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Article Summary: This article is the content of an address read before the annual dinner meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska in Lincoln, Nebraska, on September 30, 1944. It describes in some detail the various social activities of early settlers in Nebraska and surrounding states: "visitings," "socials," "pound parties," "play parties," "singings," "box suppers," and attending events at the local school house, including literary and debating societies, and the annual Christmas program.

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: Photo of sod buildings and family in Custer County, Nebraska, 1888; pioneer school and community social center in Custer County, Nebraska, about 1888

The Social Homesteader*

EDWARD EVERETT DALE

In 1862 amid the turmoil of civil war, the Congress of the United States enacted the Homestead Law. This granted 160 acres of land from the public domain to every person 21 years of age or the head of a family who was a citizen of the United States or had declared his intention of becoming a citizen and who did not already own more than 160 acres of land elsewhere. During the stress of war no large number of persons took advantage of this but immediately after the close of the conflict and the return of so many thousands of soldiers to civil life there was a great outpouring of eager homeseekers to the Prairie West. By 1870 this movement had gathered enormous momentum and during the next two decades the increase of population in most states forming the second tier west of the Mississippi River was truly startling. During this twenty year period the population of the Dakotas increased from 14,000 to 719,000, Nebraska 122,000 to 1,058,000, Kansas 364,000 to 1,427,000, and Texas 818,000 to 2,235,000. During the next decade the increase continued and Oklahoma Territory's population grew from 61,000 in 1890 to 400,000 in 1900. Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico show a similar trend.

Regardless of the state or the region in which the homesteader settled, his first desire was to become acquainted with his neighbors. He was above all eager to know what sort of people these were among whom he had cast his lot. Were some of them natives of his own state or members of his own church? How many children were in the community who might be brought into a school or Sunday School? Were these nearby settlers a kindly and hospitable people who would make good neighbors, and among whom he could live on friendly terms and with mu-

* Address read before the annual dinner meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska, September 30, 1944.

tual respect and confidence.? On the answer to these questions depended to a great extent the future happiness and well being of the new homesteader and his family.

He soon discovered that neighboring settlers were asking themselves exactly the same questions about him. In a new country cooperation and the development of a community consciousness is most important. The answers to such questions were, moreover, in most cases satisfactory. The people who came to these new prairie regions did so to make homes for themselves and their families. They were for the most part an honest, industrious, God fearing folk eager to succeed and to build up a stable society in a raw and untamed land. Any members of the rougher element that had drifted in soon found themselves so far outnumbered that they departed in search of more congenial associates and an environment more suited to their tastes.

The first few weeks or months on a homestead were busy ones for the settler and his family. A home, consisting in most cases of a sod house, dugout, or box shanty, must be built, a field and garden plowed and planted, and shelter provided for the live stock. A well must be dug or drilled, fences built, and orchard trees set out. Even while such work was going on, however, the pioneer settler found time to become acquainted with all of the people within a radius of several miles of his home and the foundations of friendships and social relations were laid.

The opportunity to cultivate and further develop such friendships was not long delayed. Much has been written of the never ending labor of the American pioneer. This is quite true of the settlers in the regions to the East where there was ample timber with which to improve the new farm. There fields must be cleared, stumps grubbed out, rails split, and fences built. The settlers of the timbered regions always had a job. The idea, however, that the homesteader on the wide prairies farther west faced unremitting toil is largely a myth. The women were, as a rule, kept very busy, but not so the men. Located on a prairie claim forty to sixty miles from the nearest railroad, the settler, once he had made his first improvements of the homestead, found himself the possessor of abundant leisure. Little timber was available for buiding a home and barn or for erecting fences. In most cases he was quite poor. Usually he was lucky if he had

enough money to purchase some barbed wire to enclose a field and garden, a few fruit trees, and the windows and doors for the sod house or dugout home. The distance to the railroad was too great to make it possible to market there any surplus farm or garden products even if the little frontier railway towns had furnished any considerable market, which in most cases they did not. Also drought, hot winds, and grasshoppers often kept the quantity of any such surplus very low.

