

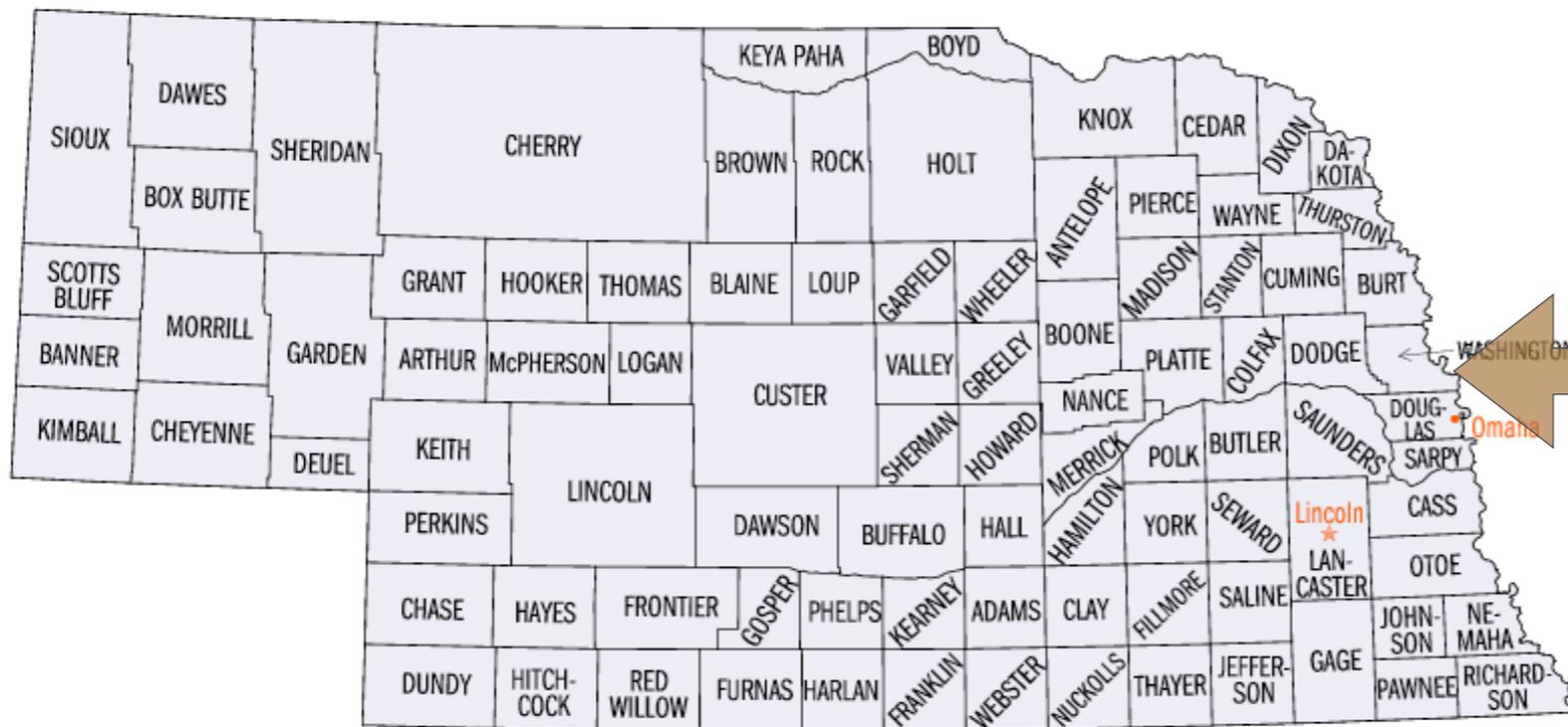
Blair, Nebraska, So Many Ways to
Get There! By Water, Rails or
Trails.



BY ZACHARY BOSWELL

Introduction

This book is about the transportation of Blair, Nebraska. Blair, Nebraska is a town in eastern Nebraska in Washington County with a population of about 8,000 people. In my book you will first learn about road improvements, the railroads and depots in Blair & John I. Blair. Second, I will talk about the Lincoln Highway in Blair. Third, there is a chapter about the brick streets. Finally there is a chapter about river transportation in Blair.



This is Washington County, Nebraska.

This is Blair, Nebraska in Washington County.



Improvement of Roads

If you could see a picture of the roadways from the past 155 years, there would be a fairly clear history of a need for improvement.

