

# PIONEER LIFE IN NEBRASKA PAMPHLETS

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## **WE SETTLED THE PLAINS**

SERIES TWO

Number Two

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Each year the number of Nebraska pioneers is growing smaller. The purpose of this series of pamphlets is to preserve some of the stories of the men and women still living who helped settle Nebraska. These stories will be presented as they are told to the interviewers employed on the Nebraska Writers' Project. Appreciation is expressed to the various local, county, and State agencies which have made this work possible.

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### INTERVIEW WITH EMERSON SHIRLEY

Lincoln, Nebraska

Date: May 14, 1941

Interviewer: Harold J. Moss

The first signs of spring were already visible as our covered wagon rolled over the top of the second high hill to the east of Stevens Creek in Nebraska Territory, and my father looked over the beautiful valley that was to be our future home. That was April 10, 1858, and I was only three years old at the time. The trail led down to a bend in the stream and the place, with its

greening prairie grass and fringe of trees, just took father's eye. We had reached the end of our journey. There was no Lincoln then.

Father pitched a tent in the bend and staked out his claim of 160 acres.<sup>1</sup> A high stream of clear, cold, sparkling water trickled into the creek, and with a little "fixing" we had an excellent spring. We lived in that tent until our small two-room log cabin was completed.

My brother, Charles, was the first white boy born in Lancaster County--that was in 1858; but he was not the first white child born there. Mary Dee, daughter of John Dee, who lived at the junction of Stevens Creek and Saline River, had that honor, the date of her birth being a few months prior to our arrival.

Of course I don't remember much of those first years, but I do remember that in 1859 we went to a neighbor by the name of Jackson who had a log house farther up the creek. I was still wearing dresses, as was customary with little boys in those days. At that time, they held church services at Jackson's every Sunday, and there were about four families gathered there on this particular Sunday.

The meeting was held in the living and sleeping room. There was a bed in one corner, the under part draped with a calico curtain. I laid down on the floor and rolled under the bed and went to sleep. When the services were finished, the folks lingered around and visited a while, then every one who lived away started for home. The folks didn't seem to miss me until someone asked where the little boy was. It was Mrs. Jackson who finally thought to look under that bed, just as mother was beginning to worry for fear I had fallen into the creek.

A good many people might wonder if there was any reason to have an inn, or tavern, away out there in the wilderness of the prairie, when so few people lived around or passed that way, in those very early days. Those who did come were supposed to carry their hotel right along with them. There is a story behind that first inn and how it came to be named as it was, and the story, as I remember it, is this:

One day, some months after father had completed his little log cabin, a man came down the trail from the east and stopped in to rest. He was, he said, on his way to the west to look for a claim. In a few days, he returned, afoot and dog tired. The weather was getting nasty, too, with snow in the air. Father insisted that he stay for the night, but the man declined, saying that he was in a hurry to get back to Nebraska City. "But it is too stormy for you to start out," father told him, "you are worn out and will suffer from the cold." This man (I don't recall his name, if ever I heard it) finally confessed that he had no money to pay for lodging. Father laughed right out at him and said, "Why I never thought of charging you anything, and even if you had money I wouldn't take it!"

So the weary traveler accepted father's invitation and stopped for the night. It was well he did, too, for it snowed and blowed, and turned freezing cold. Next morning before he went on his way, the man said, "That was the finest rest I believe I ever had, and I'm going to repay you some

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Land Office records show the William Shirley claim was the NW1/4, Section 13, Township 10 N., Range 7 E.

way." "Don't you bother about that," father told him.

A month or so later, a wagon came through and stopped. A man with black bushy whiskers crawled out of the front and came up to the cabin. "Is this the 'Travelers' Rest'?" he asked father. "Well, any traveler is welcome no end to rest here, but we don't have any such place by name around these parts," father told him, a bit puzzled, probably.

"Guess this must be the place, all right," said the stranger. "Here, look at this," and he reached into the wagon and pulled out a wooden sign, about two feet by two feet in size, all edged with molding. Big black letters on a white ground formed the words: TRAVELERS' REST. "A man in Nebraska City sent this out and said to tell you it was for your kindness in letting him stay here. He thought you might like to put it up in sight of the trail."

Father knew then what it all meant, and he set up a post out in front and hung the sign on a cross arm. It hung there for a number of years, swinging back and forth on the rusty scrap iron hinges father had rigged up. Many people who passed that way called our place the "hotel in the wilderness." It was the only inn around the whole territory, and most every traveler stopped to rest, to feed up, or to spend the night. It was all free. Father never charged anyone a cent for the accommodations, not even for food supplies, though most of them had their own.

Father faced the second winter with no money and not much else. Discouraged and anxious, he went over to a neighbor named Main, who lived north of Saline River, and told him that he had just about decided to give up the claim and go back to Iowa, as he had no money to carry him through the winter.

"Don't you do any such thing," said Mr. Main, "I'll let you have 20 dollars and I'll see that you get through."

Somewhat encouraged, father went home and thought it over. The next morning, he took his cap-and-ball rifle and walked up the creek. There was a skiff of snow on the ground and a thin sheet of ice on the water. He came to a bend and, looking along the creek, he saw some kind of an animal coming along the ice toward him. It would run a few steps and then slide. Father cocked his rifle and the animal, hearing the click, sat up on its haunches. Father was a crack shot and, drawing a bead, he drilled it through the head. Just then another one came up through a hole in the ice and began smelling the dead animal. Father reloaded and shot that one, also through the head.

They turned out to be otter and father skinned them and dried the fur. He began to wonder about the possibilities of trapping furs, but he had no traps. So he hitched his two white steers to a sort of cart he had made out of an old wagon truck and drove to Nebraska City. There he sold the two otter skins for about 17 dollars. With that money he bought a dozen traps and returned home the next day, those steers trotting most of the way.

The trapping season was just coming on, and father trapped 90 dollars' worth of furs that winter. That money carried us through and enabled father to pay back the 20 dollars Mr. Main had loaned him.

The second year, father broke 15 acres of sod and planted it to corn; he raised exactly 14 bushels of corn on that 15 acres! He had more land than he could farm, but he wanted still more and set about getting hold of another 40 acres, and finally got a deed to it by paying 50 dollars at the land office at Nebraska City.

In 1867, father and mother were hungry to see their old Iowa home, and that was the main cause of his doing a foolish thing. He sold that 200 acre farm to Jonathan Bell, a neighbor, for 2,000 dollars, and threw in all his best stock and machinery. Bell was afterward offered 50,000 dollars for the place, and didn't take it.

Iowa didn't look so good to the folks--too many people--so they came back to Lincoln that same year, and father built the first hotel, a 24 by 36 foot building at what is now 10th and O Streets. He sold it right away and we went to Sutton, Nebraska, where father started another hotel. After a year or so, he again became restless and decided to rent out his hotel and go to California.

We went to Omaha, driving through by way of Weeping Water; that was in 1869, and I was 14 years old. We took the train there, a mixed train of freight and passenger cars which were nothing more than freight cars with steps, platform, small windows and seats. The folks had a great hamper packed with food, which had to last for seven days--the time it took to make that trip.

I remember well that trip, especially the first part, for there was a girl about my own age on the train, and being on a train trip, which was a thrilling experience in those days, we felt pretty romantic. We liked to go out on the platform and sit on the steps as the train rolled along across the level prairie. The conductor was as worried as an old hen with a brood of chickens. He told us that we shouldn't be out there; it was too dangerous when the cars were in motion. The speed of the train was about that of a horse running easy like! The conductor let us stay there, however.

In 1870, we returned to Lincoln, and in 1871, went back to Sutton and into the hotel again. I was becoming quite a hotel hand by then and when, in 1873, father again went to California, he left me to operate the hotel. Every time I had money left over at the end of the week, I put it away in a drawer, and when father returned within the year, there was over 300 dollars profit to show for my year's business.

That year brought me something else besides a 300-dollar profit. There was a girl named Ella Highley who lived out south of Sutton. She wanted to work in the hotel, so as we needed a maid of all work, I agreed to give her a place. It was a lifetime job for her, though no one knew it at the time. That girl became my wife.

In 1875, we moved to Weeping Water, and I took up painting and decorating. After ten years in that business, I got the farming bug, and we went out to Cheyenne County and took a claim; for you see, we were still pioneering after 30 years in Nebraska, and it was just about as wild out there in 1885 as it was on Stevens Creek in the 1850's.

Five years' experience in Cheyenne County convinced me that the future there held very little for us, so in 1890, we disposed of our holdings and returned to Lincoln. There I took up my trade as a painter and did very well at it. But farming was still in my system, and in 1893, we acquired a

farm near Wabash, Nebraska, and there we farmed until 1904.

In that year, we decided to quit farming and so moved back to Lincoln, where again I took up my trade as a painter and decorator. Business in that line was good, and I had plenty of work, much of which was in the form of very substantial contracts.

