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," Dickinson County Heritage Center, 1918 – 1. *Daily Chronicle*, February 15, 1923. Brown owned 85 companies before his death in 1935. United Telephone and Electric Company continued to grow, becoming Sprint Telephone in the 1980s.

³²⁰ Welfare capitalism is a business philosophy and related practices in which the business owner assumes a paternalistic approach to the company's employees, providing them with a host of benefits designed to improve workers' work and living conditions to provide "security and stability in modern society." Administered by a personnel unit, employee benefits could include health and life insurance, clubhouses, pensions, housing and a myriad of other amenities. Many employers provided these benefits in hopes of attracting better, more loyal, workers, reducing employee turnover, and staving off unionization or labor disruptions. Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-6. See also, Howard Stanger, "Welfare Capitalism in the Larkin Company: 1900 -1925," *New York History*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (Spring, 2005): 210-258 and Gerald Zahavi, "Negotiated Loyalty: Welfare Capitalism and the Shoe Workers of Endicott-Johnson, 1920-1940," *Journal of American History*, vol. 70, no. 3 (December, 1983): 602-620. Because Brown's programs appeared to be driven by his religious upbringing, they could be cast as a form of moral capitalism, like that described by Katherine Carte Engel, "The Strangers' Store: Moral Capitalism in Moravian Bethlehem, 1753-1775," *Early American Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 90-126.

insured their employees, handling their sickness, death, and accident benefits. He required the young women he employed as telephone operators to live in company-operated dormitories where they were closely monitored by a house matron. Their hygiene, spending habits, and relationships were subject to close scrutiny. A devout believer in thrift, he required everyone – no matter their position or family circumstances – to save ten percent of each paycheck. Those who were not saving their money were required to meet with one of the companies’ savings counselors, who reviewed their expenses and recommended ways to spend within their means. Brown was often invited to speak to civic groups; his favorite speech encouraged individual savings and described his company’s savings plan. He firmly believed that if everyone saved the way his employees did, central Kansas would prosper and become a more desirable place to live. Other businessmen agreed. By 1916, Citizen’s Bank – owned by Rice, Nicolay, and the Malotts – offered a “Depositors’ Weekly Savings Club” to encourage other Abilene residents to save a portion of each paycheck.³²¹

Brown’s influence extended into the community. Although he abjured local politics, he was very involved in Abilene’s civic organizations, especially the Commercial Club, where he served on several committees, including the Executive Committee, the Railroad Committee, and on a special committee to improve Abilene’s water service. He chaired the hospital’s endowment campaign and served on the board of directors for the local chapter of the Salvation Army.³²² United Telephone operated a welfare department to assist struggling employees and area residents. Most importantly, Brown established a 226-acre multi-use park set just a mile outside Abilene’s city limits, designed to provide Dickinson County residents with park space and free entertainment. Built in 1926 for \$500,000, it featured a lake with sailboats and a beach, tennis courts and a golf course, as well as separate scout camps for area

³²¹ President Dwight Eisenhower’s father, David J. Eisenhower, was United Telephone’s Insurance Superintendent. He was also responsible for counseling employees who were not saving ten percent of their paychecks. *Daily Chronicle*, February 15 and March 15, 1923. Verckler, “Newspaper Notes,” 1916 – 6.

³²² *Daily Chronicle*, May 5 and August 10, 1920.

boys and girls. On weekends, it averaged 5,000 visitors. It was also home to Brown Memorial Home, a retirement home for senior citizens. Anyone living in the “territory served by the United Companies” could apply. Residents were only asked to pay what they could: “those who are able, contribute to the fund which endows the home, but there is no schedule of fees and charges to be levied.”³²³

What we view as progressive in Abilene may be better described as the extensive influence Brown’s corporate culture had in shaping Abilene. Abilene’s businessmen drew upon Brown’s businesses, values, and philanthropic gestures to define the progressive culture of their town. If Dodge City’s residents advertised their progressivism as a way of showcasing their town as the regional metropolis of southwestern Kansas and celebrating their middle-class aspirations, Abilene’s boosters viewed progressivism as an indicator of their middle-class status. Brown’s businesses fostered the development of a large middle-class population for Abilene and the values he promulgated upon his employees further shaped Abilene as a morally-upright community. Abilene’s boosters used progressive ideology to establish the city’s moral rectitude, declaring: “Abilene is progressive, clean and free from graft – the place to build a home.” Unlike Wichita and Dodge City, which came to celebrate their cattle town roots, Abilene’s boosters only acknowledged their town’s notorious past to provide a contrast to the city’s current probity. They juxtaposed the dissipation of the cattle period with the values of the current residents, insisting that current residents were “enterprising men and women who have come from the East to better their condition, educate their children, and build an empire.” They encouraged the homeseeker to relocate to Abilene, “if he be an honest, industrious man” but cautioned that “Abilene has no room for village loafers” and warned that “violaters [sic] of the law are [promptly]

³²³ “A Step Forward for Brown Memorial Foundation,” *The Voice: Speaking for all of the United Companies* (July 1929), in C.L. Brown Papers, Dickinson County Heritage Center.

brought to justice.” These claims were not meant to discourage working-class men from moving to Abilene, but they did suggest that only a certain type of worker would be welcomed.³²⁴

Like Dodge City and Wichita, Abilene’s boosters also pointed to civic improvements and institutions to indicate that their town was progressive. They pointed to the municipally-owned waterworks and to the city’s professional fire and police departments as further evidence of Abilene’s commitment to progressive ideals.³²⁵ Yet the Commercial Club and city council struggled mightily to attain these improvements. Abilene’s Commercial Club, school district, and library association spent years haggling over how to fund and operate a public library in Abilene. In the end the Commercial Club successfully petitioned the Carnegie foundation for a public library despite the school board’s plan to open a library in the high school and the library association’s plans to open a library that would require residents to purchase memberships.³²⁶ The city’s businessmen were so divided over the city’s council’s street pavement program that council members fired the city marshal to protest the cost and suspended council meetings for more than a month. Abilene’s shift to a commission form of municipal government came about to punish Mayor Rice for the paving debacle.³²⁷ And the construction of a county hospital only came about after years of debates in Commercial Club meetings, when another Dickinson County town threatened to build a county hospital in their town. In the end, it was only built after a small group of Commercial Club members went door-to-door soliciting contributions.³²⁸

³²⁴ Abilene, Kansas (1910), 2 – 4.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Verckler, “Newspaper Notes,” 1900 – 1 and 3; 1901 – 4; 1902 – 4 – 6; 1904 – 4; 1905 – 5; 1907 – 1 – 4; 1908 – 5. Abilene Commercial Club, *Meeting Minutes*, January 2, 1903. January 1, 1906.

³²⁷ *Weekly Chronicle*, September 15, and October 6, 1909. *Democrat*, September 2 and 9, 1909. *Weekly Reflector*, September 9, and October 7, 1909.

³²⁸ Verckler, “Newspaper Notes,” 1915 – 7, 1917 – 2 and 4, 1918 – 4, 1919 – 2 and 1922 – 4 – 6.

By 1929, Abilene had grown into a novel hybrid of town types. On the one hand, it was the quiet county seat of a rural county. On the other, it was the headquarters for several corporations with broad regional reach. Of the three former cattle towns, Abilene's population grew the least – it was overtaken by Dodge City by 1920 and was growing more slowly than the national population rate. It could not claim to be a center for trade, even for Dickinson County. It did not increase its rail capacity in the early twentieth century and so struggled to be a viable center for shipping. Yet a small group of businessmen created a niche within the agricultural-processing sector, shipping butter, eggs, and produce around the country. And while Abilene snubbed Parker and his carnival works, the town became home to the state's largest telephone and power companies. In so doing, Abilene became a middle-class residential city. This identity was in many ways a default. Conflicted as the business community was over whether to industrialize – and if so, what kinds of manufacturers to obtain, and how to go about enticing them to town – it became immobilized by its debates. The business community's inability to unite and effectively collaborate under the aegis of an active promotional organization certainly hurt Abilene's economic development. At the same time, many residents approved of Abilene's emergence as a middle-class community amid the farm towns of Central Kansas. By 1929, Abilene's economy and culture reflected the shared values and desires of its middle-class residents.

Watch Wichita Win: Wichita and Economic Diversification

Of the three former cattle towns, Wichita was best positioned to take advantage of the resurgent economy after 1898. The city had preserved a significant percentage of the city's working-class population by providing employment as part of a massive public building campaign. During the depression, businessmen further consolidated their trade territory by building upon their shared interests with Kansas and Oklahoma farmers and small-town businessmen. They fought for competitive railroad freight rates and service. And they continued to band together, forming the Wichita Commercial Club in 1896 in anticipation of better economic conditions. In the first three decades of the

twentieth century, Wichita's businessmen continued to collaborate as members in a series of promotional organizations that drew upon the earliest boosters' development agenda – to become the state's most important city and a metropolis on par with Chicago – and put forward a series of programs to achieve that goal. They also preserved much of their original development model – specifically a plan to control a large regional trade area for wholesaling and jobbing by building upon regional transportation routes and robustly promoting the city to residents of Kansas and Oklahoma, while advocating for industrialization and economic diversification.

Wichita's businessmen revised their development model in three significant ways after 1900. First, they broadened their understanding of transportation to include automobiles and airplanes, while continuing to promote railroad development. Second, they pressed for a more diverse industrial base – within the agricultural processing sector and by drawing in industries that relied less and less on the region for either raw goods or as primary customers. Establishing a local oil industry and an aviation industry untethered Wichita from its dependence upon an inherently unstable regional economy and propelled the city to national and international status. Finally, Wichita's businessmen grew increasingly interested in creating a livable city, reflecting their newfound prosperity, the influence of Progressive ideology upon their thinking, and their desire to represent Wichita as a modern metropolis. That Wichita sustained such an ambitious vision for growth – and achieved the kinds of growth that it did – speaks to the business community's ability to collaborate to present a united front to promote development and establish conditions conducive to the growth.

