

**Five Creeks, Clay County – The Town-less Township**

**Chapman Center for Rural Studies**

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By definition, a township is a geographic division of six square miles that acts as a subdivision of a county.<sup>1</sup> A township does not actually have to include a town to qualify as a township. Thus Five Creeks, located in Clay County, Kansas, is known to locals today, as it has been since its founding in 1871, as a town-less township (fig. 1).

Five Creeks was once home to a rapidly growing population within Clay County. W.A. Schoonover, who lived within the township's boundaries before its actual founding, was the first homesteader. Schoonover arrived in 1866 and was followed by the Pinkerton family two years later.<sup>2</sup> Rapid growth followed, as a whopping 1,181 names were listed as residents of Five Creeks in the 1880 census. These first settlers kept busy with a lifestyle of constant activity, their wheat and corn crops proving successful over time. There never were more than three grocery stores, but early citizens became prosperous through trade.

Social activities were a vital part of life on the prairie for the people of Five Creeks. Residents worked hard enough to benefit from the cultural development that accompanies wealth and leisure,<sup>3</sup> enjoying several weekly activities to choose from. Dancing quickly became the most popular pastime, picking up even more momentum during prohibition years. Bootleggers could often be found at these social events; police often overlooked the township due to its isolated location. Neighbors came from miles away to attend these dances, which often lasted long into the night; some chose to spend the night in the barn rather than take the long journey home in the dark. Twice-weekly showings at the theater, Saturday evening dances, and Sunday

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<sup>1</sup> "Township," *Dictionary.com*, accessed September 19, 2011, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/township>.

<sup>2</sup> *Clay County, Kansas Heritage Book*, (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1990), Clay County Historical Society, Clay Center, KS.

<sup>3</sup> W.G. Clugston, "Kansas, The Essence of Typical America," in *What Kansas Means to Me*, ed. Thomas Fox Averill (Lawrence: University Press of Chicago, 1991), 65-82.

afternoon dog races gave citizens of Five Creeks plenty of activities to enjoy with their friends and neighbors.

Two Presbyterian churches dominated the religious scene and became popular social centers. “There was a great spiritual awakening in [Five Creeks] in 1890...[and] many names were added to the rolls of local churches,” Helen Hahn recalled in 1937.<sup>4</sup> The Hebron Reformed Presbyterian Church experienced such growth that its original church building had to be expanded due to its flourishing Sunday School.

Five Creeks did not continue to flourish, however. Both the L.K. & W. Railroad<sup>5</sup> and the Kansas Central Railroad were instrumental in starting the town,<sup>6</sup> but one event proved to be the end for the township's railroad connection: the 1962 construction of the Milford Reservoir several townships away. Two years later, the completed Milford Reservoir caused the discontinuing of rail service – the township’s lifeline to financial success. The shipping of milk, cream, eggs, hogs, cattle, mules, and grain came to a close, and whatever hopes Five Creeks had of developing an officially incorporated town were virtually lost. The township would never make a full recovery.

As the township's populace moved from Five Creeks to Clay Center, following the prosperity brought by the railroad and the Milford Reservoir, various social institutions left as well. In the 1970s, leaders of the Hebron Reformed Presbyterian Church chose to move to Clay Center, where they thought there was greater potential for growth. The reverend stated that “that

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<sup>4</sup> Hahn, Helen A. "Has had Interesting History." 1937.

<sup>5</sup> "Lost Towns and Settlements." *The Times*, 12 January 1922.

<sup>6</sup> "A Continued Story of Clay County by Townships - Five Creeks." August 3, 1899.

part of the county was experiencing an exodus of the people.”<sup>7</sup> The post office, which had two different homes within the boundaries of Five Creeks, discontinued its services in the township in 1980.<sup>8</sup> Schools, too, left the township, moving to the neighboring towns of Morganville and Clay Center. There have not been any operating public schools in Five Creeks since 1966.

Life within Five Creeks was good. The township thrived around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but faced struggles with the construction of the Milford Reservoir and the loss of consistent railroad usage. The Five Creeks community lives on, though; the **Idana Presbyterian Church**, located at the extreme eastern portion of the township, meets every Sunday to carry on what these Kansas forefathers started (fig. 2). The church gave hope to people like Helen Hahn, who, looking toward the distance future, said, “As we turn from the past and face the future, we are encouraged by the presence of a splendid community of young people in our church.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "First Services in new Hebron Church are Sunday." Week of November 12, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Kansas Historical Society, "Kansas Post Offices, 1828-1961." Last modified August 3, 1961. (Accessed September 18, 2011.) [http://www.ksks.org/geog/geog\\_postoffices/search/placename:Idana](http://www.ksks.org/geog/geog_postoffices/search/placename:Idana).

