

DOUGLAS COUNTY

TALES AND TOWNS

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LAND BOOMERS

Douglas County was created in 1873 by the Dakota Territorial legislature, during a period when the vast unfenced prairie was being opened for settlement. As there was already a Lincoln County, the name of Stephen A. Douglas, the Civil War President's famous political rival, was given to this new civil division.

Situated in southern South Dakota between the James and Missouri River valleys, Douglas County's 435 square mile area is considered choice agricultural land. During normal years, when rainfall is sufficient, excellent crops of wheat, corn, oats, barley, and alfalfa are raised. Considerable feed is grown to fatten cattle and hogs for market. Each year carloads of grain, livestock, and produce are shipped from the county. It is only natural that of the 6,879 persons residing in the county during 1938, two-thirds of them live on farms. Moreover, they are good farmers, most of them having come from families that have been agriculturalists for generations. Two thousand are of German descent, and 1,700 of Dutch, and both of these groups are noted for their industrious and thrifty farming methods.

However, there have been hard years and times of crop failures due to drought or parasites. In the 1880's a song that was frequently sung by homesteaders went like this:

We have no wheat, we have no oats,
We have no corn to feed our shoats;
We cannot go, we have to stay,
We are too poor to get away.

Following the dust storms of 1934, the Federal Shelter Belt program augmented early tree claims by planting strips of trees to arrest soil erosion, and Federal relief agencies aided in a water conservation program by forming four new lakes.

The towns of the county depend upon the farmers for their trade, and graveled farm-to-market roads facilitate transportation. The largest town and county seat is Armour, which, along with the neighboring towns of Delmont and Corsica, is on a branch line of the C. M. St. P. & P. railroad. Harrison, New Holland, and Joubert are inland trade centers inhabited almost entirely by Hollanders.

Most of the Douglas County residents have lived in the county all their lives, still sharing the hope for bumper crops and prosperity that the early settlers had.

Douglas County was not quickly settled; in fact, it was five years after the county was created before the first home seekers arrived. It was during the fall of 1878 that Michael and John Donnelly, with their mother, filed on claims in the southeastern corner of the county. Then, as far as the eye could see in every direction, there was only wild, rolling stretches of treeless prairie. On clear days, to the southwest, the solitary smoke of some Indian encampment might be seen rising from the shores of Lake Andes in the Yankton Indian Reservation. At night the stillness would be occasionally broken by the eerie cries of coyote, or the whirring wings of a disturbed prairie chicken.

Early in 1880 Major Robert Dollard, who later became the first Attorney General of South Dakota, filed on a claim in the northeastern portion of the county. At about the same time, R. Gage, Robert Sawyer, David Palmer, and William Palmer and his family, located in this vicinity. In the southeast part, the Johnson brothers, Ed, Homer, and Frank, and Jefferson Manbeck, took up homesteads.

On the seventh day of June of this same year, the settlers witnessed the arrival of an unusual prairie schooner. Built of lumber and having both doors and windows, it was a home on wheels, drawn by one horse and one mule, and piloted by one Walter H. Brown, a land boomer from northwestern Iowa. With such a "residence" representing the mythical town of Brownsdale on the western banks of Andes Creek, Brown established the first Douglas County seat of government. Under his leadership, a petition containing over fifty names was presented to Territorial Governor, Nehemiah Ordway, asking for county organization. Despite the fact that at this time there were but a few resident voters in the county and no post office, and that in addition the petition was circulated, if circulated at all, at a time when deep snows made it impossible to travel over the county, the Governor accepted the document as bona fide.

Brown's references, as given to the Governor, stated that he had been a deputy sheriff in the State of New Hampshire, and

that while in Iowa he had been a county commissioner, a candidate for Congress on a combination ticket, and a president and right-of-way agent of a paper railroad. Evidently his qualifications bore weight with Governor Ordway for, through his recognition of the petition, he permitted Brown to become the "busiest" county commissioner in the history of Douglas County. Immediately after being given the appointment, Brown, with the aid of his followers, proceeded to purchase a supply of blank county, town, and school warrants, issuing just as many as they were able to negotiate.

