

Historical Points In Brown County

(by the Brown County Museum and Historical Society)

Brown County is rich in history in the period before the coming of white settlers as well as during the last century.

There is a great revival of interest in places of historical note in Brown County. Many people have expressed a desire to visit these places but are not certain of where to find them. It is with this thought in mind that the Brown County Museum and Historical Society has prepared this self-guided tour with thumb-nail sketches of these areas.

HISTORY OF THE AREA

Ages and ages ago this land was created through the action of glaciers. Three separate glaciers came down from the North and receded. A fourth glacier came and melted forming a large body of water, Glacial Lake Dakota. As the lake drained slowly southward it carved out the winding James River Valley and left some of the most fertile land in the world. The remnant of the glacial lake is Sand Lake, the site of a large waterfowl refuge.

Through exploration, France claimed this land in 1682. Through the Treaty of Paris in 1763 France ceded this area to Spain who in turn ceded it back to France in 1800 as part of the Louisiana Territory. In 1803 the United States, under the Presidency of Thomas Jefferson purchased the entire tract between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains for \$15,000,000 or slightly over three cents an acre.

What is now South Dakota became successively a part of the Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota Territories. For a time it was known simply as the "Land of the Dakota."

In March, 1861 Dakota Territory was established and in 1879 Brown County was created and named for legislator, Alfred Brown.

There has not been enough archaeological study of Brown County to tell us much about the earliest human beings to inhabit the area. The burial mounds along the Elm River probably date from about 800 AD. Later, wandering bands of Indians have chased the multitudes of buffalo and bison across the James Valley grasslands, but they left few traces on the land. It was not until after 1700 AD that the Sioux (Dakota) tribes began to leave the Minnesota lakes and forests for their migration across the Dakota prairies. By the time Lewis and Clark made their celebrated expedition up the Missouri River (1804), Brown County was definitely a part of the "Land of the Dakota." For many years thereafter the James River in southern Brown County was the site of an annual Sioux tribal gathering and trading fair in the spring.

EARLY FUR TRADERS AND EXPLORERS

French, British and American fur traders came into the area early in the nineteenth century. Colin Campbell established a trading post at the marked site near the Elm River for the Columbia Fur Company about 1822. Another post was located a few years later near the Rondell crossing of the James River. The important geographical expedition of Joseph Nicollet and John C. Fremont followed the James River northward through the County in 1839, and in 1845 Father Augustine Ravoux of St. Paul interrupted his journey to Ft. Pierre to celebrate a Mass at an Indian encampment near Sand Lake.

MILITARY EXPEDITIONS

The famous Minnesota Sioux Uprising of 1862 brought the U.S. Army to the Dakotas, and through the 1860's and 1870's a number of military expeditions passed through Brown County. These expeditions, such as that of General Alfred Sully in 1864, eventually established peace east of the Missouri River in the 1870's thus opening the land to settlement by whites.

PERIOD OF EARLY SETTLEMENT

In August, 1877 the first white home seekers traveled up the Missouri River to Ft. Pierre and then across country on the old military road which led to Fort Sisseton. These people, Clarence D. Johnson, William Young and his sister Hattie, brought two wagons, one drawn by oxen and the other by mules. They staked their claims near the James River in Columbia Township.

The following April, 1878, Ole, Ben and John Everson came from Blue Earth, Minnesota and located their claims on the east side of the river a short distance south. They brought with them a plow and two fiddles. Nathan Johnson came and took his claim nearby. Clarence Johnson plowed the first furrow in the County.

In May, 1878 James Humphrey and Henry H. Slack came to the southern part of the county near Rondell and established their claims. After an unfriendly encounter with Drifting Goose and his Yanktonais band, they returned to Waubay. Fearing claim jumpers they came back to Rondell and spent the winter in a dugout in the river bank on the Slack Claim.

In April, 1879 the government opened land in Brown County for settlement. The first July 4 celebration was held in Johnson's grove. There was plenty to eat and drink, baseball games and fiddle music for dancing.

A mail route from Yankton to Jamestown passed through the county, the Yorkville Post Office was established and the county was surveyed.



The First Brown County Court House

COLUMBIA STARTED

The Townsite was selected at the junction of the Elm and James River. Byron Smith of Minneapolis brought in several wagon loads of material. He built a store and bought the dam which was being built by some Iowa men. This dam was built just below the mouth of the Elm River and created Columbia Lake. Later, there was considerable steam boating with the Nettie Baldwin and Fannie Peck traveling as far as LaMoure, North Dakota.

The dam was used for water power which ran a flour mill with a daily capacity of 200 barrels.

The original name was Richmond but when application was made for a post office the name had to be given up and Columbia substituted.

EARLY ABERDEEN

The townsite was chosen in June, 1880 by C.H. Pryor of the Milwaukee Railroad. The North Western line had been surveyed and Rudolph and Ordway were located. Aberdeen was midway between them. Originally the Milwaukee Railroad was scheduled to go to Columbia but demands of the townsite company caused the railroad company to make a new survey. This laid out the route directly west from Andover.

The point a mile south of Aberdeen where the two railroads crossed was known as Grand Crossing. In the summer of 1880 Rice Brothers and Boyden opened a small store and Lew Bowman, a lawyer and land located established an office there. In the fall of 1880 the storekeepers and the lawyer moved from there to the present site of the town.

