

**What Little Remains:
The Story of Brookville, Saline County, Kansas
1865-Present Day**

Connor Shaw

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Chapman Center for Rural Studies
Kansas State University
Dr. Morgan
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**Figure 1: A present day photograph of the Brookville Post Office.
Photograph taken by Connor Shaw. November, 2012.**

Once a vibrant town, filled with hard working people who made their way west looking to start a new life, Brookville has now become a quiet, low density community. As shown in this research, we will begin to understand why and how this happened. This paper includes early maps, research, and photographs of Brookville, located in Saline County, Kansas.

Introduction

Closed signs are turned forward, lights are shut off, and streets are desolate. All I can hear is the wind howling and a few rumbling engines of vehicles as they pass by on the nearby highway. As I drive up and down the streets of Brookville, Kansas, located in Saline County, these are some of the things I notice. There are some older homes and a few children playing in their front yards, but other than that there is nothing that gives me any indication of the town thriving like it was in the late nineteenth century. Although Brookville is located in Township 15 South, 15 minutes southwest of Salina, the county seat, it never fulfilled its early dream.¹ There are visibly fewer people calling Brookville home these days, but the few who do still reside there seem to be hard working people, whom I can imagine would not want to live anywhere else. This town was once home to several thriving businesses, such as a Union Pacific machine shop, as well as the Brookville Hotel, which I myself loved eating at as a young child. Now a quiet, dusty town, Brookville struggles to keep pace with what it once was. A small town, Brookville is only about one mile by one mile in size, and lies on flat land filled with trees and a couple of open fields used for farming. Two cemeteries are located on the outer edge of town. There are a few hills, but none of the original creeks or rivers remains. What you see today is vastly different from what this town once was and almost could have been.

¹ Cutler, William G. "History of the State of Kansas." kancoll.org
<http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/saline/saline-co-p9.html> (accessed December 10, 2012).

The Early Years

The town first was founded when the Kansas Pacific Railway finally reached the area in 1867.² By the railway making its way there, settlers were able to head further west and start settling on new land. The Kansa Indians who had made their way to the Brookville area first were not happy about this. They were enraged that this railroad was coming into their land and knew it would bring many more settlers onto what they thought was theirs.³ Even with the settlers arriving “in daylight and under military escort only,” they were still attacked many times by the Indians who were already there.⁴

The person accredited with first settling in Brookville was John Crittenden.⁵ He arrived in Brookville shortly after the Indian attacks in 1867, and shortly following those attacks, in 1869, the Union Pacific Railroad surveyed and laid out the town of Brookville. With the railroad giving way to the town, citizens set up some ground rules as well. First and foremost on the list of rules was that liquor was to never be sold in the town of Brookville. According to many, this really did not help with the growth of the town in any way; if anything, it hurt it.⁶ Even with the stiff rules, the town’s first buildings were

² Weiser, Kathy. “Brookville- Another Crazy Cowtown.” [legendsofamerica.com](http://www.legendsofamerica.com/ks-brookville.html)
<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/ks-brookville.html> (accessed December 10, 2012)

³ Fitzgerald, Daniel C., *Ghost towns of Kansas, volume one: 34th anniversary edition*. 34th anniv. ed. Kansas: Dan Fitzgerald Company, 2010. Print.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Fitzgerald, Daniel C., *Ghost towns of Kansas, volume one: 34th anniversary edition*. 34th anniv. ed. Kansas: Dan Fitzgerald Company, 2010. Print.

built and a land office was set up at the Brookville Hotel.⁷ The original hotel can be seen in Figure 2 below.⁸



**Figure 2: Here is a photograph of the original Brookville Hotel.
As you can see it is now vacant and run down.
Photograph taken by and accredited to Kathy Weiser. March, 2009**

By 1870, Brookville had grown and also had elected its first town mayor, William Brownhill.⁹ The town was running well and the community was happy with where they lived, but that would only last until 1874, when in a saloon, a gunfight broke out, killing two brothers.¹⁰ The news of this double murder would soon make its way through the town and rattle many of the residents.

