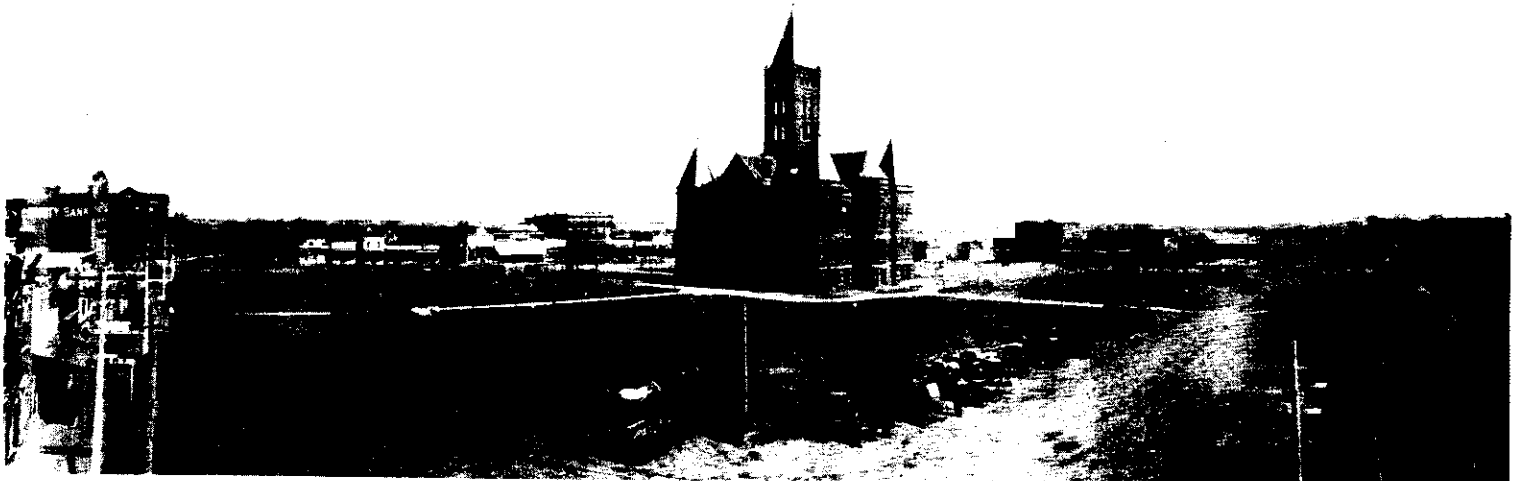


Alexander Hamilton, an early American statesman, was honored when this county's boundaries were defined and approved on February 16, 1867, just two weeks before Nebraska became a state. Aurora was

named county seat in a hotly contested fight with Orville City in 1876. Other towns include Giltner, Hampton, Hordville, Marquette, Phillips, and Stockham.

# AURORA



After Hamilton County's first courthouse burned, this magnificent structure was built in 1895. Today, comfortably flanked by tall trees, it continues to serve its citizens from the center of "the Square." [Cliff's Photo]

## AURORA

## HAMILTON COUNTY

An agreement in 1871 by seven Iowa men, led by David Stone, resulted in the acquisition of a town site. Named for Aurora, IL., it was located near the twin cottonwood trees towering over Lincoln Creek, a landmark on the vast prairie.

Stone "dug" the first home. By fall he had built a general store-residence, which was followed by Wilcox's implement store, and Nat Thorpe's construction office. By 1872 the post office was moved from Spafford's Grove. Come spring, there was a schoolhouse and 18 buildings, including the Aurora House, a hotel known as the "sample rooms." The town was "a GO!"

The county seat was moved from Orville City to Aurora in 1876 and the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad arrived in 1879. The population, already over 400, increased when the other contenders for the county seat, Orville and Hamilton, succumbed and merged with Aurora.

The first courthouse, completed in 1877, was used for church, social, and political gatherings. A much grander building was completed in 1895. The spired structure of red limestone still stands on courthouse square.