Aberdeen was named for Aberdeen, Scotland, the hometown of Alexander Mitchell, President of the Milwaukee Railroad Co.

THE RUSH OF SETTLERS

A large German settlement was made in the south and southwestern part of Brown County. Many of these people had come to America to avoid compulsory military training and migrated westward from Wisconsin and Minnesota. Great numbers came from eastern states where there was crowding. A Scandinavian settlement began in Gem Township. Welsh people came to Cambria Township. Large numbers came from Finland and settled in the Frederick area and in Savo Township. Many German Russians came. Some stayed in Aberdeen and some homesteaded northwest of town in Ravinia Township.

Most of the settlers in Brown County came by railroad. Their possessions included a wagon, team, either oxen or horses, a cow or two, a plow, some hand tools, household goods, seed and supplies. These things were in an immigrant car with the homesteader himself. His family came in a passenger coach or waited and came later.

LAND OFFICES

The first land office was in Fargo, but in 1880 the Watertown district included Brown County. In 1882 a land office opened in Aberdeen. This shortened considerably the long walk for the homesteader.

THE FIRST ELECTION

Brown County was organized in September, 1880. The November 2nd election was held at Columbia. County Commissioners were all Columbia men. This began the long bitter fight between Columbia and Aberdeen for the county seat. The census the next spring showed 71 more votes cast than there were 21-year old males in the county.

THE FIRST SCHOOL

The first school in the county was organized at Putney in September, 1881. A Miss Rachel Smith was the teacher. Her pupils were from Hosley, Fellows, Cummins, Campbell and McKinnon families. Aberdeen's school opened a month earlier in August, 1881. Mrs. C.H. Pleasants taught twenty-five children in a sod shanty on the site of the present high school.

HARD TIMES

Heavy snows and blizzards brought hardship in winter. Settlers near the rivers could find wood for fuel. Others used twisted prairie hay and in summer burned cow chips.

Dry seasons during the middle and late 1880's caused crop failures. This brought financial trouble and foreclosures. Many homesteaders left. When rains returned and crops were fairly good, wheat sold for 37 cents a bushel. For those who stuck it out, stock raising helped make the land prosperous.

THE COUNTY SEAT FIGHT

Columbia was the first County seat. Ordway, Bath and Aberdeen also wanted it. Elections were held and results were contested. Records were moved to Aberdeen and back to Columbia. The final election in 1890 showed an overwhelming vote for Aberdeen.

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION

John L.W. Zietlow built and operated the first telephone line in Brown County in 1886. The original switchboard is now in the Dacotah Prairie Museum.

The Milwaukee and Chicago Northwestern Railroads came to the county in 1881. The Great Northern Railway extended into the county in 1886. The Aberdeen, Bismarck and Northwestern Railway grade was built from Aberdeen to Leola but never ironed as the company went broke. Remnants of the grade can be seen north of the Wylie Park Trees.

The Duluth Pierre grade runs southwest of Aberdeen but it too was never ironed. Parts of it can still be seen southwest of Aberdeen. In 1907 the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad came into the county from the southeast and extended to Leola.

The first automobile in Aberdeen was on display in the Grain Palace in 1897.