The earliest roads could have been an old, worn Indian trail, then the covered wagons came along and deepened them into ruts. After the covered wagon came, the stagecoach came clattering through the countryside from Omaha to Fort Calhoun. This route would soon be extended to DeSoto, to the Halfway House at Cuming City and later to Decatur. The stagecoach road would stop abruptly in front of the post office where people were

waiting for mail. The ruts made by the stops were visible around the Fort Calhoun Hotel well over fifty years after they were created. Thank goodness the railroads, boats & the paving of roads came through Blair, NE. These much needed improvements in transportation were true progress!



This is a picture of the dirt roads of Blair's main street.

The Railroads of Blair, Nebraska

There have been
four railroad
companies that
traveled through

Blair.



Click this word to see the definition. click any other **bold** word to see it's definition.



This is a picture of the first railroad depot in Blair.



This is a picture of the second railroad depot in Blair.



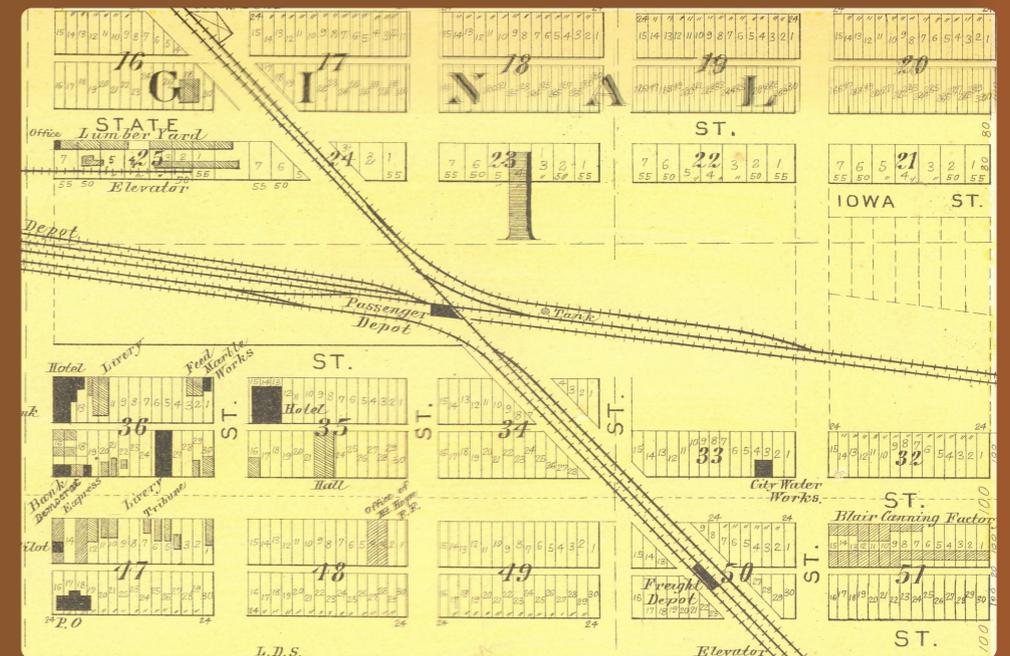
This is a photo of third railroad depot in Blair.

History of the Railroad

The railroad in Blair dates back to February 1868 when the Sioux City & Pacific Railroad finished a line from the Missouri River to Fremont, Nebraska. When John I. Blair, the founder of Blair, declared he was extending the Sioux City & Pacific Railroad from the Iowa side of the Missouri River westward where it would connect with the Union Pacific Railroad in Fremont, Nebraska, the nearby towns of DeSoto & Cuming City became excited **rivals** for the railroad builder's favor because the railroad would secure the future of both towns. Carter Valley, which ran through the heart of what is now Blair, was chosen because it was the easiest passage through the bluffs that surround the river. The town of Blair was born because of that decision.

Four different railroads ran through Blair. The Chicago & Northwestern Railroad, the Fremont, Elkhorn, Missouri Valley Railroad and the Sioux City & Pacific Railroad all ran on the east/west line through Blair. The north/south line that ran through Blair only had one railroad company on it, the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railroad. Today the only railroad company that runs through Blair is Union Pacific.

Click the images to see them.



This is a platt map of Blair showing the north/south & east/west railroad line.



The Railroad Depots of Blair

There have been three railroad depots in Blair. Two of the depots were wood and the other one was brick. Pictures of all three depots are on the next page.

