

# Belle Prairie Township

Belle Prairie township is on the southern edge of Fillmore County, bounded by Thayer County on the south. It is bounded on the north by Chelsea, on the east by Franklin, and on the west by Hamilton townships. The general surface of the land is rolling. A stream edged by hills—the north fork of Big Sandy Creek—runs through the south central part of the township (Secs. 19 to 33) from west to southeast. In 1966, the township counted 45 irrigation wells. It is crossed from east to west (through Secs. 12 to 7) by the Beatrice-Hildreth branch of the Burlington and from north to south (Secs. 6 to 31) by the Fairmont-Hebron branch; the two lines cross at Strang, its only village. Nebraska Highway 74 follows the south section line of Secs. 6 to 1; U. S. 81 comes in from the north on the Hamilton township line for a mile, cuts over to the next section line—bypassing Strang by about a half mile on both north and east—and then follows that section line down to Thayer County.

The township was a first called Beautiful Prairie because of the pleasing lay of the land. Later it was renamed Belle Prairie in honor of a very pretty little girl who lived there at that time with her parents; but the identity of the girl who thus left her name imprinted on Fillmore County seems to be lost in the mists of history.

The early settlers of this township, organized in 1872, were largely Germans, coming from Iowa, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. Among the first were the George Matson, Peter Eggenberger, Chris Dunker, Ralph Stowell and E. G. Beers families. The first farms were homesteaded. The homesteaders had to get their claim papers at Beatrice, driving there and back by team and wagon. The main industry was farming and the feeding of cattle and hogs.

## Homesteading Belle Prairie

(The following account was written by early settler Whitefield Crawford in 1908. Although we do not have for other townships any such detailed summary—and if we had them, space would not permit including them all—we print this, in all its detail, because it shows a good deal of the "pattern" of homesteading. Except for a few minor changes of punctuation, for clarity, it is printed exactly as Mr. Crawford wrote it. We have noted in square brackets [thus] some slight variations between his account and the lands shown on the homestead map.)

In Belle Prairie township there was no settlement; nothing but wild beasts and reptiles inhabited the now fertile country known as Township five (5) north of base line of range two (2) west of the 6th Principal Meridian in Fillmore County and State of Nebraska.

The whole country was like unto a mighty sea of land; no forest of timber except the shoe-string and wild rose. The grass was of the wild varieties of Prairie grass, and was swept by fire every year; which would make the country look drear in the extreme. No people except those of an iron nerve would think of settling in a sea of Prairie where not a tree could be seen to break the view as far as the eye could reach, or arrest the sweeping winds that often approached the dignity of a blizzard. The nearest mill to [at] which corn meal could be bought was at Beatrice, 60 miles east. I said corn meal, that was all we could afford to buy at that time; and we ate sparingly of even that. As Dr. Franklin said to his landlady when she wanted to raise his board, "Make the gruel thinner; that is all I can afford to pay." We made the Johnny-cake thinner. I don't know whether to call it a luxury or a necessity; it was very luxurious when we were in luck to have plenty of it. When corn meal could not be obtained we would make a soup of wild onions and last year's rose buds. This was a thin diet; especially when the mosquitoes kept us busy at night and flies at day sucking our very life's blood from our veins.

The first settlement made in the township was on Sec. 2 by George and Thomas Matson, Samuel Remley, and Samuel Holderness in June of 1870. The Matson boys were natives of Ohio; but moved to Iowa and from Iowa to Nebraska. The other two native unknown, but moved from Iowa to Nebraska. This took all of Sec. 2.

The next settlement was on Sec. 4 by J. H. Ward in the fall of 1870. Mr. Ward took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$ , native of Ohio, and moved from there here. William De La Mater took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 4 in the fall of 1870; but did not move on until spring, native unknown. Freeman Warren filed his claim on the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 14 in the fall of 1870; but stayed at Cub Creek near Beatrice until the spring of 1871; native of New York, but moved from Illinois here in April of 1871. A. Burns settled on the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 14, native unknown; but came

from Illinois. Irvin Metcalf came at the same time with Mr. Burns and took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 14, a native of Illinois, and moved from that state to Nebraska. Jake Linwander had filed his claim on the N  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 34 in April and had gone back after his Biddy and came on in the fall of 1871. Mr. Linwander (Dutch Jake) was a native of Germany; but came from Wisconsin here.

George Wright took the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 34, a native of New York; but came from Illinois here. Joe Clink took the W  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the same quarter as Mr. Wright. Joe as he was known was a native of Illinois and came from his native home here. W. S. Crawford took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 28, his native was Illinois and moved from there here. George Wright, Joe Clink, and Whitefield Crawford came together, from Illinois in a covered wagon. George Goodrich took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 24, native of Vermont, I think, but moved from Illinois here. P. D. Sturdevant took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 24, native Vermont; but came from Illinois here. D. W. Simms took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 24. W. A. Simms took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 24. The Simms boys were brothers, natives of New Jersey; but moved from Illinois here. Cass Kingsbury took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 14. Native of Illinois and moved from there to Nebraska.

In June James Vosburgh took the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 28, A native of Pennsylvania, but came from Illinois here. C. E. Hyde took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 28, native of New York, but came from Illinois here. J. E. Miller took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$ , and his brother Wm. Miller took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 22. Native of Illinois and moved from there to Nebraska. Judd Grummon took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 22, native of Pennsylvania, but came from Illinois here. George Elliott took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 22, native of New York, but came from Missouri.

Some time in early spring or fall before, a man by the name of Tuttle came here from Wisconsin and pre-empted the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 12. He was an old man with a young wife yet in her teens. Mr. Tuttle brought some cattle, and had a young man hired to herd for him. He soon found his young darling had fallen in love with the young man. Being a free love thinker, a trade was soon made with the young man, whereby the young man gave him a pony for the young wife; and each took possession of their new property at once.

Pete Green took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 10, native unknown, he came from Iowa. Isaac Rakestraw took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 4. Native of Illinois, but came here from Indiana. Mr. Raven homesteaded the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 10, but never moved onto it. Miss Mary Rakestraw held it in some way, but how I never learned. Wm. Bell took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 10, native of England, but came from Iowa to Nebraska.

E. G. Beers took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 8, native unknown, he came from Wisconsin here. James Burwell took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 8, native unknown, he came from Iowa here. T. J. Hall took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 8, a native of Illinois, but came from Iowa. John Mead took the W  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 8, he was the step-son of T. J. Hall. Henry Sinn took the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 8, a native of Germany, former residence unknown. Pryor Trenary took the SE [NE]  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 6, native unknown, came from Iowa here. J. W. Williams (Banty) took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 6, a native of Ohio and came from there here. Francis Alvy took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 6, native unknown. George Coon took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 6, native of Illinois; but came from Iowa here. Charles Minney took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 26, a native of Illinois, and came from there here. Alex McKeeney took the N  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 18, was Irish all over, came from Chicago here. George Criswell took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 18, a native of Ohio, and came from there here. J. Seese took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 12, a native of Iowa, and came from there here. [Benjamin] Spelde took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 12, a native of Germany, came from Illinois. John Cole took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 12, native unknown. John Taylor took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 20, a native of Pennsylvania, but came from Illinois. A man by the name of [George] Rockford took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 4.

In early autumn Wm. Donahoo took the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 30, native unknown; but came from Illinois here. At the same time Josiah Sheppard took the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 30, a native of Ohio, but came from Illinois. Ely Shultz took the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 30, native unknown, but came from Illinois. B. F. Turner took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 30, a native of Ohio and I think came from there here. John Chase took the E [N]  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 32, native unknown; but came from Illinois. A. M. Rex took the W  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 32, native unknown, he came from Illinois. Theo Ward took the N  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 32, he came from Illinois. Ammon Goodwin took S  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 34, a native of Indiana, and came from that state. Ernest Rippe took the N [W]  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 34, a native of Germany, but came from Illinois. Frank Hill took the S [E]  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 34, native unknown, but came from Illinois.

