

History of Gering

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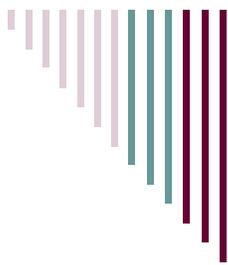
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History of Gering (Excerpted from "History of Western Nebraska" By G. L. Shumway)

The town of Gering was dreamed about by Oscar Gardner and a few others as early as 1886, but it was not until March 7, 1887 that the town really came into existence. The first thing was a post office and Oscar Gardner was the first postmaster. Gardner was also the first notary public.

The town was named Gering in honor of Martin Gering. Mr. Gering along with Mr. Gardner, under the name of Gering & Gardner, put in the pioneer store of the town. It confined its mercantile activities to implements and hardware. F.A. Garlock and T. S. Franklin put in the second store, which was a general merchandise establishment. The third business enterprise in the town was a newspaper started by A. B. Wood. Volume one, number one of the *Gering Courier* was issued April 27, 1887. The fourth store in Gering was a drug store started by Dr. W. H. Charlesworth, who was also the first doctor. Dr. C. W. Mercereau was there soon after.



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The Mail Route.

After the establishment of the post office, the next thing was how to get the mail. Old Camp Clarke wanted it to come that way, but Gardner planned to have it brought from Redington, then considered a better and quicker way. The carrier from Sidney to Camp Clarke frequently carried it onto the river post office and at least once lost it on the prairie where it lay until his return trip. Kimball put in a bid to get a route established across country from there, and occasionally a pouch of mail was brought in from that point by a freighter. This confusion and often delays continued until October.



L.D. Livingstons had established a post office at their home on Pumpkin Creek about 7 miles east of wildcat mountain. They secured mail from Redington. In Banner county, there were several stores opened an these brought mail out – for those who gave them orders – from Kimball, Sidney or Potter, as the case might be.

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In October 1887, the post office at Ashford was established and William Ashford was appointed postmaster. Then a Star route was put on from Kimball to Gering, which took in Ashford as an intermediate point, and dropped mail for Livingston at the latter point. From that time Gering had quite a regular mail service.

Jones M. Clapp was the first carrier on this route into Gering. The route is still in service, although the method of travel has changed from the broncho buckboard to the automobile; and the rough trail of the first years has changed to the fine state and federal aid scenic highway.

The first carpenter and builder in Gering was Martin Bristol, soon to be joined in that work by Ed Bosley and C. F. Berry. Orf Fanning came a little later. William and Frank Stalcup were the first blacksmiths. In May 1887, Lamont brothers were making plans for a hotel and livery stable. However, the Pioneer Hotel, in fact and name, was built by C. W. and Elmer Hogaboom.

Early Talk of Railroad.

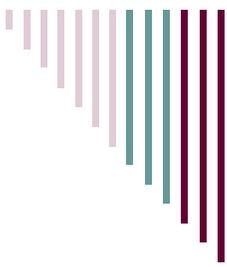
As early as 1885, the Union Pacific filed a plat through government land up the North Platte valley. On May 3, 1887, Phil Jurish and L.B. Calaghan came up to Gering and then went up to the top of the mountain. They came back down to the young town and told the folks that they could see a train coming up the south side of the river. This, of course, was what was hoped would some day occur and for long years it was Gering's fondest wish. Eventually, the dream came true. In the same month, Edson Gering came to the new town and pre-empted a half mile south. He said he was near enough to the business part of town. Also, that he did not want his children playing around the cars.

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In common with new communities, among the first institutions was a band. George Luft arrived from Seward in May and went into partnership with Dr. Charlesworth of the Gering drug store. There had been some talk of a band and with the arrival of Luft, it became a surety. He was the band leader and the other band members were: A. B. Wood, Edson Gering, Oscar and Charlie Gardner, Bert Hubbard, Frank Garlock, John Gorten and Horatio Knapp. There were short of instruments, but the band at Kimball loaned them their horns for the 4th of July celebration of 1887.



One of the curios displayed in Gering windows in the early days of the town was a set of hoofs from a dead mule. These were found in the Mitchell gap and had the shoes still attached. On one of these someone had inscribed the following: "Died with his boots on - 1849 - Scott's Bluffs". Whether this inscription was written then or later no one now knows. There were the bones of many mules and horses found along the trail near here. Several were killed



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and the wagons burned while transporting army provisions to Salt Lake City.

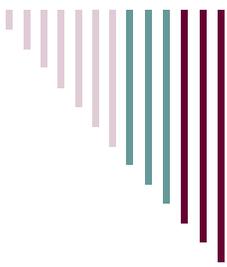
The First of Many Things.

