



Nebraska Ghost Towns

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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Article Contents: "Ghost Towns in Cass County, Nebraska," by G. H. Gilmore

"Ghost Towns in Otoe County," by John C. Miller

"Solitary Ghosts"

Cataloging Information:

Cass County Ghost Towns: Oreopolis, Cassville, Mt. Pleasant, Rock Bluff, Kanosha, Waterville, Avoca, Brooklyn

Otoe County Ghost Towns: California City, Condit, Delaware City, El Dorado, Erie, Groveland, Knoxville, Marietta, Nesuma, Saltville, St. Charles, St. Peters, Summervill (Summerville), Woodville, Chester, Douglas, Salina

Solitary Ghost Towns: Arago, Archer, Homerville, Claramont, Swan City

Photographs / Images: plat map of Brooklyn, Cass County

G H O S T

C A S S C O

MADE FOR G.H. G

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

A.E. SHELDON.

SUPERINTENDENT.

A.E. FULLER,

TOPOGRAPHER.

July 1, 1866.
12 Sections T.12-R.9.
Taken from Cass Co. &
added to Saunders Co.

CAPITOL CITY.

Aug. 3, 1857.

John Latta Prop.

SALINA

Mar. 9, 1857.

PARALIEL CITY

Oct. 5, 1856.

TROY

Claimed Filed
June 6, 1857

PLATTEAU CITY

Mar. 24, 1857

WASHINGTON CITY

July 23, 1857

SMITHLAND

July 13, 1857.

INDEPENDENCE NORTH July 13, 1857.

INDEPENDENCE CITY July 11, 1857.

SOUTH BEND

SOUTH BEND

LOUISVILLE

LOUISVILLE

Fourth District. April 6, 1857 Louisville P

GREENWOOD

MAINE LAND P.O.

T.12.R.

T I N

T I O N

MULLINS RANCH
ELMWOOD

MURDOCK.

MANLEY

GREENWOOD

C E N T E R

ELGIN CITY
Oct. 27, 1857.

CARLISLE
Filed Oct. 21,

BELMONT P.O.

LUELLA P.O.

BUSHBURY P.O.

MONTEVALLO
Apr. 3, 1857.

CALADONIA
Feb. 27, 1857.

ALVO

WABASH

MARSEILLS
Apr. 6, 1857.

GRAND RAPIDS
H. L. Nace & F. F. Fette,
Props, 1858.

Church
SUNLIGHT P.O.

ELMWOOD

STOVE CREEK

WEEPING WATER

T I P T O N

Fifth District April 6, 1857 Weeping Water

EAGLE.

VICTORIA P.O.

ANDRUSVILLE P.O.

