

The Town William Built: A Brief History of Ida, Kansas



Figure 1. Photograph of the Ida Memorial as it sits today. Photograph by Author. This is the last marker found at the original town site.

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The town of Ida, once located in Republic County, Kansas, was created to meet the needs of a growing population in Rose Creek Township. As time progressed and the railroads entered the scene, specifically the Chicago Rock Island, the needs of the surrounding community changed. Ida no longer met the demands of its people and disappeared from the landscape. This study examines early maps of Republic County, photographs of Ida town site and cemetery, and the recorded history from various local sources.

Imagine driving the countryside of the high plains. Mixed-grass prairie is the dominant feature of the landscape, and farming is the primary occupation among those who inhabit the area. There is enough water to allow for wheat and minimal corn production, and in any direction crops and prairie grass are all you see. Depending on the direction you're facing you can vaguely make out the grey hue produced from the water tower in Munden. Just four miles to the north is Hubble, Nebraska, and four miles northeast via country road is the town of Narka, Kansas. Ida, once located in Rose Creek Township, Republic County, Kansas is little more than a memory passed through generations of the people from this area. Where a town once stood is a sparse intersection, where the only vehicle you are likely to see is driven by friendly local farmer. The historical marker charged with preserving the memory of a country school and church now lies in a ditch, the result of years perched atop the countryside.

Ida was never a densely populated community, but similar to a diligent farmer today, the town served its purpose. The town lived and died serving the surrounding community and this is the story of how economic factors led to its downfall. Ida's purpose was outlived in the late 1880's when the Chicago Rock Island Railroad elected to not build rail line, or a depot in the town. Instead, the company settled on two stopping points roughly four miles to the northeast and southwest of the town in the newly formed communities of Munden, and Narka. The rail line has since outlived its own purpose, but the scars across the scenery clearly show how it permanently changed the landscape of the area. The old tracks are gone, but the high banking remains intact across most areas. Now crossing fields, it is difficult to imagine how excited citizens must have felt upon the completion of this track. At the intersection where Ida once stood the buildings leave no scars. However, pieces of Ida continue to shape the community today giving it a legacy beyond the old cemetery gates.

The Growth of Ida

Early Ida began on the southeast portion of the William Lugenbeel farm.¹ The town site was split between the Lugenbeel farm and that of Anna M. Bobenhouse, widowed mother of William F. Bobenhouse.² These names played a crucial role in the creation of the town, and as a sign of respect the citizens named a street William. A third William came into play when the town began. Ida was formally recognized with the opening of their post office on April 3, 1873. Joseph P. Williams was named the first Post Master and he too left his mark on the community.³ The town at this time had no official name, and common of post offices across Kansas the post master was likely charged with naming his office. Mr. Williams chose to name the post office after his daughter Ida Williams, even though at this time the citizens referred to the village as Royseville.⁴ During this time in Kansas history, expansion and land prospecting were common. It is not known if the town was laid out with the intent of becoming a railroad center, but it is known that Ida had a central location and a duty to serve the needs of many living in Rose Creek Township. A look at the 1880 Standard Atlas of Republic County shows another trait common across the state of Kansas. The population density of this area was evenly spread. The towns of Munden, Narka, and Hubble did not yet exist. Ida was a needed economic center for the residents in this northern part of the county.

¹ Melvin Bruntzel, *Quick Reference To Kansas: Lost-Found-Missing Towns and Places*, , Volume 2 M-W.

² Manhattan Public Library, "Ancestry.com." Last modified 12/1/2012. Accessed December 2, 2012. http://wiz.ancestry.com/Preview/?sub=294913&dbid=1088&url=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-c&gsfn=William&gsln=Bobenhouse&mswpn__ftp=Re.

³ ("Kansas Post Offices, 1828-1961")

⁴ Melvin Bruntzel, *Quick Reference To Kansas: Lost-Found-Missing Towns and Places*, , Volume 2 M-W.

