

SAUNDERS COUNTY HISTORY until Nebraska Statehood

NATIVE AMERICANS

- Primitive peoples occupied the area thousands of years ago, but little trace of their culture has survived
- Early native groups may have used the area for hunting

Mainly Pawnee and Otoe tribes lived in the area

Most of the known villages were located along the Platte River

Otoe

- Were the first Native Americans to permanently settle (or at least semi-permanently)
- Arrived in the area around 1700
- Stayed until the early 1800s and then moved out
- Famous chief was Itan or Yutan
 - Chief Itan, for whom Yutan is named, lived in that area in the 1830s. He kept the peace by marrying the daughters of various chiefs and consolidating the tribes. Chief Itan and his tribes met Lewis and Clark at the famous Council Bluffs in Fort Calhoun.

Pawnee

- Came into the area in the 1830s
- Stayed until the 1850s, when whites first started moving into the area
- Moved west to Nance Co.
- 1870s moved to what is now Oklahoma
- Famous chief was Pita or Peter Leshara/Lesharu
 - Pita/Peter Lesharo for whom Leshara is named led a mixed tribe of people until leaving the area in 1855

Native American Burial Sites

- Courthouse grounds
- Indian Mound Cemetery
- Southeast of Yutan (this site is listed on the National Register of Historic Sites)⁶

- South of the Carr/Clear Creek Cemetery
- Burial mounds in the Ashland area
- Woodcliff (this site is listed on the National Register of Historic Sites)

Pahuk Hill

- Located near Cedar Bluffs
- Considered one of 5 sacred sites for the Pawnee
- Believed that animal spirits inhabited the bluffs
- Pawnee came from hundreds of miles away for inspiration and ceremonies
 - Considered a pilgrimage to come
 - Considered as important as Mecca, the Temple Mount, and Calvary
- Is on the National Register of Historic Places
 - Several owners of the land have worked with both the Pawnee and the NSHS to create protections for the land to prevent development

AREA AND OPENING UP THE LAND

- The first European power to control the area that is now known as Saunders County was France
- 1673: maps drawn by a Canadian priest show the Platte River
- 1712: the Province of Louisiana was granted to a French merchant, Anthony Crozart, it lasted for 5 years
- The colony was then granted to the Mississippi Company
- 1739: Area that became Nebraska first explored by Europeans, the Mallet brothers
- November 1762 the area was ceded to the Spanish
- October 1800 it was ceded back to the French
- 1803-1804 ceded to the United States thru the Louisiana Purchase
 - Once owned by the United States the area was known as the District of Louisiana
 - The US didn't want all of the territory it received, it really only wanted Louisiana
- 1805 became known as the Territory of Louisiana
- 1812 this area was a part of the Territory of Missouri
- 1819: Major Stephen H. Long explored along the Platte River
 - Declared Nebraska unfit for cultivation and uninhabitable
- In 1833, a Rev. Merrill visited with the Otoe in the Yutan and Leshara areas

- 1835: Col. Henry Dodge meets with the Otoe living along the Platte, north of Salt Creek
- 1841: Preemption Act
 - Allowed individuals to claim 160 acres and receive the title after paying a minimum price per acre set by the government within an established time frame.
 - This was the most common method of purchasing property in Nebraska until 1863.
 - This act was repealed in 1891.
- 1844: Bill introduced to create a Nebraska territory fails
- 1846: 1st recorded wagon train came through the county along the Government Rd/Oxbow Trail., although there are reports that the trail was used as early as 1836. The trail was used until about 1856.
 - The trail went from Nebraska City to Ft. Kearney and was about 200 miles long ** Still marked on 1860 map.*
- 1854: Nebraska Territory (last territory created before the Civil War)
 - Created after treaties with Plains Indians
- 1855 original boundaries set of Calhoun County
 - It was named Calhoun after the Surveyor General of Kansas and Nebraska. The name Calhoun became unpopular after charges of dishonesty, ballot-box stuffing, and general corruption.
- 1856: 1st mentions of Ashland as scouts were sent to the Salt Basin
- 1858: The Cass County Commissioners formed Salt Creek Precinct, where Ashland is now located
- 1860: Issue of statehood put to the people of Nebraska Territory, proposal was defeated
- 1860: The US Federal Census lists the population at 41 people (*County*)
- 1862 name changed to Saunders County
 - It was named Saunders after the last territorial governor of Nebraska, Alvin Saunders. Mr. Saunders was governor from 1861-1867. It has been documented that one of the last items signed by President Abraham Lincoln (before going to the theater) was the reappointment of Alvin Saunders as Territorial Governor in 1865.
- 1862: Homestead Act signed
 - Went into effect Jan. 1, 1863