Thriving and Growing

By the mid 1870's the population had grown to 2,000 people and soon after, Texas cattle ranchers were driving their cattle north to Brookville to load onto railcars

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Weiser, Kathy. "Brookville- Another Crazy Cowtown." legendsofamerica.com <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/ks-brookville.html> (accessed December 10, 2012)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

and ship out to ranches.¹¹ Also by this time the Union Pacific Railroad had made the town a division point for the company. Along with this division point, the town had erected many other businesses, some of which included: a hardware store, wagon shop, cigar and tobacco shop, and a few flourmills.¹² With these businesses came work opportunities and therefore the town continued to grow. Unfortunately, the population growth would not last long. A blizzard almost ruined Brookville, but what really started the downfall of the community was a fire on December 24th, 1890, which burned down the original Central Hotel (now known as the Brookville Hotel), a bank, and a few homes.¹³ As if those couple of disasters were not enough, soon after the fire, a depression followed as well as the loss of the Railway division point. Because of all these factors, the 1890s were the beginning of the end for Brookville as people began to continue west or migrate to larger cities to find work.¹⁴ The population of Brookville today is less than 200. Fortunately the town has not been forgotten and continues to remain in the hearts of many who once lived there and had relatives live there. The Brookville Hotel is still a popular restaurant, but it is just a replica of the original and it is now located in Abilene, Kansas.¹⁵

¹¹ Fitzgerald, Daniel C., *Ghost towns of Kansas, volume one: 34th anniversary edition*. 34th anniv. ed. Kansas: Dan Fitzgerald Company, 2010. Print.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ “Welcome to Brookville Hotel Family Style Chicken Dinner Abilene Kansas.” *Welcome to Brookville Hotel Family Style Chicken Dinner Abilene Kansas*. N.p., n.d. Web, 13 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.brookvillehotel.com/>>

A “Big” Touchdown in Brookville, Kansas

To add something interesting about Brookville, Kansas, I didn't need to look much farther than the personal memories and stories written down by Lovisa Malone. Lovisa was a resident of Brookville and wanted to keep a journal of memories she herself had, as well as those of others she encountered during her time while living there. In her journal “Memories,” she recalls a story of her nephew- to- be. She was then Lovisa Ostrom and was about to marry into the Malone family. Her future nephew had an encounter with Charles Lindbergh. “It was in the year of 1922 or 1923 when Charles Lindbergh landed on the hill in the Swenson Pasture just north of Brookville. He was short on gas,” Lovisa writes. Her soon to be nephew was at home when his friends came and knocked on his door late at night. They had just spotted Lindbergh's plane land in the pasture and wanted Frank to go and see it with them. Once there, Charles asked the boy if he wanted his first plane ride and Frank gladly accepted. They flew to Wichita and then back to Salina. Once in Salina, Frank had to stop at Lovisa's house for the money to catch the train back into Brookville.¹⁶

This story is just one of many told in Lovisa's journal “Memories,” and so I thought it would be interesting to tell of a chance encounter with a famous person who just happened to land in the small town of Brookville early in the 20th century.

Below, in Figure 3 you can see a photograph of Lovisa Malone's headstone, located in the Brookville Cemetery. She was a longtime resident of Brookville and died there in 1984.

¹⁶ Malone, Lovisa. “Memories.” *Memories*. Vol. one (1977): 33, Print. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.



Figure 3: Here is a photograph of Lovisa Malone’s headstone. She is buried in Brookville Cemetery and was the author of her own journal “Memories” in which she documents actual conversations she has had with past Brookville residents. Photograph taken by Connor Shaw. Circa- November, 2012.¹⁷

Lasting Memories

Brookville, Kansas was once a small but popular community. Although this community suffered many setbacks and heartbreaks, it was a large stepping stone in the settling of central Kansas and even farther west. Not only was Brookville once a division

¹⁷ Malone, Lovisa. “Memories.” *Memories*. Vol. one (1977): 33, Print. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

point for the Union Pacific Railroad, it was also a town with many businesses, a place where ranch hands brought their cattle to be loaded up on railcars and shipped out.¹⁸ Just like many other people, I also did not know much about this small town located just a short drive from Salina, Kansas. After much research, I am able to see that it was once a booming community and played a pivotal role in the railroad company continuing westward. Although not huge, nor rich, the community of Brookville today is still remembered as a place where many events took place. Lost communities in Kansas are all over the state, and it is our duty as a society and a community in our selves to help remember and preserve the memories of these places that helped shape the state we live in.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, Daniel C., *Ghost towns of Kansas, volume one: 34th anniversary edition*. 34th anniv. ed. Kansas: Dan Fitzgerald Company, 2010. Print.

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