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Article Summary: The author traces the development of a prairie town. Its citizens, who arrived in the 1880s, "were largely of the more substantial type."

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# Cambridge

WILLIAM H. HOTZE

At the point where the Medicine breaks through the northern line of curving hills to join the Republican lies Cambridge, a dot on the map near the western border of Furnas county, just another dot in the line of towns reaching west along the river. Originally a large grove fringed the base of the hills. Here varied calls of native birds broke the primitive solitude. In spring and autumn the air was filled with squawking, quacking, migrating fowl. The beaver built his dam; herds of buffalo, deer, elk and antelope roamed the grassy plain. Valley and hillside smiled through fields of variegated flowers; a visual symphony presented in nature's matchless grouping of blossoms and verdure. This was the prairie "primeval."

On the hills above were numerous arrowheads, fragments of flints, bones and potsherds. Supported on poles or in tree tops along the adjoining stream were remnants of Indian burials, revealing the former site of the red man's camp. For the red man claimed the locality for his abode before the white man came.

Here the first settler, Hiram Doing, homesteaded in 1871, and built his house near the creek. He found the eccentric veteran buffalo hunter, John S. King, living three miles west. The Government later established a postoffice, naming it Medicine Creek. George Carruthers was the first postmaster. Twenty miles up the Medicine in the cattle range was Stockville, a trading point laid out by W. L. McClary the same year. East fifteen miles the town of Arapahoe was staked out in 1871. There also was Clute's log cabin outfitting store. West fifteen miles was Indianola, settled in 1873, where J. R. Myers, a typical frontier trader, later opened a store. South on the Beaver was Wilsonville started in 1873 also. Such was the early day setting .

In 1878, Mr. Doing sold his land to John W. Pickle. The latter built a house among the trees and surveyed a townsite,

naming it Northwood, then set up a saw mill and grist mill on the west bank. Here cottonwood logs were cut into rough lumber, and the settlers' grain was ground into flour or meal. For years on a tree by the roadside hung an iron skillet and a water pail with firewood nearby, welcoming the traveler to halt and rest. The next to arrive was D. W. Rockwell who built a large sod house into which he put a stock of goods. He also used part of the interior for a hotel. This was the only business place till after the railroad was completed.

When the Burlington reached through in 1880, a new name was selected as there was another Northwood in Nebraska. Since there was an "Oxford" and a "Harvard" on the line east, the name "Cambridge" was chosen to complete the triangle of American-English university names. The coming of the railroad marked a new epoch. Previously all supplies were hauled by wagon from Plum Creek station, now Lexington, sixty-five miles north on the Union Pacific. Prices were high during that post Civil War "greenback" inflation period; added overland freight charges made costs of necessities almost prohibitive. "Gunpowder" tea sold for a dollar and a half a pound, flour was five dollars a hundred, and other things in proportion. Out there money was about "as scarce as hens' teeth," but you could trade in your skunk pelts at twenty-five cents apiece, or corn at thirty-five cents a bushel, if you had any. The case of Thomas Doran illustrates the methods used by some early-day traders. After taking his one gallon jug to J. R. Myers' store for molasses, Mr. Doran related: "He charged me for a gallon and a half of the stuff and I couldn't reach it with my finger. I didn't care about the molasses, but it was such a terrible strain on the jug."

During the years when settlers were few, there was little need for trading points nearer than Arapahoe or Indianola. It took time to travel in slow ox team days, but time was the settler's only surplus. With no telephone, telegraph, radio or newspaper to break the monotony, and few scheduled events, long trips helped to fill the empty day. There was need for outside communication and Mr. Doing's petition to Washington in 1874 brought a postoffice. That was the only place in the picture where the settler ever turned to the Government for help. The homesteaders were independent and "men were men."

Mr. Pickle's mill came at an opportune time. Drought and grasshopper invasions had marked the previous Seventies. The year 1878 brought the first good crops. Now the settler could take his corn to be ground instead of grinding it at home in his coffee mill. An influx of settlers and increased cultivation followed. Larger quantities of merchandise were shipped in, livestock and other products were loaded for eastern markets. A number of good business men chose Cambridge as a desirable location. The first frame store was erected by J. A. Hanning in May, 1880.-In July, C. C. Messer opened a hotel, and J. E. Fardley a general store. Arriving in April, Samuel P. Delatour and Walter E. Babcock formed a partnership. They opened a large hardware, implement, and furniture store in July, then organized the Republican Valley Bank. To Mr. Babcock, especially, goes the credit of giving healthy impetus to business enterprise and stamping the high standards of the community's character. The first newspaper, *The Clarion*, began publication in 1881.

