

Union - Cass County, Nebraska



Early in Nebraska's history, prairie fires swept across the land, during which all living creatures were obliged to run for their lives. Even "modern trains" were not immune to these dangers. [Etching published in Harper's Weekly , 1869, from Nebraska State Historical Society discards, courtesy of J. Blomenberg]



Mo.Pac. Depot in Union, ca. 1910. [Centennial Calendar]
Only a few miles from the Missouri, settlers arrived in southeastern Cass County as early as 1855. The cluster of houses called "Stringtown," located on the east side of Weeping Water Creek in the 1880s, was the forerunner of Union.

In 1887, when the Missouri Pacific Railroad began surveying for a rail line from Nebraska City to Lincoln, G. A. Rose saw the potential for business, so built a store. A siding added to the excitement felt in the area. The following year several of the small inland post offices consolidated into one, called "Pleasant Grove" by the residents, was moved to an office at the rail center by Postmaster Robert Frans.

In 1890, when the enterprising MP started laying a line northward to Omaha, the village of "Union" was established. It was this junction or "union of the two rail lines" that gave our town its name. (The references in Perkey's book on names are entirely for another place and another reason.)

In 1892 the Cass County commissioners approved the organization of a village, with trustees Rose, John Kennedy, Hiram Dubois, R.A. Fleming, and Frank Tenny. By 1893 eight passenger trains passed through Union daily with a round trip ticket to Omaha costing \$.80. With easy access and the many daily freight trains, Union became a busy shipping point for area farmers to the larger grain and livestock markets. It is a certainty that the growth and permanence of the town at that time, as well as today, is due to the stable elevator system that has been in operation over the years.

Thriving businesses soon lined the kerosene-lighted dirt streets. Lamplighter Walker Jones made the evening rounds with ladder and torch. There were three general stores, a furniture and hardware store (with an undertaking sideline), a stationery and drug store, and a harness shop. The ill and ailing were cared for by Dr. Wallace. A.R. Eikenbary was the cashier of the

Union Bank, and Josie Pittman ran the millinery shop that made hand-crafted "lovelies" for the ladies. G.N. LaRue was the village blacksmith, while Leach and Peck Livery Stables cared for the livestock while customers shopped. Two large grain elevators were built, and a lumberyard filled with choice building materials did a thriving business. The first newspaper, "The Union Ledger," was started in 1888 by William Todd. He soon sold his shop, which consisted of an old discarded Civil War army press, to C.L. Graves, who then edited the paper for many years.

The contract for building a schoolhouse was let to D.W. Foster in 1889 at a cost of \$2,747. That building burned in 1912 and was replaced with a large brick structure in time for the fall term. Sports were always popular in Union's school. In 1907 the girls basketball team were "state champions." The Union district merged with the Nebraska City school system in 1956. The building now sits sad and lonely for those who remember it "back then." To attest to the place it held in our hearts is the growing attendance at the annual alumni banquet each June, when former students from near and far return to show their love for the pleasant memories of their childhood.

The Old Settlers Picnic, a big event in the early days, was held for the first time in 1889. There were parades, oratories, and music. Barbecued beef and pork, cooked by William Ellington of Rock Bluff (first sheriff of Cass County) made the day. Soon it became a two-day celebration, bringing people from a wide area.

Union boasted of three churches at one time -- Methodist, Baptist, and Cumberland Presbyterian. Of these the United Methodist and Baptist remain to care for the spiritual needs of the community.