The first bank in the present limits of Scottsbluff county was the Bank of Gering established by Martin Gering and others. The first record of a birth was a son to Mr. and Mrs. A. Porter Pritchard, born June 6, 1887. A girl was born to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Lamont shortly afterwards. It may be that there were earlier births, but they escaped the attention of the chronicler of the time.

The first wedding was that of Miss Ella Yance to William Burton and the ceremony was performed by Reverend B. L. Brisbane. It occurred in June 1887. On July 1, 1887 occurred the first double wedding in the valley. The contracting parties were Miss Mamie Randall to Elmer Hathaway, and Miss Etta Hathaway to William Burgess.

The first fire, aside from the prairie fires of old and the carnage along the old trails, was that of James Westervelt. It was caused by a neighbor who wished to burn off his place and he succeeded. The fire got beyond his control and James Westervelt's house was in line of the flames. The loss was about \$600, a considerable amount in that time.

The first barber in Gering was John Garten. The first shoemaker was William Schiffbauer. He had a claim near town and one day while he was putting down a well he found a pocket of bright yellow metal. Like many he hoped and believed he had struck gold and he carefully wrapped it up and brought a quantity to town. He called George King into his confidence and after telling him that he must never



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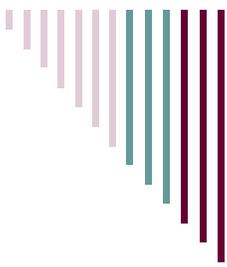
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breathe a word of the discovery, he exposed the glittering "mica" to George's gaze. King knew what it was, but congratulated Schiffbauer on his find. As he left the place, he met Frank Sands, and told him to go into Schiffbauer's store to see the "gold". Naturally the shoemaker would be surprised that Sands should know anything about it; then Sands was to tell him that King, whom he had pledged to secrecy had given it away. The "little Dutchman" lost faith in humanity, and in King in particular at that time.

Some years later Schiffbauer and Langhorst ran the pioneer shoe store in Gering. This Langhorst was the brother of Louis Langhorst, prominent for many years in the democratic politics of the state, and organizer of the "ship by truck" movement between Omaha and Lincoln.

Gering school district was organized in July 1887 with James Westervelt as moderator, Charles Johnson as director, and George B. Luft as treasurer. In April 1887, the historian finds chronicled a school report from district number 51, with Nettie K. Carling, teacher, and 11 pupils enrolled; but this school was outside of Gering.

Gering celebrated the 4th of July in 1887. Everything was new and the sporting contests were something of the wild west order. Runey Campbell and Sandy Ingraham always had some horses about them that showed speed and the Bay State ranch usually kept a few fast horsts. In revolver contests at one hundred yards, George Luft easily beat Ben Franklin and all others. There were bucking contests and other amusements and red lemonade. The bowery dance was well patronized.



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The County Fair

While Cheyenne county had been in existence for nearly 20 years before Gering was started, there was no county agricultural society. Gering proceeded to organize, and was recognized as the Cheyenne County Fair Association by the state association, Robert F. Furnas, secretary, on August 5, 1887. James Westervelt was president, and C. W. Johnson, secretary. Sidney woke up and organized an association also, but was a little too late. This peculiar attribute later followed for after county division had set the Gering association outside of Cheyenne county, Bayard organized and was recognized as the home of the county fair of Cheyenne county until it too was set off into Morrill county.

The first Cheyenne County Fair was held at Gering September 26, 27 and 28, 1887. Gering held the fair for many years after this became Scotts Bluff county, but it went to Mitchell some years ago and it has become an institution of which all people of the county are proud.

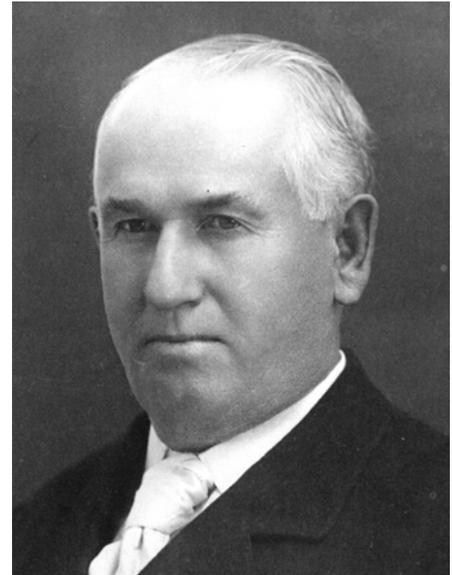
In the first years of Gering, the towns along the railroad began to talk county division. The original plan was to make 3 counties of Cheyenne. This story has been told elsewhere. The first meeting to consider it held in Gering was on May 21, 1887. A. B. Wood was chairman, and E. Cromer, secretary. O. W. Gardner and A. B. Wood were chosen delegates to attend a convention which had been called to meet at Sidney. Not long after the establishment of a post office at Gering, other community centers organized and a number of outlying offices were supplied through the Gering office. Miss Worthington had one established at Creighton valley. This valley was first called Irish Flats but after considerable newspaper discussion and

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other controversy, Creighton valley came more generally into use. Another post office was established at Mitchell, which was then on the south side of the river about 2 miles west of the south end of the present Mitchell bridge.

