Today, Lorton has a population of 45. The post office is located in the grocery store, and we have a garage and repair shop, a tavern, and the Otoe County bridge equipment storage building. The town board, Chairman Ricci Landwehr, and members Judy Teten, David Goeden, Howard Hogankamp, and Lela Goeden, meet regularly at the town hall to provide for the needs of the citizens.

For many years the young people moved away to find employment in larger towns. Recently, younger families with small children have moved to Lorton. Now, as the older citizens move away, new people are purchasing homes and taking an interest in the small-town life.

This is giving new life to our town, and helps Lorton to grow again.

By Norma J. Castle, Village Clerk, Lorton, NE 68382.

Above: Lorton's post office and other buildings along main street, 1990. [Harris]

OTOE

OTOE   OTOE COUNTY

Otoe is a small town in Otoe County. Located 18 miles northwest of Nebraska City, it is just 40 miles southeast of Lincoln and 50 miles south of Omaha. Otoe typifies today's trend to peaceful small-town living and access to larger cities for employment and entertainment.

Berlin precinct, established early in territorial days, was probably named for pioneer and Civil War veteran E. D. Berlin. Churches and schools were the first concern of the early settlers, who were primarily of German descent. In 1860 — long before we were a town — a Methodist church had been founded. County records list District 78 in the school census in 1876, with a schoolhouse just west of the present town site. A Lutheran church was established in 1878.

Our town was founded in 1880 by Aureluis Bowen, who owned 160 acres in Berlin Precinct. At that time, the Missouri Pacific Railroad was building its line from Kansas City to Omaha. Bowen gave 20 acres to the railroad, and another 20 acres to a town, which he called "Berlin." The original plat — only four blocks square — was quickly outgrown, so the first of several additions were made.

The first passenger train made its entry in 1883. The railroad was an important part of our village life, with two passenger and two freights every day. The old schoolhouse had been moved into Berlin when the town was established. Soon, a larger school built and a high school was added. In January 1896, when the population reached the required 200, Berlin incorporated.

Above:
Aerial of the Village of Otoe, in Otoe County, 1990. [Roettger]

Right: Known for nearly 40 years as the Village of Berlin (in honor of a Civil War veteran), it had to choose a "non-controversial name" during World War I, in self defense. [Nebraska State Historical Society]

Right: The Easter Sunday tornado, 1913, flattened Berlin's main street, and most of its homes. The Berlin Bank had all its windows blown out and roof removed, but it was structurally still intact.

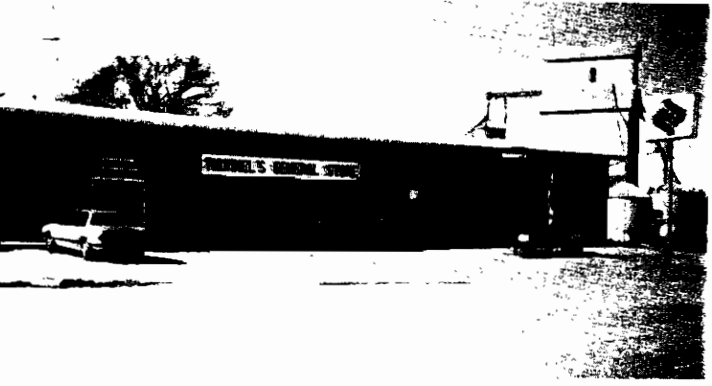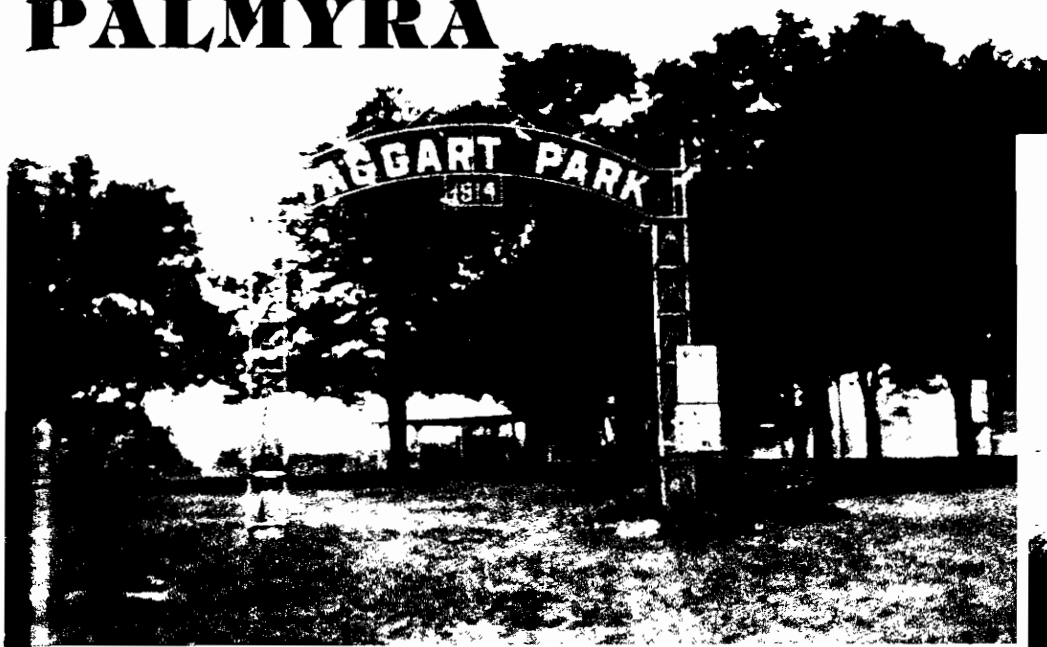Below: Otoe's main street 1989. [Harris]