As at Dodge City and Abilene, Wichita's businessmen founded multiple businessmen's organizations before establishing the Wichita Chamber of Commerce in the early 1920s. In 1901, Wichita was home to two businessmen's groups, the Commercial Club and the first Chamber of Commerce. In 1912, the two clubs merged, having realized that their goals, projects, and memberships

were largely the same. Other trade and booster organizations continued to spring up, however. In 1917, businessmen merged more than twenty of these organizations to create the Wichita Board of Commerce.³²⁹ Because these twenty groups agreed that growth was synonymous with industrialization and with the continued consolidation of its trade territory, their merger was easier to achieve than might have been expected, especially once businessmen were given assurances that they would continue to have a voice in the new organization. At the same time, other groups continued to organize after 1917, most of which were quickly subsumed by the Board. When local industrialists established a manufacturers' club in 1922, for example, the Board quickly approached them and negotiated to bring them under the aegis of the Board.³³⁰ In 1923, members agreed to rename the organization the Wichita Chamber of Commerce and it has operated as the Chamber to the present day.

Founding members envisioned the Board of Commerce as an efficient but comprehensive business organization, combining the skills of a bureaucracy of volunteers with a small group of paid professionals to administer the daily tasks of the Board. In so doing, it built upon several progressive values, including efficiency, professionalism, rationality, and specialization. Previous groups had divided work into various committees, but oftentimes the committee members lacked the enthusiasm, direction, financial backing, and time to mount or sustain committee projects. Thus, much of the work fell to the President and Secretary of the organization. Wichita's Board of Commerce, formed by the fusion of several promotional organizations, encouraged the leadership of the previous groups to become the leadership of new divisions. Moreover, it made these departments accountable for a

³²⁹ As Miner notes, the club was initially called the Board of Commerce and became the Chamber of Commerce in 1924. Craig Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City* (Wichita: Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association, 1988), 131 – 132.

³³⁰ "A Brief History of the Wichita Chamber of Commerce," in the Archives of the Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce, Wichita State University Special Collections, c. 1966. Miner, *Wichita*, 131. Eugene Fahl, "The Wichita Chamber of Commerce," J.N. Haymaker, "Chamber of Commerce," and Charles H. Smyth, "The Commercial Club," in *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas*, ed. O.H. Bentley (Chicago: C.F. Cooper, 1910), 68 – 74. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Annual Report (1921 – 1922)*, 15, in Archives of the Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce.

clearly delineating a scope of work for each department at the beginning of the year and publicizing its accomplishments at the end of the year. The twenty-one directors for the Board were selected by petition – the nominees with the most signers were invited to serve as directors – ensuring that every member had a voice in who led the Board. The directors selected eight men to serve as vice-presidents, heading each of the Board’s eight departments. These men then selected their own cabinets from the Board’s general membership with the expectation that their appointees would bring specific skills and enthusiasm to their appointments. The vice presidents elected were all men who had vested interests in the departments they oversaw. The manager for the Union Stockyards, Dean Smith, was appointed to head the Agricultural Department, while Marshall Murdock’s grandson, Marcellus Murdock oversaw the Conventions and Publicity Department. The Board also encouraged other civic groups like the Lions Club or Rotary to appoint a member to the Board’s Advisory Council, thereby encouraging these civic partners to buy into Board goals and programs. The Board’s professional staff was responsible for administering these programs, as well as managing the Board’s offices.³³¹

The Board of Commerce continued the work of earlier iterations of promotional organizations when it lobbied for additional railroads, better roads, and air fields to facilitate the city’s commercial growth. Wichita’s earliest boosters aggressively pursued railroad construction to establish the city’s trade territory. In the 1890s several lines declared bankruptcy, were bought out by other rail companies, or were abandoned. In the following decades, Wichita’s businessmen’s organizations reestablished and expanded the city’s rail capacity. They became vocal proponents of the Good Roads

³³¹ *Wichita Beacon*, June 13, July 23 and September 20, 1917. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, July 2, 1917. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Annual Report* (1919), in Archives of the Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce. The Board was particularly interested in absorbing new, potential rivals to its organization. When a number of retailers proposed to set up a merchants’ bureau, the Board quickly proposed that the group organize a department *within* the Board of Commerce. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Meeting Minutes*, September 9, 1919, in Archives of the Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce. Similarly, when businessmen on the West Side began making noises about organizing their own group, they were invited by the Board to set up a department within the Board of Commerce instead. The Lions Club was one group invited to appoint a club member to the Advisory Council. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Meeting Minutes*, December 9, 1919.

movement and led the effort to develop airfields in the state. Wichita's boosters knew from experience that the city's merchants and wholesalers benefitted from improved transportation to and from Wichita. Rail lines and roads allowed customers to patronize Wichita merchants and gave Wichita's wholesalers and jobbers access to previously remote markets, while strengthening their position in established markets.

As the economy rebounded after 1898, Wichita's Commercial Club enthusiastically pursued new rail lines and persuaded Wichita's voters to underwrite their construction. Club members successfully campaigned for residents to approve \$30,000 in city-issued bonds to draw the Kansas City, Mexico & Orient railroad to the city and joined forces in 1910 with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage voters to approve an additional \$30,000 in bonds to build the Arkansas Valley Interurban Railroad (AVI), a home-grown, light-rail electric railroad. Both lines had the effect of opening new markets for Wichita's merchants and wholesalers even if they did not extend as far as promoters had initially promised. The Kansas City, Mexico & Orient never achieved its goal of building to Mexico City, let alone the Pacific Ocean, yet businessmen appreciated that the line provided them with a trade route into Texas. Moreover, the Board of Commerce succeeded in relocating the rail line's headquarters from Kansas City to Wichita in 1919, which brought "a large number of officers and employees to the city... making Wichita the most important point upon a system of railway tapping a section of country still susceptible to wonderful development," thereby proving the value of the initial investment.³³² In 1929, the Chamber of Commerce organized a six-day trip on the line – then owned by the Santa Fe – to allow Wichita merchants and wholesalers to meet with the businessmen in the small towns of Oklahoma,

³³² O.A. Boyle became the president of the AVI. He was then president of the Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Commercial Club. Miner, *Wichita*, 125 - 126. Wichita Board of Commerce *Meeting Minutes*, August 3 and 15; and November 19, 1917; May 22, 1918; July 15, 1919. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Annual Report* (1919). By 1905, the city was shipping more than 500,000 tons of freight annually. As local businesses required additional shipping capacity, the railroads responded by sending more crews to Wichita. The Missouri Pacific headquartered forty-three crews in Wichita in 1905. Wichita Chamber of Commerce, *Illuminated Resume of City of Wichita, Sedgwick County, and State of Kansas* (c.1905), 14, Kansas State Historical Society.

Texas, and eastern New Mexico. Although the AVI never reached Salina, by 1912 it handled 35,000 passengers per month and employed more than 150 people in its Wichita shops and freight depot, while expanding the city's trade region into central Kansas. It also encouraged the early development of some of the city's first suburbs – though the line stopped carrying passengers in 1938. These new lines, in conjunction with increased service on existing lines, allowed local businesses to ship more freight, to send salespeople into new territories, and to bring increasing numbers of visitors to Wichita.³³³

Local businessmen quickly recognized the potential of the automobile to expand Wichita's commercial base but they struggled to find the right kind of promotional organization to support the Good Roads movement. The first automobile arrived in Wichita in 1899; by 1901 the first dealership opened. Wichita was home to Jones Automobile Company – one of two automobile manufacturers in the state. F. "Woody" Hockaday, a motorcycle wholesaler and repair shop owner created the state's earliest – and most comprehensive – maps for Kansas motorists. In 1904, local automobile enthusiasts organized the city's first automobile club, which sponsored drives and talks about automobile repair and maintenance, but did not actively promote road construction. The Wichita-Sedgwick County Good Roads Association, founded in 1904 after a two-day presentation from the national Good Roads Association, only operated for a few months. A second group was active sporadically for several years. Both groups received backing from the city council, the Chamber of Commerce, the Commercial Club, and area farmers, but appeared to lack the institutional wherewithal to hold consistent meetings, preserve an active membership, and locate the kinds of resources necessary to sustain these clubs as effective advocacy associations. Only after the Board of Commerce was established and created a Good Roads Committee did Wichita have a group actively lobbying for road construction. By 1919 the

³³³ "Good Will Tour Visits Rich Territory," *The Wichita Magazine* (March, 1929) vol. VI, no. 3, 14 – 15. Previous trips had reached southwestern Kansas and Oklahoma on the Santa Fe line and the Missouri Pacific. "Howdy Special Had a Great Trip," *Wichita* (May, 1924), vol. I, no. 5, 1 – 4. "1927 Trade Trip Best in Wichita History," *The Wichita* (May, 1927), vol. IV, no. 5, 3 and 14. Wichita State University Special Collections, MS2002 – 12, Box 43.

committee had persuaded the State Highway Commission to approve five roads that led from Wichita into the surrounding countryside and had secured Federal aid to construct them. The 1919 Board of Commerce Annual Report proudly boasted that the Board's work would give "Sedgwick County the largest mileage of paved highways of any county in the state, the value of which to Wichita can hardly be overestimated."³³⁴

As a promotional organization, the Board of Commerce was among the first in Kansas to understand the possible commercial applications for aircraft to transport goods more quickly and to access remote areas. Toward the end of World War I, Board members observed the military's increasing reliance on upon aircraft for transport within the United States. A committee inquired with the Army about future air routes that might include Wichita and negotiated with the federal government to be a stop on one of the first air mail routes. In 1918, Board members determined that if Wichita provided a suitable air field, the city would become part of new military and mail routes. Shortly thereafter, the Board purchased an air field outfitted by local aviator Clyde Cessna from John J. Jones, Wichita's automobile manufacturer, and opened it to commercial traffic. By 1927, Wichita was well-recognized within the aeronautics industry as an aviation center, in no small part because of the promotional efforts of the Chamber. In addition to becoming a daily stop on the national airmail routes, it offered daily passenger and express service with multiple airlines. It was one of two cities repeatedly recognized by the National Air Reliability Tour, and hosted the National Air Congress in 1925. Although much of this

³³⁴ *Beacon*, October 3, 1904 and November 5, 1909. *Eagle*, October 7, 1904. *Eagle*, May 8, 1904, October 13 and November 26, 1904. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Annual Report* (1919). The federal government agreed to pay up to \$15,000 per mile of road constructed in Sedgwick County – a substantial sum of money that flowed into the county. The Chamber of Commerce continued to view road development as a priority throughout the 1920s – the Good Roads Committee remained one of its largest. "Wichita Fortunate in Personnel of Committees of Chamber of Commerce," *The Wichita* (January 1927), Wichita State University Special Collections, MS2002 – 12, Box 43, FF2.

promotional work was designed to boost the city's aviation industry, local merchants benefitted from the growing workforce employed by Wichita's aviation industry.³³⁵