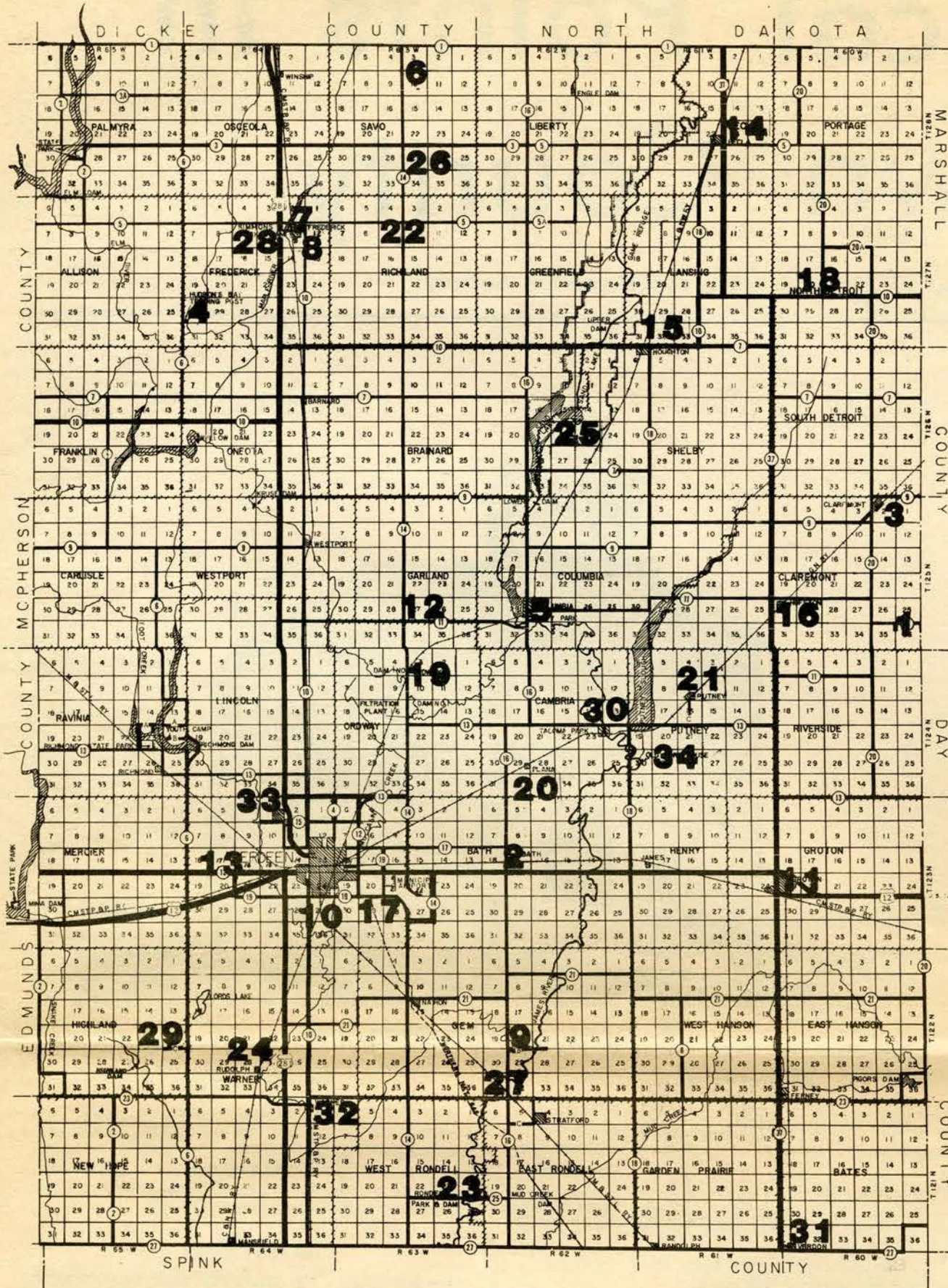
In 1912 the Yellowstone Trail (now U.S. 12) was built from Ipswich to Aberdeen. Ten years later it was completely graveled through the county, and thus began the network of highways criss-crossing our county and state today.

BROWN COUNTY SO. DAK.

U.S. HIGHWAY
STATE HIGHWAY
COUNTY HIGHWAY
GAS PIPE LINE

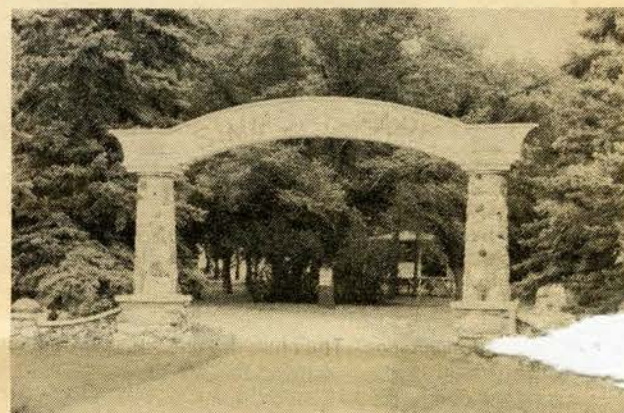
HIGHWAY MAP

SCALE IN MILES

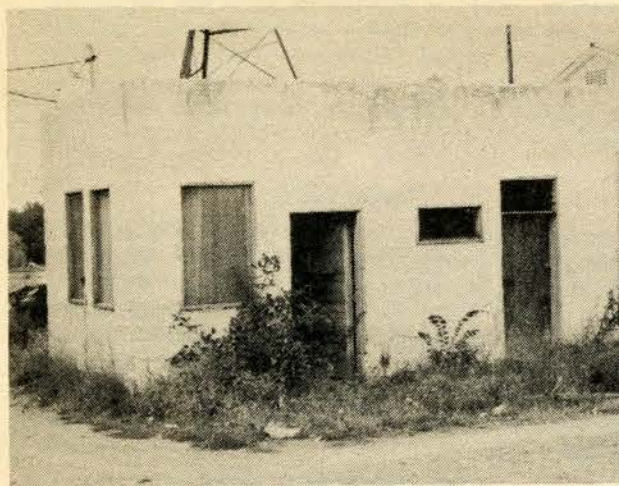


Directory of Historical Sites

1. Augustana Lutheran Church
2. Bath
3. Claremont
4. Colin Campbell Trading Post
5. Columbia
6. Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church
7. Frederick Jail
8. Fylpaa House
9. Gem Township Post Office
10. Grand Crossing
11. Groton Trinity Episcopal Church
12. Hamlin Garland Memorial
13. Hansen Restored Rural School
14. Hecla
15. Houghton Park
16. Huffton Elevator
17. Melgaard Park
18. North Detroit Township Hall
19. Ordway
20. Plana
21. Putney Country Store
22. Richland Church
23. Rondell
24. Rudolph
25. Sand Lake
26. Savo Monument
27. Scandinavia Lutheran Church
28. Simmons Park
29. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church
30. Tacoma Park
31. Verdon Opera House
32. Warner
33. Wylie Park
34. Yorkshire



FREDERICK - founded in 1881, flourished with stores, blacksmith shops, lumber-yards, hotels and in 1887 a flour mill. The town has a well-preserved business section and pioneer main street. Simmons Park with its school bell monument, mineral collection in the park gate and Indian artifacts in a stone display case is on the west side of the town. The stones used in the gate are from many states in addition to petrified wood from South Dakota.



