



Courtesy of Nebraska Signal

Woodmen Picnic in 1896. This picture, taken from the west end of Main Street, shows Sile Camp's band, a contingent of Company G (Nebraska National Guard of Geneva), and floats in the parade. The parade marshal, A. J. Beals, is in the right foreground on the white horse.

toasts in the morning before the races—boys' race, wheelbarrow race, greased-pole race, and sack race; two ball games were played that afternoon, which ended in defeat for Geneva; a grand ball was held all afternoon and evening at the Opera House and "there seemed to be no lack of dancers"; the skating rink was also crowded. To conclude the day's entertainment, there was a fireworks display in the evening.

For many years the annual Woodmen picnic in Geneva was a big affair. One of the most important events in the history of Fillmore County was the return of Company G from the Spanish-American War in 1899. The return of the veterans had been delayed several weeks. On that specific day several thousand people came to Geneva to attend the homecoming. Elaborate preparations were made. Special trains carried visitors from several points to Geneva; a grand reception was in the making. The train was due at 10 A.M., but did not arrive until 9 P.M. By this time many disappointed people had returned home. The program proceeded about

10 P.M., but relatives had taken possession of most of the boys and not many soldiers occupied their appointed seats on the stage. Five bands were present. The parade was in charge of Major T. L. Williams and seven aides mounted on white horses. The Rev. O. W. Fifer of York paid a tribute to the dead. Charles H. Sloan presented the company flag and emblems. Fireworks displays ended the program. Three merry-go-rounds and many refreshment stands did a big business that day.

## PERMANENT COUNTY ORGANIZATION

On March 15, 1871, a large number of citizens of the unorganized Fillmore County petitioned for an election to choose county officers preliminary to organization of the county. On that day, Acting Governor William H. James, by proclamation, ordered that an election be held at the dwelling of Nathaniel McCalla on Sec. 30, T7, R2W, on Friday, April 21, 1871, to select county officers. The governor appointed James Horne, E. L. Martin, and D. W. Dillion as judges, and Warren Woodard and Jacob A. Werts as clerks to conduct this election. However, according to poll books, G. R. Wolfe served in place of D. W. Dillion and A. W. Chase substituted for Jacob A. Werts.

Results of the first election (April 21, 1871), when a total of 82 citizens cast votes, were as follows:

County Clerk .....	H. L. Badger .....	81 votes
County Treasurer .....	Wilbur Deuel .....	81 votes
County Sheriff .....	J. F. Snow .....	63 votes
	W. Walker .....	18 votes
Probate Judge .....	William H. Blain .....	80 votes
Supt. Public Instruction .....	G. R. Wolfe .....	81 votes
Surveyor .....	H. L. Badger .....	81 votes
Coroner .....	T. E. Burnett .....	81 votes
County Commissioners .....	Elisha L. Martin .....	81 votes
	Charles H. Bassett .....	75 votes
	Jesse Lee .....	54 votes
	McLaughlin .....	21 votes
Judges of election .....	William Merrill .....	81 votes
	S. West .....	81 votes
	S. Baldwin .....	81 votes
Clerks of election .....	A. J. Beals .....	81 votes
	A. W. Chase .....	81 votes

The citizens also voted to locate the county seat in the center of the county on the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 36, T7, R3W.

The first meeting of the county commissioners, called

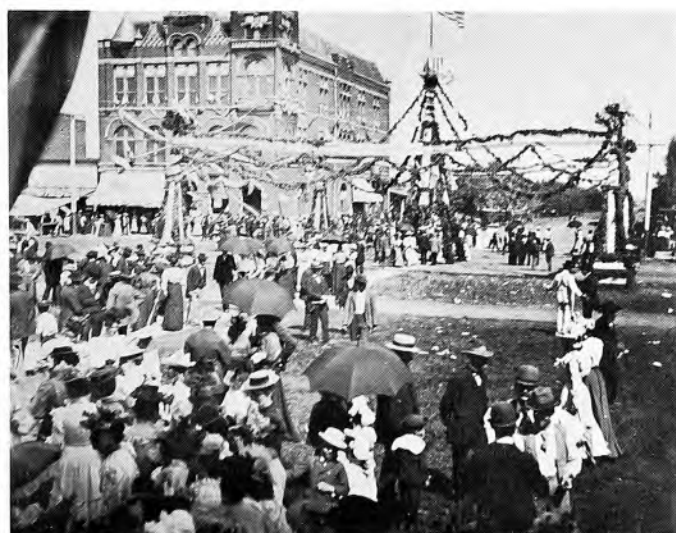


Photo from Delia Fisher

Crowd in Geneva in fall, 1899, the day Company G returned from the Spanish-American War.

