



Madison, a Pioneer Nebraska Community

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Article Summary: Kortman briefly mentions many early settlers and provides a factual account of Madison buildings constructed and businesses established. In the early 1880s a tornado and a major fire devastated parts of the town.

Note: This essay won third prize in the Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska 1936 Contest.

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Photographs / Images: drawing of the Michael Bauch home

MADISON, A PIONEER NEBRASKA COMMUNITY

By FLORENCE BAUCH KORTMAN, Madison

Third Prize, Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska 1936 Contest.

The history of Madison began in the year 1866. Nebraska was ready to become a state. Acres of fertile prairie were available for those who would come to live on them. To the Henry Mitchell Barnes family, living in Poughkeepsie, New York, this was OPPORTUNITY, so Mr. Barnes with his sons William J. and Frank W. and a nephew Peter J. Barnes left their home and set out for the "West" to acquire some of the land and engage in extensive stock raising, which in all its branches was of great interest to them. Mrs. Barnes remained in New York state.

Mr. Barnes and the young men came to Fremont by train. Learning that the government surveyors had completed the survey of the territory north of Columbus and hearing gratifying reports of the fertile soil, water courses and timber supply, they continued their journey on to Columbus where they built a log cabin, the first in that part of Columbus which lies north of the railroad tracks. In December, 1866, Mr. Barnes came with a party to investigate conditions between Columbus and the Elkhorn river, decided on the location which now is Madison and went back to Columbus to spend the winter.

On May first, 1867, the four men, with two teams and wagons, two saddle horses and a herd of good cattle, with unlimited courage, acumen and that all essential faith, left Columbus to make this place their future home. Pieces of tin fastened to pine stakes served as guideposts from Columbus to the Elkhorn river. They camped that night on the open prairie about four miles north of Shell Creek. On the afternoon of May second they reached the south bank of Union Creek and camped there near the present site of the Madison Mill. Next morning they decided to locate on the north side of the creek so built a bridge of logs, moved over, pitched their tent and made preparations to build the first frame house in the county.

Looking over the expanse of grassy land next morning one of the party is known to have remarked, "Pa, we won't have a neighbor for ten years." How mistaken he was! It was

not many days until two men, Henry Platts and Frank Flowers, drove up in a wagon. Surprised to find anyone here they visited briefly then drove on, Mr. Platts taking adjoining land.¹

In a letter written by Mr. Henry M. Barnes in 1874 he recalled their experience and said, "With material hauled from Columbus, in a short time we built a small house with good boards and battens, a shingle roof and good floors and were comfortable quartered. Then we went about making a garden, planting corn, potatoes, cabbages and melons which made remarkably rapid growth. In June two covered wagons and a herd of cattle appeared on the south side of the creek. The water was in flood but when it had subsided sufficiently we assisted them to cross. This was the Huylar family, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Huylar, Charles Jr., three daughters, Emily, Margaret and Monetta, and Mr. Emory Thavenet. They camped with us a short time, then located on their claim a few miles up the creek.² We celebrated the Fourth of July, 1867, by joining together in a dinner." Within a few years Margaret Huylar married William J. Barnes, Monetta Huylar married Peter J. Barnes and Emily Huylar married Emory Thavenet.

The next settlers to come were the J. H. Severence family from Indiana; the William Bickleys, parents of Mrs. Mary Bickley Robinson, present President of the Madison County Historical Society, and Lewis Bickley from Pennsylvania; the Henry Hill family from Idaho and "Dr." John Q. Harvey, an old man, alone, from California. These families located north and northwest from the Barneses' claims. The William F. and John Trine families came in 1868, taking land to the southeast.³ In 1871 Thomas Alderson came from Wisconsin, taking land in the same vicinity and he still owns and manages that land. In October 1868 the Henry Maurer Sr., the Philip Demmel Sr., and the Andrew Schwartz families came from Freeport, Illinois. Mrs. Schwartz often related experiences of the trip to me. Mr. Maurer and Mr. Demmel had come here in May and selected their land, made an agreement with Peter Fedderson, who had a claim,⁴ to cut and stack their hay during the summer, then returned to Illinois to harvest their crops and prepare for the moving. They were a month making the trip with their families and stock and all the way from Columbus the children kept watching

¹The William Kreitman farm.

²The John Dorr farm.

³The Weiland and Malena farms.

