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A HISTORY OF OAKDALE, NEBRASKA

by

NORMA LAUNT SCHAUER

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

June 1962

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses sincere appreciation for assistance given by Dr. Roy M. Robbins, the staff of the Gene Eppley Library at the University of Omaha, the staff of the Nebraska Historical Society, the Antelope County Clerk, the Village Clerk of Oakdale, and Mr. Everett Armstrong.

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CHAPTER I

THE INTRODUCTION

The years immediately following Nebraska's admission to statehood brought a flow of emigration northward into the Elkhorn River valley. The result of this emigration was the settling of many communities in north-eastern Nebraska. Some of these communities soon lost their identities and ceased to exist. One community which flourished and developed into a town is Oakdale, Nebraska. The history of Oakdale reflects the story of any number of other similar communities, in which agriculture has been the stabilizing factor, yet Oakdale has a personality of its own.

Oakdale, which has a population of approximately 400, is located in Antelope County Nebraska. If Nebraska were divided by a north-south line and an east-west line, crossing at the center of the state, Antelope County would lie in the center of the northeast quarter of the state. Using the same method of division the Oakdale community lies in the center of the southeast quarter of Antelope County. A. J. Leach in his History of Antelope County, 1868-1883, has described this area as follows:

The early settlers found in the county now called Antelope County, a handsome, inviting, rolling, prairie land, well watered by numerous streams, and a belt of timber skirting the

Elkhorn River and most of the creeks, with occasional groves of considerable size....There was plenty of timber to furnish the early settlers with logs for building log houses and stables, also fuel and other necessary purposes.¹

It is the purpose of this study to relate the story of Oakdale, Nebraska, with the view of showing the struggles of early settlement, the achievements of the growing community, and the permanent result of a mature community. Oakdale was chosen as the subject for this report as it is representative of its period in Nebraska history. It was also chosen because the author has personal interest in the community's past, present, and future. The author is a descendant of a family which homesteaded, established itself in business, and maintains residency within the community today.

In relating the history of a town it became necessary to limit the areas of research. Investigation into the land laws applying at this time and the significance of the railroad pointed up basic elements in Oakdale's early development. For a considerable period of time the railroad dominated the community's economic picture but as years passed agricultural enterprises emerged as the constant contributor to the economy. Aside from business there were other influencing factors in the community's development-namely, its schools,

¹ A. J. Leach, History of Antelope County, 1868-1883, (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company, 1909), p. 12.

churches, and social institutions. Oakdale felt these influences as well as the effects of political movements, national war efforts, and certain other natural or man-made disasters.

It should be understood that a community history of nearly a century requires excluding certain events which could be studied. It also should be recognized that this study was not undertaken for comparison of Oakdale with other communities.

This study, therefore, dedicates itself to providing a record of some of the past events which went into the settlement of a north-eastern Nebraska community. This community, Oakdale in Antelope County, is representative of its period in Nebraska history. A fertile soil, abundant timber, and plentiful water supply awaited the settlers and gave them substance for the story which evolved.

CHAPTER II

EARLY SETTLEMENT

It was in the spring of 1867 that Michael J. Hughes moved his family from Illinois to Columbus, Nebraska. On August 1, the group journeyed on by ox teams and covered wagon to locate on the southeast quarter of section 36, Burnett township, in present day Antelope County, Nebraska.¹ A dwelling, constructed of poles and grass, was built for a temporary home. However his wife and children were frightened by Indian visitors and Mr. Hughes determined that they should relocate themselves. They moved to Cuming County, Nebraska. Thus Antelope County lost its first white settler.²

The following spring, in April, 1868, George St Clair built a shack on the northwest quarter of the north half of the southwest quarter of section 21, Burnett township.³ On June 30, 1868, he entered pre-emption Claim No. 941 in the Dakota Land District. But within a few months his claim was abandoned.⁴

¹ A. J. Leach, History of Antelope County, 1868-1883 (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company, 1909), p. 36.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴ A. T. Andreas (Compiler), History of the State of Nebraska, Vol. I (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), p. 371.

Antelope County's third settler, Crandall Hopkins, was the first to establish permanent residence. The Hopkin's homestead entry was October 22, 1868, on the east half of the northeast quarter of section 3, in Burnett township.⁵ Mr. Hopkins, his wife, and twelve children arrived in November, 1868. They began housekeeping in a small log structure which he had readied for them.⁶

The Hopkin's family was not long without neighbors for by early spring, 1869, J. H. Snider and family, Thomas Mahan, A. M. Salnave, Jacob Bowsman, William Clark and Charles Timm had located themselves near the Hopkin's homestead. A few months later Albert Sleitter, August Learman, John Cowin, A. M. Towsley, Charles Dworak, and B. A. Trueblood joined the growing settlement.⁷ It is of interest that descendants of J. H. Snider, John Cowin, and Charles Dworak reside upon their original homestead land.⁸

It has been previously mentioned that Antelope County's earliest pioneers acquired land through pre-emption or homestead claims. By way of explanation the Pre-Emption Law of 1841 provided that the settler could make claim upon 160 acres of the public domain and acquire title by paying

⁵ Leach, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Andreas, op. cit., p. 372.

⁸ Antelope County Deed Record Book A. pp. 1-52.

\$1.25 per acre at the time the land was put up for sale.⁹ The Homestead Act of May 20, 1862, gave any person who was the head of a family, or had become twenty-one, the right to pay a ten dollar fee and claim a quarter section of public land. This person had to be a citizen or in the process of becoming one. Then, if this person resided on or cultivated his claim for five years, he could receive a final patent from the government.¹⁰ Application of either, or both, of these two land laws gave settlers an opportunity to establish upon a fair sized claim. Antelope County's early settlers made good use of these land privileges.

By 1870 community life had taken shape and the home of J. H. Snider, or Twin Groves as it was called, became the center of activity. Twice monthly mail delivery was received from Norfolk, Nebraska. J. H. Snider became the county's first postmaster.

There are other "firsts" to which the Twin Groves community lays claim. The first wedding was a double one on August 14, 1869. It was between Mr. Allen Hopkins and Miss Francis L. Riley, and Mr. Elias Ives and Miss Nancy Freelove Hopkins. The Rev. C. P. Matherson of Norfolk performed the ceremony. In May of 1870 the first white child

⁹ James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), p. 94.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 165.

born in the county arrived at the L. A. Kimball home. The baby was a girl, named Anna, and her birth caused much celebration in the settlement. October 6, 1870, brought the community's first death when J. H. Snider's daughter, Mary Frances, passed away.¹¹ The community's spirit was capably expressed in these words: "What was a joy to one was a pleasure to all, and what was a grief to one family was a sorrow to the whole community."¹²

Church services were first conducted at the Snider home in Twin Groves by the Rev. George H. Wehn who was a Methodist Episcopal minister from Fairview in Madison County, Nebraska. He was a circuit minister with a territory north into Antelope County.¹³

Twin Groves was the location of the first business and political ventures in Antelope County. The first saw mill west of Norfolk, Nebraska, operated there during the year 1872.¹⁴ This mill was set upon the southeast quarter of section 6, Burnett township. Those who patronized the saw mill brought trade for the R. P. Elwood store.¹⁵ This

¹¹ Andreas, op. cit., p. 372.

¹² Leach, op. cit., p. 96.

¹³ Ibid., p. 214.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁵ A. B. Elwood, "Sidelights on Early Day History," The Oakdale Sentinel, 12 Mar. 1926.

store's building was constructed of native cottonwood. The building served as an entertainment center in the community. Young people gathered there for dances and the county's first Fourth of July observance occurred there in 1871. A brother of the storekeeper, Dr. A. B. Elwood, delivered the oration. The Rev. Henry Griffiths spoke, telling of his journey from England to America.¹⁶

No crops were raised in the year 1869, except for sod corn and garden vegetables, but much virgin soil was broken in preparation for wheat the following year. In 1870 there were good yields of wheat and corn, despite a lack of rain, and garden stuff-particularly potatoes-was plentiful.¹⁷ The community faced the approaching year 1871 with a feeling of security. The good crops supplemented by native game and fruits assured a plentiful food supply.

By now settler's homes were fairly comfortable. Three types of construction were used in Antelope County: (1) the log house, (2) the dugout, and (3) the frame house, where lumber had been imported.¹⁸ The cracks were chinked and then plastered inside and out with clay, which filled the crevices, making the houses tighter against the prairie winds. A few pioneers brought furniture pieces with

¹⁶ Andreas, op. cit., p. 375.

¹⁷ Leach, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

them but the majority improvised home made substitutes.¹⁹

Pioneer life at Twin Groves was becoming easier. However there was an ever present fear that unfriendly Indians might cause trouble. Such trouble came when on February 28, 1870, the Louis Patras' home was attacked.²⁰ Shots were fired into the house but no one was harmed. Ten horses were stolen from the community. Other surrounding settlements were at times raided, and on November 1, 1870, the newly completed Robert Horne cabin was mauraded.²¹ Following these incidents the men formed a military company, The Elkhorn Guards, of which Jephtha Hopkins was Captain.²² This militia requested United States Military assistance and was issued fifty guns and two thousand rounds of ammunition.²³ No other serious Indian incidents followed and the militia company became inactive.²⁴

The settlers had another constant fear and that was of the prairie fire. Twin Groves community prepared for these by plowing fire lines around their homes. The most

¹⁹ A. B. Elwood, "Twin Groves, Farm of Historic Interest," The Oakdale Sentinel, 20 Sept. 1928.

²⁰ Harrison Johnson, History of Nebraska (Omaha: Herald Publishing House, 1880), p. 201.

²¹ Ibid., p. 202.

²² Leach, op. cit., pp. 73-75.

²³ Ibid., pp. 78-81.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

serious fire experienced in Antelope County was on October 14 and 15 of 1878. A great amount of damage occurred but no lives were lost. One observer commented: "The men fought the fire with desperate persistence and women and children were terrified."²⁵ Backlines prevented the fire from reaching towns.

In the fall of 1870 the question of county organization was agitated and, as a result, a meeting was held during February, 1871, at the J. H. Snider home. A petition was drawn up and signed by all the voters present. This petition requested the State Legislature to organize and define the boundaries of the territory west of Pierce and Madison Counties and to name it Oakland County.²⁶ While the settler's petition was in the mail the legislature acted upon a bill introduced by Senator Leandor Gerrard and on March 1, 1871, approved the organization of Antelope County. The name Antelope had been suggested by Senator Gerrard and was accepted. The settler's petition arrived too late for consideration.²⁷ (Refer to map, p. 11.)

To implement the county's organization an election was called. This election was held at Twin Groves June 15,

²⁵ Pen and Plow, 19 Oct. 1878.