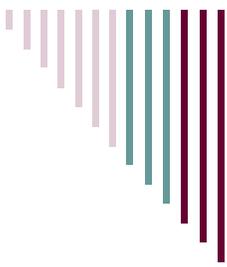
Biographical sketch of Martin Gering Excerpted from "Tales of Pioneer Days - In North Platte Valley" by A.B. Wood)

No one, so far as known, has ever attempted to bring together any connected story of the man whose name this city bears – Martin Gering. The writer does not feel he is equipped to do justice to the man or to make his



sturdy characteristics stand out in the light we feel his memory is entitled to have recorded, but from what material we have and what a rather intimate personal contact for 15 or 20 years of his life yielded we now shall do our best.

To the "tireless" energy of the man, perhaps as much as to the work of that other man who stood out in early history, Oscar Gardner, the present city of Gering can trace its success in becoming and remaining a permanent spot on the map of western Nebraska. We have elsewhere given Mr. Gardner credit for the idea of a town at this location. We now shall seek to show that the survival of the town of Gering resulted in large part from the prideful purpose and personal energy of Martin Gering. He was of that type which never knows defeat.



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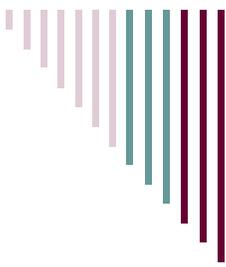
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Martin Gehring (note the spelling) was born in Germany (birth dates of 1830 or 1832 or 1838) where he lived until about 1858. A brother lived in Pennsylvania and in that year sent Martin funds with which to come to America. Martin arrived in America a mere boy and lived with his brother at Susquehanna, Pennsylvania until the civil war began. Arriving in America, he, as had his brother, changed the name to the easier spelling of "Gering". Young Martin could not speak a word of English then. When volunteers were called for he enlisted and served as a sergeant in Co. M of the 4th Pennsylvania cavalry company of volunteers, coming out of the service with two fixed mental fundamentals: one that he was every moment that I knew him one of the most intensely patriotic Americans I have ever known, and the other that he was as "black" a republican as ever lived – a phrase which never faltered.

In this connection, a little anecdote has lived in the traditions of this valley which illustrates it. When it came time to incorporate Gering as a village, a little conference was called to name the men who should be the first village trustees. Some present, and I was there, suggested that we should not make it a political matter, and to this Mr. Gering promptly agreed, adding, "No, let's don't have any bolitics, just pick out five goot republications and let it go at that."

The first location in the west where our information has found him, was at Omaha, where he was said to have operated a saloon. The west was still a frontier then and Omaha probably yet something of a frontier town. Martin had the pioneering instinct. Just how he went there is not known, but his next location was still on the frontier, at Westerville, where everything still was being freighted at



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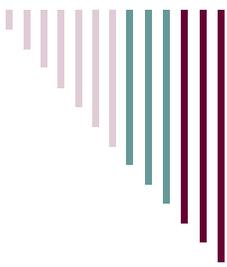
that time from Grand Island, 75 miles distant. Martin Gering was distinctly of the pioneering type.

At Westerville in Custer County, where there was yet no town, with about \$6,000 in cash, he filed on land – a homestead and a preemption – and invested his money in about 2,000 head of sheep. Storms lost him his herd except about 200 head, it being a phenomenally hard winter. Jim Westervelt, who was a resident there at the time, says that Mrs. Gering decided she could not stand it any longer and wanted to go back to Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, where they had operated a hotel, livery barn and saloon before coming west.

The determination of Martin was manifested. He said, "No, I'm going to stay mit, but no more . . . sheep." He moved into the town just starting at Westerville, their farmhouse being moved six miles, and Mr. Gering started a hardware, furniture and implement store. He prospered and in due time had a 50 x 50 two story building and in this building the store and a hotel were conducted. Young Jim Westervelt worked there, choring around and doing odd work in hotel and store. Mrs. Gering returned from Pennsylvania, finding that she didn't like it there after all.

The Burlington railroad came through about that time and missed Westerville. Martin gradually sold out at Westerville and went over to Broken Bow, where he started in the hardware and implement business at the northeast corner of the public square. He also branched out with a store at Cozad, where he was living when the idea of a town at Gering came up.

