

# The Social Impact of the Transient Grazing Industry: The Thurman Example

by Joseph V. Hickey

THE TEXAS CATTLE DRIVE ERA between 1867 and 1885 has made Abilene, Dodge City, and other "cattle towns" an important part of American history and folklore. While most people know that the railroad, barbed wire, and an advancing horde of farmers doomed the cowtown, relatively few are aware that not only did Texas cattle drives to Kansas continue after 1885, they actually increased in volume. Soon after cattle trails to Dodge City were closed in the mid-1880s, railroads began a large scale movement of southwestern cattle into the Kansas Flint Hills. According to historian James Malin, the number of beef cattle shipped annually by rail into the Flint Hills to be fattened on prairie grasses "was four to five times those for the wild years at Abilene, Ellsworth, and Dodge City."<sup>1</sup>

Whereas numerous books and articles have discussed the social impact of Texas cattle drives on various Kansas towns, relatively little is known about the next important phase in the Kansas beef industry when up to five hundred thousand southwestern cattle were shipped annually by rail into dozens of small Flint Hills villages, hamlets, and neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> What was the nature of Flint Hills society prior to the establishment of the

"transient grazing industry"? Did it change in some way to meet the needs of the new industry, and if so, in what ways? Finally, what aspects of social organization enabled many Flint Hills communities to participate in a complex economic system which extended well beyond boundaries of the Flint Hills, and ultimately to become one of the most efficient producers of beef in the nation?

This article describes the social impact of the transient grazing industry on a small, little-known Flint Hills neighborhood called Thurman. Thurman was a neighborhood of Matfield Green from 1874 when it was awarded an independent post office until 1944 when Thurman School was closed and the neighborhood ceased to exist. Since Thurman was located in that portion of the Flint Hills where the transient grazing industry became most dominant, it is unlikely its social history is typical of the region as a whole. As an extreme case, it is meant instead to highlight some of the general processes that accompanied the transformation of the region from the domain of small farmers to that of cattlemen.

Thurman, located in southeastern Chase County, was situated in the heart of the Kansas Flint Hills big-pasture country (Map 1). Topography in this region is striking and beautiful. Approximately fourteen percent of the area is composed of moderately wooded floodplains and low terraces, with slopes of generally less than three percent. The remaining eighty-six percent of the area consists of gently rolling "uplands" with local relief ranging from three hundred to more than five hundred feet, and slope gradients from three to fifteen percent. According to the Chase County soil survey, the predominant upland soil in the Thurman area is the "Florence-Labette" complex. Course chert fragments larger than three inches in diameter comprise from ten to twenty percent of the A horizon, a mineral layer on or just below the ground's surface, and

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1. James C. Malin, "An Introduction to the History of the Bluestem-Pasture Region of Kansas: A Study in Adaptation to Geographical Environment," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 11 (February 1942): 28.

2. Map 1 includes the combined territory of Thurman and Matfield Green, Thurman's trade center community. Defined in these broad terms, Thurman contained 146-square miles of land.

as much as fifty percent of the B, a mineral layer below the A horizon.<sup>3</sup>

Climate in the Flint Hills may be described best as transitional. The Flint Hills are near the boundary between the Humid Subtropical climates of the southeastern United States and Mid-latitude Semi-arid climates of the Great Plains. The overwhelming majority of individual years experience periods of seasonal drought, and approximately six percent of the years are semi-arid. The impact of winter drought may be easily seen in a region's natural vegetation. Observations of the Thurman landscape with its expansive bluestem pastures and tree-lined streams leave little doubt as to the area's Winter-dry Subtropical influence.<sup>4</sup>

Other more specific climatic traits of the area critical to agriculture are growing season and distribution of rainfall. The average length of time between the last killing frost of the spring and first killing frost of the fall is 180 days. Rainfall, which has ranged from less than twenty inches in drought years to more than fifty inches in the wettest years, is normally concentrated in the spring and early summer with June usually the wettest month. Total annual rainfall in the area averages thirty-four inches.<sup>5</sup>

The disproportionate ratio of uplands, cherty soils, and a steeply sloping terrain seem to have played a major role in determining the early settlement history of much of the Flint Hills. Early ranchers discovered in the uplands an ideal physical environment for their more "extensive" form of agriculture. They found large amounts of space, a natural abundance of nutritious native grasses, water, and a topography suitable for ranching. Most farmers saw the Flint Hills in opposite terms. They perceived the uplands as primarily grazing land, unsuitable for either farms or homesteads. In contrast, they found that the bottoms not only yielded

easily to their plows, but closely matched their cultural perceptions of a choice farming environment.<sup>6</sup>

Charles Wood in *The Kansas Beef Industry* has pointed out that while much of Kansas experienced a population boom in the 1860s and 1870s, this was not the case in most parts of the Flint Hills. According to Wood, while a few settlers stopped to take up land in the "fertile valleys," most bypassed the Flint Hills preferring the rich, deep soiled plowlands farther west.<sup>7</sup> Wood's claims are generally supported in the Matfield Green and Thurman areas. During the 1860s and 1870s, pioneers filled the narrow creek and river bottoms, but the uplands which comprised most of the land were neither settled nor farmed.

To understand the settlement decisions of post-Civil War farmers, it is necessary to examine their places of origin and farming traditions in those areas. Most Thurman farmers came from the midwestern states of Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa where during the 1860s most viewed the bottomlands as far superior to the uplands in almost every way. To midwestern farmers, the bottoms contained water, timber, and soil that they believed was much more fertile than upland soils. There were, of course, rumors in Kansas and elsewhere that under special circumstances the uplands might be better. Such reports were rarely taken seriously, however. For example, in 1860 the editor of the *Emporia News*, who was very interested in promoting land in the surrounding region, most of which were uplands, was unable to hide his skepticism when he heard a report that corn raised in the uplands was more "drouth resistant" than bottomland corn. Responding to the claim, the editor wrote: "if this be so, it is worthy of attention and we would like to have some of our farmers tell us the reason for it. The bottoms have always been considered much superior, for corn, to the uplands."<sup>8</sup>

There is a suggestion that during the early 1870s, soon after the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway completed a rail line to Cottonwood Station (Strong City), twenty-five miles to Thurman's north, farmers began to

3. James T. Neill, "Soil Survey of Chase County, Kansas," *U.S. Department of Agriculture Reports* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974). In the glossary, Neill defines a soil horizon as "a layer of soil, approximately parallel to the surface, that has distinct characteristics provided by soil forming processes," p. 65.

