



Nebraska Pioneers, Prize Stories of the 1937 Contest

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Article Contents: "Prairie Fire," by Mrs. George Peck

"West Point: A Pioneer Community," by Frank Schmitt

"George W. Hummel: Pioneer Prairie Preacher," by Emma Bargman

Note: These stories won the top three prizes in the 1938 contest sponsored by the Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska.

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Photographs / Images: Sally Gammon Peck, Frank Schmitt, Emma Bargman



Sally Gammon Peck, Rushville, Nebr.
Winner 1937 first prize, N. S. D. contest.

PRAIRIE FIRE.

By Mrs. George Peck, Rushville, Nebraska.

First Prize, Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska,
1937 contest.

Prologue.

It was in the Fall of 1888 that the events delineated in this story occurred, a time when northwestern Nebraska was a sparsely settled country, devoid of beauty and vegetation.

It was to this land of little promise that men and women of the East, lured by the extravagant posters of land sharks, flocked, the majority of them eager to es-

Sally Gammon Peck was born in Indiana July 18, 1885. In 1889 her parents brought her to Long Pine, Nebraska, where her father had accepted the pastorate of a struggling Methodist church and the subsequent moves from parish to parish which this entailed. This, and her own peripatetic four years as a country teacher, gave her familiarity with the Panhandle section and its pioneer women whose lives were fraught with peril, hardship and privation. In recent years she has turned to writing and several manuscripts have found acceptance; a novel is in the making. "Prairie Fire" recounts an experience in the life of her mother-in-law.

tablish new homes and the attendant institutions of civilization, while others came for the purpose of hiding their identity in the new land. This narrative is but one incident of the hardships and privations endured by those same sturdy people, who, in spite of adversity and disillusionment, rarely turned back, but, "having set their hands to the plough", remained to make the West the progressive country that it is today.

Louisa Peck stealthily tiptoed from the darkened bedroom where, for the past hour, she had been engaged in coaxing her teething babe to sleep, and as quietly did she close the door behind her. As she paused to arrange her pretty auburn hair, which the youngster's restless fingers had rumbled, a wave of sinister apprehension passed through her being and her eyes became distended with the same inexplicable fear.

The rays of the early afternoon sun, filtering through the windows of the large, cheery room which served as kitchen, parlour and dining room combined, cast a yellowish, sickening light throughout the interior, and a pall seemed to hover oppressively in the air. The brows of the young woman drew together in perplexity, and she spoke half aloud, "How strange everything seems! I wonder if we might be having an eclipse—no, there was no forecast of one in the Almanac. Perhaps it is just that we are having a late Indian Summer."

Quietly, lest she disturb her two small sons who lounged upon the floor at the farther end of the room, engrossed in a game of marbles, she sought for an explanation of that fantastic glare. She opened the door to step forth upon the tiny stoop, but recoiled in consternation and stared fixedly across the broad prairie.

In spite of herself, a low cry had escaped her lips, attracting the attention of the children. "What is it, mama?" George, the older boy, asked quickly as he scrambled to his feet and rushed to her side with Frank, like a shadow, at his heels.

The lads were but eight and seven years old, re-

spectively, but as their young eyes followed the mother's gaze, there was no need for words to explain to them the cause of her agitation, and they, too, stood appalled before the direful sight which confronted them. From the northwest, great billows of black and amber smoke rolled toward them, interspersed with wicked-looking tongues of flame. A monstrous prairie fire it was, that ever-dreaded peril of the unsettled West. It was rushing toward them at a terrific speed, forming an impenetrable wall of flame between the homestead and the father who was in town, four miles away.

Faintness seized the woman as full realization of their plight dawned upon her. Even had there yet been time for escape, no means of transportation was at hand, for the little sorrel mare which could easily have conveyed them to safety was gone from her stall. Each morning, hitched to the Democrat wagon, she was driven to Rushville, the nearest settlement, by the head of the house, where, by plying his trade as tinsmith, he was able to increase the scanty income derived from the homestead.

The younger lad, a delicate nervous child, whimpered in fear of the menace which threatened their lives and home, but George, though white faced and shaken as were the others, sought to conceal his fright and asked anxiously, "What shall we do, Mama? Will we be safe in the house?"

The mother, roused by his words from the terror which had overwhelmed her, strove to make her voice calm as she answered, "No, not in the house, George —. Let me see what we had best do. Ah, I have it!" she added quickly. "Take Baby and Frank to the sand-patch by the well, son, we'll be safer there. I will fetch Sukey." So saying, she set forth on a run toward the spot at the rear of the barn where the brindle cow was staked, pausing only to call back sharply to the stupefied lads on the porch. "Make haste, boys! Hurry, George! Get the children to the sand patch." Then, as

an after thought, "And be sure, George, that you close the door tight when you come out!"

The well to which Louisa directed her son stood at a distance of sixty feet from the cabin, the only place, it was found after much exploring, where an abundant supply of water was to be found. It was there, then, upon that patch of sand thrown carelessly about the well at the time of excavation, and which Louisa fervently prayed would prove an oasis of safety in their hour of need, that the little band of refugees hurriedly gathered, —and none too soon.

With a mighty roar and crackling of flames, the fire bore down upon the homestead, engulfing the woman and children in hot, stifling smoke and ashes. It had made great headway, for it was at the time of year when the prairie grass was high and dried, and Russian thistles rolled in profusion over the countryside; the time of year when extra precaution was taken to extinguish matches and cigar and cigarette stubs, for the tiniest spark had power to jeopardize life and property.

Louisa, with ears attuned to every sound, knew the exact moment that the greedy flames attacked the buildings, of which she and her husband had been so proud. "Our land will soon be as barren as the day we filed on it," she thought despairingly. "It took us three years to make these improvements which the fire is destroying in almost as many moments."

With that rare forethought which ever belongs to the true Pioneer, she had hastily drawn a pail of water from the well, and it was indeed fortunate that the hand of Providence had so directed her, for often sparks from the conflagration set afire the clothing of herself and the little ones. With her own body she sought to shield her loved ones from danger, but none escaped the hot cinders which cruelly seared the flesh. However, so great was their fright at the time that they were oblivious to pain.

To add to the confusion of that trying hour, the baby screamed shrilly from terror and hunger, and the cow,

which was tied to the well curb, had become panic-stricken. With hoofs beating frenziedly upon the earth, she kept up a continuous bawling as she tossed her head to and fro in a vain effort to free herself. Shep, the faithful herd dog, crouched quiveringly between the two boys, his coat stinking of singed hair, but, Leone, the pretty Maltese kitten, had not joined in that mad dash for safety and her absence added to the despair of the family.

After what, to Louisa, seemed an Eternity but was in fact, but a short interval of time, the smoke film grew less dense and she arose to survey the ravaged landscape. Gazing about in an effort to define her surroundings, her eyes suddenly widened with incredulence and she cried in a voice vibrant with joy and thanksgiving, "The house is still there! George! Frank! God has been good to us. He has saved our little home!"

