

**OLD COWTOWN MUSEUM  
BUSINESS DISTRICT  
SADDLE AND HARNESS SHOP**

1. The Saddle and Harness Shop represents a business important to the economy and livelihood in Wichita during the 1870s.
2. The economy of the early settlers in Wichita was heavily dependant on the transportation of manufactured goods from the East. Wagon freighting was an important business in early Wichita. After the arrival of the railroad in 1872, transportation of goods and people was still dependant on animal power and team drawn vehicles.
3. The saddle and harness business were important to the livelihood of the cowboy, farmer, and townspeople.
4. The interior of the Saddle and Harness Shop interprets the selling of commercially made saddles and harnesses, the manufacture and selling of new saddles and harnesses, and the maintenance and repair which were important for those leather items.

The Saddle and Harness Shop, located in the Business District of Old Cowtown Museum, represents a business important to the economy and way of life in Wichita during the 1870s.

Among the first settlers in Wichita was Henry W. Vigus, who established a rough hotel known as the Vigus House, or the ell. After Wichita became more established, Vigus returned to his earlier trade of a harness and saddle maker. He was one of at least two harness and saddle makers in Wichita prior to 1870. Thereafter, Wichita had approximately a half dozen saddle and harness shops.

The economy of the early settlers in Wichita was heavily dependant on goods transported from the industrialized East. It was natural that people during the period were concerned about the

transportation of those goods to Wichita from the East. Before the railroad arrived in Wichita in 1872, this transportation of articles was done entirely by animal power. Even after the arrival of the railroad, transportation of people and goods was still dependant on team drawn vehicles to outlying areas, as well as from one establishment to another in town. Wagon freighting was therefore an important business in early Wichita. Hides, machinery, and grocery supplies were among the items shipped in trains of up to ten or fifteen wagons, to and from Wichita. During the 1870s, a number of businesses had colorful delivery wagons. Hotels provided transportation to and from the railroad in a carriage known as an omnibus. Horse and animal power was important not only as a means of transportation and livelihood for the cowboy, farmer, and

townspeople, but also as a status symbol and means of recreation. The trade and craft of the saddle and harness business was crucial the support of transportation in early Wichita.

The importance of the manufacture and maintenance of the saddles and harnesses to cowboys, farmers, and townspeople is apparent. New saddles, bridles, and harnesses were in demand, as were leather straps, buckles, hooks and other hardware (called findings) used by persons doing repairs of their own.

The interior of the Saddle and Harness Shop interprets the selling of commercially made saddles such as the ladies' side saddles, the making of new saddles, and the repair and maintenance of saddle and harness leather goods. The tools used for the trade are arranged on the wall above the workbench. There are shears for cutting the leather, and various edgers and punches to cut, shape and decorate the various leather pieces. The edgers were used to round the edges of straps and other manufactured leather items. Various punches cut holes, made round rosettes or created ornamental decorations. A multiple blade chisel made holes for stitching. Leather items were stitched while clamped to the harness horse or leather vise. Stitching was facilitated by the use of awls and with large needles and waxed thread.

The process of making a new saddle was long and complicated and started with the carving of a wooden frame known as a tree. This was covered with wet rawhide which shrank into a tough

binding when it dried. The other parts of the saddle were then added layer by layer. Saddles were particularly important to the cowboys because unlike horses and other items owned by their employer, their saddle was their own. It was up to the cowboy to maintain and repair it. The saddle was one of the most important possessions of a cowboy. Drivers also depended heavily on the saddle and harness maker's craft. Team drivers included anyone with a couple of horses and a light buggy to the freight wagon train mule skinnners. Farmers extensively used the team harnesses for working their land with all modes of animal power, and in hauling grain and other produce to the Wichita markets.

### **Label In Exhibit - Saddle And Harness**

Saddle and harness shops were key to local transportation, local freighting, and agricultural practice in early Sedgwick County. Although the railroad was the primary mode of transportation of goods and people over extended distances, residents relied on team driven vehicles and animal power for their local transportation needs. In addition to harness and saddles, these shops sold and repaired leather goods, hides, and carried animal hair used for making plaster and other animal byproducts.

The number of saddle and harness shops did not decrease when the railroad arrived in 1872, but increased along with the growth of industry and population throughout the 1870s. Prior to 1870, there were at least two such shops in Wichita. By 1875, the four saddle and harness shops in Wichita had a combined net profit of approximately \$47,000. Smith & McComb Bros. competed for the local trade by listing a newspaper ad assuring readers,

*All Work Manufactured in the Shop, under the special superintendence of the proprietors. A large Stock of Saddles, Harness, Bridles and Collars, Constantly on Hand. -The Wichita City Eagle, June 6, 1878*