



Kansas Railroad Land Tracts

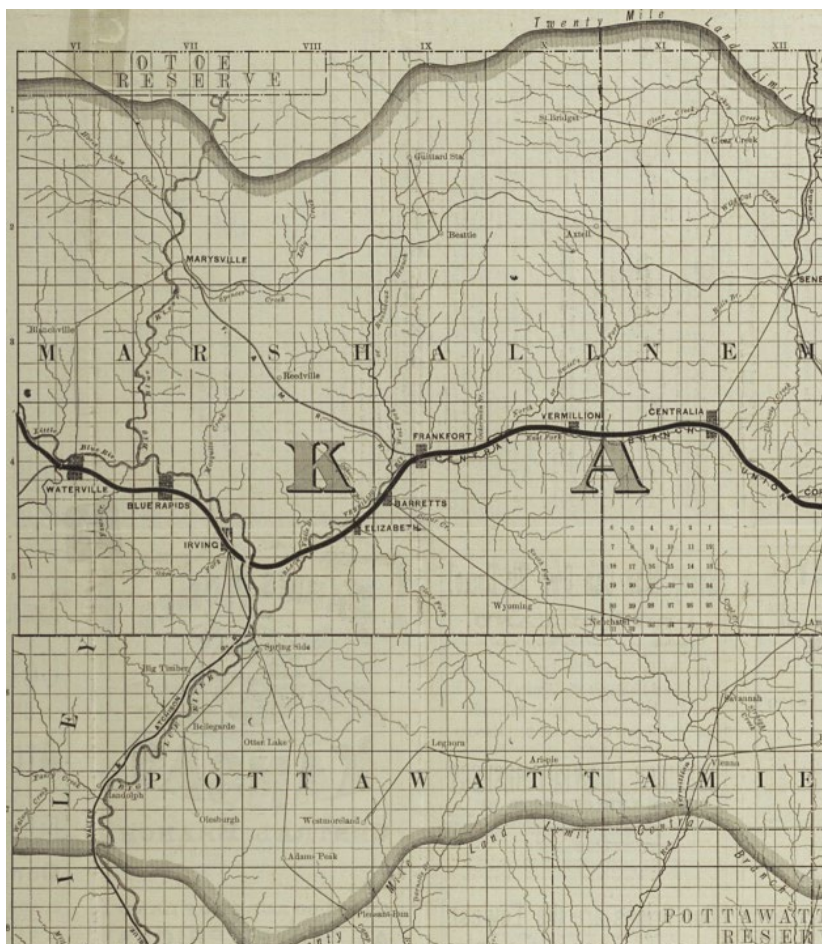
Between 1850 and 1870, about 7% of all federal land nationwide was granted to railroads; in Kansas, estimates run much higher, between 20% and 30%. This region of Kansas contained multiple railroad grants, including those for the Union/Kansas Pacific and Santa Fe railroads. These grants typically included a 400-foot right-of-way for the tracks, plus a wide corridor of land on both sides—anywhere from 6 to 40 miles across.

The federal government distributed the land within this corridor in a checkerboard pattern, alternating ownership between the railroad and the government. Rail companies were free to sell their sections to individuals or businesses, often at a substantial profit. The U.S. government was unable to sell much of the land it retained and eventually gave away much of it through the Homestead Acts.

Within the land grant, sale of lands allocated to the railroad will appear in county deed records with the railroad listed as the grantee. Deeds to government lands appear along with other Homestead Act deeds (see article on Homesteaders in Kansas).

Resources:

The **Kansas Historical Society** (<https://www.kansasmemory.gov/>) and **Wichita State Special Collections** (<https://libraries.wichita.edu/sc/digital>) provide early railroad records in the form of maps, letters, charters, and photographs.



Central Branch Union Pacific showing land grant extending 20 miles on either side of railroad. Clipped from railroad land sale brochure. Full brochure available at kansasmemory.gov/item/214180.