



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New exhibit invites visitors to explore how history shapes people, communities, and the future

Ottawa, Kansas—The Old Depot Museum is kicking off the year with an interactive exhibit exploring the role history plays in who we are and how it shapes our communities. The grand opening for “Historically Significant: How History Shapes Us, Our Communities, and Our Future” will be Sunday, February 12, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Admission to the museum will be free to all visitors that day.

“This year marks the eightieth anniversary of the Franklin County Historical Society,” said Deborah Barker, FCHS executive director. “We wanted to create an exhibit that encourages visitors to explore how history shapes each of us. We also wanted to celebrate Franklin County’s history and the efforts the county’s citizens have made to embrace and preserve that history.”

Through this exhibit, visitors will be encouraged to consider their own family histories. Tools for genealogy research will be available, and parents will have an opportunity to draw family trees with their children.

There is also an area where visitors can put on their historian hats and consider contradicting evidence presented in two events in Franklin County’s history.

“We would like to think that recording historic events is a definitive process,” said Barker. “But in reality, historians often find themselves sifting through contradictory accounts and trying to fill in holes when information is missing. In Franklin County, we have been studying two events for more than a century: whether or not abolitionists hid escaping slaves in the southern part of the county, and whether or not a massacre occurred in the northern part of the county. In this exhibit, we’ll present the information we have and invite our visitors to consider the evidence.”

The exhibit will also examine how history impacts our communities through the preservation of historic structures and contribution to economic growth.

“The creation of Ottawa’s downtown historic district is a great example of how a group of people can come together to preserve local history and turn it into a destination,” Barker said.

Although not all buildings can be preserved, community members can help save the history of those structures. Artifacts from several historic structures have found homes in the Franklin County Historical Society’s collection and some will be on display in this exhibit.

“We have a piece of one of the oldest buildings in Franklin County—a door from the 1858 governor’s mansion in Minneola, one of the many Kansas towns legislators attempted to declare a territorial capital of Kansas,” said Barker. “By 1859, the town was almost completely gone.”

Several events will be offered in conjunction with the exhibit. On March 12, the historical society will host a "Genealogy 101" program for people interested in learning how to research family history. Later this spring, there will be a program on researching houses and other buildings, a program and tour on the rehabilitation of the former Santa Fe Depot that houses the Old Depot Museum, and a special opportunity to tour a local home currently undergoing restoration.

"We tend to live in the here and now," Barker said. "As the historical society celebrates its eightieth year of preserving Franklin County's history, we want to encourage everyone to think about our place in a bigger story-- how history has made us who we are and how we will go on to shape the future."

"Historically Significant: How History Shapes Us, Our Communities, and Our Future" will be on display through May 14.

For more information, please contact the Old Depot Museum at (785) 242-1250.

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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