I have kept in the harness pretty well up to the present time, although in the last years, my work has dwindled away due to the changing conditions of my age. Two tragedies in my life almost finished me, the loss of my wife and the recent death of my son in a car accident. I find comfort--and a remedy for my troubles--by keeping active, walking miles and miles nearly every day, sometimes as many as fifteen miles at a time. It is a wonderful way to finish out.

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INTERVIEW WITH MRS. EMMA REINKE BRADSHAW Columbus, Nebraska

Date: September 15, 1941

Interviewer: Stanley Kula

I was born near Shell Creek, in Platte County, Nebraska, November 2, 1867. Perhaps I should tell you about early times as I heard father tell of them, along with what I know or experienced myself.

My father was one of the original settlers of this town, a member of what was known as the Town Company. Before that, there was no such place as Columbus. I don't remember that I ever heard father tell how or why he came West. He couldn't have had very much money, for I heard him tell, at different times, of the extreme poverty he experienced before coming here and also how hard it was to get started making a living in this soil--at that time it was all prairie.

Father's original homeland was Prussia and he could speak the Polish language. I used to hear him talk Polish to the hired men at different times--not so well, because he didn't have a chance to speak it much among the Germans. He could also speak German (High German), at which he was pretty good. But if I remember correctly, he was a poor hand at writing, which makes me think he had very little schooling. How he learned to speak English so well, I don't know, but I remember when I was a little girl, he read his American newspaper regularly.

I recall him telling how poor they were back there in the old country. His father was a shepherd, and his mother died when he was born. He said that his father told him, after he got bigger, that he he'd often wished he had been a little lamb, he would have knocked him over the head and got him out of the way! They were so poor, and with the mother gone, the worry on the father's mind then was what to do with the little fellow. My father, too, was a shepherd in the old country.

Father's kin were also very poor, and most of the time must have suffered from actual hunger. He talked of their poverty often and said that when his father passed away, he left no estate of any kind, not even enough to bury him. He had to borrow the money to bury his father. How father managed to get together enough money to come to America, I never heard him tell. Somehow he did come, and after working a couple of years in Illinois, he came to Platte County in 1858; I believe he said they all had ox teams.

One day, some time after his arrival, he and another fellow of the company, Mr. Lusche, were walking about the neighboring prairie looking for some nice place where they could settle and start farming. This time they ventured northward from town toward Shell Creek. As they came to this particular place on that creek, father said that it really was wonderful, such nice grass, birds of all kinds singing and chirping away in utter abandon. In other words, all nature seemed happy over its own accomplishments. Father said to Mr. Lusche that he would be satisfied with a place right there, and so he proceeded to build himself a shack.

The place where father intended to make his future home was ideally situated, with an abundant supply of water from Shell Creek; the creek flowed right through the place.<sup>2</sup> This farm was improved and improved and was still in father's possession when he passed away. Since he intended making his home on that wild prairie, some eleven miles from Columbus, this friend of his, Mr. Lusche, settled near him, about half a mile up-stream from our place. As a result of this decision to stake their claims on Shell Creek, both men lived to see the day when they were considered well to do.

From the first father must have had pretty good luck. He started in raising cattle and hogs. The cattle could be raised cheaply because there was as much prairie as one needed; also hay could be cut most any place and didn't cost much, if anything. Not only that--the cattle could be fattened on the grain that was raised on the farm. Columbus, eleven miles away, was the nearest town where there were railroad facilities. Anyway, what could a person do with the grain? He couldn't sell it because there was no market; then, too, there was a lot of inconvenience in trying to get it to town to the market. It was much easier to feed the corn to the stock, then, when they were fat, drive the hogs or cattle to town. From there, they went to Chicago to market. In this way the inconvenience of hauling grain to town was avoided.

There was another early settler who came out here and did pretty well for himself--Pat Murray. Father said he worked for Pat Murray for a short time, just when or why I don't know. What old Pat paid him, I never heard, but father borrowed some money from him about that time. When he paid back the loan, Pat charged him 60 percent interest! In spite of such exorbitant interest on his loan, father kept on good terms with Pat. Through knowing Pat and seeing him on different occasions, as well as visiting him one time, was how my father met and married my mother. I'll tell you how it happened.

Some distance east of where Pat lived, there lived a family by the name of Warner. Father happened to stop there on his way home from a visit to Pat's one day. They exchanged greetings and so forth, and father said to Mrs. Warner that now since he was well established and doing fairly well, he believed he could support a wife, if he was so fortunate as to find a nice young lady. She replied, "I think I know just the woman for you." Mrs. Warner was a distant relative of my mother who, at that time, was working in the house of the Indian Agent at Genoa.

As a result of this conversation, a meeting between a mother and father was soon arranged at Warner's, and as all things were found to the two people's liking, the two proceeded to make

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Land Office records show the Charles Reinke claim was the W1/2 of the SE1/4, Section 13, Township 18 N., Range 1 E.

arrangements to become man and wife. There could be little courting for either; both had work to do, one for the Indian Agent at Genoa, the other on his farm.

Mother had been married before, in her homeland, England. Her parents and she became members of the Mormon faith, and I think her parents made the trip out to Utah with one of those first wagon trains. They came over some years before mother. Mother's marriage back in England hadn't materialized very well, however, she did have one son by that marriage who was with her at the time that she and father married. His name was Peiling, and we afterwards called him our half-brother.

Since mother's marriage was not getting on so well, she wanted to come to America where her mother and father were. Of course they had little money. Her father was a butcher by trade, and he followed that kind of work. Anyway, they managed to send for their daughter and her son. Somehow the draft, or whatever way they sent the money for her passage, was forged. They tried in numerous ways to find out who got away with the money, but they never found out who did the trick. They must have sent most of their money because it was some years before they were able to save enough for her passage. This second time, they were more careful, and she got her money. Of her trip I know nothing. Her father went from place to place trying to make a living, after making the journey to Salt Lake City. However, his gradual movement was back in the eastern direction, rather than trying to go to the west coast as so many others did at that time. Anyhow, after mother married father, and I was already a girl who could remember things, her parents stayed with us one whole winter.

Father raised a good many cattle and hogs, and that winter they butchered some 40 hogs. Father took his cured meat to Fort Kearny to be used by the soldiers. I believe he hauled this load of meat with an ox-team. He had hauled some grain there before that, too. I recall his saying that he thought himself rich when he bought his first team of horses; they were so much better than the oxen, and cost quite a bit of money.

The first years that father farmed here, he had to go as far east as the Missouri River to get provisions of different kinds. Along the Missouri, at that time, was Fort Calhoun, Bellevue, and other places. Omaha was a trading post at that time, too. Father made a number of trips east to the Missouri River by ox-team. Once mother made the trip with the oxen (father must have been too busy with the farm work); whether any of us children went with her, I do not remember.

There was one short trip that I do recall very vividly. It wasn't far--only as far as Pat Murray's. There was nothing unusual about the trip, but somehow that drive stands out in my memory. I couldn't have been very old, a very little girl at most, and the name of Pat Murray was not new to me, but the folks had talked over their proposed visit for some time before, and the conversations would usually end by talking about Pat. The first Mrs. Murray was alive then. She was the one who survived the massacre when the Sioux Indians killed their whole haying party. When we got to Pat's, I was astonished at the number of hired men and at the immensity of his establishment. Then, too, Pat had so many mules to work his farm with--and not the least object of my curiosity was the type of men he had working for him, some were cripples, some were little more than half wits, and others were foreigners. He'd take most anyone to work for him because he didn't pay very much. A job could be had at Pat's at anytime of the year. Perhaps the reason for my noticing these men was their contrast with the calibre of the men who worked for father.

Father kept at least three hired men the year round. He was a pretty big farmer, too. For instance, he fattened up some one hundred head of cattle a year. With these, he had also many hogs. The stock was driven to Columbus to the railroad. To drive the cattle wasn't so much of a trick, but the hogs were a little more difficult. It required three days to reach Columbus when driving the hogs. They took a wagon along to haul any hog that played himself out by the long drive. When one couldn't go any more, he was picked up, and perhaps next day the critter would resume his journey without further trouble.

In those days, trips to town were made on rare occasions. There had to be a reason for going. Mother said that one time she didn't go to town for two years. There was no reason for her to go, so she never went. She didn't think that was anything out of the ordinary.

There were six of us children in our family, one boy and five girls. The boy died of scarlet fever when about three years old, and one girl was still-born. Father always missed his son quite a bit; he had always wanted a son. He liked us girls all right, but a boy would have been such a blessing to him.

Since there were no boys, we girls had to take their places as much as possible, so we helped in the field once in awhile, especially during corn-picking time. In those days, it was thought that it required two shuckers to pick a load of corn in a half day, so we girls would take two wagons and pick just like any other hired men.

Perhaps I should tell you that most all the work on the farm, other than what the horses did, had to be done by hand. One of the hardest kinds of work was the cutting and binding of the small grain: wheat, oats, barley, and so forth. So when the reaper was invented, father bought one of the first machines to come to Columbus. This machine was similar to the present binder; it cut, and elevated the grain to a platform where two men were standing, binding as fast as the grain came in front of them. Father thought this machine was wonderful because the work could be done so much easier and faster.