Under such circumstances the pioneer settler fell back upon subsistence farming which in most cases had been the form of agriculture to which he had been accustomed in his old home. He felt that farming was not a business to be carried on for profit. It was a way of life and was the only way he knew as well as the only one he wanted to know and to pursue. Enough wheat, corn, or kafir corn could easily be raised to provide bread for the family. This was ground at a small mill in the community. He had two or three milk cows to provide milk and butter and three or four pigs to furnish the winter's supply of meat. The garden afforded vegetables, and wild plums or grapes could be gathered from the sand hills along the rivers. Sorghum could be grown and syrup made at a neighborhood sorghum mill. A few chickens supplied the family with eggs and occasionally with roast or fried chicken. As for money it was largely nonexistent. In times of stress he could leave the family and journey east for a few months' work at seasonal labor and so earn enough to provide his wife and children clothing and shoes for the winter with something left over to buy sugar and coffee.

As for securing profitable employment in the homestead region itself, the very thought of it was absurd. All of the neighbors were in the same situation as himself. None had any money with which to hire labor or any profitable labor to be done. A census of the unemployed in western Oklahoma, Kansas or Nebraska in the early nineties would have included virtually the entire population. The new farm supplied a living of sorts, but no money, and for such crops as were grown there was no cost of production. Any labor expended in farm work had no value. The pioneer raised his own help just as he raised his own meat, bread, and vegetables. With four or five big, strong boys who needed to be taught to work, the settler often had to figure

ways and means to keep them employed at useful tasks, especially since the school term was seldom more than three or four months.

Under such a regime there was abundant time for social contacts with the neighbors and new found friends. Such contacts in the earliest days of homestead life often took the form of "visiting". These were not the formal calls to which a later generation has become accustomed, but an all day visit of the entire family. On Sunday morning the father would hitch the mules to the big farm wagon while the mother gathered her brood about her, scrubbed their faces and dressed them in their Sunday best. The entire family then piled into the wagon and drove four or five miles to the home of a friend where they always received a warm welcome. During the forenoon the men sat beneath the brush arbor in front of the sod house home, if it were during warm weather, and smoked while they talked of politics, religion, and the future of the community. Inside, the women bustled about preparing dinner and visiting at the same time, while the children ran wild on the prairie or played such games as "town ball", "prisoner's base" and "black man".

When dinner was announced the adults gathered about the table while the children had to wait since there was neither room nor dishes enough for all. No matter how meager the weekday fare might be, the Sunday dinner in which guests shared seldom left anything to be desired. Chicken and dumplings, hot biscuits with butter, three or four vegetables from the garden, hot coffee, cool buttermilk, and vinegar pie were attacked with enthusiastic vigor. In fact the food was in most cases far better than can be had today in any of the fashionable New York places where it costs a dollar to sit down and several times that much to get up. After what seemed to the youngsters an interminable time, the elders finished, the dishes were washed and the table laid afresh. Sometimes the visiting lady would insist that it was not necessary to wash a plate for her son since he "could eat off his paw's plate", but the hostess in virtually every case declared that it was no trouble and that no child should be called upon to eat from a soiled plate. In most cases the lad had long since passed the stage of being unduly particular.

After the children had eaten and the dishes had been washed a second time and put away, the "visiting" was resumed. The

men walked about over the farm, inspected the crops and live stock, the children went back to their games and the women compared fancy work or engaged in small talk until the declining sun warned the visitors that it was time to go home.

At first such visits provided almost the only social diversion for older people but it was not long until the young men and women began to plan more active and colorful forms of amusement. The old time square dances, common to the Cow Country, were often taboo in this new social order, especially in the southern zone of settlement, though they were sometimes popular farther north. Even in the southern plains region they were fairly common in those communities where some ranching still existed and were shared in by the wilder or more rowdy elements of the neighborhood. Dancing, as a rule, however, lies at the two extremes of civilization. The primitive and the sophisticated both dance but the in-betweens will have none of it. Such scruples, however, did not extend to socials and play parties. These began to be held quite often and older people often came to share in the fun. All such events were non-invitation affairs. A couple of young men eager for "something to go to" would ride over to a settler's home and ask the good housewife if a party might be held at her home on a certain evening. Having by earnest urging, secured her permission, they then made the rounds of the community announcing that there would be a party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Smith next Saturday with "everybody invited, nobody slighted."