The efforts of Wichita's boosters, working in concert within a promotional organization to expand the city's commercial reach through a growing network of roads, rail lines, and air routes, reaped enormous benefits for Wichita's merchants and wholesalers. Annual trade trips took Wichita's merchants and wholesalers to towns throughout Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas while market weeks, air shows, and conventions encouraged visitors to come to Wichita.³³⁶ The construction of Wichita's first convention center – the Forum – in 1911 ensured that the city hosted many of the state's most important conventions. By 1918, the original 5,000 seat auditorium was surrounded by buildings housing a theatre and exhibition hall. The Board of Commerce's Convention Department enticed groups to host their conventions and trade shows in Wichita and helped them plan their conventions by directing organizers to businesses that could provide catering, hotel rooms, and activities for attendees, while helping them publicize these events. The city hosted conventions, meetings, and trade shows for an array of government, fraternal, and commercial organizations but the city's biggest events supported regional farmers and included the International Wheat Show, the Mid-Winter Tractor Show, and the Kansas National Live Stock Show. The Tractor Show grew out of the Thresherman's Convention, first

³³⁵ Chamber of Commerce *Meeting Minutes*, November 30 and December 6, 1918. Miner, *Wichita*, 152 – 153. In purchasing the air field and promoting the development of a local aviation industry, Wichita's Board of Commerce anticipated the United States Chamber of Commerce's recommendation that Chambers lobby for air fields by almost a decade. "Businessmen are Boosters for Commercial Aeronautics," *The Wichita* (June, 1927), vol. IV, no. 6, 10. "Wichita – The Air Capital of America," *The Wichita* (August, 1927), vol. IV, no. 8, 11, 23 – 25. "All Kansas Air Tour," *The Wichita* (March, 1928) vol. V, no. 3, 8. "Municipal Airport To Be One of the Nation's Best," *The Wichita Magazine* (May, 1929), vol. VI, no. 5, 6 and 13. Wichita State University Special Collections, MS2002 – 12, Box 43.

³³⁶ In 1901 representatives of the Commercial Club met with the leaders of booster organizations in St. Louis and Kansas City to learn more about developing booster excursion trains to promote Wichita as a regional trade center. In 1902 the first booster train left Wichita – traveling more than 1,000 miles in just six days to promote Wichita and its businesses to the smaller towns of Western Kansas and Oklahoma. Wichita's boosters would continue to travel into their sphere of influence to promote the city throughout the course of this study, although the means of transportation would shift from trains to automobiles (1924) and finally to airplanes (1928), as the twentieth century progressed. Miner, *Wichita*, 132 – 134. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Work of the First Year*, Wichita State University Special Collections.

organized by the Wichita Thresherman's Association in 1900. By 1907 more than 25,000 people participated in what was touted as the state's largest tradeshow. The 1919 Threshermen's Convention was the largest yet – with 50,000 in attendance. Implement dealers and manufacturers set up a tractor display along South Wichita Street – temporarily renamed “Thresher's Street” where fifteen national tractor firms, three local tractor manufacturers, and several implement dealers and hardware stores were located. Advertised as Tractor City, the display of tractors and implements drew thousands of people that year and grew into its own event a year later.³³⁷

In developing and expanding Wichita's transportation systems, the Board of Commerce, following in the footsteps of Wichita's earlier promotional organizations, focused heavily on maintaining and expanding the city's sphere of influence to consolidate and increase Wichita's position as a wholesale center. Yet Wichita's promotional organizations also provided other services to Wichita wholesalers – they advertised the city's wholesalers in regional publications like the *Price Current* and *Kansas Magazine*; offered fare refunds to merchants traveling to Wichita to do business with local wholesalers; and monitored the railroads, lobbying the state and federal government for reasonable freight fares. Between 1900 and 1929, the wholesale sector flourished. In 1926, 290 wholesale establishments employed more than 3,500 residents and sold more than \$150 million in goods. Although these numbers were dwarfed by Chicago and Kansas City's, Wichita continued to compete against these larger cities for market dominance in western Kansas, Oklahoma, and northern Texas.³³⁸

³³⁷ Wichita Board of Commerce, *Annual Report* (1919). Wichita Chamber of Commerce, *Illuminated Resume*, 3 – 4. Miner, *Wichita*, 123. The Board of Commerce assisted in the organization of a wide range of conventions for 1917, including the Kansas League of Municipalities, the Farmers' Cooperative Grain Dealers Association of Kansas, the State Printers' Association, the Division Agents of the Standard Oil Company Annual Meeting, the American-Angus Cattle Association, and the State Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR).

³³⁸ Wichita Board of Commerce, *Annual Report* (1919). Wichita Board of Commerce, *Work of the First Year of the Wichita Board of Commerce*. Wichita Chamber of Commerce, *Illuminated Resume*. “Three Hundred Hear Spillman,” *The Wichita* (July, 1927), vol. IV, no. 7, 1 and 4. O.H. Bentley, *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas* (Chicago: C.F. Cooper, 1910), 2 – 3. Commissioner of the General Land Office, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.:

Wichita's industrial sector grew exponentially between 1900 and 1929, catapulting the former cattle town into a major industrial center for the state. Building upon the remnants of its milling and meat-packing sectors, Wichita's Commercial Club initially campaigned to rebuild the city's agricultural-processing sector by increasing Wichita's milling capacity, drawing a new meat-packer to town, and encouraging the development of new agricultural-processing sectors. By 1905, the Chamber of Commerce was plugging for new industries unrelated to agriculture. While these clubs cannot claim sole responsibility for Wichita's incarnation into a center for the state's oil and gas industry or the establishment of a nationally-recognized aviation industry, they could claim that they provided the kind of economic conditions and environment to encourage this level of industrial development.

Wichita's businessmen had begun their industrialization campaign with wheat. In 1896, the founders of the Commercial Club attempted to increase the city's milling capacity with a subscription campaign to fund the construction of additional grain elevators, but failed to raise the money. In 1903, local grain dealers founded the Wichita Board of Trade with a mission to manage and support the grain trade throughout the city. By 1906, the Board of Trade supervised the shipment of more than 10,000 carloads of wheat into the city annually, much of which was processed at Red Star Mill, a new mill and grain elevator built a year earlier by J.E. Howard, a miller who already owned and operated a smaller mill in Wichita. Howard assembled a partnership of six businessmen from southwestern Kansas towns to finance the mill.³³⁹ Three years later, Wichita was handling 27,000 cars of wheat annually. In 1912, Red Star's new president Lewis Hurd added another elevator to store more than 125,000 bushels of wheat, doubling the mill's initial capacity, and creating the single largest elevator in the country for a

Government Printing Office, 1888). "Wichita as Jobbing Center for Automobiles," *Kansas Magazine*, 1910, in Archives of the Wichita Chamber of Commerce, Wichita State University Special Collections.

³³⁹ *Eagle*, March 22, 1905. Howard opened his first mill in Wichita in 1895. He served as president of the Chamber of Commerce and the Wichita & Southwestern Fair Association. He was elected county commissioner and very active in regulating freight rates. "Biography," in *History of Wichita*, 808 – 809. Howard later turned over control of the mill to Lewis Hurd, who would oversee its expansion in coming years.

short time. Five years later, Hurd partnered with Henry Lassen – a lumber magnate who owned Wichita’s most prestigious hotel and its radio station – and C.M. Jackman, the vice-president of the Kansas Milling Company – to build a 1.2 million bushel elevator. Although Wichita’s grain market was only one-fifth the size of Kansas City’s, it was the second largest market in Kansas, drawing heavily from southwestern Kansas and Oklahoma, as well as parts of Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico. Moreover, it was the fourth-largest grain storage market in the country by 1927 and the fifth-largest milling center.³⁴⁰

The Board of Trade supplemented these entrepreneurs’ efforts. It acted as a promotional organization – advertising Wichita as a grain center – from which all the city’s grain dealers benefitted. The Board of Trade building reflected the prominence of the association. Five stories tall, the building took up an entire city block. By 1910, most of the city’s grain dealers as well as the five major milling and elevator companies were members of the Board of Trade and had offices in the building.³⁴¹ Working together as members of the Board of Trade, these companies built Wichita’s reputation as a grain center. They directed the organization’s activities: hosting the city’s three largest conventions, negotiating favorable shipping rates for grain, and arbitrating disputes between members and with farmers. The Board of Commerce never co-opted the Board of Trade, unlike other single-industry organizations, likely because the Board of Trade played such an active role in the wheat economy and the Board of Commerce could never have taken on this role effectively. Instead, the two worked as partners, with the Board of Commerce taking on activities that would benefit Wichita businessmen more generally or that the Board of Trade did not take up. The two groups worked together to plan conventions like the International Wheat Show. In contrast, the Board of Commerce bolstered the city’s

³⁴⁰ Miner, *Wichita*, 123. A.E. Janzen, *The Wichita Grain Market* (Lawrence: Department of Journalism Press, 1928). Kansas City could store five times the amount of grain of Wichita’s elevators and was the largest grain-storage center in the country. It was the third largest milling center. W.F. McCullough, “The Wichita Grain Market,” in *History of Wichita*, 48 – 51. “Board of Trade and How it Grew,” in *History of Wichita*, 75 – 78.

³⁴¹ To be a member of the Board of Trade, grain dealers and millers purchased memberships. Initially, these shares cost \$25. By 1910, it cost \$1,000 to purchase a membership.

relationship with area farmers. It helped Sedgwick County farmers organize the county's Farm Bureau and provided rooms for the organization within its offices. During World War I, the Board of Commerce located harvest labor for farmers throughout the entire state of Kansas.³⁴²

Booster organizations provided even more support to establish a fledgling meat-packing industry in Wichita. The city's first Board of Trade had just enticed two meat-processing firms to relocate to Wichita in the late 1880s when poor weather conditions killed the corn harvest and pork prices plummeted. Whittaker Packing Company failed almost immediately; Dold Packing Company survived only by operating sporadically. At the turn of the century, the Commercial Club successfully pushed the city to provide \$5,000 to help Dold expand so that the packer could resume full-time operations. When the plant was partially destroyed by fire in 1901, the Commercial Club again lobbied the city to help the meatpacker; the city purchased land adjacent to the meat-packing plant to help finance the reconstruction of the plant. After years of negotiation, the Commercial Club persuaded the city council to pay a relocation bonus to draw Chicago-based Cudahy Company to locate a plant in Wichita in 1906. Cudahy re-outfitted the old Whittaker plant as a pork-processing facility. These financial inducements jumpstarted Wichita's evolution into a regional pork center. Both packers later expanded their plants and incorporated beef processing. Although never as important as the major packing centers of Chicago, Omaha, and Kansas City, Wichita established a solid reputation as a regional packing center.³⁴³

³⁴² The Board of Commerce Harvest Labor Committee initially looked to Hungary, to locate laborers. After being rejected by the Hungarians, the committee contacted the U.S. Department of Labor and negotiated a deal to open a U.S. Employment Division in Wichita to match farmers with farm laborers. The committee contacted all Wichita employers to see if they could spare laborers for part of the summer to help bring in the harvest and local schools, identifying boys in the higher grades who could become farm labor, and turned these names into the U.S. Employment office. Wichita Board of Commerce, *Work of the First Year*.