In March of 1869, the first railroad depot in Blair was finished. It was used as a hotel and a depot for freight trains. It was located near the intersection of Front St. and Walker Ave. (present day 16th St.) It was torn down sometime after 1902.

The second railroad depot was built in 1880 by the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, & Omaha Railroad and the Sioux City & Pacific Railroad. It was used as a passenger depot. It was first built at the intersection of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Omaha, and the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad lines, or 14th and Front Streets.

The second depot was moved three times in its life. It was moved west two blocks and used for storage and freight. Then it was moved another time across the tracks and over to 16th St. and to the west where it sat unnoticed. In 2007, it was moved again to where it rests still today at Lyons Park. This past summer, it was **remodeled** by the Blair Historic Preservation Alliance to save this part of Blair's history.

In 1910 the third depot was built. It was made of brick and was built at the same location as the 1880 depot after it was moved. The depot was built to accommodate both lines. It's interior had tiled floors and served many passengers before the last passenger train came on June 3, 1950. It sat empty on the Union Pacific lot from then until it was suddenly torn down on April 19, 1987, without much say from the citizens of Blair.

Click the correct answer

Question 1 of 3

How many different railroad companies ran through Blair in the late 1800's?

- A. 200
- B. 4
- C. 12
- D. 8



Check Answer



Click the images to see them.



This is a picture of the original railroad depot from 1869. It was also known as the Blair House Hotel.



John I. Blair

John I. Blair was born on August 22, 1802 on the banks of the Delaware River at Four Rift, New Jersey. He was the fourth of ten children of Scottish immigrants John Blair and Rachel Insley. John was not a very well educated man, only attending school in the winter through age 11. He had many interests in manufacturing and sales. He was the **postmaster** of Blairstown, New Jersey for 40 years. John's nickname was Plain John I. He died December 22, 1899 in his home in Blairstown, New Jersey.

Click the images to see them.



This is a photo of John I. Blair.



The Man of Townships

The town of Blair, Nebraska was founded and named by John I. Blair. It was **platted** May 10, 1869. John platted 11 other cities, all in Iowa, including Woodbine, Missouri Valley, Dunlap, River Sioux, Mondamin, LeMars, Ames, Sloan, Blairsburg, Ogden, and Montana. John I. Blair may have never gotten off the train at Blair and many of the other towns he platted. Blair's estate was valued at about 75 million dollars at the time of his death, one of the half dozen greatest fortunes at the time. John was a very wealthy man. He was a very **frugal, fiscally responsible** man and emphasized ownership of land. At one point in time he owned two million acres of land.

Click the correct answer

Question 1 of 2

How many other towns did John I. Blair platt, not including Blair?

- A. 12
- B. 23
- C. 15
- D. 11



Check Answer



The Lincoln Highway of Blair, Nebraska



This is a picture of the Lincoln Highway marker at the corner of 10th St. & Jackson St.

History of the Lincoln Highway

The Lincoln Highway was dedicated in 1913. It was the first **transcontinental** highway in America. It runs from Times Square, New York to Lincoln Park in San Francisco. The original Lincoln Highway route went through Omaha, Elkhorn, and Fremont, Nebraska. Then, after the Abraham Lincoln Memorial Bridge was built in Blair to cross the Missouri River in 1929, people started using the bridge as a shortcut to Fremont from Council Bluffs. That shortcut would save drivers about 30 miles. In 1930, a year after the bridge was dedicated, the Lincoln Highway was officially **re-routed** through Blair. The **controversial** change came about when the Lincoln Highway Association ordered several crews to move Lincoln Highway markers from the original route through Council Bluffs to the new one through Blair in the middle of the night.

