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125 Years of Thomas County

Thomas County was first incorporated by order of Gov. John Martin on Oct. 8, 1885. The governor appointed W.G. Porter to take a census of the county and, once that was in order, he declared it incorporated with Colby as the temporary county seat.

Later that year the first three county commissioners, E.A. Crouse, W.H. Kingery and B.F. Stewardson were elected and Colby was officially voted in as the county seat.

The county was originally part of Wallace County. In 1873 the northwest Kansas county lines were redrawn by the state Legislature to their present day locations. Thomas County was paired with Sheridan County for judicial purposes until it was officially incorporated.

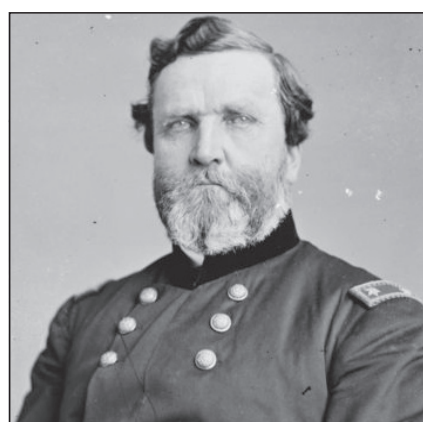
The area was in the middle of a population boom. the county's population – not counting Colby – was 161 on Jan. 1, 1885, and 3,000 on Dec. 1. Colby had about 65 houses at the time and about 300 people.

Before the boom, the county had been primarily populated with livestock and the ranchers who drove them. It was good grazing land, having been a favorite feeding ground for bison, antelope and wild horses. The Union Pacific Railroad owned nearly 203,000 acres.

Colby at the time had just moved three miles north. Old Colby had grown up around the post office, near the present-day site of Village Inn, but it was moved north to better land. The town had hotels, banks and trading stores, but much of the trading was still done in Grinnell, Grainfield and Oberlin. The county's newspaper was the Thomas County Cat, which cost \$1.50 a year.

The county was named after Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, who rose to fame in the Civil War as "The Rock of Chickamauga," for holding the Union lines at the Battle of Chickamauga in September of 1863. He went on to command the Army of the Cumberland, which scored a decisive victory over the Confederate Army at the Battle of Nashville.

Gov. Martin also named the townships after soldiers who were killed in action under Thomas.



Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas

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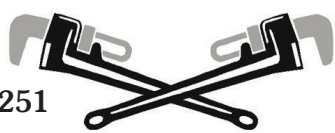
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