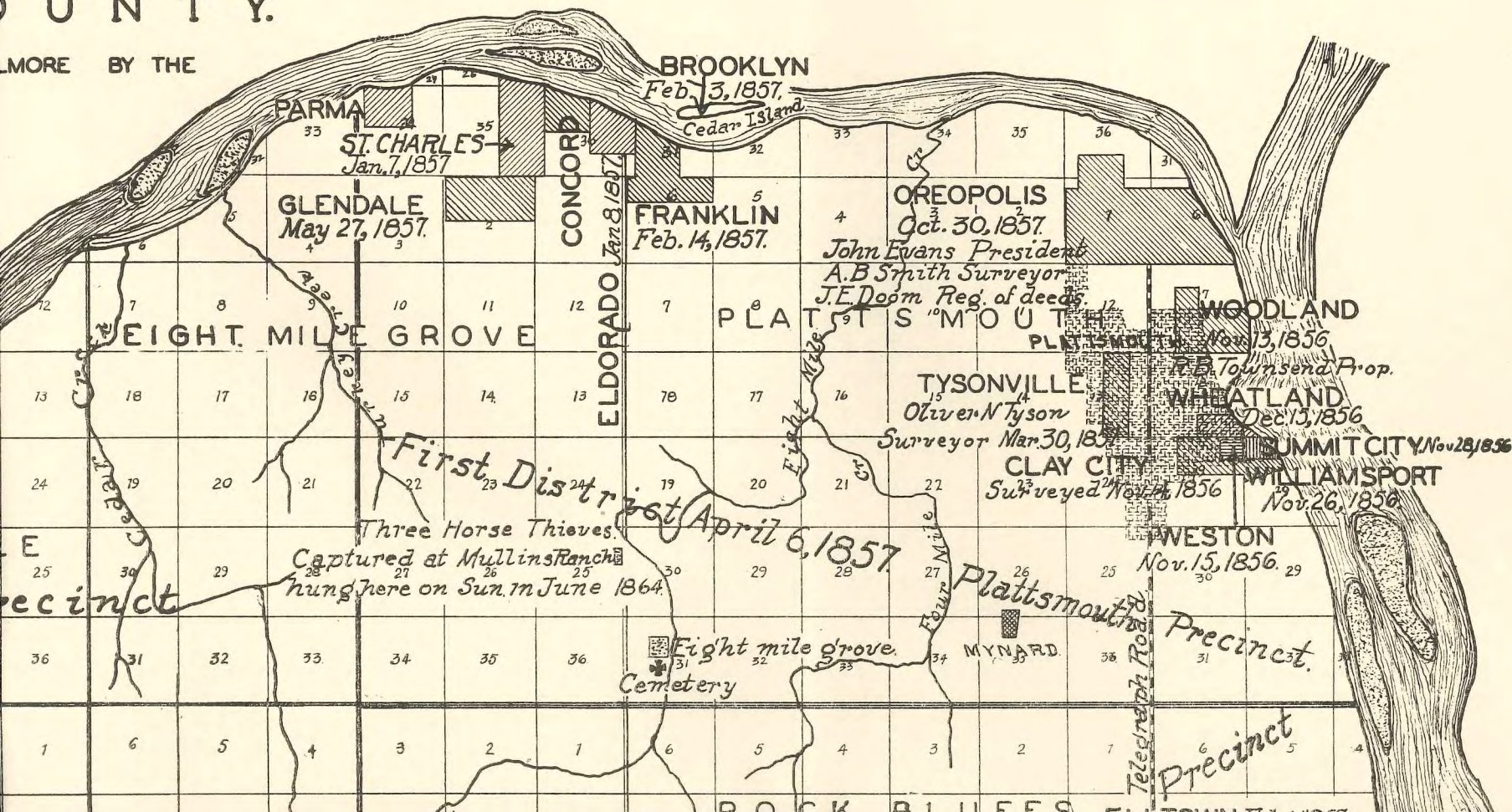
R. 9. E.

R. 10. E.

R. 11. E.

U N T Y.

MORE BY THE



R. 14

GHOST TOWNS IN CASS COUNTY, NEBRASKA

By Dr. G. H. Gilmore,
Murray, Nebraska.

In the opening of a new frontier country for settlement many factors in the social welfare of life arise. The necessities of life—food, clothing and shelter—are the leading items; and to handle these, towns were made the center of supply. Congress, aware of this fact, enacted "The townsite act, 23d of May, 1844, for the relief of citizens of towns upon lands of the United States."

Since 1854, when white men started the settlement of this state, fifty-one towns have been organized in Cass County which have vanished and some are not known even by name. Many farmers in the county today are living in cities of this ghost type and in spite of their city life are enjoying good health.

Cass county was not surveyed and sectionized until 1856 and the towns organized previous to this date were quite indefinitely located and many of these towns were resurveyed after this date.

Following the survey made in 1856, twenty-seven towns were laid out in the county in 1857, out of a total of sixty-four ghost towns now recorded there. The list comprises Avoca, Bluffdale, Bradford City, Brooklyn, Caladonia, Cedar Bluff, Cleveland, Eldorado, Elgin City, Factorville, Franklin, Glendale, Granada, Independence City, Independence North, Liberty, Marseilles, Monteville, Oreopolis, Osage, Platteau, St. Charles, Smithland, Troy, Tysonville, Washington City and Waterville.

The large number of towns organized in 1857 throughout the Territory of Nebraska, many of them by speculators, caused the legislature when it convened in Omaha City to pass "An Act to Regulate the Entry and Disposal of Town Sites. Approved November 4, 1858."

While many of the sixty-four towns were boom paper towns, many others were organized for the benefit of the community surrounding them.

Oreopolis, north of Plattsmouth, had at one time fifty substantial buildings of brick and frame structure and an endowment for a university provided. A seminary 80 by 34 feet was constructed and hope of a beautiful city was pictured by the citizens and promoters. Today there is not a building upon the townsite. It is all plow-land.