John Shaffer took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 28, a native of Ohio, but came from Iowa. R. W. Stowell took the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 26, a native of Illinois, and came from there. He went back for the winter and came on in the spring of 1872. When his mother, Mrs. Mary Hague, came and took the W  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 26. George Durham came with them and took the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 26, a native of Canada. In the spring of 1872 Charles Dunker took

the SE ¼ of Sec. 18, a native of Germany, but came from Illinois. Christ Dunker took the E ½ of the NE ¼, a native of Germany, but came from Illinois. His mother-in-law took the W ½ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 18. A Mr. Hicky took the W ½ of the NE ¼ of Sec. 18. John Goodwin took the S ½ of the SW ¼ of Sec. 34, a native of Indiana and came from there here. C. Shaffer took the N ½ of the SW ¼ of Sec. 34, a native of Ohio, but came from Iowa. Wm. Goodwin took the NW ¼ of Sec. 32, a native of Indiana, and came from there here.

Peter Eggenberger and mother-in-law took the NW ¼ of Sec. 20, and two old ladies, relatives of Mr. Eggenberger, their names I have forgotten took the NE ¼ of Sec. 20, natives of Switzerland, and came from there direct. Peter Peterson and son, Hans, took the SW ¼ of Sec. 20, natives of Sweden, and came from there.

In the fall of 1872, G. S. Crawford took the W ½ of the SE ¼ of Sec. 26, a native of Pennsylvania, but moved from Iowa to Nebraska. In the fall of 1874 George and James Bridgewood took the SE ¼ of Section 10, natives of New York, but came from Iowa.

The E ½ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 26 was taken by a German; but I never learned his name [John Conrad Graf]. The W ½ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 28 was taken by a German but he never moved onto it.

It will be noticed that only the even number of sections has been taken as homesteads. The Congress of the United States passed a law granting every alternate section to the railroad; to the Santa Fe &

Denver, as it was then called, and also to the B. & M. R.R. Sections 16 and 36 were granted to the state as school land; leaving only 16 sections to be homesteaded.

I would like to call to mind our Belle Prairie Post Office; which was located on the SW ¼ of Sec. 8. It was kept by Mr. Beers as Post Master. It was a case of bring the mail yourselves, anyone was intrusted to bring the mail from the Ohioa Post Office to Mr. Beers once a week. Well do I recollect waiting with others for the arrival of the mail; then as now sometimes late, and how with eager eyes we would watch its arrival, and how our very hearts thrilled with admiration as it came whirling in drawn by a yoke of oxen. For all this Mr. Beers received the enormous salary of \$12 per annum.

The homestead law was that all lands for homesteading within 10 miles of the railroad (then only on paper) was what was called double minimum lands. This was if you wished to pay out on your land, the land office would charge you \$2.50 instead of the regular price of \$1.25 per acre, that the Government had sold all her lands at, from the day of our Independence.

When the law of 1862 was passed it granted a quarter section to anyone who would live on it five years; had been amended so a citizen could only take one-half or eighty (80) acres within the 10-mile limit. Yet it gave the right to any honorable discharged soldier of the U. S. Army to take a full quarter section on any public lands. The

### Belle Prairie Township Homestead Map

John W. Williams	Prior Trenary			Julian H. Ward	Wm M. De La Motte			Thomas Matson	Samuel H. Holmness		
Harriet Avey	George Coon			George B. Rockle	Isaac V. Bakestraw			George Matson	Samuel H. Remley		
		James H. Burwell	Thomas J. Hall			William Bell	Peter Green			Jared P. Seese	Benj. H. Spelde
		Elon G. Beers	Frederick Dunker	Henry Sinn		Morgan C. Matson	George H. Bridgewood			Phelps D. Sturdevant	John Cole
Alexander McKinney	Henry Kiser	Christian Dunker						Castell Kingsbury	Freeman Warren		
Abel Stoltenburg											
George W. Criswell	Charles Dunster							Irvie Metcalf	Amasa S. Burns		
		Lizette Sturzenegger	Peter Eggenberger	Barbara Eggenberger	Mans Engler	Judson Grummon	George B. Elliott			P. D. Sturdevant	Geo. W. Goodrich
		Hans Peter Peterson	Lorenz Peter Peterson	John Taylor		Jacob E. Miller	Wm. N. Miller			David W. Simms	Wm. A. Simms
Eli Shultz	William J. Donahoo			John J. Koehler	James Voeburgh	Whitefield S. Crawford		Mary E. Heague	John Conrad Graf	Chas. Minney	Griffin S. Crawford
Franklin B. Turner	Josiah Sheppard			John Shaffer	Chas. E. Hyde			Ralph W. Stowell	Griffin S. Crawford	George Durham	
		William H. Goodwin	Francis M. Denman	Mrs. Jorgen Tucksen		Levi S. Drinkwater	George A. Wright	Jacob Linwander			
		Francis A. Baker	Anthony Baker	John G. Chase		William F. Bugg	Ernst Bipp	Frank Hull			
				Jacob G. Reichart		Henry Bartels					

10-mile limit cut off the North East corner of the township, leaving Secs. 2, 4, 12 and the north half of 10 outside the double minimum lands. These sections were taken by people who had never served in the army. Those taking a full quarter section except in the above numbered sections were Veterans of the Civil War. In the whole 16 sections of homestead land 32 soldiers had settled, making an average of two, to the section. The states they migrated from to Belle Prairie township, speaking of the heads of families, were: Illinois 33, Iowa 17, Ohio 4, Indiana 4, Missouri 1, Wisconsin 2, from out of the United States 6, and two unknown, making 60 [69] that had taken homesteads and settled in the township.

It is the case in any new country that but few ever stay to enjoy their hard-earned homes that they have underwent all kinds of privations to obtain for two reasons; as a rule and in our case those that settle a new country are poor; having nothing but a team and covered wagon, a few dollars in money, enough perhaps to pay the receiver's fee at the land office. In a few years they could sell their land for a few hundred dollars. Not stopping to think of the future they feel rich with so much money; they can retire and have plenty the rest of their lives. Such bliss, such a haven on earth. Who could resist such prosperity and so sudden a rise from poverty to great riches. Then again they would argue they could put such a vast amount of money at interest and live on the interest and at ease.

Just as they were getting in shape to live and be happy from their past privations they sell their homes and are now living on the interest of what they owe; and will live in poverty as long as they have a mortal existence. The other reason is there are a great many that are of a roving nature and cannot and will not remain but a few years in a place. Some of this class did not stay long enough to get a title from the Government, they just left and got nothing for their claims. There is another class that made a failure in those early days; those that had never been away from home and had always lived on soft bread and knew nothing of roughing it; became faint-hearted and went back to live with their wife's folks, of course they never got a dollar ahead. Many of the latter class took the grasshopper raid for an excuse; but did the grasshoppers drive them off? I said they were faint-hearted.

Of all that took homesteads in the township of Belle Prairie, but twelve hold their homesteads today. Most of those that have held their homesteads have bought more land and are well-to-do. Some have rented their land and moved to town to live a retired life. Many have died on their homes and many have died that have left their homes. Were they a good class of people? We will look at those living in our midst at present. At that time we were all alike and today you will not find any of the old settlers that are not good citizens. They have not learned the new fashions and are as plain and common as of old; yet they are often called old foggies especially by some young fop that parts his hair in the middle and wears his hat on one side that has more style than brains.



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
The Oldest Monument in Harmony Cemetery (1881).

A notable historical landmark of Belle Prairie township is Harmony Cemetery, located on Sec. 27 in the NE corner of T5, R2W. One of the oldest and best kept cemeteries, it is 3 miles S of Strang and 2 miles E of U. S. Highway 81. Harmony Cemetery, organized January 25, 1879, is a corner of the land that Whitefield Crawford owned at that time. Some of the farmers who bought lots in the cemetery were Ralph Stowell, Jode Shephard, Eli Shultz, George Durham, and Whitefield Crawford. The first chairman was T. G. Hill.

The oldest grave in the cemetery is that of Rhoda Mott, who died January 18, 1879. It is thought a "Conley baby" was the first child-burial. The small grave, marked by a little stone with a shoe-and-stocking design on it, it may be found along the walk on the east side as you first enter the gate. In 1889, three soldiers who had been buried southwest of Strang were given a lot and their remains were moved to Harmony.

