

**OLD COWTOWN MUSEUM
BUSINESS DISTRICT
CITY MARSHAL'S OFFICE**

Wichita's first few years were ones of especially dynamic change. Between 1868 and 1880 Wichita evolved from a trading post on the Arkansas River to a small city with all the amenities that Victorian society offered. Business and civic leaders here, as elsewhere in the western towns springing from the plains, recognized that order and security were vital to the process of town building. Law enforcement in Wichita also evolved, reflecting the culture and values of the city. The picture that emerges on review of the events of those first years is rather different than that painted by the mythology that has grown up surrounding the American West.

During Wichita's infancy, Osage Indians presented perhaps the greatest threat to settlers. The federal government had not yet finalized negotiations with the tribe regarding lands previously granted to them in Kansas, and until well into the 1870s, some of the Osages defied efforts at containing them in Indian Territory, which was present-day Oklahoma. Trading entrepreneurs, however, chose the townsite in part for its proximity to Indian Territory: it was a natural terminus for freight to or from

the south (Indian Territory and Texas) and the southwest (the Chisholm and Santa Fe Trails). That the Osages left Wichita settlers largely alone may have been due to the presence of a U.S. army regiment stationed about a mile northwest of the townsite. By the time this regiment departed in 1869 to suppress Indian resistance elsewhere in the state, Wichita was sufficiently large to protect itself.

The infrastructure of law enforcement took shape quickly in the growing town. The first term of the Kansas Ninth District Court convened in June, 1870, on the second floor of a livery stable on North Main. With 2,000 inhabitants, Wichita incorporated as a second-class city the next month. The city council drafted ordinances and appointed Ike Walker the first marshal on July 25. William Smith succeeded Walker within less than a year but resigned after only two days, ostensibly to pursue other prospects. Mike Meagher accepted the position and served ably for three years. During 1871, at least eight additional policemen were sworn in by either the police judge or by O. W. Brummett, the city clerk. Certainly not all eight worked concomitantly --opportunities were often fluid in

frontier towns, and one of the men, Meagher's twin John, assumed the position of Sedgwick County Sheriff.' Thus by 1871 the city had laid the foundations of law and order.

Although experiences with cattle herds passing by on their way north shaped the city ordinances passed in 1870, at this point Abilene, not Wichita, enjoyed preeminence in the cattle trade. Wichita's economy centered instead on the animal hide business, which it dominated on the plains throughout the 1870s, and on wagon freighting. The latter industry flourished even after the arrival of the Santa Fe railroad in March of 1872: freight continued to move south by wagon due to tribal reluctance to permit railroads in Indian Territory; and emigrants enroute to rich

south-central Kansas farmlands disembarked at the Wichita terminus. Historians contend that the presence of a developed huntingtrading economy provided Wichita with some of the prerequisite institutions to become a cattle town and that city leaders labored to secure rail service primarily in order to exploit the cattle trade.' whatever the impetus, railroads were key to survival for many prairie towns. Certainly the presence of the Santa Fe gave Texas cattle drovers earlier access to shipping, shaving ninety miles off the trip to Abilene or to Ellsworth, the previous destinations for herds to be shipped to eastern markets. The opening of the 1872 season saw Wichita, already a trading center and now a rail terminus, poised for ascendancy among Kansas cattle towns.