by the county clerk, was held on May 27, 1871, at the residence of Nathaniel McCalla. Those present were county commissioners E. L. Martin, C. H. Bassett, and Jesse Lee; county clerk, H. L. Badger; and probate judge, William H. Blain. Jesse Lee was named chairman because he had the least number of votes. The temporary meeting place to conduct county business was fixed at the McCalla home on the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 30, T7, R2W. C. H. Bassett was selected by the board to confer with the proper officers of Saline County in regard to the assessment rolls of Fillmore County. (Prior to county organization, Fillmore County was duly and legally assessed by authorities of Saline County for revenue and judicial purposes. At the meeting on September 11, 1871, of the county commissioners it was reported that the officers of Saline County refused to deliver the assessment list until Fillmore County paid the expenses of the trial of a prisoner named Morris Harris who was held for a murder in Adams County. The Fillmore authorities believed they were entitled to the list without first paying the expenses of the trial and keeping of the prisoner. The county treasurer was directed to procure the list by legal action if it could not otherwise be obtained. On October 16, 1871, the board ordered an attorney, Mr. J. W. Eller, to commence suit. However, on November 8, 1871, Saline County surrendered and delivered to Fillmore County the assessment list with the certificate of the county clerk of Saline County, stating the amount of taxes levied by Saline County for Fillmore County for the year 1871.)

Also at this first meeting of the board, the county commissioners divided the county into three commissioners districts, which was done by two east and west lines through the county, making each district 8 miles wide north and south and 24 miles long east and west—the north district being No. 1; the middle district No. 2; and the south district No. 3.

The next subdivision of the county was made when, at a general election on November 8, 1887, a majority vote was cast in favor of "township organization." Each of the 16 townships elected a supervisor to represent them on the board of supervisors.

At a meeting of the board on August 27, 1895, the commissioners—to comply with the state law, Section 27, Chapter 28 of laws of 1895—voted to divide the county into seven supervisors districts, divided and numbered as follows:

Exeter and Liberty—No. 1; Fairmont and West Blue—No. 2; Grafton, Bennett, and Momenca—No. 3; Geneva City and Township—No. 4; Madison, Chelsea, and Glengary—No. 5; Franklin and Belle Prairie—No. 6; Stanton, Hamilton, and Bryant—No. 7.

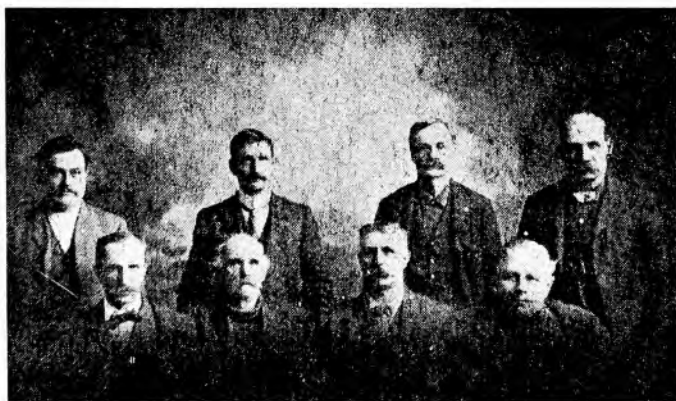


Photo from Mrs. Ella Bures  
Fillmore County Board of Supervisors (1903). Back row, left to right: Henry Kolar, Exeter, District 1; E. J. Barbur, Exeter, County Clerk; R. W. Stowell, Ohioa, District 6; T. Jacobson, Shickley, District 7. Back row: Henry Schmidt, Fairmont, District 5; D. B. Ayres, Geneva, District 4; Ed Black, Fairmont, District 2; Claus Frenzen, Grafton, District 3.

Sixty-six years later, in 1961, it was brought to the attention of the county board that the supervisors districts should again be reorganized to give each district equal representation in the county government. On January 5, 1962, they were reorganized on a population basis:

Exeter and Liberty—No. 1; Fairmont, and North Madison—No. 2; West Blue, Grafton, Bennett, Momenca—No. 3; Geneva Township and North Geneva—No. 4; South Geneva and South Madison—No. 5; Glengary, Franklin, and Belle Prairie—No. 6; Bryant, Hamilton, Stanton, and Chelsea—No. 7.

### Voting Precincts

For voting purposes, the board of commissioners on July 6, 1871, divided the county into four voting precincts:

Precinct	Location	Voting Place
No. 1	NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the county	James Horne
No. 2	NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the county	D. Long
No. 3	SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the county	W. T. Burnett
No. 4	SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the county	William Baldwins

About a year and one-half later in November, 1872, "it was the opinion of the board" to reorganize the voting precincts—to divide the county into precincts six miles square with each township constituting one precinct. The legal voters of the various precincts met at appointed places in the precincts on January 7, 1873, for the purpose of reorganization. The townships were named and voting places selected as follows:

