

Brownville, Nebraska

For more information on Historic

Brownville, Contact

Brownville Historical Society

P.O. Box 1 .402-825-6001

Brownville Fine Arts Association

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Brownville, NE 68321

Brownville Historic District

Area roughly bounded by First, Seventh, Nemaha, & Richard Streets

Known as the “City of the Seven Hills”, Brownville was first settled by Richard Brown in 1854 and became a major steamboat landing, river crossing, overland freighting terminus, and milling center along the Missouri River. Trees and brush replace many of the buildings once located on the hills of Brownville, but many of the early buildings do survive and many have now been restored. Founded In 1956, the Historical Society Is a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving Brownville’s unique historical heritage. Its many purposes include promoting fuller appreciation of the history, landmarks and beauty of Brownville and sponsoring activities in keeping with its history.

The Captain Bailey House

The Brownville Museum

This seven gabled house was built of brick manufactured in Brownville In one of three brick factories. History tells us that this house was originally built nearer the Missouri River, then taken apart brick by brick and reassembled on the present site in 1877. The house is known locally as the Captain Bailey House. Captain Bailey was a Civil War Captain who lived here for many years with his family. There is a famous ghost story associated with the Bailey House that entertains all guests to the Museum. In 1959 the Brownville Historical Society purchased the property to be used as a Museum. Now the Brownville Museum, open to the public, completely restored and filled with artifacts of the days of Brownville’s greatness, is another example of Gothic Revival architecture.

Cogswell House

This well known beautifully restored home was built in 1865 by Anthony and Laura Cogswell. In 1870 there were 16 people living in this house according to census records. These Included the Cogswells and their five children, the Episcopal minister, his wife and two children, a maid, liveryman and two children. There may be a tunnel dug near the parlor through the bluffs onto the riverbank. There is some speculation that It may have played a part in the Underground Railroad” of Civil War time. Anthony Cogswell was twice mayor of Brownville and a director of the ill-fated Quincy and Pacific Railroad. The present house is a fine two-story brick built high on the hill overlooking the Missouri River, north on First St. The house has been completely restored and beautifully furnished in period pieces by its current owners Mr. & Mrs. Carl Robman, Lincoln.

Gates House

The two-story brick house was built in 1859 by Abbott Gates, an architect and mason, who also built many of the downtown buildings and the Methodist Church, Worthing-Baker home, and Muir home. This is believed to be the first brick house in Brownville and also the first in the state since the first brickworks were in Brownville. It was sold to the McLaughlins who lived in it until 1911 and raised ten children there. It is currently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Carl Rohman, Lincoln.

Nace House

The Nace house was built in 1871 with Brownville brick in the most popular style of the 19th century, Italianate. The two-story residence was built for 1.5. Nace with a “widow’s walk and a two-level porch across the south. It has been extensively restored by the present owners, Mr. & Mrs Cal Taylor, Brownville. as a fine example of the Victorian period. Painstakingly restored over a period of twenty years, this charming house is as authentic as possible, both in house construction and furnishings.

Methodist Church

The Brownville Methodist Church is the oldest Methodist Church In Nebraska that still has services every Sunday. The fine example of Greek Revival Ecclesiastical architecture was built as a Congregational Church in 1859. Built by Abbot Gates, the Church enjoyed a short span as the Brownville College and was purchased by the Methodists in 1861. There been little

change in the church over 125years, with even some of the windows having their original panes.

The Beehive

The Beehive, so named for all the activity with people coming and going through all the many outside doorways, was built in 1864 for John Christian Deuser. Mr. Deuser was a manufacturer of tin, copper, brass and sheet ironware and a dealer in stoves and hollow ware. This was one of the first apartment houses built in Nebraska, a two and one-half story brick structure with interior brick walls. The apartment building was converted to a family dwelling in the early 1900’s, adding the concrete block porches at that time. The house still has most of its original wide plank flooring. The Beehive was purchased at a public auction during the Fall Festival in 1978 by Martin and Jeanette Hansen. During the restoration, John Deuser’s name was found written on two of the interior doors. The most delightful find was an original wainscoting ceiling hidden under two full layers of plaster and lath in the dining room.

Carson House

The best-known house in Brownville, the Carson House was originally built by Richard Brown, founder of Brownville in 1860. Brown sold the house to John L. Carson, leading southeastern Nebraska banker in 1864. To the four room original house two additions were added on, making the house as we know It today. John Carson’s daughter, Rose, left the house to the Brownville Historical Society on her death in 1966. In the terms of her will only the original furniture and furnishings would be shown in the house, and no other furnishings were to be brought in. The Carson House remains virtually unchanged today since 1880’s. The Carson House Is open to the public under the auspices of the Brownville Historical Society.

Thompson House

The Thompson House was built in 1869 by Miss Virginia Thompson of Brownville. Located near the corner of 7th and Main Street, it was a two-story brick home with five gables and two chimneys. At the rear there was a long one-story wooden addition, where the kitchen and dining room were located. In 1986 Carl and Lorraine Robman of Lincoln and Brownville turned the 118-year-old Thompson House into a bed and breakfast for visitors to enjoy. It was moved to its present site at 5th and College Streets just across from the Methodist Church and fully restored. Central heat and air condi-

tioning, interior plumbing, and modern wiring were added. The rear addition is now two stories high. The five bedrooms and private baths are fully furnished with Victorian antiques, but they also have kerosene lamps in the event of a power outage. There is a wood-burning stove for emergency heat.

