

## HISTORIC TIMELINE OF THE ALTOONA AREA

**Before 1673:** Ancestors of Native Americans lived in Iowa dating back at least 12,000 years ago

**1673:** Louis Joliet and Father Jacque Marquette are the first white men to reach Iowa

**1834:** Sac and Fox tribes settle at the fork of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers. First record of white exploration of the area was recorded by an Indian Agent from Fort Leavenworth, KS.

**1838:** On July 4, 1834, Iowa became a territory. President Martin Van Buren appoints Robert Lucas as the first territorial governor.

**1843:** Captain James Allen and a detachment of Dragoons constructed Fort Des Moines at the point where the Raccoon and Des Moines rivers met. An Indian agency was established on the east side of the Des Moines River. The Sac and Fox Indians were moved west of the Red Rock in 1845 where they remained for three years before moving to KS.

**1844:** Thomas Mitchell established the Apple Grove way station south of present day Mitchellville. Mitchell is recognized as the first white settler in Polk County.

**1845:** Indian title to land around Fort Des Moines expired and central Iowa was opened to white settlement.

**1846:** The Iowa Territorial Legislature established Polk County. The order to abandon Fort Des Moines as a military post was effective on March 1, 1846. When the soldiers left, civilians took charge. Iowa became the 29<sup>th</sup> state in the union on December 28, 1846.

**1849:** A regular trans-state stagecoach route was established through central Iowa.

**1854:** Anthony Yant settles in the Altoona area.

**1856:** Thomas Mitchell founded the town of Mitchellville. He operated a hotel and tavern and founded a seminary of learning whose building later became part of the Iowa State Training School for Girls.

**1857:** In November of 1857, the Iowa State Capitol was moved from Iowa City to Des Moines. A stagecoach transporting the Treasurer's safe became mired in a slough along Little Four Mile Creek just east of present 10<sup>th</sup> Ave NW in Altoona. The safe contained all the State's cash and was marooned for several days. Ten yoke of oxen were required to free the stage and complete the journey.

**1857:** A. C. Bondurant settled near the current site of Bondurant.

**1861:** The Civil War began. More than 1500 men from Polk County joined the Union Army--- 12 percent of the county population in 1860.

**1867:** Des Moines Valley Railroad reached Altoona. The DMVR built a siding on the crest of the hill and it became known as Yant's Siding or Yant's Station. The station was named after the property owner, Anthony Yant. The DMVR eventually built a depot located beside the tracks at approximately 106 First Avenue South in Altoona.

**1868:** A surveyor named Julian B. Bausman laid out the town of Altoona. He discovered that Altoona was the highest point on the old Des Moines Valley Railroad between Keokuk and Des Moines---966 feet above sea level. The name Altoona came from the Latin word "altus" which means high. The official plat for Altoona was recorded on July 30, 1868. The post office opened one day later on July 31, 1868. The Rock Island Railroad reached Altoona in September of 1868. It continued to call the town Yant and printed tickets and timetables using that name.

**1869:** Thomas Haines arrived in Altoona as a grain buyer for W. M. Sturges of Keokuk. Haines canvassed the countryside buying grain which was sacked and then shipped by box car. The original plat of the town of Altoona doubled in size by adding six more blocks to the east.

**1870:** Altoona Methodist Church was established.

**1872:** Altoona Christian Church was established.

**1874:** The Altoona Cemetery Association was incorporated on July 14, 1874. Trustees were J. O. Mason, T. E. Haines, William London, W. E. Rowland, D.A. Cheney, William P. Shaver, and David Cree. On August 24, 1874, the Association purchased the south portion of the present Old Altoona Cemetery. At that time, it was customary to locate cemeteries on the highest ground available. The northeast corner of the cemetery was designated as a "paupers field", an area where indigents or strangers to the community were buried.

**1875:** The town of Mitchellville was incorporated on September 20, 1875.

**1876:** The city of Altoona was incorporated. Forty-four male voters were unanimous in their decision to incorporate the city in an election held on March 3, 1876. Women were not allowed to vote. Dr. F. E. English was chosen as mayor in the first election.

**1877:** During the early morning hours of August 29, 1877, the worst railroad accident in central Iowa history occurred on the southwest side of Altoona. The wreck of a Rock Island train at Four Mile Creek killed 20 people and injured 35 others. Heavy rains washed out the stone arch railway bridge and caused the train to plunge into the creek. The first doctor on the scene was F. E. English, father of Altoona Herald editor, Emory English. Word of the tragedy spread quickly, and by mid-afternoon more than four thousand people were at the scene.

