

Grinnell - A History Hike



Welcome to a downtown walking tour of Grinnell! You might call it a “history hike” because you are about to begin a journey to discover the history of this small midwestern town.

Whether you live in Grinnell or are a visitor, you will learn how the town began, how it grew, and how the citizens helped each other make it a good place to live. You will find the answers to questions like:

- Who started the town, and why did they choose this spot?
- What was here before the town?
- Where was the first building located, and what was it called?

Put on your hiking shoes and head over to the train depot. You should start your tour where the town itself was started by four adventurous men: the leader, J.B. Grinnell, along with Thomas Holyoke, Homer Hamlin, and Henry Hamilton.

1. Railroad Crossing

Start at the **railroad crossing** (behind the depot...walk through the back parking lot) and see where the railroad tracks cross. This is where the town of Grinnell really began.



Do you know the story? J.B. Grinnell and three other men walked across the prairie in March of 1854 looking for a red survey flag. The flag was the marker for where the east-west and north-south railroads would cross when the railroad came through. And this is where they found the flag! This is where they started the town.

2. Train Depot

Look at the **depot** building. Built in 1893, it is over 100 years old. It had two waiting rooms, a baggage room, a lunch counter, and offices. In those days, trains were a common way to travel. Many people came through town on the train. Passenger service stopped in 1970, and now only freight trains come through.



3. Mural

Look at the **mural** on the north side of the **Railway Express Building**. It was created by David Loewenstein, a 1988 Grinnell College graduate and was a project of



the Grinnell Area Arts Council in 2000. The artist worked with the high school, college, and townspeople to collect stories about Grinnell and translated them into this piece. His goal was to create an image that represented the town. How did he do?

Can you see where the train tracks cross, and the trains seem to move through one another? Can you see the images of the rural landscape of Grinnell? Can you see the people of Grinnell working together?

4. Monroe Hotel

Look across the street diagonally to the Monroe Park Apartments. On this corner, the **Monroe Hotel** was built in 1899 on what had been the front lawn



of J.B. Grinnell's house. It was three stories with a big porch around it. People who came to town on the train could just walk across the street to get a room at the Monroe Hotel. It had a dining room that was popular with the townspeople as well. When rail travel declined, the hotel fell on hard times and was torn down in 1970.

5. J.B. Grinnell

Walk north towards the place where **J.B. Grinnell's** house once stood. Mr. Grinnell was

one of the founders of this town. He was a Congregational minister, a farmer, a state legislator and a member of the U.S. House of



Representatives. He came to Iowa to start a community based on education, religion and the abolition of slavery.

6. J.B. Grinnell House

Near the sidewalk on the east edge of the park you will see a big rock with a plaque describing **J.B. Grinnell's house**. Look at this picture to see what his house



looked like. It was an important house in Grinnell and many famous people visited there. His front lawn went all the way to 3rd Avenue. His house was a stop on the Underground Railroad. After Mr. and Mrs. Grinnell died, the house was sold and moved to Broad Street to be made into apartments and eventually torn down.

7. High School/Junior High

Cross 4th Avenue and continue walking north to the old **High School/Junior High**. Schools in Grinnell have been built on this spot since 1856. This building became the Community Center in 1982. It is now Hotel Grinnell.



What you see now was the part of the building added in 1921. You can see a large stone in the foundation on the northeast corner that says "1921". That type of stone is called a "cornerstone" and sometimes has the date of the building's construction on it.

8. Drake Community Library

Look across the street at the **Drake Community Library**. This is the public library for our town.

One interesting feature of the library is not inside, but on the outside of the building.



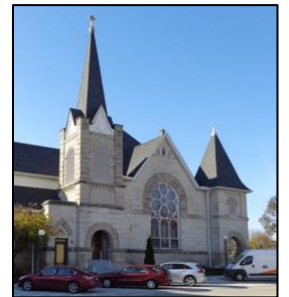
On the south side of the library is a small plot of prairie. If you stand and look closely you will see what this space and all of the surrounding area looked like before the town was started. It was all prairie!

European settlers have plowed up and built over almost all of the prairie in Iowa, but you can still see a tiny bit of it here.

9. Methodist Church

Look at the **Methodist Church**.

It is made of stone with beautiful stained-glass windows. The Methodist Church is the oldest church building in Grinnell, built in 1895. See if you can find the cornerstone of the church.



10. Oldest House

Look diagonally across the street and see a small house. It is among the **oldest houses** in Grinnell, built in 1857 by J.B.

Grinnell's cousin, Levi Grinnell. It is currently owned by Grinnell College.



11. Phoenix Block

Go back to Central Park. Walk to the west side of the park on Broad Street where you can see what is locally known as the **Phoenix**

Block. In June of 1889 there was a terrible fire in what was then the downtown area of Grinnell... this block between Commercial and 4th Ave. It started at noon in a grain elevator just north of the railroad tracks. There was a strong wind that day and most of the buildings at that time were made of wood. It all burned in only three hours.

