

Newbury, Kansas

Built by Faith, Destroyed by Progress



History 558

Submitted by:

Thomas Haynos

November 14, 2011

The town of Newbury, located in northern Wabaunsee County, has a story like many of the towns in Kansas during the beginning years of statehood. Newbury's original settlers built their town with the high hopes that someday, as the county's economic status grew, it would become the greatest metropolis in the county. Like so many other early Kansas towns, Newbury did reach a height of prosperity for a short time, but, when the desired change in economics occurred, it sank into nothingness, ruined by the very progress for which it was built. This rise and fall of a society seems to have prevailed a lot in Kansas. Karl Menninger and Milton Eisenhower point this out in their essays. They both say that Kansas had a remarkable, exciting beginning for a state which seemed to disappear in later years as the rest of the nation passed it by. The state then sank into the lethargy that seems prevalent today and is now considered just another ordinary Midwest state, no longer the progressive state it once was.¹ Newbury accurately displays this same cycle of how a community progresses, built on high hopes and faith; then progress passes it by and it falls into decline. This cycle can be seen in Newbury's early years and its eventual demise.

Wabaunsee County established the township of Newbury in 1868, and the town bearing the same name followed soon after. Originally, the whole northern half of Wabaunsee County was part of the Pottawatomie Indian Reservation, but in 1868 the federal government opened it up to Euro-American settlement. At that time, this entire part of the county was Newbury Township, and then as more settlers came in, it was split up into smaller townships.² The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad bought the land from the Indians first for \$1 an acre and then sold it to white settlers for \$5 an acre.³ The original settlers thus entered the township with the belief that someday the railroad would lay a line through and that they could then prosper

over the rest of the county. From the very beginning, they catered to the railroad officials to get the line.⁴ The accounts say that residents even came up with the name 'Newbury' after one of the CEOs of the railroad company.

The first settlers in the area were primarily German. John Mocke, his father, Joe Glotzbach, and Martin Muckenthaler are the first recorded settlers to have land in area in the fall of 1869.⁵ All of them were either directly from southern Germany or from east Central States like Indiana and Illinois which their families first came to from Germany. Being southern German, they were a very Catholic group. One example of this is the fact that Martin Muckenthaler is recorded to have traveled to Wabaunsee County because he was advised to do so by Fr. Rimmele S.J., a Jesuit stationed in St. Marys.⁶ These men bought a lot of the land that the town was later built on from the railroad.

In the spring of 1870, four men from Topeka, D.H. Horne, Maj. H Bartling, D. Lakim, and B.P. Kellam arrived on the scene and formed the Newbury Town Co. They set up the town and gave the railroad 50% of the site (again, an attempt to attract the railroad).⁷ The Pottawatomies still in the area advised them on the best location of the town. They put it on a rise above Mulberry Creek about a mile from where it emptied into the much larger Mill Creek. The reason for this was to avoid flooding in the spring, but in the end it would prove to be a bad decision and lead to the town's demise.

From this small beginning, a flourishing town quickly grew. By June of 1870, the town had a post office, lumber yard, two general stores and a dozen houses and several schools across the township. The original site plan was for a city that covered an entire section of land, with an eight-acre park and courthouse in the center.⁸ Newbury never reached that size, but it was a prosperous town before its fall. P.H. Moser, the town's first postmaster, recalls that at its peak, Newbury had three general stores, a hotel, drugstore, blacksmith and a carriage shop.⁹

One of the other early buildings built on the site was the Catholic church. First established in 1874, it was serviced by Jesuits from St. Marys, and then later from Alma. The church was rebuilt in 1884 and a convent of nuns was added to teach at the parish school.¹⁰



Figure 1: Drawing of the Catholic Church at Newbury. Source: Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

Overall, the town started small and became a flourishing community within a few years. It had some troubles (the grasshopper storms of 1873-74 to name one) but it continued to grow until its sudden end.¹¹

The prelude to Newbury's downfall was the election for a county seat in 1871, just when the town was beginning to grow. Alma had beat the town of Wabaunsee for county seat in an election in 1868, but many people were still dissatisfied over that elections results, so the county seat came up again in an 1871 election. This time, Alma was contesting with Newbury and Eskridge. Newbury lost this election to Alma.¹² This was a blow to the town, but it still survived after that.