²⁶ Leach, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

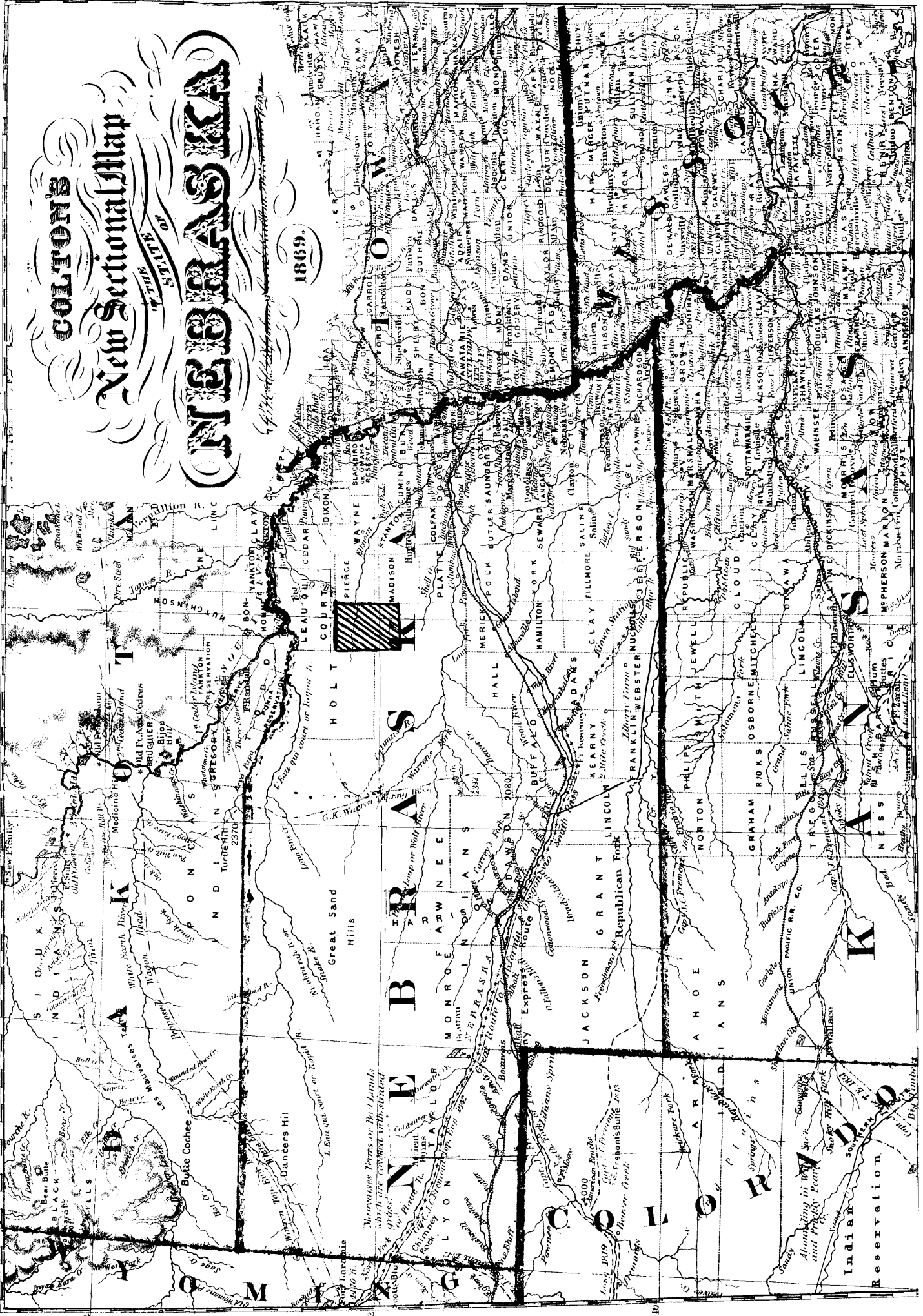
COLTON'S

New Sectional Map

OF THE STATE OF

NEBRASKA

1869.



1871, and polled approximately seventy-two ballot votes.²⁸ County organization had now been effected. The men, elected as county officers in June, served until October, 1871, when a non-political general election was held.²⁹

At this election an important item of business was neglected. State Statutes of Nebraska required that the county seat be designated at this time. Antelope County did not vote upon a choice at its first election. A. J. Leach, county historian, explained that it was overlooked because there was not a copy of statutes in the county and settlers were not aware of the law. He further observed: "The county officials were acting solely on their own judgement. Very fortunately they did not go far wrong."³⁰

Since no county seat had been designated each county official conducted matters pertaining to his office from his residence. Few detailed records were kept. Of those available, one showed that the first personal tax receipt was issued to A. J. Leach, April 4, 1872. This receipt certified payment of personal tax of \$8.60 with \$2.00 for dog tax. The County Clerk's records show the first deed

²⁸ Ibid., p. 49. It is an apparent error in Johnson, p. 202 and Andreas, p. 375, in stating that 202 votes were polled. Leach, as county historian, kept local records in detail and following the courthouse fire, 1874, had many statistics recorded which were otherwise lost.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

recorded on April 2, 1872. This deed transferred title to R. P. Elwood from Cyrus D. Buck on a portion of his claim.³¹

While matters pertaining to the establishment of Antelope County were transpiring another event was taking shape. This event had its origins when the State of Nebraska granted some 32,000 acres of Antelope County Internal Improvement Lands to the Omaha and Northwestern Railroad. This railroad was interested in building northward and desired terminal locations.³²

Early in 1872 I. N. Taylor, land agent for the Omaha and Northwestern Railroad, visited Antelope County. Upon returning to Omaha he recommended that the northeast quarter of section 11 and the northwest quarter of section 12, in what is now Oakdale township, be selected for a townsite.³³ Five men purchased the land from the railroad. These men were: (1) Charles F. Walther, (2) F. W. Hohman, (3) Frank M. Jenks, (4) I. N. Taylor, and (5) John Rath. The group proceeded to plat and lay out the townsite of Oakdale. (Refer to map, p. 14.)

Mrs. Grace Ihlenfelt, a grand-daughter of J. H. Snider,

³¹ Antelope County Deed Record Book A, p. 5.

³² Leach, op. cit., p. 131.

³³ Ibid.

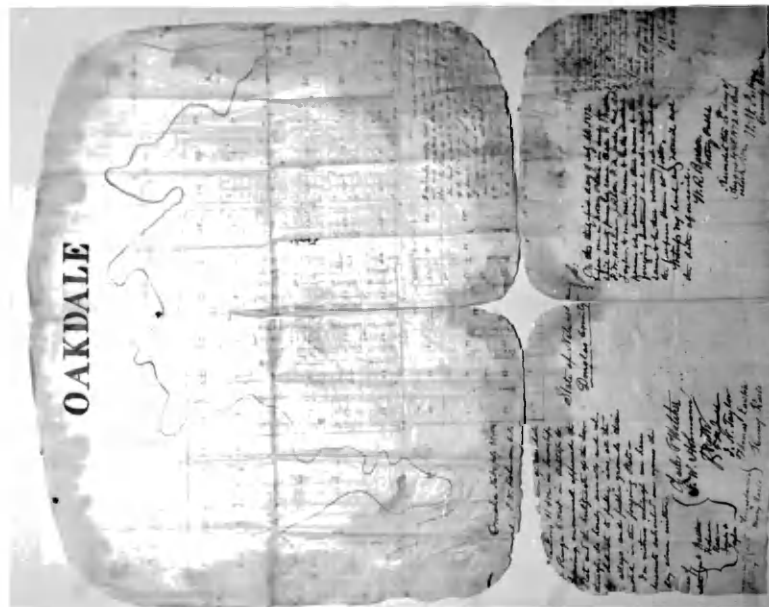


FIGURE 2
ORIGINAL TOWN PLAT-1872

These photographs were taken of the original plat map as in the office of the County Clerk, Neligh, Nebraska. Note smoke and water damage, along the edges of the plat, which resulted from the courthouse fire in 1875.



FIGURE 3
VIEW SHOWING MILL SECTION AND STREETS
OAKDALE IN 1872

relates that when the streets were first laid out a furrow was plowed to indicate the edge of the street and trees planted to mark the corners. Two huge cottonwoods are to be seen in Oakdale today which appear to be of this origin.³⁴

The townsite was surveyed and platted by J. G. Routson, county surveyor of Platte County in July, 1872, and the plat was filed with W. W. Putney, Antelope County Clerk, on August 28, 1872. From this date on Twin Groves lost its position of prominence and Oakdale became the center of community activity.

At the second general election October, 1872, Oakdale was selected county seat of Antelope County. A small frame courthouse was built in the Court Square, as provided in the original town plat. This building, erected in the spring of 1874, cost \$750.00. The structure and all its contents burned on October 6, 1875, and was never rebuilt.³⁵

The railroad required the five townsite purchasers to pay the sum of \$3.25 per acre and guarantee bond of \$10,000.³⁶ This bond was to insure the erection of a flour mill. The original townsite provided the mill site

³⁴ Grace Ihlenfelt, paternal grand-daughter of J. H. Snider, Oakdale, Nebraska, personal interview, 24 Nov. 1961.

³⁵ Leach, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

³⁶ Andreas, op. cit., p. 376.

on Cedar Creek. This site, the west half of the town, was sold to R. G. King of West Point, Nebraska. Mr. King paid \$400 for the location and guaranteed a bond of \$10,000.³⁷ By September 23, 1873, the Oakdale Mill neared completion and began operation in November of that same year. This mill, 24 feet by 40 feet, five stories high, and built at a cost of \$18,000, fulfilled the requirements of the railroad's sale contract.³⁸

For nearly a year before the completion of the mill settlers had been arriving in Oakdale. In April, 1873, the first house and general store were built by B. C. Palmer. A second store, that of R. G. King, was constructed in July of the same year.³⁹

Among the advertisements in the September 9, 1873, Oakdale Journal, were the following: A. M. Cool, blacksmith; A. B. Elwood, physician and surgeon; A. E. Gross, druggist; R. G. King and Co., bankers; John McDonald, Oakdale Billiard Saloon; R. P. Elwood, collecting agent. Several known businesses of this period did not seem to believe in advertising for their ads did not appear in this issue of the paper.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Oakdale Journal, 23 Sept. 1873.

³⁹ Ibid., 9 Sept. 1873.

The Oakdale Journal, in which these business advertisements were printed, was the first newspaper published west of Norfolk, Nebraska. However it was not printed locally for two years. Copy was composed and mailed to West Point, Nebraska, where the printing was done.⁴⁰ These early issues were about one-half local news and the other half was national or state material. The outside news was purchased boiler plate with the local news on the front and third pages. The early editor's comments often injected personal opinions on the local situations.

In addition to the list of previously itemized businesses the paper mentioned others that were building at Oakdale. Among these were a livery stable, meat market, and hotel. The editor commented: "Work on seven new buildings has commenced here in one week. How is that for improvement?"⁴¹

The cultural aspects of the community were not being overlooked. A. J. Leach, who had homesteaded in Cedar Valley, had been elected County Superintendent of Schools in 1872.⁴² It was under his careful direction that Oakdale's school, District No. 11, was organized on January 3, 1873.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Leach, op. cit., p. 51.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 168.

The school officers in September of the same year determined to locate the first schoolhouse on the School Square.⁴⁴ A contract for \$2,000 was let to H. P. Davis and construction was completed in 1874.⁴⁵ The Rev. Charles Sale, Methodist minister, taught school in his private residence prior to 1874. Mr. A. Warner taught the first term in the new schoolhouse and Mr. Robert Wilson the second.⁴⁶ (Refer to the photograph in the Appendix, p.⁸⁰) The school also served as a worship center until October of 1881 when the Methodists dedicated their first church building.

Crops were good in the years 1872-1874 and agriculture's success contributed to the community's growth.⁴⁷ The local paper reported: "The new wheat and oats are coming into the market and the heart of the farmer is made glad."⁴⁸ Rapid settlement of the farms surrounding Oakdale was taking place and the local editor commented:

Emmigrants are passing through town each day. On Monday we noticed a schooner passing that was completely filled with fat and sassy urchins, whose heads were protruding from every side; their very looks indicated that they were exceedingly happy.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Oakdale Journal, 23 Sept. 1873.

⁴⁵ Andreas, op. cit., p. 376.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Leach, op. cit., p. 57.

⁴⁸ Oakdale Journal, 23 Sept. 1873.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

By the year 1874 a considerable number of new business houses had opened in Oakdale. These included: John Malzacher's Implements, Kryger's Millinery, A. McKinstry's Land Office, and Cox and Trask's Drugstore. The Elwood House operated as a hotel and rates were twenty-five cents for either meals or lodging.⁵⁰ One observer commented: "The sound of the hammer and saw makes pleasant music in our town these days."⁵¹

As early as 1872 Oakdale had felt the effects of the grasshopper plagues, however it was in 1874 that the worst infestations occurred.⁵² These grasshoppers remained with pioneer Nebraskans until late in 1877.⁵³ Numerous accounts are given of these infestations but Antelope County's own problem was best described as follows:

The year 1874 was known all over the settled portions of Nebraska as the 'Grasshopper Year.' The spring and early summer had been very favorable for growing crops; corn was looking well and promising an extra heavy yield; wheat and oats were mostly in the shock, when in the afternoon of a bright, sunshiny day a cloud was seen in the distance, to the northwest, as of smoke or dust. It was a cloud of grasshoppers. They covered the earth, the buildings, the shocks of grain, and everything. They alighted on trees in such numbers as to break off large limbs with their weight. In a few hours they stripped the corn field of every vestige of leaf....Their alighting on the roofs and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24 Oct. 1874.