- Very similar to the Preemption act
- Had a 5 year residency requirement
- Soldiers (or widows and children) could deduct their time of service from the 5 year requirement. If a soldier had been discharged due to wounds or a disability, they could deduct their entire enlistment from the requirement
- 1862: The US Government approves land grants be given to the builders of the Transcontinental Railroad. Along with a 400' right-of-way, the railroads receive every other section of land within 10 miles on both sides of the route (not including rivers and excluding established cities) (10-20 miles on both sides)
- 1865 boundaries changed slightly
- 1866: Current boundaries of the county set.
 - Until this date the county was attached to Cass Co. for all legal transactions, including land sales, marriages, court case, etc. People had to travel to Plattsmouth.
 - The first general election held in the county was on October 8, 1866
- March 1867 Nebraska becomes a state
- October 1867 Saunders County is permanently organized

SETTLEMENT

1856-1867

- Early settlers came from the east, mostly the northern states. One or 2 came from Virginia
- Many were young men in their 30s
- Most were married and had started their families
- Once settled, many brought other family members with them
- Families and neighbors from the 'back home' often came in groups
- The first immigrants were from English speaking countries: England, Ireland, Scotland, and Canada
 - Many of these early immigrants settled in eastern states before moving west.
 - Later immigrants often came directly to Nebraska
- Some settled in other areas of Nebraska before coming to the county
- Many didn't stay, some left after 10, 20 or even 30 years
 - Thousands of papers for land were filed but often there wasn't any follow through
- Quite a few men came, stayed, left, and returned
- Many were not farmers or had other occupations before coming to Nebraska * although many farmers came because there wasn't enough land to farm in the east
- Many of the people coming in the late 1860s were men who served during the Civil War

FIRST SETTLERS

- Speculators had set up a camp or settlement on the west side of the Saline Ford to take advantage of the wagon trains heading west. As usage of the Oxbow Trail waned, the speculators moved on.
 - These individuals weren't interested in town building or permanence, they were in it for the money

1857

- Joseph Stambaugh, Clear Creek Precinct

- Originally located at today's 13th & Silver streets and then moved north of town
- John P. Aughe, Clear Creek Precinct
 - Married Cecelia Throckmorton, who was the 1st teacher in the county
- Reuben Warbritton, Clear Creek Precinct
- Harrison Ramsey, Ashland Precinct
- Archibald Wiggins, Ashland Precinct

1858: Ashland Precinct

- George H. Bryan
- Thomas K. Chamberlain
- Samuel Hahn

1859: Ashland

- Jacob Aughe, Ashland
 - Bricklayer and contractor, built many of the early brick buildings in Ashland

1860: Ashland

- Stephen Brown, Ashland (first foreign born settler, from Canada)
- 3 others

1861: Ashland

- Perry Tarpenning

1862: Ashland

- Abel B. Fuller
 - ~~Ran a general store and conducted a freighting business on the side and later real estate.~~ Was among the 1st board of regents for the State University and was the 1st county superintendent of schools
- Dr. William McClung
 - First doctor in the county
- 2 others

1863

- Barnhill, Newman*
 - 1st known settler in Newman Precinct, he established a ranch but not much is known about him
- William Ingram, Rock Creek*
 - 1st settler in the Precinct
- Jacob Saunders, Clear Creek
 - Civil War veteran, served in Co. G, 34th Iowa Volunteer Inf.
 - 1st probate judge of Saunders County
- 2 others

1864

- Thompson Bissell, Green*
 - 1st settler in the precinct, later became one of the 1st county commissioners

1865

- Andrew Johnson & Rodney Johnson, Oak Creek*
 - Andrew & R.K. Johnson settled on Sect. 22, just west of Valparaiso in 1865. Helped establish the town of Valparaiso
- Moses Stocking, Stocking*
 - Biography in the 1915 Past & Present book
- George Stocking, Wahoo Precinct*
- Andrew A. Wilson, Wann*
- 2 others

