

# GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The Chapman Center for Rural Studies

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## “Picked While It Was Green” Alida, Geary County, Kansas: Mrs. Mary Clemons Finds a Town



Alida Depot circa the 1950s. As seen this was little more than a shed as Alida was never a stopping point on the railway. Also notice the grain elevator in the background, this was the pride of the town. Source: Geary County Historical Society. <http://www.gchswb.org/>

In the early morning hours Mrs. Mary Clemons awakes and goes to her bureau drawer and reaches for her stockings in preparation for her day. She quietly sets aside a stack of

letters being lovingly kept for her neighbors. Correspondences from friends, loved ones, and business acquaintances; the only connection the people had to the places they had come from. This was Mary's contribution to the founding of the town of Alida; she offered up the use of her chest of drawers to be the store house of the post offices of Alida, Kansas.

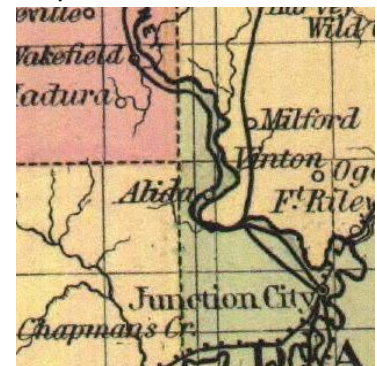
Alida was located in what is now Geary County, Kansas, at the confluence of Curtis Creek and the Republican River. This portion of Geary County has an abundant water supply: the Smoky Hill and Republican River along with numerous creeks criss-cross the landscape creating fertile, gently rolling river valleys. When settlers arrived, the creeks and

### Sources:

Geary County Historical Society. Kansas State Historical Society. Gfeller family history, [www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com). *Cutler's History of Kansas*, [www.kancoll.org](http://www.kancoll.org). Digitized map collection, [www.wichita.edu](http://www.wichita.edu)

ivers provided a plentiful timber margin, including white and burr oak, hackberry, black walnut, elm, cedar, sycamore, ash, hickory and cottonwood. In 1858, Peter Gfeller, a Swedish immigrant and his sons arrived in the area and saw the agricultural potential of the land around the future community of Alida. Peter eventually brought his entire family to Kansas and lived out his life in Alida. While there were settlers like the Gfellers, growth in the area stagnated until the close of the Civil War in 1865. At this time there was a land rush in Kansas due to government land grants given to Civil War veterans as payment for their service. In 1868 Royal Clemons and his wife Mary settled in Davis County (now Geary County) near the Gfeller claim. Mr. Clemons became the first postmaster, and his wife Mary responsible for naming the little village. According to the Geary County Historical Society, Mary was homesick and so named the town Alida after one of her childhood friends. It is also said that the post office was located in Mrs. Clemons' chest of drawers. In a May, 1888 letter from Leslie Snow a U.S. pension examiner, he writes, "I went north to Alida 7 miles Monday. Alida is one of those towns which was nipped in its infancy. It was picked while it was green and before it got its growth. It consists of a store and one house." It is obvious from this account that Alida was not competing with nearby Junction City, yet it persisted until the 1960s when it was razed for the creation of Milford Reservoir. The reason Alida hung on was the grain elevator. The Alida Co-op was the main agricultural shipping hub for the county.

The population of the little village never grew beyond approximately one hundred people; however, the town's economic importance to the county preserved it until the mid 20th century. The town is now buried under the lake and is all but a glancing memory to area residents.



Portion of 1873 map. First map showing the town of Alida. The black lines indicate railroads in the process of being built.