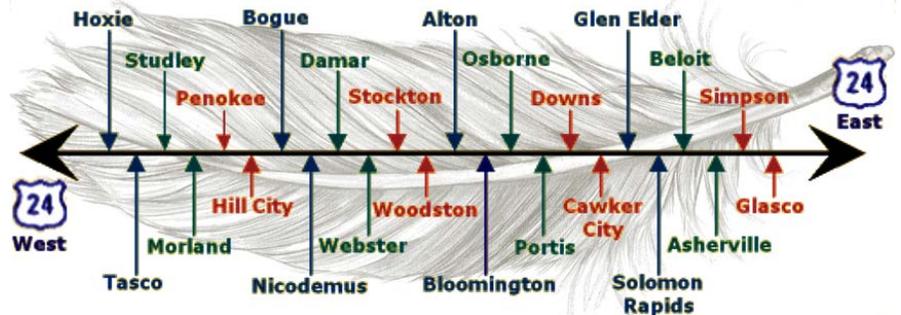




Beloit, Kansas

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History of Beloit

by Sharon Treaster

The Beloit town site was homesteaded by Aaron A. Bell who came from Williamson County, Illinois, by ox-drawn covered wagon, arriving in April 1866. His deed to the land was burned in an Indian raid before he could have it recorded and his title to the property had to be settled in court. His was the first home put up on the town site, a log cabin which stood about a half block south of the present municipal light and water plant.

It was 1868 before the settlement was named. It was called Willow Springs after a fresh-water springs surrounded by willows on the north bank of the Solomon River. The springs served those located here, as well as hunters, emigrants, and freighters passing through, until the mid-1870s.

On August 12, 1868, some 35 Indians made their appearance at Aaron Bell's cabin, just as he and his family, consisting of his wife and two little girls, had finished their dinner. The Indians immediately took possession of any food they could find, mistreated the people, kicking and striking them, and ended up by packing up whatever they wanted to take and breaking up what was left. Then they left.

Bell took his family to his relatives a few miles away. The next day, the Indians reappeared, killed Braxton Bell, a brother of Aaron, his wife and child, and David Bogardus, a brother-in-law of the Bells. They captured and carried off Aaron Bell's two little girls, Ester and Margaret. Troops were sent in the direction of the massacre. The Indians, seeing the troops, were panic stricken. They cut the thongs that bound the two little girls to their pack ponies, leaving the children alone on the prairie. The little girls were lost for three days then were found by a settler and reunited with their parents.

Another post office, established in 1885 in Douglas County, was known as Willow Springs, and it is possibly because of this that the name of the settlement was changed. It was in 1870 that Timothy Hersey took the initiative to rename the town Beloit after his home city in Wisconsin. The woman who cooked for his mill hands told the story that Hersey came to the cook shack one day and said the place no longer would be called Willow Springs but Beloit "and with a crayon proceeded to write the name on the stove pipe."

In 1869, Hersey purchased part of Bell's land. Hersey started getting out timber to dam the river and build a mill in 1869. Despite the heavy floods, he put his sawmill in operation in September 1870 and his grist mill the following season.

A sketch of Hersey in the Dickinson County Historical Society reports "it has been said at one time he was the very life of the Solomon Valley. He gave the first child born in Beloit the deed of a fine lot, gave lumber liberally to the first church built in town, also to the first school house and printing office." His family followed Hersey to Beloit in 1872, and they lived there a number of years before they moved to the west coast.

J. D. Williams, who had served during the Civil War, arrived in Beloit in the fall of 1870 and built the city's first business structure, a 2-story native limestone edifice still standing on the northeast corner of the Mill-South streets intersection. He opened a merchandise business in partnership with James Finnegan. By 1883 Williams had erected some 10 buildings in Beloit.

Beloit's first marriage took place December 9, 1870, when Mary Bell, daughter of A. A. Bell, and O. P. Pooler exchanged wedding vows. The first congregation organized in Beloit was by the Baptists in the summer of 1871 with Rev. George Balcom as minister. History records that on one occasion Rev. Balcom strode into one of the saloons dotting Mill Street, took the violin from the hands of the establishment's musician, walked behind the bar, and held the audience's attention for an hour by singing, playing and preaching.

A cottonwood store building located on the southwest corner of Mill and Court was the first used to hold classes in 1871, the year it was put up with Hersey's help. Beloit was organized as a city of the third class in August, 1872. It was proclaimed a city of the second class March 10, 1879.

Today Beloit is the largest city in the SV24 Alliance. It is located in the heart of post rock country, and many fine post rock buildings may be seen there, including the courthouse and St. John's Catholic Church. Much of the history of Beloit and surrounding region may be seen at the Mitchell County Historical Society Museum in Beloit, where visitors are always welcome.

Stories Of Land Of Man Of Nature