It was not long before many of the settlers became suspicious that the county was being fraudulently organized. Forming a vigilance committee, they at once took steps to bring to justice the persons who were attempting to burden the county with heavy debt. This proved to be quite a task, for during the day time the Brownsdale patriots usually kept one of their "county officers" on the lookout with a field glass. With the approach of strangers, the alarm was given and all the members who were in on the fraud, hurriedly fled with a team of horses that were kept constantly harnessed for a quick get-away. Finally, in desperation, the vigilantes staged a night raid upon Brownsdale, seized the books of the fraudulent organization, and carried them south to the Indian Reservation where all the records were burned with the exception of the warrant book which could not be found, as Brown had made his escape and was never apprehended. Before Major Robert Dollard could invalidate the bonds in the courts, the total amount of warrants issued equalled about \$200,000.

During the latter part of 1881, through the toss of a coin, J. C. Baird, C. F. Huston, and A. D. Mather decided to file on land bordering Choteau Creek. Coming from Milltown in Hutchinson County, they had spent the day inspecting farm land in Douglas County and, with a bad storm approaching, were undecided whether to attempt the return trip or remain overnight. They finally agreed to come to a decision through the age-old method of flipping a coin. As a result, they spent the night with Jefferson Manbeck and filed on nearby land the next day. Mather later became the first County Treasurer, handling, during his term in office, a total amount of 25c in cash.

Among the settlers who arrived during 1881 and 1882 were John Meade, A. C. Williams, Joseph Lester, A. C. Atwater, Walter Fiscus, K. G. Foster, Alfred Thomas, and John Bean. Bean and his wife opened a boarding and rooming house which became the center of activity in the county, providing a temporary haven for many a weary and seeker from Iowa, Indiana, or Wisconsin. Among others who arrived about this time were B. T. Boylan, Frank Morgan, James Berry, and the three Brown brothers, Charles, William and James.

Although a few of the early Douglas County settlers came from States farther east, the majority of them, including the Dutch and German colonists, came from the nearby States. While many were former teachers, office clerks and merchants, most of them were farmers or descendants of farmers, and all were pioneers in the fullest sense of the word—seeking permanent homes and prosperity in a new land. At that time there was neither church, school, store, post office, nor railroad in the county. All lumber and supplies had to be hauled from the towns of Mitchell or Scotland, and as both places were 35 miles distant, the majority of the early arrivals lived in sod shanties or tents.

Following "The Famous Douglas County Case," as the Brownsdale affair became known through South Dakota, Douglas County was reorganized July 10, 1882, with Huston temporarily the first county seat. At the November election, a permanent location was voted upon, with Huston, Grandview, and Douglas City contesting for the honor. A tabulation of the votes gave Grandview the county seat by a majority of eleven votes. After the railroad reached Armour in 1886, Grandview gradually faded into a ghost town, as many of its business buildings and residences were moved to a new location. However, the little inland town continued to be the county seat until 1894, when Armour became the center of county government.

TIDES OF SETTLEMENT

During the year 1880, Frederick Deisterhaupt and the Hudner brothers, together with several other German families, settled in the northeastern part of Douglas County. Their glowing accounts of the new land induced hundreds of their fellow countrymen to leave Iowa and Illinois and hasten westward to seek new homes in Dakota Territory, which had only recently been opened for homesteading by the Federal Government. This migration resulted in the eastern and northeastern townships of Douglas County being occupied almost solidly by families of German extraction. Plainview, the first postoffice in the county, was established on the William Palmer homestead in the extreme northeastern township, with Palmer as the first postmaster. Although short lived, it was one of the first meeting places for the early settlers who came for their mail, and to exchange bits of gossip.

The migrations of Hollanders into Douglas County began in 1881. During that year a mass meeting of all Hollanders interested in cheaper lands was held at Orange City, Iowa, and Frank Le Cocq, Leendert Van der Meer, and Dirk Van den Bos were selected to investigate land in Dakota Territory. After several days of travel, they selected a location in western Douglas County. Their reports of the fertile prairie land and its promise of prosperity induced friends and relatives to join them in such large numbers, that by 1883 all available land in the four western townships were taken up by Dutch homesteaders.

