

Bennett Township

Bennett township, on the west edge of Fillmore County, is bounded on the north by Grafton, on the east by Geneva, and on the south by Momence townships, and on the west by Clay County. It differs from the other precincts of the county in that it has no towns, churches, rivers, railroads, or highways, although its southern boundary is marked by Nebraska 41. In one considerable respect it is like all the other townships: farming constitutes its financial basis and background. Its southern sections are crossed from east to west by a branch of Turkey Creek. Thanks to experience of drouth years and to technical progress, the township had, by mid-1966, a total of 73 irrigation wells.

It was named for Allen Bennett, son of Josiah and Mary Bennett, who were among the first settlers in the precinct. Their first home was a sod house in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 8, T7N, R4W, and in this house Allen was born. It was also in this sod house that the first school was held in District 64, with Allen's mother as teacher at a wage of \$12 a month. Here she rocked the cradle of the young Allen as she imparted the rudiments of learning to other young Americans.

SCHOOLS

In September, 1872, John A. Dempster, county superintendent, organized Bennett township into four school districts, by the simple process of drawing two bisecting lines which divided the precinct into four quarters of nine sections each. These he numbered as follows: Southeast, District No. 61, Northeast, No. 62, Southwest, No. 63, and Northwest, No. 64.

On September 26, in accordance with the school laws, he sent to a qualified voter in each district a notice of his school's organization and setting a time and place for the first meeting to be held to elect a school board. It then became the duty of this voter to relay the message to each of the other qualified voters in the district and to hand to the chairman of the meeting a list of those notified.

District No. 61 was set up to consist of Secs. 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, and 36. Thomas Ackland was notified that the first meeting to elect officers would be held at his home on October 12, 1872. This was the third school organized in the precinct. School was held for a number of years in the home of David Frolic, with Mrs. Frolic as teacher.



Photo from Nebraska Signal

School District No. 61—1900. *Front row, left to right:* Yeager, Rotter, Ed Myers, Ed Shafer, Mamie Shafer, Laura Yeager, Rotter, Buttell, John Clawson, Lora Harrold (teacher). *Middle row:* Clarence Huston, Buttell, Laura Myers, Lillian Harrold, Gertie O'Brien, Sadie Cypher, George Buttell, Lee R. Harrold, Rotter. *Back row:* Jim O'Brien, Frank Huston, Albert Clawson, George O'Brien, Leslie Myers, Will Myers. Some of the first names of students are not known.

District No. 62 constituted Secs. 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The first meeting to elect officers was held in the home of J. B. Lewis on October 5, 1872. The first school in Bennett township was held in the Lewis sod house, with Mr. Lewis as teacher at a salary of \$25 a month. It began on November 1, 1872.

District No. 63 used to be situated on the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 30 but in 1889 was moved to the SE corner of Sec. 29, where it remained.

The organization meeting was held in the home of P. M. Robbins at 2 P.M. on Saturday October 5, 1872, David Kreachbaum having notified the following voters: Barnett Isley, A. Sherwood, Gilbert Sherwood, Andrew Sherwood, Elihu Hambleton, George W. Hambleton, C. S. Hooper, P. M. Robbins, and David Kreachbaum.

P. M. Robbins was chosen temporary chairman; the officers elected were: Aden G. Sherwood, director; P. M. Robbins, moderator; and David Kreachbaum, treasurer.

Quoting from the minutes; "After discussing the propriety of voting bonds for school purposes and holding a winter term of school, it was decided to let the matter lay over until the annual meeting to be held the following April."

Evidently this did not prove satisfactory to a majority, for at a special meeting on March 11, 1873, in the home of G. W. Highley, it was voted to hold a spring term of school of three months, from April 1 to July 1, 1873, with the teacher's wages fixed at \$12 per month.

This first school was held in the home of C. S. Hooper with Miss Mary Isley, daughter of Barnett Isley, as first teacher. She received the munificent sum of \$36 for the three months of teaching.

No record is available of those who attended, but the list is known to have included John Isley and Martha Isley.

The first annual meeting was held in the home of G. W. Highley on Monday, April 1, 1873. At this meeting Barnett Isley was elected treasurer and thereafter served on the school board. Those who attended were B. Isley, David Kreachbaum, A. G. Sherwood, G. W. Highley, C. S. Hooper, and P. M. Robbins.

Because it was typical of many first meetings of that early time, and the schoolhouse described therein was the typical sod schoolhouse of that day, the details of building and furnishing a schoolhouse, as contrasted with similar expenses today, are most interesting.

A part of the minutes of that meeting are quoted here; "Motion was made by A. G. Sherwood, seconded by David Kreachbaum, that a tax of 10 mills on the dollar on the taxable property of the district be made for a schoolhouse fund to continue for one year and that a tax of 5 mills be voted to be used in any way required to sustain a school and furnish the house in a proper manner and to pay the teacher and any other indebtedness that the district might incur according to law. Motion carried since homesteads were not taxed, etc."

"Motion made by G. W. Highley, seconded by A. G. Sherwood, that there be a sod schoolhouse built in the district to be 14 x 18 ft. inside with walls 2 ft. thick and 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. high with a board roof and sod covering. To have a door and 4 glass windows to be built in a good workmanlike manner and furnished with seats sufficient to seat 20 persons, to be finished on or before the first day of October, 1873." No mention is made of a floor, since the ground usually served as such.

"Motion made by David Kreachbaum, seconded by G. W. Highley, that the schoolhouse be built on the SE corner of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 20, that being the homestead of G. W. Highley, and that an agreement be made between the board and G. W. Highley that the house may be removed at any time a majority of the legal voters of the district shall so decide. Motion carried.

"Motion made by A. G. Sherwood that the district award the contract of building said schoolhouse to C. S. Hooper for the sum of \$150 to be paid in a district order. Carried.

"Motion made by B. Isley, seconded by C. S. Hooper, that a three months school be held in the district to commence the 1st of December, 1873. Motion carried."

After so much detailed planning, the work eventually came to naught. Several new homesteaders had come into the district that spring, and the board realized that the number of pupils had outgrown the schoolhouse before it was built.

The second term of school was held in the home of P. M. Robbins, with Mr. Robbins as teacher at a salary of \$20 per month. According to the superintendent's report, there were then 19 children of school age in the district, too many to be accommodated in any home, so the settlers were determined to have a schoolhouse even if they had to bond themselves in



Photo from Mrs. Sam Huntley

School District No. 63—1930-31. *Back row, left to right:* Susie Solberg, Bertha Isley, Martha Kalberg, Albert Johnson, Bert Solberg, Harry Peter, Ruth Shultz, Esther Johnson, May Isley, Teacher Clara Turney. *Front row:* Walter Isley, Carl Johnson, Marvin Shultz, Edith Johnson, George Isley, Jessie Isley, Willie Stertz, Rose Stertz, Nels Kalberg, Mary Isley, Arthur Shultz, Albert Fessler.

order to build it. Accordingly they petitioned the board on January 2, 1874, before the school had begun, asking that a special meeting be called for that purpose. Most of those signing the petition had lately come into the district. Their names are therefore of interest, since they were among the early settlers. They were H. P. Wondling, Uriah W. Oblinger, M. P. Hoover, H. Cook Griffith, also Elihu and George W. Hambleton heretofore listed.

The meeting was held in the home of Aden G. Sherwood (present John Sheridan home) on February 4, 1874, with most of the men of the district in attendance. We quote from the minutes: "On motion of H. Cook Griffith, seconded by U. W. Oblinger, that part of the former minutes relating to the building of a sod schoolhouse were rescinded and it was voted to build a frame school 18 x 22 by 10 ft. high on the inside to be wainscoted 4 ft. high on 2 sides and 1 end and ceiled overhead with the balance of the surface plastered. That there were to be 6 full windows, 3 on each side with plain shutters, and 1 large door."

This description is given here because it is that of the typical cracker-box schoolhouse, thousands of which dotted the plains of Nebraska and in which most of our eminent present-day citizens received their early education but which have now all but faded from the landscape.

The board purchased two acres in the SE corner of the homestead of H. C. Griffith (SE ¼ of Sec. 30, T7, R4W) for 50 cents per acre. The proposed frame schoolhouse was contracted to A. F. and R. L. Clemons for \$600. In later years this schoolhouse was moved to the SE corner of Sec. 29.

The last full term taught in District 63 was that of 1944-45, with Doris Fenske (Miles) as teacher.

Teachers who served District 63 included the following. (The records are not clear, and so these names are not necessarily in chronological order, although we are sure about the first and the last teachers.)

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|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Mary Isley (first) | 24. May Smith |
| 2. P. M. Robbins | 25. Helen Trace |
| 3. Ida G. Sherwood | 26. Agnes Kennan |
| 4. G. H. Bumgarner | 27. Pearl Armstrong |
| 5. F. A. Brownell | 28. Faye Hawkins |
| 6. Christena Flink | 29. Lillie Kleinschmidt |
| 7. Laverne Finnegan | 30. Carrie Lytle |
| 8. Clyde Basey | 31. Mildred Clausen |
| 9. Lucy Eckley | 32. Esther Salmen |
| 10. Bertha Thompson | 33. Fauna Young |
| 11. Lillie Green | 34. Roine Richey |
| 12. Millie Brown | 35. Marita Weatherford |
| 13. Hallie Salzer | 36. Pearl Tysell |
| 14. Ella Brown | 37. Evelyn Rudd |
| 15. Sylvia Pratt | 38. Ruth Sutter |
| 16. Lillie Harrold | 39. Doris Bruit |
| 17. Guy Carson | 40. Evelyn Moravac |
| 18. Lula Boop | 41. June Statz |
| 19. Rosy Davis | 42. Bernice Carlson |
| 20. Pearl Wagers | 43. Alvina Johnson |
| 21. May Smith | 44. Joseph Moore |
| 22. Alma Toren | 45. Doris Fenske (Miles) |
| 23. Clara Turney | (last) |



Photo from Frank Pearson

Picnic at District 64 taken in 1922. Children attending District 64 in 1922 were Janice Cundall, Raymond Cundall, Inez Cundall, Jean Cundall, Grover Cundall, Edna Huffman, Luella Huffman, Helen Huffman, Clara May Huffman, Hazel Pearson, Blanche Pearson, Oscar Kelly, Lawrence Rath, Albert Nuss, Solomon Nuss, Dina Nuss, Johanna Zimbleman, Antonia Zimbleman, Jessie Milroy, Walter Maser, Ruth Maser, Otis Burrow and Maude Case Hansen, teacher.

District No. 64 was the second school in the precinct, where the first schoolhouse was built. On September 26, 1872, Alonzo Lucor was notified that the first meeting was to be held at the home of Josiah Bennett on Thursday, October 10. Mr. Lucor notified the following voters: R. Gell, William Gell, A. Tooker, S. J. Case, James Donnelly, E. Angel, O. Angel, J. Brown, B. Knee, Alonzo Lucor, and Josiah Bennett. At the meeting, Samuel J. Case was elected temporary chairman; James Donnelly, moderator; Josiah Bennett, director; and Alonzo Lucor, treasurer.

School began a few weeks after that of District 62, in the home of Josiah Bennett, with Mrs. Bennett as teacher at a salary of \$12 a month.

At a special meeting called at the request of five legal voters and held in the home of Josiah Bennett on January 31, 1873, it was voted to establish the schoolhouse site on the NW ¼ of Sec. 8, T7N, R4W, on the north line of that quarter. It was also voted that the men of the district do the work on the schoolhouse (to be completed on or before May 1, 1873), and that if any money were left in the treasury, it should be applied on the teacher's wages for the present term. The building committee consisted of John G. Parish, Albert Tooker, and James Donnelly.

At the first annual meeting, on April 7, 1873, the board voted that teachers should not be paid more than \$20 a month plus board and room, or \$25 if they boarded themselves; to have three months of school commencing May 1, 1873; and to levy a tax of 10 mills for building purposes. The treasurer was also authorized to lend \$100 of the district's money if he saw fit.

The second annual meeting in 1874, held in the schoolhouse, voted to have three months of school that year, to begin in May. In 1875, they voted to have six months of

school, the spring term to begin May 1 and the fall term October 1. In 1878, four months of school were held; in 1879, seven months; in 1880, nine months (three in summer, three in fall, and three in winter; and 1881, eight months.

In 1882, it was voted to move the schoolhouse site not to exceed 90 rods south of the NE corner of the SE ¼ of Sec. 7, T7, R4W, by a lease of five years with the privilege of 10 years. J. Spencer, J. Bennett, and Albert Tooker served as a committee to let the contract for moving the building, the move to be completed before May 1, 1882.

This location, however, did not prove acceptable to all residents of the district, especially those of the eastern part, and a special meeting was held on April 19, 1882. Since no site could be agreed upon, the meeting voted unanimously to leave the location of the site to J. B. Lewis, the county superintendent. After due deliberation, Mr. Lewis decided upon the site then occupied by the schoolhouse, which remained there until it was sold in 1955.

District No. 74, in accordance with a majority of the legal voters in Districts 61 and 62, was formed from Secs. 13, 14, 15, 22, 23, and 24 in T7N, R4W, on June 4, 1875. Charles H. Harrington was notified that the first meeting was to be held on June 12, 1875, at his house. Mr. Harrington notified the following legal voters of the new district: George Watkins, W. Corey, A. H. Orcutt, F. Schulz, E. S. McCashland, Geo. Harrington, F. B. Harrington, C. H. Harrington, D. Dobson, William Miles, John Starr, A. Archibalde, R. J. Young, and Isaac Gosser. The records show that the meeting was held at the home of F. B. Harrington with G. S. Harrington presiding. A. H. Orcutt was elected moderator, J. B. Harrington, director, and George P. Watkins, treasurer.

At the first annual meeting on April 3, 1876, it was voted that a school site be located on the corner of Secs. 13, 14, 23, and 24, "provided said site can be secured." They also voted to levy a 10-mill tax on the dollar for the purpose of building a schoolhouse.

According to the minutes, no schoolhouse had yet been built by April 2, 1877. However, they "voted to have a three-



Photo from Mrs. Wm. Lauenstein
School District No. 74—1907-1908. Teacher, Miss Maude Jones.

months school in case a suitable building can be secured for the purpose, also said school to commence on or before May 1st, 1877." Adella Lewis was hired to teach the three-month term (May through July) for a salary of \$20 a month.

At the annual meeting on April 1, 1878, it was decided that the size of the schoolhouse as established in 1876 should be reconsidered. The patrons voted to build a schoolhouse 18' x 30' x 12' studding on "condition E. S. McCashland donate to the District free of charge two acres of ground on the southeast corner of said, McCashland's land now owned by him on SE ¼ of Sec. 14, T7N, R3W."

On May 25, a special meeting was called and it was decided to build a temporary building, 14' x 16' x 8' high. This building cost a sum of \$62.47.

Two years later, in 1880, the permanent schoolhouse was built on the McCashland corner with certain specifications. The said building to be 18' x 28' x 12' posts and was to be completed in 40 days so "fare" as money on hand would go and said building to have an east front and said building to have a stone foundation.

At the annual meeting it was decided to have "six month school this present year" and "to employ a female teacher if one can be secured. Two months to be taught when schoolhouse is completed, the balance in the fall and winter." In 1881, the school term was lengthened to seven months and in 1882 to an eight-month term, three months to be taught in the winter, the balance to be taught in the summer and fall.

District 74 was dissolved by petition and annexed to and included in District 16 on July 9, 1956. The last year school was held was the 1947-1948 term taught by Della Everts for a salary of \$1,440.

On March 16, 1888, upon written petition signed by a majority of the qualified voters in Districts 63 and 64, the following territory was set apart to form **District No. 89**: from District 63, all of Secs. 19, 20, and 21; and from District 64, all of Secs. 16, 17, and 18. County Superintendent J. J. Burke fixed the time and place for the first meeting in the newly formed district at the home of James Mount on March 24, 1888, at 2 P.M.

S. J. Case was elected the first director. His report of July, 1888, to the county superintendent stated there were 20 males and 12 females between the ages of 5 and 21 in the



Photo from Way Barnell
School District No. 89 "Willow Dale" 1910. Back row, left to right: Way Barnell, Claude Long, George Barnell, Sergia Barnell, Alma Leininger, Mary Goesch, Myrte Long, Gertrude Leininger. Middle row: Edward Leininger, Homer Thingan, Clarence Spurling, Harvey Thingan, Pearl Oswald, Mable Goesch, Grayce Long. Front row: Leo Barnell, Flora Spurling, Dora Brehm, teacher.

district, for a total of 32 children. Nineteen, 10 males and 9 females, attended that year. Earnest Case taught the two-month school term for a salary of \$28 a month.

On May 26, 1954, the school was dissolved and annexed to District No. 2 in Clay County. The last year the school was in operation was taught by Phyllis Schinzel in 1948-1949.

FAMILIES

I, **Thomas D. Ackland**, third son of Thomas and Eliza Ackland, was born May 29, 1866, in Berry Arbor, England. In 1869 at the age of three I came to America with my parents, brothers, and sister. There being three sons and one daughter: John Francis, William, and Thomas D., and later Mary was born.

The family located at Kalamazoo, Michigan, where father worked at the carpenter trade for one year. (In England he had been a wheelwright).

