Touring Fillmore County

The **FLLMORE COUNTY VISITORS COMMITTEE** invites you to take a self-guided tour of the featured sights in this brochure. **Northern Fillmore County is 15 minutes south of the I-80 York exit.** Sights not located in the communities are marked on the map.

Geneva, which is located on Highway 81, was the logical choice for the Fillmore County seat. When the railroad extended its lines from Lincoln to Hastings in 1871, it proposed naming the towns from Crete westward alphabetically. Taking over where Saline County left off are the Fillmore County villages of **Exeter, Fairmont** and **Grafton**. The location of these towns, also along Highway 6, provided them with opportunities for transporting and receiving goods via rail for many years. East of Geneva on Highway 41 is the Fillmore County community of **Milligan**; to the south is **Strang**; **Ohiowa** lies southeast and **Shickley** southwest, both on Highway 74.

Please respect the privacy of residents of homes on the tour by viewing from the street.

1. Fillmore County Courthouse, 900 G St., Geneva

Geneva, the geographical center of Fillmore County, was declared the county seat in 1871. The newly renovated **Fillmore County Courthouse,** a simplified version of the Richardsonian Romanesque style was first completed in 1894. A walk around the courthouse square opens the imagination to the activities occurring there over the past century. Portraits of former county officials, suspended below its tin ceilings, and the grandeur of its second floor courtroom provide a sense of the history and permanence of the county's heritage, as does the tower's clock which still chimes. **(National Register of Historic Places, 1977)**

2. George W. Smith House, 324 N 12th, Geneva

The Queen Anne style **George W. Smith House** was built in 1890 by Geneva settler George Smith, whose loan office was the predecessor of the First National Bank of Geneva. Through his banking business and also as a partner in a land development company, Smith platted and promoted the sale fo building lots in Geneva in the early 1880s. From 1925-1942 the house served as a hospital. The home features cherry and oak woodwork, hardwood floors, four stained glass windows, and three fireplaces. **(National Register of Historic Places, 1986)**

3. J.M. Burk House, 331 N 11th, Geneva

The **J.M. Burk House** was built in 1891 for J.M. and Minnie Burk, who moved from Seward County to Geneva to open a hardware business. One of its many owners was a doctor who practiced in the home to its south. The sidewalk from the house's south door still leads to the back door of this neighboring home. Three fireplaces, three stained glass windows and five sets of 6 by 8 feet pocket doors are its special features. **(National Register of Historic Places, 2001)**

4. Dempster Woods Bed & Breakfast, 1212 M, Geneva

The 1888 Italianate was built by John A. Dempster, a Civil War veteran from Illinois, who homesteaded near Ohiowa and served in the Nebraska House of Representatives. "Dempster's Block," evidence of his general merchandise business, can be seen on an old storefront. Living in the home for 50 years was Charles H. Sloan, the orator at the laying of the cornerstone for the courthouse, a county attorney, and a member of the Nebraska Senate and U.S. Congress. In addition to the home's tin ceilings, fireplace, and stained glass windows, its property

provides an acre of woods for walking. **(National Register of Historic Places, 2005)**

5. Geneva Auditorium, 162 N 9th, Geneva

Serving as the city hall and opera house was the **Geneva Auditorium**, built in 1915. The building is now used for live performances and weekend movie showings. In addition to local entertainment productions the Geneva Arts Council provides a yearly schedule of musical and theatrical performances. On weekends volunteers transform the stage into the Rialto II move theater, formerly located on main street. The interior has a raked floor, balcony, stage and orchestra pit. **(National Register of Historic Places, 1988)**

6. St Stephen's Catholic Church, 130 E Seneca, Exeter

The first church, a wood frame, was built in 1874. The present Romanesque church building dates from 1902 and has undergone many renovations and restorations, the first occurring in 1918 whan a storm damaged the steeple which was not replaced. A complete interior redecoration was done in 1978. Another renovation was completed in 2003, restoring the painting of the altar ceiling. Original to the interior are the altars and the stained glass windows; also original and still in use are "Thomas" and "Paul", the bells in the church tower.