Harrison, at present, a village of 135 inhabitants, became the center of the Dutch settlement. This little inland town was named in honor of Senator Benjamin Harrison, who in 1884 was the first to introduce a bill into the United States Senate proposing to divide Dakota Territory and admit the southern half as the State of South Dakota. By a curious coincidence, it was the same Benjamin Harrison who, as President of the United States, signed a proclamation of November 2, 1889, admitting the State of South Dakota into the Union. The first post office in the settle-

ment was at this village, which was on the military route from Plankinton to Fort Randall. L. Van der Meer opened the first general store, later selling to Peter Eernisse, who was appointed the first postmaster. H. Vis was the first druggist in Harrison and L. Markus opened the first blacksmith shop. In the fall of 1882, the first church building in Douglas County was erected with the customary building material—rough boards and sod, permitting services to be held regularly on Sundays and during the week. It also served as a public school building with Miss Sophie Le Cocq as the first teacher.

Garret Van der Linden built the first hotel, where in these pioneer days Major Sharp, the paymaster of Fort Randall, often bivouacked for the night after a hard day's ride in a four-mule ambulance. The cash wagon outside, the flimsy hotel walls through whose crevices, large enough to serve as portholes, was heard the howling of wind and prairie wolves—all this completed a picture of rough and ready pioneer days; and the one or two soldiers, sitting up all night at the Major's bedside, made it attractive and safe also for land seekers who, with pockets full of money, slept in every nook and corner of the twelve by twenty prairie "Waldorf," with one eye open.

During the summer of 1882, settlers came into Douglas County in increasingly large numbers, and the prairie land which had formerly looked so barren was now dotted with shanties, most of them built of sod. To the east and northeastern part of the county came those of German nationality; to the west and northwest were the Hollanders; while the central portion was settled by mixed nationalities, for the most part American born. It was during this year that Huston, named after C. E. Huston, pioneer surveyor and locator, was established as the second post office in the county, and the first recognized county seat, following the downfall of the Brownsdale organization. The first Douglas County school was organized at Huston in the fall of the same year with W. H. Rowe as teacher during the three months term. Dr. T. M. Stewart and Dr. J.W. Ward were the first doctors in the community. At the general election of 1882 the county seat was moved to Grandview, which at that time was only a small general store.

George Mathews published the first newspaper, called the Douglas County CHRONICLE. This was printed at the residence of Jefferson Manbeck, in the southeastern corner of the county, and as buildings were scarce, a calf shed was extemporized into a press room. While the calves were grazing on the rich prairie grasses, the editor toiled at the press, being editor, type-setter, proof reader, and printer's devil, all in one. And in turn while the editor slept, the calves were safely sheltered in the news office. Sometime later, this paper was moved to Grandview and T. B. Roberts became editor. During the county seat campaign in 1882, a newspaper known as the GRANDVIEW ENTERPRISE was started at that place by James Brydon.

The first wedding in Douglas County occurred on March 8, 1883, when Emma Lester, eldest daughter of Joseph Lester was united in marriage to A. C. Williams, son of Mrs. Elizabeth Williams. The ceremony was performed at the home of the bride's father by Dr. R. B. Bull, one of the first ministers in the county. Later, Dr. Bull preached the first sermon in Armour from a wagon in front of what was then the Crutchett and Scallin drug store.

In 1884 the Reformed Church of Harrison was organized. Shortly after this the Christian Reformed people built a church there and also one at New Holland, a settlement four miles west of Harrison. About the same time the people of Grandview built a suitable church and parsonage.

So rapidly did new settlers arrive in Douglas County that by 1885 practically all the land open for homesteading had been filed upon. The total population by that time was approximately 4000.

BLIZZARD AND PRAIRIE FIRE

Many stories of the hardships and perils encountered by the pioneers of Douglas County are recalled by the few remaining survivors of those sod shanty days. Other information concerning early day life with its attendant trials has been brought to light through the scanning of newspaper files and items found in scrap books kept and treasured by the "old-timers."