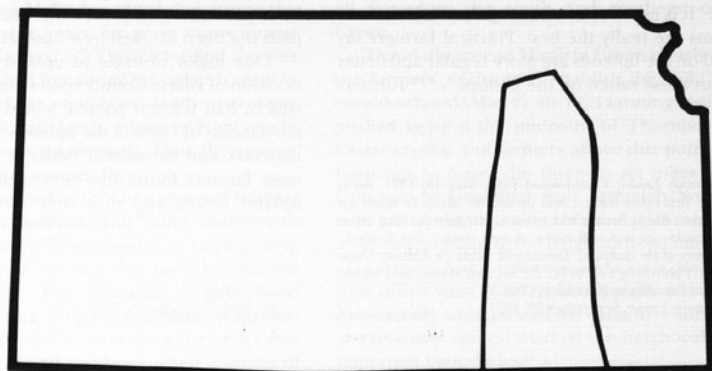
4. This is geographer Charles E. Webb's assessment of Thurman's climate. A fuller description of the physical environment can be found in Joseph V. Hickey and Charles E. Webb, "The Transition From Farming to Ranching in the Kansas Flint Hills: Two Case Studies" (paper presented at the Twenty-seventh Annual Conference of the Western Social Science Association, Fort Worth, Tex., 1985). See also Joseph V. Hickey and Charles E. Webb, "The Transition from Farming to Ranching in the Kansas Flint Hills: Two Case Studies," *Great Plains Quarterly* 7 (Fall 1987):244-55.

5. U.S. Department of Commerce, Weather Bureau, Climatological Data, *Kansas Annual Summaries: 1896-1984*. Data from both Cottonwood Falls and Matfield Green were used to provide a more complete record.

6. Hickey and Webb, "Transition from Farming to Ranching," 247-48.

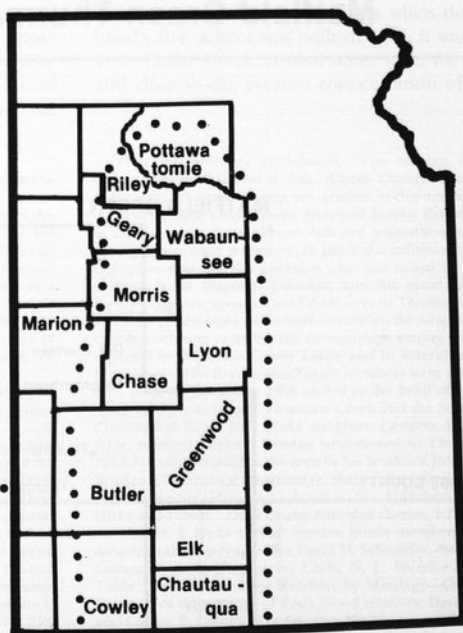
7. Charles L. Wood, *The Kansas Beef Industry* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1980), 4.

8. In the 1860s and early 1870s surveyor classifications of land as bottomland or upland were taken very seriously by town boomers of all types, including newspapermen. For example, in the early 1870s the editor of the *Emporia News* admitted that the amount of Lyon County bottomland was 15 percent, but he thought the "31 percent for Shawnee County was too much." See Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Third Annual Report* (Topeka: Geo. W. Martin, 1874), 334.



## The Flint Hills of Kansas

Flint Hills Boundary . . . .



Map 1. The area of the Flint Hills in Kansas (top) and the counties within this area (bottom) are represented here. Thurman, in southeastern Chase County, was in the heart of the Flint Hills big-pasture country.

change their views of the uplands.<sup>9</sup> They did so under a propaganda assault by the *Chase County Leader* which in 1871 wrote: "It is now become a recognized fact that our upland farms are really the best. Practical farmers say crops raised on the uplands are more regular and better average than those raised on the bottom..."<sup>10</sup> Farmers

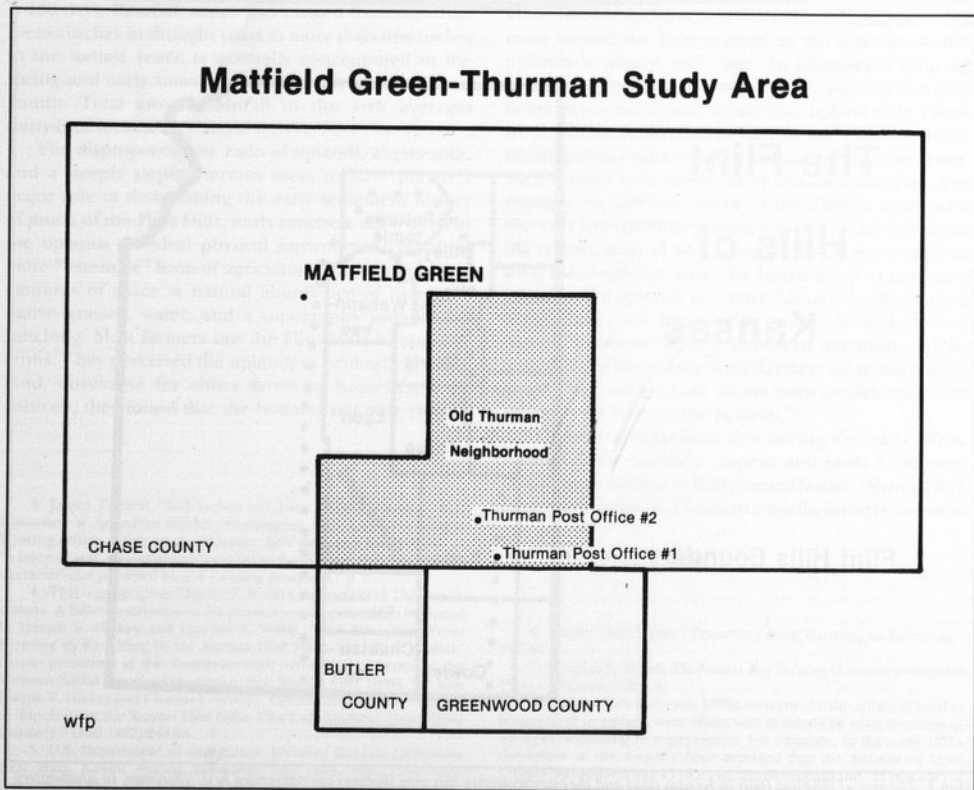
began to expand into the relatively flat uplands, which they termed "sloping uplands," and it seems they would have pushed even farther into the uplands had their path not been blocked by a number of other factors.<sup>11</sup>

