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Article Summary: Leeper, who struck out for the West in 1860, made important contributions to frontier settlement. He and his family developed eleven farm sites. In several cases they built the first homes, outbuildings and fences on those sites.

Cataloging Information:

Names: John Milton Leeper, Harriet Augusta Leeper, Anna Leeper, Blanche Leeper, Minnie Leeper, Barbara Gier, Will Gier, Caleb Olin

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Photographs / Images: map showing pioneer farm homes occupied by Leeper, 1844-1905; fanciful drawing of the Beaver Creek valley of Boone County, Nebraska, 1874; soddy similar to the one occupied by the Leeper family in Boone County (S D Butcher photograph of the George Golden family in Custer County, c. 1886)

JOHN MILTON LEEPER: PIONEER FARMER

By HERBERT T. HOOVER

A "PIONEER FARMER" was identified as a unique figure by frontier historian Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 in his seminal article entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." He said the "pioneer farmer" (to be distinguished from the equipped agrarian frontiersman) was a wanderer in the vanguard of the farmers' frontier movement who tilled the soil with rude implements for subsistence alone. At each stop on the fringe of civilization he erected a cabin, and sometimes a stable and corn crib, and he broke a dozen acres or so. He never had more than a few livestock, and he seldom owned his land. But that was immaterial, for once he participated in the founding of a new county, or state, and partially subdued his environment, he reacted as neighbors crowded in and broke for the hinterland where he could enjoy elbow room.

Brief as his appearance always was at a given place, he was important. He broke virgin soil and erected crude dwellings — for possible subsequent use by equipped farmers — as he moved from place to place across the continent.

As Turner wrote, he noticed pioneers fitting this description were then leaving his own region — Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois — to escape intensive culture and to find "virgin soil" at "nominal prices" to the west. Indeed, the 1890 census revealed many counties of states in the old Northwest experienced decreases in population, for they had been sending pioneer farmers "to advance the frontier on the plains."¹ Under the attractive terms of the Homestead Act, whereby a bona fide settler could hold in fee 160 acres for \$10 plus incidental costs and five years' occupancy,² hundreds of thousands made application for quarter sections across the Mississippi River in the latter 19th century. In Nebraska alone there congregated approximately 131,000 would-be

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settlers to make application for homesteads during three decades following the first homestead entry in 1863 — the period Turner was writing about.³

Scarcely more than half that number ever received final patent, however, even though the land was “free.” Approximately 63,000 of those Nebraska homesteaders failed to “prove up” their claims, and many of those who stayed on and secured title soon sold their lands. There were many, many roving pioneers in Nebraska.⁴

Accurate determination of the experiences which caused those tens of thousands to abandon their undeveloped claims never has been possible. For one thing, the sources have obvious bias. Western newsmen and officials sometimes hid the horrors of frontier life for fear of discouraging immigration. Ironically, at the same time they often overstated hardships to secure aid and benefits for their communities from governmental agencies and from private benefactors.⁵

Information about the fate of those who left likewise has been elusive. Foremost scholars of the period offer feebly that the ones who gave up their lands “went East.”⁶

The author does not pretend to unveil truth at last, or even to advance an hypothesis about the experiences and dispositions of the elusive figures. But some interesting evidence has come to light about them through the discovery of personal correspondence of one of the very persons Turner referred to in his article — correspondence which tells the story of a “pioneer farmer” as it was perceived by the pioneer himself and his wife. Following is the story of John Milton and Harriet Augusta Leeper — affectionately referred to in correspondence as “Milton” and “Hattie.” Their experience evidently was typical. At least they felt it was; they believed many of their neighbors and friends bore similar hardships, and endured similar fates.⁷

It is certain, at any rate, that their tale was typical at its inception because Milton came from the most recently settled agrarian communities eastward. He was born in McLean, Illinois, and was raised in Bloomington, Illinois, and he was young, like many pioneers — only sixteen — when he struck out for the West to “seek his fortune.” The year was 1860.