Early in April, 1871, the family moved to Nebraska over the newly built Burlington Railroad. The road at that time ended at Crete and there our father hired a team and wagon to take us to Fillmore County, where he had previously filed a homestead in what was later named Bennett precinct, being the first to take up a claim in that precinct. When we arrived in the vicinity of our claim late in the afternoon we had a hard time locating it, since ours was the first claim taken in that precinct and the tall prairie grass which grew every-

where hid the surveyors' stakes. Finally we found a stake by which we were able to locate the approximate boundaries of our claim and our driver unloaded the few supplies we had brought with us—three trunks and a box filled with bedding. Imagine our feeling of desolation as the driver headed his team eastward, leaving us alone on (the sole occupants of) the prairie.

That night we spread the bedding on the prairie and then enclosed it with the three trunks and the box, and in this one enclosure we all slept the first night on our homestead. In the night it rained, a cold wet April rain, and we got soaking wet.

Next morning the sun came out nice and bright and we spread our clothing out to dry on the tall prairie grass. After breakfast, a slim one, because there was only set fuel with which to cook, yet it seemed like a royal banquet since it was the first meal eaten on our own land.



Photo from Earle Ackland
Mr. and Mrs. T. D. Ackland wedding picture, April 20, 1893.

Our father and brother took our only spade and went on an inspection tour of our homestead. They found a large badger hole dug in the side of a hill and beginning with this they enlarged it into a dugout. The dugout was about 8 feet wide and extended back under the hill about 12 feet—using the ground overhead for a roof and leveling the bottom for a floor. By that night they had dug far enough back into the hill so that we were able to sleep with a roof over us. With a blanket to hang over the opening, we felt very snug indeed compared with the night before.

Gradually they extended it back about 12 feet, then on the back end they dug a hole from the top down for a stove-pipe.

This dugout was our home for a couple of months or until Father could get some poles hauled from the river to make a roof on a sod house which we later built. In the meantime we had found that the dugout was not on our own land but a few feet south of it on what was later the O'Brien land, so the new sod house was dug several yards to the north of the dugout but still at the south end of our claim, and thereafter used as a stable. The depression which was the dugout, the first in Bennett precinct and in this part of Fillmore County, can still be plainly seen and is often visited by those

who are interested in the early history of the county.

When the sod house was finished, Father and my older brother went to work on the Burlington Railroad which was building through from Crete to Sutton and beyond and thus he supported his family for a time.

We had no well, so my mother carried water from the dug well of a neighboring homesteader over a mile way. This was the A. O. Orcut homestead where Will Bohlen now lives. One day while she was coming home with her jugs of water she noticed what she thought was a black cloud in the northwest, gradually it came closer, it was in the direction of Sutton. At length she saw flames leap into the sky, She realized then that it was no cloud she saw but a much-dreaded prairie fire and a very unusually large one at that.

She ran for home, seized a blanket and sack and soaked them in the water, then hung them at the door and window. All this time the fire was coming on with a roar like thunder and she had barely time to get us inside and shut the door when it had the house completely surrounded. The heat was intense and when it had passed everything was black as far as the eye could see. The burned prairie was dotted with dead rabbits, birds, and snakes. We found snakes in big round balls, several wrapped together.

We children were young and gay, and nothing daunted our spirits; but for our parents the outlook must have been a gloomy one. We had very little money when we came here and it did not last long. That winter our fare was mostly mush and water; since we had no cow we had no milk.

Like many of the other settlers, Father worked on the railroad until he had enough money to buy a team of oxen, a cow, and a pig. Then, with a plow and some few other pieces of machinery, finally we started farming and had some crops. In the meantime my older brother had taken up the homestead adjoining us on the west, where the Kennedy family now lives, and we were farming a quarter section.

Then in the spring of 1873 on April 13, came the Easter Sunday storm. Although I was only seven, I remember it well. It had been raining all day Easter Sunday, but just before dark the wind changed from the southwest to the northwest, the rain changed to sleet, then to fine snow, so fine and driven with such force that few houses were sturdy enough to keep it out. We had to bring our oxen and cow and chickens into the house to keep them from freezing to death. We put the chickens under the bed and put boxes around it to keep them there. Finally we ran out of fuel and had to cut up some of our homemade furniture to keep from freezing to death. Had to melt snow for water for our stock and ourselves.

However, the snow, when it melted, gave us plenty of moisture and that year we had a good crop. The next year was a good year also. The corn looked good and most had cut their wheat. It was midsummer. The gardens were good. Then came the grasshoppers! They covered the sky like clouds, darkening the sun, they lit on the green cornstalks and the garden truck and devoured it all. Nothing green was left except sorghum. They came on July 20 and left as suddenly on the 23rd.

Many people were discouraged and returned to the East. My brother decided that he wanted no more of farming and sold his homestead right to a man named Gelespie for a watch, not a good watch either. My parents, however, stuck it out, although it was tough sledding that winter.

After that we got on our feet again and got along fairly well. We had some good crops and some failures but managed to live through it all. We finally got a team of horses and a wagon. My brother cut the wheat with a cradle and bound it with straw by hand. A neighbor bought a threshing machine and we had him thresh it.

When we landed on the homestead there were no neighbors for miles around. A few came in that summer, but the next spring settlers came in fast and some of them had money. Then we had neighbors about a mile away. Finally about all the claims were taken and sod houses were plentiful over the prairie.

For almost 35 years through good times and bad my parents lived on their homestead until the spring of 1905, when they moved to town.

Written by Thomas D. Ackland in his own hand in the summer of 1956 at the age of 90 years.¹

One of the early settlers of Bennett township was **Eilert Baumann**, born in Leer, Osterstrasse, Germany, December 31, 1843. He came to America in 1872 and first settled near Edwardsville, Illinois. Here Eilert met Folste Bohlen, who later became his wife. She was born July 11, 1851, in Lammerstfehn, East Friesland, Germany. She had journeyed to America with her parents in 1872, and settled near Edwardsville.

They were married in 1873, and lived on a farm near Edwardsville, Illinois, until the fall of 1882, when they moved to Nebraska. They were blessed with nine children, five of whom were born in Illinois: Edward, born in 1875, twins, Almina and Anna in 1877, Marie in 1880, and Jacob in 1882. Anna, one of the twins, and Marie passed away in Edwardsville in June, 1881.

When word reached Edwardsville that land could be homesteaded in Nebraska, Eilert Baumann, along with several other men, decided to go west. They boarded the train and rode west as far as Grafton. The location seemed satisfactory, so he looked at the homestead lands. These didn't please him, and so he made a down payment, on March 1, 1878, to the Burlington R. R. on the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 15 and the S $\frac{1}{2}$ of Sec. 15, T7, R4W, Bennett township.

Mr. and Mrs. Eilert Baumann, sons Edward and Jacob, and daughter Almina came to Nebraska by train in September, 1882. The furniture, household goods, farm machinery, a team of horses, and wagon were shipped in a box car. A young man named Harmon Everts was in care of the horses during the long trip.

The prairie land which they had purchased had no buildings. However, they were fortunate enough to be able to live with Mrs. Baumann's father, Jacob Bohlen. He had preceded them to Nebraska in 1877, and lived on the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 9, T7, R4W, Bennett township.



Photo from Mildred Baumann
Home of Mr. and Mrs. Eilert Baumann about 1900. Left to right: Edward, Jacob, William, Eilert, George (cousin), Etta, Edward Englemann (cousin), Folste, Sophia, Minnie, Rev. Wessel Bohlen (uncle), Deana Englemann and daughter Della (cousin).

Over and above the hardships they had to endure came sorrow and bereavement. Their five-year-old twin daughter, having been in Nebraska less than three months, was called to her heavenly home on November 6, 1882, and was laid to rest in the Grafton Cemetery.

In the spring of 1883, the Baumanns undertook the tedious work of building a house on the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 15. A four-room, two-story house was built with a lean-to kitchen. A water well was dug, and water was brought to the surface by bucket. They bought a milk cow near Shickley. The team of horses was used to break up the sod and to put in a crop.

These early settlers had many hardships to endure. There were no roads, only trails across the prairies. Long distances were traveled with a team and wagon to religious worship,

and to obtain supplies for living and building purposes. Medical care in the pioneer days was not easy to secure. When illness came, the pioneers relied mainly on home remedies.

As the children grew older the parents were concerned about their spiritual education. They drove 10 miles to Zion Lutheran Church, north of Shickley.

There were still Indians in this part of Nebraska. The tribes camped along the Blue River and many of the early settlers were often visited by them. The Indians were eager to get the dead animals that were lost by the early settlers. The Baumanns, however, were not mistreated by them.

After they moved on their place, they set aside an acreage for an orchard and planted apple, cherry, and mulberry trees. Cottonwood trees were planted for shade, and could be started in the spring by cutting a twig and sticking it into the ground. These were planted along the government-surveyed section and quarter-section lines. Some of these trees are alive today along the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 15.

Many years later they planted several rows of grape vines east of the house. These were mulched with straw, and the older children decided it would also be a good place to plant watermelons. Their decision proved profitable, because many a spring-wagon load was hauled to town. Some were stored in an oats bin and were good eating till Christmas.

As the years passed, most of the prairie was broken up and put into crops. One of the years that was outstanding in the memory of the early settlers, and the older children of the Baumann family, was 1896. Corn made around 50 bushels per acre. In the towns, long cribs were built along the railroad tracks. The farmers hauled each load as they picked it, receiving 8 cents a bushel. It was hauled for miles and hand-scooped into these tall cribs. You could hire a man to unload a big load for 10 cents. The two years that followed were failures. Corn sold for 30 to 35 cents a bushel the first year, and 50 cents the second year of drouth. Since corn was hauled in the ear, cobs for fuel were scarce, and many had to resort to cow chips for fuel. This, however, was a common practice among the early settlers.

In 1900, the house was remodeled. They moved the lean-to kitchen. Another two-story room was added on the north, and porches were added on the south and east.

Eilert Baumann was called to his eternal home February 13, 1903, and was laid to rest in the Grafton Cemetery. He left his wife Folste, three sons, and three daughters. Three daughters had preceded him in death.

Folste Baumann and the children continued operating the farm from 1903 till 1915. During these years all the children married with the exception of Ed.

In 1913, Mrs. Baumann gave a portion of her real estate to her six children so each would have a farm on which to establish a home. The land given them still remains in their possession.

From 1915 till 1920, Ed and his mother continued to farm. In the spring of 1920, they had a public sale, after which they moved to Sutton and resided there for three years. In 1923, Mrs. Folste Baumann and her son Ed moved to Grafton. She was called to her eternal home January 26, 1930. She left to mourn Edward, Jacob, William, Mrs. Sam Oberlander, Mrs. William Otte, Mrs. Reinhard Everts, and 20 grandchildren. Mrs. Baumann, having been bounteously blessed by the grace of God, contributed much to Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Grafton.

The original land in Sec. 15, purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Eilert Baumann in 1878, remains in the possession of two of the Baumann children. Ed, the oldest son, possesses the E $\frac{1}{2}$ of Sec. 15, Bennett township, and Etta, the youngest, now Mrs. Reinhard Everts, has the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the same section.

Of the Baumann children who survived Eilert, three are now deceased: Jacob and Edward, and Sophia (Mrs. William) Otte. Jacob Baumann entered his eternal home on January 30, 1942. The living descendants are William Baumann of Geneva, Etta (Mrs. Reinhard Everts), and Minnie (Mrs. Sam Oberlander), both of Grafton. All of these three live today within a radius of 12 miles of the home place.

—Mrs. Sam Oberlander (Deceased Aug. 23, 1967)

¹ Thomas D. Ackland died June 13, 1960.

Newton C. Burt came to Nebraska in 1873 from Rockdale, Crawford County, Pennsylvania, and homesteaded south of Grafton — 80 acres in Bennett township and 80 acres across the road in Geneva township. Here the Burts lived and worked diligently, wresting from the prairie not only a living but a finely improved farm, with the addition of many acres to the original homestead. Two children were born to them; John and Mattie (Mrs. Edwin Chambers of Whittier, California).

In 1920, Mr. and Mrs. Burt retired to Geneva where Mr. Burt passed away in 1927 at the age of 82. Mrs. Burt resided in Geneva until her death in 1950.

In 1918, John Burt took over the management of the farm and lived there and farmed the land until 1959, except for two years. In 1954, John and his wife decided to retire. They held a sale of all their belongings — machinery, cattle, hogs, everything. Those who attended agreed that it was the largest sale they had ever seen in Fillmore County. Although the Burts retained ownership of the farm, they shortly thereafter moved to Hastings, where they expected to spend their future. But the call of the land was too strong, and after two years of “retirement” they returned and took up life again on the homestead. Their son Keith, who farmed the Harvard Air Base from 1949 to 1960, helped out with the operations and the development of a nice herd of Black Angus cattle.

In December, 1959, Mr. and Mrs. John Burt moved from the farm into Geneva. In 1960, Keith Burt moved onto the farm and also bought the Geneva Implement Company. This is one of the relatively few homesteaded farms in Fillmore County that has remained continuously in one family.¹



Photo from John Burt

Newton C. Burt family about 1920. Left to right: Mrs. Newton (Mary) Burt, Miss Ella Turney, Pennsylvania relatives, Newton Burt, John Burt.

The families of **Anthony Buttell** and his brothers and sisters made notable contributions, both economically and numerically, to our area.

At the time when this part of Nebraska was being settled, Illinois and other states to the east were already thickly populated and the land was too high priced for young people starting out for themselves. “Cheaper land” was the cry, and Nebraska held alluring possibilities to those who were willing to leave the fertile farm lands to pursue the harder task of breaking sod and risking crop failures in the dryer lands to the west.

In the Buttell family of Lincoln, Illinois, there were three young men and five young women who were eager to make this venture. They did not all come to Nebraska at the same time, but in the course of a few years all were settled within a short distance of each other, Adam and Anthony (Tony) in Fillmore County and the others in the near-by county of Clay.

They prospered and soon owned their own homes. They were good farmers, but their most valuable crop was their children. The first families of the 8 Buttells numbered more than 70 children. They were all members of St. Mary's Catholic Church of Sutton. To the rest of the St. Mary's parishioners they were “The Relations.”

¹ This account, and the other unsigned sections of Bennett township, are presumed to be by Miss Anne and Miss Nellie Sheridan.

In 1894 Anthony (Tony) Buttell and his family took up their residence in Bennett township. His parents came from Alsace-Lorraine, that disputed territory lying between northeastern France and southwestern Germany, hence the French name Buttell. The nine children of Tony and Anna Buttell grew up on the same farm and all attended District 74 school.

In 1905, Frances joined the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and began her novitiate at St. Elizabeth's Convent, Cornwells Heights, Pennsylvania, dedicating her life to the teaching of Negroes and Indians.

In 1914, Korella (Sister Rita) joined the Ursuline Order, beginning her novitiate at Fishkill, New York. After taking her final vows she taught at Steinauer and later volunteered for mission work in faraway China. She taught a year in Bangkok, Siam; because of the trouble in China the Sisters had to give up their schools and teach in the homes and finally were forced to leave China altogether. She now resides in Arcadia, Missouri.

In 1916, Anna (Sister Juanita) entered the Order of the Blessed Sacrament. While in Chicago she had a bad siege of flu from which she never entirely recovered. She died at Cornwells Heights, Pennsylvania, in 1935.

Edward married Anna Burns and lived in Sutton until his death in 1963. Mayme married George Schmal and lived at Lexington, Nebraska, until her death in 1930. Amelia married John Mulvihill; at his death she and her small daughter went back to her home and lived with her parents, caring for them in their later years until their deaths. She now lives in Sutton.

George married Mabel Lyhene, granddaughter of John O'Brien, Sr. They reside in Sutton.

Albert, who married Pearl Sheehy, worked for the Union Pacific R.R. in Hastings until his death in 1956. His widow and their six children still live there.

Cyril married Opal Roulier of Hastings. He acquired considerable wealth from his wheat lands near Goodland, Kansas. He retired to Denver, Colorado, where he passed away in 1950 from a heart ailment, survived by his wife and an only child.

During the depression years, Anthony Buttell, like most of his neighbors, relinquished the ownership of his farm and in March, 1933, he and his wife and daughter Amelia moved into Sutton. Two months later he was called to his eternal home. Twelve years later Mrs. Buttell followed him.

None of the Buttell families are now living in Fillmore County.

In the spring of 1879, **Charles Elofson**, at the age of five years, came with his parents, Ole and Johanna Elofson, from Mt. Carroll, Illinois, and settled in Fillmore County on a farm southeast of Sutton. In 1909, he was married to Anna Baas, who lived in Grafton township. From 1913 to 1925 they



Photo from Bessie Erickson Hammer taken about 1907
Olof Elofson, wife and granddaughter.

lived on the John Paulson place on Sec. 20, northeast of Sutton. Then they moved to the O. R. Lytle farm southeast of Sutton, on Sec. 8, where they resided until 1944, when they retired from farming and moved into Sutton. Thus the greater part of their lives was spent in Bennett township.

Two children were born to the Elofsons: Hazel (Mrs. Orval Oates) and Paul, who was never strong as a child, but

of a cheerful disposition which endeared him to his companions. He passed away in his youth, leaving no one to carry on the family name. Through the Orval Oates family, the Elofsons possess five loving grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

—Mrs. Albert Johnson

Henry Fessler was born in Pennsylvania of Pennsylvania Dutch parents. At the age of 18, he joined the Union army and fought in the Battle of Shiloh or Bull Run or both. He was fortunate enough to receive only a mouth wound during the entire war. About the year 1891 Mr. Fessler came to Fillmore County, settling on a farm in Bennett township, which he purchased from David Kreachbaum. It was here he raised his family of five children; Henry, Dewey, Albert, Sophia, and Susie. Sophia, the last survivor except Dewey, passed away in 1962.

