

This tour is a sampling of the many points of interest in the downtown district, known as Railside. Due to the number of stops and the walking distance between stops, the tour has been broken into eastern and western tours.

In 1916, the first paved coast to coast roadway known as the Lincoln Highway came to town connecting New York to San Francisco. The town's paved seedling mile is still present, just north of Highway 30, and east of Stur Road. Today, Lincoln Highway is known as Highway 30, and in Grand Island as 2nd Street.

In the 1940s, during World War II, the city was bustling at the seems with thousands of soldiers, airmen, and about 100 German prisoners of war. The POWs were located at the former Dodge School building downtown. A historical marker is now on the site where the buildings once stood. Ironically, the POW camp was directly across the street from the Liederkranz, a large German social organization.

These war related operations had a profound impact on downtown Grand Island and the surrounding area. But, as with so many downtown areas across the country, Grand Island's saw a downturn before enjoying a renaissance.

In 2018, Grand Island's downtown became one of only three in Nebraska listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## A Bit of History

In the 1850's, three lowa-based businessmen saw the economic potential of a town near the grand island in the Platte River.

Westward settlers developed the land that would soon become a bustling metropolis, thanks to the Union Pacific Railroad. By the turn of the 20th century, Grand Island had carved out its place as a major railroad, business, agriculture and industrial center.

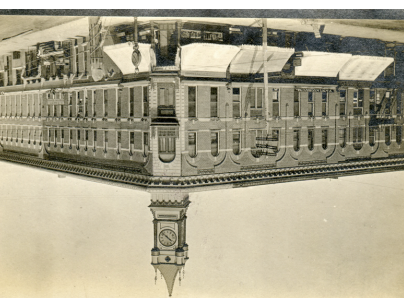
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## Walking Tour



# Eastern Railside



In 1909, an addition was added with Wells Fargo & Company Express as a tenant. Over the years, dozens of businesses have occupied the building, including barbershops, bars, professional offices, Anheuser-Busch and the Busline Shoe Shop, named after the intercity buses that parked along Pine Street.

The Michelson Block was built in 1885 by James Michelson and was expanded to include a third floor in 1887. The most unique feature of the building was a clock tower at the corner of 3rd and Pine. It included a bell and a three faced Seth Thomas clock, lit at night by gas.

### 5 Michelson Building 102 W. 3rd St.

Over the years, these buildings would get façade changes, be consolidated and be subdivided. Beginning in 1891, they contained First National Bank and Sondernann & Company Undertaking and Furniture among many other businesses. Through the years, businesses located here included clothing and shoe stores, art galleries, and a dinner theater.

### 4 Jones and Empire Buildings 112-114-116 W. 3rd St.

For decades, people waiting for passenger trains and buses etched their names and the dates in the bricks on the back of this building. It was located across the street from the Union Pacific Depot, and next to the bus line.

### 3 Western Union Building 313 N. Locust St.

The Hedde building was built by Fred Hedde in 1887. Hedde, who first operated a general store located on the main floor from 1893 until the 1930s.

### 6 Coney Island 104 E. 3rd St.

In 1885, the exterior of Coney Island resembled a small bank and was an office for Grand Island attorneys Thomas Oliver Cromwell Harrison, and Charles Rief. Harrison's distinguished legal career included two years as Chief Justice of Nebraska's high court.



Coney Island Lunch Room opened in 1923 serving coney dogs, chili, and the best malts in town. The restaurant has been operated by members of the Katrouzos family since 1933. The interior still has a vintage feel with the original, 1933 menu board on display.

### 7 Red Rooster Building 120 E. 3rd St.

The Red Rooster building was constructed in 1889. It served as a grocery store and a popular auto parts store with upper level living quarters that serviced the railroaders, and later, servicemen.

Thanks to a façade improvement grant, the building was restored to a historical design when it became a restaurant and apartments. Doors from the upstairs apartments were used to create the restaurant's booths.

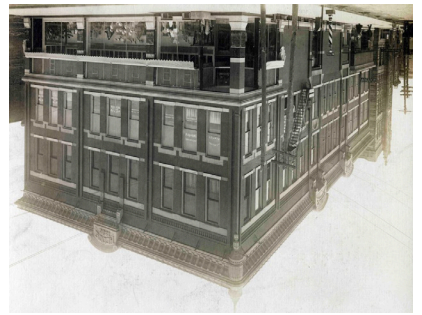
### 8 G.A.R. Hall 213-215 E. 3rd St.

The cornerstone of the G.A.R (Grand Army of the Republic) Hall was laid in 1886. From 1893 to 1910 the post office had a ground floor space in this two-story brick building. Most of the original facade remains, with the interior reflecting modern design.

At the 1925 First National Bank shareholders' meeting, the need to replace the bank's small one-story building with a modern facility was discussed. Following the merger of First National Bank and the State Bank of Grand Island, negotiations resulted in the creation of the new First National Bank at the Third and Locust location. At first, a new two-story building was to be constructed, but the plan was changed in favor of a five-story structure. The bank building included an auditorium and several professional offices.

### 2 First National Bank Building 202 W. 3rd St.

The main building and addition have contained many medical and professional offices, a beauty parlor, barbershop, pool hall, and various other businesses.