Mr. Pickle now rebuilt his mill, replacing the mill stones with modern patent rollers, and sold it in 1882. J. W. Newell, an experienced miller, became owner in 1886. "Gold Coin" and "Silver Coin" designated the two grades of flour he produced. Harvey Butler, the father of Senator Hugh Butler, was connected with the mill for a number of years; there young Hugh gained his first experience in handling grain. Under different management that mill has continued to grind through good years and bad years, on steam power and water power, to the present time. In 1889, Arthur V. Perry, the father of Judge Ernest B. Perry, moved to Cambridge from Deer Creek and engaged in the lumber business. He operated eighteen yards located from Holdrege to Bartley and on the Beaver.

In 1883 there were scarcely three hundred people living in Cambridge. Neighboring towns with earlier starts boasted larger numbers, yet history will record that the re-naming of that little village on the bank of the Medicine in 1880 put a town of a different type upon the map of Nebraska. Entering later upon the scene, it was her fortune to escape the more undesirable characters who always accompany the first waves of immigration. Her citizens were largely of the more substantial type who came later from farther east; they were more homogeneous, co-

operative and progressive. Just west, in a town of mixed stratas, there was continual conflict, although the better element usually prevailed; there progress was difficult. Farther up the valley where the rough elements had taken early possession, saloons and gambling joints flourished, crime and lawlessness ruled. With an atmosphere unhealthy for questionable characters, no driftwood from the stream of western immigration lodged at Cambridge. Nor did the "Populist" storm that later swept the state carry her off her feet.

There were the boom days of the middle Eighties, in some cases more destructive than the grasshopper years of the early Seventies. Many towns fell victim to the mania. McCook, a railroad division, dreamed of securing the Burlington machine shops and launched a building splurge, but the shops went to Havelock and Denver and the bubble burst. Then Indianola, a county seat, fell victim to eastern promotion sharks who sold her citizens "The Great Western Watch Factory." No factory was built. A mushroom town sprang up over night in a nearby cow pasture. Here a "University" was launched and widely announced; teachers were induced to join the faculty. It existed till the town lots were sold and the promoter decamped.

Whatever Cambridge has undertaken, she has carried through; vision and well balanced judgment have held her on a steady course. The present Congregational Church grew from a Sunday School planted one summer vacation by a seminary student, Newell Dwight Hillis. He later became a noted writer and pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

Like the tough-fibred elms that arch her shady streets, despite adversity, she has maintained a healthy growth. Her attractive homes, excellent schools, well attended churches, substantial business blocks, modern hospital, and first-class hotel speak for themselves. But these form only part of the picture. The community early developed an attractive park with a sizeable lake above the mill dam. Here young people came to enjoy skating, boating, swimming and other wholesome recreations. The town also developed a creditable baseball team; has allowed no saloons and tolerated no rowdies. For several decades a chatauqua course was maintained; crowds of five thousand or more were not unusual, many coming from Kansas and Colorado.

Camp meetings also attracted large attendances. Through these avenues Cambridge extended an educational and cultural influence over a wide section.

Cambridge has welcomed everyone with genuine hospitality, with no attempt to exploit her guests. This has always been the Cambridge way. Typical of her concern for visitors were the devoted efforts of D. L. Neiswanger. Heeding the injunction of the evangelist, Sam Jones, "Keep your streets clean, some day a gentleman may come to town," he made it his voluntary task for over a quarter of a century to see that Cambridge streets were neat and free of litter. He delighted in rendering any helpful service to visitor or stranger, setting the example that others learned to follow. Always admired and respected, Cambridge has lived up to the dignity of her name.

Time will not permit the naming of many other worthy citizens who have contributed to her achievement. A pervading spirit has ever filled the locality marked by the grove where Cambridge grew. It was there when the feathered people first came to nest and sing; was there when the red man built his lodge; the weary traveler felt it when he saw the welcome camp site; whoever comes feels that spirit of hospitality and good will. Its force moves on as the strong current of the Medicine flows on to power the mill and water the thirsty soil.

Such is the picture viewed in the perspective of succeeding events; Cambridge, the gleaming gem in the beautiful setting of the Republican Valley; an ever-shining star in the line of towns reaching from the Missouri to the Rockies. Located near the center of the Republican valley flood control project, a new opportunity awaits the little city at the mouth of the Medicine.