

Merriman Memories

Centennial Souvenir

MERRIMAN, NE.

1985

Merriman was established with the coming of the railroad in 1885. It was named after John Merriman, who was the road boss and division superintendent for the Freemont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley Railroad.

Merriman was first built on the north side of the tracks. It was along a street from about where Dale Marrs resides East to near the Mac Galloway residence. The early town included a store owned by Frank Ecoffey, a hotel run by Bill White and family, a drug store operated by Herb Green, a butcher shop, a U.S. Land office, and a millinery shop owned by two young ladies, Miss Anna Thompson and a Miss Dart. Miss Thompson later married George Shadbolt, Sr.

Merriman's first school had one room and was built of logs. Mrs. Herb Green followed by Mrs. Joe Crowe (Inez Smith) were the first teachers. In 1894, Merriman built a new and larger one-room schoolhouse just West of the present Alex Scott home. Miss Unis Downing was the new teacher and taught 40 pupils in the first to the eighth grade. This school building was sold to the Methodist congregation on January 31, 1901, and moved to its present location in 1904, where it still serves as the Methodist Church.

In 1899, Mills Brothers built a new store just North of the depot. After one year, they sold out. In 1900, Z.T. Davis, a Jew from back East, came to Merriman and built a store, which is the present Future store on the corner. This was a general store, and Mr. Davis catered to the ranchers. He also started an Indian Trading Post. The U.S. Government started to issue purchase orders to the Indians so they could buy wagons, harness, plows, harrows, blankets, and beads.

As there were no towns on the reservation, Davis sent out riders, telling of his new trading post and inviting them to come to Merriman. The Indians started coming by the hundreds with their purchase orders. They bought or traded for new wagons, harness, and so forth. Every day there were 10 to 50 wagons, tepees, and tents, with the horses hobbled along Dry Creek. The Merriman town board met one night and decided to move the town over to the South side, where all the activity was.

In 1900, Merriman was noted as the largest shipping point from Belle Fourche, S.D., to Omaha, Ne. All the big outfits, as the Spade, the 101, the Overton, and later the Churn were shipping from Merriman. As there was no

Milwaukee railroad through the Badlands, all the cattle from that country came here to be shipped. Some of these owners were the Cravens, Livermonts, and the Lesserts. There were others large and small. Most of the cattle that came into the yards to be shipped were three and four-year-old Texas Longhorn steers. These cattle were wild. It wasn't uncommon to see the stockyards full with hundreds of cattle being held outside, waiting their turn to get in. When the trains came, blowing their whistles, those big long horned steers often tore the stockyard fences down and stampeded.

These steers were cheap, bringing about three cents a pound, but, in those days, ranchers operated cheaply on open range. Top wage for cowboys was \$25.00 a month. Hay hands got \$1.00 per day to \$2.00, if they would stack.

In 1900, Captain Fuller bought a ranch now known as the Sandoz ranch one mile North of Merriman. Mr. Fuller was a sea boat captain, and he took for his brand the anchor. Mr. Fuller also established a bank, and he built the stone building near the Z.T. Davis building, calling it the Anchor Bank. Later, Captain Fuller sold the Anchor Bank to the Metzger brothers and

George Shadbolt, Sr. They operated it for many years with D.W. Coffee as cashier.

Merriman was booming. In 1901, a new four-room schoolhouse was built in the present city park. By 1902, there were three general stores owned by Bert White, Z.T. Davis, and Collins. Three hotels were owned by Will White, Alder, and Peacock. The town had a poolhall, a barber shop, a bank, a drugstore, a blacksmith shop, two restaurants, and the Gray Eagle Saloon, run by Jim Childers. There were two resident doctors.

In 1904, the U.S. Government enacted the Kincade Homestead Act, wherein a person could take a 640 acre homestead. This brought thousands of homesteaders to the Sandhills. Every section was filed upon. Many people were coming to Merriman to buy groceries, lumber, and coal. With the Indian purchase orders, Merriman was doing okay.

"Merriman had several flourishing businesses. J.V. Scott had the City Hotel, where meals were 35 cents. F.P. Bresee had the barber shop, where haircuts were 35 cents and a shave was 15 cents.

