

“First downtown store ‘linked’”
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Even after 125 years, some facts of Ottawa’s creation are still coming to light. The latest discovery documents a building that was here well before the town was first surveyed 125 years ago this month.

According to John Mark Lambertson, director of the Franklin County Historical Society, John Tecumseh “Tauy” Jones had a small store for the Ottawa Indians on the townsite probably as early as the late 1850s. It was reportedly made of logs and operated by Jones’ friend, Joseph Badger King.

King and his wife, both educated Ottawa Indians, lived in a nearby log cabin.

The store was erected south of the Marais des Cygnes River and near both a natural ford of the river and an excellent spring. For more than a century, it has simply been understood that this trading post was somewhere in the vicinity of First and Hickory.

The site now has been positively established with literally surveyor-like precision.

“I was reading the original field notes from when the Ottawa Reserve was first surveyed in 1863,” Lambertson said, “and was amazed when one of the survey lines ran smack into Jones’ store. It was a totally unexpected discovery.”

The line being surveyed was the dividing line between sections 35 and 36 of Township 26 South, Range 19 East. Ottawa was platted the following spring on the east half of section 35 and the west half of section 36.

The surveyors started at a point that is now in the middle of the intersection at Seventh and Princeton. From there, “they proceeded north through what is now City Park and on across our courthouse square,” Lambertson said, “dissecting both neatly in half.”

At 44 chains” north of the starting point, the line ran into Tauy Jones’ store. One chain equals 66 feet, with 80 chains making a mile.

If the surveyors were accurate, the store stood just slightly north of the center of block 57, in the middle of the alley between where Jay’s Hardware and Dan Hope Chrysler Center Inc. are today. (Editor’s note: in 2011 the Jay’s Hardware location at 117 S Main is occupied by East Central Kansas Area Agency on Aging and the Dan Hope Chrysler location at 118 S Hickory is a public parking lot.)

“At that spot Ottawa’s commercial development first sprouted and took root,” Lambertson said. He also noted that the name “Ottawa” came from the Indian word “adawe, which means to barter or trade.”

After off-setting around the store, the surveyors continued north another 13 chains to the river. The field notes, which are at the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka, also mention crossing trails, giving today’s historians a better picture of where the highways of yesterday were located.

The fact that Ottawa’s first store apparently blocked what later became an alley also explains a notation in the original town company minutes.

On September 12, 1864, the town fathers discussed the need to confer with Tauy Jones “as to moving his foundation or shortening the building ten feet.”

It is not known which solution was taken, but there are clues that the altered structure later fronted Main and perhaps was used as a church by the Baptist Indians.