

HISTORY OF DONIPHAN COUNTY

AND

WATHENA, KANSAS

by

Janette Elder

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹Brazelton, History of Wathena and Doniphan County.
- ²A.J. Andreas, History of the State of Kansas, p. 472.
- ³Brazelton, History of Wathena and Doniphan County.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Ibid.
- ⁷Ibid.
- ⁸William Frank Zornow, Kansas a History of the Jayhawk State, p. 134.
- ⁹Brazelton, History of Wathena and Doniphan County.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³George W. Martin, ed. Kansas Historical Collections, Vol III, p. 485.
- ¹⁴John R. Brazelton, History of Wathena and Doniphan County.
- ¹⁵A.J. Andreas, History of the State of Kansas, p. 494.
- ¹⁶Brazelton, History of Wathena and Doniphan County.
- ¹⁷Ibid.

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HISTORY OF DONIPHAN COUNTY AND WATHENA, KANSAS

Doniphan County is situated in the extreme northeast corner of Kansas. It is bounded on the south by the Missouri River, the state of Missouri, and Atchison County, Kansas; on the west by Brown County, on the north by the state line and the Missouri River, and on the east by the Missouri River and the state of Missouri.

The early settlers in Doniphan County came from all parts of the East and South. A majority of them were from Missouri, either natives of Missouri or people from other states who had lived for some years in Missouri. The settlers from Missouri usually selected claims along the streams where there was an abundance of timber country. The prairie was left for the settlers with more foresight and industry at a later time. Now the western part of the county is the wealthiest part of the county. Splendidly cultivated farms and magnificent farm houses are to be seen in the western part of the county. These have a market value quadruple that of the farms along the streams and in the timber.¹

In 1883 Doniphan County had twenty-five per cent of bottom land and seventy-five percent of upland. There was 242,560 acres of land in the county. Sixty percent of the land was under cultivation. Doniphan County is not rich in minerals.² The land usage is greater now, but by 1883 the best lands had been settled.

The present population of Doniphan County is made up of people from every region of the United States and many European countries. The North and South are both strongly represented, and the Germans are predominate among the foreign portion of the population. Wolf River and Union townships contain a large number of Germans in the eastern part of Wayne and the northern part of Washington townships. Irish also have settlements around Denton and parts of Union township, while Scandinavians are found around Brenner and Bendena. The greatest number of French families are to be found around Wathena.³ The French are the families who started Wathena's fruit industry.

Previous to 1854 the lands in Doniphan County were held by three Indian tribes, the Kickapoos, the Iowas, and the Foxes. It was not until these tribes had signed a treaty with the government ceding the lands, that progress could be made in organizing the territory.

The Kickapoos were located on the present site of Wathena and the adjacent county. The Iowas were settled about the mission near Highland, and the Sacs and Foxes had three villages on Wolf River. They seemed content with their land and were reluctant to consider the treaty at first.

The Kickapoos were one of the most troublesome tribes the government had to deal with in Kansas. They were always contending for something that didn't belong to them. When the government removed the Iowas and Sacs from the Platte, in the northwest corner of Missouri in 1837, and placed them on the northern half

of Doniphan County, the Kickapoos claimed that their lands extended north of the Wolf River. Thus a long controversy began. The controversy ended with the Kickapoos losing some territory. Their northern boundary was established at a point beginning on the west bank of the Missouri River, four miles above St. Joseph and running westward through the center of Doniphan County.

When the government started to negotiate with the Indians for their lands in Kansas prior to opening up the county to white settlement, trouble again broke out with the Kickapoos over their boundaries. They now claimed that their southern boundary extended down along the Fort Leavenworth military reservation. The Kickapoos were encouraged in their claim by A.J. Boyd, a whisky trader, who pretended to read their letters from the secretary of the interior saying that they were right in their belief. They admitted they were wrong in a meeting with agent Vanderslice on the Grasshopper River.

The next trouble the government had with the Kickapoos was over the price of their lands. They wanted one dollar and twenty-five cents, but the government turned them down. The government then agreed to have their improvements appraised and pay them the appraised value.⁴

May 18, 1854 the chiefs of the the three tribes went to Washington where they signed the treaty agreeing to accept a much decreased reservation.

Three ferries operated in the early days of Doniphan County. The terminals were in White Cloud, Belimon, and Elwood.⁵

Eventually the railroad reached Marysville and Mr. Senter moved his family to Marysville while construction moved westward. The first conductor on the passenger coach was William Bryan. William never married and died in Wathena January 31, 1914.¹⁰

Wathena's second railroad was constructed in 1870 to the city of Doniphan. Much of the freight hauled was wine from the Brenner Winery, the largest in the state. Palermo was very happy about the construction of the railroad because steamboat traffic was declining and they needed an outlet for their manufactured flour. The road operated at a loss and after two years was abandoned. Thus as a town Palermo was doomed, but Doniphan had rail connection from Atchison and was able to continue for another half century.