Krotter and Hall Lumber was established in 1905; Henderson and Crane had the Stockmen's Barn; Bert E. White was the Postmaster; Hugo Stevens had the Gray Eagle Saloon; Peter Fitch and George F. Roberts, real estate; A.B. Green was a locator, surveyor, and draftsman; I.B. Nichols, plaster and cement work; Dean Hale, the meat market; Sasenberry and Lessert Hardware; Charles Sexton, the harness repair shop; Eva Jones, the restaurant; and the Anchor Bank.

V.L. Green was editor of the Merriman Maverick, and subscriptions were \$1 per year. The train noted two departures a day going west: at 9:40 and 2:15 p.m., and going east at 8:57 and 11:40 a.m. The Merriman Stage Line offered passage to Gamble, Allen, and Kyle, S.D. three days a week, and to Bailey, Harlan, and Lacreek, S.D. on alternate days.

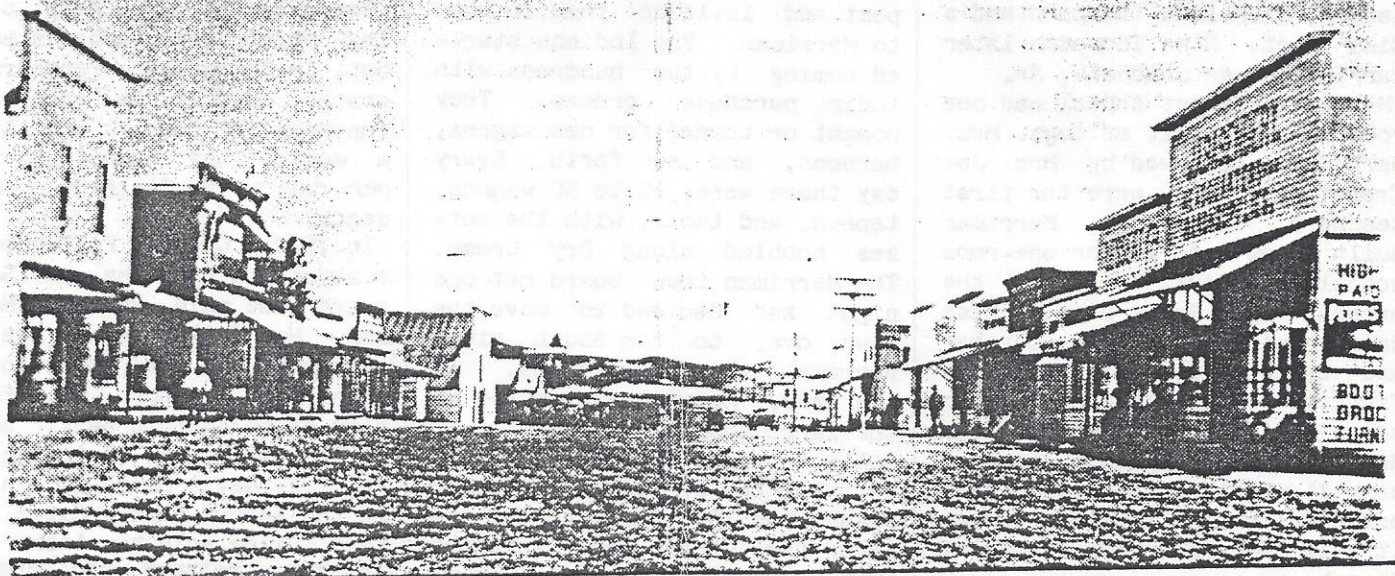
In 1909, Z.T. Davis sold out. Dick Lessert bought the hardware and John Sasenbery got the general store and groceries. By 1915, many homesteaders had spent five years 'proving up' and were selling their homesteads to the ranchers.

John Sasenbery, Arthur Bowring, G.O. Fairhead, Henry Quible, and Ben Roberts built the American State Bank in 1917. Good prices prevailed due to World War I. Homesteaders and ranchers needed money to buy land and cattle.