⁵¹ Ibid., 4 June 1874.

⁵² Leach, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵³ Olson, op. cit., p. 183.

sides of houses sounded like a continuous hail storm.... If any were crushed under foot, or otherwise the others immediately devoured them....When at last there was nothing left for them to devour, and they rose in clouds that partially obscured the sun for hours, a scene of desolation and discouragement presented itself to the settlers that can better be imagined than ever described.⁵⁴

Repeated adverse weather conditions also caused hardship during the 1870's. Severe winters with heavy snowfall were followed by high water during the spring. Agricultural pursuits seemed almost impossible.⁵⁵ One of the many Nebraska settlements which vanished as a result of this period's hardships was Pleasant Valley. This community was located near Oakdale prior to 1875.⁵⁶

Oakdale's economy during the 1870's was given impetus when gold was discovered in the Black Hills.⁵⁷ The position of Oakdale, on the natural thoroughfare, made it a stopping place for travellers on their way to the Hills. Several local men organized freighting companies which hauled supplies and drove cattle to the new mining country. Among Oakdale's freighters were listed: (1) The Lon Snider

⁵⁴ Leach, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 97-109.

⁵⁶ Andreas, op. cit., p. 375.

⁵⁷ Pen and Plow, 19 Oct. 1878.

Company, (2) Means Brothers, (3) Woods and Loren, and (4) The Cy Buck Company.⁵⁸ Many local farmers, hard hit by drouth and grasshoppers, joined the freighting companies.

An example of a local product in demand for the Black Hills region was found in the following ad: "WANTED- 10,000 pounds of butter, by M. W. King."⁵⁹ Mr. King was the local miller who during the 1870's shipped large quantities of Snow Queen flour via Black Hill's freighters. It would appear that Oakdale contributed its share of bread and butter for the mining camps. It was this same commerce which provided "bread and butter" for the local tables.

Oakdale hotels, eating houses, liverys, harness makers and any other freighter associated business developed quickly.⁶⁰ All that remains today of this thriving industry is the evidence of the trail which wagons wore into the Antelope County countryside.

As the freighting era passed Oakdale felt the influence of another form of transportation. There had been considerable speculation as to when and where the railroad would

⁵⁸ C. H. Torpin, "Oakdale the Pioneer Town of Antelope County," The Oakdale Sentinel, 24 Sept. 1923.

⁵⁹ Oakdale Journal, 5 Oct. 1875.

⁶⁰ Pen and Plow, 29 Mar. 1879.

come to Antelope County.⁶¹ The Fremont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley Railroad Company had been organized since January of 1869 but construction of their line had proceeded only to Wisner, Nebraska. From 1871 to 1879 Wisner was the end of their line.⁶² Now the road determined to push northwest through Antelope County and 100 local men were hired to construct the grade from the county line to Oakdale.⁶³ After the completion of the bridge across the Cedar Creek, November 11, 1879, Oakdale heard the roar and rumble of the trains. By November 20 the regularly scheduled trains were operating to and from the Oakdale depot which formally opened on December 4, 1879. The local editor commented: "It is now possible to travel to Omaha and back in a day's time."⁶⁴ (Refer to photograph, Appendix, p. 84)

Oakdale had also been keeping pace culturally. By 1880 there were four religious denominations represented in the community. The Methodist Church organized in 1874; the Congregational in 1877; and the Presbyterian and Episcopalian in 1881.⁶⁵ These four groups had services in

⁶¹ Ibid., 8 Sept. 1877.

⁶² Albert Watkins, History of Nebraska, Volume III (Lincoln: Western Publishing Company, 1913), p. 351.

⁶³ Pen and Plow, 23 Oct. 1879.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 20 Nov. 1879.

⁶⁵ Andreas, op. cit., p. 376.

the schoolhouse prior to the completion of the Methodist Church building.

Public school had been established for sometime when the Oakdale Presbyterian Seminary organized. The Seminary had the following officers: Rev. George L. Little, President; Rev. Harvey Wilson, Vice-president; I. N. Taylor, Secretary; and S. S. King, Treasurer.⁶⁶ The Seminary planned to provide for the community's higher education. Cornerstones for the Seminary building were laid with impressive ceremonies on April 19, 1882.⁶⁷

Societies and fraternal organizations came early to Oakdale. The first to organize was the Sons of Temperance on June 4, 1874. Rev. Henry Griffiths was Worthy Patron and called meetings every Tuesday night. The Advanced Templars with J. H. Snider Worthy Master, and Oakdale Grange No. 387 under J. W. Skiles started meeting at about the same time.⁶⁸

On August 3, 1875, a county literary society had been proposed but it was not a reality until November 17, 1877. Oakdale's literary society had as their first president S. D. Thorton and the first debate question was: "Should

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Leach, op. cit., pp. 178-180.

⁶⁸ Oakdale Journal, 4 June 1874.

capital punishment be abolished?"⁶⁹

Other diversions were the baseball league started in 1874 and the Oakdale Brass Band organized in 1878. The first baseball teams were the Excelsiors of Oakdale and the Antelopes of Cedar Creek. At a game played on August 31, 1874, the Excelsiors defeated the Antelopes by a score of 109 to 45. A. J. Leach umpired, and afterward treated the teams to supper at his home.⁷⁰

Music from the Brass Band provided background for numerous occasions. Many gatherings would begin with supper at the Elwood House and close by dancing at King's Hall with music by the Brass Band.⁷¹ E. P. Mc Cormick, editor of the Oakdale paper, reported:

The boys are taking hold of their horns as if they were in earnest. The prospect of a good brass band is now splendid. These brass horns are the first that ever 'tooted' in Antelope County.⁷²

By 1882 Oakdale, Nebraska had become a well established community. The earlier settlement at Twin Groves had given way to a bustling pioneer town. This town was meeting the needs of its era. The 1870's had witnessed

⁶⁹ Pen and Plow, 24 Nov. 1877.

⁷⁰ Oakdale Journal, 9 Sept. 1874.

⁷¹ Pen and Plow, 3 Sept. 1874.

⁷² Ibid., 5 Oct. 1878.

rapid expansion which resulted from westward emigration and improved transportation. The pioneers of the community had met and survived the challenge of their adventure. The community of Oakdale was now ready for the next stages in its development. (Refer to the photograph in the Appendix, p. 82)

CHAPTER III

POLITICS AND BUSINESS, 1869-1900

The coming of the railroad gave impetus to further settling of the county. By now all parts of the county had some settlers, and although there still was government land left, the new surge of emigration was taking it up rapidly.¹ Census figures of 1886 showed the tremendous rate of growth in Antelope County's population:

Year	Population	Loss	Gain
1874	1,387	98	
1875	1,289		14
1876	1,303		
1877	1,036	267	
1878	1,575		439
1879	2,178		603
1880	3,953		1,775
1882	5,239		1,286
1883	6,407		1,168 ²

It is of interest to note that the loss in 1876 was attributed to the organization of Holt County which had previously been enumerated with Antelope County.³ Oakdale's population in 1880 was 532 of which 175 were school age children.⁴

¹ A. J. Leach, History of Antelope County, 1868-1883 (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company, 1909), pp. 153-158.

² Ibid., p. 148.

³ Ibid., p. 149.

⁴ A. T. Andreas (Compiler), History of the State of Nebraska, Vol. I (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), p. 376.

The railroad gave Oakdale and community a new sense of security. No longer an inland town, Oakdale could develop a wider scope of commercial enterprises. As early as April 2, 1876, the community attempted to spark increased settlement by advertising. A pamphlet written by A. J. Leach was circulated and a group organized to conduct guided tours when prospective settlers arrived.⁵ This venture was fruitless. In December, 1881, the community again decided to seek newcomers and discussed the failure of their previous attempts. This discussion convinced them that further progress depended upon incorporation of the town.⁶ A petition requesting incorporation was drawn on December 31, 1881, and presented to the Board of Commissioners.⁷

The Village of Oakdale was given official recognition on January 12, 1882, when the County Commissioners acted favorably upon Oakdale's petition. A Board of Trustees was elected on January 13, 1882. The first board was as follows: F. H. Green, Chairman; M. W. King, W. S. Smith, D. E. Beckwith, and Robert Wilson. Other village officials were: D. A. Holmes, Attorney; Samuel McCord, Marshal; and E. P. McCormick, Police Justice.⁸

⁵ Leach, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

⁶ Pen and Plow, 7 Jan. 1882.

⁷ Leach, op. cit., p. 157.

⁸ Pen and Plow, 14 Jan. 1882.

Oakdale's newly elected Village Board accepted its responsibility and met on the evening of its election. Four ordinances were passed at the first meeting. The first two and the fourth had to do with governing regulations. The temperance movement was evidenced in that the third pertained to licensing or selling intoxicating liquors in Oakdale.⁹

In the advertising which followed much emphasis was placed upon the facts that Oakdale was an incorporated village and the county seat of Antelope County.¹⁰ As had been stated Oakdale was designated county seat in 1872 at the second general election. However this election was never considered final as a decision by Neligh-Oakdale's rival town.¹¹ Neligh was located five miles north up the Elkhorn River. Consequently the Neligh interests made relocation of the county seat an issue in several general elections. This issue was known locally as the "Neligh-Oakdale feud" and much bitterness was engendered. The county seat fight has been a matter of ready comment among the older residents in the county. C. H. Torpin described the conflict in the following:

⁹ Andreas, op. cit., p. 376

¹⁰ Pen and Plow, 17 May 1882.

¹¹ Leach, op. cit., p. 140.

Oakdale was the county seat of Antelope County from 1872 until 1883, at which time the county seat was removed to Neligh. During these years there was continual county seat strife between Neligh and Oakdale. Five county seat elections were held before its removal, and the old timers recall these strenuous days during the long war before the county seat was permanently located. Politics were forgotten. The rankest democrat and the most unreasonable republican walked arm and arm and stood shoulder to shoulder in the one absorbing topic of the day, and all that counted was where you stood---are you for Oakdale or for Neligh? And still even to this day we often catch a reflex of that spirit since at a hotly contested ball game between Neligh and Oakdale, that old time buried county seat war seems to bubble to the surface.¹²

It was in the summer of 1883 that a "Neligh petition", bearing 984 names, was filed with the county Board of Commissioners. This petition called for a special election to decide the question of relocating the county seat. The election was held on October 2, 1883, with the following results:

For relocation at Neligh.....	1,061
Against relocation	673
For relocation at Clearwater.....	1
For relocation of the county seat.....	1
Total vote.....	1,636
Necessary to relocate at Neligh.....	982 13

Neligh therefore had seventy-nine votes to spare.

¹² C. H. Torpin, "Oakdale the Pioneer Town of Antelope County," The Oakdale Sentinel, 24 Sept. 1923.

¹³ Leach, op. cit., pp. 140-146.

There was no contest made of this election and on January 1, 1884, the Board of Commissioners ordered the county officials to remove the county records to Neligh. This was done and the war was over.¹⁴ However a "treaty of peace" has never been signed between Neligh and Oakdale.

Oakdale had lost the fight with Neligh but its economic growth was steadfast, in fact, good times were felt throughout the entire State of Nebraska.¹⁵ Thirty-seven business houses were operating in Oakdale by the spring of 1888. Indicative of land transactions was the listing of two loan agencies, two banks, and three land agents. Indications of building activity were seen in the record of two lumber yards, two contractors, a brick yard and a painter. It is interesting to note that general merchandise was attractively priced with good plow shoes for \$1.50 and the best ladies walking shoe for \$2.00. Time payments were also offered on merchandise if good security was provided.¹⁶

To a large extent this business prosperity depended upon the fortunes of agriculture, and during the Eighties agriculture enjoyed success.¹⁷ Favorable weather gave the farmers

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁵ James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), p. 203.

¹⁶ Pen and Plow, 18 May 1888.