Three miles north of Nehawka the town of Cassville was laid out by Rev. W. D. Gage in 1855. Here he ran a store and sold dry goods, groceries and patent medicine "cheap for cash." He with others organized the Western University which was incorporated Jan. 26, 1856, and was to be located "near or in Cassville." Just north of Cassville

W. D. Gage with others organized the town of Mt. Pleasant in 1856, but this town was not incorporated until 1861. The Mt. Pleasant Post Office was established in 1858.

At the bottom of the plat of Mount Pleasant of 1856 the following description of the country is given:

"Mount Pleasant N. T. is situated in the geographical center of Cass county at the intersection of the territorial road leading from Nebraska City to Omaha City with the road leading from Kanosha to Chester on Salt Creek and Fort Kearny. The site is the most beautiful in Nebraska, being surrounded as far as eye can see by the most fertile and best farming land in the Territory, dotted with beautiful groves of timber and watered by the romantic Weeping Water and its branches which flow near the town, furnishing abundance of water power. A saw and grist mill is already in operation on the Weeping Water; a steam flouring mill is in the process of construction in the Town Site.

It is also the dividing line of the railroad from Burlington to Glenwood and the mouth of the Platte, and when constructed westward must necessarily pass through this place

"Building material is abundant and cheap and the best quality. Stone, coal, iron ore and limestone of the best quality and in the greatest abundance, 1856."

In the southwest corner of the plat is a square set off for the Western University.

Rock Bluff still has its public square and a few streets. Many of the towns laid out in the county were platted after the method followed by Rock Bluff. The public square was the point from which lots were located, five blocks south and three blocks west or any direction from this public square. Rock Bluff stood well to become a city. It was one of the leading points for equipping freighting outfits to cross the plains. It was here that the Naomi Institute was organized and run for several years under the supervision of Prof. Joseph Patterson and a good faculty to aid in running this college. It was here also that the Ballot Box was taken to dinner, and this trip is ably told by Mr. Sheldon in his Nebraska History. This incident changed the political situation of the county, state and nation, due to the fact that the votes from this town and precinct were thrown out and not counted.

Three miles down the Missouri river is where was located the old steam boat town of Kanosha, a town that at one time bid well to become a leading town in our state. Here were large stores, school, wagon and blacksmith shop, saloons, doctors and many residences. My father, John Gilmore, with Benjamin Thompson and William Williams, operated a ferry boat here in 1855-56 and the traffic was very heavy during these years -- travelers and home seekers westward bound. John McK. Haygood, one of the proprietors of Kanosha, was

ected to serve in the second territorial legislature at Omaha City. He fought to keep the capitol in Omaha and also put up a fight with the aid of John F. Buck to have the penitentiary located at Kanosha. The representatives from Otoe county fought this strongly and the feeling toward Otoe county was not very friendly at this time for opposing the bill.

Waterville, at the south side of the town of Nehawka, was incorporated February 10, 1857, by Isaac Pollard Jr. and Lawson Sheldon, the father of Governor Sheldon. This town was established as a manufacturing town. "The said town is hereby made a body corporate, and is invested with all the privileges and attributes of a municipal corporation: To elect officers. To pass laws and rules.

The town council shall consist of five members. The said Isaac Pollard Jr. and Lawson Sheldon, their heirs and assigns, shall have perpetual right to keep a dam at the point designated in this section, the height of 12 feet above low water mark so as to propel machinery that the said parties wish to erect." Waterville at that time had a post office and store.

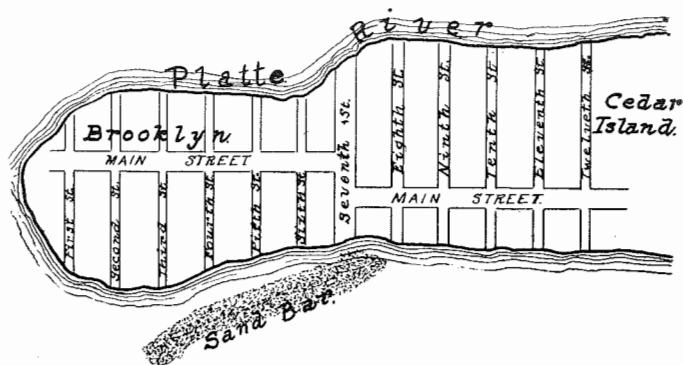
The paper town of Avoca was established October 19, 1857, three miles east of the present town of Avoca. It lay on the south side of Highway No. 34 and covered the north half of Section 27. George H. Vick Roy and Masten Riden, proprietors, must have been college men, for the letters of the Greek alphabet from Alpha to Omega were the names of the north-and-south streets. The plat also shows a Public Square, Odd Fellow and Masonic Squares, and a large cemetery laid out at the southeast corner.