James Hanskutt, pioneer Armour merchant who arrived in Douglas County in 1886, remembers that during his first few years in business he had more experience trading with Indians than with white people, since there were frequently as many as a thousand Indians camped around the town at one time. While staging their dances and pow-wows, the squaws would often seize a white man and dance with him almost forcibly, demanding pay before they would let him go. On other occasions the Indian bucks became wild and unruly, usually because of liquor. For, while it was against the law to sell or give them liquor, the fact that there were seven saloons in the town of Armour made it quite easy for them to obtain "firewater" providing they had money. During this early period large groups of Indians camped in different places throughout Douglas County. The bucks were glad to "swap" moccasins or blankets with the white settlers for meat or whatever they could get in exchange. Many an Indian blanket was traded for a side of pork or a chunk of beef. This was more or less dangerous because the blankets generally had a large "I. D." stamped on them, since they were issued by the Indian Department and were really the property of the Government. However, many of them were made into clothing with the I. D. "conspicuously" missing, some even having changed their color.

During Armour's disastrous fire of 1889, Hanskutt's store and living quarters were destroyed, forcing him to move into a house that had been brought overland from Grandview. Since this house had never been finished, it had large cracks in the

walls, which were built of boards running up and down. As a result, the Hanskutt family found, upon awakening one morning following a blizzard, that their house had filled with snow, which even covered their beds. It required considerable time and labor to dig their way out.

Undoubtedly one of the worst enemies of the early settler was the prairie fire. As there was very little land broken for cultivation at this time, such fires, once started, often burned over miles of dry, grassy prairie land before dying out or being quenched. Jefferson Manbeck who arrived in March 1880 and filed on a homestead in the southeast part of the county, tells of seeing that first year one of the worst prairie fires in the history of South Dakota. According to Manbeck, the fire was started by Indians at the Yankton Agency and burned over a large section of southeastern South Dakota. Mrs. Donnelly, the first white woman in the county, and one of the first persons to file on a homestead in Douglas County, was burned to death in this conflagration, which, driven by a strong wind, at times traveled faster than a horse could run. Manbeck recalls the unpleasant experience of spending the night alone with the corpse, since several women, who started from Old Bon Homme in Bon Homme County to care for the body, lost their way because of the dust and smoke that filled the air, and did not arrive until the following day when the haze lessened.

January 12, 1888, will never be forgotten by the early settlers of Douglas County. The morning was ideal, as the sun came out warm with the promise of a beautiful day. Toward noon the wind changed, clouds gathered, and snow began to fall. Within an hour it was not safe to venture outside without a rope attached to the house for guidance on the return. Four lives were lost in the county and several hundred head of stock perished during the terrible storm.

Later in the morning of this ill-fated day, Ed Christianson started on foot from Armour to Beulah. Just as the storm struck he met Jake Mack, who prevailed upon him to turn around so that they might attempt the return trip together. Bewildered, they

lost the road and drifted with the storm 12 miles where, just at the edge of the Yankton Indian Reservation, Mack became exhausted and gave up the fight for life. Christianson, who was dressed more warmly, made futile attempts to arouse him, and then started on alone, walking with the storm. With the coming of daylight he knew he was on the reservation, and by turning north he finally reached the Hutchinson home, two miles south of Delmont. He was severely frozen, and his survival seemed almost miraculous, as he had struggled on foot continuously for 20 hours and covered unnumbered miles during the worst blizzard in South Dakota history. Two days later a searching party found the body of Jake Mack at the place where Christianson had been forced to leave him.

More pitiful yet was the case of John Davis who set out to bring his children home from school. After missing the road and becoming lost he was forced to turn his team loose and take shelter under his sled, where he was found with legs so badly frozen that amputation was necessary.

Walter Fiscus, who filed on a Douglas County homestead and tree claim in March 1882, was living in Armour during the winter of '88. On the day of the "Big Blizzard" he was doing work which required the use of twine, and upon going home for dinner he placed one of the twine balls in his pocket and forgot about it until the storm grew worse, and he decided to go after his children who were in school. By tying one end of the twine to the door-knob of his home and carrying the ball with him he made the trip to the school and back safely, though it took him three hours to do it.

M. M. Brumbach, another unfortunate caught in the storm, had an extremely lucky escape from death. Losing his way while returning to his home in the country, he kept walking until he finally discovered a line of stones which he recognized as marking his land. After following these as far as they went, he continued in the direction which he felt sure would take him home. However, he again became lost and wandered around until almost exhausted when, suddenly stumbling through a snowdrift, he fell against the walls of his own house.

