



Nebraska Homesteads Speak, Prize Stories of the 1938 Contest

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Article Contents: Thurman A Smith, "The Story of a Government Land Claim in Nebraska"
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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: Mr and Mrs Thurman Smith, a pool on the Smith property, Florence B Kortman, Hubert Braun



"Mrs. Smith and her husband"
—from letter of Judge Thurman A. Smith

THE STORY OF A GOVERNMENT LAND CLAIM IN NEBRASKA

By Thurman A. Smith, Taylor, Nebraska

First Prize, 1938 Contest

Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska

I am the North Half of Section Six, Township Twenty North, Range Fifteen West, Valley County, Nebraska.

How many ages I have been "in the making," scientists, geologists and explorers can only guess. Beginning with the Ice Age, more than a million years backward count, I have a vague memory of my changing and improving form.

For centuries man-forms have occasionally trodden over my ever-enriching soil. For years I was a part of the Great American Desert. As late as 1820 I was so classed, and with insufficient rainfall to insure profitable agricultural pursuits.

Years passed, and as vegetation increased, so increased the rainfall. The North Loup River, flowing like a silvery ribbon unwinding, nourished cottonwood, elm, ash and cedar, and different varieties of willow. A canyon formed across my level smoothness, draining excessive rainfall from the clay hill-folds to the south. Native trees took root along the canyon walls. A spring of sweet water came gushing out and formed a small stream that watered the rich alluvial soil where the canyon spread out into a beautiful meadow.

Indians trapped along the river, often passing over my grassy surface as they chased the buffalo, elk and

antelope. Sometimes they set up their tepis near my spring of clear, cold water.

Beaver and muskrat made their home in the deep pool formed by my spring, and trappers camped and took many lives and much fur from the beautiful creatures. This I resented, even as I did the fierce prairie fires that often swept the North Loup Valley, consuming the luxuriant grasses on my bosom and even destroying the timber I had so richly produced along my canyon banks.

Came a day, as I lay slumbering and dreaming under the warm sun of summer, when a spade sank deep into my soil and a stalwart white man-creature, after carefully examining the sod pyramid he had cut from my bosom, said:

"Good earth—fine rich soil, Captain North."

"Yes, it compares very favorably with that of the Loup Valley in the Columbus territory," he answered. "You are unlikely to find anything better than this, Mr. Goodenow."

Their investigating footsteps led them to different parts and levels of my surface, and the keen, shining blade of the testing spade cut pyramids of my mellow sod, but always came the same satisfied pronouncement:

"Good earth, Captain North!" and the reply:

"Very fine, say I, Mr. Goodenow."

Such praise was gratifying, indeed, to me, and as the soft breeze caressed the lush grasses they rippled like water over my surface. I thrilled deeply.

Their questing strides led them as I wished to my beautiful spring in the canyon's bank. Before descending they stopped to view the scene, which I realized was one of great charm. I hoped they would appreciate its beauty.

"This canyon is fine and means shelter and firewood. The wide spread at its mouth promises plenty of hay," declared Mr. Goodenow, and his companion assented enthusiastically.

They went to the foot of the bank and Mr. Goode-now dipped water from my spring with his cupped hand; tasted it.

"Sweet water, and cold as ice." Both drank deeply, as though their thirst would not be satisfied.

"I shall build my cabin near here. It will save digging a well for a time, and better water cannot be had. The soil is rich, and what more can one desire?"

"Remember, Mr. Goodenow, this is border land. Open to settlement as indicated by the section and the quarter stakes we inspected, but the Sioux Indians still trap and hunt this part of the state, and they and their enemies, the Pawnee, often have war parties here. As you know, no other settlers have ventured this far up the North Loup valley. Your wife would find it a lonely life. There really is danger," cautioned the Captain, whom I soon learned to know as Luther H. North.

