



Morland Graham County

Morland: Railroad Helps Small Town with a Desire to Succeed Morland, Graham County, Kansas 1881-1892

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Dr Morgan's HIST 533 Lost Communities
Course

It's a cold, crisp October morning; the bright red-orange sun is beginning to come up and is peeking over a hill top. The cool air is entering your lungs and is causing an overwhelming sense of feeling refreshed as you walk up a pavement road on State Highway 85. There are numerous hills with plotted out fields on both sides of you. They are fenced off with old wooden fence posts and have four rows of barbed wire, which still contain the white morning frost. The fields on your right are freshly plowed crop fields ready to be planted with Milo. The fences on your left enclose a herd of buffalo grazing on the tall yellow grass of the prairie land. As you continue to walk down the hill into the valley you begin to notice houses on both sides and see the large white grain elevator. Next you walk upon a bridge and soon cross the Solomon River, which is surrounded by massive trees. The leaves on these trees are beginning to turn yellow, red, and orange and are starting to fall onto the white rapids of the fresh water river below. After you pass the river you cross old railroad tracks that have been paved over and you see the old railroad depot on your left and the old and newly built grain elevators. The old depot is an unusual color; it has bright yellow paint with a red trim that is beginning to crack and peel away from the wood underneath due to the weather.

If you walk just a hundred yards more you will be standing in the middle of a run down, small town. You will see old limestone buildings as represented in figure 1, which are three stories high, and an old broken down gas station that has all the windows boarded up with a giant gold pad lock on the front door. Across



the street a giant, beautiful red brick building with two huge white garage doors stands, which houses the fire department. Another red brick building with a gorgeous half circle, tan colored water fountain embedded in the side of the building is the bank. Perpendicular to the bank is a lot with six businesses on it. On the right is the old grocery store; it has been closed for four years now and is being rented out for storage. The once red paint is beginning to fade and now has little to no color. The next building is a small ma and pop restaurant, it has dark green paint and looks like the newest building in the town. In between the old grocery store and the restaurant is a small privately owned mechanic shop. The next three buildings at the end of the lot are tall, slim, red brick buildings that once contained businesses that closed down years and years ago. Surrounding all these buildings is a community. Standing there on Main Street surrounded by these old buildings and this community, you will find yourself in Graham County. In Graham County you will be in the Solomon Township standing in the

middle of present day Morland, Kansas.¹ The opportunity to stand on Main Street in Morland derived from many factors. However, the pivotal turning point as to whether or not Morland would rise or fall exists due to the fight and pride of the citizens of Morland, and the development of the railroad in 1885-1890.



Figure 1, The old limestone bank of Morland is now just a building on the corner of Main Street. Source: Scott Helberg

Part 1: Defining Morland

Morland was first known as Fremont, it was named after General John C. Fremont who was the noted explorer.² Originally Fremont was established as a government townsite, under Judge James Gordon's filed Declaratory Statement No. 18000 "Kirwin Series" on February 24, 1881.³ On May 11, 1881 the first post office was established in Fremont, and it was moved from Beach Grove to Fremont and was placed on the north side of the Solomon River. Chas. H. Morgan was the first postmaster of this little town, and was extremely active in trying to get the town started on the north side of the river.⁴ Very little information is known about Fremont between 1881 and 1885. However, the first years of Fremont were a struggle for the families that lived there and the town was nearly abandoned.⁵ In 1885 there was talk that the Union Pacific was coming in a couple years so the post office was moved to the south side of the river. Chas. H. Morgan wrote a letter to the Government Land Office on March 2, 1885 stating that he had been the postmaster of Fremont and had a merchandise business but the post office moved away and he now owned the only improvements on half of the townsite (north side). He asked if he could open his half of the

townsite for settlement if he saw fit to do so.⁶ In the Graham Gem a newspaper article on January 4, 1898 stated: "During the first settlement of the townsite on the north side of the river, there was one time when the town had dwindled down to one family, that of C. H. Morgan, and about 1000 prairie dogs."⁷

Part II: Rise and Fall

Fremont was like most small towns just trying to survive, but some unusually little hiccups along the way tried to prevent Fremont from growing. Once the post office moved to the south side of the Solomon River talk about the railroad expanded, and Fremont experienced a boom of development in 1886 with the following businesses: Drug Store owned by J. B. Smith; Dry Goods, Groceries, etc. H. M. Morgan; Brown's Investment Co.; The Fremont Weekly Star newspaper; Star Land Agency; S. E. Leinbach, Blacksmith and Veterinary Surgeon; Fremont House; J. S. Deerholt, Barber Shop; E. M. Bright, coal; W. H. Reasoner, Agricultural implements, buggies and wagons; Coder and Horton, General Store; Stone livery stable; and "K" House. Mr. Trosper was also planning to start the Fremont Bank with a capital stock of \$15,000.⁸