He did not reach the frontier right away. He was delayed more than a decade due to various factors, but first it was his own hesitancy. On his initial migration he got no farther than DeWitt in eastern Iowa,

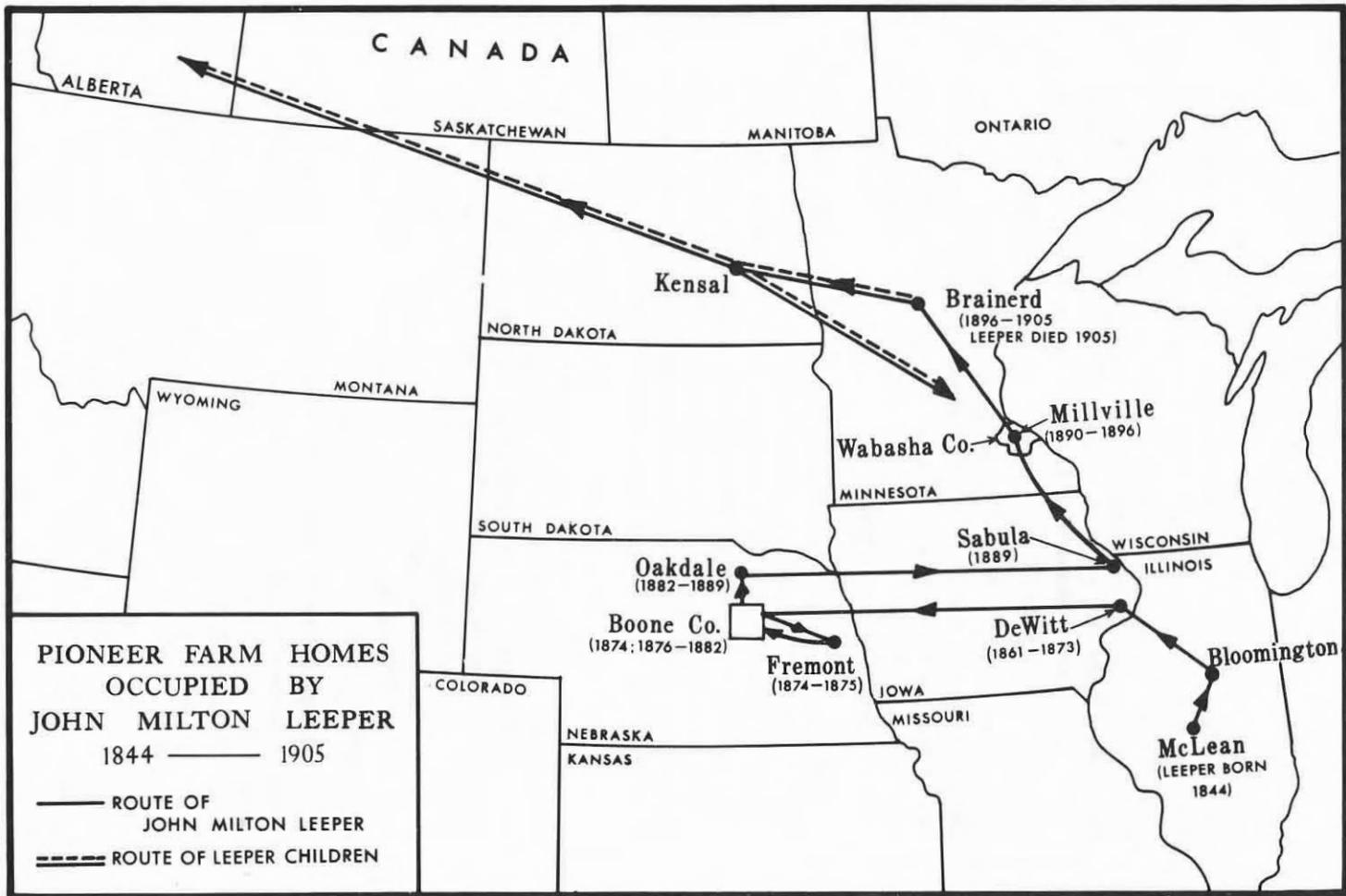
where on finding the security of employment, he decided to stop and get his bearings. Then the Civil War intervened, and at eighteen he enlisted in an Iowa Infantry unit in which he served until the War's end. Finally, his plans were interrupted by matrimony. Following the War he courted and married Hattie Schaeffer and the two settled near relatives at DeWitt, where they had their first child (Anna) in 1872. After Anna's birth they evidently decided to remain in eastern Iowa and to forego adventure on the frontier.