Franklin	Schoolhouse, District 40
Belle Prairie	James Vasburgh, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 28
Hamilton	John B. Hibbits, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 22
Bryant	C. H. Bemenderfer, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 32
Chelsea	Schoolhouse, Sec. 24
Momenca	Mr. Morgan's
Glengary	Glengary [P.O.]
Stanton	William T. Burnett's, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 10
Liberty	John S. Beardsley, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 22
Madison	John Burnett's, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 22
Geneva	Geneva
Bennett	Mr. Bosworth, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 22
Exeter	Exeter
Fairmont	Fairmont
West Blue	Jonathan Hall, NW of Sec. 22
Grafton	Arthur Murdock's, SW of Sec. 22

### County Seat Located

When the organic election was held in 1871 the southeastern part of the county had the majority of voters. Franklin precinct, in the southeast, not being covered by railroad land grant at that time, was settled more generally than any other early precinct. Judge William H. Blain wrote: "It was found to contain more voters at the time of the organic election than all the remainder of the county, yet, strange as it may appear, the citizens of that precinct unanimously voted the county seat at the center of the county. Such magnanimity is seldom seen in the location of county seats." Thus it was voted that the geographical center of the county (the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 36-7-3 W) would be the location of the county seat. As it was school land belonging to the state, nothing could be done until arrangements were made for its purchase.

However, the county seat was surveyed, platted, and recorded on July 7, 8, and 9, 1871, by Henry L. Badger, county surveyor and county clerk. The surveyor and his assistants camped on the town site, with a covered wagon to sleep in, and "cooked on the big prairie range." At that time only one building, about 4 miles S, owned by Robert Shields, was completed. James O. Merryman, about the same distance southwest, was busy erecting a fine-looking sod house for a dwelling.

While awaiting the state's approval to purchase the school land, two persons near the center of the county tried to secure the seat of government. At the meeting of the commissioners, on July 3, 1871, James Mar, owner of the N  $\frac{1}{2}$  of Sec. 25, T7, R3W, offered to donate, at the option of the county commissioners, either 40 acres of said land or to donate 10 acres and erect a courthouse at the cost of \$2,500, provided that the county seat be located on the above-described land. This offer was refused. About the same time, A. J. Manley tried to secure the location of the county seat on the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 27, T7, R3W. He built a large hall, 20' wide and 60' long, and offered to donate this to the county should they locate the county seat there. This village, called Manleyville, consisted of 233 lots, a number of which were sold but never occupied. This offer was also refused.





View of Geneva in 1883, looking northwest from schoolhouse block. Notice old courthouse (1) and Kellogg House (2).

Courtesy Geneva State Bank

In accordance with an act passed by the legislature, which provided for the sale of school lands, a public sale was held in June, 1872, and a number of lots were sold. Among these was the land purchased by the county, on which to erect public buildings. (An account of this sale appears in the "Early History" chapter.)

At the July 2, 1872, meeting of the county commissioners it was reported they purchased several blocks—Block 8 (Courthouse Block) for \$135.50, Outlots No. 17 for \$160, No. 18 for \$162 and No. 20 for \$100. Also land for a "Fillmore County Poor House Farm" was purchased for \$8 per acre (the SE ¼ of Sec. 16, T6, R3W).

The county seat was first named Henry but at the July 2, 1872, meeting of the commissioners at the residence of N. McCalla, it was decided to change the name. Colonel McCalla's daughter Emma, a young lady in her teens, suggested that the town be named after Geneva, Illinois, the McCallas' former home. The board ordered that hereafter the county seat be called "Geneva" instead of Henry as was first filed for record.

### The First Courthouse

On September 11, 1871, at a meeting of the county commissioners, a petition signed by 30 people asked for a vote of the citizens on a proposition to issue bonds in the amount of \$50,000 to provide a courthouse and jail and other county buildings.

At an election on October 8, 1872, it was voted to levy a tax not to exceed five mills on the dollar valuation for the purpose of constructing county buildings. The tax was to be levied annually year to year until \$50,000 had been realized. The votes cast were 264 "for" and 243 "against."

In November, 1872, the commissioners made plans for a "temporary courthouse and jail" to be constructed. The plans were referred to George P. Webster for detailed specifications. On November 16, 1872, bids were received as follows:

Duell & Brock for courthouse and jail.....	\$4,000.00
Williams & Webb for courthouse and jail.....	4,000.00
George P. Webster—courthouse (\$2,924) and jail (\$687) .....	3,611.00
Jesse P. Thompson—courthouse and jail.....	3,075.00

The contract was awarded to Jesse P. Thompson and was to be completed by May 1, 1873. The commissioners purchased Lot 83 in the city of Geneva from James Loghry for \$36.50 on which to erect these buildings. (Lot 83 is the present location of Gamble's Hardware & Appliance store.) The buildings were approved on May 5, 1873, and at once the county's records were deposited there. Prior to this time each officer had kept his records in his own home.