When the cemetery was laid out, a family by the name of Kingsbury planted pine trees around the grounds. In 1893, an outside fence with cement posts was put in. In the same year, 2½ acres were added (January 3, 1893) at a cost of \$88.50. During the time James Mikkelsen was caretaker, a permanent upkeep program was started (October 5, 1920). Since then numerous improvements have been added, many of them by donation. The following write-up appeared in the *Nebraska Signal* of May 24, 1956:

"This year the Memorial Day service at the Harmony Cemetery near Strang will be a special occasion, as the new water pressure system that has been installed the past year will be in full operation.

"From year to year the cemetery has always been neat and attractive under the special care of Mr. and Mrs. N. N. Brown of Strang, assisted by Edgar Miller of Geneva and other cemetery trustees. The lack of water has been more vital than usual the past few years on account of the unusually dry weather. The new water system has been in operation for some time and vegetation is improving accordingly.

"The well is 105 feet deep and there is an endless supply of water for use. The submerged pump is electrically operated. Under-



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
Harmony Cemetery, Decoration Day, 1956.



Standard Atlas of Fillmore County, 1905  
Map of Strang in 1905.



ground pipes, buried to a depth of five feet, are radiated four ways from the pump. With the addition of 100 feet of hose from each tap, the entire cemetery can be watered. There are five frostproof taps and the pressure is enough that all can be operated at one time.

"This project was installed by donations from interested friends. Work was donated in preparation for the installation of this project by Strang residents and business firms from near-by communities.

"The pit was dug gratuitously by Junior Lentfer of Strang. Ernest Anderson, also of Strang, donated the mason work and Fred Ough of Strang donated the hose sprinkler. The brick was donated and delivered by the A. Koehler Co. of Geneva. The trench work was donated by the Kiester & Walker Construction Company of Geneva.

"Numerous other people have donated their time and labor. More than \$1,000 has been collected and donations are still coming in.

"The peony bed in the northeast corner of the cemetery includes about 280 plants donated by Mrs. Henry Wernimont of Geneva as a memorial to her late husband. The bed was planted last fall and came through the winter without a single loss. Many of the plants are budded.

"The Memorial Day service will be held at the church at 2 P.M. May 30. Dr. Frank E. Pfoutz of the Geneva Methodist Church will give the address. There will be special numbers of music.

"The service at the cemetery will be in charge of the Geneva American Legion. The Ohioa School Band, under the direction of Ben Fussell of Geneva, will give a concert.

"Mr. and Mrs. N. N. Brown, Edgar Miller, and many others interested in the cemetery have given many hours to the progress of this fine community project."



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
Memorial Day at Harmony Church, May 30, 1956.

There are 25 G.A.R. veterans, two Spanish-American War veterans, and at last check, six World War I and two World War II veterans buried in Harmony Cemetery.

The Harmony Upkeep also owns the little church just across the road north of the cemetery. This church seems to have been built around 1889, having been formed by the people in that community at the time. Mrs. Edith Walker of Alexandria, who remembers that as a child of 10 she went to this church, supplied this information. The church and its contents were purchased for \$340 on February 5, 1900, by an M. E. Church committee consisting of L. S. Wells, J. Shephard, and W. C. Hervet.

## SCHOOLS

District No. 36 is included under the history of Strang.



Photo from Mrs. N. N. Brown  
District No. 37 (Prairie Grove school)—taken about 1890.

District No. 37, known as Prairie Grove school, was located one mile E of the Hamilton township line and one mile N of the Thayer County line, on what is now U. S. 81, on the NW corner of Sec. 32. This school was organized in 1876. It served its purpose well for 75 years. After the school closed in 1951, the buildings were sold and moved away in 1953.

On Sunday, June 29, 1953, a reunion was held on the grounds. Many of the old pupils were present, among them Chris Reichert of Bruning, who started to the school in 1881. His teacher was Jennie Deselms. The oldest lady present was Mrs. G. C. Bruning, who became a pupil in 1888 and whose teacher was Carl Wilson.



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
District No. 38 (Harmony school).

District No. 38, better known as Harmony school, was located 3 miles S of Strang and 3 miles E of U. S. 81, on the NW corner of Sec. 26. The first record of the school was found in a treasurer's book dated 1888. In 1912, the original building burned down and school was held at the Albert Stowell farm until a new school was built. When this new schoolhouse was partly burned in 1929, classes were held in a building on the Henry Hopken farm.

Mrs. Edith Walker of Alexandria tells us that her grandmother, Mrs. Mary Heague, homesteaded the 80 acres on which the Harmony schoolhouse stands. Mrs. Heague's home was a sod house on the SW corner. Later a sod house was made east of the schoolhouse, where Mrs. Walker's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Adam Rex, lived and where she and her brother were born.

District No. 42, known as Goldenrod school, was  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles E of Strang on the SW corner of Sec. 1. County Superintendent John A. Dempster organized the school September 14, 1872. He appointed A. S. Burns to call the first

meeting for election of school board members on September 28, 1872. The first teacher was Susan Mott.



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
District No. 42 (Goldenrod school).

Some of the people who served this school during its 87-year life are listed below.

Year	Teacher	Term	Salary	Director
1872-73	Susan Mott	3 mo.	\$22.50 mo.	No record
1873-74	Mary Mott	3 mo.	\$22.50 mo.	No record
1874-75	Mary Mott	2 mo.	\$22.50 mo.	Thomas Matson
1875-76	E. E. Corbin	3 mo.	\$20.00 mo.	Thomas Matson
1876-77	Sadie Mosier	3 mo.	\$30.00 mo.	Thomas Matson
1877-78	Sadie Mosier	4 mo.	\$25.00 mo.	George Matson
1878-79	Eleanor Matson	3 mo.	\$30.00 mo.	George Matson
1879-80	Chester Metcalf	3 mo.	\$30.00 mo.	George Matson
1880-81	William Evans	3 mo.	\$28.00 mo.	John Near
	Elmer D. Town	3 mo.	\$30.00 mo.	
1881-82	Elmer D. Town	2½ mo.	\$28.00 mo.	John Near
	Walter White	3 mo.	\$30.00 mo.	
1955-56	Carol Jones			
1956-57	Carol Jones			
	Kapperman			
1957-58	Mabel Craddock			

After Mabel Craddock ended the 1957-58 term, school in District 42 was discontinued and the district contracted for one year with the Ohioa school. On June 1, 1959, District 42 formally joined with the Ohioa public school (District 40).



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
District No. 84 Schoolhouse.

The District No. 84 schoolhouse was located 2½ miles E of Strang on the NW corner of Sec. 15. The first organizational meeting was held at the home of Joseph Thomas on September 7, 1886, and the school was organized on September 11, 1886. The ground for the school was given by Mr. Kubes.

## FAMILIES

Elon G. Beers homesteaded on the SW ¼ of Sec. 8, T5, R2W, ½ mile S and ½ mile E of Strang. He operated the first post office in his home on this piece of land, later owned by Ellis Bumgarner of Strang. A blizzard in the early 70's caught some of the homesteaders out of shelter for their stock. The Beers family, in this predicament, penned a place under the beds for their few chickens and pigs.



Photo from Mrs. Roy Dunker  
The Chris Dunker family (taken in 1897 or 1898). Chris Dunker (father), Mrs. Chris Dunker (mother), James Dunker (son), Herman Dunker (son), Julia Dunker (daughter), Minnie Dunker (daughter).

Chris Dunker filed homestead entry rights in the spring of 1872. He and his brother Charlie came to Alexandria from Moline, Illinois, to stay with friends and to look for land. Chris made his homestead on the E ½ of the NE ¼ of Sec. 18. The brothers had the first two-room house in that locality, built by W. J. Mosier and Frank Sauer with lumber brought from Lincoln. After the house was finished, Mrs. Dunker and daughter Julia, who was only one year old, came to settle in their new home. This farm was the birthplace of James, Minnie, Herman, and Theresa. Theresa passed away when a small child. Chris later purchased 280 acres of land next to his homestead. Mr. and Mrs. Dunker made this homestead their home until Mrs. Dunker's death on March 12, 1918. Chris died on December 11, 1919. Upon the passing of their parents, James came into possession of the 80. Julia, Minnie, and Herman received the home place and the remainder of the land. They lived there until the fall of 1952 when they purchased a home in Geneva. Mr. and Mrs. Willard Rippe and family moved to the Dunker farm to keep the line intact. Mrs. Rippe is a great-granddaughter of the Chris Dunks.



