

# The disappearing communities

By Shana Powell  
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*The Weekly News*

Booming, growing by leaps and bounds, prosperous – all apt descriptions of many communities dotting the West in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Sometimes, it seemed that all it took was the arrival of a stagecoach line or railroad; a discovery of gold or some other precious metal; creation of a new attraction; or occasionally just the right intersection of roads and rivers for the establishment of one of those towns.

People always hoped that such a village, in time, would develop into a thriving metropolis. Occasionally, a boom period also might hit an already settled town.

Residents in Cooke County witnessed the emergence of many such communities.

But on the other side, a railroad or highway bypassing a community, a mine playing out, a natural disaster, or a school closing or consolidation could spell the disappearance or decline of a once vibrant town, possibly leaving behind only a few hardy souls to continue its existence. Sometimes the decline even transpired without any apparent reason or explanation.

Automobiles also encouraged many people to leave smaller towns and head to larger nearby cities, draining

the population of many areas.

Inhabitants of towns like Custer City, Sturgeon, Breedlove, Lois, Leo, Bloomfield and others in Cooke County planned for success and growth of their communities. For various reasons, that failed to happen.

In 1876, the United States celebrated the centennial of the country with a large celebration in Philadelphia and smaller ones across the country. In Cooke County, Jim Jones founded a town he named Centennial City in honor of that momentous event. But the town underwent a name change when later in that year George Armstrong Custer and members of the 7th Cavalry were killed at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Centennial City became Custer City.

Located 10 miles northeast of Gainesville, Custer City flourished and by 1882 contained “a flour mill, cotton gin, sawmill, blacksmith shop, store, church, post office, and a population of 300.”

But, inexplicably, the city lost its momentum and “ten years later there were only 2 mills, a blacksmith, general store, and 25 residents. The post office closed in 1902. In 1978, a church and a few dwellings were all that remained.”

Sturgeon, otherwise known as Baum, was a small

farming community located about 12 miles northeast of Gainesville. Not much is known about it, though the name Baum appears on some older letters that exist in the county. During the 1940s, “there were 50 people and 2 businesses. By 2000 the population was 10.”

Established in the early 1880s 15 miles south of Gainesville, Breedlove also known as Needmore, was founded by two men one – of whom was named Breedlove. The school was constructed in 1885 on land given by J.S. Riley. For a few years students from Hemming also attended this school. A cotton gin “opened next to the school but ended operation around 1900, the time when the town began to decline. By 1936, the town no longer appeared on county maps.”

Coesfield was named by

Frank Liedtke, a Civil War veteran who moved to the northeastern part of Cooke County in 1867. He “named the town after his hometown in Germany. Other Civil War veterans moved to the area and took up farming. A post office opened in 1883 and by 1890 one hundred and fifty people resided there. The post office closed in 1906 and by 1933 the population had dropped to 81. By the mid-1980s only a few residents remained there.”

Settlers in Dexter hoped to challenge Gainesville and make Dexter the new county seat for Cooke County. The town had many businesses and a growing population; it was a reasonable conclusion that they might be able to win that gamble.

Unfortunately for Dexter, a new railroad line coming into Cooke County

bypassed Dexter and went through Gainesville, helping to guarantee the survival and success of Gainesville and helping to begin the decline of Dexter and the exodus of

many of the business owners from there to what is today Oklahoma.

Sometimes the fate of a community turned on one decision.

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## Business news

### Chamber sets ribbon ceremonies

GAINESVILLE – The Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce will hold three upcoming ribbon cutting ceremonies in Gainesville.

The first will be a ribbon cutting ceremony for Red River Family Denton at 2:30 p.m., Friday (Jan. 10) at 1320 N. Grand Ave., in Gainesville.

The second ribbon cutting ceremony will be for Starnes Orthodontics at 5 p.m. Friday (Jan. 10) at 1213 E. California St., in Gainesville.

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