His early acquaintance with the life of hard knocks gave him a roughness of personality which to one unacquainted with him would seem harsh, but that was only on the exterior. He was an honest man and a good neighbor.

During the years 1903-1904 Mr. Fessler served as county commissioner and later held other township offices.

After Mr. Fessler's death, Henry, who married Nellie Ericson, continued to live on the home place for a number of years.

In 1930, Dewey and his wife Lola bought the farm and moved on it in 1931, where they still reside. They put down the first irrigation well in Bennett township in 1941 and another one in the spring of 1955. It is now one of the best-improved farms in Bennett township. The Dewey Fesslers have four children: Mildred, of Grand Island; Marion (Mrs. Richard Helton), of California; Darrell, who married Frances O'Brien, lives a short distance from them on the John Reed place; and Duane at home.

This farm has been in the possession of and resided upon by Fesslers since 1891.



Photo from Dewey Fessler taken about 1900

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fessler and family. Left to right: Susie, Mr. Fessler, Henry, Mrs. Fessler, Sophia, Dewey (center front).

Elijah Huntley and his wife Adelaine (Mann) settled in Bennett township not far from Shickley. (For details of his life and career, see *Stanton*.) Two of his sons carried the name of Fillmore County to relatively far places.

Arthur V. Huntley was born September 12, 1895. He went through eight grades in District 61 and was a member of Grace United Brethren Church in Bennett township. He later took pre-medical and missionary training and then held various pastorates on the West Coast. He founded Trinity Church in San Diego, California, in 1939 and was its pastor from then until 1955. He married Marjorie Traviss of Los Angeles in 1929, and they had two children, Arthur V., Jr., and Phyllis Elaine (Mrs. Earl Brown Lloyd). He died in San Diego on February 10, 1957.

—Mrs. Sam Huntley

Leslie Loran Huntley, fifth son of Elijah Huntley, was born near Shickley on January 10, 1903. He went through the grades in District 61 and then graduated from Grafton



Photo from Mrs. Sam Huntley

Dr. Leslie L. Huntley

High School in 1921. The following two years he taught in a rural school near Shickley and then enrolled in Huntington College (United Brethren) in Indiana. After two years there, he came back and farmed for two years, and then returned to college graduating in 1929. In the fall of the same year, he entered the University of Nebraska School of Medicine, graduating as an M.D. in 1933. After interning for one year at the Methodist Hospital in Omaha, he married Mary Lucretia Bergdall of Cissna Park, Illinois, on July 7, 1934.

On August 9, 1934, the couple began a long "honeymoon" by sailing from New York directly to Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa, where they spent two three-year terms under the auspices of the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Brethren Church. Forced by the war to return to America in November, 1941, just before Pearl Harbor, Dr. Huntley and his family located at Larned, Kansas, from March, 1942, to September, 1943, when he was called into service as a captain in the Army Medical Corps. One of his first assignments, because of his experience in the tropics and his training at the London School of Tropical Medicine, was to a special School of Malarialogy in Panama; from there he was sent to Assam, India, a highly malarial area. Later he was liaison officer for the First Chinese Field Hospital in Assam, then sent across into China to an American field hospital, where he was stationed at the war's end. Discharged from the army on February 3, 1946, he located as a general practitioner at Washington, Kansas, where he still maintains his own office.

Three of Dr. Huntley's children — Carolyn Joanne, Dwight Eugene, and Alyce Elaine — were born in Africa; the fourth, Mary Louise, was born in this country. Dwight became a bacteriologist; Carolyn became a bacteriologist before turning to pediatrics; Alyce was a graduate nurse until her marriage in 1965 to a physician. The youngest girl, still (1967) in high school, plans to become a teacher.

—Data from Dr. Leslie L. Huntley

From the leaves of an old scrapbook kept by **T. O. Huston**, now the property of his daughter, Mrs. Floy McCashland, the stories of the Huston families have been gleaned.

T. O. Huston, imbued with the pioneering spirit and a desire to own a home he could call his own, heard the call of the West where land was cheap and easy to acquire. He came to Fillmore County, Nebraska, in August of 1880 and purchased a farm 7 miles S of Grafton on Sec. 36, Bennett township. Returning to his home in New Boston, Illinois, he was married on September 1, 1880, to Viella Bear, daughter of Peter Bear, pioneer of Eliza township, Mercer County, Illinois; he left September 16 with his bride for their home in Nebraska.

While he was back in Illinois getting married and making preparations for coming west, J. H. Sager and E. O. Lemon built a shanty 14' x 22' for him and his bride. This humble

dwelling, with additions, was to be their home for more than 20 years, until a fine new home replaced it.

Six children were born to Mr. and Mrs. Huston, five of whom grew up on the farm. They are Mrs. Floy McCashland of Geneva, Frank of Sedro-Woolley, Washington, Clarence of Aledo, Illinois, Eva (Mrs. John Curtiss of Lincoln, now deceased), and Mrs. Ada Price of Cozad, Nebraska.

Mr. Huston and his wife endured all the hardships and privations of pioneer life but refused to be beaten by them. He recalled that at one time a renter had planted a part of his farm to corn. In the fall he picked his share and left the country, leaving Mr. Huston to harvest the rest as best he could. This he did, picking it in sacks while wading in snow above his knees. That winter he burned it for fuel, as coal was expensive and corn was worth scarcely anything.

Mr. Huston took great pride in his fields, his orchards, and his livestock. He had one of the largest peach orchards in the county and one of the largest flocks of sheep.

Mrs. Huston was an active member of the W.C.T.U. and Mr. Huston had received awards for 50 years of membership in the Masonic Order.

In 1912, the family moved to Geneva, where Mr. Huston purchased and operated the Mark Alexander Meat Market until a few years prior to his death, which took place in December, 1942. Mrs. Huston had preceded him in death in 1927.

The Huston family have scattered elsewhere to found homes of their own. The only one remaining in Fillmore County is Mrs. Floy McCashland of Geneva.

Walt Huston was one of the earliest pioneers of Fillmore County. After his graduation from Monmouth College, Illinois, he came west, spending a few years in the Utah mines and teaching school in Utah, Iowa, and Nebraska. He was married in 1886 to Ida Sprout. To this union were born five daughters and one son.

After his marriage, Mr. Huston engaged in different lines of enterprise, the implement business constituting the major part of his career. He held several offices of political trust, serving for a number of years as city treasurer and treasurer of the County Fair Board.

He was a humorist in every sense of the word, even carrying it into his business advertising and office campaigning. For example, he advertised "Wife Getter" buggies guaranteed to do the work. He liked to tell of his baby-kissing, potato-digging campaign to win votes. He being an ardent Republican and John Christiancy a jolly Democrat, they made a campaign bet which John Christiancy lost. For a penalty, he had to paint his campaign hat red, buy a sack of flour, get a red wheelbarrow, and deliver the flour to whoever would buy it at auction, the money to go to charity. The flour sold for \$26. The band led the procession and 20 Republicans on horseback followed to the courthouse where the Glee Club sang "Good-bye, old Grover, good-bye." This was in 1888.

None of the Walt Huston family reside in Fillmore County now.

Barnett Isley was born near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on February 22, 1822; his wife, Mary Wolfe, was born near by in the same year. They were married in 1848. Their oldest son, David, was born in January, 1850; their four other children — Mary, Susan, John, and Martha — were also born in Pennsylvania.

The family lived in Davenport, Iowa, while Barnett served with the Union Army from 1863 to 1865, and then moved to a farm near Stuart, Iowa. In the fall of 1871, he filed a homestead claim on the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 28, Bennett township, and the next spring, the family came out together. Susan, who had married, remained in Iowa.

Mr. Isley used to walk some 10 miles to Lakeside School in Clay County to teach a Sunday School class. Mary Wolfe Isley passed away in April, 1891; Barnett lived on the homestead until his death in November, 1911, just under 90 years old. Both are buried in Geneva.

David Isley homesteaded the W $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 34 in 1878, but later traded the land for a team of horses,

harness, and a wagon. He married Addie Kreachbaum in Geneva on August 5, 1891, and farmed the home place. They had seven children: Edward, May, George, Martha, Jessie, Mary, and Walter. Edward was born May 26, 1892; the youngest was born in 1904. After David's death on November 1, 1903, his widow sold off the livestock and machinery; but in 1909 the family resumed farming. She kept the family going until all the children had homes of their own, except for George, who remained with her until her death, October 3, 1951, at the age of 81 years.

Walter passed away in 1955. May (Mrs. Ancel Sedersten) lived in Lincoln (died 1957); Bertha (Mrs. Henry Meyers) lives in Des Moines, Iowa; Jessie (Mrs. John Oldenburg) and Mary (Mrs. Hilbert Dahlbeck) live in Sutton. George lives in Fairmont.

Edward Isley stayed on the home place until 1920, when he started for himself $\frac{1}{4}$ mile E of there, on a rented place — the E $\frac{1}{2}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 33. He was married in Council Bluffs on September 24, 1924, to Florence Hatcliff, daughter of Mark Hatcliff, from near-by Momence township. They came from there directly to the farm, where they have now resided continuously for 48 years. Here were born their two daughters: Shirley (Mrs. Roger Larkin), of Peoria, Illinois, and Norma Jean (Mrs. Byron Gillett), of Aurora, Colorado. Both girls attended school in District 63 and graduated from the Geneva High School.

Thus four generations of Isleys have lived in Bennett township, and three generations attended school in District 63 — Mrs. David Isley (Addie Kreachbaum), her seven children, and two granddaughters. —Data from Edward Isley

Some of the hazards of pioneer — and later — farm life are suggested by these stories of two mishaps which occurred to Ed Isley within less than one year (August and October, 1952):



Photo from Ed Isley
Barnett Isley (at right), his son David Isley and wife Addie and grandson Ed Isley taken in the spring, 1893.

ED ISLEY BITTEN BY RATTLESNAKE

Ed Isley, living 10 miles west of Geneva, is in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Lincoln, for treatment of rattlesnake bite received about 8 o'clock Tuesday evening as he was doing chores at his place. He was working late and while walking through the hallway of the barn lay his hand on the manger and the snake struck two fingers. Thinking it was a wasp he went on with his work until his fingers began to swell and stiffen when he went to the house for a flashlight and found the rattler. He was brought to Dr. Ashby in Geneva but there was no serum to be found there so Dr. Ashby rushed him to Lincoln to St. Elizabeth's Hospital where he was confined from Tuesday until Friday. His hand was sore for several months afterwards until the corn picker accident which he said was so much worse, made him forget about it.

CORN PICKER ACCIDENT FARMER INJURED WHEN CLOTHING CAUGHT IN PICKER

Ed Isley, living nine miles northwest of Geneva, sustained a broken shoulder blade, a broken thumb, six broken ribs and numerous bruises and lacerations when his clothing was caught in a power take-off on a cornpicker about 2 o'clock Friday afternoon.

Mr. Isley and Ed Girmus were picking corn on the

Haessler farm when the accident occurred. Ed was wearing a jacket which was blown into the power take-off as he stood behind the tractor. Most of the clothing was torn from his body. The motor was killed when his clothing clogged the take-off but he was still held to the machine by shreds of clothing. As he started down the corn row for help he lost consciousness twice. He was on his way to where Mr. Girmus was working.

Mrs. Girmus who had gone to the house for oil saw Ed coming and put him into her car and brought him to his home from where her husband brought him to the Geneva Hospital.

LARGE GROUP GATHERS ED ISLEY'S CORN

More than one hundred neighbors and friends of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Isley gathered at their farm home Wednesday morning of last week to pick and store 100 acres of corn for the Isleys. Ed is recovering from injuries received recently when he was caught in the power take-off on his tractor being used with his cornpicker. Ed had picked 80 acres before the accident. The Geneva Odd Fellows and two sets of neighbors joined forces and gathered for work at 8 o'clock the morning of October 24th. 17 pickers and other equipment were used. The picking was completed by 11:15 and the crews were through by noon. Altogether they cribbed 2,800 bushels of corn and also shelled and delivered 800 bushels.

At noon members of Rebekah Lodge of Geneva, neighbors, relatives and friends served a bountiful dinner.

—Ed Isley



Photo from Warren Lefever
Corn picking bee for Ed and Walt Isley.

Andrew Johnson (widowed young) and his three children — Emma Caroline, Hilda Marie, and John Andrew — left Stocksund, Sweden, and came to America on May 5, 1868. They first settled in Illinois for a short time, and then moved on to Essex, Iowa, early in 1873. Mr. Johnson took out his naturalization papers at Clarinda, Iowa, on October 1, 1873. By occupation, he was a tailor.

In the early spring of 1878, Mr. Johnson and a neighbor came to Fillmore County in a covered wagon. He bought 160 acres of railroad land, the NE ¼ of Sec. 29, T7, R4W in Bennett township. He then built a house which was later used as a granary.

After Andrew's son John's confirmation in the Swedish Lutheran church in Essex, Iowa, he joined his father in Fillmore County in May, 1878. Together they built a house and barn and planted trees and orchards, as all pioneer families did.

On March 13, 1886, John A. Johnson was married to Julia Ellen Johnson. To this union were born five girls and two boys: Johanna, Emeline, Ellen, Esther, Edith, Albert, and Carl. The children attended the same school (District 63) as their father.

Sunday School and church were held at the schoolhouse until in later years a church was moved in one-half mile south of the school. This family worshiped and worked to the betterment of the community.

During the scarlet fever epidemic of March, 1894, Ellen May, a 2½-year-old daughter, died.

Johnnie Johnson (as he was familiarly called) and his



Photo from Albert Johnson
Andrew Johnson and Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Johnson and children taken in 1900.

wife could best be described as gentle folk, honest and God-fearing. They brought up their family in the same way. Mr. Johnson took an active part in all civic affairs and held offices of trust in the county and his school district.

This pioneer family went through family losses, the blizzard of 1888, hail, drought, grasshoppers, and all the other hardships of pioneer life. The surviving children of John A. Johnson are Carl J. Johnson and Mrs. Johanna Solberg of Alliance, Nebraska, Mrs. Emeline Burough of Scottsbluff, and Albert R. Johnson of Sutton.

Albert, eldest son of John A. Johnson, was born on the farm to which his father had come as a youth with his father (Albert's grandfather). Albert was married to Cecil Lytle and took over the management of the farm. Here they brought up their four children besides rearing as one of their own the motherless daughter of Albert's sister, Esther Burough.

Sheldon A. Johnson resides near Geneva. Dorothy (Mrs. Paul Schneider) lives across the line in Clay County. Geraldine (Mrs. Harry Hank) resides in Grand Island, as does Velma (Mrs. Perry Schneider). The niece Zeola (Mrs. Vern Domeier) lives on a farm in Bennett township.

—Mrs. Albert Johnson

On February 18, 1879, **Miles Kavanaugh**, with his wife Jane and their family, came from Sparlin, Illinois, to Bennett township, where they purchased 120 acres of land — in the SE ¼ of Sec. 7, T7, R4W — from the Burlington R.R. A cottonwood twig used as a cane en route from Sparlin was stuck in the ground and grew to be a large tree on the farm. The lumber for their house was hauled from Grafton. The sod was broken with walking plows. Some dropped corn by hand in the field.

Miles's son, Charles, was united in marriage to a Lostant, Illinois, girl, Catherine Lawless. Father Murphy performed the marriage in Grafton, as there was no priest in Sutton. They resided on an adjoining farm belonging to his father. Meanwhile Miles K. moved to Hastings, Nebraska.

Around 1886, Charles purchased the farm his father had settled on when first coming to Nebraska. It was a few years before he moved onto his newly purchased farm. In these few years, Charles and Catherine experienced many hardships. One was the famous blizzard of 1888, which struck suddenly and without warning about 4 P.M. It became so severe that Mr. Kavanaugh had some difficulty in getting the stock sheltered and getting back to the house. From what had been a beautiful day a few hours before, it became so cold that the frost lay on the hinges inside the house. The teachers led some of the children to safety by following fences; others kept the children in the schools and burned desks and books to keep warm; but many lives were lost other than school children. Farmers also lost stock. Earl Tucker and Hi Brown, close neighbors of the Kavanaughs, lost large numbers of sheep which were driven off with the wind and frozen. Many farm animals lost in the blizzard wandered around houses and

frightened people inside who did not know they were stock.

Hordes of grasshoppers and chintz bugs came in the summer, so numerous that they hid the sun. They, along with the drouths, destroyed the crops in those years.

Mrs. Kavanaugh once prevented a hardship for the Miles Kavanaugh family. While she was out in the yard, she noticed smoke at their farm. Knowing they were gone to town, she hurried across the field and put out the fire before it reached the house. Miles K. gave her an eight-day clock and a mirror in appreciation.

During these years quite a few children died of diphtheria and the Kavanaughs were also very sick with it. The schools were two miles apart and many teachers walked several miles to them. When cars came out, Mrs. Kavanaugh remembered her horse shying when they met a car. They had to hold the horse at the side of the road until the car passed.

People had many peddlers at their doors in those years. Some of these stayed overnight in the schoolhouse, and this frightened the teachers. Dog races and horseshoe games amused the settlers on Sundays. Families supplied their tables with prairie chickens and quail which were abundant. Indian arrows and buffalo bones were found on the Kavanaugh place.