One major obstacle to upland settlement was the decision of Chase County voters not to adopt a herd law which, had it been passed, would have restricted the movements of cattle in the uplands; with limited fencing material, and substantial herds of free ranging cattle, most farmers found that they could not protect their upland farms, and thus they avoided making large

9. *Chase County Leader*, Cottonwood Falls, May 18, 1871, mentioned that "the first cattle train... was up on the Santa Fe Road on the 8th." Historian Keith Bryant has written, "In July the line from Newton to Emporia opened—78 miles of new track." See Keith L. Bryant, Jr., *History of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 25. See also Hickey and Webb, "Transition from Farming to Ranching," 248.

10. *Chase County Leader*, September 29, 1871.

11. *Ibid.*, September 5, 1873.



Map 2. The decision to establish the Old Thurman neighborhood was influenced by the travel distance to Matfield Green.



purchases in this microenvironment.<sup>12</sup> Failure to adopt a herd law was not the only obstacle to upland settlement. Historian James Malin has noted that during the late 1870s "unfavorable years for grain crops almost became a habit in Kansas...." This factor and the fact that farmers already had free use of the uplands seem to have made the purchase of railroad lands, speculator lands and common school lands, all priced from one to six dollars an acre, poor investments. Thus, throughout the 1870s most farmers avoided them.<sup>13</sup>

Thurman was founded in 1874 by a group of farmers from Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and other midwestern states. They were primarily interested in raising corn, wheat, and a variety of livestock that included, but did not emphasize, cattle. The Thurman neighborhood received its name from William Thurman, a farmer-speculator who is believed to have been the area's first settler. The neighborhood was born when a group of "creek bottom farmers" decided to separate from Matfield Green, founded earlier in 1867, and form their own independent post office.<sup>14</sup> Geography and kinship appear to have been the major catalysts leading to the neighborhood's birth. By 1874 all land in the upper South Fork Valley where the Matfield Green Post Office was situated had been claimed, and farmers were forced to settle less desirable creek bottoms, including the

headwaters of the South Fork and Thurman and Little Cedar creeks. These streams, each six miles in length, all flowed to the south and southeast of Matfield Green.

Travel distance to Matfield Green clearly influenced the farmers' decision to establish the "Old" Thurman neighborhood (Map 2). By 1874 farming settlement had pushed beyond the midpoint of Thurman and Little Cedar creeks, and farmers above this point found it a hardship to travel the three to six miles to Matfield Green to pick up their mail. Jeremiah Nowlan, Thurman's first postmaster, and his kin appear to have played a key role in shaping the neighborhood into an identifiable entity. Five of twenty petitioners for Thurman's post office were Nowlan kin. Equally important, their homesteads were located on each of Thurman's three streams, and several marked the neighborhood's most important boundaries.<sup>15</sup>

Most lines of evidence suggest that creek bottom farmers founded the Thurman Post Office largely to serve a practical need and that little else was intended. This is suggested by the fact that when the neighborhood's first school was built in 1875, it was placed on Little Cedar Creek, several miles from the post office, and close to the greatest concentration of school-age

12. Farmer debate concerning the herd law was most active in the early 1870s. In the *Chase County Leader*, March 29, 1872, a farmer opposed to the law wrote, "Every person in Chase County has seen the 'flint hills'.... It was never calculated by the all wise Creator for farming." Countering this claim a herd law proponent replied: "I can show... hundreds of acres of good upland which could be made into good farms, but for want of timber to fence with.... I have lived in a county... where the herd law was in force, where the poor farmers clubbed together and hired herders [and]... made it a success." See *Chase County Leader*, April 26, 1872. For a more detailed analysis of how various classes of Flint Hills agriculturists perceived the land, see Hickey and Webb, "Transition From Farming to Ranching."

13. Malin, "Bluestem-Pasture Region of Kansas," 10. Land prices have been determined primarily from sales reported in the Chase County Tract Records which list prices of various classes of land including railroad, common school lands, and speculator sales during the period in question. In addition, the price of railroad lands and the terms of sale are listed in most Kansas State Board of Agriculture reports including the *Fourth Annual Report*, 665, 670. This lists AT&SF lands in Chase County at \$2.25 to \$10.00 an acre, and Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad lands at \$2.00 to \$6.00 an acre. Although barbed wire was invented in 1874, it was neither widely available nor priced within most Chase County farmers' means until the 1880s. By the end of the 1880s most of Chase County was fenced and the open range was no more. See Thomas D. Isern, "Farmers, Ranchers, and Stockmen of the Flint Hills," *Western Historical Quarterly* 16 (July 1985): 258. Fencing materials used and the relative extent of fencing may also be documented through the state agricultural census.

14. Thurman was founded on August 24, 1874. See *Reports of Site Locations, 1837-1950*, Post Office Department, Kansas, Barton-Chase, Roll 189, M1126, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Isern discusses the various kinds of Flint Hills farmers in "Farmers, Ranchers, and Stockmen," 260-61.

15. Clara Brandley Hildebrand, "The Nowlan Family," *Chase County Historical Sketches* 4 vols. (Chase County Historical Society, 1940) 1:311-13. Most kinship ties detailed in this article are based on the four-volume *Chase County Historical Sketches* that discuss kin ties in considerable detail. These data are supplemented and verified through informant testimony, in particular information provided by eighty-five-year-old Ray Johnson who was raised in Thurman (his mother, Stella Wagoner Johnson, and his maternal grandfather, Henry Wagoner, spent most of their lives in Thurman) and who has collected genealogies and other material on the neighborhood. Marital ties and more complex kin relationships among families also are reported in the *Chase County Leader* and in several Matfield Green newspapers. The five Nowlan family members were actually all kin of Mrs. H. S. Hicks who in 1863 moved to the head of South Fork just south of the junction of Thurman Creek and the South Fork of the Cottonwood River. Mrs. Hicks' daughter, Geneva, by her first marriage, married Michael Nowlan who moved to Thurman Creek in 1866. He was followed to the area by his brothers, John and Jeremiah Nowlan (Thurman's postmaster); their father Simon Nowlan; and William Rector, Mrs. Hicks' brother. See Hildebrand, "H. Stephen Hicks and Family," *Chase County Historical Sketches*, 1:226-27.

