

BROWNVILLE, NEBRASKA

"Richard Brown began building a log cabin, 18 feet square, on August 29, 1854. Not only did the Brown family, which included three or four children (and several slaves), live in the small house that first winter, but Brown also taught school, and held church services there on Sundays."

By fall there were perhaps ten other cabins at this location. Brownville was considered, briefly, as a possible location for the territorial capital [a proposed location was included in the first plat]. A post office was established on January 16, 1855.

In the spring, Brown built a flatboat ferry. A flour mill and a lumber mill sprang up. Religion, education, commerce, and culture came into the new territory with the burgeoning steamboat trade, and the rush of overland settlers. When the county organized in 1856, Brownville was named its county seat.

In 1856, when Robert W. Furnas (the state's second governor) arrived, he began publishing *The Nebraska Advertiser*. In 1859 he founded the *Nebraska Farmer*. Soon the town was booming—with three brickyards, a telegraph line, a large high school building, and a medical college.

When the Civil War broke out, this became an enrollment center. The rosters of the Nebraska volunteers show that over 300 men signed up at Brownville.

After the war, railroad fever gripped the town when the Brownville, Fort Kearny & Pacific Railroad Company was organized. A lobbyist was sent to Washington in hopes of securing land to fund the project. Nemaha County, Brownville Precinct, and the city of Brownville all passed bonds to be paid when the railroad was in operation. Everyone was excited as the first ten miles of track were laid. A group of dignitaries traveled (probably in a modified wagon, pulled by horses) to the end of the tracks and then back to the city to await further construction.

However, when Congress (embroiled in postwar reconstruction) did nothing more to help, the company

was forced into bankruptcy. The rails and ties were torn up and sold to another company to pay some of its debts, while the matter of payment of the bonds was argued in the courts. In 1875 the Midland Pacific Railroad came to Brownville from Nebraska City, which helped to restore some of the commerce to the 'port city'.

At its peak in 1880, Brownville had a population of 1,309. There were three banks, four drug stores, 12 churches, and 17 saloons.

In 1883 the Supreme Court finally ruled on the lawsuits in favor of the defunct railroad's claim. Since "something with wheels had passed over the rails, it had been in operation." The terms of the bond had been met! To pay the debt, Brownville's taxes shot up to \$1.7 on the dollar. The action to remove the county seat to a more central location took on new momentum. The 1886 election gave the seat of government to the newly-created town of Auburn, and the once-thriving city of Brownville became a virtual ghost town.

One primary industry remained. When Furnas arrived in Brownville, he had established a large nursery. It was soon apparent that fruit-growing could be profitable here. Hundreds of acres of peach and apple trees were planted, and there were vast vineyards and fields of strawberries. Orchards augmented the more traditional crops, which broadened the community's economy for many years. Fruit by the carload was shipped from Brownville before the Armistice Day freeze of 1940, which killed a large portion of the trees.

Still the village survived. In 1956 Nebraska artist, Terence Duren, urged its citizens to do something with Brownville. The Brownville Historical Society was organized, with its first festival in 1957 attracting over 10,000 people.¹⁰

The Brownville Village Theatre, Brownville Fine Arts Association, Brownville Concert Series and BookTown designation further enhanced the village's future.



"Brownville 'has a most eligible situation, with a fine landing—and is almost surrounded by forests of natural timber that even the inroads of twenty-five years of civilization have not sufficed to exhaust. The city is built upon hills and in the valleys that nestle between, sloping to the river's edge and affording fine natural drainage. From the billings that surround it a view is afforded of the rolling prairies and wooded slopes of four fertile states.'"



"After years of a failed struggle to gain a major railroad route in Brownville, railroad service between Brownville and Nebraska City was established in February of 1875. Eventually, the track went as far south as Nemaha."