Left: The Otoe School. [Harris]

Below: St. John's Lutheran Church, built in 1971. [Roettger]

Below: Thummels' General Store, next to the elevator. [Roettger]

Our town has survived a number of disasters. The 1913 Easter Sunday tornado did great damage to our town. The entire business district was destroyed and 75 homes were in shambles. After flattening Berlin, the storm ripped through several other towns on its way to Omaha where hundreds of people were killed. The citizens of Berlin gathered up the pieces and rebuilt.

Then, in 1918, numerous fires "broke out" along Berlin's main street. After a full block was destroyed, thought to have been because of the intense anti-German feelings during World War I, a group of citizens petitioned to the town's name changed to "something else." The name "Otoe" was chosen, and became official on October 18, 1918, less than a month before the end of the war. (Postal records show no other town by that name in the United States.)

In the 1920s, Otoe was a thriving town with two churches, a bank, two grocery stores, a light plant, two elevators, a butcher shop, a hardware store, a blacksmith, a newspaper, a livery stable, and two barber shops. Even though passenger train service was discontinued in 1932, Otoe's population peaked in 1940 with 298 citizens. After World War II, various shifts in both the rural and urban population occurred so that in 1958 the high school closed its doors. The railroad abandoned this branch of its line in 1960.

There have been many changes since then. Today Otoe has a population of 196. Still governed by a five-member board of trustees, the community supports a 14-member volunteer fire department, with a nine-member quick response team, and a K-8 elementary school. A new Lutheran church was built in 1971 to replace the structure destroyed by fire earlier that year. In addition to our post office, we have a grocery-catering service, two taverns with eating facilities, a radio and TV shop, a construction company, a small plant that manufactures car crushers, a plumbing shop, and an elevator.

Otoe has a very nice park. The ball diamond was dedicated in 1982, in connection with the Otoe centennial celebration. An annual barbecue is held the second Saturday in September as a community-wide project with proceeds going to benefit the community. A booklet written for the centennial provides more details about our town, Otoe.

By Verena Paap and Loris Roettger, Box 85, Otoe, NE 68417.

PALMYRA

PALMYRA   OTOE COUNTY

On gently rolling hills near the Little Nemaha Creek, our town was platted in 1870 on land belonging to Rev. John M. Taggart, a Baptist minister. Taggart, who arrived early in 1856, was also an architect, stone cutter, and served in the territorial legislature. Early activities included a Sabbath school, "...held in an old log schoolhouse in 1856, Rev. Webb officiating."

As pioneers settled along the cut-off trail from Nebraska City to Fort Kearny, a post office was requested. Established on June 20, 1862, it took its name from the ancient city of Palmyra in Asia Minor. Prior to this, mail was brought to J. R. McKee's farm by the stagecoach. McKee's great-granddaughter, Barbara Fey, served ten years as Palmyra's postmaster, retiring in 1989 after 30 years of postal service.

A "real town" started to take shape when the Midland Pacific Railway was being built parallel to the old trail in 1870-71. When platted, a four-square-block village park was dedicated and named Taggart Park in his honor. Oakley's built a general store, Sylvanus Brown established a hardware store, which included a stock of agricultural implements, and Foster & Garnett also erected a store. Viola Campbell built the first home in the spring of 1870, at which time the post office was moved to her home and run by her daughter. When the first train arrived in April 1871, Palmyra was well established.

In 1873, with the help of local farmers and citizens — each subscribing $1,500 toward construction — Gualt & Powell built a mill. The following year, using a windmill for power, a machine shop and elevator was established. A larger schoolhouse was also built in 1874 at a cost of $3,300.

