

Bellevue, the "oldest continuous settlement" in Nebraska, is currently one of the fastest growing communities in the state. Evidence of Bellevue's growth is seen in the constant expansion of the school system, new municipal buildings, new and enlarged businesses, new churches, and many hundreds of new homes. While there is a great deal of new growth, the old is not forgotten.

A field headquarters and trading post of the Missouri Fur Company was founded on this side of the Missouri during the later part of 1822 under the direction of Joshua Pilcher. A few years later, Lucien Fontenelle became a partner. He was a prominent figure in the Rocky Mountain fur trade, and is thought to have been Bellevue's first permanent resident. Around this time, the Kennerly Diary recorded the use of the name "Bellevue" (meaning beautiful view), reflecting French influence during that era.

In 1828 Fontenelle became the owner of the Bellevue post, but sold it four years later to the Office of Indian Affairs. Soon thereafter Peter A. Sarpy, who worked for the American Fur Company, established a trading post about a mile away. Active in the development of the area and in civic affairs, it is for him that the county is named.

An Act of Congress, in 1834, declared the land west of the Missouri to be "Indian Country." Only military personnel, missionaries, scouts of exploring parties, and fur traders were allowed to stay. Pioneers who were "only passing through" were not required to have "passports." In 1835, after repeated bouts with high water along the Missouri, the settlement moved from the river bottoms to the nearby plateau.

In 1846 thousands of Mormons camped in the area, with permission of Omaha Chief Big Elk, prior to their long trek across the territory to Utah. Two years later, when gold was discovered in California, a steady stream of prospectors, adventurers, and whole families passed through Bellevue. Some chose to remain, setting up businesses or outfitting the wagon trains that headed west.

Early in 1854 Lucien Fontenelle's son Logan, and several other Indians, journeyed to Washington D.C. to conclude a treaty whereby they ceded 4,000,000 acres of land to the United States for \$846,000. Not long after

this treaty was made, Congress organized the Territory of Nebraska, which included not only Nebraska, but also parts of the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. Bellevue, which had an estimated 50 residents in 1854, was among the first villages to incorporate under the Territorial Legislature in March 1855.

The first Masonic Lodge west of the Missouri River was established here that October, and Reverend McKinney established the first Presbyterian Church before the end of the year. The church, completed in 1858, is said to be the oldest church building in Nebraska.

Early residents had great hope for the future of the robust frontier town. For a time it seemed certain that Bellevue would become the capital of the territory, but Omaha won that prize. Omaha also got the bridge, the railroad, and as a result, much of the wealth for the early settlers.

Sarpy County separated from Douglas County in 1857 and Bellevue served as the county seat until 1875, when the county government was moved to the "more central location," Papillion. Bellevue's courthouse, originally built as a territorial bank, served as the town hall from 1876-1959. The structure is currently maintained as an example of the architecture of the period.

When the first phases of frontier days were over, the Indians and the agency moved to a reservation (1854-56) and the waves of humanity "going west" had left the scene, Bellevue became a quiet town with houses widely spread and separated by pasture land. During those years, however, the foundation was laid for the Bellevue of today.

In 1888 the federal government bought 545 acres of land near Bellevue for use as a fort. It was given the name "Fort Crook" for General George Crook in 1891, with the first infantry soldiers arriving in 1896. An air strip, added in 1924, was named Offutt Field. The excellent runway facilities were a determining factor in the location of the Martin Bomber Plant at Bellevue during World War II. The Strategic Air Command Headquarters moved to Offutt Field in 1948. The number of people working at SAC and the base has increased steadily over the years.

Bellevue College was organized in 1880 by Presbyterians to provide a Christian education for the young people of the community. It was maintained until 1920, when the small wartime student body and resulting financial troubles forced it to close. A new Bellevue College opened its doors in 1966, this one a private four-year liberal arts college, which has enjoyed steady growth and increasing enrollment.

Today, Bellevue -- a growing cosmopolitan community of over 30,000 -- is the fourth largest city in Nebraska. The immediate trade territory comprises 65,000 people. Bellevue has 19 manufacturing plants, 17 public schools, four private schools, 19 churches, 12 shopping areas, and seven banking facilities. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) Museum, Missouri riverboat cruises, Fontenelle Forest nature refuge, and historic buildings are among the most popular attractions in Bellevue.

Bellevue's location, with the large metro-area to the north and Offutt Air Force Base to the south, means many residents work either in Omaha or at the base. Retiring Air Force people often choose to settle in Bellevue because of its small town attributes, plus proximity to base facilities and Omaha. The hilly, wooded location of Bellevue still provides many beautiful building sites. The city continues to establish new housing developments to meet the needs of this growing community.