

**Havensville, Kansas:
The Beginning of the Railroad Industry for Pottawatomie County**

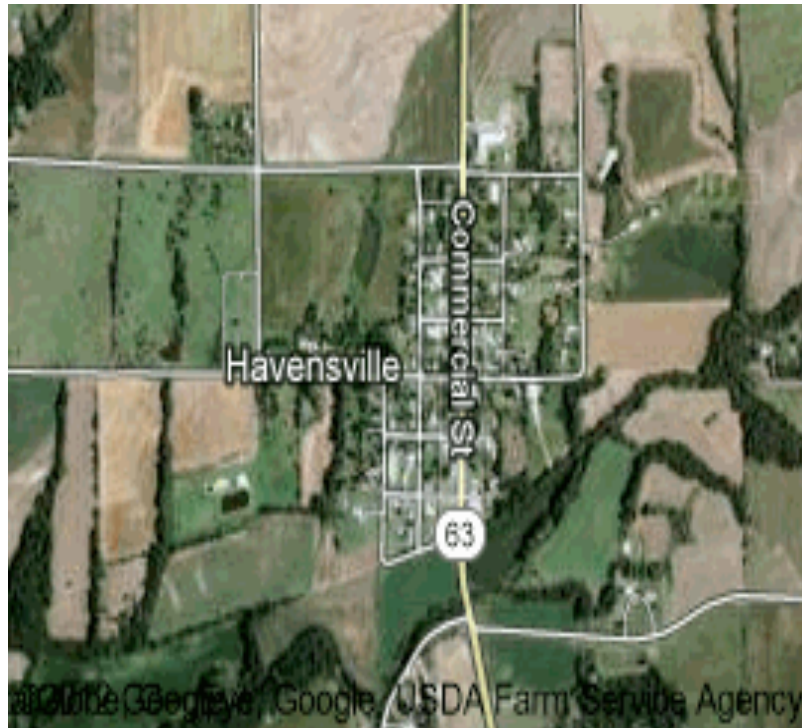


Figure 1: Ariel image of Havensville, KS. Source: www.googlemaps.com

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Havensville, Kansas, of Pottawatomie County, has certainly gone through some transitions in the last 133 years since the time it was established as a town in 1878. Driving through the town today, a traveler sees little evidence remaining of the once-thriving settlement. This lost town of Kansas used to boast a dentist, multiple general stores, and even two hotels at one time.¹ Settled in the northeast corner of Kansas, Pottawatomie County was considered one of the most fertile areas in the entire state. With a ready supply of trees ranging from walnut and cedar, to oak and maple, along with limestone quarries and even gypsum, there were plenty of excellent building materials. The Blue River Valley was considered one of the most productive wheat-growing areas in Kansas. Farms produced a plentiful supply of other crops as well, including corn, rye, barley and a number of others.² With both functional and valuable natural resources in abundance, it did not take long for Havensville to become a populated and essential part of the county.

In the middle of the Civil War, the site of future Havensville attracted attention. R. M. Croy and his wife traveled from Indiana in 1863 to join Mrs. Croy's brother, W.B. McComas, in northeast Kansas. At this time, freighting and farming were the main industries of the area. Within a decade, Mr. Croy had tried and failed in the freight business and turned to farming to make a living. However, in 1877, Croy saw his chance for success when the Kansas Railway Company (or Central Kansas Railroad) decided to extend the railroad west from Holton through

Pottawatomie County, straight through Croy's land. Croy decided to build a town along the railroad and set aside individual lots of his land for sale at a low price. The inexpensive land reportedly drew in quite a number of interested investors, resulting in the formation of "Havens". The town was named after the superintendent of the railroad and former banker from Leavenworth, Paul E. Havens. The town itself was not called "Havensville" until the formation of the post office that carried the name Havensville. By 1880 the town had a population of nearly 100, along with a school district and daily mail. The first postmaster was Abbey Dennen.³

With the coming of the railroad, Havensville became one of the prominent shipping points of the area,⁴ with railroad business even supporting eight families in the town at one time.⁵ This success drew more people to the area, with the town's population reaching 260 by 1887 and 274 by the following year.⁶ The growth in population brought businesses and, in turn, more people to Havensville. At the beginning of Havensville's history, the town had two doctors, three druggists, three blacksmiths, two hotels, four general stores and even a dentist. Citizens State Bank of Havensville was chartered in September of 1889. In 1900, the bank became the First National Bank, though it was known as "Knox Bank" (after vice president of the bank M.S. Knox) by many until its close in 1932.



