Ford County Kansas Essay, Research Paper

FORD COUNTY

by Brandon Noll

Ford County was named in honor of Colonel James H. Ford, of the

Second Colorado Calvary, Commander at Fort Dodge, once a Military

Reservation of about 12,000 acres. It was the most important military

outpost on the Santa Fe Trail from about 1858 to 1882. Land was

homesteaded by settlers and some land was purchased, coming from two

sources, the Santa Fe Land Grant and the Osage Treaty Lands. Dodge City,

was declared the county seat and was a famous frontier town and shipping

center.

Mention ‘Dodge City’ to anyone above the age of five and the “wild

west” will come alive for them. Of all the cattle and railroad (trailhead)

towns, Dodge City has been the most notorious and romanticized of the lot.

Dodge City was founded in 1872. It quickly began to rise to a major trade

center on the Santa Fe Trail. By September of 1872 the shiny steel rails of

the brand new Atchison, Topeaka, and Santa Fe Railroad stretched into

view. And Dodge City was waiting and began to grow at a record rate. But

in those early years Dodge City also obtained its infamous stamp of

lawlessness and gunslinging. There was no local law enforcement and

military had no jurisdiction over the town, so lawlessness reigned. Buffalo

hunters, railroad workers, drifters, and soldiers scrapped and fought, leading

to the shootings where men died with their boots on. And that created a

hasty need for a local burial place, and still a famous tourist attraction- Boot

Hill Cemetery. Dodge City’s reputation for rowdiness was universal and it

was boasted that 24 men were killed in single year, which was a lot for back

then. By 1876 the buffalo were gone and longhorn cattle from Texas drove

the dollars into town. During the next ten years, over five million head were

driven up the western branch of the Chisholm and western Trails to Dodge

City. Law and order came riding into town with such respectable peace

officers as Bat Masterson, Bill Tilghman, Doc Holliday, and Charlie Bassett.

Out of these personalities evolved the famous fictional character of Marshall

Matt Dillion.

Too soon, however, the ultimate fate that swallowed up all the cattle

towns: in 1885 the state legislature passed a new quarantine law that closed

all of Kansas to the tick-infested cattle that were being driven up from

Texas. By the end of that year the trails were blocked by lines of barbed-

wire fence.

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Finally, and ironically, the very railroads that provided the original impetus

for the cattle towns also helped to make them anachronisms. They did this

by simply extending their lines into Texas.

Dodge City is world famous for “Boot Hill”, and “Front Street”, which

is located in the heart of Dodge City. In western lore Dodge City holds a

unique place as, one of the wildest and roughest towns on the frontier, its

reputation as, “the wickedest little city in America” was well founded. Front

Street with the Long Branch Saloon and Rath and Wright Store, is as much

a part of its legend as the names of Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday and Bat

Masterson. There are deeds on file in the Register of Deeds Office with Bat

Masterson’s signature on them. The Historical Lora Locke Hotel, built in

1928, was purchased by Ford County in 1989. All six floors renovated with

the Lobby and Mezzanine areas staying in its original design. County

offices moved to the “Ford County Government in May of 1991.

Dodge City is served by two colleges, Dodge City Community College

and St. Mary of the Plains College. Dodge City Community College

prepares over 2,300 students for further training in every field from

accounting to pre-veterinary medicine and hands-on technical training for

everything from communication technology to wastewater technology. A

computer laboratory of 65 IBM and Macintosh computers prepares students

for such field robotics, computer-aided design and programming. St. Mary

of the Plains College offers 26 four-year degree programs for literally

thousands of careers. With medical campuses in Wichita and Topeaka, St.

Mary’s provides young minds with highly acclaimed academic programs and

a personal, small-city touch.

Ford County is the center of a large area that produces hard winter

wheat and grain sorghum. The principal market for the grain produced in

the southwestern part of the state is Dodge City. Other crops harvested are

oats, barley, rye, corn, and alfalfa. In Ford County more than 69% of the

total income is derived from the sale of livestock, and livestock raised in the

County, but sheep and hogs are also important. EXCEL, a beef packing

plant was constructed in 1979 employing over 1500 people. Hy Plains Beef

just completed an expansion on their facility.

So, I hope you have learned about Dodge City and Ford County. And

about how fascinating and historical they really are.