

Papillion entered the scene as the second of the county's five remaining incorporated cities. The Union Pacific Railroad already ran through what would become the City of Papillion. There was a depot a few miles east of town, which local residents paid to have moved to the new town site.

The Papillion Creek had been named many years earlier by French explorers who, making note of the many butterflies around the creek, named it Papillion or "Butterfly" Creek. The extra "i" was inserted into the name of the town by Americans who had not studied their French very well.

Religion thrived in the new little town. During the 1870s, congregations were formed by German Methodists, English Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Episcopalians; by the end of the decade most had their own churches.

Agriculture remained the biggest industry in the county, despite a huge infestation of grasshoppers in mid 1870s.

Sarpy County's population was originally concentrated in the far eastern part of the county along the Missouri River. By the mid 1870s, the county's population was growing and moving farther and farther west. Agitation began for moving the county seat from Bellevue at the far eastern edge to a more central location. Petitions were signed all over the county and a two-part election scheme resulted. Three towns wished to be the county seat: Bellevue, Papillion, and Sarpy Center. It was decided that at the first election the town with the fewest votes would drop out, and the second election would be between the two surviving contenders. Sarpy Center had a majority of the votes and Papillion came in second. Bellevue, with the fewest votes, was eliminated from the contest.

J. D. Spearman, founder of Sarpy Center, decided on a maneuver which unfortunately backfired. He introduced a bill in the State Legislature to name Sarpy Center as the county seat, thus doing away with the need for the upcoming election. The bill was defeated; and, at the election, Papillion won the right to be the seat of government. It is thought that part of Papillion's success lay in a distaste for the unfair advantage attempted by Spearman.