Her words were indeed true; the little log cabin, though blackened by smoke and ashes, remained sturdy and intact as ever. The fire had swept to the very doorway, then, halted by the sparseness of grass and weeds upon which to thrive, had skirted the corners of the house and rushed on with renewed destructive vengeance to other quarters.

The out-buildings, sad to relate, had not fared so well. The straw-thatched roof of the barn had caught a fire at once and tumbled, a blazing heap, inside the walls. Heavy columns of smoke now poured from the building, telling the Watcher that the interior was slowly being gutted. The woodhouse, with its goodly supply of wood and coal, which had been procured at no little expense and by hard labor on the part of Frank Peck, was fully ablaze, and Louisa wondered dully where the money was to spring from to replace the loss.

"Perhaps we'll have to burn 'native fuel' ", she reflected desperately, fastidiously recoiling from the thought of gathering dried cow chips from the prairie to

be used as fuel, as many of her neighbors were compelled to do.

The anguish of the poor woman was further intensified as she beheld the hen coop where she housed her chickens, in the same state of ruin; and she wept bitterly as she thought of her hens and "fries" smothered in the coop, or burned to cinders as they rushed across the prairie in mad flight before the raging fire. The children, standing beside her, perceived her tears and grieved with her—George silently, the others in open abandonment.

The ground was as yet too warm for a return to the house when, from over the hills, there sounded the welcome beat of horses feet and the roll of buggy wheels. The next moment Frank Peck drove the sorrel mare, reeking with sweat and panting from a brisk run, into the yard. Jumping from the wagon, he ran to the spot where his family were forlornly huddled, and clasped his wife in his arms. With tears streaming down his rugged cheeks, he cried brokenly, "It's been Hell, Louise, thinking of you and the children! I came as soon as I could."

Louise, until that moment, had borne her afternoon's tribulations with unlimited courage and endurance, but now that she had someone upon whom she might lean, her nerves collapsed and she burst into wild sobbing. Her husband, with the man's helplessness in face of tears, endeavored to comfort her, the meanwhile chiding himself for having subjected a frail woman to the perils of frontier life. No one, he reflected remorsefully, as he gazed upon her face, reddened and swollen from the heat of the fire and excessive weeping, would have recognized in her the pretty, vivacious, young woman who had bravely renounced the comforts of the East to follow him to that bleak, undeveloped country.

"Of, take me away from this horrible place!" she cried, her voice rising almost to a scream. "If it's been Hell for you, Frank Peck, what do you suppose it has been for the children and me?" Then, asserting herself for, perhaps, the first time during her years of marriage,

she added in desperation, "I will not stay alone here another day. If you must go to town to make our living, then we will go, too."

"And so you shall, Wife, so you shall", the husband answered placatingly. "We will commence to pack our things right away, but first you must calm yourself or you will be ill. Here, take my handkerchief and bathe your poor face."

While Louisa was thus engaged, the man lifted the baby from the ground where the little fellow, all smiles again, had been vainly tugging at his father's boots, clamoring for attention. He held the little one close to his breast and listened but idly to young Frank's chattering recital of the events of the afternoon, for a wave of nostalgia had seized him at thought of the horror and danger which had been the lot of his loved ones.

"I might have lost them all if Louisa hadn't used her wits as she did," he thought silently. "What a plucky woman she is!"

At that moment the lady of his thoughts broke forth into fresh grief, and the man turned toward her in bewilderment. "What is it, now Louise?" he asked gently. "Is it that your burns are so painful?"

"No, no, I can stand the pain. It's my chickens, Frank," she wailed. "My beautiful Plymouth Rocks and Goldie! They were all there when the fire came, I remember, waiting to be fed—and now,—not a one of them is left!" And, again, the husband was called upon for comfort.

When, at last, the excess of the young woman's grief had abated, the family set forth upon a tedious journey to the cabin. They were forced to step gingerly, for the fire had left smoldering embers and hot soapweeds in its wake. Louisa, spent and bedraggled, clung limply to the arm of her stalwart husband, while the baby, from the shelter of his shoulder, crowed with glee as he leaned forward to peer into her face, and sought with grimy fingers to grasp tendrils of her disordered hair.

Frank Junior trudged solemnly behind, absorbed in

his own reflections, but the excitement of the afternoon's experience was soon outweighed by the thrilling thought of leaving the homestead. "Hi, George!" he called softly, "Didja hear what the folks waz sayin' about us movin' to town to live? We'll git a chance to lick them kids what called us country jakes, now." And his small fists doubled up as he anticipated a victorious combat with the town bullies.

George, however, remained unresponsive to his brother's enthusiasm and lagged far in the rear. Poor George was exceedingly unhappy at that moment, for he felt sure a scolding—perhaps a more drastic punishment—was in store for him. Strange to say, George, the dependable, the one upon whom his mother most often leaned, had for once been remiss in fulfilling his duty, and in his boyish heart he considered he had betrayed her loving trust. Until too late, he had entirely forgotten her parting injunction as they hastily fled to the sandpatch: **THAT HE BE SURE TO CLOSE THE DOOR OF THE CABIN.** There had not been a moment of that hideous afternoon but what the poor boy recalled visions of the interior of that little home as he had last seen it, and in comparison, pictured those cheery rooms as they must appear, clothed in the grime of a prairie fire. Now, he thought miserably, their immaculate order had been destroyed. The walls and ceiling which his mother had painstakingly endeavored to make attractive by means of paint and paper, must now, through his carelessness, appear unsightly, her labor gone to naught. The plants in the double window, which she had tirelessly tended and which had repaid that patient care by blooming profusely, were, without a doubt, blighted, — their beauty gone forever. At such a thought, the lad had difficulty in restraining his tears, for plants in the West, at that time, were exceedingly scarce and hard to procure. So overcome by wretchedness was the poor boy, indeed, that not even the sight of Leone, who, in some miraculous manner, had escaped incineration and now advanced, purring, to greet him, had power to lighten his mood.

By that time the others had passed from view around the corner of the house and George halted in his tracks, shrinking from the cry of dismay for which he was prepared. Suddenly, he lifted his head to a listening attitude, and a wave of astonishment slowly covered his young freckled face. Instead of the wails of sorrow, which he sadly expected to hear, great shouts of laughter came to his ears; booms of merriment from his father, hysterical peals from his mother and the childish shouts of young Frank.

Casting aside his cloak of gloom, the boy bounded forward to join the merry group. He pressed forward eagerly, peering, as the others were, into the interior of the cabin. For a moment he stood there, transfixed with amazement, then he, too, lifted his voice in hilarious care-free glee.

