History of Union County

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Early Settlement and Ranching

The settlement of Union county can not be regarded as an isolated circumstance, but must be considered as a part of that great westward expansion movement which peopled many western states of the United States during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. In 1890 the four states, New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, and Colorado, had a total population of 688,296; the population had increased to 2,987,834 in 1910, and had mounted to 4,290,521 in 1930.¹

Although there was not much in sight for the early settlers of Union county with its semi-arid plains and only an underground water supply, yet the pioneers came to it with as much zeal and enthusiasm as their kinsmen had displayed in going to many other more likely sections of the West.² As nearly all newly settled regions do, Union county drew its settlers from various places, and among them were many remarkable people who have since become prominent elsewhere.

The earliest settlers of Union county located in four different places about the same time. The oldest and largest group of settlers was found in the southern part of the county.³ Another group settled in the northwestern part near the present town of Folsom. By 1885 there were two or three settlers on the Perico creek, near the present town of Clayton. The fourth settlement was in the northeastern part of the county.

In the southern part of the county the Garcia brothers, Jose Manuel, Luis J., Maximo, and Abelino, had settled by

¹ Author of Settlement and Economic Development of Union County, New Mexico. (M. A. thesis in History, University of Colorado, 1934), Ms. The parts here published in the Review with slight editorial changes are chapters v, vi, and vii.
³ George Hubbard, Interview, February 10, 1931.
1880, and were engaged in the cattle and sheep business. Not far from the Garcia brothers lived James McDonald, James Carter, Thomas O. Boggs, Candido Garcia, N. M. Foster, James H. Lee, J. S. Holland, and J. W. Snyder.4

Most of these settlers were employed by the Prairie Cattle Company, a large Scottish corporation that had gotten control of the best watering places in the northern, central, and southern portions of what is now Union county by 1881.5 Control of the watering places gave them control of most of the land. Their headquarters for New Mexico was on the Cimarron, near the Colorado-New Mexico line.6 This corporation had bought out a few "squatters" who had settled on the land with the best water. These "squatters" either left the locality or went to work for the Prairie Cattle Company. In this manner the company secured control of most of the area now embraced by Union county. Near the headquarters of this corporation were three other ranchers—Doctor T. E. Owen, F. D. Wight, and Oscar W. McGuiston.7

In 1885 only one person lived between the present post office of Clapham and the Hundred and One ranch on the Cimarron river. At the Pitchfork ranch, situated three miles west of the present town of Clayton, Doctor T. E. Owen, whose home ranch was on the Cimarron river, ten miles above the town of Folsom, bought in 1883 several preemption claims of one hundred sixty acres each.8 On one of these subdivisions he built a three-room adobe house. The lumber, shingles, flooring, and doors for this house were freighted one hundred twenty-five miles from Trinidad by wagon. Here Doctor Owen established a supply depot and store for the convenience of his round-up wagons and cowboys. This house was still standing in 1933, near the site of the Clayton water works. One room, that nearest Perico creek, was used as a kitchen, the middle room as sleeping quarters, and the north room as a store. This north room

4. Mrs. Francilia Bangerter, Interview, January 5, 1934.
6. A. W. Thompson, Interview, January 12, 1934.
sheltered the first post office in the Clayton district. 9 It was established November 9, 1886, under the name of Perico, with Homer E. Byler as postmaster. 10

Until the railroad was built through Clayton, the Perico post office was supplied from Tramperos, forty miles distant, on a weekly schedule. A few letters and newspapers addressed to Byler and Edward Sprague constituted the mail. They were the only settlers then living in this large area. For a year or more after this post office was established, Byler sent a man on horseback to Tramperos Plaza once each week for the mail. 11

In 1885 the country between the Pitchfork ranch, on the Perico, and the Cimarron river was an unfenced, uninhabited, well grassed domain belonging to the Federal government, which exacted no charge for grazing thereon. 12 Perennial streams were numerous over this area, including the Seneca, the Corrumpa, the Rafael, Road Cañon, the Carrizozo, and others. Thirty miles northeast of the Perico, in the then unsurveyed “No Man’s Land,” lived Francisco Lujan, who had recently driven a flock of sheep there from Mora, New Mexico.

In 1886 a rough road or trail led from Byler’s store to the Cimarron river. This road was used chiefly by round-up wagons and trail herds, moving from the south during the summer months. Following the narrow valley which lay northeast of Byler’s store, the road climbed the rocky mesa half a mile southwest of Clayton and bore off toward the northeast. One branch of it crossed the Corrumpa at the old Santa Fe trail crossing, while another branch of it entered “No Man’s Land,” crossing the Corrumpa near the present ranch of Juan C. Lujan and following the Carrizozo down to the Hundred and One ranch. It was a long trek, the ride from the Perico to the Cimarron. Not a human habitation then existed thereon for fifty miles. H. C. Abbot’s ranch at “Dish Rag” camp, established near the falls

10. Tom Gray, Interview, September 18, 1933.
12. Lorenzo Lujan, Interview, January 14, 1934.
of the Corrupa in 1884 or 1885, was too far north to be passed by travellers going from Perico to the Cimarron.\textsuperscript{13}

This old road met and crossed a newly laid out road a mile or two before reaching the coal banks on the Seneca. The new road led from Trinidad, Colorado, to Buffalo Springs, Texas, one hundred and thirty miles. Over it was hauled, in wagons drawn by mules or horses, tons of barbed wire which the Capital Syndicate Company used in the construction of its fences erected between New Mexico and Texas and between Texas and "No Man's Land," in 1883. Their post cutters established camps in the brakes on the Cimarron, Carrizozo, Carrizo, and Tramperos water-courses.\textsuperscript{14} Mule teams were constantly on the move from these camps to the New Mexico-Texas line. The enterprise was a large one, and the requirements of the Syndicate Company as to the size of posts and the mode of construction were very exacting. Many of the cedar posts on this north and south fence are standing today (1933) after fifty years of battering by the elements and molestation by settlers and livestock.\textsuperscript{15}