Such parties assumed various forms. One of the commonest was the "social", sometimes locally known as the "set to". At this, seats were arranged around the wall and, as the young people assembled, they were seated in couples by a young woman known as the "hostess". After a man had talked to a girl for ten or fifteen minutes, it was the duty of the hostess to bring up another man, pluck the first one away, and give his place to the newcomer. The first man would then be seated by some other girl, and so the people were shifted about until every man had been introduced to every girl and had talked with her for at least a few minutes. When the number of boys greatly exceeded that of the girls, a man might be left out in the cold to chat with his

male friends for a time, but eventually he was once more put back into circulation. The success of such a party depended a great deal upon the fairness and wisdom of a hostess who would play no favorites, but use reasonable discretion in shifting couples that were not congenial and in allowing those who seemed to be having a good time to prolong their conversation beyond the limit ordinarily allowed.

Refreshments were usually served about the middle of the evening, but, owing to the meager abilities of the average household to provide them, the guests often brought their own. Such an affair was called a "pound party" since each young man had been instructed to bring a pound of some delicacy to help out the good cheer of the occasion. If the home boasted two or more rooms, a long table, usually made of rough boards, was set up in one room. Here the packages were unwrapped, the cans or jars opened, and their contents put in dishes and strung along the table. The result was sometimes a bit startling. Pounds of candy, crackers, apples, cookies, figs, dates, nuts, canned fruits, and various other things were scattered about over the table and five or six couples came out at a time and chose what they wanted.

For the more boisterous young people and those who had formerly danced and perhaps still would, were it not contrary to public opinion and the rules of the church, the play party was a favorite diversion. The procedure of "getting it up" was exactly the same as for the social, but at such an affair "singing games" were played instead of merely devoting the evening to conversation. The play party was perhaps imported directly from the hills of Missouri or Arkansas or the timbered regions of Texas. Favorite games were "We'll all go down to Rowser's", "Coffee grows on White Oak Trees", "Chase the Buffalo", "Little Brass Wagon", "Old Dan Tucker", and a multitude of others. Some members of a community, especially those who would have liked to dance, viewed such games askance and declared they were "only dancing with the best part of it, the music, left out". Certainly the steps and figures were more or less reminiscent of the old-fashioned squares and yet many older persons who thought dancing an invention of the devil viewed the games of the play party with entire approbation. The words sung were often sheer



Photo from Butcher Collection

“VISITING IN STYLE”

These buildings of sod were in Custer County, Nebraska, in 1888.

drivel, but the tunes were catchy and the figures danced sometimes quite intricate. Note these words of a popular favorite:

“Then come on, my dearest dear
And present to me your paw
For I know you’ve got tobaccer
And I’m bound to have a chaw.
I’m bound to have a chaw.
And I’m bound to have a chaw.
For I know you’ve got tobaccer
And I’m bound to have a chaw.”

“Then come on, my dearest dear
And we all will fight and scratch
For we’ll all root together
In the sweet potato patch.
The sweet potato patch,
The sweet potato patch.
For we’ll all root together
In the sweet potato patch.”

Another less common was as follows:

“Eighteen pounds of meat a week
Whiskey here to sell
How can the boys stay at home
When the girls all look so well
When the girls all look so well.”

“If I had a scolding wife
I’d whip her sure as she’s born
I’d take her down to New Orleans
And trade her off for corn.
And trade her off for corn.”

As the words were sung with spirit and sometimes a good deal of harmony, the couples on the floor went through an elaborate dance figure with all the movements of swing, dos-a-dos, promenade, and various others. Other more childish games

such as "snap", "marching 'round the levee", "miller boy", and "hunt the thimble", were sometimes played.

If some home had a cottage organ, the young people of the community would sometimes assemble there for an evening of singing. Hymns were usually sung, though other songs, particularly those of a humorous nature, were also common. Even those people who cared little for music and knew even less about it, would come to a "singing" merely for the opportunity it gave to meet friends and form new social contacts.