1866

- Enoch B. Critten, Pohocco*
- William Dech, Wahoo Precinct
 - 1st settler in Ithaca
- Iver Jensen, Oak Creek (first Danish settler)*
 - 1st Danish settlement came later and was in Pohocco Precinct
- W. Pierson, Estina*
- 5 others

1867

- Theodore Adams, Marietta*
- Nils Berggren, Center (first Swedish settler)*
 - Along with a Mr. Wall established the first Swedish settlement in the county
- Andrew Berggren, Mead*
- Peter Campbell, Chapman (first Scottish settler)*
- Joseph Datel, Morse Bluff (first Czech settler)*
- Joseph Kaspar, Prague*
- Peter Kastl, Elk *
- John Savlik, Bohemia*
- John H. Wageman, Union (first known German settler)*
- 18 others

PAPERS FILED

Individuals and groups often filed paperwork with the state in order to establish towns-this would help bring in settlers and the founders, in turn, would make money selling land to newcomers. Here are some 'towns' in the county that had filed papers.

- Brooklyn/Brooklyn Heights (East Ashland)
 - Papers filed Feb. 3, 1857
- Troy (NE National Guard Site)
 - Papers filed June 6, 1857
- Independence City (Hwy 6 & 63)
 - Papers filed July 11, 1857
- Smithland (Ashland Precinct)
 - Papers filed July 13, 1857
- Washington City (South Ashland)
 - Papers filed July 23, 1857

ON THE MAP and POST OFFICES

- 1857: Ashland
 - While the Oxbow trail was active, there many individuals that set up shacks and businesses to provide services to the overland travelers, the town of Ashland sprung up from here. The settlement also served as supply and freight 'depot'
- 1857: Parallel City (Ashland Rodeo Grounds)
 - Still on the map in 1860
- 1857: Saline
 - Still on the map in 1860 & 1866
- 1857: Excelsior, Marble Precinct
 - Still on the map in 1860 & 1865
- 1858: Neopolis, Cedar Precinct
 - Site selected to be the Nebraska State Capital City
- Post office at Tuscoria, Dec. 11, 1858-Apr. 21, 1860
 - Named changed to Colona, post office lasted from April 27, 1860-Feb. 11, 1861
 - Probably located between Colon & Cedar Bluffs
- 1860: Buffalo, Cedar Precinct
 - Still on the map in 1865
- 1860: Valparaiso, Oak Creek Precinct
 - Valparaiso was said to be laid out on government land but it is unknown by whom or when
 - Business didn't start in town until 1870
- 1865: Powhocco, Pohocco Precinct
- ~~1866: Washington City, Ashland Precinct~~
- Ashland, post office established November 13, 1866