FREDERICK JAIL - What the old jail lacked in modern comforts it made up in security. The entire building is covered with concrete. During the early years of the century it was in frequent use. College boys from Aberdeen, Jamestown, Valley City and Ellendale often earned a night's free lodging there.



RICHLAND CHURCH - was built by members of a Norwegian Congregation in 1897. This church is a replica of a church in Aurland, Norway. The inside was completed in 1905. Total cost of materials was \$850.00. Services were discontinued in 1953 but the Ladies Aid still functions to keep the building painted and in repair. In 1961 a stone monument was erected in memory of the early pioneers. Their names, candlesticks and a communion set are in the monument.



HECLA - founded in 1886 and named for a volcano in Iceland, the Dakota Central Railway came first and later sold out to Chicago, Northwestern. Lumber for the first school house was brought up the James River from Columbia on the Nettie Baldwin.

The Hecla School system has a long history, beginning with the first school census in 1885, showing 100 pupils in the area. Four rural school buildings were quickly constructed and not until 1887 did the town of Hecla have a school, the first classes held in the annex wooden structure across the street to the west. To this day the building is used by the School, although serving for a few interim years as a theatre.

In 1905 the cement block building, still in use, was erected to serve as a high-school. E. Ray Lampert was the first graduate in 1907. In 1924 this Township School became an independent school district, and the following year this present high-school building was erected and connected to the old building, with the bell tower being removed.

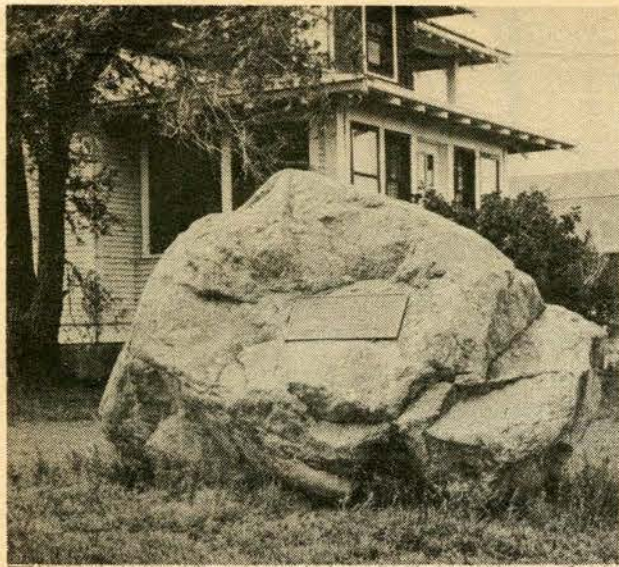
Through the years the top enrollment was 250 in the grade school and 130 in the high-school. In 1957 the present six-room grade building was opened to the north, and a vote in the following year made this a six township school district. In 1971 the new Gym to the east was constructed. For a few years these schools were a part of the North-Brown School District but in 1976 reverted to the present district with more local control.



FYLPAA HOUSE - built about 1900 by John Fylpaa, pioneer of 1882, it has been added to and changed as utilities such as water and electricity became available. Beautiful columns are a distinctive architectural feature.



YORKVILLE - the first post office in Brown County. Established in 1879 it also served as a hotel and grocery store. The building was erected of logs cut from trees along the river. Brown County's first white girl Stella Everson, was born here. There was also a ferry crossing the James River at this point. Neither remains, but the site is marked.

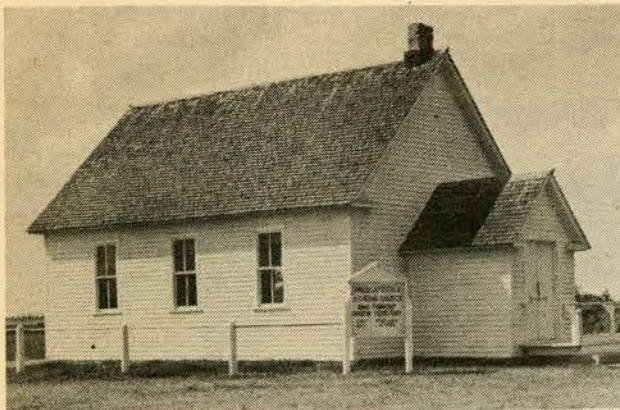


HAMLIN GARLAND MEMORIAL - Hamlin Garland, poet, novelist and lecturer, born in Wisconsin in 1860, migrated to Ordway in 1881. He helped his father on the homestead and in the Garland store in Ordway. Physical discomforts of summer heat and winter cold colored his writings of pioneer life. He sought to depict realistically the rigors of pioneer life and the endless labor of farm life.

Hailed as a courageous writer by eastern editors, his first book, *Main Traveled Roads*, 1891, was not popular with Ordway people. In 1936 this memorial boulder was put into place on the site of the homestead house.

