

Wellsville

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Wellsville, the second largest town in the county, is located in the northeast corner of Franklin County. In 1825, the native Kanza and Osage Indian tribes ceded a large part of their land to the government, who intended to use it to resettle emigrant Indians from lands to the east and north of Kansas Territory. This corner of Franklin County had been part of the Shawnee Reserve, but those emigrant tribes were being resettled once again to what is now Oklahoma. In 1857 Jacob Rynerson paid the government \$1.25 an acre for a quarter section of land for agricultural pursuits with no thought of it becoming a town. At that time there were no railroads near, just the Santa Fe Trail. In 1867 the railroad was built to Olathe. However, more changes were coming. On April 9, 1870, representatives from the Lawrence, Leavenworth and Gulf Railroad paid Rynerson \$400 for a right-of-way to pass through his property. The railroad was built in 1869 and 1870.

P.P. Elder of Ottawa and J.B. Shute of Chicago purchased a 27-block townsite in 1870 from Rynerson for \$8,740.54. The town was named for P.L. Wells, a construction engineer with the railroad. The completion of the railroad from Olathe to Ottawa attracted the movement of freight and passengers from trails to rails, setting the stage for the development of Wellsville. The first passengers passed through town August 31, 1870.

During the next two decades the first and last saloon was opened and closed; streets and alleys were laid out; Congregational, Baptist, Methodist and Holiness Churches were organized; and a dentist, doctor and veterinarian established practices. Business include a general store, drug store, hotel, wagon shop, blacksmith, hardware store, hotel, wagon ship, blacksmith, hardware store, furniture store, undertaker, livery stable, newspaper bank, millinery store elevator and insurance agent.

The town became an incorporated city of the third class June 1884. The sidewalks were made of boards, and streets were dust or mud depending on the weather. There was a town well west of Fifth Street that supplied most of the business area with good water.

The first school was a tuition school established in 1867. The first public school was established in 1871. Ten years later a building was erected at 3rd and Main Street, at a cost of \$3,500 with a capacity for 260 students. The present location of the Wellsville schools was chosen in 1913.

The town was essentially rural, depending on the surrounding farming community which boasted some of the best farm land in the state. Wellsville had the distinction of being called the English Bluegrass Capital of the world during the period 1900-1918. Oil was discovered in 1915 and has been produced in varying amounts.

The Wellsville Women's Band was organized by S. M. Brockway in November of 1902. In the *Wellsville Globe*, dated September 30, 1904, it was reported: "Eight-seven persons, including the Ladies Band and their director left Wellsville on the early morning train Wednesday to go to the St. Louis Exposition. In Kansas City, they boarded a special Burlington coach."

The group took several thousand circulars along advertising Wellsville. From the *Globe* of October 7th: "The Wellsville Ladies Band was accorded Royal Treatment in St. Louis. They rode in the parade Friday, September 30, Kansas Day, and played as a part of the morning program. The

Associated Press gave them flattering mention and the *St. Louis Star* printed a three-column picture and article. In their green uniforms with gold braid and red caps, they attracted favorable attention everywhere."

At the time, an instrumental group comprised of all girls was virtually unheard of, but this group enjoyed the distinction of attending to the weaker sex's ability as musicians. Local merchants of the town donated the car fare for the group's trip to St. Louis. Mrs. Linnie Tyler's recollection of the event was quite vivid. She played the bass drum and was in seventh heaven at the parade. She heard one woman remark, "Oh, see that poor thing with the drum!" Linnie didn't think of herself as a "poor thing." It was one of her fondest memories, and she spoke of it many times in her later life. At the concert program, they were seated adjacent to Sousa's band, and it was reported that they were very nice to the girls, and even clapped for them when they played.

Members of the band were: Rosa (Kline) Waddell, Edna (Everett) Averill, Sue (Cope) Barnard, Bessie (Brown) Pool, Susie Wilson, Dessie (Wertz) Collins, Fernleaf (Davis) Barnett, Lillian Ryan, Dot (Whitley) Harrison, Vera (Bennett) Cline, Linnie (Hodges) (Boone) Tyler, Maude (Bennett) Miller, Elsie (Job) DeTar, Amy (Watson) Whitley, Nell (Pool) Graham, Winnie Adkins, and Elsie Stoner.

In 1962 the town honored Dr. N. E. Naylor for his 50 years in the medical profession with over 1,000 people attending. Also, in 1962 Bernard Fleming and Bernice Holden published a book about the area entitled "From Out of the Past." Wellsville is the home of the well known artist, Elizabeth "Grandma" Layton.

The first brick building built in Wellsville is still standing at 418 Main. The house at 113 East 5th was Wellsville's first hotel and is the oldest home in town. Present churches are Methodist, Baptist, Southern Baptist, Assembly of God, Latter Day Saints and Countryside Baptist Church.

With the building of highway I-35 in the late 1950s, Wellsville enjoys the advantage of easy transportation to larger cities for employment, shopping and entertainment, but the business district suffers the same problems as surrounding small towns and struggles to compete. However, industry is growing and new housing sites are being platted. Wellsville's population in 1991 was 1,560 and in 2010 it was 1727. There was 7.53 percent population growth between 2000 and 2010.

Ann Coughlin, 1993

and Deborah Barker, 2011