The year 1879 was a great one and the most progressive in the town's history. Telegraph service arrived in October, regular train service in November, and mail delivery in December. E.W. Hastings built a two-story plant for his



Above: Gen. Delevan Bates, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient and our most distinguished pioneer and civic leader, donated the statue on Courthouse Park.

Left: "Among The Skyscrapers..." a photo of the west side of the Square in early 1900s.

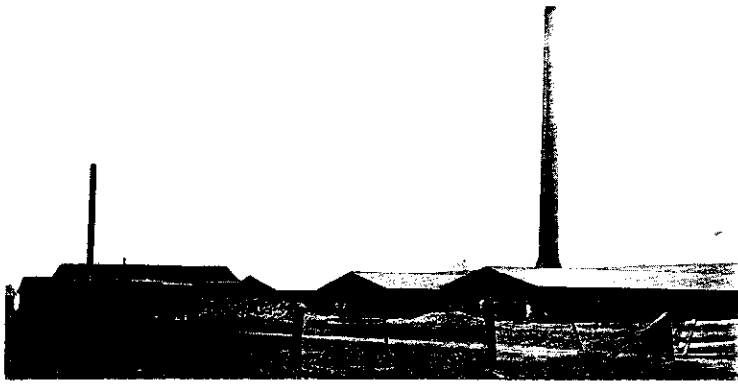
Right: The Aurora Hotel, as it looked in 1957. [HCHS]



Right: One of Aurora's banks, with opera house located on the top floor, 1890.



Below: Built for \$40,000 in 1904, the brickyard closed in 1921 due to an economic downturn. [Plainsman Museum]



newspaper, "The Aurora Republican." Later purchased by the Hamilton County Register, a merger in 1942 gave our news coverage the title, "Aurora News-Register." Banks erected substantial buildings in 1879, 1881, 1813, and 1904. Banking was "a popular business," with as many as four operating at one time. Aurora presently has two.

H.T. Jensen established a machine shop in 1884 with a patent to manufacture "feed steamers," and Curry & Grover built a roller mill using "first class modern machinery" for the production of flour. In 1886 F.W. Wilson built a foundry, and a brickyard started in 1904. Production rose to five million bricks per year, but a financial bust in 1921 left great piles on hand and operation ceased.

Aurora was well-supplied with rail facilities. In addition to the Lincoln-Billings mainline, the town served as a terminal for branch lines southwest to Hastings and northwest to Burwell, Sargent, and Ericson. An engine house to service steam locomotives was located here, and a substantial brick depot was built in 1912.

An agricultural association was organized in 1871 with fairs held in Orville City until 1876 when it was moved to the Square in Aurora. In 1879 a 40-acre tract of land southwest of town was purchased so "a proper race track could be built." Permanent stalls, cattle sheds, and an amphitheatre with seating for 500 were built in 1889.

Education for Hamilton County's children was organized in 1872. By 1885 there were 95 districts in the county, and before the turn of the century, Aurora had a 12-grade institution. The town boasts many famous individuals, among them Dr. Harold Edgerton, inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 1986.

The first church was organized in 1872. Spiritual growth and development have played an important role in the community. Today local churches represent nearly every major denomination.



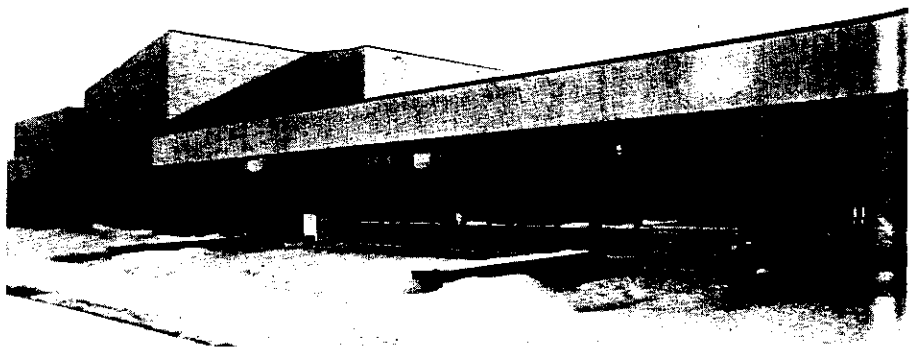
Above: B&MR Depot built during the early 1900s.

