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Water Related Names in the Flint Hills

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Vessel with Terra Sigillata and Green (detail)
Dale Allison-Hartley

WATER-RELATED NAMES IN THE FLINT HILLS

ALCOVE SPRING

This spring below the waterfall at the Independence Creek Crossing was named in 1846 by emigrants on the Oregon Trail, who carved the name on the surrounding rocks and trees. Thousands of thirsty travelers on their way to Utah, Oregon, and California in the 1840s and 1850s camped near the spring.

ALMA

This town was named either for a city in Germany from which some of the first settlers had come or for the stream Alma in the Crimea, where western European allies defeated the Russians. The German word *alm* means “a pastureland on the mountainside.” There are no mountains around Alma, but the pastures are abundant.

BLUE MONT

Explorer John C. Frémont once camped on the high hill with its magnificent view of the Big Blue River Valley. Bluemont College, which preceded Kansas State University, was opened in 1860 within a few miles of the summit.

BLUE RAPIDS

Colonists from New York established the town in 1869. They constructed a dam near the Blue River rapids, thus developing a superior source of water power. Early entrepreneurs built a woolen mill; flour, paper, and gypsum mills; a foundry; and a machine shop.

CHINGAWASSA SPRINGS

The healing, invigorating mineral springs at Chingawassa attracted many visitors in the late nineteenth century. Sometime between 1873 and 1888 the name of the springs was changed from *Carter's Mineral*

Springs to Chingawassa for an Osage chief whose name meant “handsome bird.” After five Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University) faculty members visited the spring in 1888, they suggested that the springs could possibly become a famous health resort rivaling the Hot Springs of Arkansas. Marion County entrepreneurs promoted the health spa successfully until the 1890s when interest declined and a nationwide financial depression closed down the Chingawassa Railroad.

CLEARWATER

The Osage-Siouan word *Ninnescah* means “spring water,” “running water,” “good water,” and “clear water.” This town uses an English version.

CONWAY SPRINGS

Early settlers enjoyed the sparkling clear spring water at the site. J. L. Johnson, a local resident, named the town for his old home town in New Hampshire and for his favorite author, Moncure D. Conway.

COTTONWOOD FALLS

Cottonwood Falls and Strong City are known as the “twin cities” of Chase County. The older, Cottonwood Falls,

began when three Dunkard families settled near Jacob’s Creek and Isaac M. Alexander laid out a town overlooking a falls in the Cottonwood River.

CRYSTAL SPRING

The largest spring in Marion County has supplied the city of Florence with water since 1920. The spring is located two miles north of Florence.

DIAMOND SPRING

*They called you “Diamond of
the Plain,”
So great was the far-reaching fame,
When o’er the prairies heated wild,
They stopped to taste a beverage mild.
No water flowed so full and free.
Along the Trail to Santa Fe —
“Dear Old Diamond,
Diamond Springs.”
— George P. Morehouse*

George Sibley, Santa Fe Trail surveyor, camped near the spring in 1827 and wrote: “This spring is very large, runs off boldly among Rocks, is perfectly accessible and furnished the greatest abundance of most excellent, clear, cold sweet water. It may be appropriately called ‘The Diamond of the Plains.’”



Kaw-Pink Sketch
Lisa Grossman

DRAGOON CREEK

A U.S. soldier — a dragoon — died on the western bank of this creek.

EMMA CREEK

The daughter of a pioneer family had ridden her horse out one evening to herd cattle homeward when a storm came up. She became lost along the creek bank and was never seen again. Tradition says wild animals killed her. Her name remains on the creek where she disappeared.

EUREKA

In search of a town site, Edwin Tucker and M. L. Ashmore were traveling southwest of Burlington when they discovered a spring on the bank of a small stream. Whether they cried “Eureka” or not, this was the place. They organized a town company and proceeded with the development of Eureka.

FALL RIVER

The town is located on the banks of the Fall River.



