

Pomona

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The town of Pomona, ten miles west of Ottawa, is located on elevated land north of the Marais des Cygnes River that wanders through high timbered bluffs along its south bank.

John H. Whetstone, the city's founder, chose the name Pomona for the Roman goddess of fruit. Whetstone purchased 12,000-15,000 acres in 1868 from John McManus of Reading, Pennsylvania who by act of treaty acquired 192,310 acres in Franklin, Coffey and Osage counties that had been the original Sac and Fox reservation.

The town site of 640 acres was organized in 1869 by Whetstone and S.T. Kelsey, a nurseryman. A leaflet printed in 1883 advertising "Pomona For a Home" announced that 15,000 surveyed acres, subdivided in quarter sections, with a growing hedge (Osage Orange) around it and leaving roadways on all section lines. Fruit of all kinds does well, and grows to great perfection."

Early land owners in the area included the Honorable John Palmer Usher, Lincoln's Secretary of the Interior. Rev. L. Newcomb built the first home in the colony in 1868 northeast of the townsite. The first home in Pomona was built by Alfred Jones at the east edge of town on the south side of Franklin Street.

The first business building serving as a general store, drug store and post office was erected in 1868 by Rev. L. Ricksecker who was named first postmaster. That same year a second business building was erected by A.H. Stanton, remodeled as the Pomona Hotel and later known as Harrah House. Other early businesses and owners included a furniture factory (1870) John Kraus and Sons; a flour mill (1870) H.O. Kelsey; mercantile house (1876) and later a corn and feed mill and exchange bank, Abel Hensley and Son; sorghum and sugar mill (1877) Whetstone and J.L. Hawkins.

Whetstone organized the Farmers Exchange in 1898, the forerunner of the Farmers Union Mercantile Co. and later known as the Farmers Union Corp. Whetstone had planted 30,000 fruit trees and in 1898 the Pomona Fruit Co. was organized by J.J. Whetstone and his wife who produced jelly, dried fruit, catsup and later toilet goods and bluing.

The Santa Fe Railroad was built through Pomona in 1883 and a second track added in 1904. The depot that also served as the post office was located west of town. The Missouri Pacific Railroad surveyed in 1876 and built in 1886. The MoPac depot was destroyed by a tornado in 1917.

The Pomona school district was organized in 1870. The first school constructed in 1871 when it became a public school serving all grades. The first class of four students graduated from high school (two year) in 1899. A high school was built (1919-1920) when rural districts were formed. A gymnasium was added in 1961. A new grade school was built in 1958. Following unification, West Franklin USD 287 was formed to include Pomona, Williamsburg and Appanoose, and a new high school built in Pomona in 1965. A new middle school and new gymnasium were built in 1989.

The Methodist Church organized in 1871 and held services in the stone school house until a church was built in 1879-80. The United Presbyterian Church organized in 1873 and erected a building in 1879.

The town had two early newspapers, the Pomona Enterprise founded 1884, later sold and moved to Quenemo in 1902; and the Pomona Republican founded 1889, lasting until 1929 when it was sold and moved to Williamsburg. T.J. Mackey installed the first telephone system, 1881-82; and the first Bell system was added 1900-02 and locally operated for two years. Pomona was served by United Telephone Co. of Kansas in 1991 and is served by CenturyLink in 2011.

Woodlawn Cemetery west of the city on K-68 was established in 1871 on 10 acres purchased from Whetstone for \$70. An additional five acres were purchased in 1931.

Electric lighting was installed in 1914, water added in 1938, and a 100,000 gallon reservoir completed to be linked to Water Supply District #12 (Melvern Reservoir). A sanitary sewer system was built in 1960. The city park on the west edge of town, started in 1920, is an attractive addition today.

Through the years businesses have dropped, but the town still supports a grocery, several other enterprises and the Citizens State Bank. The bank was chartered in 1901 by J.E. Reed and purchased by the Hudelson family in 1909. It was sold to the Goppert group (Kansas City) in 1951.

New homes, apartments, trailer courts and improved city streets are part of the city's update. A new city hall/community center was completed in 1992. Pomona's population continues to show growth through the years: 1883, 300 residents; 1910, 523; 1976, 802; 1990 U.S. census, 830.

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