Brooklyn, Cass county, Nebraska Territory, had a distinction of being different from any other town in the interior of the United States.. It was a town wholly surrounded by water. It was located on the west end of Cedar Island with Main street running east and west, the only east and west street. The cross street ran north and south, with First Street at the west end and Twelfth street at the east end of town. Joseph Harper, Peter L. Beaver and Curtis Moore, early settlers in this section, were the proprietors of the town of Brooklyn.

Many towns organized in other counties by act of the legislature were in fact recorded in Cass County. The Neapolis Land Company held a meeting at Powhocco in Calhoun (Saunders) County in 1857. In the same year Iowa City was established on Wahahoo Creek in this county, with elaborate rules and regulations. Many pioneer towns in Lancaster, Green (Seward), and Clay counties were recorded in Cass County.

Among the shifting sands of pioneer life was the country post office which sometimes entered the mercantile business, and eventually we find a town at this point. Among the drifting post offices we have Andrusville, Bushbury, Belmont, Center Valley, Luella, Sunlight, Three Grove, and Union Post office which drifted along the Missouri and eventually was permanently located in the town of Union.

While sadness, suffering and chilling tragedies are found in the history of many of these vanished pioneer towns, the beautiful side of life is also portrayed. Many of the outstanding citizens of our country started life in one of these deserted villages, and they hold in reverence the name and the spot even if there is only the waving yellow tasseled corn to salute them as they pass.



Brooklyn, Cass County, Nebraska
Platted February 3, 1857

GHOST TOWNS IN OTOE COUNTY*

By John C. Miller

Brooklyn

Surveyed September 5, 1856, by A. T. Drake, located on fractional Sections 7 and 18, Township 9, Range 14, Otoe County, Nebraska.

This town was on the Missouri River and seems to have been a rival of Old Wyoming, as it was only one mile south of that village. Brooklyn was evidently "smothered" by its competitor on the north.

The original proprietors of the land upon which the village was located were Edward H. Bischof and Charles F. Hunter. The surveyor's notes on the plat in the office of Register of Deeds also contain the following description: "All streets are 75 feet in width, alleys 16 feet in width, lots 50 by 150; fractional lots are represented upon the plat; the levy is 300 feet wide." The scale of the plat on file in the plat book indicates that it is drawn on a scale of 176 feet to the inch. The plat was filed September 8, 1856.

Inasmuch as the plat on file does not run true with the compass, it is evident that the village was laid out with streets and alleys parallel with the Missouri River. There appears to be but one transfer by the proprietors: that made to J. P. Snow for a fractional part of Block 10 in this village. This is now owned by Joseph Lutz and Anna Ramold.

In the old plat book in the office of the Register of Deeds, on the original plat (dated May 8, 1857) is found the village of Cambridge. It was located on the northeast quarter of Section 17, Township 8, Range 14.

In the center of the recorded plat is a vacant block between University Street and Park Street, marked "Park and University Grounds." This indicates that they expected sometime to be recognized and to have the state university located there.

In this village there seems to have been quite a lively real-estate business, as the books indicate some twenty transfers. It was on present Highway No. 75, six miles south of Nebraska City, and the land is now owned by James W. Lyon.

California City

The plat of the town site was filed June 19, 1856, by John Hamlin, agent for the proprietors, but no plat is shown in the records and its location cannot be determined.

* Read before the meeting of the Otoe County Historical Society, held at Nebraska City, October 19, 1937; and here published to supplement the article on "Ghost Towns in Cass County" which we feature in this issue.

Condit

Condit was located on the east half of the northeast quarter of Section 5, and the west half of the northwest quarter of Section 4, Township 8, Range 14. John C. Campbell was the agent of the proprietors, and the record indicates that a considerable real-estate business in connection with this village, some twenty-five transfers appearing of record. The site was just north of and adjoining Nebraska City, on land now owned by Mr. Bone.

