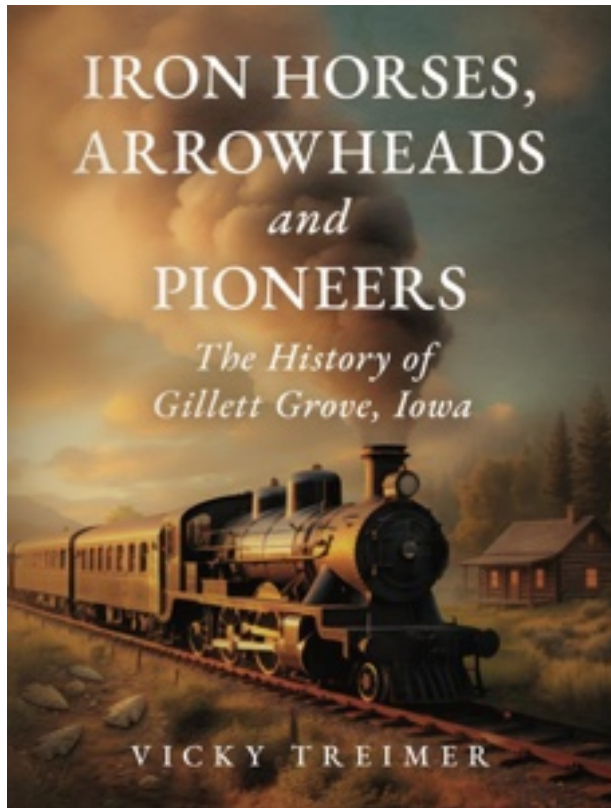




Iron Horses, Arrowheads and Pioneers: The History of Gillett Grove, Iowa is about living during Indian attacks. It tells of the dangerous survival from Indians in pioneer days. The experiences of small-town living are revealed.

**Iron Horses, Arrowheads and Pioneers:
The History of Gillett Grove, Iowa**
By Vicky Treimer

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IRON HORSES, ARROWHEADS *and* PIONEERS

*The History of
Gillett Grove, Iowa*



VICKY TREIMER

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Gillett's Pioneer Days



The wildflowers spread across the open prairie. What a beautiful sight in the mid-1800's. Photo credit: Vecteezy.

It was a quiet summer night in 1900 across the Gillett Grove area. The sound of owls and mourning doves was heard. The atmosphere was peaceful. The settlers relaxed from a hard day's work. It was time to embrace the precious memories of days gone by. The Lord brought the settlers through these times. The journey was so worth it. Children of the settlers listened intently. "Tell us about these times," they begged persistently. Everyone gathered around the fire to hear such a mystery. And so, the settlers recollected the precious days to their children.

It was the era of cattle drives where pioneers of the prairie were getting settled. Villages were being established. Wood and log houses were being built along with much needed businesses. Grist mills, general stores, lumberyards, and banks were constructed. It was an answer to prayer to approach such a town. It was the town of Gillett Grove, Iowa, just west of the Little Sioux River in northwest Iowa.

It was dark and it was time in 1856. The traveling wagon train had stopped on the Iowa prairie. Their destination was California. After a long day, they made camp just east of the Little Sioux River. The horses and families would be refreshed the next day.

Daybreak woke the families. Esther was preparing breakfast. The smell of coffee and bacon permeated everyone's nostrils. Another day of travel was ahead of them. Yet, they didn't have to travel too far. Across the river was a small town named Gillett's Grove.

They examined their resources carefully. The wagon train traveled through Gillett's Grove. This was a town that was just established. There was potential here. The wagon train stopped. A man approached them. He identified himself as Isaiah Gillett. Gillett invited the families to settle here. Soon, the town kids would be seen, and they invited the traveling kids to play—for a while at least.

The families were content. Their traveling days came to an end. It was 1856 and Gillett Grove would see more activity than it wanted in the next few months. The winter of 1856 was harsh for Iowa. Food was scarce as prairie chickens and wildlife had died from the extreme cold. And yet, people survived because they had to. Other towns in Clay County were built. Peterson, Iowa was just getting established by the Kirchner family. Life went on and became better despite the disruptions in the settler's life.



The aroma of the prairie wildflowers could be enjoyed across the Iowa flatland. Stagecoach passengers would make their stops in the smaller towns on what is now highway seventy-one south of Spencer. The town of Annieville was one of those stagecoach stops. It had not developed as a town yet until 1871. Annieville was located on highway seventy-one south of the Royal B-40 blacktop and north of the Rossie Blacktop (silo city corner). Gust and Jacob Kirchner were just developing the land we now know as Peterson, Iowa in 1856. The town of Everly, Iowa was in the very early stages of development. Spencer was just prairie grassland until the following year.

Within the next forty-four years, sixteen towns would emerge to make up what is now Clay County. 1865 was also the year Indian chief Inkpaduta, and his tribe were in the Peterson and Gillette Grove areas. They continued to travel to Spirit Lake and instigated the Spirit Lake massacres. Farmers around Peterson and Gillett Grove can still find Indian arrowheads, stones and (animal) bones in their fields. The Indian raids, however, did not detour any advancement in establishing more towns in Clay County. The year 1865 also marked the birth of the transcontinental railroad. Stagecoaches were the primary mode of transportation. Horses, covered wagons and buggies roamed the Iowa prairie. Mark Twain, alas Samuel Clemens, was thirty years old. The Civil War has ended. April 14 1865 marked the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. The Younkers Store existed in 1865. Although many events were occurring, numerous towns were just getting established on this open prairie. Bishon still roamed this Iowa flatland.



Gillett Grove was in the middle of nowhere! The nearest post office was Peterson, which was twenty miles away. The nearest flour mill was Estherville, thirty-five miles away. Fort Dodge had the closet trading post at seventy-five miles distance. The nearest railroad was in Iowa Falls, which was one hundred and twenty miles. Keep in mind that there were no bridges to cross sloughs. Winters were harsh with blizzards; some animals did not survive. Fowls devoured them. This left nothing for the settlers to eat. Photo credit: Vecteezy.



The First Baptist Church was built in 1867. It was one block off Grand Avenue at the northwest corner of West Fifth Street and First Avenue West. The Spencer City Hall occupies that property now. Photo credit: First Baptist Church.

In 1865, Greenville was already established, then Spencer. The first house in Spencer was built in 1866. The First Baptist Church in Spencer was built the next year in 1867. It is located where the city hall is now. However, the town of Spencer was not incorporated until 1880. Gillett Grove was established in 1867 but was incorporated in 1874. At this time, it was located west of the Little Sioux River. It was named Gillett's Grove until it moved east of the river in 1899. It was then referred to as Gillett Grove, dropping the "s" from Gillett's.

Annieville, south of Spencer, was established in 1871. It was dissolved in 1901. Today, there is no evidence that it ever existed. Again, it was a small town with established businesses. The people, however, choose to live somewhere else, thus closing unsuccessful businesses, and alas, the town. Dickens was the next town, established in 1880. Dickens was east of Spencer.

Everly, formerly known as Clark, was incorporated in 1884. Everly is west of Spencer. Fostoria, north of Spencer, was next to develop in 1890. In October 1899, the town of Langdon, northeast of Spencer, was just established with two lumberyards, a grain elevator, and a hardware store. Rossie, Royal, and Webb were all established in 1900. These towns were located south and southeast of Spencer. They were incorporated later. Cornell was the last Clay County town to be established in 1902. It was located three and a half miles north of Sioux Rapids on highway seventy-one.

Cornell only existed for thirty-four years. The population of Cornell in 1925 was twelve. It increased to twenty-one in 1940. Businesses in Cornell consisted of a bank, general store, fire department, a roller skating rink, a school, a telephone company, grain elevator, post office and a Methodist Church. In 1936, the freight train carrying merchandise for Cornell businesses ceased. The town deteriorated significantly. This naturally led to the demise. The post office and school closed in 1967. Students went to Webb School or Sioux Rapids School. Some of the smaller Iowa towns didn't have the people yet had the businesses to exist. It takes people to bring money into businesses so they can exist. If towns had enough people, they usually became incorporated.

So, it was with Gillett Grove on May 14, 1874. There were so many advantages to being incorporated. The most desired thing is control over the city and utilities. Before incorporation, the old-style streetlights were owned by a power company. A Gillett Grove citizen would collect money from other town folks to pay for these lights! This was natural for Gillett Grove citizens to help each other out. It was at this time that Gillett Grove was located on the west side of the Little Sioux River.

An inadequate water system was another factor to incorporate. With being incorporated, the mayor and city council would make decisions involving the utilities. While incorporation was the answer, the only disadvantages were to the citizens. The county would not be responsible for clearing the streets. This, of course, would refer to snow removal. Gillett Grove would also be responsible for law enforcement. But the people of Gillett Grove would, again, come together. They would fulfill the goals they had to accomplish. In 1899, Gillett Grove moved to the east side of the Little Sioux River. The move would leave behind an abandoned flour and grist mill which was built in 1872. Gillett Grove would now be closer to the railroad tracks which were being laid down. The railroad tracks would bring the Chicago, Milwaukee, Saint Paul and Pacific trains. It was essential to have merchandise delivered to the Gillett Grove businesses. Coal was also delivered as it was used to heat the schools. Some of the early businesses were grocery stores, a bank, cafes, hardware stores, a black-

smith shop, post office, grain elevator, lumber yard, train depot and a school. The lumberyard also carried coal which was needed for burning in steam trains and houses. A creamery was later added after July 1900. These were all necessary for the growth of small towns. Gillett Grove was named after two brothers, George and Isaiah Gillett. Two miles west of Gillett Grove was a red country schoolhouse. This served as a church until one was built in Gillett Grove in 1901. It was called the Methodist Episcopal Church. The red country schoolhouse served as a community center thereafter. The community was prospering quite well. The train contributed to the business of the town.



An abandoned grist mill was left at Gillett Grove when it was located west of the Little Sioux River. That was all that was left of the town aside from a flour mill. The citizens of Gillett Grove made a new start east of the Little Sioux River. They would have access to the train which was beneficial to the town and its citizens. Photo credit: Vecteezy.



The train from Gillett Grove to Spencer made up to ten trips daily. This was six freight and four passenger transports. Photo credit: Vecteezy.

In 1900, it wasn't unusual to ship train carloads of wheat or hay. Livestock was shipped to Chicago for sale. In later years, lumber for houses ordered from the Sears Roebuck catalog was shipped by train. People could ride the train to visit relatives. They could also take the train to Spencer to go shopping. It was an essential mode of transportation in this era.

Looking at Gillett Grove now, it remains incorporated despite the demise of a once-prosperous business district. It once met all the needs of its Danish and German settlers. The landscaped area north of Gillett Grove is hilly, yet so beautiful. Within the town of Gillett Grove, a log house remains at the east end of the residential area, on top of the hill. What looks like a small cemetery is in that area also. Most of the houses and former business buildings are over one hundred years old. Yet the wholesome feeling from its prosperous days is still vibrant in people's memories. Whether it's recollections of certain businesses or people, citizens of Gillett Grove worked together. Some of them had more than one occupation.



Rebecca remembers her Uncle Roy Nielsen working as a janitor for the Gillett Grove School. She fondly remembers his other duties as the town gravedigger.



Citizens kept Gillett Grove going despite other inconveniences such as fire and police departments. This required Gillett Grove to rely on the surrounding towns for these services. Dickens Fire Department and Greenville Fire Departments were utilized by Gillett Grove. Newspapers from surrounding towns were also used.

The fire department in Dickens, Iowa was established in 1890. In 1891, Dickens, Iowa would publish their newspaper, the Dickens Tribune. In 1900, Spencer would publish their first newspaper, the Spencer Herald. They would join the Peterson Patriot, the Webb Record, the Terril Tribune, and the Greenville Times newspapers. The Clay County towns established good advertising practices to bring people into their town. It was essential to patronize businesses to keep a town alive.

In 1898, Spencer boasted of five law firms, nine attorneys, and six physicians/surgeons. Many restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries, laundry and hardware stores existed. Spencer streets also provided water troughs for the horses and animals.



Horses traveling to Gillett Grove while eating forage. Photo credit: Vecteezy.

1900's:

It was in 1900 that the wagon wheels kept turning to Gillett Grove's new location just east of the Little Sioux River. The sound of horse hooves could be heard. They walked on the dirt roads. A small amount of grass lays between wagon wheel tracks. It was a slow trip to the river and even slower across it. The new territory would be near a newly built railroad. The hilly grove possessed many trees. Some trees were cut down in some areas. The wood was used to build homes. Pathways

were made for roads. The streets were named after the railroads that would come through. They were Saint Paul, Milwaukee, and Chicago.



**One of the many first families of Gillett Grove: the Chris Nielsen family.
Chris is upper left. Photo credit: Becky Nielsen Ricketts.**

Three of the Gillett Grove businesses started in 1900 were a creamery, a harness shop and a General Store operated by J.H. Zimmerman. These businesses were possibly located in the present red/brown concrete building. This building was built in 1900. The creamery, harness shop and general store would join the grain elevator which was established in 1899.