One of the earliest settlers in what is now known as Union county was Horace C. Abbot, who now (1932) resides in Las Animas, Colorado.\textsuperscript{16} In October, 1878, Abbot trailed seven thousand sheep, belonging to Abbot Brothers, from Trinidad, Colorado, to northeastern New Mexico. He was looking for a new range where these sheep could be grazed and for a place where he could establish a ranch. The following extract from the Clayton News gives Abbot's own version of this experience.\textsuperscript{17}

On the 19th day of October 1878, . . . I crossed over Trinchera Pass, and for the first time saw Sierra Grande and the Rabbit Ears. I owned no ranch—just kept going from one place to another, where I could range my sheep. My outfit consisted of one saddle horse and eight burros, four burros for each camp. Two of my herders were Leandro Romero and Agapito Mares, later for years residents of the Pennewetitos country.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13.] Ibid., January 12, 1934.
\item[14.] A. W. Thompson, Interview, January 16, 1934.
\item[15.] S. L. Miller, Interview, February 4, 1932.
\item[16.] Clayton News, September 28, 1932, p. 3.
\item[17.] Idem.
\end{footnotes}
Among the ranchmen and sheep owners who were living on the upper Carrizo (northeastern New Mexico) in 1878 were Frank E. Sage, and below him were Adams & Williams. Both Adams and Sage had their families with them. 'Old Man Handy,' a brother-in-law of George W. Thompson, the cattle king of southern Colorado, was running sheep on the Perico. (Handy's headquarters was the present Otto ranch five or six miles northwest of Clayton). Colonel Beatty was running about ten thousand sheep on the Pennevetitos. His partner was Mr. Goodwin. Henry White, a native of Massachusetts, entered the sheep business in 1879 on the Alamositas, twenty miles northwest of Clayton. Briggs & Leighton who had been partners with F. D. Wight in the sheep business divided their sheep and were in 1880 ranching on the upper Corrumpa. W. A. Barney was at that time located near them. We bought from a Mexican the claim where we established headquarters at the head of Pennevetitos Creek. Here we kept a small store. We wintered our sheep at Middlewater (Tramperos) on the line of Texas and New Mexico. I can safely say I built the first house in the Pennevetitos country, and I do not believe any other persons were living there at that time (1879). We sold our sheep and Pennevetitos ranch in 1882. In 1884 Frank Unruh the surveyor, who was living on the Travajo, located me at Dish Rag ranch (Corrumpa). This was my pre-emption entry. Here I built a very nice stone house in which I lived until 1867 when I sold my three thousand ewes to Henry White.

After the completion of the Colorado and Southern railroad, in 1885, the settlers came to Union county in larger numbers. By 1890 there were more than six hundred people. In 1900 the county had 4,528 inhabitants. This number had increased to 11,404 in 1910, and to 16,680 in 1920. A reduction in the area of the county in 1923 reduced the population by approximately one-third.

Like pioneers in other states, those of Union county were so far removed from any means of transportation, save ox wagons, that they had to depend upon the country and its resources for their food and shelter. Their houses could not be built of logs, since there were not many trees from which to obtain them; but they could be built easily and cheaply by digging down into the ground. Houses were often built of sod, which was obtained by use of a sod plow that would turn over a strip of turf six or eight inches wide.

and of any thickness desired, usually three or four inches.\textsuperscript{21} This strip of turf was cut into blocks from eighteen to twenty-four inches long which were laid one upon the other, without any mortar to hold them together, to form the walls. A certain amount of lumber had to be used in making the roof. Sometimes a ridge pile and brush from the brakes were used, but usually some lumber was brought from the railroad.\textsuperscript{22} Such houses as these were called “dugouts,” and most of the early settlers lived in them, for a time at least.

The settlers who lived in these “dugouts” scattered over the prairie were many times practically secluded from the rest of the world, as people rarely ever passed their way. Sometimes the man of the house would be gone a great part of the time to freight for some one or to work on some nearby ranch. The women and children, who were left at home, were glad of an opportunity to communicate with the outside world if some passerby should chance to come their way.\textsuperscript{23}

Nearly all of the early settlers kept a few head of cattle and allowed them to run out on the open or unfenced land all about them. At first these settlers did not farm, but depended entirely upon the grass for cattle and horse feed. They believed it to be too dry to raise any kind of crops; but farming was gradually begun, so that by 1890 each man raised a little feed with which to carry his horses and a few cattle through the winter.\textsuperscript{24} The cattle, sheep, or other livestock could be driven to market with but very little cost to their owners.

The people suffered many hardships and privations. They seemed to realize that such things could be expected on any frontier. They were always ready to help a friend or neighbor even though they had to neglect their own interests.\textsuperscript{25} The small cattlemen in Union county from 1890 until 1900 let their cattle range together. They all worked together in the spring round-up to get all the cattle gathered

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Mrs. George Hubbard, \textit{Interview}, February 12, 1932.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Mrs. George Hubbard, \textit{Interview}, February 4, 1932.
up and correctly branded. A foreman was appointed from among them and the others worked under his orders. Thus the work was quickly and easily done, and ranchmen were near at hand to represent their interests.\(^{26}\)

Everyone was hospitable, the county being noted for many years for its widespread hospitality. Whenever a person left home, his door and gate were never locked. He always expected any passerby to stop and help himself to anything that he might need. If a man was very far away from home when night came on, he would stop at the first house or dugout that he came to, and would be cordially welcomed and lodged for the night regardless of how crowded the conditions of the home might be. The people were always glad to keep a traveler in order that they might learn something of what was happening elsewhere. If no one was at home, the visitor would put his horse in the corral and feed him, spending the night as though he were at home. The people were ever willing to trust each other with their property, rarely if ever losing anything through theft. The freighters would often be forced to leave a wagon or two on the trail due to rain or other bad weather conditions. The driver would merely unhitch one of the wagons and leave it by itself, expecting to return at his convenience to get it without fear of its being molested in the least.\(^{27}\)