Map of the Lincoln Highway



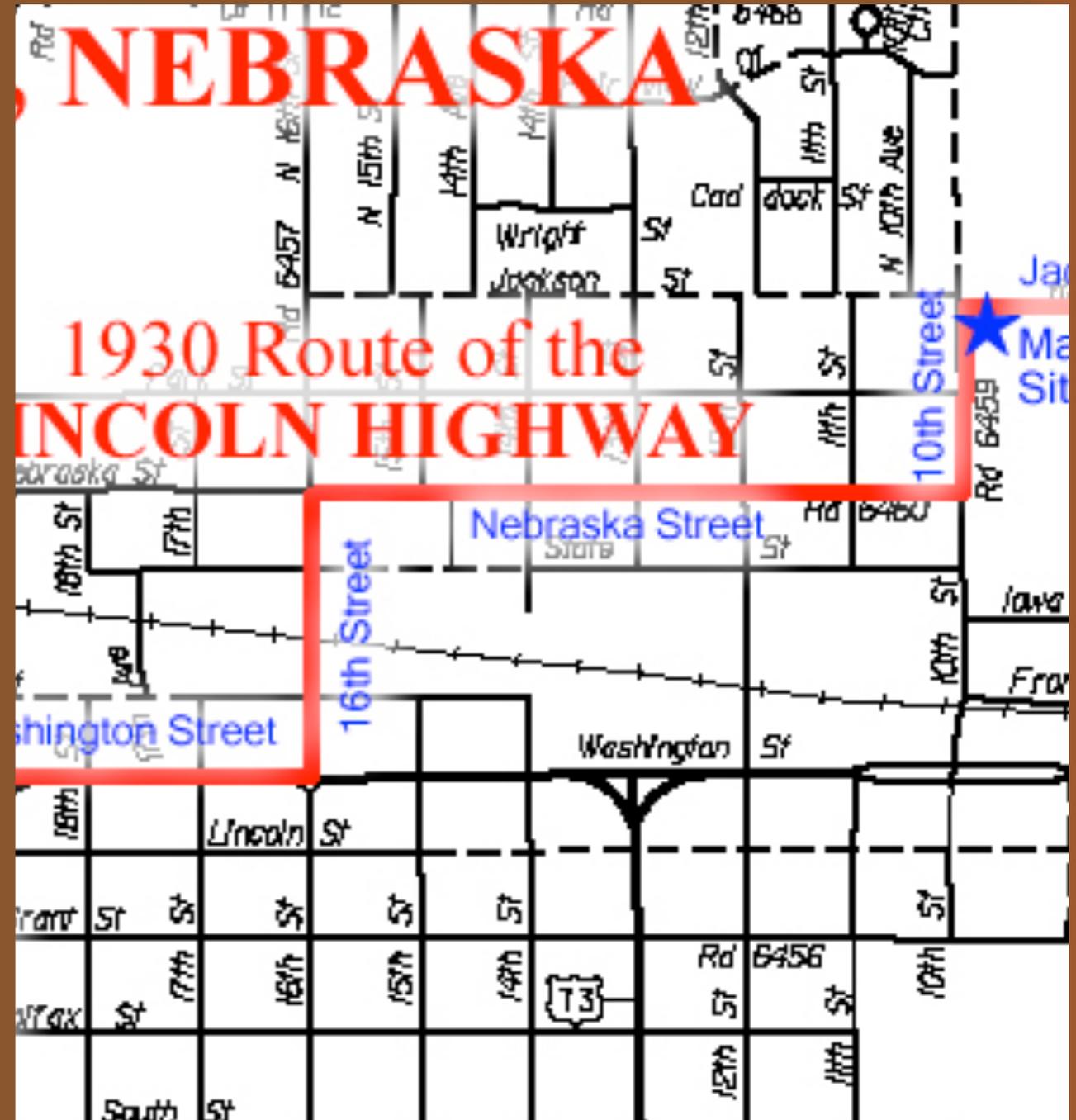
Click the correct answer

In what year was the Lincoln Highway established?

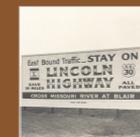
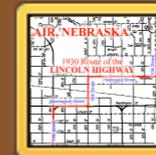
- A. 1980
- B. 1929
- C. 1913
- D. 1489

Check Answer

Click the images to see them.



This is a map of the 1930 route of the Lincoln Highway through Blair.



The Brick Streets of Blair, Nebraska



This is a picture looking west at the intersection of 16th & Washington Streets.

History and Facts

The brick streets of Blair, Nebraska were laid in 1921. A brick street can last a long time, but no one knows how long they last. The brick streets in Blair are over 90 years old, and the city has no recorded maintenance of them. They are rarely replaced. There are about 10,000 bricks in a brick street. There are also no potholes in brick streets. There are about 2 1/2 miles of brick streets left in Blair. Over time brick streets are cheaper than paving the streets, because asphalt has to be replaced every 15 years and brick

streets don't have to be replaced as often. The brick streets on Washington Street were paved over in 1971, most of the bricks were left under the pavement. The bricks were pulled up when it was redone again in 2006.

Click the images to see them.



This is a picture looking west at the intersection of 16th & Washington Streets.