Late on the day of the storm, William Conover drove to the schoolhouse after his children. Being afraid to attempt the return trip with the youngsters, he led his team into the schoolhouse and remained overnight with the school children.

The saddest and most touching incident among the many tragedies which came to southeastern South Dakota as a result of this most disastrous snowstorm on record took place a few miles from Tripp in Hutchinson County, which borders the County of Douglas on the east. Here, with the passing of the blizzard, were found the frozen bodies of nine country school children and their teacher, Mrs. Anna Wilson, all huddled together in a cornfield several miles from the schoolhouse. They had perished in an attempt to reach a nearby home.

April 2, 1889, is vividly impressed upon the minds of early Douglas County settlers as the date of a great prairie fire. Driven by a high wind, it swept with surprising and terrifying speed over a large portion of the county, destroying hay, buildings, stock, and other valuable property which stood in its path, and taking the life of one woman, a Mrs Cline. Fred Kellogg tells how his father hitched his team to a wagon and as the fire approached their home put his family in it and drove out on some plowed ground, from which they were forced to watch their stock and buildings burn, powerless to save them.

All have heard of the queer and unusual pranks played by cyclones in their course of destruction—some so strange that they are almost unbelievable. One of these “believe it or not” discoveries followed the extremely severe “twister” which visited Douglas County during 1892.

At the moment this terrific wind struck the village of Grandview, Alfred W. Thomas was attempting to close the door of his living quarters which were on the second floor of his store building. When the roof and walls left for parts unknown, Thomas experienced the unusual thrill of being carried through the air for almost a block and then being dropped none too gently in a sitting position in the center of Main Street. Although badly battered and bruised, he still had a firm grip on the doorknob, however it

was no longer attached to the door. And while he suffered no broken bones, his greatest misfortune was to land upon a piece of lumber from which a twenty-penny nail protruded. As a result of his forced landing, he spent many uncomfortable days in bed. Several weeks later he received a letter from a friend, addressed "To The Man Who Sat On A Nail, Grandview, South Dakota."

The Thomas store was completely demolished as a result of the storm and some of the contents were found more than five miles away. Thomas tells of six dozen plates which were in stock on a shelf and were afterwards found, each with a piece about the size of a nickel broken out of the side, but otherwise undamaged.

Stranger yet, is the story of the old kerosene lamp which was resting on a desk within the store when the "breeze" arrived. With its passing a most incredible discovery was made by the curious as they searched among the ruins. For still reposing upon the desk in its usual spot was the kerosene lamp, unbroken—and with its chimney also intact.

Among those who vouch for the authenticity of this story are A. W. Thomas, the storekeeper, and Mrs. Harry Piner, each of whom saw it directly after the storm. Both are pioneer residents of Douglas County.



COUNTRY MAIN STREETS

On any Saturday, a stranger in Armour will see Main Street jammed with automobiles and occasional horse-drawn wagons, people milling on the sidewalks, stores crowded. The farmers have come to town. It is the day to sell eggs, cream, produce, livestock, and grain; the day to buy groceries, clothes and machinery.

Sunday the town appears deserted, except for a part of the morning when a series of bells ring out from church steeples, and the streets fill briefly with people in their Sunday best. The bells cease on, and the stranger is told that when the town was founded in 1886, it was named for P. D. Armour, prominent meat packer and at that time a director of the Milwaukee railroad, who reciprocated by purchasing a bell for the town's first church.

Monday, the town of 1,008 citizens returns to normal—county seat business, lodge meetings and contract bridge.

Armour is 100 miles west of Sioux Falls, and 44 miles southwest of Mitchell on State highway 41 and on the C. M. St. P. & P. RR., a branch line between Tripp and Stickney. While never a boom town, its position in the midst of a prosperous farming district has resulted in a steady growth and advance until it is now a thriving, modern town of 1,008 population, its oil-surfaced Main Street lined with nearly 100 business places. Without question those first pioneer businessmen of Armour were building for the future, for when the town celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1936, three of the firms that began business with the opening of the town were still in existence, managed by descendants of those who originally started the enterprises.