M.L. Werts, Sr. operated a general store for two years in Gillett Grove and seven years in Spencer. His father, J.W. Werts was one of the first settlers of Gillett Grove when it was located west of the Little Sioux River. Many people referred to J.W. as "Grand-dad Werts". It is very possible that the first general store in Gillett Grove in 1900 was operated by the Werts family.

In October 1900, W.T. Dubois would open a blacksmith shop in Gillett Grove. He would establish a partnership with Mr. Eckly. This partnership was dissolved in August 1901. Dubois

acquired the shop, and Mr. Eckly received the machinery. Many of the houses still standing in Gillett Grove were built in 1900.

Since the red/brown concrete building was built in 1900, any of the above businesses could have been in this building. Remember, it was not unusual for several businesses to be in one building. Businesses in neighboring towns were advancing. Spencer Light and Power Company would add a one hundred and fifty horsepower engine to their plant in 1900. Other towns were flourishing also.

In 1900, Royal boasted two banks, two grain elevators, two lumberyards and several general stores. One of the banks was the Citizens State Bank. In that same year, W.L. Schutz and Company (Cash Shoe Store) would be established in Spencer, Iowa. In March 1901, Mr. Valentine Hammes would open the Hammes General Store in Rossie, Iowa. It would consist of dry goods, hats, boots, shoes, notions, furnishing goods, etc. They also boasted of trading for butter and eggs. In 1901, the United Methodist Church was built in Gillett Grove. Harmony Church was also constructed. It was outside of Gillett Grove, but in Gillett Grove Township. There were always new business transactions occurring. Mr. R. Moore sold his Gillett Grove goods and business to a party in Mississippi. The Somers Brothers elevator had a new proprietor, Ernie Ingveid, in August 1901. A new business was being built. Gillett Grove was becoming quite a busy town! A two-story hotel is in Gillett Grove. A store and post office were located on the first floor. Upstairs was housing for two families. However, not only were people and businesses busy but also the trains.



Automobiles were introduced in the 1900's. Electricity was also developed. The Wright Brothers had their first airplane flight in 1903. The residential streets in Gillett Grove are wide enough for the first model cars. In some respect, it also leaves a homey feeling to its visitors. Photo credit: Vecteezy.



The Gillett Grove Hotel had rooms upstairs for two families. There was a store and a post office on the main level. It joined the creamery, harness shop, train depot, General store and elevator after 1901. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper



United Methodist Church in Gillett Grove, 1901. It was one of the first buildings built in Gillett Grove, Iowa. Children would take turns ringing the church bell for church. Some houses in Gillett Grove were built in 1900. They are still standing today. The red/brown concrete building was also built in 1900.

Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper.



The Gillett Grove Depot was one of the first buildings built as the train tracks were laid in 1900. The depot is located east of the railroad tracks. This is the side of the building facing south to incoming trains. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper.

The freight train was essential for passenger and freight transportation. Not only did the trains keep busy with hauling cattle to Chicago but also crops. A farmer had sold five hundred bushels of corn for thirty-one cents on a bushel. He brought in one hundred and fifty-five dollars from that sale. He couldn't buy much land with that at all. Land was selling for sixty dollars an acre. Like today, money is essential to keep living.

Communication other than trains is also necessary. Such as it was with the telegraph and newspaper services.

Telegraph services were still available in Gillett Grove. However, in 1903, telegraph operations were reduced to raise the wages of telegraph operators. It wasn't until 1905 that Gillett Grove would have their own telephone company. Newspapers, like Spencer Herald, were another beneficial means of communication at this time. Dickens Tribune newspaper was still being printed.



The Gillett Grove Depot front facing west to the Chicago, Milwaukee, Saint Paul and Pacific railroad tracks. The railroad into Gillett Grove was built in 1900. To the right of the depot, southward, was the lumberyard, elevator and hog buying station. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper



Gillett Grove's first telephone office building (aka Logan house). Ladies who served as Operators were Minnie Jorgensen, Mrs. Green, Arlene Logan, Darlene Stoermer and Thelma Lang. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper

By 1905, Gillett Grove would now have their own telephone company, post office, and grain elevator. These would join other Gillett Grove businesses of a general store, train depot, harness shop, blacksmith, creamery, church and hotel. The creamery was managed by Mr. E.P. Conway. Gillett Grove did not have a library, but the Carnegie Library in Spencer opened on March 6, 1905. The population of Clay County was twelve thousand, seven hundred and eleven.



Gillett Grove elevators are used for storage, 2025. In its active years, many farmers brought grain to the Gillett Grove elevators. This area was once surrounded by the train depot, lumberyard, stockyards and hog buying station.

In August 1906, the Farmers Elevator Company of Gillett Grove was incorporated. The present manager had been with the company since 1900. The Farmers Elevator also joins DeWolff and Wills Elevator. However, it would be in 1907 that the Farmers Elevator Company of Spencer would open. The Farmers Elevator Company purchased the Hunting Elevator in Spencer. The Farmers Elevator would advertise the highest prices paid for grains and hogs. The company also boasted of having the best grades of hard or soft coal.

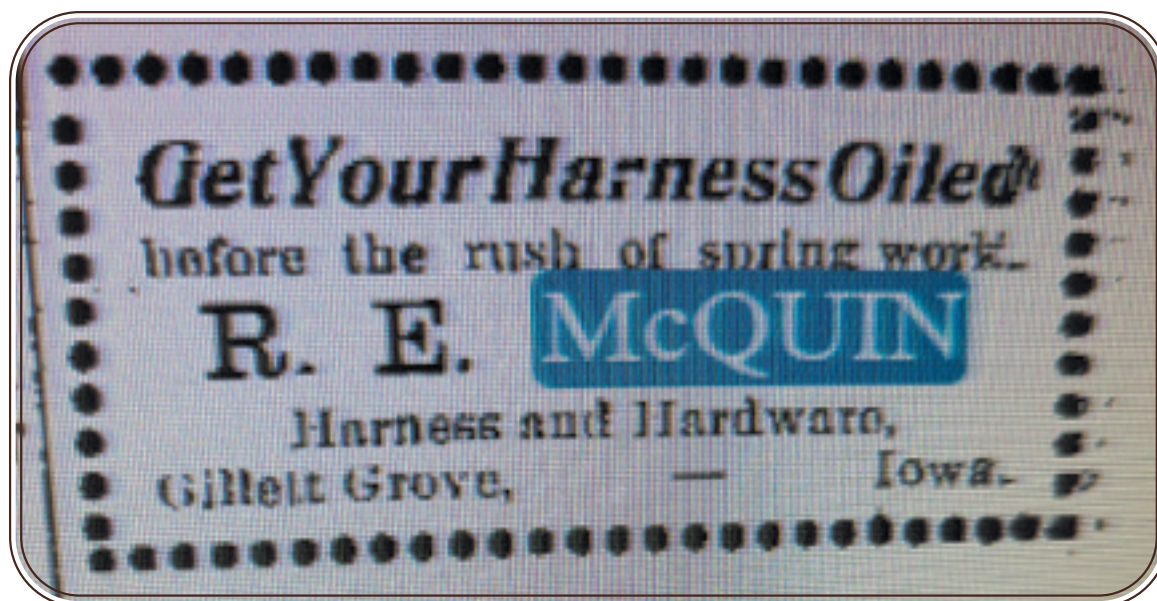


Gillett Grove boasted of a hog buying station. The Farmers Elevator in Gillett Grove advertised the best prices paid for hogs.

In December 1907, a new bank building in Gillett Grove was built. It was called Citizens Bank. A former Webb, Iowa banker, F.A. Lahr would manage it. Rossie was also starting a bank at this time. Langdon and Cornell were the only towns in Clay County without a bank. The Gillett Grove Citizens Bank was incorporated in 1908. The Gillett Grove businesses kept growing despite some setbacks.

In January 1908, the Farmers Elevator in Gillett Grove experienced more activity than usual. A fire started in the engine room which was below the office. It spread not only to the office but to the scale platform and driveway. The Milwaukee railroad was summoned. The train was sent promptly from Albert City. At the fastest speed possible, the goal was to save the elevator. However, the fire was diminished upon the train's arrival. The Farmer's Elevator was saved. This event did not deter any setbacks for Gillett Grove whatsoever.

In 1908, supplies and instructions to build a house could be ordered from the Sears and Roebuck Catalog. The supplies would be delivered by train. Can you imagine how many of the older houses in Gillett Grove came from a catalog? The train was an asset to providing the needs for people and the town. They carried the essential supplies that builders and business owners needed.



McQuin's Hardware operated in Gillett Grove from 1910-1915. Photo credit: Spencer Daily Reporter.

In June 1909, Zimmerman sold lots five and six of block 6 to H. Lahr, who then sold it to the Gillett Grove Citizens Bank. In September 1909, F.A. Lahr (bank cashier) was replaced by W.A. Williams. It was at this time that the bank changed its name to Gillett Grove Savings Bank. It is possible that the new bank location was in the north part of the red/brown concrete building still standing in Gillett Grove. However, some reveal that in the early days, a bank building was located on Main Street in the hardware store. It then relocated to the red/brown concrete building later in 1912. The citizens of Gillett Grove wanted more than the businesses they had. They desired that a drug store was desperately needed. However, other business transactions were occurring. J.H. Zimmerman sold his General Merchandise Store to M. Mills of Whittemore. This store would also buy butter and eggs. Zimmerman had other plans and decided to construct a Hardware store in Gillett Grove. They would join McQuin's Hardware which advertised granite ware. Ray McQuin would open McQuin's Hardware Store. Ray's brother, D.M. McQuin, would help with the opening. Aside from hardware, granite ware, and harnesses, clothes washers would also be for sale. The competition with previous Zimmerman's General Store didn't last too long. Ray McQuin, his wife, son, and daughter, closed their store and moved to Archer, Iowa in 1915. Nonetheless, more stores were being built in Gillett Grove, using cement blocks. The cement blocks could withstand fire better than wood structures. Gillett Grove was finally getting even more established. The railroad tracks in Gillett Grove were located west of the present standing grain elevators. The grain elevators were owned by the Farmers Elevator Company. In 1910, the Farmers Elevator company purchased the Zimmerman lumber and cement yard. So, in the vicinity of the railroad, were the businesses of the grain elevator, lumber yard, train depot and the Walstrom stockyards. All kinds of business activities occurred in Gillett Grove.

A fire consumed some Gillett Grove businesses on Main Street in 1910. McQuin's hardware was one of them. It is unknown if some of them were rebuilt. Perhaps the businesses moved to a

different location. The two hardware stores and a cafe were on the main street. The post office was on the main street also. Perhaps this is when the post office was relocated to the red/brown concrete building. Alger's Store was in the rear of the concrete building. It advertised the post office in the front of the store. It later moved to its current location.

In 1910, diphtheria was spreading around Gillett Grove. Dr. Webb served in the Greenville and Gillett Grove area. His service to the community didn't last too long, but there were other medical doctors not too far away. Dr. Baldwin was in Ruthven. Dr. Hand was in Hartley, and Dr. Voight was in Spencer. Spencer also had Dr. Crandall as a dentist in Spencer. The doctors provided the best services. Communities worked together to accomplish the best professional services.

Such as it was with area telephone company meetings which were held in Spencer. People employed by area telephone companies would meet together. Meetings like this would also be for people in the grocery/merchandise store business. Grocers from various towns held a consolidated meeting in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The train was taken by grocery store owners to Cedar Rapids. Business goals and decisions were made at these meetings.

In September 1912, a new bank building was built. It would not only house a bank but a hardware store. The Gillett Grove Savings Bank would last one year before a bank examiner would close it. The bank had endured some bad loans, a fire, and a bank robbery in that first year. However, after a thorough investigation, the Gillett Grove Savings Bank re-opened. No one lost any money. It was beneficial and convenient to have a bank in the growing town of Gillett Grove. Gillett Grove continued to grow and function as a prosperous town.

In 1913, the red wood building many of us know as the Rendezvous Bar was built. From its structure, it could have occupied many businesses. Anyone could imagine General Store stock within its walls. It wasn't unusual for many businesses to be in the same building.

In September 1913, it was decided by citizens to have a school. (This was also the era that other schools would be built in surrounding counties and towns.) Contractor proposals were submitted for the erection of the school. In May 1914, bricks were delivered to Gillett Grove to begin the construction of the school. This would house kindergarten through twelfth grade. In 1916 and 1918, the school closed for a while due to an outbreak of influenza. The school was like another brick school in the area consisting of two to three stories. It was located on Railway Street. It would be home to the Gillett Grove Giants baseball team. The train depot was located west of the school. The General Store, Hardware Store, and gas station were located close to the Gillett Grove School. The gas station was located where the existing motorcycle repair and gun store is.

Not everything in Gillett Grove was work-related. Box Socials were held in the different townships in Clay County. The Farmers Elevator in Gillett Grove sponsored a picnic and colt show. Church revivals would take place, refreshing tired souls. The Ladies Aid Society of Gillett Grove was busy with certain annual celebrations. Kids would be active in baseball. Some would be players on the Gillett Grove Giants Team. Others might be active in Gillett Grove 4-H, Gillett Grove Farm Bureau or other various clubs offered in Gillett Grove. Movies could be seen in Spencer for ten and fifteen cents. Other activities were happening outside of Spencer and Gillett Grove.