**1878:** The original plat for the town of Altoona was located in Beaver and Delaware townships. Difficulties soon arose, and Mayor F. E. English proposed a third township that encompassed just the town of Altoona. On October 8, 1878, Clay Township was created to alleviate the problems of having a town situated in two different townships. T. E. Haines, G. T. Kennedy, and A. H. Hawkins were elected trustees.

**1881:** King David Lodge was established on June 19, 1881. Thomas Haines served as Master for the first three years.

**1888:** Thomas Haines donated four acres of land to the town of Altoona for a park. The park road was designed with large, sweeping curves so that Haines could exercise his horses there. The first improvement to the park was the construction of a lagoon with an island in the center. A bridge was built connecting the island to the rest of the park. Townspeople planted trees and school children observed Arbor Day for many years by planting trees in Haines Park. Many celebrations and community gatherings were held there. Haines Park is located at the corner of Sixth Street Place SE and Third Avenue SE. An urn on the north side of the park honors Thomas Haines.

**1890:** The Altoona Herald began publication. The first editor was Emory English.

**1896:** Burget Mill opened for business.

**1897:** The city of Bondurant was incorporated on December 23, 1897. The town was named after its founder, A. C. Bondurant, one of Polk County's largest landowners. Bondurant was an early railroad town on the Great Western Railroad.

**1902:** Porter Hardware opened in the Lang Building at 102-2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE in Olde Town Altoona. The Interurban electric train system begins regular service to eastern Polk County.

**1903:** Haines Park Hotel opened at a site located on the east side of the 400 block of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue SE in Altoona. The hotel was later moved to the Olde Town Altoona business area in 1914.

**1903:** The city of Runnells was incorporated on May 21, 1903. It was named for John S. Runnells who helped organize the town.

**1904:** The Old Altoona Cemetery was turned over to Clay Township because of financial problems.

**1907:** Clay township trustees purchased the north section of the Old Altoona Cemetery.

**1908:** Thomas Haines dies on May 9, 1908. The Altoona Herald reported that his funeral was the largest funeral ever held in Altoona.

**1909:** The first Altoona High School was built at a cost of \$9,000. It was located at 301 6<sup>th</sup> Street SW at the site of modern day Altoona Elementary.

**1912:** A contract to construct an electrical distribution system using current supplied by the Interurban was approved by the Altoona City Council.

**1914:** The Great White Way (Highway 163) was registered by the State Highway Commission in July of 1914. The insignia of the road was a "W" painted on a white band. Telephone poles along the road were used as markers, so the road soon became known as "The White Pole Road."

**1915:** Thirty-two electric street lights were lit in Altoona for the first time in August of 1915.

**1916:** The River to River Road (Highway 6) was registered with the State Highway Commission in June of 1916. The road was marked with a red "R" on a white background.

**1919:** Porter Hardware moved to the building located at 104-2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE now used as the Altoona Area Historical Center.

**1923:** George Kurtzweil grew the first acre of hybrid seed corn in a field located at near the 100 block of First Avenue North in Altoona.

**1926:** Iowa's first municipal airport was established on the west side of Altoona at the spot where Adventureland is today.

**1927:** On August 27, 1927, aviator Charles Lindberg visited Hanna Field (also known as Des Moines Aviation Park or Altoona Airfield).

**1927:** A second story was added to the Altoona High School located at 301 6<sup>th</sup> Street SW. There was no gymnasium or athletic facilities at the site.

**1928:** An Altoona Town Hall was built in the Old Town area. The east portion of the building was used as a fire station.

**1931:** Altoona voters approved a plan to build a water system on March 5, 1931. The cost of the system was \$24,500. A well six hundred and ninety-six feet deep was dug, a standpipe erected, and two and seven-tenths miles of mains were laid to complete the system. The water system improved fire protection to the town, but the water had high iron content, a peculiar odor, and easily stained clothing.

**1932:** Clay Township trustees purchased land for a new Altoona Cemetery one-half mile south of the Old Altoona Cemetery. The first interment did not occur until 1941.

**1939:** A gymnasium was added to Altoona High School with the assistance of the Federal Emergency Works Program Administration.

**1948:** A group of Altoona Citizens petitioned for a \$21,500 bond issue to dig a "deep" well. The proposition carried. The well was dug to a depth of 2,551 feet and, by the time the project was completed, it cost \$47,500. The well served the community until 1967 when the casing sprang a leak and allowed inferior water to enter the system.