The potential danger which the early settlers feared most was the prairie fire.\(^{28}\) When the grass had ripened or had died on account of the dry weather, it was very easily fired. Should it ever be set on fire and the wind be from the right direction, it would mean widespread disaster. The ranchers fought fire by killing a calf or a cow and dragging the carcass, by means of a rope attached to it and to the pommel of a saddle, along the line of fire to put it out. The cowboys also used their “slickers,” which were always on their saddles, to fight with if a cow was not near. They always went to help fight the fires for miles around, not only to help the other person, but also for self-preservation. Fires

\(^{26}\) Colonel Jack Potter, Interview, February 18, 1934.
\(^{27}\) Ibid.
\(^{28}\) This discussion is based upon an interview with S. L. Miller, March 12, 1933.
were usually fought in such a way as to narrow them down as they burned on, and finally to bring them to a point where they could be extinguished. The early settlers built fire guards to protect their houses and other buildings, and they also kept a large strip of land plowed around such buildings. Many times they would set backfires to stop or check the main fires. Everyone knew fires were dangerous, once they were started; therefore, they were guarded against with all possible care.

A diversion which was enjoyed by almost everyone was the occasional dance. Dances were given, as a rule, at some ranch house where there was enough room and good floors to dance on. An invitation was always sent out to everyone in the surrounding country to attend. A dance usually lasted for two or three nights. It was customary to dance all night and sleep during the day. Good food was always prepared, and there never failed to be enough for all.29

Most of the settlers before 1880 came from the Eastern states, but since that time, most of the settlers have come from Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.30 More than half of the population in 1930 had come from Texas.31

The cattle industry, which is one of the oldest industries of Union county, was carried on in much the same way as in other regions where the open range was used. These features included the use of the brand, range riding, and the round-up. The central figure was the picturesque cowboy. On the open range livestock from different ranches often mixed; but all questions of ownership were settled in the round-ups, where calves were branded with the same brands as their mothers and both were returned to their owner. This system of doing business was all right where honesty prevailed, as it usually did among the cattle growers.32 The honesty of the ranchers themselves was not questioned; but numerous wandering fortune-seekers, knowing the high value of cattle, began to make a practice of stealing cattle from the range. This practice was known as “rustling.”

29. Sam L. Miller, Interview, March 12, 1933.
30. Union County, Record of Brands, A, pp. 1-100.
32. John Springs, Interview, November 4, 1931.
There is no record of any ranching in what is now Union county before 1874. In that year four brands were recorded. The first thing which the early rancher did was to record his brand with the brand recorder of the county. This gave him protection against the "rustlers" and a means by which he could locate his stock. Each rancher advertised his brand in the county newspapers.

The first ranching in Union county was on a small scale by individuals who had "squatted" on the land containing the best water holes. All of Union county before 1881 was government domain. A man would settle at a good water hole and claim all of the grazing land between his home and a point half-way to the next water hole. The first patent that was granted to any land in the present area of Union county was in 1881. In that year eighteen patents were granted by President Garfield and President Arthur. Each of these patents was for one hundred sixty acres of land. Some twenty patents were granted in 1882, and thirty-two in 1883. By this time most of the good water holes had been taken up. Many of these early ranchers were from England, Scotland, and Germany. Some of the men had been hired by large cattle companies to settle and make a branch headquarters for their ranch.

Among the large concerns operating in Union county, the Prairie Cattle Company was outstanding. This company had a good business until the late 'nineties, when settlers occupied the land which had been free range territory. It sold most of its holdings in 1901, 1902, and 1903 to settlers. At one time the Prairie Cattle Company controlled most of the range in Union county between the Canadian and Cimarron rivers. The Hundred and One ranch "ran" cattle in the northeastern part of Union county; and the XIT ranch of the Capital Syndicate Company had cattle in the southeastern part of the county in 1880. The Garcia brothers con-

33. Union County, Record of Brands, A, p. 1.
34. Ibid.
38. Dan Taylor, Interview, May 4, 1934.
trolled most of the southwestern part of the county. In the northcentral part of the county were individual ranchmen, such as H. C. Abbot, Leighton and Briggs, F. D. Wight, W. P. Duncan, and B. F. Smith. In the southcentral part of the county, on the Pennevetitos, lived a few families who had sold their interests to the Prairie Cattle Company. The southern part of the county was controlled by the Illinois Live Stock Company. Doctor T. E. Owen controlled the northwestern part of the county, and the western part of the county was controlled by Senator S. W. Dorsey, who sold out to the Palo Blanco Cattle Company in 1894. The range cattle industry was a flourishing business as long as the price of beef was high and the grass was free; but as the country gradually filled up with homesteaders, the range cattle business came to an end.

By 1885 the cattle business was on the decline and the sheep business was getting a good start. Mateo Lujan and Pedro L. Pinard had driven a few thousand sheep from Mora county to Beaver creek, near the Oklahoma line. By 1884 Christian Otto and Claus Schleter drove four thousand sheep from California and settled on the Tramperos, in the southern part of Union county. Later Otto became the largest sheep owner in the county. At several times his flock numbered over one hundred thousand head.

As a rule there were from ten to twenty men employed on the larger ranches. The cowboy's or sheepherder's equipment consisted of a "six-shooter," a Winchester, and a good supply of cartridges. No feed for the cattle was raised by farming, but the buffalo grass and the lake grass frequently grew large enough to be cut and stacked for feed for the cow ponies and a few cattle.