But soon thereafter Milton changed his mind. Panic struck the nation in 1873, plunging Americans into deep depression. Now fearful he could no longer "make a living in DeWitt," Milton loaded Hattie, Anna and all the family's possessions onto a wagon and belatedly resumed his trek westward toward the Great Plains.⁸

His destination, as he started out, was northern Nebraska. Fixing a course west-northwest, he planned to homestead in the Niobrara Valley where he heard the land was unsettled and fertile. Somewhere along the way he altered his plans, however. Probably it was when he arrived in Nebraska and learned that the Niobrara region was remote, that it lay too far from civilization to be completely safe from Indian attacks, and that there were no established towns except near the mouth of the river.

By the time he made application for land in Nebraska he had decided to settle in Boone County. Located directly north of the Pawnee Reservation, it had attracted fewer than two persons per square mile at the 1870 census, and it was virtually unsettled on the Leepers' arrival. Yet it was close enough to civilization to escape the occasional Indian raids, and there were growing villages nearby — Oakdale, for example — to provide essential services and supplies.⁹ Milton, Hattie, and Anna settled in Beaver Valley, probably arriving during the early months of 1874.

No records survive to indicate their first response to the claim, but subsequent remarks suggest they were pleased. On arrival Milton eagerly studied the soil and began to break sod. Meanwhile Hattie planned a home. Unlike many pioneer women of her time who were "reduced to tears" at their first encounter with prairie home sites, she seemed delighted.¹⁰ "I like our place the best of any around here," she wrote a sister, Florinda, back at DeWitt. "When we get a fine house and 100 acres under cultivation, I wouldn't trade with any one." She complained a bit about the water problem. "We have had to get our water from the



Spring & Creek . . . which has made it very unhandy." But she hastened to add, "Water is the only thing that discourages me here."¹¹ Indeed, the hardships of initial settlement apparently did not bother either of the Leepers very much.

Their early optimism soon changed to deep concern. Milton had broken only thirteen acres and Hattie had just begun to plan her home, when during a dry spell the grasshopper swarms forced them back to Fremont for refuge. They remained there through two seasons, whence they watched the destructive insects strip eastern Nebraska bare.¹² On one occasion Hattie wrote Florinda:

I wish you had been here today and seen the sight. The grasshoppers came this morning like a storm. They are so thick they look like a big snow storm coming . . . The corn will not last two days at this rate. There are more in the air and on the ground than there are folks in the United States. Milt came home from threshing today [and said]. . . they aint half as thick here as they are where he was. The Presiding Elder was over from Grand Island and he says it looks like the middle of winter there. Every green thing is gone. . . I don't know what will become of us at this rate.¹³

Evidently scenes like this wrought horror on various occasions in the Leeper household.

In these darkest moments Milton and Hattie took consolation from one thing; their claim was never in jeopardy.¹⁴ Under the original Homestead Act it would have been subject to legal seizure, since a settler could remain off his land no more than six months without relinquishing his rights. But Congress passed a succession of "grasshopper laws" during the middle and late 1870's, which provided that if a farmer could show his crops were seriously damaged or destroyed by grasshoppers he could absent himself from year to year. During his absence "no adverse right could be attached to his land."¹⁵

Illegal seizure, though often a problem on the homesteaders' frontier, was never a serious threat to the Leepers, either. Claim jumpers tried to muscle in sometimes, despite the "grasshopper laws"; once a man named Chapman tried to jump the Leepers' claim. But interlopers were easily discouraged; neighbors in Boone County who remained on the land warned Chapman if he tried to seize the claim they would "drive him out of the country."¹⁶ So the land was safe from legal and illegal seizure alike.