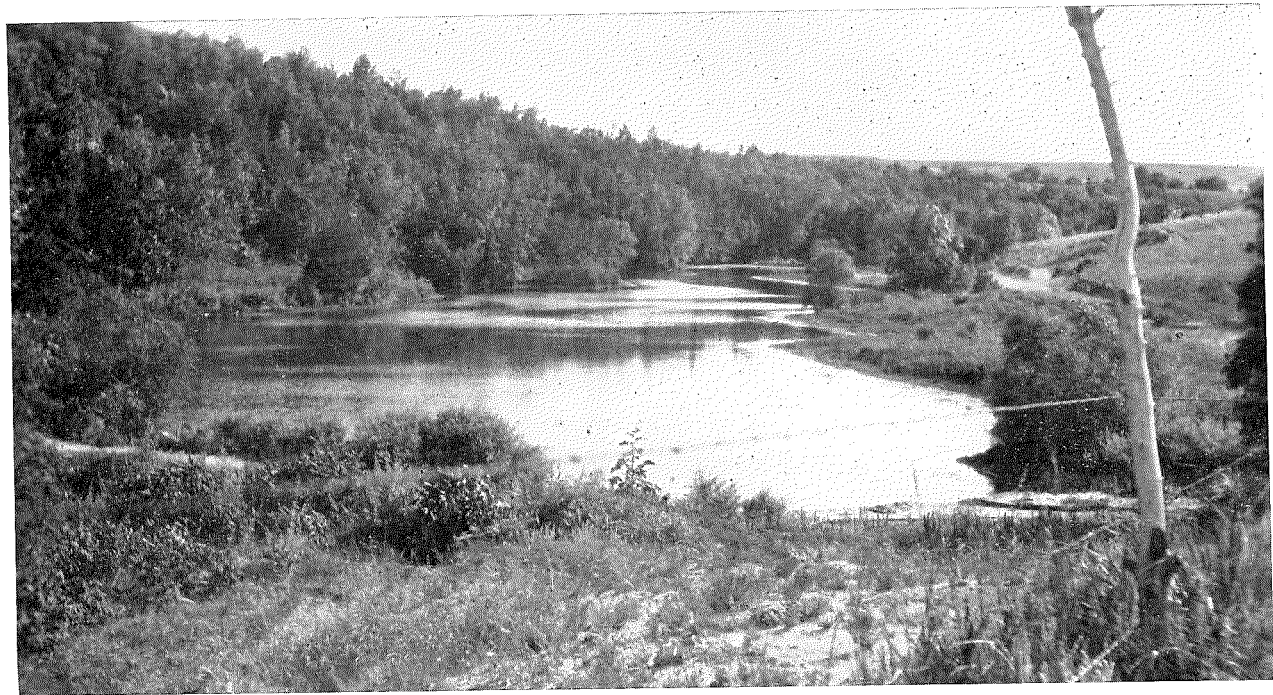
"My wife is a real pioneer, and willing to follow her man. Then too, before snow flies there will be a settler on every claim."

He set his spade deeply into my wet, black soil of the canyon bed and smiled at his reflection in the pool formed from the spring's overflow. It was a lovely pool. Green, lush reeds were grouped on one side, and where the cold waters of the spring flowed over pebbles, plants of the jewel weed or touch-me-not grew luxuriantly. Clumps of mule-ears with their stalks of waxy white blossoms sprang up in profusion in the shallow water near the bank. Its mirror-like surface reflected the deep blue of the sky and the white, fleecy clouds lazily floating from the northwest.

"Yes, here I shall build my home!"

They turned toward the covered wagon they had left to the north, talking as they walked.

"I'm almost glad that scalawag I brought from Iowa jumped my prospective claim near Albion. I have you to thank for suggesting that as good land lay farther west, Luther." Both men sometimes forgot titles and it was Luther and Mel.



"It was a lovely pool. Lush reeds and the waxy white blossoms of mule-ears framed its cold waters. Its mirror-like surface reflected the deep blue of the sky and the white, fleecy clouds lazily floating."

"It has been a worthwhile experience and I have liked it immensely. That Pawnee Indian guide who started with us from Columbus and deserted us at Long Pine, when he saw signs of a large war party of Sioux, gave me an anxious day or two. But after several days of travel southward through the sandhills and we sighted what we took to be the North Loup River, I knew we were safe."

He smiled in a way I liked, and continued:

"When you waded into the water, tasted it, and said 'It's sweet,' I knew we had reached the North Loup and was sure of our position."

"This suits me. The soil is even richer than near Columbus. Here I stay," decreed Mel.

And the men passed on and left me in solitude to dream for a season over all that they had said. I was thrilled with the promise of his return and hungered for its fulfillment.

The crescent moon on the evening's horizon became full and round and again a crescent before I once more felt the firm tread of the man who had fallen in love with my fertile beauty. I loved his voice as he sang:

"Oh, Nebraska land, fair Nebraska land!"

This time he camped near my spring in his covered wagon, and cut many fragrant cedar logs from the bluffs on the north side of the valley. He felled the huge trees with shining axe, trimmed them smoothly, hauled them to the river and floated them across. Again fixing the chain about their butts, his strong horses hauled them to the building site he had selected near the spring and on the brink of the canyon.

As he performed this heavy labor, I heard him talking to himself: "It is well I am familiar with forest work. Those months I spent in the New York lumber camp gave me brain and brawn for just this job." He erected a cabin, roofed it with logs and clay from my canyon side, hung a heavy cedar puncheon door, and floored it with the same sweet-smelling wood.

I deeply regretted his cutting the ancient cedars that had withstood a century's winds, drouths and fires; but when he brought dozens of seedling cedars and carefully planted them here and there on the canyon's sides about the cabin and at another point across the canyon, which he named "the site of the future Goodenow mansion," I came to understand that he was a man who took only as his need demanded and replaced, so far as was within his power, every tree he used.

My regret then became an urgent desire to produce and reproduce richly in response to his careful taking and replacing. He planted a large grove of cottonwood to the north of his cabin as protection from the blizzards that swept down from the Dakota prairies, and in my rich soil and with the plentiful rains that now fell, they grew rapidly as did the cedars.