In 1914, Mr. and Mrs. Kavanaugh and their daughter Cora retired to Sutton. Later, their early-day home was burned to the ground by bootleggers. Since, they have moved another house there, and now the fourth generation is living on the same land.

—Mrs. Cora (Kavanaugh) Hoarty

Down the road to the south of Joe Schaaf's place, **Joe Keller** had built a two-room house where he lived with his wife and family. When Joe married Trace Auer, sister of Mrs. Joe Schaaf, they moved in with his folks. Mr. Keller then built on two rooms to the west and the young couple lived there while the parents lived in the original rooms. This house is about the same age as the Schaaf house and is owned by one of the Walters heirs and occupied by Lou Walters and his wife.

David Kreachbaum and his wife (Elizabeth Hooper) were born and grew up near Logan, Ohio. After their marriage they lived on farms near Des Moines and Marshalltown, Iowa. Two of their children, George and Addie, were born in the Hawkeye State.

In the spring of 1872, the Kreachbaum and Barnett Isley families came to Nebraska and took up homesteads adjoining each other on Sec. 28 in Bennett township. The covered wagon which they came in served as a home until they built a house. The team of horses which they drove and the one cow which trailed behind the wagon were their most valued possessions. Two children, Walter and Christian, were born on the homestead. Christian lived only a short time. Seven years after their arrival the mother closed her eyes in death.

The sorrowing husband, unable to carry on with three small children to care for, returned to the home of his parents in Ohio. Later he remarried and in 1885 returned to Nebraska, locating on a farm just east of their first home. This place, though untenanted because of the destruction of the house by fire, is still in the ownership of the Kreachbaum family.

In 1884, **Richard Lawless** and his sister Catherine came to Bennett township from Lostant, Illinois. They began their home on the farm of Hugh Jennett, who lived near Streator, Illinois. A few acres of this farm was used for a school. Two years later Catherine was married to a neighbor, Charles Kavanaugh.

In 1888, Richard purchased 160 acres of land in Sec. 29 from John A. Peterson and wife, who had in 1881 secured it from the Burlington R.R. This land later became his sister's and now, since her passing, belongs to her daughter.

One annoying experience for the pioneers was ridding their hen houses of bedbugs and fleas.

Richard Lawless was invited to the home of Sumner Barnell in 1907, for an evening with friends, where he became seriously ill. He passed away the same evening.

Samuel B. Mann was born in Germany and came to the United States when a small boy. He was educated in New York City and after finishing school traveled northward and



Photo from Mrs. Hobart Springer
Mr. and Mrs. Samuel B. Mann about 1913.

became a charcoal burner (charcoal was used for smelting iron).

In May, 1863, he married Theresa Devins and soon enlisted in the Civil War and stayed until the close of the war. He and his wife then began working for the Great Northern Iron Company, Mrs. Mann as a cook and Mr. Mann as a charcoal burner. They lived in the woods following the forest workers. Mrs. Mann became ill and the doctor advised a change to a drier climate, either Arizona or Nebraska.

In April, 1871, Mr. Mann and his brother-in-law Thomas Devins and Francis Blake entrained for Nebraska. The railroad was built to Council Bluffs, so at this point they bought an equipped oxen train to move westward. Omaha was only a small fort, and Lincoln was a tiny place.

They located on Sec. 32 in Bennett township.

No health precautions were taken. They drank from creeks and lived on this barren prairie, erected small houses, dug a 75-foot well by hand, and brought material from Council Bluffs. There was no means of communicating with their loved ones, and great anxiety was felt for their safety. No harm came to them, but Indians were still roaming these prairies.

In the fall of 1872, they brought their families to these barren prairies. There were no towns or mail, but plenty of work. Grasshoppers plagued them, and then a prairie fire which took their feed. So they packed their wagons and went back to Michigan.

After a stay of six years in Michigan they migrated back to Nebraska again, better equipped to stand the rigors of the prairies. But by then all available land had been taken and neighbors were plentiful.

The greatest drawback was that the buildings had been taken off their land and again buildings had to be erected for shelter. It was a hard task, as they had children by this time. But by their indomitable will and great strength this was accomplished.

Mr. and Mrs. Mann were the parents of 13 children, raising 10 to maturity. Mr. Mann gave his whole life to build a better community, always helping wherever needed. He served many years on the school board and acted as justice of the peace for years. He passed away on May 25, 1914, and Mrs. Mann passed away on February 3, 1935.

—Esther E. (Mann) Meyers

George B. Miles, Sr., and his wife came from Kewanee, Illinois, in 1875 by train as far as Fairmont, where they were met by his uncle, Charles C. Miles, who had homesteaded in Geneva township in 1871. George had been married the year before; he was 21 and his wife was 18.

Charley Miles, George's brother, lived on the farm next east of Finnegan's — the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 1, T7, R4W. George bought this farm and later bought the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ from his uncle,

C. C. Miles. Their first house had just two rooms, one downstairs and one upstairs. Later they built on two more rooms. They had lots of company. They used to have dances, and often the guests stayed overnight, the men sleeping upstairs and the women downstairs.

On this farm the Miles family reared their family of seven children: Lydia, Edythe, Leslie, George, Nile, Jimmie, and Gordon. Mr. and Mrs. George B. Miles were very active in helping to establish the Congregational Church at Grafton and were charter members. They continued living on this half-section until they retired to Grafton in 1908, where Mrs. Miles passed away in 1928. Mr. Miles died in 1944 at the age of 89.

Edythe Miles George lives at Good Samaritan Village in Hastings. George and Gordon Miles settled in Portland, Oregon, where George died in 1966. Lydia Miles married Miles Longman in 1908. After his death in 1930, she moved to Grafton, where she resided until her death on June 6, 1967. Leslie Miles farmed the home place until his death from cancer in 1954.

—Data from *Lydia (Miles) Longman*



Photo from Mrs. Emma Miles taken about 1900
Left to right: Leslie Miles, George Miles Jr., George Miles Sr. ("Smiley" the dog), Gordon Miles, Mrs. George Miles Sr., Lydia Miles, Nile Miles, Edythe Miles.

In the year 1874, **Joseph Oberlander**, with his wife and son, left their native Russia, then ruled by Czar Nicholas I, and came to America to found a home. They bought land in Bennett township which is still owned by members of the Oberlander family.

Of the six children born to them, three survive; Mrs. Elizabeth Unterseher, of Harvard, Margaret of Sutton, and Mike, on his farm south of Grafton. Sam, deceased, married Minnie Baumann and raised a family of five children, one of whom (Clarence) resides on the farm with his widowed mother. Joe married Katharine Hahn and was living at Gering at the time of his death. Mike married Anna Bohlen.



Photo from Clarence Oberlander
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Oberlander taken about 1905.

They were not blessed with a family, consequently he was left alone at his wife's death, and for some years he lived alone close to the road a short distance from the country Lutheran church which he and his wife attended.

Henry married Minnie Bohlen, and was left a widower. He retired to Sutton, where he married Marie Kranz. Like his brother Mike, he had no children, and at his death his wife Marie became owner of the farm in Bennett township.

All of the Oberlanders chose farming as a vocation. Theirs was ever the simple country life but they had time for music and dancing also. The neighboring youth of that generation recall with pleasure the polkas, two-steps, waltzes, and quadrilles which they danced, to the tunes played by the Oberlanders.

John O'Brien, Sr., was born June 24, 1847, in County West Meath, Ireland, in the town of Mullingar, home town of the famous tenor, John McCormack. At the age of 18 he came, with his widowed mother, to America, landing in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1865, just after the close of the Civil War. There he worked in the coal mines and on the railroad for a number of years. On May 6, 1869, he was married to Bridget Battle at Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

In the spring of 1874 they came to Fillmore County, landing in the new town of Grafton. Hoping to take up a homestead, he walked to Alexandria and Belvidere and at length filed on a claim, only to learn that others had filed before him. On the way back he was caught in a storm but was rescued by a Bohemian farmer who took him into his dugout where he remained for two days.

Returning to Grafton, he again worked on the railroad and helped to lay the Burlington siding through Grafton. He lived in a sod house on what is now the William Schumacher place in Grafton township until 1877, when he and his family moved to the farm in Bennett township. Here he resided until 1912, when he retired to Grafton, leaving his sons, George and Jim, to farm the place. He passed away on January 2, 1926; his wife Bridget died August 25, 1936.

The O'Briens went through all the hardships of the early settlers and raised a family of ten children: John, Thomas, William, George, James, Mary (Mrs. James Murray), Ann (Mrs. William Lyhene), Bridget, Ellie, and Gertrude (Mrs. Andrew Schaaf).



Photo from Jim O'Brien taken in 1911
Left to right: George, Bridgie and Ella O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien was a feeder and shipper of livestock ever since there was a market in South Omaha. An ardent Democrat, he took much interest in politics and served several terms as a member of the Board of Supervisors.

All of the O'Brien children attended District 61, known as the O'Brien School. It was not built, however, until 1879. Before that time they attended school where August Rotter lived. Henry Gillespie plowed a furrow from his place to the Frolics' so the children could go to school in the fall and have a path to follow. When the weather warmed up in the springtime, rattlesnakes used to come out from the tall grass and lie in the sun in the furrow, so they had to change the children's path because of the danger lurking there.

As the children grew to young manhood and womanhood they settled near home.

Tom O'Brien lived on a farm south of the home place. He married Winnifred Dwyer and had four children: Mildred (Mrs. Carl Schneider), Cecilia (Mrs. Bartol Walters), Paul, and Roger. Tom was on the school board 40 years. John, Jr., lived just across the road in Moomence. His wife was Minnie Willey. He had one daughter who died in young womanhood. Will and his wife bought and lived on the Anthony Buttell

home after the Buttells moved to Sutton. They had one adopted son, Barney. Jim lives in Grafton in the parental town home. Gertrude married Andrew Schaaf and now lives in Albion. Bridget and Ella lived with their parents in Grafton. Bridget passed away and Ella now lives with Jim. George O'Brien married Sara Britt and they had seven children who grew to maturity. Mike remained on the home place and still lives there. Mary (Mrs. James Murray) lived near there for many years until her husband's death, when she went to live with her daughter, Mrs. Albert Rotter, at Beaver Crossing. She died on October 5, 1962. Anna (Mrs. Will Lyhene) lived on a farm in Clay County. When her husband died, she moved to Sutton, which remained her home until her death.

Most of the O'Brien lands are still owned by members of the family or their descendants.

John O'Brien, Sr., gave an account of the great blizzard through the *Lincoln Star* and the *World-Herald*.

"That morning snow began to fall coming from the southeast. It was soft and warm and melted on the ground as fast as it fell. I had two cars of cattle and hogs to feed. I spent the forenoon caring for them as they were all wet with the soft snow. When I had done the chores I started for the house. Looking northwest I saw a white ribbon-like cloud not thinking much of it.

"When I came into the house Mrs. O'Brien said there was a churning to be done and I could commence churning at once. It being an old-fashioned churn with a long dash, I pounded away. It made lots of noise but I thought I could hear something louder than the churn, so I looked out of the window. Everything in the yard was on the move—wagons, hay racks, corn stalks, etc. I went outdoors and looked northwest. The storm was coming not more than half a mile away. It was not a floating cloud but was built from the ground up and it came like a stone wall about a mile high.

"The cattle started running around like they were wild. Then it became dark. When the crest of the storm came with the snow you could not see anything the length of your arm away. It was so cold I had to put on extra clothes and go to the yards. Mrs. O'Brien did not want me to go for fear of getting lost or struck with flying things.

"Making my way out to the stock yards I found it impossible to drive the stock to the sheds as their eyes were frozen shut with the snow and ice, so I gave up. Finding my way back to the house, nearly frozen, I thought of something else.

"We had five children at school and would they ever be able to come 100 rods against the storm? At all hazards I must go to the schoolhouse. But how could I get there as one could not see any distance? Thinking of a wire fence we had for 80 rods on one side of the road. If I could make my way to it I would have no trouble reaching the schoolhouse. Finding the fence I arrived at the schoolhouse in time to find Miss Nannie Huston and her 11 pupils standing in a circle around the stove and 'scared' was no name for it. The schoolhouse was rocking like a cradle and the draft of the chimney was drawing the fire up the stovepipe.

"There were five O'Brien's, four of Mr. Dobson's, and one boy staying at Mr. Ackland's. I have forgotten his name. There would have been more pupils from the east and south but for the snow in the morning. I told them to put on their wraps and try to make it to our house. They all thought they couldn't make it against the storm but I told them it was easier to die frozen than to burn to death, so they all got ready. I told them to all hang together and I would lead them. Then came the 'tug-of-war.' We made the fence and I kept my stick busy following it. The snow was like broken glass. Every few steps we had to turn around to get our breath. We reached the end of the 80-rod fence and still had 15 rods to the house. At this stand, the boy from Ackland's made a break for home. He went but a short way when he got down in the snow. Before he could get up I took hold of him and brought him back to the rest of the children.

"We reached the house all covered with ice and snow. When bed time came we had to make beds for some of them

around the heating stove. All were well and able to be up and around in the morning. O boy, didn't that churning come in good! Mrs. O'Brien made pancakes for the whole bunch. After breakfast, with buckets packed, all were ready to be off to school for the day.

"My loss was 30 head of hogs. It took the cattle one month to look as good as they did the morning before the storm."

The first settlers of Turkey Creek were Luxembourg Catholics or Luxemburgers, as they were called, from the duchy of that name in Europe. They located first in Wisconsin and about the year 1871 came to Fillmore County. Among the names were John, Peter, Jacob, and Hans Weiss, Peter and Nicholas Gergen, John Marson, two Rock families, Bernard Schommer, John Nittler, Peter Carl, Bartols, Webbers, and Diederichs. Germans came later: Reinschs, Kamlers, Rotters, and others.

August Rotter came to Bennett township in 1885. Bernard Rotter came nine years later. They lived on farms across the road from each other where their children grew up together attending the same school (District 61) and the Turkey Creek Catholic Church known now as the Shickley parish.

August Rotter had seven children: Joseph, Anna (Mrs. Edward Wachter), Mary (Mrs. George Wachter), Minnie (Mrs. Fred Standard), Hattie, Emma, and Albert.

Bernard Rotter had nine children; Agnes (Mrs. John Fleming), Fred, Charley, Elizabeth (Mrs. Leonard Finnegan), William, John, Gertrude (Mrs. John Dillon), Leo, and George.

Being small of stature, they were usually spoken of as the "Little Rotters," but size did not affect their capabilities, for among the 16 children there were farmers, mechanics, storekeepers, salesmen, business managers, nurses, one teacher, and one member of a Benedictine Order of Brothers.

George, the youngest son of Bernard Rotter, had the misfortune to lose an arm in a runaway while raking hay as a young boy. He has since distinguished himself in the field of education, having written several textbooks. He is now State Director of Conservation in the Nebraska Department of Education. His wife is the former Gertrude Burke of Grafton, daughter of the late Thomas Burke.

The name of Rotter has gradually disappeared from the columns of the Fillmore County papers as they have taken up residence elsewhere. The little town of Trenton, Nebraska, is the home of many of their posterity, since six of the Bernard Rotter family chose that particular spot when launching out for themselves. Denver attracted some of them and California called others away from Nebraska and Fillmore County and Bennett township.

Mrs. Joseph Schaaf, living in her neat little house in Grafton, gave us her story as follows:

When she was a young girl of 14 her father, a New York harness maker, or carpenter, decided to come west. A half-brother, John Auer, was working for Weisenborns of Grafton and his letters to the folks "back home," urging them to come out to this fast settling up new country, were the deciding factor.

Accordingly, in midsummer of the year 1867 [?] the Auers purchased four horses and two mules, loaded all their possessions in two covered wagons, and started for Nebraska.

It took six weeks of slow, steady plodding to make the trip. For the two young Auer girls, Anna and her sister, it was high adventure all the way. Pitching the tent each evening, eating meals cooked by the campfire, falling asleep to the drowsy murmur of prairie insects, wakened often in the night by the howl of coyotes, and breaking camp at dawn each day were never-to-be-forgotten thrills.

Arriving in Grafton in September, they lived in Weisenborn's yard until their house was built, which required several weeks.

About this time the Zierens, Francks, Schaafs, Kellers, Stahls, and Shanks arrived to occupy the land which Mr. Stahl had purchased, thus making a "Little New York" settlement. All of the families were related by marriage

except the Stahls.

As the children of these families grew to young manhood and womanhood, Francis and Joe Schaaf married two Auer girls. Joe married Anna Auer, the subject of this story. Joe's parents built and lived in a little two-room house on the NE ¼ of Sec. 11, the same house in which the Lou Schinzels later lived. When Joe married Anna Auer, they went, as was the custom then, to live with the "old folks." An addition was built to the west and later the kitchen to the south was added. This is one of the oldest houses in Bennett township.

Two sons and a daughter were born to the Joseph Schaafs. Andrew married Gertrude O'Brien, daughter of John O'Brien, Sr., a pioneer of Bennett township. They now live in Albion. Andrew worked for the Farm and Home Administration and in similar governmental positions for a number of years until his retirement. Leo, now retired, worked at the Naval Ammunition Depot in Hastings and made his home with his mother in Grafton until her death on May 8, 1965. The daughter, Mrs. Merl J. Stead, lives in David City. The Schaaf farm was sold to Alton and Bertha Workentine on May 12, 1966, and the buildings have now all been removed.