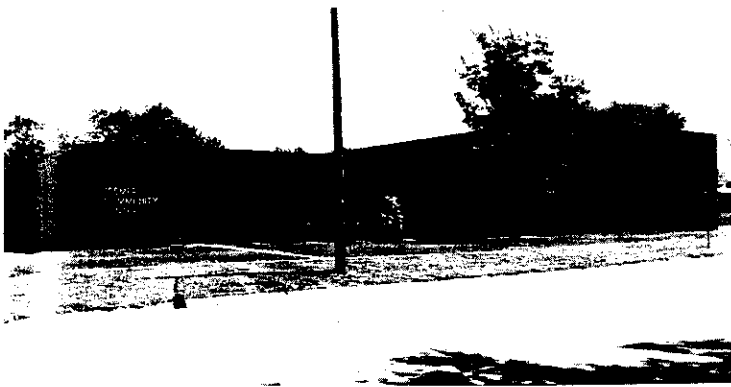
Right: Residence of T.E. Williams, served as Hamilton County Museum, is again a residence.



Left: Harold Edgerton's inventions include multiframe photography, as in this "Tennis Serve."

Right: Aurora Junior High, built 1962 with sports arena and fine arts theatre, 1978, is the site of many community activities. [Aurora News Register]





Left: Built in 1979, the Bremer Center is self-supporting, providing space for meetings, recreation, and the Chamber's offices. [Aurora News Register]

Below: BonnaVilla Homes, makes mobile homes and draperies for many commercial entities.



Aurora, population 1,175 by 1885, had wide streets, miles of good sidewalks, and trees on the courthouse square. Present population 3,717, Aurora is billed as "a city of promise, progress, and productivity." Its central business district has a full range of products and services.

Still very much at the crossroads, it is served by highways 14 and 34, and is less than three miles north of I-80. The Burlington Northern Railroad and a lighted municipal airport keep the city "on the map." With one of the larger consolidated school systems, it has a well balanced curriculum and an exceptional sports facilities for K-12 students. The Nebraska Youth Leadership Development Center just east of town serves young people from the entire state.

Aurora has a fully accredited hospital, two industrial parks for various manufacturers, a modern fire station and volunteer fire department, a good library, a fine arts theatre, three parks, a golf course, a community center, and care facilities for elderly and handicapped citizens. The Plainsman Museum holds historic and educational artifacts from the area and exhibits that tell of life at this location for the last 120 years.

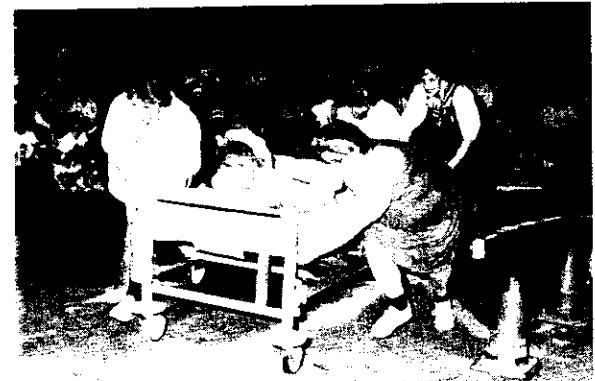
B: Gwen Allen, 210 16th, Aurora, NE 68818.

**ADDITIONAL MATERIAL:** History of the State of Nebraska, 1882; Biographical & Historical Memoirs of Nebraska, Adams, Clay, Hall, & Hamilton Counties, 1890; Hamilton & Clay Counties, 1921; "The Light of South Central Nebraska", by Aurora Chamber of Commerce; Centennial History of Hamilton County 1867-1967, by Bremer and Kirk; and Aurora & Hamilton County, Nebraska, 1979, NCH Bradford, chairman.