³⁴³ "History of the Wichita Union Stock Yards," in *History of Wichita*, 687 – 703. John M. O'Rourke, *The Cudahy Packing Company: A History* (Chicago: The Cudahy Packing Company, 1924). Miner, *Wichita*, 131. *Beacon*, January 23, March 2, and August 22, 1900. *Daily Eagle*, July 24, 1900.

In addition to milling and meat-packing, Wichita's businessmen encouraged the development of other agricultural-processing sectors and became the nation's center for the broomcorn industry. In 1904, the American Warehouse Company opened the first storage facility in Wichita for broomcorn, a kind of sorghum used to make brooms. In 1906 J.A. Hockett opened the first broom factory. By 1909 Wichita had seven broomcorn warehouse facilities and five broomcorn manufacturers. *The Broom Corn Review*, a national trade newspaper, was published in Wichita. By 1912, Wichita dominated the broomcorn market with eighteen broomcorn facilities and more than twenty brokers. The Wichita market became the price-setter nationally, making the city the industry leader for a niche market. By 1919, nineteen broomcorn dealers were running their businesses out of Wichita with more than 65% of the national crop moving through Wichita. Buyers employed by broomcorn warehouses traveled throughout Kansas, Oklahoma, Indian Territory and Nebraska in search of product.³⁴⁴

Although Wichita's business organizations did not actively encourage American Warehouse Company to set up operations in the city, they did support subsequent development of the industry. In a 1930 study of Wichita's broomcorn market, University of Nebraska researchers concluded that while a variety of factors led Wichita to market dominance, including its location within a broomcorn-producing region and a strong network of railroads through this region, local businessmen played a major role. The study cites "an aggressive business method together with the investment of large sums of capital in the business [that] gives the city an impressive importance," including the willingness of local bankers to provide seasonal capital, the solidarity of local broomcorn dealers to protect their market, and the role of the city's Board of Commerce in securing advantageous freight rates for broomcorn on railroads. Local businessmen drew upon their longstanding relationship with railroad officials to expand their city's

³⁴⁴ *Eagle*, August 21, 1904. The founders of American Warehouse Company were not from Wichita. Robert Findlay had been in the broom corn business for several years in the state of Kansas, but H.K. Lindsley was from Sterling, Colorado. Miner, *Wichita*, 124. Frank A. Neff, *Wichita, Kansas as a Broom-Corn Market*, ed. University of Nebraska, Nebraska Studies in Business (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1930).

rail lines into remote areas and to successfully negotiate reasonable rates for shipping to and from Wichita, which likely inspired American Warehouse to establish itself in Wichita and may well have created an environment conducive to the development of this industry. As American Warehouse Company prospered in Wichita, other companies took notice and followed suit, inspiring the establishment of a broomcorn center.³⁴⁵

Wichita also benefitted from its proximity to the oilfields of southeastern Kansas, Oklahoma, and northern Texas. Oil was first discovered in Kansas in the 1860s, but did not become commercially viable until the development of the Chanute field in 1899 (one hundred miles east of Wichita) and the subsequent construction of the first Standard Oil refinery in the state.³⁴⁶ Wichita's businessmen did not meaningfully invest in the oil industry until it was discovered much closer to the city, in the adjacent Butler County towns of El Dorado, Augusta, and Towanda. Typically, individuals formed investment syndicates to drill wells across southeastern Kansas and Oklahoma (and even north at Abilene) or to purchase existing wells and leases. Many of these syndicates were small and open to local investors only, in the same way that land speculation was dominated by local investors in the 1880s, but some larger concerns included outside investors, often from Chicago or New York. Oftentimes, these syndicates found themselves in competition with Kansas City syndicates to buy mineral rights and oil leases.³⁴⁷ Newcomers also moved to Wichita to take part in the oil industry. Jacob M. Moellendick and William Burke both moved to Wichita from Okmulgee, Oklahoma where they had first made strikes in

³⁴⁵ Neff, *Wichita, Kansas as a Broom-Corn Market*, 39.

³⁴⁶ For an in-depth history of the Kansas oil and gas industry, see Craig Miner, *Discovery! Cycles of Change in the Kansas Oil & Gas Industry, 1860 – 1987* (Wichita: KIOGA, 1987).

³⁴⁷ J.M. Reynolds, "Letter to the Stockholders of Marigold Oil & Refining Co," in Archive of the Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce, Wichita State University, Special Collections.

the oil fields. They joined other oilmen who established their regional headquarters' in Wichita's business district and built mansions in Wichita's College Hill district.³⁴⁸

By 1918, Wichita was home to five oil refineries and connected to the oil fields by seven pipeline systems. Bank clearings were up more than forty percent from the previous year, largely due to regional oil production. Local refineries provided employment opportunities for the city's growing working-class population. Local investors and the regional managers of larger oil companies built mansions and invested their earnings in the local economy. Wichita wholesalers profited from supplying businesses in nearby oil towns. And Wichita's merchants attracted a new customer base as workers from the oil fields traveled to Wichita to enjoy a day in the city. Jones Motor Company even developed a line of trucks specifically designed for oil field work. The G-31 Jones "oilfield special" truck was an adaptation of the standard model, with the same hauling capacity, but was lighter, with a "bit-bed on the back."³⁴⁹

Wichita's Board of Commerce did not materially support the development of the oil industry in the same way that it influenced the development of the agricultural processing industry. Although the Oil and Gas Department repeatedly negotiated with Standard Oil to build a refinery in Wichita, the oil conglomerate never built the proposed plant although they did convince Standard Oil to set up an office for regional managers in the Beacon Building. The Board attempted to increase the industry's visibility overall, working with the publishers of the *Eagle* and the *Beacon*, as well as the locally-published *Petroleum Journal*, to promote Wichita's role in the regional oil market. The Board's Industrial

³⁴⁸ Miner claims that these fields "injected over \$65,000,000" into Wichita's economy during the war years. Miner, *Wichita*, 154. Moellendick is described in Frank J. Rowe and Craig Miner, *Borne on the South Wind: A Century of Aviation in Kansas* (Wichita: Wichita Eagle and Beacon Publishing, 1994), 59 and 86 – 87.

³⁴⁹ *Beacon*, January 2, 1918. In the 1920s, the Wichita Chamber of Commerce put out a weekly circular – "Wichita This Week" – that detailed the week's amusements and included advertisements from Wichita merchants, as well as bus and train schedules to and from the oil fields. Wichita Chamber of Commerce, *Wichita This Week*, in Wichita Pamphlet Collection, Kansas State Historical Society. Jones' oil-field trucks proved extremely popular and durable. They were even sold in Bolivia to oil companies. *Old Cars Weekly*, February 19, 1980. The Jones Motor Car Company, *The Jones 'Six-Sixty'*, Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum.

Department occasionally worked with the Oil and Gas Department to bring smaller oil companies to Wichita and publicized the efforts of local businessmen like Floyd Hoyt – a local banker – to create investment syndicates and establish their own refineries. Perhaps the Board’s most important role in supporting Wichita’s oil industry was that of a watch dog; the Board regularly researched new investment syndicates and published its recommendations to protect residents from fraudulent or poor investment opportunities.³⁵⁰

Profits from Wichita’s oil and gas industry were, in turn, invested in Wichita’s fledging aviation industry. Jones used the profits made from his successful line of trucks to purchase a half-interest in an airplane with Clyde Cessna in 1911. His purchase heralded the beginnings of the aviation industry in Wichita. Jones rallied Wichita’s Aero Club the club to sponsor Cessna to compete in a transcontinental aerial race sponsored by the Army. He provided Cessna with space and tools in his automobile factory to construct his first planes and outfitted the field next to his automobile plant as an air field so that Cessna could offer flying lessons and test his airplanes.³⁵¹ In 1919, oilman Jake Moellendick purchased an airplane to expedite his commute to his Oklahoma and Texas oil fields. Six months later he organized a syndicate of investors and founded Wichita Aircraft Company, creating the city’s first commercial air field, with four air hangers, a landing strip, and five airplanes available for charter. Moellendick proposed to establish a flight school, a commercial airline offering regional and transcontinental service, and to contract with the postal service to provide the region with an aerial mail route. Within months, he induced E. “Matty” Laird, then designing airplanes in Chicago, to move to Wichita to open the E.M.

³⁵⁰ Wichita Board of Commerce, *Meeting Minutes*, November 1 and 19, December 11 and 26, 1917; January 23, 1918; October 7, 21, and 28, 1919. Wichita’s Board of Commerce engaged in protracted negotiations with Standard Oil to build a major refinery in Wichita. The company did purchase more than 400 acres for \$174,000, but never built the refinery. *Eagle*, January 21 and March 19, 1918. *Beacon*, March 11, 1915; September 29, 1918. By 1915, both the *Beacon* and the *Eagle* ran weekly “oil and gas” columns.

³⁵¹ Wichita’s residents were – like most Americans in the early twentieth century – fascinated by airplanes. More than 18,000 people witnessed the city’s first aviation show in 1911. *Eagle*, May 4 and 7, and August 6, 1911. *Beacon*, May 4, 1911; May 22 and June 21, 1916. Miner, *Wichita*, 154 – 161. For a detailed account of the development of Wichita’s aviation industry, see Rowe and Miner, *Borne on the South Wind*.