The early settlers of the prairie frontier had an almost fanatical belief in education. Almost the first community enterprise in every neighborhood was the erection of a school building and the establishment of a little school. Once this was done, the opportunities for social life were greatly increased. The school house, no matter how small or rude, soon became something of a social center. To it were transferred many of the community "sings". A Sunday School was quickly organized and arrangements made to have church services at least once or twice a month. The school itself was, moreover, a matter of general interest. Visitors dropped in on Friday afternoon to hear the children "speak their pieces" that were usually given at that time or to enjoy the spelling and ciphering matches.

A literary and debating society to meet twice a month was usually formed. This was in most cases held every other Friday evening and a program committee worked hard to see that each meeting was an unqualified success. Here recitations and declamations were delivered, most of them old selections chosen from McGuffey's Readers or from some special "speech book". "Spartacus to the Gladiators", "Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight" and "The Lips That Touch Liquor Can Never Touch Mine" were prime favorites. Quartets and soloists rendered numbers, dialogs were presented and debaters, with more fire than grammar, thundered forth their views as to which is the more destructive element, fire or water, or as to whether there is more pleasure in pursuit or possession.

Box suppers to provide funds for an organ for the schoolhouse or some other laudable enterprise were common and well attended. Every woman and girl in the community packed a choice supper for two in a pasteboard box which was frequently

covered with tin foil or gay tissue paper and decorated with artificial flowers. When all had assembled at the schoolhouse, these were sold at auction, the purchaser of a box having the privilege of eating supper with the lady who had prepared it. Whether you should eat a square meal at the usual time before leaving home or merely take a light snack to hold body and soul together until the boxes were opened about nine-thirty, was a question which each individual must decide for himself.

After the boxes had all been sold and supper eaten, a cake was sometimes presented to the most popular young lady as a means of raising additional funds. Votes were usually one cent each and in most cases there were but two leading candidates. One represented the church going element and was usually a girl who taught a Sunday School class, sang in the church services, and was known to be good "to wait on the sick". The other in all probability represented the more frivolous and wilder element. She made all the play parties, dressed in showy fashion and was commonly considered "good company" whatever that might mean!

The two girls were usually led to the end of the room and seated near the teacher's desk where everyone might appraise the charms of his favorite candidate. Then the voting began and as the money came in, the number of votes was checked up on the blackboard. Sometimes the election was quite spirited and became more than a friendly contest between two personable young women. It was a struggle between two sets of ideals, a battle of two types of society.

Other forms of entertainment flourished throughout the community and other types of social events became common. "All day singings with dinner on the ground" were held at the schoolhouse. A singing school lasting two weeks or more was taught by some itinerant music master. The young people for miles around attended each evening, paying a small fee for the privilege. A difference of opinion usually arose at first as to whether song books with round notes or with "shape notes" should be used, but after this had been settled, things went smoothly enough. Perhaps they learned little of the music, but the singing school was invaluable as a means of becoming better acquainted with

one's young neighbors and often had some of the attributes of a matrimonial agency.

As time went on, the number and variety of social events increased. Candy breakings, taffy pullings, fruit suppers, and pie suppers became common. Fish fries and picnics were often held, the latter varying from the small Sunday School picnic which had nothing more exciting to offer than a basket dinner, foot races, and a ball game, to a two or three day affair which people traveled long distances to attend. At these, concessions were granted for lemonade stands, a merry-go-round, and other attractions. Political speeches were in order and rival schools brought glee clubs or drill teams. The protracted meetings held under an arbor in summer often had quite as much of a social as they did a spiritual aspect. Oratorical contests and religious debates were popular, as were Sunday School conventions, and at times, private theatricals.

The growing importance and complexity of social life in a region that had never heard of telephones created some more or less grave problems. If a young man wanted to take a girl to a party or the literary society, how should he proceed in order to make the necessary arrangements? This was an important question since the men usually greatly outnumbered the girls and competition was in consequence quite keen. But the resourcefulness of the frontier was equal to the occasion. The ordinary procedure was for a young man to send the young lady a note by one of his friends and await her answer with whatever patience he was able to muster.