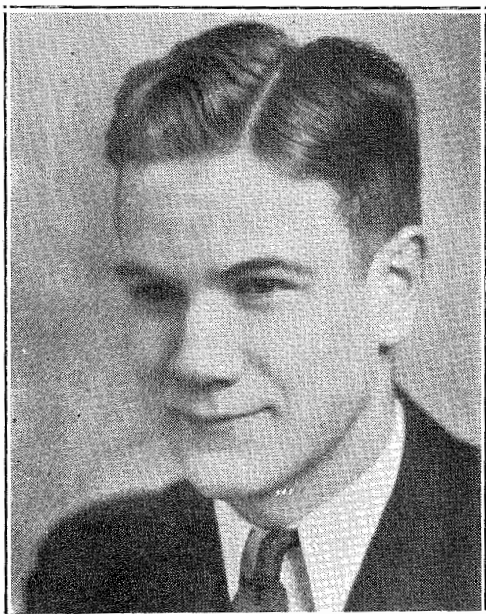
And 'twas no wonder the little Pioneer family laughed! Louisa Peck need mourn no longer for her beloved fowls. They had sought refuge from the fire through that open doorway, and there they were, safe and sound, perched upon the table, the stove, the dresser and the chair backs; in fact, they had perched upon all available objects which might afford roosting places. And, high above the other feathered occupants of the room, ensconced upon the massively framed portrait of Louisa's father, which hung from a peg upon the wall, was Goldie, gazing down upon the intruders with sleepy, bead-like eyes; Goldie, the sleek, bronze turkey hen which Louisa and her boys had raised from young turkhood and had been fattening in eager anticipation of Thanksgiving Day, only a few weeks away.

In that moment of joyous mirth, the perils and disappointments of that afternoon magically disappeared, and thankfulness reigned in the hearts of the Peck family that they, one and all, to the least of their cherished creatures, had escaped unscathed from the fire.

Louisa was the first to regain composure. "Well, Papa," she announced, as she wiped away the last of her

tears of mirth, and was again the brave, capable woman of the frontier, "I guess you will have to go back to town for more fuel. While you are about it," she continued as she gazed speculatively over the devastated farmyard, "you'd better go by Kendalls and borrow their team and heavy wagon, for we'll need uprights for a new roof for the barn."

"Get plenty of them," she added shrewdly, "then we can make perches in one end of the building for these fowls of ours to use until we can afford a new hen house. We don't want them to get the habit of roosting in the house."



Frank Schmitt, West Point, Nebr.
Winner second prize, 1937 N. S. D. contest.

A PIONEER NEBRASKA COMMUNITY

By Frank Schmitt, West Point, Nebraska

Great grandpa John Andrew Bruner entertained no wild imaginings about the unruliness of the Elkhorn's spring floods, nor of the prairie-wide north winds that swept the snow off her frozen shallows in midwinter. What with floating ice and a bitter night-blizzard, the

Frank Schmitt is the son of M. J. Schmitt, who has long been in business at West Point. His maternal grandfather, Peter Koppes, homesteaded near Marysville, Kansas, in 1859; his paternal grandfather left Chicago for the same locality in 1880. The author of above story is now studying philosophy and theology at St. Paul (Minnesota) Seminary.

Delaware was bad enough. Besides it was Christmas night, and he was away from home—with good chances of having his brains blown out by the Huns, if things didn't go as General Washington calculated. Anyway, he wasn't thinking about the Elkhorn. And I am sure that I, for one, should never have thought about his crossing the Delaware if his grandsons, Uriah, John and Andrew had not, at some time or other, crossed the Elkhorn.

There are two points of interest that revolve about the early history of West Point, like satellites. The simile is not altogether apt, for "Catherine" existed before West Point, and De Witt made its appearance almost simultaneously with West Point. Catherine was designated as the seat of Cuming County by the Territorial Legislature of 1855. The spot now lies in Dodge County, and is referred to by old settlers as "Dead Timber". Its first and only townspeople were the members of the Benjamin Moore family, who had come from Michigan in the summer of 1856. The first winter proved to be an unusually severe one, and had it not been for the hundreds of antelope, deer and elk that sought shelter in the timber of the river-bottom, the Moores would have gotten off to a hungry start. The following summer they abandoned claim at Catherine and settled at De Witt, about six miles northwest of the present site of West Point. Both places had been laid out just that spring, the former by a group of men from Fontenelle, and West Point by the Nebraska Settlement Association of Omaha. It was the beginning of a rivalry that occasioned some genuine western melodrama. Back in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Solomon Brobst might have regretted his sending his daughters and son-in-law west, had he foreseen the tumultuous events their coming provoked.

Brobst had lost his wife when his daughters Amelia and Catherine, or Kitty, were very young. Amelia had married Uriah Bruner when she was twenty two, and was now the mother of two small babies. Her husband was a druggist. Talented, he studied law during his

spare time, and was admitted to the Bar of Pennsylvania. Solomon was just back from the west; back with him was the usual lore of that goodly realm. Anyway, the young couple decided to leave Catasauqua for Omaha, and Mr. Brobst urged Kitty to go along. She could take care of Uriah's and Amelia's children, and besides, the future offered her more out there—"If you don't go, I will", he said. And so they went. I do not know if Kitty really wanted to go, but many have since been glad she did. A young woman of twenty two, dark and strong, she took a place beside her fair and stoutly bearded brother-in-law in the covered wagon en route to Allentown. When the big wooden hub groaned at the starting jolt, and the sand climbed half way up the wheels' rims to sift down again, the pioneer gleam that shone deep in her sister's hazel-eyes must have begun to sparkle in her own....From Allentown to Philadelphia they travelled in a train and boat; after that it was the belching iron horse again, as far as Iowa City,—then a stage.

The stage journey was made during a rainy spell, and we may guess that at this point things began to look drab enough. For there is nothing particularly arresting about an Iowa landscape, especially if it is muddy. And there appears to have been plenty of mud. When the stage-driver shouted, "Here's a good chance to walk, boys", they knew he was gently informing them that they were about to get stuck. Then the women and children would sit beside the road and wait until an ox team could be procured to pull them out. Sometimes too, they cried. They spent their nights in whatever sort of lodging they could find. One evening, as they were about to put the baby to bed, they felt something suspiciously soft and marshy. Closer inspection revealed a pioneer method of raising bread.

On May 5, 1856, they arrived at Council Bluffs, and the following day a ferry took them across the Missouri River to Omaha, a young and hopeful village of perhaps a dozen scattered houses. They had been sixteen days on the way. Mr. Bruner began practicing law, and in

March, 1857, was instrumental in founding the Nebraska Settlement Association. Early in the month Uriah and John Bruner and others started on a prospecting tour to the Elkhorn. They reached the whereabouts of the present site of West Point only with some difficulty, spring floods having damaged the roads and swollen Bell, Logan, and Cuming Creeks. They must have first beheld the Elkhorn valley from the hills east of town-----out across the river the country rose again, gently, then straightened out to the west. The breath of early spring moved through the valley and the hills. The departing snows revealed a rich, loamy soil; and the Elkhorn, gliding quickly and gracefully down its winding course, bid fair to support mills and factories galore.

The group recommended that the Association in Omaha locate a town at this site. Accordingly claims were taken, and the company purchased a steam saw-mill, which arrived sometime during June. A log house was built and the town site surveyed by Andrew Bruner, the other two Bruners returning to Omaha to await developments. There were plenty, and they changed the name of the town from Philadelphia to West Point in a hurry.