The following description of the first courthouse and jail is from records in the office of the clerk of District Court, filed in 1874:

1. Each frame building ceiled on inside with light pine boards and are neither lathed nor plastered.
2. Is 24' by 48' on the ground and two stories high.
3. Lower story is divided into three rooms and a hall. Second story is all in one room.
4. The three lower rooms are used by County Clerk, County Treasurer, and Probate Judge as offices.
5. The upper room is used for a court room.
6. The jail is 12' by 14' and one story high.

As soon as the temporary headquarters were constructed, the commissioners promptly began making plans for the permanent courthouse. In July, 1873, the board ordered that the clerk be authorized to advertise for sealed proposals not to exceed the amount of \$37,500 for a courthouse and county offices according to plans and specifications presented by Architect L. W. Foster. The building was to be built of brick on a stone foundation and to be completed within three years. The proposal was printed in the *Fillmore County Bulletin* and the *Weekly State Journal* of Lincoln.

The bids were opened and filed on October 11, 1873. However, an injunction had been filed by Samuel Butterbaugh against the county commissioners, thus enjoining them from letting the contract. The injunction stated that the five-mill levy exceeded the authority of the board. Mr. Butterbaugh contested that the county buildings just constructed were quite sufficient and as "large and commodious as those in the surrounding counties" and it would be wasting the citizens' money to build such an expensive building, especially when there were doubts that Geneva would even retain its status as the county seat, since only one dwelling and one store had been constructed on the town site as of October, 1873.

After almost a year and a half, on May 19, 1875, the court decided in favor of Mr. Butterbaugh. The "courthouse tax" was declared illegal by the District Court of the First Judicial District; thus the plans for the permanent courthouse were canceled.

The commissioners proceeded to make the existing building more presentable by lathing, plastering, and painting. In 1876, an addition was built onto the courthouse by C. C. Wright for a sum of \$625. Fireproof safes eventually were supplied for the offices for the safety of the records. The *Fairmont Bulletin* in June, 1882, said of one such safe: "The county safe, weight 7,000 pounds, was being brought from Fairmont to Geneva on wagons. Two miles south of town it slipped off the wagons. It took several days to get it loaded again and brought to Geneva." Later the people realized that a safer place was needed for important papers and records than the "old firetrap," and so, in 1885, a concrete vault—14' x 16' x 6½' high, with walls 2' thick—was constructed.

In the summer of 1880 the courthouse was moved across the street to the "Courthouse Block" from Lot 83, Block 5. A contractor from Lincoln, J. M. Cramer, was acquired to



Map of Geneva in 1885. The Fillmore County Fair Grounds are off to the northwest, just west of the cemetery.

move the building "150 feet and turn around." The jail had been moved in the same year prior to April 1, by several local men.

It is interesting to note that in August, 1873, the board ordered that a firebreak be plowed around the county buildings for protection from prairie fires. At a board meeting on May 5, 1877, it was decided that the "Courthouse Block" be broken "during the proper breaking season," which was done by M. D. Williams and A. J. Beals at the proper time. In April the following year, J. M. Fisher planted trees on the square. More trees were planted in the spring of 1883 when Peter Youngers, Jr., agreed to plant 50 Austrian pines, 24" to 36" high, and 20 cedars, 2' high, on the "Courthouse Block" for a price of 40 cents per foot for pines and 30 cents per foot for cedars. He guaranteed the trees to live one year.

### The New Courthouse

As time went on, the old courthouse, often referred to as a "rickety old rat trap," became inadequate for county requirements. The third story of the Citizens Bank building, belonging to the Masonic Temple Craft Association, had been rented in 1891 for county and district court meetings, thus allowing more room in the courthouse for the officers. These crowded conditions and the desire for a "fire proof" building for the safety of records prompted the county supervisors to call a special election to be held in April, 1889, to vote on issuing bonds in the amount of \$50,000 for building a new courthouse. This proposal was defeated—1,064 "for" and 1,434 "against." This amusing statement in the records of

the county supervisors following the defeat of the "poor house bond" voted on a little later, shows their discouragement: "This board would like to do something that would be approved by the people, therefore be it resolved that this board of supervisors is a set of blank fools." On November 8, 1892, at the general election, the courthouse bond issue was again voted upon. This time it was approved; the people of Fillmore County showed themselves not only willing, but anxious, that the old courthouse should be replaced by a new and handsome building, as the vote stood 1,693 for the bonds and only 986 against. At the same time a proposal to sell the east half of the "Courthouse Block" to raise funds for the new building failed to get the necessary two-thirds majority vote.