⁴The George Straecke farm.

and asking, in German, "Are those our stacks?" There were eighteen persons in the three families. They went to work at once building their sod houses but got only two made before winter set in so the Schwartzes lived with the Demmel family through the winter. Today the third and fourth generations of the three families farm that homestead and pre-emption land. The G. Polenske family had located in that vicinity previously and still hold title to their homestead.

The Chris Neidig, the Chris Schwank and the Louis Weltz families came from Kankakee, Illinois, in April, 1869. The August Buettner family, also, came that year and William L. Wills from Indiana. These claims were all on upper Union Creek. In 1870 the Stephen Stork family came from Illinois and took land nine miles northeast of the present city site. George Stork, a member of that family, has resided sixty-six years on that farm.

On the 21st of January, 1868, in obedience to an order from Governor Butler, the voters of Madison County held the first election in a small frame building (spoken of as the pre-emption house because settlers moved it from place to place until they had title to their land) located near the William Bickley homestead at about the place the railroad crosses Taylor Creek. Most of the men elected to offices lived in or near Norfolk, consequently the official business of the county was conducted there.

Mathew Flagg, a college graduate from New York state, came here in June, 1868, located a claim, bought an ox team and started to break prairie. The Barneses had built a cellar for storing their vegetables and in this Flagg attempted to start a store. Money was scarce and his venture soon came to an end, he left to find employment in Columbus, the Sheriff gathered up the remnants of his stock and his claim was "jumped".

As news of the fertile prairies reached the eastern states the settlers came more rapidly and the Barnes men decided to plat a town to be known as "Madison". During the month of January, 1870, Frank W. Barnes surveyed, staked and made a plat of twelve blocks "on the flat". Our city flag pole marks the southeast corner of this original town which extended for the length of four blocks west and from that line north to the creek. A business or residence lot was given to any person, company or corporation who would build on it.

The "First Presbyterian Church of Madison" was organized on February first, 1870. While living in Columbus during the winter of 1866 and 1867 the Barnes family became acquainted with a Reverend Alfred Brown, a Congregational

minister. Mr. Henry M. Barnes invited Reverend and Mrs. Brown to come to his home on a Sunday in July, 1867, and hold a service. From this gathering of the few persons in the little home on the north side of the creek came the development and formal organization of the church. The organization was formed by Reverend Sheldon Jackson, a noted missionary who later introduced reindeer into Alaska. There were three members, Mr. Henry M. Barnes, Mrs. Anna Marrs, and "Dr." J. Q. Harvey. Mr. J. M. Wilson was the first pastor.

On the first Monday in May, 1870, Mrs. Miranda Ellis opened the door of the Madison Public School, District number 1 in Madison County, to the youth of this community. The determined efforts of Mr. William Bickley had brought results. He called the voters together several times at the Barnes' home, had taken the school census, circulated the petition for a building fund and was the first Director. Frank Barnes had donated Lots 1-2-3-4 in Block 8 to the School District and was the architect for the building which was 14x20 feet with three windows in each side and a door in one end. The lumber cost \$21.32 and was hauled from Columbus. Seats and desks were homemade. The term was for three months, salary was \$50 for the term and twenty-two pupils were enrolled. Mrs. Ellis boarded with the Hill family about four and one-half miles from the schoolhouse.⁵ The first state apportionment was \$139.25. Mrs. Mary Stork Lyon is the only teacher in this schoolhouse now residing in Madison. This schoolhouse was the first building erected in the town and was used for religious services until churches were built and for other meetings of the citizens.

Miss Phebe Bauch came from Kankakee, Illinois, in September, 1870, to be with her sister, Mrs. Chris Neidig, and teach a few months school in a sod addition to the Neidig home. The Neidig family was then living on the homestead, a part of 23-21-2. Mr. Albert Zessin accompanied Miss Bauch here on this trip. He was pleased with the farming prospects, took a claim on Union Creek and wrote for his people to come here which they did in October, 1870. Mr. Michael Bauch, who was storekeeper in Kankakee, came that Fall to visit his daughters, Mrs. Neidig and Phebe. The settlers convinced him of their need for a store. Frank Barnes sold him the building he had used for a surveyor's office and gave him the south part of Block 8. Mr. Bauch had the building moved onto one of the lots and began the erection of a house adjoining the store. He returned to Illinois, disposed of his busi-

⁵The Charles Elley farm.

ness, and in April, 1871, returned with Mrs. Bauch and their son Philip, seventeen years of age. Thus the Bauch family was the first to have a home and business in the platted town. The post office was located in the store.