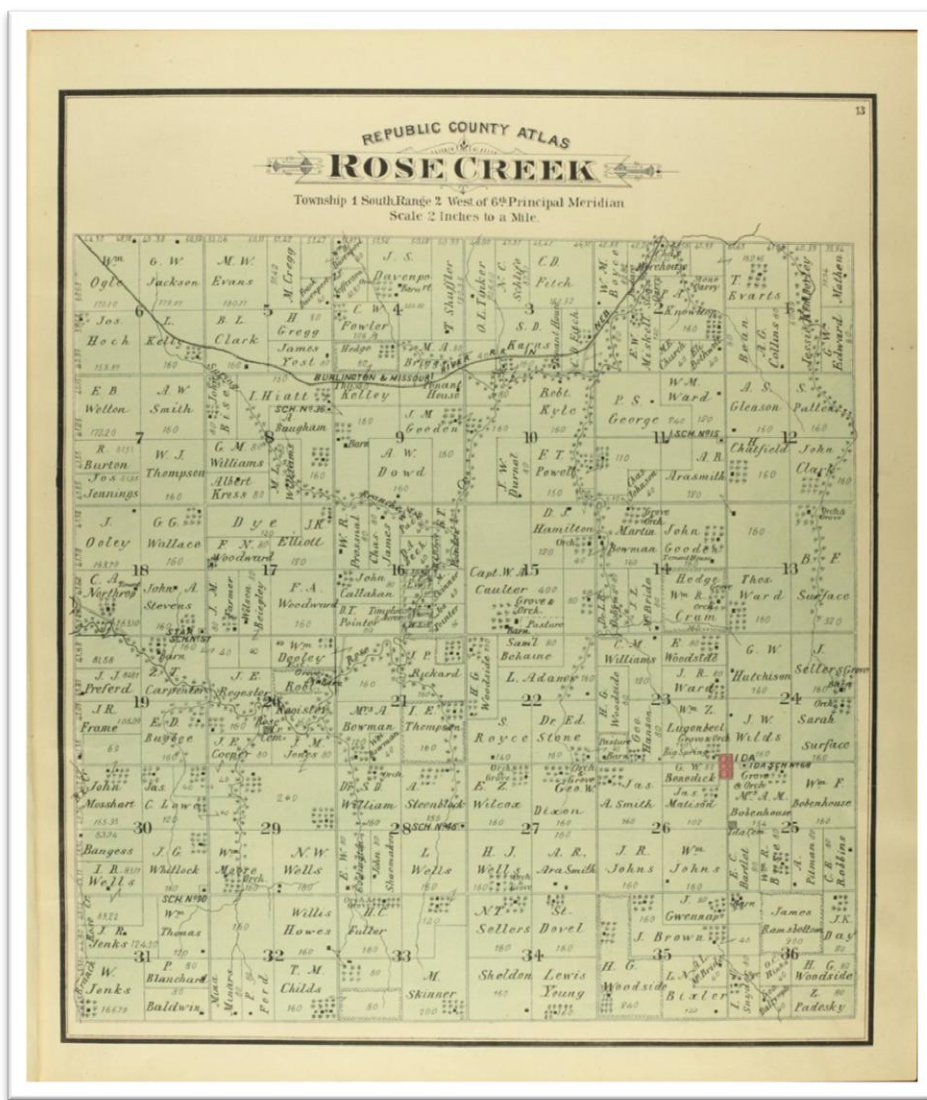


Figure 2. Plat Map of Rose Creek Township, Republic County 1884
 SOURCE: Chicago: Gillen and Davy, *Atlas of Republic County*, last accessed December 10, 2012, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/224009/page/9>. Note that Ida was the only town located in the area at this time.