Laird Airplane Company. Moellendick and his partner Burke sold Laird the assets of Wichita Aircraft Company and put up the seed money to start fabrication; Laird contributed his tools and designs.³⁵²

Although private investors backed individual designers to establish an aviation manufacturing sector, the Board of Commerce also materially supported the development of Wichita's aviation industry by negotiating with the Army and the federal government to be included as a part of military and postal aerial routes, promoting Wichita as "the nation's Air Capital," and lobbying for a municipal airfield. The Board added an aviation department just three weeks after the Armistice was signed ending World War I. They purchased Jones' airfield and sold it to the city to establish Wichita's first municipal airfield. The Board sponsored annual air shows, including a National Air Congress, drawing air enthusiasts from all over the region.³⁵³

The boosters' single most important contribution to the local aviation industry was probably the construction of a municipal airport, however. Although Wichita needed a municipal airport to establish air mail service, Kansas state law prohibited municipalities from purchasing land more than a mile outside of the corporate city limits. The Chamber of Commerce promoted the incorporation of the Booster Building Company, in which Chamber members invested. The Booster Building Company purchased an airfield and outfitted it for commercial aircraft. In 1927, when the state passed legislation allowing municipalities to own property outside the corporate limits for air fields, the city reimbursed the Booster Building Company for its expenses and took ownership of the airport. By purchasing and developing the municipal airport privately, Wichita's businessmen-boosters opened Wichita to early air

³⁵² Rowe and Miner, *Borne on the South Wind*, 59 – 69 and 96. Laird hired Cessna and Walter Beech. Moellendick also recruited Lloyd Stearman to Wichita; he opened a fabrication plant that he sold to the United Aircraft and Transport Corporation, bringing a branch of Boeing to Wichita. In the early days of Wichita aviation, these men opened, closed, and moved between companies frequently.

³⁵³ *Beacon*, June 2, 1916. Board of Commerce, *Meeting Minutes*, November 30, 1918 and June 10, 1919, in Archives of the Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce. Miner, *Wichita*, 158 – 160, 220.

traffic and allowed Wichita's wholesalers and manufacturers to ship their goods more quickly than their competitors. Moreover, the airport allowed Wichita to establish air traffic supremacy in the state.³⁵⁴

Wichita's municipal airport and growing aviation industry reflected businessmen's enduring metropolitan ambitions. The airport – and Wichita's position on a national air mail and military transport route – created additional linkages connecting Wichita to its hinterland and offered the towns and villages within its network new services, including quicker delivery of goods and mail, and the potential to move about the country more quickly. At the same time, Wichita's burgeoning aviation industry promised to disrupt Wichita's position within the hierarchy of villages, towns, and cities tied to Chicago because the aviation industry did not fit within the hierarchy. Early aviation manufacturers did not look to Chicago to supply parts or even funding. Moreover, Wichita's aviation manufacturers sold their aircraft all over the world, rather than looking to Chicago for buyers. While the airport and air routes further anchored Wichita into its metropolitan economy, Wichita's aviation manufacturers simultaneously lessened the city's economic dependence upon the region it had worked so hard to develop.

The airport also furthered Wichita's claim that it was culturally a metropolis. While the city may have developed a metropolitan economy in the 1880s, it certainly did not achieve the cultural trappings of metropolitanism before the twentieth century as it lacked many of the cosmopolitan features – including parks, cultural institutions, and infrastructure – that we associate with metropolitanism. The progressive movement impelled Wichita's businessmen to redefine its metropolitan aspirations using progressive tenets. In the first decades of the twentieth century, businessmen's organizations worked with the city government to create a White Way for the central business district; spearheaded bond issues to pave roads, build sewers, and construct a convention center; and promoted the creation of a

³⁵⁴ "Municipal Airport To Be One of Nation's Best," *The Wichita Magazine* (May, 1929), vol. VI, no. 5, 6 and 13.

park system. These acts were emblematic of their Progressive spirit, but also reflected a conscious desire to present Wichita as a metropolis on par with any of the nation's largest cities. To that end, Wichita's businessmen successfully lobbied for two major programs that would change the basis of how the city was governed and what it would look like. In 1917, businessmen led a campaign to restructure the city government and became one of the first cities in the country to enact a city manager-commission style of government. In 1919, the Board of Commerce hired Harland Bartholomew – a renowned city planner – to develop Wichita's first comprehensive urban plan. These two movements simultaneously differentiated Wichita from every other town in Kansas, save Kansas City, and set Wichita upon a path of continued metropolitan development in years to come.

Eager to impart local government with progressive ideals of efficiency and professionalism, Wichita's businessmen – like businessmen in Dodge City and Abilene – pushed for a referendum to change from a council to a commission form of municipal government. After the *Eagle* and *Beacon* published multiple reports of police corruption in 1909, the city held a special election to eliminate the ward system, in which council members were elected by the residents of a designated district, in favor of electing commissioners. Commissioners were elected by the entire electorate to head specific city departments, creating a more professional model of management, whereby city business was carried out by a staff and supervised by qualified individuals. The shift to a commission-style of government was expected to curtail favor peddling and back-room deals. In destroying the ward system, it also allowed business leaders the opportunity to be voted into every available commission seat, thereby ensuring Wichita's city government would maintain a pro-business stance.³⁵⁵ By 1917, businessmen had organized the Greater Wichita Civic League – to lobby for a shift to a city manager form of government, claiming that a manager-commission form of municipal government would end cronyism and corruption and encourage the kind of professional management that would result in more efficient and effective

³⁵⁵ Miner, *Wichita*, 139 – 141. *Beacon*, January 29 and February 2, 1909. *Eagle*, January 13 and February 3, 1909.

city government. All residents were encouraged to join the League but an executive committee of thirty businessmen managed it, orchestrating a sustained and wide-reaching education campaign to persuade voters to opt for a manager-commission form of government. The group hosted public meetings throughout the city with female civic leaders and labor leaders speaking in support of the change. Both the *Beacon* and the *Eagle* editorial staff endorsed the proposal. In a special election, residents voted two-to-one to do away with the position of mayor and hire a full-time, salaried city manager. When Wichita instituted its first city manager, it became one of sixty cities nationwide to enact this form of municipal government.³⁵⁶

In 1919, the Board of Commerce decided to hire a professional planner to create a comprehensive city plan for Wichita. Frustrated when the city balked at the cost, the Board selected a committee of seven influential businessmen to study the problem and locate the appropriate consultant. In 1919, the Board hired nationally-recognized city planner Harland Bartholomew to develop a comprehensive plan for the city and agreed to fund the study. Having recognized the value of a city plan to “direct and control the growth of the city that it will be convenient for work, economical for business, healthful for home life, and pleasant for social life,” the Board not only bore the costs of the study, but also lobbied the city council to adopt its recommendations. In 1920, Bartholomew drafted legislation to authorize the creation of city planning commissions and zoning ordinances and, at the behest of Wichita, petitioned the state legislature to affirm it. In 1921, he directed the organization of the city’s first planning commission and helped draft the first zoning ordinance. Two years later, he presented a Comprehensive City Plan that was largely accepted by the commission in March 1923. Bartholomew’s plans, which considered parks, roads, public transportation, and even the continued

³⁵⁶ Miner, *Wichita*, 144-148. *Beacon*, November 16, 1915; December 19, 1916; February 10, 23, and 28; and March 10, 1917. *Eagle*, February 10, 23, 25, and 28; and March 8 and 10, 1917. Despite businessmen’s predictions that the city manager would become the most popular form of municipal government, many of the nation’s biggest cities never adopted the city manager form of government.

development of the downtown, remained the city's blueprint for development for twenty years until it was revised during the aviation boom of the 1940s. As with the earlier campaigns to change the form of municipal government, the creation of a Comprehensive Plan, planning commission, and zoning ordinances further professionalized city government and furthered businessmen's vision of Wichita as a progressive, modern, metropolis. It suggested that growth would occur in an orderly, rational, and business-like fashion. It also allowed businessmen, under the guise of good government, to further protect their privileged status by regulating construction; designating commercial, residential, and industrial districts; and identifying locations for future parks, schools, and other public amenities.³⁵⁷

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Wichita's businessmen continued to work together to press for economic and community development. They retained the earliest residents' vision of the city as a metropolis to rival Chicago, but refined it. Between 1900 and 1929, Wichita's businessmen pressed for additional roads and railroads to consolidate and expand their market area throughout Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas in order to strengthen their position within a metropolitan economy. Building upon an embryonic industrial sector established in the 1880s, businessmen's organizations promoted the development of additional milling and meat-packing facilities as well as the growth of new agricultural-processing sectors, especially broom-corn. Wichita's businessmen enthusiastically capitalized upon oil discoveries in southeastern Kansas, broadening the city's economic base. And they leveraged profits from the oil industry to establish the city's aviation industry. In so doing, they loosened their ties to Chicago and the agricultural economy developing an industrial sector independent

³⁵⁷ The Board of Commerce was not the first group to consider this issue. City planning clubs had existed since at least 1910 and the Rotary Club had recently appointed a committee to assess the city's planning needs as well. The Board of Commerce, as the city's largest and most influential civic group, was the first to actively respond to the challenge of creating a city plan by hiring a consultant and funding the study. Board of Commerce, *Meeting Minutes*, December 9 and 23, 1919. The *Eagle* denounced the idea of city planning, complaining that it was too expensive and that it infringed upon the right of individuals to build and operate businesses wherever they chose. Miner, *Wichita*, 172-174. Eldridge Lovelace, *Harland Bartholomew: His Contributions to American Urban Planning* (Urbana IL: Department of Urban and Regional Planning, 1993). Harland Bartholomew, *A Comprehensive City Plan for Wichita, Kansas* (1923), Kansas State Historical Society.

of the agricultural economy and the region. At the same time, they presented Wichita as a metropolis drawing upon the new cultural tenets of the progressive movement. In building a convention center, parks, and other amenities and by reforming city government and enacting a comprehensive city plan, they hoped to be recognized as a metropolis, akin to Chicago, or at least Kansas City.

Between 1900 and 1929 the city's population exploded – more than quadrupling from almost 24,000 to more than 108,000 residents – easily outpacing the growth rate of any other city in Kansas, including Kansas City (the Kansas side of Kansas City) and Topeka. The city also became increasingly affluent; its assessed valuation increased from \$4.5 million dollars to \$147.9 million. Wichita retained its position as the second largest city in the state, and became the second wealthiest city. Clearly, Wichita did not become “the next Chicago,” and it never eclipsed Kansas City. Yet it did become an industrial city in a rural state and its influence would continue to grow throughout the course of the coming decades. In December, 1929, local oilmen struck oil just north of Wichita's city limits at a time when other fields' production was slowing. As the Chamber of Commerce's local journal enthused, the “Petroleum Santa Gives Wichita Gushers,” even as most of the state and the country was sliding toward the Great Depression.³⁵⁸

Poised for the Depression:

Between 1900 and 1929, the pioneer town-builders of Dodge City, Abilene, and Wichita passed the torch of urban development on to younger generations. Increasingly, these new men looked to businessmen's organizations to create an institutional support for discussions and programming about the nature of development and growth in their communities, reflecting both the popularity of

³⁵⁸ Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Twelfth Biennial Report*, 830 and 863; and *Twenty-Seventh Biennial Report*, 494 and 530. Certainly, Kansas City's growth – in terms of population and assessed valuation – is complicated by its position straddling the Kansas-Missouri state line and the role of its suburbs, even in the early twentieth century. The State Board of Agriculture's report does not reflect that growth. It does provide some understanding of Kansas City's relative standing in the state of Kansas, however. Chamber of Commerce, “Petroleum Santa Gives Wichita Gushers,” *The Wichita* (December, 1929), vol. V, no. 12, 7.