Outside of Gillett Grove, country roads from Webb west to Highway seventy-one were to be graveled. Other areas included to be graveled were Gillett Grove to Greenville and Royal to Highway 71. Horse-drawn delivery wagons traveled on these graveled roads. Not only did they deliver in the rural areas but also in the homey town of Gillett Grove. Dr. Clyde Winter would travel on these roads. He was a physician and surgeon located in Greenville in 1917. Something better was always achieved in the 1910 era. It continued even greater in the majority of the nineteen twenties.

In 1919, E.F. Smith advertised his general store, meat shop, and cream station for sale in Gillett Grove. He advertised that the annual income from this business was seventy-five thousand dollars. He took a similar ad out in the Spencer paper. This advertisement read: Small Butcher Shop for Sale in Small Town near Spencer. It included all buildings, fixtures, an icehouse, and stocks. A sum of four thousand five hundred was needed to operate.

From 1900 to 1919, Gillett Grove boasted of Mills Merchandise Store, a harness shop, a grain elevator and a creamery. Two hardware stores, McQuin and Zimmerman, added to the above businesses. A hotel, post office, telephone company, a bank, a church and blacksmith shop graced the streets of Gillett Grove. Walstrom Stockyards along with a lumber and cement store consolidated all the Gillett Grove businesses.



A lumber and cement store added to the many businesses to Gillett Grove in the 1900's. It was located in the area of the grain elevators, stock yards and hog buying station.

COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS, 1900 –1919 era:

1901: The Bee Hive in Spencer, Iowa was a general store. It would advertise kitchenware, school supplies, wash basins, soaps, flowerpots, pianos, shoes and hosiery. They would boost a bargain basement. The store was managed by J.C. Rasmussen and Company. In 1905, Rasmussen moved the Bee Hive to the Sully building in downtown Spencer.

1912: The town of Gillett Grove did not have any law enforcement. However, Gillett Grove Township did have a constable, L.J. Daughtery. Justice of the Peace was H.C. Brown.

Goat Hill owner Jesse Ditton placed ads in newspaper looking for a wife in 1913. He was forty-one years old. In 1914, Ditton married Rebecca Negley for a short time. In 1926, Negley married Ora Eaton in Missouri.

1919: Admission to the Opera House in Spencer was under fifty cents.



In the Roaring Twenties, there was prosperity in every town. Photo credit: Vecteezy 1920's:

In 1920, the Harmony Center Light and Power Company proposed to build a line from Spencer to Harmony and then to Gillett Grove. This would provide electricity at a cost of \$ 800 per mile. This was beneficial for all town businesses to have.

In 1920, the Cooperative Shipping Association was formed. This was for the farmers who marketed their livestock. The livestock would be delivered to Chicago by train. It would be beneficial not only to Gillett Grove but to other towns. Such as it was with the necessary businesses.

It was a must in every town! In the 1920's there seemed to be a hardware store in every town. Walstrom Hardware is still operating in Gillett Grove. The town of Dickens hosted Z.C. Platt Hardware, which was established in 1919. Leach/Thompson and Ben Bjornstad Hardware were in Spencer. Baker Hardware in Everly was established in 1926. Knight Brothers Hardware was in Langdon. It was essential to have necessary stores in town, so travel was not necessary. Some of these businesses would be advertised in the Webb newspaper and the Spencer Herald newspaper. The Webb newspaper had been operating since 1910. It took a lot of people to keep Gillett Grove operating.

Clarence Hopkins operated the cafe/tavern on Railway Street. The red/brown concrete building is still standing. It was built in 1900. Hopkins could have had his business in this building. He was also the town barber. Hopkins managed a chicken buying and selling operation. D. Gibson operated a trucking firm located south of Alger's Sore on Railway Street, aka M54. Jim Hackett had a blacksmith shop. Shoe/harness repair was done by Wilbur Olmsted. Harry Shaw was the train depot agent. Assisting him with the operations of the train were the rail keepers. These were men that inspected the railroad tracks. They would look for any damage to the tracks which might cause derailment. These men were: John Clayton and John Lindt. This was an important job as the train was very active. Four passenger trains and five to six freight trains ran daily to Spencer and returned to Gillett Grove.

Gillett Grove would also boost a necessary icehouse in the 1920's. Ice was retrieved from a nearby river. In some towns, ice would be delivered from the lakes area by train. This ice was in seven hundred-pound chunks. It was chopped into small two-foot chunks to be used. Life was good in this era, although it didn't prevent crimes from occurring.

It was in June 1921 when the Gillett Grove post office was robbed. Three hundred dollars were taken from the safe. Although the safe was not damaged, it leads one to think this robbery had some assistance. Life in Gillett Grove was not all criminals. Happy and enjoyable times were spent on social club activities.

There were many social clubs in the 1920's in Gillett Grove. The Happy Harmony Girls Club started on June 5, 1923. They were a sewing club located seven miles south east of Spencer. Another sewing club, at this time, was the Springdale Club. Their purpose was to sew items for people and organizations. The Gillett Grove Township Farm Bureau was founded in 1920. Aside from functioning in agricultural activities, they also provided an educational program and lunch.

Many towns also had their own branch of the Red Cross. In June 1922, the Gillett Grove branch of the Red Cross raised money for a community building in Gillett Grove. A committee had been established to accomplish this. Community sales; membership drives, and other ventures

were undertaken to raise two thousand dollars. This community center would not only be for Gillett Grove citizens, but also for the Red Cross. In fact, the Red Cross would lease this building. The community center was beneficial for all meetings and events. Previously, many clubs would meet in people's homes. Now they had the convenience of using the community center. This community center is not the same building now standing in Gillett Grove.

The Riverside Club of Gillett Grove started in September 1923. They had one hundred and twenty-five members and met in Gillett Grove Township. The club was a branch from the Farm Bureau. They dealt with domestic education. The Riverside Club offered classes on apron sewing, meat cutting, rug making, jelly making and menus for threshing times.

Another domestic education club was the Home Circle of the Community Club of Gillett Grove Township. It also began in the 1920's. It had twenty-five members and were in the southwest corner of Gillett Grove Township. The Gillett Grove Gleaners Club had ten members. They offered domestic demonstrations. Education opportunities were always abounding around Gillett Grove.

The 1920's also brought Chautauqua celebrations to Gillett Grove and Spencer. Chautauqua provided education and entertainment to the community. The three-day, three-night event was June 19, 20 and 21. Perhaps a re-enactment of Indian life was depicted. There were always various types of community events occurring. Many of them were educational in other areas.

In December 1923, four Gillett Grove teachers would join seventy-six other teachers in educational programs at Spencer High School. The Spencer High School is at 104 East Fourth Street in Spencer. Teachers from the surrounding towns of Webb, Dickens, Ruthven, Greenville, Milford, Spencer, Royal, and Rossie would participate. Spencer offered not only educational opportunities but also a variety of shopping stores.

In 1923, K and D Bootery were operating in Spencer. They joined Cobbs Bootery. Hanson and Perry Company, which carried shoes, were also in business at this time. This was all advertised in the Spencer News Herald. In September 1923, a newspaper ad was posted regarding the Gillett Grove businesses. It boosted the Gillett Grove Bank and the Hardware Store. The hardware store carried not only hardware but Husky tires and harnesses. It was also known to be a trading post. In 1924, the Birdsall Brothers General Store was in business at Gillett Grove.

Gillett Grove gained another business store in June 1925. H.C. Jones and E.R. Walstrom opened the Jones and Walstrom Mercantile firm. Mr. Jones resigned his position at the L.J. Olney Store in Gillett Grove. Walstrom resigned his position at the Gillett Grove Savings Bank. The Jones and Walstrom Mercantile carried general merchandise, hardware and farm implements. Another business existed in Gillett. It was a gas station located south of the red, wooden building, also known as the Rendezvous in later years. There is little known about this gas station or why it closed. Perhaps Gillett Grove was not big enough to support two gas stations when the other was built in 1927. The nineteen twenties was quite an era to remember.

This was also the age where you could buy fifty cigarettes for ten cents. In 1926, the infamous Babe Ruth hit four homers playing for the Saint Louis Cardinals. It was the Yankee slugger's fourth game in the world series. It was enjoyable to listen to the game on the old radio. It was pleasant to accomplish other goals, however. Life, itself, was pleasant and prosperous in the Roaring Twenties.

People would drive their Model "T" (tin lizzie) automobiles down the winding road to Gillett Grove. Telephone poles and wires embraced the gravel roads. Scenic, rolling green hills lay amongst the Iowa farmlands. Some people could take the graveled back roads into Gillett Grove. These roads would be east of Gillett Grove. Their destination would be the house on the hill, overlooking Gillett Grove. Gillett Grove had such convenience for a small town. The nineteen twenties were such a prosperous time! Money was flowing freely and living was thoroughly enjoyed. One would think that it would last forever.

But in November 1926, the Citizens State Bank in Spencer, Fostoria and Langdon would close. Borrowers became delinquent in repaying loans. This scenario followed in January 1927 when the Everly and Greenville banks also closed. In May 1927, banks in Everly, Spencer and Webb engaged in lawsuits against people who were delinquent in their bank loans.

These lawsuits continued indefinitely throughout the Depression. Dickens and Gillett Grove banks got waivers from depositors, which allowed them to stay open. A Spencer businessman and banker took his own life at this time. This was two years before the October 1929 stock market crash, which would close banks again for up to four years in some areas.

It came with a little legal fight, but it finally came. In 1927, Henry and D.M. Sharff wanted to build a gas station at the intersection of Main and Railway Streets. However, Mr. Hoss had filed a petition prohibiting this location. This was because of certain city regulations. Mr. Hoss had a garage directly across from the would-be gas station. So, in essence, the gas station was located on Chicago Avenue, close to the Main and Railway Street intersection. Another essential business helped the Gillett Grove community in this era. More events occurred before the stock market crash on October 29, 1929.

The Hartman Anderson family from Webb moved to Gillett Grove to take over a store. Anderson would later be in partnership with Art Birdsall in the Birdsall and Anderson Store. This store carried clothing, dry goods, and meat. More business transactions were occurring.

The Gillett Grove Savings Bank was sold to a group of Spencer businessmen in May 1929. This sale was essential to keep the Gillett Grove Bank afloat before the stock market crashed in October 1929. These men held a controlled interest in the Gillett Grove Bank. After this purchase, several Gillett Grove citizens invested 70% to avoid liquidation. More news was waiting for the community.

The Spencer and Gillett Grove community could not believe what they heard. Desperately, they waited for the May 23, 1929, Spencer Daily Reporter to be published. And what a relief it was to read! The Gillett Grove citizens who had invested in the Gillett Grove bank now had total possession of it. The Spencer businessmen sold their interest but kept their initial investment. The local newspaper listed those men to be Wilson Cornwall, L.A. Witter, Joe Stewart, A.E. Anderson and R.M. Cornwall. Wilson Cornwall was forty years old when pursuing this endeavor. Good events existed with unfortunate events. Such as it was later that year.

In July 1929, the Brownell Gas Station was robbed. This gas station was not located in town but eight miles south of Spencer on highway seventy-one. The robbery was done in the daylight hours with only the attendant there. The two men had guns and ordered the attendant to go into a closet. Then, the suspects took the cash within the cash drawer and left without paying for their gas. The joke

was on them when they only retrieved three dollars. Before the hold-up, the manager, M.L. Brownell, took seventy dollars that was previously in the cash drawer. The attendant was able to notify police after the heist. Though 1929 brought difficult times, small blessings were most beneficial.

Such as it was with the Spencer Rendering Works. They now expanded to serve more towns in Clay County. This included the towns of Gillett Grove, Webb, and Terril. For the most part, the nineteen twenties were very good for Gillett Grove businesses before the stock market crash. Even Spencer would boast about its success.

The other banks in Spencer were doing well. However, the Citizens Bank closed in 1926. In October 1929, the government desired to buy the old Citizens Bank building for a post office. Even with this proposal, the building stood empty for one year.

From 1920 to 1929, Gillett Grove would boast of the following added businesses. The Cooperative Shipping Association was established. A cafe was operating on Main Street as well as Hopkins tavern/cafe on Railway Street. A barber, a chicken buying/selling operation, a trucking firm, Alger's Store and an icehouse business now exist in Gillett Grove. Walstrom Hardware joined Zimmerman, as McQuins Hardware was not operating. Jones and Walstrom Mercantile were established as well as a much-needed gas station. Gillett Grove now has over twenty well-established businesses since 1900.



CLAY COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS 1920: In America in the 1920's, women were finally given the right to vote. Technology has advanced to the increase of automobiles, radio, and movies with talk. There was prosperity in the economic world and in some of the smaller Iowa towns.

1921, July: Abbie Gardner Sharp died at seventy-seven years old.

1921, September- The Greenville Bank was robbed. Witnesses took the driver's license plate of robbers and called Spencer Police. The Spencer Shot Gun Squad took a position near all the bridges. The robbers were traced northwest of Gillett Grove. There was a car exchange by the criminals at Fostoria. Even though the banks in the lakes area were notified, the robbers were not caught. A posse of forty members were led on a wild goose chase.

