

Minneola

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Minneola, one of the earliest towns in Franklin County, was founded in grandiose style complete with plans and maps that never materialized.

Minneola was declared the county seat following the destruction of St. Bernard, the county's first post office and first county seat, at the hands of the free-staters in the summer of 1856. The establishment of the post office at St. Bernard in 1855 followed the arrival of the first settlers who came to the county in 1854. The pro-slavery Kansas Territorial government [called the "bogus legislature" by the free-state men] supported Westport merchant Joab Bernard in his desire to be recognized as the first post master and town father in the county. However, his town, St. Bernard, was virtually destroyed by free-staters during the troubled summer of 1856 after the Pottawatomie Massacre and the Battle of Black Jack, both events within thirty miles.

Township settlers led by Perry Fuller attempted to develop a free-state county seat almost upon the exact site of St. Bernard, on the east bank of Eight-Mile Creek. The name of Minneola was suggested by E.N. Morrell, one of the financiers who established the Minneola Town Company. This company included many members of the legislature who were bribed with town shares and lots to insure their support for Minneola as the new Territorial Capital. The Minneola founders went so far as to draw up extravagant plans for the state's future capitol—twenty named avenues crossed by ten streets, including "State" street, and plans of a beautiful capitol building. A map also pinpointed the city as the junction of the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Ft. Gibson and the Minneola and Neosho Valley railroads. The latter railroad never existed. A few real buildings were erected—a hotel at \$8,000 and a legislative hall at \$1,500—in a period of six weeks. The capitol building was never built.

Many settlements at this time were vying for the state's capitol as the territorial legislature began its meetings to become a state. At the third meeting of the Territorial Legislature, January 4, 1858, a bill making Minneola the seat of government passed by a two-thirds vote over the Territorial Governor's veto (28-9). However, the removal of the capitol to Minneola was subject to the suspicion of letting a speculative movement in which a working majority of the members had more or less interest. Many of the members of the legislature owned lots in the embryo city, thanks to Perry Fuller and the Town Company. The removal was declared illegal and became known as the "Minneola Swindle."

A constitutional convention was held at Minneola March 23, 1858, with 72 delegates in attendance. James Lane was elected president of the convention, though he refused to step foot into the newly-built hall. The convention adjourned to Leavenworth and never again returned to Minneola.

In 1860, Minneola lost its county seat status when Ohio City was thus named. The hall at Minneola was moved—intact—to Ottawa. The town of Minneola exists today recorded as farm land.