

# Huscher, Cloud County, Kansas: The End of a Proud Family Legacy



Figure 1: Photo of the Huscher Historical Landmark Site in Cloud County near Concordia, KS. Photo taken by Dionysius Theres

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**HIST 533: LOST KANSAS COMMUNITIES**

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## Introduction

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the invention of the automobile was one of the most important factors in rural social change and progress. However, it was detrimental to many small towns in plains states like Kansas because it brought business and commerce to larger communities, especially the county seats.<sup>1</sup> As a result, thousands of small towns dispersed and disappeared, leaving behind faint traces of their history today. I researched the rise and fall of Huscher, Kansas, in Cloud County and will apply the information I've uncovered as a perfect example of this concept. I was fascinated to learn how the town was originally founded by David Huscher and his three brothers, who helped build a prosperous town and whose pride was the "Huscher Elevator". I also learned how Huscher disbanded due to the invention of the automobile and the growth of Concordia, Kansas, the county seat of Cloud County. Currently, Huscher is no longer even a tiny community but instead is a rural landscape with very little development. It is home to no more than 50-75 people spread out over the surrounding acres of land. My point is that if you were to drive through Huscher, you would have never guessed that it used to be a town consisting of a post office, businesses, school districts, blacksmith shops, and more. I believe uncovering this information is important because it adds to the study of lost communities and how they disband.

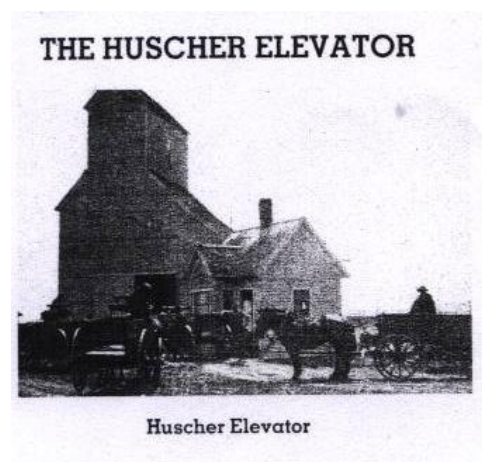


Figure 2: Early photo from the 20th century of the Huscher Elevator in Huscher, KS of Cloud County. SOURCE: Cloud County Historical Museum

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. M.J. Morgan, class lecture, "Lost Kansas Communities," Kansas State University, April, 2012.

Huscher, Kansas, in Cloud County was originally settled between Center and Nelson Townships in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. David Huscher and his three brothers, all from Canada, migrated to Kansas to stake claims in 1871.<sup>2</sup> At first, the small town consisted of one stone house and two dugouts built by the Huscher brothers. In 1887, the Chicago, Kansas, and Western Railroad laid new track passing through the Huscher settlement to Concordia. This benefitted the town and by 1900, Huscher was prospering with two stores, a post office, a cream station, a blacksmith, a school district, and various other shops. This success was the result of David Huscher purchasing grain delivered by the local farmers during harvest for a Kansas City Company.<sup>3</sup> Later, in 1902, the Bossemeyer Brothers, a partnership from Nebraska, built a grain elevator that was operational by 1904 and managed by David Huscher.<sup>4</sup> This elevator is shown in Figure 2. For several decades until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Huscher Elevator served the same purpose and provided for the small town. It was sold on several occasions to larger foreign companies, but still was managed by a Huscher descendant. To this very day the Huscher elevator still stands where the town was once settled.

### Factors that led to Huscher's Disbandment

The first factor that led to the decline of



Figure 3: Photo of the Huscher Elevator in Cloud County near Concordia, KS. Taken by Dionysius Theres on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> "Huscher Elevator" *Concordia Blade-Empire*, May 4 2012. Copy at Cloud County Museum and Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "Huscher Elevator" in *the Concordia Blade-Empire*. Copy at Cloud County Historical Society and Museum.

Huscher was the absorption of the Chicago, Kansas, and Western Railroad into the Santa Fe Railway. At first during early development, the town benefitted from the railroad. As stated earlier, David Huscher saw the market potential and bought the grain that local farmers harvested for a Kansas City company. A few years later three railroad lines merged into the Santa Fe Railway which traveled from Strong City in Chase County, Kansas north to Superior, Nebraska in Nuckolls County. Figure 3 is a modern day photo of the Huscher Elevator and the railroad running near it. With the rail merger, the trade with Huscher became expendable; it was more profitable for the Santa Fe Railway to stop in larger cities such as Concordia. As a result, local farmers had to travel into town to load their grain onto boxcars to earn profit. Also, residents were now traveling to Concordia to buy, trade, and sell goods, and as a result Huscher suffered financially.

Another factor that likely led to the decline of Huscher was the survival of cumulative towns around it. These were towns founded by a mixture of people from different places and ethnicities, religions, and languages. Cumulative towns were often more tolerant of diversity, drawing more settlement, and they tend to have a longer survival rate in Kansas history.<sup>5</sup> Cumulative towns could be a cause as to why smaller towns, founded by people from just one area, disbanded. Just five miles northeast of Huscher flourished a cumulative town called Concordia. In its early development businesses opened up quickly and benefitted Concordia's overall growth because the Santa Fe Railway brought in immigrant parties and land-seekers as well as shipping out grain.