Photo from John Gewacke  
Mr. and Mrs. William G. Gewacke (taken in June, 1902).

William George Gewacke was born January 28, 1871, on a farm near Beecher, Illinois, the first child of Christoph and Sophie Gewecke. His mother died in September, 1872. His father remarried, to Marie Sophia Richerdt, in 1877 and



shortly thereafter moved to a farm 5 miles SW of Ohioa, where for several years they lived in a sod house. During their first year in Nebraska it was not uncommon to have bands of roving Indians come and steal anything outside that was loose, particularly any colored clothes which might be hanging out to dry.

In 1892, he and his parents moved to a farm near Sharon Springs, Wallace County, Kansas, but in 1894 returned to Fillmore County to live southeast of Ohioa. As a young man he worked as a hired hand on farms. After leaving home he changed the spelling of his name from "Gewecke" to "Gewacke."

On March 25, 1902, he was married to Elizabeth Wernimont, born April 16, 1872, at Varna, Illinois. In February, 1881, she came with her parents, Theodore and Catharine Wernimont, and her brothers and sisters, on a long train journey in an "immigrant car" which contained all of their possessions, including a cow and a team of horses. They arrived in Belvidere, the nearest railroad point at that time.



Photo from Clyde Gewacke  
Parents of Mrs. William Gewacke—taken in December, 1890. Theodore Wernimont—born in Luxemburg, Nov. 25, 1837; died Sept. 14, 1895. Catherine Wernimont—born in old country, Oct. 1, 1839; died May 6, 1911.

The summer before, her father had come to Nebraska and built a small frame house upon a quarter section of land 4 miles W of Ohioa. They traveled from Belvidere to their new home by bob-sled through the deep snows which then covered the plains.

The Burlington R.R. line which now passes through Ohioa was built across their farm in the spring and summer of 1886. In October, 1886, Elizabeth watched the first train that crossed southern Fillmore County.

After her marriage she and William lived the remainder of their lives on a farm 3 miles W of Ohioa. To this marriage were born two sons, Clyde William Gewacke, born August 11, 1905, and John Clifford Gewacke, born October 30, 1907. Clyde was married January 23, 1936, to Thelma Burt. John was married August 16, 1942, to Dorothy Knight.

There are five grandchildren: Margaret Ann Nichols and Mary Ellen Gewacke, twin daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Gewacke (born September 27, 1940), and Joan Elizabeth Sargent (born July 28, 1944), Virginia Suzanne Gewacke (born March 6, 1948), and Marilyn Ann Gewacke (born April 13, 1951), the three daughters of Mr. and Mrs. John Gewacke.

William Gewacke died June 28, 1942, and Elizabeth Gewacke died July 13, 1957.

—John Gewacke



Photo from Florence Loghry  
Montcure and Harriet McReynolds (about 1900).

Montcure Robinson McReynolds was born on May 5, 1834, at Washingtonville, Pennsylvania, and moved with his parents to Mason County, Illinois in 1838.<sup>1</sup> He married Harriet Lytell at Mason City, Illinois, on February 25, 1859. They had nine children, of whom two died in infancy. Those who survived were Mary, Robert, Minnie, Luretta, Carrie, Florence, and George, all born in Illinois.



Photo from Florence Loghry  
Golden Wedding Party (1909) of Montcure and Harriet McReynolds. Front row, left to right: Mary (McReynolds) Gaffney, Monteure McReynolds (Donald, son of George, at his knee), Harriet McReynolds, Mildred (daughter of George) McReynolds, Minnie (McReynolds) Deselms. Second row: Luretta (Lou) Loghry (wife of James), Lorena McReynolds (wife of Robert), Lois McReynolds (wife of George), Caroline (Carrie) McReynolds, Leon McReynolds (son of Robert). Top row: James Loghry, Ross Gaffney (son of Mary), Robert McReynolds, Maude Calkins, George McReynolds, Rena Robertson.

In the spring of 1880, Mr. McReynolds, with his son Robert, 15, and his nephew, Willie Cross, of Forest City, Illinois, came to Fillmore County in a covered wagon. He had mortgaged his land to help a member of his family, and the mortgage had been foreclosed. He had heard that land was cheap in the West, and also his wife and his daughter Minnie were sick quite a bit in Illinois. Before the migra-

<sup>1</sup> Information about the McReynolds family was supplied by Miss Florence Loghry of Maywood, Nebraska, daughter of Luretta McReynolds and James Loghry.

tion, the family discussed going to Missouri, California, or Nebraska. Mrs. "Mac" turned thumbs down on Missouri because the "James Boys" were robbing and looting there, and they agreed that California was too far away. So they settled on Nebraska.

On arriving in Fillmore County, Mr. McReynolds made arrangements for land on Sec. 20, Belle Prairie township, SE of Strang. Then he wrote home, telling his wife to sell the cattle and bring the family. She sold the cattle at a good price, and she and the children came West by train. The children who came with Mrs. McReynolds were Minnie, 17; Luretta, 13; Carrie, 10; Florence, 8; and George, about 4 years old. The oldest daughter, Mary, was already married.

In the meantime, Mr. McReynolds had made a dugout for shelter, as the land was unimproved. Later, they built a house, partly in the bank, with a frame upstairs. This was the family home until 1899, when they moved to the vicinity of Geneva.

The move west was especially hard on the womenfolk, as they had left a comfortable home, with orchards of apple, plum, and cherry, and berry patches, to come to this prairie dugout. Luretta remembered one dirt and wind storm. Her mother had washed the plates three times while preparing supper and then cried because she had to feed her family on dirty plates.

The McReynoldses were good neighbors, never happier than when "doing" for others. They were good gardeners and lovers of flowers. One of their hobbies was trying new varieties of vegetables. Neighbors visiting the "Macs" in growing season always went home with flowers, or a head of cabbage or a melon, in season.

Mr. McReynolds had an education better than average and was always a great reader. He was honest, upright, and a good citizen. His wife Harriet, who was quite religious, instilled honesty, generosity, and good moral character in the seven children.

Some of their neighbors near Strang were the Arnold, Jones, Shepherd, Gertz, Deselms, and McKeon families.

The McReynoldses moved in 1902 to Frontier County and bought 400 acres 5 miles S of Maywood, where they lived the rest of their lives, and where they were privileged to celebrate their Golden Wedding in February, 1909. On this occasion, all their living children were present except Florence (Mrs. Phil Theobald). They had 29 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren. Mr. McReynolds died in 1914 at the age of 80 years, 4 months and 12 days. His wife Harriet died in 1916.

The oldest boy, Robert, went to the city when they moved and became a streetcar man. He died on February 16, 1914. The younger, George, went to Frontier County with the family, and after the old folks' deaths continued to farm his land and his sister Carrie's share until a few years before his death in 1951.

The oldest girl, Mary, had married John B. Gaffney in Illinois some time before 1880. They both came out to this area, where her husband, a carpenter, worked for some years around Belvidere and Strang. She died at the age of 52, on December 22, 1911. Minnie married David Deselms (brother of school teacher Jennie Deselms), and moved to Bertrand, later to Edison, passing away at the age of 92. Luretta (Lou) married James Loghry, who moved to Frontier County, 5 miles S of the McReynolds place; she died at 67 years of age. Florence married Phil Theobald in Fillmore County; after some moving about, he settled near Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, where she later died at the age of 90.

The only unmarried daughter—"Aunt Carrie" to generations of friends and neighbors—learned the dressmaking trade at Friend, and worked for families around Strang as long as they lived in Fillmore County. She too went to Frontier County, and after her parents' death farmed (with the aid of her brother George, a mile away) her share of the land for 25 years or more, until she moved into Maywood, where she died in 1961 at the age of 92.

Aunt Carrie used to tell about butchering days. Four or five hogs were killed, and scalded in water heated in a large iron kettle in the yard. When dressed out and cooled, the meat was cut up for curing. A team was hitched to a light wagon and a tub of ribs, backbones, and livers was taken to neighbors. They spoke of it as "a fresh of meat." The lard was tried in the same kettle. Then cracklings and lye were put in the kettle and soap was also cooked outside.