The trouble centered around the steam saw-mill, which was the only thing that made West Point any better than De Witt. The man engaged by the Omaha Company to erect the mill—Gaul by name—proved incompetent and was discharged. Greatly offended, he became an ally of the opposition town site company. From time to time valuable pieces of the mill's machinery were missing, thrown into the river presumably by Gaul and a fellow-rouster called Smith, who was known to be a deserter from the U. S. Army. Then, when Omaha mechanics were engaged to finish the mill, the two would go out with their minie rifles - one to the timber near the river, and the other to the bluff on which the old High School stood - and keep up a constant fire on them. The Omahans returned home. A party of about thirty was organized and, coming to West Point, proceeded to Gaul's place during the night and set fire to his hay or stables.

When he went out to extinguish the fire, they loaded his back with buckshot. Smith was captured a little later in a strong log-house just north of town, and taken to the ravine near the old Creamery. There he was tried, convicted, and hung on one of the oak trees nearby,

In the spring of 1858, John D. Neligh and James Crawford of Pennsylvania, and the two McKirahan brothers of Ohio arrived in the Elkhorn valley. They took Squatters' Claims, and bought the unfinished saw-mill and the claim to the town site. The town was surveyed and platted anew by Mr. Neligh. Energetic, enterprising, and of sanguine temperament, he was destined to become the dynamo about which centered the growth and activity of this tiny frontier community. More settlers dropped in around this time, and on May 15, 1858, a post-office was established, mail being carried between West Point and Fontenelle now and then by the postmaster, or by whomever happened to be going that way. The postal receipts for the first year amounted to \$2.50.

As the summer months waned into autumn, the West Point-De Witt trouble pot began to steam and brew once more. One of the two places had to become the county seat. In what was probably the most heated election West Point has ever witnessed, twelve votes were cast for West Point and seven for De Witt. When the excitement subsided, the pioneers settled down to providing food and shelter for the winter. And well they might; the winter was severe and the going hard. A number of people were compelled to grind corn in coffee-mills, in order to make bread. Years afterwards some of the old timers were still unable to look a piece of corn-bread in the eye. Somehow, the winter months dragged themselves out. The valley, awakened by the winds and birds from the southland, put her verdant vesture on, and prospects brightened. Crops were in the offing and the tide of settlers on the rise.

In late June, 1859, about three thousand Pawnee Indians came up the river on a hunting expedition. Being half starved, they commenced a systematic warfare on

the settlers' pigs, poultry and stock. They appeared near West Point on June 29. About sun-down that evening, a company of volunteers arrived from Fontenelle, and during the dark hours of the night, surrounding settlers were notified of the prospective trouble and advised to get into West Point while it was still dark. Twice the next day Indians were sighted—once to the south, once across the river. Both times they were pursued, but escaped unharmed.

Thus discovering that a strong force was stationed at West Point, the Indians began moving up the river; a party of thirty white men hastened up the east side to protect the settlers in the vicinity of De Witt. These stopped at Moore's place. At the appearance of eleven approaching Indians the men moved quietly into the kitchen, where Mrs. Moore was preparing dinner. As the Indians entered the empty sitting room, part of the whites slipped out of the kitchen and took a position at the south door—then someone, in one of the parties, fired, and the Red men, with startingly wild war whoops, dashed out the door, broke through the line of whites, and scrambled for the river. Lead stifled the cries of seven or eight of them before they could escape. Across the Elkhorn, almost two miles away, the Pawnees picked up their comrades' battle-cry, and this once, at least, the contorted river valley, the bottom timber, and the surrounding hills reverberated with the weird and frightful howling of three thousand red-skins. Hearts stopped with an inward jolt at the first sound of the fiendish chorus; throats were throttled by a warm hand within, and grew speechless. Excitedly, the party at De Witt rushed back over the trail to West Point—only to find that the remainder of the Fontenelle company had already started home. The townspeople were panic-stricken, envisioning a quick return of the Indians to avenge the fallen braves. Screaming children clutched at women's skirts, and mothers ran trembling fingers through their locks, and wept. Silent men stood by with rifles firmly clutched, and faces twitching nervously. Despite

the pleadings of Neligh, Crawford and others, the remaining soldiers and the settlers started a fear-worn train to Fontenelle. West Point was abandoned.

On July 5th an Omaha party, without much trouble and with a degree of safety and quiet, settled the Indian trouble peacefully, and before long the majority of settlers returned to Cuming County. Prairie fires, snow drifts, lack of money, and the fever, combined to make the winter of 1859-60 harder than the year before. And spring broke a good deal less hopefully.

Mr. Neligh determined to procure more settlers. He obtained a valuable addition on March 13, 1860, at the Bruner house near Omaha, where he married Kitty Brobst. The couple started to West Point on their wedding trip in a covered wagon, drawn by oxen. A cow was tied to the back to the wagon, and a half dozen chickens roosted inside. They traveled upland, crossed the Logan and came down the hill country; there in the hills the young bride first viewed the meager beginnings of the town that for generations was to affectionately refer to her as "Aunt Kitty". That summer Mr. Neligh induced six families to change their course from Grand Island to West Point—"Dere is gooten land", he explained, and they followed him up and over to the Elkhorn, where they formed the nucleus of the St. Charles settlement. With new blood in its veins, the pioneer community looked up again, and smiled, plodding on.

John and Kitty Neligh settled on his pre-emption claim on the banks of the Elkhorn in a shanty that he had erected beforehand. There in the winter of 1861, their first child, Alice, was born, the first white girl born in Cuming County. Food was so scarce that the expectant mother had laid away a half loaf of white bread so that she would have this to eat when her child came. In her reminiscences, Aunt Kitty wrote: "In 1862 we sowed wheat, and we reaped about forty bushels—we threshed it out with oxen and a flail. Then we went overland to Decatur to the mill—and that year we had plenty to eat." In 1865 the Nelighs built a house from cottonwood lum-

ber farther up on the hill. The Neligh home became a by-word for genuine western hospitality. Both meals and lodging were generously shared with friends and strangers alike—as many as a dozen people sometimes being cared for, for the night. The house, the oldest in West Point, is still standing on South Colfax Street, and was for many years the home of Mrs. Alice Neligh Simms. It is now used as a museum by the Cuming County Historical Society. In 1935, Ella Bruner DeBell wrote the following tribute to Aunt Kitty: “If John Neligh can rightfully be called the Father of West Point,—Aunt Kitty Neligh—can just as truly be called the Mother of West Point. From the earliest days—Aunt Kitty was always on hand at time of sickness and trouble. Her hands first held the newborn babies; indeed, on such occasions her help was indispensable. In recognition of her services, and in honor of her memory, the Elkhorn Valley Chapter of the D. A. R., in September, 1930, erected a bronze tablet on the site where Aunt Kitty did her first washing on their pre-emption land.”

About 1862 many new settlers began to come. Heavy drafting in the older states furnished the incentive in many cases. Cuming County furnished twelve Union Soldiers. Only two of them died in service—George Moore, of a fever, and John Roggensack at the Battle of Shiloh.