Small comfort this must have seemed during the grasshopper invasion, however, for Milton and Hattie doubted they ever would see Beaver

Valley again. Grasshoppers did more than drive them from the valley; the insects threatened their very existence in Fremont as well. Looking ahead after the first crop was destroyed, Hattie remarked:

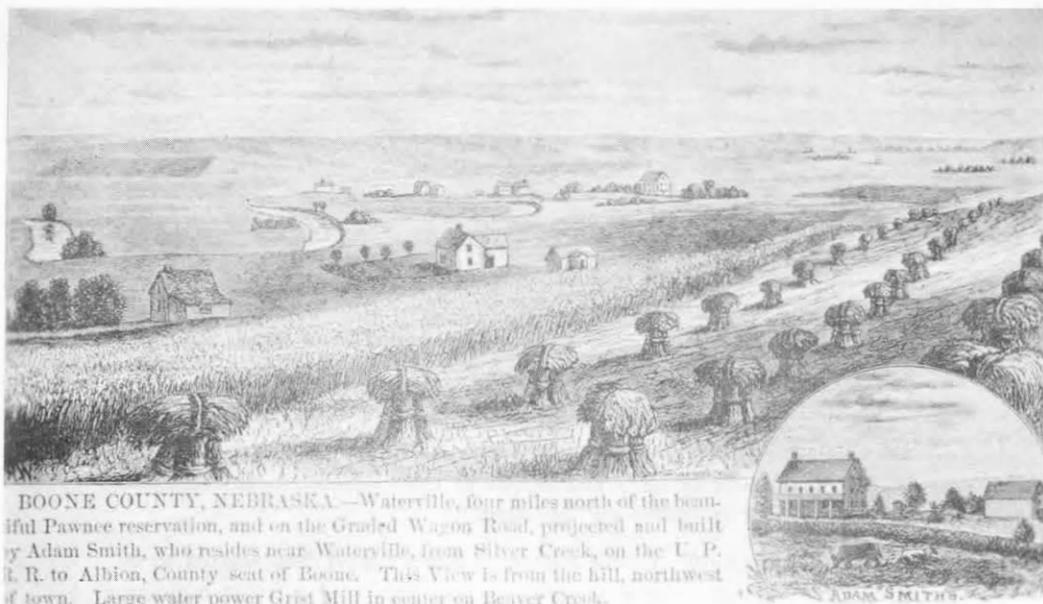
We have the poorest prospect for winter we ever had. He [Milton] planned all right if the hoppers had not come [to Fremont]. He was going to thresh while that lasted and then gather corn . . . at .03 a bushel but the hoppers are taking that & there are so many threshing machines in the country that it wont [sic] last long.¹⁷

Indeed the Leepers doubted that they could even find food to last the winter. Others went hungry. "Many are . . . leaving," Milton reported, because after they were "grasshoppered" they failed to find jobs, and they faced starvation.

"But we will try it a few years," he added, until satisfied "as to the productiveness of the soil and the chances of farming."¹⁸ Thus resolved to return to Beaver Valley, Milton secured employment wherever he could. During the first year he found work in a wholesale store, for which he received about \$40.00 a month. The second summer he bought a team of mules on credit for \$257.00, and worked them at \$2.50 a day in the harvest. Meanwhile Hattie did her part. She earned up to \$1.50 a week with her sewing machine and \$4.00 a week "taking in a boarder." She also kept a flock of chickens and a milk cow in the yard to enlarge the family's diet.¹⁹ By these means the two kept the family alive during the grasshopper storms.

All the while they bore extreme hardships. There was cold weather. "My such a cold winter," Hattie once wrote her sister. "There has been 3 weeks at a time that the windows has been so frosted that we couldn't see out of them." Water pails froze "solid to the bottom every night in the pantry." Illness and the threat of fatal disease also plagued them. Once Milton was incapacitated for several weeks by sunstroke. On another occasion Hattie and Anna followed him during harvest because in Fremont youngsters "were dying with the whooping cough and measles all over town."²⁰ That they lived on the edge of economic failure is evidenced by the fact that after two years of hard work in Fremont, they left for the claim with only \$27.00.

But they had stood firm despite hardships and financial distress. Finally back on the homestead in 1876, but occupying temporary quarters offered by a neighbor nearby, they took up their work with renewed zeal. "Times are hard and we have had bad luck," Hattie admitted.²¹ But she vowed, "I am going to hold that claim . . . there



BOONE COUNTY, NEBRASKA.—Waterville, four miles north of the beautiful Pawnee reservation, and on the Graded Wagon Road, projected and built by Adam Smith, who resides near Waterville, from Silver Creek, on the U. P. R. R. to Albion, County seat of Boone. This View is from the hill, northwest of town. Large water power Grist Mill in center on Beaver Creek.