Left: Pet Parade & Contest on the Square, 1987, with Jams Company sponsoring prizes. [ANR]

Right: "Bed Races" on courthouse parking lot, part of the Chamber's Moonlight Madness promotion, delights a huge crowd. [ANR]

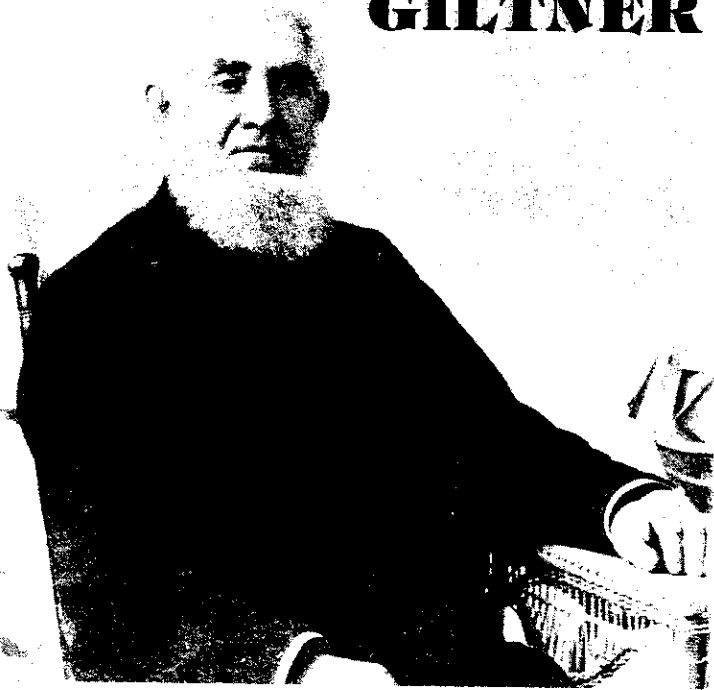


Below: Mather Building houses dining facilities for the Nebraska Youth Leadership Development Center, built 1971. [HCHS]



Left: Hamilton County's outstanding Plainsman Museum, dedicated July 4, 1976, built from money raised by many private donors and volunteer help. A second building added in 1986 preserves a complete farmstead. [ANR]

# GILTNER



Left: Rev. Henry Giltner, who served as chaplain at the second territorial legislature in 1855, was a circuit rider for 12 years before moving to Hamilton County. Pastor at Bromfield, it was "one of his favorite places for Gospel work." Highly respected, the community chose "Giltner" for the name of their town.

Commercial House was run by John Smith. There was a newspaper called "The Bromfield Bulletin" which Samuel Figge owned. George Pierce and H.S. Frymire were implement dealers. Frank Malone was a barber, Brock and Simmons were insurance agents, Ehlebracht had a harness shop, and Farrand and Walters were the town's blacksmiths. The livery stables were operated by Sam Gibbons, Charles Hite, and J.W. Petrea. The drugstore was run by Mrs. Myers and George Moore, the general stores were run by Trobee, and another by Leinbergers. Mrs. Trobee and Mrs. Ehlebracht were milliners, and Sue Harrod had a dressmaker's shop. The billiard hall was run by Orendorff, and the saloon by John Goos. Charles Harrod and Charles Jewett had butcher shops, and hardware stores were run by Mather and the Wheeler Brothers. Dr. Brown and Dr. Case had offices, and Bell Williams, L.C. Genoways, and Albert Ehlebracht were carpenters. In addition there was a bank, a lumberyard, two elevators, a school and a church. The population was just under 200.

The name of the town still did not suit the postal service, because of the town of Bloomfield in Knox County. There was constant havoc with the mail, but since their post office had not opened until 1890, there was considerable debate as to which one should yield and chose another name.

In order to move the community ahead, Rev. H.M. Giltner, the minister who founded the Presbyterian Church in 1893, was honored by having the town re-named for him. The name "Giltner" became official on September 14, 1895.

The public school, started in 1885, also had to change its name. A new brick school building was erected in 1917. A major addition was made in 1956 and a gymnasium and classrooms were added in 1981 when the 1917 building was removed. The largest graduating class was 34 members in 1941. In recent years it has decreased to an average of six to eight students. However, classes are still offered for K-12 students.