Mrs. Schaaf's life was not an easy one. Mr. Schaaf was never robust physically and in later life his health was a constant worry to Mrs. Schaaf, fearing that he might be overcome while at work in the fields. His death was very sudden but within his home after a strenuous afternoon's work. Cholera had struck his herd of hogs, wiping out most of them in a few days. To keep the disease from spreading to neighborhood herds, it was necessary to burn the dead swine so that dogs or wild animals might not carry parts of the animals away and thus cause the loss of a neighbor's herd. With his neighbors' help, he had been working hard to avoid the danger of fire if left burning into the night. The exertion brought on a heart attack and consequently his death.

When Julius Schinzel decided to go west and purchase a home for himself and family, they left Illinois in 1888 and traveled to Orleans, Nebraska, where Mrs. Schinzel's sister lived. They stayed there five years and then came to Fillmore County, settling on the place which Ralph Schinzel still farms.



Photo from Ralph Schinzel

Julius Schinzel family taken May, 1908. Back row, left to right: Josephine, George, Emma, Laura, Louis and Myrtle. Front row: Carolyn, Julius, Ralph, Theresa and Amanda.

The Julius Schinzels had nine children. Amanda (Kendall), George, Laurence (died in infancy), Louis, Caroline (Van Patten), and Josephine (Thompson) are deceased. One daughter, Laura May (Rains) lives in California; another, Emma Belle (Miles) lives in Fairmont. The Lou Schinzels lived for a long time on the Schaaf place, where they raised a large garden and kept a yard very attractive with plants and flowers.

The Ralph Schinzels have three boys and one girl: Charles, Waldo, Dean, and Phyllis. Dean, after graduating

from the University of Nebraska's Agricultural College, returned to help his father farm the home place.

The Schinzels and Van Pattens were threshermen in the early days, and ran almost every kind of threshing machine manufactured until the combine made its appearance.

—Ralph Schinzel

Among the prominent early pioneers of Fillmore County was the John Sheridan family.

At the age of 21 young John Sheridan left his farm home in Castle Pollard, West Meath, Ireland, to go to England. On the voyage he met a young crew member who convinced him to come to America.

On May 15, 1871, he landed in New York. Because he had used all his money for passage, he had to work at various jobs there until he had earned enough money to take him to Decatur, Illinois, where he had distant relatives.

In the spring of 1878, seven years after his arrival in America, the young Irishman, with his new-found friend Bill Coan, seeking adventure and the opportunity to make their fortunes, invested all their savings in a wagon, a team of horses, farm equipment, and provisions and left the older state of Illinois in a covered wagon to settle in the newly founded state of Nebraska. Although the railroad that was built through Fillmore County had been completed as far west as Kearney in 1872, many people found it too expensive to travel great distances with farm equipment and livestock; and so these two young unmarried men came across the plains by covered wagon. They were among the last settlers to make the trip in this way.

Upon arriving in Fillmore County, they spent their first night at the Morgan home, and stayed on there until John found a suitable farm to rent. Bill Coan and the Morgans were cousins.

The following fall John returned to Clinton, Illinois, where he and Ellen Sheehy were married September 24, 1879. Ellen Sheehy, a daughter of John and Mary Sheehy, was born in Wilson, Niagara County, New York, and when six years of age (in 1864) came with her parents to Illinois.

Mr. and Mrs. John Sheridan returned together to Nebraska and lived near Exeter, a pioneer town established in 1871. Four of their children were born there: William, Mary, John, and Ellen (Nellie). The family lived in a sod house which had been built by Jim Dolan, who homesteaded in this area. The rugged pioneer life, carrying water for family use and caring for four young children, was strenuous. Six years later the family moved to Grafton, where Anne and Edna were born.

Shortly thereafter the family realized their dream and purchased a home of their own 5 miles SE of Sutton, just across the county line in Sec. 30, Bennett township, Fillmore County. This had been the homestead of Aden Sherwood.

Like others among the pioneers, they experienced many hardships, the blizzard of 1888, crop failures, and other heartaches; but they also experienced the joy of carving out a destiny for their children and grandchildren, in an earlier day when the great tide of emigration sped forward and backward before their door. Hard work and the passing years brought a generous bounty. John was not only a farmer, but also an avid reader and an advocate of legislation that would benefit the people of this area. The family were devout Catholics, active in church work. John, Ellen, and Anne received their first Holy Communion on October 1, 1899, at Sutton, from Father Michael A. Shine, the famous Nebraska and Catholic historian.

Though the home farm was in Fillmore County, the young Sheridan children went to school at District 13 in Clay County, because this school was nearer their farm. The three younger girls attended high school in Sutton, and Ellen went to Kearney to normal school.

William was married to Margaret Hogan and they made their home in Sutton, where they did extensive farming and sold farm equipment. They raised a family of seven children, five of whom still live in the Sutton area. Mrs. Margaret Sheridan also makes her home in Sutton.

Mary was united in matrimony to Timothy J. Joyce of



Photo from Nellie Sheridan
John Sheridan and his sulky (about 1904).

Clay Center, Nebraska, and Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, on November 25, 1908. Afterward they left for Wyoming, where Mr. Joyce had homesteaded 8 miles SW of Pine Bluffs the preceding year. They raised a family of seven children, having lost one son in infancy. In 1958, they celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary. Mrs. Mary Joyce still lives in Laramie, Wyoming.

John remained at home and farmed. After his father's death, he expanded the Sheridan holdings to several sections of land. He still owns the home farm, but in 1964, due to the ill health of his sister Ellen, he moved into Sutton and continues to make his home there.

Ellen, Anne, and Edna chose teaching as their professions. Ellen taught District 13, Clay County, and District 74, Fillmore County. In June, 1908, she went to Wyoming with her friend May (Joyce) Swanson, now of Alexandria, Virginia, where both these young ladies took up adjoining homesteads near those of Timothy Joyce, Bill Joyce, the Hughes brothers, the Sam Thompson family, and others from this part of Nebraska, who had gone west the year before. Ellen taught in Wyoming for four years while she was "proving-up" on her claim. She then returned to the family home and taught again at District 13 and later at Ohiowa. Much of her time, along with her sister Anne, was spent in research and the collecting of antiques and artifacts of the locality in the hope of preserving them for future generations.

Anne as a young woman taught schools at Districts 63 and 20, the West School, Yetman's, and Fairview. Her overwhelming desire to be near her sister Mary later took her West to the Colorado mountains, where, in an isolated mountain area, she taught children and boarded in a log house. Her love for Wyoming brought her back there during World War II, where she taught at the Thomas Sun ranch and lived with the Sun family on their ranch home between Rawlins and Casper. Anne became noted in the local area as a poet of merit, was a member of *Ars Poetica* (the Nebraska poetry society) and left a large collection of unpublished poems at the time of her death.

Edna, also impelled by her pioneer heritage, obtained a teaching position in the Sand Hills of Garden County, where she boarded and roomed in a dugout. Later she taught a ranch-house school in Wyoming in a region newly opened to homesteaders. Because of her mother's poor health she returned home and taught one year in the home school. On May 3, 1917, she was married to Charles Lacy of Laramie, Wyoming. The Lacy family lived at Trenton, Omaha, and Sutton, Nebraska. They also raised a family of seven children.

There are two members of this pioneer family living today, John in Sutton and Mary in Laramie, Wyoming. Grandchildren of the pioneers John and Ellen Sheridan are Rita Ellen Haviland (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) and Jeanette Motichka (Rock Springs, Wyoming).

—Mrs. Andy Motichka

Ole Solberg, Swedish by birth, his wife and one child came from Norway to LaCrosse, Wisconsin, where an uncle of Mrs. Solberg's resided. Lack of employment was the reason for leaving the Land of the Midnight Sun to come to America, the Land of Opportunity. A large part of Norway cannot be inhabited and only about one-fifteenth of the country can be cultivated. Lumbering is the most important industry. When the Ole Solbergs settled in Wisconsin, he worked in the saw-mills there for a few years, but malaria was so bad there that for health reasons there they were anxious to find a dryer climate. Nels Nelson, a brother of Mrs. Solberg, who was living in Bennett township in a sod house, sent for the Solbergs. It was rather cramped quarters in a one-room soddy, so a bedroom was added which accommodated them until a frame house was built close by. —Mrs. Albert Johnson

Joseph Zieren, Sr., with an older sister, came to America from Essentoh, Germany, at the age of 14 years. They made their home with an uncle in New York who was a cobbler by trade. Joseph worked at cement making and in a brewery until his marriage to Catherine Sillas of Albany, New York, when he purchased a canal boat on the St. Lawrence River. This was their home. On it they lived and worked and traveled, coming to shore for cargo to exchange for a return load.

In the fall, before the rivers froze, they would go up into Canada and bring back a boat load of potatoes and other vegetables which they kept on the boat until their market season was past in the states, thereby getting a better price for them. However, the size of their family had been increasing and, realizing that a boat was not the best place for raising a family since they were never stationed for any length of time in one place, they were interested in a home where they could settle down.

Christian Stahl had returned from Nebraska after taking an option on a section of land. Having purchased an 80, the Zierens were anxious to see it and make it their home.



Photo from Joseph Zieren Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Zieren Sr. and family taken about 1905. Back row, left to right: Anne, Joseph Jr., Theresa, Nettie. Center row: Thecla, Mrs. Joseph Zieren Sr., Joseph Zieren Sr., John. Front row: Mary holding a grandson Joe Martin, Elizabeth, Johanna, Caroline, Kathryn, and Frank.

In 1878, they took leave of their relatives and friends and their canal boat, the *Mary E. Gaylord*, and boarded the train for the far-flung prairies of Nebraska. Arrived in Grafton, Mrs. Zieren and the two children remained there until a two-room house was erected on the 80 in Bennett township; the lumber was hauled from Fairmont. It was unplastered and remained so for several years.

As more room became necessary, the Zierens built on and around the original. It was in this unpretentious home that 10 of their 12 children were born. They were: John (deceased); Mary (Mrs. Ben Martin), Lincoln; Anne (Mrs. Mike Griffin), Grafton; Nettie (Mrs. Louis Klein), North Bend, Oregon; Thecla (Mrs. Will Schmitz), Clearwater, Nebraska; Joe, Grafton, Nebraska; Theresa, Rock Springs, Wyoming; Frank, Sioux City, Iowa; Catherine (Mrs. Paul

Rickettson), Santee, California; Elizabeth (Mrs. John Weiland), Madison, Nebraska; Hannah (Mrs. James Whelan), Missoula, Montana; and Caroline (Mrs. Gene Workman), Grand Island, Nebraska.

Only two of the first generation of Zierens still reside in Fillmore County.

Across the fields from his father, Joseph Zieren, Jr., batched and farmed. Close by lived the Albert Dietricks. Mrs. Dietrick was expecting a baby and found it hard to locate help for the home at that time. She had lived at Indianola and a friend of hers told her daughter she thought she should go out and work for Mrs. Dietrick at that time. She seemed reluctant to go. Her mother urged her, saying it would only be for a couple of weeks. Two weeks seemed a long time, but, acceding to her mother's wishes, she went. Shortly after arriving there, she met Joseph Zieren, Jr. Romance began, and culminated in marriage later.

In 1913, the elder Zierens retired to Grafton and Joseph and his bride moved onto the home place vacated by them. They have lived on this same place for the past 54 years. The two weeks that seemed so long to Mrs. Zieren lengthened into more than twenty times that many years, and she and Joseph are still living contentedly there with their son Raymond. Their 10 children were born there, bringing the number of births in the two generations to 20 in the same house, and never yet has a death occurred there.

The second generation of children are: Lenora Hansen, Denver; Wilma Baird, Cheyenne; Irene King, Denver; Ethel Krull, Hastings; Mary Garbers, Lincoln; Bernard, Carmi, Illinois; Raymond, at home; Florence Faughn, Lincoln; Ellen Voss, Lincoln; Theresa Zieren, Crete; and Frances Kamler, Shickley.

Only two are living in Fillmore County. Joseph Zieren served on the school board of District No. 62 from 1914 until the school was discontinued, the school where 22 Zieren children received their early education. He was for many years supervisor of roads for Bennett township.

—Joseph Zieren, Jr.

MISCELLANY

"Buried Treasure"

The *Signal* for May 4, 1922, contained the following account of this unusual incident:

While Alvin Oberkotter was plowing his garden on the afternoon of April 13, he plowed up a baking-powder can containing \$1,000 in \$20 gold pieces. This 120-acre farm lies in Bennett township 9 miles west and one mile north of Geneva. It belongs to the Oberkotter estate, having been purchased three years ago. Tenants have occupied the land since the Oberkotter ownership until this spring. Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Oberkotter completed their moving to the farm on the day the gold was plowed up.

There were many old cans and bricks in the garden which Mr. Oberkotter was tossing out of the way. This particular can was so heavy he decided to look inside. There he found 50 golden eagles spotted with dirt. Since there was no one to prove positive ownership the Oberkotters assume that the money belongs to them.

Some years ago an elderly man named Nels Nelson owned and resided on the farm. He lived alone and was known to keep considerable sums of money around with him and that he occasionally became intoxicated. Stories are told of his losing money which the neighbors found and returned to him. He was found dead at his home five or six years ago. The Swedish Consul came from Omaha when the estate was settled as it was believed probably that Nelson buried the gold [perhaps in the wall of his sod house, which was pulled down in 1917].

Page after page of filings are included in the abstracts to this land which is known as "Treasure Farm." Distinguished names appear in the history of this farm including William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State for Wilson, who attested to some of the record. Birth records from Sweden figure in its history attested by Swedish dignitaries. Jack

Nolde and his mother recently purchased the farm from Oberkotter heirs.

—From Scrapbook of Mrs. Ed Isley

Grace United Brethren Church

This church, sometimes called Grace Chapel but more familiarly known as the Mann Church, was established in 1895. Sunday School and church services were first held in that year in the District 63 schoolhouse, located on the SE corner of the SE ¼ of Sec. 29, T7, R4W. Land for the church site was donated by Samuel B. Mann from the Mann homestead on the NE ¼ of Sec. 32.

The first church was a building put up by the Methodist, known as Asbury Chapel, located 4 miles E of the present church site. The Grace congregation purchased that building in the spring of 1908 and moved it to the Mann homestead. The parsonage was built in 1909.

Established as a United Brethren Mission church, the new organization numbered among its first members Mr. and Mrs. S. B. Mann and their daughters Adeline, Caroline, and Jane; F. V. Mann and his wife Alma; the Fenske family; Willie Levander; Louis Lauenstein; Mamie and Ida Peterson; Mrs. Ezra Harrington; and Mrs. John Whitaker. Others influential in establishing the work of the new church were Bernard Isley, Mr. and Mrs. George Myers, and Henry Fessler. The first minister was a Rev. Mr. Wheeler.

On October 14, 1920, the first church burned down. In the spring of 1921, a Baptist church building, over in Clay County, was purchased and moved to the Mann site.

There were many activities in this country church which endeared itself to many people for miles around. Everybody was always willing to go the second mile.

There were Sunday School and church services every Sunday morning, and Christian Endeavor and another church service in the evening. There was always a young people's choir. Ladies' missionary meetings met once a month. Every summer, a Sunday School picnic was held in the Manns' yard, where there were plenty of large shade trees.

In early church days, camp meetings were great events, and people came from miles around. They brought along camping tents, cots, stoves, bedding, food and other supplies enough to last for the duration of the tent meeting. All had an opportunity to meet in fellowship with other Christians. There was always a missionary present.

Two ministers and two foreign missionaries went out from this church during its lifetime, the Revs. F. V. Mann and Arthur Huntley (both deceased); Dr. Leslie Huntley, now of Washington, Kansas, the first medical missionary to serve in the mission field in Sierra Leone, West Africa; and Miss Mabel Shultz, who also served in Africa. So it would seem that this church not only was a great influence in its community but touched many other lives as well.

The last conference held in Grace Church took place in August, 1944. The visiting delegates and ministers stayed in homes in the community, and the church ladies served meals in the basement of the church.

The last services were held here on September 11, 1945, while the Rev. John Frederick Lippe was pastor. In November, 1949, the building was sold to Vern Domeier.



Photo from Mrs. Sam Huntley
taken in 1923
Miss Mabel Shultz
(Missionary)

Miss Mabel Shultz, a member of Grace U. B. Church, consecrated her life to Christian work at the age of 14. After completing her studies at the Moody Bible School in Chicago, she served one year as pastor of her home church. On July 28, 1923, Miss Shultz, with other missionaries,

sailed from New York for Freetown, Sierra Leone, where she was stationed at the Bonthe Serbeo Mission. Despite the fact that she liked her missionary work very much, illness forced her to return home before her term was finished. She passed away on March 15, 1938.

Baptismal Pool

A baptismal pool on Sec. 29 in Bennett township is still very visible and when the water comes up it is all of four feet deep.

This pool was inaugurated under the tenure of the Rev. William Trace from Dorchester, Nebraska. A minister of the United Brethren Church of Huntington, Indiana, Rev. Trace was the first minister in the second United Brethren Church on the NE corner of Sec. 32, T7, R4W, Bennett township.

In this pool possibly six adults were immersed in 1909. All are now deceased.