"The arrival of the newly appointed United States Land office [the first Homestead Act claim was filed here by Daniel Freeman January 1, 1863] made 1857 a noted year. In those days two Territorial officers were appointed, one was taken from the North and the other from the South. The gentleman appointed to the land office was Col. C.B. Smith, of New York, and Col. G.H. Nixon, of Tennessee. Col. Nixon was fond of speech making, he would vaunt the great and growing country, and wind up with, 'somewhere in the Mississippi Valley we will build a monument high as the thought of man, and on it place the American eagle.' In every address, 'the bird of freedom with one foot on the Alleghenies, the other on the Rocky Mountains, and, bathing his plumage in the thunder's hoar, was sure to figure.'"



"When slavery became a burning issue, citizens of Brownville found themselves with divided loyalties. There were southern sympathizers who owned slaves, including the original founder. Many others from free states had actively assisted the Underground Railroad. When war broke out, over three hundred men enlisted in the Union forces, the majority in the 1st Nebraska Infantry and the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry, the latter led by Col. R. W. Furnas."



"The halcyon days of Brownville were when steamboats made regular and frequent trips between St. Louis and Omaha. During the year 1857, forty-four packets were running on the Missouri River. In 1856, the fine, large steamers Admiral Edinburg, Omaha, John G. Tutt, Arabia, Genoa, Martha Jewett, Warner, Keystone, Hannibal and A. C. Goodin were plying as regular packets. Two or three years later it was no unusual thing to see as many as half a dozen steamers at the Brownville wharf at the same time, receiving and discharging freight."



"Special event celebrations like the beginning of telegraph service in 1860 and train service in 1875 called for speeches, cannon fire, toasting or banqueting and general jollification. The arrivals of new ferryboats were occasions for public rejoicing. Completion of structures such as a store or sawmill was reason for dances or other festivities."



"Early day big business centered in the vicinity of Wharf and lower Main Streets. There steamboat warehouses, transfer houses and wholesale establishments were located, wagon trains acquired supplies and farmers unloaded their grain and produce."

Later the business section grew and was solid from Wharf to Third Streets with scattered business houses to Sixth Street and a few on the lower side streets. A blacksmith shop and two store buildings, one a two story brick, stood at Sixth and Main Streets."



"On April 17, 1903, the most disastrous fire in the history of Brownville destroyed what was commonly called the 'brick block' of two and three story structures. These buildings [were] on the south side of Main Street between Second and Third Streets."



"Robert W. Furnas first planted fruit trees in 1855, he 'had been the instigator and the producer of horticulture in the Brownville area from that day on. So even after the town itself entered the years of its long sleep, the fruit industry prospered...there was 'fruit on many hills all the way to Nemaha.' Apples, grapes and strawberries were the three largest crops. Apples were packed in barrels and lined the depot platform to be shipped out by boxcar. In strawberry season, all hands, including those of children, were recruited. The Brownville Fruit Growers Association shipped carloads of grapes to brokers and wholesale dealers."



"At the foot of Main Street, the Great River from far mountains rolling its watery way through the midlands fascinates the casual viewer. Those who know the river's story of Indians, trappers, explorers, fur traders, gold seekers, and the Indian Wars feel a kindred kinship with the fading past."