In 1876 the citizens, who referred to their town as Royseville, decided to officially change the name of their town to Ida.⁵ Prior to this date only the post office was named after Ida Williams, but many referred to the town simply as Ida and consequently the name Royseville was forgotten. Ida had business, and area residents relied on the goods and services from the town to advance their lives. Prior to the official naming of Ida, the only school in the area was a

⁵ Anoma Blackburn, and Myrtle Cardwell, *The Republic County History*, (The Belleville Telescope,).

subscription school located one mile to the north of the town site.⁶ Around the late 1860's, Ida had enough of a population to warrant the need for public services. At the time it was the only village in Rose Creek Township and it was time for the town to build.

Notable Structures and Buildings

Ida school was organized on March 16, 1872. As shown in Figure 3 the schoolhouse was a wooden building with three windows on each side.⁷ This was not the location of the first schooling in the township, which was held at a subscription school located one mile north of the town site, but was the first public school in Rose Creek Township.⁸ This rural school district served as the educational center to the people of the area until 1951.⁹



Figure 3. Photograph of Ida Schoolhouse. ca. 1906
Source: Republic County Historical Society

One possible reason for the survival of this rural school long after the town itself disappeared is a Kansas law once in existence. The law stated that no child should walk farther than two miles to receive schooling. With the centered location of Ida, many farmers sent their children to this

⁶ Ibid

⁷ ("Munden Memories 1887-1987")

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

one room schoolhouse long after the town disappeared. In fact, in 1925 the area residents decided that the school house needed updating in order to better serve the children. Taking it upon themselves to solve the problem, they built a new schoolhouse that year, complete with a full-size basement and five windows per side.¹⁰ This building would stand in Ida for years and today survives in the town of Munden, Kansas. The last year of schooling at its original location was school year 1950-51.¹¹ The next year it was annexed to Munden School District #20, and until the closing of Munden High School, was used as the band room.¹² Today the school house stands as part of the ProHoe Manufacturing site, located at the former location of Munden High School.

Ask a Kansas resident what the common traits of a small town are and often the reply is faith, family, and farm. Built during the summer of 1885, the Methodist Church located in Ida is another legacy Ida once used to shape the landscape of the prairie.¹³ Ida appeared to be expanding during this time, and Neville Brick Yard was helping to supply the material.¹⁴ Another common trait existent in any proper town is the general store. At its height, Ida more than filled this quota boasting two general stores.¹⁵ This was part of a business district that also included the Mattison Brothers, who were shoemakers, and The Grant-House Hotel whose reputation was growing in popularity up until the town was relocated.¹⁶ Perhaps describing the attitude of the people, The Independent Order of Odd Fellows organized a lodge in Ida on May

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ *Munden Centennial*, (Munden Centennial Committee, 1976).

¹⁴ Melvin Bruntzel, *Quick Reference To Kansas: Lost-Found-Missing Towns and Places*, , Volume 2 M-W.

¹⁵ Anoma Blackburn, and Myrtle Cardwell, *The Republic County History*, (The Belleville Telescope,).

¹⁶ Ibid

17, 1878. The I.O.O.F. was a religious and civic organization devoted to helping its fellow citizen. A portion of their mission statement follows,

“As an organization, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs aim to provide a framework that promotes personal and social development. Lodge degrees and activities aim to improve and elevate every person to a higher, nobler plane; to extend sympathy and aid to those in need, making their burdens lighter, relieving the darkness of despair; to war against vice in every form, and to be a great moral power and influence for the good of humanity...”¹⁷

Their lodge was relocated to Munden in the fall of 1887.¹⁸ Unfortunately, in June of 1895 the building, charter, and records of the organization were destroyed by fire.¹⁹ Narka also housed a lodge for the I.O.O.F. and in 1894, William Bobenhouse was a first officer of the Narka lodge. A natural feature of Ida is Big Spring Creek, located just to the Northwest of the town. This creek runs into Rose Creek, a larger water source and namesake for the township. This was a likely source of fresh water for the town. Typical of most communities, Ida’s town cemetery is still located a half mile to the south along the higher countryside. The cemetery, shown for perspective, is the final resting place for a number of veterans of war dating back to the Civil War.

