

## Smith County Kansas

### Halfway between Kansas City and Denver

As you travel Highway 36 from west to east, be sure to stop at the “biggest town of its size in the state of Kansas”. Home of the former Goldbugs and the black and gold water tower, Kensington is proud to have one of a few successful community owned grocery stores in Kansas. As you head on east, take a step back in time with a visit to Brewster Higley’s cabin 9 miles north of K-8/US-36. Enjoy breathtaking scenery at the location where the most famous cowboy song in the world, “Home on the Range”, was written. The cabin was highlighted in the January 16, 2011 edition of the Wichita Eagle’s yearlong coverage of Kansas’ 150 anniversary of statehood examining the people and events that shaped our state. As you continue your journey across Smith County, Athol would make a good stop for a tank of gas or auto repair if needed. Athol’s community hall displays the world’s only home-made fire truck built on a Pierce-Arrow chassis. Just before getting to Smith Center, history buffs can drive south ¾ mile on M Road to the marker at the site of the 1853 Forks of Beaver Creek Indian Fight. This was a battle between the Pawnee, Delaware and Omaha Indians against the Cheyenne, Comanche, Arapahoe and Apaches. This battle lasted for three days and was one of the bloodiest conflicts between opposing bands of Indians ever fought on the American continent.

When you get to Smith Center, plan to spend the day or longer.

- Smith County Historical Museum is open seasonally. It consists of 4 buildings that contain an extensive array of artifacts chronicling life in early Smith County.
- Paul’s Café, at 114 E Hwy 36, was an original Valentine Diner. Although it has been remodeled and expanded, the current window and door placement suggests part of the original diner is still there.
- Wagner Park is the perfect place to stop for a picnic lunch. Relax in the outdoor gazebo. Children can run, play and let their imagination run wild on state of the art playground equipment. The park is the home of the Old Dutch Mill. The mill began operation in 1883 in northern Smith County in the community of Reamsville. Corn, graham, and wheat flour were processed in this mill. The 60 foot blades relied on Kansas winds and turned from 2-18 revolutions per minute. In 1913 the mill was converted to kerosene and operated until 1920. After the mill became nonoperational, it was moved to Smith Center in 1938. The mill remained in near original state until a 1955 fire destroyed much of the interior. The interior is now used as a seasonal gathering place for meetings, family gatherings and picnics.
- The Smith County Courthouse on Grant Street was completed January 1, 1920. This imposing modern classical eclecticism style building is 97 feet long, 81 feet wide and 47 feet high. Its construction is of gray Ozark granite up to the water table or to the first floor. From there on up it is of cream colored Bedford stone. The flooring and wainscoting throughout is tile. Stairways to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors are marble. The attic of the courthouse in 1920 had two padded jail cells and two common cells. This area is used for storage today. Total cost of the original building completely furnished was approximately \$98,000 and was paid for in full when ready to be occupied.

- The Courthouse Square Veterans Memorial was dedicated in 2003. This tribute to Smith County Veterans was planned by a group of interested military veteran volunteers. The memorial courtyard is paved with bricks bearing the names of veterans and loved ones. This self-supporting tribute was financed with donations that continue to be received to maintain the project. Landscaping around the memorial is maintained by county staff.
- Smith County Memorial Hospital opened in June 1951. It was dedicated to the Veterans of the County. Lists of the Veterans at that time are on the Memorial Wall on the northwest side of the hospital.
- Park Street in town is home to two of the initial Lustron Steel Homes, These two-bedroom, one-bath, 1000-square-foot units were erected between 1946 and 1948. All interior and exterior surfaces were porcelain-enameled metal, from the roof, gutters and down drains to the master bedroom's built-in vanity. The cost ranged from \$10,000 to \$12,000. These two homes are still occupied today.
- Sports enthusiasts will want to drive down Roger Barta Way to see Hubbard Stadium, home of the Smith Center Redmen and subject of acclaimed author Joe Drape's 2009 book, "Our Boys: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Redmen".
- The prominent Richardsonian Romanesque style building on the corner of Main Street at the north end of the downtown commercial district is architecturally and historically significant. Also known as the Burrows building this two story brick and stone masonry structure with a raised basement is approximately 29 feet wide and 100 feet long. It was erected in 1889 at a cost of \$15,000. This building served as a bank until 1930. This former bank is an anchor building at the end of a continuous block of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings. This building is currently owned by Kansas Preservation Alliance, Inc. It is on the National and State Historic Registers and will hopefully be restored to its original state.
- Peterson Industries, manufacturer of 5<sup>th</sup> wheel Excel RV's, offers plant tours at 1:30 pm Monday thru Friday at their 616 East Hwy 36 location.
- East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, also known as Relihan Row has block after block of restored mansions set back in the middle of the block. Stop by the Chamber of Commerce Office for a guide to the walking tour down Relihan Row.
- Ingleboro Mansion on north Main Street now serves as a Bed & Breakfast. When the mansion was built by Mr & Mrs. J.R. Burrow at the end of the 19th century, it covered what is now considered an entire city block. The property included a running stream, gazebo, deer and peacocks. The original house consisted of 12 large rooms aside from the halls, bath room complete with running hot and cold water, closets and alcoves. In the early 1920's the house was purchased by Dr. Funk, turned into a hospital and remained so until 1951.
- Hunting enthusiasts can enjoy their sport in season throughout Smith County. Several lodging accommodations throughout the county cater to hunters including private land hunting experiences.
- Modern amenities in Smith Center include:
  - 9 hole Golf Course
  - Outdoor Swimming Pool