Having determined to ask for a date, he brushed the dust off the family ink bottle, sought out a pen and "ink tablet" and carefully and painstakingly indited a brief epistle. This was a difficult and delicate task. Should he say "Dear Miss Smith"? or "My dear Miss Smith"? Might not the latter salutation indicate a spurious claim to ownership that was quite unwarranted? Perhaps "Dear Miss Mary" would be better even though slightly informal. Having settled this weighty question with some qualms as to whether or not the word "Dear", should be used at all, he got down to the body of his communication. "May I have the pleasure, or honor, of accompanying you, or of your company, to the party tomorrow night?" Then there was another struggle

over the conclusion. Should it be "respectfully" or "very respectfully yours", "sincerely", or "very sincerely yours", or "yours very respectfully or sincerely"? All this having been decided upon, the note commonly called a "compliment", though nobody seems to know why, was folded carefully and addressed to "Miss Mary Smith, at Home".

One corner of the note was folded down, again for no apparent reason, and a friend was asked to deliver it. This he did, stopping long enough on the way to read it in hope of learning something that would be helpful to his own technique in preparing similar missives. He always waited for the girl to write an answer which she did with the same painstaking care shown by the boy friend. Once this had been delivered, the transaction was complete.

On the evening appointed, the young man appeared at the girl's home in his buggy if he had one. If he did not and the young woman owned a horse and side saddle, he merely rode over early enough to catch and saddle her pony and they were ready to start.

During the lean years of the frontier's early settlement, the problem of clothing a family was a serious one. Many tragic instances might be given of an attractive young woman who was frequently denied the opportunity of attending a social event because she lacked a good pair of shoes or a suitable dress. Young men were also hard put at times to find the money for a "Sunday suit" and must stay at home because they had nothing to wear but their working clothes. Such experiences were among the minor tragedies of frontier life perhaps, but they could hardly have seemed minor at the time to the young people concerned.

In the abundant leisure that was theirs, the prairie pioneers naturally celebrated with enthusiasm virtually every holiday. Thanksgiving was seldom shown much attention except by those settlers from the north who had acquired something of the spirit of the day from New England. Eggs were colored for the children at Easter, however, and the big picnic of the summer was usually planned to include the Fourth of July as its most important day. The great holiday of the entire year, however, was Christmas.

Usually two or three weeks before Christmas a mass meeting would be held at the schoolhouse to make plans for a com-

munity Christmas tree. At this meeting the various committees were appointed and their duties outlined. One of these was the committee to provide the tree. This consisted of three or four stalwart young men since it was often necessary to drive ten or fifteen miles to some mountain or canyon to find a suitable cedar tree. This must be cut down, loaded on the wagon, and brought to the schoolhouse and then set up at the end of the room.

The next committee was the one to dress the tree. Its chairman was usually some elderly lady famous for her patchwork quilts and crocheted tidies. Then came a committee on program usually headed by the school teacher, and finally a committee to provide something for the "poor children" of the community! If this last committee had taken the words, "poor children" literally, it would have been forced to provide for the entire junior population of the neighborhood, but there are degrees of poverty even on the frontier.

With its duties definitely assigned, each committee set to work with amazing energy. A tree was brought and set up at the schoolhouse and the teacher prepared a program of drills, songs and recitations, keeping her young charges long after the ordinary dismissal hours in order to practice. The committee to provide for the poor, solicited gifts of money or presents, and the group chosen to dress the tree worked hardest of all. Christmas tree ornaments were quite unknown but popcorn was strung by the yard and by the rod and looped in gay festoons upon the green branches. Nuts were gilded, and stars and crosses made of pasteboard covered with the tin foil from between layers of plug tobacco. Golden oranges, big red apples, and bags of candy, made of mosquito netting so the candy could be seen, were distributed over the tree under the critical eyes of the artistic chairman. Last of all came the presents proper!

The drug store in the little frontier town had always laid in a stock of Christmas goods and these were purchased with a reckless abandon limited only by the extreme scarcity of money. A "dressing case" which consisted of a red or green plush box containing a comb, brush and mirror could be bought for a couple of dollars or less and was considered an ideal, though lavish gift. A "manicure set" with the same type of box containing scissors, nail file, tweezers and other accessories cost about the same.