Palmyra's first library, located in the town hall basement, was destroyed by fire on December 24, 1913. Moved to space above the drug store, it was again burned (along with many other buildings) in 1914. The Woman's Club decided that a fire-proof library should be built, a structure which is still being used.

For many years, Palmyra's premier event was a day-lor picnic. First suggested by settler Edwin Baldwin in 18 "...to welcome the many new settlers to the area," it w. formally organized in 1887 as the Old Settlers' Associatio Held at J. R. McKee's grove just south of town until 189 the gathering grew of over 10,000 persons, many of who arrived on special trains that offered reduced rates for th event. It was moved to the village park, where a big te could shelter people from the sun. There were bands, race contests, and "...plenty of food, music, and politic speakers."

A "big affair" was featured at the 1933 picnic, when monument was dedicated on the Douglas Road south town, marking the early westward trail from Nebraska Ci to Denver. Built from stones gathered from the foundatic of the Oakley store, a bronze plaque commemorates "...tl second night stop" along that trail. For the 100 anniversary of the event, observed June 13-14, 198 Palmyra's senior citizen, 96-year-old Dick Nash, w chosen Grand Marshal of the "Parade of the Century."
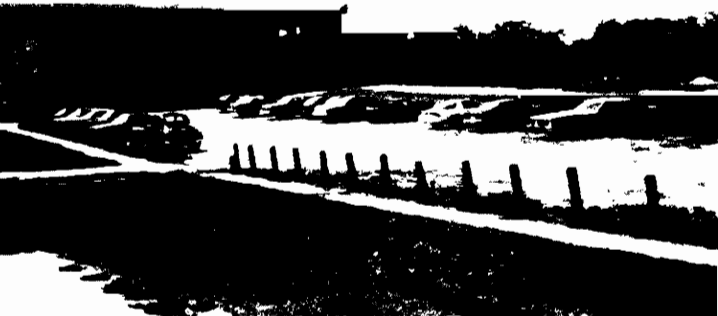

Above: Palmyra's fire-proof library. [Bolz]

Below: Palmyra-
Bennet High
School. [Bolz]

Other excitement in bygone days was provided by baseball games and horse races. It is said that Palmyra had two real-good race tracks.
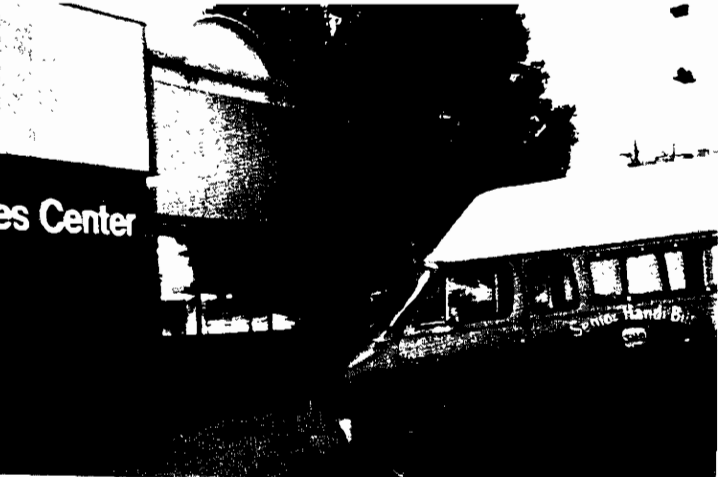
Today over 500 people call Palmyra home. A housing development, started in the 1970s, provided for new growth. Our businesses include a grocery store, a bank, a farmers' co-op, numerous small shops, and gas stations. The school district, which consolidated with Bennet in 1869, remodeled its facilities in 1982. The Senior Citizens' Activities Center, built in 1984, attracts senior diners daily and is available for other activities in the evening.

Volunteers provide fire protection for the town and rural residents, and have formed a quick-response medical squad. Volunteers also support year-round athletic programs that ranges from kid's T-Ball to adult co-ed volleyball. Others deliver meals-on-wheels, care for plants around town, publish a monthly village newsletter, and provide fun and educational programs for all ages.

These are the things that help make our town, Palmyra, a nice place to live and grow.

By Bob Fey, Box 194, Palmyra, NE 68418, with the help of his daughter Pam Bolz (a great-great granddaughter of J. R. McKee, one of the original settlers of Palmyra).

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: "Picnic Day" by Winifred Dowding, 1987; and an earlier history by Cora Nash and J. H. Sweet.