¹⁷ Olson, op. cit., p. 204.

a good crop yield and the railroad provided a market. The farms of Oakdale territory were producing well.¹⁸ C. H. Torpin, an early Oakdale elevator operator, made these comments:

During the eighties Oakdale was a great cattle and hog shipping center. The Reno Brothers buying cattle as far north as the Niobrara, west to Buffalo Flats and south to the Beaver and Shell Creek. It was also a great grain shipping point. It was nothing strange in the old days to see loads of grain reaching from the elevator as far up town as where the Brainard Lumber Co. is now located, waiting their turn to unload. The first car of grain ever shipped out of Antelope County was shipped from Oakdale. This was a car of wheat loaded from a flathouse with wheelbarrows by Eugene Gaily, 'Gene', as they call him, has been manager of the Farmer's Elevator in our sister city of Elgin for many years.¹⁹

Farmers, encouraged by favorable yields and good prices, tended to increase production. By the Nineties production was at a peak and prices had fallen.²⁰ Agriculture displayed unrest and the Populist Revolt took hold. The drouth of 1894 gave intensity to the farmer's agitations. Rainfall that year in Oakdale amounted to 11.94 inches. The 1894 total was less than half the

¹⁷ Olson, op. cit., p. 204.

¹⁸ Pen and Ploy, 18 May 1888.

¹⁹ Torpin, loc. cit.

²⁰ Olson, op. cit., p. 216.

the normal figure.²¹

Antelope County, particularly Oakdale and community, took active interest in the Populist movement.²² The usually Republican county yielded to agricultural interests and voted Populist along with the rest of Nebraska.²³ By 1901 the Populist influence had subsided as shown by the following:

In Antelope County populist rule has been overthrown at last. The county has elected all the Republican candidates with the single exception of the surveyor.²⁴

The citizens could again concern themselves with such matters as prohibition and the license for the local saloon.²⁵

After 1901 Oakdale's economy improved. By 1902 the highest price since 1873 was paid for hogs, \$6.40. Other prices were also good as illustrated in a comparison of the 1901 and 1902 levels:

²¹ United States Government Weather Records, kept by George S. Clingman, Oakdale, Nebraska (The Oakdale Sentinel, 29 Jan. 1929).

²² The Oakdale Sentinel, 6 Dec. 1901.

²³ Olson, op. cit., p. 240.

²⁴ The Oakdale Sentinel, 9 Nov. 1901.

²⁵ Ibid., 4 Apr. 1903.

February 9, 1901

April 19, 1902

Corn	26¢	50¢
Wheat	53¢	54¢
Rye	35¢	40¢
Oats	20¢	36¢
Eggs	10¢	12½¢
Butter	12½¢ 26	20¢ 27

By now Oakdale had security in its thriving agriculture and the steady income of the railroad payroll. These two factors were large contributors to the local economy. Many Oakdale families derived their living from railroad employment and for sometime now agriculture's ups and downs have been noted. The good years for the farmers and the railroads are reflected in the community's improvements. These improvements are summarized as follows:

Oakdale is coming to the front. She has been doing so for sometime but nobody has said anything about it. It's no secret though-and it's no dream-it's an absolute certainty. What with a brickyard, a water works system, a farmer's elevator, and two brick banks going up, there will be something doing in Oakdale this summer. Our business men are pushing these projects with a will....There will be some good work done on the streets this summer and the town board is arranging to have sidewalks repaired. Let the good work go on-Oakdale to the front.²⁶

Several accomplishments of 1902 are worth mention. A telephone company, The Cedar Mutual, organized and by

²⁶ Ibid., 9 Feb. 1901.

²⁷ Ibid., 19 Apr. 1902.

²⁸ Ibid., 15 Apr. 1904.

November had erected poles.²⁹ Electric lighting was considered but the Oakdale Acetylene Gas Company incorporated and furnished illumination until 1912 when electricity was installed.³⁰ A period of below zero weather contributed thick ice and Oakdale's seasonal employment began. Local ice houses and the Chicago and North Western Railroad cars were filled annually.³¹ (Refer to Photograph, Appendix, p. 83)

Coincidental to these projects was the installation of the town's central water system. The contract for \$7,000 was awarded to the National Construction Company, of South Bend, Indiana. This firm began the work in 1904.³² In conjunction a fire company was formed. This group trained in modern fire fighting techniques.³³

Oakdale's appearance assumed a new look during the early 1900's. Business had nearly doubled and the town substantially improved. The economy was stable and prospects for the future looked good. (Refer to photograph, Appendix, p. 82)

²⁹ Ibid., 19 Apr. 1902.

³⁰ Ibid., 18 Oct. 1902.

³¹ Ibid., 2 Feb. 1902.

³² Ibid., 5 Aug. 1904.

³³ Ibid., 22 Aug. 1903.

CHAPTER IV

CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS TO 1900

The recreations enjoyed by the pioneers were of the simplest kind. They found pleasure in the church and Sunday school groups they organized, in visiting by family groups, and in an occasional neighborhood get-together. A pioneer woman expressed it this way:

I wonder how we lived through it. We had to work hard. When we were married all my husband had was a span of horses. But we were happy and we had a lot of good times. We were homebodies most of the time, even our entertainments were held in our own homes. We had to go by team and wagon picking up our neighbors as we went, until there were eight or ten of us. Sometimes the men would go to town leaving us women with our children at the neighbors. The ladies spent their day swapping news and sewing. At other times we'd go in the evening, after chores were done, and we'd enjoy a night of dancing. The children would fall asleep and we'd bundle them into the wagon for the ride home. After the lodges were instituted Ed and I joined and partook of the fellowship. We were happy!

The urge to be with other persons was soon satisfied in Oakdale by the churches, school, lodges and societies. A cultural and social life developed.

The school was established by 1872. Each year the course of study was expanded until the first class was graduated from the high school in 1891. Miss Ola Launt

¹ Catherine Peets, pioneer of Antelope County, Oakdale, Nebraska, personal interview, 23 Jan. 1962. Permission to quote secured.

and Mr. Nial Brainard comprised the class. These two young people represented pioneer families. The program included the graduate's orations and select musical numbers.² There was great elation at this first commencement. It marked not only the first Oakdale graduation, but the first in Antelope County.³

The first Oakdale schoolhouse, built in 1874, had been replaced in 1886, by an up-to-date, two-story, frame structure.⁴ (Refer to photographs, Appendix, p. 81) Oakdale District No. 11 had become a graded school in 1883 and was the first in the county to accomplish this advancement. In that year Oakdale had two teachers, Miss Lettie Cooper and Mr. C. D. Bon, who were paid \$32.00 and \$50.00 respectively.⁵

A seminary had been organized by the Presbyterians in October, 1881, and school opened in January, 1882. An imposing building was planned for the Oakdale institution. The editor of the local newspaper, Pen and Plow, reported:

I. N. Taylor is home this week from Omaha to attend to some important business, but will return there

² Graduation program of the First Annual Commencement, Oakdale, Nebraska. Copies are in the possession of Mrs. W. E. Launt and Mrs. Myrtice Tavener.

³ The Oakdale Sentinel, 16 May 1940.

⁴ C. H. Torpin, "Oakdale the Pioneer Town of Antelope County," The Oakdale Sentinel, 24 Sept. 1923.

⁵ A. J. Leach, History of Antelope County, 1868-1883 (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company, 1909), p. 170.

in a few days to complete the work of securing the materials to finish the Oakdale Seminary building.... It is high time that elegantly situated frame received its bright veneer of brick. The people of Oakdale will surely all unite in a final endeavor to finish entirely, outside and inside, what will be one of the finest of our beautiful Elkhorn Valley.⁶

This institution did not fulfill the dreams of its founders and was soon abandoned.⁷ (Refer to photograph, Appendix, p. 80)

The Oakdale public school produced an excellent product. Spelling bees between Oakdale and adjoining towns were popular. In a match with Tilden on March 29, 1902, the Oakdale spellers won. This contest had been highly advertised and admission was charged, with proceeds going to the Oakdale school.⁸ In 1904, an Oakdale student, Mamie Dworak won the state spelling contest. Her prize, a Webster's Dictionary, was displayed at the local reception held in her honor.⁹ Also enjoyed were chess and checker games which provided inter-school competition throughout Antelope County; Oakdale and Neligh played chess by mail during 1903.¹⁰ Community chess clubs were formed and in March, 1904, a group concluded a chess match which had lasted over a year.¹¹

Interest in athletics was high in early Oakdale. The

⁶ Pen and Plover, 18 May 1888.

⁷ The Oakdale Sentinel, 26 July 1897.

⁸ Ibid., 22 Mar. 1902.

⁹ Ibid., 9 Jan. 1904.

¹⁰ Ibid., 23 Jan. 1903.

¹¹ Ibid., 26 Mar. 1904.

schools shared in this enthusiasm. The 1894 Course of Study placed emphasis upon physical education. Gymnastics, drill exercises, and organized games were a part of the scheduled curriculum.¹² Baseball and basketball were accepted school sports by late 1902.¹³ In 1904 a picture, showing Oakdale's baseball team, appeared in an Omaha paper with this comment: "Oakdale isn't the biggest town in the map of Nebraska but it has a high school baseball team that is making its rivals hurry."¹⁴

Denominations having congregations in Oakdale by the early 1890's included the Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, German Evangelical, and Seventh Day Adventists.¹⁵ The women of these churches organized into auxilliary bodies such as ladies aids or missionary societies. The ladies contributed not only to the support of the churches but enlivened the community's social life. The Women's Missionary Society, Methodist Church, was active as early as 1881.¹⁶

Other church associated activities were the revivals and camp meetings. The camp meetings were held in String-

¹² The Course of Study, Oakdale public schools, Oakdale, Nebraska, 1894.

¹³ Ibid., 6 Dec. 1902.

¹⁴ Omaha Bee, 8 May 1904, (The Oakdale Sentinel, 12 May 1904).

¹⁵ Pen and Plow, 29 June 1888.

¹⁶ The Oakdale Sentinel, 4 Apr. 1906.

fellow's Grove along the Elkhorn River. Entire families moved to the camp grounds and spent their time there for the meeting's duration. Picnic baskets were prepared in advance, tents were secured, and everyone looked forward to the fellowship.¹⁷ This fellowship was enjoyed by over 1200 persons at the Oakdale camp meeting during August, 1902.¹⁸ James C. Olson says this about camp meetings:

The camp meeting combined a vacation with a period of spiritual refreshment, and families who could afford them took tents to the meeting place, usually a grove on the banks of a stream.¹⁹

Various fraternal and benevolent orders were established in Oakdale before the year 1900. The regularly conducted meetings of the lodges and social life their activities included attracted large and loyal memberships. One of the most active was the Kilpatrick Post No. 82 of the G.A.R. which organized on December 17, 1881, with thirty-five members and by 1882 had fifty members.²⁰ Also active were the following: Oakdale Lodge No. 113, I.O.O.F.; Oakdale Lodge No. 210, I.O.O.F.; Oakdale Lodge No. 90 of A.O.U.W.; Union Encampment No. 28 of I.O.O.F.; Knights of

¹⁷ Myrtice Tavener, maternal grand-daughter of A. J. Leach, Oakdale, Nebraska, personal interview, 25 Nov. 1961.

¹⁸ The Oakdale Sentinel, 16 Aug. 1902.

¹⁹ James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), p. 105.

²⁰ A. T. Andreas (Compiler), History of the State of Nebraska, Vol. I (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), p. 377.

Pythias Lodge; Woman's Relief Corps. of G.A.R.; Degree of Honor, A.O.U.W.; Rebekah Lodge; and a W.C.T.U.²¹ There was no Masonic lodge but members of that order met as a social group, attending lodge in Neligh. Surrounding towns recognized proficiency in Oakdale's ritualistic work and local groups enjoyed journeying to other chapters for installations and conferring of degrees.²²

Examples of the many social activities sponsored by Oakdale churches, schools, and lodges were: candy pulls, ice cream socials, pound socials, bundle parties, bakery sales, nugget parties, box socials, and others typical of the period.²³

Musical groups had been organized for sometime in Oakdale. As early as the first 4th of July celebration the Cedar Creek choir had performed.²⁴ The other churches had choirs that presented cantatas, and rendered special numbers at Sunday services. The Oakdale band dates back to 1878 when they organized. Weekly concerts were well attended and during warm weather the band stand was used.

²¹ The Oakdale Sentinel, 26 June 1897.

²² Peets interview, loc. cit.

²³ The Oakdale Sentinel, 11 May 1904.