The new buildings were quickly rebuilt of brick and stone, less likely to burn again. And because the new buildings rose up from the ashes, so to speak, this block is called the "Phoenix Block", after the mythical bird that burns and then rises from the ashes to live again.



12. Jewel Box Bank

Walk north to the Sullivan Bank. We call it the Sullivan Bank because it was designed and built by famous American architect Louis Sullivan.



You might also hear it called the "**Jewel Box Bank**". It's called that because it resembles a jewel box with winged lions guarding the door. And the large, round window above the door looks like a keyhole.

By the way, look at the beautiful design surrounding the round-stained glass window. That design was the basis for our city's logo...you will see it in the brick designs in the streets at downtown intersections and on the round planters on the corners. Can you see it? Our town is referred to as the "Jewel of the Prairie."

13. Oldest Building

Walk west on 4th Ave. and see the **oldest building** in the commercial district on the north side. It is the smallest building on the block and has a street lamp in front of it (807 Fourth Ave.)



14. Eagle Block

Look up and see the eagle on the roof of the **Eagle Block**. An eagle has watched over 4th Avenue for over 100 years. This one is a copy of the original.



15. Sleeping Space

Turn north on Main Street. Look at the building with six tall windows on the second floor. The first floor was originally a department store. But the second floor was once used as a **sleeping space** for workers who would come into Grinnell from the country to work at the Glove Factory, Spaulding Factory, or other businesses. The workers would rent a bed and a night table on the second floor. They would stay there during the week and go home to the country on weekends.



16. Strand Theater

Walk north and look across the street at the **Strand Theater**. It is over 100 years old (built in 1916). It was built for motion pictures (movies), which were very new at the time. Notice the beautiful marble pillars in front.



17. Spaulding Building

Cross the street and look up at the name on the **Spaulding Building**. What other business did the Spaulding family own in Grinnell? They owned the Spaulding Buggy Company, which made many horse-drawn buggies and later cars in a factory on Spring Street. That factory is now the City Offices and Spaulding Lofts.



18. Masonic Temple

Continue down the street. Stop and look at the features on the **Masonic Temple** building. It was built by the Masons, an organization of men that has been around for many years. Look up and see two globes, one representing the terrestrial (earthly) world and the other the celestial (heavenly) world. Can you tell which globe represents the earthly world and which one the heavenly world?



19. Ford Dealership

Cross the street going north and look at the **McNally's Foods** building. What do you see on the building that is unusual?



Winged tires. This building was originally a **Ford Dealership**, built in 1920. Tires looked different than they do now! But they didn't have wings even in 1920!

Retrace your steps south and turn east at 5th Avenue. Continue on the south sidewalk.

20. Herald Building

Look at the **Herald Building**. See the name on the front of the building? There used to be two newspapers in Grinnell. The other paper was the Register. Its office was just down the street on the corner. In 1936 the two papers merged to form the Grinnell Herald-Register, which is still our newspaper today.



Notice that you go up steps to get into the building. Businesses that relied on walk-in traffic had ground level entrances (barbers, grocery stores, butchers, furniture stores, banks, etc.). People who conducted private business or who didn't want people on the street looking in or listening had raised entrances (newspaper offices, lawyers, doctors, accountants, etc.). Newspaper offices often had large printing presses in the lower level so the first floor had to be raised.

21. Interior Telephone Company

Look across the street to the telephone building. Can you see the letters ITC built into the brick on the left side of the building? That stood for **Interior Telephone Company**, which was the first telephone company in town. The spot next door (to the east) is where Anor Scott's store (the first store in Grinnell) was located when the town was first settled.



22. Long Home

Continue east to Broad Street, cross the street north and go to the site of the **Long Home**, the first building in Grinnell (see the stone marker). The Long Home was built in an east-west position; with the east end in what is now Broad Street.



23. Register Building

Turn around and go south on Broad Street, cross 5th Avenue, and see the **Register Building**. Look at the beautiful tile decoration in the brick (and notice the steps going up).



24. Post Office

Look across the street to the **Post Office**. Before the Post Office was built in 1917, there was a livery stable there. Do you know what a livery stable was? (A place where horses were kept or rented out.)



25. Stewart Library

Walk south and look across the street at what used to be Grinnell's public library - **Stewart Library**. It was built by Joel Stewart and his wife, Anna Marie Heber Stewart for the town. This building is now the Grinnell Arts Center.



26. Old Congregational Church

Walk further south and look across the street at the site of the first church in Grinnell, the **Congregational Church**. The original is gone now, but it was made of stone and nicknamed the "Old Stone Church". It was not just a church, but a meeting place for large gatherings in town. It has been replaced by the newer, more modern red brick church you see today.



27. Central Park

Cross the street to **Central Park**. This is your last stop.

Central Park is built on land donated by J.B. Grinnell and was drawn into the plans for the city from the very beginning.



Central Park was and still is a place where the community is welcome to gather for outdoor activities; for children to play, and for people to just enjoy the outdoors in a beautiful place.

*Special Thanks to
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