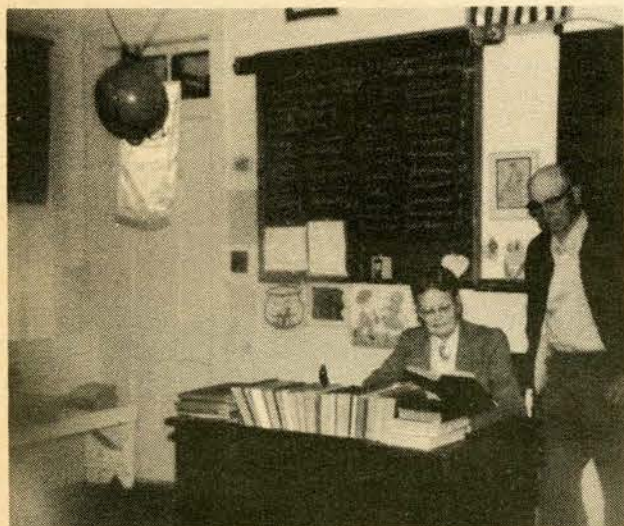


PLANA - the area settled in 1881-82 by Welsh people from Wisconsin. The village grew when the railroad was built through in 1886-87. It included a church, school, general store, barber shop, town hall, depot, three grain elevators and several residences. The church, still standing, was built in 1887. Early services were in the Welsh language. The long frame building northwest of the church was the town hall used for community meetings, elections, dinners and dances until about 1940. The school building, erected in the 1920s now serves as the Cambria Township Hall.

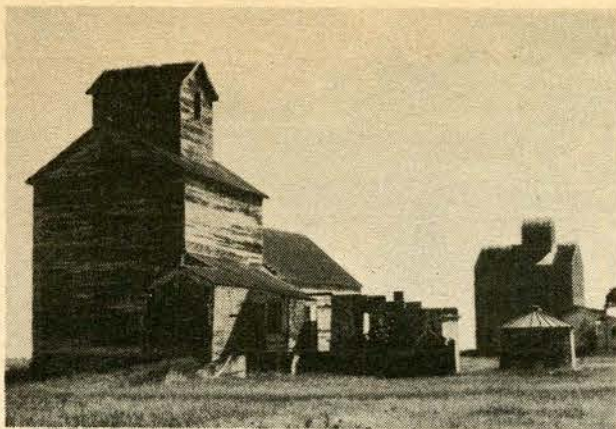


THE FINNISH APOSTOLIC LUTHERAN CHURCH - was built in 1884 and used continuously until 1952 when the congregation built a new church over the line in North Dakota.

It was extensively restored with new cedar siding in 1972-73, to be maintained as a memorial to "The Faithful Finnish Christian Pioneers."



THIS RESTORED RURAL SCHOOL - was built in Clear Lake Township, Edmunds County in 1885. It was in operation until 1954, then became a garage. Leo Hansen discovered the building in 1972 while doing some wiring. He recognized it as the building which he and his family, including his father had attended. Mr. Hansen bought the building and moved it to the yard of his present home on old U.S. 12, two and one half miles west of Aberdeen. It is furnished with the original desks, books and other equipment.



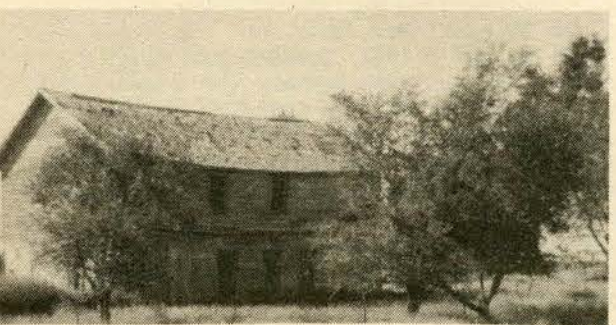
HUFFTON - on the Great Northern Railroad was settled in 1882 by people from Michigan and named Foxton. In 1889 the town was moved northwest to be on the railroad line and was renamed Huffton for a Mr. Huff who had homesteaded the land. An elevator remains of the town which once included a post office, church, a two story depot and several residences.



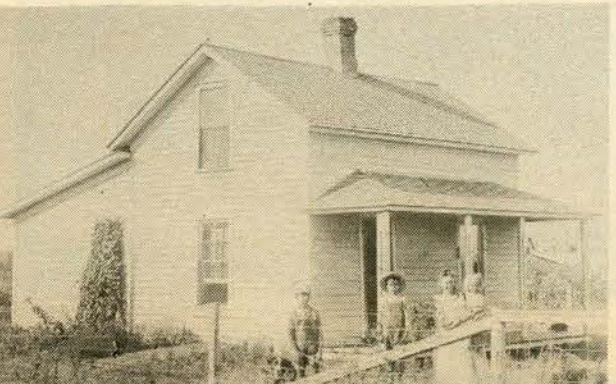
TACOMA PARK - a most attractive wooded spot on the James River was the scene of Populist and Alliance political meetings, chautauquas, concerts, baseball games and Fourth of July celebrations. Popular speakers there included Bryan, Senator LaFollette, Mary Ellen Lease, Eugene V. Debs and Carrie Nation. The park was the summer home of many families and in its day boasted a large pavilion, auditorium and steam powered merry-go-round. The Great Northern Railroad ran special excursion trains in summer.