¹⁷ ("Sovereign Grand Lodge")

¹⁸ Frantiska Palecek, Rosalie Novak, Raymond Blecha, Frank Filipi, and Benjamin Rundus, *Munden Community News and Views*, (Republic County Historical Society, 1976).

¹⁹ Ibid



Figure 4. Photograph of Ida Cemetery as it appears today. Taken facing the east. November 26, 2012. Photo by Author

Railroad and Movement

News of the Chicago Rock Island and Pacific rail line coming to the area reached the town of Ida during the mid-1880s. This report of a rail line moving in was not uncommon for the time period. The 1870s and 80s in Kansas saw the greatest expansion of rail line in the history of the world.²⁰ This time period was connecting goods and materials from the west with the manufacturing in the east, and Kansas was right in between. When the expansion finally began dwindling around 1890, Kansas boasted the highest amount of rail-line per citizen.²¹ Unfortunately, when the Rock Island decided not to place a depot in the town of Ida, its fate was sealed. Ida had served as an economic center for the surrounding farm community, but now the needs of the farmer had shifted location. The economy in the area was enough to warrant three stopping points along two separate rails, but Ida's central location would not serve. Today the economic shift is still seen with the emptied center location of Ida. The lost town site sits in the middle of two former stopping points along the Rock Island. Narka, Kansas is located one mile

²⁰ (Morgan November 2012)

²¹ Ibid

to the north and three miles east, and Munden, Kansas is located two miles west and two miles south of the town site. Hubble, Nebraska is located four miles to the north of Ida with a depot that was built along the Burlington Railroad.

Christmas of 1885 was Ida's last with a post office. Ida's post office closed the door for the last time on New Year's Eve, 1885.²² The newly created towns of Hubble and Munden became the new home for the buildings transportable from Ida. After the post office closed it took roughly two years before most of the buildings were completely moved. The town did retain its church and schoolhouse suggesting that not all residents moved from town immediately. This is typical of many lost communities where remnants of what once existed linger for years before inevitably disappearing.

Notable Individuals and Culture

William Bobenhouse, farmer and carpenter, was responsible for many of the buildings in Ida.²³ Born in Prussia and later living in Iowa, he is the son of Anna M. Bobenhouse whose land contained part of the Ida town site.²⁴ This story is commonplace among immigrant families who continually move west after arriving in the United States searching for a comfortable location.

William Bobenhouse is one of three notable William names in the area, along with William Lugenbeel and Joseph Williams. Perhaps to memorialize this, one of the street names in the town

²² ("Kansas Post Offices, 1828-1961")

²³ Frantiska Palecek, Rosalie Novak, Raymond Blecha, Frank Filipi, and Benjamin Rundus, *Munden Community News and Views*, (Republic County Historical Society, 1976).

²⁴ Manhattan Public Library, "Ancestry.com." Last modified 12/1/2012. Accessed December 2, 2012. http://wiz.ancestry.com/Preview/?sub=294913&dbid=1088&url=http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-c&gsfn=William&gsln=Bobenhouse&mwpn__ftp=Re.

of Ida was titled William St.; however the street was in the portion of town on the Lugenbeel farm suggesting it was named for William Lugenbeel. The Lugenbeel name originates from Switzerland and appears in census data under many different spellings.²⁵ Other common spellings for this name I found include Lugenbell, and Lugenbeil. Worth noting, Dr. W. A. Shaw, a popular dentist in the Belleville area during the early 20th century, was the grandson of William Lugenbeel.²⁶ The Lugenbeel name has Swiss origin; however, this area of Republic County is known for its Czech heritage. Every year Cuba, Kansas, located ten miles south and two miles east of Ida, holds the Czech Festival to celebrate their heritage.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Melvin Bruntzel, *Quick Reference To Kansas: Lost-Found-Missing Towns and Places*, , Volume 2 M-W.

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