It can be seen that ranching in Union county on a large scale did not endure very long. The largest ranches of the

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40. Union County, Record of Brands, A, p. 460.
40a. Union County, Record of Brands, A, p. 462.
42. Mrs. F. Bangerter, Interview, September 26, 1833.
43. The Chronicle-News (Trinidad, Colorado), February 9, 1934.
44. Lorenzo Lujan, Interview, January 12, 1934.
46. Colonel Jack Potter, Interview, January 16, 1934.
county lasted through a period of from ten to twenty years in connection with the range cattle industry. Of course, it was present for several years longer, but was never a potent factor to be dealt with as a big institution similar to those of other sections of the country. Although it was short-lived, it served its purpose well in its many pioneering activities and its presence there to induce more people to come to the county. With its level prairie, fertile soil, and healthful climate, Union county was destined to be the home of many, rather than a few, inhabitants who would till its soil and find a living within its bounds. The cattle industry then was left to the small-ranch farmer, who lived on his land and cared for his interests personally, and gradually made room for more and more settlers until he became a farmer or a sheep rancher.47

The Organization of Union County

Soon after the organization of the Clayton Town Company, a movement was launched for the creation of a new county. In 1888 Colfax and Mora counties stretched from their present western boundaries in the mountains toward Taos to the Texas line. Springer, which was the county seat of Colfax county, was one hundred miles from Clayton, while Mora, the county seat of Mora county, was one hundred twenty-five miles from the settlement along Tramperos creek.1

The boundary between Mora and Colfax counties then crossed Tramperos creek one mile north of the Bushnell ranch. It crossed Leon creek just south of Tabor mountain, four miles north of the present post office of Clapham. Thence the line ran eastward to the New Mexico-Texas boundary, through a country inhabited only by antelope, mustangs, and cattle.2 Ranchmen and settlers in the Ute creek country near Gallegos were within a third county, San Miguel. Before the construction of the Denver, Texas and Gulf railway they purchased supplies at Las Vegas.3 Official matters and attendance at court had to be transacted at the

1. Morris Herzstein, Interview, October 15, 1928.
2. Tom Gray, Interview, September 14, 1933.
respective county seats of Colfax, Mora, and San Miguel counties, although residents within portions of these counties were much nearer the railway at Clayton. Naturally, great inconveniences were experienced by the citizens of Clayton who had to go to Springer for the transaction of business. Later the official headquarters of Colfax county was established at Raton.

The move for the creation of a new county to be located in the northeastern corner of New Mexico, adjoining Colfax and Mora counties from north to south along the 104th meridian to the line between townships No. 18 and No. 19, thence southeast along the eastern side of the Pablo Montoya land grant,3a and finally terminating at the New Mexico-Texas line east of the Baca location,3b was seriously considered in 1889.4 Portions of this district are now within the counties of Union, Harding, and Quay; formerly the same area comprised parts of Colfax, Mora, and San Miguel counties.

It is probable that the prime spirit in the new county movement was John C. Hill—stockman, man of means, and principal owner of the Clayton townsite—who was a resident of Clayton in 1889. Hill had the reputation of carrying out with success such enterprises as he applied himself to seriously.

Meetings were held and discussions freely entered into as to the wisdom and feasibility of demanding from Colfax, Mora, and San Miguel counties5 portions of their territory in the interest of a new county. It was a bold undertaking. Colfax was asked to cede an area sixty miles from east to west and about the same distance from north to south. Mora and San Miguel counties were asked to relinquish a smaller area, perhaps fifty-five miles from east to west by thirty-five miles from north to south. Many large ranches on the Cimarron river and Rafael creek and their tributaries, the towns

3a. The Pablo Montoya land grant was made in 1840, and included four hundred square miles of land southwest of Union county.
3b. The Bacas had a claim to the Las Vegas grant, but the federal government gave this grant to the town of Las Vegas in 1860, and gave the Bacas two hundred seventy-five square miles of land south of Union county.
4. See the New Mexico House and Senate Journals, 1889.
5. J. J. Heringa, Interview, September 29, 1931.
of Clayton and Folsom, sixty-five miles of railway, and other taxable property would be lost to Colfax county, while the herdsmen, cattle companies and ranchmen in the Tramperos, Ute Creek, Tequesquite and Canadian districts would no longer pay taxes to the counties of Mora and San Miguel. Differences of opinion, too, might be expected within the proposed lines of the new county, and rivalry was almost sure to appear over the designation of the county seat.⁵ᵃ

Several impromptu meetings were held, in which John C. Hill and the citizens of Clayton got together. Attending these meetings were prominent men living south of the railway, such as Luis F. Garcia, Francisco Miera, and J. S. Holland, from Tramperos creek. The Vigil family and Jose Manuel Gonzales came from Bueyeros. T. E. Mitchell and the Baca brothers (Tequesquite, Francisco, and Emeterio) and Eugenio Gallegos,⁶ᵃ came from Gallegos post office. Mateo Lujan and his partner, P. L. Pinard, both prominent citizens and large sheep owners, lived on the Muerto.⁷ Many smaller ranchmen attended these meetings, both native sons and newcomers. At these gatherings the opinion of each was freely invited. All wanted a new county and every locality wanted the county seat. Folsom⁷ᵃ laid high claim to this distinction, because of its aspiration to be the city beautiful and a summer resort, with a tourist hotel already under way and a land office established.⁸ Luis Garcia pictured Tramperos as appropriate for the county's capital; while J. M.

⁵ᵃ. Tom Owen, Interview, September 29, 1931.
⁶ᵃ. The Spanish-Americans have not had much influence on the development of Union county. This is due to the fact that there are no railroads, streams or valleys connecting the county with the rest of New Mexico. The nearest early Spanish settlement to Union county was Mora. Mora is one hundred fifty miles from the center of Union county. Poor communications and the dangers from the Plains Indians kept the early Spaniards from settling in the county. The people of Union county are influenced more by the people of the plains and the people of Colorado than they are by the people of New Mexico. They read Colorado and Texas newspapers because they can receive them the day they are published; whereas New Mexico newspapers are conveyed by way of Trinidad, Colorado, or Amarillo, Texas, in order to reach Union county. The county was not included in any of the Spanish or Mexican land grants. Texas influence has been strong since the beginning of permanent settlement, most of the immigrants to Union county having come from that state.
⁷ᵃ. In 1889 Folsom, named in honor of President Cleveland's bride, was a growing and active village with wide-awake citizens and leaders. Tom Owen, Interview, September 29, 1931.
⁸. United States, Statutes at Large, December 18, 1888.
Gonzales, Augustin Vigil, Lujan, Pinard, and the Baca brothers viewed Bueyeros as a good location. Francisco Gallegos and his brothers thought Rincon, Colorado, should become the county seat. While these factions did not agree as to the location of the county seat, there was unanimity for the new county. Clayton was backed by John C. Hill, Senator G. W. Dorsey, E. R. Fox, S. T. North, J. S. Holland, H. E. Byler and others residing there. Clayton was on the railroad; hence they thought the county seat should be located there.

