

# Russell Springs, Logan County, Kansas: 1887 to Present

Chapman Center for  
Rural Studies

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## Russell Springs

### Timeline:

- 1887 Russell Springs is founded, and the courthouse is built.
- 1911 The Scott City Northern Railroad passes through town.
- 1917 The Scott City Northern is torn out and the rails are melted down for the WWI effort.
- 1937 Russell Springs maintains the county seat
- 1945 despite Oakley's attempts to move it.
- 1960 Russell Springs loses the county seat to Oakley.
- 1963 The Butterfield Trail Museum is opened in the old courthouse building.
- 1967 The first annual Butterfield Trail Ride takes place.

## 1963 County Seat War Rips Holes into Russell Springs



*A gaping hole still remains in the Russell Springs Courthouse wall where zealous Oakley residents cut out the safe door after finally winning the battle for the county seat. SOURCE: Butterfield Trail Museum and Historical Museum, <http://www.kansastravel.org/butterfieldtrailmuseum.htm>.*

Every Kansas historian is familiar with the vicious county seat wars that characterized town settlement during the 1880s but few are aware that these brutal battles were still occurring in the 1960s. The town of Russell Springs is located in Russell Springs Township, in central Logan County, north of the Smoky Hill River. It was established in 1886 as a point on the Butterfield Stagecoach Trail. By the end of 1887, the town had a school, hotel, two churches, and enough business to support 800 residents. However, its crowning achievement was the construction of a \$10,000 courthouse accompanied by a gift of 100 trees on the

courthouse property, permanently rooting the Logan County seat in Russell Springs for the next 76 years. Oakley contested to have the county seat moved in 1937, 1945, and 1960, but was shot down by a close margin each time. Finally, in 1963 the stakes had changed. Interstate 70 was being constructed in Logan County, and this important highway had passed up Russell Springs for Oakley, a town with a bustling railroad connection, a hospital, and more people. The ballots were cast for the fourth time since Russell Springs had been originally chosen as the seat, and Oakley finally won the election. Amazingly, the deciding factor was a matter of only three votes.

This close margin led to many accusations of voter fraud, but 33 months after the election, the Kansas Supreme Court upheld the district court's decision to move the county seat. On August 13, 1963, Oakley townspeople went to Russell Springs to transfer the county records to the new seat. While they were there, they ripped the safe door from the wall and hauled it off to the new courthouse. Just as the removal of the door left a gaping hole in the old courthouse, the removal of the county seat left a gaping hole in the livelihood of Russell Springs. Today the dwindling population is only 24, but the town does maintain the preservation of the old courthouse, which now houses the Butterfield Trail Museum.

### Sources:

Information available about Russell Springs at: Discover Oakley, <http://discoveroakley.com/county/history-of-logan-county>. The Butterfield Trail Museum and Historical Association, <http://www.windyplains.com/butterfield/history.html>. <http://www.ksdot.org/burtransplan/maps/HistoricStateMaps/1963-64Mapside.pdf>. Bill Warren (lifetime Logan County Resident).