We used to see Indians lots of times. They used to come from the east, along Shell Creek, and many of them stopped at the house to beg something to eat. Just a little way east of our place, another creek joined Shell Creek. We called the place where the creeks joined "The Point"; the Indians used to camp there. We girls liked to watch the Indian children play; of course, we were on our side of the creek. I guess we were just as interesting to the Indian children as they were to us, because they watched us, too. We weren't afraid of the Indians at all, and we never had any trouble with them.

When I was a little girl, I attended country school about a mile and a half from our place. Incidentally, that school district is now known as School District No. 2, the first school outside of Columbus. At the time I attended, there were no such things as "grades." But whatever standard they went by, I managed to take the entire course. I attended high school here in Columbus for a couple of years, but did not graduate. In Columbus, I also studied the organ and piano. I used to play both instruments fairly well.

I have told you that father had little schooling, but I forgot to tell you that for a short time Mr. I.

N. Taylor taught a night school for the older people. Father attended those classes and must have learned about some of the intricacies of the English language. I. N. Taylor got to be quite famous around here.<sup>3</sup>

Religion was another problem in those days. Not to certain individuals, but to the people in general. To begin with, there were no ministers, and hence, no churches. At first, the people would hold services in the schoolhouse; one Sunday perhaps the Lutherans used the building, the next, some other denomination. Everybody got along very well that way for a short time. Then the Lutherans got to knocking the Catholics, and so on. Father attended the Lutheran services, and this sort of ballyhoo made him disgusted with going to church. He said that he was not going to church any more if that was what he had to listen to, so he quit. He always said that one could be a good Christian without going to church.

Mother had been a convert to the Mormon faith, but she didn't get a chance to practice her religion very long, on account of her marriage to father; not because he was against Mormonism, but because there was no near colony where she could express it. To be right honest about it, I think that she didn't know what that type of religion really meant. She attended the Lutheran services with father as long as he went to church, and when he quit going, she didn't go any more either.

My husband was a mason by trade, and at the time I met him, he was employed as a brickmaker just north of the Ernst place, a couple of miles north of town. Our meeting was perfectly natural; my sister was married to one of the Ernst boys, and when I visited there, we used to go to dances. That's how we met. That type of entertainment was about the only form of enjoyment we had in those days--we didn't have such things as "picture shows." Once in a great while, we would have a dance at our place; in fact, father encouraged us girls to have dances in our barn.

Father always remembered how hard he had it in his homeland, so when he got able, he sent to Germany for his kin. Most of them came to this country too. Then, after they were here and had got stared for themselves--getting along so much better than they ever dreamed was possible--they repaid father for his trouble. They sure must have had a hard time back there!

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#### INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES WERTZ

Richland, Nebraska

Date: January 19, 1940

Interviewer: Sarah Cover

My father and mother came from their home near Rochester, Fulton County, Minnesota, in the spring of 1866, when I was a little child six years old, and settled on a farm near Springfield,

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<sup>3</sup> I.N. Taylor was one of the first real estate dealers in Nebraska. Mr. Taylor represented Platte County in the legislature for one term and also served that county as judge and surveyor. In 1871 he was secretary of the Nebraska State Emigration Society.

Missouri, staying there until I was a boy of eight.

In 1874, father and mother, in company with two other families (Mr. and Mrs. Langley and Mr. and Mrs. Graves), migrated west in covered wagons, forming a procession five wagons long loaded with our household possessions and families. In the rear followed the cattle and horses which the boys who were old enough had to help drive. At night we camped cooked our meals over campfires, fed and watered the stock, and milked the cows. Father and the men took turns watching the cattle at night so they did not wander away. It proved to be a very pleasant trip. The weather was very favorable, it being the fore part of June.

We went by way of Lincoln, Nebraska, camping there one day and two nights. We wanted to see about a homestead, having written to Governor and State Treasurer before we left Missouri. They called on us dressed in overalls and denim shirts, inviting us to visit the State Capitol and the city, which we did. We enjoyed the sights, including some large buffalo they had in a pen on the streets. I was thrilled, as these were the first live buffalo we had ever seen.

We had another surprise, for although we had heard a great deal about the Indians, we had never seen any. There were four bucks riding in full regalia, on the prettiest horses, and equipped with bows and arrows. In front of one of the Indians rode a five year old child, a nudist for the time being. We children were shocked by his appearance and discussed at length the reason for his lack of clothes, but as none of us boys had any extra clothes, we could do nothing about it.

The next day we started on our way again, following the Platte River, going into camp a short distance southwest of Schuyler. The men folks agreed to send father ahead to look at the land we had selected from the description given us at Lincoln, while they looked after our folks in camp.

The wagon bridge had been taken out earlier in the spring by an ice gorge that formed when the ice broke up in the river, so the only way father could get across was in a boat. Due to the heavy rains in the early spring, the river had flooded the naturally low land, so the water came nearly to town. Someone took father to see the land, which was twelve miles northwest of Schuyler. On his return, the water had not receded, and he again crossed in a boat.

We broke camp June 14. Father was directed to go west and cross the Loup River, south of Columbus, by a temporary bridge. the main bridge had also been taken out by an ice gorge that spring. The temporary bridge had only a plank floor and was barely wide enough for one wagon. There was no railing on either side, and it was really quite shaky, and the water came nearly to the floor. The wagons and teams were headed across the bridge first with great care; the twelve head of livestock was driven in single file, back of the wagons, by the women and such children as were old enough to help. We were scared most out of our shoes until we reached the other side. Our five heavily loaded wagons and livestock must have weakened the bridge, for we had just stopped by the side of the road after crossing to rest and eat and were getting the fire started when, to our horror, we saw the temporary bridge go out with a sudden rush of the water.

We did not waste any time getting started, driving northeast from Columbus to Shell Creek to a place owned by Mr. Held and Charles Weather. We stopped and asked them if we could cross the bridge over Shell Creek. The men and their families were all out looking at us and talking in German. Father was the only one who could understand them. However, one said we could, and

another said we could not, and they got into an argument that led to a quarrel with the women taking part. The "Dutch" just flew. While they were quarreling, father being quick witted, jumped into his wagon and motioned to the rest of us to follow, and we drove quickly over the bridge going back for the cattle and making them ford the creek. The others were still quarreling and paid no attention to us. By nightfall, we were at our new home on the eighty acres of land. We camped the first night and next morning started our sod house, and when it was completed, we helped the others.

I lived with the folks through the grasshopper time of the 1870's, which was a terrible experience. The blizzards of the early days were terrible, too. I well remember the hardships the early pioneers suffered. I attended rural school through the winters and worked for the neighbors in the summers. My chief job was herding cattle.

In September of 1880, I was hired by Mr. Richerand, with two men and two boys, to go the Dismal Lake to bring back cattle and horses. I was the youngest, a boy not quite fifteen. Mr. Richerand took a covered wagon to haul our supplies, our rifles, and tents for us boys to sleep in, with three horses tied on the back of the wagon. The trip out along the Loup River was grand. Wild geese and ducks, the prairie chickens, and wild game was plentiful. We shot some everyday, roasting them over our campfire for our meals.

I was considered a pretty good marksman, and I shot three deer and two antelopes on the way up to the lake. After we reached Dismal Lake, we were there about two weeks while the cattle and the horses were being rounded up for the homeward trip.

I killed, much to my regret afterward, a beautiful trumpeter swan. There was a pair of these large, white birds always swimming on the lake. One day Mr. Richerand was loitering around the lake with us, talking and joking with a silly old man who was shooting at the swans, but he never hit them, or came anywhere near hitting them. Mr. Richerand said that he bet the kid could hit them in three shots or less and would put up five dollars, and the old man took him up. I was anxious to demonstrate, so I went to the wagon, got my rifle, and took aim at a distance of a quarter of a mile. The first shot was high, but the next shot hit the swan square in the head, killing it dead! The live swan seemed to know what had happened for it rose in the air, circled around and lighted by the dead swan, giving out its trumpeting call, and keeping it up all day and night--a sound I can never forget. Never could I ever be tempted to shoot at the poor, harmless birds again.

About October 10, we started on our return trip. Everything went fine until the morning of October 15, when we needed some supplies. Mr. Richerand took the wagon and team and drove ahead to Fort Hartsuff, intending to get supplies and drive back to meet us. Before leaving, he gave us each a slice of bread, a little bacon, and a quart of hot coffee in our canteens. He pulled out in a drizzling rain and told us, if a storm came up, to move the cattle on where there were three haystacks and wait for him.

A storm did come up, a howling three day blizzard. It struck us about noon. We worked the cattle east to the haystacks, landing there about night. Our coffee was gone but we each had a slice of bread left. The storm got steadily worse.

Near the haystacks, we found a clump of willows covering three or four acres of land. We held the cattle around the haystacks while one of us went over and looked at the willows and found that some of them were taller and closer together. When he came back, we decided to cut willows with our pocket knives and weave them into some of the standing willows; then we pulled hay from the stacks, dragging it by ropes attached to our saddles. We built a good shelter with a roof, in the shape of a half circle. We killed and dressed two rabbits and built a good fire to cook them. While we were working, we found a pool of good water, so we filled our canteens. In the herd were a few good milk cows, so we roped one and milked some of her milk into our cups. We drank warm milk, ate the cooked rabbits without salt, enjoying our meal, especially the warm milk.