Delaware City

This town was located on the southwest quarter of Section 17, and the southeast $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 18, Township 8, Range 13. Charles F. Holly and Henry Sands were the proprietors, and the only transfer shown is a sheriff's deed growing out of an action of foreclosure for the entire village, said deed running to Charles F. Holly and Miles W. Brown. Delaware City was located two miles east and a half mile south of the present village of Dunbar. Part of this land is now owned by Caroline Heinke; the balance is a part of the old H. S. Baker farm.

El Dorado

The village of El Dorado was located on northwest quarter of Section 4, Township 7, Range 14, Otoe County, Nebraska, four miles south of Nebraska City on the east side of Highway No. 75. Job Casel appears to be an agent of the proprietors, but there is no record of any lots or blocks having been transferred. The land is now owned by Carl Overton.

Erie

The town of Erie, according to the notation of the surveyor, was located on the northeast quarter and the southeast quarter of Section 33, Township 7, Range 14, in Otoe County, Nebraska; surveyed by James D. Wheeler and the plat drafted by W. E. Harvey, on May 27, 1857. Date of dedication was not shown on the plat, and no indication of any transfer. Attached to the plat, however, is found the following notation which seemed to be a part thereof:

"The town of Erie, situated on the most desirable location, in full view of the valley of the Missouri River for miles up and down, and overlooking the beautiful valley of the Little Nemaha and Rock Creek, is on the road leading from Nebraska City to Topeka, Kansas, which is destined ere many years to be on the line of the Nebraska City-Topeka railroad. It is five miles from the Missouri River, twelve miles from Nebraska City, and surrounded by an excellent farming country which has already attracted much attention."

The land on which Erie was located is now owned by Ernest and William Hauptman. This appears to be a company undertaking and the plat indicates that Joab Deneen was the agent for the company, but aside from the filing of the plat there is no indication of

any transfers ever having been made of the property in this village. It was one-half mile east of the present Highway No. 75 and on the Otoe-Nemaha county line.

Groveland

In the plat book in Register of Deeds' Office is the original plat of the village or city of Groveland, but no record of the dedication, or who surveyed it, or when.

The plat indicates, however, that it bordered on the bend in the Missouri River and had a very extensive levee, and the business portion appears to have been divided into small lots adjoining the levee. The original plat is now attached and pasted to very heavy paper, but it is apparent that there is some writing on the back of the original plat.

Whether it was north or south of Nebraska City, our investigation was unable to determine.

Knoxville

Knoxville was located on the west half of the southwest quarter of Section 20 and the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 30, and a part of the southwest quarter and all of the south half of the southeast quarter of Section 19, all in Township 7, Range 10, East of the 6th P. M., in Otoe County, Nebraska.

It was surveyed by Andrew H. Runyon, and the original plat certifies that it is made according to the survey of Mr. Runyon and signed by W. E. Harvey, draftsman. The scale is 250 feet to the inch.

This village apparently was two miles northwest of the present village of Burr, and was located on both sides of the south branch of the Little Nemaha River. We find no record of any lots or blocks having been transferred in the village. The land on which it was located is now owned by John T. Walker, Ben Smith, Fred Finke and Rudolph Thiesfeld.

Marietta

Marietta was located on the south half of the northwest quarter of Section 15, Township 8, Range 14. No plat appears of record. The original proprietors were A. A. Bradford, Joel Helvey and W. C. Folkes. Plat filed Oct. 23, 1856. No transfers shown, no plat recorded. It was located just south of Kearney Addition to Nebraska City, and the land is now owned by Fred Weber and George Homeyer.

Nesuma

Plat of above village indicates that it did not border on the Missouri River, although some creek, evidently the Little Nemaha, seems to have passed through the village and a very extensive park was dedicated to the public. Located on parts of Sections 12 and 14, Township 8, Range 10, in Otoe County, Nebraska, about one mile southeast of the present village of Unadilla. Proprietors were Wil-

liam Iler and Albert Crane. No plat recorded; no transfers appear of record. Land now owned by Harry Witt and George Borchers.

Saltville

Plat indicates that it was located in Otoe County, Territory of Nebraska, and covered 320 acres in Sections 12 and 13, Township 8, Range 10, in Otoe County, Nebraska. This village appears never to have been divided into lots and blocks. Proprietors, N. S. Harding and William Iler. No transfers shown. This village was evidently close to the village of Nesuma.