Sam Huntley and his wife Ruth Shultz Huntley recall vividly the service, and to Sam this baptismal pool is hallowed ground; those persons immersed in the pool were his relatives.
—Mrs. Sam Huntley

Vanished Scenes

Along the county line where the "Fillmorian" may reach out and shake hands with the "Claytonian" many changes have taken place in the last half-century and more. But the early settlers with far sightedness planted twigs of cottonwood which soon grew into large trees. A row on each side marked the way for miles, not as an avenue, thickly set but at intervals, some distance apart. Travelers jogging along the dusty roads or farmers plodding along to market with heavy loads of grain often stopped their horses for a rest in the shade of these trees from the hot summer sun. They must have blessed the early settlers for their thoughtfulness.

One such tree stood on the corner 2 miles N of Highway 41. It towered above all the other trees, which it outlived a decade or more. It served as a landmark for many years but also as a target for lightning aimed at the highest object around. Each strike stripped it of bark, limbs, and branches until it was no longer a thing of beauty and was cut down and used as firewood. All that remains of those trees are a few stumps by the roadside which refuse to be moved by wind or high water.

If a boy or girl of 60 years ago were to appear along the county line today he would find few of the people he used to know. There are no Adams left, where seven families in a row each had boys named Adam. The same families each had a John, but that is not uncommon even today. In fact, so few people are living along the county line that he would scarcely recognize the farms without their houses and other buildings.

Many things of the first half-century in Fillmore County that the children of today have missed, they will not see again.

There was the Irish linen peddler with his pack of linens and laces walking a hundred miles and more on his trip each way from house to house.

The Arab peddler traveled an easier way but scarcely any faster. His one-horse open vehicle, the back of which was equipped with a covered box, held his wares. Happy the boy or girl at whose home the peddler was allowed to spend the night, as they were assured some gift from his pack: toys, fancy combs, brooches, ear rings, beads, etc. Baubles they were, but wonderful in the eyes of the young. Other articles they had, too: bolts of silks and satins, fine laces, gay colored scarfs, and handkerchiefs.

The Abdallahs and Aliases had their favorite stopping places where they knew they were welcome to spend their weekends, while in the vicinity. Often as many as four or five would be gathered together to spend their Sunday talking over their week's sales and experiences. To their credit, none was ever known to break the trust placed in them or take advantage of their hosts' hospitality. A slow way of making a living, you might say, but nevertheless many of these peddlers were able to establish themselves in large towns and set up stores of their own.

On a Sunday afternoon you might see a young man approaching the home of his lady love on foot or on horseback, and if you were too young for romance yourself you would hurry to announce to your elder sister that her beau was coming, at which announcement she would pin a pretty bow or ribbon in her pompadour, add a dash of talcum powder on her cheeks — no rouge or lipstick — and would welcome him into the parlor or the porch hammock. If you were the inquisitive kind you might peek from some vantage point to see him present her with a box of bonbons or to draw from his vest pocket one of the dainty little name cards so popular in those days, or he might present her with his silk neckerchief which many of the swains wore and gave to their favorite lady friend.

If the beau were lucky enough to have a horse and buggy you could see rings on his harness at some distance as he cracked his whip to show off a bit before his admiring girl friend.

On a Sunday afternoon, too, you might see all sorts of vehicles gathered in a pasture with horses tied to fence posts and discover a game of ball was in progress. After the game there would be a horse race. The boys who rode the horses then have grandsons who are the hot-rod racers of today.

All was not hard work in those early days. There were parties, house dances, barn dances, school programs, etc. There were sleighrides in bob sleds or cutters, with the passengers bundled up and tucked in under horsehide lap robes. There were spelling bees and lyceums. If these programs did nothing else, they taught folks to stand on their feet and talk in public. At each program there would be a debate on some subject close to the lives of the people. Debating teams from one school would challenge those from some other district.

"A Reporter at Large"

The following paragraphs are from a newspaper article written by P. J. Kennedy at the turn of the century, listing the people who lived in Bennett township.

Bennett joins Grafton township on the south and is one of the finest townships in the county. We never met finer people. Their homes are cheerful and happy.

The first man we met on the trip was C. C. Kavanaugh. Mr. Kavanaugh owns 160 acres of land and has 30 acres of wheat, 20 acres of oats, and 40 acres of corn.

We took dinner with W. C. Lange. Mr. Lange owns 160 acres of fine land. He has the following crops this year: 50 acres of wheat, 20 acres of oats, and 40 acres of corn. The rest of his farm is pasture and hay land.

We called to see Mike Oberlander but he wasn't at home. He has a fine quarter of land.

John Oswald has a beautiful farm and his buildings are all new.

Joseph Oberlander was taking his noonday nap when we called and we were a little afraid to disturb him but he came out in good humor. Mr. Oberlander has a fine 160 and we are pleased to say he is doing well.

John Zieren has just completed a new house and has otherwise improved his farm. He is a strong Republican but his politics do not prevent him from being the good fellow he is.

George Martin is living on the W. G. Hainey farm. Mr. Martin bade us welcome and treated us like gentlemen in every way. We wish him a long and prosperous life.

William F. Van Patton is farming a fine quarter section. He has the following crops: 80 acres of wheat and 60 acres of corn.

Harm Evarts is farming 160 and has the following crops: 50 acres of wheat, 30 acres of oats, and 50 acres of corn.

G. W. McCormick was very busily engaged cultivating corn. Mr. McCormick is farming a very fine 160 and his crops look fine.

J. J. Gibbons is farming 240 acres and has the following acreage planted to crops: 90 acres of wheat, 25 acres of oats, and 75 acres of corn. Mr. Gibbons is a pleasant man to visit with.

Charles Burns owns a fine 240 acres and we are glad that we happened around his place about dinner time. We stand ready at any time to speak a kind word for Charles Burns.

The next man we met on this route was Ed Lawless. Ed was asleep when we came to his place, taking his noonday nap. Mr. Lawless and family are nice people to visit with.

P. W. Murray lives along this line. In addition to being a big farmer Mr. Murray is chief justice of the supreme court of Bennett township, a position he very creditably fills to the entire satisfaction of his constituents. The people say his decisions are final.

Here we met our political friend, the Hon. Richard Dobson. Mr. Dobson was not studying politics when we ran fer-nist him. Oh, no; on the contrary, he was very busily engaged mowing alfalfa hay. He owns 240 acres of choice farm land.

Anthony Buttell owns 320 acres of splendid land on this line. He has just completed a fine new house.

John and Carl Stengel both are big farmers and are happy and contented.

J. B. Garrison and brothers own a section of almighty fine land.

Louis Oswald is making money and doing well. Mr. Oswald owns 240 acres of nice land and we wish him prosperity.

Pat and John Sullivan are young men who are farming 240 acres of land. They have quite a large crop of everything and it looks well.

P. J. Case is an old settler having lived on his present farm 31 years. We enjoyed our visit with Mr. Case and hope sometime in the future we may be able to call again.



Photo from Mrs. Sam Huntley
Taken in 1921 on Highway 41. Moving the second E. U. B. Church from Clay County.

G. H. Meyers was hoeing in his garden when we called to say hello. Mr. Meyers and his family are among the best people in Bennett township.

David Kreichbaum is another one of the good citizens of Bennett township. Mr. Kreichbaum owns a beautiful and well improved farm.

P. H. Hoarty owns 320 acres of land on this line and has his place stocked with a fine herd of cattle. Mr. Hoarty said he was doing well.

Fred Bieser lives right across the road from Mr. Hoarty's. Mr. Bieser has a good crop but we are sorry to say he is not having very good health. We hope to soon hear of his return to good health.



Photo from Mrs. Sam Huntley taken in 1914
Grace United Brethren Church. Right to left: Rev. Trace, minister; Rev. Durham, a missionary; Mrs. Durham, Mrs. Trace, and Rev. Durham's daughter.

We turned in for the night with John Sheridan. We knew John and his family when they lived down by Exeter. Mr. Sheridan has a fine home and his hospitality is known the entire country over. He is the assessor for Bennett township and so far as we heard has given entire satisfaction, a fact we like to mention.

We stopped for dinner with George M. White and a finer dinner we never sat down to. The kindness of Mr. White and his family is appreciated. We were invited to call again and that is just what we will do some day soon.

J. A. Johnson has a fine 160 and is treasurer of Bennett township. The funds of Bennett township are safe in the hand of Mr. Johnson.

G. E. Mitchell is farming 160 acres of choice land. He has the following acreage sowed to crops: 100 acres of corn and 50 acres of wheat.

L. F. Launstein is another farmer who has a mighty lovely home. Everything about the place looked clean and neat and this is why we think he is prosperous and doing well.

Well, we meandered along till we came to Henry Fessler's place. Mr. Fessler is supervisor from the third district and is sure enough a jolly fellow to meet. When his term of office expires we think the people will say, well done thou good and faithful servant.



Photo from Nellie Sheridan
Camp meeting on Church grounds (about 1914). Rev. and Mrs. Durham were the missionaries. Seated in second row from front, left to right: Mrs. Brotherton, lady unknown, man unknown, Mrs. Samuel B. Mann, Mr. Burroughs, between Mrs. Mann and Mrs. Ezra Harrington, Mrs. Burroughs, between Mrs. Harrington and Mrs. Solberg, Albert Talkington holding child.

J. J. and Dan Murray own a large tract in this locality. We didn't have time to call on the boys but the neighbors all told us that they are doing nicely.

Julius Schinzel lives over on the north line of Bennett. Somehow we could never catch him home before. Mr. Schinzel is quite a large farmer and a good one, too.

When we called to see A. F. Schulz we found him sick in bed.

Mr. Schulz, Sr., owns a fine farm on the Bennett and Geneva township line.

Charles Whitaker wasn't at home when we called.

Bernard Rotter was cultivating corn and we stopped to say a word with him. Mr. Rotter owns a fine farm of 160 acres.

August Rotter is farming 160 acres of land. He has the following crops: Wheat 25 acres, oats 15 acres, and 80 acres of corn.

We found T. O. Huston making hog pasture. He had just received a consignment of wire from Cleveland, Ohio, and was busy getting it in shape. Mr. Huston has 30 acres planted to peach trees and they are bearing some this year. His farm is a veritable paradise with trees and flowers. We will slip back some day when the peaches are ripe.

C. B. Sypher is farming the E. A. Cushing farm.

We called to see John O'Brien but he was down in Omaha with a carload of hogs. Mr. O'Brien owns 720 acres of land. He also owns something like 150 head of cattle and about *three acres of hogs*. When Mr. O'Brien came to Fillmore County he didn't have the beautiful home one sees today, but he worked hard and had the help of a good wife, and then his boys grew up and little by little wealth came his way until finally he triumphed and today he is reputed one of the best fixed men in Fillmore County. The writer is glad to note this fact because we know Mr. O'Brien to be a splendid citizen.

David Isley, Ole N. Karlberg, and C. J. Lundberg were people we called on.

S. B. Mann owns 400 acres of choice land in Bennett township. Mr. Mann paid us a goodly sum on subscriptions for which he has our hearty thanks.

William Stollendorf and Oscar Solberg live along this line. Both are good farmers.

We are now at work in Momence township and are happy to say that our success in the past has been far beyond our expectations. We always speak with respect for those who don't agree with our politics. —P. J. K.

THE OBLINGER LETTERS

Greatly enriching the early history of Fillmore County are the Oblinger Letters. These consist of a series of letters written through the years 1872 to 1880 by a young homesteader, Uriah W. Oblinger, and his wife, Martha Thomas Oblinger, to members of Mrs. Oblinger's family back in their old home in Indiana. Not written for publication, they give an intimate first-hand description of life on a Fillmore County homestead.

Beginning with the young homesteader's determination to have a home of his own, they provide a vivid picture of almost every phase of homestead life. The search for a claim, the filing thereon, building of the sod house, breaking the first sod, the Easter blizzard of 1873, the grasshopper years, hard times, etc., are all there.

The Oblingers' letters were preserved by the Thomas family, who recently presented them to the Nebraska State Historical Society. To the courtesy of the Historical Society and the kindness of Mrs. William Lennemann of Orleans, Nebraska, to whose mother most of the letters were written, and of Mrs. Margaret Oblinger Sandon of Denver, Colorado, the youngest daughter of the Oblingers, who was born on the homestead on October 11, 1877, we are indebted for the privilege of including a few extracts from them in this history of our county.¹

These letters are of particular interest to the authors of the Bennett precinct story, as the Oblinger homestead was in that immediate locality. The homestead map of Fillmore County (see Bennett homestead map) shows that it was located on the SW ¼ of Sec. 32, on the present Highway 41, 1¼ miles east of the Clay County line and in the same section with the Mann homestead. The Oblinger land, now the Nuss estate; the Giles Thomas land, now the Henry J. Kamler estate, was cornered on the northwest by the E.U.B. Church

¹ There are many more letters than those we have chosen extracts from to quote here. The Historical Society hopes to publish the whole collection at some future date.

by the one in which the writer's home is located.

Mrs. Oblinger's older brother, Giles Thomas, from whose dugout house many of the letters were written, lived on the SE ¼ of Sec. 4, Momence township, which cornered Sec. 32 of Bennett, the Oblinger section. A younger brother, Sam, sometimes referred to in the letters as "Doc," lived on a homestead. The homesteads of many of those mentioned in the letters may be found in these maps.

Giles, Sam, and Uriah had come to the county in October, 1872, in search of homesteads. Giles, a soldier, took his homestead on the SE ¼ of Sec. 4, Momence, now the Henry J. Kamler home where Carl Kamler lives. Sam had taken land in Sec. 2, Momence.

In one letter Uriah speaks of his determination to have a home of his own; of his search for a claim; of his intention to jump an abandoned claim; of the procedure required for doing so; and of the wonderful land, smooth-lying and "rich as cream." He mentions a number of neighbors, such as a Mr. Entwisle and a Mr. Elliott. It should be understood that although the ordinary claim jumper was universally despised, no opprobrium was attached to a man who "jumped" a fully abandoned claim. Jumping, or contesting, of a fully abandoned claim was reliably estimated at 2½ filings on every homestead claim in Nebraska. The average was probably not that high in Fillmore County. —Nellie Sheridan



Photo from Nebraska State Historical Society
Uriah W. Oblinger family about 1874: Uriah W., daughter Ella, and wife Martha Thomas.

[*Editor's Note:* The letters—or extracts from letters—that follow are printed exactly as they were written except for very minor changes in punctuation and paragraphing.]

Uriah W. Oblinger to his wife, Martha ("Mattie") Thomas Oblinger:

Sabbath Nov. 17, 1872
At Giles House

Dear Wife and Baby:

You guess right when you think I am homesick. But it is not to go back to Indiana. It is to secure a home right here and that I think can be done. It is going to cost some privations, but I have made up my mind to stand them for the sake of a home.

I know it will seem pretty rough to those who have never tried to do without wood or timber, but it looks rougher on paper than the reality seems. As to water, there is plenty of it by digging pretty deep. And good too, and never failing. As to the streams, I do not want land with one of the streams here on it, for they are very crooked, cutting the land up bad and the banks are so steep that they are hard to get down to. Besides, there is considerably fever and ague along them and the land is pretty sandy, too. Back from the streams is a better quality of soil, no fever and ague, and the land is very even and nice and almost every section near here can every foot be plowed and cultivated with a very few exceptions. The claim that Giles and Sam has taken can every foot be plowed.

South of us the land is more broken, being a good many wet places and hilly between.

There was Methodist preaching last Sunday about 4 miles south of here. Two weeks from today there is preaching by the same man at Brother Elliott's $\frac{1}{4}$ mile east from here. An Englishman, Mr. Entwisle (a bachelor Nett with 160 acres), said if the neighbors would build a sod church he would furnish the wood all winter for it. So you can see what church privileges are at present.

I like the neighborhood pretty well. There are several English families here and I think they are good neighbors. I have been hunting for a good claim ever since I came from Beatrice but all the good ones are taken that are near here but I have found one nor-west of here about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles that is a splendid piece of land that was homesteaded about a year ago and the man is in Michigan and don't intend to come to it and has never done any work on it. It is in the Lincoln district and tomorrow I start there to jump it as he has forfeited all claims to it by not commencing improvements in six months. All I can do this trip is enter complaint against it and go through legal form to have it canceled. It will cost \$10.50 besides the homestead fee when the papers come back from Washington canceling it from the present homesteader back to the government.

I will mail this at Lincoln and tell you the success I meet there. I have traded my wagon off for another and got \$27 to boot. I have also traded my shotgun off for a rifle. Oh, I killed a wild goose last week. It made 4 messes for us big eaters. I set right on Jenny's back and shot when I killed it. I can drop the bridle and shoot whenever I please and she will stand like an old sheep. I think more of her every day. She is fat enough now for any use and I have drove her about 1,000 miles since I started besides what I have rode her hunting for a claim. Old Nelly's ribs stick out in spite of me. Besides, she hurt me this morning but hurt herself as bad while she was doing it. I took her out of the stable to exercise a little and started across the prairie riding her with a halter and when I started back she run with me and I could not get her stopped till she run on some plowing close to the stable and fell, pitching me over her head and turning a somerset after me and rolled on my left leg with my right sticking up over her belly and no one near me to help me out.

I caught her by the forelegs to keep her from striking me in the face and head with them while she pounded me in the back and ribs with her hind feet and I tell you I held manfully trying to turn her over from me to keep her from killing me. I finally succeeded by her struggles to raise her enough to draw my leg out and it was useless for a while, I tell you. She skinned her head in three places and cut a small gash about an inch long in the front of her shoulder. The boys are gone about 28 miles from here to husk corn on the shares and Mr. DeWolf had started to his brother-in-law's about 18 miles from here so you see I was entirely alone and had to get out the best I could. Well, I must do up my evening chores and then more will be written.

