

The Chapman Center Rural Crime Map Project:

Kansas Crime, 1890 - 1930

Directed by Dr. M.J. Morgan

Cartographer: Angela Schnee

Data: Kansas State University Undergraduates

Analysis: Janet Adam, Grant Peters, Rebecca Hall, Interns

Text: M.J. Morgan and Angela Schnee, Research Assistant

Bibliography: Griffin Page, Intern

Overview of Project: During four semesters of the academic years 2011-2013, Chapman Center students conducted research into rural crime occurring in (mainly) the service area of Chapman Center for Rural Studies, a ten-county area surrounding Manhattan, Kansas. Students worked with two groups of newspapers published predominantly between 1890 and 1930, selecting crimes reported in enough detail to drive analysis. The newspapers students most consistently consulted were *The Westmoreland Recorder*, *The Manhattan Nationalist*, *The Manhattan Mercury*, and *The Junction City Sentinel and Tribune*. In a more urban setting was *The Wichita Eagle*. However populous the community, the newspapers still reported crime occurring in rural areas. Up until 1930, 43.8% of the national population still lived in rural areas, combining rural-farm and rural non-farm (village) populations (SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau). This percentage was even higher in agricultural states like Kansas. We chose the newspapers used to gather data based on their availability to students as either bound volumes (e.g., *The Westmoreland Recorder* at Rock Creek Valley Historical Society in Pottawatomie County) or digitized online through such sites such as The Library of Congress or Kansas State Historical Society. We wanted to eliminate microfilm searching, as obtaining and searching microfilm is quite time-intensive for students.

The purpose of this project was to gather information, historic crime data, suggesting how different types of crime changed over time; we also wanted to determine if spikes in crime could be related to larger national events. The general research parameter dates of 1890 – 1930 were selected because of the following reasons: 1) most Kansas newspapers began publishing in the late 1880s and 2) with the onset of the Great Depression, news reporting swung heavily to national events and policies. The minute, detailed coverage from local areas virtually ceased.

Method: Each semester, students who had enrolled in History 533, Lost Kansas Communities, wrote a methods assignment on a rural crime of their choosing. Interns then collected and classified this data into seven categories based on those established by current government websites. Interns then analyzed the data for patterns. Finally, Undergraduate Research Assistant Angela Schnee created a GIS map and correlated timeline that suggest interesting trends for future research.

Limitations of the Project: Due to the nature of the data, we had to overcome several challenges. First, there was not a systematic approach taken with the collection: although encouraged to focus on north-central Kansas, students could locate crimes from any county in Kansas. This introduces some bias to the dataset as counties with newspapers available online and in bound volumes have higher collection rates. Second, certain types of crime are more heavily reported in local newspapers. Third, the dataset is obviously incomplete and needs additional data for reliable statistical analysis. This project is to serve as an initial study of the data currently collected and should not be used to make definitive assumptions. Despite these challenges, some interesting trends begin to emerge even with the weak dataset.

Findings: On the graph below, crimes appear grouped into the seven classes that best describe the type of crime; crimes were then plotted on a line graph using ten year periods to determine if there were any trends across the time period being studied. The cartographer also created a timeline with major national events so that the reader can easily relate the rise and fall of the crime classes to events happening nationally. Notice that during the two decades 1890 -1910, the crime data creates a pyramid with high numbers of violent crime, theft, and civil crimes being reported in newspapers. The timeline indicates that this is a period of unrest for the U.S. with the Spanish American War, financial crisis (the Panic of 1893 and resulting devastating depression), a presidential assassination (McKinley), rapid technological development driving social change (the automobile), and also in the 1890s, a severe drought. Chapman interns and researchers concluded that these factors aggregated to form high social stress driving crime increase.

Next, in looking at the 1920s and 1930s, readers will notice a rapid increase in alcohol related crimes. This is correlated with the events timeline through the enactment of National Prohibition. Although Kansas had been a dry state since 1880, it is likely that with the implementation of national laws, alcohol-related offenses were more stringently prosecuted. The choropleth map highlights the sources of data and reports data as a percentage by county of total crime reports collected. Counties with only one crime reported were excluded from this analysis. Sedgwick County shows the highest percent of reported crimes; this is partly due to the availability of *The Wichita Daily Eagle* online. However, Wichita's much larger population also created the likelihood of more crime in general. Future analysis and additional data collection could allow for population to be considered as a variable.

Below we furnish a brief bibliography supporting the basic findings of the Rural Crime Map Project. This is an initial and selective source list, but it does support the trends of the analysis.

Selective Project Bibliography

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McKinley Assassination

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Wartime Violent Crime

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- Von Trotha, Trutz. "Violent Universalization, Modern Violence and Violent Stakes of a Criminological Sociology of War." *Deviance et Societe* 29, no. 3 (2005): 285-298.

Change in Rural Crime

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Historic Kansas Crimes 1890 to 1930



Percentage of Crime by County



Created By: Angela Schnee
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