<sup>9</sup> Hahn, "Interesting History."

**Figures**



Figure 1: Idana Presbyterian Church is the only operating church within the township of Five Creeks today. Source: "Idana Presbyterian Church." Photo. [http://www.resortnaturelle.com/Idana/idana\\_presbyterian\\_church.htm](http://www.resortnaturelle.com/Idana/idana_presbyterian_church.htm)

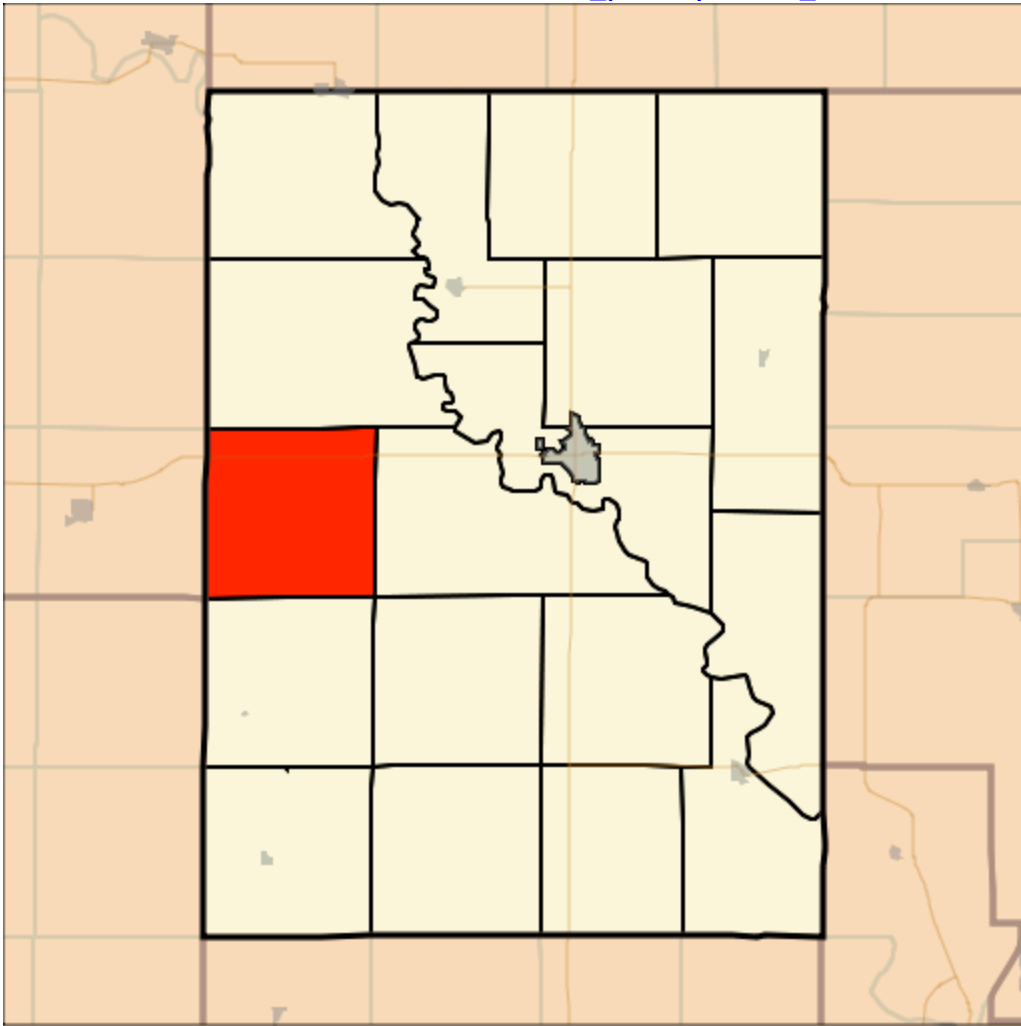


Figure 2: Location of Five Creeks township within Clay County, KS. Source: Omnedon. "Map highlighting Five Creeks Township, Clay County, Kansas." Wikimedia Commons. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_highlighting\\_Five\\_Creeks\\_Township,\\_Clay\\_County,\\_Kansas.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_highlighting_Five_Creeks_Township,_Clay_County,_Kansas.svg).



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