The River and Ferryboats in Blair

The Missouri River runs on the east side of Blair. The **headwaters** are near Three Forks, Montana. It flows into the Mississippi in St. Louis, Missouri. The Missouri is the longest river in North America. The Mississippi flows into the Gulf of Mexico near New Orleans, Louisiana.



This is a view of the Missouri River.

History & Facts About Ferryboats

Ferryboats provided early Nebraska travelers a means of crossing the shifting sands and changing currents of unbridged rivers.

The first ferryboat to operate in the region was at Ft. Atkinson in the 1820's. Early diary accounts mention the operation of a ferry across the Missouri, probably part of activities at the fort. The early ferries were large flatboats propelled by **sweeps**. In the 1860's, steam ferries replaced many of the original ferryboats. Standard rates for a ferry trip were 75 cents for a wagon and horses, 40 cents for a horse and buggy, 5 cents for "**footmen**", 10 cents a head for cattle, horses, and

mules, and 3 cents a head for **swine** and sheep. The first sign of spring along the Missouri River was not the first Cardinal, but the first steamboat that made it's way up the river. When the boat blasted its whistle, every normal thing that was going on stopped. Then the people would rush to the waterfront to greet the captain and the crew. Finally they would collect the supplies the ship had brought to replenish their stocks after the long winter.

By the 1880's, bridge-building had progressed. Even the wide, unpredictable Platte River had a bridge built over it. The ferryboat was a must have for every town along the Missouri River because it looked at itself in the future as "The Gateway to the West." River boats in the 1860's, could have been lined up for a half mile or more at DeSoto.

Some ferryboats continued to operate into the 20th century, but most just disappeared because of the bridges that were built and the services of the ferries were no longer needed.

Click the images to see them.

