

Rantoul

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The Rantoul area at the eastern edge of Franklin County was a part of the earliest settlement in the county as settlers moved down from Lawrence and Leavenworth and across the Missouri border into Kansas.

However, the present site of the town of Rantoul was not determined until the Missouri Pacific Railroad laid track through the area between Osawatomie and Ottawa in 1882, and a depot and post office for the area were determined. Several farmers in the area had established early post offices and one claimed a depot.

Daniel Cutler, born in Ohio in 1799, came to Franklin County in 1855. Cutler purchased his claim at a land sale in Paola in 1857, bidding on the land at its appraised figure. He filed the 32nd pre-emption option for his land in LeCompton which marks it one of the earliest in the state. The township of Cutler honors his name. Realizing the need for a post office, Cutler established one on his farm and was appointed postmaster in 1859. His wife named the post office "Rantoul" after reading a stirring speech given by a Massachusetts legislator and lawyer, Robert Rantoul. The Cutlers also built a building for the post office which was later to become the Rantoul depot when the railroad came through.

Robert Reed who first came to the area in 1855 did not settle until 1857, after a return trip to Iowa. Reed's family included his wife and two sons who also settled in the area. The Reeds established a post office at their farms east of Rantoul known as Reedsville.

Benjamin J. Seymour and his family came to Franklin County in 1857 and settled just south of the present site of Rantoul. Benjamin died soon after his arrival leaving his wife and eight children. His son Quincy A. Seymour took over the farm and after serving in the Second Battalion, **M.S.M.** returned to the area, purchased land and began farming and raising stock. In 1863 Quincy married Martha Ellen Wise whose father's farm included the present site of Rantoul. Jeremiah Wise built the handsome stone house **(still standing on Main Street in Rantoul)** in 1866. Quincy and his wife moved to the Wise farm and the stone house later became known as the Seymour home. The railroad completed in 1882, passed through the Wise property. Seymour who shipped large numbers of cattle, petitioned the railroad to move the building on the Cutler farm to his farm. The "Rantoul" post office/depot was moved (according to some accounts on the sly) along with two stores, a lumber yard, smithy and several houses, and the town of Rantoul came into being.

Other early settlers in Cutler Township were Hendrick Kinkaid in 1857, considered the first settler by Andreas, S.A. Hester in 1857, and Franklin Bowker in 1865.

It is known that John Brown was in the Rantoul area at an early date. In the winter of 1858 Brown built a house for his brother-in-law, Orson Day, located west of Rantoul. Payment was a draft to the Springfield, Massachusetts Arms Co., for the purchase of arms for Brown. Mrs. Day, Brown's sister, was teacher of the first subscription school serving Rantoul.

Rantoul continued to grow and prosper through the early years. In 1904 oil was discovered on a farm east of town. The Wise/Seymour house became a hotel and meeting place for the influx of workers as the town's population neared 400 during the oil boom. Oil prices dropped and the town returned to normal after about six years. Many people moved away to find work elsewhere. Some of them returned with the second oil boom which began in 1912 when oil was discovered on the Tulloss place. The third stage of oil operation began in 1940 when the Kilby's began using water to flood the oil deposits to bring the gas and oil to the surface. In 1941, the Sack-Brundred Oil Co. began using this technique. Later Brundred sold out to Maracaibo Oil Company.

The Rantoul State Bank was founded in 1905 and operated for many years with W.G. Tulloss as cashier. In 1921 the bank was robbed. The thieves dynamited the safe and the bank caught fire. The thieves fled with a large sum of money and were never caught. The bank was sold during World War II when bank president Max Fockele, entered the U.S. Army.

The town was incorporated in 1912 and improvements followed: hard surfaced streets, lights and water. A fire destroyed most of the business district in 1914; and much of the rebuilding was done in brick instead of wood. As the town rebuilt there were two garages, a blacksmith shop, two restaurants, a cream station, elevator and a hotel.

The first school building was built at the south edge of the town where the high school was later built. Robert Smith, a great uncle of W.G. Tulloss, was the first teacher in the early school.

The Rantoul Rural High School was built and dedicated in 1917 and a gymnasium was added later. Following unification in 1965, Rantoul is now a part of USD 288 where students are bussed to the Central Heights School southwest of Rantoul.

Today there is no longer a crockery store in town. There is a post office, a café, and antique shop. The elevator was demolished in 1992. In 1991 the residents of the area completed a new community center, a roomy, modern building of which the community can be proud.

In 1910 Rantoul's population was listed as 275 and in 1990 the U.S. Census listed 200 persons.

Catherine Jane Richards, 1993 and Deborah Barker, 2011