MAIN STREET

- 1. Old Stone Wharf, 1854:** Thousands of steamships, "as many as six packet boats a day" arrived here during Brownville's heyday with westward homing migrants.
- 2. Robert Stout House, 1857:** Home to Brownville's earliest blacksmiths, J.W. and J.C. Gibson.²
- 3. Lone Tree Saloon, 1868:** A two story Italianate brick block building, mentioned in Willa Cather's writings as a saloon.
- 4. Land Office Reproduction, 1963:** Daniel Freeman filed the first U.S. homestead here in 1863.
- 5. Boettner Park:** Owned by the Brownville Historical Society (BHS). This park contains a Civil War and Veterans Memorial.
- 6. John B. Didier Log Cabin, 1854:** BHS restored this cabin utilizing many of the original logs and stones. They operate tours.
- 7. Brownville Historical Society Office, 1905:** The first telephone sent from Nebraska originated from this spot on August 28, 1860, sent from Brownville to St. Joseph, Missouri via the Missouri and Western Telegraph Company. The message was a "brief greeting from the citizens of Brownville to people of the United States." Locals celebrated with bonfires, a band and a barrel of wine.
- 8. Brownville Post Office, 1905:** Features a mural, "Arrival of Packet Boat," by Terrance Duren.
- 9. Middleton Shop, 1905:** This false front frame structure was rebuilt around 1905 and operated as a garage for Ford Motors. It is currently operated as the Wheel Museum by the BHS. Included in its collection is a cannon presented to the Village for its protection during the Civil War. The original building was erected in 1859 for John W. Middleton as a saddle and harness shop on lower Main Street and moved to its current location in 1862.
- 10. Town Hall & Opera House, 1918:** The Village of Brownville offices and community center are housed in this bowstring trussed building that is floored with hand planed tongue and grooved maple flooring. From the 1920-50s movies were shown for the community seating up to 200. It also welcomed traveling medicine and magic shows; basket ball games and school plays; and orchestras and revivals.
- 11. Brown-Carson House, 1860, & Carriage House, 1880:** The original one story brick dwelling was built in 1860 for Richard Brown, founder of Brownville. Brown added a two story frame wing in 1861 and sold the property to John L. Carson, one of Nebraska's leading 19th

- century financiers, who in turn made an addition in about 1880. This Italianate dwelling, including its furnishings and basement kitchen, has remained virtually unaltered since then. Just south of the house is the handsome Carson Carriage House built before 1880. In 1966 the Carson family gave both structures to the BHS, which conducts tours.
- 12. Commercial Buildings, 1870:** Both are good examples of Italianate commercial architecture. Built for The State Bank of Nebraska, they operated as such until 1880. Founded in 1858, the Masonic Nemaha Valley Lodge #4 have been using this building as a meeting hall since 1894.
- 12. Dr. Spurgin's Dental Office Museum, 1963:** This BHS landmark features antique dental tools and oddities in an old-time dentist's office.
- 14. Lyceum Bookstore, Gallery & Cafe, 1863:** Over the last 150 years this accommodating building has been home to the post office, library, lecture series, taverns, restaurants, galleries, grocery, banks, hardware stores and more.
- 15. Thomas Haywood House, 1857:** Haywood later sold the house to the Bridgewater family who lived there for many generations. Early Christian Church Reverend John W. Sapp and his wife Sarah lived on the property as well.
- 16. Ruth & Jacob Berkley House, 1865:** Berkley was Brownville's first wagon and carriage maker. He also led the local stringed orchestra. The property was also home to an icehouse that villagers filled with ice from the winter frozen Missouri River.
- 17. Worthing House, 1863:** Built for Evan Worthing, a baker, this 1.5 story brick residence remains a good example of Greek Revival architecture.
- 18. James Vail House, 1860:** Early resident Jessie Berlin taught piano lessons to generations here.
- 19. Captain Bailey House, 1877:** A Gothic Revival brick dwelling erected for Benson M. Bailey in 1877, purportedly built near the Missouri River, dissembled and rebuilt on the current site. Now a BHS museum.
- 20. Elizabeth Stevenson House, 1866:** Elizabeth was the widow of James. Together they ran a hotel and served on many philanthropic committees.
- 21. Schoolhouse Gallery & Nature Center, 1981, and Governor Furnas Arboretum, 1996:** The Brownville Fine Arts Association (BFAA) offers events and tours in both the arboretum, an affiliate site of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, and the gallery.
- 22. Matthew A. Handley House, 1863:** This property was home to two pioneer families, both the Handleys and the William Dens. Den was Brownville's first cobbler.

