

## **Eisenhower's Abilene Childhood**

By Dawn Hammatt, Director of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum

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Dwight Eisenhower was always proud of his Kansas roots. He was raised in Abilene, Kansas and like many prairie towns, Abilene was settled by people who believed strongly in hard work and helping one another in times of need. According to Dwight, Abilene families were self-sustaining. In later years he reflected on his youth and said, “we grew our corn, and we grew our meat, we grew our vegetables, and the local mills ground the flour and we didn’t have much connection with the outside world.” In the daily life of a young boy that was probably true, but Abilene actually had six newspapers, a creamery, a telephone company, two business colleges, three factories, and the C. W. Parker Amusement Company that made carousels and had a circus and a skating rink.

Dwight grew up literally on the “wrong side of the tracks,” but he claimed that he never knew his family was considered poor. Father worked more than 60-hours each week at the local creamery, but feeding, clothing, and housing six boys took all of the father’s income. Well-worn clothes were handed down from one brother to the next and the boys may have gone barefoot each summer; however, they never wanted for love or family support. Being self-sufficient didn’t only apply to growing your own food. It meant working hard for what you wanted, even if it seemed beyond reach. Ida Eisenhower encouraged her sons to set goals and then work to achieve them. In fact, the boys were allowed to sell extra vegetables in town for pocket money. Much of Ike’s money went towards sports equipment. Mother also taught her sons how to cook and clean and sew. In his book, *At Ease: Stories I Tell My Friends*, Dwight recalled that he was interested in the dramatic events of history, such as military leaders and battles. He later recognized that it was ordinary people who achieved great things. Average people, through hard work and persistence, had transformed America in the course of his lifetime from its frontier days to the space age. And while Dwight Eisenhower remained humble throughout his life, he was one of the instrumental people in that transformation...thanks to the small-town values he learned in his childhood... It’s no wonder he later said, “The proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene.”

*This transcript of “Eisenhower's Abilene Childhood” is part of the Humanities Kansas Hotline, a series of bite-sized micropresentations about Kansas stories – both serious and light-hearted – that are researched and presented by experts across the state. Humanities Hotline topics change monthly. For more information about Humanities Kansas and the Humanities Hotline, visit [humanitieskansas.org](http://humanitieskansas.org) or call 1-888-416-2018.*