November 20, 1872

Well, I promised to write more as soon as my chores were done but Mr. Elliott and wife came and spent the evening with us so I did not write any more and here I am in Crete at the Hotel 20 miles southwest of Lincoln where I have been to complain against a homestead. I am in a fair way now for a home but I will have to make 2 trips to Lincoln yet. My trial for the claim is the 20th of December when I will have to appear at the land office in Lincoln with 2 witnesses to prove that the man has been gone more than 6 months and has never did anything on it. Then the papers will be sent to Washington and his claim canceled and as soon as they come back I can homestead it, which may be 2 or 3 months yet. But I am sure of a home now and there is not a square inch of it but what is rich as cream and can be plowed and I can stand almost anywhere on [it] and see it all. There is a well near the corner of it only 67 feet deep, which is shallow for this country. Giles well is 124 feet deep. There is 3 families living by my claim so that I can build on any part of it and they will not be over $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from us and all native born

Americans so you see we will be better off for neighbors than we expected to be. We have had some very cold breezes from the Nor-west that make a fellow shiver, I tell [you]. But I am not scared yet and to tell my opinion I like it better every day that I am here.

I took dinner today with Mr. Vandoran (Joe's uncle) and I tell you they [were] glad to see me come in. They said it did them good to see some one from their old neighborhood. They are living in the best house they were ever in and are doing well and are well pleased, so you see when I go to Lincoln I will have some place to get my grub — and I tell you it takes a lot to do me now. I can eat from the time I get up till bed time and go to bed hungry. If it serves you so when you get here it will take all we can raise to eat. I have not seen Giles and Sam since Monday week. They went off toward Beatrice 28 miles to gather corn on the shares and left me hunting for a claim. Sam need not stay on his land only go to it and stay a short time every six months and then go off and work somewhere and put his wages in improvements is all the law requires of a single man. There is a great many of them here doing that way and [it] is the best thing they can do. I think if Father was here he would be tempted to do just as we did when he would see the land. There is a good many come just to look but as soon as they see the land they go to the land office as fast as they can get there.

Well, Ma [Uriah's pet name for Mattie], I have got Plato yet and I am going to keep him just for you. He killed two skunks last week and we had plenty of musk for a while. It made him awful sick; he vomited like everything. You ought to see him chase the swifts. They are similar to a fox only smaller. There is but one dog in the neighborhood that can out-run him; he can run almost as fast as a greyhound.

I am going to try to get hauling here and if so I will gather corn on the shares. Well, Ma and Baby, a sweet good-night and may God keep you from harm and bring you safe to my western home.

—Your loving husband

Uriah to Mattie:

Sabbath December 1, 1872

At Giles House

Dear Wife and Baby:

I am again at the pen talking to you through its silent medium and a great satisfaction it is to be thus blessed but more so if you were here with me and us occupying the homestead I have in view. . . .

Ma, I don't want you to get discouraged about our situation yet, for I am not. I did not come here to be baffled off so easily. I am going to have my land before I leave here if I live and have health, if I have to sell my team and take the money to live on, and live here alone till I can get a deed for a piece of land, and then I am confident that I can live when I have 160 acres of my own. So you can just make up your mind that I am going to have a home for Ma and Pet. When once my homestead papers are filed on a piece of land you can hold it as well as me, if I am called away; and if I am called before [the papers are filed], you can homestead 160 acres and hold it, for the law says soldiers' widows and orphans can have the same right as the soldier himself; even the guardian for a soldier's orphan can take a piece for the orphan as well as the soldier himself. Some are doing so at this time. So you see Uncle Sam has been mindful of those who stood by the country in her hour of peril by providing in a great measure for those who were ever nearest and dearest to us.

Well, Ma, we were all at church today and a good meeting we had. Some got up and said they wanted to cast their influence on the side of Christianity that were not professors. This is more than they will do in Indiana, where there is more and better church privileges than we have here.

Ma, the longer I stay here the better I like it. There are but very few old families here. They are mostly young families just starting in life, the same as we are, and I find them very generous indeed. We will all be poor here together and grow up together and I hope be happy together.

Ma, you know I was saying when I left home, just for

fun, I would be a single man when I got here, but I soon found that did not pay. When I would ask anyone to show me vacant land, about the next question was: Have you a family? When I answered in the affirmative they were ready to show me a claim, for they are anxious for people to come in who will be permanent settlers, for that is what we need to make the country. Nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the claims here are taken by single men. The section that Giles is on has 3 single men. The one that Doc is on has 3 and you might say 4, for one man came from England and left his wife in Chicago till he could come and get a claim, and when he wrote for her she sent him word that she was going back to England and would not come, so he is here alone. Is that the way you are going to serve me, dear wife? If it is, just send our baby, and then I guess Ma will come too. . . .

Well, I have been down to tend Mr. Robinson's things for him (he has gone to Beatrice as a witness for Mr. DeWolf) and when I came back Mr. Elliott and his wife were here, so I did not get to writing till just now. . . .

Ma, you know I expected to be a good way off from neighbors when I left home, and you will know by my former letter that I am happily mistaken, and I think, taking everything into view, we have good neighbors. I do not know of one near that drinks, and we can count the improvements on some 75 to 80 farms from here, and that is more than we can say of our old neighborhood. . . .

Well, Ma, I must tell you something about prices out here. We can buy Sterne's make of goods right here for about 5 cents more per yard than it costs at retail at the factory, his flannels and his jeans both. And groceries and other goods are no higher than they are in Indiana.

I am trying to make a trade with a man for his cow. He wants a well and I am trying to get the job of digging it for the cow. . . .

I am not discouraged yet nor anywhere near it, and the longer I stay here the better I like it. I think that there is a bright future for Nebraska and us with it. I think you will certainly like it here, for mud there has been none yet to speak of and never is. There is always nice grass to walk on and the best roads in the world. You can go at all times and never mud bound. . . .

I think that anyone that is not able to own a farm in Indiana or any of the older states and make their living by farming are foolish for staying [there] any longer than just to get enough to live on. If I had come here when we were first married and put in as many hard licks here as I have there, I would have a farm of my own now pretty well improved; as it is, I am just where I was then — just starting. It is going to be rough starting, as I always told you, but when started it will be ours. I want you to make up your mind to have to take it rough for a few years and then you will not be disappointed. I will make the way as smooth as I can for you, but the best will be rough. Those that are here seem to be as happy as larks. They are all homesteaders yet there is not more than one in 25 that has a deed for their land.

Uriah to Mattie:

Lincoln, Nebraska
Sabbath, December 22, 1872

Dear Wife and Baby:

I am at Lincoln this evening, and the boys, I suppose, are looking for me out in Fillmore County. I was to have been back this evening. I left there last Wednesday morning and came to the trial for my claim on Friday at 1:00 P.M. It was decided in my favor, so you can rest now as I know where I am going to make our home. . . .

After my trial I got ready to start back and it commenced snowing, and as there is a very wild country between here and Crete and the distance 20 miles or more and the time 3 o'clock, I concluded to stay till Saturday morning. (I am stopping at Mr. Vandoran's.) Well, Friday evening 2 men called to spend the evening here, and lucky for me it was, too, for they were wanting teams to haul ice, and as the horse disease is here they were hard to get, so I got work right on the spot and there will probably be more chances when I am through this job. It will be some 7 or 8 days' work for me at

\$3 per day and board myself. I only brought the clothes I had on, but I thought I would put up with anything to be earning something. My horses I thought had just the common distemper till I came here (and very light at that) but here they tell me it is the horse disease. If it is, they have had it very light and are about over it.

There is another chance here soon for teaming or at least I think so. If they get the iron soon for a railroad they are building here, I can get to haul ties. If I can get work here I will stay all winter.

[He calculated that steady winter work would provide enough money to send for his family early in the spring. But he wrote home on January 26, 1873, that he had worked only three days for the railroad. Then old Nelly fell and hurt herself; after nursing her back to health, he sold her for \$100. Although the railroad had recruited labor by promising to pay promptly on the 20th of each month, he discovered that the company was involved in a management squabble back East and had not paid any of its local bills since "October last." For his three days' pay, he had to argue — successfully, he reported with pride — and then got not cash but an order for coal and groceries, which Mr. Vandoran managed to turn into cash for him.]

Uriah to Mattie:

Bachelors' Hall, Fillmore County
March 23, 1873

[He is still at Giles's house, but looking forward to the arrival of his wife and baby girl, who are due to start West just one month from that date.]

. . . Plows have been going full blast for 2 weeks now, and all the spring wheat is sowed and some oats. The grass is starting a little but it is too dry for anything to grow very fast. We need a warm [rain] now to freshen things a little. We have had but one soaking rain since we have been in the state, and that was soon after we came here around the last of October. We get our rain here in the summer time and none in the winter. Besides, the soil is of such a nature that it holds moisture a long time. We have had no rain for about 5 months and but little snow, and yet the ground is moist within an inch of the top. What we most need rain for now is a warm one to warm up the ground. . . .

Oh, yes, don't forget any of my books. Bring every one from least to largest, for I am going to look over my school books and teach next winter. . . .

Mattie to her mother and family:

May 19th 1873

At home in our own house, and a sod at that, and just ate dinner. Dear friends as I have an opportunity to send a letter to the office I will send you a few hastily composed lines.

Billie Mote came to our house Saturday morning, he is going to Grafton this afternoon so I will not have time to write much. We have [had] considerable of rain since I came here. Saturday night it rained very hard. It is too wet to plant corn. Some are ready but have to wait a day or so for the ground to dry off. The plants and strawberries that I brought I put on Giles' place. I was looking at them last evening. They look very promising, the Dialetre especially. We went to Mr. Cambels yesterday to church and Sabbath school. They live seven miles south of here. The minister failed to come so there was society meeting. The Cambels are real Kentuckians, wish you could hear them talk. We took dinner with them.

Uriah and Billie are talking. WAC is lying on the lounge and Ella is teasing him for his book. We moved into our house last Wednesday (U.W.O. birthday). I suppose you would like to see us in our sod house. It is not quite so convenient as a nice frame but I would as soon live in it as the cabins I have lived in and then we are at home which makes it more comfortable. I ripped our wagon sheet in two, have it around two sides and several papers up so the boys think it looks real well. Uriah's made a bedstead and a lounge so [we] could have something to sleep on. The only objection I have we have no floor yet. Will be better this fall. I got one tea cup and saucer and the corner of the glass on the little hero picture broken. Pretty good luck, I think. My goods got here two days before I did. Uriah had taken them out to Mr. Houks. Uriah was plowing sod this forenoon talks of planting some this afternoon. He has 20 acres sur-

rounded, have 10 of it broke. Doc and Billie and Uriah C. stayed with us. I know you would have laughed to see us fixing their bed. We set boxes to the side of the lounge and enlarged Uriah's bed for all of them. We enjoyed the fun and they enjoyed their bed as much as if they had been in a nice parlor bedroom. U. C. and Doc sung while I got supper. They call Doc "Sam" out here, sounds very odd to me. Wish you could see his whiskers shaved all off but what is on his chin and lip. I told him I wanted some to send you but he could not see it. He has worked one day at his house.

I have got acquainted with some here. They are not hard to get acquainted with. The boys went to Sutton Saturday afternoon. I went along to see the town and country. On our way we seen three antelopes. U.C. shot at them for fun. Charlie, if you was here you would never get done looking for you can see ever so far. Coming from Sutton we could see the county seat which was 11 miles from us. We got a letter from you. U.C. says tell Kate D. that he glories in her spunk and for peace and joy to go with her but she must not do so when she comes to Nebraska. There is some here looks as though they would like for some girls would come around. I am real sorry to hear of Aunt Eliza's ailments. Hope she may get well soon. I saw J. Arnwot on the cars, he told me that two of the Swigart boys and their wives started to Oregon the same morning I started so Rose Thomas has gone farther west than I have. The other woman was a Larose.

I am washing today. This afternoon is little cloudy with the sun shining occasionally. Ella is as hearty as she can be and has an appetite like a little horse. I never cooked for such appetites as I have since I been here. Sometimes I think I will cook enough of some things for two meals but the boys clean them every time.

We are all well. I must close for this time. I am as ever, your sister and daughter. Our love to all. —M. V. O.

Mattie to her family:

At Giles's, Monday morning
August 25, 1873

. . . Yesterday we had preaching (Methodist). I feel sorry for our preacher [Mr. Heckman] for he is so timid. It seems as though he has no confidence in himself and it hurts his speaking very much. He is a very poor man. Has a home-stead and of course, like the rest of us he must work hard and he has not much time to prepare sermons for Sunday and he has always been a local preacher. He says he will try to keep us together until conference and then perhaps we may get someone else that can preach better. We may get a better speaker but no better man. The Presbyterian preacher will be here in two weeks so we will have preaching every Sunday now after this and Sunday School, too. . . .

Mattie to her family:

[Undated, but probably about
December, 1873]

I think Geo. and Griffin would do well to come west if their money will not go far enough there for them. If they don't watch the corners pretty close we will be as well off as they are in a few years. We can say now that we own 160 acres. All it wants is improving and I am sure it is a healthy place. Poor little Earny, it is too bad he must have the chills so much. If I was them I would be willing to sacrifice some of my enjoyments to endure a few privations for the sake of having health in my family. I am very sure they would be healthier here but *I shall not* urge them to come for fear they would not be satisfied and then we would be to blame. Do you ever hear how Al Shoap likes the west. Is he in the grasshopper regions? Tell Doc we will write to him soon to be patient and wait. I am anxiously waiting for the barrel to come. Think we will get it this week or next. I assure you we will feel very thankful to you all for what is in it. Oh, yes, we got a dime worth of Banbo apples in Fairmont which was seven. I tell you they were good. Ella thought so. I left her at Mr. Heley's when we went to Fairmont. Well, I will have to stop writing. Guess there is a piece of paper for each of you this time.

Mattie to her family:

April 25, 1874

. . . I wish we could get a good preacher to preach for us. I think after our schoolhouse is finished we will have to try to get Bro. Heckman started again. We did not go to hear Father Spears last Sunday as Uriah had been working the oxen so hard it looked like a sin to drive so far with them on Sunday and I was very glad we did not go for about noon it commenced raining and rained very hard in the afternoon. . . .

Mattie to her family: [Undated, but apparently between
April and November, 1874]

. . . dinner and just come home from Sabbath School. But few were out. Some that attended were at a dance last night and of course feel too badly used up to go to Sabbath School. There was a special few of us there and only 3 families of us that make any profession at all and those that don't want to, run the thing to suit themselves. Are too contrary to listen to anything but their own will and you know that will not work. But however, we have hope that it will be different after a while. As there are so few regular in attendance it is hard to hit upon any regular routine of business each Sunday. Consequently we will do the best we can. . . .

Mattie to her family:

November 24, 1874

. . . I have said nothing about being at church for a long time. Well, we have had no meeting for quite a while as our old minister had quite a hard spell of sickness this fall and has not been able to preach since. Some think he is done preaching. We are getting real hungry for meeting. I think if ever there was a missionary needed, there is one needed here. There is a plenty of work to do. There are but few men here that can preach and support their families too, and the people are not forehanded enough to hire a minister. How I would like to be in a genuine old Methodist meeting once more. I suppose it will soon be time for you to have protracted meeting again. How I would like to attend one of them. . . .

Mattie to her family:

January 11, 1880

While Uriah sings and the girls wash the dinner dishes the preacher and his wife drives up so here is a stop.

Monday evening after supper the preacher and wife stayed all night. Brother Johnson preaches every two weeks for us — preaches after night. Mrs. Johnson and I did not go as it was rather cold for her to go. She has a babe only 2 months old. It was fretful all evening after they came. Brother Johnson is a splendid preacher and he is well thought of. He came on this work in October. (We have our Conferences in the fall.) I never saw his wife before last evening. I like her appearance very much. She seems so common and sociable. Brother Johnson is a Kentuckian. He has been in this state 23 years. Last night before he started to church he said "Now, Sister Oblinger, as you are not going to church I would like some corn bread and sweet milk for my supper when I get back and that is all I want." I had it ready for him and how he did feast on it. I cooked other things but he just ate his corn bread and milk. When they started home we gave them a jug of fresh milk, some meal and butter and potatoes. It does not insult them to give them eatables like it did the man that was on the work before him.

Well, now, something else. Uriah is repairing the minutes of their last literary society which was held last Saturday night. They have some big times debating. The question for next Saturday night is "Resolved, that Intemperance causes more sorrow than War. . . ."

[The following letter about her parents was written by Maggie Sandon. To whom it was written is not known, and it bears no date. The location of the manuscript letter is also not known. The Oblinger letters given above were checked against their originals at the Historical Society; this letter follows, with no changes whatever, the typescript given to the compilers of this history:]

Uriah W. Oblinger and Martha V. Thomas married March 25, 1869, near Onward Cass Co. Indiana. Lived in that vicinity til the fall of 1872. Uriah and his brother, Horace,

and Sam and Giles Thomas (Martha's brothers) decided to go west. Traveled in two covered wagons. Landed in Fillmore County, Nebraska. Uriah took a homestead. Giles bought a mans right who wanted to leave. Giles was 31, would be 32 Dec. 16, 1872. Sam filed on an 80 acre homestead — the West ½ of the NW ¼ of 8-6-4 and remained in Fillmore Co. at least a year. Sam returned to Indiana without taking land. A small house was on the place Giles bought so Uriah and Giles lived there; also a straw covered sod stable. Uriah did not build on his land that fall. Took his team and went to Lincoln where he got work till spring. Returned to his homestead to build a sod house. The walls were up and ready to put on the roof when the terrible Easter storm on April 13, 1873. A three day blizzard. Some people lost their lives and much of the stock perished. Uriah was still living at Giles house so they were safe, but could not get to the barn to feed and water the horses (3 days).

