

The Town that Refused to Fade Away



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History 557 – History of American Agriculture

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12/12/12

On the peaceful plains of central Kansas lies Carr Creek, a creek that flows through vast acres of Kansas's prairie ground, full of wildlife that is perfect for hunting and recreation and soil that is rich and fertile and suited for abundant crops. Carr Creek flows through what truly seemed like an area shined upon by God himself, perfect for settling a town that would soon flourish with a flame burning so strongly it could never be extinguished. At least these were the hopes and aspirations of William A. Pitt almost a century and a half ago, as he brought a small group of settlers from Trier, Germany, to begin a new life and a thriving town that would eventually be known as Tipton in the central plains of Kansas.¹

When William A. Pitt came to Kansas with his family and four or five other members of the community in 1871, he originally settled southeast of the present day Tipton, Kansas, along the low valley of Carr Creek.² His reasons for settling near the river were apparent. He knew that this would be an ideal location to irrigate crops, have a vital water source, and the creek and forest would supply wild game for recreation and food. But in the spring of 1871, heavy rains came and flooded William A. Pitt's settlement, forcing them northwest to the top of the hill.³ This event founded the original name of present-day Tipton, formerly known as "Pittsburg," which in German means "Pitts Hill."⁴

When William Augustus Pitt and the four or five other members of the town

¹ William G. Cutler, "Mitchell County," in *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/>.

² Mitchell County Historical Society, "Town of Tipton," in *Looking to the Future by Remembering the Past* (n.p.: n.p., 2003) 1-7.

³ Alfred Smith, interview by Austin Bechard, 2012.

⁴ Ibid.

moved to the top of the hill after the flood, they homesteaded a quarter section to begin their new community just slightly east of present-day Tipton. The handful of residents quickly laid out the town. They established a large storehouse that was “run by the Sternberg Bros,” and offered “dry goods and groceries, boots and shoes, hardware, queens ware, hats and clothing, while farmers [could] buy all the implements they need[ed], from a wagon or reaper to a sewing machine.”⁵ Through the efforts of William Pitt, the McCreerys, and other members of the community, the town also built a schoolhouse for the cost of \$1,000.⁶



Figure 1. An early photo taken of Tipton. This is looking south of what would be Tipton’s present-day Main Street. Photo courtesy of Alfred Smith.

In early 1872, a man by the name of Peter Jacobs came from his hometown of Caledonia, Minnesota, to inspect the land. After his inspection, he returned home with favorable results.⁷ In the summer of 1872, a group from Iowa led by Fred Sackhoff, J.F.

⁵ Mitchell County Historical Society, “Town of Tipton,” n.p.

⁶ Adeline Arnoldy, “History of Tipton Kansas,” *Cawker City Ledger*, September 1972.

⁷ Arnoldy, “History of Tipton Kansas.”

Stunberg, and Chris Reinking came to Pittsburg with ten other people in ten covered wagons. Later that fall, Peter Jacobs returned from Minnesota with a group of twelve others to begin a new life and settle in Pittsburg.⁸

With a rapidly growing community full of individuals with a rich heritage of German Catholicism, a love for music, and a passion to succeed, the settlers were on their way to constructing a thriving little town. In November of 1872, the town company was organized. Fred Sackhoff was named President, William Pitt was Treasurer, and J.F. Stunberg was named Secretary.⁹ The Pittsburg Post Office was also established in 1872, naming William Augustus Pitt as the first postmaster.¹⁰ Figure 2 below shows William A. Pitt next to his wife Susan Pitt.



Figure 2. William A. Pitt and his wife Susan Pitt. Photo courtesy of the Mitchell County Historical Society, from *Looking to the Future by Remembering the Past*.

In 1875, the Franz families and the Boden families found their way to Pittsburg. They traveled across the country on a covered wagon looking for a church steeple they heard had been built on the plains of Kansas, but instead they came across a cluster of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Robert W. Baughman, *Kansas Post Offices* (Kansas: Kansas Postal History Society, 1961), 128.

buildings and dugouts the people called Pittsburg. Since they had no place to live, they found a home with the Arnoldy family until their home could be built. That same year, Peter Jacobs was struck by lightning. This was the first known death in Pittsburg.¹¹

In 1875, the staunch Catholic community came together in hopes of forming a Catholic Parish. That same year, Father Anton Timphaus organized the Catholic people as they chose the name “The Pittsburg Catholic Congregation.”¹² Until this point, the congregation had met and celebrated mass in a temporary dugout, but on March 26, 1877, this would all change. On this date, the town of Pittsburg acquired block 44 from the United States Government as building grounds for a Catholic Church.



Figure 3. The building on the far right was the first Catholic Church built in 1877. The middle building is the rectory that was built in the same year. The church on the far left was the second to be erected, but later burned down and the existing church was built in its place in 1950. Photo courtesy of Alfred Smith.

¹¹ Arnoldy, “History of Tipton Kansas.”

¹² Ibid.

The town of Pittsburg continued to grow as the SS Vanderland arrived at the Collection District of New York on May 17, 1877. The SS Vanderland carried the Schmitt family of fifteen and the Gasper family of ten to America as they found their way to the town of Pittsburg, Kansas.¹³

To this point, the township of Pittsburg was organized and flourishing, but had not yet been platted. When the town filed to be platted with the United States Government in 1877, President Grover Cleveland had already issued a patent on another quarter section of land called Pittsburg, Kansas.¹⁴ This Pittsburg, Kansas, was named after Colonel Ed Brown. This event caused William A. Pitt, and his town of Pittsburg, to change the name in order to be platted. In an interview with Alfred Smith, resident and historian of Tipton, Kansas, he said that there is controversy to this day over the founding of the town's present name of "Tipton." One story is that Chris Reinking, a resident of Pittsburg that had come from Iowa, suggested the name "Tipton," after Tipton, Iowa, the name of the county seat in Cedar County, Iowa, where he came from. The most interesting and popular recollection of the naming of "Tipton," however, comes from the idea that, out of frustration over having to rename their town, the residents of Pittsburg chose Tipton as a way of saying to the government, "Not Pit."¹⁵ As a result Tipton, Kansas, was platted in Pittsburg township of Mitchell County, Kansas. It is located in the southwest part of the county on a portion of sections 19 and 20.¹⁶

The desire to thrive as a community continued to burn strong in the hearts of the town-now-called Tipton's residents, as they continued to establish groups in their

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Smith, Interview.