Included among the Armour businesses are five grocery and mercantile stores, a bank, theatre, hatchery, two ready-to-wear shops, two drug stores, ten filling stations, three beauty shops, two lumber yards, four garages, five cream and produce stations, three elevators, a wholesale tobacco company, and two weekly newspapers, The Armour HERALD and The CHRONICLE.

The residential section has an abundance of shade trees, grown from seedlings, that have long been the pride of local citizens, for trees are scarce on the prairie. An annual clean-up week keeps the town neat and orderly. In the northeast corner of the city is the Pleasant Ridge Cemetery, one of the most beautiful in the entire State.

The first building in Armour was moved there from Grandview, an earlier settlement and former county seat. It was used to house the first post office and also a newspaper plant, in addition to providing living quarters for the early arrivals. This old landmark, still on Main Street, is used at present (1938) as a cafe. Later, other buildings and homes were moved from the old county seat and Armour became the principal city and business center of Douglas County.

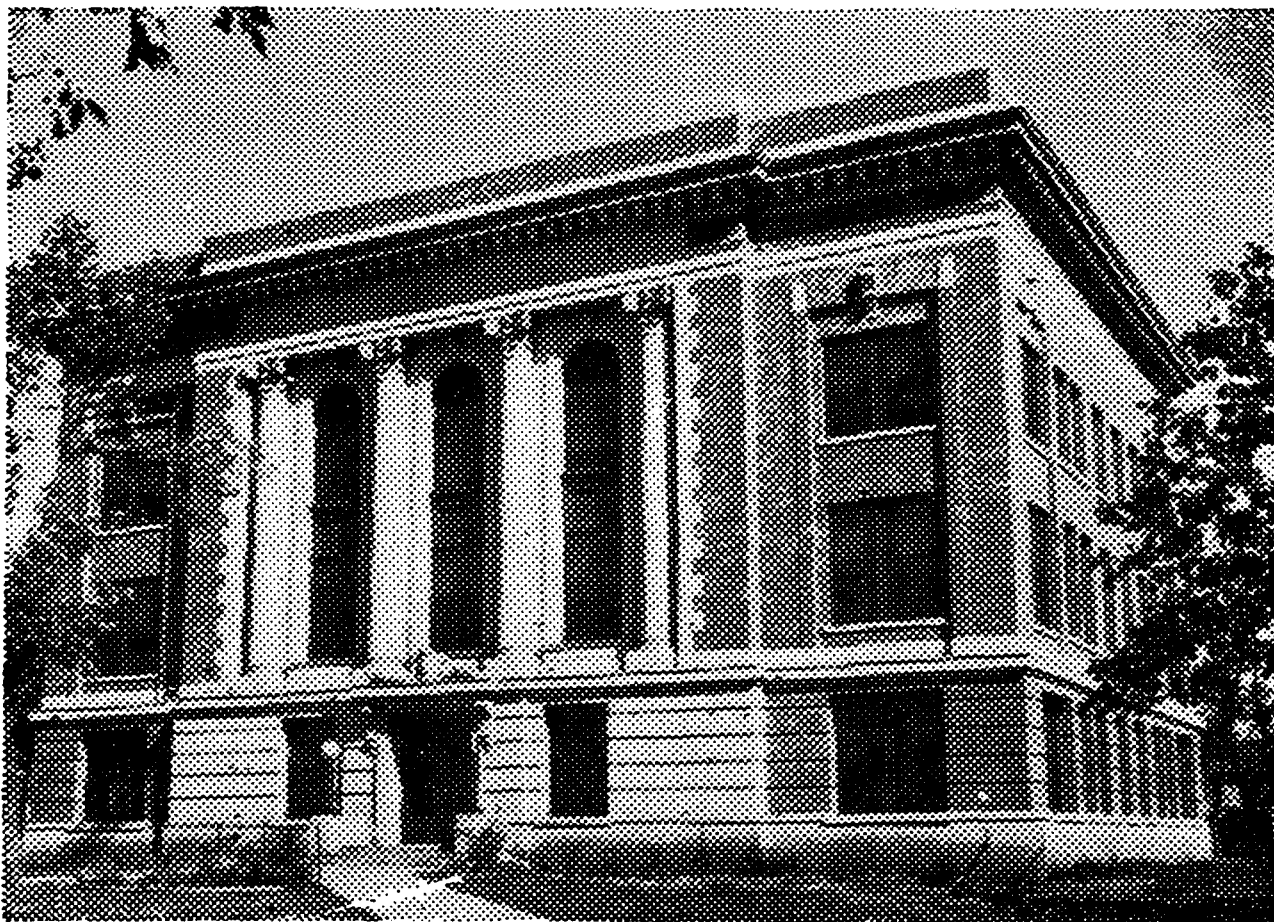
The first school was held in the Congregational Church in 1886 with Mrs. H. B. Mead as the first teacher. In 1887 a frame schoolhouse was built on the site of the present grade school. This consisted of one large room divided through the center by a long curtain, like the walls of Jericho in "Green Pastures." During that first year, E. P. Wanzer, who arrived on the first train to Armour in 1886, taught the upper grades on one side of the curtain, while his wife had charge of the lower grades on the other side.