The first night we had no sleep. We stayed in the shelter by the fire, and every two hours we rode around the cattle just to see that they were all right. The storm was a bad one, so we stayed in our shelter, taking turns watching the cattle. Our food was the same as the evening before, rabbits and milk. The second night we took turns watching the cattle. We were dressed warmly so did not suffer from the cold. On October 27, the storm broke and the sun came out, and at four p.m., our boss found us just where he had told us to stay.

We were sure glad to see him. We boosted up the campfire and that evening we had hot biscuits, baked in a dutch oven, fried bacon, and hot coffee. That day, October 17, was my birthday, and I'll say that I will never forget my fifteenth birthday. I haven't had a birthday dinner since that I enjoyed more than that one. When I think of it, I can still taste those biscuits.

That night, it turned bitter cold, but our boss had a jug of whisky; he poured a little into each of our cups, putting in some hot water and quinine, and we drank it. He put up our tents, fixed our beds with good warm robes, and sent us to bed early so we would get a good night's rest. We boys did not even take a bad cold or freeze our feet.

That blizzard, from October 15 to 17, 1880, was the worst storm I went through, and it was bad in Colfax and Platte Counties. My folks were real worried about me and were glad when I sent them a letter saying I was fine. They had heard that two or three young fellows had frozen to death in the vicinity where we were.

The corn was late in ripening that fall, as there had been no frost to ripen it. The weather changed suddenly from Indian summer to zero, starting with rain and sleet, later turning to snow. The following spring, men and women could be seen working in the same field, husking corn, plowing and planting corn at the same time. However, it was worthless; such as it was brought only eight to ten cents per bushel in the ear. Mr. Frank Faulkner, who bought most of it, said it was not fit for bad whiskey.

That spring, late in March, I went to work on the Fuller ranch as chore hand. The proprietors were Messrs. Fuller and Legge. They were partners. Sandy, Mr. Legge's son, and I were given the job of being nursemaids for the newborn "calfies." Sandy and I were the best of friends, forming a friendship that lasted as long as Sandy lived, although he became, in later years, a very notable character--Alexander Legge, Chairman of the Farm Board.

Sandy was going to school in Schuyler when the historic blizzard of 1883 struck. His father had

asked the other hands if one of them would drive to town for Sandy, as it was too cold for him to walk in such a storm, but no one would go. Then he asked me, and I said I would go. They hitched a trusty team of mules to a bobsleigh, putting plenty of warm robes for us to cover up with. The return trip was made facing the storm, in a snow so thick that we could not see the mules' ears most of the way, so we gave the team a fee line, trusting them to take us safely home, which they did. We were almost frozen when we reached home and had to be carried into the house.

Each year in June, Sandy and I were given the job of selecting the cattle for the State Fair. The ranch was stocked with the finest of cattle and made a good showing at the Fair. Sometimes he would go with me on the train, and we stayed the whole time, enjoying the Fair, always proud of our exhibits.

My employers sent me out to the southwestern part of the State to bring back a carload of cattle for the ranch. I went by train. We were met at the train by the ranch foreman and other employees who said it would be at least a week before we could have our carload of cattle, but took us to the ranch that night. The next morning, they suggested that we go on a buffalo hunt. Most of the group agreed to this; I was one of them. Next morning, I left on horseback with the ranch foreman, the rest followed with a wagon, their saddle horses tied on the back of the wagon. We formed two groups, keeping some distance apart. The hunting ground was south, where Holyoke, Colorado, now is.

The first buffalo I killed was an old bull, too old for meat, and it was never skinned. However, an hour later, I shot two more, a two year old and a calf. That ended my hunting; we joined the other group and all went back to the ranch. I felt pretty proud, as I had two to the others' one. I never went on another buffalo hunt.

In March, 1884, I received my teacher's certificate and began teaching school in April, continuing to teach in the winter and attending business college in summer. I completed a commercial course at this school and, later, a normal training course.

Sandy's health greatly alarmed his parents at this time, and their family physician advised them to send him to a drier climate and a higher altitude. At the request of his mother, I agreed to meet Sandy at the V R Ranch as soon as my school was out. As ranch life appealed to me, I joined him in May 1887. The V R Ranch was 45 miles from Douglas, Wyoming, and was stocked with 12,000 cattle and 1,500 horses, which were being raised for the United States Cavalry. Major Wolcott was manager and one of the owners of the ranch. We were paid 35 dollars and keep.

After doing some work on the round-up, Sandy and I were given jobs as "fence riders." Later, we were given the job of "payroll couriers", a very dangerous job as checks were not much used in those days. We were sent to the bank in Douglas to meet these payrolls, and sometimes we had 1,500 dollars in our pouches. These trips were always made at night. We never left from the ranch together, but soon met. When we had money to deposit, it was brought to us about four o'clock in the afternoon. We would start off at once, meeting where we were ordered to; we never failed to deliver the money.

We were never molested but once. We met at Fort Fetterman, two miles from Douglas. As we

rode around a large rock, which was a very dangerous place, we saw, crouched against the rock, a band of Mexicans. One of them had something in his hand that was bright. We each drew our "Colts" and fired a couple of times, and putting spurs to our horses, we rode as fast as they could go, never looking back. We reached the bank safely depositing the money at nine o'clock. While in the bank, a couple of freighters came in and said they had seen two dead Mexicans by a big rock. Soon word went out that they had killed the Mexicans. Sandy and I said nothing, so no one knew who did the job.

While fence-riding, I was told to practice shooting, 25 times from my Winchester, and 25 times with my revolver, which I did, both from the ground and on my horse. While tending the horses in the pasture, I killed two large mountain lions. They were killing young colts. I received 25 dollars apiece for them from the government.

Sandy's health was much improved, and we returned to Colfax County late in August in response to a letter saying that his mother was awful sick. He was really quite disappointed, as ranch life in the west was fascinating to him, as well to me.

The Northwestern Railroad was being extended from Douglas to Casper, Wyoming, and that section of the country harbored a wild and lawless gang of horse thieves and desperadoes. One of the leaders of this terrible gang was known as Bill Kieth; another was a woman called "Cattle Kate." These desperadoes were so powerful that they were in virtual control of that region, and encountered little opposition.

Early in September the horse thieves, or rustlers, as they were called, were making a raid on every ranch in that section. Mr. Wolcott, our foreman, together with a United States Marshal, decided they needed another marshal so, as I had been successful as a payroll courier, they swore me in. That evening when I came in from the pasture, the ranch booker met me and told me Mr. Wolcott wanted to see me at the office at once. On reaching the office, he explained the matter to me and then said, "Put up your right hand"; and I was sworn in as a United States Marshal and given the name of "Dismal," as they always went by an assumed name. A saddle horse and a lead horse were waiting for me, so we started at once. The United States Marshal gave me my instructions as we rode along. We were going up into the mountains after Bill Kieth and his gang.

The third morning out, we surrounded the horses and started for the V R Ranch. We stayed back some distance from the horses; I was just going through a clump of sarvice berries when the desperadoes opened fire on us. They fired three shots at me, killing my horse dead at the first shot. I jumped and ducked to the ground, lying flat; the marshal and two other riders came to me, thinking I was dead. We crawled on our hands and knees around a big boulder and, when they saw that I was not hurt, they gave me a fresh horse. I can still hear "Kalamazoo", the second commander, give orders, shouting, "Go into them and give them hell," and we did. We retired seven of the desperadoes, leaving their bodies for the coyotes.

When we arrived at the V R Ranch with the horses, word had been received that two of the desperadoes were hiding in the sawmill on the ranch. The marshal and two men went out there and soon had them out of the way. We found two more at Deer Mouth Canyon, one of them being the notorious Bill Kieth. After resting a few days, we were ordered to find "Cattle Kate."

We found her and her gang of five men. The men were shot and "Cattle Kate" was hanged, sixty miles from Douglas; their belongings, including a covered wagon, were burned. "Cattle Kate" was considered the most vicious, bloodthirsty, human being alive.

I came back to Nebraska and again took up teaching, opening the first school at Clarkson. I taught only four days, then took down with typhoid fever so that I had to give up my school. When I was well again, the first person I visited was Sandy Legge.

On January 12, 1888, we went to Rogers after Sandy's father, who was attending to some business there, but who had left, leaving word for us to come to Schuyler. We left Rogers about 2 p.m. in a sleigh pulled by two big mules. A short distance from Rogers the famous blizzard of '88 struck us. It came without any warning, a blinding mass of snow, the temperature dropping suddenly to thirty-six degrees below zero. Sandy's father was there and insisted on going home. Sandy took him, but I stayed in Schuyler until morning, then went to Rogers by train, riding out to the Legge ranch with a neighbor, none of us the worse for our ride the day before.

