

**OLD COWTOWN MUSEUM
INDUSTRIAL AREA
GRAIN ELEVATOR/SCALE HOUSE**

1. The Grain Elevator and Scale House located in the Industrial Area represents the role of agriculture in Sedgwick County, and agribusiness in Wichita.
2. The development of agriculture in Sedgwick County became increasingly more important to the economy of Wichita as the cattle trade declined. Farm implement sales, milling, and trading and processing of crops were important to the economy of Wichita.
3. When Wichita received railroad service in 1872, the agricultural industry was able to move from a subsistence level to a commercial level.
4. Farmers in Sedgwick County faced a hostile environment and an unregulated economy in which to make a living.
 - A. The land surrounding Wichita was Osage Indian Trust Land. It was not available as free land under the Homestead Act. Speculation and high interest rates on mortgaged land kept the price of land high.
 - B. A drought in 1873 was followed by the national Panic of 1873, which kept crop prices low. Another dry year in 1874 ended with a devastating grasshopper plague.
5. Corn was the first common crop raised by local farmers. When area farmers made the transition to commercial agriculture, via the railroad and the winter wheat industry, Sedgwick County became one of the top winter wheat counties in the country by the late 1870s.
6. The Arkansas Valley Grain Elevator was constructed in 1910, and was originally located in Bentley, Kansas. It was moved to the Museum in 1986. Although it is typical in design and construction of late 19th century grain elevators, it is believed to be the only fully restored, operational elevator of its kind in North America.

In 1988, Old Cowtown Museum received the Kansas Museums Association=s Award of Excellence for Restoration for its work on this elevator.

The Grain Elevator and Scale House located in the Industrial Area of Old Cowtown Museum represents the role of agriculture in Sedgwick County and agribusiness in Wichita.

The development of agriculture in Sedgwick County was important to the economic base of Wichita during the 1870s. As the economic importance of the cattle trade began to wane in Wichita by the mid 1870s, the agrarian industry became a resource, which ultimately exceeded the economic impact of the cattle trade. The agricultural industry, like the cattle trade, was dependent on railroad service, which Wichita received in 1872. Between 1874 and 1876, the growth rate of winter wheat, a principal commercial crop in Sedgwick County, was more than eleven-fold. In a four county area that surrounded Wichita, the increase was six-fold. Winter wheat acreage in Sedgwick County increased from 23,000 acres in 1874 to 128,000 in 1876. Wichita. Merchants responded in turn by increasing the farm implement and milling and trading opportunities that the wheat industry brought. The buying, selling, transporting and processing of this resource provided substantial economic opportunities for Wichita businesses.

The Agricultural Economy

As Sedgwick County and Wichita experienced a boom in winter wheat

between 1875 and 1876, area farmers also saw an upturn in their industry. However, a number of economic factors resulted in businesspersons other than farmers from becoming the principal benefactors in this industry. The first obstacle farmers had to overcome was the location of their industry. Although farmland in Sedgwick County was located in a relatively flat, well-watered, grassland, (the land that belonged to the Osage Indian Nation) land was not available for purchase until 1870. Instead of receiving free acreage under the Homestead Act, Wichita area farmers had to pay \$1.25 an acre. The settler on Osage lands had one year from the filing date to pay in full. A farmer in search of a longer term of payment was forced to mortgage the property to a Wichita banker at ruinous rates. In this economic environment land speculation became prolific, driving land prices higher. The dry season of 1873 was followed by another drought in 1874. In August 1874, Sedgwick County was devastated by a grasshopper infestation, which greatly reduced crops that could be harvested. In addition, the National Panic of 1873 depressed the prices farmers received for their crops. During the 1870s, farmers in Sedgwick County found themselves on the wrong side of an unregulated economy that created inflation and high interest rates.

Crops Raised by Local Farmers

Corn was originally the most common agricultural product grown by area farmers. In the absence of a commercial market, corn was the easiest to use for family consumption and animal feed. Winter wheat became the more common crop after Wichita received railroad service in 1872, when area farmers learned how hot and dry the summers could be, and after the grasshopper's devastated corn still in the fields in the summer of 1874. By the late 1870s, Sedgwick County became one of the top wheat producing counties in the country. Other crops raised by area farmers included barley, rye, oats, sorghum, and potatoes. Some successful experimentation with growing cotton was also accomplished.

The Operation of the Grain Elevator

During harvest time in the late 1870s, Wichita's streets were crowded with horse-drawn wagons filled with grain, each waiting its turn to unload at one of eight grain elevators. At the grain elevator, the farmer would pull his wagon onto the platform scale by the scale house. A clerk inside would write the total weight of the wagon on a ticket. Then the farmer would take his wagon into the grain elevator drive-through. The horses would then be unhitched and led a few steps forward. A block-and-tackle pulley

was used to hoist the front end of the wagon up and the grain was unloaded into the pit below the elevator. At the bottom of the pit was a long canvas conveyor belt with small metal buckets attached. The conveyor belt extended from the bottom of the pit to the top of the head house. The conveyor belt moved in a continuous circle. The metal buckets carried grain from the bottom of the pit to the top of the head house where they tripped and spilled grain into a hopper before returning to the pit. The hopper had a moveable shaft at the bottom to direct grain into any one of ten bins in the elevator. At the bottom of each bin was a trap, (a small door) which could be used to empty the grain back into the pit for recirculation to another bin or to a spout which emptied outside the grain elevator into grain cars on the railroad tracks or into farmers' grain wagons for seed or animal feed. When a farmer's grain wagon had been emptied and his horses hitched, the farmer would pull his wagon onto the platform scales to be reweighed. The difference between the total weight of a wagon that was full and then emptied was the weight of the crop, which was written on the farmer's ticket. When the farmers sold their crop they were paid the going price per-hundred-weight, less storage, handling, and processing.