The Hedde building was built by Fred Hedde in 1887. Hedde, who first operated a general store located on the main floor from 1893 until the 1930s. An addition to the building's south side was completed in 1910. Over the years, the main building and addition have contained many medical and professional offices, a beauty parlor, barbershop, pool hall, and various other businesses.

### 1 The Hedde Building 201 W. 3rd St.

Woolstenholm and Stern Clothiers was a well-known business that was located on the main floor from 1893 until the 1930s.

### 9 Wolbach Building 103 W. 3rd St.

In 1880, Michael Wolbach chose this site for his general store — the first brick store in Grand Island. Over the years, as his family business grew and grew, the building expanded to three floors on five lots.

The building housed the Wolbach retail businesses for many years and later became Brandeis Department Store, which used a pneumatic tube system for payments until its move in 1974.

Other businesses that called these buildings home included furniture stores. They now house a variety of businesses owned and operated by another entrepreneurial family.

### 10 Roeser Building 115 W 3rd. St.

The dates on the Roeser Building facade represent the year of the building's construction and the year of its expansion and renovation. The Roeser family's grocery store, which occupied the space, was a fixture in Grand Island for generations. Due to the store's popularity, the Roeser family's business grew from one storefront to two at 115-117 W. 3rd St.

After the Roeser's Beehive Grocery closed, several businesses followed, including Jones Walgreen Drug Store, Curry Sipple Men's Wear, restaurants and stores.

### 11 Masonic Temple Building 217 N. Locust St.

Now known as Tower 217, the former Masonic Temple Building is a striking, seven-story brick building, housing businesses and apartments.

In 1870, Ashlar Lodge No. 33, A.F. & A.M. (Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons) was organized in Grand Island, and in 1925 this building was erected. The top floors were originally devoted to Masonic activity and the rest of the space was used for office suites, with retail businesses on the main floor.

Renovation of the former Masonic Temple began in 2012. When possible, salvaged materials were used in the renovation.

## 12 Bartenbach Opera House

209 N. Locust St.

This three-story brick structure was owned and operated by generations of the Bartenbach family for 138 years.



Construction was completed in 1883 with six, street level retail spaces, one of which was the Bartenbach Paint Store. The second floor was home to the Bartenbach Opera House. A street entrance on 2nd Street led to the ticket booth and main auditorium with a balcony, providing seating for 1,000.

Local talent and professional touring shows entertained area residents for 45 years. Notable talents appearing included Buffalo Bill Cody, Al Jolson, The John Phillips Sousa Band, and John Barrymore. The American Legion Convention in 1934 was the last to use the opera house.

Its neon sign is believed to be the first in Nebraska. In 2015, the Bartenbach family sold the building. It closed its framing business in 2021.

## 13 The Yancey

123 N. Locust St.

Typical Renaissance Revival period architecture marks this 11-story building which once housed a 150-room hotel. Construction began in April 1917, but due to financial problems and World War I, completion was not until October 1923.

Hotel Yancey was named for William L. Yancey, who first operated it on a lease basis. The hotel became the center of social and political activity for Grand Island and Central Nebraska.

The Yancey closed as a hotel in 1982. It was remodeled and reopened in 1985 as a stylish apartment, condominium, and office complex. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## 14 Hall County Courthouse

111 W. 1st St.

One of the finest examples of Beaux-Arts Classicism architecture in the Midwest, the Hall County Courthouse was completed in January of 1904 for \$131,000. The Courthouse was designed by one of Nebraska's premier architects, Omaha's



Thomas Rogers Kimball. The contractors were Henry Falldorf and Otto Kirschke of Grand Island. Many of the original design

features are still in place. In 2017, a historical renovation to one of the courtrooms was

completed. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

On the grounds are two additional historic pieces. The first is a cannon from O.K. Store which was located where Fonner Park now stands (1.5 miles south). It was the area's first store and telegraph station, built in 1862. Settlers fortified the O.K. Store with a sod stockade which sheltered 68 men and 100 women.

The other historical piece is the Civil War and Spanish American War memorial, dedicated in 1913.

## 15 Federal Building

203 W. 2nd St.

In 1908, Supervising Architect of the Treasury James Knox Taylor authorized the final architectural plans for Grand Island's new post office and federal building. Postal facilities occupied the first floor, while the second floor held a two-story district courtroom and associated offices.



In 1935, a two-story addition was added on the west as the population grew. In 1968, the post office moved and federal offices remained. Today, the building houses several county government offices and agencies.

Information obtained for this tour was provided by various sources and is as close to historically accurate as we could determine. Our thanks to the Railside Business Improvement District, Hall County Historical Society and Stuhr Museum.

More information about Grand Island history may be found at:

[ArriveRailside.com/building-history](http://ArriveRailside.com/building-history)  
[HallNEHistory.com](http://HallNEHistory.com)  
[StuhrMuseum.org](http://StuhrMuseum.org)

Download this brochure at [VisitGrandIsland.com](http://VisitGrandIsland.com).

If you are interested in other self-guided tours, contact Grand Island Tourism at 308-382-4400.



The streets in Railside – Grand Island's historic downtown district – were originally platted to parallel the railroad tracks. As the city grew, planners decided new roads would point true north.

City lot parking is free.