There were other less expensive gifts, however, in abundance. Mustache cups, shaving mugs, "fascinators", celluloid glove boxes, collar boxes, gold washed jewelry and scores of other articles were sent down, carefully tagged with the name of the recipient, to be hung on the tree by the harassed committee.

A shaving set was a wonderful though expensive gift for a man. For children there were all kinds of toys, fruit, candy, mittens and sweaters. An autograph album was a gift of which any girl was certain to be proud. It was usually bound in plush or pink celluloid, or sometimes leather. If the giver had the education and finesse to write a sentiment on the first page, the value of the gift was greatly enhanced. Such a sentiment might be as follows:

"When the golden sun is setting
And your mind from care is free
When of others you are thinking,
Won't you sometimes think of me?"

Or one equally fetching might read:

"Forget me not, forget me never
Till yonder sun shall set forever
And when it sets to rise no more,
Forget me then and not before."

Such a worthy and altogether reasonable request could hardly fail to touch the heart of a girl and give her a very warm feeling toward one who accompanied his Christmas gift with such a beautiful sentiment.

Perhaps the most popular present of all was a photograph album. A large one bound in red plush set with a small mirror or in celluloid painted with a spray of forget-me-nots, was an ideal gift. It always contained spaces for two sizes of pictures — "cabinet size" and tintypes and few people knew that any other dimensions for a photograph were possible. Once in a while a very expensive album would have a small music box enclosed in the cover which, when wound, played "Home, Sweet Home" if the book were opened.

A photograph album was not only a beautiful gift but a very useful one as well. Kept on the little table in the front room, it

could be used by a girl as an excellent source of entertainment for a young man. Filled with all the family pictures, it could be turned through slowly and names, relationship and general status of all the relatives explained in detail to every caller. Solemn-eyed babies, plain-faced aunts, long whiskered uncles and always Aunt Jane's wedding picture, were viewed in turn. For a visitor to show indifference was the height of rudeness. He was expected to manifest an interest in each portrait, ask questions and comment favorably upon the dress and appearance of every individual picture. With the proper technique, an hour or two could be spent in looking through an album. It was a pleasant pastime and in the words of Ken Hubbard: "You can make fun of the old family photograph album if you please, but it *did* give a young fellow a pretty good idea of the gang he was marryin' into."

When Christmas Eve at last came and the presents were on the tree, virtually all the people living within a radius of several miles assembled at the schoolhouse. Usually they filled the room to overflowing. The teacher gave her program, bringing the children out and putting them through their paces. Then when the last one had "spoken his piece" and the applause had died down, there came a great jingle of bells outside and Santa Claus came through the door, bowing and scraping and shouting greetings, while the pop-eyed children screamed with delight. Making his way to the tree he began to take down presents, read off the names and willing hands passed them back to the one for whom they were intended. His running fire of jokes and comments kept the crowd laughing and happy little squeals of joy from various parts of the room as the gift packages were opened only served to increase the general merriment.

Altogether it was a wholly joyous occasion and yet a thoughtful onlooker might have seen there a note of pathos too. Rough, bearded men proudly fingered white handled razors that would never shave, a celluloid collar and cuff box, or a pair of gilt cuff buttons certain to turn green far sooner than would the brown prairie, no matter how early spring might come. A wife with hands worn by the toil of sweeping and scrubbing floors, churning butter, washing, ironing and mending, fondled lovingly a foolish little jewel case or pink celluloid glove box and looked up