Giltner's population reached its peak, 550, in 1910. The current population is 360, down slightly from recent years. A population decline was experienced in the 1930-40s, as people moved to larger cities in search of work. The number of businesses also declined as people sought greater

## GILTNER HAMILTON COUNTY

The town of Giltner, while always being at this location, had a difficult time in finding a suitable name.

In 1886 the Lincoln Land Company, whose business was developing towns along the railroad lines, bought land in Union Township. On May 25, 1886, a town was platted and named "Huntington" by an employee on the railroad for his home town in Pennsylvania. There were great festivities when the first train arrived in September. Promoters claimed that Huntington was "the new pearl on the line and sure to become the best of them all."

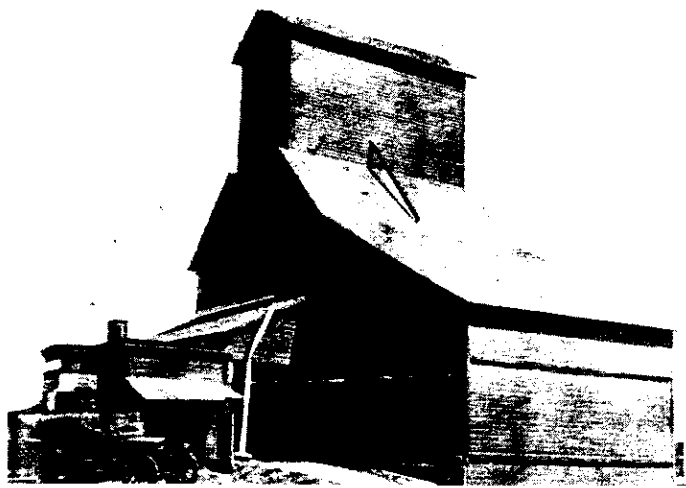
In February 1887, however, the name of the town was changed to "Bromfield" at the request of the post office, because mail was getting mixed up with that going to Hartington in Cedar County. The origin of this name is not known.

By 1890 Bromfield had a large array of stores and services. Bromfield House was owned by William Chisholm, the



Above: Claude Chapman's Hardware Store, 1903-22. [Sherard]

Left: The old Bromfield Bank building, now the Giltner Post Office.



Left: Farmers' Elevator Company at Giltner, n.d.

Right: Catholic Church built 1901.

Below: Aerial of Giltner, calendar from Wagner's hardware & grocery, late 1980s.



selection of goods and lower prices in Hastings and Grand Island.

In the 1940s Giltner had four churches: Catholic, Christian, Presbyterian, and Methodist. The shift in population also caused two of these to close. Currently Giltner has the United Methodist Church and St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

In the late 1970s the town built a new city park with picnic shelters, tennis court, lighted ball field, and restrooms. A monument was built, listing the names of all the servicemen in the area who served in the armed forces from World War I through the Vietnam conflict. Many community events are held in the park or at the school. The town hall, which was the opera house of early years and later the movie theatre, is also used.

Giltner, just three miles south of I-80, has a number of small businesses in addition to the two large grain

elevators. The current trend for families to locate in smaller towns places Giltner on the list of stable Nebraska communities, happy with its location and its name.

By Gerald E. Sherard, 429 South Moore Street, Lakewood, CO. 80226.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: "The Giltner Gazette;" The Sun Directory, 1890 & 1897; Adams, Clay, Hall, & Hamilton Counties Memoirs, 1890; Atlas & Plat Book, 1888, 1916, 1903, 1923. Hamilton Co: The Garden Spot of the State, C.L. Hall, 1887; History of Hamilton :& Clay Counties, Stough, 1921; History of Hamilton County, HSHS, 1936; Centennial History of Hamilton Co., B.G. Bremer, 1967; Hamilton County Nebraska Indexes, G.E.Sherard, 1985; Chief - A Collection of Early Giltner Stories, 1984, L.C.Haymart; Historical Sketches of Giltner, Nebraska, 1985, Gerald Sherard; and the Centennial Newspaper, September 19-21, 1986, sent by Donna Tobler.