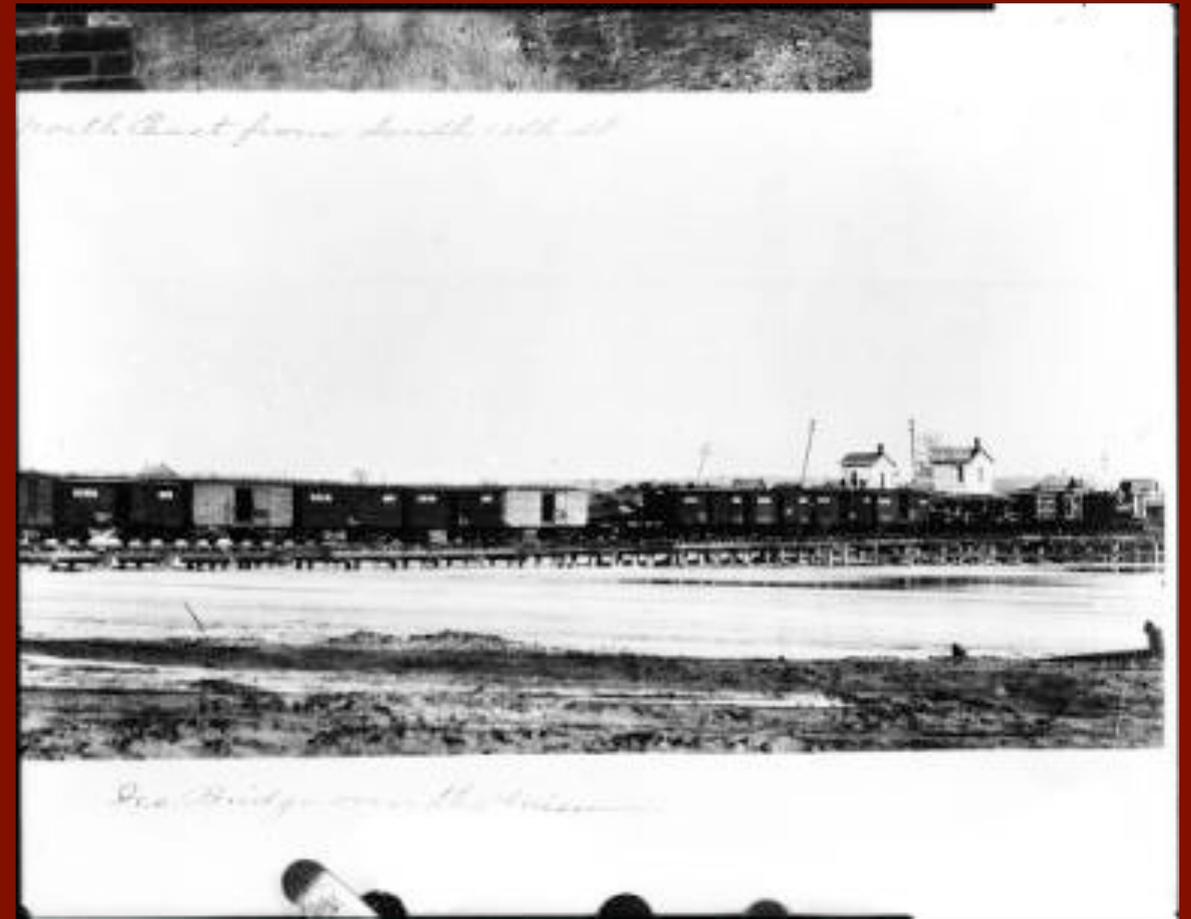


This is a picture of a car on a river ferry.



The Missouri River Ice Bridge

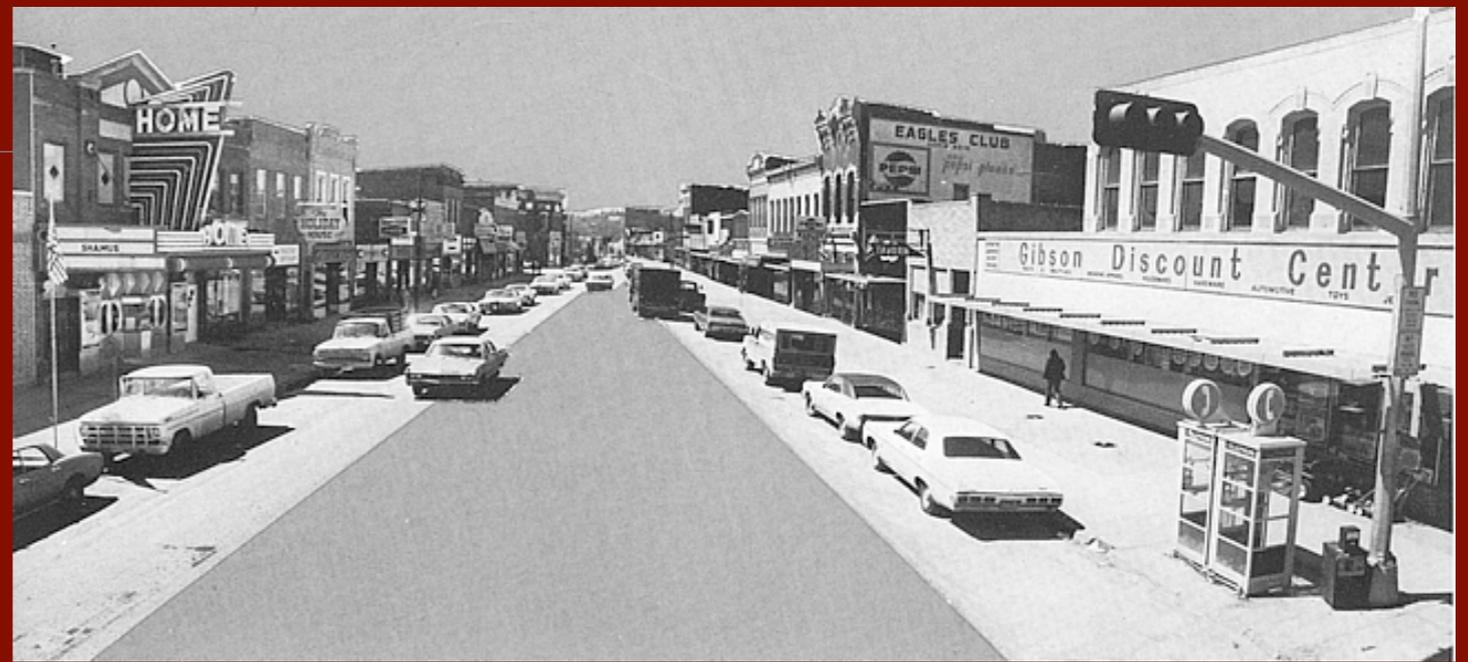
When winter came in eastern Nebraska, it meant that the Missouri River would freeze solid, and they lost the all important steamboat. However there was an advantage to the river being frozen. Nebraska had a bridge to Iowa. Sometimes when the river was frozen there was a steady stream of wagons across the ice. The railroads even ran trains across the ice until the bridge was completed in 1873. They used the ice bridge as transportation in the mid-1800s



This is a picture of an ice bridge over the Missouri River with a train on it.