As soon as the Bauch family had settled in their new home, Phebe Bauch and Frank W. Barnes were united in marriage. The birth of their son, Edward Y., in February, 1872, was the first birth in Madison.

The first deaths in the community were those of little Katie Weber, who had tied the pony's lariat around her body and was dragged to death, and that of Mrs. Henry Hill. Mr. Lewis Bickley made the coffin for Mrs. Hill, lining it with a sheet. Mr. E. A. Lyon was one of the pall bearers. These burials and that of Mr. John Craig were made in what is now the business part of the city of Madison. The cemetery on the hill south of town was used after 1873.

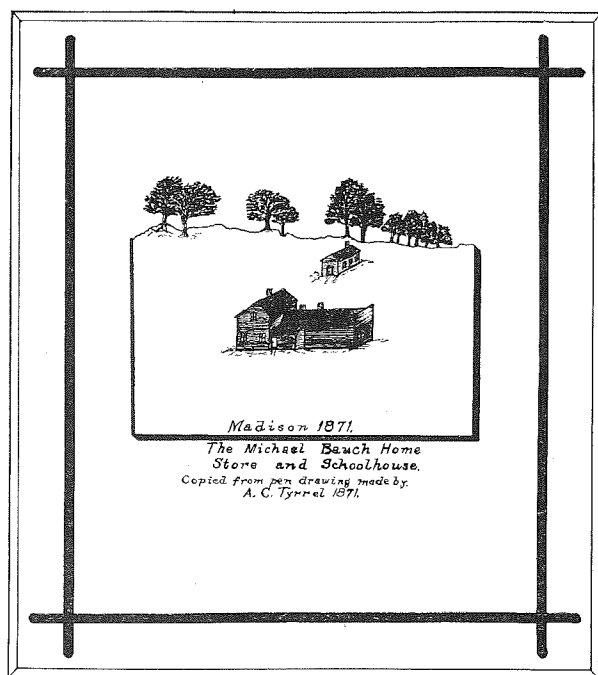
The Presbyterian Church, built in the spring of 1872 on the corner of Pearl and Third streets, was dedicated on May 12, 1872. Mr. Henry M. Barnes spent the summer months of 1876 in the East visiting friends and relatives and attending the Centennial Exposition. While there, with the donations of philanthropic friends and the balance from his own funds he purchased a bell of the best bell metal, weighing 200 pounds, from the Clinton H. Meneely Company of Poughkeepsie, for the Madison church. Mr. Barnes was justly proud of the clear-toned bell but had not long to enjoy it for his death occurred on November third, 1876. The bell was tolled for the first time for his funeral service. After years of use in church and school the bell is now stored in the Madison Public Library.

The Methodist Episcopal Church was organized as part of a circuit in 1871. The corner stone of their church was laid in 1877, on the lot which the present church occupies.

The German Evangelical Church was organized in the early 70's.

The first St. Leonard Catholic Church was built in 1880, several rods north of the present Catholic Cemetery. Masses were said in homes prior to that time.

Because of its proximity to the creek and being almost inaccessible in the rainy seasons, the little schoolhouse, built in 1870, was moved south about three blocks or onto Block 22, Barnes 2nd Addition, after the summer term in 1873. This schoolhouse accommodated the community until September 25, 1875, when it was sold at auction to Mr. W. S. Osborne for \$55. He moved the building and remodeled it for a home for his family. Mr. D. K. Robertson, who came from Illinois, says one of his first jobs in Madison was helping plaster this house.



Madison Beginnings

Years ago it was moved again to Block 36 in Clark's Addition and is now owned and occupied by Mrs. Anna Myers. The second schoolhouse, built in Block 22, Barnes Second Addition, by Mr. John Wilson, was 22x40 feet, had a brick foundation, four Gothic style windows in each side and two in the east end, two doors, wainscoting three feet high, 120 feet of black-board surface, patented seats and desks and cost \$1200 when completed. This building was the social center of the community and dances, spelling bees and entertainments were held in it. Our esteemed citizen Mr. Frank Prince was one of the teachers in this schoolhouse, his term beginning January, 1877.⁶ Except for a re-modeled entrance the building stands as it was built and is owned and used regularly by the Immanuel Lutheran Church.