The board advertised for plans and specifications for the new building. The plans submitted by George E. McDonald of Geneva were accepted. On January 11, 1893, the board awarded the courthouse contract to L. F. Pardue,<sup>1</sup> his bid being \$46,176.55. Fireproof vaults, as well as gas lighting and steam heating systems, were to be installed. It was among the first Nebraska public buildings so designed as to place the vaults and files on the interior, leaving more room for offices near the windows.<sup>2</sup>

The Board appointed a building committee, consisting of W. S. Brown, W. S. Huston, Peter Keenan, Pius Reinsch, and C. W. Dumond. W. S. Brown, a prominent farmer, was named chairman of this committee and was to "remain upon work daily and constantly." The entire committee met at least once a week to examine all materials and workmanship.

In December, 1892, the board decided to locate the new courthouse at a point near the middle of the courthouse square, as had been originally planned when the park was laid out. The ground on which the courthouse was built was broken by Jesse Walker, using his oxen to pull the plow.

Preliminary work having been completed, contractor L. F. Pardue had begun to lay the foundation for the courthouse by April 20, 1893. Side-tracks were laid from the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley R.R. depot eastward to the center of the courthouse block to convey construction materials to the grounds, thus saving the expense and danger of unloading onto wagons. But the *Fillmore County Republican* said (April 26, 1893): "The track laying to the courthouse grounds is at a stand still. A small sized hitch seems to be troubling the contractor and railroad company."

The laying of the cornerstone on July 6, 1893, was observed with a fitting ceremony and county-wide celebration. It was estimated that from 4,000 to 5,000 persons swarmed through the gaily decorated streets of the city that day. The stone was cut in Omaha and laid in accordance with the rites and usages of the Masonic fraternity.

This account of the program is from the *Nebraska Signal* for July 13, 1893:

"The following program, previously arranged, was carried out: At 3 P.M. the procession formed in front of the courthouse, led by Camp's band of 15 pieces (also known as the military band of Company G), and next came Company G, Nebraska National Guards, followed by 24 plumed Knights of Pythias, 160 A.O.U.W.'s, 75 Odd Fellows, 25 ladies of Eastern Star, 100 members of the Masonic fraternity and the following Grand Officers: J. P. A. Black, G.M., Bloomington; H. H. Wilson, G.W.W., Lincoln; Christian Hartman, G.T., Omaha; George W. Martin, G.C., Kearney; Monroe C. Steele, Grand Marshal, Beatrice; Lee P. Gillett, Grand Custodian, Beatrice; then came the Fairmont and Geneva Hose com-

<sup>1</sup> L. F. Pardue, a resident of Geneva, also owner of several farms in the county.

<sup>2</sup>The Board of Supervisors in 1893, the year the building was constructed, consisted of: Paul Anton, Liberty township; W. S. Brown, Geneva city and township; Charles Charlton, Stanton; G. B. Clawson, Bennett; William H. Davis, Bryant; C. W. Dumond, Fairmont city; W. H. Garrison, Franklin; Walt S. Huston, Geneva city and township; Peter Keenan, Grafton; A. V. Kouba, Gengary; George Matson, Belle Prairie; J. M. Perkins, West Blue; Pius Reinsch, Momenice; M. S. Schelkopf, Hamilton; G. R. Simmons, Chelsea; M. E. Trauger, Exeter; G. A. Walker, Madison; J. S. Foulon, Fairmont township.



panies and citizens—about 500 persons being in the procession.

"The line of march was east on Court St. to Main St. north to Lincoln, west to Church, south to Court, east to entrance to the park, across the park, and back to northeast corner of the courthouse, where the final ceremonies of laying the stone took place." The Hon. Charles H. Sloan delivered the oration of the day.

The following articles were deposited within the stone, sealed in a copper box about 6" square and 8" high:

History of Geneva Lodge, No. 79, A.F. & A.M., including names of charter members, date of dispensation, date of charter, list of officers, and number of members.

History of the Order of Eastern Star of Geneva.

List of officers of the Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M.

History of Fillmore County from its organization to 1893, with population, assessed valuation, list of officers, and members of County Board.

Copies of all daily state papers.

Copies of all Fillmore County papers.

Copy of the Holy Scriptures.

History of Geneva with summary of business, institutions of all kinds, its population, assessed valuation, and names of members of city council on July 6, 1893.

Copy of the program of the day.

Columbian half-dollar medal and other current coins of the realm.

Sundry social, business and professional cards.

History of Triune Chapter R. A. M., its officers and members.

Picture of the new courthouse as it was to be when completed.

Y.P.S.C.E. badges and card of invitation to meetings of Congregational Church of Geneva.

A.O.U.W. badge.

Copy of the A.F. & A.M. manual.

Refreshments were furnished in the park by the Congregational Church people. At the west end of the park was a steam "merry-go-round" that attracted lots of attention plus many nickels.

Later in the afternoon the fire bell called the Geneva and Fairmont hose companies out to a contest. After each had made a run, Geneva Hose Company No. 1 was awarded the prize. A display of fireworks concluded the program for the day.