- 23. Erastus Parker House, 1857:** This early settler was a Quaker.⁵
- 24. Wibley House, 1870:** Built for William D. Lewis and purchased the same year by Eli S. Wibley, this 1.5 story brick dwelling is a good example of Gothic Revival architecture.
- 25. Brewery Cave, 1866, & Whiskey Run Creek Vineyard & Winery:** Used by the Brownville Brewery Company until 1900, the cave has been restored and is part of the Whiskey Run Creek Vineyard & Winery.
- 26. Wheeler-Drury House, 1867:** C. W. Wheeler was a judge and builder of bridges and homes. He later sold this home to Jonas Drury, an early Brownville carpenter.⁶
- 27. Pierce House, 1874:** This house is in nearly original condition and was built with clay Brownville bricks sourced just north of the property.

SOUTH OF MAIN STREET

- 1. I.S. Nace House, 1884:** Ira Simon and Malinda Nace raised 22 children in this home.⁴
- 2. Governor Furnas House, 1868:** Probably built by and for Andrew J. Berry. Occupied by Robert W. Furnas, Nebraska's third state governor, from 1878-1905. Civil War officer, statesman, journalist and agricultural leader, Furnas played an important role in Nebraska history. A 2.5 story brick example of Gothic Revival and Italianate styling. Tours are given by the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation.
- 3. Thompson-Lowman House, 1860:** Probably built for Benjamin B. Thompson and purchased by the Louis Lowman family in 1872, this 1.5 story building has had a two story addition.
- 4. Methodist Church, 1859:** Built of brick with a frame cupola for the Congregationalists led by Rev. Thomas W. Tipton, Brownville resident and U.S. Senator, 1867-1875, this is one of Nebraska's oldest churches and one of the state's few remaining examples of Greek Revival ecclesiastical architecture.
- 5. Cyrus Wheeler House, 1858:** Known locally as the Drovers' house, this home was host to cowboys on the Texas Trail.
- 6. Tipton House, 1869:** Built for Mrs. H. M. Atkinson, daughter of U.S. Senator T. W. Tipton; this is a fine example of Italianate architecture.
- 7. Obediah & Mary Hewett House, 1878:** This home changed hands many times belonging to pioneers like, Mayor Andrew Holladay, Banker John L. Carson and Governor R. W. Furnas.
- 8. Site of Brownville College & Nebraska State Teachers Association, 1867:** The first meeting of the Nebraska Teachers Association was held to 'elevate' the profession on this site in 1867 in the Brownville Union High School, the

- largest free high school in Nebraska.
- 9. Cyrus A. Pollock House, 1871:** Pollock was an early printer, and had a shop that sold gifts, books, sheet music and stationery.²
- 10. Brownville Christian Church, 1903, & The Brownville Village Theatre:** This frame building was originally located on Main Street and was moved to Water Street in 1966. It has been home to Nebraska's oldest repertory theatre since that date.
- 11. Morrison-McNaughton House, 1859:** The oldest wooden framed house in Brownville.
- 12. John C. Deuser House, 1858:** Deuser was a "tinmer," merchant and farmer.¹
- 13. The Beehive House, 1863:** Built for John C. Deuser as an apartment house, this 2.5 story brick was originally divided into four living units.
- 14. Henry Atkinson House, 1860:** Atkinson was a Civil War General, Lawyer, U. S. Surveyor General.
- 15. McLaughlin House, 1862:** The McLaughlin House was probably built by and for Timothy McLaughlin, a mason and business man.
- 16. Theodore Hill House, 1859:** Hill was a general merchant with a shop on First and Main Streets.
- 17. Brownville Depot, 1875 & Railroad Veterinary Museum, 2010:** Preserved by the BHS, this 1875 railroad depot documents the history of the railroad in the region.
- 18. Israel Cummings House, 1859:** Home of one of Brownville's first families.⁵
- 19. Samuel Summers, 1868:** In the 1890s this became the home of LeRoy and LuLu Hood.
- 20. Brownville Riverside Park & Landing:** This park offers fishing, camping and picnicking opportunities.
- 21. Meriwether Lewis Missouri River History Museum, Dredge 1931/Museum 1981:** Named for the 1804 Lewis and Clark Expedition, and built for the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, this historic steam powered, side-wheeled dredge boat is now a museum that is permanently docked alongside the river it helped to channelize between 1939-1969.
- 22. State Fair Park, 1870-71:** Nebraska State Fairs were held in Brownville in 1870 and 1871.
- 23. The Spirit of Brownville, 1981, & River Inn Resort, 2009:** These two ships offer visitors a glimpse of river life, historical river tours, and a night's rest aboard a floating Bed & Breakfast.

