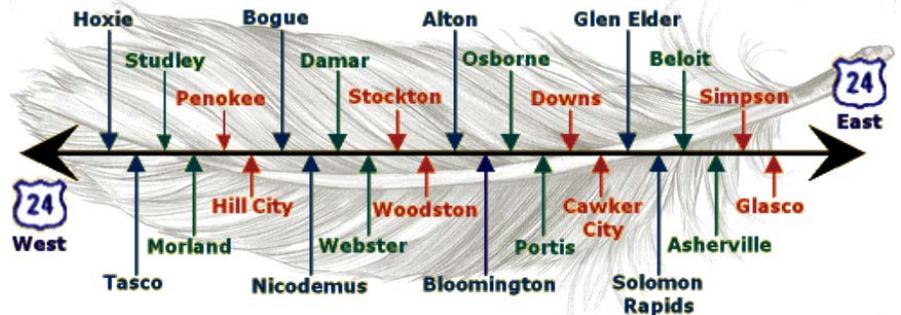




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## Bloomington, Kansas



### History of Bloomington

by Von Rothenberger

Dr. Daniel E. Tilden was one of those restless souls who after many years of searching at last found his home in the South Fork Solomon River valley in what is now Osborne County, Kansas. Born in Madison County, New York, in 1818, Tilden moved to Vermont and later to Erie County, Ohio, where he opened a medical practice. Here also the new Dr. Tilden met and married his wife and brought his first three children into the world.

In 1853 the family moved to Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, where twelve years later Dr. Tilden volunteered for the Civil War. He served 18 months before being wounded and discharged. After the war the family moved to Valparaiso, Indiana, and then to Lawrence, Kansas, and finally to Osborne County, where on April 1, 1870, Dr. Tilden staked out a homestead and settled down at last.

A year later, Dr. Tilden determined that a town in the area was needed. He consulted with the local Indians as to where a good location on his homestead might be, and in early 1871 he laid out and platted the new town of Tilden on a site that the Indians claimed was legendary for being avoided by tornadoes and other violent storms.

Being young and vigorous and near the relative center of the county, Tilden threw in his hat as one of the four candidates for the permanent county seat of Osborne County. In the first two elections to determine the county seat Tilden placed fourth and then third to rivals Osborne City and Arlington before dropping out of the race. A consolation prize of sorts came Tilden's way when Osborne City was declared the county seat. The rival town of Arlington, between Osborne City and Tilden, disbanded and its buildings were moved to Osborne while the post office was removed to Tilden. The new Tilden Post Office opened on May 30, 1872, with Cyrus C. Tilton (not Tilden) as the first postmaster.

After the defeats for county seat the community's residents decided that a good name change would inspire the town to grow to new heights. The town site was officially re-platted with the new name of Bloomington on May 10, 1873, and the post office name was officially changed to Bloomington on January 1, 1874.

Bloomington School District #10 was organized in May 1873. After meeting in homes a one-room schoolhouse was built in 1879 from local limestone and used until May 1898, when a larger building was purchased.

The only bona fide gold rush ever seen in the Solomon River Basin occurred in January 1880 when two men digging a well five miles northwest of Bloomington claimed to have discovered the precious metal. The two-day rush of farmers and other fortune seekers to the area ended when two men with mining experience pronounced the nuggets as being only pyrite, or "fool's gold."

During these growing years the community could lay claim to some very interesting characters that livened up the neighborhood. Charles Jesse Jones claimed a homestead two miles southwest of Bloomington in 1872. One of the first environmentalists, he foresaw the over-hunting of the American bison and began saving and raising buffalo calves—much to the consternation and ridicule of his neighbors. "Buffalo" Jones's many exploits over the next 40 years stand out as one of the great unsung legends of the American West and has earned him the title of "Savior of the American Bison." He also served as the model for the hero in author Zane Grey's popular Western novels.

In 1877 21-year old Howard Ruede claimed a homestead 11 miles southwest of Bloomington. Over the next year he faithfully wrote home to his family in Pennsylvania of his struggles and experiences. Those letters were posthumously published in 1937 under the title *Sod-House Days: Letters from a Kansas Homesteader 1877-78*, a book now considered to be one of the finest works ever written on homesteading on the Great Plains.

Benjamin Franklin Matchett arrived in Bloomington in 1885, an ordained Christian Church minister. A native of England, Matchett had entered the American Civil War as a spy for Union forces in 1862. In 1889 he was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives for a two-year term and also served as the Speaker Pro Tem of the Kansas House.

Phil Hahn was born in Bloomington in 1932 when the community was at its peak with about 75 residents. In the 1950s he went to work as a writer for Hanna-Barbara TV cartoons. Over the next two decades he became a top comedy writer in Hollywood, writing for such series as Get Smart, M\*A\*S\*H, Sonny and Cher, Three's Company, and many others, winning one Emmy Award and being nominated for four others. In the 1980s he produced some of the biggest TV shows of the decade, including the American portion of Live Aid in 1985 and several Bob Hope specials.

By 1932 Bloomington consisted of a church, a lumberyard, two cafés, a post office, a bank, a general store, a grain elevator & stockyards, a railroad depot, a telephone company, a blacksmith shop, and two garages. The community never incorporated as a formal city and within 25 years the population had dwindled to the point that on August 31, 1955, the post office was closed. The school followed suit in December 1968. Today Bloomington boasts just one business, the grain elevator, and 13 residents who continue to preserve the 1879 one-room stone schoolhouse and work to keep the spirit of the community alive.

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