Everything for the town was going well. People were settling in the town and the economy of the town was really beginning to pick up. However, on October 27, 1886, Hiram Bundy filed an affidavit of contest alleging that the Fremont townsite had been wholly abandoned for more than six months and said the tract was not settled upon and occupied as a townsite as required by law.⁹ Mr. Bundy was referring to the north side of Fremont, which so happened to be Chas. Morgan's townsite. Mr. Bundy wanted the land to himself and because Fremont was still a government town, it was considered not a real town. So under the Homestead Act Bundy could acquire up to 160 acres of land, which was the north side of Fremont and part of the south side.¹⁰ Also in October of 1886 a petition, which is represented in attachment A, was signed for the formation of the Solomon Township. Approval was given by the commissioners to be put into effect January 1, 1887.¹¹ The year 1887 was a period of rapid growth; as long as Fremont was considered a government townsite, there was no charge for the lots and people continued to come and choose their building lots. With all the development on the south side of the Solomon River, railroad surveyors were surveying south of the river and hopes were high for a railroad

in the near future.¹²

In April of 1887, the hearing was held for Mr. Bundy's claim of abandonment. The decision was made that 48 inhabitants were living on this land with businesses being carried on with a value of \$9,000.00 and this suit should be held void and be stricken from the records of the department.¹³ Mr. Bundy was persistent and appealed to a higher court. Mr. Bundy lost again in his claim on July 1888, and filed a second appeal to the Washington D. C. court. Mr. Bundy's appeal once again failed and in March of 1890, after three years of hearings and appeals, the final decision was in favor of Fremont.¹⁴ Fremont was no longer a government townsite and arrangements were made for the surveying and laying out of blocks and lots for the town.¹⁵ However, Mr. Bundy was not Fremont's only problem, just a mile west and a little north of Fremont was the town of Atkin.¹⁶ Fremont and Atkin were bitter rivals and this caused the phenomenon of "twin town die off". Twin town die off consists of two towns that are close together trying to gain people from the opposing town to gain a better economy. It was an ongoing battle between the businesses in both towns. However, in May of 1888 the people of the Solomon Township voted in favor of the bond issue for the railroad and the depot was to be located in Fremont.¹⁷ People in Atkin moved to Fremont causing businesses to die off and before the year was over Atkin was no more.

In August of 1888, the railroad officials changed the town's name from Fremont to Kalula although the post office remained Fremont. The reason for the change was because the Union Pacific already had a Fremont on their system.¹⁸ Finally the big chunk of steel that influenced the location and development of the town, the reason Fremont lasted to this day arrived. After all the trouble and wait, the first train passed through in October of 1888. The part of the Union Pacific that went through Morland was the Plainville Branch.¹⁹ This branch was a prominent rail line in central and northwestern Kansas and was extremely important to the economic development of the region. The Plainville Branch was originally created for servicing large Kansas farming in remote areas of Kansas.²⁰ The new line out of Salina would ship fuel (coal), building materials, and other merchandise

into remote areas of Kansas, and ship agricultural and livestock products out of those areas. The railroad stockholders fostered the economic development of western Kansas by encouraging people to relocate to towns along the railroad line.²¹ The incentive for moving along this line was that the cost of land in western Kansas was 1/10th of the cost of land in the eastern part of the state.²² The town skyrocketed; businesses were popping up left and right.

A train depot, represented in figure 2, was built right across the street from the elevator on the south side of the tracks.²³ A new post office was built



Figure 2: Morland train depot across the Street from the elevators and located on the South side of the former Railroad tracks. Date: Present day. Source: Scott Helberg

and the citizens of Fremont did not like the name Kalula so in April 1892 under A. T. Mitchell as postmaster the town name was forever changed to Morland.²⁴ Morland continued to grow bigger and flourish and in 1901 consisted of four general stores, two lumber and coal yards, two hotels, two livery barns, two physicians, two stock and grain buyers, and one each of the following: drug store, furniture store, newspaper, meat market, barber shop, blacksmith and wagon shop, carpenter, creamery station, photo gallery, confectionery, harness shop, two church organizations and three lodges.²⁵ In 1904 the Morland State Bank was organized and in 1906 new elevators, a new mill, a new bank, and other businesses had been built.²⁶ The citizens felt it was time for Morland to become incorporated, so 48 people signed the petition as shown in

attachment B, and it was published.²⁷

Among all the businesses the mill was the seemed to be the most important to people. In July of 1905 Mr. E. Nichols of Lucas went to investigate Morland in order to build a mill.²⁸ Mr. Nichols decided that Morland could support a 50 barrel per day mill, and so construction began. The mill was located 150 feet north of the depot.²⁹ Mr. Nichols supplied the lumber used to build the mill and it was transported by the train on the Union Pacific. In November, four more families moved to Morland just because of the mill and in December the mill was up and running.³⁰ The Morland Advance, December 7, 1905, stated: “At about two o'clock on Friday, December 1st, the electric spark was applied to the big gasoline engine and the machinery of the Morland Mill was set in motion. At five o'clock that evening biscuits made from the new flour, the first ever ground in the county, were



Figure 3: The old tree tunnel from the railroad leading into the town of Morland. Date: Present Day. Source: Scott Helberg

served to the men working in the mill. The mill is a new institution and one that the people of Morland should be proud of.”³¹ The name of the mill was “The

Attachment A: Petition for Solomon Township

SOURCE: Blue Skyways, “Morland Kansas History,” last modified February 13, 2007, accessed December 5, 2010, <http://www.skyways.org/towns/Morland/history.html>.