Progressive tenets, as well as an increasing recognition of the benefits of standing together and speaking with one voice. By 1929, businessmen in all three cities had established Chambers of Commerce, which would continue to be active directors for economic and community development programs for years to come. That said, the relative strength of each Chamber was predicated upon the social dynamics of each business community and its ability to create systems to harness and channel members' energy and resources to effectively collaborate on development. In Wichita and Dodge City, businessmen's organizations grew increasingly popular and the bureaucracies that developed within them grew increasingly efficient, allowing these groups to effect substantive change upon their towns. Abilene's promotional organizations also evolved into a more professional and effective Chamber of Commerce over time, but continued to lack the comradery and the organizational structure to support the kind of campaigns that Dodge City and Wichita's groups undertook.

The relative strength of each town's businessmen's organizations, combined with the developmental vision each group generated, in many ways defined what these towns would become by 1929. Dodge City became the modern gateway city to southwestern Kansas and portions of Oklahoma and Texas. As the division point for the Santa Fe railroad and the center of an increasing network of roads and highways, Dodge City acted as a through point into and out of the region. Their status as a transportation hub gave merchants and wholesalers a clear advantage over those working in other towns in the region and ensured that Dodge City would remain the region's commercial center. Wichita's businessmen also capitalized upon transportation advances during this period, increasing their rail capacity and building an extensive network of roads trying to become one of the country's largest metropolises. They used transportation to gain access to remote markets, to build a diversified agricultural-processing sector, and to tap into the oil fields southeast of Wichita. They became early leaders in the growing industry of aviation, allowing the city to free itself from its dependence upon the agricultural economy. Although Wichita never became as big or as powerful as Chicago – or even

Kansas City – it did become the second largest city in the state and an industrial powerhouse in the Great Plains. Abilene’s business community lacked an explicit vision for future development with a business community that struggled to come together. Although Cleyson Brown effected significant change as his conglomerate grew and his brand of welfare capitalism permeated the city more broadly, Abilene’s businessmen never developed the kind of unity that Wichita and Dodge City’s did. Instead, it became a quiet, middle-class residential community dominated by a few employers with a regional reach. Coming from common beginnings as cattle towns, businessmen in each town had charted a distinct trajectory for Dodge City, Abilene, and Wichita that continues to define what they are today.

CONCLUSION

On the eve of the 1929 stock market crash that signaled America's descent into the Great Depression, Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City appeared as bright spots on the Great Plains. They had evolved from their common beginning as three of Kansas's most notorious cattle towns and become successful communities that functioned as far more than their circumscribed roles as county seats for Dickinson, Sedgwick, and Ford counties. Businessmen in each town had exploited the population boom of the 1880s, overcome the depression of the 1890s, and emerged to capitalize upon the booming agricultural economy of the early twentieth century. By 1929 each town enjoyed a durable population, economies built upon more than just retail trade, and sufficient community development projects to satisfy businessmen's progressive aspirations, including constructing sewers and paving streets, providing electricity, gas, and water to residents, and funding local libraries and hospitals.

Despite these similarities, Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City had become three dynamically different towns, with social dynamics peculiar to each business community that substantively influenced how each town grew. In part, these differences were the result of external constraints and advantages – weather patterns; shifts in the regional, national, and international economy; investment decisions made by remote corporations; state and federal laws and programs; among others – which could affect one town, or all three. Yet, local businessmen's attitudes about what constituted appropriate development and growth, in addition to their ability to collaborate with one another, with other townspeople, and with their rural neighbors, materially affected how each town responded to these threats and opportunities. Their responses largely shaped what each town looked like by 1929.

This dissertation, situated in a rich vein of regional political, economic, and cultural history, encourages scholars to reassess the Kansas town-building phenomenon by privileging the voices and experiences of businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City to reveal how these residents

substantively shaped each town's growth. In so doing, it explains how businessmen's attitudes about what constituted appropriate development, as well as their ability to work with one another, affected how each town responded to shifts in regional and national politics, advances in transportation, and the burgeoning agricultural economy. Moreover, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of the social dynamics of town-building by teasing out the personalities and relationships of Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's businessmen and exploring how informal and formal collaborative structures played out to help shape the development of each town. In highlighting the role of collaboration to generate development, this dissertation posits a third explanation for urban development that builds upon Dykstra's conflict thesis, as well as other scholars' interpretation of town-building as the outgrowth of a consensus-driven model.

In examining how Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City grew between 1870 and 1929, this study identifies and characterizes the social dynamics of each town's business community by describing the individual personalities of influential businessmen and analyzing the kind and tenor of interactions occurring between businessmen. It assesses how personalities and personal relationships within each business community materially affected each town's development. In so doing, it reveals the diversity of social experience that characterize business communities in towns like Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City. It also finds that social dynamics could be fluid, changing over time, and that these shifts further affected town-building impulses.

This dissertation confirms that businessmen largely defined development in economic terms, but it also demonstrates that local businessmen and businessmen's organizations in each town defined appropriate development and measured growth using their own standards. And it acknowledges that these definitions could change over time. Finally, it reveals that economic considerations were not the only determinants that drove development decisions; religious beliefs, cultural attitudes, and political

affiliations at times privileged specific community development concerns over potential remunerative benefits.

It also identifies and evaluates the role of collaboration in shaping town-building, laying out a trajectory by which a myriad of familial, socio-political, and economic collaborations encouraged the development of increasingly more formal institutional structures in which to promote continual collaboration among each town's businessmen. In so doing, it evaluates the efficacy of businessmen's organizations in fostering an environment in which development could occur by defining and pursuing specific developmental objectives. It concludes that cities like Wichita and Dodge City that organized strong businessmen's organizations were more likely to be guided by a comprehensive and viable vision, which encouraged the establishment of robust programs to promote development. And it finds that the economic and community development programs put forward by these organizations typically enjoyed greater support from all residents and were more likely to achieve their goals. Ultimately, it demonstrates the value of these groups as more than just a vehicle in which to coordinate and expedite programs, but as boundary organizations – spaces in which competing interests could come together and collaborate to identify common goals and to work toward achieving those goals, thereby creating the impression of a united front speaking with a common voice, even while individual members pursued their own goals.

In contrast, this study finds that in towns like Abilene, where the business community was divided into factions – or where one group dominated but was not supported by the rest of the community – residents could not create strong promotional organizations and could not conceive of a vision that would be supported by the larger community. In other words, if members of a town's business community were sufficiently alienated from one another, formal avenues for sustained collaboration were not viable. In these situations, growth could (and did) occur, but this growth was tied to informal, one-time collaborations, driven by individuals, and reflected their personal and

economic mores. As a result, it was more difficult to grow, and that growth was piecemeal and did not necessarily reflect the values or goals of the broader community.

While this dissertation emphasizes the role white, middle-class businessmen played in directing and engineering urban development in their Great Plains communities, it does not pretend to offer a comprehensive analysis of town-building on the Great Plains. Nor does it offer a complete examination of the businessmen's interactions with other stakeholders. Instead, it begins a conversation into town-building intended to be extended with further research. For example, this dissertation emphasizes the result of local businessmen's ongoing attempts to define a market area for merchants and wholesalers; additional research would explain how the decision-making process evolved within each business community. Future research might explore how local businessmen consciously conceived of their market areas after the Texas cattle trade ended and examine how these definitions did – or did not – change over time. Debates over what each town would become – whether they would become commercial centers or pursue a wholesale sector, agricultural processing, or manufacturing unrelated to farm products – led to related discussions about where to acquire the grain, beef, pork, and other agricultural products necessary to develop an agricultural-processing industry and where this industry's products would be sold. These conversations shaped a town's proposed economic reach and speak to businessmen's understanding of what the hinterland might become and of their town's place in the evolving urban hierarchy of the Great Plains.

An important future project would explore the relationship between area farmers and local businessmen. As the experience of Abilene makes clear, businessmen could not accomplish many of their town-building goals if they did not have the support of area farmers. Farmers patronized area merchants; provided the grain, pork, and other agricultural products to be processed in local plants; and voted in local elections. Although this dissertation emphasizes the power businessmen leveraged to shape development, they did not enjoy absolute authority; businessmen negotiated with area farmers

to secure their patronage and approval for any number of town-building projects. While this dissertation identifies a number of instances when local businessmen required the support of area farmers, it does not extend the collaboration model to consider how these stakeholders resolved points of conflict specifically or to examine town-building from the perspective of area farmers.

A related study might examine how businessmen proposed to connect local businesses to a market area. Considering how businessmen exploited and were constrained by transportation advances would be useful. Clearly railroads were essential; Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City relied upon rail service to lay claim to a territory. But it would be valuable to identify and assess other linkages in more detail. Automobiles, highways, and airplanes changed the way businessmen defined their geographic reach. This dissertation evaluates the zealotry with which local businessmen pursued railroads during the 1870s and 80s and, to a lesser extent, it explores businessmen's interest in becoming located upon an artery of the state's emerging highway system. A more detailed analysis of how these roads connected – or did not connect – Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City to other towns could define the boundaries of each town's actual reach and the reach of other, competing towns. It could then illuminate how transportation advances reordered existing urban hierarchies.

In addition to transportation advances, a host of other technological and economic changes played a role in how each town defined its dominion. The increasing use of tractors and other farm equipment, as well as the adoption of new kinds of seed and increasing knowledge about how to farm in the Great Plains reshaped how farmers worked, what they raised, and the kind and number of farm laborers they hired. Over time, farmers produced higher wheat yields and began using migrant harvest crews to cut and thresh it. At the same time, the cooperative movement became an increasingly popular option for farmers to store and sell their grain. Changes in the country almost certainly affected how local businessmen defined their relationship to the hinterland and how they drew the boundaries of their influence. Using rail and highway maps – in conjunction with state reports that identified and

listed the storage capacity, annual production, and annual sales of the state's flour mills and elevators – researchers could recreate the flow of grain from fields to agricultural processing plants, better identify the boundaries of each town's reach, and evaluate how those boundaries changed over time. A more methodical analysis of how businessmen in each town responded to specific environmental conditions, transportation advances, and political, economic, and demographic shifts by refining the boundaries of their market area could highlight the intersections between the existence of external constraints and the degree of cohesion among members of the business community.