John Milton Leeper homesteaded in the Beaver Creek valley of Boone County, Nebraska, in 1874. This fanciful drawing of the valley, designed to lure settlers in 1876, indicates a prosperity the Leeper correspondence does not reflect.

will [be] one gal that won't be out of a home. . . . We can't do more than to hold the claim and keep out of debt for a while but . . . we will come out all right."²²

Milton agreed. More often than Hattie he grew wistful over their circumstances. "I could be all right if I had about \$50 to help myself to seed Grain [but] . . . I dont got em [sic]," he once wrote sadly. Yet he never lost hope. Comparing Nebraska to Iowa, in a letter to Florinda, he said, "This country is far ahead of that. Times is hard here, [but] so they are everywhere. . . . I think we will come out all right. . . . This country is bound to come out after a while."²³

So the Leepers held on, and soon their faith in Nebraska was rewarded; within a short time things began to "come out all right." Beginning in 1877 the grasshoppers nearly disappeared, and a "wet cycle" set in which lasted almost a decade.²⁴ As a result, there was an economic boom in the eastern part of the state. Virtually an unsettled wilderness a decade before, Boone County reported 794 farms valued at more than \$800,000 at the 1880 census. And those farms produced annually, by that time, crops chiefly of grain and corn worth more than \$220,000.²⁵ The Leepers, of course, had a share in the prosperity.

They enjoyed the fruits of institutional development, too. By the time they returned from Fremont, postal services were available at Columbus and at nearby Hammond. Milton also reported firm plans for establishment of "preaching ½ mile from Our House Sunday at 11:00," as well as for construction of a school but a quarter of a mile from the claim.²⁶

The Leepers now realized some of the personal hopes and aims they had cherished since their arrival in 1874. Hattie gave birth to two more daughters, Blanche in 1877 and Minnie in 1879. Milton, meanwhile, had the opportunity to "prove up" his claim.²⁷

And the two pioneers built a house — not the kind they wanted to be sure, since various comments indicate they preferred a frame building. They could not afford it, however, and were forced to settle for sod construction instead. Rather than bemoaning the fact that sod was not what they wanted, they accepted it and looked for its attributes — and they found some. For one thing, it did not require their going into debt. As Hattie put it,

Our house, plaster, and all grew on our own land, so we thank no one for it. We took clay from the hillside where we dug the cellar and sand and water from the creek, and made the mortar and Mr. Rae who is a blacksmith made a trowel of a piece of old plow lay [sic] to put it on with.

Regarding the appearance of the place, Hattie admitted in answer to Florinda's inquiry that all sod houses were "homely old things on the outside." But she went on to assure her sister that the interior was suitable:

Our wall is just as hard and smooth as yours, but not so white. It is light grey . . . and looks more suitable than white to this kind of cabin. Some [people] paper over, or white wash but ours is the natural color.

The dirt floor, she complained, got dusty sometimes. Still she boasted about that, too. "It is as hard as ground can be and smooth. Everyone says it is the best ground floor they ever saw."

Hattie also pointed out that sod houses were generally quite comfortable. They were "cool in the summer [and] warm in the winter." Water never froze inside in wintertime as it had in the frame house in Fremont.²⁸ And in a final note she asserted, lest anyone in DeWitt should look upon her with disdain because of her dwelling place:

I never saw any hay floors, or carpets strung up for plastering on the walls here. Everyone has their walls plastered that I ever saw, and live just as civilized as they would in Chicago.²⁹

It is apparent from all the evidence that by the end of the 1870's Milton and Hattie had found, if not ideal conditions, at least a measure of contentment on the prairie. And evidently they considered themselves entrenched for years to come.

Only a few years later all their good fortune suddenly was swept away, however. Hattie grew ill during her fourth pregnancy, and in October, 1882, she died of acute hemorrhage while giving birth to a baby boy. A physician stood by, but that he could not save her life is not surprising. The only law in Nebraska governing medical practice was one passed in 1880 that required registration but not competency. In any event, Hattie became a casualty of the frontier to which she had adjusted so well. Her infant boy died with her, and Milton was left alone with three small daughters.³⁰

