

19th Century

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Washington began as a Missouri River boat landing. The St. Johns settlement from which it grew was at the extreme western edge of the frontier when Lewis and Clark's "Corps of Discovery" camped nearby in May of **1804**.

By **1818** when Franklin County was formed, thousands of American settlers had already arrived. Many of these were friends, family and followers of Daniel Boone and his sons who came to the area in **1799**. Daniel Boone served as the Spanish syndic (judge) on the north side of the River. The first ferry in the area was licensed to run in **1814**. It connected the settlements of La Charrette and Marthasville on the north bank to the Franklin County settlements.

In **1824** a German attorney named Gottfried Duden settled across the river along Lake Creek. He visited the Washington landing and became acquainted with Nathan Boone, Elijah McLean and other pioneers. He was investigating the possibilities of settlement in the area by his countrymen. In **1827** he returned to Germany which he felt was overpopulated. There he published a glowing "Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America" in **1829**.

By that time the town of Union had been founded, and the County seat had been moved there from New Port in **1826**. On the Missouri River, the Washington Landing was becoming more important for slave holding families to ship their tobacco and other crops. William G. Owens, Franklin County's leading public official, saw a great future for the landing site and purchased the site and land nearby in **1827** in order to found a town. In **1829**, lots for a new town called Washington were offered for Public Sale on the Fourth of July. Owens offered a lot free to anyone who would build a substantial house within two years. His wealthy friend, Dr. Elijah McLean bought 80 acres west of the town's borders.

By **1832** there were two German residents who had built homes on Owens' promise, Bernhard Fricke and Charles Eberius. In October of **1833** a group of twelve Catholic families arrived by steamboat at Washington. These farmers from the Osnabrück area of Hanover had heard and read of the Missouri valley described so favorably by Gottfried Duden. They were welcomed by Owens and Fricke and bought land in the vicinity on which to settle.

Then on November 16, **1834** Wm. G. Owens was shot in the back and died. With his death the legal affairs of the young town were thrown into turmoil. On October 8, **1836** a rival town named Bassora was started just east of Washington. In **1837** a Post Office was first established at Washington, but then moved to Bassora. Soon German born John F. Mense, son-in-law to Owen's widow Lucinda, managed to untangle Washington's legal affairs which were tied up in probate. On May 29, **1839** the town sometimes later referred to as "New Washington" began again, and the Post office moved back in **1840**.

After **1833** the German population of Washington area grew rapidly. Anti-slavery Germans were overtaking the population of wealthy slave owners. In **1834** groups of Germans from Giessen led by Friedrich Muench, and Soligen led by Frederick Steines, would fill the nearby hills and

valleys. Their letters written home to friends and relatives brought more of their countrymen to the Missouri valley.

After the first years preoccupied with carving new homes out of the wilderness, the German pioneers craved cultural items such as books and musical instruments. Books were the items most requested in the letters back home where German encyclopedias, textbooks, bibles and hymnals, were sent from the "Old World" to enlighten the New.

On February 9th, **1855** the Pacific Railroad came to town and Washington experienced a boom. Steamboat ferries connected the town with its neighbors of North Washington, Dutzow, and Marthasville across the river. Brick buildings were built all over town, giving Washington the nickname of "brick town of Missouri." In **1856** the town's first newspaper "The Franklin Courier" appeared in both English and German. Cultural groups such as the theatrical society called the Players' Club and the Turn Verein were forming by **1859**. Washington's "Busch's Brewery" had been established in **1854** by German born John B. Busch, older brother of the St. Louis brewer. By **1860** all of the town's Trustees but one were German. These German Americans were strongly supportive of the new homeland, which would be important to Missouri's role in the civil war.

Federal forces during the Civil War controlled both the Missouri River and the Pacific Railroad. The Union Army's 54th and 55th Regiments of the Enrolled Missouri Militia numbered over 2,000 troops raised in Franklin County. Also formed here were the 17th Missouri Regiment. But when Confederate Gen. Sterling Price, staged his last campaign to recapture Missouri - known as Price's Raid- there were only about 600 troops stationed at Washington

On September 28th, **1864**, Union General Rosecrans at St. Louis wired Capt. Julius Wilhelmi, warning him of the approach of General Sterling Price and his troop of 10,000 men. Fearing the enemy too strong for their small number, the Militia and the townspeople retreated to the north side of the river by ferryboats and skiffs. The night of October 1st Price's men camped at the Detweiler's place east of Washington. They moved into Washington the next day and plundered the town for food, forage and usable horses. The railroad depot was set afire. A teamster John Henry Uhlenbrock and a young man named Bartsch were shot. After satisfying its appetite for supplies, the army moved westward towards Missouri's capital, Jefferson City.

After the war, son of the town's slaveholding founders, Franklin County's State Representative James W. Owens, was instrumental in drafting the State's proclamation abolishing slavery. The town then entered a postwar period of creativity, industry, and prosperity – a "Golden Era." Franz Schwarzer arrived in Washington in **1865**, where he would soon open a zither factory that would turn out International Award winning instruments by **1873**. That same year, at Washington's first Agricultural and Mechanical Fair, James Jones won the horse race and the pewter pitcher trophy. In **1884** Joseph A. Bayer started his pottery using locally mined clay. The next year Henry and Anton Tibbe devised the manufactured corn cob pipe which would bring their family worldwide fame and fortune.

The new "grammar" school was built in ornate architectural style in **1871**, after many years of using the second floor of the Town Hall for classes. A citywide waterworks opened in **1889** with

a power plant at the foot of Jefferson Street. Next Anton Tibbe built an electric light plant and on New Year's eve, **1892** officially "turned on the lights" in Washington. By February **1893** audiences were crowding Turner Hall to enjoy its plays and parties by the light of the new incandescent lamps. The "Independent Telephone Company" another Tibbe enterprise, was organized a few years later.

By the turn of the century Washington was serving its bi-cultural inhabitants and the surrounding territory as a commercial and social center. The pioneer families from the old South had blended with those of more recent vintage to form a vital population prepared for the challenges of the next century.