St. Charles

Located in Section 14, Township 7, Range 12, in Otoe County, Nebraska. Original proprietors, James W. Bond and F. Beyschlag.

Plat recorded January 30, 1858. Located one mile south and one mile west of the present village of Lorton.

St. Peters

Located on the east half of the southeast quarter of Section 12, Township 9, Range 13. No plat filed. Original proprietors, James W. Bond, F. Beyschlag. Located one mile west of Old Wyoming and now owned by Ed Ramold.

Summervill

Summervill (Summerville) was located upon the Missouri River and contained 187 acres; not surveyed by the United States when laid out "On Island," one and a half miles north of the southeast corner of Otoe County. Plat recorded July 25, 1857. From the plat it appears to have been rather a small village, but had an extra wide levee facing the Missouri River, upon a very sharp bend. What was intended for the business section is divided into small lots, and all border on the levee.

Woodville

Woodville was located on the west half of Section 3 and the east half of Section 4, Township 8, Range 14. Original proprietors, M. W. Riden, N. S. Harding and J. H. Decker, September 9, 1856. The records show some 15 transfers of lots and blocks. The original plat is not shown. This town seems to have been on the same land that is now Greggsport Addition to Nebraska City.

Chester, Lancaster Co. (A-59, 162-3) "Chester Town Claim is situated on the east branch of Salt Creek and commences at a post at the northeast corner of the Mill Claim of Claborne, Whitmore & Co. (which) runs south one mile, east one mile, north one mile to the Carfield's claim.—C. Nuckles, President."

Filed July 21, 1856. A-152: Bonds and sale of lots. A-203: "Chester Claim Club Association." Very elaborate rules and regulations, penalties, etc.

Douglas, Lancaster Co., N. T.

Good Plat; A-173; Filed Jan. 17, 1857.

"The town of Douglas is situated north of the city of Chester on the claim belonging to Wm. Carfield, Wm. Kempton and Jonathan Shin. Located June 5, 1856.—C. E. B. Claborne, J. W. Hawes, Bonded Trustees for Douglas."

A-185½. Douglas, located in Lancaster County, west of Salt Creek,—etc.

Salina was located at the present site of Ashland. On the margin of the plat the following description is given:

"Salina is beautifully situated on the western branch of Salt River at Rock Ford Crossing on the California Road running west from Old Fort Kearney. It is about 34 miles southwest of Omaha City, the present capitol of Nebraska, 26 miles west of the mouth of the great Platte River, and 40 miles northwest of Nebraska City; and comprises within its limits the north fractional one half of Section number 2, Township 12 north, Range 9 east of the 6th principal meridian."—Filed for record March 9, 1857.—The Original Proprietors: J. L. Gibbs, J. Safford, R. Moore, William B. Hail, S. F. Jackson and L. T. Nuckles, Agent."

Editor's Note: Chester was about two miles south of the State Penitentiary on the west side of Highway No. 77, about one-half mile south of the present Memorial Cemetery commanding a beautiful view of Salt Creek Valley.

SOLITARY GHOSTS

The voluminous manuscript files of the State Historical Society disclose various references to other "ghost towns" that are worthy of inclusion in this series.

A clipping from the *Nebraska State Journal* tells of "a rare item of historical value" in the records of Richardson County, namely, a seventy-year-old copy of the "*Southern Nebraskan*," published by Edward Sachse at Arago. This was "a thriving community of the old steamboat days, located twelve miles northeast of Falls City on the Missouri. This was an important town before Falls City existed, but long since gave way to the primeval woods which it replaced for a short time. . . .

"This paper (No. 22 of the second volume) was presented to the Richardson County Historical Society by Mrs. Lillis Abbey, a pioneer resident of Falls City. Published December 17, 1867, it closes the entrance of Nebraska into the Union as a state. From its advertisements one learns that Arago possessed two hotels, a brewery, a distillery, dry-goods stores, butcher and blacksmith shops,

mills, and other business institutions of a flourishing community; also, that W. Solomon of old Arago was a manufacturer of spinning wheels. . . .

"It is interesting to note here a list of the county post offices of that date, including those at St. Stephens, Elmore, Middleburg, Monond, Monterey and Long Branch, all since out of existence. . . Barada, Preston, Shubert, Verdon, Stella and Dawson had not yet attained to the dignity of post offices at that time— some of these communities had not even been laid out."