When Uriah went west in the fall of 1872 he left his wife and a 2 year old daughter (Ella) at the Thomas home. When the sod house was ready in the spring of 1873, he sent for them. Martha had kept the dishes and bedding. Uriah had taken 2 chairs and a small cook stove with him in the wagon. Dishes and bedding were shipped to Crete, Nebraska (Railroad was not built through Fillmore Co. yet) (R.R. was completed through Fillmore in Aug. 1871 but due to a quarrel between the town fathers the R.R., trains did not stop in Sutton at that time.) Uriah met them in Crete. Ella was only 2½ years old but could faintly remember it and how glad they were to all be together again.

A home was established in a "little old sod shanty on the claims." Uriah had plowed some land, and planted, wheat and corn. Also a garden and got a few chickens and a couple of little pigs. Wheat had been harvested; corn was just tasseling nicely. It was getting dry so they were wishing for rain. This was in 1874.

At dinner one day Uriah wondered if it was going to rain as it seemed to be getting dark. "I can't see the sun," he remarked. On going outdoors, he called his wife, "Come out here, I never seen anything like this." The air was so full of grass hoppers, they could not see the sun. They soon began dropping and settled on all growing things, till everything was covered. Chickens ate hoppers until they could hold no more. Uriah turned the pigs out. They ate hoppers also till they could eat no more. Uriah thought he might save the corn by mixing trash and manure together. Martha drove the team while Uriah put the mixture in small piles. It was somewhat damp, so he set it on fire to cause a smudge; this kept the hoppers off for a while, but when the smoke ceased they soon had the corn. Every thing was gone in a 24 hour period. All green vegetation except the buffalo grass was gone. Pumpkins and squash were near enough ripe so the eating of the vine leaves did not spoil them.

Hoppers stayed only a few days and left as suddenly as they came. Evidently left no eggs as there were no hoppers next year.

The stove they had was a little No. 7 cast iron one. The house was built all one room. Corn stalks left by the hoppers dried up. Uriah would cut and tie them in bundles, carry in and store them in a corner by the stove. Then would cut them stove size, with his pocket knife. That was all the fuel they had except a little wood he had hauled from Elk Creek about 25 miles away. Sod houses are warm so they did not have it too bad.

The first season on the homestead they had no milk, butter, meat or lard.

Uriah had made a table and some stools from the boxes the goods had been sent in from Indiana. Also bought a little lumber and made two bedsteads, so those with a few boxes from the stove was all the furniture they had.

On Feb. 4, 1875, I (Ella) saw an Indian for the first time.¹ The date is remembered for that night a sister (Estella) was born.

¹ As this account is presumably Maggie Sandon's, and there is now no way of checking sources, this curious reference to "I (Ella)" is unexplainable; we can do no more than print it as written.

At dinner Uriah saw a man walking across the prairie, thought it was a neighbor, but soon saw it was an Indian. Martha had just finished baking bread. Uriah took it and hurried to the cellar. (An Indian will not go into a cellar so the bread was safe.) Indian just walked in — they never knock—and said "How." He carried a gun. Uriah took it and set it back in a corner out of the Indians reach, and managed to keep between the Indian and his gun. The Indian took a little red purse out of his pocket (he was wearing pants) and a blanket around him with a narrow strip of pink calico wrapped around his head. His hair was hanging to his shoulders. He held out the purse and said "five cents." Uriah said "no money." Then he said "pork" and pointed to his mouth. Wanted meat. Uriah said "no pork." They gave him food which he ate sitting by the stove, then he left and Uriah gave him his gun after he was outside. Uriah had to bring the dog inside to keep him from attacking the Indian. Ella was only 4½ years old, but remembers it all quite vividly. Uriah broke out more land that year, 1875. Set out some trees and the homestead began to look better. Built a larger sod house and put in a floor. The first only had the hard packed dirt. Also dug a well. Had been hauling water from a neighbor. Had a garden now, so they began to live a little better. A neighbor (widow) let them have 2 cows on the shares so they had milk and butter. They had to sell the pigs that ate the grass hoppers for lack of corn to feed them. After getting the cows they got a pig so that year they had meat.

In those days they took wheat and corn to the mill, about 20 miles North, for grinding. Toll of a certain number of pounds for each bushel was taken by the mill to pay for the grinding. A nice crop of potatoes also was raised that summer. On October 11, 1877 another girl was born — Maggie Esther. Good crops on what land was cultivated was making homestead life look better. Then in Feb. 1880 Martha became very ill in confinement. After 3 days she passed away, and the child (a little boy) born dead, was buried in the mothers arms. She was about the first buried in what was then the "Dave Myers" cemetery. Name now is Fairview. I believe it is about 11 miles West of Geneva and 3 miles South. The homestead was 11 miles west of Geneva on the north side of the road. It is the South West Quarter of the section 32-7-4. Uriah stayed on the homestead that summer. Hired washing done and the bread baked. Also had help during harvesting and threshing.



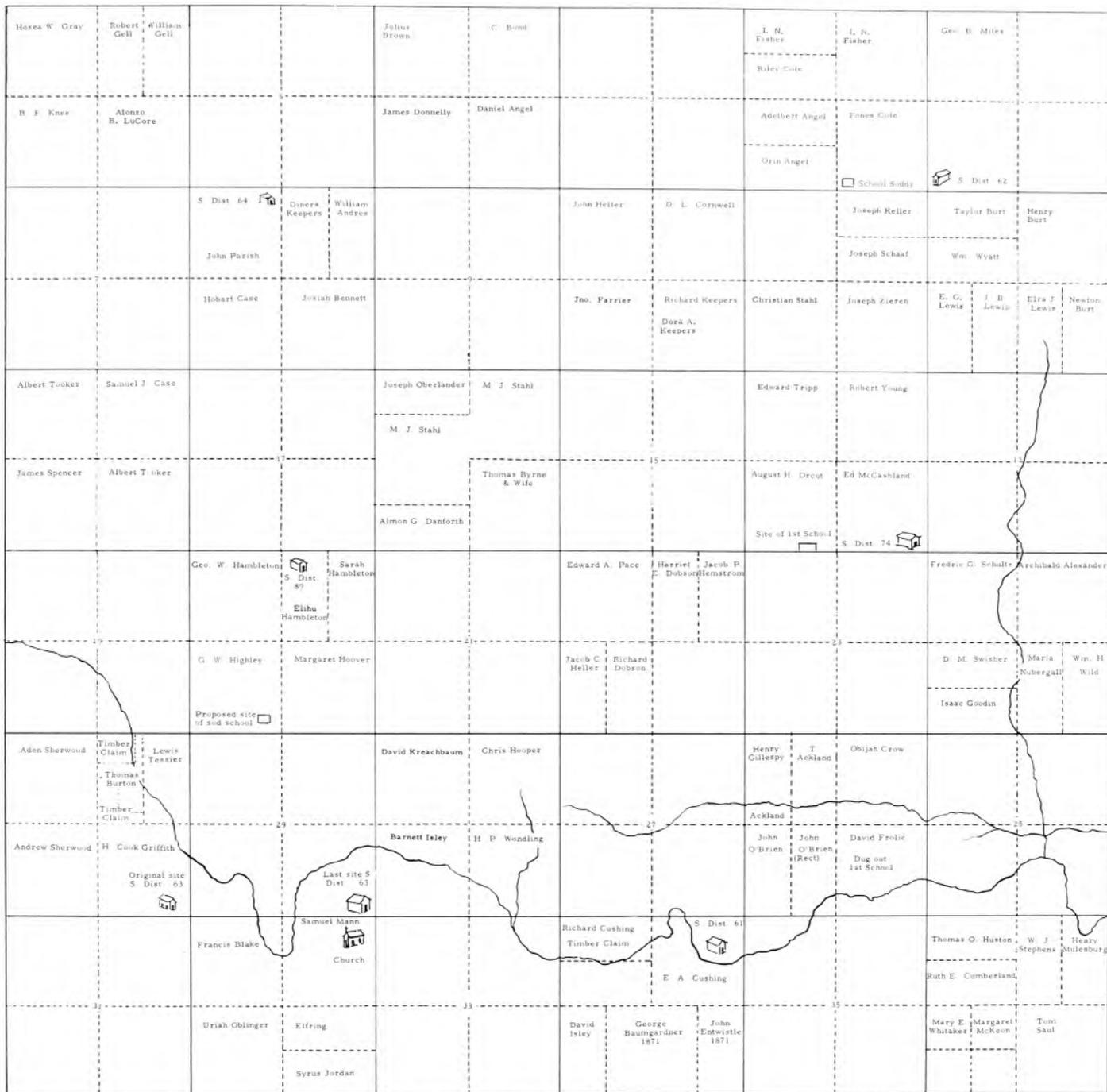
Photo from Nebraska State Historical Society
Headstone in Fairview cemetery in Momence Township.

Maggie was 2½ when her mother died, and had always been a delicate child, so the ministers wife cared for her that summer.

Ella and Stella were 9½ and 5 years old so stayed home and assisted in keeping house. All liked mush and milk, fried mush and corn bread. Uriah taught Ella how to do all of them and she continued doing them the same all her life.

In the fall of 1880 after corn and wheat were harvested, Uriah decided he could not continue to manage alone. So had a sale in Jan. 1881 selling everything. Then went to Min-

Bennett Township Homestead Map



nesota where his parents lived; also his brothers and sisters who were married, He left Ella at Menominie with her mother's sister and husband (S. Bailey). Estella was left with his brother Horace Oblinger and Maggie with his sister, the Travers. The Travers and Oblinger had no children of their own.

Uriah then worked at different places. In Oct. 1881 he married again. In July 1883 he decided to return to Fillmore Co. He traveled by covered wagon (he had sold the homestead). Left Minnesota on July 4th, arrived in Grafton, Nebr. Aug. 4, where Giles Thomas was living. Rented a place about 1½ miles from the homestead. At that time it was known as the "Fellows place," where Bill Fenskies son, Otto now lives. A half mile east of us was the schoolhouse No. 60. So Ella, Estella and Maggie all attended school there. It was Maggie's first school.

We lived on that farm through 83, 84, 85; left the spring of 1886. Hearing of new land being opened in Kansas he went there in the fall of 1885. Took a timber claim as his homestead right had been used in Nebraska.

In April 1886, we were on the move again in a covered

wagon. This time with an ox team. Arrived at the timber claim in Gove Co., Kansas, May 15, 1886. A dugout was the home this time. There were 3 more girls and a boy by this time. The little boy died that summer, 9 months old. Ella was married in Dec. 1886, age 17 years. County was organized in 1887. Uriah was appointed Clerk of the District Court, so we moved to Gove City in Sept. Then at regular election almost 2 years later he was re-elected. Many of the settlers made their final proof on the land at the Clerk's office. Timber claim had been sold, so we were soon on the move again in the covered wagon. This time for the Ozarks in Missouri. Visited Ella, near Danbury, Nebr. While there, Estella, a young lady by then, who taught school, was unknowingly exposed to the measles. In a few days they were very evident. A doctor at Downs, Kans. pronounced it measles. Of course no one would let us in with a contagious ailment. There were four other girls who had not had them. All came down with them at once. We kept traveling however, and all recovered very nicely.

Missouri did not prove to be the garden of Eden he thought, and a farmer going from the Kansas and Nebr. plains

to the rocks of the Ozarks would not like it. Estella married her Nebraska sweetheart and returned to Danbury. Uriah soon went there also in the covered wagon and a few months later the family went by train and Nebraska was the home for all of us thereafter. Uriah, Estella and Nettie (a half-sister) are all buried at Danbury, Nebr.

Ella and family moved near Irmiter. She died in 1958 at the age of 88. Maggie (Oblinger) Sandon has lived in Denver since 1917 and is the only one of the 3 little girls living on the homestead that is living.



Taken March 18, 1915
Oscar Solberg and two brothers opening a road near the Solberg home.

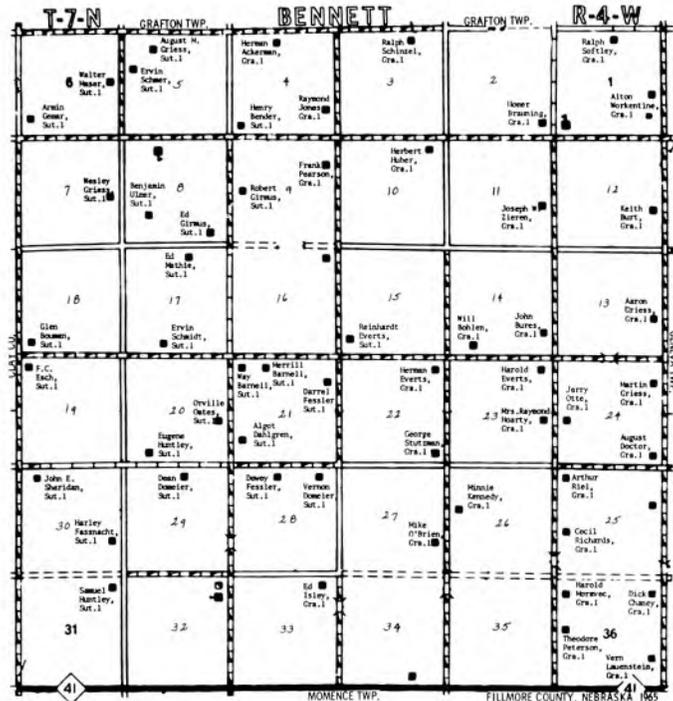


Photo from Mrs. H. E. Wild
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dobson (born Harriet Davis). Mr. Dobson homesteaded the E 1/2 of the SW 1/4 of Sec. 22 in Bennett township. He was a member of the State Legislature during the 1890's and was instrumental in securing the location of the Girls' Training School at Geneva.

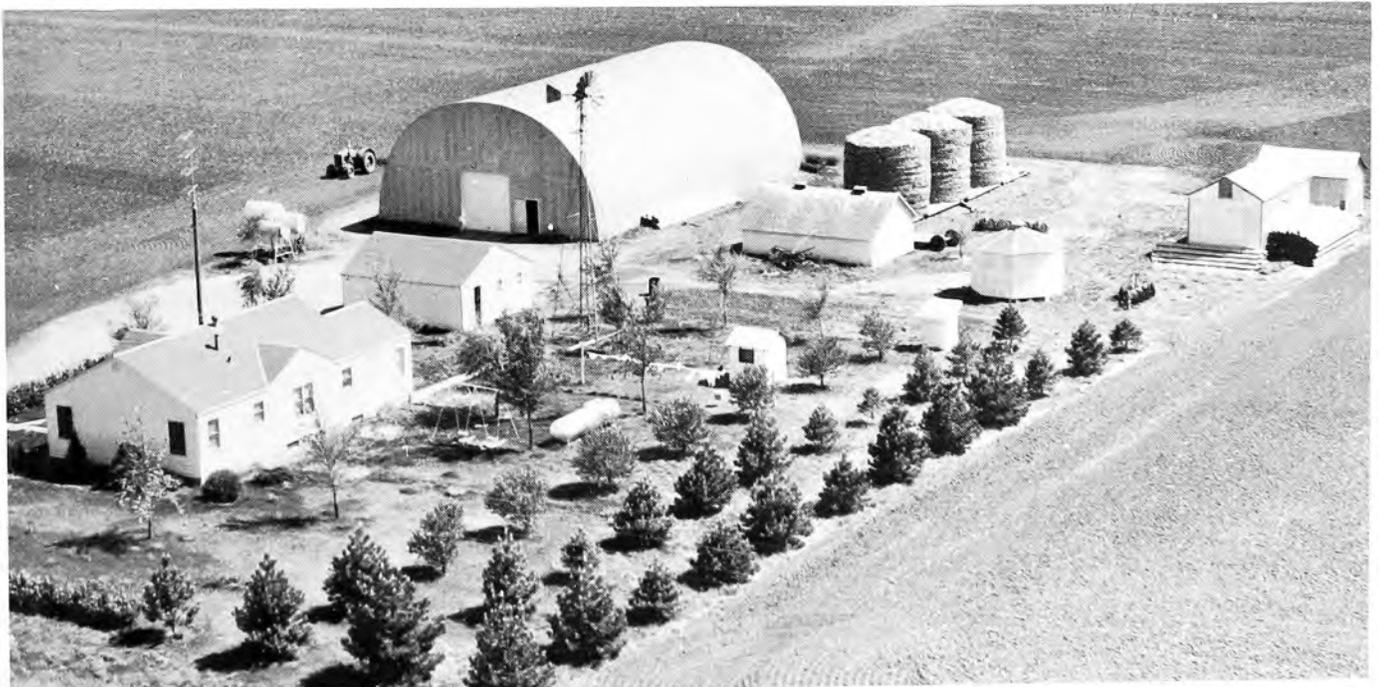


Photo from Harold Everts
Aerial view of the Harold Everts farm in 1953. A Bennett township farmstead built up from the beginning; the construction of the house in 1947 was followed by other buildings in the next few years.