

Hoyt, Kansas, Jackson County: The Little Town That Could

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The original town of Hoyt, Kansas, was founded in 1869 and was located two miles north of the current location of Hoyt. The reason the town was moved was because in 1880, the Rock Island Railroad built a railroad line just north of Topeka.¹ In 1886, buildings from old Hoyt, such as the church and a house or two, were uprooted and transferred to the new location. Only the cemetery remains in old Hoyt.²

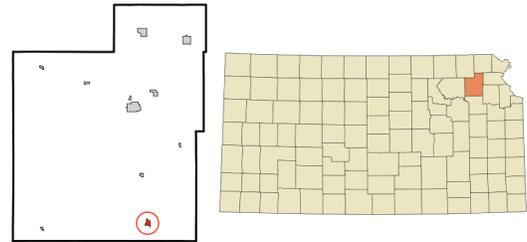


Figure 1: Jackson County/ Hoyt City (Current)

In 1886, I.T Price and A.J. Walker, members of a Holton, Kansas, company, laid out the site for the new city of Hoyt.³ It was not until W.B. McKeage laid out twenty lots on his farm and sold them for \$100 each that the new town of Hoyt was finally established.⁴ McKeage filed his plot on April 27, 1887, the day the town was officially established.⁵ When new Hoyt was created in 1886, the first building constructed was a general store that Joseph Burns ran.⁶ In the 1890s and into the 1900s, Hoyt was the biggest cattle and hay shipping point between St. Joseph and Herington. Because of this, residents built a barbed wire fence around Hoyt, with gates at the four corners of town, to keep livestock from roaming through the town center.⁷ The oldest

¹ "Early History of Hoyt," City of Hoyt, accessed March 24, 2012, <http://www.hoyt-ks.us/history.php>.

² Hoyt Centennial Committee, *Hoyt, Kansas, 1886-1986: Plains Survivor* (N.p.: 1986).

³ Elizabeth N. Barr, *Business Directory and History of Jackson County* (N.p.: Author, 1907), 73.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *The Hoyt Messenger*, April 1887.

⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁷ Hoyt Centennial Committee, *Hoyt, Kansas, 1886-1986*.

building still standing in Hoyt is its jail, a one-room 12-by-11-foot building located in the middle of town that looks like it could still be used if necessary (fig. 2 and 3).

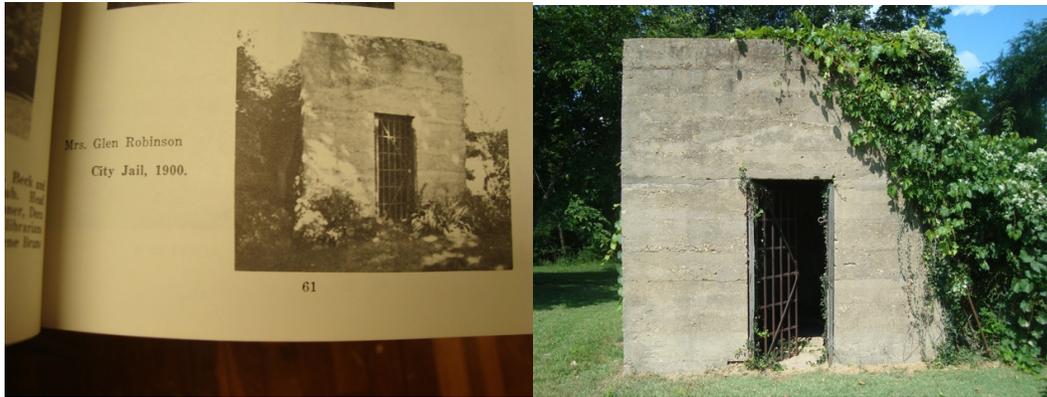


Figure 2: Hoyt city jail, 1900. *Liberty Clicks in '76*. ed. Mary Willard and Doris Shoff.



Gossip Printery, 1976.
Figure 3: Hoyt city jail, 2011. Photo by author.

In 1895, Hoyt had a big fire, causing the town to change the two main streets from running east to west; the original plans were to run these two streets north to south. Almost fifteen years later, on November 26, 1909, another fire forced residents to evacuate the products of a lumber yard and one of the general stores because they could not put out the fire. Men, women and children removed lumber and the contents of the general store until the fire finally over took the two establishments. The fire burned through five business houses west of the post office on the north side of Main Street, causing a majority of the business in Hoyt to stop for a time. Most of these businesses had no insurance, slowing the process of rebuilding. More than 200 members of the town responded to the call, along with about seventy Mexican workers who were working on the rail road nearby.

The troubles of Hoyt did not stop at the fires. In August 1887, a giant rain and wind storm passed through, damaging a lodge that was being built, as well as some barns and the local

lumber yard. In September of 1916, a tornado swept through the town, removing a house, a horse and buggy, and even a woman from the town. Luckily, no one was killed. The next year, another tornado damaged nearby Rock School. Despite all of these hardships, the town became one of the major stops on the railroad to pick up cattle headed to markets in the east. As the use of the railroads declined, in the 1960s, the government built old U.S. Highway 75, which brought about a decline in business for Hoyt and surrounding towns. Finally, as fortune has it, in 1984, another tornado swept through Hoyt, damaging businesses and destroying one house north of town.

Beginning in the mid 1960s, residents of Hoyt were having issues with their water supply, so they dug new wells. Due to manganese and chlorine in the water, Hoyt cooperated with a rural water district to manage its water needs. In 1982, Hoyt built a new fire station in town, which helped improve its volunteer staff.

Hoyt, Kansas, started out as a small town where farmers took cattle to transport them on the railroads back to eastern markets. Despite all of the terrible events that have plagued Hoyt throughout its history, the town is still a thriving part of the suburban environment in northeast Kansas.



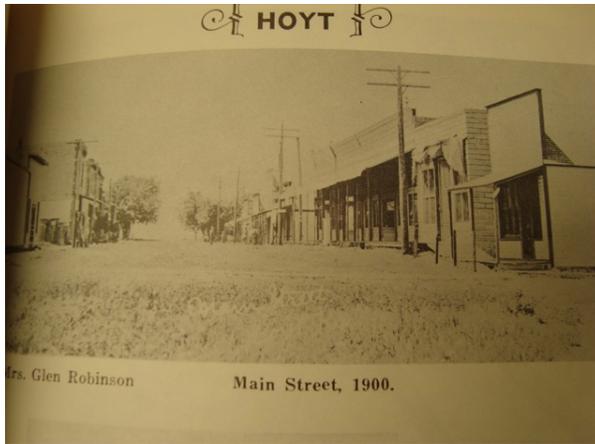


Figure 4: Hoyt, Kansas, Main Street 1900. *Liberty Clicks in '76*. ed. Mary Willard and Doris Shoff. Gossip Printery, 1976.

Figure 5: Hoyt, Kansas, Main Street 2011. Photo by author.

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