Above: Palmyra's Activities Center and Handi Van. Senior Citizens enjoy lunches here, served daily. [Bolz]

Right: The new gazebo in Taggart Park, built by the Palmyra Action League, 1986. [Pam Bolz pictured]
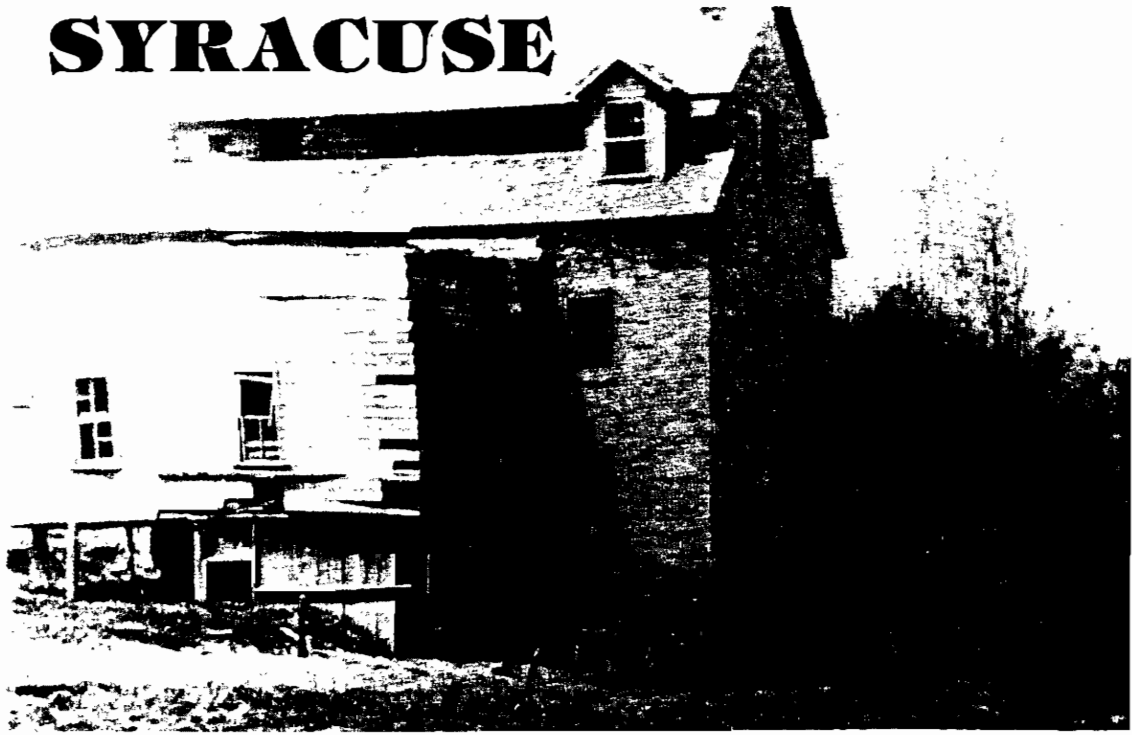
SYRACUSE

SYRACUSE
OTOE COUNTY

Syracuse had an unusual origin. The name appears at a site southeast of Unadilla in 1856, nearly six miles west of its present location where salt was discovered. To claim the land, the "Syracuse Town Company" was formed. Named for the great salt entity in New York, it was hoped that a similar market would develop. Salt mining was not successful and it soon died down, but the name was not forgotten.

A "postal drop" established at a farm in Syracuse precinct was lost in 1863 when another man acquired the office and moved it to his place of business on "Nursery Hill," west of our present location. Some historians suggest that present-day Syracuse was an outgrowth of that settlement. However, those observations are not entirely correct, since the earlier Syracuse postal address was moved to Nursery Hill, it was not the predecessor — only an interim step.

The first root for the present town of Syracuse was planted in the late 1850s when a school was established. It continued as settlement increased. In 1869, when talk of a railroad coming through the area got serious, a Mr. Thorn gave 100 acres of land to the Midland Pacific Railway, and Dr. J. N. Converse and L.E. Sinsabaugh laid out a town. In 1871, when the railroad was completed to Lincoln, the station was given the name "Syracuse."

The importance of the railroad was immediately felt. As Syracuse became a major shipping point in the county, buildings sprang up at a rapid pace. Nursery Hill's two stores and post office were moved to the new town, and

on March 6, 1872, the post office became "Syracuse" again. Incorporation was accomplished on January 6, 1875.

Syracuse also grew as an agricultural center. In 1878 over 350 cars of grain and 100 carloads of livestock were shipped from this station. The original town was built primarily on the bottomland near the tracks, but it gradually moved to the higher ground. By 1879 the population was upwards of 500 residents, and in 1882 over 80 services were listed, including a carriage factory. A stone quarry was developed five miles from Syracuse. Some of its light-gray stone was used to build the state penitentiary at Lincoln.