After many preliminary discussions by the contending factions, a meeting was called in the latter part of 1889 to be held at the ranch of Don Jose Manuel Gonzales on the Alamosa. To this meeting came the leading men of Tramperos, Gallegos, Bueyeros, and Clayton. The convention was soon in the midst of that wide and lavish hospitality which was characteristic of the times. Clayton, through the logical pleas of its delegates, was selected for the county seat; Garcia, the Bacas, the Vigils, the Mieras, and Gallegos gave way to the preponderance of argument that was advanced due to its being situated on the railroad. After two or three days of conviviality, interspersed with good will and no little oratory, every man pledged himself to carry on toward the creation of a new county with Clayton as the seat of its government.

In 1889 J. S. Holland was a member of the New Mexico Territorial legislature (lower house) from Mora county. He lived then on the so-called IL ranch, a mile south from the Tramperos. His nephew, Thomas S. Holland, a surveyor, was associated with Hill and others in the Clayton Town Company, not only as stockholder, but as agent for the sale of lots. In the Territorial legislature, which convened in the winter of that year, a bill was introduced by J. S. Holland looking to the creation of a new county which was

10. O. T. Toombs, Interview, October 6, 1932.
11. The Clayton group wanted the support of Gonzales and his friends, in part because the majority of the State legislators were Spanish-Americans.
12. F. C. de Baca, Interview, November 17, 1933.
13. Ibid., January 5, 1934.
to follow practically the same boundaries that were later prescribed for Union county. But such violent opposition to this bill sprang up from Colfax and Mora counties, that it was tabled indefinitely. The Clayton enthusiasts, however, refused to abandon the move for a new county.

In the legislature of 1890 and 1891 Paz Valverde, later of Clayton, represented Colfax and Mora counties in the Territorial council. Valverde was a resident of Springer. J. S. Holland had been re-elected to the lower house, and both were pledged to support a bill for the creation of Union county. In the legislature of that session a bill, prepared by Attorney L. C. Fort of Las Vegas, was again introduced in the interest of a new county comprising portions of Colfax, Mora, and San Miguel counties. A name for the proposed county was much discussed and various suggestions were advanced. It was finally decided to call the county Union, from the fact that it was to embrace (unite) portions of three older counties.

With the presentation of L. C. Fort's bill, Clayton's supporters went to Santa Fe and there remained for several weeks. Within the legislative halls, gambling establishments, saloons, and various public places, Union county was talked, advocated, and promoted. Outside of Springer, Raton, and Mora, the Union county bill was a popular one. E. W. Fox, who was active in Republican politics and had been a member of a former constitutional convention seeking statehood for New Mexico, was in Santa Fe along with John C. Hill, Doctor S. T. North, and J. R. Curren, editor of the Clayton Enterprise (Clayton's first newspaper). Money for necessary details had been subscribed, principally by John C. Hill and the Clayton Town Company. Representatives of Folsom and of Raton, both from Colfax county, tenaciously opposed the bill. Mora county also lined up with the opposition. The Clayton promoters had secured the support of two leading Territorial newspapers, the Las Vegas Optic and the (Santa Fe) New Mexican. Albert B. Fall, later Sec-

17. Morris Herzstein, Interview, April 6, 1928.
retary of the Interior, William C. McDonald, subsequently the first governor of the State of New Mexico, and T. D. Burns, of Rio Arriba, had promised to support the bill. Its passage looked hopeful. Finally a vote was taken in the spring of 1891, with Captain L. C. Fort still supporting the bill. It passed the council safely.18

Meantime violent opposition had developed in the lower house, with the probability of a close vote there. On Monday of the week following the passage of the bill by the council, it was called up by Representative Valdez of Springer and defeated.19 Again the creation of Union county was postponed. It was indeed a saddened group of men, a disappointed delegation, which returned to the little frontier town of Clayton; but they were still fired with a determination to push their cause to a finish.

From 1891 to 1893 Clayton experienced a steady growth, although it was largely a shipping and supply town. From Clayton to the legislature of 1892 went a stronger and more determined delegation, with increased confidence that the third Union county bill would pass.20

Paz Valverde, still in the Territorial council from Colfax county, was again pledged to support a bill for the creation of Union county.21 Hard work was performed for some weeks and, when the bill was brought forward in the upper house, favorable action was taken.22 Representatives from Colfax county continued to oppose and block its passage in the lower house. They were aided by men of Mora county; the San Miguel county delegation was passively active.23 Considerable money was spent during the session, and it is probable that its influence was one of the determining factors in the final vote.24

Finally, in the early days of February, 1893, the Union county bill, having already passed the council, was called up

18. New Mexico, Senate Journal, 12th Session, 1891, p. 98.
22. New Mexico, Senate Journal, 13th Session, 1892, p. 112.
by the Speaker of the House. Here its fate was awaited with deep concern, for it was conceded that it would be passed, if at all, by a narrow margin. On the roll call a tie vote resulted. Hardly had the result been announced when Representative McMullen of San Miguel county arose in his seat and requested that his vote be changed from "nay" to "yes." Thus Union county had come into being.

With the signature of Governor L. B. Prince, on February 23, 1893, Union county began its career. Governor Prince soon appointed county officials, some of whom were not wholly acceptable to Union county leaders because of their political affiliations; however, these officials were found to be well qualified for their positions.

Soon after its officials qualified for office, the county commissioners met in Clayton for the transaction of business. Hearings as to the wish of Union county citizens with respect to the site of a courthouse, which it was proposed should be built with as little delay as possible, were ordered and held. Public opinion, in the early days of this new county, was strongly in favor of locating the courthouse on the east side of the railway, where the commercial activities of Clayton were centered. The influence of the Clayton Town Company, which desired to exploit the western portion of the town in which many large residences had been constructed, finally prevailed, and a block of lots was purchased by the county.