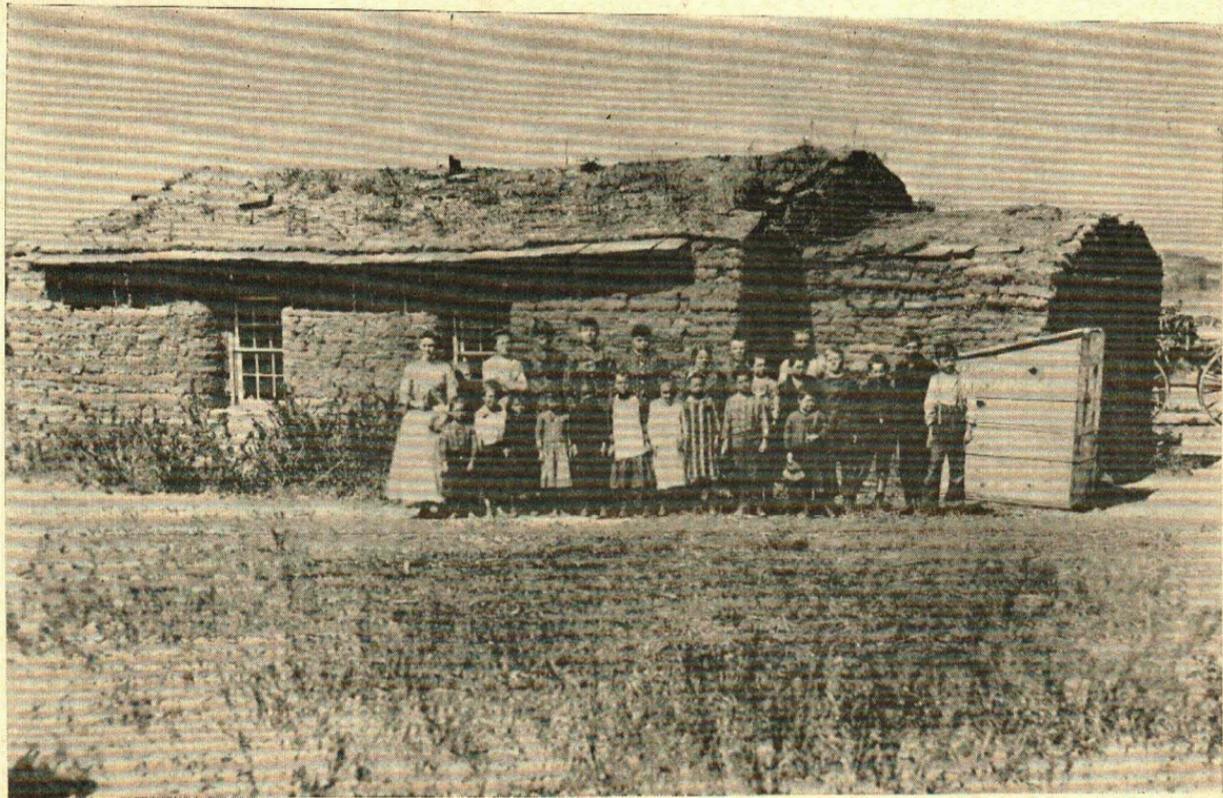


Photo from Butcher Collection

THE PIONEER'S SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY'S SOCIAL CENTER
This one was in Custer County, Nebraska, about 1888.

with misty eyes at the big, rough featured, self-conscious man by her side. Perhaps among people who so desperately needed the bare essentials of life, the very uselessness of the gift made it even more dear, when she considered that her husband had denied himself something that was a real need in order to please her.

Eventually the last gift had been taken from the tree and the apples, oranges and bags of candy and nuts distributed to the poor children of the neighborhood. Then Santa Claus bowed himself out, the sleepy babies too young to enter into the spirit of the occasion were bundled up, the older children helped into coats and jackets and the happy crowd poured from the building and climbed into wagons for the drive home. The next day came a good Christmas dinner and life settled down into normal channels. Christmas was over until next year.

It was not many years until the character of frontier society began to change. The coming of railroads made markets readily available. Farming for profit instead of merely "holding down a claim" became the rule. This brought more money and less leisure. The region became more thickly peopled. The store and a blacksmith shop grew to a small town, the town to a thriving little city. The dugout or shanty was replaced by a commodious farm house and the straw-covered shed by a big, red barn. The straggling little fruit trees grew to an orchard. Another room or more was added to the schoolhouse. Good roads, rural mail delivery, and eventually telephones, became common.

