

Dover, Kansas: More Than Just a Dot on the Map



Figure 1: Main Street of Dover looking west, circa 1910s. Source: www.wikipedia.org

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For years, the small town of Dover has been a mere blip on the map of Kansas – in fact; it does not appear at all on some maps.¹ Until recently, when a Dover baker won a national pie-baking contest, even residents of Shawnee County, where Dover is located, had heard little about the town. The unincorporated township, which has a population of 1,734², lies on Kansas Highway 4 about twelve miles southwest of Topeka. Dover truly does embody the saying, “if you blink, you might miss it.” Though Dover might be lost to most Kansas residents, the town remains as a small thriving community with a rich historical background.

The area in which Dover is located was first settled in 1855, and up until that point, the land was inhabited by various American Indian tribes.³ The town of Dover was formally established in 1870 and founded primarily by two families, the Sage and Bassett families.⁴

¹ General Map, “Shawnee County, Kansas (KS),” image of Shawnee County, *City-Data.com*, http://www.city-data.com/county/Shawnee_County-KS.html.

² *Table DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000*, 2000 United States Census, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

³ The First Baptist Church of Mission Creek, *Dover Heritage Early History 1855-1885* (June 20th, 1987), 4, 6.

⁴ *Ibid*, 6.



Figure 2: Sage family in front of the Sage Inn, circa 1900. Source: www.historicsageinn.com

The name of the town was chosen from the area that these two families immigrated from in England. They came from Sommerset Shire, England, close in proximity to Dover, while another family that moved into the region came from Dover, New Hampshire.⁵ A café that is still located in Dover is named the Sommerset Hall Café in honor of its founding settlers' original home.

The originally small settlement of Dover would see exponential growth over the years. Dover saw an economic boom between 1860 and 1890, when the town boasted two of the largest cheese factories in the nation at the time,⁶ grist mills, blacksmith shops, and a hotel that remains standing today. Many more businesses would set up shop over the years, including a post office, a bank, grocery stores, churches, and schools, among others.⁷ Dover currently boasts one church,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lorraine Sencicle, "Dover Shawnee, Kansas," *The Dover Society*, August 13, 2009, <http://www.doversociety.org.uk/65-Dover+Shawnee,+Kansas.html>.

⁷ Vey Basset Rutledge Spaulding, *Dover Then and Now, A History of Dover, Kansas 1856-1964* (Kansas City, Kansas: Phelps Creative Printing Inc. 1964), 4-5.

two cemeteries, two automotive and small engine repair shops, a fire station, a post office, and a single gas pump, along with the café, hotel, and school, which is now used as the town's community center.



Figure 3: Sage Inn as it exists today. This inn has been in operation since 1878 and is currently run as a bed and breakfast. Source: www.historicsageinn.com

As the years passed, Dover would slowly fade out of the picture. After losing many of its main businesses, the town began to slip into obscurity. The Great Depression hit the community very hard, and Dover like many communities never fully recovered from this disaster.⁸ Dover's main staple, agriculture, would continue to support the town's economy and its people throughout these hard times, as it still does today. Despite the town's declining prominence in Kansas, residents of Dover remain devoted to the community. The town maintains a tradition of hosting its annual Heritage Day festival every third Saturday in June, which draws many people who have roots in the community.

⁸ Dover Heritage Association, *Dover Heritage 1915-1940 Volume III* (1990), 16.

Not all hope has vanished for the town to regain widespread recognition. In the fall of 2008, ABC's morning talk show "Good Morning America" set into motion a competition to determine who made the best pies in the country. Norma Grubb, Dover's local pie-baking legend, of the Sommerset Café, was a finalist and went on to win the competition.⁹ This tiny town of Dover, Kansas, was recognized on the national level as the home of America's best pie, putting Dover back on the map.

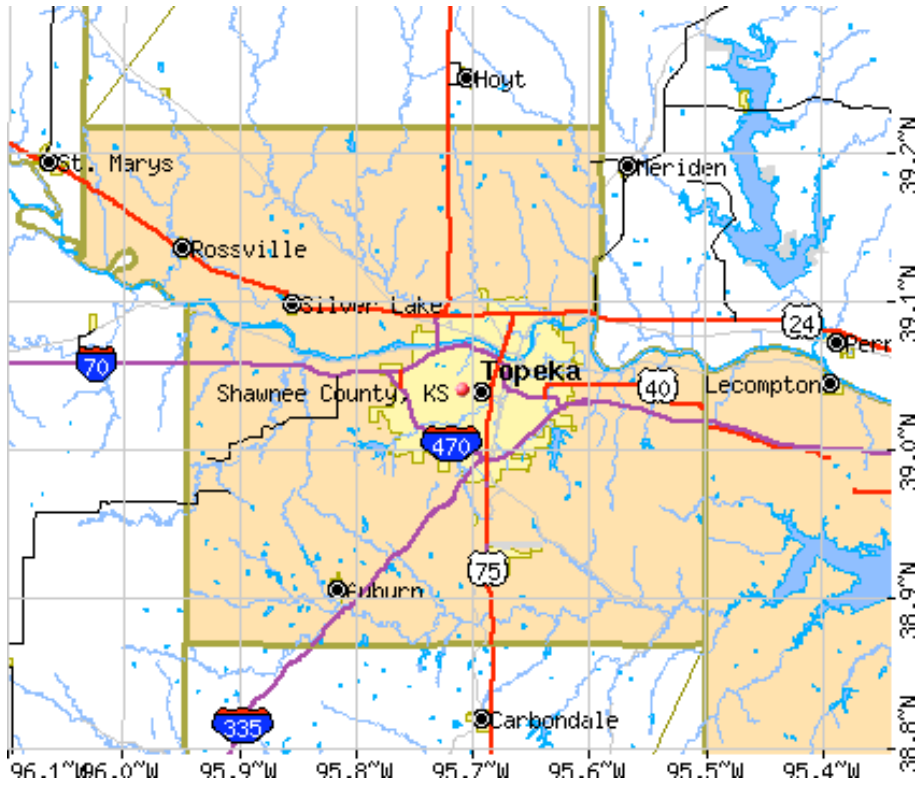


Figure 4: Norma Grubb bakes her award winning pie with Marysol Castro of "Good Morning America". Source: www.doverkansas.com

Though most Kansans might only notice the small town as it shrinks in their rearview mirrors while passing through on K-4,

Dover's long history and intimate community – not to mention its delicious pies – make it worthy of notice. Dover is no longer the prominent town it was in the early years of Kansas, but it retains its value to residents and the many people who can trace their roots back to the community.

⁹ Angela Deines, "Dover Pie Maker Passes Away at 90," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 29, 2011.



Map 1: Map of Shawnee County and the town of Dover, courtesy: Google Maps.

Works Cited

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United States Census Bureau, 2000. s.v. "2000 United States Census. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics:Table DP-1."