Mrs. H. S. Hicks and all Nowlan family members are kin in the American kinship system. See David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 79, Table Two, "In Laws" or Relatives by Marriage—Category No. 5—Relatives of the spouses of Ego's blood relatives; David M. Schneider and Calvert B. Cottrell, *The American Kin Universe: A Genealogical Study* (University of Chicago Studies in Anthropology Series in Social, Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology, No. 3 (Chicago: 1975), 13. The Thurman study suggests that during the nineteenth century, high levels of mobility during frontier settlement may have led to the activation of some unusual kin ties, among them, brother's mother-in-law. The fact that the Nowlan-Hicks families lived in close proximity would have been a critical factor in the activation of such kin ties.



One of the "upland farmer" households in the Thurman area was that of Charles Johnson and his family.

children. Equally telling in this regard was the decision of Thurman Creek families where the post office was located to continue sending their children to the Brandley School, a prominent Matfield Green institution, even after the new Little Cedar Creek School was opened.<sup>16</sup>

Because of droughts and farming disasters Thurman stagnated during the late 1870s, but it was dramatically revived in 1880 by a livestock boom that occurred in the Flint Hills and throughout much of the West. Historian James Malin has noted that the livestock boom included horses, sheep and hogs, but the major emphasis was on the improvement of cattle herds. According to Malin, Flint Hills cattle herds were expanded with the help of

new men and money, some from the Southwest and Colorado and some from Scotland and England. Most importantly for Thurman's future, there was a major growth in the business of maturing pasturing cattle from outside the area, especially those wintered in Texas and Colorado.<sup>17</sup> To provide for their extensive cattle operations, a number of newly formed cattle syndicates purchased large blocks of Flint Hills land during the early 1880s, and a short time later they began fencing their pastures.

Whether by accident or design, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (KATY) railroads accelerated the transition from farming to ranching in the Flint Hills when in 1882 they sold almost their entire holdings in Chase County to two large syndicates—the Western Land and Cattle Company, a Scotch-British firm, and the Eastern Kansas Land and Loan Company of Atchison. In November of 1882, the Western Land and Cattle Company purchased

16. County Superintendent Records, School District Boundaries, Register of Deeds Office, Chase County Courthouse, Cottonwood Falls, Kansas. See also County Superintendents' Register of [School] District Officers, Register of Deeds, Chase County Courthouse, for household heads that served as officers in each school district. These records show T. J. Banks and Mike Nowlan (members of the Thurman post office) as being officers in Districts 12 and 58; Banks was an officer in both; Nowlan in District 58. Officers in District 34, Little Cedar Creek, between 1875-1881, included Calvin Nichol, C. M. Brewer, Mrs. Carpenter, Robert Madden, Henry Wagoner, and J. C. Nichol.

17. Malin, "Bluestem-Pasture Region of Kansas," 11-12.

75,000 acres of Santa Fe land and an additional 20,000 acres from the KATY Railroad; within two years, the company had constructed ninety-four miles of barbed wire fence. This land soon became part of the Diamond Ranch (which later became the 101 Ranch) and "was used in part for pasture fattening steers from its 160,000-acre sister operation in Hartley County, Texas."<sup>18</sup>

In 1883 the Eastern Kansas Land and Loan Company, comprised of a number of investment bankers including Hiawatha banker and future governor of Kansas, E. N. Morrill, purchased one hundred thousand acres of railroad land, much of it in Chase County and the Thurman uplands.<sup>19</sup> Some of the company's holdings were sold to local stockmen. However, most were fenced, and beginning in 1887 when a railroad spur line was constructed from Strong City to Bazaar only a few miles to Thurman's north, the company began stocking its pastures with transient cattle from Colorado and the Southwest.

Geography appears to have played the key role in making the Flint Hills a major summer fattening ground for southwestern cattle. According to James Malin, both the railroad and Texas cattlemen chose it because of its intermediate position between the cattle-growing ranges of the southwestern plains, the central markets for grass-fattened cattle, and the feedlots of the cornbelt.<sup>20</sup> The movement of Texas cattle into the Flint Hills generally began in the latter part of April when abundant rains began to produce lush stands of bluestem. The bovine vacation, however, usually proved to be brief. Around July when grasses began to brown and shrivel, and protein levels declined, shipment out began, usually ending sometime around October 15 when Flint Hills pastures once more became vacant.

The transient grazing industry had a dramatic impact on Thurman society that for analytical purposes can be divided into three distinct stages. In stage one (1887-1893), as the industry was being established in Thurman, there was a general exodus of creek bottom farmers who apparently decided to take advantage of the high prices offered by cattlemen for their land. Analysis of census data show that of the twenty original petitioners for the Thurman Post Office in 1874, only

four remained after 1895.<sup>21</sup> Most significantly for Thurman's future, Jeremiah Nowlan and all of his kinsmen who had played such an important role in Thurman's birth joined the farmer exodus.

As creek bottom farmers departed, the Thurman uplands were invaded by two new kinds of farmers: farmer-stockraisers who grass fattened and winter fed cattle with grains they themselves produced, and upland farmers who primarily raised corn for their own consumption and for sale. Forty-six new families joined the four Thurman survivors to give the neighborhood a total of fifty families. Sixteen of the new settler families were farmer-stockmen who had moved to Thurman in the early 1880s from many parts of Kansas. Most arrived with capital, and they appear to have had a good understanding of both the cattle industry and the nature of the Flint Hills' physical environment. They purchased narrow patches of bottomlands at the head of Thurman and Little Cedar creeks, which the creek bottom farmers had largely avoided. To these lands they added hundreds of acres of low priced upland pasture for their cattle.<sup>22</sup>

21. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Bazaar Township, 1875, reel 3, pp. 7-8, and Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1895, reel 15, pp. 2-6, 10-17, and Greenwood County, Salem Township, 1895, reel 56, pp. 2-5, 28, KSHS. The four survivors were Henry Wagoner, John Nichol, Olive Madden, Lee Fent, and their families; ironically, postmaster Jeremiah Nowlan was one of the first to leave Thurman. In the *Chase County Leader*, August 16, 1877, the editor noted, "Jerry Nowlan, of Thurman, is in the Black Hills... prospecting for gold and is having encouraging success."