1922, March- Resources at the Savings Bank in Gillett Grove were \$ 103,704.77

1922, October 13- The JC Penney Store opened in Spencer, Iowa. The Woman's Shop was also in business at this time.

1925-The Cornell School established hot lunches for the students. Cornell was located between Greenville and Sioux Rapids on Highway seventy-one. It was also north of highway ten.

May 1924- Attorney Claude W. Baldwin announced his candidacy for Clay County Attorney. He had moved to Spencer in 1923 after completing the Bar. He was previously from Sioux City, Iowa. Baldwin had served previously as an assistant to the Clay County attorney. Baldwin was twenty-seven years old in 1924.





Because of the Great Depression, there were County Homes in which people could stay when they lost their farms. They were provided with shelter and food. Photo credit: Vecteezy.



Kirsten (Kitta) Nielsen on their farm south of Gillett Grove. Kitta was married to Chris Nielsen. Their children were: Roy, Howard, Earl, Marion and Ingrie. The farm remains in the family. Life consisted of hard work, yet enjoyment was relished in Gillett Grove, Iowa: Happy Valley, U.SA. Photo credit: Becky Nielsen Ricketts.

1930's:

The Roaring Twenties would lead to dirty thirties. In October 1930, the Spencer Citizens Bank was finally sold to theatre owner H.N. Davies. He planned to renovate it for commercial use. One month later, the bank's safety boxes were sold. The banks in Terrill and Royal were also sold. In November 1930, Mr. W. Roberts purchased the Citizens National Bank of Royal. All remaining assets were turned over to him.

The stock market crash in October 1929 would be devastating for some smaller towns. It would not only lead to many livestock and farm sales, but also to many suicides. Some people would drown themselves in their own cisterns because of the times. The stock market crash would also lead to many crimes. That was the only way to make money aside from bootlegging. In 1932, the vault at the Gillett Grove Bank was cracked using an acetylene torch. This same year, the exact method was used later at Rossie Bank. Twenty-five hundred dollars were taken from the Gillett Grove Bank and thirteen hundred dollars from the Rossie Bank. The Gillett Grove Bank was located at the southeast intersection of Main and Railway Street. Walstrom Hardware shared that building. It is the red/brown concrete building still standing today. The thefts spread to other towns.

By August 1932, Everly had four robberies. Two thefts occurred at the Home Oil Company, and two other general stores were burglarized. One of them was the Evans and Breitsprecher General Store. All the robberies did not stop the Everly Corn Theatre from showing movies. The admission was ten, fifteen, and twenty-five cents. It also did not halter progress in the Clay County area.

New telephone wires and poles were installed from Greenville to Gillett Grove. They replaced the old wires and poles which were installed over twenty-five years ago. Just one year earlier, 1931, Highways 18 and 71 were paved. This was fourteen years after they were graveled. Progress continued in Clay County as did the robberies.

In 1933, the Hartman Anderson Store was in Gillett Grove. It was robbed of fifty dollars. This occurred after the Gillett Grove bank reopened in March 1933. The Hartman-Anderson Store carried dry goods, meat, and clothing. Thieves had broken the combination lock. People were desperate in this era. January 1933, thieves entered the Gillett Grove Elevator and escaped with some change and stamps. Another theft occurred in 1933 when a man stole blank checks from the Gillett Grove Depot. He was sentenced to fifteen years. While many thefts were occurring, the Gillett Grove Savings Bank had filed a civil case against a citizen for collection of bank payments. This was not the only case filed for delinquency on bank payments. Spencer, Iowa had their share of crimes in 1934. Two brothers confessed to five car thefts and fifteen burglaries. In Everly, Bonnie and Clyde robbed the Everly Bank.

Due to the stock market crash in 1929, all banks had closed. It was March 1933, when banks in Gillett Grove, Spencer, Royal, Webb, Peterson, and Fostoria opened.

It was at this time that the hardware stores in Spencer and Webb existed, but the Gillett Grove's hardware store was not. Many other small towns lost businesses due to the stock crash. They had no finances to reopen. However, some stores in Gillett Grove did make it through the Depression. Some of them were Shell Service Station, Anderson General Store, the Methodist Church, Shoe and

Harness Repair Shop, the Lumber yard and Gillette Grove Depot. The Gillett Grove Bank reopened also. What a relief for the community. A cafe/bar owned by Clarence Hopkins was also operating. The Gillett Grove School continued to exist. All these businesses were beneficial to keep the town going—especially in this Depression Era. The Gillett Grove Shipping Association shipped three train carloads of hogs to Chicago. It was good to note that life did go on in this Depression Era.

Many other Clay County towns were surviving during the Depression. The following is a list of towns with their substantial businesses. These were not the only businesses left amidst the Depression Era. They are the most substantial businesses. They also met the needs of its citizens.

CORNELL:

Miller's Store: Joe Miller operated his General Store which carried General Merchandise, groceries and work clothes. His slogan was: "Where a round dollar gets a square deal."

DICKENS:

Bailey Lumber: Owner C.B. Bailey would advertise the necessity of lumber in his slogan: "You'll need a home as long as you live."

Farmers Elevator Company: J.F. Jones was the proprietor. He advertised grain, coal, flour, and feed.

Derry Garage: R.W. Derry was the proprietor. It was beneficial to a private owner to make it through the Depression.

EVERLY:

Everly Stockyards: Millard Drury was the proprietor. He could be reached at his business phone number 34 or his resident number of 25.

Everly Drug Company: August Staegart managed the drug store.

Momsen Rendering Works: Momsen was not only operated in Everly, but also in Moneta, Iowa in O'Brien County. You could phone them at 65.

GILLETT GROVE:

Walstrom Hardware: Ray Walstrom carried a variety of supplies. He had also operated the stockyards in Gillett Grove. Son-in-law, Ken, managed the hardware store. Ray and Ken were a wonderful asset to Gillett Grove. They were hardworking men with community pride and ambition.

LANGDON:

Bitter Elevator Company. Proprietor F.C. Bitter carried grain, feed, seeds and coal. His slogan was: "Our coal makes for warm friends."

Ginger Hardware: Owner G.L. Ginger supplied hardware, gas and grease in his store. He also advertised payment for cream.

Hopkins Store: Proprietor John Hopkins carried all groceries of fruits, vegetables and meats.

Hopkins Service Station: Manager Roy L. Hopkins operated this gas station. Aside from Gas, tires and tubes, it also offered groceries. Candy bars, cigars, tobacco, and drinks were available.

PETERSON:

Batchelor Auto Company: C.E. Batchelor operated this Ford car dealership which provided sales and service for its vehicles.

ROSSIE:

Rossie Savings Bank: It was so crucial to have a small-town bank re-open after the stock market crash of 1929.

Anderson Elevator: A.L. Anderson managed the elevator. Like most elevators, it carried feed, seeds, grain, and coal.

WEBB:

Lane-Moore Lumber Company: Art Johnson was the proprietor. Like most lumber companies, he carried lumber, paints, and coal.

Citizens State Bank: H.C. Bittinger was the president. C.A. Anderson was the vice president and J.H. Stewart was the cashier. A bank was a necessity in any town.

Birdsall and Anderson Store: Hartman Anderson and Art Birdsall managed this store not only in Webb but also in Gillett Grove. The supplies they carried were dry goods, meat, and clothing.



Who could ever imagine? It was to be revealed: a history no one knew except Mr. George Gillett. Gillett Grove was named after this man and his brother, Isaiah. It was 1933 and Mr. Gillett was in declining health, but this had to be revealed. Gillett revealed to a friend the experience with Chief Inkipaduta and his tribe in 1856. When Inkipaduta and his tribe came to Gillett Grove, Gillett confessed he, along with other settlers, treated them with kindness. The Indians were offered provi-

sions which they accepted. There was no discord among the whites and Indians. However, peace did not exist for too long. It was during 1856 to 1857, that there was a shortage of food for the Indians.



The Depression (stock market crash era) did not affect some clubs in Gillett Grove. The Ladies Aid still hosted their annual Bazaars. The Gillett Grove 4-H Boys, Gillett Grove Farm Bureau and Hopewell clubs continued to function. The Hopewell Club offered education on certain topics of interest to housewives. It was pleasant for people to keep these clubs going. The Gillett Grove School and sports continued to function. Plays were given at Gillett Grove School. These were open to the public. In 1933, the 4-H Poultry Club for Boys and Girls was organized. The following year, the Chic-A-Dee Poultry Club of Gillett Grove Township was formed. Life was going well amidst some activities.

In 1934, the Anderson General Store expanded to the towns of Ayrshire and Dickens. It was still operating in Gillett Grove. Patrons could call dialing 15. In March 1935, the Gillett Grove branch of this store was burglarized. Entrance was gained by smashing a padlock on the back door. Over two thousand pounds of sacked sugar (cane and beet) were taken in ten- and twenty-five-pound bags. Some of those bags were within another bag weighing one hundred pounds. This robbery would, therefore, take more than two men. A truck was parked in the back to load the stolen merchandise. While no one had seen the get-away truck, Sheriff Fred E. Erickson stated that some progress had been made. More progress was being made in Gillett Grove.

In the 1930's, the Gillett Grove Shipping Association was formed. This replaced the Cooperative Shipping Association, which was established in 1920. The president was C.D. Bernard; Treasure, Walter Stewart and the buyer was Ray Walstrom. Ray Walstrom also owned the stockyards. This Association was formed by farmers and producers to ensure market stability and to secure better prices. The Gillett Grove Shipping Association would boost two hundred and fifty-three carloads of cattle shipped that year. It was always pleasant to hear good news. Also, in the mid-nineteen thirties to nineteen forty, Leo and Wanda Stoermer operated the gas station in Gillett Grove. Such as it was with other Gillett Grove businesses

In 1935, Mary Dischler was still operating her Main Street Cafe. George Dischler would help his twenty-three-year-old wife in the cafe. He was thirty-one years old at this time.



The home-town coziness you see here is what was felt in Mary's Main Street Café. No one is a stranger in a small town like Gillett Grove. People's lives were enriched by the socialization of small-town, Gillett Grove living. Happy Valley, U.S.A. Photo credit: Vecteezy

However, not everything is in our control. The Gillett Grove School closed for four weeks because of the blizzard of 1936. The blizzard of 1936 also halted transportation out of Gillett Grove. Snow on the railroad tracks had to be cleared by hand. It was crucial to deliver necessary items to towns. Two carloads of coal arrived in Gillett Grove. This was the only train in ten days. Schools within the area closed for four weeks. In an emergency, Dr. E.A. Rust from Webb, Iowa took the train to Gillett Grove to attend to his patient. Despite the weather, priorities such as necessities came first.

Such as it was with the rural farmers of Gillett Grove. Horse and sleigh were utilized after blizzard conditions. Farmers would bring cream and eggs into Gillett for exchange of groceries. This was done at the Anderson Store. But the snow would melt, and better days were ahead. Such as it was for the town of Gillett Grove.

In 1938, the school was able to purchase a bus. At that time, school bus drivers were Harold Vanderhoff, Milbert Kron, Ernie Stoermer and Gale Alger. These people were beneficial to keep the school going. Gale Alger also operated Alger's Store. It took people to keep the town of Gillett Grove existing. Some of those people would have businesses in other towns. Such as it was with Mr. Hartman Anderson who operated the Anderson Store in Gillett Grove. In January 1938, Anderson and Fred Hedgegaard purchased the Briarsdale Store in Webb, Iowa. They installed meat lockers. More business ventures were occurring for Hartman Anderson. In May 1941, Mrs. Lillie Hadley of

Hadley Grocery in Webb sold her stock to Anderson. Anderson could also boast of his stores not only in Ayrshire, Gillett Grove and Dickens but also in Webb.

Gillett Grove would gain another business. Madge Birchard would open her beauty shop in latter 1938. She would operate her salon until 1942. While the town of Gillett Grove had other establishments, it was always beneficial to have a salon in town.



Cars are parked in front of an old hardware store. In 1912, the bank was located in this hardware store. Madge Birchard's Beauty Shop is on the left. These businesses were located on Main Street in Gillett Grove. The café was located to the right of the hardware store. Perhaps, they were located where the Gillett Grove—Ayrshire Telephone Company building is now. That was the only flat, level area on Main Street to occupy a building. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper.



This is the south side of Gillett Grove Main Street looking east up the hill. The man is standing in front of the hardware store. This building also housed a bank and a post office. The street heading right goes to Madge Birchard's Beauty Shop as you can see on the previous page. Mary's Café was to the right of the hardware store. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper.



Gillett Grove's Biggest Little Fair had fun for everyone! Photo credit: Vecteezy.

Such as it was in July 1939. Gillett Grove celebrates the World's Biggest Little Fair! The two-day celebration would attract many people from surrounding communities. Adults and kids would enjoy many games. Different rides, shows and concessions occupied the city of Gillett Grove. Women's and men's boxing would take place. Women's boxing occurred in the back room of the Main Street cafe. Dancing, refreshments, and adult entertainment were also on the agenda. Music would be provided by Miss Cecilia and the Little Giants band from Mason City, Iowa. A Spencer, Iowa band, the Little German Tooters, participated in this celebration. The Hoochie Coochie girls would provide some risqué entertainment. Bowery dances were performed. I can see the school playground large enough to provide some of these activities. Other activities would be in the other areas of Gillett Grove. The afternoon was filled with baseball games with Garfield and Gillett Grove. Gillett Groves' hospitality was extended to the Spencer, Iowa Boosters Club of fifty to sixty members. What an event to behold! The World's Biggest Little Fair began in Gillett Grove as far back as 1932.