**1956:** The first sanitary sewers were installed in the city of Altoona.

**1959:** Neal Smith of rural Altoona was elected to Congress. He would serve for 36 years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

**1960:** Interstate 80 opened.

**1961:** Altoona Regular Baptist Church established.

**1962:** Southeast Polk Community School District established on July 1, 1962. A new Altoona fire station was built on Third Street SW at the cost of \$20,000.

**1964:** A paving program was initiated in the city of Altoona. Some unpaved roads within the city limits were improved each year. Paving was required in all new subdivisions.

**1967:** The Polk County Conservation Commission voted to name a county park in honor of Thomas Mitchell. The park is located five miles east of Altoona along Highway 6. The commission “called upon all who should pass that way in the future to honor the memory of a truly great pioneer.”

**1968:** A new well was dug by rotary drill for the City of Altoona. Cost of the project was approximately \$100,000. It supplied water as far north as the intersection of Interstate 80 and Highway 65.

**1968:** The City of Altoona celebrated its Centennial year. Centennial Elementary was built. Altoona voters approved bonds totaling \$100,000 to finance a swimming pool. The size of the pool was 5200 square feet with a capacity of 250,000 gallons. The pool would be lighted and have a twelve foot diving board. A baby pool adjoined the main pool.

**1969:** Zilla Hick donated property at 700 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South in Altoona for use as a public library. Faith Kurtzweil donated her time as Altoona’s first librarian.

**1970:** The City of Altoona purchased 18 acres bordered by the railroad tracks, Fourth Street SW, and Thirteenth Ave. SW for a new city park. Because the Lions club gave so many volunteer hours to improve the area, it was named Lions Park. The park had two ball diamonds, playground equipment, and a shelter house.

**1974:** Adventureland Park opened.

**1977:** The Altoona City Hall located at 407-8<sup>th</sup> Street SE was completed at a cost of \$225,000. The building contained 6600 square feet of office space, council chambers, and the police department.

**1984:** On July 1, 1984, a new 5,000 square foot Altoona Public Library located at 700 First Avenue South was dedicated. The new building replaced the old Library that stood at the same location.

**1984:** St. John and Paul Catholic Church constructed. Adventure Life Church constructed.

**1989:** Prairie Meadows opened.

**1989:** On September 14, 1989, the newly widened Highway 6 through Altoona was dedicated. The name of the road was officially changed to 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

**1991:** The Sam Wise Youth Athletic Complex was dedicated on September 12, 1991. The complex was named for long-time Mayor Sam Wise in honor of his work developing Altoona’s park system.

**1991:** Willowbrook Elementary opened in August of 1991.

**1992:** The Altoona YWCA/Campus opens with 1800 charter members.

**1993:** Record rainfall amounts left much of Des Moines and Polk County without drinking water. The City of Altoona provided water to much of central Iowa for several weeks.

**1994:** Highway 65 Bypass opened

**1997:** Groundbreaking ceremonies were held for a new 20,000 square foot Altoona Public Library located at 700 – 8<sup>th</sup> Street SW.

**1998:** The current Altoona Public Library opened at 700-8<sup>th</sup> Street SW.

**2002:** A new Altoona Fire Station located at 950 Venbury Drive SW opened in February of 2002. The new fire station had six bays with doors on both sides to allow twelve vehicles to leave the building at the same time. It also included offices, a kitchen, a meeting room, and ample room for training.

**2003:** The Altoona Area Historical Society was established. On May 5, 2003, the Altoona City Council recognized the Society as the City's official organization to preserve and protect historical records and artifacts of the City of Altoona and surrounding area.

**2003:** The Altoona Aquatic Center at 1200 Venbury Drive SW opened on June 28, 2003. The estimated total project cost was \$4 million.

**2005:** An improved Interchange 945 (Exit 143) of Interstate 80 opened. The interchange had a new four-lane bridge, a pedestrian bridge, and improved entrance and exit ramps from First Avenue (NE 72<sup>nd</sup> Street) in Altoona.

**2006:** The Altoona City Council purchased the Old Porter Hardware building at 104-2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE to use as a historical center.

**2006:** A new water tower on the western edge of Altoona in constructed. It will provide 1.75 million gallons of water storage for the growing community.

**2006:** Relocated Adventureland Drive opened in Altoona.

**2007:** Clay Elementary opens in August of 2007. The First Avenue South widening project is completed in time for the new school year.

Sources: Henning, Barbara Beving Long, and Beam, Patrice K. *Des Moines and Polk County: Flag on the Prairie*. Sun Valley, CA: American Historical Press, 2003.  
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