

## History of Garfield

### Garfield's first settlers arrived in 1873

In the late summer of 1872, Camp Criley was established as a supply station for workmen building the Santa Fe railroad. As Captain J.D. Criley was superintendent of construction, the camp was named for him.

At Geneva, Ohio, an association of Union War veterans adopted a constitution and formed a company known as "The Volunteer Free Homestead Colony." Its object was to locate a colony under the existing Homestead Act. A committee of three examined prospective sites in Kansas and Nebraska, and agreed that Camp Criley was the most promising.

First settlers, led by Col. H.P. Wolcott, arrived at the old campsite on March 15, 1873. They were followed by homeseekers from Ohio's Nineteenth Congressional



district and they changed the name of the town to honor their representative, and later president, James A. Garfield.

When Garfield was informed of this honor, he wrote that he would present a bell to the first church erected in the town. The bell hung in the Congregational Church from 1875 to 1959 and is now part of a monument in the City Park. Methodists of the community organized in 1878. The church building was erected the following year, and the enlarged and modernized structure is

still used. The Swedish Evangelical Church was organized in 1879. When the present edifice was built in 1910, the white frame school building that had been used by the congregation was purchased by Charlie Peterson and is now used for storage. The Lutheran Church records were kept in Swedish until 1918.

Elmer Steven of Aurora, Ill., came to the town and established a weekly newspaper, The Garfield Letter. In July, 1885, news of the death of U.S. Grant was flashed over the wires and Steven stopped the press to put this in the first edition of the paper. In another of the early issues, the paper announced that a colony of 65 Swedish families had purchased land in the neighborhood and were coming to Garfield. Many of these same homesteads are still owned by the descendants of these

families.

Prairie grass was the only thing visible for miles and miles. Emil Abrahamson once recalled that there was only one cottonwood tree between Kinsley and Garfield, and that was on a sandbar in the river. Coon Creek used to be called Clear Creek and it was fed by springs; you could see them bubbling on the bottom of the creek.

In 1895, when the population was 420, the town exported 100 train carloads of flour, 200 cars of livestock, and 450 cars of wheat. The first general store in town was the Pitt's General Store. Mr. Erickson started a general store with his partner, Alfred Polson, and he also helped build the first flourmill. Polson's Mercantile Store was a great boon to the town until it burned on Easter Sunday in 1921. The Rains Family had a grocery store in the community for many years. Mr. Hitler was the proprietor of the first hotel. N.O. Waymire built a hardware store just west of the present city building.

Garfield is a quiet village with sparkling clear air and dear to the hearts of all her children.

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