# HAMPTON



Joshua Cox wanted to call his town "Plano," but eventually settled for "Hampton." Pictured is Hampton's Main Street ca. 1895. [Plainsman Museum]

## HAMPTON HAMILTON COUNTY

"We're Small, But We Have It All" is the slogan you see as you enter the Hampton city limits on Highway 34. Our town owes its beginning to the vision of one man, and the coming of the railroad.

The railroad — the Burlington & Missouri River — built a line west from Lincoln to Hampton, arriving in 1879. The man was Joshua Cox, who drove over the entire eastern part of the county in a lumber wagon to obtain signatures on a petition to get a town located where Hampton is. Cox had purchased 400 acres of land in 1879. It was here that he platted a town. Later he purchased 600 acres next the original tract, and his brother James purchased 1,000 acres adjoining Joshua's land.

The Cox brothers called the new town "Plano," after the city in Illinois where they had lived. The railroad objected, since there was another station by that name, and proposed the name "Murray." The inhabitants objected for reasons unknown. Finally the name "Hampton" was agreed upon by all concerned.

Building began immediately. Ernest Leyrer built a general merchandise store with living quarters above. A home was built by C.R. Young, who also built a grocery store. Incorporation was completed in 1879, indicating that there were 200 or more residents within the first year of existence. Because of the town's location on the B&MR's mainline, elevators equipped to handle large amounts of grain have always been a major business.

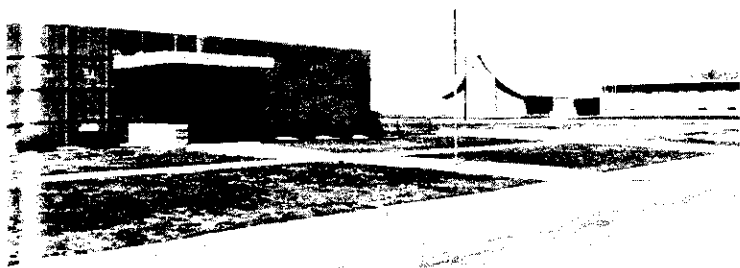
By 1882 there were 25 business establishments, and the 1887 Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory listed 49 business places. In 1886 there were 600 inhabitants. German, Danish, and Swedish settlements were located north of Hampton, and a Russian community south and east of town, all of which made Hampton their trading headquarters.

The first schoolhouse was built in 1881, with Joel Sauls listed as its teacher. A larger elementary school was built in 1885, and in 1913 a new 12-grade school was built. This structure served Hampton until 1958, when a new elementary school was built. A high school was erected in 1972.



Left: Charles Feelhaver, Henry Dahms, Henry Rhode, John Budler & Bill Vogt out advertising Hampton's "Field Day" in 1915. [HCHS]

Left: Both Hampton's Lutheran churches and the parochial school. [Harris]  
 Below: The elementary and high school at Hampton, 1990. [Harris]



In early times, Hampton had both a Christian and a Methodist church. The Christian closed before 1910 and the Methodist in 1949. There are now two Lutheran churches:

— St. Peter's German Lutheran, organized in 1910, with services held in the vacant Christian Church until 1915 when a new church was built. A new sanctuary was built in 1967. A parochial school was built in 1958.

— The United Lutheran is the result of a merger between the Danish Lutheran congregation, three miles north of town, and the English Lutheran Church which organized in 1916. Its place of worship was purchased from the Christian Church, just after it was vacated by the other Lutheran congregation. Following the merger of the two groups in 1962, a new church was built. The Danish Church was moved to Stuhr Museum in Grand Island, where it has been restored.

The Hampton IOOF Opera House, built in 1893 on main street, provided the community with space for various groups of entertainers, school activities, dances, and civic meetings. Of special interest are the walls around the stage, said to be "a solid mass of names of persons who took part in the activities there." In 1987 this building, whose upper floor has remained just as it was when it closed in 1928, became one of 26 opera houses now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. An auditorium was built in 1939 and continues to be the center of community activities.

