

## Founding of Urbandale

People of the Urbandale area have a history of working together for the good of the community; and interest in the education of children played an important role in the initial establishment of our town.

Some concerned citizens organized as Greater Urbandale Boosters and invited others to a meeting at Hays Grocery Store on October 31, 1912. The invitation read, "There are several matters of importance to all of us that need attention, and we would like you to come. (signed) L. L. Talbot"

Later, a larger group gathered at Center School, the rural school originally built on the Milligan farm in the west part of Webster Township. (The other school in the area, McDivitt Grove on Meredith Drive, was becoming part of the Johnston School District.) The families decided it was important to build a community school at 70<sup>th</sup> and Douglas. They worked to raise \$2,000 and by 1916 a two-room school house was ready for occupancy. There were two teachers and the children were divided with the younger children in four grades in one room and the older grades in an adjoining room.

During this time there was state legislative emphasis on school consolidation. To avoid having to become part of the Johnston Consolidated District, Urbandale needed to form its own independent school district. This could be done only if the town itself was legally incorporated. The proposed town comprised about 2,600 acres about three miles west of Des Moines and one mile north of the Walnut-Webster Township lines. There were approximately 350 inhabitants, with 60 eligible voters. (Women could not yet vote.)

Forty seven residents petitioned for an election. C. C. Olmsted, Otto Laverrenz, L. L. Talbott, William Echey, and J. C. Witmer were appointed by the District Court in Polk County to organize and proceed with an election set for April 5, 1917 at the new school house. Notices were posted in public

places and published in the Des Moines Daily Record, a newspaper published in Des Moines, "there being no newspaper published within the limits of the proposed town".

The April vote was unanimous—49 votes cast in favor and none against. On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the new Urbandale citizens elected Mr. Laverrenz as the first mayor. Councilmen were E. T. Botsford, G. W. Mead, Mark Stuart, and J. C. Witmer. Walter Parmenter was chosen treasurer and M. A. Olmsted, assessor. The mayor was to receive one dollar for each council meeting and other officials were to get \$.25 each. Meetings were held at the school house for many years and the town's records were kept in a locker in the building until the first city hall was built.

Information compiled by Virginia Gee, Urbandale Historical Society, from 1917 newspaper reports and Listening and Learning – Urbandale by Mae Nelson. 2010