

# Geneva

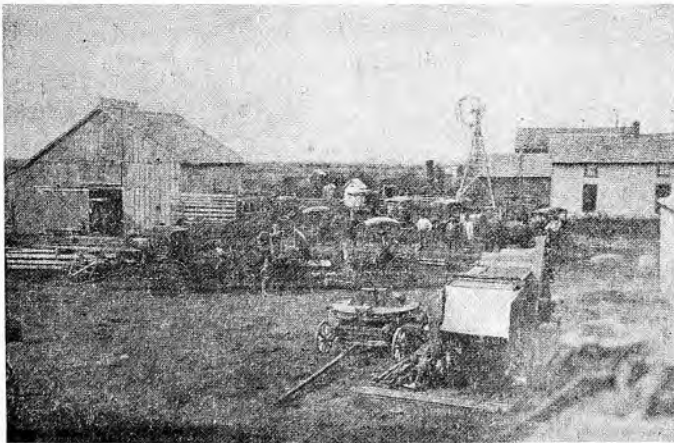
The history of Geneva begins with the organic election of the county on April 19, 1871.

The group that originally established the town suggested a number of nationalities. Names like Dixon, Whitaker, Martin, Porter, Shields, Merryman, Badger, Camp, and Bigelow indicate Anglo-Saxon extraction; Katheiser, German; and a Russian settlement located on the west side of Geneva. This group scattered after the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. (Learning of the assassination upon returning from the Peter Youngers beet field, where they had been working all day, they expressed great joy. This angered the other citizens, so they were told they would be tarred and feathered if they did not leave town by morning. They left—many moving toward Sutton.)

Soon after the county buildings—jail and courthouse, first located on the north side of Court Street (G) between 9th and 10th, then later moved across the street to the courthouse block—were completed in 1873 (as described elsewhere), James H. Bigelow erected on the northwest corner of the square a small, one-story building in which George Bigelow opened a store with a small stock of goods. A post office had been established in the first residence. The next building to be erected was a small store by A. S. Shepherd & Co. on a lot where the Putnam House was later built. The store was kept but for a short time, the foods were soon moved, and the building sold to W. P. Friend, who occupied it as a hotel.

In June, 1874, the courthouse, the jail, a small frame building east of the courthouse, a residence, and a store room west of the square were the only buildings in the county seat. Later in the year, A. G. Camp & Sons—S. B., J. H., and C. D.—moved their grocery and dry-goods store from Fairmont to the G. E. Bigelow building west of the square and opened the first general-merchandise store in Geneva.

In the spring of 1875, J. H. Camp started building a residence and hotel and barn northwest of the square. In the fall of 1875, several business and professional men located here and improvements at once commenced.



Courtesy Nebraska Signal  
James H. Camp's livery stable (1882), located at west end of Geneva business district. The stable was behind C. D. Camp's photograph gallery.

Geneva's first paper, the *Fillmore County Republican*, was published at Rockford, Ill. About 200 copies were expressed to W. T. Burnett, one of the county commissioners. The editor came in a few days; but, there being no place for a plant but the courthouse and no place for his family, he "threw up the sponge."

In November, 1875, Mark M. Neeves came. His press and other material were taken up the stairway into the courthouse. There he commenced to publish Geneva's first regular

paper, the *Fillmore County Review*. He continued to publish the paper in this location until February, 1876. He then moved to the west of the square into a building erected for him.

This concern is the oldest continuous business in the city—now known as the *Nebraska Signal*.

During 1876, the village began to improve rapidly, and several families located here. By January, 1876, the village had a total of 140 inhabitants.