Tipton House

Seated upon one of Brownville's highest hills is the house Senator Tipton built in 1862 for his daughter, Kate, as a wedding present. Tipton was first a territorial senator and later ran against and defeated J. Sterling Morton to become one of the first two U.S. senators from Nebraska. Legend has it that the first telegraph office was in this house, but this has not been proven historically accurate. The Tipton House was sold for \$5 in 1960 to Ada Crooker, mother of Jane Smith. Ada gave the house to Jane and Handel as a wedding present. It has been a 30-year effort of labor and expense to turn it into the lovely restored home it is today.



Furnas House photo kindly provided by Kevin Vanourney

Furnas House

This two and one-half story house which combines both Italianate and Gothic Revival styling was built in 1868 and was occupied by Robert Furnas from 1878 until his death in 1905 as his retirement home. Robert Furnas played an important role, not only in Brownville's history, but also in the history of Nebraska. He was Nebraska's third (or second elected) governor, and he had an impressive list of accomplishments, which included many agricultural and educational

achievements. From 1943 to 1962 the house was owned and occupied by James Halbert and Myrtle Electra (Rose) Alden. The Alden grandchildren spent many summers enjoying the grounds surrounding the house, and large Alden family reunions took place there. In 1962 Father and Mrs. James Stillwell of Lincoln purchased the house with the hope of restoring it and making it useful to their needs as their retirement home. When their plans changed, the house was sold in July 1986 to the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation. It has been authentically restored as a historical landmark and operated by the Brownville Fine Arts Association.

Minick House

A large two-story brick residence was built about 1863 for George Bratton and purchased in 1878 by the Minick family. Alice A. Minick was the first woman to graduate from the University of Nebraska College of Law and the 15th woman to be admitted to the Supreme Court of the United States (1892). She wrote *One Family Travels West*, an account of her experiences as a pioneer woman. The house was lived in by the family until the death of their niece, Helen Hitte, in 1954. The house was then owned and used as a gallery for the paintings and sculptures of Thomas D. Palmerton. It is now owned by Robert Lutz and is under restoration.

Muir House

This two-story brick mansion was begun in 1868 and completed in about 1872 for Robert Muir. Robert Valentine Muir was born in 1827 in Scotland and came to America in 1835. He seemed to be a "Jack of all trades." as he was a treasurer of the Nebraska Settlement Company, ran a saw and flour mill, owned a ferryboat, sold real estate, and was a publisher of the "Nebraska Advertiser." He led an active public life and actually ran for governor as a candidate of the Prohibition Party of Nebraska. The Muir House is built of native brick, and each brick was soaked in water prior to its being laid. The style of the house is what is called the "Hudson River Bracketed." Numbers of these large, brick or frame, cube-shaped houses with overhanging cornices upheld by large carved brackets were built along the Hudson River in upper New York during the period 1850-1870. Purchased in 1983 by James Keene and family of Omaha, the Keenes are completing the work started in the 50's by Richard Rowan of Lincoln and added to by Mrs. Harold Lamar of Omaha, in the 60's. Mr. Keene added an observatory to the third floor of the

house, a most wonderful addition to one of the outstanding show homes in Brownville. The observatory was planned as part of the original 1868-1872 construction. A major staircase was built, and for 115 years went nowhere. So after a lapse of over one hundred years, Mr. Keene has finished the house as originally planned.

Pierce House

This very charming Gothic Victorian home was built in approximately 1874 by John and Martha Pierce. The Pierces, along with their ten children lived there until the 1920's. Deserted from 1920 to 1950, the small house has now been completely restored. Including the flowerbeds that survived the 30 year overgrowth. It is owned by John Anderson.

Pollack House

Built in 1871 by Cyrus Pollack, local grocer, the Pollack House, like the other brick homes in Brownville, is of soft native brick. Shortly after the home was built, Mr. Pollack's grocery business went bankrupt, and he lost his home. Fully restored, it is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Blanke, Jr., Lincoln, who direct the Village Theater during the summer.

Brownville Village Theatre

Originally the Christian Church, the building was purchased by the Brownville Historical Society and converted into a theatre. A repertory theatre is produced by Nebraska Wesleyan University for eight weeks each summer, beginning the first Saturday in July. Brownville Village Theatre will open its 25th consecutive season in repertory in the summer of 1991. A company of 15 takes up residence in Brownville on June 1 and runs four plays in repertory all summer. A repertory season means that each show is played, in alternating performances, throughout the summer. In the Brownville Theatre, all actors are also technicians. Each company member has an assigned job for the summer; they work on scenery, costumes, properties, lights and sound, box office, make-up and/or house management. The company has been directed by Henry H. Blanke, Jr. since its beginning. Phyllis Blanke acts as Costumer and Business manager. The Blankes own the historic Pollack House, which is their summer residence. Students and alumni of Nebraska Wesleyan have been the majority of company members since the beginning of the theatre, although anyone interested may apply to be in the company. Phone 402-825-4121