

# McGREW

## Scotts Bluff County

### Nebraska

by  
Gary B. Speck



Back in the mid 1800s, the future site of this town sat smackdab in the middle of America's then "super highway", the Oregon Trail, about 2.7 AIR miles east of Castle Rock and 4.7 AIR miles northwest of Chimney Rock, both major landmarks on the route. Alongside of the slow-flowing North Platte, the Mormon, the Oregon and the Pony Express trails left their marks on American history, as over 350,000 people trekked this route in the years between 1841 and 1866. Diagonally bisected by the North Platte River and its rich bottom-lands, the southern half of Nebraska's panhandle, from the Sandhills to the Colorado State line is liberally sprinkled with faded farming towns and forgotten travel stops. It is hip-deep in history, even though it seldom makes national press.



## WITH ONLY ABOUT

**100 PEOPLE,** McGrew is a forgotten little agricultural town slapped down along State Highway 92 and the Union Pacific Railroad on the south side of the North Platte River, in the midst of the wide-open western Nebraska prairie in the far southeastern corner of Scotts Bluff County, just 2.7 miles west of the county line and 15 miles southeast of the city of Scotts Bluff. As we rolled through the town the first thing that caught my eye was the fact that I spotted only one open business scattered amongst Main Street's gap-toothed collection of empty lots and abandoned buildings. It was a bright pink, two story masonry structure with a cadre of pickups snuggled up to the front. The sign above proclaimed it to be the *McGrew Lounge - "The Pink Palace."*

McGrew is just a dried up husk of what it was a century ago. Land for the future village was purchased in 1910, and a land office established. In late 1911, when the Union Pacific Railroad arrived, the town was named for C. F. McGrew, a prominent banker in Omaha. The post office opened on August 30, 1911, inside F. E. Sheffer's general store. A Presbyterian Church was built in 1912 as was Ora E. Adcock's *McGrew Mercantile Company* General Merchandise block. In July 1912, McGrew incorporated as a village. The McGrew State Bank was erected in 1914, while the magnificent brick school building went up in

## McGrew, Scotts Bluff Co., NE

1920. It served as a K-12 school from 1920 until 1967, then as a K-8 school until it closed in 1986.



By the 1920s McGrew boasted a population of 400-500, as well as businesses such as Frank Jones' Chevrolet dealership (taxi service) and repair garage, bank, barbershop, blacksmith, Jack Sauerwine's butcher shop, café, church (built in 1912), creamery, several general stores, grain elevator, hardware store, hotel (today's *Pink Palace*), livery stable, Cox Lumber Company lumber & coal yard, newspaper (*The Wasp*), pickle station, pool hall with saloon, post office, railroad depot, saloon, a Kindergarten-12<sup>th</sup> grade school, a stockyard and a sugar beet dump (established in 1917). The latter was a location where locally grown sugar beets could be stockpiled awaiting shipment by the railroad to the factory in Scotts Bluff.



According to the USPS website, the post office (69353) is said to have been discontinued on January 01, 1986. At the time of our visit in 2000 and later photos and sources show it to be

still open. Is it now a contract station or branch station of one of the nearby cities?



For the past four decades at least, the town has held on with a population see-sawing back and forth across the 100 person mark. Remaining buildings of note include the red-trimmed, double-doored, brick fire station (still used);

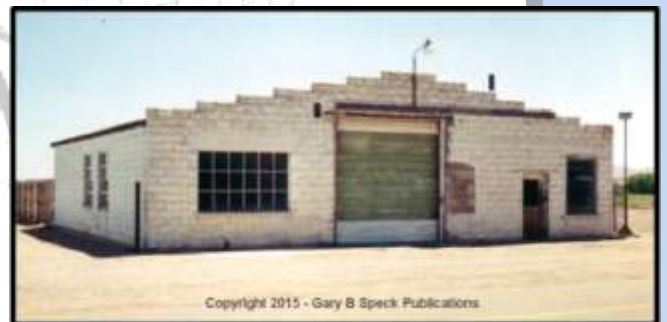


Fire Station



Bank

bank (building (empty at the time of our visit, but appears in use as a residence now); the automotive repair garage; the McGrew Store complex (closed in 1983), *The Pink Palace*, post office building; the white, clapboard church; the two-story, brick school building with its tall brick smokestack and adjacent park; as well as several other unmarked structures and the various residences consisting 44 mobile/modulars and a few stick-built homes, only four of which were vacant, according to the 2010 census.



Garage

# McGrew, Scotts Bluff Co., NE



**The Pink Palace**

The Presbyterian Church closed in early 1971, and in May the building was reopened as the McGrew Community Church. In 1986, it was renamed *The Oregon Trail Chapel*.

**POPULATION FIGURES:**  
PEAK - 400-500  
1940 - 139  
1970 - 79  
1980 - 110  
1990 - 99  
2000 - 103  
2010 - 105



This is one of the towns featured in my most recent book, [GHOST TOWNS: Yesterday & Today](#)™.

This was our Ghost Town of the Month for March 2015.

As always, when you visit, please abide by any **posted signage**, respect the rights of the property owners and always abide by the [Ghost Towner's Code of Ethics](#).

**LOCATION:**

- SW $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec 36, T24N, R53W, 6<sup>th</sup> Principal Meridian, Castle Rock B Township
- Latitude: 41.7466364 / 41° 44' 48" N
- Longitude: -103.4182717 / 103° 25' 06" W

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