Gradual but steady growth is noted, with the population at 510 in 1880, 728 in 1890, and 861 by 1900. With community

Above: "Waiting for the train" at the Syracuse Station, ca. 1900s. [OCMS]

Left: Syracuse's main street in front of J.H. Arends store, ca.1910. [Museum of Memories]

Right: A Fourth of July celebration in downtown Syracuse, ca. 1920s.

Below: The Syracuse Kittenball Team, 1932, "The Bluebirds." [Museum of Memories]

Above: The old Lutheran Church, donated in 1973, now the home of the Otoe County Museum of Memories.

Below: Syracuse's traditional Christmas Tree, at the center of town. [Museum of Memories

infrastructure in place, the 1992 population of 1,671 represents a solid citizenry, and the highest to date.

Syracuse's schools played a major role in its continued existence, with 31 students registered in 1859. (The average attendance, however, was only five.) During railroad construction in 1870, a new schoolhouse was built for the 50 pupils. Other buildings were needed in 1880 and again in 1890. Enrollment was 330 by 1900. An annex was built to the main building in 1925. These buildings were replaced in 1943, and a new high school was built in 1963. Now a consolidated district known as Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca, serves over 600 students from this area.

The first church was built in 1873, with others in 1887 and 1880. A number of fraternal and social organizations also appeared in the community. Because of its central location, the county fair was moved to Syracuse in 1883. A half-mile race track was constructed and became well-known throughout the state, with huge crowds gathering, especially on the Fourth of July. While athletic events, such as ball games, became very important in the late 1890s, probably the greatest center for social activity was the opera house. Moving pictures first appeared in 1901.

In May 1899 Henry Coit of St. Louis established a telephone exchange. Rent was $1 per month for a residence, and $2 for businesses. The next civic improvement was a water system and standpipe. By 1915 electricity was sought for the town. Concrete started replacing boardwalks in 1902, with six blocks of main street paved in 1923 and another 24 blocks surfaced the following year.

The activity which came in the early 1900s provided a strong basis for the town, and made it appear much more advanced than other communities its size. As the railroad era diminished, Syracuse did not die. Instead it recognized its reason for existence — the rich soil on which it had been founded and the agricultural potential of it. Syracuse stands as an example of the struggles and successes endured to became an established town on the Nebraska prairie.

By the Otoe County Museum Society, Norma Jean Dettmer, president, 366 Poplar, Syracuse, NE 68446.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: For The Record, 1972, a centennial history of Syracuse by Margaret Dale Masters; and Otoe County History, 1983, Otoe County Historical Society and Otoe County Museum Society.

TALMAGE

OTOE COUNTY

The first address for the community which later became our town, was "Morrallton," said to be "a port on the Missouri." Its post office was established on July 15, 1854. On November 1, 1864, when John Patrick became postmaster, the office was renamed "Grant" and moved to a farm in Nemaha County, where he had a small general store. It remained at that location for nearly two decades. Not until the 1880s, when a railroad was being built through this area, did the town, "Talmage," come into being.

Early in 1881 plans for a station were announced, some distance to the north of this location. A committee of citizens headed by Clark Puffer, a prominent farmer and cattle feeder, asked the railroad to build the station on a hill several miles to the south of its proposed site. The officials agreed to "consider the proposal."
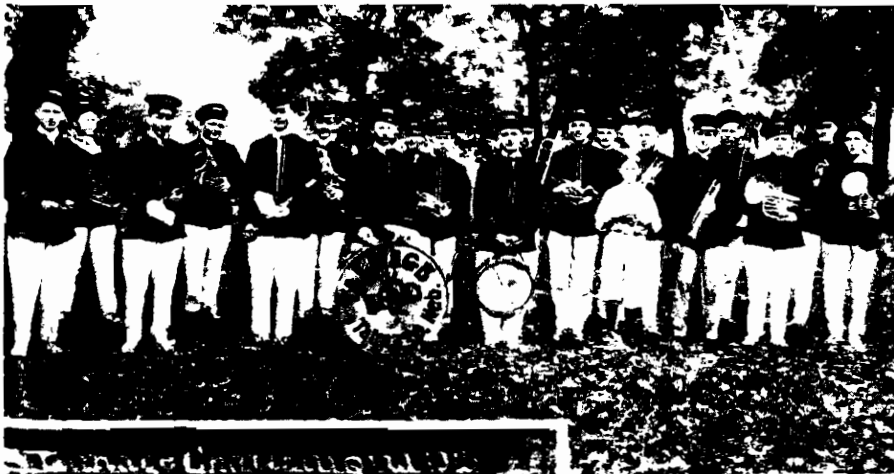
To help influence its decision, Puffer offered to donate the land the railroad would need. Since the land had been planted to corn, neighbors — wanting the station nearby — helped cut down the knee-high corn so that the grade and a town site could be surveyed immediately. (It is said that evidence of old corn stalks are still found under several early houses.) Puffer, who declined to have the town called "Pufferville," asked that it be named for Archibald Talmage, the railroad's superintendent. Honored by the request, Talmage consented, and agreed to establish the station at this location.