²⁴ Andreas, op. cit., p. 375.

This bandstand was constructed so that it was portable and during use was placed at the center of Main Street.

Oakdale's Commercial Club activities began in June, 1904. The business men urged all town as well as country citizens to join. Assisting the businessmen in civic improvements was the Federated Woman's Club which sponsored a library project in November, 1905.²⁵ The Commercial Club helped in securing two entertainment features for the community. These were the Cooper Bowling Alley²⁶ and the Freeman Brother's Canvas Theatre which opened showing Uncle Tom's Cabin by stereoptican slides.²⁷

About this time the community realized need for an improved cemetery facility. A. J. Leach undertook the task of securing members for an association. This association was formed in September, 1907, and twenty-three acres were purchased for improvements.²⁸ It was under the personal supervision of Leach that 600 evergreens were planted along the cemetery entrances.

In keeping with the cemetery improvements the local undertaker, David Blesh, purchased a new \$1,000 hearse. The Oakdale Sentinel's editor commented: "Mr. Blesh is now

²⁵ The Oakdale Sentinel, 5 Nov. 1905.

²⁶ Ibid., 18 Jan. 1902.

²⁷ Ibid., 8 July 1904.

²⁸ Ibid., 3 Mar. 1914.

²⁹ Ibid., 10 June 1904.

equipped to furnish the best of style for funerals.*29

Oakdale's social foundations were well laid by the turn of the century. Schools and churches had been established and growth recorded. Cultural influences effected by these institutions were a part of the community life. Social and fraternal bodies lend support to the town's refinements. Oakdale gave all indications of having a well rounded society. The community moved toward maturity.

CHAPTER V

THE COMMUNITY, 1900-1930

The next three decades were to witness Oakdale's greatest development, and then came the crash. An era of board side walks, five cluster street lights and band stand concerts Saturday night had begun. Dreams and efforts of the pioneers were the foundations upon which Oakdale built. The combination of the farms, the mill and the railroad gave a rhythmic hum and the town enjoyed the good things it brought. This proved to have been the time of greatest affluence. By 1914 the Oakdale Booster's Club proudly proclaimed their accomplishments:

Oakdale was the first town in Antelope County to build permanent street crossings.

Oakdale was the first town west of Fremont to install cluster street lights.

Oakdale was the first town in Antelope County to provide a public school gymnasium.

Oakdale was the first town in Antelope County to provide a system of sanitary drinking fountains.

Oakdale was the first town in Antelope County to provide weekly band concerts and have the first portable band stand in the state.

Oakdale leads as the best hog market in this county.

Oakdale elevators handle the most grain of any in this county.

Oakdale's telephone exchange was the first in Antelope County.

Oakdale gave many of Antelope County's best men their start in business and professional ways.¹

¹ The Oakdale Sentinel, 22 May 1914.

Booster organizations are inclined to extravagant statements but basis for Oakdale's claims would appear to be sound. A comparison of Oakdale with the state economic situation of the period would place Oakdale above the average in most of its enterprises.² Pre-war as well as post-war prices for agricultural stuffs maintained at a high level.³ However by 1922 Oakdale's prices fell in line with those on a state basis and the speculative demands ceased.⁴ It was interesting to note that local economy flourished as long as the mill and cattle buyers had demand for the farm products.

Using the Oakdale Milling Company for an example it was found that in 1916 a gross income of \$80,000 was realized and by 1917 an annual gross of \$190,000 was declared. This increase required a 28% business expense outlay.⁵ Preferred stock in the company was then issued with a 7% interest guarantee, as well as a share in the company's annual profit.⁶ Oakdale's milling speculation increased and on April 4, 1919,

² James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), pp. 278-282.

³ The Oakdale Sentinel, 9 May 1904; 24 Feb. 1911; 26 Oct. 1917; 16 Jan. 1920; 11 Feb. 1921.

⁴ Ibid., 2 June 1922; 17 July 1925.

⁵ Ibid., 19 Jan. 1917.

⁶ Ibid., 19 July 1918.

the first of a series of feeder elevators was constructed at Rivertown, Wyoming.⁷ This elevator was described as the "largest and most complete in Wyoming."⁸ The home plant increased operations on a round the clock basis and installed a Murray Corliss steam engine to supplement water power. Oakdale's mill prospered and the community's farmers enjoyed good grain prices, until operations, slowed by general economic conditions, lapsed into bankruptcy.

The Oakdale Mill was idle from 1925 to 1928 when the property sold to Burdette Boyes of the Seward Milling Company. The mill again produced flour and My Kind, Snoball, and Queen were trade names.⁹ Throughout the depression of the Thirties Oakdale's mill continued production until 1944 when the milling ceased and facilities became elevator storage space. (Refer to photograph, Appendix, p. 83)

Many business houses established themselves in Oakdale before and immediately after the first World War. Among the listed firms of the period were: three groceries, three general merchandise or hardware, a meat market and a bakery. Also included are two lumberyards, two grain elevators, one mill, and two implement dealers. There were

⁷ Ibid., 4 Apr. 1919.

⁸ Ibid., 31 Oct. 1919.

⁹ Ibid., 1 Aug. 1928.

two each of the following: barbers, doctors, dentists, druggists, livery barns, banks, hotels and restaurants. One of the implement dealers and one of the blacksmiths operated horseless carriage agencies as a follow up to previous buggy dealerships.¹⁰ Perhaps the most influential of all Oakdale's businesses, and certainly its oldest in years of community service, was the newspaper.

Oakdale's newspaper had begun publication on September 3, 1873, as the Oakdale Journal, with editor R. P. Elwood. M. S. Bartlett took over in May of 1874, and published a little over a year. The Oakdale Journal was then moved to Neligh, Nebraska, and became the Neligh Journal.¹¹ The community, having been without a newspaper, welcomed the Pen and Plow's first edition, which came on April 7, 1877. I. N. Taylor, one of the town's first citizens, was the owner and I. N. Noble editor. E. P. McCormick purchased the paper in 1878 and published until 1883. At this time Boyd Brothers took over and revived the paper's original name-Oakdale Journal.¹² This Oakdale Journal published until it again became the Pen and Plow, with Samuel Clingman editor, in June, 1887. His son, George S.

¹⁰ Ibid., 22 Dec. 1916.

¹¹ The Neligh Journal, 12 Oct. 1875.

¹² The Oakdale Sentinel, 7 Apr. 1955.

Clingman, assisted in operations until 1889 when he became editor. From 1889 until the present the Oakdale newspaper has been The Oakdale Sentinel.¹³ During the 1890's two competitive newspapers published for brief periods. They were the Oakdale Guard, 1891, and The Beacon Light, 1893.¹⁴

Oakdale was bustling with energy as evidenced in business enterprises of the first World War period. Social and civic activities also evidenced vigor. Many entertainments were offered at the Morris Opera House and in 1912 The Crystal was opened as a moving picture theatre. The Aerodome continued operating when weather permitted.¹⁵ (Refer to photograph, Appendix, p.⁸⁴) Chautauqua, an annual summer attraction, was sponsored by Oakdale's Booster Club. The big tent was raised in Johnson Brother's Park. (Refer to photograph, Appendix, p.⁸⁴) This park was donated by the Johnson family and improvements were built by the town.¹⁶ During Chautauqua the park would be dotted with camper's tents and many families stayed for the entire offering.¹⁷ Cal Bretz operated a lunch wagon service on the grounds.

Oakdale held a Corn Show during the fall. Its program

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ From the Newspaper Film Record, H-O, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

¹⁵ The Oakdale Sentinel, 15 Nov. 1912.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16 June 1922.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14 Apr. 1922.

presented persons who were recognized as agricultural experts and prizes were in keeping with the show's theme.¹⁸ Another farm-centered event was the annual Star Neighbor's Picnic. This affair was sponsored by the Star Band and the young people of the Star United Brethren Church. As many as 800 persons were attracted to these picnics.¹⁹

Baptist and Catholic services were no longer held in Oakdale, but the remaining churches, lodges, and societies functioned at an increased tempo. The I.O.O.F. Lodge had added many persons to its membership and constructed a meeting hall by 1917.²⁰ Oakdale's Federated Woman's Club was also active and presented numerous public programs.²¹

On the less serious side was The Men's Welfare Club which was an organization designed to foster community harmony. Their meetings were held in a club room, above Trask's Drugstore, which was elaborately furnished with leather upholstered furniture. The men assembled a private library and the meetings were devoted to their "serious"

¹⁸ Ibid., 13 Oct. 1911.

¹⁹ Ibid., 9 Aug. 1918.

²⁰ Ibid., 16 Mar. 1917.

²¹ From a collection of advertising bills owned by Helen Dunham McNare, Oakdale, Nebraska. This collection includes many of the sale bills, leaflets, and general advertising posters printed by the Oakdale printing firms.

purposes.²² A group of single young women banded into a town booster club known as the I.O.U.B. They held meetings in their homes with social times as a principle feature.²³ When matrimony claimed one of these two groups, or others of the town, these clubs usually arranged appropriate celebrations, called "charivaris."

An Oakdale Amusement Association incorporated in April, 1919, and sold shares so as to construct a pavillion. This building was opened on July 29, 1919, and was designed to accomodate dances and other social gatherings.²⁴

The fire department, library, and scouts were several of the civic groups which contributed to community life. The firemen organized as a volunteer company during the 1880's and functioned as a "bucket brigade" until the town installed a pressure system in 1904. Their equipment was improved when a fire truck was purchased on March 6, 1925. The fire department raised funds through donations and from benefit dances to buy their new truck.²⁵ Library facilities were expanded when a Library Association formed and in 1926 the Village Board established free library service.²⁶ Oakdale's

²² Ibid., 2 Jan. 1917.

²³ Grace Ihlenfelt, Oakdale, Nebraska, personal interview, 24 Nov. 1961.

²⁴ The Oakdale Sentinel, 25 July 1919.

²⁵ Ibid., 6 Mar. 1925.

²⁶ Ibid., 7 Jan. 1926.

Boy Scouts had their beginning in 1915 and at about the same time Girl Scouts were organized.²⁷ A swimming pool was adopted as a community project. The troops proposed using a part of the mill dam for swimming and succeeded in petitioning for a special bond election. The community rejected their project.²⁸

In 1906 the Oakdale paper reported that board sidewalks were being built so as to accommodate the depot traffic. The same account told that on a recent Saturday over one-hundred and fifty teams were in town at the same time.²⁹ Certain regulatory actions were taken by the Village Board in order to control this expanding society. An ordinance was passed which provided that no team should be tied or hitched longer than to transact business. Another stipulated that motor vehicles were to park in the center lane on Main Street.³⁰ Also pertaining to motor vehicles was the ordinance which required them to have mufflers.³¹ Along with these regulations the board instructed the local marshal to burn the street lights on Main Street as far

²⁷ Ibid., 8 Jan. 1915

²⁸ Ibid., 5 July 1929.

²⁹ Ibid., 9 June 1906.

³⁰ Ibid., 15 Aug. 1916.

³¹ Ibid., 13 Sept. 1912.

as the depot to facilitate night travel and aid in enforcement of the newly enacted curfew ordinance.³²

It was in 1912 that Oakdale's first electric light plant began operations. This system was owned and operated by Hugh Ingalsbe. Business houses were wired and five cluster light poles installed for street illumination. The acetylene gas lamps were gradually replaced in private homes and the local company dissolved.

A special election, held in 1911, approved subscription for \$12,000 bonds to build a new school building. A three-story, brick, structure was built and ready for the 1912 fall term.³³ (Refer to photograph, Appendix, p. 81) The school board received authorization in 1920 for the erection of a gymnasium. The old schoolhouse was razed and used in constructing the new gym.³⁴ Commencement exercises in 1922 were opening events for the gymnasium.³⁵

Sports, principally basketball and baseball, have always received Oakdale's support. Local teams had excellent records from 1910 to 1940. State championships were sought by several of the local teams. Of all the early basketball

³² Ibid., 26 May 1905.

³³ Ibid., 13 Sept. 1912.

³⁴ Ibid., 26 Nov. 1920.