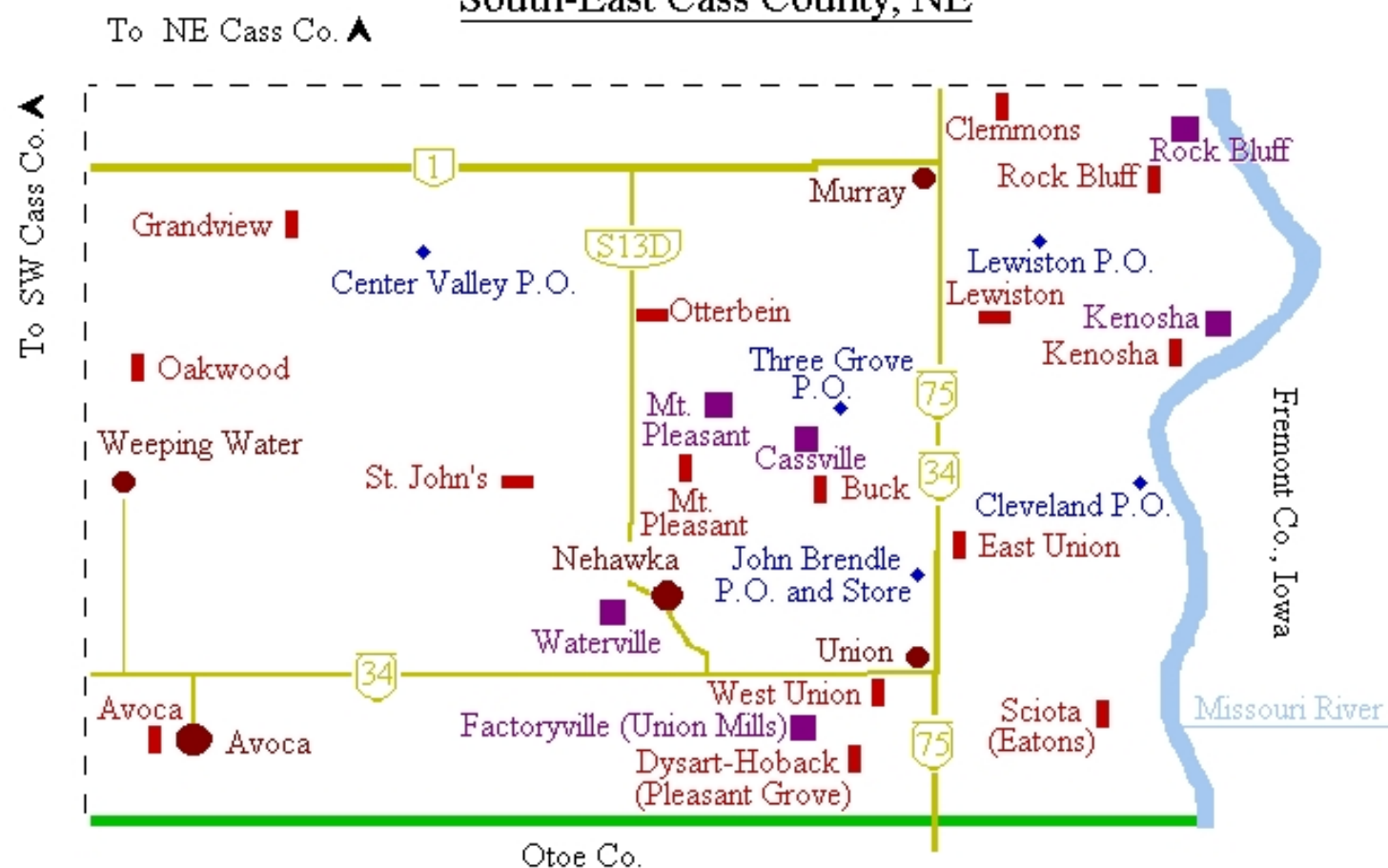
The business section of Union has been rebuilt a half-dozen times because of first one, and then another fire. Severe flooding has also plagued the town more times than one cares to remember, as nearby Weeping Water Creek overflows its banks easily.

Union's centennial celebration was held in 1987 and great numbers of former residents came to enjoy "reminiscing our past and planning a future." As a result of that event, a group was formed calling itself "P.R.O.U.D." (Premature Rumors of Union's Demise) to make certain our town remains a viable entity.

Our prayer is that another 100 years be granted to our town, Union, and good leadership skills to those who will be entrusted with her future.

By Ruth Stine, 2018 Nehawka Road, Union, NE 68455.

South-East Cass County, NE



Legend:

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|---------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| ● Current Town | — County Line | I-80 Interstate Highway |
| ■ Discontinued Town | — River | 34 US Numbered Highway |
| ◆ Rural Post Office | ⊙ County Seat | 1 Highway Spur |
| ■ Cemetery | | S13D Highway Spur |