Water-use system came early, established more for fire protection than for private or commercial use. Fire, which had ravaged the business district in 1891 and again in 1894, resulted 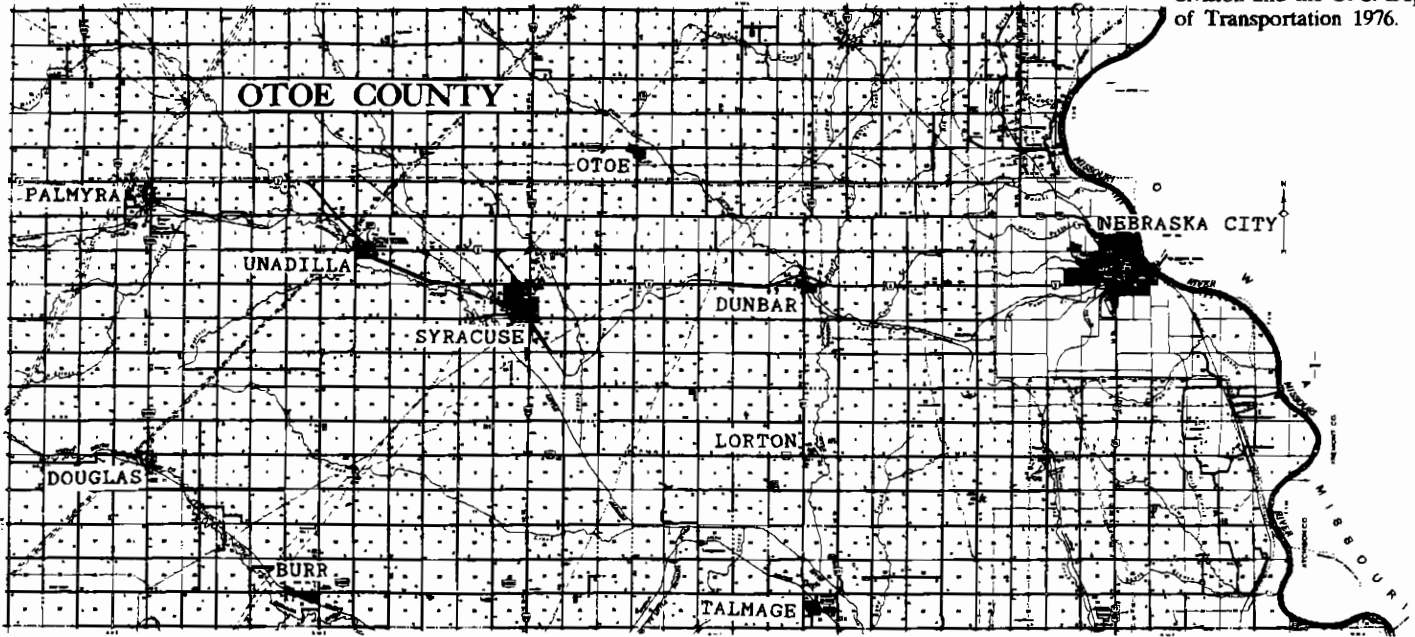in strong support for a bond issue. By 1896, when the 100-foot standpipe was in place, Talmage had organized a "fire company." That system served until 1954, when a larger tank was built. The present volunteer fire department consists of 21 well-trained members, representing farmers and business people.

A "subscription school" was started in 1881 in Gregory Hall and a district had organized by 1882. The town grew so fast that by the time the first schoolhouse was ready for use in 1883, it was outgrown, so some classes continued to be held in the hall. The first graduation was held in 1896 in Cash's Opera House. Early in 1900 several additions were made to accommodate a K-12 system. A brick structure was built in 1935, with vocational classes added in 1951. As enrollment declined, Talmage and Cook merged to form the Nemaha Valley Schools in 1967.
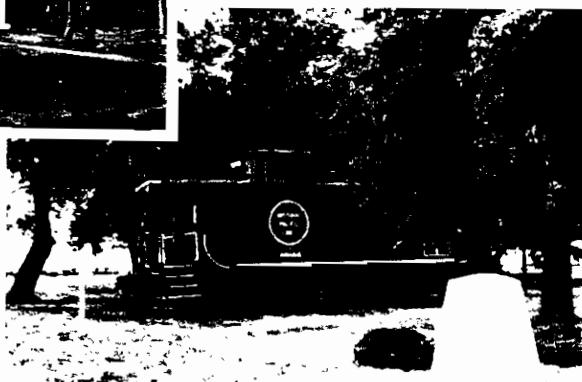
Above: Talmage school, now part of the Nemaha Valley District. [Harris]