To Mrs. Sarah Crook Wilhite of Falls City we are indebted for information about the little town of Archer, taking its name from its founder, which was laid out from public land in the summer of 1855. In an article on "Earliest Settlers in Richardson County," Mrs. Wilhite wrote:

"Archer was situated on the east side of Muddy Creek about three miles northeast of Falls City, near the claim of Judge John C. Miller, who had moved thereon the same summer. The town consisted of one hotel, owned by Judge Miller; two general stores, kept by Abel D. Kirk and John P. Welty; one blacksmith shop, four or five dwelling houses, and the offices of two lawyers—William Loan and Abel D. Kirk."

We find that the townsite was abandoned in 1857 because of a re-survey by the government, which, changing the western boundary of the "Half-Breed Tract," left Archer about three-quarters of a mile within the Indian Reservation. The original line was reestablished by act of Congress June 12, 1858, but by then the little ghost-town was beyond human help.

"The Biography of a Nebraska Pioneer," submitted by Bertha E. Johnson of Lincoln in the 1934 contest of the Nebraska Writer's Guild, tells us that Homerville was once "the wide-awake little inland county seat of Gosper County, but nothing of this place remains except its site and the memories of it in the minds of those people who saw it during some period of its growth or its decay."

Mrs. Lulu Waite of Laurel, telling the story of that town as "A Pioneer Nebraska Community," pays tribute to one of its distinguished first settlers.

"Cedar County and Laurel are each greatly indebted to Roger O'Gara, who was instrumental in establishing our school system and in starting the embryo village a mile west of the present Laurel townsite, which was called Claramont in honor of a railroad official. Roger O'Gara, when a little boy in far-away Ireland, trudged bare-foot to school with his penny for admission. If he had no penny he could not go. At eight his parents emigrated to America . . . and later drifted west. He was lured to Nebraska to cast his lot with Cedar County pioneers, purchased land, and became one of the early superintendents of schools. Although self-educated, his brilliant mind

and perseverance made him a scholar. . . . In 1890 he donated a tract of his home farm to establish the town of Claramont. Perhaps two dozen buildings were erected there, with a station, elevator, store, lumber yard and dwellings.

"A year or two later, when the rumblings of a new railroad began to be heard, sentiment favored the crossroads junction for a town, and Claramont, beautifully situated upon an eminence, was doomed. . . . Soon a cross-country caravan of mule-drawn wagons, loaded with a medley of merchandise, lumber, hardware and drugs, wended its way over rutty roads in pursuit of wooden-wheeled trucks trundling gaunt frame structures, which came to a squeaky stop near the crossroads location, then barely visible for tall slough grass.

"This sounded the knell of Mr. O'Gara's hopes for community building; but, as a true Irish gentleman, he assisted in the building of the new community of Laurel . . . The embryo Claramont had been removed bodily to the valley, the railroad later moving its station to the new location."

Interesting recollections of the beginning of Beatrice include reference to another vanished town. In "Reflections of Early Days in Saline County," W. E. Cox of Arnold gives this picture:

"Beatrice at that time was a mighty small place. A mill and a store comprised the business of the burg. Sometime in September the Indian trouble had been temporarily suppressed and the families returned to their homes.

"The year 1865 was an eventful period in our community. Tom Klein constructed a dam across Turkey Creek a mile below its confluence with Swan Creek and built a new mill; Tom Freeman started a general store; Ed Cartright built a sort of a shed and did all kinds of blacksmithing; William Remington secured a government contract carrying mail, and a post office was established in his home. Thus Swan City was hatched.

"I think Mr. Remington's mail route was from Brownville to Little Sandy. Later he had a branch route from Swan City to Milford. The mail on that route was carried on horseback.

"Swan City reached its zenith after Saline County was organized and it was made the county seat. However, it held this honor but a couple years, when Pleasant Hill stepped in and won the prize—later purloined by Wilber." The village survived this loss and held its own until the fall of 1871, when the Burlington & Missouri, completing its branch from Crete to Beatrice, platted a townsite on the line two and one-half miles east, "and Swan City moved, building, bed and baggage, to the new town of DeWitt. Today Swan City is numbered with the ghost towns of the state, but in its day was considered a pretty decent burg. It never had a 'killing' nor a jail."