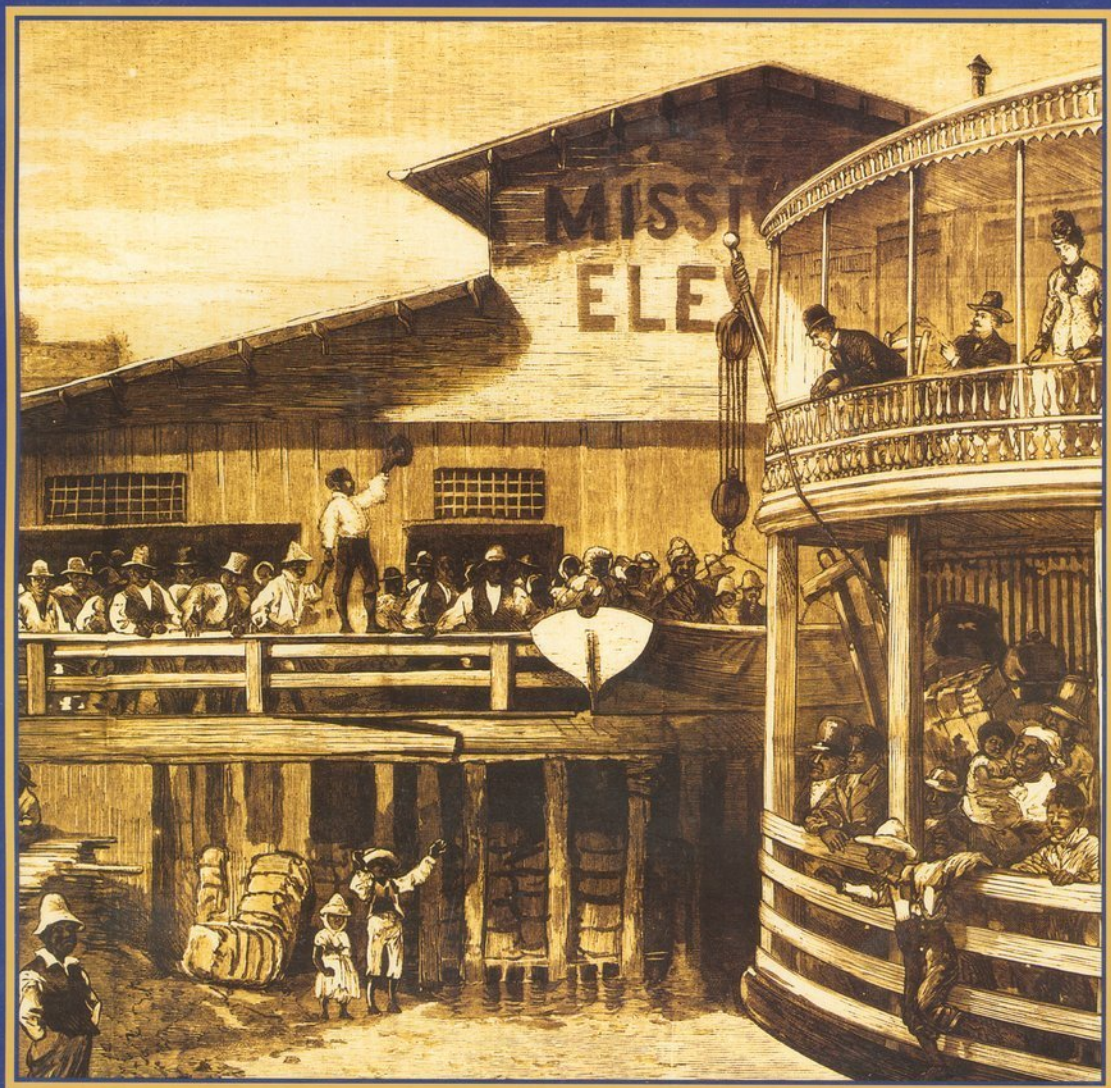


KANSAS HISTORY

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Unidentified farm in Sherman County, 1910s.

"On the Smoky and Beavers water can be secured at from 10 to 60 feet, and on the higher divides at the average depth of 100 feet," boasted the Sherman County Immigration Association in its 1893 publication *Sherman County, Kansas*. "The supply is abundant and the quality is splendid, clear as crystal and entirely free from all deleterious substances. There is little difficulty in securing, at modest cost, a good well, as parties make a specialty of putting down both bored and tubular wells, while the wind mill furnishes the power. A good well and wind mill can be secured at from \$75 to \$150, with a tank for the watering of stock. The water supply is inexhaustible, and a good well never runs dry, regardless of whether the season is wet or dry. A Niagara of water flows ceaselessly under all the country."

Although we might rightly question the accuracy of this late-nineteenth century booster rhetoric as we approach the end of the twentieth, it is apparent that a good supply of water for crops and livestock is the timeless concern of any agriculturalist, not to mention the promoter of agricultural real estate. Never was this more true than when draft animals outnumbered humans on the High Plains. Sherman County in far western Kansas had between forty-

five hundred and fifty-six hundred human inhabitants during the 1910s; its horse and mule population, however, ranged from five thousand to nine thousand with the total livestock count holding steady at more than thirty thousand head during the last half of the decade. Naturally, a good supply of drinking water for this stock was vital, and not surprisingly sorghum for forage and grain ranked fourth behind only wheat, barley, and corn in terms of production and value on Kansas farms.

Horses and mules remained the primary source of power for most Kansas farmers well into the twentieth century. And, with only ten thousand tractors (fifty-eight in Sherman County) in use on the state's 170,000 farms at the end of the 1910s, feed and water for working livestock remained a life blood for most Kansas farm operations. Indeed, it was not until after World War I that tractors began to displace traditional work animals: Kansas farmers reported 1,413,000 horses and mules in 1919 and only 10,400 tractors; a decade later there were 943,000 such animals and 64,000 tractors, plus nearly 19,000 combines. Thus the gasoline tank became another fixture, along with the water trough or stock tank, in the barnyards of the family farm.

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VIRGIL W. DEAN
Editor

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on 1930s Morton County land
projects begins on page 140.

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