

A LITTLE HISTORY OF ATLANTA, KANSAS, AND THE ATLANTA LABOR DAY CELEBRATION

By Gloria Gordon Ulbrich, Edited by Pat McCutcheon

Atlanta, Kansas – small-town America – very-small-town America – has a current population of 192 plus a few dogs. It's interesting to note, though, that these people from northern Cowley County may be few in number, but they have strong roots and are proud of those roots. Many families have lived in this county for over 100 years, where their ancestors lived before them.

On May 30, 1854, Kansas Territory was organized; and in 1861, Kansas became the 34th state to join the union. Originally, this was the home of the Osage Indians and other tribes that roamed the area, with its tall grass, rolling prairie, creeks, buffalo, and other wildlife. In fact, near Atlanta there are still buffalo wallows on the prairie land.

Cowley County was organized on February 28, 1870, and was originally named Hunter County. It was officially opened for settlement on July 15, 1870, and renamed for Matthew Cowley, who was a First Lieutenant in Company I, 9th Kansas Cavalry.

Many of the early settlers came from England, Germany, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Sweden, Denmark, France and Prussia. They came following the Civil War for the opportunities they believed were on the prairie. Some were pushing further west on the Oregon and California trails but decided Kansas looked pretty good. As the wagon trains came to the area, sometimes sickness would prevail; and burials would be made on the prairie. Stones piled high often marked tragedy of earlier times.

Omnia was the first town established by those early pioneers in northern Cowley County. It was about two miles southwest of Atlanta, in fact, on land that my ancestors later owned. Rosena "Sena" (Gordon) Wilson (my great-aunt) was one of the first teachers at the Omnia School. Rosena went on to marry and raise her family in the Atlanta area. Some settlers had some knowledge of the area and brought trees to plant on the barren prairie. Since access to water was critical, choice places for farmsteads were along the creeks. Many of the early white men also traded with the Indians. Signs of Indians in the area are sometimes still found today with flint, arrowheads, and axes being uncovered by farmers, especially after heavy rains.

One story told from the early days was of a farmer that had a large number of pigs: The pigs got cholera and were dying. However, the Indians in the area were not afraid and proceeded to eat the pigs. This story was passed down through the years; and as far as it is known, the Indians did not suffer any dire consequences. Many strange things happened in those times.