NORTH OF MAIN STREET

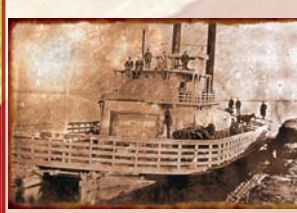
- 1. Muir House, 1868:** A Two story brick mansion completed in 1872 for Robert V.

- Muir. One of Nebraska's finest examples of domestic Italianate architecture.
- 2. Brownville Concert Hall, 1990:** Home to a highly regarded concert series.
- 3. Sarah Barrett House, 1865:** Home of the widow of U. S. Land Office Registrar, R.F. Barrett.
- 4. S.W. Abbott House, 1863:** Home of Elizabeth and Frank Morrison. Brownville's first telephone switchboard was operated by Elizabeth and her lodger Ruth Wood; Frank married⁷
- 5. Anthony P. Cogswell House, 1868:** Built for Anthony P. Cogswell, this is a handsome two story brick structure overlooking the Missouri River.
- 6. Noble House, 1865:** Home to historian and author Glenn Noble; remnants of 19th century grape vineyards remain.
- 7. River View, site of Lewis & Clark Expedition July 5, 1804:** The Lewis and Clark expedition camped here during the exploration of the Missouri River. View the State Historical Marker in the Brownville Riverside Park & Landing.
- 8. John L. Colhapp House, 1869:** Built for John L. Colhapp, a cigar maker, this 1.5 story native brick dwelling with Gothic bargeboard is a good example of Gothic Revival architecture.
- 9. Saltbox House, 1865:** This home was moved in the 1900s from west of Seventh and Main Streets. It is an early shotgun or duplex home.
- 10. Middleton House, 1861:** John W. Middleton was a saddler and viticulturist with regionally recognized grape production.
- 11. Nace House, 1871:** Built for Israel S. Nace, this two story brick Italianate style home has been restored. Nace was a confectioner, farmer and Civil War veteran.
- 12. Bratton-Minick House, 1864:** Built for George M. Bratton, this large two story brick residence was purchased in 1878 by John and Alice Minick. Their daughter Alice A. Minick was the first woman to graduate from the University of Nebraska College of Law and the 15th woman to be admitted to the Supreme Court of the United States in 1892.
- 13. Hoover House, 1873:** Built for William H. Hoover, a 1.5 story brick example of Gothic Revival.
- 14. Walnut Grove Cemetery, 1862:** Established in 1864, this historic five-acre cemetery is the final resting place to many of Brownville's early pioneers, including Governor Robert W. Furnas.
- 15. Capitol Square Park:** The proposed site for the Nebraska state capitol when the town was laid out.

• National Register of Historic Places Site

A self guided tour of

BROWNVILLE Nebraska



Founded in 1854, Brownville, a National Registered Historic District, is a village where visitors step back in time to when life was simpler and friendlier.

Located on the banks of the Missouri River, Brownville is just 10 minutes west of I-29, take Exit 110, on US 136. It is easily accessible from major cities such as Omaha, Lincoln, Kansas City and St. Joseph.



www.Brownville-NE.com



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