The Stephen C. Houghton Memorial Masonic Temple, said to be the first of its kind in the country, was dedicated November 1929. An appreciation day was held in 1954 to honor Dr. Otto Michael Troester, born near Hampton in 1889, returned to the community where he practiced medicine until 1977, a total of 56 years.

Today Hampton is a town of just over 400. While the number and kinds of businesses has changed considerably, it continues to serve the needs of its citizens and of those living in the surrounding trade area. A dozen or more businesses make this their headquarters.

A grand centennial celebration was held in 1979. Our town of Hampton continues to be a credit to the man who envisioned it, and the railroad that brought it into being.

By Wilhma Malek, 1308 15th Street, Aurora, NE 68818

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: History of Hamilton & Clay Counties Nebraska, Volume I, 1921; and Centennial History of Hamilton County, 1967.

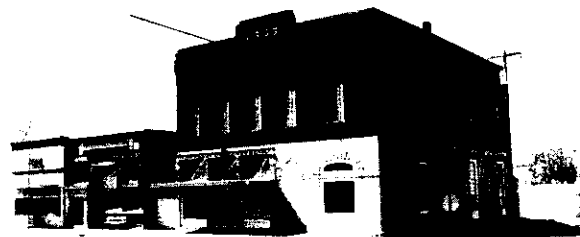


Dedication of the new post office, 1961. Right: People gathered for the ceremony. Below: Honor guard raising the flag. [Pohl]

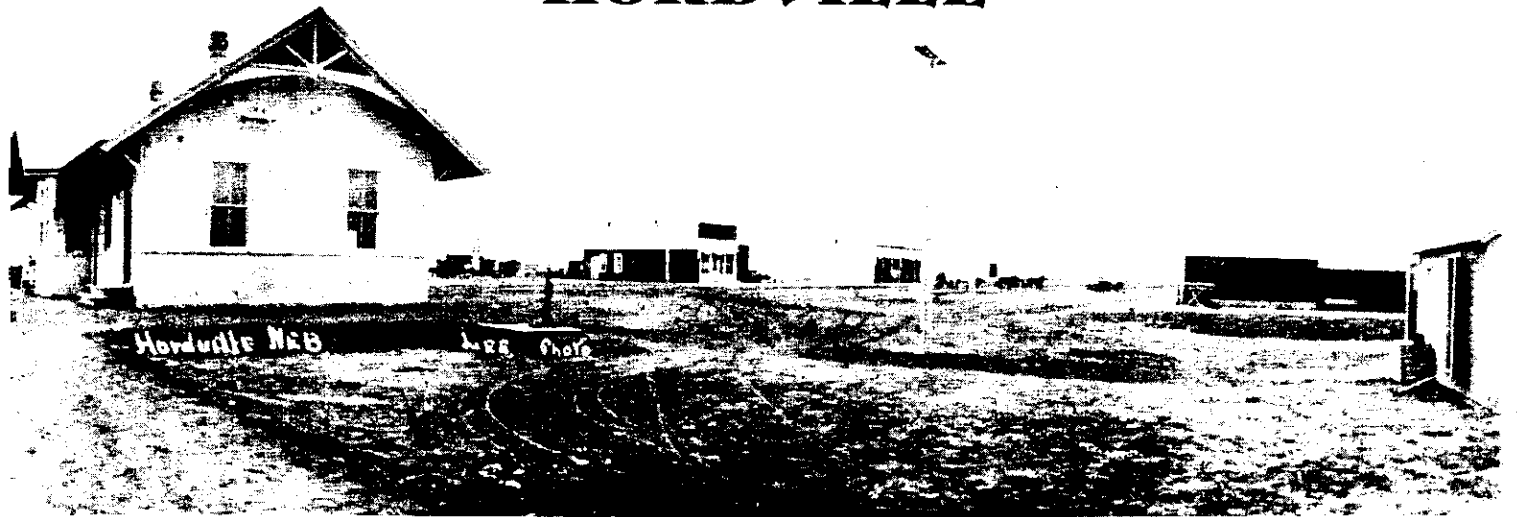


Below: Hampton's opera house, pictured in 1990. [Harris]