⁶Mrs. Ira Chittenden, Mrs. A. K. Robinson, Mrs. A. V. Smith, Mrs. U. D. Mathews, A. E. Ward, Peter Oberg and Lew Ganzer are Madison citizens who were pupils of Mr. Prince.

In February, 1873, two of Madison's enterprising young men, F. W. Barnes and A. C. Tyrrel, procured a small safe, put a counter across the room Mr. Barnes had built for his use as a surveyor and announced themselves the proprietors of the Madison County Savings Bank. They made loans for Eastern capitalists, sold land and wrote insurance. Soon the office was too small and their equipment inadequate so a more commodious building was built, a \$700 fire and burglar proof safe and a complete set of banking books which cost \$35 were purchased. This bank eventually became the First National Bank of Madison.

One of the greatest factors in bringing about the rapid development of the Nebraska prairies was the newspaper. The first newspaper edited in Madison County was the *Madison County Review*. Mr. Theron M. Blakely was the editor, and the first publication was dated January 23, 1874. That was a great undertaking for Madison was but a small settlement three years old, the nearest railroad was thirty-five miles away, with stage service twice a week if roads and weather permitted. Part of the paper, the "patent insides", was printed in Chicago and shipped to Columbus. The bundle was brought by the stagedriver, a farmer who chanced to go to Columbus on business or someone went for it on horseback. Mr. Blakely edited the paper for nearly three years then sold to John H. Slater. In December, 1878, Philip Bauch became owner and changed the name to *Madison Chronicle*. In August, 1883, he sold the paper to Mr. Blakely, who had been the original owner.

Mr. Barnes and Mr. Tyrrel opened a lumber yard in September, 1873, with three carloads of lumber on hand. The Madison Mill was built by F. W. Fritz in the summer of '73. One of the first millers was Mr. Alvin Mohr, the grandfather of Mr. J. A. Mohr, who is proprietor of the Madison Shoe Store. Mr. Charles Huyler moved the frame house in '73 from his claim to the block where the schoolhouse and store were located, built a log addition for a dining room and opened a hotel. The first jewelry store was opened that year by J. D. Sallade. In 1874 Madison had a drug store with a soda fountain in it, owned and operated by H. B. Tyrrel. The Chris Neidig family had moved from their homestead into town and opened a store. Mr. Neidig advertised a full line of groceries, drygoods, ready made clothing, boots and shoes, crockery and glassware. The J. R. Thomas store advertised stoves, tinware, nails, putty, glass, and wagon timber. There were two blacksmith shops at that time. Mr. Becker opened a furniture store that year and N. L. Bryant a carpenter shop, a dressmak-

ing and millinery establishment began business, a photographer located here, Dr. Merriam, the first registered physician, came to locate and Mr. Shartzter, a shoe-maker, came to engage in business. There was no vacant house so this family consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Shartzter and their two little girls lived temporarily in the schoolhouse until their home could be built. Mr. Shartzter brought all the lumber cut and frames made ready to assemble. Part of that home stands where it was built and is the back room of the C. J. Kortman Jewelry Store. A picture of my grandmother, standing churning on her porch (the City Hall location) as the Shartzters drove into Madison that day, stamped itself on the impressionable mind of little Josie Shartzter, who, as Mrs. Ira P. Chittenden, claims the honor of having the longest continuous residence in Madison.

In 1874 the stage and mail route from Columbus to Norfolk was driven by Mr. Thomas F. Linn, a cousin of Mr. Robert Linn of Madison. The route from Madison to Stanton was driven by Edward Wilberger.

Think of Madison holding a County Fair in the early seventies! A meeting of those interested in a Madison County Agricultural Society was held in Madison on March 2, 1874, to make plans for the Fair. A committee, Peter Barnes, J. D. Gould, and William Barnes, was appointed to prepare a track for the exhibition of trotting and running horses, a committee was appointed to prepare a premium list and the dates were set for September 16-17-18, 1874. The report of the Fair says it was a complete success, estimating the attendance on the second day as a thousand persons. There were entries of horses, cattle, hogs, poultry, grains and vegetables, baking and fancy work. James Dover won first prize of fifty cents on Early Rose potatoes. William F. Trine won a dollar prize for the best display of vegetables.