Figure 2: Commercial Street, Havensville, KS between 1907 and 1909. Havensville had numerous businesses operating around the turn of the century. Source: www.kansasmemory.org

In July of 1863, a small house served as Havensville’s first school. It was not until 1882 that an actual two story, stone school was built, in which nine years of grade school and two years of high school were offered.⁷ By 1919 more space was needed, so the town’s Baptist Church served as a lab for vocational agricultural classes. The class achieved considerable popularity, with all the freshman boys enrolled in the course. The church soon became known as “The Crow’s Nest” after instructor Blaine Crow. The vocational courses were important for keeping the farm boys in school at the time. It was even quoted by an anonymous source in the *Topeka Capital Journal* that Havensville was a “progressive town” that “set an example for other towns in taking advantage of vocational training work.”⁸ Though a new high school building was built in 1921, it burned down in 1936. This event forced the high school students to go back to the old grade school for classes for the following three semesters until a new structure (the

building that currently still stands in Havensville) replaced it in 1938. It is said that some seventy students attended the high school, many riding in on horseback from surrounding areas.⁹ Along with a number of businesses, there were three churches in the town as well. Since social life was largely centered around the church during these times, Havensville had a bustling social atmosphere to go along with its growing industry.¹⁰

Although most of the businesses along with the post office, bank, and school are either gone or no longer functioning, there is no doubt that Havensville was a significant town in its time. The post office was still open in 1961, and in 1978, residents produced a Centennial book titled *Our Heritage: Havensville, 1878 -1978*. A hundred years is enough time for at least three generations to flourish in the town. Serving as an important railroad center, Havensville supported many families and their businesses throughout the years, even reaching close to 500 inhabitants in 1900.¹¹ As the twentieth century passed through the Depression and World War II, more and more people left the rural life. Automobiles created competition among small towns founded close together. Though Havensville's growth did not continue, it shouldn't be forgotten that this community was once home to a plethora of different businesses and industries that served not only its citizens but people from surrounding towns as well. Throughout its history, many called Havensville home.

Endnotes

- ¹ Centennial Book Committee, *Our Heritage: Havensville 1878-1978*, 2-3.
- ² *6th Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, to the Legislature of the State: For years 1887-88*, 383-4.
- ³ Mary E. Montgomery, *Lesser Known or Extinct Towns of Kansas: Volume 8*, (compiled), pages not noted.
- ⁴ David Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas: A Traveler's Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), 34-35.
- ⁵ Centennial Book Committee, *Our Heritage: Havensville 1878-1978*, 31.
- ⁶ *6th Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, to the Legislature of the State: For years 1887-88*, 383.
- ⁷ Centennial Book Committee, *Our Heritage: Havensville 1878-1978*, 11.
- ⁸ "Crow's Nest at Havensville," *Topeka Capital Journal*, 14 December 1919, 1.
- ⁹ Centennial Book Committee, *Our Heritage: Havensville 1878-1978*, 12.
- ¹⁰ Centennial Book Committee, *Our Heritage: Havensville 1878-1978*, 11.

¹¹ Centennial Book Committee, *Our Heritage: Havensville 1878-1978*, 31.

Sources

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Newspaper Articles:

“Crow’s Nest at Havensville,” *Topeka Capital Journal*, 14 December 1919, 1.

Secondary Sources:

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David Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas: A Traveler’s Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), 34-35.

“Havensville, KS Kansas Aerial Photography Map,” scale 1 in. to 500 m. accessed March 27, 2012. http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&sugexp=frgbld&gs_nf=1&cp=27&gs_id=2y&xhr=t&bav=on.