On April 6, 1863, the County Commissioners passed a resolution to borrow \$7 with which to purchase a county seal. The seal was described thus: “Cuming County in a circle, and in center two elk in a wheat field”. The first recorded assessment, made that spring, totaled \$7,289, with personal property nearly doubling real estate in value. About this time too, settlers began to be concerned about building roads, and the commissioners acted to raise money to defray the expenses of laying out a territorial road through the County, the road running from Decatur to Columbus.

In February, 1866, the first law-suit was brought before Justice of the Peace Crawford. The plaintiff

charged the defendant with killing a dog valued at \$20; and the defendant filed a counter-charge, demanding \$1 for damage done to his clothes and \$50 for his life being in jeopardy from the plaintiff's dog's attack. The plaintiff started for Tekamah to employ an attorney on the afternoon of February 15th. The weather was warm and pleasant, and the man took no precautions for the blinding snow-storm that came whirling out of the northwest late that afternoon. He was found a few days later, frozen to the ice on Logan Creek.

In 1867, Uriah Bruner and John Neligh began damming the Elkhorn, preparatory to building a grist-mill at West Point. The project was noised abroad and in the ensuing boom West Point assumed village airs. People came to West Point to mill from fifty to a hundred miles around. The growth of the town and the improvement of the surrounding territory took a marked turn upward that fall. By spring, the settlement west of the river had become so extensive that the people voted a special tax to construct a bridge across the Elkhorn.

The next year saw the U. S. Land Office transferred from Omaha to West Point. E. K. Valentine was Registrar, and Uriah Bruner, Receiver. The latter's interests having become more and more centered at West Point, he decided to move his family to this locality. He had a lot of lumber hauled from Fremont, and started building a large house up on the hill, overlooking the town and the Elkhorn; the home completed, the family came in the summer of 1870, beating the railroad by a few months. For on June 17th of that year, Cuming Countians had voted 351 to 158 for issuing bonds to the amount of \$100,000 to aid in the construction of the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Railroad. Gradually, the lazy river bed found itself girded by two strong bands of steel—and on the 28th of November 1870, trains commenced running regularly between West Point and Missouri Valley, Iowa.

On November 4th, 1874, the West Point Manufacturing Co. was organized by John Neligh, E. K. Valentine, Thomas Fish, Uriah Bruner, and J. C. Crawford. The city voted bonds to finance the project, and stocks and bonds were sold by Neligh in the east. By mid-summer 1876, the water that gushed through the new mill-race, was turning the wheels of a furniture factory, and the 60 by 120 foot brick structure that was to house the paper mill was well on its skyward way. There were also two flour-mills, the old saw-mill, two wagon and carriage manufacturies, and one brewery. In 1878, Thomas J. King and others of Orange County, New York, established the first creamery in the state, known as "The West Point Butter and Cheese Association". The idea was to supply Omaha with dairy products. The original frame structure burned down and was replaced by the present brick building which contained rooms upstairs for the employees. The company later became known as the West Point Creamery, and for a time was under the management of J. J. King. At one time the creamery kept three hundred well-bred cows, and the plant had a capacity for two thousand pounds of butter a day.

A brickyard that had been established many years previously, a condensed milk-factory, and a foundry, completed the list of the young town's industries.

Through all of these years, the records contain long lists of county and city officials, lists which have largely lost whatever interest circumstances might have given them. Suffice it to say that the Nelighs, Crawfords, McKirahans, Stuefers, and Baumans, were well represented. West Point was incorporated as a village in 1869. In 1874, it became a city of the second class, until 1881 when its status was reversed to that of a village, because of a change in state population requirements. In 1887 it once more took a city incorporation.

Far greater than the influence of manufacturing interests on her citizenry has been the influence of West

Point's churches and schools. In 1859 a Methodist Episcopal church organization was effected. It is no longer in existence. In 1869 the German Evangelical Church was formed by Rev. C. Sanders. The brick structure on Grove and Colfax was built in 1871, and is the oldest church building in West Point. 1871 saw St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church organized by the Rev. A. W. Frese. They built one church in 1873, and the present edifice on Colfax and Walnut in 1892. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church was formed, and building commenced, in the fall of 1874, under the guidance of Father Frederick Uhing. Monsignor Joseph Ruesing built the present edifice at Walnut and Monitor in 1891. Long before his death in 1934, Father Ruesing was reckoned in the ranks of West Point's foremost citizens as the founder and builder of St. Joseph's Home for the Aged and Hospital. The "German (Grace) Evangelical Lutheran" Church was founded in 1874 by Rev. J. F. Kuhlman. The present structure on Colfax and Park, built in 1913, replaced the original church on Lincoln and Bridge, which was erected in 1885. The Congregational Church was organized in Nov. 1878, by the Reverends George Scott and Gates. The present church at Park and Lincoln was erected in 1880. The German Methodist Church, formed in 1879 by Rev. C. Lanenstin, has since met its demise. A frame church, built in 1885, was located on the corner of Lincoln and Decatur streets.

The first regular school in West Point was built in 1866. A small brick structure, 22 by 40, it is today the home of Mrs. Franz Fisher, and the Henry Schinstock family. To this truly little red schoolhouse on Lincoln street, the pioneer children trooped. There were no grades; one just went to school. The Bruner children, living up on the hill, ran to school across the snow in a bee-line, there being no intervening buildings. In those days, the only dwelling between their house and Aunt Kitty's was the Fenske home, two doors north of the present Abbot filling station. A high school building, torn

down since, was erected in 1881. Both the Catholic and Lutheran people have maintained fine parochial schools for many years.

During these years of building and expansion, West Pointers had their quota of life's ups and downs. There were the potato bugs, and grasshoppers from '73 to '76. Typhoid fever hit the town in the fall of 1870. At 1.30 A. M., June 9th, 1879, a fire swept away an entire business block. On July 5th, 1871, a violent tornado crossed the southern portion of the county. It struck a railroad train near Scribner, throwing two coaches from the track. In May 1885, and September 1889, West Point was faced by the grim specter of murder, the second one taking place during a midnight brawl in a saloon. In 1872, the settlers took steps to build a court-house and jail. Surmounted by a hundred foot tower, it has stood in the center of Grove street for sixty-five years, with the town gathered round about.—Pioneer days soon gave way to the gay nineties; and the West Point of the pre-war era appears to have been a bellowing good town, with good business, a good ball club, a good town band, and good race horses.

An old map of the city, printed in 1888 still points out the old creamery, its sheds and stables, the old foundry on Main and Washington, and the West Point Manufacturing Company's paper, flour, and planing mills, and brickyard. The depot was fully three blocks south of its present location. Four and a half blocks west of the old depot site was a city park, with "fountain" marked in the center.

Today the old creamery is boarded up, and its reservoir, on the nearby hill, overgrown with weeds. The large mill—what was left of it—burned down in a great conflagration during the Christmas holidays not so many years ago. Corn grows well in the old mill race, and the beautiful Neligh Park and County Fair Grounds cover the territory once occupied by nine other shops and mills belonging to the West Point Manufacturing Co. Each fall, at "Fair time", thousands of people roam over the

pre-emption land of John and Aunt Kitty Neligh, and small children finger the bronze covered wagon and oxen on her monument—plaque with joyous wonder. Nestled in the hillside to the east is a little fairy-city,—still holding its own, and doing better, while the bells of the great clock aloft the towers of old St. Mary's mete out the hours, in halves and quarters.—That too, bears a memory, for one or two of the bells were placed there by an early lumber merchant, Henry Hunker, in memory of his wife and daughter.