Most construction projects seem to have their setbacks. Mr. Pardue did not escape his share of tribulations. Early in the construction, as they were laying the brick walls, part of the west wall collapsed under the pressure of a strong cyclone-like windstorm. A second mishap occurred in September when Mr. Pardue was injured when thrown from the top of the new courthouse to the first floor, a distance of 20 feet. "A rope to a derrick came loose from some cause letting the derrick swing and strike him with sufficient force to knock him off the wall."

The county officers moved from the old courthouse into the new building on January 27, 1894—or "the rats left their holes and vacated their old stamping grounds", as the local newspaper remarked. One of the first criticisms of the new building after occupancy was "too much light," so venetian blinds were ordered for the sum of \$400, installed.

The old courthouse was purchased by George Kenyon on February 17, 1894, for \$261. Mr. Kenyon moved the building, which was used in more recent years as a dairy barn, to his farm 2 miles S of Geneva—now known as the Joe Bixby farm on the SE ¼ of Sec. 12, T6, R3W. On March 26, 1936, however, the building was destroyed by fire and the loss was set at \$1,800.

The new courthouse was dedicated on a "bright, sunny and frisky" February 22, 1894, with a day-long affair. As early as 9 o'clock that morning teams began to arrive in Geneva from the surrounding country, bringing hundreds of Fillmore County citizens to the county seat to assist in the dedication. By noon there were 3,000 people in Geneva. Citizens of Fairmont and the northern part of the county chartered a special railway car for transportation to the "blow-out." The Burlington officials held the car till night to carry its patrons back home. Every town in the county was largely represented and the reports say, "Never before in the history of the county did there exist such good feeling and sociability."



Courtesy Nebraska Signal

Fillmore County Courthouse, erected in 1893.

The program began with a parade under the direction of the marshals of the day, A. J. Beals of Geneva and J. G. McFadden of Fairmont. The parade, headed by Grafton, West Blue, and Fairmont cornet bands, included the mayor of Geneva; the speakers of the day; the county officers; the different secret and civic societies, consisting of the Ancient Order of United Workmen, Odd Fellows, uniformed ranks of Knights of Pythias, Grand Army of the Republic, Woman's Relief Corps, and a Bohemian society from Milligan; citizens on foot and citizens in carriages; the military band and Company G, Nebraska National Guards, brought up the rear of the line. They all marched to the depot to welcome Governor Lorenzo Crounse, then back to the courthouse to listen to speeches and toasts.

The courthouse was entirely too small to accommodate the enormous crowd. Hence the overflow was entertained at Ward's Opera House by Captain W. C. Henry of Fairmont and at the Fraternity Temple building where different bands dispensed music. Meanwhile, at the courthouse, the dedication program was proceeding. Music was provided by the four brass bands and a double quartet. Speeches and toasts were given by the following: Address of Welcome, County Attorney Charles H. Sloan; Governor Crounse, who gave pleasant reminiscences of early history and the holding of court in schoolhouses and vacant buildings, showing the contrast between then and now; "Our New Courthouse," architect George W. McDonald; "Board of Supervisors," Hon. John Jensen, ex-representative of the Nebraska Legislature from the Geneva area, who came all the way from Enid, Oklahoma; "County Officials," Charles H. Miller; "Our Churches," Rev. A. A. Cressman; "Our Schools," County Superintendent J. C. Clegg; "Homely Men," Rev. Joel A. Barker; "Old Court House," Charles H. Sloan. The Toastmaster was J. J. Burke.

In the evening a rousing camp fire was held at the Opera House sponsored by the Grand Army of the Republic. Speakers in the evening were Captain Henry of Fairmont, who was especially entertaining, Comrade W. H. Pardee, and Charles H. Sloan. The day ended with a well-patronized ball given by the Sons of Veterans at the Fraternity Temple hall.

The Women's Relief Corps fed all who came to their tables in the Masonic banquet room at noon and in the evening for 25 cents a plate.

In 1909, a "large first-class" clock was installed in the courthouse tower by Geneva jeweler W. P. McCall. A place had been especially provided for it during the construction of the courthouse. The cost of the clock was \$1,000, half of which was paid by the business men of Geneva and the other half furnished by the county board.

Two cannons secured for the Grand Army of the Republic by Congressman Charles H. Sloan were placed, in

1912, on the north side of the courthouse block, one on the east side and one on the west side of the walks leading north from the courthouse. They were dismantled during World War II when the metal was needed for war machinery.

For many years the men in the Geneva community played croquet on a specially constructed croquet ground northeast of the courthouse. At the first the players were mostly Civil War veterans; often 20 or 30 men would be sitting on the benches around the court watching the game. The croquet ground went the way of the old trees and other landmarks, when the courtyard was rebuilt in the late thirties.



Photo from Fred Reeb  
Fred Reeb, present Courthouse Custodian, shown with old wooden box in which he found the leather-tipped hickory croquet mallets and the croquet balls used by old-timers who played on the specially constructed croquet grounds in Courthouse Park. (Photo taken about 1958.)

