

hold its population

Herald said the Wano township assessor had investigated the figures and found that the population was 1,340. The year before, the population had been 1,180.

The assessor said every house in town and every business building was occupied.

In the Sept. 4, 1930, issue of *The Herald*, the high school superintendent reported an enrollment of 171 students, an unspecified increase.

Twenty years later, in 1950, the population was down to 4,708 people, a decline of 38 percent. The St. Francis school principal reported 181 students in the high school and 394 in the grade school for a total of 575, up 37 from the year before.

Business seemed to be thriving, with five car dealers in St. Francis and several in Bird City. Each town had grocery stores, offering round steak for 79 cents a pound, eggs at 33 cents a dozen and bread, two loaves for 25 cents. There were lumberyards, banks, dress and hardware stores.

Through the years, businesses have come and gone. In the 1970s, Consolidated Freight Line trucking established a center in St. Francis and the population increased overnight. However, about 10 years later, the center was moved and almost as quickly as the population increased, it decreased as drivers moved their families.

In 2000, the population was 3,165, down more than 1,500 since 1960. Mr. Zwegardt said farmers started using bigger machinery, which required less help even though they were generally buying up more land.

through the entire community

for expansion or start up. As businesses pay back the loans, Century II can then loan money to other small businesses.

One of the businesses which Century II and Domsch helped establish three years ago is the Bird City Dairy east of town on U.S. 36. The dairy milks around 1,800 cows and hires 20 full-time workers, which has helped increase the enrollment at the Cheylin Schools and stabilize the population in town.

The foundation, in the last seven years, has given \$142,850 in scholarships to high school seniors. It also gives a business development scholarship to students wanting to expand their education, then coming back to Bird City to live and work.

Century II was recently involved in getting a Kansas Small Business Development Center branch office in Bird City. The office covers 10 northwest Kansas counties.

Domsch said the regional office had been looking for a place for two years. The board met the challenge for the hosting community to come up with half of the matching funds.

The office has been set up in the Frontier Ag building on U.S. 36. Center personnel help business people with consulting services and those businesses that are starting up or expanding. If a business owner wants to retire and someone is interested in taking over, the staff works with the current and prospective owners to keep the business open.

People, he said, who once helped on the farms were out of work, so they moved to the cities with their families. This hurt businesses and the schools.

By 2005, the county population was down to 2,840. The St. Francis Schools were down to 320 students, and the Cheylin School, in Bird City, was at 146.

The latest estimate for the 2010 census shows 2,651, a drop of 189 people, or 6.6 percent. These figures are projections from the Kansas Department of Labor.

Despite the figures, most people will say that Cheyenne County is a good, safe place to live. There are grocery stores, good medical facilities and schools. Both towns have swimming pools and there's a city-owned theater in St. Francis.

Mr. Zwegardt says he believes that the drop in population will, and maybe already has, leveled off. He noted that most farmers are older, and he thinks that younger farmers will take over and there will be more children in the school system.

Some will disagree but, having lived almost 95 years in the county, Mr. Zwegardt sees it as one of the best places there is to live – a place, he said, that is full of history.

He has built two historical markers and said 11,400 people have registered at the Cherry Creek Encampment in the last 16 years. People stop and they see what is here in Cheyenne County, he said.

"It has survived a long time," he said, "and I think it will survive long after I have gone."

The staff works with businesses that are struggling with plans for their business, including financial, cash flow and marketing. It also sponsors workshops.

"I think that it is important to have a strong, economic development program with good funding," Mrs. Domsch said, noting that it is difficult to do the necessary networking and go to meetings without financial backing.

The county commissioners and both city councils offer incentives for new businesses. They offer percentage payments for leases, signs, utilities and other items. There are stipulations that go with the incentives, to protect both the giver and the receiver. The city of St. Francis has an industrial park put aside for businesses. The county will also help build a road to a new business.

The St. Francis Area Chamber of Commerce holds events through the year to encourage people to shop at home.

Several years ago, the Community Builders were established after a group took leadership classes. Since that time, the groups has grown as others took the leadership classes. They have organized workshops and meetings, trying to find out what people are looking for when it comes to business and activities in the city and the county. They recently sponsored a forum with legislators and people of the county which drew around 300 people to an early Saturday meeting in Bird City.



Now in ruins, the Simon Matson house was once a lovely home on the Cheyenne County prairie. Matson bought the land in 1887 and built a house where he and his wife Elnora lived. Simon died in 1964. The house and buildings eventually fell apart.

— Photo by Karen Krien/ Saint Francis Herald

*Your Neighborhood
Affiliated Grocery Proudly
Supports Our Community!*

Super Sales Weekly

Services Offered:

- Deli Trays
- Custom Meat Cutting
- Free Delivery in Area
- Case Pricing
- Fresh Produce
- Grocery Carry Out

**St. Francis
SUPERS**

120 E. Washington • St. Francis
785-332-2084