Considered from another perspective, research into businessmen's spatial consciousness could explore how and why individual businesses and entire business communities were able to successfully exploit emerging and established industries. Certainly, Wichita's proximity to – and established economic connections with – the oil towns of southeastern Kansas encouraged the development of the oil and gas industry in Wichita. Yet these reasons do not explain how Brown Telephone Company came to dominate the Great Plains telephone industry. Nor do they explain how Belle Springs Creamery came to sell its butter throughout the eastern United States. What were the factors that allowed Abilene's businessmen to grow their businesses in the manner that they did? Were businessmen aware of these constraints and opportunities when they established these businesses? Examining how these businesses defined and developed their market territories could help explain the growth patterns of other communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In a similar vein, this dissertation demonstrates the role of private, local capital in fomenting local development in Great Plains towns between 1870 and 1929. Businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City were largely responsible for financing individual businesses and entire industries, as well as for partially underwriting the construction of railroads through town and providing land and funds to build public enterprises like Dodge City's Soldiers' Home and Abilene's county courthouse. The complex and evolving connections between the private capital allocations of local businessmen and the creation

of public – or quasi-public – programs, organizations, and buildings merits an extended analysis that probes the dynamics of these transactions as well as the larger ramifications for society and urban development.

Future research should consider the structure of capital formation in these towns in more detail. Analyzing how local businessmen were able to successfully siphon capital from area farmers, other towns, and outside funding sources – the railroads; local, state, and federal government entities; and Eastern businessmen – would uncover patterns of capital accumulation and distribution that may help illuminate how development strategies were capitalized. William Cronon’s analysis of bankruptcy records and wills to identify linkages and establish credit flows between Chicago businessmen and businessmen in Chicago’s hinterland could also be applied to Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City. A systematic analysis of how local banks operated, examining ledgers to track capital flows and identify depositors and debtors could reveal linkages to each town’s hinterland, larger cities like Chicago and Kansas City, and eastern investors. It would also probe the role of social, familial, and business relationships in capital accumulation, illuminating how crony capitalism shaped each town’s development.³⁵⁹ Conversely, an analysis of chattel mortgages could also probe the deep connections between a town’s hinterland and its merchants, further explaining how townspeople siphoned capital from area farmers to benefit the business community, while exposing patterns that would speak to how and when capital was accumulated, as well as its effect on rural residents and area development. An analysis of chattel mortgage debt would help flesh out the power dynamic emerging between townspeople and area farmers and it could further explain the role of land in the Kansas economy.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

³⁶⁰ Earlier historians including James Malin and Allan G. Bogue also encouraged further analysis of chattel mortgage as a means of demonstrating the particularly exploitative nature of this form of debt. James C. Malin, “The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties (Part I),” *Kansas Historical Quarterly IV* (February 1935): 23-49, and “The Kinsley Boom of the Late Eighties (Part II),” *Kansas Historical Quarterly IV* (May 1935): 164-185; and Allan G Bogue, *Money at Interest: The Farm Mortgage on the Middle Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955).

Although this dissertation emphasizes the contributions of white, middle-class businessmen, it is not a study of masculinity or gender and it considers paternalism in a very narrow context. A gendered analysis of the Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's businessmen would further explain why each town's development was distinct. It could uncover evolving gender roles between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in the Great Plains. Robert Haywood began this investigation with *Victorian West* by exploring how Victorian sensibilities were adapted to the cattle towns. While his study is more concerned with the manifestations of Victorianism found in these towns, he necessarily explores Victorian constructions of masculinity and femininity and how these constructions were adapted for life in frontier Kansas.³⁶¹ Additional research could examine how constructions of masculinity in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City might be circumscribed by class or occupation, exploring how beliefs about masculinity shaped local businessmen's understandings of their responsibilities to their community and to their businesses. One might assess the role of paternalism in the evolution of local governments and the economy, especially during the 1890s when local businessmen were largely responsible for identifying and implementing programs to mitigate the effects of the depression.

Great Plains women have been the subject of several studies, although most have emphasized their role on family farms, in the prohibition movement, or in the Peoples' Party.³⁶² Typically, women were not business owners in post-cattle town Kansas. Research could explore ways in which women influenced the economic life of these towns, however. As consumers, they influenced the type of merchandise local merchants carried and how it was marketed. As wives, they influenced their husbands' behavior. Women's groups often agitated for political and social change in these towns. Middle-class women in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City organized relief societies during depressions to

³⁶¹ C. Robert Haywood, *Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

³⁶² See, for example, Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986) and Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

help struggling farmers and destitute neighbors, actions which often pre-dated businessmen's efforts to organize seed programs or openly conflicted with booster narratives claiming that area farmers were doing well. Kansas women earned the right to vote in municipal elections in 1887 and their presence at the polls affected the tenor of political discourse and the outcome of local elections. In *Army of Women*, Michael Lewis Goldberg offers a nuanced and thoughtful analysis of the role of women in shaping politics and culture in the 1890s, but his work could be profitably extended into the twentieth century to consider how women's roles evolved and influenced the progressive movement. Indeed, Abilene's novel mix of Pennsylvania Germans, carnival workers, and female telephone operators employed by Brown Telephone Company could be the subject of fascinating case study on the intersections of gender, religion, class, and early-twentieth century corporate culture.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore the role of race in the Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's development. As the charts in Appendix A demonstrate, the residents of Dickinson, Sedgwick, and Ford counties remained overwhelmingly white throughout the course of this study. African-Americans made up less than five percent of the state population throughout the course of this study. Even as Wichita developed its industrial base, its African-American population remained at five percent. Fewer than twenty-five Native Americans and Asians lived in Dickinson, Sedgwick, or Ford County between 1870 and 1930. The federal census did not begin recording Mexican immigrants until 1930, at which point, they made up only one percent of the state's population. Overall, the foreign-born population dropped as a percentage of the total population over the course of this study for the state and for all three counties and cities. In Dickinson County, and in Ford County between 1880 and 1890, the immigrant population was higher as a percentage of the total population than the state's percentage of foreign-born residents, which was largely due to the influx of German farmers to both counties. In contrast, throughout the study, Sedgwick County was home to fewer immigrants as a percentage of its population than the state average. While Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City remained

overwhelmingly white, race and ethnic difference were negotiated in urban development schemes, the economy, and politics in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City between 1870 and 1929.

Although they represented a very small percentage of the state's population, African-Americans in Kansas made an important impact upon the state and nation. They shaped the state's early history and drove the country closer to Civil War when abolitionists and pro-slavery factions fought bloody battles over whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free or slave state. And in 1954, the landmark United States Supreme Court decision *Brown v. The Board of Education*, which ruled that "separate but equal" educational facilities were unconstitutional, became a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement. Apart from a few studies of the state's Exodusters, researchers have not explored the role of African-Americans in the state's development between these two bookend national events.³⁶³ How businessmen in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City viewed the small population of African-Americans living in Dickinson, Sedgwick, and Ford counties speaks to how African-Americans were treated throughout the state and would flesh out how Kansas race relations evolved in the aftermath of statehood and the Civil War. In the 1890s there is evidence that Dodge City Republicans viewed the African-American vote as an important constituency to achieve electoral victory, especially when Democrats and Populists fused. Examining how Kansas Republicans viewed the state's African-American population could reframe how we understand race relations in the state and how we understand the politics of the 1890s. Additionally, we should explore the role African-Americans played in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's development and examine how segregation played out in the state. While Kansas entered the Union as a free state, residents moving to Kansas in the years following did not necessarily view their Black neighbors as equal. Topeka was not the only city in the state to racially segregate its schools and de facto segregation played out in housing, employment, and community

³⁶³ The two most recognized works on Exodusters are: Robert Ahearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879 – 80* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978) and Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

programs. At the same time, Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City's Republican newspaper editors appeared eager to point out the value of having African-Americans in their communities. The editor of the *Abilene Reflector*, for example, applauded the work of Dickinson County African-Americans who volunteered to clean the newly-constructed hospital and sewed curtains to hang in its windows.³⁶⁴ The reasoning behind Republican newspaper editors' eagerness to recognize African-Americans good works should be fleshed out and evaluated to better assess the role African-Americans played in towns throughout the Great Plains.

Mexican immigrants constituted an even smaller percentage of Kansas's population between 1870 and 1929. After 1900, Santa Fe railroad officials actively recruited Mexican immigrants to move to southwestern Kansas, however and they quickly established a small but significant population at Dodge City. Over the course of the twentieth century, Mexican immigrants have continued to move into western Kansas and now constitute a large segment of the population in towns where meat-packing plants, feedyards, or large corporate farms hire cheap, unskilled labor. This population remains largely unstudied. Mexican immigrants living in Dodge City were initially segregated from the rest of the town in a "Mexican village" that included homes built of salvaged Santa Fe building materials, a store, dance hall, church, and a two-room school house. Over time, this population moved out of the village and into Dodge City. How Mexican immigrants successfully integrated Dodge City society merits examination as this phenomenon appears to be the exception rather than the rule and could offer valuable insights into how immigrant communities can be accommodated and integrated into existing rural communities.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Stewart Verckler, "Newspaper Notes," 1922 – 4 – 6. Dickinson County Heritage Center.