In April, 1938, a resolution regarding the trees in the park stated that the park should thereafter be known as "Fillmore County's Pioneer Park"; and that the trees planted in the park should be dedicated as follows—46 American elms on the east side and 45 American elms on the west side to be dedicated to the school districts in Fillmore County; all trees not dedicated to school districts to be dedicated to pioneer citizens of the county or others; the county should purchase, care for, and replace all the trees dedicated; the school district or person dedicating a tree should pay \$5 for cost of the bronze dedication marker. In November, 1938, it was announced that any forest trees not already dedicated were open to anyone wishing to dedicate a tree.

On February 7, 1938, the city of Geneva leased the ground on the east and west ends of the "Courthouse Block"—until then, occupied by the bandstand and picnic tables—for a period of 99 years to be used for parking lots.

A fountain was placed north of the courthouse some time prior to 1918—but the date and the identity of the donor seem to be lost in the mists of unwritten history.

#### Postal Service

The original proposed location for the Geneva post office was designated on February 28, 1873, as follows: 6 miles W of Empire and 7 miles E of Turkey Creek. In late 1873 or early 1874, the post office was located in the first residence on the town site. It was moved when John Dempster in 1876 erected a building located on G St. between 9th and 10th Sts. Later it was moved into the Citizens Bank Building. In 1890, when the Citizens Bank Building was moved from its location on 9th and G to the south end of the lots on 11th and G Sts., the post office was moved to the brick building two doors north of the new bank building, now known as 135 North 9th St. In 1912, this building burned and the post office was moved to 139 North 9th St. Early in April, 1926, a lease was effected with the Geneva State Bank for quarters at 140 North 9th St. The post office remained here until September 1, 1940, when a new Federal building was completed on the northwest corner of 9th and H Sts. The post office has occupied this site from that time to the present.



Geneva Post Office, erected in 1940.

From 1873 to 1968, 21 men and one woman have served as postmaster. David Lee served as first postmaster, when the office was established on March 11, 1873. His successors were: James Shepherd, appointed June 17, 1873; Calvin H. Bane, November 3, 1873; Silas B. Camp, October 30, 1874; Samuel R. Bane, February 1, 1876; Silas B. Camp, January 23, 1877; George W. Lowry, March 19, 1877; John A. Dempster, January 8, 1878; Sherwood Burr, November 28, 1881; William H. Cooksey, January 30, 1885; William H. Stewart, July 9, 1889; Jere Donovan, May 12, 1893; Charles E. Summers, December 12, 1894; Martin V. King, November 5, 1897; Charles A. Warner, January 21, 1902; Hattie A. Little, December 11, 1907; Henry P. Wilson, February 3, 1916; Sanford E. Ralsten, August 6, 1923; George L. Koehler, August 31, 1933; Thomas J. Keenan, Acting, April 1, 1945; Charles E. Rock, April 1, 1947; Ben D. Fussell, from September 5, 1958, to the present time.

Post Office Department records indicate that David Lee was appointed at an annual salary of \$12. Early receipts of the post office are not available. The records also indicate that the Geneva office was established on Route No. 14,444, from Dewitt to Empire, but details of the service on this route are not available. Money order business was established at Geneva on July 1, 1878.

Rural delivery service was established at Geneva on October 1, 1901, with two carriers at a salary of \$500 per annum each, and city delivery service started April 12, 1929. Postal Savings was established here on April 1, 1912.

Gross receipts for the year 1895 were \$3,750.47. This figure gradually increased yearly until 1920, when gross receipts were \$12,219.42. A slight decline occurred in 1920, after the war; then receipts remained fairly constant through 1942, when the figure was \$15,495.19. In 1943, the presence of the Fairmont Army Airfield Branch caused receipts to jump to \$26,588, and to \$40,000 in 1944. In 1947, this figure dropped to \$17,000, but then climbed to \$27,808 in 1958. Receipts steadily increased, spurred by increases in postal rates, until the total in 1967 reached \$52,000.



Courtesy Geneva State Bank  
Bert Bradley, one of the first rural mail carriers, and his delivery wagon.



Later, rural carriers were paid \$600 per year until July 1, 1905, when the pay was raised to \$720. In 1907, it was again raised to \$900 and to \$1,000 in 1911. Since then salaries have been based on mileage traveled and are contemporarily favorable.

During earlier years, John Curtiss, Waldo Propst, Paul Curtiss, Minnie Carson, Adeline Allen, Mae Timmons, Harry Simmons, and George Harrington were among those who served in the post office. The present complement includes a postmaster, assistant to the postmaster, one regular clerk, a substitute clerk, two regular city letter carriers, a substitute city letter carrier, two rural carriers, with substitutes, and two custodial laborers. The office is served by three star routes and a mail messenger from Fairmont. Mail service by rail was discontinued about 1939.