Summary

Today we are spoiled by the transportation we have, because it is so much easier to get around. Travel is so much different than it was in the late 1800's & early 1900's, as you learned from this book. Today you can travel from coast to coast on Interstate 80 or fly anywhere in the world very easily. If you ever come through Blair and drive down our main street, you will be driving on the historic Lincoln Highway, also known as Highway 30.



This is a picture of Highway 30 through Blair taken in 1973.

Credits

1. River Ferry Picture

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/blair_bridge/BRG0052.htm

2. Washington St. Blair, Nebraska

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/main_street/DWT0011.htm

3. Main Street Panorama

http://blairhistory.com/archive/photo_archive/gallery_subject.asp?Subject=Downtown

4. Nebraska Map

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nebraska_counties_map.png

5. Washington County Map

<http://www.co.washington.ne.us>

6. 1869 Train Depot

<http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/depot/1869Depot.htm>

7. 1880 Train Depot

<http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/depot/1880depot.htm>

8. 1910 Train Depot

<http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/depot/1910depot.htm>

9. Plat Map

http://www.blairhistory.com/projects/plat_map/towns/Blair.htm

10. Train Picture to the Washington County Historical Museum

11. John I. Blair Photos

http://blairhistory.com/archive/biographies/John_Blair/john_i_blair.htm

12. Lincoln Highway Marker

http://blairhistory.com/projects/lincoln_highway_marker/default.htm

13. Lincoln Highway Map

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LH-Map-75.jpg>

14. Lincoln Highway Map

http://blairhistory.com/archive/lincoln_highway/default.htm

15. Lincoln Highway Signs

http://blairhistory.com/archive/lincoln_highway/time_line.htm

18. 16th & Washington Picture

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/main_street/DWT0007.htm

19. 17th & Washington Picture

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/main_street/DWT0008.htm

20. Brick Street Map

<http://blairhistory.com/bricks/default.htm>

21. Missouri River Picture

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/city_scenes/SEN0011.htm

22. Ferry With Car on it

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/blair_bridge/BRG0017.htm

23. Ferry Picture

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/blair_bridge/BRG0052.htm

24. River Ferry With Multiple Cars

http://blairhistory.com/landmarks/blair_bridge/BRG0059.htm

25. Missouri Ice Bridge Picture from
Bostwick-Frohardt Collection

[http://
durhammuseum.contentdm.oclc.org/
cdm/ref/collection/p15426coll1/id/1664](http://durhammuseum.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15426coll1/id/1664)

26. Highway 30 Picture

[http://blairhistory.com/archive/
photo_archive/gallery_subject.asp?
Subject=Downtown](http://blairhistory.com/archive/photo_archive/gallery_subject.asp?Subject=Downtown)

Blair

A town in Nebraska.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

Find Term

Chapter 1 - The Railroads of Blair Nebraska

Controversial

Giving rise or likely to give rise to public disagreement.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 2 - The Lincoln Highway

Depots

(de-po)

place for the storage of large quantities of equipment, food, or some other commodity.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - History of the Railroads

Ferryboats

A boat that carries people, animals, cars and many other things over a small body of water like a river.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 4 - History & Facts About Ferryboats

Fiscally Responsible

To be good with money.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - John I. Blair

Footmen

Men/women who are on foot on the ferry.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

Find Term

Chapter 4 - History & Facts About Ferryboats

Frugal

Sparing or economical with regard to money or food.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - John I. Blair

Headwaters

The input stream of a river close to or forming part of its source.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 4 - The River in Blair

Platted

To make a plot of land.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - John I. Blair

Postmaster

A person in charge of a post office.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - John I. Blair

Re-routed

To move a path somewhere else after it has been designated at least once, and can be re-routed again.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 2 - The Lincoln Highway

Remodeled

To rebuild with a different design.

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Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - History of the Railroads

Rivals

A person or thing competing with another for the same objective or for superiority in the same field of activity.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - History of the Railroads

Sweeps

Giant paddles that move the boat.

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Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 4 - History & Facts About Ferryboats

Swine

Another name for pigs.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 4 - History & Facts About Ferryboats

Transcontinental

Something that crosses from one side of a continent to the other.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 2 - The Lincoln Highway