January 20, I took up the commercial course again but did not work at it long before I was called back into the service of the V R Ranch in Wyoming. The United States Marshal I had worked with before swore me in, and I was again made deputy marshal. After getting lined up, I, in company with fifty western men, was joined by a group from Cheyenne and another from Rock Springs, making in all about 200 men. I was put in charge of twenty men. I was only twenty-three years old, the youngest man in the crowd. We first divided the outfit into squads of twenty-five men. Each outfit was equipped with campwagon and complete outfit, and extra horses. Our orders were to clean out "Jackson's Hole."

Landers, Wyoming, was our first stop. This was a general hideout place for criminals. We had a little "brush" here, as it was called, but all we did was burn their log cabins. From there, we went into Jackson's Hole, were given new orders and joined by fifty more men. Somehow the desperadoes had heard we were coming. We were ordered to shoot every white man in the Hole, and these orders were fairly well carried out. Quite a number of "hard" characters went over the mountain, either to the east or to the west, but they did not all get away.

My squad had surrounded a log cabin; suddenly three persons came out of the cabin with rifles in their hands. We took them to be men, but they were two Chinese women and a man. As they were in the gang, they were shot and their bodies thrown into the cabin and burned.

We worked northward; the timber was so dense we could not enter it but had little "brushes" or "scraps" all along the side of the mountains. This went on until one forenoon one of the horses was killed, but the rider escaped. Orders flew, and we surrounded the timber on three sides. On the north, the timber was set fire, backfiring from the south. A rain-and-sleet storm put out the fire, but a few thousand acres had been burned, and we found the remains of several log cabins.

The outfit then pushed into the Yellowstone Park, west of Yellowstone Lake, where there was a good place to rest and let our horses feed, but the first night here, our old pack mule was stolen from under our very noses although we were guarding the horses most of the time.

Dutch Charlie, Indian Joe and I (Dismal) were sent to find the pack mule and bring him back, a

foolish order, we thought. We trailed the pack mule and several desperadoes north to Montana, where we spotted the men.

At Mammoth, we were given fresh horses and a supply of food. One night, Indian Joe was scouting around and found the old pack mule and a bunch of horses hobbled in the woods. He came back and told us, also, that he had located a log cabin with a bunch of thieves, and they were drinking. We left our horses at the edge of the woods, and about midnight, Indian Joe slipped around, untied two or three horses and brought them to the edge of the timber. I received them and led them to Dutch Charlie who took them to a safe place; when he came back, I had some more for him.

The thieves were asleep, and all was going fine until the old mule brayed; this woke them, and they jumped up, but they were so drunk they became confused and began shooting wild. Indian Joe's Colt spoke, then my Winchester. So died this gang of desperadoes. We moved back to Mammoth with our horses and mules, reaching there by noon. Mammoth was an army post in Yellowstone Park, in charge of the War Department. We turned our horses over to them, and stayed there all night. Next morning we were given fresh horses, some eats and coffee, and packing the mule with our supplies, we started south, going back the way we had come, through Jackson's Hole. Nothing of importance happened, so we went back to the V R Ranch. After resting a while, I was given my pay, seventy-five dollars a month and a bonus of 200 dollars.

In a few days, I left for home. I once more took up teaching, continuing until my hearing got so bad I had to give it up. I taught seven years in all. In 1895, I married Miss Doria Brockelsby. We built us a new home in the quiet little country town of Richland. Here, in 1904, I became rural mail carrier out of Richland, continuing to carry mail until I became totally deaf, or for twenty-five years. Am now retired and living on my pension of 1,000 dollar a year.

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#### INTERVIEW WITH FRED H. ELLIS

Omaha, Nebraska

Date: October 2, 1941

Interviewer: John H. Hinrichs

I was born in Osage, Mitchell County, Iowa, on June 3, 1865, and moved to Holt County, Nebraska, with my father and mother in 1880. There were four in our family, father, mother, and two boys. I was fifteen years old and my brother was seventeen. My brother did not care about moving to Nebraska on a homestead, so he got a job on a farm in Iowa, and later came to Nebraska and lived with us on the homestead just one year, and then returned to Iowa.

We landed on our homestead in Nebraska on October 12, 1880, just four miles southeast of a small inland store and post office. John Reed was postmaster, and a man by the name of Hunter Brown owned a small store at Redbird. This inland station was, at that time, the end of a stagecoach line.

Redbird is located in the northeast corner of Holt County, a few miles south of the Niobrara River. O'Neill, Nebraska, the county seat, is located about thirty miles southwest of Redbird,

with no bridges, roads or signpost to guide you. We made our first trip to O'Neill in the spring, about the middle of April, for some badly needed supplies. When moving from Iowa to our homestead in Nebraska, mother brought some smoked hams and bacon, and my father brought seven bushels of seed corn, also six head of horses and thirteen head of cattle.

My father John L. Ellis, bought this homestead of 160 acres in 1880.<sup>4</sup> It was all prairie, with no timber on it. The improvements consisted of a slab of shanty, built in 1879. It was made of cottonwood slabs--just a small one-room shanty. I put up a tent just outside our shanty and cut blocks of snow and built them around and over the top of my tent, which made it quite comfortable. This was my bedroom during the winter of 1880.

As I said, we landed at our homestead on October 12, and on October 14, it started to snow, and snowed on and off all winter long. The snow was from three to four feet deep on the prairie and, in the canyons in various places, 30 feet deep. The little store at Redbird had only a small stock of goods, and the snow was so deep, one could not travel very far. All father and I could do was to hitch four horses to a wagon and get some wood from the Niobrara River, four miles north. One trip was a hard day's work. Quite a number of Indians were camping along the river in their tents, and they came out occasionally and helped me load my wagon.

The winter of 1880-81 was the worst winter I ever experienced in Nebraska. When I hauled wood from the river, I used to see many wild deer and elk and antelope. Beavers also were very numerous on all creeks and rivers. Hunter Brown, the man who owned the small store at Redbird, killed twenty-eight deer within one mile of Redbird in the winter of 1880-81. When our supply of groceries ran out, and we had no way to get any, my mother started to use the seed corn. We ground this in our small coffee grinder, and mother made corn bread and pancakes. She also roasted corn and made a substitute for coffee. At the country store, my father met a man by the name of Henry Smith who lived eight miles from us. Several days later, the Smith boys brought us a nice deer. We had no guns of any kind to do any hunting with.

I can remember quite well how my mother used to put some kind of oil or grease in a saucer, put a rag in it and light it for a light in the room.

We were rather fortunate because one homesteader, just a mile and a half south of us, had put up two stacks of hay in the fall, and then left the country for the winter. We were out of hay, so father went to this man's place, measured up a stack of hay and hauled it home to feed our horses and cattle. This stack of hay saved our stock that winter. However, we lost four head of cattle. In the spring when this homesteader returned, my father paid him for the stack of hay.

Our nearest neighbors were Oscar and Clayton Bike. They were brothers who lived in a dugout three and a half miles from us and made their living by hunting and trapping on what we called Louse Creek. Games of all kinds were plentiful in those days.

During the long cold winter of 1880-81, many people on homesteads died from exposure and shortage of food. I remember that my mother was out of white flour for months, then toward

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Land Office records show the John Ellis claim was the NW1/4, Section 32, Township 32N., Range 9 W.

spring we heard of a homesteader by the name of Barrett Scott who had made a trip to O'Neill and brought back a load of wheat flour. We brought a sack of flour from him.<sup>5</sup>

In the fall of 1881, we built a log house out of cottonwood logs. We laid those logs up around our slab shanty and plastered it with mud, so we had it ready for the coming winter. It was warm and comfortable. Father and I made some extra money that fall cutting and hauling wood to Fort Randall for the Government. It was nine miles to the timber, or gulch, as we called it then, now the town Gross, in Boyd County. There was no work to be had in the winter at that time.

A good many new families moved into this country several years after we located here. I lived with my folks until the spring of 1884, then, June 20 of that year I married. Our first place was a dugout in the side of a hill, built of logs, timber, and hay. My neighbor gave me a window for this dugout. Later, I filed on a piece of land at Dorsey, Nebraska, located in the northeastern part of Holt County. Still later, I traded this for some livestock. For the next four years, I made my living buying, selling, and trading land, horses, and cattle.

Then we moved to a place on Squaw Creek, seven miles northwest of my folks, where we lived in a small frame house. This was the winter of 1888. On January 23, we experienced the worst blizzard on record in this part of the country. It was a beautiful calm morning when I started out with my wagon and team of mules to get a load of wood from my parents' homestead. The blizzard started about ten o'clock in the morning, and it snowed and blowed so hard it nearly took my breath away. I left my wagon and one mule at my father's place and started for home on the other mule. The storm was so bad I could not see two feet ahead of me. I had a grain sack with me and pulled it over my head to keep the snow from beating and cutting my face.