The pioneers, of course, have gone. John Neligh died on his sixty-fifth birthday in the fall of '96. Uriah Bruner and Amelia followed him in 1905 and 1909. And last of all, Aunt Kitty left,—on March 12, 1912. I do not know if they felt repaid for all their pioneering, but one likes to think, when evening storm clouds pass to the north, pulling the sun down in golden shreds, that they have gone out there—to the real Eldorado.

Ida Bruner King still lives in the large Bruner house on the hill. The old mansion has stood there all these sixty-seven years since she came up the valley with her parents from Omaha. It was the writer's pleasure and privilege to talk with her one evening not long ago. Sitting on the west porch with its marvelous view of the valley, she spoke of most of the things of which I have written. The haze in the bottom lands glazed the mirror-spots of the river that shone through the brush and the trees. The sun had slipped behind a blue, petered-out raincloud, patching it with jagged daubs of quiet orange.

—And I know that often, when the mists settle over the Elkhorn at dusk, I shall see tepees pitched along its banks, and the lazy smoke of distant camp-fires stretching phantom arms and fingers heaven-ward—and prairie fires shall race up and down the western land that bounds the stream, and weird calls echo from each crackling flame. And through it all will shine, quite plainly, the face of a pleasant, white-haired lady, who as a little girl of nine, beat the railroad up the valley; whose father was one of the first white men who ever crossed the Lo-

gan and came down through the hill-country to view the Elkhorn valley at the town-site of West Point; and whose great-grandfather crossed the Delaware with Washington, very long ago, on Christmas night.

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The material for this paper was gathered from "The History of the Elkhorn Valley", published by the National Publishing Co., in 1892; "The History of Cumming County Nebraska", by E. N. Sweet, published by the Journal Co. at Lincoln in 1876; "Some Nebraska Gems", published by the Herald Job Printing Rooms, Omaha, in 1889; Volume 16, No. 2, of "The Nebraska History Magazine"; Volume 43, No. 46 of "The West Point Republican"; and a conversation with Ida Bruner King.



Miss Emma Bargman, Red Cloud, Nebr.
Winner third prize, N. S. D. contest, 1937.
Second person from right, indicated by arrow.

MEMOIRS OF A PRAIRIE PREACHER

By Miss Emma Bargman, Red Cloud, Nebraska

Third prize, Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska, 1937 Contest.

Webster County, a southern Nebraska county, lies in the Republican Valley, 150 miles west of the Missouri River, and touches the Kansas State Line on the south. The county first began to settle in 1870, and in 1871 was

Emma Bargman of Red Cloud, "born in the 'Gay Nineties' and living here all of my life," is a granddaughter of Rudolph Schultz, who with his wife and five children left Prussia in February, 1882, "taking passage on a sailing vessel which was three weeks in crossing. He went through all the trials and tribulations of farming in the early day, learning English at the same time." Her parents lived on a farm near Guide Rock, whence Emma "trudged two miles by myself to a little school where the Pawnee Indian village is located. We children collected arrow heads, beads and Indian relics, and became greatly interested in Indian lore." Miss Bargman is a stenographer in the law office of Bernard McNeny, Red Cloud.

organized with a population of 45. After a three weeks trip in a covered wagon over rough roads and trails of Iowa and Nebraska, it was here that George W. Hummel and his brother came in May 1872.

While still in Iowa they fell in with William and Vinten Ludlow who were also bound for the Republican Valley. They came into Nebraska by ferrying the Missouri at Nebraska City. After several days travel, they reached the vicinity of what is now Guide Rock. Not knowing where to find it, they asked a man they met how far it was to Guide Rock.

He said: "Did you see that sod house back there with a board out with the word, 'Lodging'?"

They nodded.

He said: "Well, that was Guide Rock."

They had heard of Red Cloud, and were anxiously looking up the valley for the clouds. They thought they would see a mass of red clouds hanging like a washing on a line in the distance.

While camping on the Crooked Creek they became acquainted with Dr. Williams who helped locate them south of the river on Section 17, Town 1, Range 11. After locating their claim and while building their sod house they lived with William Maxwell. About all they had to eat was corn, boiled, baked or fried.

The first Fourth of July celebration the Hummels attended in 1872, was in the little village of Red Cloud. The settlers came from far and near, bringing their families or best girls in lumber wagons or on horseback. One man had fastened a big box with a log chain to the front wheels of his wagon and hitched his horses to it. His wife and children rode in the improvised cart.

A cottonwood platform had been erected for dancing. The boards, being rough, caught at the moccasins some of the young men wore, causing them to put on some very fancy steps, which aroused the admiration of the girls. A fiddler by the name of William Laird furnished the music.

As the dancing grew fast and furious someone looked towards the northwest and saw a great herd of buffalo which was headed toward the platform. The dancing stopped very suddenly. The men mounted their ponies and gave chase, killing one buffalo. When the excitement died down the men returned to the anxious women at the platform, and the celebration of the Nation's birthday continued.

As the land office was to be opened at Lowell on August 9, 1872, Mr. Hummel, Joe Williams and Vinson Ludlow left for that place on the 8th. After driving all day they became lost on the prairie. Toward evening they camped for the night. When they reached Lowell about noon the next day, they found hundreds of people camped around it with drinking and gambling in full sway.

When Mr. Hummel had filed his claim he sent for his wife and year old baby who had remained in Iowa until he could build a home. There being no railroad to Red Cloud they came to Juniata where Mr. Hummel met them.

In the Fall of 1872 Mr. Hummel built a log house on his homestead. There being no mill nearer, he went to Salem, Kansas with his load of cottonwood logs to have them sawed into boards for a floor. This was the first floor in the township. During a rain the floor warped badly, it being of cottonwood.

As soon as his house was finished he cleared a small patch of ground in the bend of the creek for a garden. Here the Indians must have in some way trapped buffaloes as the ground was covered with bones. Mr. Hummel collected seven loads of bones from this plot, and built a bridge of buffalo heads across the creek. By the holes in the buffalo skulls it could be told that the Indians had killed them. They made these holes to remove the brain which they used for tanning purposes.

Mr. Hummel was singularly successful in gardening and farming. He was active in promoting the first

Farmers Institute of which he was president. His work helped the Institute to be the big thing in the life of the County. The first County Fair was held in Red Cloud in the fall of 1873. Mr. Hummel was awarded a silver cup by the Fair Association for the production of the best corn.

To get his corn ground into meal, which the settlers called "Nebraska Grits," Mr. Hummel made a trip to Old Spring Ranch on the Blue River to a little grist mill. The meal was ground coarse, and not having a sieve they put it in water and floated the bran out, the heavy meal settling to the bottom.