In the year 1870, **George Matson** came from Marengo, Iowa, and homesteaded the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 2. His first home was a dugout built in a draw on the north side of the land. In 1873, he built a three-room frame house on the south side of the land (now marked by Highway 74). The following year (January, 1874), he married Rachel Pumphrey. This house was their home until 1891, when a larger two-story house was built near the same location. This homestead still stands in the name of the heirs of George Matson. He had four children, John W., Charles L., and Edith Mae Matson, and Mrs. Rena L. Ewart. John had three children, Dorothea Matson, Mrs. Vera Darby, and Mrs. Della Thoroughgood. Edith Mae is the last survivor among George Matson's children. The homestead now is in the name of Edith Mae and three grandchildren. It is still registered in the original U. S. patent deed, since it has never been sold.



Photo from Mae Matson  
The Matson Family, about 1905. Back row: John W. Matson, Rena L. Matson, Charles L. Matson. Front row: George Matson (father), Mae Matson, Rachel A. Matson (mother).



Photo from Dorothy Runge  
The Ralph Stowell Family. Standing: Albert, Mae, and Clyde. Seated: Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Stowell.

**Ralph Winchester Stowell** was born in Waddington, New York, in 1847, and moved with his parents to Illinois in 1853. At the age of 16, he joined the Union Army, serving under General U. S. Grant and taking part in the siege of Vicksburg and other battles. Mr. Stowell cast his first presidential vote for Abraham Lincoln in 1864. He was not of legal age for voting, being only 18, but because of being in the service and carrying a musket for his country he was allowed to cast his ballot for "Honest Abe."

He and his wife came to Nebraska in 1871 and homesteaded on the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 26, Belle Prairie. They lived in a frame house but their stock was sheltered in a straw shed. Their first trading place was Crete, about 40 miles northeast of their farm. He made a specialty of stock raising, having brought 29 head of stock from Illinois. He also served as a county supervisor for 12 years.

They lived on this homestead until 1905, when they moved into Ohioa. He lived to be 97 years old, departing this life in 1944. Their daughter, Mrs. Mae Stowell Grant, lived in Ohioa until her death in January, 1962. The homestead is still in the family.

Other early farmers in Belle Prairie township as listed in the *Fillmore County Handbook* of 1886 were William Bell, J. H. Bell, Julian H. Ward, W. S. Crawford, Hon. T. J. Whitzel, D. Cook, and Cyrus Macy.



## Strang

Strang was the largest village in Belle Prairie township at the time of its incorporation on November 3, 1886. The nearest towns to it then were Ohioa, Shickley, and Geneva.

The first building in Strang was the west elevator. It burned down in 1902 and was replaced by the present one (1956). The first elevator man and stock shipper was Anthony Koehler. The Koehlers still operate the two elevators in Strang (much expanded) as well as a lumber, coal, and hardware business there.

Among the first houses built in Strang were the home of M. L. Matson, two and one-half blocks west of Main Street, and a two-story structure across the street from it, later owned by Mr. and Mrs. Adam Sallomon. Another old house, which has been remodeled, on the SE corner of Strang, is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Jess Messman. Still another, two blocks east of Main Street on the south side of the street, was originally owned by Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Schilling, now of Lincoln. The present owners are Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Anderson.



Photo from Deb Witt

Birdseye View of Strang—taken about 1910, looking north. The first elevator is at the upper left. The town windmill stands in the main intersection; the larger windmill to the right supplied the Burlington's water tower.



Photo from Emma Christianey

The original hotel building in Strang. Its general appearance has not changed.

There are two landmarks in Strang which are much the same as in the early years. One-half block east of Main Street is a house which was the town's first hotel, run by J. R. Piersol. The two-story building on the east side of Main Street, now owned and used by Rebekah and I.O.O.F. lodges, is equally old.

## Churches

As early as 1884, preaching services were held 3 miles E of Strang by the Rev. R. G. Carter.



United Brethren Church, Strang (about 1890).

When the village of Strang was established, the present church (later remodeled) of the *Evangelical United Brethren* was erected. Originally called the United Brethren Church, its first minister was the Rev. R. G. Carter. Over the years, 50 ministers served this church, which until the last decade or so remained a prosperous body with an active Ladies' Aid. This congregation is now disbanded. The parsonage, which was moved to Strang in 1891, has been remodeled and rented out. At the present time, the Salem Mennonite Church, southwest of Strang, holds Sunday School and worship services here.

Up until 1955 the *Evangelical Church* had held an auction, bazaar, and supper at the schoolhouse for three successive years. These were well attended, and the money raised helped to support the church.

At one time there was a *Methodist Church* in Strang, but this was disbanded and the building was sold around 1917 to the late Harvey Parks of Bruning. No records of this church seem to have survived.



Photo from Mrs. N. N. Brown

Congregational Church, Strang—built in 1886.



A *Congregational Church* was organized April 5, 1887, and dedicated July 10, 1887. The Reverend J. J. Robertson was pastor. This church disbanded in 1934.

#### School—District No. 36

A sod schoolhouse was built March 12, 1872, on the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 8, T5, R2W, now owned by Ellis Bumgarner. At that time District 36 included Secs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18. In 1886, the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  and the S  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 12 were added. Later this same year, the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 4, the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 8, all of Secs. 9 and 16, and also the E  $\frac{1}{2}$  of Sec. 17 were detached from it.

Around 1879, a frame schoolhouse on Sec. 7 replaced the sod building. This was also used for church services until the village of Strang was established. The Reverend R. G. Carter was the minister. The NE corner of the ground is now owned by the Roy Christianity heirs.



Photo from Emma Christianity

Strang schoolhouse on original site, built after Strang was incorporated in 1886 (taken in 1902).



Photo from Emma Christianity

Strang school pupils in 1902. *Standing, from left:* E. C. Kimble, principal; Guy Allsman, Ed Mitchell, Josie Munday, Belle Brown, Vern Gaffney, Nettie Folger, Thirza Wellman, Walter Messman, Harry Allsman, August Eggenberger. *Two in middle row:* Robert Munday, Fred Messman. *Seated:* Grace Schilling, Harry Miller, Florence Taylor, Clyde Simmons, Jennie Rocolle, James McAlpin, Maude Ray, Lonnie Bennett, Mabel Ray.



Photo from Emma Christianity

The old Strang school building after being moved to the present school location in 1908. This picture was taken in 1923. The school faculty were (left to right) Lale Scofield, Stella Gilmore, Hannah Gilmore, and Vera Shepherd.



Photo from Emma Christianity

The new Strang school (built in 1929).

After the village of Strang was incorporated on November 3, 1886, a new two-story schoolhouse was built on Sec. 7 at the SE edge of town. This school, which included 10 grades, was moved in 1908 to Sec. 7 on the NE corner. The building was bricked over and made to include 12 grades. In 1928, this school burned down and a modern school for 12 grades was built in 1929. Owing to consolidation, the high school has now been discontinued but there still is an accredited eight-grade school which includes rural near-by districts.



Photo from Deb Witt

Main Street, Strang, looking south from the railroad (taken before 1909).

Before its incorporation the village was called Media. But when it was found that another Nebraska town had the same name, it was renamed. An Omaha dealer in windmills, A. L. Strang, on hearing of this name change, gave the town its first windmill, which until very recent years ran the town pump, squarely in the middle of the principal intersection. Nothing in the records indicates whether Mr.

Strang's gift was "accidental," after the fact, or whether the town fathers named the town for him on purpose. No matter: it was a long-useful gift, and gave Mr. Strang at least the same kind of municipal immortality as that befalling a man who builds a skyscraper to which he gives his name.

While the village was still "Media," the railroad was having a well dug not far from the school. This railroad well, in use until 1954, was dug by hand. One day while the diggers were gone for their noonday meal, a group of boys and girls from the school, including James Dunker and his sisters Julia and Minnie, dared someone to go down in the bucket used in digging the well. The largest boy of the group, William ("Bill") Coon, took the challenge and went down. The boys at the top were too small to pull him up and so they had to round up some older boys to get Bill out of the well. By the time Bill was rescued, the school bell rang and all started on a quarter-mile run for the schoolhouse. The boys got there on time but the girls, who could not run fast enough to make it, all had to stay in after school. After the well diggers reached water, they had to suspend operations until the railroad was completed so that rock could be shipped in.