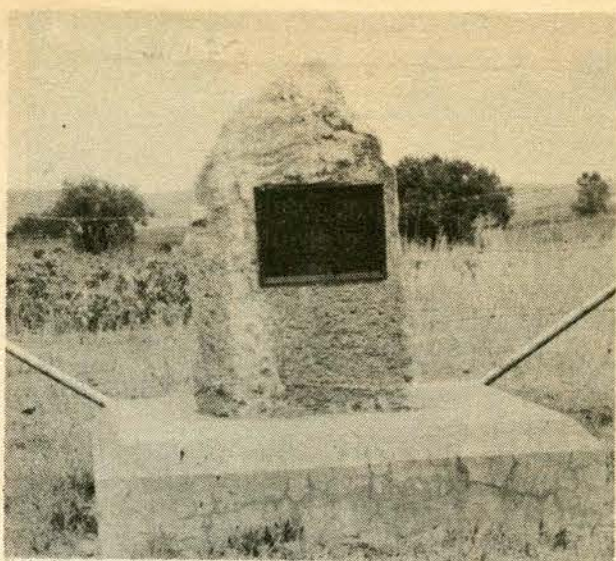
VERDON - was founded in 1886 when the Chicago and Northwestern railroad reached here from Doland. At one time it included two banks, five grain elevators, three churches and numerous businesses, but after the turn of the century it declined rapidly. The general store still operating was built in 1886 and had a second story until 1926. The Verdon Opera House was built in 1916 and for thirty years was used for plays, dances, lodge meetings, and basketball games.



RUDOLPH - was on the Northwestern Railroad and many early settlers came that far and then drove to their homestead. There were at one time three elevators, a post office and store. A blacksmith shop, several homes and a school. Now very little remains.



BATH VILLAGE - platted in 1880 boomed before Aberdeen with early settlers holding first church in Rujmo's Tent Hotel. In 1881 the first permanent hotel was built. Both prospered but in 1943 a tornado wiped out the town except for two houses. One of these is a large square house on the east edge of town. Built in 1892, it is typical of pioneer homes.



COLIN CAMPBELL TRADING POST - The Elm River Valley was a favorite camping ground of the Cut Head band of the Yanktona Sioux tribe. Waneta, Sioux warrior who fought on the side of the British in the war of 1812 was born near here in 1794. Colin Campbell was interpreter and trader for the Missouri, Columbia and American fur companies along the Missouri River 1820-1850. He established a trading post on this spot about 1822. By 1830 the supply of game and pelts in this area was decreasing and the trading post was abandoned.



The congregation of **St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church** was organized in 1889. The present church was built in 1931. The church yard lies adjacent to the building and has been in use since 1888. The parsonage is close to the church which is now associated with St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Aberdeen.

AUGUSTANA LUTHERAN CHURCH - was organized by Norwegian settlers on July 25, 1884. This church was erected in 1890. Tower and spires are replicas of the big Chicago Lake Church. Skilled craftsmen carved the altar table, tall pulpit, and canopy. Granite rocks for the foundation were brought 15 miles in winter by bob sled. Stained glass windows are memorials.

THE GEM TOWNSHIP POSTOFFICE - was established in February 1883 in the home of E.S. Nelson near the junction of the James River and the Moccasin Creek. At first the mail was brought in by horse and buggy or wagon and the Nelson home was a gathering place with settlers coming in from miles around to pick up their mail and visit.

In June 1900, the first rural mail delivery was started here. The small building at the north end of the row of buildings is the old house and in it are some of the original mail slots Mr. Nelson used for sorting.

GRAND CROSSING - approximately two miles south of Aberdeen where the Northwestern and north-south Milwaukee Railroads cross. This spot was chosen for the town site of what was later Aberdeen. After a few months the town site was moved to the present location of Aberdeen. There is no marker, but the crossing is close to Siebrecht's greenhouses.

RONDELL - Records of an encampment at this spot date from at least 1832. It was called Otuhu or Oakwood Settlement after the jack oak trees. In 1838 Major Joseph Brown built a trading post under the management of Pierre LaBlanc.

In 1842 a Frenchman, Francis Raundelle came up the Mississippi to St. Louis then on to the James River to Oakwood Post. He built a large log cabin for the American Fur Trading Co. He lived there nine years before moving to Waubay.

In April 1879 James Humphrey built a cabin on the high bank west of the Rondell Crossing. He started a store and later started the Rondell Postoffice.

