



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New exhibit explores Franklin County baseball history from town teams to the major leagues

Ottawa, Kansas—America’s favorite pastime has been part of Franklin County’s history for more than a century. The Old Depot Museum’s newest exhibit, *Small-Town Ball: Playing America’s Game in Ottawa and Franklin County*, explores the local history of baseball as both recreation and profession. The exhibit will be on display through July 31, 2016.

During the first half of the Twentieth Century, most of Franklin County’s towns supported community teams, which were a major source of recreation for both the players and the town. Centropolis, Lane, LeLoup, Ottawa, Princeton, Richmond and Wellsville cheered for their own local teams. Other teams traveled to Franklin County to play. The most notable team to visit Franklin County was the Kansas City Monarchs, which played LeLoup during the Modern Woodman of America picnic in Seylers Grove on August 21, 1929.

“The M.W.A. picnic illustrates how baseball was about much more than the game back then,” said Deborah Barker, executive director of the Franklin County Historical Society. “The picnic was a two-day celebration with music, food, prizes, and several baseball games featuring local teams as well as the Monarchs.”

Many local teams were sponsored by companies like Ottawa Car Works, Business Man’s Assurance Co., and KCP&L.

Notably missing from Franklin County’s history are high school teams. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, baseball was considered a “low” sport, encouraging drinking, tobacco chewing, and gambling, and many high schools refused to incorporate baseball into their athletic programs.

However, baseball was one of the earliest sports played at Ottawa University. According to Dave Malone, author of *Ottawa University: 150 Years of Significance*, it is believed that the Ottawa Indians played a version of baseball called “Two Old Cat” on the grounds now occupied by the Administration Building. By 1876, Ottawa University had its own official team.

Although Franklin County was not a hotbed for producing professional players, a few Franklin Countians have gone on to play in the minors and two players with Williamsburg roots—Lou McEvoy and Willie “Willie the Knuck” Ramsdell—made it to the majors.

And for a brief eight weeks in 1924, Ottawa was the temporary home of the McCloskeys, a minor league team from Newton. A member of the Southwestern League, the team was temporarily displaced when a microburst knocked down the stands and fences in their own field, and they played in Ottawa until their park was rebuilt.

The Old Depot Museum's exhibit features photos, jerseys, pennants, and baseball equipment, as well as the stories of some of the players who made it to the minors and the majors. Several artifacts are on loan from the Richmond Community Museum and Appanoose Museum, two regional museums in Franklin County. The Franklin County Historical Society is also planning several events connected to Franklin County baseball history.

The Old Depot Museum strives to educate visitors about the importance of trains in small towns and the history of Franklin County, Kansas. It is operated by the Franklin County Historical Society.

Founded in 1937, the Franklin County Historical Society strives to preserve, present, and promote the history of Franklin County, Kansas.

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