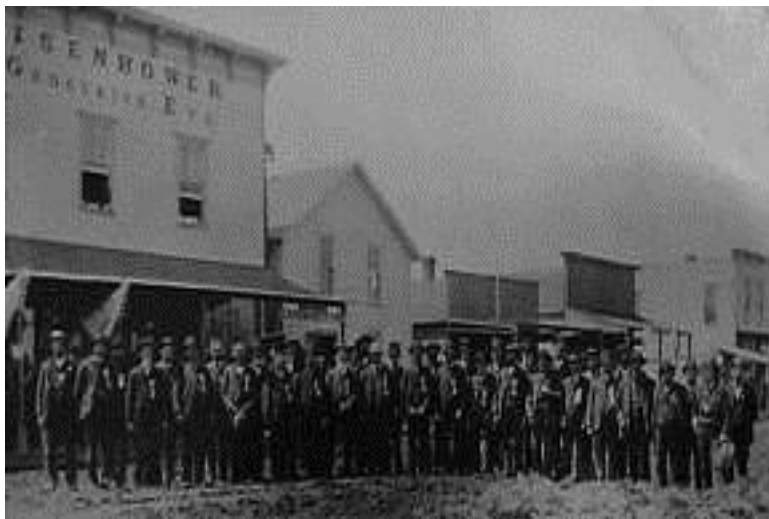


There Will Always be Hope in Kansas

A Character Study and Photo Essay of Hope Kansas



Civil War Veterans on Main St. in front of Eisenhower Store. This street scene shows how vibrant Hope, Kansas once was. Source: <http://www.skyways.org/towns/Hope/history.html>

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The state of Kansas has many great traits, including its history. There were many changes that occurred during early settlement and later, in the 20th century, that impacted society as a whole (for example, the arrival of the automobile); and although the citizens of Kansas have been witness to decline in rural communities, those who vividly remember their own history still reside in these diminishing areas. This essay is about the remembered traits and stories of one small place.

All over the state of Kansas, there are hundreds of old towns that have been left and forgotten. I had the opportunity to conduct research on Hope Township of Kansas, located in the southeast quadrant of Dickinson County. The actual community of Hope was founded in 1881 and was once a fairly large town that thrived upon the up and coming railroad industries. Its citizens were loving, caring, and determined, proud of the success of their community. Yet this once active transportation-based community has today diminished to 368 people. However, Hope hasn't fallen off quite yet.¹

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hope,_Kansas

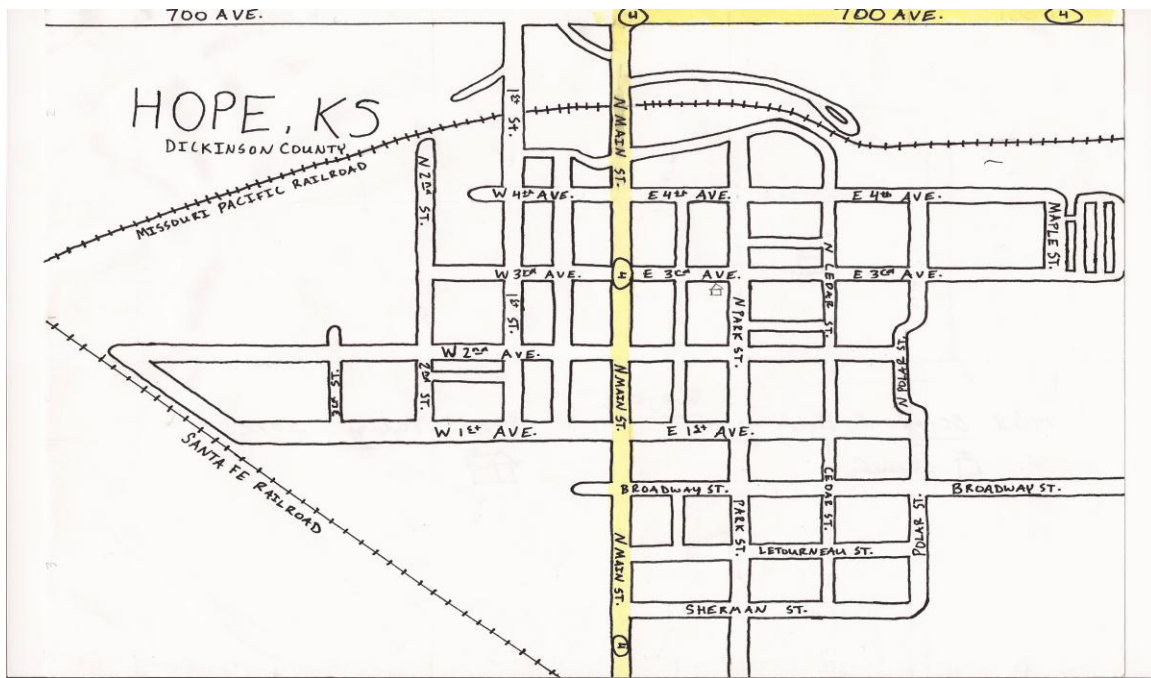


Figure 1: This is a map of Hope, Kansas. The map also shows the road system and the Santa Fe and Missouri Pacific Railroads that helped so greatly to develop Hope. This map depicts the actual, settled community rather than empty subdivisions and "paper projections" that show up in the plat maps, often created by railroads. Map drawn by author, April, 2012.