Households included in the Thurman neighborhood were determined by a variety of methods: census data were gathered at the Kansas State Historical Society; lists were then compiled by using Kansas State Agricultural Censuses from 1865-1925. Agricultural Statistical Rolls, KSHS, helped determine who was present in Thurman in 1935. Since Thurman was a neighborhood of Matfield Green, it was included in Matfield Green's census. Thus, in the various censuses the households of each population group are often found together. To distinguish Thurman households from those of Matfield Green, a variety of methods were used. First, informant Ray Johnson, who was born in Thurman in 1903 and whose kinsmen lived in Thurman continuously from its founding in 1874 until its end in 1944, studied the census data. Based upon his experiences and what he had been told by his mother who was born and raised in Thurman in the late 1870s (and other kin), Thurman families were isolated. This list was checked against other sources to correct for errors. Newspaper reports and, where available, school records of Thurman's five school districts, were used to support or refute Johnson's conclusions. Tract and deed records, which showed land ownership and changes in farm ownership over time, also were used to check census estimates.

22. A number of sources were used to construct a portrait of the careers and economic activities of Thurman's farmer-stockraisers including *Chase County Historical Sketches*; Chase County and Greenwood counties' tract records which detail land purchases of these and other farmer-stockraisers; and state agricultural census data. Because farmer-stockmen were generally prosperous and politically and socially active, their social backgrounds and activities were also often reported in Chase County newspapers.

18. Walter M. Kollmorgen and David S. Simonett, "Grazing Operations in the Flint Hills-Bluestem Pastures of Chase County Kansas," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 290.

19. Secretary of State's Office, Corporation Charters, vol. 12, p. 523-24, Eastern Kansas Land and Loan Co., March 15, 1883, Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society [hereafter cited as KSHS].

20. Malin, "Bluestem-Pasture Region of Kansas," 6.



Farmer-stockmen played a key role in reviving the Thurman neighborhood. When they arrived in the early 1880s, Thurman consisted of a little used post office and the "Shaw or Fent" School at the midpoint of Little Cedar Creek. To farmer-stockmen, these two institutions did not comprise a "community." Their first decision was to build a church and school roughly in the center of all farmer-stockmen homesteads; they named both institutions "High Prairie." To these, they added a cemetery, a tangible symbol of their commitment to the area. It seems farmer-stockmen wished High Prairie to be the focal point of all neighborhood activities. However, a population boom immediately to the east of High Prairie and the creation of three new school districts, each of which served as a church and social center for its members, appears to have doomed this possibility.<sup>23</sup>

23. Chase County Tract Records, Register of Deeds Office, Chase County Courthouse. Tract records reveal that on November 2, 1887, Jacob and Casandra Mustard, of Indiana, whose son, James Mustard, and his family lived in Thurman, contributed the northwest corner of the northwestern quarter of Section 36, Township 22, Range 8, East, for the High Prairie Church. Data on church membership in the 1880s and 1890s is contained in *Church Record of the Methodist-Episcopal Church* (New York: Phillips and Hunt Publishers), Chase County Historical Society, Cottonwood Falls, Kansas. The central role of the church began to dissolve soon after Lone Star School District No. 56

In the late 1880s thirty families of poor farmers and "farmer-speculators" also invaded the Thurman uplands. Before coming to Thurman most had been tenant farmers or craftsmen in surrounding communities. The majority of upland farmers were in very early or late stages of family development when they heard the news that a railroad was coming to Matfield Green; because barbed wire was available, the Thurman uplands had now become a bargain. They found some low priced railroad and speculator claims at the head of Thurman Creek in Greenwood County. However, in Chase County where most of Thurman's territory was located, they discovered only sixteen sections of common school lands that were priced within their means. The remaining uplands, all of which had been purchased by cattle and real estate speculators during the 1860s and 1870s, they discovered to be too high priced to farm for these

and Thurman District No. 63 were formed in 1887 and 1891, respectively. See County Superintendent Records, School District Boundaries, Register of Deeds Office, Chase County Courthouse. After they were established, reports in the *Chase County Leader* indicate that both schools served as churches for members in their school districts. See *Chase County Leader*, November 7, 1889, for Lone Star Church services. See *Matfield Mirror*, Matfield Green, September 29, 1893, for Thurman School services.



In the late 1880s, farmer-stockmen moving into the Thurman area built "High Prairie" school and church; the building for each stood about one hundred twenty yards apart. This 1918 photograph was labeled "High Prairie" and presumably shows members after a school function. This was High Prairie's second location.





*Thurman's social development reached its peak between 1894 and 1908. During that time the home of Daniel Eastman, Sr., served as a general store and post office. Shown are the Eastman home; the post office interior (Mrs. Daniel Eastman, Sr., at the desk); and a group portrait of the Eastman family.*



lands were being converted into pastures for transient herds.<sup>24</sup>

Sixteen upland farmers settled common school lands clustered three miles northeast of High Prairie School, and in 1888 they organized the Lone Star School. Most other upland farmers took claims in Greenwood County three miles southeast of High Prairie, and in 1893 they founded Hardscrabble School. That same year, farmer-stockmen living between the headwaters of Thurman and Little Cedar creeks decided it was a hardship for their children to travel the one and a half miles to High Prairie, and they too formed their own school district. Since one of their homes had been selected for the site of the new Thurman Post Office a few years earlier because of its central location, it was decided that the neighborhood's fifth school should be called Thurman School.<sup>25</sup>

Thurman's social development reached its peak in stage two (1894-1908). During this period the neighborhood included a post office and general store in postmaster Daniel Eastman, Sr.'s, home, a small competing general store and blacksmith shop operated by Robert Younggreen across the road from the post office, the High Prairie Church and cemetery, and five school districts.<sup>26</sup> I call this neighborhood "New" Thurman