On January 19th., 1873, while Mr. Hummel was gathering driftwood on the river, his log house was burned. Everything, but a pillow and straw-tick, was lost, even the wedding gifts and a cherished rag carpet which Mrs. Hummel had brought with her from Iowa. When Mr. Hummel returned from the river he found his house in ashes and his wife and children a half mile from the house wrapped in a quilt. He was completely discouraged. Had no money, but still had two colts back in Iowa. He borrowed three cents to write his father to sell these colts and send him the money. The mail was so slow that he did not hear from his father for a month.

When the letter came it had \$90.00 in it. With this he built another log house, During the time he waited for the money they lived with Dan Norris who was baching in a little log house. He had bunks along the walls of his cabin which they used for beds. They cooked in a fire place. All they had to eat was corn bread, molasses and sometimes a rabbit or grouse.

Easter Storm

A terrible storm came up on April 13th, 1873. It was a beautiful day until about four o'clock in the afternoon when a black cloud came up. It began to rain which turned to a fine snow. The high wind and swirling snow soon hid everything from sight. Many people lost their lives and much stock perished in this

storm. Mr. Hummel's stock did not suffer because their sheds were sheltered. His house was nearly covered with snow. He had to cut his firewood in the house.

Early in 1873 Mr. Hummel and a number of men took 18 teams into Saline County to get a mill from Potter Brothers on Swan Creek, and hauled it to Red Cloud. This mill had a burr attachment which ground a coarse grade of meal or flour. Having no fanning mill those who brought grain to be ground cleaned it themselves by holding the grain high in the air and letting it fall to the ground, the wind taking out the chaff.

Indians

In the Fall of 1873, a tribe of Otoe Indians, of whom Medicine Horse was the Chief, came up the river to hunt.

While camping near the mouth of Cedar Creek in a grove of trees, the Chief's daughter was taken sick and died. They gave her a regular Indian burial, wrapping her body in a bright blanket and buffalo robe. They brought her pony and placed her body on its back in a sitting position, fastening her on with lariat ropes. One Indian led the pony and the procession started, the Indians following in single file, chanting a mournful tune. They went up on the high bluff south of Red Cloud where a grave, which covered a large space, had been dug. In it they placed her body in a sitting position, facing east. Her bow and arrows, bridle and parched corn were put in the grave with her. They put poles over the top of the grave, covering it with brush and about two feet of sod.

The settlers, learning that they intended to kill the pony, which was a beautiful animal, offered the chief \$75 for it, but he shook his head, saying: "No, squaw needs pony to ride in happy hunting ground."

They led the pony up by the side of the grave, put a lariat around its neck and choked it to death. They painted its tail a bright red color, put some corn in front of its nose and left it.

The Indians set an 8 foot post in the ground at the west end of the grave, on the top of which they tied a bundle of arrows. They returned to camp, where they remained for several days. This spot was visited by Indians for many years. The body of the squaw was afterwards removed and all that remains of the grave now is a depression in the ground. Medicine Horse lived for a long while in Indian territory, refusing to become civilized, saying he would die as he had lived, free.

A large band of Pawnees came up the river about a mile from Hummel's homestead. They stopped because one of their braves was sick. The Medicine Men were painted in bright colors and heating rocks by the fire. They put the heated rocks into kettles of water to heat it. When it was hot they held the Indian over it to steam him.

About one o'clock that night the Indians began an unearthly howling which they kept up until morning. The Indian had died. The next day his squaw dug a shallow grave with a tomahawk and hoe in a clump of willows near the river bank. She wrapped his body in a blanket and put it in the hole together with his bow and arrow, and covered it with brush and earth.

They appeared to be in a great rush to get away and went about 4 miles west and camped on Buffalo Creek.

After the Indians had gone some of the people came to see the grave. While looking around they heard groanings and mutterings coming from the brush. This frightened the women so that they ran screaming from the place. The path was strewn with hairpins and shreds of calico hung to the bushes along the way. After running some distance they paused for breath when a young Indian rode up, and asked: "See sick squaw?" They tremblingly answered: "No." He said: "Mother sick." And pointing to where the camp had been, said, "I get her." He rode on, leaving the women feeling rather silly to think their ghost was only a sick old squaw.

Grasshoppers

The weather conditions of the spring of 1874 were ideal, and the outlook for a crop was good. Everything went well until in July, when one day they saw dark clouds coming up from the south which proved to be grasshoppers. The people's hearts were heavy as they saw their sod corn disappear. They tried to drive them away by smoking them with sulphur, and driving them with branches, but the smoke did not affect them, and if driven one way they came on another. In some places the grasshoppers were a couple of inches deep all over the ground, and at times the air was so filled with hoppers that they could not see the sun.

During the rain of grasshoppers Mr. Hummel made a trip to Kearney with a load of flour and feed. The hoppers came down on his load by the hundreds, covering wagon and horses. He brushed them off hastily and covered the load. He stopped at an open well to water his horses, but it was so full of hoppers that he could not get any water. All the way from Kearney back to his home the grasshoppers had eaten everything. Many settlers went back east. Mr. Hummel and his brother were the only ones left on the creek, as most of the others had gone. Mrs. Hummel and three small daughters had gone back to Iowa in the summer of 1874, where they remained until the next spring.

Not much attention was paid to styles in those days. They wore what they could get. When they had no boots or shoes they went barefooted, and wore overalls when they had them.

Mr. Hummel had bought a grain-sack in Hastings for 75 cents. Out of this he had a pair of pants made. To get them fitted he put his leg in the sack and Mrs. Hummel cut the pant leg by this measurement, then turned the cloth that was left, the other end up and cut the other leg from that so no cloth was wasted. His shirts were of the old-fashioned, unbleached muslin kind with big collars and ties of the same material. These had been sent here in a barrel of clothing from the east.

One Sunday a neighbor of Mr. Hummel's came by to go fishing. He asked him to go to Sunday School. He said he didn't have any shoes, but said he would go if Mr. Hummel would go barefooted too. Mr. Hummel went barefooted. He was superintendent and class leader. The people stared at him in amazement, but he opened Sunday School and they soon became so interested they forgot his appearance.

Mr. Hummel had a four-horse-power sorghum mill on his homestead in 1878. Two teams were hitched to the sweep. An old white mule and sled were used to bring the cane to the mill and to haul away the pomace. Usually two men were in charge of the grinding and two boiled down the juice, skimming it whenever necessary. Money was scarce so they used sorghum for that purpose, trading it for other necessary articles.

In September, 1883, Mr. Hummel was ordained by Presiding Elder Riley. A pastor, according to the requirements of the Methodist Church, must take a four-year course of theology in order to become an ordained minister. Having only a common school education, it took nearly all of his time to read and prepare himself. He got up at three o'clock, studied until daylight, then did his chores and went to the field, taking his book with him. When he stopped to rest he studied. By hard work he prepared himself for the ministry and was ordained elder September 25, 1887. His first sermon was preached in a log school house on Ash Creek. His first appointment was on Walnut Creek where he preached six years.