Photo from Mrs. N. N. Brown

Burlington Water Tank at Strang. This later burned down with a tank full of water.

The first graduating class of the Strang school was in 1896, the last in 1951. At this final graduation, the descendants of Chris Dunker were especially honored. Chris Dunker, homesteader, served on the school board 45 years. His son, James, who lived near Strang, was on the board 35 years. Five generations of the Chris Dunker family have been connected with the school.

The first Strang School Alumni Reunion, sponsored by the Belle Prairie Homemakers' Extension Club and Ladies' Aid, was held November 5, 1954, at the Strang schoolhouse. This first reunion brought together 61 out of a total 186 graduates. A second Alumni meeting was held in 1955, sponsored by the same group of ladies. At that time it was voted to have another graduate homecoming in 1958. Other reunions have been held since; the most recent was in 1966, with another planned for 1968.



Sixth Annual Commencement, Strang High School, Monday, May 19, 1902. The principal was E. C. Kemble; the graduating class consisted of (left to right) Thirza Wellman, Nettie Folger, Walter Messman, Vernon Gaffney, and Harry Allsman.



Photo from Emma Christiancy

Belle Prairie Homemakers Extension Club—taken at their Christmas party in December, 1954. This club started as early as 1923 as the "Strang Community Woman's Club." Standing, left to right: Alma Ohnesorge, Ruth Bumgarner, Elaine Bumgarner, Ethel Ough, Ollie Duis, Martha DuBois, Beverly Vaught, Lila Wilkinson, Ida Sallomon, Helen Lichti, Katie Reichert, Hannah Gilmore, Bernice Ely. Sitting left to right: Emma Christiancy, Betty Bumgarner, Elsie Reinsch, Wilma Fitzgerald, Patricia Houck, Flora Houck, and Rose Wells. Norma Lee Christiancy was unable to be present.

During the school year of 1896-97, the teachers were J. C. Adams, principal; Whitman, intermediate; Mae Palmer, primary. A. Strickland, William Messman, and Chris Dunker made up the school board. The largest class graduated from the 10th grade was the class of 1910, with 10 graduates. The principal of this class was Frank Adams, a son of the late J. C. Adams, one of the first principals of the Strang school.

An interesting school paper, called the Strang *Strangulator*, has been preserved by Mrs. Herman Ohnesorge, the former Alma Hopken. This paper, published in April, 1927, was written by the pupils of the Strang school. Marian J. Hedden was editor-in-chief, Lois R. Witt, business manager, and Vern Miller, assistant business manager. It mentions that Strang High School is a minor accredited school as it meets all requirements. Teachers at that time were Lale Scofield, professor; Miss Alice M. Gilbert, principal; Maurice McAvoy, grammar room and basketball coach; Mrs. Curtis Witt, intermediate room; and Miss Eva Meyers, primary. The Board of Education was composed of Thelo Houck, president; Mrs. Fred Messman, secretary; and J. H. Dunker, treasurer. The valuation of District 36 for the year 1926-1927 was \$700,635.70 and the total levy was 6.5 mills. There were 44 pupils in the grades and 22 in high school. High-school enrollment included 13 non-resident pupils.

Some interesting news items and advertisements appearing in the *Strangulator* are: "An Outdoor Program. The Strang school will observe American Forest Week in a 30-minute program." An account of the *Basket Ball Banquet* lists athletic letters and chevrons awarded to the girls' and boys' basketball teams. According to the paper the girls had the honor of playing 15 games with only 2 losses, both were to Glenville school. The boys were not so fortunate. "The seniors gave their annual class play, *Aaron Slick from Punkin Creek*, before a good-sized house, Wednesday evening, April 6. All of the actors did





Photo from Emma Christiancy

First Alumni Banquet at Strang School, held November 5, 1954. 1 Keith Eich. 2 Julius Lentfer, Jr. 3 Marion Hedden. 4 Alvin Hopken. 5 Kenneth DuBois. 6 Laverle Hopken. 7 Virgil Steffens. 8 Will Oldham. 9 Russell Bumgarner. 10 Walter Christiancy. 11 Norman Dunker. 12 Earl Houck. 13 Wendell Christiancy. 14 Mervell Bumgarner. 15 Gerald Ough. 16 Herald Ough. 17 Kenneth Robare. 18 Warren Rocole. 19 John Evans. 20 Art Evans. 21 Byron Bumgarner. 22 Donald Bumgarner. 23 Vern Gaffney. 24 Leland DuBois. 25 John Zimmerman. 26 Pat Ohnesorge Houck. 27 Wynona Christiancy Lechtenberger. 28 Grace Strine Trapp. 29 Alma Hopken Ohnesorge. 30 Merle Anderson Webster. 31 Beverly Ohnesorge Vaught. 32 Lorraine Vostrez Hinrichs. 33 Elsie Hopken Reinsch. 34 Leta Dunker Messman. 35 Ora Brown Skipton. 36 Bessie Bumgarner DuBois. 37 Ella Plank. 38 Grace Messman Eich. 39 Mable Hunter Witt. 40 Gladys Monroe Brown. 41 Thirza Wellman Garrett. 42 Dolretta Powell Vobril. 43 Fred Messman. 44 Grace Schilling Fricke. 45 Dorothy Gerard Erickson. 46 Delores Gerard Folkerts. 47 Alberta Lentfer Hulse. 48 Helen Thompson Styskal. 49 Louise Messman Dubois. 50 Emma Schott Christiancy. 51 Shirley Noel Kennel. 52 Wauneta Christiancy Lothes. 53 Mabel Miller Monroe. 54 Luetta Messman Archer. 55 Rahama Rakestraw Stewart. 56 Lucile Bumgarner Evans. 57 Hazel South Erickson. 58 Doris Houchin Brinegar. 59 Belle Brown.



Photo from Alma Ohnesorge

Girls' Strang School Basketball Team, 1926-27. Top row, left to right: Alice Gilbert, Coach; Margaret Kiester; Alma Hopken, Captain; and Lois Witt. Center row, left to right: Una Witt, Hazel Houck, Leona Dunker. Front row, left to right: Josephine Dunker, Ruby Houchin, and Bonita Butler. These girls won 13 out of 15 games played.

very well and the play was a pleasing success." "Commencement exercises will be held at the Opera House on Thursday evening, May 19." "The senior class spent the day of the 22nd in Hebron at the Day Studio." "Helen Thompson, who had the misfortune of breaking her leg while playing at school, is able to be back with us again."

"Bonita Butler, Harold Steffens, Winona Butler, Virgil Steffens, Kenneth Mitchell, and Walter Christiancy have been neither absent nor tardy this month." "If you want to know about verbs, ask Harold Steffens." "Russell seems to attend to the class work of his neighbors lately."

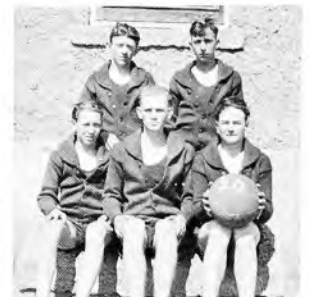


Photo from Alma Ohnesorge

Strang School Basketball Team, 1926-27. Top row: Marion Hedden and Leon Crawford. Bottom row: Leo Payne, Harold Hacker, and Vern Miller.



Photo from Deb Witt (taken about 1910)

The man on the left is C. W. Witt; the other man is unidentified.