³⁵ Ibid., 27 Apr. 1922.

groups the 1915 team was outstanding. It has been said:

Oakdale is well known for always having good basketball and baseball teams and perhaps there were better teams before and after the basketball team of 1915 but it was a good one.

The 1915 team won 19 out of 23 games and scored 753 points to their opponents 384, among the opponents were Lincoln, Albion, Neligh, Plainview, Newman Grove, Pierce, Genoa Indians, Tilden and Norfolk....Oakdale won four out of six games at the state tournament, the loss being to Nebraska City. The winners were Lincoln, Omaha, Nebraska City, and Oakdale.³⁶

Other basketball teams brought home tournament honors.

During the Thirties Oakdale won the District Class B

Tournament for seven consecutive years. These years were 1930-1938 inclusive.³⁷

Oakdale's water bonds were paid by September, 1922, and the municipality was free of bonded indebtedness.³⁸

Enough revenue had accumulated by 1927 to warrant gravelling the town's streets.³⁹ The economy that had facilitated this improvement was also to be appreciated when on September 10, 1932, the city hall was destroyed. This destruction came as a result of the water pressure tank explosion. Cash on hand in the village treasury provided for new construction.

³⁶ Ibid., 11 Mar. 1937.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 23 June 1922.

³⁹ Ibid., 15 July 1927.

This building today houses the City Hall, Fire Department, and water pumping station.⁴⁰

Weather is always a conversation topic but when the unusual happens it becomes noteworthy. Oakdale's weather records reveal several disastrous events of nature. Perhaps the most severe occurred on July 16, 1920, when the community was visited by its most destructive storm. Black clouds rolled out of the northwest and tornado-like winds, accompanied by large hail and rain, struck. Flooding followed and mud engulfed the town. The Norfolk News commented:

The scenes in Oakdale are pathetic. Every resident in the town suffered from the storm. To the close observer it is seen that the hail storm was one of the worst ever experienced in this state. Practically every window in the town was damaged by the hail...every house will need reshingling or patching.

The bark on one side of all the trees was cut away by the pelting ice balls. Oakdale citizens made little or no complaint over their experience and visitors who return from that city declare the optimism of residents of the town merits public attention.⁴¹

Earlier this same year the Elkhorn River rampaged and cut new channels north of town. The flood was described by early residents as the worst in the community's history. No later records reveal damage to the extent

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15 Sept. 1932.

⁴¹ The Norfolk News, 29 July 1920.

of that inflicted by 1920 storms.⁴²

Hardships resulting from weather extremes have been recorded on several occasions at Oakdale. Extremely cold weather, with quantities of snow, was noted during 1936. A cold wave began January 16 and ended February 21 with temperatures never above zero degrees.⁴³ In direct contrast July and August, 1936, registered temperatures of over 100 degrees every day.

Sixty-nine years of weather have been recorded by the Clingman family at Oakdale, Nebraska. This family, descendants of Samuel Clingman, started private weather records in 1888 and was officially recognized in 1893 when the United States government accepted their efforts. The Clingman observations have been a weekly feature in the local paper since the Pen and Plow was published by Samuel Clingman. In 1960 the United States Department of Commerce gave recognition to this family for more than fifty years government weather service.⁴⁵

Oakdale, like many other small communities, enjoyed

⁴² The Oakdale Sentinel, 23 Apr. 1920.

⁴³ United States Government Weather Records, kept by Geo. S. Clingman, Oakdale, Nebraska, Jan., Feb., Mar., 1936.

⁴⁴ Ibid., July and Aug., 1936.

⁴⁵ United States Department of Commerce, The Cooperative Weather Observer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 57.

the boom of the early 1900's, slowed pace during the 1920's, and by the 1930's slipped into depression along with the entire nation. Oakdale's story was illustrated by local action when the Antelope County Supervisors offered the county poor farm at public auction in 1927.⁴⁶ Four years later the effects of local depression were evidenced when this board voted to open a poor farm. The increased needs of paupers was given as reason for this action.⁴⁷

The elements which contributed to depression elsewhere were present in this community. Over-speculation was reflected when the Oakdale Mill entered bankruptcy proceedings in 1925. The community was stunned when the Oakdale Bank and the Antelope County Bank were placed under the Guarantee Fund Commission in 1927.⁴⁸ The bank failures dashed the citizens hope for recovery from the economic slump. When they awoke from the shock they realized the depression was upon them.

⁴⁶ The Oakdale Sentinel, 4 Feb . 1927.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 23 July 1931.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1 Apr. 1927.

CHAPTER VI

OAKDALE REFLECTS NATIONAL AND STATE EVENTS, 1869-1962

Throughout the years Oakdale has maintained interest in not only the everyday events but in those happenings which were of state and national significance. Perhaps any small town, similar to Oakdale, would have reacted in like manner, but in some respects the community showed distinguishing features. Oakdale's citizens displayed enthusiasm during national crises, political campaigns, and emergency causes.

However there was little evidence of active participation in outside affairs prior to the 1890's. The community, to a large extent, lacked communication with other than immediate areas. The exception to this was Oakdale's weekly newspaper and a Saturday trip to town. Local matters commanded attention and the primary interest centered in the Neligh-Oakdale county seat dispute.

Local citizens saw little need for meddling in state or national politics until they were caught in the swell of the Populist movement. They again responded when Nebraska's Bryan emerged as a national figure. A previously conservative community lent support to movements which seemed the panacea for the ills of the

time.

Bryan Clubs were formed in Oakdale with both men and ladies participating. Regular meetings were held but on one occasion, December 6, 1900, these groups sponsored a banquet which was attended by over five-hundred persons. Bryan's speech, "Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining," brought a standing ovation. The local band and glee clubs provided patriotic music. Several toasts and responses were presented and A. J. Leach recited the "The Declaration of Independence." The audience was apparently stirred for they generously contributed when the free-will offering was taken.¹ This offering helped finance Bryan's campaign.

Democrats may have taken heart from these popular affairs but election returns showed that the Republicans held control. Antelope County, including Oakdale, also voted Republican.² By 1904 The Oakdale Sentinel's editor declared: "Roosevelt is elected and we all rejoice with him in his success. Even the opposition, deep down in their hearts, are glad and well satisfied."³

At about this same time the community rallied to

¹ The Oakdale Sentinel, 13 Dec. 1900.

² Ibid., 8 Nov. 1902.

³ Ibid., 11 Nov. 1904

support our cause in the Spanish-American conflict. Oakdale was brought close to the war when large numbers of troops passed through town by railroad. Local aggregations met army trains from Fort Niobrara and Fort Robinson at the depot. Appropriate ceremonies were held and community organizations provided the soldiers with basket lunches. The train schedule included a service stop at the Oakdale roundhouse and this hour's time permitted the citizens opportunity for their attentions.⁴ In keeping with the war effort, on May 8, 1898, Union Memorial Services were held at the Methodist Church in honor of the war casualties.⁵

In September, 1905, the line "A Republican Newspaper" was removed from the directory of The Oakdale Sentinel.⁶ Editorial policy did not bear out the deletion for in 1912 the paper strongly endorsed William Howard Taft as the only progressive, strong, candidate for the presidency.⁷ The election of 1916 also witnessed support of the Republican cause.⁸

⁴ Ibid., 9 Apr. 1898.

⁵ Ibid., 7 May 1898.

⁶ Ibid., 9 Sept. 1905.

⁷ Ibid., 16 Oct. 1912.

⁸ Ibid., 3 Nov. 1916.

Politics, which had gained influence in the years prior to 1917, was to be less significant for a few years. The war effort, as in all the nation, became dominant consideration. Patriotic rallies, war bond societies, and the Red Cross Work were a part of every citizen's living.

The results of Oakdale's patriotic rallies were seen on May 16, 1917, when recruiting officers first began enlisting men for the services.⁹ Numerous registration days followed and by September, 1918, seventy-one names were inscribed upon Oakdale's roll of honor. One of these men was listed as a casualty. Later his death was attributed to influenza and not to actual fighting.¹⁰

Citizens determined to back the men at the front with all possible endeavor. The local Red Cross chapter organized and within eight hours subscribed \$2,015.90.¹¹ Sewing groups and welfare societies met as part of the Red Cross work and their goals were more than attained. The Oakdale Red Cross sponsored a

⁹ Ibid., 1 June 1917.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6 Sept. 1918.

¹¹ Ibid., 22 June 1917.

series of county band concerts which were a successful fund raising effort.¹²

A war instituted agency, Council of Defense, was responsible for managing all war projects within the county. Oakdale adhered to the policies set forth by this council. The community accorded to its decree by removing all pro-German symbols from homes and businesses.¹³ The local school board abolished teaching German in action passed on December 12, 1917.¹⁴ To these actions the local paper lended support by declaring: "Hereafter America will be the home of Americans and citizenship will not be as cheap as in the years gone by."¹⁵

Food conservation was advocated through the Council of Defense and local housewives learned to substitute when wheatless, porkless, and beefless menus were used.¹⁶ Even the children of the community felt the war sacrifices when the council declared no fireworks for the

¹² Ibid., 17 May 1918.

¹³ Ibid., 16 Nov. 1917.

¹⁴ Ibid., 14 Dec. 1917.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3 Aug. 1917.

¹⁶ Ibid., 8 Feb. 1918.

Fourth of July in 1918.¹⁷

Oakdale received the Armistice news by telegraph wire on November 12, 1918. The depot agent informed the telephone operator who issued a general ring. School and church bells were rung as the joyful word spread about the town. Celebrations continued throughout the day and in the evening citizens gathered at a bonfire rally and burned the Kaiser in effigy. A parade was organized and proceeded around the town with anvils and guns used for noisemakers. The evening concluded with patriotic music; the band played and spontaneous group singing took place.¹⁸ Returning service men were honored at receptions held for them.

Oakdale's G.A.R. chapter suffered rapid loss in its ranks at about the time of the first World War. The local organization disbanded January 1, 1925, with but four veterans remaining. This organization, which had locally included over two-hundred members, annually sponsored the Decoration Day program in Oakdale.¹⁹ It was at one of these observances, May 30, 1915, that the soldier's monument, which stands at the entrance to

¹⁷ Ibid., 14 June 1918.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15 Nov. 1918.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2 Jan. 1925.

the Oakdale cemetery, was dedicated.²⁰ A replacement to the G.A.R. was realized in the American Legion. LaFayette Post No. 1 was organized at Oakdale on October 13, 1919.²¹ The Legion Auxilliary unit was formed on May 23, 1922.

The Twenties were a period in Oakdale's history when politics and meetings of the Ku Klux Klan caused much speculation. Politics remained loyal to the Republican philosophy. Suspicions of Klan activities were confirmed when on October 2, 1925, a group of white robed Klansmen appeared at the union church services. Their mission was to donate \$75.00 gold to the local church treasuries. The identity of the Klansmen was never learned but local comment was made as follows:

This is the first time that members of the Ku Klux Klan have appeared in Oakdale in their regalia, and considering their errand on this occasion we wonder if the propaganda against them has not been greatly exaggerated.²²

The crosses which burned a-top Seminary Hill were attributed to the work of Klansmen, but the identity of the members remained unknown.

²⁰ Ibid., 14 May 1915.

²¹ Ibid., 17 Oct. 1919.

²² Ibid., 2 Oct. 1925.

Weather, politics, and "alphabet agencies" commanded Oakdale's attention during the Thirties.²³ The extremes of weather were a part of the national and state picture. The community was similarly distressed with drouth, but unlike other places remained Republican during the Roosevelt landslides in 1932 and 1936.²⁴ The community yielded to the "alphabet agencies," despite Republican determination, in November, 1933, when a C.W.A. town improvement project commenced.²⁵ Oakdale received assistance which directly amounted to \$15,000 and over twenty-five unemployed men were put to work. Streets were improved, water mains connected, and a storm ditch constructed.²⁶ The Village Board issued a revised town plat map as part of this program. (Refer to map, p. 64)

Citizens of this community, as elsewhere in the nation, were stunned when radios flashed the startling news of Japan's attack. Several Oakdale servicemen were believed to be in the Pacific area at the time.²⁷ As the war became a reality Oakdale responded with whole-hearted support.