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. M.J. Morgan, class lecture notes, Lost Kansas Communities, Kansas State University, March, 2012.

Because the Santa Fe Railway didn't stop in Huscher, local farmers were forced to haul their wheat harvest to Concordia, at first in horse-drawn wagons and later, with trucks pulling enormous loads. As more and more services and businesses grew in Concordia, the county seat since 1869, residents of Huscher found themselves able to use those benefits because they had acquired automobiles. By the late 1920s, many thousands of Kansas farmers owned automobiles. "In 1930, the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce showed 9,724,950 passenger cars on farms and in towns of under 1,000."<sup>6</sup> This is an example of an effect the automobile had on many small towns in Kansas. Their economy suffered and local residents were forced to migrate to larger cities to survive. In fact, several Huscher descendants such as George Huscher and Fred Huscher moved to Concordia for this very reason. There the entrepreneurial Huscher family started and maintained the Concordia Ice Company.<sup>7</sup> This business began in 1902 and was proficient in the storing of ice and making Huscher homemade ice cream. Businesses such as this also persisted through the economic development of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and were competitive to businesses in Huscher.

The last factor that led to the disbandment of the Huscher community was the closing of the Huscher Elevator. Based on historic research I found that in 1984, operation of the Huscher Elevator ceased after the current owner retired and sold the business to Kurt Johnson, a family descendant.<sup>8</sup> During his time as manager, several factors led to the closing of the Huscher Elevator. They include rail deregulation, increased bonding requirements, and heavy

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<sup>6</sup> Michael L. Berger, *The Devil Wagon in God's Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893 – 1929* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979), p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> "Huscher Store," *Concordia Blade-Empire*, May 4, 2012. Copy at Cloud County Historical Society and Museum. .

<sup>8</sup> "Huscher Elevator," *Concordia Blade-Empire*.

competition from businesses in Concordia. Despite a long history of resilience, Kurt was forced to close the Huscher Elevator.<sup>9</sup>

### Field Work in Huscher

Besides conducting research at the Cloud County Historical Society and Museum, I conducted field work on the site where Huscher once existed. As indicated, the old Huscher Elevator still stands. Through some research I believe the town was built near the Huscher elevator. It occurred to me that it represents the pride and ambition of the Huscher family and the town itself.

Also directly across the street from the Huscher Elevator is a Historical Landmark site indicating occupancy from the 1870s to 1984. This site is shown in Figure 1. Here is where most of the shops and businesses were built. Also in the area are two remaining institutions. The first is the Huscher United Methodist Church, built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, shown in Figure 4. This church still provides Sunday morning sermons at 9:30 a.m. by Pastor L. Dean Thompson. The other public service that still



Figure 4: Photo of the Huscher United Methodist Church in Cloud County near Concordia, KS. Photo taken by Dionysius Theres

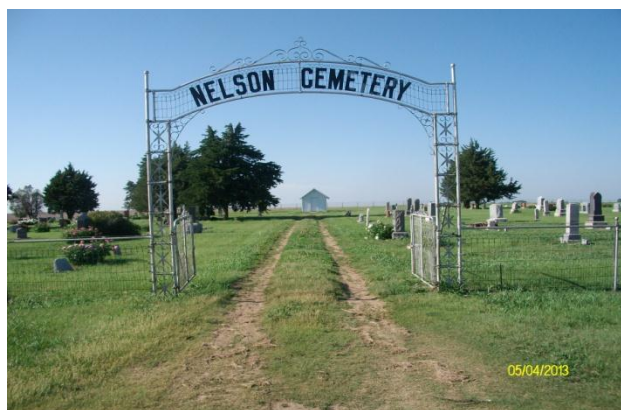


Figure 5: Photo of the Nelson Cemetery in Cloud County near Concordia, KS. Photo taken by Dionysius Theres

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

persists in the area is the Nelson Cemetery, shown in Figure 5. The cemetery was a valuable source of information through family names found on the gravestones. Researching the Huscher name and tracking their family tree led me to information concerning the Huscher Elevator, the town site, and more. The most surprising element I encountered when conducting field work was the availability of information. Despite my first impression of the rural area lacking important information and history, I learned that it does exist. By researching the family names in the Nelson Cemetery, I was able to construct a Huscher history. I was fascinated by the reality that even a name on gravestone is a treasure for history.<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the community of Huscher in Cloud County, Kansas, is no longer marked as a town because of the absence of a municipal court, a post office, education, public services, etc. All of these factors are indicators of a town. Huscher died due to several factors, including a railroad merger, the invention of the automobile, consolidation and growth of larger towns, and large competitive businesses drawn to nearby prosperous places. As Huscher began to decline, local carpenters and construction workers would recycle abandoned homes, closed businesses, old one-room schools, etc., in order to resourcefully improve their town, however they could. It amazes me how pride and effort were the pillars that held this town together until 1984. All that remains of Huscher today that gives any indication that it *was* once a town are the Huscher Elevator, the historical landmark site, the United Methodist Church, and the Nelson Cemetery. Though the disbandment of Huscher is disappointing, its story can serve as

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<sup>10</sup> See "1917 Map of Huscher" in Cloud County Historical Society and Museum.

moral for how early entrepreneurial settlers like the Huschers put forth effort into goals and built communities.



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