OTHER

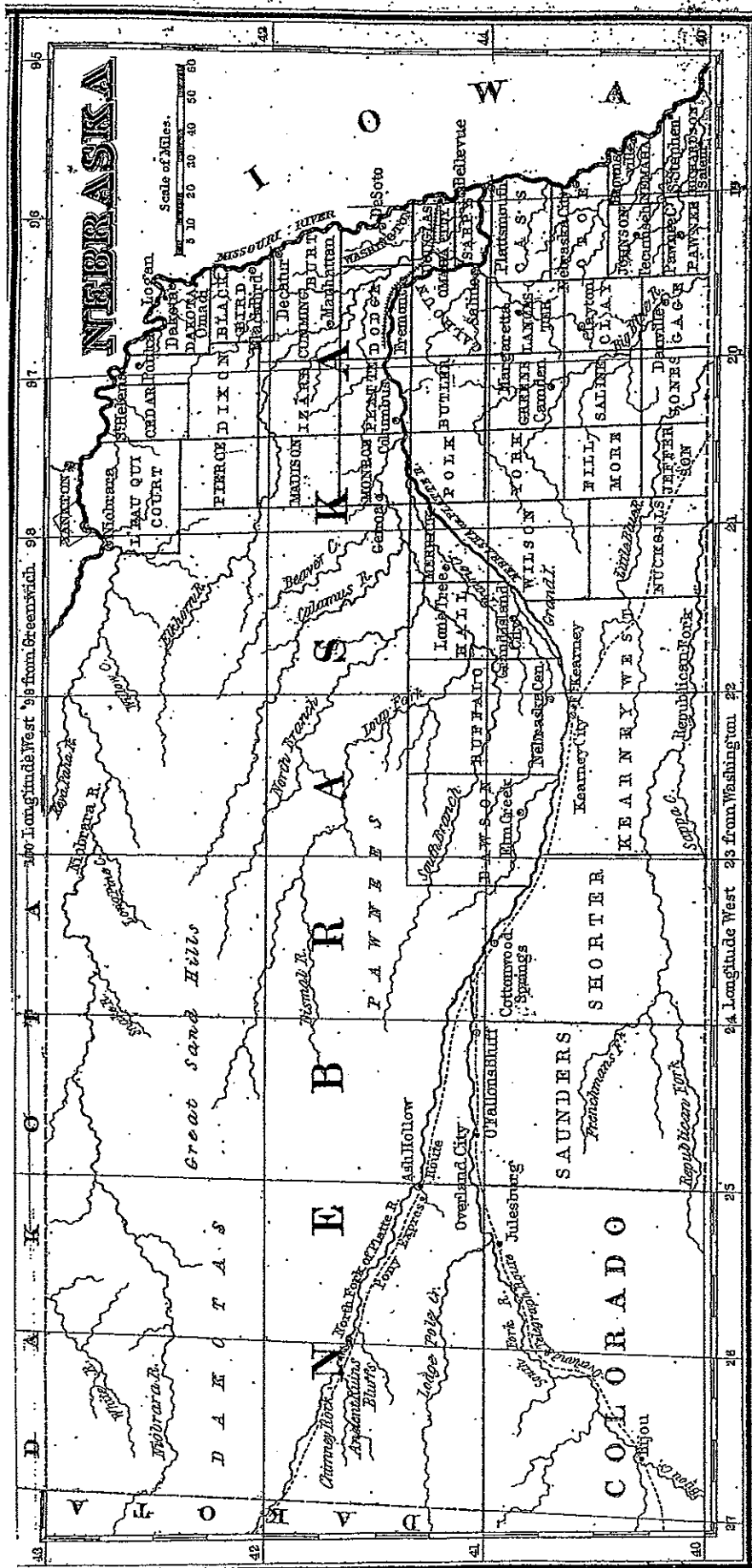
- Carr-Clear Creek Cemetery, established 1859
- Indian Mound Cemetery (Wahoo Prec.) burials date to the 1850s
- St. Vitus Cemetery (Newman Prec.) burials date to 1853
- Sunrise/Knights of Honor (Stocking Prec.) burials date to 1860
- Holy Rosary/St. Joseph's Cemetery (Douglas Prec.) established 1862

- Ashland Cemetery, established 1865
- Bethel Cemetery (Chapman Prec.) established 1866
- Maple Grove Cemetery (Cedar Prec.) established 1866
- St. Francis Cemetery (Stocking Prec.) burials date to 1866

ASHLAND

- First white child born was the son of Harrison Ramsey, born in March 1858
- 1860, a Methodist class was organized by settlers in Ashland, this would later become the Ashland United Methodist Church, the oldest church still active in the county (Methodist Church wasn't organized until 1869)
- The original Main Street is now known as Birch Street and it extended to both sides of the creek
- The first frame building built in 1863 and housed a general store
- 1864
 - Mill built by Dennis Dean. This was the 2nd mill, the first had been a brush dam built in 1857 by Archibald Wiggins
 - Sawmill, wagon shop, blacksmith and a hotel were all established in Ashland by 1864
- 1865: A Baptist missionary, Rev. Martin, visits Ashland and organizes a Baptist church, the first organized church in the county
- October 1866 the first elections were held and Thompson Bissell, Austin Smith and William Reed as the first county commissioners
 - Hobart Brush was county clerk
 - Dennis Dean was treasurer
- The first marriage in the county occurred on Nov. 7, 1866 between Mr. Samuel Bumgarden and Miss Lucinda Hooker
- 1866 the names of Flora City and Saline Ford were changed to Ashland, named after the hometown of Henry Clay, Ashland, Kentucky
 - It was not formally organized until 1870
- 1867: The first court case about horses
 - Sarah M. McClure vs. Isaac Clark & Levi Clark
- 1867: Ashland was considered a possible state capital site but it lost out to Lancaster

1905



96 97 98 99 100

43 42 41 40

27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18

24 Longitude West 23 from Washington

23 from Greenwich

NEBRASKA

Scale of Miles.

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Scale of Miles.

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