Although Hope was founded in 1881, the community's development had been moving along since the "first recorded settlers Blanchet, Kandt, and Koepke in 1859."² Twenty-six years after Hope's first settlers, the town had sky rocketed in popularity, resulting in the addition of the Missouri Pacific Railroad (1885). This railroad layed track through Hope on November 1st, 1885, giving the town a chance to further expand. At this point the Missouri Pacific tracks connected Hope and Council Grove, which granted the town regular and express mail between the two areas, along with any track laid east of Council Grove. With new mail services at

² "Chapter A." *A Century Of Hope (1886-1986)*. Compiled by Theresa Lorson. Hope, KS: Eva L. Miller, 1986, p. 14-15.

hand, and a strong community, "September 17, 1886 brought about a day when Hope sent and received more mail than all other towns put together."³ Hope was thriving due to the addition of the Missouri Pacific Railroad. This rail activity caught the attention of a second and more prestigious rail company, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe. On July 29, 1887, "The Santa Fe depot is finished and by mid August a plank sidewalk was laid from the Koch building to the depot."⁴



Figure 2: Missouri Pacific Depot in Hope, Kansas. (Photo from Kansas State Historical Society.)

³ "Chapter C." *A Century Of Hope (1886-1986)*.

⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 3: This is a picture of the abandoned Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks in Hope. Once a very important factor in the Hope community, the line now sits unnoticed in the community's backyard. Photo by author, April, 2012.

Although the two new railways brought a lot of growth to Hope, there were two incidents involving the railroad companies that are still remembered in present day. Just two years after the Santa Fe railway track was laid, an unfortunate collision between a Santa Fe freight and an occupied horse and buggy occurred. In 1889, Ora Hull Niemeier and some of her family members were riding back into Hope in a buggy. Ora and her family approached the Santa Fe railroad crossing off of Main Street (intersection labeled on map below with a "blue X"). To the right of the railroad crossing stood tall trees that obstructed the Hull family's view of the oncoming Santa Fe freight. While the horse proceeded through the intersection, the

Santa Fe freight demolished the buggy, killing the whole family except Ms. Ora Niemeier. Ora was tossed from the carriage and somehow got caught in the cowcatcher (front part of train), and was dragged until the engine stopped. Miraculously, Ora did live through the experience and in 1907, she married Joe Niemeier.⁵ Her story remains alive in Hope today.

The presence of two railroads created many accidents in the town. Forty-one years later in the year 1930, the Missouri Pacific Railroad had another very detrimental accident in Hope as well. And back on January 17 1898, newspaper headlines and article stated: " Big Wreck and Fire- Mo. Pacific rear end collision in Hope: at just 6:00p.m. last Monday evening the north part of town was startled by a loud noise followed by a hissing sound and a few minutes later the whole town was startled by the cry of Fire! Fire!"⁶ This train accident burned down the depot but didn't result in any deaths or harm any other part of the town. Many members worked together to put out the fire before it could do any further damage to their prized community.

⁵ "Chapter C." *A Century Of Hope (1886-1986)*. Comp. Arvis (Niemeier) Steimel. Hope, KS: Eva L. Miller, 1986. C7-8. Print

⁶ "Chapter C." *A Century Of Hope (1886-1986)*. Comp. Eva L. Miller. Hope, KS: Eva L. Miller, 1986. C3-4. Print