Now confused and disheartened, the lonely father accomplished little for a time except to scrape together approximately \$100 to give Hattie a respectable burial in return for the "influence and life she gave." But soon he regained composure. He disposed of the claim and moved to Oakdale, where he found work in a lumber yard. Within three months of Hattie's death he married a young woman named Barbara Gier. Frontier conditions required a woman in the house and the children loved Barbara "next on earth to their mother," Milton reported. Thus, following Hattie's death Milton reordered his life completely to make a home for his daughters in Oakdale, and the pioneer homestead experience in Nebraska came abruptly to an end.³¹

He remained in Oakdale for approximately seven years,³² during which time the family was enlarged. Barbara bore a daughter named Elsie; Anna married Barbara's brother, Will Gier, and the two settled on a farm nearby. Milton held various jobs. He worked in a lumber yard, a livery barn, and was engaged as a horse trader part of the time.

After nearly seven years he reacted against urban confinement, however, as hard times came to Nebraska in the latter 1880's. In 1889 he loaded his possessions and family (Barbara, Blanche and Elsie; Minnie had died) on a covered wagon, and struck out to make another new start. The ensuing journey at first appeared a retreat. Milton made his way eastward across Iowa and wintered at Sabula near DeWitt, where he manufactured and sold horse linament to make a living for the family.

But when spring arrived, it became evident he was not in retreat at all. With family and all earthly possessions on his wagon, he pressed



One of the homes occupied by the Leeper family in Boone County was of sod construction similar to that of this soddy owned by the George Golden family in Custer County ca. 1886. (Photo, S. D. Butcher Collection)

back toward the virgin soil. Moving north-by-northwest he journeyed to a point near the Mississippi, down-river from St. Paul in Wabasha County, Minnesota, and stopped to seek out unclaimed farm land in the high timber.

The search was a futile one. By 1890 Wabasha County was no longer a place for a farming pioneer; the agrarian frontier had passed it by two decades before. Milton remained several years, though, and tried to farm. He occupied three paltry sites in quick succession, probably because he was too poor to move on. One was a barren farm near Keegan along the Zumbro River. The second was a rocky plot on the banks of Long Creek, one of the Zumbro's tributaries. The last was a rugged, virgin timberland on a bluff overlooking the Zumbro at Millville.

None of the three sites was productive; so within six years of his arrival in Wabasha County, Milton pulled stakes to face the western prairie once again. This time he led a veritable train of wagons. He, Barbara, and Elsie rode in one. Anna and Will Gier, who had followed them from Nebraska to Minnesota in 1894, drove another. And Blanche with a new husband named Caleb Olin followed in their wake. In 1896 they arrived in three wagons to stake claim to as many homesteads in central Minnesota near Brainerd, and there they farmed successfully for a number of years. The land was rugged, heavily wooded, and somewhat swampy, but by then they all were seasoned pioneers and made the land produce. There Milton died in 1905, and his death led to one more episode of frontier re-settlement for the Leeper clan.

His survivors responded to the same lure of new lands to the west that had kept Milton Leeper on the move throughout most of his life. Anna and Blanche, and their families, pressed on to the vicinity of Kensal, North Dakota, doubtless hoping to prosper in the wheat boom. There they rented land, intending eventually to homestead farther west. As it turned out, however, Caleb Olin's father fell ill, and he and Blanche returned to "take over the home place" in Wabasha County. Anna and Will went on to Alberta, where they tried their luck on Canadian wheat land. There the tale of the pioneering Leepers came to a close.

The Leeper story cannot of itself unveil new truths about the restless farming pioneers; one case study is not enough to support conclusions. It is sufficiently typical, however, to warrant its use as basis for some observations about them.

A most obvious one is that the first "pioneer farmers" like Milton Leeper made a not inconsiderable contribution to western development. Naturally, there has been a tendency to applaud more strongly the "more successful" types, many of whom cultivated and expanded previously lived-on farmsteads and made them into stable and enduring agricultural operations. But the contributions of Milton, the capricious, wandering pioneer and of the family he begat, were also important. Their presence resulted in the development of no less than eleven farm sites, most of which had had no previous non-Indian occupants. They built upon at least half of those sites the first homes, outbuildings, and fences, using little more than the natural resources at hand. They applied for and "proved up" four homesteads, while they put under cultivation perhaps as many as 1,000 acres of land.