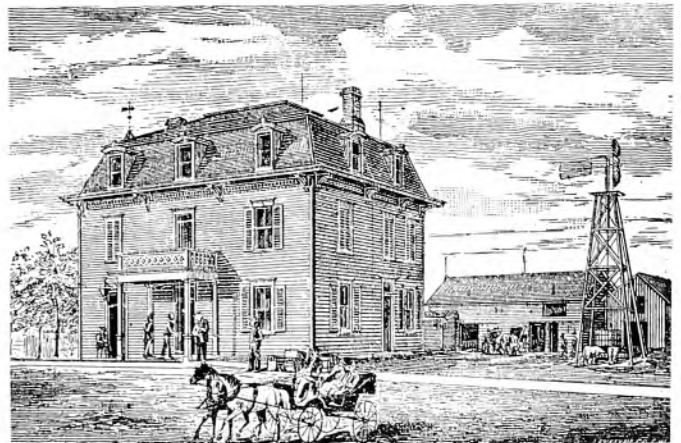
According to Judge William H. Blain, by July 4, 1876, Geneva boasted two dry-goods stores, one drugstore, one millinery, one hardware, and one grocery store, three hotels, a fine schoolhouse, a parsonage, four lawyers, four ministers, and three physicians. Geneva also had a publishing house, which issued the *Fillmore County Review*, a weekly devoted to the interests of the county.

In the fall of 1877, Pliny M. Putnam began the erection of a hotel, which cost nearly \$5,000. Encouraged by this, others came to Geneva. The following report, taken from the May 29, 1878, issue of the *Review*, describes Geneva's "metropolitan" hotel built by Putnam:

"Something of which a city might be proud is the Putnam House, now nearly completed. In dimensions the main part is 32' x 40' and three stories high with a Mansard roof which will soon be crowned with an observatory where a view of the surrounding country can be taken, as far as the eye can reach. The whole is placed upon a stone foundation enclosing a large basement story. Through the center of the lower story extends a spacious hall, on the one side being an office and a large dining hall and on the other ladies' and gentlemen's parlors. These are being nicely furnished and are most delightful apartments. The second story is also divided on either side by a hall into suites of rooms and single rooms, in pleasant and convenient style. The third story is not yet divided into apartments, but will be before long. To the main part is connected a wing 18' x 32', two stories high. The lower story is occupied as a culinary department and the upper story is divided into sleeping apartments. The whole has received the first coat of paint and the finishing touch will soon follow."

"We can truthfully boast the finest and largest hotel west of the capital of our state."

This hotel also had a large livery barn attached, "30' x 50' and 28' x 34', erected at a cost of \$1,000, can keep 40 horses." Mr. Putnam traded his hotel to Horace Kellogg in September, 1882, for a 240-acre farm in Franklin township; the hotel then became known as the "Kellogg House" and in 1885 it was called the "Fillmore," with C. Banta as proprietor. In 1890, J. M. Noyes purchased the ground occupied by the Fillmore House and erected a \$15,000 brick hotel which retained the name of Fillmore. This hotel burned in 1908. (This building was located on G Street between 9th and 10th on Lots 84 and 85 east of the Opera House that was built in 1883.)



Fillmore County Handbook (1884)  
The Kellogg House, Geneva.

By 1882, E. Stowell was operating a hotel located west of the square next to the Platt store, which he operated until it was closed about 1890.

In 1885, the old Platt store building at the southwest corner of the square was rebuilt as a hotel and was advertised to accommodate as many if not more than any other hotel in the county. E. Stowell managed this hotel after the Stowell House closed.



Courtesy Geneva State Bank

The Platt House (about 1889). Notice two sections to the building—the south part erected in 1875 and the north section added in 1887. Mr. Knowler in buggy at left; A. B. Miller on right; others unidentified.



Jameson Hotel, built in 1890—Harry Porter's hack alongside.

The Jameson Hotel was erected by W. H. Jameson in 1890 at a cost of about \$20,000. It was a three-story brick structure 48' x 109'. This building is now the only hotel in Geneva. It was managed for many years by Les Poole, and since his death has been run by his widow, Irma Poole, and his son, Keith Poole.

The Jayne Hotel, owned by Ebb Jayne, began operations about 1900. In later years it became an apartment house, managed by Miss Hannah Gilmore. It was demolished in 1966 and replaced by the new Fillmore County Bank.

Geneva, which had a population of scarcely 50 inhabitants in 1875, had grown to a population of 250 people by 1880 and was a thriving little community. A business directory of that year is listed below.