¹⁶ Cutler, "Mitchell County."

community. The community built a new church in 1899. In 1912, the Catholic Knights of Columbus was established. The new public school built of brick was finished and ready to start school around 1914.¹⁷

By 1915, the town of Tipton was ready to share its stories and success with everyone, including neighboring towns, so the citizens created their newspaper, the *Tipton Times*, with its first issue published in April of 1915. The issue was a four-column eight-page periodical by C.W. Wells of Osborne County. The first issue opened by saying, “In this our first of the *Tipton Times*, we wish to state we have chosen this field for a newspaper with a firm belief in a great future for Tipton and surrounding territory...”¹⁸ Other featured articles in the first edition of the *Tipton Times* read, “A son was born to Mr. and Mrs. Wm Budke, Monday,” and “The interior of the Fisher Hotel is being remodeled and things arranged to handle the crowds which are bound to come later.”¹⁹

Tipton is a unique, bustling little town unlike many others. Although Kansas has seen many communities and small agricultural towns disappear, some with little evidence of their existence, Tipton managed to continue to flourish through the next century. On October 18, 1916, the Salina Northern Railroad arrived in Tipton, and ran between Salina and Osborne. In that same year the Tipton City Council held its first meeting. A. Bueche was mayor, Nick Arnoldy was appointed city clerk, and John Pottberg was treasurer.²⁰

Throughout the next century a series of events marked Tipton’s ability to grow and continue on as a lively little town. In 1921, the Catholics built a new brick grade

¹⁷ Arnoldy, “History of Tipton Kansas.”

¹⁸ C. W. Wells, *Tipton Times*, April 1915.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Arnoldy, “History of Tipton Kansas.”

school and high school.²¹ In 1928, the Knights of Columbus Band that was established in 1880 was chosen as the official state band.²² Figure 3 below shows the band, standing in front of a stone building that stood at the corner of Main and Pitt streets that was built by John Scheer. It stood as housing for immigrants and interested families that came to town.



Figure 4. Knights of Columbus's first organized band of the 1880s. Most of the men cannot be named, but there are records of a few members. From left to right: Base drummer - Billy Lambertz, snare drummer - Phillip Smith, director - Adolphe Bueche, cornet - John Konzem, cornet - Phillip Schroeder.

In 1946, Tipton formed the community fire department, and in 1964 the city put in a sewage disposal site. Some other events include streetlight installation, construction of the new post office on Main Street, and the conversion of the phone service to dial in 1965. Also, in 1966 the school districts were united, the tomato factory was started, and in 1969 the streets were paved and the new bank was built.²³

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Tipton: Founded By Music-Loving Germans," *Solomon Valley Post, Bicentennial Edition*, July 1976.

²³ Arnoldy, "History of Tipton Kansas."



Figure 5. View down Main Street of Tipton before the roads were paved. The white building on the corner is the original bank. Photo courtesy of Alfred Smith.

Since the 1900s, Tipton has had, on average, about 28 businesses. Some of these businesses have continued to provide service to the community and others have faded away to provide room for new enterprises in the small town. At the end of its first 100 years in 1972, Tipton was still a thriving town of 364 individuals with a passion to provide success for their small town.²⁴

There are many recollections and stories of different aspects of Tipton's rich history. One of these recollections depicts school life in the early days of Tipton. In the book *Prairie Schools*, one woman describes her days in the Tipton Shockley Schoolhouse south of Tipton. She said, "I remember in 1927, the wall blackboard and maps, pot bellied stove, hand bell, sweeping compound and shared desks."²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Eloise Bean, *Prairie Schools* (Osborne, Kansas: Osborne Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 264.

As many small towns that were established over a century ago seem to fade away and leave behind grand legacies or tales of their own destructions, some even with little proof that they even existed, Tipton, Kansas, continues to live on. The residents have most definitely seen their ups and downs, trials and tribulations, but with its rich heritage and citizens' desire to press forward as a happy community, Tipton continues to live another day while other towns fade away. In my interview with Alfred Smith, he gave some insight about the key to living on as a community:

It's exciting honestly! There is so much history; it is beyond comprehension. Few people take the time to learn about where they come from and how they got where they are today, and that's why we are still here today, because we care and we will honor those who built such a grand community, and got us where we are today. Everyone has the ability to do it, it's just making the decision to do it. And that's why Tipton is still here today, because the people care.²⁶

Tipton currently has a population of about 210 individuals. They have a lively Catholic Parish and a private Catholic school to this day. You can still find smiles on each face as you drive 200 yards down Main Street and see the homes and businesses lining the street, some of which are still standing where they were built over a century ago. Tipton still holds annual festivals that cultivates the town's rich German-Catholic history with music, drinking, and activities. Its engine is fueled by the community's love for its history and one another. In the heart of the rolling plains of Kansas, you will still find a small town called Tipton, with a heart and soul as strong as it was over a century ago; Tipton, Kansas, refuses to fade away into the vast space of history's lost towns.

²⁶ Smith, interview.

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