The Leeper story reveals another fact which further underscores the importance of these pioneer farmers. It indicates that perhaps far fewer were on hand to accomplish the work of conquest than some agrarian historians have indicated — historians who have relied principally upon census reports for statistics. In forty years Milton appeared as five different people. He appeared as an urban citizen of Bloomington, Illinois, in the 1860 census, as a farm hand near DeWitt, Iowa, in the 1870 census, and as owner of a "proved up" homestead in Nebraska, in the 1880 census. Then he showed up as a tenant farmer in eastern Minnesota in the 1890 census and as a homestead occupant with fee pending near Brainerd in the 1900 census. His two daughters made similar marks. If their experience is at all typical, census figures should be checked against other sources in order to arrive at an accurate appraisal of individual contributions to frontier community life.

Another observation derived from the Leeper Odyssey is that it presents a sort of Turner "safety valve" thesis in reverse. When the Leepers found rural living conditions intolerable, they retreated to the towns of the urban frontier to recoup their fortunes — to Fremont from their Boone County farm for two years during the grasshopper invasions, and to Oakdale for seven years following the death of the mother.

Were there no lessons at all to learn from the Leepers, however, their story would seem worth telling solely for the fact that it underscores the character and tenacity of one type of pioneer who settled the lands across the Mississippi River in the latter 19th century. For all the credit extended to them, they probably have yet to receive recognition for their true service. Soldiers of a citizens' army marching against the

unknown, they responded with little display of fear. Seldom did they really retreat very far in the face of disaster. As the Leeper story might indicate, they only withdrew strategically in order to perceive a more advantageous avenue of attack.

NOTES

1. *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 19-22.

2. 12 U. S. *Statutes at Large*, 392-393.

3. James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 166; Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1937), 120.

4. Olson, *History of Nebraska*, 166. For the period 1863-1910 the rate of abandonment for all homestead entries was approximately 43 per cent in Nebraska. Homer E. Socolofsky, "Success and Failure in Nebraska Homesteading," *Agricultural History*, XLII (April, 1968), 104.

5. Gilbert C. Fite, *The Farmers' Frontier 1865-1900* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 71-72.

6. *Ibid.*, 72.

7. The letters of John Milton Leeper are in the possession of the author. As much of a letter's date is given as its writer recorded.

8. John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, Jan. (Florinda Schaeffer was the unwed sister of Harriet Leeper.)

9. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Oakdale, Nebraska, Sept. 3; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, May 23; Fite, *The Farmers' Frontier*, 37; Superintendent of Census, *Statistics on the Population of the United States by States, Counties, and Minor Civil Divisions* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), illustrations following xviii.

10. Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier*, 233.

11. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, Nov. 17; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Oakdale, Nebraska, Sept. 3.

12. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, n.d.; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, July 12.

13. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, Aug. 15.

14. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, n.d.

15. 12 U. S., *Statutes at Large*, 392-393; 18 U. S., *Statutes at Large*, 294; 19 U. S., *Statutes at Large*, 59, 405; 20 U. S., *Statutes at Large*, 88, 169; 21 U. S., *Statutes at Large*, 48.

16. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, July 12; Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier*, 124.

17. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, Aug. 15.

18. John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, n.p., n.d.

19. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, Aug. 15; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, n.d.; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, n.p., n.d.; John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, n.p., n.d.

20. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, Nov. 17; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, n.d.; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, n.p., n.d.; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, Aug. 15.

21. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, n.p., n.d.; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Oakdale, Nebraska, Sept. 3.

22. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, n.p., n.d.

23. John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Fremont, Nebraska, Jan.

24. Olson, *History of Nebraska*, 183.

25. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, May 23; Census Office, Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 715, 792.

26. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, May 23; John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Hammond, Boone Co., Nebraska, May 23.

27. John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Hammond, Boone Co., Nebraska, May 23; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Oakdale, Nebraska, Sept. 3.

28. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, Nov. 17; Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, May 23.

29. Harriet Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Beaver Valley, Nebraska, Nov. 17.

30. John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Oakdale, Nebraska, Nov. 17, 1882; Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier*, 435-439.

31. John Milton Leeper to Florinda Schaeffer, Oakdale, Nebraska, Nov. 12, 1882.

32. Information for the remainder of the Leeper story comes from recollections in correspondence recently written by Anna Gier, plus interviews conducted and observations made by the author in Wabasha County, Minnesota.