- Digital Movie Theater
- A variety of quaint downtown shops sure to satisfy the shopper in you
- Smith Center lays claim to several well-known colorful individuals with historical ties to the area.
  - Ellen Watson aka “Cattle Kate, was married to Will Pickle in the late 1800’s and lived seven miles north of Lebanon KS. She filed for divorce from Mr. Pickle in Smith County Kansas in 1886.
  - Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle was born in 1887 on the outskirts of Smith Center. He worked in the motion picture business and starred in several old time comedies. He later directed movies under the alias, William Goodrich. He died in 1933.
  - Erin Brockovich’s father graduated from Smith Center High School in 1942.
  - Cromwell Dixon, “America’s Boy Aeronaut”, was hired by the Smith County Fair Board to fly his Sky-Cycle at the fair in August, 1911. Dixon died in October 1911 during one of his stunt exhibitions in Washington State.

After a day in Smith Center, travelers driving east will want to take a side trip north of Hwy 36 on Hwy 281 to Lebanon Kansas. A stop at Ladow’s Market will be a treat. Drive one mile north and one west of town to the Geographic Center of the 48 Contiguous States. There is something special about standing in the exact center of the United States. More people than you can imagine still take time to do it. A quiet moment can be spent in the miniature chapel on the grounds. Occasionally those born and raised in the area return to this site for their wedding. Just to the northeast of this historic marker is the “Farm Built in a Day” accomplished in 1950.

A tour of Smith County would not be complete without driving 9.5 miles south Smith Center on US Hwy 281 to the 8’4” replica of “Lady Liberty”. It is one of 26 in the state of Kansas that were manufactured for the Boy Scouts of America in 1950. The statue sits on a native limestone pedestal surrounded by evergreen trees, bushes and a circular driveway which provides a place for motorists to stop, rest, and reflect upon the independence, freedom, and liberty we enjoy today. This spot overlooks a beautiful view of the Solomon River valley. A short drive south will take you to Harlan Kansas that was home to Gould College in the 1880’s. This institution of higher learning was managed by the United Brethren Church. There is a historical marker near the Harlan Church. A drive back north and west on US Hwy 9 will take you to Gaylord Kansas. Of interest in Gaylord is the archway to the city park. This archway was constructed from recycled parts from the first country road bridge in Smith County. Continuing west you will find Cedar Kansas. Here you can spend quiet time in the only town in Kansas with a population of less than 50 that can claim two beautiful parks. In Jim Lydic Memorial Park, both you and your four legged friends can enjoy beautifully landscaped grounds, a gazebo stage, bridges and seating area. The park sports an outhouse, an uptown variety of that age-old necessary building...with its own septic pit. A more recent addition to the park is a koi pond with an overhead pergola. As you continue your drive to the western edge of Smith County, in Claudell Kansas you will find a quaint Catholic county church. Due to declining population, the church is closed to regular services and is only used several times a year on special occasions.