A contract for the first courthouse in Clayton was awarded to a contractor from Las Vegas, New Mexico. This building was a two-story edifice. The district court room was on the second floor. The first term of the district court, Union county, convened in September, 1893. This first building was unroofed and seriously damaged by a gale.
of tornado proportions which swept much of northeastern New Mexico on October 10, 1908. It did great damage to property, and took the lives of several homesteaders living outside the village of Clayton. It was the worst gale ever experienced in this locality, at least according to the testimony of the first settlers. Soon after this catastrophe, the present courthouse and jail were constructed.

The Development of Railroads and Industries

In the 1880's railroad building in the West was at its height. The Denver and Rio Grande had been completed from Denver to Pueblo, Colorado, and was pushing its steel arms toward Salt Lake City by way of Tennessee Pass and the Colorado river. In New Mexico there was only one railroad, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. In 1884 a company had been incorporated, which planned to construct a line of railroad south from Denver to Fort Worth, and thence to the Gulf of Mexico. The corporation was known as the Denver and New Orleans Railway Company.

By 1886 track had been built from Ft. Worth, Texas, to Clarendon, Texas. It was the first railroad to be constructed into that sparsely settled district. Another railroad had been built from Denver to Trinidad, Colorado. By filling in the gap between Clarendon and Trinidad, both northern Texas and northeastern New Mexico would be supplied with much needed railway facilities. Prior to 1886 the vast herds of Texas cattle were driven to Dodge City, Kansas, Granada, Colorado, and Springer, New Mexico, for shipment. Cattle trails to these points from Texas were sometimes over five hundred miles in length. A shorter haul than any then existing from Gulf cities to Denver would be established on completion of this new railway.

Actual work of grading the Ft. Worth line, on which

34. Clayton Citizen, October 12, 1908, p. 1.
35. Idem.
3. Denver Republican, March 27, 1888, pp. 1, 4.
4. Idem.
was to be established the town of Clayton, was well in progress in the summer of 1887, and by September of that year the connecting links which were to bind Texas with northeastern New Mexico and Colorado were about to be welded. The road ran southeast from Trinidad to the New Mexico line, and thence through the wooded brakes adjacent to Emery Gap. Thence it ascended from the Cimarron valley to the station of Des Moines, where it reached the highest point between Denver, Colorado, and the Gulf of Mexico, 6,632 feet above sea level. From the Cimarron river to the Canadian river no perennial stream was crossed. The railroad's course then lay along a high, well grassed plateau, devoid of timber.

Among those who in 1886 owned vast landed interests in northeastern New Mexico was Stephen W. Dorsey who had been United States Senator from Arkansas from 1873 to 1879. His home ranch was located at Chico Springs, twenty-five miles east of Springer. He came to New Mexico in 1887. His cattle were of a superior quality and grade, and in the 'eighties they were scattered over the whole of northeastern New Mexico. He had acquired thousands of acres of watered lands along the Palo Blanco, Ute creek, Corrupma creek, Rafael creek, Seneca creek, and other streams, some of which were seventy-five miles from his home ranch. Dorsey's ranch was the scene of many regal functions and festive gatherings. Here men of national and territorial prominence gathered. For Colonel Robert C. Ingersol, who had defended Dorsey successfully in the trial growing out of the star route mail frauds in Washington, he constructed an ornate log house half a mile from his home ranch at Chico Springs. The noted attorney and orator spent part of one summer at this house. Dorsey's large home, built of cut stone and surrounded in summer by lawns and gardens, shrubbery and flowers, was the show spot of northern New Mexico.

Among Senator Dorsey's many acquaintances was General Granville Dodge of New York, construction manager of

7. Union County, Record of Warranty Deeds, A, pp. 18ff.
8. Ibid.
the Denver and Ft. Worth railroad.\textsuperscript{9a} John C. Hill, later of Clayton, was in 1887 and some years prior thereto range manager of the Dorsey interests. Hill was a very active and ambitious young man. In a conference with his employer, it was suggested that a town might be established on the new line of railroad then being pushed across Dorsey's wide cattle range in northeastern New Mexico, which would be an attractive cattle shipping and general merchandise supply station for southern New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle.\textsuperscript{10} To this proposition Dorsey agreed to give his co-operation. He said that he expected to visit New York soon, where he would lay the plan before General Dodge and ask for the railroad company's co-operation in the undertaking.\textsuperscript{11}

From New York in the winter of 1887 Dorsey advised Hill that he had conferred with General Dodge who had promised him that, should a townsite be established on his new line near the Texas-New Mexico boundary where water could be obtained, he would designate it as a division point, construct a round house, install a turntable, and make necessary improvements.\textsuperscript{12} The site of the present town of Clayton was finally chosen for the proposed new village. This location was agreed upon for four reasons. It was about half way between Trinidad, Colorado, and Amarillo, Texas, at both of which points divisions were to be established. It would be a convenient shipping point for cattle, sheep, and wool from southeastern New Mexico, since there was no other railroad in that section of the Territory. The proposed site was on an approximately level stretch of the railroad right-of-way, while north and south thereof were grades unsuitable for the location of yards and side tracks. A mile and a quarter north from this site was a spring where the railway company could install a pumping plant and force water to its track when the road should be completed to that point. This was the only surface water of permanence near

\textsuperscript{9a} General G. M. Dodge was Construction Manager for this road, \textit{Denver Republican}, March 28, 1888, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} John Hill, Jr., \textit{Interview}, November 1, 1932.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
As the work of grading the new lines of railway proceeded southward, Hill made frequent trips from the Dorsey ranch at Chico Springs to the site of the new town, which was located on Section 34, Township 26 North, Range 35 East.¹³ In the late fall of 1887, the Clayton Town Company was organized under the laws of the Territory of New Mexico.¹⁴ At the suggestion of Senator Dorsey, the new town was named Clayton for the Senator's son, Clayton C. Dorsey, who is now (1933) a prominent attorney of Denver, Colorado. The Clayton Town Company was originally composed of Dorsey, Hill, Holland, and Perrin,¹⁵ the last named being a civil engineer.