One of the first pieces of improved highway in Kansas was the three mile stretch of road between Wathena and Elwood.

In January, 1834, Daniel Vanderslice, then the agent for the Kickapoos, gave Ebenezer Blackiston and Lillary Smallwood a contract so they could cut some timber from the road between Wathena and the St. Joseph ferry. The road was one hundred feet in width. It was completed in 1866.

The private company that constructed it charged a twenty-five cent toll. The road made money for the stockholders until the Missouri River flooded and tore up two miles of the road. The road was neglected and the stones sank into the mire as years passed. Small portions of it still remained in 1967.

About 1919 the road was paved from Wathena to St. Joseph. A few years later the pavement was extended to west of Troy and eventually to the west county line near Highland. In 1954 the

road was rerouted and repaved from St. Joseph to Troy.¹²

Wathena is located on Peter's Creek, four miles from the Missouri River. Just north of Wathena is a huge bend in the river which helps make the river boundary of Doniphan County so irregular. A short distance east of town the river has cut through the stone road to St. Joseph and threatens to meet the return curve, now only removed by half a mile of bottom land.

The first settler on the town site was Peter Cadue, an interpreter of the Kickapoo Indians, who moved to the Cadue Reserve in 1847. In 1852 Wathena, a Kickapoo Chief, settled in the area. The town of Wathena was named after him.¹³

Prior to laying out of the townsite of Wathena several people had settled in Wathena, some to trade with the Indians and others to serve people on their way to California. Wathena was first claimed by Anderson Cox who sold his quarter section to Milton E. Bryan for seven hundred and fifty dollars in gold.¹⁴

In 1856 the town was laid out by Milton E. Bryan, P. Morse, and W. Ridenbaugh. Besides the seven hundred and fifty dollars to Anderson Cox, they paid a large sum to Chief Wathena for his improvements. Wathena was incorporated in 1857. Soon settlers began arriving, and Wathena grew rapidly.¹⁵

Captain Etinne de Bourgmont was among the French pioneers in Kansas. He and other Frenchmen made voyages up and down the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. One of the attractions was the abundant supply of wild grapes. This was the prelude to Wathena's large wine and fruit market.

Many more early French settlers recognized the great possibilities of this area for the production of fruits. Many of them passed up rich river valleys to build homes and plant vineyards on the steep

bluffs overlooking the Missouri River. The first settlers interested in the growth and development of the fruit market settled in the area between Wathena and Palermo.

One of the men that became famous for his fruit was Constance Poirier. Mr. Poirier planted his first vineyard, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and apricots in 1855. The large wine cellar he constructed is still standing. In 1872 his output was thirty thousand gallons from which he received twenty-five thousand dollars. Many German immigrants also began growing fruit. Wathena soon was producing more than the St. Joseph market could absorb. This was especially true after Kansas adopted prohibition and the manufacture of alcoholic beverages for sale was banned. The large vineyard growers shipped their fresh grapes to a St. Louis winery in open top one hundred gallon casks. This didn't prove satisfactory because no refrigeration was available. Thus the grapes didn't reach their destination in satisfactory condition.

In the late 1880's a solution to the fruit problem was found by chance by John Brazelton Sr. He bought prairie hay from producers in western Kansas. One of the producers happened to visit Wathena during blackberry harvest and Mr. Brazelton gave him some fruit to take home. He showed the blackberries to others in his community and they wanted more of them. Shipments of grapes, apples, and pears followed later in the fall.

In the following spring strawberries, wild gooseberries, apricots, and raspberries were shipped to the Kansasans. Wathena had a good market for the fruit, but it became evident that they needed better packing and shipping methods. A crate and box factory supplied these needs. At their peak, twenty carloads of seasonal fruit were shipped each day. Nearly everyone began raising fruit and more attention was shown toward the fruit tress. An attempt was made to produce better quality fruit from

the trees. Spraying was tried in many orchards. The wormless fruit brought a better price. New types of sprayers were also used. Gas powered sprayers were being used of the old generated power from a gear on the axle.¹⁶

Early in 1905 co-operative sales were tried. A Wathena Fruit Grower's Association was organized. L.N. Linder was chosen president. It continued business until 1936.

Meanwhile the Wathena Apple Grower's Association was organized in the late 1920's. It absorbed all the fruit shipping.

The fall of 1939 was unusually warm and trees didn't go into the dormat stage as they usually did. The temperature suddenly dropped and caught the trees with sap still flowing. The "Armistice Day Freeze" destroyed a large acreage of orchards. Other orchards were so weakened that they produced poorly.

With the advent of World War II farmers were short handed. Berry culture demands alot of hand labor and it was not available. When World War II ended, the fruit industry had been seriously hurt. Attractive high wages in town, welfare and relief payments of many of the former pickers, and the natural restlessness of returning veterans contributed to the decline in berry growing.¹⁷

Wathena apples and apple cider are still important, along with strawberries.