The snow was driven with such force that it filled the mule's ears and nostrils, then he would stop until I removed the snow, and we would start on again. I had to do this about every hundred feet or so, all the way home. There was only one house between my place and Redbird. I just let the mule have his own way, trusting him to find the road home. The only time I knew we were on the right trail was when the mule walked into a wire fence. I knew then that it was my neighbor's fence, and that we were only three-quarters of a mile from home. We followed the fence into my neighbor's yard, and the mule walked right to the kitchen door, although I could see nothing until we got close to the door.

My neighbor's wife told me that her husband was in the barn doing chores. I noticed a small rope tied on the doorknob and asked her what it was for. She said her husband had tied the clothesline onto the doorknob when he started out to the barn, so that if he failed to find the barn, he would be able to get back to the house by keeping hold of the rope. So I tied my mule to the kitchen doorknob and followed the rope to the barn, talked to my neighbor awhile and got warm, and

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<sup>5</sup> Barrett Scott was treasurer of Holt County in the early 1890s. Accused of embezzlement, he fled to Mexico, but was returned, tried, and convicted. Sentenced to the penitentiary, he appealed and was released on bail pending retrial. On December 31, 1894, he was kidnapped by several masked armed men. His frozen body was found in the Niobrara River on January 20, 1895.

then started for home on the mule, following the wire fence to my place. I had left my father's place at ten o'clock in the morning and got home that afternoon at four. I discovered that I had frozen both wrists, and that my wife had busted up some of our furniture to keep the house warm.

The next morning was bright and clear but very cold. As we were out of wood, I again started out for my father's place, and when I arrived there, my father and two other men were out looking for me; they were afraid I had frozen to death on the road.

A man who lived two miles north of Scottville stared out that morning for O'Neill with a load of hogs. He got lost in this terrible blizzard so, not knowing where he was, he unhitched his team and tied them to the wagon, then, to save himself, crawled in among the hogs. The next morning he found he was only twenty rods from a farm house. The farmer had kept a lamp burning all night in his window, but the man with the hogs failed to see it. Thousands of head of stock froze or smothered to death in the canyons, and many homesteaders lost their lives in that blizzard.

I worked in the Dakotas several seasons, harvesting near Fargo, then settled on a piece of land in Boyd County, "squatter's right" and built a log house on it. I was the first white man to make a squatter's right in the eastern part of Boyd County. My nearest neighbor was twelve miles to the southwest of me. He was a squaw man, Ed Whiting, who lived on the Sioux reservation. The Ponca Indian reservation was ten miles east of me. From my place to Niobrara was twenty-four miles, and only two families lived on that road. For many miles around, this country was a desolate looking prairie. Many new settlers came from the east in 1890.

While farming in the east part of Boyd County, my hobby was buying, selling, and trading horses, cattle, and land, so I formed a large acquaintance with white people as well as the Indians. I had a number of Indian neighbors who, as a rule, had peculiar names, such as Eddie Brokenjaw, Billy Bear, Tom Whiteshirt, and William Birdhead. We bought blankets and shawls from the Indians. Most of them talked English fairly well. I always got along fine with them and never had any trouble.

I was school director in my district for seven years. It was the first country school in this part of the county. We had no schoolhouse, so I rearranged our home, and we used one of our rooms for a schoolroom. When school opened in the fall of 1903, about twelve children attended.

When I filed on my land in June, 1891--I had established a squatter's right on this place about a year before people started filing on land around here--I had selected a good piece of land with a nice lot of timber on it, and on the day of the filing, I got the land I was living on.<sup>6</sup>

It seemed that certain landseekers in the colony settled around me got the idea of crowding me off my place, to make room for a family in their colony. I had no advance information as to what they were planning and had already plowed six or seven acres on the north side of our land, only fifteen or twenty rods from my neighbor on the north. It was nine o'clock in the morning, and I

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Land Office records show the Fred Ellis claim was the SE1/4 of the NW1/4, E1/2 of the SW1/4, SW1/4 of the SE1/4, Section 7, Township 33 N., Range 10 W.

had plowed just one round. My wife happened to be with me in the field. Suddenly we saw six or seven men coming across the field toward us, waving their arms and clubs. One of the men carried an army musket. He stepped right up to me, poked the gun into my ribs and ordered me to unhitch my team, which I did without argument. The man with the gun was my nearest neighbor, and he made it plain to me that they were going to force me off my place and take possession.

When I got home, I got on a horse and rode to a dugout on Ponca Creek to see if I could get some help. There were five or six men living in this dugout; I knew them, they were looking for land in that section of the country. I told them my story and they agreed to help me. They came over, and I hid them in a ravine near the land that I was plowing. I went home, hitched up my team and started to plow. I made just one round when here they came across the field with the musket and clubs, and their arms waving in the air, and started toward me. Just then my men came out of their hiding place and met them. We had a real free-for all fight and took the gun away from them. We were all bruised and cut more or less, but from that time on my trouble with those men was over. I went ahead with my spring work and put in the crop. In the fall, I made the Dakota harvest, which lasted several months.

Up to the spring of 1895, the room in my house was still being used for a school. Our school was invited to attend a "literary" at Lynch, Nebraska, so I hitched up my team and wagon, loaded on all the school children and drove to Lynch. Few of the children had ever attended a literary until that night. When I returned home, I found that one of my best milk cows had been stolen while we were gone. A few days later, we formed a searching party in the neighborhood and searched every farm for miles around. We were just about ready to give up when one of the men in the party said, "Well, we've searched nearly every place in the neighborhood except your nearest neighbor. We might just as well go to his place." So we went to my neighbor's, and after looking around the bins and buildings, we found a large tub under the corncrib. When we pulled it out, we found it filled with large chunks of beef. After questioning my neighbor and his wife, they finally admitted that it was my milk cow; they had butchered it the night I had taken the school children to the literary. This man who stole my cow had a boy and a girl attending school at my place everyday, and his two children were in the crowd that I took to Lynch. I reported the case, so the law took care of him.

I had a nice patch of timber on my place. In the fall I cut down quite a number of trees and made fence posts to use in the spring. Before spring arrived, however, someone had taken all the posts I had cut. I also cut some corn that fall and had quite a few shocks in the field. One morning I noticed a wagon track in the field, so I followed the track and found a man and a woman loading up some of my corn shocks on a wagon. I told them if they wanted to save themselves a lot of trouble to unload the shocks and leave the field, which they did.

On my farm, in 1894, I found a space where the ground had settled. It was about the size of a grave and lay under some brush on the side of a hill. I got a spade and dug up this spot and found an old flintlock rifle, a big pistol, a sabre, a lot of beads, and a human skull. Later, I gave these relics to C. V. Kenderson of Spencer, Nebraska, who sent them to the Omaha World Herald.

I sold my place and moved to Holt County and lived near the Niobrara River for two years, then traded this place for a bunch of horses and moved to Fargo, North Dakota, where I bought, sold,

and traded horses and also did quite a little business with the Indians.

My next venture was at Park Rapids, Minnesota, where I bought out a restaurant. We operated this business until spring, when we again sold out and moved back to Lynch, Nebraska. The next spring, I bought forty acres south of town, located in the bend of Ponca Creek. On the south side of this creek, the bluffs were about 150 feet high, while on the north side of our place, the land was very level, up to the railroad track.

In the spring of 1903, when we were living in Lynch, Ponca Creek ran just on the south edge of town. When the ice went out in the spring, it would form ice gorges and flood the bottom land. The farmers in the lowlands were notified of the high water due in that neighborhood shortly, so they could move to higher ground.

I was walking down the street one morning and met Dr. Guy Ira. He said, "Do you know where we could get a boat?" I told him there was one near C. J. Brown's feed yard in Ponca Creek. Doctor Ira told me that Mrs. Andrew Just, who had recently returned from the hospital, was still quite ill, and that they were marooned on an island in the Niobrara River five miles south of Lynch. Help was needed immediately. The main stream had been blocked by an ice gorge, and the river had cut a new channel around Andrew Just's place, which left them marooned and in grave danger of drowning.

We went down to get the boat and found that it was chained and padlocked to a willow tree about eighteen feet from the shore. Ponca Creek was only a small stream, but that morning it was about twenty rods wide with a very swift current and ice chunks floating down stream. A crowd of about twenty-five people stood on the bank debating how to get the boat; nobody seemed willing to risk swimming out to release it. Finally I volunteered to go and get it. I asked C.J. Brown to get a long rope, which they tied around my waist, the men on shore holding the rope in case I had trouble with the swift, icy water. I walked about twenty feet upstream, then plunged in and swam with the current to the willow tree. I found that the lock and chain were about four feet under water, so had to dive to unlock the padlock. The men on the bank pulled me out. Jim Irwin, the drayman, hauled the boat to the Andrew Just place, five miles south on the bank of the Niobrara River, and Fred Torbit rowed the boat out and rescued Mr. and Mrs. Just. Getting this boat out of Ponca Creek was the means of saving two lives.