From 1930 to 1939, some of the Gillett Grove businesses suffered. This was because of the October 29, 1929, stock market crash. However, the Gillett Grove Shipping Association replaced the Cooperative Shipping Association with name only. The post office, school, bank, grain elevator, hardware store and church remained in Gillett Grove. The gas station, Alger's Store, lumberyard, stockyards, depot and Main Street Cafe also existed. Marge Birchard opened her Beauty Salon

on Main Street. The Hartman Anderson Store expanded to the towns of Ayrshire and Dickens. Fourteen businesses existed in Gillett Grove in the 1930's era.

CLAY COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS 1930's:

The 1930 census listed Goat Hill owner Jesse Ditton, 58, and Alma, 24, living at Goat Hill. It is unsure if Alma was his wife or housekeeper.

October 1930: H.N. Davies, owner of the Solon Theatre in Spencer, purchased the Citizens' National Bank building. It is estimated that the building sold between twenty-five and thirty thousand dollars. Davies plans to renovate it and lease it. Davies had been proprietor of the Solon Theatre for over five years

July 1931—The Rexall Drug in Spencer was open at its temporary quarters at East Fourth Street and Grand Avenue. This was because of the Spencer fire which occurred on June 27, 1931.

While some people in Spencer lived in "shanty towns" in the depression, the population of Gillett Grove grew. Homeless people in Gillett Grove would stay in empty railroad cars.

Government provisions of flour, sugar, and fruit were delivered to the Anderson General Merchandise Store. It was there that donations would be dispersed to families, depending on the size.

In 1933, Jesse Ditton was missing a gun and ax from his home on Goat Hill. Ditton filed a complaint. A charge of petit larceny and grand theft was charged against Mr. L. Austin of Spencer. Austin spent 30 days in jail. Sheriff Harry Wilsey returned both items to Ditton.

August 1933—Coast to Coast in Spencer held their Grand Opening. They were located next to J.C. Penney. Carl Knowks was the owner.

1935: The Spencer Herald was delivered to twenty-three towns in O'Brien, Clay and Dickinson counties. They would then be delivered by carriers to homes.

1938: Driscoll Candy Shop was in the Tangney Hotel in Spencer, Iowa.

1938: Interstate Transit Lines Bus Schedules at the Tangney Hotel Bus Stop existed. Routes are to Fairmont, Minnesota and Omaha, Nebraska. In Iowa, the routes consisted of Garner, Algona, and Mason City.

1938: A subscription to the Spencer Times newspaper was two dollars a year. The loaf of bread was nine cents. A gallon of milk was fifty cents, and a dozen eggs were eighteen cents. A new house would cost thirty-nine hundred dollars. The annual average salary was seventeen hundred dollars.



The 1940's were the War Years. Men fought for our country. People who lived through the Great Depression were called "The Greatest Generation".

Photo credit: Vecteezy

Though it was a different era, some things didn't change. One of them was farm sales. This included livestock, machinery, and land. A Community Days Sale was held by the Gillett Grove Bank. It was a consignment auction. The auctioneer was none other than Filmore Stoermer. This was a stressful time for anyone who had to endure selling their property. However, the release of stress can be helped by being involved in social events. Community clubs and organizations continued to function. Some Gillett Grove businesses continued to operate.

The lumber yard in Gillett Grove made it through the Depression. Dorey Sharff was the proprietor. The Bailey Lumber yard in Dickens also survived the stock market crash. However, the Cornell Elevator and Lumber Company in Cornell Iowa was dissolved by its stockholders on November 15, 1941. Mr. Hartman Anderson was able to keep all his stores in Gillett Grove, Dickens, Webb, and Ayrshire. In the 1940's, he would advertise a fifty-pound sack of flour for two dollars and fifty-nine cents. His son, Carlos, would help in the grocery store. Carlos was in his twenties at this time. Hartman Anderson had five other kids who could help him in his business. It was great to have someone to depend on. But not everyone or everything is dependable.

It wasn't expected, but it happened. And oh, what a surprise it was! On January 7, 1940, a silo located next to the Quaker Oats elevator in Gillett Grove collapsed at 5:30 p.m. It held twelve thousand bushels of corn. The cause of the destruction was unknown. The silo was only twelve years old. Other instances beyond anyone's control happened also.

It was the lowest ever in five years! Ninety-two pupils were enrolled in the Lake Center School in 1940. This was not good news. The Lake Center School is located between Terril, Iowa and Dickens, Iowa. However, better news was in Spencer, Iowa.

Waiting, waiting, and waiting...for a permit to build a radio station in Spencer. It would be a 2500-watt station with a radius of fifty to seventy-five miles. While the transmitter will be located north of Spencer at the intersections of highway eighteen and seventy-one. The office and studio would be in the Hotel Tangney on Grand Avenue. This was in February 1941. More exciting news was for Spencer!

Let's fly with this idea! Spencer City Council will act on a fifteen-thousand-dollar bond. This is to be voted for the completion of an airport north of Spencer. Not only was the radio station an asset to Spencer, but an airport would be even more beneficial! All aspects of communication were being established in Spencer! Transportation had a part in communication.

And what would Spencer be without car dealerships? A 1937 Chevy four-door Sedan could be purchased for three hundred and forty-five dollars. A 1939 Plymouth two-door Sedan could be obtained for four hundred and eighty-five dollars. Loans could be through any of the Clay County Banks. Life seemed to be going well, especially for the Gillett Grove Cagers girls' basketball. In February 1939, they defeated Garfield 40-20. However, the good news is always shared with the bad.

December 7, 1941, brought the worst news ever. It was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This action brought the United States into World War Two. This unpleasant news was the talk in every town. The latest news scoop was always heard at Mary Dischler's Cafe in Gillett Grove. Perhaps the talk would be of the girls' basketball tournament that would be held at the Gillett Grove School in 1941. Or the fact that the Gillett Grove girls' basketball beat Lake Center 57-30 in 1942. No one will forget Cornell and Gillett Grove girls' basketball battling it out in the State Finals in March 1942. Friends and family would meet here for more than just coffee. Mary Discher's Cafe was located on the graveled Main Street just off Railway Street. It was convenient for people passing through Gillett Grove to stop for lunch. They also could patronize other businesses in this town.

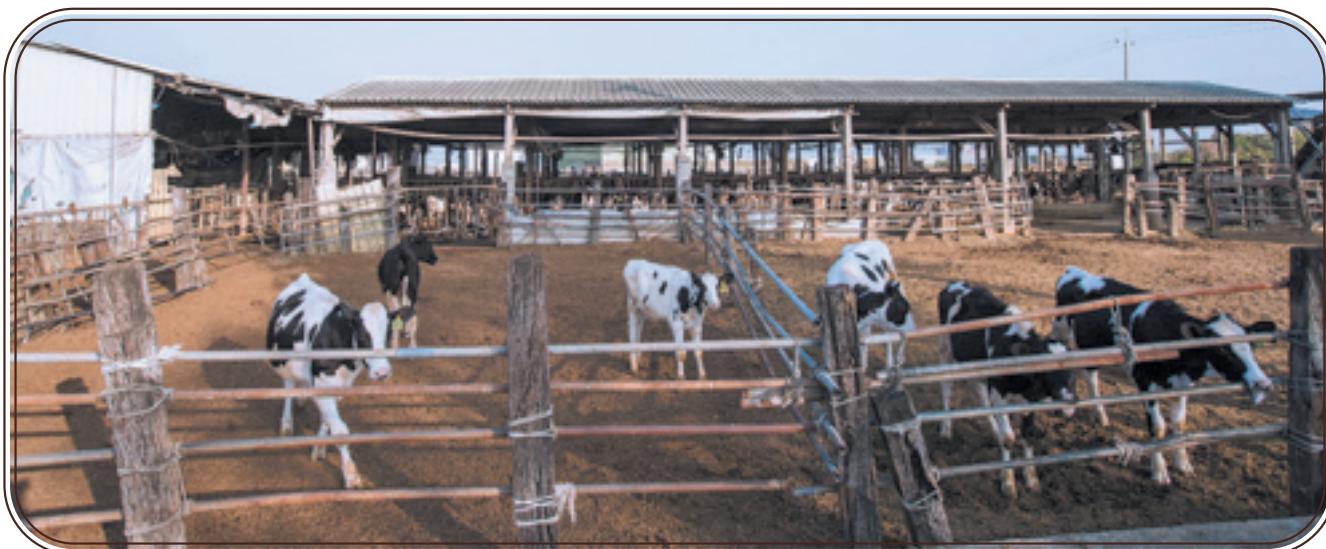
A hardware store was also located near the cafe on Main Street. It joined many other businesses on Railway Street, adjacent to Main Street. Railway Street businesses included a bank, Hartman Anderson grocery store, lumberyard, gas station, post office, depot and school. Hopkins Produce would also join these businesses. C.E. Hopkins was the proprietor. The Hartman Anderson grocery Store would later become Alger's Store. These establishments met the needs of Gillett Grove citizens and local farmers. It was a quaint town nestled in the rolling hills of Iowa. Completing this fact was the arrival of the Saint Paul and Milwaukee train.



Burt entered the Gillett Grove Hardware store on Main Street. He had to purchase some building nails, nuts, and bolts. His next stop was the lumber yard. He frequented these establishments in his line of business. He was the best construction/handyman in Gillett Grove. It's always good to know such a guy and beneficial to be located close.



It was something to boast about—right here in Gillett Grove! The Quaker Oats Company was one of Clay County's leading feed and grain dealers. The warehouse and elevator company had a storage capacity for seventy-five thousand bushels of grain. The warehouse stored many carloads of flour and feed. The Quaker Oats Company was responsible for the buying and selling of grain and flax. They also sell over forty carloads of Ful-O-Pep feeds for poultry and livestock. Flour and soybean meals are handled by carload lots. This Gillett Grove firm was established in 1902. In 1942, A. Evans was the manager. Evans was successful in continuing the Quaker Oats legacy. The Quaker Oats Company had many locations, even in Sioux Rapids and Emmetsburg. Evans ancestors were the pioneer families of Gillett Grove. And there is still more to brag about in Gillett Grove, Iowa!



Cattle in the stockyards waiting to be loaded onto the train. Photo credit: Vecteezy.

1942 also boasted of the Shipping Association in Gillett Grove. It had been operating since 1920. The Gillett Grove industry was responsible for hauling livestock to the city of Chicago. It was the largest shipping point for livestock between Spirit Lake and Des Moines. The largest—can you fathom that? The Saint Paul/Milwaukee railroad operated in this vicinity.

It blew and blew, echoing through the town of Gillett Grove. The train whistle permeated nearby Iowa farms. Farm animals were alert to the loud sound. The Saint Paul/Milwaukee train carried lumber for the lumberyard, fresh peaches for the Hartman Anderson Store and supplies for the Gillett Grove Cafe. It also carried passengers. Ethel and Andy would ride the train to Gillett Grove

to visit Ethel's sister, Irene. The train ride was pleasurable across the Iowa flatland. It sure saved wear and tears on the old car. Charley and Buck relaxed at the Gillett Grove Depot. It was fun to see the people get off the train. Sometimes, Charley and Buck would help with the freight transfer. More activity occurred outside of Gillett Grove. The paving of concrete took place on Highway seventy-one south of Spencer. It was between Spencer and Royal, Iowa. This was the same route that the stagecoaches took to Spencer decades earlier. It was good to see progress within Clay County.

Carlo Anderson, son of Hartman Anderson, owned and operated a grocery store in Everly, Iowa. As a young child, Carlo helped his dad in his own Gillett Grove grocery store. But now, this Everly grocery store was all his after 1943. With Carlo's experience, he would be successful for sure! Other interesting facts occurred after 1943.

Gillett Grove's basketball team showed their true skills in many of their games. The small-town girls team nipped Lake Center 19-18. The boys would defeat Ruthven 16-9 in 1944. While Gillett Grove's basketball teams may have lost a few, they sure gave it their best shot! What is interesting is that the small towns in Clay County sure had a mighty team. This led to many victories.

Victory and advancement go hand in hand. Wahlstrom Hardware is now advertising gas and electric milk machines in 1944. These were beneficial for the many farmers in Clay County. But while the milk machines were successful in selling, other events were successful also.

It was in the works and finally was accomplished. On August 14, 1945, the Farmers Trust and Savings Bank in Spencer purchased the Gillett Grove Savings Bank. The Farmers Trust and Savings Bank was located on the corner of Main Street and West Fourth Street in Spencer. The bank managers at Spencer requested that Doris Salton oversee the Gillett Grove Bank. Doris was employed at the Spencer location. She was nineteen years old at this time. Doris Salton was a 1943 graduate of the Gillett Grove School. Salton oversaw the bank's money. Doris Salton would utilize the train after bank hours. At the end of the day, she would take the train from Gillett Grove to Spencer to deposit money into the main branch bank in Spencer. But that's not all she took! Doris carried a gun at all times. When she was in the Gillett Grove Bank, a gun was close by. She kept a gun in her purse while on the train. It was the responsible action to do. It was efficient to be ready for any kind of surprise. More interesting news waited for not only Gillett Grove but for the United States.