The decision having been made as to the site of the town of Clayton, title to its location was the next matter to receive consideration. The district through which the railroad right-of-way passed was unoccupied government domain. Quick ownership of any portion of this domain could be acquired by filing "land scrip" claims.¹⁶ Land scrip, the issue of which had been authorized by Congress as additional compensation or bonus to the veterans of the Civil War, could be exchanged for public lands without compliance with the requirements of the Pre-emption and Homestead acts as to residence and improvements. Under the Desert Land Act of 1877, a soldier who had not acquired title to a full 160-acre homestead might obtain enough scrip to make up the deficiency.¹⁷ Through a Mr. Easley in Santa Fe, who dealt in land scrip, Hill and his associates bought forty acres of "Soldier's Additional Scrip," owned by Sion Shaddox of Missouri. This was filed on the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 34, Township 26 north, Range 35 east, New Mexico Meridian, through the Santa Fe Land Office, on November 18, 1887.¹⁸

In 1887 the United States Land Office required the appli-

¹⁴. Union County Commission, Minutes, B, p. 82.
¹⁵. Ibid.
¹⁶. United States, Statutes at Large, March 3, 1877.
¹⁷. United States, Statutes at Large, March 3, 1877.
cant for a Soldier's Additional Homestead entry to appear in person, together with his wife if he were married, before the local land office, and there file application for the desired tract. \(^{19}\) Such requirements were later modified. \(^{20}\) After buying the scrip, it was necessary for Shaddox and his wife to journey from Missouri to Santa Fe, the expense of the trip being borne by Hill and his associates. \(^{21}\) In this way immediate title was secured to the original unit of the Clayton Townsite Company's land, \(^{22}\) although the railroad was not completed through the new town for several months. Thomas S. Holland, assisted by surveyor C. M. Perrin, laid out the streets, lots and blocks of Clayton some time in November, 1887.

The first building constructed in Clayton was erected about the middle of October, 1887. It stood facing south, near the railroad right-of-way, about four hundred feet in a northerly direction from the present Colorado and Southern railway station. It was twelve or fourteen feet square, having a door and a window. \(^{23}\) It was used by engineer Charles M. Perrin as office and sleeping quarters, and served as his residence on a homestead of 160 acres. \(^{24}\)

The lumber contained in the Perrin house was purchased from Thomas O. Boggs, whose sheep ranch was situated on Pennevetitos creek, thirty miles west of Clayton. \(^{25}\) His corrals, pannels, and sheds were purchased by John C. Hill, carefully taken apart by a carpenter, and carted to Clayton to be used in the construction of several early buildings. A long and expensive haul of material from Trinidad was saved through this purchase. Old lumber served well enough for the needs of this new village until after the completion of the railroad. The first three buildings erected in Clayton were constructed from the Boggs lumber. \(^{26}\)

In the fall of 1887 the townsite company offered lots for

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\(^{19}\) United States, *Statutes at Large*, April 12, 1881.
sale in Clayton. Generous inducements were offered to those who would buy lots and construct buildings. Main street property, naturally, sold for higher prices than any other in town.\textsuperscript{27} Soon after the first of January, 1888, considerable activity developed and several commercial enterprises were launched, although Byler's store at Apache Springs continued to supply the people with the necessities of life. A week was required to complete a trip from Apache Springs to Trinidad and return.\textsuperscript{28} Lumber being scarce and expensive in Clayton, many wall tents had been erected. These served as places of business and residences for the first inhabitants of the town.\textsuperscript{29}

On the 13th of January, 1888, George A. Bushnell and Edward W. Fox, former residents of Raton, opened a store in the Perrin cabin with a small stock of general merchandise.\textsuperscript{30} Their firm name was Fox Brothers, Bushnell, and Company. It was the beginning of a large and, for a time, lucrative enterprise. This firm drew trade from northern New Mexico and the country as far south as White Oak and Roswell. Clayton was to absorb trade which had formerly gone to Las Vegas, New Mexico.\textsuperscript{31} Las Vegas was closer to the Pecos river points than was Clayton, but the road to Clayton was more easily traveled than was the road to Las Vegas. In the fall of 1888 a trail was established from the Pecos valley to Clayton, over which cattle from Roswell, Ft. Sumner, and the Capitan mountains were driven.\textsuperscript{32} For years, thousands of "longhorns" which had been raised in the southern part of New Mexico and northwestern Texas followed this dust-covered road.\textsuperscript{33}

About March, 1888, Homer E. Byler moved his stock of merchandise and Perico post office from Apache Springs to Clayton where it was housed in a small frame structure\textsuperscript{34} with canvas roof, located on the south side of Main street.

\textsuperscript{27} Union County, \textit{Record of Warranty Deeds}, A, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{28} R. W. Isaacs, \textit{Interview}, January 12, 1934.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Denver Republican}, March 29, 1887, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{30} Tom Bushnell, \textit{Interview}, September 14, 1933.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{32} Colonel Jack Potter, \textit{Interview}, January 14, 1934.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{34} A. W. Thompson, \textit{Interview}, January 19, 1934.
This was the first post office in the town, the name being changed on March 23, 1888.

The first hotel was the Clayton House. It was erected in February, 1888, by John C. Hill. It occupied the corner lot by the Isaacs Hardware store. This building, a story-and-a-half structure, formerly stood on Rafael creek, on one of the Dorsey ranches. For several years it served as Clayton's only hotel. Its first landlord was Dr. S. I. North, the town's first physician, who in 1892 purchased the hotel and added several rooms. A year or so after the Clayton House had been enlarged, S. A. Dyson, the first minister of the gospel to settle in Clayton, erected on the site of the Big Jo Lumber Company's yard a square, two-story, frame building, which was also used as a hotel. This was called the Phoenix Hotel.

