The South Howard County Historical Society in New Franklin, Missouri, was founded in the 1980’s to create an awareness of the surrounding region’s rich and unique history. The SHCHS maintains a museum which displays relics and information of various historic events in the area as well as providing temporary displays on specific subjects of community interest. SHCHS is also host to festivals throughout the year which help promote community involvement.

The frontier town of (“Old”) Franklin was established in 1816 and within a decade grew to become the largest town west of St. Louis. It was the county seat of Howard County, home to the first newspaper west of St. Louis, and became the jumping-off point for the Santa Fe Trail when William Becknell embarked on his first journey to Santa Fe in 1821. “The Rock” in downtown New Franklin was dedicated in 1909 by the DAR to mark the beginning of the trail. In 2011, after raising funds for over a period of four years, SHCHS dedicated the “Franklin, Mother of the Santa Fe Trail” monument, which can be found along the Katy Trail Parkway at the south entrance into town on Highway 5. These five black etched granite stones depict William Becknell, Father of the Santa Fe Trail; Josiah Gregg, a doctor who traveled the Santa Fe trail and wrote “Commerce Of the Prairies”; Kit Carson, the frontier legend; Ezekiel Williams, Godfather of the Santa Fe Trail; Millie Cooper, a local legend; and George Caleb Bingham, the “Missouri Artist”, who all lived in the historic town of nearby Franklin before it was washed away in the floods of 1826 and 1828. Renowned bronze artist, Harry Weber, sketched the characters and worked with granite artist, Kevin Hale, to bring the stones to life.

New Franklin, the town which was established in 1828 after the floods washed away the town of Franklin, is known as the town where the four trails meet, 1) marking the end of the Boone’s Lick Road, 2)
the beginning of the Santa Fe Trail, 3) the Lewis and Clark Trail and 4) the Katy Trail, taking the visitor to
history in any direction.

In the 1990’s members of SHCHS constructed an authentic Conestoga wagon using plans from the
Smithsonian Institute. Upon completion the wagon received honors at the American Royal parade in
Kansas City. The wagon is a participant in many parades and festivals in the area. SHCHS is in the
completing stages of constructing a building which will house the Conestoga wagon and showcase the
wagon for visitors to view from all three sides via large glass windows. It is located along the Katy Parkway
in New Franklin where the Katy Trail crosses Highway 5.

The Katy Trail is a by-product of the M-K-T Railroad which played a major role in the history of the
area. The M-K-T railroad line was connected to the area in 1867 and eventually created the entire
community of Franklin Junction (now called Franklin), which included eight tracks, a roundhouse, a
railroad yard and, in 1940, an Art Deco-styled viaduct which was built to ensure the safe crossing of all
eight tracks by vehicles and pedestrians. This viaduct was razed in 2010 and provides an attractive
entrance into the town of New Franklin along the Katy Parkway. In 2013 the SHCHS moved an M-K-T
caboose alongside the Katy Trail across from the “Franklin, Mother of the Santa Fe Trail” monument and
adjacent to the soon-to-be completed Conestoga Wagon Building. These three attractions on the Katy
Parkway all serve to inform the visitor of the area’s vast history.

Historic homes abound within the area and “Hickman House”, one of the oldest homes in Howard
County, is located at the University Of Missouri Horticulture and Agroforestry Center in New Franklin,
Missouri. This one-and-one half story Georgian-style cottage was constructed for the early Howard
County merchant Thomas Hickman and has been completely restored by the University. Visitors will also
find relics from the nearby site of Fort Hempstead inside the Hickman House.
Riverboat Captain Joseph Kinney’s civil-war era summer home can be seen on Highway 5 looking eastward from the north side of the Missouri River bridge at Boonville. Placed on the National Historic Registry, the architectural plans were copied by the State of Missouri for the present Governor’s Mansion. This magnificent mansion will capture you with its character, history and period style.

Both historical and current music thrive in the area. Edgar Lee “Jelly” Settle, author of the Missouri Waltz, is commemorated in nearby Mt. Pleasant Cemetery. And as you enter New Franklin you will be greeted with a sign dedicated to our more current country music star, Sara Evans.

Next year commemorates not only the 200th anniversary of the State of Missouri, but also the 200th anniversary of the Santa Fe Trail. The SHCHS will be dedicating the year to the Santa Fe Trail. The museum itself will be displaying all things ‘Santa Fe Trail’: “Traders of the Trail”, trail travel, blacksmithing and area forts alongside their permanent collections. The museum is open April through October. In addition, SHCHS programs for 2021 will be highlighting the Santa Fe Trail. In March Ray Glendening will present an overview, “The Santa Fe Trail”; June will highlight Ezekiel Williams presented by one of his ancestors; in September Les Vilda, who traveled the trail with his mule in the 1980’s, will share his adventures; the town’s annual “Santa Fe Trails Days” will be celebrated in September; and in December there will be an Old Fashioned Christmas will be enjoyed. The public is always welcome to all programs and more information about SHCHS can be found at: www.newfranklinmo.org/visitors.
Figure 1 - “Franklin, Mother of the Santa Fe Trail” monument located on the Katy Parkway at the south entrance into New Franklin, MO.

Figure 2 - Hickman House, located at the University of Missouri Horticulture and Agroforestry Center in New Franklin, MO.
Figure 3 - Katy Caboose, located on the Katy Parkway at the south entrance to New Franklin, MO.

Figure 4 - The Katy Railroad viaduct before it’s razing in 2010. This viaduct moved traffic on Highway 5 over eight tracks in the Franklin Junction railyard before the railroad was discontinued in the 1980’s.
Figure 5 - “The Rock”, a monument placed in downtown New Franklin, MO, in 1909 by the D.A.R. commemorating the beginning of the Santa Fe Trail in Franklin, MO.