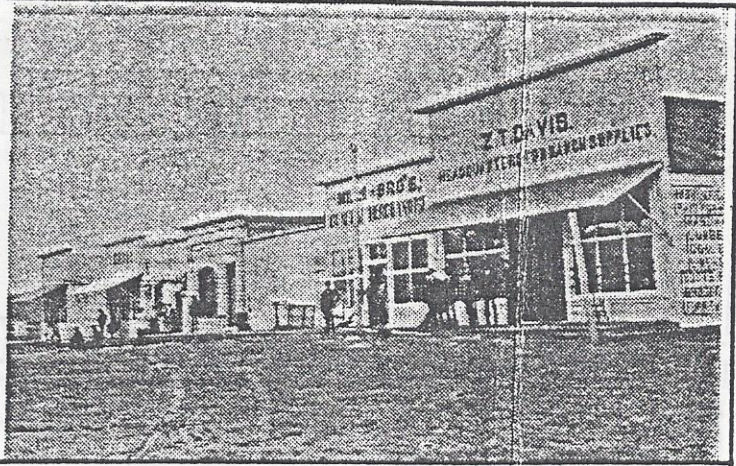
The Merriman Potash Company was established in 1917. It leased all the lakes from Irwin to Cody and built several plant buildings and pipe lines to all the lakes. Three hundred men were on the payroll. They built offices, homes, barracks, and stables. The plant was in the area of where the Coop Elevator now stands. The stables and barracks were about where the Buckles' station and Sand Cafe is presently located.

The flu epidemic affected Merriman as it did all communities during World War I. The Merriman dance hall was converted into a hospital. Reverend James Merrill, the Methodist minister, took over the hospital under the supervision of the resident doctors. Many lives were saved.

The war ended in 1919. One hundred fifty dollar cows dropped to \$25.00 or two cents a pound. Homesteaders and ranchers came to the bank saying, "We owe \$70.00 on these cows. All



1900



they are worth is \$25.00. Why don't you come and get them?" The American State Bank went broke. The directors, Arthur Bowring, G.O. Fairhead, Henry Quible, Ben Roberts, and John Sasenbery, paid off all depositors, but this bank broke Mr. Sasenbery and Ben Roberts.

The Anchor Bank bought the American State Bank building in 1920, moving across the street.

The Anchor Bank was sold to the Abbott Bank Corporation in 1945. The present officers are: Don Stull, Chairman of the Board; Ted Bare, President and Cashier; Frank Tolstedt, Vice President.

Clyde Weber moved off his ranch into Merriman in 1946, and started the Weber Equipment Co. They have been instrumental in supplying rakes, stackmovers, and all equipment needs for ranchers

throughout the Sandhills. Their shop stands where the old livery barn used to be.

The American Potash Company was in trouble with low production and low prices. Potash had been a war item, used in explosives and medicine. Foreign imports took over what market was left. One night when the wind was right, someone set fire to the factory, burning everything, including all records. Merriman business men and ranchers owned most of the shares, and many lost \$10,000.00 to \$35,000.00.

About 1920, there was another readjustment period. Cars became plentiful. Highway 20 went through Merriman, and, later, Highway 73 to Martin. Now Merriman is on an intersection of these highways, extending from coast-to-coast, and joining the Gulf of Mexico to Canada. A new brick schoolhouse was built in the twenties.

Merriman is the shipping point of a million-and-a-half bushels of grain annually. The Merriman Coop elevator has extensive facilities and storage to handle it.

One of Merriman's present features is the greenhouse owned by Lester and Verla Thayer. Memorial Day plants and flowers, and Christmas poinsettias attract people from many miles away.

Churches

Merriman Methodist

Circuit riding ministers, including Rev. Bazel Hunt, were holding services as early as 1891. When the large, one-room schoolhouse was built in 1894, the Methodists held services there on Sundays. The first parsonage, built in 1900, is the present-day home of the Merle Fords. In 1901, the school was sold to the Methodists, and this structure and the second parsonage were moved from the north side to it's present location in 1904 on lots donated by Robert Koontz.

Cemetary

Is located on a hill west of the water tower. An early burial was that of four-year-old Charles I. White on January 21, 1901. Also of interest is the burial of Alex Brown in 1933 and his wife, Harriet, in 1949. They were the only black people in the area.