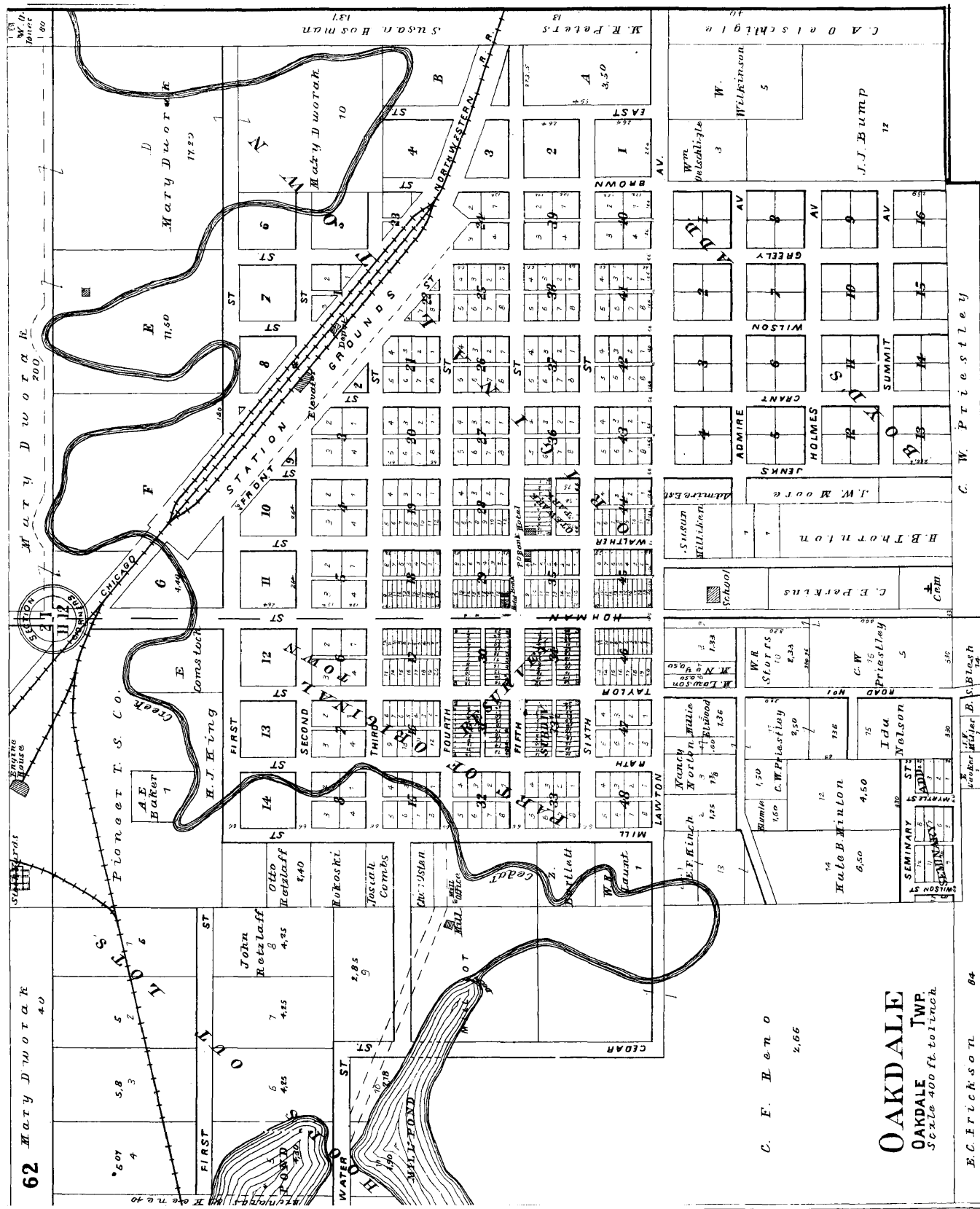
²³ Ibid., 21 Aug. 1930.

²⁴ Ibid., 5 Nov. 1936.

²⁵ Ibid., 14 Dec. 1933.

²⁶ Ibid., 13 Aug. 1934.

²⁷ Ibid., 11 Dec. 1941.



Food rationing was accepted, war bonds purchased, and local boys left to serve their country. D-day news was fearfully received. Throughout the entire period the citizen's thoughts were of the men in service. Five young men lost their lives in the second World War. It was their memory which dimmed the celebrations at the conclusion of the war. Oakdale citizens again concerned themselves with everyday pursuits and the joyous return of each service man.

During the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties Oakdale citizens took particular interest in the political careers of J. I. Stringfellow and Val Peterson. Mr. Stringfellow, a local resident who had served as a county officer, was elected State Representative November 4, 1930. He was re-elected twice and was serving at the time of his death, July 6, 1936. The Oakdale Sentinel commented:

In his own community, where a man is really known for what he is and does, he was even more respected and loved. As a business man he was progressive, and a great booster for Oakdale, and as a private citizen was a wonderful friend and neighbor.²⁹

Val Peterson, whose mother is an Oakdale resident, has had the loyal support of Oakdale in his campaigns

²⁹ Ibid., 9 July 1936.

and community interest in his government career. Mr. Peterson was elected Governor of Nebraska in 1946 and served three consecutive terms. He was appointed Administrator of the Federal Civil Defense Administration in 1952. During President Eisenhower's second term Mr. Peterson served as the United States Ambassador to Denmark.

The history of Oakdale, Nebraska, reflected its interest in affairs having to do with the community's development as well as those happenings of national or state significance. Oakdale has passed through various stages of development and become mature. This community survived periods of crisis and began its recent period of history.

CHAPTER VII

OAKDALE IN RECENT YEARS

In 1929, when most of the nation was alarmed over the stock-market plunge, Oakdale registered little surprise. Local reaction had been four years earlier when Oakdale's crash occurred. It was in 1925 that the local mill became bankrupt and in 1927 that the Guarantee Trust Fund assumed banking operations. Oakdale's final blow came in 1928 when the town banks closed. These were the adversities that left this community reeling.

The report on Oakdale's banks, as issued by the Guarantee Fund Commission, stated that "Loss on recovery section lists the Antelope County Bank at \$85,483.58 and the Oakdale Bank at \$122,010.96."¹ No entry was made in the credit columns. In June, 1928, the dividend paid respectively by these two banks was 12% and 20% on deposits.² Depositors realized a small return. Final assets of both banks were auctioned three years later. Antelope County Bank brought \$2,621.00 and the Oakdale Bank \$644.05.³

Oakdale's early banking history was closing while the

¹ Ibid., 10 Mar. 1928.

² Ibid., 7 June 1928.

³ Ibid., 12 Oct. 1931.

bank of today was beginning. Even before the Antelope and Oakdale banks had ceased operation D. L. Shenefelt petitioned for a National Bank Charter.⁴ This Charter No. 13339 was granted on June 17, 1929, and the First National Bank of Oakdale opened July 1, 1929.⁵ This bank has operated continuously to the present day.

The new bank provided citizens with a ray of hope and facilitated business operations, but the effects of individual losses were great. The tragedy of this loss was most keen to the segment of elderly persons who had retired from their farms, or other means of livelihood, and had residency in Oakdale. A few had retained ownership of their land but most had sold their properties and deposited their wealth in local banks. In either case they faced a stark future. The bank losses were apparent and agriculture suffered adversities in the next few years.

Agriculture's plight during the Thirties were summarized in this Oakdale farmer's statement:

Times were terrible! Our money was gone in the banks and crops were bad. I remember in the summer of 1936 we just didn't get rain. It was awful hot and the dust storms were bad for all of us, stock and all. Our corn was burned up and we didn't get our seed back. The first cutting of hay, and it

⁴ Ibid., 19 Mar. 1928.

⁵ Ibid., 13 June 1929.

any pasture except by the creek. Prices weren't any good if we had raised anything. It was our Christianity that brought us through.⁶

Town conditions are reflected in the action of the Oakdale taxpayers, as recorded in the local paper:

At a school board meeting expenses for next year were slashed by \$4,500 on salaries. Economy is a must to meet growing local demands. A taxpayer's delegation made the request and a 30% reduction will be made. One less teacher will be hired in the Commercial Department.⁷

At the April, 1933, school board meeting an additional 5% salary cut was voted.⁸

The gradual decline of the railroads seriously affected Oakdale's economy at this time. Railroad supported families left town as employment necessitated transferring to other locations. The loss of this payroll, added to other lower incomes, was felt by the cash registers of the business houses.

As northern terminal of the Scribner-Oakdale Branch line, the community had benefitted from the "iron rails." Railroad assets to Oakdale have been many. A four-engine roundhouse, coal chutes, water tower, and depot were built in town. These facilities engaged in twenty-four hour service. Several crews were required in their

⁶ Charles Johnson, farmer, Oakdale, Nebraska, personal interview, 10 June 1961. Permission to quote secured.

⁷ The Oakdale Sentinel, 9 Mar. 1933.

⁸ Ibid., 6 Apr. 1933.

operation and an agent with three operators were the supervisory personnel.

The presence of the railroad had been an accepted fact since 1879. Community thinking was awakened when on November 4, 1937, the Oakdale paper carried this announcement:

The Chicago and North Western Railroad this week requested the Nebraska Railway Commission to remove the motor car service on the branch. Their petition states that the line pays \$1500.00 tax revenue per month and losses are over a cent per mile.⁹

Oakdale joined with other branch towns in a "save the trains" organization.¹⁰ This organization had some influence in the controversy, but it did not achieve its full objective. Train service on the branch and main line through Oakdale was gradually curtailed until all passenger trains were abolished on November 1, 1958.¹¹ Freight service is still maintained. The train's "roar and rumble" faded from the community.

Commerce in all Nebraska moved at a slow pace until through the year 1938. Business men were cautious about credit and farmers and townspeople alike had little

⁹ Ibid., 4 Nov. 1937.

¹⁰ Ibid., 18 Nov. 1937.

¹¹ Stanley Johnson, Freight Agent, Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, Fremont, Nebraska, telephone conversation 6 Feb. 1962.

inclination to plunge into uncertain ventures. Many of the retired citizens were obliged to accept the Old Age Assistance program. The younger groups were attracted to other localities. Census figures show that by 1920 Oakdale's population was at a peak of 707.¹² Ten years later there were 663 persons, while by 1940 the population was 561.¹³ The extent to which local citizens sought outside livelihoods is evident from these figures as well as local newspaper accounts of residents moving from the community.

Oakdale's recovery from the depression had been long and hard but by 1938 drouth no longer plagued agriculture and war prosperity had its affect. A comparison of Oakdale's market prices for the years 1934 and 1944 illustrated the ten year difference:

	1934	1944
Corn	34¢	99½¢
Oats	28¢	75¢
Cream	20¢	93¢
Eggs	12¢	52¢
Heavy hens	08¢ 14	17¢ 15
Heavy springs	06¢	19¢

¹² Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Volume I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), p. 252.

¹³ Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 1950, Volume II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 10.

¹⁴ The Oakdale Sentinel, 8 Feb . 1934.

¹⁵ Ibid., 6 Apr. 1944.

In 1942, improvement in community utilities is again noted. In this year the Consumer's Public Power District bought the local electric system.¹⁶ Farmers in the community rejoiced at the extension of Rural Electrification Administration lines in 1944.¹⁷ Additional benefits came in 1946 when Central Electric and Gas Company supplied natural gas for the community.¹⁸ These changes in utility service brought about establishment of several related business firms.

As the 1940's progressed several other new businesses were established in Oakdale. Two are related to agriculture. The Curtiss Farms Bull Service meets the growing need of stockmen in this area. The other business is Cooper's Blue Grass Association which began operations in 1949.¹⁹

Expansion and building took place in many business firms during the Forties. The Oakdale Elevator Company purchased the Oakdale Milling Company assets and expanded grain storage facilities. A locker plant and filling station constructed buildings and started new enterprises.

¹⁶ Ibid., 30 July 1942.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5 Oct. 1944.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27 June 1946.

¹⁹ Ibid., 23 June 1949.

Town appearance improved with extensive remodeling at the lumber yard, post office, and bank. New street lights were installed on Main Street in 1951 and the town's business section took on a "new look."²⁰ Modern influences were felt when Wagner's Television Sales and Repair Service opened a shop in Oakdale.