In the spring of 1913, we had another flood. There was a cloudburst northwest of us, and Ponca Creek rose out of its banks nearly up to my barn. I did not feel alarmed about it, as I thought the water would go down in a few days. Some distance west of us, the following day, there was another cloudburst. The telephone operator, Miss McAllister, was our neighbor's daughter. She was night operator and was on duty until four o'clock in the morning. She had telephoned to many families that lived along the creek and warned them of the danger of a flood. When Miss McAllister arrived home that morning, her father asked if she had notified Mr. Fred Ellis? She said no--that she had tried to get them but failed, on account of wire trouble. Mr. McAllister then got on a horse and rode over and notified me to get out as quickly as possible. I replied "as soon as I get my shoes on." "Forget your shoes" he replied, "you have got to hurry!"

I ran to the barn, barefooted, harnessed one horse, grabbed a singletree and hooked it on the tongue of my spring wagon, loaded my family, and started out across the field to my neighbor. I

cut down two wire fences; the water was a foot deep before I got to the first fence. We stayed with our neighbor, John Orr, several days. The third day, the water was down enough so I could get back to the house. I found everything ruined. I lost fourteen head of hogs, my household goods and furniture, and about five hundred turkeys and chickens. A week later, one old hog and one old hen appeared on the place. How they ever survived the flood, I have never been able to figure out.

We left Lynch in 1915 and moved to Norfolk where I entered the real estate business. In 1918, we came to Omaha where I have been in the apartment house business for twenty-three years.

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## INTERVIEW WITH FRANK GRADY

Raymond, Nebraska

Date: October 3, 1941

Interviewer: J. Willis Kratzer

Not many years ago, there was a baby boy born in Fon-du-lac, Wisconsin, and from the howl they tell me he put up on his arrival, he was destined for a wild and woolly life. That squalling youngster was myself, born into this world August 18, 1876.

I did not wait long to start my search for a wilder country. New Years Day of 1877 found me being landed in Nebraska, my parents having come from Wisconsin to settle near Raymond. After six months in this first Nebraska home, the family moved into a dugout located in the present bounds of the village of Raymond, about where Bill Forman built that brick shop that was destroyed by fire a few years ago.

I don't remember much about living in a dugout, and I reckon there ain't a sizable number of people who honestly do, considering that any who are old enough to remember are about too feeble to be reckoned responsible. Course, there probably are some, and their stories should be very valuable, much more so than mine, because I moved out of the dugout when I was about two years old, and, believe it or not, I remember the moving day!

We moved to a log house located on the present Gillette place, which for many, many years was the W. W. Wilson home. There we lived for about two years, and I do remember that log house very vividly. I can see it in my mind's eye yet. It was not a palace, just a regulation log house; they were about all alike. About twenty years ago, or maybe a little earlier, Bill Brown tore it down, and with it, he tore down a place that still lives in my heart.

In the year of '83, my parents got this place, and here I have been ever since, except for a short period or two when I got wind in my whiskers and had to travel about a bit and see other places, but I always came back to Nebraska, a darn good place to come back to--yes sir-ee!

It is a long time back to 1880, but I have covered the distance with Raymond from that date to the present. I saw this neighborhood when there was no Raymond at all, when the Post came to McFarland, down nearer Lincoln, and then about the time we came here, they started Tipton, which later became Orlando, located on Oak Creek about where Highway 79 crosses it. It was

there that Strickland had the mill that finally, in its mad anger at flood time, dragged him down into the swirling waters and ended his life. In 1880, the rails came through and moved the post office over to the site of the new town and named it after the Lincoln wholesalers of beans, salt fish and crackers.

The old school was down near the mill. Reckon it had a name, but I don't remember it. It was a log school. I never went there, but in 1880, with the arrival of the rails, the new town got the school, and by the time I started to school in 1883, I went to the new village school.

The first teacher in the Raymond school was run out by the boys who used stones as weapons of assault. The second met the same gang, but when he had soundly thrashed one boy, and the youth's father coming to take up the battle shared the same fate, the reign of terror ended abruptly, and a new respect for the school was established.

School wasn't what we have nowadays. Let me tell you about some of the teachers that poured out their best in my behalf. There was Mr. Burke, whose brother still runs a taxi line in Lincoln. There was Miss Stetson, who used to knock the dickens out of me, and Bessie Jolley, and Bertie Woods, and Edith Bowman--pretty nice women I'd say. And I don't want to forget Mr. Bishop or Mr. Brothour, or J.W. Kerns who used to pull up the window and spit a gob of tobacco juice clean down to Main Street.

Discipline on the whole was pretty good in our school. There was no high-falootin' laws, and the teacher could whale the very devil out of you if it would aid any in your "bringin'to time".

I reckon some of us kids were plenty tough, but not as tough as I heard tell of other places. Why I heard of places where they used to bar out the schoolmaster and make him treat them, or they wouldn't let him in to teach. I heard tell of one case where the teacher was already in the school on New Years Day, and they threw brimstone--sulphur I reckon it's called--down the chimney and smoked him out, getting possession of the premises. There used to be some pretty wild schools in these parts. Quite a percentage of the big fellows in the school considered the teacher as Public Enemy Number One.

The worst thing of all was when parents took up the battle of the kids who had determined to make life miserable for the schoolmaster. That happened quite often, and they vowed that if the kids couldn't put the teacher out, they would. They usually got the worst of it, however.

We had a great time in the old days, and it cost us so little money. We had church and camp meetings, and they provided a lot of nights when we boys had somewhere to take our girl friends. The camp meetings would be held in the open air, usually in the timber in a clearing several hundred feet square. In the middle would be built a speaker's stand, which was really a big platform, from sixty to eighty feet square; a stately pulpit was built and covered with white, or some pretty color, but usually white. Seats were provided on this platform for a choir to back the preacher with loud "Amens". Out in the timber in each and every direction were tents, many of them, which provided shelter for those who came for miles, and the campfires were numerous--looked a lot like an Indian encampment. There weren't any warwhoops of the Red man, but when that preacher started, and the Free Methodist began to shout, heaven knows any Indian would have rated a poor second.

Sometimes those who came a long way went to common tents for sleeping, the women in one long tent and maybe twenty or more in one bed, the bed being made by putting mattresses side by side in a long line. The men did likewise in a tent of their own. Nor did they have to go to heaven for their meals. That was real food that was cooked over those campfires.

You can have your sermons read from a revised and carefully edited copy, over a velvet-draped pulpit in a church of many spires, but you can never realize what happiness abounds in the primitive timber when God gives His message from the lips of a man fired by the very nature around him. It is like going back to the primitive church of the Pilgrim Fathers. To the man who has never attended worship in these open air temples, I can only say, "You've missed a lot of livin', brother." Nowadays it seems that half the youth have to be driven to church, and the other half don't go.

The world has to grow; it cannot stand still. With the coming of the rails in 1880, and the new town, came even more: a new way of living. I saw the first train as it came crawling down Oak Creek valley; not the train of today which is rated a 9,000 and carries a hundred big coal cars with ease, but a little engine, puffing like blazes to pull a few pintsize cars.

With the coming of the rails Raymond became the center of the community for miles around. The old mill ceased to run, the little country school nearby was closed and a new village school started, the post at Orlando was abandoned and nearly forgotten. The nearest church was over at Crouse, but now Raymond needed a church of its own, and before long it was blessed with two churches so that they could scramble the religion a little between themselves.

Farming, too, has changed since the early days. My father plowed about all the land on this farm with a walking plow, and when Uncle John got a Marsh harvester, man was he up and coming! When he took it to a neighbor's farm, it would be loaded on a wagon for the trip, and when it arrived at the field, it would be wheeled down on planks. Two men were kept busy binding for the old harvester; some different, and, I reckon, from these combines that race through the fields behind a high-powered tractor, cussing because the Lord lets the dew fall at night and slows down their mad rush!

I can remember when we threshed with horsepower. Who is it says, "round and round she goes, and where she stops nobody knows?" Round and round the horses went, hour after hour, threshing out the grain. Today a couple of men, if there is a spare man around, take a combine out and whirl it around the field, sometimes almost making the corners on two wheels, and the trucks race back and forth between town and the field to get back to the machine in time to take the next load. The man beneath the big straw hat, from his seat on the tractor, keeps one eye on the combine and the other on a little cloud over northwest. Heavens! it might rain, then he'd have to go home and sleep a little, and you can't afford to sleep when the tractor will run.

We had lots of fun in the old days on lots less money. That's my opinion, anyway. There was dancing, lots of dancing. We went miles to attend a good square dance. There was always plenty of fun to be had there. I used to call the dances for miles around. I never learned any calls from any book. I just heard some other fellow, then I called it anyway that suited me. Every caller had his own version of the way a dance should be called, and, of course, his way was the right way. I

would call for "swing like thunder" and boy! they'd swing like thunder, too. They'd land that gal clean into "old Arkansas."

But the old square dance has gone, made way for a new kind of dance that has all the earmarks of epileptic wiggles and squirms. But they call it dancing, and I guess maybe they know. The old camp meetings are gone; they have given way to more pious and dignified kind of religion, a trade that I doubt the wisdom of. The covered wagon fell before the train; the lumber wagon and buckboard before the automobile--and our little settlements of earlier days have dwindled away before the populous towns and cities. Much has happened to Nebraska since the Mormons passed through the Kerlin place over on West Oak, and crossed the ford on the Joe Masek place. That was before my time, but what I have seen in the way of change since I came here would fill a book.

