

*By the Kansas Historical Society*

## Caring for Your Community

Who do you call if your house catches on fire? Who removes snow from your streets in the winter? Who mows the grass at your local park? The answer is someone who works for your local government. It is the responsibility of local government agencies to provide for the health, welfare, and safety of people in the community.



There are three levels of government: federal, state, and local. Each level has its own set of responsibilities. Local government is made up of cities, counties, and townships. Where you live will affect whether it is the city, county, or township that provides your local government services. Sometimes it is a combination of one or more of these entities. For example, the city or county government may operate your library. In some cases the library receives funds from both. The county sheriff and the city police are responsible for law enforcement but are governed by different parts of local government. Even your school district is part of local government. A school board is made up of people elected from your community to govern your school district.

Since Kansas became a territory in 1854, local government has been providing needed goods and services to its citizens. Law enforcement, fire departments, and schools were priorities. Communities also encouraged improvements in transportation services to attract more settlers. Local government regulated and supervised many of a town's services. Primary duties included collecting taxes, enforcing the law, registering land deeds, and issuing licenses.



*In 1887 the Wichita County Commission consisted of the following positions: (Top row, left to right) sheriff, with a gun in his belt; county attorney; treasurer; surveyor; and coroner; (Middle row, left to right) representative, three commissioners; and clerk of the district court; (Bottom row, left to right) county clerk; probate judge; and register of deeds.*

The way services are provided has changed over the years. Instead of a horse-drawn fire engine, now fire trucks come to people's rescue. The school board is no longer responsible for the activities of a single one-room school but an entire district with many schools. While many things have changed, one thing remains the same. It is your local government that cares for your community.