Several unusual weather incidents happened during the Forties. Cedar Creek had often flooded but in 1940 its highest floodstage occurred.²¹ This creek flows around and through the town and inundated many homes and surrounding farms. In 1942 a tornado struck northeast of Oakdale and left destruction for several miles.²² It was in 1949 that nature paralyzed northeast Nebraska with repeated snow storms. Nebraska's Governor, Val Peterson, declared Antelope County a disaster area and "operation snowbound" moved in.²³ Oakdale was headquarters for the bulldozer crews who operated in Antelope and Holt counties.

At the beginning of the snowbound disaster The Oakdale Sentinel injected a note of humor in its storm news:

²⁰ Ibid., 13 Dec. 1951.

²¹ Ibid., 20 June 1940.

²² Ibid., 14 May 1942.

²³ Ibid., 3 Feb . 1949.

Oakdale had more heavy snow. High winds blocked roads...the worst since 1936. As a result Oakdale has gone modern with one-way streets. The town's snow plow was finally put in action Monday afternoon. It got two blocks and went into the ditch.²⁴

Prairie fires, which had been a hazard of pioneer days, caused much destruction during this era. In 1947, 1949, 1952, and 1956 thousands of acres were destroyed by grass fires. Fire companies from Oakdale, Tilden, Elgin, and Neligh answered alarms and successfully prevented destruction of local ranch places. The last of these fires witnessed use of Oakdale's new fire truck. The following year, 1957, a Rural Fire District was organized at Oakdale and rural equipment purchased. The City Hall was enlarged to accommodate the rural fire-fighting truck.²⁵

Pride in civic affairs was renewed when The Oakdale Sentinel sponsored a community improvement campaign. The editorials stabbed the citizens into action with repeated criticisms. The editor urged Oakdale to improve the library, park, cemetery, and entire community. One of these articles read:

Is Oakdale Dead?---I don't think so! We have homes, school, churches, business houses and most of the facilities that makes up an organized community

²⁴ Ibid., 25 Nov. 1942.

²⁵ Ibid., 14 Feb . 1957.

of 500 population. Oakdale is not dead. It is the citizenry of our town which is 'dead'....Let's forget about immediate benefits. It is benefits for the future that will eventually repay our effort. Once a project is started, let's get together and stay together....Let's advertise our community and let's advertise it as a town we are proud of. If we can't be proud of it now let's work until we have a town we can be proud of....²⁶

Community response was immediate. The first project was undertaken by the newly organized Town and Country Club. This group sponsored remodelling the old Oakdale pavillion and by March, 1955, the work was started.²⁷ The remodelling job has now been completed and a nicely furnished community center is the result of their efforts. This building accommodates civic and social functions. It is used as the polling place, and a meeting place for civic groups. Community dances and parties, church and school banquets, Memorial and Veteran's Day observances, and other similar events are all held here. The center is the scene of the annual polio auction which draws large crowds.

At a meeting of the Cemetery Association in September, 1955, plans were established for two annual clean-up days.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 10 Sept. 1953.

²⁷ Ibid., 3 Mar. 1955.

²⁸ Ibid., 29 Sept. 1955.

The clean-up campaigns met with community approval and as a result the cemetery was restored to its original beauty. The Oakdale cemetery is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the area. It fulfills the dream of its pioneer founders in that it has natural beauty and a commanding view of the Elkhorn River valley.

Two other projects, the library and park, were developed. The library solicited additional funds and a new location. The Village Board granted the library more financial support and provided an attractive building on Main Street for its facilities. Garden Club ladies accepted the park project and Oakdale now has a well-equipped and beautifully landscaped area for such use.

Changes have also taken place in the local churches. The Methodist congregation, which has the oldest and largest membership, has extensively reconstructed and redecorated their building. A new worship center has been constructed and an electric organ installed. The Church of Christ and the Church of the Nazarene have also remodelled their facilities.

The Oakdale schools have modernized the building which was built in 1912. This school house adequately provides for the needs of the community. The gymnasium

has undergone improvements and is used for athletics, music, and dramatics.

The curriculum of the Oakdale schools has also kept pace with modern times. There are several courses emphasized which include: college preparatory, commercial training, and a general education course. The high school is state accredited and provides extra-curricular activities on the basis of enrollment at the Class D level. Athletic teams and music groups have received many honors in recent competitions.

Recent improvement in local communications is taking place. The Oakdale Telephone Company was purchased by the Hunt Telephone Exchange and is installing dial systems to go into operation in April, 1962.

Although the population of Oakdale has decreased the community has kept pace with modern influences. The town presents a neat and attractive appearance indicative of an interested citizenry. An economy based upon agriculture is apparent. Oakdale looks forward to the future.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SUMMARY

Nebraska settlement began along the Missouri and Platte rivers during the middle part of the nineteenth century. Tributaries of these rivers afforded access routes for other pioneer ventures and as a result many northeastern Nebraska communities sprang up along the Elkhorn River. Earliest of these were West Point and Norfolk but shortly after 1868 homesteaders pushed on for new land. The fertile soil, abundant timber, and plentiful water supply was the basis for the growth of a community.

One such community, known as Twin Groves, developed for a time and then ceased to exist. It was here that Antelope County organized in 1871. However the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad sought terminals and their land agent, I. N. Taylor, selected a location adjacent to Twin Groves. The result was the establishment, in 1872, of a town named Oakdale.

Antelope County settlers welcomed their first platted town, they selected Oakdale as county seat, and business boomed. Trade increased with the coming of the railroad and by 1881 the town incorporated. Oakdale's distinction as county seat was short-lived, for a special election, in 1883, favored Neligh.

However, since Oakdale was a railroad terminal, it continued to be the agricultural trade center for Antelope County. This pioneer town was located for commerce and prosperity followed. The early settlers also laid Oakdale's cultural foundations; the schools, churches, and social organizations have always played a major role in the community's progress.

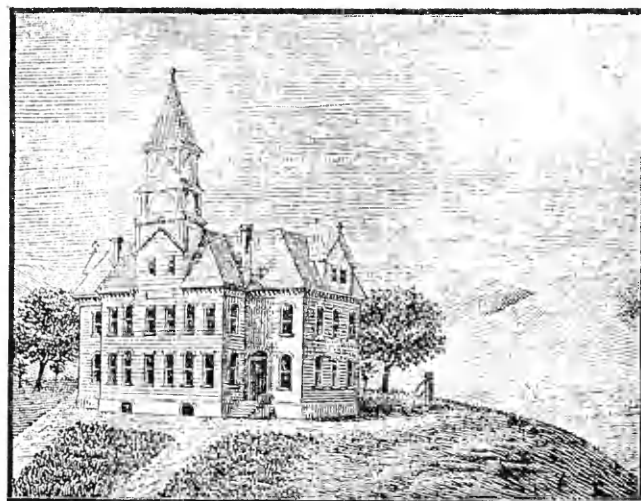
As years passed Oakdale continued to grow. Until well into the twentieth century an economy based upon railroads and farming flourished. Railroad decline and agricultural distress of the Thirties had adverse effects upon the community. Unlike some small towns, in a similar situation, the town did not die. Agricultural interests held on, despite difficulties, and the town revived when farming conditions improved. Today's Oakdale has an economy based upon agriculture and the town is meeting the needs of a farm community.

Oakdale is a typical town of the period in which it developed. The history of the community shows that it is representative of a small north-eastern Nebraska town. In spite of the many dramatic struggles, Oakdale has survived and became one of Nebraska's prairie towns.

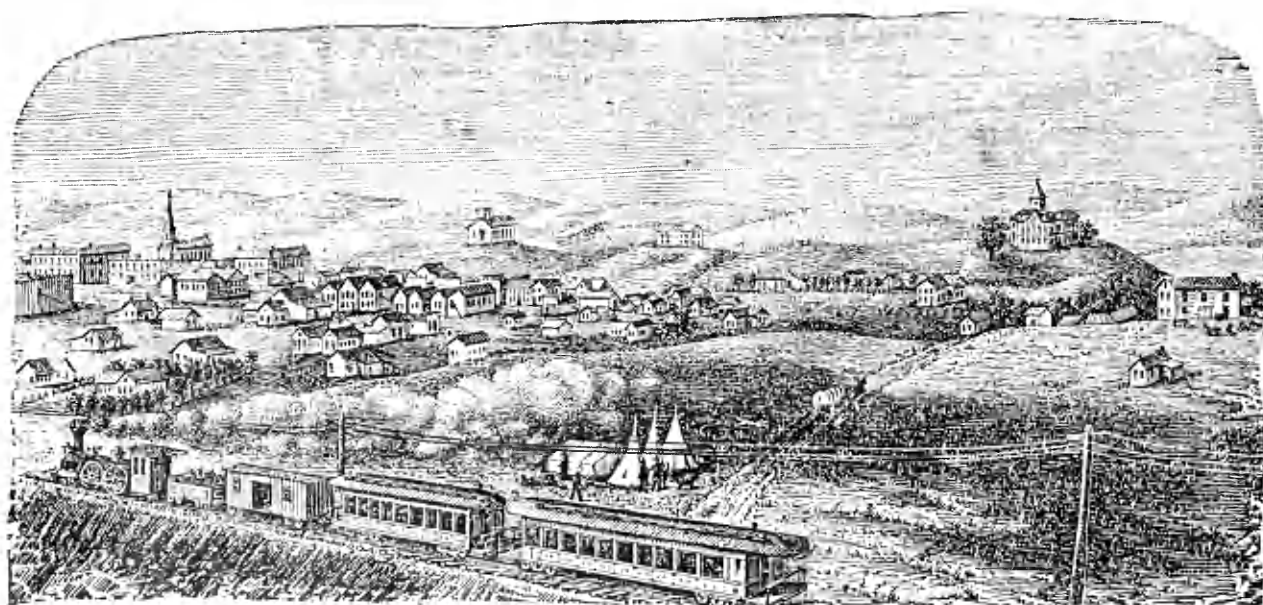
APPENDIX



FIRST SCHOOLHOUSE-1874
IN OAKDALE



PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY-1881



Sketched by E. P. McCORMICK Oakdale, Nebraska. Moss Engraving Co., New York.

A VIEW OF OAKDALE AT ABOUT 1882 SHOWING THE SEMINARY AND SCHOOL
(Reproduced from a post card series owned by Helen McNare,
Oakdale, Nebraska)



OAKDALE SCHOOLHOUSE
IN 1886



TODAY'S SCHOOLHOUSE
IN 1912



AN EARLY OAKDALE HOTEL
1882



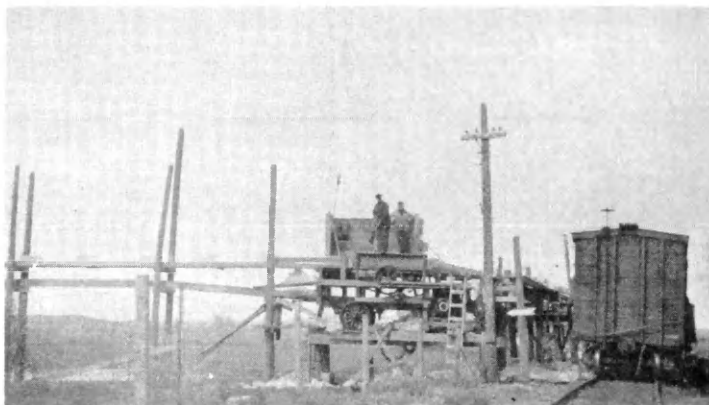
MAIN STREET LOOKING EAST
OAKDALE IN 1882



MAIN STREET LOOKING WEST
OAKDALE IN 1882



MAIN STREET OF OAKDALE AROUND 1912



PART OF THE ICE CHUTES
OAKDALE, NEBRASKA



FILLING RAILROAD CARS WITH ICE
OAKDALE ICE PLANT



THE OAKDALE MILL AND DAM



PICTURE ABOVE SHOWS
OAKDALE BRASS BAND
ABOUT 1900



PICTURE AT THE LEFT SHOWS
ONE OF THE FIRST TRAINS
INTO OAKDALE
ABOUT 1880



OAKDALE CHAUTAUQUA IN JOHNSON'S PARK-1915

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