A surprise is just what occurred in 1945. The Methodist Church bell in Gillett Grove rang continuously. It was to notify people of the end of World War Two. What a wonderful time of celebration. Another celebration occurred when Fay and Annabelle Stoermer purchased the grocery store from Mr. Hartman Anderson in 1946. There were many grocery stores within the surrounding towns.

In 1947, the towns of Royal and Rossie had "Ben Griffiths Grocery Store". Droessler's Grocery was in Greenville; A.E. Jensen Grocery was in Terrill; and Ruthven had two grocery stores: Hanna Station and Hastings Grocery.

The number of Spencer's grocery stores decreased from 1938. Thirteen grocery stores were in Spencer in 1938. In 1947, there were only six of them. They were Van's Grocery, Krile's Jack Sprat, Lucky Market, Olins Grocery, Stan's Grocery and the Red Circle Grocery. The Red Circle Grocery was located on Fourth Avenue west. It was still the era of neighborhood grocery stores.

In 1947, Fay Stoermer was given cigarette permits for his store in Gillett Grove. The new manager of the Woodcliff in Spencer was also given a cigarette permit. These permits provided the opportunity for more sales in both establishments. Sales of any kind could be beneficial.

Such as it was with the sale of Fay Stoermer's Standard Service Gas Station. This station was in Spencer, Iowa, just north of the Hotel Tangney. It was on Grand Avenue and east Railway (seventh) Street.

The summer of 1948 brought much road construction around Gillett Grove. A new black-top from Gillett Grove to Dickens was laid. This is currently M-54. Osterman Construction from Ocheyedan, Iowa oversaw this road construction. A cafe, "Ye Old Nose Bag" was established to serve construction workers. Carlo, along with his sister, Margurite Andersen, operated this cafe. While it was beneficial during its time, the cafe ceased operations after the road construction was completed. Carlo and Margurite were the children of Mr. and Mrs. Hartman Anderson who had the merchandise store. Two years previous, Carlos had a grocery store in Everly, Iowa. There was always plenty of activity in people's lives.

Such as it was with Gillett Grove's Happy Helpers 4-H Club in 1947. They gathered at the Dairy Cattle Congress in Waterloo, Iowa. The girls club represented Clay County and offered a demonstration in chair refinishing. The Gillett Grove Clipper Club was a part of this adventure. For it was this organization that supported the local 4-H clubs. It was always good to show some kind of progress in anything.

From 1940 to 1949, Gillett Grove would continue to offer the necessities to its citizens. The bank, post office, gas station, school, church and hardware store were operating successfully. The Hartman Anderson Store and Hopkins Produce Store provide groceries. The depot and train continued for the next twenty years as well as the grain elevator. This is substantially less than the over twenty businesses Gillett Grove had twenty years ago. However, the 1929 stock market crash was a drastic deterrent to progress.



The front and side view of the standing concrete building. The front is on the left side. This building was utilized for many businesses. In the 1940's, the north end was the Gillett Grove Bank which Doris Salton managed. When she closed for the day, she took the train to the main branch in Spencer to make the daily deposits. The bank area later became the post office. A grocery store, Alger's, was in the back of the building. Later, the building became a bar. Gillett Grove, at that time, also had the Rendezvous Bar. The Rendezvous Bar/Restaurant is located south of this bar. Both buildings remain there today. They radiate the history that once existed.

GILLETT GROVE'S MINI MALL



This building housed a bank, a post office a hardware store and Alger's Store. Ben remembers Alger's Store located in the back half of this building. The front left was a bank and then the post office. When obtaining mail, the former bank vault was left to admire in the post office area. A hardware store was located on the right side. Ben remembers a model airplane hanging in an inside window near the hardware store. It was quite the shopping mall for its era.

COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS, 1940:

The 1940 census revealed that Jesse Ditton was still living on Goat Hill. In 1949, the Sioux City Journal ran an ad for Ditton. It stated that Ditton could not live alone. He would like someone who needs a home for a companion. He was sixty-seven at this time.

1940: Spencer could now boost two Texaco Gas Stations (Williams Oil Company) located in the north and south areas of Spencer, Iowa.

1940-Ruthven had a Rendezvous Bar located on Highway 18. It served food and alcohol. C. Phillips was the proprietor. Phone 156.

1940: Attorney Claude Baldwin, 43, was in business with attorney Gilbert James.

1940: Tanker Service was at the corner of Second Avenue East and Railway Street in Spencer. In later years, it was known as Cleber's Station. Tanker Station would sell Ethyl gas at ninety-five cents for six gallons in 1940.

1941: Jay Hammer was owner of Hammers Cafe in Spencer. He had expanded the Hammers Cafe building. The cafe advertised serving Carroll's Bakery bread. Hammer's Cafe had been established in 1931.

1941: An issue of the Spencer Daily Reporter costs five cents a copy.

January 1942: The Hotel Tangney in Spencer advertised that living at the hotel would cost fifteen dollars a month.

1945: Filmore Stoermer was an auctioneer serving the Webb and Gillett Grove areas. You could reach him by calling 52-F6.

1946: Fay Stoermer not only owned the general store in Gillett Grove but also owned the Standard Service Station in Spencer, Iowa in April 1946. The Station was located at 703 Grand, north of the Tangney Hotel.

1949- Hartman and Anna Anderson's daughter, Jeanette, married Jack on May 1, 1949. In 1962, Jack would start his auction and real estate business in Spencer, Iowa.

1949: The Farmers Co-op Elevator at seven fourteen fourth Avenue west, Spencer, was renovated. The updated feed annex installed labor-saving method to grind and/or crush corn, mix feed and custom grinding.



The Nifty Fifties was called the Golden Age. The music was fun and innocent. Respect and morals existed in society. You could hitch a ride with a stranger and be safe. There was no identity theft, child abductions or school shootings. It was an enjoyable era to live. Photo credit: Vecteezy

1950's:

He thirsted to travel the old country roads that would take him home to Gillett Grove. Robert was on furlough from the Army. He hitchhiked his way home to Gillett Grove to surprise his parents. The memories of growing up in Gillett Grove put a smile on his face. Walking the tightrope at the Gillett Grove Fair was courageous for his age, Robert recalls. And who could forget the sweet looks he made to Patsy in math class. Patronizing the many businesses, especially with his dad, were dearly remembered. They all brought a smile to his face. Now, he longed to walk the graveled streets to surprise his parents. He admired this less active town. But for some reason, that doesn't matter. It's those precious memories that are remembered that prevail in his mind. And it was right here—in Gillett Grove—Happy Valley, U.S.A. The town had everything!



Small towns could be beneficial for each other. Webb, Iowa, was only five miles from Gillett Grove. Dickens was also a short distance not only from Gillett Grove but also Spencer. While they all had businesses, it was also important to establish a decent population. When the census is low, stores lose the patronage to keep their businesses operating. The town of Gillett Grove continued to do well. It was the era where relatives would help their family in their Gillett Grove business.

Ken joins his father-in-law's business, Walstrom Stockyards. Ken also managed Walstrom Hardware, located on Main Street in Gillett Grove. He was also involved in the radio and television repair business. One family established two businesses that were beneficial to Gillett Grove.

It was in 1950 that Glenora (now Webb) was renamed Webb. The town boasted four grocery stores, three gas stations, and two creameries. Dickens also had a variety of businesses. In 1950, the population of Clay County was seven thousand two hundred and fifty-nine. The Gillett Grove Township population was seven hundred and sixty-two.

Other townships, other than Gillett Grove, in Clay County included: Waterford, Summit, Meadow, Lake, Lone Tree, Riverton, Sioux, Freeman, Clay, Lincoln, Logan, Peterson, Douglas, Headland and Garfield.

Other events occurred during the Korean War on June 25, 1950. The King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley, made his debut in many homes.

It was in 1952 that the Lake Center School (aka: Lake Township School) would have their last graduating class. Lake Township is in the northeast area of Clay County. Many changes were always occurring no matter where you were.

So, it was with the Spencer Post Office. Who wants your two cents? The Spencer Post Office! On January 1, 1952, postcard rates were raised from one penny to two cents. That wasn't the only talk in Clay County.

The pride of Dickens, Wild Bill Gerdes, was a professional boxer! The boys at the gas station would talk about Wild Bill's early boxing days. He would be boxing during the World's Largest Little Fair at Gillett Grove. Wild Bill's successes were the talk of the town in the cafe, the post office, and Alger's Store. Any place there were people, they reminisced of Wild Bill's earlier days. His successes were celebrated by the people who knew him.

From 1950 to 1959, Gillett Grove would still have her post office, school, gas station, church, bank, train depot, Walstrom Hardware and Walstrom Stockyards. The Scharff family continued to own the lumberyard. It is not known if the former Hartman Anderson Store purchased in 1946 was still operating. Alger's Grocery Store was a beneficial asset to Gillett Grove. Many citizens remember walking on the wooden floors of Alger's Store. The aroma of the fresh meat counter permeated their nostrils. Kids recollect the sight and smell of assorted treats. The post office was also located in Alger's Grocery Store. Alger's Store carried not only groceries but precious memories to its patrons. Even in this era, Gillett Grove could be distinguished as Happy Valley, U.S.A.

CLAY COUNTY REFLECTIONS, 1950:

1953: Attorneys Earl Hoover and Claude Baldwin had their offices above the present Steffen Furniture. Jennie B. Quinn was a secretary for Claude Baldwin. Lorraine Treimer was a secretary for Earl Hoover. In later years, Baldwin retired, and the office was moved to 10 West 5th Street, Spencer. Quinn and Treimer relocated with Hoover. Quinn became abstractor of Clay County in Hoover's office. Quinn's office was behind the glass walls. On a glass door were the words "Clay County Abstract Company". They were etched in green and gold overcast lettering. Treimer continued her career in the legal field for a total of forty-three years.

The Goat Hill house was featured in the September 9-26, 1954, edition of the Des Moines Register. It was in this era that Jesse Ditton moved to the county home west of Spencer, Iowa. He was eighty-two years old in 1954.

Throughout the decades, the memory echoed dearly. Unsure of the year, a man walked into the Gillett Grove hardware store. He purchased a rope. Later, he hung himself in a grainary. It was unsure why, yet the sad memory is retained by some former citizens.



The Apollo 11 launch was one of many events in the 1960's. Vietnam and the Beatles Band also prevailed. Photo credit: Vecteezy.

1960's:

Not everything lasts forever. Such as it was with the Quaker Oats Elevator. At eleven p.m. on July 7, 1961, there was a fire at the elevator. It was discovered when school board members had adjourned from a meeting. Ken, a school board member, called in the alarm. Fire departments from six communities responded. Fire trucks came from Spencer, Ayrshire, Webb, Sioux Rapids, Ruthven and Laurens. The fire could be seen as far away as Spencer and even Cherokee. The elevator and annex were not saved. However, the Gillett Grove—Greenville firemen were successful in preventing the flames from spreading to the lumberyard. The lumber yard was located north of the elevator. The Walstrom Stockyards were to the south of the elevator. The fire was totally distinguished at 2:00 a.m. The Quaker Oats elevator was rebuilt in 1900 due to a previous fire. The annex was built in 1935. This did not prevent future transactions within Gillett Grove.



Bob Berger's Sinclair gas station. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper

Bob Berger purchased the Sinclair gas station at 426 Railway Street in 1963. It was purchased from his relative, Roy Berger. Roy Berger would deliver gas to the surrounding farms. The farmer's fuel tank was always full when Roy was in charge. However, that was not the only thing that was filled up! The gas station was full of men and boys who would gather for coffee, smokes, the latest gossip and tire changes. Sometimes, they'd even purchased fuel!

To Gillett Grove residents, it was also known as Bergers Champlin Station. Travelers going through Gillett Grove could not only stop getting gas but also groceries. Bob operated this gas station for sixteen years. Berger was beneficial to Gillett Grove in many other aspects. Gillett Grove was fortunate to have fine men like Bob and Roy Berger!

Bergers Gas Station was not the only gas station in Gillett Grove. Another gas station existed south of the red wood building (formerly Rendezvous). Some of the remains of it are present. Former Gillett Grove School alumni remember such a business.



Wendell was a child in the 1930's, living in Gillett Grove. In his adult years, he lived in Spencer, Iowa. His heart, however, never left a specific Gillett Grove business. For it was at Burger's Gas Station that he purchased gas for his car! He knew that if he didn't support his hometown small business, that it would surely close. It was always good for Wendell to see his old stomping grounds in Gillett Grove. Moreover, it was great to see those good guys: Bob and Roy Berger!



Gillett Grove remained prosperous in this era, much like any small northwest Iowa town. Some people outside of Gillett Grove would even do their banking in this quaint town. More activities were occurring in Gillett Grove. It was in this era that many train tracks were removed. Trains that once hauled cattle and produce were now replaced with semi-trucks. Business owners that once received their store items by train now had to receive them by truck. Another transportation method could also cut into their business profits. It is a fact that once train transportation is removed from a town, it is the beginning of the end of town businesses. Once town businesses are closed, people move away, and the town slowly dies. It's hard to see a town die let alone any other way of life. Many residents of Gillett Grove, after being married, moved away from the area. There were many towns with better business and job opportunities than Gillett Grove.