(Map 3). Sometime in the 1890s the transient grazing industry also became well established in the area. Initially, most Thurman farmer-stockmen and a handful of small farmers were active in some phase of the industry. Each spring, Texas cattle were purchased and grass fed through the summer on the farmers' lands. Many also wintered Texas cattle, feeding them surplus corn or contracting them out to creek bottom farmers who carried them through the winter for a fee. In the 1890s the business of leasing pastures and stocking them with cattle owned by others, typical of the more mature phase of the industry, was uncommon. Only three of fifty Thurman families served as "pasturemen," managing the grass and cattle of others. Further, in the 1890s most Thurman farmer-stockmen used this business as a supplement rather than as the primary source of income.<sup>27</sup>

In the Thurman uplands during the 1890s the main participants in the transient cattle industry were the kinsmen or agents of Matfield Green cattlemen and other absentee cattlemen, who during the previous two decades had purchased most of the area's pastures. A study of Chase and Greenwood counties' tract records revealed that from a total of fifty-one sections in the Thurman area, Thurman residents owned only fifteen sections (29.6 percent) of land. The remaining thirty-six sections (71.4 percent) were owned and used mainly as pastures by three major interests: The Eastern Kansas Land and Loan Company; Capt. Henry Brandley and Dr. George Bocook, two Matfield Green cattle and real

24. Chase County Tract Records, Register of Deeds Office, Chase County Courthouse. Tract records show that during the 1880s and 1890s all farmland purchases in the uplands at the divide between Little Cedar and Sharps creeks and the Verdigris River were common school lands. An excellent portrait of the social characteristics of Lone Star "upland farmers" is presented in *Chase County Leader*, October 24, 1889, under "Lone Star Glimmerings." An analysis of Chase County Tract Records revealed that most land in the Thurman uplands was owned by absentee speculators or the Eastern Kansas Land and Loan Company.

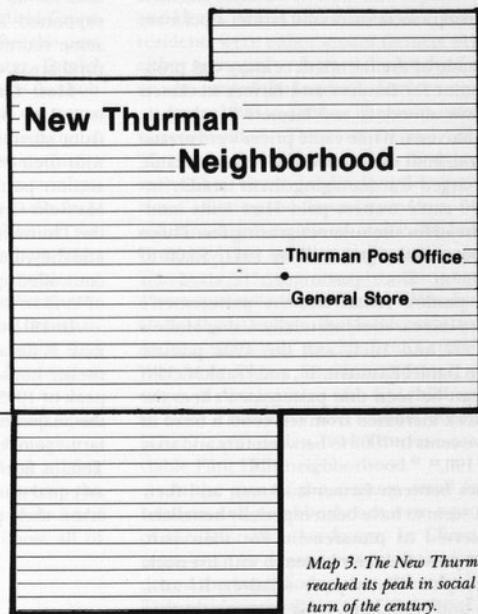
25. Lone Star, District No. 56, was formed on September 18, 1887, and Thurman, District No. 63, was formed on August 22, 1891. See Superintendents' Records, School District Boundaries, Register of Deeds, Chase County Courthouse. Hardscrabble School District No. 112 was formed in September 1893. Seven households with thirty-two school-age children, all at the extreme northern edge of Greenwood County and all within three miles of Thurman Post Office, organized Hardscrabble. See Superintendents' Records, School District Boundaries, Register of Deeds, Greenwood County Courthouse, Eureka, Kansas.

26. The Eastman general store is mentioned in Emma Wood Eastman, "Daniel W. Eastman Family," *Chase County Historical Sketches* (1948), 2:83. See also Joseph Wood Diary [Daniel Eastman's father-in-law], in possession of Ralph Eastman family, Emporia, Kansas. The diary reported conditions in Thurman during Wood's visits there between 1891-1898. Information about the Younggreen store and post office was collected in interviews with Lena Younggreen Maxey by the author, November 20, 1978, and interviews with Ray Johnson by the author, between 1982-1987. Chase County Tract Records show that the Younggreen house and store were built in 1908, and in the *Matfield Mirror*, January 10, 1908, this item appeared, "R. W. Younggreen took out lumber...to commence a house." Earlier, on January 3, 1908, the *Matfield Mirror* noted, "R. W. Younggreen, the Thurman blacksmith, was in town...."

27. Thurman's three pasturemen in the late 1890s and early 1900s were Daniel Eastman, Sr., Fred Hull, and Leonard Wagner. Interview, Ray Johnson, summer 1987. The 1905 agricultural census shows that Eastman, for example, had a large stock farm operation: that census shows that Eastman owned 560 acres and that he ran sixty-two of his own cattle on this land. Because he was a pastureman, however, his corn crop was small compared to his farmer-stockraiser neighbors. Eastman shows no corn crop or other small grains in the 1905 census. See Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1905, reel 19, vol. 53, schedule 2, pp. 1-9, KSHS.

By contrast his farmer-stockraiser neighbors, for example, Henry Wagoner, listed 150 acres in corn. No agricultural census was taken in Matfield Green in 1915, but the 1925 agricultural census shows dramatic changes in Daniel Eastman, Jr.'s, economic emphasis. In the 1925 census, Eastman declared that he owned and leased 6,300 acres. His family herd of fifty-seven cattle, however, differed little from that of his father's mentioned in the 1905 census. The rest of his acreage was devoted to cattle of absentee urban capitalists. Fred Hull's agricultural emphasis was much the same. In the 1905 census he listed twelve cattle on his 160-acre farm. The 1925 census shows that he owned and leased 1,760 acres and that he owned five cattle; his remaining acreage was devoted to the cattle of absentee owners. See Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1905, reel 19, schedule 2, pp. 1-9, and Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1925, reel 17, vol. 26, schedule 2, p. 1. (remaining pages have no typed numbers), KSHS.