Mr. and Mrs. Wanzer soon became active in State as well as local development. After several years of teaching school, Wanzer passed the bar examination and became one of the best known attorneys in the State. He served as president of the Armour school board for many years, was States Attorney for two terms, and was a State Senator in 1918 and 1919. His wife, Lula S. Wanzer founded the South Dakota Health Association in 1913, and was chosen its first president. During that year she organized the first Christmas Seal Sale in South Dakota and, with the proceeds, employed the first public health nurse. In appreciation of her continued efforts and influence toward developing public health work in the State, Camp Wanzer, the South Dakota Tuberculosis Association's summer preventorium in the Black Hills is named for her. In Armour, she was instrumental in establishing

the Andrew Carnegie Library. At the time of her death in 1931, she was a member of the Board of Regents which exercises supervision over State colleges and normal schools.

In 1927 a new and completely modern high school building was erected at a cost of \$50,000. During the past several years, the enrollment for the grades and high school has averaged more than 300.

The Douglas County Courthouse was completed in 1928 at a cost of \$150,000. The new building was the first in the State with its records not locked in vaults, but placed on racks in the offices. Occupying an entire block, it is considered the finest public building in Douglas County.



DOUGLAS COUNTY COURT HOUSE

Among the city's churches are the Community Congregational, Lutheran, Catholic and Episcopal. The Congregational Church celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1936 with one charter member, Mrs. H. B. Mead, still active in church work. St. George's Catholic Church, established in 1886, has had the same priest, the Rev. Father E. W. Carey, for more than 35 years.

Chief among the active organizations within the city are the Masons, Eastern Star, Odd Fellows, Rebekahs, Knights of Pythias, Royal Neighbors, Degree of Honor, P. E. O., American Legion and Auxiliary, a Community Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, and also several church organizations and two federated study clubs.

Armour has a Carnegie Library which, built on Main Street during 1914, now has over eight thousand books available for public use. Part of this building is used for meetings of the different city organizations.

The telephone system is privately owned and operated, while the electric light and power service is furnished by the Northwestern Public Service Company. The city possesses the necessary modern fire fighting apparatus and has a well trained volunteer fire department.

Lake Alacazar, on the edge of town, is a recreation center developed with the aid of the Works Progress Administration, well stocked with game fish. It has an attractive bathing beach, and provides the community with an excellent skating rink during the winter months.

Other recreational advantages include a nine-hole golf course, a public course at the northeast edge of town, tennis court, ball park, and skating rink. A bandstand where the high school band presents regular weekly concerts during the summer season is in the center of town. In 1915 the city purchased 15 acres which are used as a ball park and race track. The town sponsors a semiprofessional baseball club, which competes each season as a member of the Central South Dakota League.

Second in size among Douglas County towns is Delmont with a population of 518, in which the German element predominates. Founded in 1886, it was presumably named for a railroad official. This town lies 13 miles southeast of Armour on U. S. Highway 18, and is a station on the Milwaukee branch line. Surrounded by some of the best farm land in South Dakota, Delmont is a shipping point for many carloads of grain and livestock annually.

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