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Ghost Towns of Kansas: A Traveler's Guide

Daniel C. Fitzgerald

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As soon as the Kansas Territory was opened for settlement in 1854, towns sprang up like mushrooms first along the Missouri border, then steadily westward along trail routes, rivers, and railroad lines. Many of them barely got beyond the drawing board and hundreds of them flowered briefly and died, victims of the "boom or bust" economy of the frontier and the vagaries of weather, finance, mining, agriculture, railroad construction, and politics.

Ghost Towns of Kansas is a practical guide to these forsaken settlements and a chronicle of their role in the history of Kansas. It focuses on 100 towns that have either disappeared without a trace or are only "a shadowy remnant of what they once were," telling the story of each town's settlement, politics, colorful figures and legends, and eventual abandonment or decline.

The culmination of more than ten years of research, this new book is a distillation of the author's immensely popular three-volume work on the state's ghost towns, now out of print. Condensed and redesigned as a traveler's guide, it is organized by region and features ten maps and detailed instructions for finding each site. Twenty of the towns included are discussed for the first time in this volume. The book also contains more than 100 black-and-white photographs of town scenes.

With this new guide in hand, travelers and armchair adventurers alike can journey back to the Kansas frontier to places like Octagon City, where settlers signed a pledge not to consume liquor, tobacco, or "the flesh of animals" in order to purchase land at $1.25 per acre from the Vegetarian Settlement Company. Or to Sheridan, a tough, end-of-the-line railroad town where, according to the Kansas Commonwealth, "the scum of creation have congregated and assumed control of municipal and social affairs." At least thirty men were hanged and a hundred killed either in gunfights or by Indians during Sheridan's tumultuous two-year life span. Today the only remainder of Octagon City is a stream named Vegetarian Creek, and "wild and woolly" Sheridan is again a pasture.

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