

Story Ideas

Clafin, Kansas



"Little Germany"

■ Historic Architecture

- German ingenuity turned a rich vein of clay near town into homes, streets, and stately brick buildings - including Wolf Hotel, still standing, and an opera house that drew crowds until it was raised in the 1970's.
- Ironwork Trim. You won't find rotting wood trim on any of Ellinwood's historic buildings. Their German builders used elaborate ironwork instead of expensive, elusive lumber.

■ Ellinwood's Underground World

- The secret under Ellinwood's streets is a system of tunnels that were filled with underground businesses. Until the turn of the century, they provided coal storage, a brewery, bath house, harness shop, barber, dentist, sample room, gambling, and the service of soiled doves. Tunnel businesses catered to cowboys, railroad men, and wagon trains streaming down the Santa Fe Trail in the 1800's.
- In the 1970's, the City of Ellinwood began to fill the tunnels with sand. But a determined local woman, Adriana Dierolf, was captivated by the untouched tunnel shops under the buildings she owned. She refused to fill them in. She stabilized her section of tunnels and opened them up for tours in 1979.

■ Devoted to Entertainment

- The Wolf Brewery produced fine beer and schnapps. Frederick Wolf famously said, "You have to have beer when you sing!" He and his family made sure Ellinwood had both. The brewery and the bars they served were located in the underground tunnels. The Wolf Family also built a mill to produce White Lily Flour, Wolf Pond to harvest ice, Wolf Hotel, the opera house, Wolf Park and band shell, and twin mansions for Frederick's two children.
- Frederick Wolf was not alone in needing good food and drink. The Ellinwood Men's Chorus built Maennerchor Hall in 1890 (still standing) as a place to eat good food, raise a beer, dance, and sing. German families gathered to socialize at the hall every Sunday afternoon until around 1910 when the Kansas Bone Dry Law passed.

1959 Sinkhole

- In 1959, a circular pit 300 feet in diameter and 85 feet deep developed suddenly on Larry Panning's farm near Ellinwood. This collapse of a deep salt deposit was caused by early oil drilling practices. Today, the sinkhole continues to grow, and has become a pond that attracts eagles and other wildlife. Larry notes, "When it fell, a column of dirt flying up in the air looked just like Old Faithful."

"When you live in a small town, these are the things you live for."

■ Ellinwood is small town America at its best. It's the place we dream about and aren't sure still exists. But here it is.

- Children roam the town on bicycles year-round. Summers are spent at the pool, tubing on the river, eating an ice cream cone on Main Street, visiting friends, cooling down with a book at the library, making a parade float, and playing baseball.
- There is almost no crime here. Community members watch out for each other and for every child in town. Family bike rides are a tradition with stops at the farmer's market to pick up homemade bierocks or a loaf of bread.
- Ellinwood schools are award winning. Students score above average on Kansas state assessment tests. St. Joesph Catholic School just celebrated 125 years of educating children in Ellinwood.
- History lives here. Here's an example: The Ellinwood Depot was built in 1903 and was active as a depot into the 1980's. The depot was built two feet wider and ten feet longer than the Atchison, Topeka, and other Santa Fe depots of its kind. Today, its purpose has changed but it continues as a hub of community life. The American Legion moved into the depot in 1986 and, with the help of donations and 4000 volunteer hours, transformed it. Class reunions, community meeting, and delicious meals are enjoyed here. The depot is open six days a week, and the parking lot is always full. The depot has been full of Ellinwood life and activity since 1903.

For more information: We will be happy to supply photographs, contact information for interviews, tours, guides, background information, and assistance with travel arrangements.

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