

THROUGH THE TRAIN TOWN OF MONT IDA

Mont Ida, Anderson County, Kansas, 1880-1930.



Figure 1: 1901 Plat of Mont Ida. The town was founded in 1880 as an “Instant Town” once the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company built their tracks. The town was built around and survived through the railroad. SOURCE: “Plat book, Anderson County, Kansas.” Northwest Publishing Company. 1901.

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Lost Kansas Communities

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This study illustrates the instant town of Mont Ida, Washington Township, in Anderson County and its establishment of the Missouri Pacific railroad, peaceful people, and local support that thrived until the decline of trains and neighboring competition. Maps, archived photos and new photos are featured to demonstrate the persistence of the small agricultural community.

In our world today, it only takes an instant to look up historical facts, statistical figures, and answers to unknown questions. But in 1880, it only took an instant to make a town. Within Washington Township, a town company scouted Anderson County to find a town that would have a station along a new railroad. At first it was called, Oneida, after an original settler's daughters. However, there was already a community in Kansas called such, and the name bounced between Mount Ida and Mont Ida. Today, the local people of the community, which still stands as a small village, call it Mont Ida. The area's peak occurred the instant it was born as a railroad town; by the 1930s where we begin to see the decline of the train tracks' use. The settlement of Mont Ida thrived off train transportation, settler inclusion, and supporting local business but would ultimately decline with the use of automobiles and competition of neighboring towns.

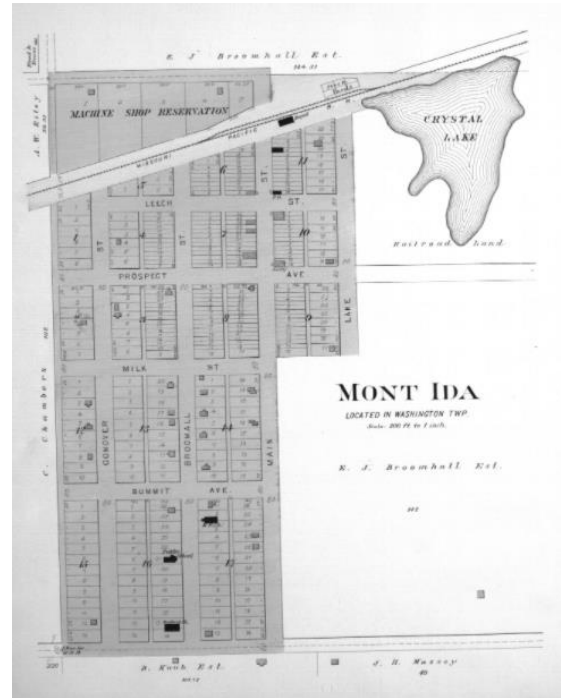


Figure 1: 1901 Plat of Mont Ida. The town was founded in 1880 as an “Instant Town” once the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company built their tracks. The town was built around and survived through the railroad. SOURCE: “Plat book, Anderson County Kansas.” Northwest Publishing Company. 1901.

<http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/209374>

Although Dr. E.J Broomhall was the first settler of Mont Ida in 1857, the land was “survey and platted in 1880, by the railroad company.”¹ Mont Ida's location on a high upland prairie was perfect for farming settlers, but for owner of Missouri Pacific railroad,

¹ Cutler, William G. “ANDERSON COUNTY, Part 8.” *Kansas Collection Books*. 12 Dec. 2016.

the train tracks would also serve to as a connection between Colorado, Nebraska, Arkansas and Texas. Jay Gould, an extremely controversial New York Financier, saw this vision. Gould has previously been involved with the ownership of the Wabash railroad and the Union Pacific. He built up these railroads and controlled the market with gold, and by withholding the gold until stock prices went up. Then he would sell the gold, and the trains that brought in the product when they reached the highest market to sell. During his time within these railroads, Gould was seen as a traitor. With his next endeavor, he was described as a “manipulator to a businessman” as he bought out the Missouri Pacific Railroad and would earn much success for himself, and the town of Mont Ida.²

When Gould invested into the railroad of Missouri Pacific, also known as MoPac in 1879, he invested almost 50 million dollars to add 2,500 miles of railroad. One route was being built nine miles west of Garnett, Kansas. “On October 11 [1879] a town company was formed for the purpose of establishing a town along the railroad.” The site was chosen on Dr. E.J. Broomhall’s farm and they built in Mont Ida for the railroad to link together St. Louis, Kansas and Arizona. However, the railroad track itself would be the county divide between Garnett and the instant town, Mont Ida.³

The Missouri Pacific had four stations within Anderson County, which included Greeley, Garnett, Mont Ida and Westphalia. The train was used to ship grain and

² Geisst, Charles R. *Monopolies in America: Empire Builders and Their Enemies, from Jay Gould to Bill Gates*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

