

Franklin County Kansas Historical Information and Physical Characteristics

The history of agriculture in Franklin County began with the first white settlers who were mostly farmers. Prior to 1845, a few trappers, hunters and traders lived in intervals in the district. Franklin County was originally a part of the Osage Indian Reservation. In July 1855, Franklin County was established by the first territorial legislature as one of the original 33 counties in the territory. The county was named in honor of Benjamin Franklin. After the mid 1850's white settlers, mostly from eastern agricultural states, swarmed into the district to take up land as the federal government began to move the Indians out to new reservations in Oklahoma. Some of the land was purchased from Indian owners and a few tracts were filed as homesteads. Nearly all of the principal towns were founded between 1850 and 1880. Ottawa was organized in 1864 and was named in honor of the Ottawa Indians. The principal railroads through the county were built between 1865 and 1895.

Major Land Resource Area: Franklin County is located in Major Land Resource Area 112- Cherokee Prairie. The Cherokee Prairies are gently sloping to rolling dissected plains that are underlain by sandstone, limestone and shale. Thin loess mantles the northern part. Elevation in the Cherokee Prairies is 700-1200 feet above sea level. Average annual precipitation is 35-42 inches. Average freeze period is 185-200 days.

Location: Franklin County is in the east-central part of Kansas. It has a total area of 269,280 acres, or 576 square miles. In 1997, Franklin County had a population of 23, 260; about 50% of which lives in Ottawa, the county seat. Ottawa is near the center of the county and is located along the Marais des Cygnes River. Marais des Cygnes interpreted means- Marsh of the Swans.

Geology: Rocks exposed in Franklin County have an aggregate thickness of about 700 feet and all are sedimentary. Bedrock of Late Pennsylvanian age comprises mostly shale, sandstone, limestone and siltstone; the section extends from Chanute Shale at the base to the Doniphan Shale Member of the Lecompton Limestone at the top. These strata are nearly flat lying; dips approximate 10 to 30 feet per mile.

Franklin County lies within the Forest City Basin. Strata exposed in the county are a small part of the Prairie Plains Monocline, which dips west and northwest away from the Ozark Dome area of Missouri. Faulting is uncommon but two faults affecting the upper part of the Lawrence Shale, the Oread Limestone, and the lower part of the Kanwaka Shale, were mapped in the northwest part of the county. Vertical displacement ranges from approximately 15 to 400 feet.

Alluvial deposits in the Marais des Cygnes and Pottawatomie River valleys yield large supplies of ground water and constitute the most important aquifers in the area. Bedrock aquifers are scant in eastern Franklin County but Douglas Group sandstone beds are commonly suitable aquifers in western Franklin County. Oil, limestone, sand, gravel, coal, and shale are other mineral resources exploited in Franklin County.

Topography: Topography of Franklin County is that of rolling prairie with low hills and occasional steep bluffs in the vicinity of the principal streams. The major topographic features are the east trending valley of the Marais des Cygnes River and the northeast trending valley of the Pottawatomie Creek.

The Marais des Cygnes River and its tributaries drain all of the county. The highest elevation of the county is in the northwestern part of the county and is about 1,145 feet above sea level. The lowest point is located along the Marais des Cygnes River in eastern Franklin County and is about 840 feet above sea level. The average gradient of the Marais des Cygnes River is about two feet per mile.

Climate: The climate is variable and is considered to be typical of eastern Kansas. Sudden temperature changes may occur during any month of the year. Sunshine is prevalent throughout the year. Wind is usually mild but March and October are considered windy months. The cold months are December, January and February and highest temperatures usually occur between June and August. The growing season averages 191 days.

The total expected annual rainfall is about 38.6 inches. Of this 70% falls April through September, or during the normal growing season. An average of 23 inches of snow may be expected during January, February and March.

County Economic Base: Farming is still one of the principal economic enterprises. Livestock and cash grain farming are of equal importance to the local economy. Soybeans, wheat, grain sorghum and corn are the major crops. Approximately 19% of the acreage in the county is rangeland and 14% is considered pasture/hay land and seeded to cool season grasses. Also important for the local economy are various industries, Ottawa University and a satellite campus of Neosho County Community College.

Information was taken from the Franklin County Conservation District Long Range Plan: 1980 and is provided as an information service only, for more complete history of Franklin County other sources should be consulted. The Long Range Plan was originally compiled by Ms. Pauline Willford.