The Denver and Fort Worth railroad was completed in March, 1888. The first passenger train, which was a so-called mixed train containing a passenger coach, was run from Texas to Trinidad on March 20, 1888. The day was hailed as the initial birthday of the new town. A regular schedule was soon maintained on this line, and merchandise that had been freighted in wagons from the nearest available points on the Santa Fe railroad, was now shipped to Clayton by rail. Ranchmen from the Tramperos and Ute Creek districts found it more convenient to come to Clayton to trade than to buy in Springer or Las Vegas. Roads were quickly laid out both to the north and to the south of the new settlement. The road north to the Cimarron river was laid out by Bill Metcalf, a pioneer of that region. It crossed the Cieneguella near the coal banks, where water was always available; thence it wound along to the Corrumpa, which it forded at the old Santa Fe trail crossing, and descended to the Cimarron by way of Road canyon. From the south a great trade at once sprang up. In the summer of 1888 sheep

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35. Carl Eklund, Interview, December 27, 1928.
36. Ibid.
37. Denver Republican, March 28, 1888. Several pages of this issue were devoted to this new railroad.
38. Tom Gray, Interview, September 26, 1933.
owners hauled their wool to Clayton for sale and shipment.\textsuperscript{40} The summer and fall of 1888 saw a large business turning to Clayton.\textsuperscript{41} Fox Brothers and Bushnell opened their new building with a $20,000 stock of general merchandise, hardware, provisions and dry goods, which was stored in a warehouse erected on the railroad right-of-way. It was no unusual sight in 1888 and for a decade thereafter to see four-horse wagons draw up before this warehouse, unload hides, sheep pelts, or wool, and load sacks of corn and flour.\textsuperscript{42} Frequently during the fall and winter, ranchmen were obliged to wait a number of days, or even a week, for shipments of corn to arrive by rail before they could secure their needed consignment, so great was the demand for grain.\textsuperscript{43} While the Byler and Walker stores carried small stocks of dry goods and groceries, Fox and Bushnell were generally prepared to do a wholesale as well as a retail business. This store opened early in the morning and did not close until late at night. About its large heating stove during the winter congregated ranchmen and their families. Cowboys who had ridden to town from faraway ranches, were to be found on the street at almost any time of the day or night. Numerous saloons, which had almost instantly sprung up, were centers of warmth and good cheer. In these saloons poker, monte, and other games of chance were indulged in. The usual scenes incidental to frontier life were not absent. One favorite pastime of the cowboys was to ride up and down the main street, shooting off their guns to the accompaniment of wild yells.\textsuperscript{44} Little damage was done, however, in these sportive exhibitions.

The first two newspapers published in what is now Union County were the \textit{Folsom Idea} and the \textit{Clayton Enterprise}. It is not known which of these journalistic enterprises was launched first, although it is likely that they came into existence about the same time.\textsuperscript{45} The \textit{Folsom Idea} was a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Morris Herzstein, \textit{Interview}, April 6, 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{41} George Hubbard, \textit{Interview}, November 4, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Tom Bushnell, \textit{Interview}, September 14, 1933.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Colonel Jack Potter, \textit{Interview}, May 28, 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{44} D. W. Burke, \textit{Interview}, December 27, 1928.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Morris Johnson, \textit{Interview}, October 4, 1929.
\end{itemize}
small sheet of six columns. It was gotten out on an antiquated Washington hand press. Its editor was J. W. Curren, who, with his family, settled in Folsom shortly after the town was established. The business of the Idea and the Enterprise was small. The town companies purchased space weekly in both of these publications for a time, and local merchants advertised their wares in them. After the opening of the land office in Folsom, legal notices as to final proof of pre-emption and homestead claims contributed to the support of these newspapers, the existence of which was precarious and not always one of profit. The Clayton Enterprise was first published in a one-story frame building on Broadway street. The second newspaper to be published in Clayton was a four-page sheet, ten by fourteen inches in size, called the Maverick.

Between 1893 and 1900 several other newspapers sprang into existence in Clayton. The El Fenix, published partly in English and partly in Spanish, was owned and edited by Faustin Gallegos, who was district court interpreter during the term of Judge Mills. A Republican campaign sheet, Union del Pueblo, had an adventurous and short career; it was printed in the Spanish language and was supported by the Republican Central Committee of Union County. In 1908 the Clayton News was established, a successor to the Enterprise. Clayton now has two weekly newspapers, the Clayton News and the Union County Leader.

The towns of Folsom and Des Moines were laid out soon after the building of the Colorado and Southern railroad. Their development has been much like that of Clayton. The population of Clayton increased from 750 in 1900 to 2,518 in 1930. Des Moines, the only other incorporated town, had a population of 362 in 1930. At that time Grenville had only 231 inhabitants. Folsom, the second largest town

46. Ibid.
47. J. E., Stanley, Interview, March 27, 1934.
48. Ibid.
49. Dan Taylor, Interview, March 28, 1934.
52. Idem.
in the county, had a population of 761 in 1930.\textsuperscript{53} There are a few other small towns, or villages, in Union County.

In 1907 the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company built a branch road from Raton to Des Moines.\textsuperscript{54} In 1931 the same company built a line from Felt, Oklahoma, across Union county to Farley, New Mexico. This gives the county a total of about one hundred fifty-six miles of railroad.\textsuperscript{55}

Before any railroad was built in Union county, there were three trails that crossed the county. One of these had been the old Santa Fe trail; another was a wagon trail from Springer, New Mexico, to Tascosa, Texas. There was also a trail from the lower part of the county to Trinidad, Colorado.\textsuperscript{56} Today (1934) the county has about seventy miles of oiled highway and more than three hundred miles of graded and maintained dirt roads.

Farming within the last twenty years has become rather important. Union county has 180,000 acres under cultivation.\textsuperscript{57} The principal crops are corn, beans, grain sorghums, broom corn, and the small grains such as wheat, oats, rye, and alfalfa. There are about six thousand acres under irrigation.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{53} Idem.
\textsuperscript{54} Clayton Citizen, April 4, 1907, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{55} Helen Haines, History of New Mexico, pp. 258-259. New York: New Mexico Historical Publishing Company, 1891.
\textsuperscript{56} Colonel Jack Potter, Interview, January 14, 1934.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., Vol. III, Part 3, p. 320.