With changed conditions came changes in the social order. People became so numerous that society tended to form itself into groups. Invitation affairs took the place of the old "free for all" social gatherings. With a greater sophistication came formal calls, dances and bridge parties to take the place of the old time socials, box suppers and candy breakings. The old order was passing. No doubt it is better so, and yet there are people in the West today who look back upon the pioneer years with a certain feeling of regret. They have many happy memories of their social life in a far different West and feel that with the passing of the old time ways and customs, there passed away something fine and beautiful which we will never see again, in quite the same form at least.

Yet in recent years we have seen a great revival of many of those things which grew in pioneer soil. Driving a car a sum-

mer or two ago through the Appalachian Mountains, I found offered for sale at many places beside the road the old-fashioned, hand-woven coverlets and rag rugs or the hickory bottomed, ladder backed chairs which belonged to a bygone generation. In our own community we have seen a renewed interest in square dances and other social diversions common half a century ago. Tune in on the radio any evening and you can readily get the old hill-billy or cowboy songs, orchestras, or mountaineers, or fiddler contests. It may be that this is only a passing fad and yet there are many people who are not so sure.

The student of history has not failed to observe that in the past the life and social diversions of a people have always tended to swing pendulum-like from the simple to the complex and sophisticated. In Great Britain the age of Puritanism was succeeded by the Restoration and that in turn by the Victorianism of the later nineteenth century. Social life in our country has shown similar trends. The raw, crude life of the frontier with its tawdry dance halls, saloons, horse racing, cock fighting and gambling establishments passed away and these earlier institutions were succeeded by church, Sunday School, educational contests and the simple pleasures of a plain, earnest, God fearing people who abhorred all of the wild, rough features of the social order which they had come to displace.

Then, with the growth of towns and cities, the acquisition of wealth and a more complex society, came a curious sort of "synthetic sophistication" that found its social diversions in cocktail parties, card playing, dancing and elaborate dinners accompanied by alcoholic refreshments. Hosts and hostesses vied with one another in fashionable parties, expensive luncheons, the keeping of late hours and extravagance in dress, homes and furnishings.

Such a state of society, used in the narrow sense of the term, has been enormously fostered and developed by the newly rich and the newly important. People without any standing in the social world who formerly must work hard for long hours to earn a living, finding themselves suddenly possessed of money, position or leisure jumped for the band wagon with an enthusiasm worthy of a better cause. By lavish entertainment, gaudy display and an eager desire not only to keep up with their

neighbors but to excel them, they plunged whole-heartedly into a mad social whirl, counting their success in it as the chief end of life. So, certain communities that were wild cow towns only two generations ago have passed through an age of Victorianism to the development, in some circles at least, of social diversions which in a more gilded setting, bear some resemblance to the crude, raw social life of the early frontier.

To those people who have shared in the social life of every type of people from the crude riders of the Cow Country to the most cultured of the New England intellectuals who find in a pleasant home, books, flowers and the pursuit of knowledge, everything required for gracious and happy living, it is obvious that a return to a greater simplicity in our social diversions has been long overdue. It is equally apparent that this will be greatly hastened by the events of the past few years. In a nation at war, both good taste and economic necessity will obviate any lavish expenditure of time and money for elaborate entertainments or extravagant social functions. Under such circumstances it may be possible that a knowledge of the social diversions of our pioneer forebears will be of some value to us by helping us to readjust our own social life along lines of greater simplicity. That any such readjustments will detract from the pleasure derived from social contacts with our friends and neighbors, everyone old enough to have shared in that life of a generation ago will deny. Surely an evening spent in conversation with a few congenial friends, in the course of which neither host nor guest are required to spend anything except the evening, should be as pleasant and as stimulating as an elaborate party.

Nor need we, in any revival of the old time simplicity practiced by the frontier homesteader, sacrifice our love for beauty. The gay flower gardens of the pioneer farmers showed all too plainly their willingness to work for things of purely an aesthetic nature. Their hand-woven coverlets, rag rugs, patchwork quilts and other things of home manufacture were so lovely that collectors search eagerly for them and when once acquired, they are treasured by people of highest culture as almost above price. Just as such old things are best, to many of us the old time ways are also best, particularly at a time when the grim shadows of war darken the land and we are devoting our best energies to defeat those sinister forces that threaten our freedom and national existence.