Millbrook Times April 9, 1886

To the Honorable Board of County Commissioners:

We the undersigned citizens of Graham County and legal electors now living in Millbrook and Gettysburg townships, pray your honorable body to set off the following described section of land for the purpose of a township:

Commencing at ne corner of Section 21, township 7, range 24, running west to the county line, thence south on the county line to the sw corner of Millbrook township, thence east to the se corner of section 16, township 9, range 24, thence north to the place of beginning. Said township to be knowing and designated as the Solomon township and the voting precinct to be located at Fremont townsite; and we ask your honorable body to lay out said described territory in a township according to the law of the State of Kansas.

J. B. Smith	John Williams	G.E. Johnston
E. P. Weida	A.A. Brown	D.M. Findley
Wm. Peterson	David Findley	R. Burt
W. T. Holmes	Alex Keith	R.A. Richmond
C. F. Curl	C. McKinley	I.B. Thayer
E. A. Cadman	A.G. Brock	Charles Hazen
A. C. Luse	James Keith	I.F. Blackman
H. G. Geer	E.E. Biddle	H.E. Hays
E. D. Emery	Henry Keith	T.S. Endicott
H. M. Morgan	George Keith	Jesse C. Clark
Snyder Horton	John Findley	C.H. Foltz
Chas. H. Morgan	John Keith	Thos. Noland
Daniel Smith	John Chadsey	John Waters
Philip Holmes	John M. Glover	T.F. Gaff
Levi M. P. Clark	H.S. Clubb	J. Torbert
John Q. Adams	W.B. Kanoff	J.H. Purcell
John Horton	T.P. Lee	Paul Ulrich
J. S. Dearholt	W.V. Quinn	Matt Freeman
Isaac Covalt		

Morland Milling and Grain Co” and it did better than people thought. The mill had an output capacity of 100 barrels a day and a grain storage capacity of 5,000 bushels. However, in 1906 the mill was burned to the ground and was a huge loss to the community.³²

Many towns were settled in the 18th and 19th centuries, but only the select few made it. Morland was part of that select few. In the 16th and 17th centuries a good water supply meant a town could make it. In the late 18th century the railroad was the means for survival. The people of Morland fought hard for their survival and in the end it paid off. Just the thought that a railroad could be coming gave people that little faith they needed to continue. New businesses started and old businesses lasted. The railroad was the life support they needed to last 129 years.

The railroad was discontinued in 1998, as shown by figure 3, and the businesses slowly began to die off, but the town has not fallen off the map.³³ One cannot overlook the sheer faith, hope and desire this town has had to succeed. The town is what it is today, due to these factors over 100 years ago. Even though the town continues to slowly die the values of these people continue on, and with these values still around the town will be around for a very long time. So as you walk back up the road, across the Solomon River past the fields with the frost-covered fencing you will see a sign saying “We’re Glad You Came – Come Again!”

Morland Advance June 7, 1906

PETITION

To the Hon. Board of County Commissioners of Graham County, Kansas.

We the undersigned, taxable inhabitants of the village of Morland, Graham County, Kansas, respectfully pray your Honorable Board to declare the village of Morland, Graham County, Kansas, incorporated as a City of the third class to be known as “The City of Morland.”

Such city of Morland shall include all of the South East Quarter of Section 14 and all of the North East Quarter of Section 23, both in town 8, Range 25 West of the 6th P.M.

We further petition your Hon. body that said village contains more than 200 inhabitants that your petitioners are a majority of all the taxable inhabitants of said village and that this petition has been published in the “Morland Advance,” a weekly newspaper published in said village of Morland, for four consecutive weeks, and that this petition is reasonable.

Names

D. C. Kay	H. Ellis
F. M. Harvey	Dr. G. E. Webber
W. E. Rush	Lewis J. Stitt
Sam Herren	Jas. Ellis
C. A. Cain	S. Summerson
E. H. Melms	O.E. Trosper
Cy Jamison	Z.A. Calvin
Mary S. Calvin	E.O. Morgan
J. R. Stober	G.W. Butler
A. J. McAdams	B.F.B. Stober
Sanders Cain	G.W. Collins
R. A. Collins.	T.M. Jobe
W. W. Goodrow	David Findley
W. I. Laird	W.R. Cunningham
John T. Trosper	Ira Conner
W. Z. Moore	Wm. Millirons
John D. Trosper	W.H. Yohe
G. W. Hummel	M.E. Mitchell
F. Smith	C.H. Murphy
F. J. Schilling	J.W. Weichert
Ed Hay	C.L. Laird
Edw. Voisinet	B.W. St. John
A. Winchester	Tom Heath

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