7. Exeter Mural, 231 Exeter Ave., Exeter

This representation of downtown Exeter around 1900 and was created by Greg Holdren, an artist from Friend, Nebraska. Adjacent to the mural, which depicts a fire truck en route to a fire, is the historic marker for the founding of Exeter. In 1870 the first house was built in Exeter, named by former residents of Exeter, New Hampshire. The Burlington Railroad aided the community's growth and brought many Easterners, Czechs, Germans, English, Irish, and Scandinavians to the area. Sixteen businesses were in operation by the date of its incorporation, April 1, 1879. In 1896, Charles C. Smith built a factory, which produced index tags and operated for 66 years.

8. Fairmont Creamery Building/Fillmore County Museum, 610 6th Ave., Fairmont

The Fairmont Creamery Company occupied this brick building in 1886. The company, later called Fairmont Foods, was well known in the dairy industry. Dr. S.F. Ashby purchased the building for his medical practice in 1907. The **Fairmont Creamery Building** now houses part of the **Fillmore County Museum**, which contains the doctors' waiting room and rooms devoted to World War II and the Fairmont Army Airfield, and other memorabilia donated by Fillmore County residents. The museum is open Sunday and Wednesday afternoons from 2-4 p.m. **Visitors can also make an appointment to tour the museum by calling Ruth Black, 402-268-3607, or Don West, 402-268-2231. (National Register of Historic Places, 1983)**

9. Union Soldier Monument, 612 6th Ave., Fairmont

Also in Fairmont, located in the park just south of the Fillmore County Museum, is a union soldier monument, dedicated on June 26, 1910. The monument was restored and rededicated "to all who served" in 2001.

10. Blue River Bridge, Road 6, northwest of Grafton

The **Blue River Bridge**, 6 miles northwest of Grafton, was identified by the Nebraska State Historical Society as one of ninety-nine historically significant bridge in the sate. Designed in 1918, this fifty-foot concrete arch was designed by the county engineer, William A. Biba, and built by Frank Craven, a contractor from Exeter, Nebraska. **(National Register of Historic Places, 1992)**

11. St. Helena's Catholic Church, 170 N Jackson, Grafton

The original St. Helena's, the first church in the township, was built in 1880. A building fund was begun in 1916. Parishioners' donations and the church ladies' yearly bazaars resulted in $18,000 by 1922 when the original church was sold for $400 and moved to make room for its replacement. Church services were held in the Opera House until September 10, 1923, when the new St. Helena's was ready for worship. At the cost of $250 each, stained glass windows from Italy were added in 1927 and refurbished in 2000. The church's completed cost was $43,325. The ladies bazaar is still an annual event, contributing to the support of the church.

12. Manning Grain Co., 4 Burress Rd., Fairmont

Four miles north and five miles east of Geneva is a former Burlington train depot, not the **Manning Grain Co.** on the site of the little community of Burress, once a trade center of 75 people in the 1920s. The first railroad was built here in 1887. Before the depot's transition into a grain company, it wasn't unusual for over 1,000 people per night to attend dances there, until the bands became too big and the prices too high. The last dance was held there in 1949 on the Fourth of July. On the following day the Mannings discovered that the former dance hall held over 28,000 bushels of grain. Through the years in addition to providing beer, boots, feed and fertilizer, it has been a gathering place for area farmers.

13. Ceski Bratri Cemetary, Highway 41, west of Milligan

The earliest gravestone in the **Ceski Bratri Cemetary** near Milligan is dated 1876. Other unmarked graves represent earlier buriels of travelers from passing wagon trains. Built in 1874 on farmland northwest of the cemetery, the chapel was moved to the cemetery in 1901. It was the first church for Catholic pioneers in Fillmore County.

14. Milligan Auditorium, Main St., Milligan

The **Milligan Auditorium**, an all concrete masonry and steel structure, was built in 1929. It is one of ten halls built by liberal Czechs from 1920-60 and the only one built by an association of organizations: Z.C.B.J., a vesna of the J.C.D., a society of the T.J. Sokols, and a local dramatic club. Located halfway between the Fairmont and Bruning air force training bases, the auditorium was a prominent social gathering place during World War II. Live bands still entertain there. **(National Register of Historic Places, 1998)**

15. Strang Museum, Main St., Strang

Formerly the Hamilton township hall built in 1889, the **Strang Museum** was moved to town in 1984. During Strang's centennial year, 1986, the building was transformed into a museum. Standing on the grounds is a wooden windmill and the steeple bell from the United Bethren Church. **Visitors can make an appointment to see the museum by calling Joy Lentfer, 402-759-3706, or Janet Lentfer, 402-627-2085.**

16. Strang Windmill, Main St., Strang

Once called Media before it was incorporated, this village was renamed when it was discovered that another Nebraska town had the same name. A.L. Strang, an Omaha windmill dealer, gave the town its first windmill, which used to run the town pump. A windmill still sits in the middle of the principal intersection on main street.

17. Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, 3 miles south of the southwest corner of Ohiowa
The original **Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church** was organized on September 25, 1887, as St. John's Lutheran church. The first church building was constructed in 1888. In 1917 the new church replaced the first one. Some of the early pastors of this church were born in Germany and migrated to America. Over the years the church has been known as the South Lutheran Church, and in 1954 its name was changed to **Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church**. After the original statue on the altar was destroyed in April 1967, the church was restored in September and a new statue from Trinity Lutheran Church in DeWitt, Nebraska, was placed on the altar. **Visitors may see its interior by calling Willard Rippe, 402-295-2579, or Ronald Rippe, 402-295-2542.**

18. Franklin Township Building Mural, Main St., Ohiowa
In 1978 an Ohiowa graduate and artist, LuAnn Matthies, created the 74-foot mural n the north wall of the former **Franklin Township Building** in Ohiowa. From the framed silhouettes of deer grazing on the populated plains, the westward bound wagon trains, the horse drawn plow breaking the sod, and the appearance of the tracto, this four-frame progression captures the essence of the land and its changes with the arrival of the homesteaders in Fillmore County.

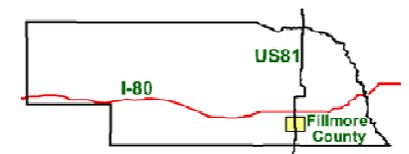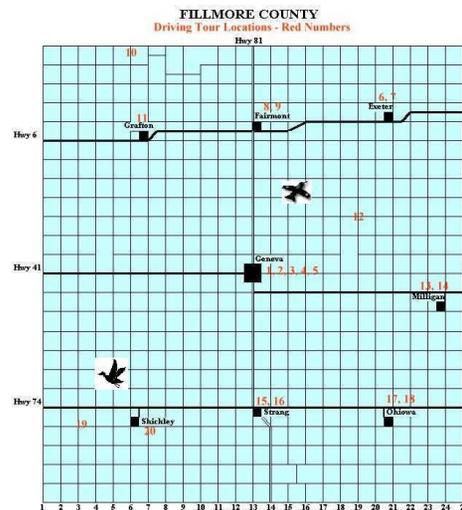**19. Stockholm Swedish Lutheran Church and Cemetery, 2-1/2 miles west of Shickley**
A group of Swedish settlers from Illinois organized this congregation in 1875. When the original building became too small in 1900, the **Stockholm Swedish Lutheran Church** was built in less than six month at the cost of $3,549. Named after the Swedish capital, the building has a 70-foot steeple and Gothic Revival detailing. Its red roof can be seen for miles. Until 1937 the congregation used the Swedish language occasionally for worship. Inside hangs a large painting, depicting Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. The artist, Professor Olof Grafstrom, a Swedish immigrant, finished this work for the church in 1902. **To view the inside of the church please contact: Maurice Hendrickson, 402-627-7095; Eldon Benson, 402-284-2317; Norman Landgren, 402-627-7155. Church and cemetery. (National Register of Historic Places, 1995)**

20. Virgil Biegert Public Library, 214 N Maket St., Shickley
Chosen as one of the best libraries in the nation was the **Virgil Biegert Public Library** in Shickley, a community of about 360 residents. According to an article published in the January 2001 Hastings Tribure, the America Public Library Ratings Index recognized the library based on the size of the community it serves and the amount of use by its patrons. Virgil and Helen Biegert, lon time residents of Shickley, funded its building in 1994. Library hours: Monday and Friday, 9:30-11:3- and 1:30-5:30; Wednesday, 2:30-6:3-; Saturday, 9:30-11:30.

Cemetery location maps are available in the Fillmore County Courthouse and the Fillmore County Museum.

THE FILLMORE COUNTY VISITORS COMMITTEE THANKS YOU FOR VISITING OUR COUNTY. PLEASE COME AGAIN.
www.visitfillmorecounty.org