My parents came to Nebraska with the Wilcox family. I remember old man Wilcox once caught some boys stealing his chickens, and made them come into the house. On entering, he was gone a moment, reappearing with a big pan of hot biscuits which he presented to the boys, saying that fried chicken was no good unless you had biscuits to go with it.

Every advance of the human race has come up the slope of struggle, and it was the same in Nebraska. The struggle to carve new homes out of the wild prairie and win a living from the soil has brought great progress to that group of men called "bug eaters." From hustle came muscle; from strain came brain. The fight for life gave birth to might, and the rigor of the battle bred vigor in the man, both in mind and body.

Even when I came here, as a small child, the country was still mainly governed by the hard law of nature, and they say nature in the raw is never mild. The country was pretty wild, but freedom was everywhere. Nebraska was born in freedom, and here we have reaped a full harvest of Liberty.

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#### INTERVIEW WITH OWEN BERNEY

Albion, Nebraska

Date: September 25, 1941

Interviewer: Maude Swanson

I was born in Illinois in 1876. We came to Nebraska when I was five years old. Father came out in the immigrant car, mother and us kids came on the train. When we arrived at Council Bluffs, we had to stay over a day or two on account of a big flood. My, how it did rain. I can remember that rain yet, and how restless we kids got. We wanted to get out to Nebraska.

At that time, the railroad only came as far as Columbus. We had four head of horses, two cows, some chickens, machinery, and household goods. When we got to Columbus, father hitched the team and wagon, loaded the furniture, and we drove to Genoa where we were going to live on a farm. Dad had one team hitched to the wagon and the other hitched to a piece of machinery, with the other pieces tied on behind. It made quite a procession. We kids drove the cattle. There was no town where Monroe now is, and we plowed through mud all the way to Genoa. Muddy, my

how muddy it was, and such slow traveling! I thought we would never get there. We stopped at old acquaintances of ours over night.

We had heard so much about the Indians and now we really saw them. They used to travel back and forth by our place. The government was taking care of them, and there would be a government man or two with them when they moved from one place to another. Some of the Indian kids were running behind the wagons, some were riding ponies, and others were in the wagons with their parents. My brother used to play ball with the Indians; they were good players, big, husky guys. They played down in the Prairie Dog Town. We kids were kinda afraid of them.

I will never forget the time when President Cleveland was elected. Father took me to town with him. It was a big celebration, with barbecued ox sandwiches, coffee and lump sugar. Say, that was fine! That was the first time I had ever seen lump sugar. They had the band out--just men who could play some instrument who got together and made a band. At Albion, they had a terrible accident. Someone stuffed the cannon full of rags and stuff, when they went to shoot it off, it exploded; the pieces flew in every direction, and one boy was killed.

When we first came here, we had a two-bucket well. It was a dug well, curbed up, with a pulley in the top with a rope through it and a wooden bucket on each end of the rope. When you pulled one bucket up, hand over hand, the other bucket went down. At another place we had a dug well; it was curbed up and had one bucket about five or six feet long and as big around as a stovepipe, with a spigot in the bottom. It was made of galvanized iron, and we drew it up by a windlass. When we got the bucket up, we set it on the trough where there was a raised place; that opened the spigot and the water ran into the tank. Uncle Jim lived with us at that time. One day the rope broke and the bucket fell down into the well. Uncle Jim was an old coal miner and used to such things. He wanted to go down and get it, so they let him down with the windlass. The well was about twenty-five or thirty feet deep. He got the bucket and hollered for them to pull him up again.

Years ago, I was plowing a garden in town with an old team and all at once, my gracious! the team broke through! They lunged and got themselves out. An old well had been covered over with boards and there was dirt on the top of the boards about as deep as I plowed. I hung onto the handles, and two boards broke through. Say, I didn't plow across there no more. We examined it afterward. It was a cistern twelve feet across and fourteen or fifteen feet deep.

We used to have some real storms. Such snowbanks! That blizzard of '88, I was at the schoolhouse. One of the neighbors came after his children, and we went home with him. We went east, and we made it all right. That man was feeding cattle, and he had a lot of hogs, too. The hogs were buried under the snow, and he could not take care of them. Several days later, he dug them out of the snow and all but 18 or 20 were alive.

We were in a cyclone one time. It took the house slick and clean and killed cattle and hogs, blowed a 2 x 4 through some cattle and twisted the windmill into a rope-like piece. We had no good cave, so mother and Frank went into the ice house and laid down on the ice. Mother had been baking bread and so had a fire in the stove. When the house went, it set fire to the barn--burned everything; several horses, a couple of calves, and all the harness. We'd had a lot of feed

in that barn. We didn't have a thing left to do anything with. Very few things that was in the house was ever found.

I went to school in a sod schoolhouse. It had seats made along one side of the room, and the teacher had a table and chair. The little tots had to sit on the long seat, too, and let their feet dangle. They got tired, of course, but nothing was said. When our class was called, we went up to the front of the room where there was a long recitation seat. Friday afternoons, after recess, we had spelling downs, or cyphering downs. It was good practice.

I remember that we burned corn for fuel, lots of it. Corn was cheaper than coal and right on the place. We burned cornstalks and anything we could get a hold of. Father would sit and twist hay by the hour, and we burned that. I have seen piles of prairie fires, too. One time, there was a bad one came through, and it looked like it was going to take the little Quaker Church. We went over to help fight the fire. One man got his hands burned so badly that he was in bad shape for a long time. That fire wiped out everything slick and clean.

Gypsies and peddlers were a pest to the people of that day. They were pretty mean sometimes. I had my fortune told by them. I don't know how they hit it so good. Bands of gypsies used to come through between St. Edward and Genoa, big droves of them, sometimes thirty or forty wagons. The men would trade horses, and the women told fortunes and sold little things. You couldn't trust any of them. Us kids played tricks on the peddlers whenever we could. They used to go through with a team and wagon, drive in Saturday night and stay over Sunday. One time, there were five or six peddlers there, and we kids took all their hats and hid them, just for devilment. My, were they mad. We had a lot of fun over it. Monday morning, we told them where their hats were, and they had to go and find them themselves. Their hats were up in the haymow.

One time, we shot an old mother coyote and dug out six or seven pups. We got a bounty on coyotes those days, two dollars a head, I think. Those coyotes used to howl at night, one of them can make a noise like a dozen, and then the dog would start in too. It was awful. One day, I was helping Harry Williams stack grain. I picked up a big bundle and threw it on the rack, and there was a big rattler in it. I killed it. It was an old one, had six or seven rattles.

Our first services were held in a house. We didn't have services often, the winters were so bad, the people lived so far apart, and the priest had to come so far.

They say a dog is the best friend a fellow's got. We had a good dog once. I remember one night we sent him after the cows. He came sneaking back without them and crawled under the house. We punched him out with a big stick, and then he went and got the cows, brought every one of them. I guess he was like a person--just didn't feel like going that night. He saved our chickens more than once. If anyone or anything came prowling around, he let us know. One night, he made such a fuss, barking out by the barn, that I went out. I could tell by the way he was barking that he was after something or someone, but I didn't see anything. Next day, we discovered we had lost a lot of our chickens. The thieves had left the chickenhouse and gone by the barn on their way over the hill to where another fellow was waiting with a car. It was all plain then.

We used to have dances, literaries, spell-downs and debates. I remember one time we were

going to Albion to the fair, in a top buggy. The wheel broke down, but I wired it up, and we came on to the fair in a rattling good buggy. I did draying here in Albion for twenty-five or thirty years. I plowed gardens as a side line.

At first, I had a long dray wagon and a team, but later I operated a truck. I remember one day I was at the depot, unloading eggs and cream. The team was gentle and hardly ever noticed anything. A circus was in town, and a man came along leading an elephant, and just as the elephant got to the crossing by the depot, it bawled, and away went that team like a flash. The horses headed east and ran down that right-of-way pell mell. I tried to grab the lines, but they jumped so quick that they threw me out of the dray. That right-of-way was rough, and the cans and crates went every which way--some of the lids came off and the cream spilled and the eggs were running out of the cases. It was a sight! The horses ran into a ditch and upset the dray, causing one of the horses to fall, and that's the way we found them. We unhitched the wagon and got the horse up. One wheel on the wagon was broken, and some of the harness. I took the harness to a harness maker to have fixed, got a new wheel, and then went back and gathered the cream cans and egg crates and brought them back to the depot. Then I went home, put on a boiler of water to get hot, and gave the dray a good scrubbing. I wasn't hurt much, but I was good and stiff for a day or two.

We have two boys in the army now, one in Alaska and the other in the medical department at San Jose, California. The boy in Alaska was a volunteer and joined the regular army at Omaha. He says they crawl into their sleeping bags and sleep right out in the snow. They are warm while sleeping but so cold when they get out of them. He has been there a year now and says the sun comes up about one o'clock in the afternoon--not all the time, but part of the time.

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