

## Thomas County Townships

When Thomas County was officially organized in 1885, the townships were named by Governor John A. Martin for Kansas soldiers who were killed in the Battle of Chickamauga under General Thomas, and they were; Wendell, Randall, Rovohl, Morgan, Barrett and Hale. As the town of Colby was laid out, some streets were named for battles and towns where Thomas fought: Chickamauga, Mission Ridge, Franklin and Nashville. In fact, for a short time, there was even some talk about changing the name of the town from Colby to Chickamauga.

## Governor John A. Martin

Colonel Martin became brigade commander after his predecessor, Colonel Hans Heg of Wisconsin, was killed at Chickamauga. Following the Civil War, Col. Martin returned to Kansas and was elected as the tenth Governor of Kansas and was inaugurated on January 12, 1885. He was re-elected in 1886 to serve a second term. Governor John A. Martin of the Eighth recalled the battle in 1886 for a Memorial Day address in Wichita:

*"Selected, as the color-guard always is, from different companies, and with a carefulness inspired by regimental pride, the color-bearer and his guard of honor formed a striking group – he tall, powerful, manly, grave and silent; they boyish, beardless, laughing, chattering, careless—but one and all of them daring and gallant beyond what was common even in those heroic years. Within an hour after the battle began, Rovohl. . . was mortally wounded. When he fell his comrades indulged in fierce dispute as to which of them was entitled to carry the flag. Several claimed it, but Wendell, affirming his seniority in rank as a corporal, secured it. Two of them proposed carrying Rovohl to the surgeons in the rear, but he refused all help, saying, 'My life is nothing—keep the flag to the front.'"*

Charles O. Rovohl enlisted in Company I, Eighth Kansas Infantry on the 3rd of April, 1862 at White Cloud, Kansas. He was promoted Corporal January 1st, 1863. He was the Color Bearer of the regiment at the Battle of Chickamauga and was killed in that engagement on September 19th, 1863 at the age of 28.

William E. Wendell enlisted in Company E, Eighth Kansas Infantry on the 13th day of September, 1861 in Topeka. He was promoted to Corporal on the 16th of September and was killed at Chickamauga where he was one of the Color Guards on the 19th of September, 1863. He was 21 years old.

Charles Morgan enlisted in Company H. on the 20th of January 1862 at Fort Leavenworth. He was promoted to Corporal on the 6th day of June and was one of the Color Guards at Chickamauga. He was killed in that engagement at the age of 30.

Thomas L. Randall enlisted on the 28th day of September, 1861 at Fort Leavenworth. He was promoted to Sergeant on October 1st, 1862 and was killed at the battle of Chickamauga on September 19, 1863 at the age of 23.

Oliver Barrett enlisted in Company C, Eighth Kansas at Atchison, on the 11th of August 1862. He was only 17 and was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga.

Robert Hale enlisted in Company D, Eighth Kansas in August of 1861. He was promoted to Corporal and then to First Sergeant and was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga on September 19th, 1863.

George Henry Thomas was born in Southampton County, Virginia. He trained at West Point (1840), and fought in the Seminole War, on the western frontier, and in the Mexican War. After teaching at West Point (1851-1855) he joined a new cavalry division. Although a Virginian, he stayed with the Union and commanded units at several major campaigns and battles.

His greatest moment came at Chickamauga (1863), where his stubborn defense earned him the nickname of the “**Rock of Chickamauga**.” During the second day of the desperate battle, whenever Thomas’ position was observed, his unit would still be holding their ground, even after being told that he “could withdraw at his discretion.” That afternoon, Thomas sent an aide with a message to Colonel Harker. When the aide asked where he would find Thomas when he returned, Thomas, having heard enough about retreat that day, glared at the officer and thundered, “*Here!*”

Forces under Thomas' command stormed Missionary Ridge at Chattanooga (1863), and his Army of the Cumberland decisively defeated a Confederate army under Hood at Franklin and Nashville, TN (Nov-Dec 1864), for which he was one of 15 officers voted ‘Thanks of Congress’. He stayed in the army after the war, and died in San Francisco while in command of the Military Division of the Pacific. A quote from General Thomas explaining why he stayed with the Union. It was stated in response to the presentation of a gold medal given to him on the second anniversary of the Battle of Nashville by the Governor of Tennessee.

*“Some thirty years ago I received my diploma at the Military Academy and soon after a commission in the Army. On receiving that commission I took an oath to sustain the Constitution of the United States and the Government to to obey all officers of the Government placed over me. I have faithfully endeavored to keep that oath. I did not regard it so much as an oath but as a solemn pledge on my part to return the Government some little service for the great benefit I had received in obtaining my education at the Academy.”*

## Civil War Flags

Civil War flags were so important to soldiers because their lives depended on them. Soldiers fought under conditions that are difficult to imagine today. Because of the weaponry used, a battlefield quickly became a smoke-filled place. The color guard with the flags was out in front of the regiment, guiding the soldiers forward. By watching the flags, officers could see the locations of regiments from a distance. This allowed them to give the appropriate orders to direct the battle. If you planted your flag within enemy lines, you were signaling victory. The absence of your flag was a sign of defeat. It was a deadly honor to be a color bearer. You were out in front of the troops. While carrying the flag you were unarmed, although surrounded by an armed color guard to defend the flag. If you were wounded or killed, one of them would take your place. Colors is the name for any flag. The Color Bearer is the soldier carrying the flag. The Color Guard, whose job was to protect the color bearer, usually consisted of a sergeant and five to eight corporals.

The Eighth Kansas Infantry went farther east than any other Kansas regiment, finding itself fighting in northern Georgia. It was at Chickamauga in Georgia that the Eighth Kansas had a very bloody day. It was particularly deadly for the color guard. Of the nine members of the color guard that day, four were killed, three wounded and only two went unharmed.

## Homestead Act

Men returning home from the Civil War battlefields sought a better, perhaps more idealistic life, for themselves and their families. The Homestead Act of 1862 gave them the idea and opportunity to pick up and go west. This settlement created a need for more available land. The 1868 survey opened the High Plains to settlers.

(PHOTOT)

Colby

In 1882 J. R. Colby had settled on his homestead and secured a patent for his town in 1884. The Colby Post Office was located in the NE 1/4 Section 24, Township 8, Range 34. There were sod homes offering room and board. One housed the shop of the first paper in the county, the *Thomas County Cat* issued on March 12, 1885. In March 1885, the Colby Townsite Company recorded a plan for a town three miles north of Mr. Colby's site. A compromise was worked out. Mr. Colby consented to move and the town was named Colby. J.R. received a residence and business lot where he ran the Colby House. By 1890, Colby left the Thomas County.

PHOTO

The Grand Army of the Republic

Among the earliest settlers in Thomas County were Civil War veterans and, once organized, the county grew rapidly. The streets, cafes and shops in towns around the county were filled with the reminiscences of old soldiers. Memorial Day observances in Colby's early history were large day-long affairs with a parade that ended at the cemetery. There were so many involved from the community that there were few spectators. The afternoon programs were held at the brick armory constructed by the local G.A.R. members. Names of those who served in the Civil War both living and deceased were listed in the local paper each year. Active in many communities after the war, the G.A.R. in Colby built an armory. It was located at NW corner of Franklin and 8th Street and was an 50' by 50' octagon shaped building with a tin roof. Dances, plays and musical programs were booked here. Some early high school graduations and court cases were held in this building. The armory was torn down in 1908.