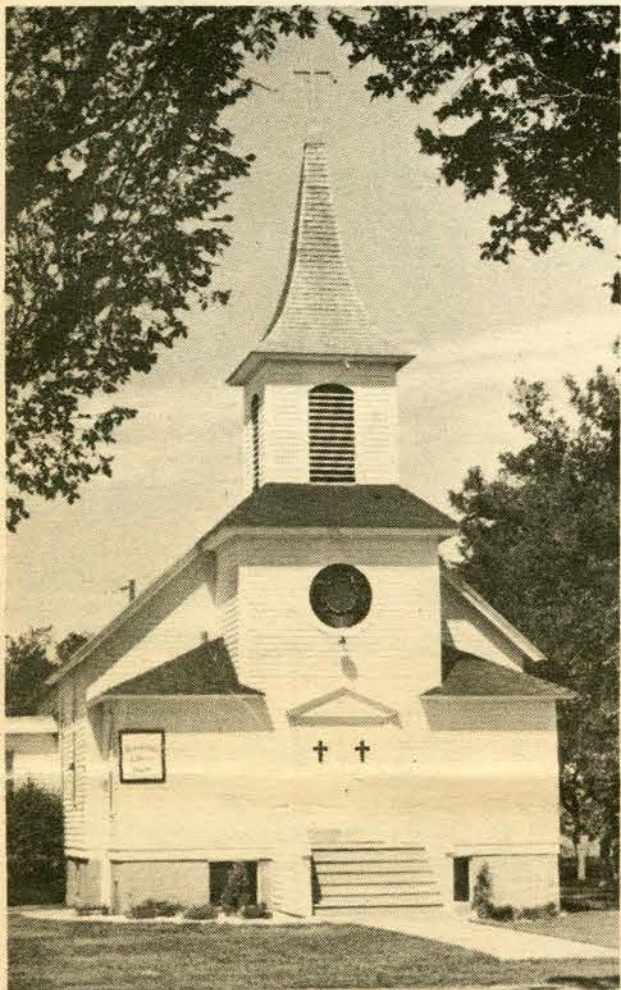
WARNER - was located on June 28, 1880. The Chicago, Milwaukee Railroad track was laid through Warner in the fall of 1881. Trains came in the spring of 1882.

All lots in town were 142 feet long, streets were 66 feet wide. Main Street was 80 feet wide, alleys were 16 feet wide. For a time Warner was larger than Aberdeen. It was settled by many immigrants from Germany.

WYLIE PARK - located one mile northwest of Aberdeen, just off No. 281 was a tree claim in the 1880's. There are picnic grounds, a buffalo herd and other animals. A large dance pavilion is located at one side of an artesian water lake.



HOUGHTON - a village on the Northwestern Railroad was platted in 1885, partly in Shelby and partly in Lansing Townships. It is immediately east of Sand Lake. In the park on Main Street is a marker to honor Ralph Herse, former Governor of South Dakota. He was instrumental in the development of the Sand Lake Game Refuge.



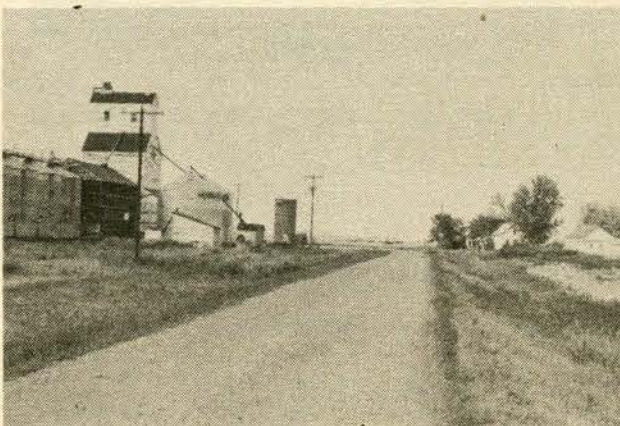
SCANDINAVIA LUTHERAN CHURCH - located eight miles south of Bath, has stood in its tree sheltered area near the James River in Gem Township for nearly eighty years. It is the church home for families over a wide area. Many of the families live on farms that were homesteaded by their ancestors. Most are of Scandinavian descent and many are related.



SAND LAKE - is an expansion of the James River and what was formerly called Mud Lake. It is the site of the first Catholic mass celebrated by Father Ravoux in 1845. The Game Refuge was begun in 1936 by boys in a Civilian Conservation Corps Camp near the present headquarters building. Approximately four by sixteen miles in size the lake functions as a propagation place for thousands of water fowl. This refuge was developed because the abundant waterfowl hunting was diminishing. It is part of a system of sanctuaries along the central migratory route. The area on the west side of the lake was at one time platted as the resort town of Pectoria but was never built.



NORTH DETROIT TOWNSHIP HALL - built as schoolhouse in 1884 has been known as the Dinger school and the Heineman school after local families. Thirteen children and their teacher were trapped there overnight when the blizzard of 1888 struck. They were without fuel and survived by burning the stage and the desks.



ORDWAY - a bustling frontier boom town was founded in 1881. It was named for the territorial Governor. It hoped to become the capital of Dakota Territory. The hope died when Bismarck became the capital in 1883. A Methodist University was begun but lost out to Mitchell. In 1883 the N.W.R.R. extended to Columbia. Hamlin Garland's father homesteaded two miles north of town.



CLAREMONT - This area was settled in 1881-83 mainly by people from Michigan and Minnesota. The town was platted by the Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad Co. and was named after Claremont, New Hampshire. The railroad came through the town in 1887. Buildings were moved in from Detroit, seven miles to the northwest when it failed to win a railroad connection. The First State Bank building, erected before 1889, was enlarged in 1957. Across the street a square wooden building was the home and office of Dr. W.E. Dinsmore who practiced in Claremont from 1886 until his death in 1936.

Dr. Dinsmore did heroic work during the 1918 flu epidemic. He was responsible for the first artesian well, the water tower and the city park.