The following poem, which appeared in the *Strang Reporter*, was written about 1908 by Mrs. Minnie Simmerman, a Strang resident:

# STRANG IN RHYME

In our airship we set sail  
And westward took a fly.  
And as we passed o'er the city of Strang  
Sailing fast and high,  
We saw a hand outstretched to us,  
Beckoning us to hail.  
We took a dive and landed near  
The telephone office door.  
Soon before us was unrolled  
Ten yards of rhyme or more,  
Telling all about the people,  
And every shop or store;  
So we made haste on our return  
And the type was made to fly;  
Click, click, click, in the typo's stick,  
And Arthur heaved a sigh.  
With pleasant things we wish to deal,  
And tell you how today  
We're all alive to toil and strive  
And nobly win our way.  
So now we'll take you thru our town  
And toot our horn a bit,  
And hope that in our pleasant mood  
We'll make a happy hit.  
The first great thing that we recount  
Are Cole's and Posson's stores  
Packed full of goods, all up to date  
And full from door to door;  
Dry goods, groceries, hats and caps  
And ladies' finest wear,  
Elegant shoes from which to choose  
A nobby fitting pair.  
Shickley and Ray our bankers are  
Safe and sound we know.  
The Gold standard is their motto  
And pay up as you go;  
Alden Cross is assistant  
And handles the cash with care,  
Obliging in his manners  
He'll serve you on the square.  
Sam Renner is the hardware man  
With stoves and tinware too;  
And I'll tell you right here now  
He's here to see you through.  
Wheeler and Messman are quite alert,  
To sell you implements right,  
And they'll make the hardware rattle,  
When a customer is in sight.  
Tom Tonkinson has also come,  
He's also in the block,  
And if you call you'll find he carries  
A rattling grocery stock.  
D. W. Simms is the place  
To get your furniture fine  
Says he'll give you goods that please,  
And save you money every time.  
J. H. Schilling, paper hanger  
Or painter, if you please,  
And he'll adorn the most forlorn  
With all dispatch and greatest ease.

Art Brown is the man  
That furnishes the beef,  
And tender roasts he sells you  
To the housewife's great relief.  
And Geo. Workman is right in place  
Our station agent here,  
He's served us true, he's served us well  
Without a doubt or fear.  
J. Rakestraw is the restaurant man  
Who dishes up the hash;  
It's understood their grub is good  
And always cheap for cash;  
But I declare I most forgot  
His bread so good and sweet—  
His buns are rare, and I declare  
They simply can't be beat.  
And here's our friend Mrs. Ella Sauer  
And sister Julia too,  
They're milliners up-to-date  
Ready to dare and do.  
Johnnie Houck is here  
And runs a shoe shop fine,  
And if you want to get togged up  
Perhaps you had better stop.  
We're not without a good hotel—  
Mrs. Winslow runs the ranch;  
And for cash sets up the hash  
Good and strong and stanch.  
F. L. Nicolay has lately come  
To lather and shave your face;  
And he does his best to keep in trim  
The human hairy face.  
Roy King is our druggist  
To sell you pills and quills.  
And patent lotions guaranteed  
To cure all your ills.  
And in this office Roy  
Runs a silver store,  
Watches, clocks and jewelry,  
And all such goods galore.  
D. E. Smith is our postmaster,  
His right none dare dispute,  
And in his office you will find  
Postals and stationery to boot.  
Dr. Hickman is the young man  
His honors we'd extol;  
He doctors you clear thru and thru  
And makes the sick man whole.  
C. Bumgarner is our smith  
To shoe your horses right,  
To sharp your plows, and fix your gigs,  
And bring you great delight.  
Isaac Theobald with flour and grain,  
Is very much alive,  
Pays well for grain, sells flour cheap,  
And so makes business thrive.  
Wm. Pumphrey is on foot,  
When there's any stock to buy,  
He eats his hash and pays the cash,  
And never tells a lie.

S. A. Allsman the rural mail  
He brings it round precise.  
He licks and licks, your stamp he sticks  
All at the same old price.  
Powell and Grone the elevators run,  
And also hold the fort;  
They buy your grain at market price,  
And not a penny short.  
W. J. Wells with his livery barn  
Will furnish a rig that spins  
And if you want a driver  
He'll drive you out and in.  
Koehler & Co. with coal and lumber  
Are very much alive;  
And B. B. Brown sells them cheap,  
And so makes business thrive.  
Mrs. Smith and Simmerman  
Are telephone girls you know;  
And always ready to answer you  
By ringing out "Hello!"  
We have three churches spick and span  
Where you can worship free,  
Praise God from whom blessings flow  
Both here and over the sea.  
Here's our schools, they're our pride;  
They're always called, "fast-rate,"  
Prof. Husman did preside  
And kept them up-to-date;  
Miss Nellie Wilson, she is in  
The intermediate room,  
And her sister Maude, in the primary  
Is making business boom.  
In lodges we are well supplied:  
Odd Fellows, good and true,  
Royal Neighbors lodge is here,  
And Degree of Honor, too;  
The Court of Honor shines from afar,  
And lights you on your way;  
M.W.A. and A.O.U.W.,  
All good and true are they.  
Village board are Brown and Simms,  
Pumphrey, Houck and Adkins,  
Messman as treasurer, Cole as clerk,  
They keep us all from starvin'.  
S. N. Kuntz runs the dray  
For Brown's and Theobald's coal,  
And he'll do your draying too,  
And get you out of the hole.  
We've lovely homes and pretty girls,  
And ho isewives tried and true,  
And everybody takes the "Reporter,"  
And profits by it too.  
But really now I guess I'm thru  
With all my boomerang;  
I'll take in the town and simply say  
"Hurrah, Hurrah for STRANG."



Photo from Deb Witt  
Early store in Strang,  
(1910), run by Mr. and  
Mrs. Tom Tonkinson. The  
clerk is Fern Woodworth.



Photo from Emma Christancy  
The Original Burlington  
Depot at Strang. "Bur-  
lington Depot Red" has  
given way to white paint.



## Businesses

At one time Strang boasted the following place of business: a depot, two elevators, a bank, a hotel, a lumber yard, a coal dealer, three grocery and dry-goods stores, two millinery shops, a butcher shop, a newspaper, a printer, a shoe shop and shoe repair, a drugstore, a hardware store, furniture and undertaking shop, a wagon and harness repair shop, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable, a feed mill, a railroad coal chute, and a saloon. There were also two doctors, a dentist, and a photographer.



Photo from Mrs. N. N. Brown

Lloyd Monroe and one of his teams at his livery barn, located where Elmer Messman's shop now stands.

Since 1902 there have been at least eight fires which have destroyed business places. Although some of these were replaced, most were not. With the present ease of transportation by car to larger communities, rebuilding seemed unnecessary. There are now in Strang a Burlington depot (freight trains go through two or three times a week), two elevators, a lumber yard, a hardware and grocery store, a produce station, and a cafe. There is a post office which provides good mail service; it has been in charge of Postmistress Lavera (Mrs. Harry) Gewacke since September 1, 1961. N. N. Brown has been mayor of Strang for 44 years (since May 1, 1923). The town board is made up (1967) of N. N. Brown, Charley Hobbs, Louis Trenary, Paul Harms, and Glenn Hintz.

Strang's newspaper was the *Strang Reporter*, of which the late Frank Sauer was editor. A news item of 1887 reports, "Citizens of Strang burned off the prairies surrounding Strang to avoid danger to the town from prairie fires." The issue of the *Reporter* for November 2, 1893 (in the possession of Mrs. Grace Eich, the former Grace Messman), reports Mrs. Eich's birth: "The home of William Messman was gladdened Sunday by the arrival of their first baby girl." Other news in this paper, a weekly two-page affair 15" x 21" in size, was largely political, as it was near election time. Besides the Republican and Democratic parties there was also a People's party (Populists). President Grover Cleveland received a write-up, and there was an article pertaining to the election of a county treasurer: "If you want the interest on the county funds to go into the pocket of the county treasurer, then vote for Sandrock, but if you want the county to receive such interest then vote for Trauger."

Some of the advertisements in the *Reporter* are as follows:

"L. Vanzele, Dealer in Flour, Feed and Exchange."

"Bargains at all times for cash, O. O. Thomas."

"An Artesian well in Strang has not been discovered but the place to buy your boots and shoes for summer and fall can be found at the corner of Main and Center Street, Strang, Nebraska. Bender, The Shoeman."

"The Metropolitan Hotel—This is a first-class House. Special attention given to traveling salesmen. Convenient to depot. J. E. Miller, Prop."

Also advertised were these items: Hood's Sarsaparilla, Chamberlain's Cough Syrup, Royal Baking Powder, St. Jacob's Oil, Syrup of Figs, Mother's Friend, and Kennedy's Medical Discovery.