³ “Oneida- Mt. Ida.” *Anderson Historical Society*. 12 Dec. 2016. http://www.historyandersoncoks.org/Oneida_-_Mt.html

livestock from these areas. Mont Ida specifically had a busy depot with 30 trains every 24 hours, and within a year made about \$150,000 from farm trade along the line in 1903.⁴ Mont Ida's depot was located right next to the stockyard, which allowed the farming town's goods to be shipped easily from their area on to other locations. But with the business of MoPac, workers were often working in dangerous situations, and Mont Ida citizens had to deal with many outsiders coming and going. We can gather a few facts from an article found in the *Garnett Journal* in 1903. A wreck in Buffalo, just between Garnett and Mont Ida, occurred that killed 11. The men working on the train were



Figure 2: Photograph of Missouri Pacific Railroad in Garnett, Kansas, 1966. Mont Ida's neighbor brought in a lot of competition, which would lead to the town's decline. SOURCE: Killam, H. Kansas memory. 1966. <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/215300>

“mostly Greeks, who were instantly killed.”⁵ The foremen in charge of the group was a local from Garnett, and the train had collided with another freight train that was passing. Although this may seem like little information, we learn the type of people the railroad was bringing in. The situation would only rise when MoPac added passenger trains to their routes.

In May of 1903, Mayor Baylee announced that a passenger train would be added. This route now allowed citizens to travel from Mont Ida to Garnett and even to Topeka. For the early 1900s with the ease of transportation like this, a small town was hopeful that more people would come to Mont

⁴ “Mount Ida Past and Future”, *“Garnett Journal”*, 31 July 1903.

⁵ “A Bad Wreck”, *“Garnett Journal”*, May 1, 1903.

Ida. However, in 1915 when the automobile arrived in Kansas, this would actually be bad for Mont Ida. People could travel more easily to Garnett and could see the riches of the larger town, encouraging them to move.

Since the railroad was a huge part of the town yet the people were known as peaceful, it's hard to reconcile these two aspects. In studies we have seen since groups of people constantly come and go into small towns that these visitors can be rough. Traveling men came into towns and would want to be drink and be aggressive with woman. For some towns, woman often did not want these cowboys to ruin the community's harmony. However, in Mont Ida, citizens were always welcoming.

In the years that followed as passenger trains were added to the railroad lines,

Mont Ida's people were still described as peaceful. "The citizens of this favored spot are peaceable, law-abiding and sociable. They are good neighbors and are accommodating to each other. This is at should be, as peace and brotherly love



Figure 3: Church of Brethel was a staple in accepting diversity within the community. SOURCE: Photograph by Clarissa Weers. Mont Ida- Church of Brethel. 4 Nov. 2016.

in a neighborhood is a great blessing.”⁶ The quiet town seemed to have good moral values and judgment, which stemmed from the origin of its settlers.

⁶ “A very prosperous little town on the Missouri Pacific”, “Garnett Journal”, 29 Dec. 1911.

Mont Ida settlers established two churches within the town, “Wesleyan Methodist and Dunkard, both of which societies are said to have a good following and are the salt of the community.”⁷ It was not uncommon at the time to have a Methodist church within a Kansas community. However, it was strange to have two churches within a population of less than 150, especially one of Dunkard practice. Dunkard is the religion known as “peace churches” from the 16th century in Germany, when John Calvin was questioning religion. The idea of anti baptism (only being baptized as an adult) would spread to America in the beginning of the immigration phase, “with inhabitants of the palatine region of Germany heading for America in great numbers.”⁸

In 1870s, Germans settled in Kansas and were proud farmers; however, “Germans in Kansas did not always have it easy. They often faced difficult times while settling and even after being in communities for years, faced ant-German sentiment.”

Settling in Mont Ida seemed to be a perfect choice especially since “they

also helped build railroads and started new businesses.”⁹ One family found within the 1912 Polk directory the Studebakers, originated from Germany and owned one of the



Figure 4: Mont Ida Schoolhouse No.8, had 70 pupils in 1911. The schoolhouse had three teachers and ran for 8 months out of the year. SOURCE: Photograph by Max Stewart. Mont Ida-School House. 4 Nov. 2016.

⁷ “Mount Ida Past and Future”, “Garnett Journal”, 31 July 1903.

⁸ Winder, Ann. “Ann’s Ancestors: Dunkards, Mennonites and Quakers.” *Ann’s Ancestors: Dunkards, Mennonites and Quakers*.

12 Dec. 2016. <http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~annieron/Meo/Dunkards%20Mennonites%20and%20Quakers.html>

⁹ “German Settlers in Kansas.” *German Settlers in Kansas - Kansapedia – Kansas Historical Society*.

general stores within Mont Ida in 1912.¹⁰ Research shows that the Dunkards also had a Love Feast almost every year between 1903 and 1911. During this Love Feast, families would take this two-day ceremony to “strengthen bonds and spirit of harmony, goodwill, and congeniality.”¹¹

Mont Ida’s acceptance of people was strongly impacted by the sense of peace Dunkards brought into the town. In many ways, they kept the town alive with acceptance of newcomers and treated the small yet German populated town with dignity and friendliness. Although Mont Ida is in decline today, the presence of care for one another is still visible within Mont Ida’s cemetery. Gravestones from the 17th century have been up to date with newer models to honor the dead.