His first share in the Gering townsite plan was not a large factor, in fact he was but a minor stockholder, but when



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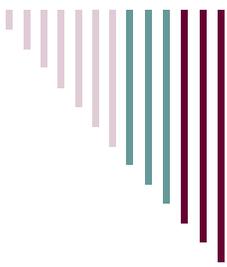
the name of the proposed town was changed, his interest quickened. He liked to be important, and that little piece of strategy on the part of Gardner, Garlock and others in the town scheme probably had a lot to do with his removal here in due time.

He first came to Gering in May 1887, about a month or so after the post office was established. The opportunity to have his memory perpetuated no doubt appealed to him. He had sent a little advance stock of implements and hardware here to be handled by a firm to be called Gering & Gardner. His stepson, Edson Gering, whose name really was Robinson, was to work there. Martin's May visit here, however, enraptured him with the North Platte Valley and it was but a short time until he had arranged for the building of a log house (afterward sold to the writer and for many years the printing office and post office) and came here to put his shoulder to the wheel of progress.

No man was ever more loyal. He had both determination and energy. Along with them he had a keen business ability and was a born trader.

Countless stories of Martin Gering could be told. Although a thorough gentleman and something of a dandy, never appearing except dressed spic and span, he forgot himself in his customary way, when at a mixed affair just after he had returned from a trip back to the old country some lady talking about his sea voyage asked him, "Mr. Gering, were you sick both ways?" He replied, without the least embarrassment, "No, I jüst womit."

In spite of the semi-rough language he used once in a while, Martin Gering, although speaking with a German accent, was a fluent talker, save that when he became



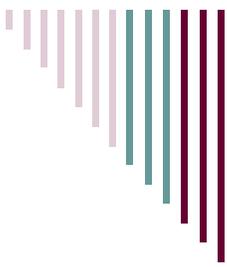
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excited or indignant he would talk so fast that he would run out of breath and almost gasp the closing phrases of his long sentences. He was accused, as are all successful men, of being a sort of Shylock, but those who knew him best believed him to be a kindly man at heart. In many business transactions he did take cognizance of the circumstances and made allowances for hard luck, and he was inclined to be dictatorial, but not more so than the trait shows itself in the normal German character, having little patience with those who stood up to him bluntly disagreeing.

Martin Gering was the originator of the plan to offer Scotts Bluff County a free bridge on condition the county seat was located at Gering. He kept his word, and he steered the job through, not forgetting to induce farmers along the hills to get out a good share of the logs for the piling as a contribution. He was a smooth easy talker, highly persuasive. In 1888, some of us accompanied him on a visit to the county commissioners at Sidney where he talked them into putting up \$500 in cash and sent a piledriver over to make a crossing over the south hills, something all of us had regarded as a wild goose chase. That was in August, and the road, such as it was, was finished before snowfall, for he took charge of the job and pushed it through, again with donations of piles he wheedled from hill landowners.

In 1889, when the townsite company had the talking point of a county and a county seat, Mr. Gering took a trip back to Pennsylvania and sold dozens of lots in Gering to former acquaintances there. Few, if any of them, ever came out here, and few, if any of them, ever sold their lots, although many of them paid taxes for years. For some reason he sold all of them in the south half of town where water was then hard to get, and the town did all its growing



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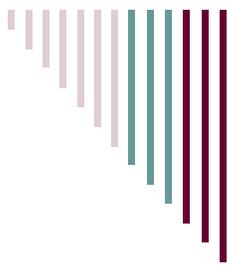
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northward. Perhaps that was why he sold them there, for he knew no one had up to that time struck water south of the old main street.

Martin Gering was also a builder. He probably instigated the Sayre-Gering brick block plan, and the building of the old Commercial hotel, two of the earliest substantial buildings. He erected the first frame residence and later on built a trio of residences in the north part of town, climaxing it with the most pretentious residence of all which used to stand south of the old courthouse block. This was after his second marriage. His wife, a very fine woman, sickened and died, and later on he wed the lady who had been her nurse, Mrs. Josephine Dooley Logan. Josephine had been the wife of John E. Logan, pioneer cowboy and horse fancier and county clerk of Banner County. She was the daughter of A. J. Dooley, pioneer settler in the Ashford territory, the Dooley home then being in the canyon about where the game park dam and lake are located.

The new Mrs. Gering had espoused the cause of Christian Science and was also one who had a yearning for larger places, apparently. At any rate, it was probably she who prevailed upon Mr. Gering to remove to Washington, DC, where he spent his declining years and where he died and was interred in Arlington cemetery – a spot set apart for veterans of the civil war.

It has always been my own opinion that this change was not a welcome one to Martin Gering. Even though the years had not been good to him physically, he had when he left Gering, ample energy and public spirit to have continued active for years and to have added to his genuine service to the town in which he took such personal pride.



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