Left: The Talmage Chautauqua Band, 1915. [Nebraska State Historical Society]

Left: Talmage's Trinity Lutheran Church, during construction. [OCMM, Nebraska State Historical Society]

Right: The bright red Missouri Pacific Lines" caboose and marker, dedicated during the town's centennial, 1982. [Harris]

Below: Talmage Main Street, 1989. [Harris]

Our first church was Charter Oak Christian Church, established in 1868 about one mile south near the Grant post office in Nemaha County. A cemetery was established and a larger church built at that location in 1884. When that building was destroyed by fire in 1949, its members accepted an invitation to meet at the Methodist church in Talmage, and later merged under the Charter Oak name. Several Lutheran families that arrived as early as 1858, organized a church by 1868, and second Lutheran congregation formed in 1906. In 1972 the two Lutheran congregations merged and built a new church in Talmage. A Church of Christ was organized with its first services held on Christmas Eve 1884.

A creamery, established in the north part of Talmage in 1888, purchased cream from local farmers that was made into butter. Ice was cut and stored from "Creamery Pond," for use during the summer. The pond also provided recreation — boating and fishing during the summer, and ice skating during the winter.

When ice was no longer needed, the pond was allowed to deteriorate. When the Talmage businessmen organized a chamber of commerce in 1927, initial projects included outdoor picture shows during the summer, and treats for children at Christmas. In 1956, when George Stanley was elected president, his project was to restore the old pond to its original beauty. Renamed for Dr. C. T. Gritzka, it is again enjoyed by fishermen. By 1960, with renewed purpose and leadership, the chamber sponsored a drive to build a community building and a medical facility. Annual events now include a pancake supper, Easter egg hunt, and Christmas party for all.

During Talmage's centennial, May 29–31, 1982, a caboose and an historical marker were dedicated. Several descendants of the town's founder, Clark Puffer, were in attendance for that occasion.

By Jane Graff from material found in the Otoe County History Book, 1983; Andreas' History of Nebraska and Perkey's Nebraska Place Names.

UNADILLA

OTOE COUNTY

When looking at all the towns platted in Otoe County during the 1860s, it is a wonder that Unadilla has survived. Paisley, to the west, and Nursery Hill, to the east, met their demise before the turn of the century.

In 1864 James Wallen and his family claimed the 24th homestead in the county and established a "half-way house" which served freighters on the Nebraska City cut-off route. It was immortalized under another name in the novel "Nebraska Coast" by Clyde Brion Davis.

Strite and Catherine Axtell, having "inside information" on the path of the railroad, platted and recorded a town in May 1871. Mrs. Axtell is said to have borrowed the name from Unadilla, New York. "Unadilla" is an Iroquois Indian word meaning "a place of meeting." William Saunders built the first house, which was on the site now occupied by Lempka Recycling. Almost due south, on the bank of the Little Nemaha, Saunders built a dam to provide power for the Unadilla Roller Mills.

The school district was organized in 1871, with classes held in a building near the town site. A school was built in 1872 near where the Methodist Church now stands.

The Midland Pacific Railroad tracks entered Unadilla approximately 1,000 feet south of the Saunders' residence. Crossing the south road, it made a wide curve and exited the town in a north westerly direction. Following the grade of the tracks, main street was also laid out along the curved line.
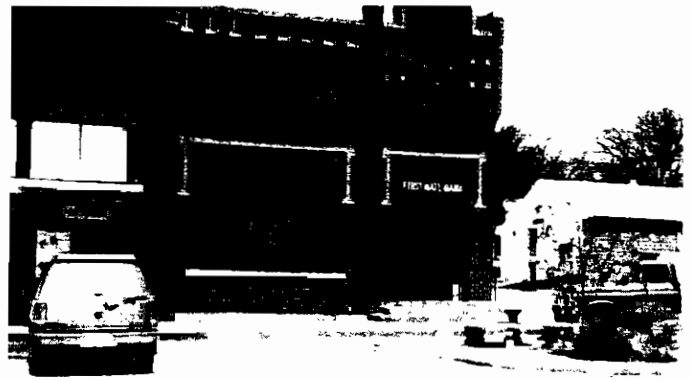
A post office was established in April, 1872, as were two small general stores, and a blacksmith shop. However, while there was a siding at this location, no depot was built. A depression, which gripped the nation in 1873, made for "tight money" all along the new line. In 1874 the people collected what they could and built their own depot and a stockyard, which they donated to the railroad. It soon became known for "top prices" for cattle and grain. An elevator was built in 1880, which handled 90,000 bushels of grain the following year. Large amounts of stone from a nearby quarry were also shipped by rail.