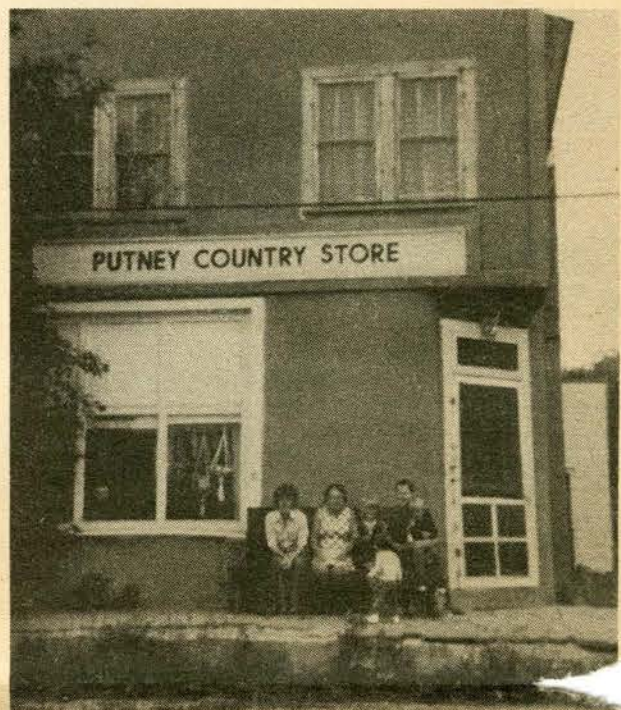


GROTON TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH - was built in 1883, and at the time was used by several other churches. Always a small congregation, baptisms were done when visiting ministers came. Lights were put in around the turn of the century. Otherwise the church is exactly as it was with the original wall paper of flocked red velvet. The west end windows came from Connecticut especially ordered for this church. In 1974 this church was given to the Brown County Museum and Historical Society.

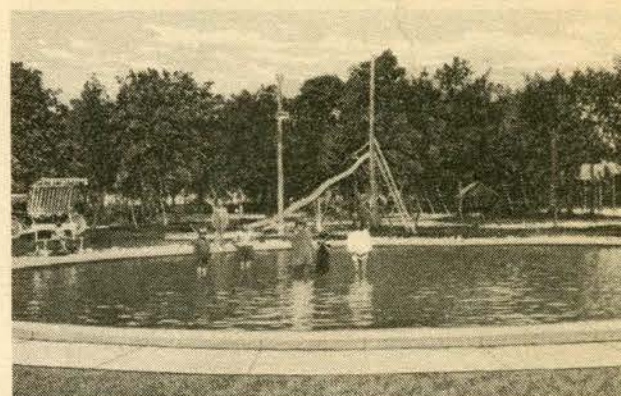


SAVO - Monument, Church, Hall. The Finnish Settlement was brought about in 1882 by policies of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad and its emigrant agent Kustaa Frederick Bergstadus who named the area Savo for his birth place in Finland. A school was built in 1884 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1888. The Community Hall, built in 1899, is used as a meeting place, social center, site for theatrical events and has been for more than 75 years the Scene of the Mid-summer festival.

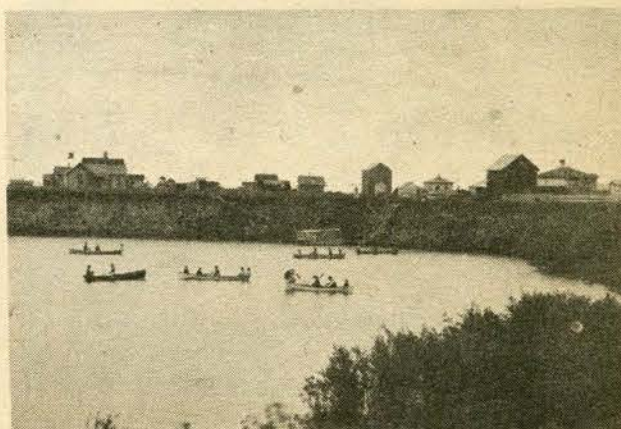
The Savo Historical Society, founded in 1952, dedicated the fieldstone monument in the church yard in 1955. Designed and built by John Peterson it has hand-stamped stainless steel plates imprinted with the names of homesteaders by townships, and a chronology of important events in the community.



PUTNEY VILLAGE - northwest of Groton is the site of the first school in Brown County. The building was a half mile west of Putney but was later moved into town. The site is marked. The town was established after the building of the Great Northern Railway in 1886 and was named after Putney, Vermont.



MELGAARD PARK - Eleven acres were given to Aberdeen in 1909 by Andrew Melgaard. Designated as a "beauty spot" the area was part of the tree claim Melgaard filed for in 1880. Memorial trees were planted by The Women's Relief Corps and a bronze statue of Andrew Melgaard was erected in 1931. A band shell, tennis courts, picnic tables, playground, and camping area are part of the park.



COLUMBIA - oldest town and first county seat, was founded in 1880 where the Elm and James Rivers meet. A dam was built here and a 200 barrel capacity flour mill built. Lake Columbia was formed. The Grand Hotel was built (now in Redfield) and steam boat traffic flourished between Columbia and Ludden, ND. The Nettie Baldwin and Fannie Peck made daily trips between these two points.