³⁶⁵ Ford County Historical Society, *Ford County, Kansas, 1873 – 1998: A Brief History and Dodge City and Ford County, Kansas, 1870 – 1920: Pioneer Histories and Stories*, 35 – 38, Ford County Heritage Center. James Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 171 – 172. Unpublished studies of Mexican immigrants in Kansas include: Daniel E. Aguilar R., "Mexican Immigrants in Meatpacking Areas of Kansas: Transition and Acquisition of Cultural Capital," (PhD. Diss, Kansas State University, 2008); Tomas R. Jimenez, "Replenished Identity: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and

Central to the discussions of paternalism and race laid out earlier, future research into the town-building phenomenon should consider the role of labor in physically building these communities and producing the goods of local factories. In considering who built and sustained the railroads in each town, as well as who the factory workers were and where they were from, this research would offer a far richer understanding of what these towns looked like and why they grew in the manner that they did. This study suggests that the presence of a small working-class shaped local politics, influenced what size and kind of industries could operate there, guided the physical layout of the town, and affected its culture and community institutions. Reframing the study from the perspective of local workers would enrich our understanding of local politics, urban spaces, economic development, and the culture distinct to each town. It could also identify instances of collaboration between the working-class and the business community and examine how collaboration came about and how power relationships shaped negotiations. Finally, a study of the working class in Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City – like a study of businessmen in each community – would necessarily speak to the cohesiveness of labor within each community and could further explain development by exploring the diversity of religion, cultural background, and political outlook that existed within each community. The Pennsylvania German dairymen in Abilene, Mexican railroad workers in Dodge City, and machinists of Wichita’s first airplane manufacturers all negotiated with local businessmen to define a space for themselves in these towns, but they also negotiated with other laborers.

In 1929, Abilene was the smallest of the three towns, with just over 5,000 residents, representing about one-fifth of Dickinson County’s total population.³⁶⁶ It was a prosperous community of elegant homes, tree-lined streets, and a largely middle-class population. Its business district included

Ethnic Identity,” (PhD. Diss, Harvard University, 2005); and Larry G. Rutter, “Mexican Americans in Kansas: A Survey and Social Mobility Study, 1900 – 1970,” (Master’s thesis, Kansas State University, 1972).

³⁶⁶ All population data comes from the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Twenty-Sixth Biennial Report* (Topeka: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1929).

the headquarters of several regionally-recognized firms, including Belle Springs Creamery and United Telephone & Power Company. Yet its population was increasing at a rate only slightly faster than the state's, and it preserved a small-town feel, in large part because residents preferred it that way. The early development of cliques among Abilene's businessmen hampered their ability to achieve any consensus about how the city might grow and what kinds of programs might encourage that growth. Abilene's early businessmen never defined a clear vision or programs for economic development. These factions grew so entrenched that local development initiatives fell to individual businessmen who imprinted their particular – and sometimes contradictory – visions of town-building upon Abilene. After members of the county's Pennsylvania German population began moving to Abilene beginning in the late 1880s, they exerted increasing influence over how the town would grow. By 1929, the city's two largest employers were owned by Pennsylvania German businessmen. These businesses gradually reshaped Abilene's economy and society so that it increasingly reflected their values and ensured that Abilene became a "city of homes."

Dodge City, on the other hand, had emerged as a commercial and transportation center – the gateway city for the twenty-four counties comprising southwestern Kansas. It remained the largest town in southwestern Kansas with more than 10,000 residents by 1929, far surpassing the growth rate for the state of Kansas. Local businessmen were building more imposing brick buildings downtown, including an elegant hotel, banks, and a movie theatre; and had proudly funded a number of public amenities, including an electrical plant that lit a White Way running through the city's business district. Housed in the new hotel, Dodge City's Chamber of Commerce was well-supported by local businessmen, and reflected a shift away from the business community's long-time reliance upon pioneer businessmen to forge an economic identity for their town. At the same time, the Chamber of Commerce preserved the pioneers' vision of Dodge City as a regional transportation center and trade hub for southwestern Kansas. The persistence of this vision, first forged in the late 1880s with railroad construction projects,

was cemented in the 1890s when Dodge City's enduring partnership with the Santa Fe railroad encouraged the railroad to build additional facilities in town. Early twentieth century promotional organizations continued to support this vision, successfully lobbying the Santa Fe to build additional branch lines from Dodge City into previously inaccessible parts of the state, while actively supporting regional road construction for automobiles. Although Dodge City's businessmen remained largely dependent upon the success of the surrounding agricultural economy, their position as the division point for the Santa Fe provided them some security against widespread crop failures and falling grain prices.

Wichita's growth dwarfed that of Abilene and Dodge City. Buttressed by three major economic sectors – agricultural-processing, oil and gas production, and the burgeoning aviation industry – Wichita grew steadily after 1900 and boasted more than 100,000 residents by 1929. As the second largest city in the state behind Kansas City, Wichita's Chamber of Commerce continued to promote the city as THE metropolis in Kansas, a vision first established by the city's earliest promotional organization, the Board of Trade, in the early 1880s. In fact, Wichita's Chamber of Commerce in the 1920s strongly reflected the beliefs and priorities of the city's earliest businessmen: to foster a business community unified under a vibrant promotional organization; to develop strong trade relationships with communities throughout Kansas and points south of the Kansas border; to establish a diverse economic base; and to become the economically-dominant city in Kansas. While local businessmen continued to emphasize Wichita's economic development in the first decades of the twentieth century, they began to invest in community development projects to make their city healthier, more modern, and more comfortable – a trend begun in the late 1880s. To this end, the Chamber of Commerce financed an urban planning study by recognized urban planner Harland Bartholomew and pressed to have its recommendations implemented. By 1929, Wichita entertained thousands of visitors every year on its busy streets, while offering jobs and homes for a large working-class population in a series of newly-constructed suburbs

situated near the city's packing houses, oil refineries, and factories. Prosperous businessmen built mansions in tree-lined neighborhoods near the city's bustling financial district and supported the construction of hospitals, colleges, and arts centers. Wichita never became "the next Chicago." Yet by the end of the 1920s, it was a modern industrial city that reflected the metropolitan dreams of the business community.

When the United States plunged into the Great Depression, and western Kansas was consumed by dust storms, hundreds of Kansas towns disappeared. In coming years, the lures of cities, combined with the increasing corporatization of agriculture, continued to empty the plains of family farms and made Kansas towns increasingly unviable. In the early twenty-first century, the Kansas plains have become ever more desolate, and the remaining towns struggle to survive. Yet Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City remain. In many ways, their persistence in the light of other towns' diminishment can be traced to the decisions made by local businessmen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which established these towns as permanent fixtures on the Plains. At the same time, Dodge City and Wichita have continued to grow, building upon the base that their founders created. The social dynamics of each town's business community continue to shape each town's economic and community development.

APPENDIX A:

Population Statistics for the State of Kansas, Dickinson County, the City of Abilene, Sedgwick County, the City of Wichita, Ford County, and the City of Dodge City³⁶⁷

1880	Total	Native-Born	White, Foreign Born	As a % of total	White	African-American	As a % of total
State of KS	996,096	886,010	110,086	11%	952,155	43,107	4%
Dickinson County:	15,251	12,562	2,689	18%	15,170	81	1%
Abilene	2,360	nr	nr		nr	nr	
Sedgwick County:	18,753	17,175	1,578	8%	18,459	268	1%
Wichita	4,911	4,501	410	8%	4,730	172	4%
Ford County:	3,122	2,567	555	18%	3,048	73	2%
Dodge City	996	nr	nr		nr	nr	

Table 1: Population, 1880

1890	Total	Native-Born	White, Foreign Born	As a % of total	White	African-American	As a % of total
State of KS	1,428,108	1,279,258	147,838	10%	1,376,552	53,543	4%
Dickinson County:	22,273	19,036	3,237	15%	22,113	158	1%
Abilene	3,547	nr	nr		nr	nr	
Sedgwick County:	43,626	40,029	3,597	8%	42,256	1,354	3%
Wichita	23,853	nr	nr		nr	nr	
Ford County:	5,308	4,772	536	10%	5,257	51	1%
Dodge City	1,763	nr	nr		nr	nr	

Table 2: Population, 1890

1900	Total	Native-Born	White, Foreign Born	As a % of total	White	African-American	As a % of total
State of KS	1,470,495	1,343,810	126,685	9%	1,416,319	52,003	4%
Dickinson County:	21,816	19,154	2,662	12%	21,588	228	1%
Abilene	3,507	3,314	193	6%	3,353	154	4%
Sedgwick County:	44,037	41,125	2,912	7%	42,546	1,489	3%
Wichita	24,671	23,224	1,447	6%	23,280	1,389	6%
Ford County:	5,497	5,090	407	7%	5,432	65	1%
Dodge City	1,942	nr	nr		nr	nr	

Table 3: Population, 1900

³⁶⁷ Native Population figures are not included because the population was less than twenty-five residents per county.

1910	Total	Native-Born	White, Foreign Born	As a % of total	White	African-American	As a % of total
State of KS	1,690,949	1,555,499	135,450	8%	1,624,352	54,030	3%
Dickinson County:	24,361	21,648	2,551	10%	24,199	162	1%
Abilene	4,118	nr	nr		nr	nr	
Sedgwick County:	73,095	66,109	4,304	6%	70,413	2,652	4%
Wichita	52,450	47,121	2,855	5%	49,976	2,457	5%
Ford County:	11,393	10,421	877	8%	11,298	93	1%
Dodge City	3,214	nr	nr		nr	nr	

Table 4: Population, 1910

1920	Total	Native-Born	White, Foreign Born	As a % of total	White	African-American	As a % of total
State of KS	1,769,257	1,598,328	110,578	6%	1,708,906	57,925	3%
Dickinson County:	25,777	23,644	1,949	8%	25,593	181	1%
Abilene	4,895	4,578	211	4%	4,789	106	2%
Sedgwick County:	92,234	84,532	4,026	4%	88,558	3,627	4%
Wichita	72,217	65,602	3,021	4%	68,623	3,545	5%
Ford County:	14,273	13,362	777	5%	14,139	134	1%
Dodge City	5,061	4,456	188	4%	4,644	117	2%

Table 5: Population, 1920

1930	Total	Native-Born	White, Foreign Born	As a % of total	White	African-American	As a % of total
State of KS	1,880,999	1,725,131	69,716	4%	1,792,547	66,344	4%
Dickinson County:	25,870	24,077	1,225	5%	25,302	223	1%
Abilene	5,658	5,353	178	3%	5,531	120	2%
Sedgwick County:	136,660	126,078	2,935	2%	129,013	5,726	4%
Wichita	111,110	102,059	2,263	2%	104,322	5,623	5%
Ford County:	20,647	19,444	205	1%	19,649	238	1%
Dodge City	10,059	9,631	154	2%	9,785	205	2%

Table 6: Population, 1930

Source: United States. Bureau of the Census. *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, v. 1, Population (New York: Norman Ross, 1991); *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*, v. 1, Population (New York: Norman Ross, 1994); *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*, v. 2, Population (New York: Norman Ross, 1997-1998); *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, v. 2, Population (New York: Norman Ross, 1999 – 2000); *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, v.2, Population (New York: Norman Ross, 2006); *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*, v.2, Population (New York: Norman Ross, 2003).

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