Sunday services met in John Abbott's store in 1873. The first church was built in 1879, with a Methodist church completed in 1899. Numerous fraternal organizations provided cultural and financial support for the community. These include the Order of Good Templars (1874), the Building and Loan (1879), the Equitable Aid Union (1881), and the Mutual Aid Association (1882). A literary association was established in 1881, and a cornet band, best known and long affiliated with the community, was organized in 1879.
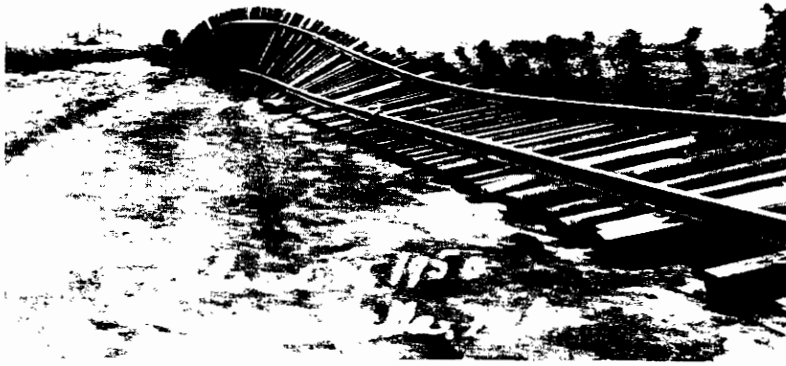

Left: View to north-northwest, with everyone in town, ca. 1880s. [Wilhelm]
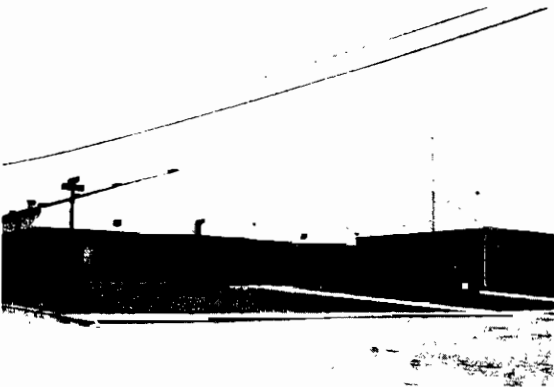
Left: A new school building was completed in 1991, next to the gym, built in the '50s. [Harris]

Below: The water tower and residential street in Unadilla, 1989. [Harris]

Unadilla grew in spurts. In 1888, when the Bank of Unadilla was formed, the population hovered around 300. The 1900 census listed only 243 residents. After numerous small floods, which were blamed on the mill dam, it was blown up. A few years later, in 1908, an even larger flood did $20,000 damage and took six lives. The drop to 209 residents in 1910 was attributed to the flooding. The town gradually moved north to higher ground.

Telephones were introduced in 1901 and a water system was installed in 1905. However, no fire department was initiated at that time. In 1911, a disastrous fire destroyed all the businesses, with the exception of Horstman & Parker's Grocery and the bank.

The restoration of Unadilla during the next two years were a tribute to the unity of the community. Residents pitched in to help clean up and build temporary shelters. While a number of businesses suggested relocating to the block north (so the buildings could "line up straight") the majority were rebuilt along the original curved street. Soon new buildings were completed, and a full line of services, which had been available in Unadilla since its inception, were again in place.

Unadilla's population remained constant until the end of World War II when the town again began to grow. Now boasting a population of nearly 300, a new Methodist Church was built in 1990, and an elementary school was completed in 1991.

Unadilla celebrated its centennial in 1971. Since then an annual birthday party has been held in June with a picnic, ball games, and other festivities. In January 1988, the Lt. Governor signed a proclamation declaring Unadilla "Groundhog Capital of Nebraska." It is celebrated with a wild game feed, and (weather permitting) a parade.

By Barb Wilhelm, local historian, Rt. 1 Box 161, Unadilla, NE 68454.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: Unadilla — the First 100 Years, by Norman Rodaway, and Perkey's Nebraska Place Names.

Left: Unadilla's curved front street, looking east from the post office, 1992. [Harris]