Answers to the following questions, dating back to 1886, were supplied by L. H. Sauer, Peter Eggenberger, and W. A. Simms.

1. Who was the first resident in Strang? M. L. Matson
2. Who erected the first residence in Strang? W. J. Mosier
3. Who first engaged in business in Strang? A. Koehler
4. Who was the first born in Strang? Victor V. Vodra — 1887
5. First death in Strang? Annie Minnie
6. Who taught first term of school in Strang? Jennie Deselms
7. Who preached the first sermon? Rev. R. G. Carter
8. Who was the first station agent? Kenyon
9. Who was the first newspaper man? A. L. Scott — *The Record*

10. Who was the first postmaster in Strang? J. H. Bridgwood — 1886
11. First Town Board? C. H. Woodruff, J. A. Ashbrook, E. G. Beers, A. T. Scott, J. C. Bender, A. J. Hettinger (treasurer), and H. Leowin
12. Who conducted the first hotel? J. R. Piersol
13. Who operated the first bank? A. J. Hettinger
14. Who was the first blacksmith? George Vodra
15. Who was the first apothecary in Strang? L. S. (Sanford) Darling
16. Who was the first physician in Strang? T. Leelanie
17. Who operated the first meat market in Strang? Bridgwood & Matson
18. Who operated the first general store in Strang? J. M. Bender
19. Date of first lodge organization in Strang? A. O. U. W., June 25, 1887
20. First carpenters living in Strang? W. J. Mosier and Massey
21. Who operated first Snake Store? John Stabenow
22. Who operated first elevator in Strang? A. Koehler
23. Who was first stock shipper in Strang? A. Koehler
24. Who was first liveryman in Strang? Uoher?
25. Who was first justice of peace in Strang? W. A. Simms
26. Who was first constable in Strang? F. M. Rathburn
27. Who were first graduates in Strang? Will Odell and Nellie Matson — 1896
28. Who were the first lumbermen in Strang? Kerlin and Miller
29. Who operated the first barbership in Strang? J. R. Piersol

Businesses advertising in the *Strangulator* in 1927 were these:

"Strang State Bank — Banking, Farm Loans, Insurance — Practice Thrift."

"Cuttenden Grian Co. — Grain, coal and grinding — Elmer Messman, Manager."

"Frank Baand & Koehler Co. — Wholesale and Retail — Grain and feed — Chix feed."

"Trade with Us — We carry a full line of Groceries, Dry Goods, and Shoes — Highest prices paid for Cream, Poultry, and Eggs — Snodgrass & Norris."

"Congoleum by Yard — Very attractive, very durable, and very reasonably priced — Earl Christianity, Dealer in Hardware and Harness."

"C. S. Bridgwood — Contractor and Builder — Manufacturer of Cement Blocks — All work appreciated."

## Mail and Phone Service

Peter Eggenberger started the idea of the first mail route, which was established out of Strang in 1903. Arthur Allsman, a Strang citizen, was the first rural mail carrier. The original mail route was 24 miles long and had about 70 patrons. Later, it increased to 27 miles and served about 77 patrons.



Photo from Emma Christianity  
The New Strang Post Office (built 1936).

As nearly as can be ascertained, the Bell Telephone service was installed in 1905 or earlier, for offices. Around 1906 or 1907, the Independent Telephone system started serving country homes. Later, Bell bought out the Independent company, and, in time, telephones were placed in all city, town, and country homes where desired.

The Strang telephone directory, printed in a two-column square in the *Strang Reporter* on July 23, 1908, listed the following names:

Bumgarner, Clarence, res.....	34	Kuhns, Nathaniel, residence.....	42
Bell, John, residence.....	36	Lenhard, J. H., residence.....	40
Cole, D. D., store.....	20	Posson, A. C., store.....	39
Cole, D. D., residence.....	20	Powell, G. W., elevator.....	39
Gardner, Rev. F. W., res.....	28	Rakestraw, J. E., restaurant.....	27
Grone, F. J., elevator.....	26	Renner, Sam., hardware.....	21
Hickman, Dr. J. C., office.....	35	Theobald, Isaac, feed store.....	38
King, L. R., residence.....	41	Tonkinson, T. H., grocery.....	23
King, E. R., residence.....	43	Wheeler, E. E., residence.....	37
Koehler & Co., lumber yard.....	25	Wells, W. J., livery.....	31

## Electricity

The residents of Strang had the convenience of electric lights on the streets when Consumers Public Power wired them in January, 1923. On May 25, 1923, the homes of Strang were rendered more efficient with the installation of domestic electricity. Consumers also electrified farm homes within 1/4 mile S and E of the town. Frank Eich was the first to have lights on this route, in 1928, when they were

<sup>1</sup> For the benefit of several younger generations since 1886, it may be useful to explain that this was a Temperance term for "saloon."

<sup>2</sup> This unusual name remains, despite many inquiries, unidentified.

living  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile S and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile E of Strang. In the fall of 1950, the R.E.A. came down on the road  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile W of Strang, making power available to more people.

The first irrigation well in Belle Prairie township was put down on the farm of Jack Hinrichs, 3 miles S and 3 miles E of Strang. By February 21, 1957, the number of wells had risen to 30, and by January 1, 1967, there were 45 irrigation wells in the township.



Photo from Paul Lefever  
Honor Roll of World War I Servicemen from the Strang Community.



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
The Strang Baseball Team in 1919. Front row, left to right: Lloyd Monroe, Leon ("Peewee") Crawford, Oscar ("Buzz") Miller, Ora Wells, "Winnie" Messman. Back row, left to right: Ed Mitchell, Elmer Messman, Jim Hurley, Norman Dunker, Alfred Archer, Lou Domeier, N. N. Brown.



Photo from N. N. Brown  
A baseball crowd brought from Grafton to Strang by a special excursion train (1913).



Photo from Emma Christiancy  
The Strang Baseball Team in 1937. Front row, left to right: Walter Christiancy, Vernon Messman, Keith Eich, Elmer Messman. Back row, left to right: Warren Rocole, Leon Messman, Roy Dunker, Dean Messman, Laverle Hopken, Lowell Messman, Bob Dondlinger.

## Recreation

For some years free motion picture shows during the summer were sponsored by the following Strang businesses: Koehler Lumber & Grain Co., managed by Charley Hobbs, assisted by John Jansen, the depot agent; Albert Butler, Hardware and Groceries, run by Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Messman; Lowell Messman, operator of the Produce Station; Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Ebbeka, owners of the Strang Cafe; Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Messman of the Post Office, and others.

In 1910 N. N. Brown organized a baseball club in Strang, and continued to manage it until the close of the 1930 season. At first the club traveled to neighboring towns by a hack hired from the Strang Livery Barn. When automobiles came into use, they traveled by car and were able to play clubs at greater distances.

In 1913, several special excursion trains ran from Grafton and Fairmont to Strang. In order to get the service, the ball club gave the railroad company a certified check for \$50. Sometimes more than 300 people would take advantage of these excursions. The ball park was then located  $\frac{1}{8}$  mile from the Strang depot on the west side of the road on Sec. 7. Earl Boering from Dunning, Nebraska, and Lloyd Monroe of Strang were the battery.

The Meridian League was organized in the early twenties, and continued for several years. An old schedule in the possession of N. N. Brown shows 10 towns in the league. They were Tobias, Exeter, Sutton, Geneva, Strang, Milligan, Fairmont, Belvidere, Ohio, and Grafton.

When Strang won the M. L. pennant in 1929-1930, Mr. Brown chose for his boys silk watch fobs each with a gold baseball on it. These were given by the Spalding Sporting Goods Co. Bob Logan, whose father had been a depot agent at Strang, was playing with Strang at Sutton when the State League spotter signed him up. He started playing professional baseball in 1930.

In 1937, Elmer Messman organized a baseball team made up of some boys in high school and some out of high school. This team played 22 straight winning games. The battery were Lowell Messman, Herman Everts, and Walter Christiancy.



Photo from Lowell Messman  
The Strang Baseball Team in 1940. Front row, left to right: Paul Conners, Herman Everts, Roy Dunker, Keith Eich. Back row, left to right: Elmer Messman, Tiny Luttman, Fred Kuch, Keith Endorf, Gerald Ough, Lowell Messman.