Thistle Studies 2 and 6
Clare Doveton

GEUDA SPRINGS

Geuda's seven healing springs were visited first by the Ponca Indians, whose word *Geuda* meant "healing waters." The springs never became as well known as Saratoga Springs in New York or Hot Springs in Arkansas, but they were used as a health resort. A German member of the Dunkard faith who was a missionary to the Indians in 1867 used the German word *gute* ("good") for the springs. *Gute* and *geuda* were nearly identical in sound.

GOESSEL

Around 1895 a German ship sank in the Atlantic. Captain Goessel stayed aboard until the last person was safely off, then he went down with the ship. Dr. Richert of a Mennonite community in western Marion County admired the captain and proposed the name *Goessel* be given to the new post office in the area. The town of Goessel developed at the site.

KECHI

This community northeast of Wichita was named for the Kechi Indians who were closely related to the Wichitas and Wacos. The word *Kechi* may mean "water turtle."

LOST SPRING

*Who spoke so soft the southwest
Spanish tongue,
And failed to find this fountain
as of yore,
They wailed their loss and from their
lips was heard,
"Oh, Agua Perdida, Oh, Water Lost!"*
— George Morehouse

Despite its occasional dry spells, Lost Spring had enough water to be a regular stopping place on the Santa Fe Trail from the 1830s through the 1860s. In 1846 the U.S. Army planted watercress and strawberries there for passing soldiers to eat to prevent scurvy. A ranch located there in the 1850s catered to gamblers and outlaws before closing in the late 1860s.

MARAIS DES CYGNES

The translation from French is "marsh of the swans." The name is given to a waterfowl refuge area, a river, and a historic massacre site. Legend surrounds the name. An Osage story tells of two young lovers who disappeared mysteriously while canoeing in the river. As the horrified people looked upon the scene where the canoers had vanished, they saw two great white swans swim away

together. Another story told of Evangeline of the Longfellow poem who walked to the top of a timbered mound overlooking the river and valley, saying "C'est le marais des cygnes." In the valley of the Marais des Cygnes there are more than 15,000 acres of oxbows, natural lakes, and wetlands and an occasional swan. The river was originally called the *Osage*. The Kansas part was officially renamed *Marais des Cygnes*, but it remains the *Osage* in Missouri.

NEOSHO RAPIDS

After being called *Florence*, *Neosho City*, and *Italia*, the town took its present name in 1860 when Forrest Page platted the town. He located it on the Neosho River near a rapids that powered the local gristmill.

RANDOLPH

In 1855 Gardner Randolph and his family came from Illinois to the Blue River Valley. It has been said that he planned to organize a slave plantation and make Kansas a slave state, but incoming settlers with contrary ideas squelched that plan. The elder Randolph became the first postmaster. The construction of Tuttle

Creek Dam forced the relocation of the town from its original site.

SOLOMON RIVER

French fur traders named the river after Salmon, intendant of Louisiana. When explorer Zebulon M. Pike passed through the region in 1806, he referred to the stream as *Solomon's Fork*. The Indians called the river *Nepahalla*, *Wiskapalla*, or *Wisgapall*, all meaning “water on a hill.”

TOWANDA

The town and township lie in the valley of the Whitewater River and are said to take their name from the Osage Indian word for “many waters.” The name also could have been a transfer from Illinois or Pennsylvania. In the spring of 1863, James R. Mead built a trading post where he collected furs from hunters and Indians to sell in the east. His place served as dwelling, church, wayside inn, and Indian Agency and became a general supply point for the southwestern frontier. The post was widely known as *Meade's Ranche*, and the town of Towanda was built on a hill above the “Ranche.”

WABAUNSEE

The town received its name more than three years before the county. In 1856 town planners envisioned a great city — the “New Haven of the West,” with a park, steamboat landing, and tract for a university — that might even become the capital city. It never became more than a small town, but it was famous in Kansas history for its free-state activity. Rifles smuggled in with shipments of Bibles were intended to aid in the antislavery fight.

WHITewater

The presence of the White Water River accounts for the town name. The post office started with the name *White Water* in 1871, then switched to *Ovo*, and back to *Whitewater* by 1950.

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