What really killed the town was the railroad switch of 1886. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe line went bankrupt and sold all of its rights to the Rock Island Railroad.¹³ The people of Newbury began to beg this new railroad company for a line through their town, but it did not happen. Newbury, built on high ground, had little to no water in the summer months (Mulberry Creek is dry through most of the summer) and so the railroad chose to pass through Paxico, a small town built on the shore of the larger Mill Creek, a mile away from Newbury.¹⁴ This ruined Newbury economically and caused almost all residents to move to Paxico. Newbury kept some residential sections as well as the large Catholic Church, Sacred Heart (Paxico was actually started by the Protestants living in Newbury who wanted their own town). The two towns had a rough start as neighbors because of this but eventually, after Newbury lost the railroad war and everyone moved to Paxico, the two towns were on good terms).¹⁵ Today, Newbury consists of a

few residential houses and the large and imposing Sacred Heart Church visible on the prairies for quite a distance. It is still in operation for the Catholics in the area but interestingly, its address is Newbury Street, Paxico.

So the town of Newbury was destroyed by the economic progress it had been built for. It was built on the belief that the railroad would come and bring it prosperity. When the railroad changed its route, the town's chances of keeping its economy going were too small and it was destroyed. The story of Newbury and many other Kansas towns that suffered a similar fate from the railroad gives an excellent portrayal of the overall history of the state. Kansas had a remarkable beginning, built on the dreams and hopes of its early settlers. It reached its peak in the Progressive Era and then as modernization continued in the rest of the U.S., it had difficulty developing and keeping up. Today Newbury, like much of Kansas, is what outsiders refer to as a fly-over place.



Figure 2: Many small towns had bands that played at political rallies and other events. This is a photo of the Newbury Band-date unknown. Source: Wabaunsee County Historical Museum

Notes

Sources

- Averill, Thomas F., ed. *What Kansas Means to Me*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991.
- Cutler, William G. "Wabaunsee County Part 4: County Organization and County Seat Troubles." In *History of the State of Kansas*, edited by John H. Fowler. Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1882.
- Fitzgerald, Daniel. "Newbury: Wabaunsee County." In *Ghost Towns of Kansas: A Traveler's Guide*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988. 100-102.
- Hiebert, Douglas. "A Tale of Three Towns: Newbury, Paxico, Old Paxico." Manuscript, 1982. Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- Kansas State Board of Agriculture First Biennial Report: Wabaunsee County 1877-1878*. Chicago: Rand, McNally and Co., 1878.
- Moser, P. H. "The Early Settlement of Newbury." Article. Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- Thomson, Matt. *Early History of Wabaunsee County with Stories of Pioneer Days and Glimpses of our Western Border*. Alma, KS: 1901. Retrieved on 9/17/11 at <http://ia600300.us.archive.org/27/items/earlyhistoryofwa00thom/earlyhistoryofwa00thom.pdf>

- ¹ Thomas Fox Averill, ed. *What Kansas Means to Me* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 88-96, 110-115.
- ² William G. Cutler, "Wabaunsee County Part 4: County Organization and County Seat Troubles," in *History of the State of Kansas*, ed. John H. Fowler. (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1882), 1
- ³ Douglas Hiegert, "A Tale of Three Towns: Newbury, Paxico, Old Paxico." 1982, Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- ⁴ Daniel Fitzgerald, "Newbury: Wabaunsee County," in *Ghost Towns of Kansas: A Traveler's Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 101.
- ⁵ P.H. Moser, "The Early Settlement of Newbury." Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- ⁶ Douglas Hiegert, "A Tale of Three Towns: Newbury, Paxico, Old Paxico." 1982, Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- ⁷ P.H. Moser, "The Early Settlement of Newbury." Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- ⁸ Daniel Fitzgerald, "Newbury: Wabaunsee County," in *Ghost Towns of Kansas: A Traveler's Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 100.
- ⁹ P.H. Moser, "The Early Settlement of Newbury." Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- ¹⁰ Douglas Hiegert, "A Tale of Three Towns: Newbury, Paxico, Old Paxico." 1982, Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- ¹¹ P.H. Moser, "The Early Settlement of Newbury." Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.
- ¹² William G. Cutler, "Wabaunsee County Part 4: County Organization and County Seat Troubles," in *History of the State of Kansas*, ed. John H. Fowler. (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1882), 1
- ¹³ Douglas Hiegert, "A Tale of Three Towns: Newbury, Paxico, Old Paxico." 1982, Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.

¹⁴ P.H. Moser, "The Early Settlement of Newbury." Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.

¹⁵ Douglas Hiegert, "A Tale of Three Towns: Newbury, Paxico, Old Paxico." 1982, Newbury Collection, Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, Alma, KS.