St. Elizabeth's Catholic

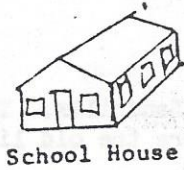
First Guild was organized in 1902 with officers consisting of Mrs. Gus Craven, Mrs. Z.T. Davis, Mrs. Jim Childers, and Mrs. T.A. Peterson. Services were held once a month with Rev. Wells of Valentine coming by train. The first confirmation class of six members was held in the Methodist Church in 1904. The church was built in 1905 at the present location. A large hall was added in 1955, and has been available for community gatherings.

Grace Lutheran Church

Affiliated with the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and started in 1977 by Rev. Lloyd Lenz, a Nebraska District Missionary from Hyannis. Both a church and parsonage have been erected, and a good-sized congregation is being served by Rev. Stan Ostegren. The site is the former location of the Catholic Church.

St. Paul's Episcopal

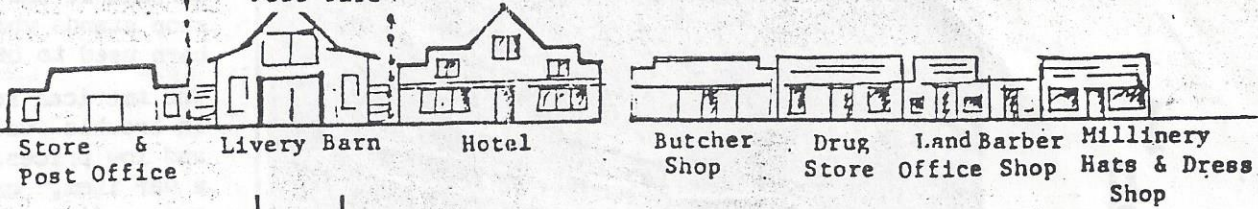
The first church was a wooden structure built in 1908 on a lot donated by Herb Green, where the Lutheran Church now stands. Mass was held in private homes prior to this. A new brick church was dedicated in 1957. The Catholic cemetary located one mile north-east of Merriman was established around 1900 on land also donated by Herb Green. The first person buried there is an unidentified man killed in a train accident in Merriman.



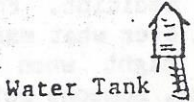
School House

Corral
Feed Yard

1885 - 1900



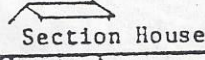
Depot



Water Tank

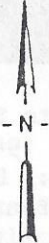
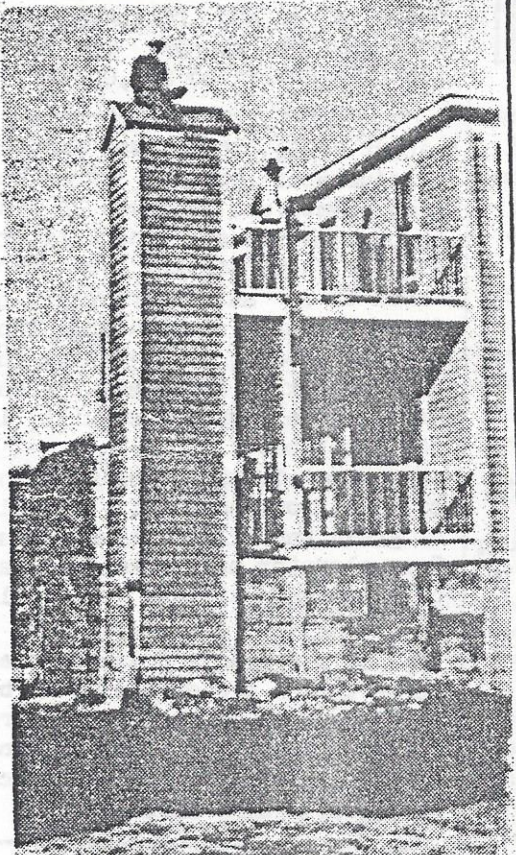


Section House



Section House

1900 - 1935



The tall old "back house" built in 1916. Used only from the upstairs porch, this outhouse was a part of the Arlington Hotel in Merriman when Philip Mensinger was the proprietor. The outhouse was demolished in 1930 and the hotel closed in 1963.

The information herein was derived from an article by Joy J Fairhead and information from the James and May Buckles family history.

