

# Nemaha County – The Interesting, The Unique, And the Downright Remarkable

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Nemaha County has a personality all its own. Call it ambiance, atmosphere, character. It's a certain blend of the interesting, the unique and the downright remarkable.

## The Interesting

Until the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 created Nebraska Territory, what is now Nebraska was known as “Indian Country”, and was not open to white settlement. However, Nemaha County was not unknown to European Explorers. In 1804, Lewis and Clark note the confluence of the Missouri and Nemaha Rivers in their journals and made an encampment near the spot south of present-day Brownville.

St. Deroin, now part of the Indian Cave State Park, was established in the 1840's by Joseph Derion, an Otoe half-breed chief. It served the 232 residents of the Half-Breed Tract established just east of Auburn by the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien. The treaty is memorialized by a Nebraska Historical Marker along Highway 136.

As early as 1852, several families settled unofficially in a community known as Dogtown about three miles west of the Calvert section of Auburn. Brownville was founded by Robert Brown in 1854 and witnessed hundreds of settlers flocking into Nemaha County during 1855-56. Records indicate that as many as 50 families in one week crossed the river at Brownville and settled in the county.

The people who settled in the County were a mixture of visionaries, entrepreneurs, prospective farmers and the usual assortment of thieves and scalawags. The scalawags nearly bankrupted Brownville at one point with a scheme to build a railroad that never materialized. Investors lost all of their money but the town survived.

Only seven of the 35 communities that were planned or established remain. A few clusters of homes, notably, Glen Rock, northwest of Auburn and Howe, southeast of Auburn, still live on as unincorporated neighborhoods.

The struggles and joys of the early inhabitants have faded from memory and the foundations of many once proud civic structures, homes and barns have sunk into the soil. But something of their contributions lives on in their names etched into the tombstones of the 30-plus cemeteries in the county.

The agricultural roots of Nemaha County still run deep today. Along with traditional grain and livestock farms, the Kennedy apple orchard near Brownville continues as an independent family business. But these days those roots are also branching off into more varied farm enterprises. Walnut groves are scattered over the county and you can spot longhorn cattle along the Highway 136 west of Auburn. Area gardeners offer their produce at the weekly farmers market. Numerous small vineyards supply area wineries as the vineyard industry that once thrived here enjoys a renaissance.



Brownville Ferry