The election in the Fall of 1875 resulted in Madison being the choice for the County Seat. When the officers were moved from Norfolk to Madison there was no building to accommodate them and the offices were located as follows: County Clerk in the Tyrrel Drug Store; County Treasurer and Surveyor in the bank; Sheriff in the Huyler Hotel; County Judge in the Thomas Store and the Superintendent in the newspaper office. The Court House was built in 1887.

On December 4, 1875, citizens were called to a meeting in the Tyrrel Drug Store for the purpose of discussing the feasibility of erecting a Town Hall. A committee was appointed to draft a plan and get an estimate of the cost, another committee appointed to solicit funds for building. The

committee on building plans and cost reported later that a building 22x40 feet could be built for \$1335. The soliciting committee reported the funds could be raised. A few years later such a building was erected on the lot where the Dr. F. A. Long home stands, has been moved twice and enlarged and now is on the lot east of the Midway Oil Station.

Madison was incorporated on July 6, 1876. The first Board of Trustees were F. W. Barnes, C. Neidig, T. M. Blakely, E. F. Prince and H. E. Becker. Regular board meetings were held at 4 P. M. on the first Tuesday in each month in the W. M. Robertson office.

There has been an organized band in Madison since 1879. Mr. Albert V. Smith, (deceased October, 1935), one of five brothers who came with their parents and others in a colony of settlers from Pennsylvania in March, 1876, was a charter member and a regular attendant at all meetings. Mr. Charles Altschuler, who came to Madison in March, 1875, has been a faithful member of the band for fifty-five years.

Covering a period of five years time, meetings of the citizens were held at Columbus, Norfolk and Madison, visits were made by railroad officials, propositions submitted to the voters, defeated and again submitted, in an effort to bring the railroad from Columbus to Norfolk. Finally the road was built and a daily train, except Sundays, began making the round trip from Columbus to Norfolk on December 30, 1879. The first express package delivered in Madison came to the office of the *Madison Chronicle*. Five cars of grain were shipped during the first week. The first annual report made by station agent Mr. Sumption showed 297 carloads of hogs, corn, wheat, oats, potatoes and cattle shipped, ranking in the order given.

On Thursday the 29th of September, 1881, a tornado swept over Madison and in three minutes time had caused great damage. Many houses were moved from their foundations, the roof was torn from the depot, the Town Hall was moved about fifteen feet, the fronts of the Brinckman Drug Store, the A. H. Steele Drug Store and Mrs. Simpson's Millinery Store were blown in, the *Chronicle* office was leveled to the ground, the type scattered broadcast and the job press broken. The Presbyterian Church was demolished, but the organ, the bell and the flag, which was draped on the west wall for a memorial service honoring the martyred President Garfield, were intact. The bolt of black calico donated by Chris Neidig for festooning was in shreds. That flag, which had been donated by Mr. Walter Craig, was the first in the county and now is one of the treasures of the Madison County Historical Society. The

church was rebuilt on its present site the next year. There were two deaths in the tornado, a four year old boy at the Soennichsen home on Depot street and a little daughter of the S. O. Trines, who were living near the site of the light and power plant.

Madison was without any fire protection until after a destructive fire in July, 1882, when the Neidig store, the Brinckman and Steele drug stores, a barbershop, the household goods of D. Robertson and the Robertson and Campbell law offices with most of their contents were a loss. Then a hand pump apparatus was purchased and several wells were put down on corners of the business blocks.

The first house which Mr. Michael Bauch built, in connection with his store, was moved in the Fall of 1884 to the southwest corner of the block in which it originally stood. In December of that year, Dr. F. A. Long brought his bride, Miss Maggie Miller of West Point, to this home to begin house-keeping. After about a year and a half in that home they built on the lots where they now live in a new, modern home, and where they have been privileged to spend over fifty years. A history of Madison would be incomplete without mention of this estimable couple who have instigated or stimulated interest in every civic enterprise. Theirs has been a hospitable home and their interest in individuals and organizations omnipresent.

I regret I could not mention everyone of the pioneer families for each made some contribution to the development of the community and left some impression. True neighborliness was exemplified by these pioneers in loaning their possessions, sharing their pleasures, caring for each other in sickness and alleviating sorrow.

All these pioneers came expecting to work, their courage was amazing, their faith all enduring. Let us pay tribute to the early settlers of Madison, a Pioneer Nebraska Community.