Carpenter and builder—A. E. Boynton  
 Loan agents—S. B. Camp, — Burr  
 General Merchandise—Camp, A. G. & Sons; Platt, J. T. & Co. (SW corner of courthouse square); John A. Dempster—drugs also (Court Street)  
 Livery stable—J. H. Camp

Harness, boots, shoes—C. H. Carlow (N side of square)  
 Blacksmith—W. J. Carrier; A. E. Coon; W. Keeney  
 Attorney and real estate—D. H. Conant (3 doors W of courthouse);  
 Walter V. Fifield; Hedges & Scott  
 Attorney—R. A. McKee; Northrup & Likes  
 Physician—R. T. Dailey (office at drugstore); G. R. Hart; H. L. Smith  
 Dentist—R. M. Hazlett (office at drugstore)  
 Hardware, furniture, and restaurant—W. Purdy (W end of square)  
 Hardware, stoves, and tinware—Dawson, O. P. & Co.  
 Millinery—Mrs. M. H. Kessler  
 Meat Market—G. T. Lemmon  
 Wagon Maker—H. H. Martin (NE corner of courthouse square)  
 Brick Manufacturer—Merrill Brothers (kiln 3 miles N of town)  
 Hotel—Putnam House  
 Justice of Peace—M. L. Spear

They also had four churches—Baptist, Christian, Methodist Episcopal, and Presbyterian; and two societies—Geneva Lodge, I.O.O.F. and Geneva Lodge, I.O.G.T.

The Geneva Exchange Bank, incorporated June 4, 1880, by Smith, Fisher & Fifield, with a capital of \$20,000, was the first bank in Geneva. This bank was the outgrowth of a collection and exchange business, started about two years before by W. V. Fifield.

In 1889, the Geneva Exchange Bank became the First National Bank, with capital stock being raised to \$50,000. Officers of the bank were G. W. Smith, president; Frank J. Miller, cashier; Dr. A. G. McGrew, vice-president; Walter V. Fifield, attorney. In 1891, the city had three banks to care for its financial business—the First National Bank, Citizens Bank, and Geneva National Bank.

## ORGANIZATION

On July 1, 1879, at a regular meeting of the Board of County Commissioners of Fillmore County held at the courthouse at Geneva, a petition was received from D. H. Conant and 55 other citizens of Geneva asking the board to incorporate the town of Geneva. A week later on July 8, 1879, the board proceeded to hear parties interested in incorporation of the town of Geneva. After hearing all parties and being fully satisfied that a majority of the male taxable inhabitants had signed the petition for incorporation, it ordered that the proposed town be incorporated as the town of Geneva, to include the following described territory: The SE  $\frac{1}{4}$ , the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 36, T7N, R3W, also the N  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  and the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 1, T6N, R3W.

Five persons were appointed to serve as trustees until their successors were elected and qualified. They were M. M. Neeves, John B. Brazelton, Sherwood Burr, George P. Wintersteen, and D. H. Conant.

The first meeting of the village board was held at the courthouse on Friday, July 25, 1879; present were M. M. Neeves, Sherwood Burr, George Wintersteen, and D. H. Conant. M. M. Neeves was elected chairman and W. V. Fifield, clerk. An ordinance provided that all regular meetings of the board would be held in the office of W. V. Fifield at Geneva on the first Thursday of each month.

At a meeting on July 28, 1879, John A. Dempster was elected town treasurer. Also M. D. Williams was appointed town marshal, which office he held a very short time. At a meeting on September 20, 1879, Mr. Williams resigned and J. E. Lemmon was elected to fill the vacancy.

On November 6, 1879, it was decided that a town attorney should be appointed and a report of attorney fees be brought to the next meeting. The fees asked were: J. Jensen—\$150, R. A. McKee—\$200, and Gray & Hedges would accept whatever the board saw proper to allow. Gray & Hedges were elected to the office of town attorney.

The next change, from the status of a village to that of a city, second class, was made on March 9, 1889, under provisions of Chapter 14 of the Compiled Statutes of State of Nebraska. At that time the village had grown to a population of more than 1,000 (W. H. Stewart, who took the census, reported that there were 1,360 inhabitants), and it therefore became the duty of the board to incorporate under the new designation, and to adopt such rules and procedure for government as were prescribed by state law.

The city was divided into three wards. Commencing at a point in the center of Court and Church Sts., and running