## Thurman—Matfield Green Study Area



*Map 3. The New Thurman neighborhood reached its peak in social development at the turn of the century.*

estate speculators; and absentee capitalists, many of whom lived in neighboring counties.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1890s and early 1900s these three groups brought intense pressure on Thurman farmers to sell, and this factor, combined with droughts and a severe economic depression, resulted in a second major exodus of farmers from the area. The out migration included all classes of Thurman farmers although upland farmers were the major casualties of this period.<sup>29</sup> Census data for 1905 listed fifty-one families in Thurman, an increase of one family over the previous decade. This statistic, however, masks a fundamental transformation

in Thurman society because, from 1895 to 1905, twenty-eight of fifty (56 percent) families left the Thurman area. The turnover rate for upland farmers in the Lone Star neighborhood was even more dramatic. By 1905 only six of eighteen (33 percent) of the original Lone Star settlers remained.<sup>30</sup>

Some upland farms were converted to pastures by their new owners, while others were rented to tenants who were primarily kinsmen of Thurman's most prosperous farmer-stockmen. By 1905 each of Thurman's school districts had become closely associated with particular men and their kinship groups. Social changes

28. Chase County Tract Records, Register of Deeds Office, Chase County Courthouse; Greenwood County Tract Records, Register of Deeds Office, Greenwood County Courthouse. The "New" Thurman neighborhood was bounded by the Verdigris River to the east and the midpoint of Thurman and Little Cedar creeks to the west. Within these boundaries, all homesteads three miles north and six miles south of the Eastman Post Office were part of the Thurman neighborhood.

29. Isern, "Farmers, Ranchers, and Stockmen," 260.

30. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1895, reel 15, vol. 41, pp. 10-17, 26, and Greenwood County, Salem Township, 1895, reel 56, vol. 143, pp. 2, 5, 28, and Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1905, reel 19, vol. 53, pp. 1-4, 6-7, 12-13, and Greenwood County, Salem Township, 1905, reel 60, vol. 175, pp. 5-6, KSHS. The immediate families of the original settlers are included in this statistic. The seven survivors were: C. A. Hubbard, W. Weller, Al Fent, Fred Hull, Al Johnson, D. W. Richards, and Charles Johnson.



in High Prairie seem to have been fairly typical of what occurred in Thurman as a whole. In 1895, High Prairie was comprised of six families who shared no kinship ties. A little more than a decade later, High Prairie had grown to eleven families with most new settlers kinsmen of that locality group's most successful farmer-stockman, Henry Wagoner.<sup>31</sup>

The first decade of the twentieth century was probably the high point for farmers and farmer-stockmen alike. Rainfall was abundant and farmers consistently produced good harvests. While cattle prices were erratic during this period, both the numbers of transient cattle and the fees charged for managing them steadily increased. In 1900 cattle owners paid Flint Hills landowners \$1.00 a head for the summer grazing fee. Three years later \$3.50 was charged, and by 1911, \$5.00 to \$6.00 was common. Since pasturemen received ten percent of the pasture rental fee, the pasturemen's income therefore increased substantially. Using Malin's figures from 1900 and 1911, and the 1903 pasture contract between Daniel Eastman, Sr., and Frank Nicklin of Emporia, it can be seen that pasturemen's fees for managing livestock increased from ten cents a head in 1900 to thirty-five cents in 1903 to between fifty and sixty cents a head in 1911.<sup>32</sup>

Economic ties between farmer-stockmen and their farmer kinsmen seem to have been especially beneficial to those who served as pasturemen. For their part, farmer-stockmen provided their kinsmen with livestock, farmland, and capital. Their poor relatives, in turn, contributed hay and grain, and, most importantly, they were available to serve as herdsmen, especially during the frantic spring and fall cattle drives.<sup>33</sup>

Thurman's decline and the eventual merger of its identity with that of Matfield Green occurred in stage

three (1909-1944). Thurman lost one of its most important neighborhood symbols in 1909 when Rural Free Delivery caused the closing of the Thurman Post Office.<sup>34</sup> More damaging to the neighborhood was the loss of most of its farmer-stockmen who had organized and supported Thurman's institutions. From 1909 to 1915 some retired or died; many others relocated to other rural areas, or they moved to towns and cities.<sup>35</sup>

Most farmer-stockmen lands were purchased or leased by Matfield Green stockmen or by cattlemen from surrounding counties who combined the lands with their other holdings to form the large five to ten section pastures, now required by the industry. Two Matfield Green landowners also sent married sons to the Thurman neighborhood to look after their pastures, and they, along with Thurman's three pasturemen, soon controlled approximately twelve of the fifty-one sections of land in the Thurman area.<sup>36</sup>

In 1915 there were thirty households listed in Thurman. A decade later there were thirty-one, a decline of twenty households (39.2 percent) from the population peak of 1905. Farmer-stockmen and small farmers were the major casualties of this period. By 1925 only two farmer-stockmen and seven small farmers remained. Tenant farmers, some with kinsmen in Thurman and an equal number with Matfield Green ties, seem to have taken their place because by 1925, nineteen of thirty-

34. Rural Route #1, Matfield Green, Kansas, was established February 1, 1909. See "Matfield Green," *Chase County Historical Sketches* (1966), 3:351.

35. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1905, reel 19, vol. 53, pp. 1-4, 6-7, 12-13, and Greenwood County, Salem Township, 1905, reel 60, vol. 175, pp. 5-6, and Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1915, reel 29, vol. 30, pp. 1-7, and Greenwood County, Salem Township, 1915, reel 99, pp. 3, 5, 7, KSHS. Farmer-stockraiser out migration also can be documented in Chase and Greenwood counties' tract records which record the sales of farmer-stockraiser holdings between 1905 and 1915. The difficulty of raising cattle in competition with large dealers and pasturemen is suggested by an item in Mrs. C. B. Smith, "Samuel T. Drury," *Chase County Historical Sketches*, (1948), 2:74, that noted that in 1911 one of Thurman's farmer-stockraisers, Samuel T. Drury, retired and moved to Emporia "after years of hardships and disappointments that would have dampened the spirits of most men."

36. Chase County Tract Records, Register of Deeds Office, Chase County Courthouse; Greenwood County Tract Records, Register of Deeds Office, Greenwood County Courthouse. State census for 1915 also listed Robert Brandley, whose father Henry Brandley owned several large pastures in the Thurman neighborhood, as living in the Lone Star neighborhood. See Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1915, reel 29, vol. 30, p. 6, KSHS. Everett Bocook, whose father George Washington Bocook of Matfield Green, also lived in Thurman on the James McDowell ranch where he managed the McDowell and some of the Bocook family pastures. See *Chase County Leader*, January 18, 1907.

31. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1895, reel 15, vol. 41, pp. 4-6, 11, 13, and Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1905, reel 19, vol. 53, pp. 1, 4, 6-7, 13, 19, KSHS. The Wagoners' kin were Arville Johnson, Frank Wagoner, and J. R. Hamilton. The Wagoner kinship ties were determined by interviews with Ray Johnson, Wagoner's grandson. Mutually beneficial ties among Wagoner kin were determined in interviews and newspaper items. For example, in the *Matfield Independent*, Matfield Green, September 9, 1904, the High Prairie correspondent reported, "H. Wagoner and sons are helping A. E. Johnson [son-in-law] make hay."

32. Malin, "Bluestem-Pasture Region of Kansas," 21; pasture contract, February 1903, between Frank Nicklin and Daniel Eastman, family papers, Ralph Eastman family, Emporia, Kansas.

33. Mutually beneficial ties were mentioned in Ray Johnson interviews. Newspaper accounts also document cooperative projects engaged in by kinsmen including spring cattle drives, one of which was reported in the *Chase County Leader*, April 4, 1911, "Thurman Items" column: "Ira and A. I. Nichol, Isaac Covalt... went to Ruweda Saturday after cattle."



one Thurman families were listed as tenant farmers (renters).<sup>37</sup>

The loss of Thurman's farmer-stockmen had the most damaging effect on Thurman society. Without their support Thurman's institutions began to fail, and social distinctions between Thurman and Matfield Green were rapidly blurred. In 1912, three years after the post office closing, Thurman's former postmaster, Daniel Eastman, Sr., died, and his general store, once the hub of the neighborhood, had to be closed.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, so few people attended High Prairie Church that it was decided to move the church to the Thurman district where five or six families expressed interest in continuing services. Without a center, Thurman gradually fragmented into five locality or kinship groups although the Thurman Ladies Aid, which included members from each of Thurman's five districts, and the bewildering variety of clubs it spawned—including the Sunflower Embroidery Club, Thurman Canning Club, Thurman Rook Club, Thurman Players, and other clubs and associations—kept the neighborhood alive for another decade or so.<sup>39</sup>

The Great Depression had a negative impact upon both farmers and stockmen, but it was most damaging to small farmers. Many of those who had eked out a living during the previous decade were unable to survive the 1930s, and by 1935, Thurman's population had declined to only sixteen families.<sup>40</sup> By this time, almost all of

Thurman's land was controlled by pasturemen, among them Daniel Eastman, Jr., Fred Hull, Jess Bailey, and Gene Johnson. Two farmer-stockmen, Jim Shaw and his brother, Guy, and their families still lived in the area, and only three small farmers, Hod Johnson, Clara Smith, and Henry Reidel, and their families remained. All other residents were either tenant farmers or herdsmen who either managed or farmed the lands of retired kinsmen or who rented the lands of absentee capitalists.<sup>41</sup>

From 1900 to 1930 a Thurman column, which was variously titled "Thurman Items," "Thurman News," "Greetings from Thurman" or "Stringtown," appeared in the *Chase County Leader* alongside the "Matfield Green News." During the Great Depression, however, the two columns were combined under the heading "Matfield Green." A few families continued to participate in the Thurman 4-H, and several remained members of the Thurman Ladies Club. By the 1930s, however, Matfield Green had become the focal point for all important social activities in the Matfield Green-Thurman area. With only fifteen families, and most of them in late stages of development with few children, it was decided to close Thurman's five schools. When the Thurman School was closed in 1944, Thurman ceased to exist as a viable Flint Hills neighborhood.<sup>42</sup>

At the turn of the century, small farming villages, hamlets, and neighborhoods were a prominent feature of the Flint Hills landscape. In Chase County alone, more than a dozen crossroads and railroad villages dotted the land. Today, they either lie in ruins or, as in Thurman's case, all traces of their brief lives have been removed to ensure the return of prairie grasses so necessary to the cattlemen's livelihood. The transient grazing industry played a dominant role in both the speed and direction of Thurman's decline, but it was clearly not the only factor involved. The mechanization of agriculture, the automobile, and many other factors also played their parts. Ultimately, these factors in combination decided both Thurman's fate and the destiny of dozens of other small communities throughout the Flint Hills.<sup>43</sup> [KH]

37. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1915, reel 29, vol. 30, pp. 1-7, and Greenwood County, Salem Township, 1915, reel 99, pp. 5, 7, and Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1925, reel 17, vol. 26, pp. 2-10, 11, and Greenwood County, Salem Township, 1925, reel 57, vol. 92, pp. 9- (remaining numbers not clear), KSHS.

38. *Chase County Leader*, July 25, 1912.

39. The activities of the Thurman Ladies Aid are reported in the "Thurman Items," "Greetings from Thurman," "Thurman News," and "Stringtown" columns of the *Chase County Leader* between 1911 and March 11, 1931, when the last meeting at Mrs. Emma Eastman's home was reported. The *Chase County Leader* reported that the Thurman Embroidery Club was formed on June 4, 1915, the Canning Club in 1917, and the Rook Club in 1921, and the Thurman Players in 1926. For a detailed discussion of the role of the Thurman Ladies Aid in Thurman's revival, see Joseph V. Hickey and June O. Underwood, "In the Name of the Thurman Church: Women's Clubs and the Revitalization of a Flint Hills Neighborhood," *Locus* (forthcoming, 1988).

40. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Agricultural Statistical Rolls, Chase County, Kansas, Matfield Green Township, 1935, schedule 1, pp. 1-8, KSHS. Agricultural statistical rolls do not list pastureman Jess Bailey, but informant, Ray Johnson, said that Bailey was a tenant (and pastureman) on the old J. D. Riggs farm. Daniel Eastman, Jr., controlled the largest pastures; the 1935 agricultural statistical rolls listed him owning or leasing 10,800 acres.

41. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Agricultural Statistical Rolls, Chase County, Matfield Green Township, 1935, pp. 1-8, KSHS. In interviews with author, Ray Johnson and other former Thurman residents checked the agricultural census data and described the economic emphasis of each Thurman family.

42. On November 14, 1944, Thurman School District No. 63 voted to consolidate with Matfield Green School. See *Chase County Historical Sketches* (1948), 2:350.

43. Hickey and Webb, "Transition from Farming to Ranching," 253-54.