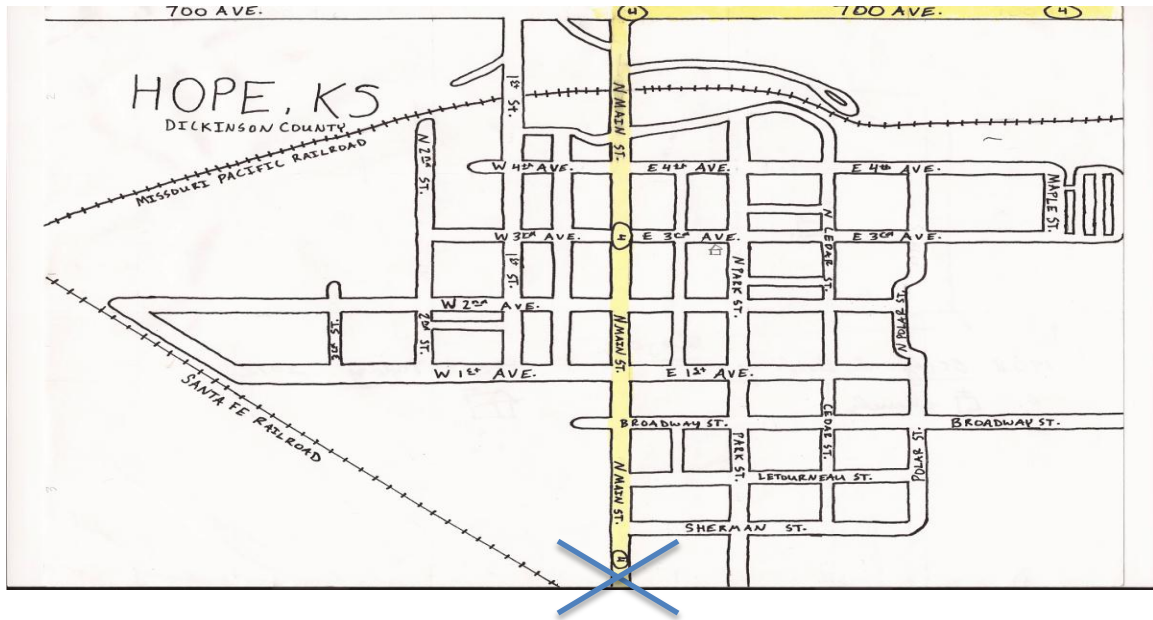


Figure 4: Hope Town Map sketched by Craig Kohman. The "blue X" is used to illustrate where Ora Hull Niemeier escaped death while riding back into town with her family.

Although there were accidents that had to do with the railroads, the railroads are what truly brought life to Hope. Famous people such as Dwight D. Eisenhower were frequently traveling between Abilene and Hope – Eisenhower took the Santa Fe Railroad to visit his parents who at one time lived in Hope. Hope was naturally appealing with its vast prairies, both planted town trees and creek timber, and quality members of the community. Hope was, and still is full of characteristics that can be described with three words: Pride, Love, and Care. I chose these three words as descriptive traits of Hope community during my interview with my grandmother Geri Kohman. During our interview, I kept hearing my grandma say the word “pride”, be it “taking pride in our yard work” or “having pride for our religion.” She made Hope seem like a place where the citizens hold each other accountable because they are so proud of their town. I asked a few questions about how she

would compare present day Hope to the Hope she once knew. According to my grandmother's responses and judging by my recent trip, a lot has changed. For example, I asked, "How involved with the community is the Santa Fe Railroad today, does it even stop?" My grandma responded, "Today all it does is pass through, so frequently that I'm accustomed to the loudness of it."⁷ This statement made me realize that Hope is on the verge of extinction because a once defining factor in the community now doesn't even stop.



Figure 5: Present day Santa Fe Railroad. These tracks show an actively maintained line, but no train stops today in Hope. Photo by author, April, 2012.

⁷ Kohman, Geri (current citizen of Hope, KS), interview by Craig Kohman, May 5, 2012, Hope, Kansas.

Earlier I stated that Hope was a town full of pride and with pride, comes support. While interviewing with my grandmother, we went into the only restaurant in town for lunch and the walls of the restaurant were covered with photographs of Hope High School's significant athletic history. This didn't come as a surprise, though, because earlier, I had asked my grandmother if she could think of anything that all of the town had in common. She could only think of two things: love for Hope athletics and church attendance. Members of the Hope community rely on social gatherings such as athletics or religious affiliations to stay connected with one another.



Figure 6: K-12 schooling system. Photo portrays how tight knit the community is as school athletics remain an important activity in Hope. These community values are vital in a peaceful community.

Photo by author, April, 2012.

Although Hope may still have a loving and caring community, I feel that Hope will continue to decay until it officially falls off the map. In today's society the most common migration trend is rural to urban and present day Hope is fairly isolated, surrounded by larger and more dominant towns. Hope is barely hanging on to its postal service and once the post office closes, likely a rapid decrease in population will occur. I found it ironic that the earliest settlers worked so hard to gain an opportunity to send/receive mail through the railway system to help advertise their town, yet today the postal service will be the death of this tiny, beautiful village. Although I feel Hope will leave the map one day, I know there will always be Hope in Kansas. Too many memories have been recorded for us to forget about this town and many others just like it. Without towns like Hope, America wouldn't have progressed to the point where it is today and that is why I say there will always be "Hope" in Kansas. Even if we don't discover the history of every last town, we can still emphasize the values that shaped small town communities and America itself. Pride is the answer to success and perhaps survival, not only for Hope, but for all the vanishing towns of Kansas.



Figure 7: Bell Monument in front of Hope High School. Date on limestone strip is 1887-1922. Date directly below the bell says "Restored by Class of 1954". Photograph shows the pride, love, and care felt by residents of Hope, Kansas. Photo by author, April, 2012.



Figure 8: Abandoned home with junk filled interior and broken windows. Picture signifies the fact that Hope is on the verge of distinction. Photo by author, April, 2012.



Figure 9: Abandoned store on Main Street. Photo by author, April, 2012.



Figure 10: Another abandoned store on Main Street. Photo by author, April, 2012.

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