Country Schools like this one closed in the nineteen sixties. Students were bussed to schools in surrounding towns like Gillett Grove, Iowa. Photo credit: Vecteezy.

It was the beginning of this era that many country schools closed. The Lake Township School between Ruthven and Terril closed in 1967. Students were then bussed to schools located in surrounding towns. The wooden structured country school opened in 1903. It was demolished in 2017. There were no country schools existing anymore. The rural school students were transferred into town schools, which also offered a better curriculum.

The Gillett Grove School had a lot to offer. There were eight junior high teachers and fourteen high school teachers. The kindergarten through sixth grade had a total of eight teachers. It took three cooks to feed these students and their teachers. Mrs. Barnard, Mrs. Daily, and Mrs. Smith worked diligently preparing nutritious meals. With the students' active schedules, the meals were much appreciated.

Gillett Grove boasted about its curriculum. Many students participated in a variety of activities. They were pop concerts, skating parties, variety shows and pep rallies. The FFA offered more education and fun. There were the usual Boys and Girls Glee Clubs, Cadet Choir and mixed chorus. Sports consisted of track, baseball, softball, Girls and boys' basketball and cheerleading. Participation in these activities made school more enjoyable. The school also had certain regulations students had to follow, especially in junior and senior high. Junior and Senior high girls were expected to wear

skirts to the knee and blouses worn inside the skirts. The boys were expected to wear button-down shirts, tucked in, with the collar down. No tight or short pants were allowed. The trousers' length had to be not above two inches from the ankle. No t-shirts and shoes or boots with steel cleats were allowed. Both the girls and boys had to have hairstyles that did not attract attention. This meant no Beatle cuts or bangs for the boys. This was the 1960's era when appropriate attire was respected.

Cleaning the school daily were janitors Howard Stoermer and Roy Nielsen. The school rooms and hallways were cleaned immaculate, the wastebaskets emptied daily, and the exterior was presented well to the public. It was all in a day's work for these faithful janitors.

In 1964, the South Clay School district headquarters was established in Gillett Grove. This was a big plus for the small town of Gillett Grove. The nineteen sixties were a prosperous time for many small Iowa towns. It wasn't unusual for some folks to help with those needs. Such as it was with Roy Nielsen. Nielsen was not only the janitor at the South Clay School in Gillett Grove, but he also was the town's gravedigger.

The Gillett Grove Bank, gas station, hardware store, grain elevators and Alger's Store were still operating at this time. Alger's Store advertised meats and vegetables. The Gillett Tap was a tavern that also served food. Gillett Grove citizens were proud of their established businesses. They didn't have to travel for their basic needs. Even a trucking and shelling firm in Gillett Grove was advertised in the local newspaper. Agricultural needs were met also by the Country Tractor and Equipment Company in Spencer. Manager Jim was a good negotiator in buying selling and trading farm machinery on Eleventh Street Southwest. Many remember the assortment of Blue Ford Tractors on display.

Spencer provided different clothing stores and shoe stores such as Redmond's. Twettens carried a variety of furniture. Good times could be enjoyed at the Woodcliff or at the Spencer Bowl in the north shopping center.

When Bob Berger purchased the Sinclair gas station in 1963, he sold Champlin products until 1988. He then switched to selling Sinclair products. A truck tank service was provided. R and B service was also established by Berger. Bob Berger knew the importance of having a gas station in his town of Gillett Grove. It was important, also, to have businesses that employ people. Some Gillett Grove residents traveled to Spencer for employment. Spencer was a higher populated town with more businesses. More shopping and eating places were available also. A meal could be purchased at Eddie's Coffee Shop in the Tangney Hotel. You could get a haircut at the Tangney Barber shop. Meanwhile, Gillett Grove had many businesses.

From 1960 to 1969, Gillett Grove continued to function as a town. The bank, gas station, church, school, post office, grain elevator, cafe and Alger's Store existed. A trucking and shelling firm was established as well as the Gillett Tap. The Gillett Tap was a bar and restaurant. The school district of South Clay is now in Gillett Grove, serving the Webb, Dickens and Gillett Grove areas. South Clay students remember an ice cream stand in Gillett Grove. Ronnie remembers his dad getting a peanut butter malt. Life seemed good in Gillett Grove. It was Happy Valley, U.S.A. for sure! The pleasures outweighed the unfortunate situations. This was especially sad when the train tracks were removed. This left the depot not in use. This was the second deterrent in growth for Gillett Grove.



Behind the fresh meat case. Alger's Store carried such meats. What an asset Alger's Store was to the citizens of Gillett Grove. Photo credit: Vecteezy

Nancy remembered walking on the wooden floors of Alger's Store. She held her dad's hand as they headed toward the meat counter. Gale would hand the wrapped package of beef to Nancy's dad. It was then she would pull on his hand. Nancy reminded her dad that it was time for his Snicker's candy bar. Nancy's dad loved a Snickers candy bar! Moreover, what it meant in kids' language was that Nancy desired some candy. And her dad was obliged. Currently, the Alger's Store is no longer present. However, Nancy can view the property where Alger's once stood. In her mature eyes, she sees the store that created precious memories in her childhood.



CLAY COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS, 1960:

The Ralph Wyatt Oil Company is fondly remembered at the North Y Cafe. However, in 1965, it was known as the North Y Truck Stop Oil Company. They offered diesel and gas motor repair. Also offered were truck and car service. The company boasted offering electric and acetylene welding, high pressure washer and steam cleaning equipment. The owner at that time was Carl F. Poulsen and family.

Del's Garden Center opened on April 1, 1967. It remains in business and is an asset to the Spencer and surrounding communities.



Disco lights and music were popular in the nineteen seventies. Many people danced to this music at the Rendezvous in Gillett Grove, Iowa. Good times were enjoyed at Happy Valley, U.S.A. Photo credit: Vecteezy

1970's:

Come and get it! So many citizens remember a trailer house parked next to the Gillett Grove gas station. It operated as a food trailer. People could drive up, order and enjoy their food.

The downtown Gillett Grove businesses continued to function as well as the school. The city council continued to meet in the town hall. Goals and past accomplishments were on the agenda. Citizens enjoyed the life still offered in the community. The gas station, grocery store and cafe were essential businesses in a small town. The famous Rendezvous Bar and cafe were operating at this time. People still patronized business stores. The Methodist Church was also in operation. That was important to keep the town alive. Farmers still utilized the Gillett Grove grain elevator. And life was good—especially for farmer Joe. Joe enjoyed chatting with the guys at the elevator when he brought corn in. Farming, itself, was a gamble and the few laughs he had with them sure made life easier.

It was in 1975 that the old Methodist Church was razed. It had been one of Gillett Grove's first buildings in 1900. A new church was built and is active today. Delicious fundraising suppers are held in this church periodically. Good food and friendly people are always enjoyed.

From 1970 to 1979, Gillett Grove would still maintain her many basic businesses. The post office, church, school, grain elevator, cafe, gas station and Alger's Store would continue to oper-

ate from their previous years. RAGBRAII riders would patronize Fast Eddy's Bar and Restaurant (pre-Rendezvous) in 1978.



CLAY COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS 1970's: Royal, Iowa had a jubilee parade celebrating seventy-five years of incorporation.

The South Park Mall in Spencer opened on February 12, 1970. It joined the Gateway North Mall. The downtown business area was full of a variety of stores in Spencer.

1971: Attorney Earl Hoover joined several other attorneys in the professional building. This building was located north of the present Farmers Trust and Savings Bank. It was in the area which is currently an extension of the bank. The law firm in the professional building relocated their services to the south end of Spencer.

Eaton's Corporation in Spencer, Iowa opened in 1974. They produced hydraulic pumps and motors. They had employed up to eight hundred people. They closed in September 2017.

1974: N.M. Company in Dickens began their steel fabrication business. They have currently been in business for over fifty years.

January 10, 1975, northwest Iowa endured a blizzard. Four to eight inches of snow with winds as high as ninety miles an hour. Visibility was less than three-eighths of a mile. The temperatures were below zero. Snowdrifts reached as high as twenty feet.



1980's:

In the next few decades, notable changes occurred in Clay County. Gillett Grove lost their grocery store, hardware store, bank, hog-buying station, produce-buying station and lumberyard. The Gillett Grove (aka Happy Valley U.S.A.) business district now consists of a grain elevator, Sinclair gas station, post office, school, Alger's Store and the Rendezvous cafe/tavern. The elevator closed later in this era and is used for storage. The gas station was located where the motorcycle repair and gun shop are. The Alger's Market Store was located to the south of the gas station. The Alger's Store was a large brick building on Railway Street.

Alger's Store sign had Coca Cola emblems on each side of the rectangular store sign. On the right side of this building was the post office. The hardware store and depot are not in business. The building south of Alger's was a bar (Rendezvous) which is still standing today. Imagine driving amongst the peaceful hilly surroundings to Gillett Grove. In the 1980's, these businesses would be at your service. However, the Farm Crisis affected the Gillett Grove Bank. Agricultural loan losses forced the bank to close.

This was devastating for Gillett Grove. People would have to drive out of town to do their banking. It was also the era where banking could not be done online like it is today. Gillett Grove

citizens banking options were at the Community State Bank in Webb. Several banks in Spencer, Iowa were also another option. Eight miles from Gillett Grove, Dickens also had a bank.

Who would ever imagine Happy Valley, U.S.A. like it is now. The population of Gillett Grove in 1980 was ninety-three. The post office, church, school, gas station, Alger's Store and grain elevator existed. The Rendezvous bar and restaurant were operating on Railway Street. In 1989, the Rendezvous had new owners. At that time, the post office, gas station, church and school were operating. Alger's owners had retired and the building was left empty. The gas station would close in the late 1980's. The farm crisis did not help. The effects of it will be shown in the following years.



CLAY COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS 1980:

In 1980, Clay County Fair entertainers were: Johnny Cash, June Carter Cash, Victor Borge, The Statler Brothers and Brenda Lee. This was during the farm crisis.

1980: The Rubiks cube, Cabbage Patch doll and PAC-MAN was introduced.

In 1981, the Clay County Courthouse that was built in 1901 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Rossie, Iowa post office closed in 1984.

September 8, 1986: The Oprah Winfrey Show aired.

October 19, 1987: "Black Monday" was referred to as the Dow Jones took a dive of 22.6 per cent.



The 1990's was the introduction of the World Wide Web. Instead of searching through encyclopedias and other books, answers could be obtained instantly on the computer.

1990's:

The South Clay School District in Gillett Grove had a lot to offer. South Clay sports consisted of football, volleyball, track, girls/boys' basketball, choir, swing choir, drill team and cheerleading. Concerts from the Jazz Band would be during the Spring and Winter. FFA was also offered at this time.

There were still three cooks at this time: Darlene Enderton, Jan Hoover, and Delores Carlson. However, there was only one custodian, which was Danny Roberts.

The bus drivers were Ray Stone, Andi Roberts, and Carol Warren. Pre-school to twelfth grade had at the most, sixteen students in each class. Some classes were fewer than sixteen enrolled.

In 1990, the population of Gillett Grove would decrease to sixty-seven. Thirty years later, the population would be less than half of the previous census. 2020 brought a population of thirty to Gillett Grove. The town of Dickens would have a population of one hundred and forty-six, decreased from two hundred and two in 2000. It is always important to have a good number of people, not only in towns but in businesses.

Such as it was with the Rendezvous Bar in Gillett Grove. It was a red building on Railway Street with handicap access. You can't miss it if you're heading south to Webb out of Gillett Grove. Some fundraisers were held at this bar and cafe. It would leave many memories of good times had. Many other recollections would bring smiles, especially at Christmas time. The delight of small Iowa towns is especially seen at Christmas time. So, as it was with the town of Gillett Grove in 1992. Up to twenty light poles were decorated with colorful wreaths and garland. Red and gold lanterns would also be displayed. Homes in Gillett Grove would be decorated in the holiday spirit. Even the Gillett Grove School, schoolyard and evergreen trees would be filled with festive decorations. A special delight for the children would be the arrival of Santa Claus in a wagon. The wagon would be pulled by a team of mules.

Not every year did Gillett Grove have light pole Christmas decorations. In July 1992, Ragbrai went through Gillett Grove. The money raised from RABRAI was placed in a community fund. Funds were solicited by the community to raise two thousand dollars. This was enough to purchase Christmas decorations. Gillett Grove had a special ceremony on December 2, 1992, to celebrate their beautiful, festive Christmas decorations. Good times in Gillett Grove were enjoyed. Sometimes, it allowed one to handle the sad times a little easier. Then again, sometimes not—especially when it came to the school and established friendships.



This schoolhouse was the first one built in Gillett Grove. The structure is similar to the North School building in Spencer, Iowa. Photo credit: Gillett Grove Centennial Paper.

