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Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal

2016 - Future of the Flint Hills (Larry Patton,
editor)

Clements, Kansas

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Recommended Citation

Patton, Vicki (2016). "Clements, Kansas," *Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*.
<https://newprairiepress.org/sfh/2016/orientation/5>

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The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

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CLEMENTS, KANSAS

The South Clements Pasture in Chase County is south of the small community of Clements. Easily accessible via U.S. Highway 50, Clements was once a vibrant community along the Cottonwood River. Before European settlement, Native Americans traveling across the Flint Hills established trails throughout Chase County.

These trails were easy to navigate and, most important of all, had access to water. One trail along the Cottonwood River became known as the Kaw Indian Hunting Trail. The Kaw traveled southwest along the Cottonwood River in order to reach their hunting grounds in western Kansas. Pioneers used these same trails between Council Grove and Florence, which became known as the Immigrant and Pioneer trails.

At the time of the Civil War, the first settlers were drawn to the rich bottom ground along the river. With a backdrop of scenic outcroppings and tallgrass prairie of the Flint Hills, they began settling the area we now know as Silver Creek. This community was located at the junction of Silver Creek and the Cottonwood River.

A man named Hunt built a log structure for trading just west of Silver Creek, and his trading post became known as Hunt's Station. As time passed, more people settled in the vicinity of the trading post. In 1882 one of the residents, Joseph Crawford, decided to plat out a town close by and call it Crawfordsville. Crawfordsville built its own

OPPOSITE PAGE: OLD SILO
Mark A. Fisher



CLEMENTS BRIDGE — LOW WATER
Dave Leiker

post office, which quickly absorbed the post offices of both Hunt's Station and Silver Creek. As with many small towns throughout the west, if a railroad planned to locate by a town, progress and growth followed. Crawford was undoubtedly excited about the opportunities available with the coming of the railroad.

The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway built the railroad by

Crawfordsville in 1881, and in 1884 Crawfordsville was renamed Clements to honor the auditor of the Santa Fe Railway, H.G. Clements. This must have been a major disappointment to Joseph Crawford.

Families settled near Clements not only because of the railroad, but also because of the river, the rich farm ground, and the excellent native grass. Although never incorporated, over the years the

little village sported a bank, barber shop, blacksmith, church, city park, dance hall, grocery, library, livery stable, lumber yard, mercantile, railroad station, and restaurant. A three-story school building was visible for miles. Clements was naturally a center for the local farming and ranching communities. Longhorn cattle arrived in Clements from Texas by the train-load. The cattle were unloaded,

driven across the Cottonwood River at the Old Rock Bridge, and moved south and east to the pastures. The residents also built a hand-dug well for watering their local animals as well as the cattle being shipped on the railroad.

The people of early Clements undoubtedly had dreams of growth and prosperity. Naturally, they wanted economic success, but they also longed

for cultural and social lives similar to the places they had lived in the past. Bringing culture to the community was an attempt to replicate the more developed, thriving towns.

Neighboring towns also grew up along the Cottonwood River. Elmdale to the east and Cedar Point to the west were close enough to be natural competitors for growth.

Since Kansas Territory first opened for settlement in 1854, more than 4,000 communities have established post offices. The majority of these places aspired to become important cities, but only a minority survived in any form at all. The people strived for success, but most suffered disappointment as their small towns failed to grow.

Clements was once a busy, prosperous, growing little frontier settlement. The community endured fires and numerous floods, but ultimately it fell victim to changing economic times. Today the post office is closed, and only a few homes remain.

Clements' remaining claim to fame is the Clements Stone Arch Bridge. Completed in 1888 over the Cottonwood River, the bridge made life more convenient for residents, especially the farmers and ranchers. Built to serve as a farm to market road to enhance business, it has stood the test of time better than the town for which it was named.

Located half a mile south of Clements at the John Patton Ford, the Clements Stone Arch Bridge spans 175 feet across the river. The bridge rises forty feet above the water level, and the road bed is ten feet wide. The span is supported by twenty-eight-foot twin stone arches accented by voussoirs and keystones. The total construction cost was \$12,000.

A plaque bearing the date and the names of the construction company, its principals, and the county commissioners has been inserted on the west face of the bridge in the spandrel. The bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, one hundred years after construction began on the



CLEMENTS BRIDGE — HIGH TIDE
Dave Leiker

bridge. The nearby limestone quarry from which the bridge's stones were extracted also produced stones for the Kansas Statehouse, Fort Riley, Fort Leavenworth, and Hutchinson Correctional Facility.

Those who built the bridge would have no trouble recognizing the structure as it is today. It has survived the raging Cottonwood River and numerous floods for more than a century with little decay. Make a visit to the Clements Bridge, sit for a spell, and imagine a time when

things cost less, people labored hard, and time moved more slowly.

Vicki Patton married into a fifth-generation Flint Hills family. John Patton traveled by covered wagon from Indiana to Hunt's Station (later Clements) in 1868. Patton's Ford was named after him. John's son, Nelson Monroe (Net), was a foreman during the construction of the Clements Stone Arch Bridge and later operated the livery stable in Clements. Vicki is a retired educator who enjoys the culture, beauty, and people of the Flint Hills.