The unique support of Mont Ida’s community allowed the small town’s businesses to boom in the 20th century. By 1911, Mont Ida had all that a small town could need. “There is a hotel, barber shop, blacksmith shop, livery barn, lumber yard, a good physician, three general stores, two restaurants, a hardware store, a bank and a real estate agency.” The town also included a bank and a nice schoolhouse that had 70 students. The town was able to meet the needs of its permanent residents and those passing through on the train. Even residents who wanted to go afar to visit neighboring towns or even into Kansas City were able to travel on the Missouri Pacific passenger train. The town was at

12 Dec. 2016. <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/german-settlers-in-kansas/16710>

¹⁰ "Kansas Memory." *Polk's Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory*.

12 Dec. 2016. <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/200087/page/718>

¹¹ "The Moravian Church in North America: Love feast". May 18, 2012.

<http://www.moravian.org/moravian-church-northern-province/palmyra-moravian-celebrates-sesquicentennial-2/>

its peak population of nearly 200 in 1915. However, the train tracks that had made the town thrive most would also cause the town's decline.

Mont Ida was established to be a station stop for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, and was only nine miles outside of Garnett. Garnett had a stop along the Missouri Pacific railroad as well as the Santa Fe. Once the train established passenger freight, there was fear that consumers of Mont Ida would prefer their business in Garnett as it was just a train stop away with three to five passenger freights in a 24 hour cycle. Yet not much was seen of a decline until automobiles took Kansas. "The railroads thrived through the early 20th century until railroad

traffic, especially passenger service, began to dwindle." ¹²

By 1900 Kansas ranked 10th in the nation for having the most automobiles. However, the lack of good roads in rural areas limited the use of these early vehicles. It wasn't until

1920 that the 'Good Roads

Movement' took place to establish a better road system. "Kansas voters passed a 'good roads' amendment allowing state aid to counties for roads." ¹³ In this decision, Kansas



Figure 5: Updated tombstone of the first settler in Mont Ida, E.J. Broomhall. The cemetery exemplifies the perseverance and care Mont Ida citizens have for their own. SOURCE: Photograph by Clarissa Weers. Mont Ida- Cemetery. 4 Nov. 2016.

¹² "Railroad Companies in American History." *Legends of America*. 12 Dec. 2016.

<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/rr-railroadcompanies3.html>

¹³ "Good Roads Movement." *Kansapedia - Kansas Historical Society*. 12 Dec. 2016.

<https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/good-roads-movement/12067>

was losing money from the government for federal aid because it violated the ban that states could not finance any kind of internal improvements. It wasn't until 1929 that Kansas and 47 other states would pass a new amendment in legislation that would establish the statewide highway network.

This major movement allowed Mont Ida citizens to skip the train and take their car to neighboring towns. Although the train was still needed to ship around grain and livestock, farmers had the option to ship their products themselves locally. Options seemed endless to those in the Midwest. They were able to travel for leisure and on their own time. Finally, they could discover new places that they had not been before. This would later affect the population growth of rural towns and send them into a decline. However, with the wide open road in front of them, Mont Ida citizens would also be able to take their business elsewhere as well.

Since Mont Ida was so close to Garnett, the competition between town stores became very fierce once residents had their own cars. Now, instead of Mont Ida's three general stores competing together, it was the three other stores in Garnett as well.¹⁴ Mont Ida consumers moved their business to a town with a population of nearly 2,500. For Garnett, they were losing business as well with the advancement of cars, but they had enough people in their town to survive. Compared to Mont Ida's top population of only 200, it was inevitable for Mont Ida's business owners to sustain what they had. Farmers also were able to scout better land and could choose to move more easily than ever before. The town was able to prosper in its time along the railroad. But once residents

¹⁴ "Kansas Memory." *Polk's Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory – Kansas Memory*. 1912.

didn't have to rely on the train, they couldn't keep up with the neighboring competition in Garnett.

Mont Ida's trail along the train tracks is what created the town, invited settlers of all backgrounds with peace, and provided a stable economy before cars allowed for more competitive choices of competition for residents. Although the instant town's most prosperous years were founded upon the Missouri Pacific, Mont Ida will not disappear in an instant. The town continues to live on with a loyal population of 75. Although Mont Ida is unable to be found in an instant on Google maps under the names of Mont Ida, Mount Ida or Oneida, the community's perseverance says more than a keyword ever could. Mont Ida will continue to build its history in Kansas with its unique community. With the town's consistency and love, with time there could be another instant growth for its future.

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