Early Rural Free Delivery service was provided by the following persons:

July 1, 1903		
Carrier	Where Born	Salary
Bert Bradley	Illinois	\$600
John Klink, Jr.	Illinois	600
Charlton B. Hyde	Iowa	600
Stanley F. Morrow	Ohio	600
William H. Forsythe	Indiana	Substitute
William Klink	Nebraska	Substitute
Henry Sheldon	New York	Substitute
July 1, 1905		
Bert Bradley	Illinois	720
Charlton B. Hyde	Iowa	720
John Klink, Jr.	Illinois	720
Stanley F. Morrow	Ohio	720
Henry Sheldon	New York	Substitute
William Klink	Nebraska	Substitute
1907-1909-1911*		
Bert Bradley		900
Robert M. Carson		900
Roy D. Hampton		900
John Klink, Jr.		900

\*Salary listed at \$1,000 in year 1911.

Other rural carriers included Pete Ertel, Clyde Propst, Henry Reinsch, Gleye McCaulley, Floyd Abbott, Linus Walter, and George Cruse.

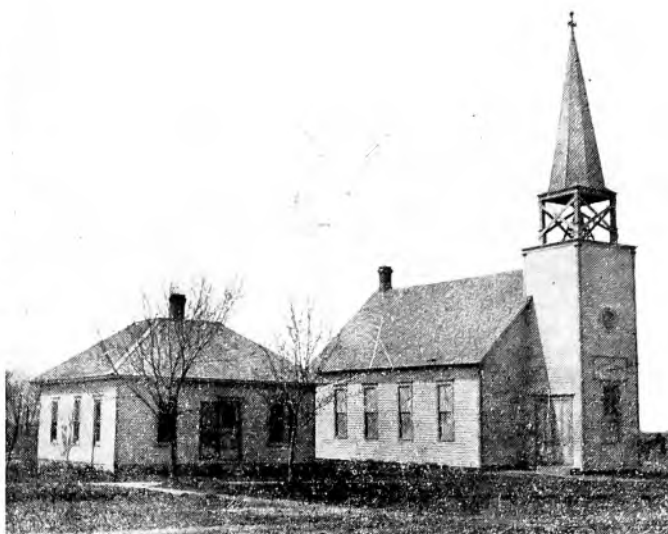


Courtesy Nebraska Signal  
First airmail out of Geneva, May 19, 1938. Left to right: Pilot, Dr. George Hansen; Shickley Postmaster Amos Frieden; Geneva Postmaster George Koehler; Assistant Postmaster Paul W. Curtiss; Legionnaire William Dana. The landing field was on the Gilbert McPeck farm, 4 miles S and 2 miles W of Geneva.

## CHURCHES

The Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church was established and installed its first minister in 1925. The Wisconsin and Ohio Synods made several attempts to establish mission stations in Geneva. The Mission Board of the Nebraska District of the Wisconsin Synod finally decided to place a man in this city. After two candidates had returned the board's call, the Rev. Herman Kuckhahn accepted and was installed on October 4, 1925.

The installation and all services were held in the vacant West Ward schoolhouse until May, 1926. Starting that month, services were held in the vacant Free Will Baptist Church across the street.



Courtesy Nebraska Signal  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church and parsonage (former Free Will Baptist properties).

Sunday School was organized October 18, 1925, with 23 children enrolled, divided into three groups. Meetings were held August 7 and 14, 1927, to organize a congregation. The five charter members were: George Everts, John Riel, John Wittmack, Thomas W. Boyes, and W. A. Domeier. Incorporation of the church was completed and signed December 6, 1928. In the spring of 1929, the congregation purchased the church and parsonage (the Free Will Baptist properties they had been renting).

Pastor Kuckhahn left Geneva March 29, 1929. Pastor Roy Vollmers accepted the call to Grace Church and preached his initial sermon on the first Sunday in Advent, 1929. He was succeeded by Pastor E. A. Breiling, who served from May 31, 1942, till October 6, 1946. During his pastorate in 1944 the interior of the church was redecorated and refurnished. This work was dedicated in a special dedicatory service on October 29, 1944.

The Rev. D. Grummert began his pastorate in Geneva on January 19, 1947. He served the congregation until July 11, 1954. In November, 1947, the congregation voted to establish a Christian day school. A building was acquired, renovated, and dedicated on August 28, 1948. The first teacher (not including the pastor, who did a good deal of teaching) was Miss Laverna Everts, who taught from 1947 to 1958. Later teachers were Sharon Becker and Judy Meyer (1958-63), Virginia Neidfelt and Phyllis Haas (1964), and Beverly Renike (1965 to the present). Enrollment over the years has averaged 28 pupils.



Courtesy Nebraska Signal  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran parochial school, dedicated in 1948.