

Osceola

history

Overview

Prehistory-Civil War

The area now known as the city of Osceola was originally occupied by the Osage Indians, who had occupied the area for centuries until European traders came to the area in the 18th Century. At this point, the Natives and the settlers came into conflict because the settlers began slaughtering the wildlife. The settlers mostly came from the states of Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee. Settlers used the area primarily because the Osage River runs through the middle of the county. As they explored the county, they began to discover both fresh water springs and mineral water springs. Eventually settlements formed, especially around what is now Osceola. The first settlers to build semi-permanent structures in Osceola were Reuben Nance and Phillip Crow. Nance and Crow had a legal battle over who had the right to occupy the land, and while Nance built the first structure, Crow was able to win the legal battle. Crow built the first store in Osceola, known as the Crow-Crutchfield store, which was located northwest of the current city pool. The town became a stopping point for traders and was used as a shipping point by those who were taking supplies to the rest of the Louisiana Territory. By 1840, Osceola began to appear on Missouri state maps, at this point, we know that it was developing into a town of reasonable size. In 1841, Osceola became the county seat of St. Clair county. In the 1850s, Osceola was lively, and it was primarily being used as a port town. Supplies were also driven by cart to Osceola from other nearby towns such as Warsaw to the northeast.



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Civil War Era and Aftermath

By the beginning of the 1860s, Osceola rivaled towns like Westport and Booneville in its economic power and influence. At this point, the Border Wars between Missouri and Kansas were heating up. Towns near the Missouri/Kansas border became battlegrounds and were frequently raided by guerilla groups. In 1861, because of its significant influence and power, and being the home of a Senator loyal to the Confederacy, Osceola was the target of Kansas Guerillas. The entire town was sacked and destroyed, suffering over \$1,000,000 worth of damage. This dealt a major blow to the town. Two years later, Lawrence, KS was sacked in retaliation to the sacking of Osceola. After the Civil War era, Osceola remained a favorite hideout for the Younger-James gang. Osceola tried to regain its former strength, but it never fully recovered from the destruction.

20th Century-Present

By the 1900s, it had regrown to about 1,000 people, about half its population before the Civil War. Eventually, construction on the Harry S. Truman dam began in 1964, finally reaching completion in 1970. Upon its completion, land around the town was permanently flooded, and most of the bridges crossing the river were demolished. The town of Osceola as we know it today has evolved, grown and suffered greatly since the first settlements in the 18th Century.

Demographic History

Osceola had grown to nearly 2,500 people before the Civil War, making it one of the largest towns in the state during its time. Then, when it was sacked during the Civil War, its population declined significantly. However, the town did begin to recover, and by 1900 had climbed back up to a population of over 1,000 people. Its population peaked, like most U.S. cities, in the 1940s, and then, like the national trend, began falling. This was due in part to the decline in both rail and river transportation as modes of both public transportation and freight transportation, which were two major factors in the initial success of Osceola. Its decline can also be attributed to the trend of people moving into larger metropolitan areas and away from rural locations. We can compare Osceola's demographic history with that of the county, which, like Osceola, grew until the early 1900s when its population began to decline, and then, like Osceola, stabilized in the latter half of the 20th Century. We can see the stabilization as an advantage, as many other cities and counties have continued their decline that started in the post-war period. With its decline somewhat slowed, this gives Osceola a real opportunity to rebound back.

Land Use History

Osceola's land has served different purposes throughout history. The city itself was built within a 9x5 grid of blocks, with 12 lots within each block and an alley running through the middle of each block. By the 20th Century, some of the blocks were built up, with a plethora of varied uses. Surrounding the central square you would find more shops, but mainly churches and single-family detached homes. Surrounding areas consisted of farms and relatively open land. Overall it was very typical for a rural community of its day.

Economic History

At one point in time, Osceola rivaled towns like Booneville, Westport, Kansas City, etc... in its economic influence/power. This was mainly because of both the Osage River and the rail lines that ran through the town. Its economy was based upon trade goods moving through the town through these modes of transportation.

Natural Resources History

The historic natural resources of Osceola has varied throughout time, though it has mostly remained consistent, since many of the resources have not been destroyed. A major source would be the Osage River, which has provided both transportation and sources of food. Another resource found soon after the first settlers arrived would be springs, which included mineral water springs and fresh water springs. Eventually, the area became primarily agricultural.

Transportation History

Osceola's main modes of transportation was grounded in the Osage River, Rail lines, as well as the roads/bridges that could be used between nearby towns. The river wasn't always a reliable mode of transportation because of fluctuation and flooding, so transportation by cart was typical between towns.



Key Points:

- Origins date to early 19th Century
- Was once an economic powerhouse.
- Was a major port town.
- Because of its prominence, it was sacked.
- The town began to regrow and rebuild.
- The town can change things and set its own history.

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3. The Sacking of Osceola, The Legends of America. 9/16/2010.
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