Below: Booster Day Parade, 1987, "Wheel of Fortune" with Barb Richert and Gerri Rehrs standing for Vanna and Pat. Driver is Greg Rehrs. [HCHS]



# HORDVILLE



Above: Depot and Main Street in 1907, when Hordville was one year old. [Clayton]

## HORDVILLE HAMILTON COUNTY

A new town in Hamilton County!! What great news! Enthusiasm was high at the auction on September 12, 1906. The Union Pacific Railroad had authorized the City Improvement Company of Stromsburg to plat a town on the land acquired for extending a branch line from that town to Central City. Land had been purchased from the Swedish church and several farmers for \$100 an acre. Here was the chance to be a part of the new town, "Hordville," named for T.B.Hord, a prominent cattle feeder and grain dealer.

At that time there were only two buildings on the town site, the Fridhem Lutheran Church, erected in 1882, and a parsonage. The village was planned with a wide boulevard extending down the main street and ending in a park. Lots sold quickly. The next day work began on a store on the west side of Main Street, originally selling general merchandise. Later it became a grocery store which is still in operation.

Soon after the tracks were laid by Greek and Chinese workers, and with cornfields all around, new buildings sprang up all down the street. Two buildings were moved in from Stark, a trading post east of Hordville, which was abandoned when the railroad came. The First State Bank, capitalized with \$10,000 and chartered on September 10, 1906, opened in temporary quarters even before its building was completed. Robbed twice, it remains strong and is now located in a new building erected in 1982.

During the next few years Hordville boomed. It boasted of having five doctors, four grocery stores, a drugstore, a jewelry store, a hardware store, a photography studio, a garage, a blacksmith shop, a hatchery, and a large lumberyard (which was sometimes used for basketball games). There was a barbershop, a shoe repair shop, and a cafe, in addition to a hotel and livery stable used by traveling salesmen, boarders, and visitors to the community. Most of these are gone now. The cafe still provides food and drink for the community, a beauty shop is in the old bank building, and the former town hall is now a woodworking shop.

### Grand Public Auction

of Lots in the New Towns of

## POLK & HORDVILLE

At Polk, Tuesday Sept. 11, '06 Hordville, Wednesday Sept. 12, '06

**PLAT OF POLK**

**POLK**

**HORDVILLE**

**PLAT OF HORDVILLE**

**POLK**

**HORDVILLE**

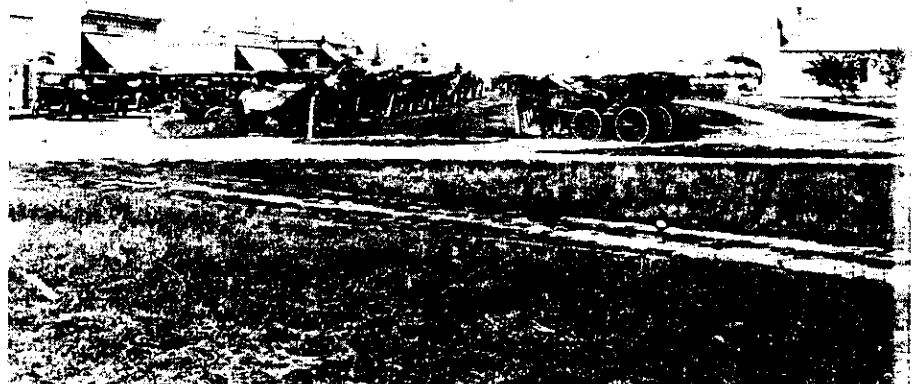
**PLAT OF HORDVILLE**

TERMS: Cash on delivery. 10% down on lots. Balance on delivery. Lots can be purchased by installment. Interest 10% per annum. All sales subject to the terms and conditions of the auctioneer's contract.

For Further Information Apply to

## City Improvement Co.

Stromsburg, Nebraska



Above: Some big doings on Hordville's Main Street about 1910.

Left: Sale bill from the Polk & Hordville Auction, 1906. [Anderson]