Mr. Hummel married over 500 couples in Webster County and northern Kansas, and in the last 30 years of his life conducted more than half of the funerals in the same territory.

"Who married your folks?" a Webster County boy asked his girl one night.

"Rev. Hummel, I think," was the answer.

“Did he? He married my folks, too. Say!” after a little pause, and clearing of his throat, “How would you like to have him marry us?”

“Oh, Sam! You’ll have to ask Ma and Pa, I reckon.”

One wonders how many young couples Mr. Hummel joined together whose parents he united years ago.

Mr. Hummel organized several Sunday School classes on Penny Creek. They met wherever they could, some in little dugouts along the banks of Penny Creek, some in little cottonwood log-cabins. The people came from far and near. They came in ox-wagons, horse-back, or on foot. They had no other form of entertainment or diversion, and were all much interested and took an active part.

Mr. Hummel’s was a rich experience to grow from young manhood to ripened years in the ministry in one community. It is doubtful if there is another minister in the state who has been so intimately connected with the life of a county for as many years as Mr. Hummel.

When not driving broncoes Mr. Hummel rode a sorrel horse. His friends had named him “Methodist Jim,” because he attended most of the meetings with his master. Mr. Hummel’s saddle consisted of a sack filled with prairie hay tied on with a rope, with rope stirrups.

Returning one hot day from Ebson, where he had taken the Presiding Elder who had been holding quarterly meeting at Mt. Hope, and noticing that the flies were annoying his horses, he stopped to put a few green branches in the harness to drive them off. In a moment he discovered something was wrong because the ponies began humping their backs and kicking up their heels. He tried to get into his buggy quickly, but before he could get in, the hind wheel caught him in the back and away they all went down a steep embankment. Mr. Hummel landed in a plum thicket and the horses ran on a little further. He picked himself up and looked for his horses. They had kicked themselves loose from the buggy, but were so frightened that they stood still, trembling. He tied up the harness, righted things and started home.

Everyone he passed looked at him suspiciously. When he got home his wife said:

“What is the matter? Where have you been?”

He answered: “To Quarterly Meeting.”

She said: “Well, you look more like you had been in a fight. What ails you anyway?”

His face was scratched and covered with blood and dirt. He had not noticed that he had taken the green branches from an osage orange hedge.

Cowles

When Mr. Hummel went to Cowles to hold a revival meeting he was met by the blacksmith, who asked him what he came for. Mr. Hummel said: “To hold a meeting.” The blacksmith said: “No use, the devil has this place.” Mr. Hummel said: “Well, the devil and I are not on good terms, and I am not going to run.”

He got permission to hold meetings over a hardware store and carried some planks and boxes up-stairs. He was the first preacher they had seen and they were anxious to see what he looked like.

Everything went well for several nights until one of the owners of the building returned from Iowa and said he was going to give a dance and run the meeting out. So when Mr. Hummel began to preach the music struck up below and the dance began. He went down to see what was the matter. When they saw him coming they knocked the props out from under the floor, kicked the stove over and ran out of the building. The floor began to settle and the people upstairs became frightened and ran to the stairs, all trying to get out first. Mr. Hummel thought he was having an encounter with the devil all right. Soon the people found there was no danger so they came back and the meeting went on.

The next morning the owners of the store apologized. Mr. Hummel held meetings for three weeks, organizing the Congregational Church there, and later the Methodist Church.

In 1893 the Hummels were living in a stone house which they had built when the log house became too small for their family, which now consisted of four young ladies, Eva, Nettie, Carrie and Ida, besides the smaller children, Emma 14 years old, Edgar 6 years old, and Minnie 4 years old. A baby, William, died in 1878 at the age of nine months.

The stone house was a story and a half high. The upper half was one big room where the children slept. The ground floor had a large living room and dining room, and two bedrooms. The kitchen was of lumber and built in the form of an ell.

Mrs. Hummel knitted mittens and stockings for the children and made their dresses, which were mostly of blue calico which had been bought by the bolt. Mrs. Hummel herself wore black sateen and lawn dresses, as was then the custom.

In the summer of 1893 the entire family became sick with typhoid fever. Mr. Hummel and the older girls partially recovered. Mrs. Hummel and the three younger children were very ill and inside of a month all four died, leaving Mr. Hummel and the older children, two of whom were still very sick. The youngest of the four older children, Ida, died in 1896, never having fully recovered.

To pay the debts incurred during the misfortune of having his family sick and dying, Mr. Hummel was compelled to sell his homestead. He later bought the Peter McNitt homestead just south of Red Cloud, where he moved with his daughters and tried to make a home for them.

Prior to this time Mr. Hummel's preaching had been in the southern part of the county and in Kansas, but in 1893 the annual Conference sent him to Blue Hill where he served five years. The Blue Hill circuit was composed of Bladen, Plainview, the Ranney school house, and the church in the village. For several years he was the only English speaking preacher in Blue Hill. During this time he lived on his farm south of Red Cloud, worked hard all week, went to Blue Hill by train and preached Sundays.

At the beginning of his last year at Blue Hill in 1898 he was married to Henrietta Funk of Iowa. The people of Blue Hill wanted their minister to live in town, and it being impossible to rent a house, they moved into the two small rooms in the front end of the church under the gallery. During his pastorate at Blue Hill he traveled 12,000 miles, 7,000 by rail and 5,000 by buggy. He preached five times every Sunday; had 300 converts and 75 weddings.

After his fifth year at Blue Hill he was sent by Conference to Red Cloud, which charge consisted of a little church in Garfield township. Services were held in a dug-out.

Mr. Hummel was elected supervisor in 1887, and County Commissioner in 1907; being re-elected three years later without opposition. This position he resigned in 1912, when he was elected State Senator from the Twentieth District. He received considerable publicity as the author of the Hummel bill which allowed county boards to levy a tax for the erection of a court house when petitioned by 51 per cent of the voters. After the close of the session he assisted materially in securing such a petition for a court house in this county. The tax was voted and the contract let, when the Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional. Matters had gone so far, however, that the tax proposition carried easily at a special election. The contracts were let at a time when labor and material were the cheapest they had been in years, consequently the county received unusual value for the money expended.

In recognition of Mr. Hummel's services a tablet was placed in the new building, and may be seen there today.

Mr. Hummel was born in Erie County, New York, June 27, 1848, and was of German descent. He came with his parents to Louisa County, Iowa, in 1856, where he was reared to young manhood, received part of his education, married Lottie A. White, and immigrated to Nebraska

with his brother in 1872. On July 23, 1917, he died after having ministered to one community for more than thirty years.

Mr. Hummel's evangelistic work was the most efficient and productive of any in the county, and the people who have been converted as the result of his labors would perhaps equal in number those from all other sources.

“They that turn many to righteousness
shall shine as the stars forever.—”

Daniel 12:3

No man in the history of this county has been better entitled to the reward offered in this promise. The world is a decidedly better place because of the life and work of Mr. Hummel, and his piety, his desire to help his fellow men, and his willingness to sacrifice his interests for their welfare will be held in the memory of our people for years to come.