Both young and old were sad at the end of this era. It was in 2011, that the South Clay Community School District would close. Nineteen teachers, three cooks, seven bus drivers and one custodian would reminisce of days gone by. The principal, superintendent, and office staff would recollect school memories of when it opened in 1914. The students would cherish the precious memories established in past years. The South Clay School served not only Gillett Grove but also Dickens and Webb areas.



Mrs. Faith Fogelman remembers working as a secretary for South Clay School. Her office was on the main floor below the gym. She recollects the challenge of concentrating on her work despite the noise above her.

The curriculum had expanded to offer more classes. Science, Home Economics, Art/Photography, Business and Industrial Arts were only a few. More classes like English, History/Math, Science and Agricultural were also offered. Spanish, Social Studies and Government/Journalism completed the curriculum. This small school would make a big hit, especially in baseball!

It was unbelievable and astonishing, but it did happen! The students at South Clay had a part in the "Final Season". The "Final Season" was a movie shown at the Spencer Theatre in 1991. It

was a re-enactment of the baseball game between Norway and the Gillett Grove Spartans. Norway High School had won its twentieth state title. Now, they played eight innings with South Clay High School in Gillett Grove. Norway defeated the Spartans seven to four.

South Clay fought a good battle. Previously, they had won seven straight games to reach the state tournament. In 1991, the South Clay Spartans had a record of thirty-one wins and nine losses. The Sioux City Journal published an article about the Final Season movie sixteen years later in October 2007. More enjoyable news creates such cherished recollections in Clay County.

In 1993, Aalff's and Eaton's were higher employment factories in Spencer. Families could spend their money at Stub's Ranch Kitchen one mile south of Spencer. Stub's had a great smorgasbord! People could also patronize Fast Eddy's in Gillett Grove. Fast Eddy's would also have a smorgasbord on Friday nights from six to ten p.m. Tuesdays were famous at Fast Eddy's for their Taco's from five to ten p.m.

From 1990 to 1999, some changes came to Gillett Grove. It made a difference decades ago. The gas station was now a gun and motorcycle repair shop. The post office and school were functioning as well as the church. And there you have the five remaining operations in Gillett Grove. Seventy years ago, there were over twenty businesses. The farm crisis of the 1980's was the third and last deterrent to growth for Gillett Grove.

CLAY COUNTY RECOLLECTIONS 1990:

1990: Spencer, Iowa started their recycling service in 1990. Spencer's population was over eleven thousand.

1990: The Clay Central School District (located in Royal, Iowa) merged with the Everly School District to become the Clay Central/Everly School District.





The 2000 era (Y2K) presented many challenges. On September 11, 2001, planes crashed into the World Trade Center. An economic crash developed in 2008. COVID-19 swept the United States in 2020. Photo credit: Vecteezy

2000:

Rossie, Iowa, was also decreasing in population. Forty-nine people census in 2020, decreasing from fifty-eight in 2000. Greenville, like Rossie and Gillett Grove, would have a small population. In 2020, the Greenville census showed seventy-one people. This was a decrease in the 2000 census of ninety-three. Everly, Iowa had a few more businesses, thus, a better census. The Everly population in 2020 was six hundred and forty-seven. 2020 would see a small decrease to five hundred and seventy-five. Royal, Iowa carried a population of four hundred and seventy-nine in 2000. It declined to three hundred and seventy-nine in 2020. The Royal census has not changed in the last five years. Everly, Royal and Dickens carried the most population of the smaller towns. Peterson, Iowa census in 2000 was three hundred and seventy-two. Twenty years later in 2020, Peterson would see a decline of fifty from three hundred seventy-two to three hundred and twenty-two. The population of Webb in 2000 was one hundred and sixty-five.

It declined to one hundred and eighty-three in 2020. It seems inevitable that small towns are getting smaller. This is much like the early history of Clay County. Except now, the smaller towns still exist as “bedroom” towns instead of dis-incorporating and eventually dying.

Spencer, Iowa, maintained a decent population. It has changed little in the twenty-year period from 2000 to 2020. Eleven thousand, three hundred and seventeen was the 2000 census. In 2020, it

changed very little to eleven thousand three hundred and twenty-five. Since 2020, the Spencer flood occurred in 2024, causing some people to move out of Spencer.

In 2023, two businesses existed in Gillett Grove. One of them was a motorcycle repair and a gun shop. (This is located where the former Sinclair Gas Station was.) The other was a furniture business. (This is located on the property where the school once was.) The furniture business was sold and turned into a pet salon for about one year. In June 2024, the business was sold and turned into a residence. In 2025, it was turned into a dog boarding business. This left the only businesses existing were the motorcycle repair/ gun shop and the dog boarding business.

A post office remains in Gillett Grove. It employs a postmaster for two hours, eight a.m. to ten a.m. Monday thru Friday. The city hall also remains with monthly city council meetings. The city hall is also utilized in other city recreational capacities. All these buildings are on Railway Street. A community center is also occupied in Gillett Grove. It is located on Railway Street north of the post office. The United Methodist Church continues to function. It is a small, yet dedicated congregation. Soup and pie suppers are one of their fundraisers. In 2026, the United Methodist Church will be celebrating their one hundred- and twenty-five-year anniversary. It is the longest establishment in Gillett Grove.

There are two empty buildings on Railway Street. One is a red concrete building near a horse hitching post. Like most buildings built one hundred years ago, it had more than one business. On the north end of this building is where the Gillett Grove Bank was. In later years, it was another bar.

There's one or more in every town, and Gillett Grove was not exempt from having one. The other red building farther south was the Rendezvous Bar/Cafe. It had a ramp to the entrance. It stands empty now. Pleasant memories and good times still exist in the minds of its patrons. The brick building left on Gillett Grove's Main Street was once the Gillett Grove-Ayrshire Telephone Company. It is the only building left on Main Street. The hardware store and cafe buildings do not exist. There is no evidence of them.

And yet, you wonder what happened to this once prosperous town. Why did the population dwindle to where it is now? Circumstances beyond our control such as the Depression, train tracks removal, school closure and the 1980's farm crisis. Not everyone who lived in Gillett Grove remained there. Many people, even after marrying, moved out of Gillett Grove. There was limited employment in Gillett Grove. Other businesses were affected so much that they were forced to close. It was not even profitable to start a business in a dying town. What is witnessed in every town is that once the train tracks are removed and school is closed, the town dies. It has occurred in every small town.



Gillett Grove-Ayrshire Telephone Company on the south side of Main Street. This property could have been the former location of the café, hardware store and the beauty salon. It is the only area on Main Street without trees and flat. To the right, you can see the community building on Railway Street. Ayrshire would have their own phone company in 1993.

In northwest Iowa, O'Brien County, Moneta, Iowa slowly became only a village as the school had closed. The train route was halted through Moneta. Furthermore, there were no businesses to keep the town going. It's the same song and dance in every town that loses its school and train.



This is the north end of the Rendezvous Bar/Restaurant. The front of the building is dilapidated beyond repair. A sign on the front once advertised: beer, pop, spirits, food, pool tables and a dance floor.

THE BEST OF TIMES

The famous Rendezvous Bar and Restaurant. It provided the finest dining and entertainment. Inside, a long bar, tables, and a dance floor provided a fun and relaxing atmosphere. Occasionally, the Rendezvous would host fundraisers. The small-town establishment left many cherished memories of its patrons. This building was Fast Eddy's previous to the Rendezvous. It was built in 1913.



Decades later after closing, many people remember the Rendezvous Bar at Gillett Grove. Good times were enjoyed at Gillett Grove, Iowa. Happy Valley U.S.A. Photo credit: Vecteezy.



Gillett Grove Community Center is located on Railway Street. Citizens still gather for council meetings and socialization. The beautiful Iowa scenery in the background hides winding gravel roads our ancestors traveled. It was in that location that Gillett Grove was before moving east of the Little Sioux River.



This concrete brick building was once the bank, hardware store, Algiers grocery store and a post office in the 1940's. The post office was established in the bank area after the late 1940's. It was also a bar, Gillett Tap, at one time. South of this building was another red building, the famous Rendezvous Bar. Currently, it seems to be used for storage. To the right of this building, in the background, is the former Ayrshire-Gillett Grove telephone Company building located on Main Street.



In early pioneer days, roads like this lead to many towns in Clay County, Iowa. There were once thirteen towns in Clay County. Photo credit: Vecteezy.

Established Losses

Clay County towns started strong as settlers made the Iowa prairie their home. The earliest towns were established in 1871. They were the town of Freeman on the northeast corner of section thirteen, Sioux Township in Clay County. Freemans' post office only lasted for four years, closing in 1875.

The town of Douglas Center was established in 1871 until 1875. It was located near Cornell.

The town of Annieville was established in 1871. It was in the southeast part of section twelve in Lincoln Township. It remained there until 1880.

Willow Creek town was established, also, in 1871. It was in section thirty-six in Clay Township. The town dissolved in 1900.

The town of Prospect was in the northwest corner of Meadow Township. It survived for twelve years. Its demise was in 1875.

The town of Summit was established in 1875. It was in Section twenty-four of Summit Township. This is five miles north of Spencer on Highway seventy-one and two miles north of Fostoria.

Cromwell Center was located two miles from Summit. Cromwell Centers location was also north of Spencer (four miles) and four miles west of Highway seventy-one. Cromwell Center did have a country church.

Trimello was established in 1875 in Section six of Clay Township (Royal area). Two towns were next to be established. They were Headland in Section fourteen of Headland Township from 1881 until 1897. Headland Township is south of Greenville and west of Webb. The town of Yankee existed from 1881-1900. It is in the north central part of Peterson Township. Peterson Township is located southeast of Rossie. The town of Platt existed from 1875-1900.

If you examine the abandoned towns, the first four years from 1871 to 1875, six towns had been established: Annieville, Freeman, Willow Creek, Prospect, Summit and Trimello. The towns of Spencer, Greenville and Peterson also existed at this time for a total of nine towns established in Clay County before 1875.



A small cabin near Annieville was the stagecoach stop. It provided passengers with a meal and a chance to relax after a bumpy ride. The stagecoach would continue up now Highway seventy-one to Spencer, Iowa. Photo credit: Vecteezy.



In pioneer days, hitching posts were found in every town. The mode of transportation were trains and horses. Water troughs graced the dirt streets for the horses and animals. It represents an era where settlers worked hard. Nothing was convenient like it is today, over two hundred years later.

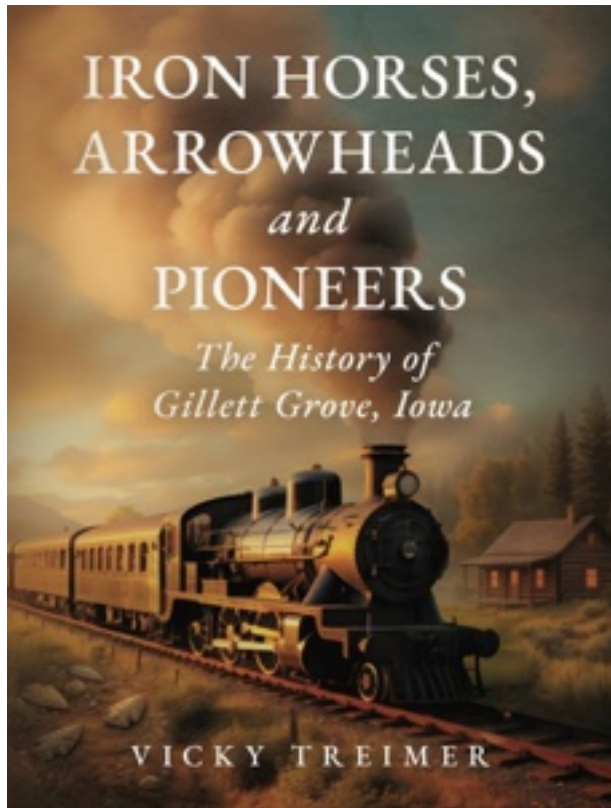
In 1881, two more towns were established. They were Yankee and Headland. Headland existed for sixteen years until 1897. It was in section 14 of Headland Township. Headland Township is located south of Gillett Grove and west of Webb. This was also where the town of Trimello existed.

The town of Yankee existed from 1881 until 1900. It was in the north central part of Peterson Township, north of Peterson.

Four other towns in Clay County also existed. The timeframe of their existence is unknown. The towns of Bridgewater and Cromwell Center exist in Summit Township. This is around the town of Fostoria. Bridgewater was in the southeast area of Lake Township. It existed from 1873 until 1887.

Cornell was established in the early 1900's. It had a general store, lumberyard grain elevator, school and post office. When the train halted service to Cornell in 1936, the town slowly died. The school was closed. The Cornell basketball teams that would play against other small towns became non-existent. Nevertheless, the memories of that era existed for many years.

Clark was another town in northeast Clay County. This is a different town than Everly Iowa, which was formerly named Clark. It was north of Dickens and west of Graettinger, Iowa. There are hardly any facts revealed about Clark, located in northeast Clay County.



Iron Horses, Arrowheads and Pioneers: The History of Gillett Grove, Iowa is about living during Indian attacks. It tells of the dangerous survival from Indians in pioneer days. The experiences of small-town living are revealed.

**Iron Horses, Arrowheads and Pioneers:
The History of Gillett Grove, Iowa**
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