One day as my owner was turning long ribbons of tough sod, in preparation for spring planting, he heard the report of a firearm. He carried his gun always slung over his shoulder. Unslinging it, he laid it within reach, and after a survey of the prairie for lurking danger, began filing the plow lay that was dull from cutting roots of the vegetation.

Busy for a time, he heard not the approaching mocasin-clad feet and was startled by an Indian's salutation:

"How!"

There stood a Sioux chieftain and his squaw.

"How, yourself! How did you get here without my hearing or seeing you?"

"Much scare white man?" queried the Indian, making the sign of peace.

"No scare, but how come?" My owner was now smiling and sure of himself.

"Me heap big chief, Chief Blackbird, this my squaw, Bird-that-comes-with-the-Spring. For one moon has she been my squaw. We spend Mating Moon hunting and trapping. Now we return to Dakota." And on they went.

As men measure time, it was during the year 1872 that the cabin was built and the wife and two children, a boy and a girl, came and made the cabin a home. The husband labored long hours that lengthened into weeks and months erecting barns, sheds and corrals for his stock, all from the cedars he cut on the north bluffs across the river.

My owner's prophecy was fulfilled as to the rapid coming of other settlers on quarters adjoining me and extending up and down the river valley. The meadow larks told me that there was no longer safety in the prairie grasses, because of men and their stock being everywhere. A prairie hen and her brood took refuge in my canyon and complained that something the man called a plow, drawn by a yoke of oxen, had turned over acres of sod where she and other hens had nested and hatched scores of downy young. They had escaped with their lives only because the men were more intent on turning the sod than hunting.

That fall, quail finding shelter in my wild plum and gooseberry tangles told how all the wild fowls and birds were feasting on the yellow corn the turned sod had produced. Compensation and revenge were realized by the wild things.

As I became accustomed to the footsteps of men, I learned to listen to their voices and thus determine in some measure the reason of their much walking about. I heard them tell how the Indians, the first man-creatures I had known, had visited their cabins and taken their goods, their stock and their corn. One settler they had killed when he resisted.

A frontiersman and scout who bore the cognomen "Happy Jack" (Jack Sweringen) built a dugout and then a log cabin on a claim lying east of me. He often visited with my family, and his firm tread and joyous laugh always brought to me a thrill of pleasure. His wife never came to occupy the log cabin. Many moons cast shadows and lighted many nights with varied brilliancy, and Jack became strange, distraught, shut him-

self in his cabin and refused admittance to even his best friend, my owner. He labored under the delusion that someone was trying to poison him, and refused to eat the delicious pie, his favorite, which Mrs. Goodenow sent him. Settlers said he was crazy and he was taken to his boyhood home for treatment, which I heard was successful, but he never returned to his cabin. I missed him and mourned.

A company of soldiers, with hired labor, was building a fort with stockade of cedar logs to protect the settlers from Indians. This was a source of great relief to the settlers in more than one way. First, it gave them protection; second, it gave them much work and a market for their products.

The soldiers did one thing that I deeply resented, though I was wrong. They brought in men to file on the claims on which settlers "squatted," and less than a hundred miles east of us this trick was played many times.

Came a day when my owner's wife saw some of the soldiers examining corner stakes of my own and many adjoining quarters. She told her man, and after a hurried conference with a dozen of his neighbors, he mounted his horse and, with his pockets full of land descriptions and the necessary gold, rode as fast as he could to the United States Land Office at Grand Island. There he filed entries for himself and all his neighbors on the lands on which they had held "squatter's rights" for two years.

Now, instead of being known as "squatters," they were "homesteaders"—tentative owners of farms. And it felt good to them.

In this year (1874, by man's calculation) several important things happened: My "family," as I now knew them, named me "the Goodenow Homestead;" Fort Hart-suff was built, and soldiers under General Ord occupied it; the county east of Valley County, of which the Goodenow Homestead was a part, was established and named

for the fort commander, General Ord; more homesteaders came; and the country was devastated by hordes of grasshoppers.

My owner had turned many acres of my tough, fertile sod and had it in a mellow state of cultivation. I was thrilled to respond to his careful planting and care and was producing a field of fine corn and oats. I was proud of the long rows of dark green stalks, each one bearing one or (more often) two large ears of corn just in the roasting-ear stage, when came the devastating 'hoppers in clouds that darkened the sun and settled upon every growing thing. All that was saved from their hungry maws were a few bushels of hastily snapped ears that my family and their friends, the soldiers, gathered.

The notorious horse thief, Doc Middleton, visited my family and other settlers, and spied out the barns and corrals where there were good horses. Perhaps because of the nearness of the soldiers in the Fort he did not return with his band and his lieutenant, Kid Wade, to run off the horses. It is said they stole many elsewhere, and these they sold in the Black Hills at a large profit.

My family and many others faced a winter—yes, two winters—without corn, wheat or oats, for the grasshoppers consumed all vegetation in '74 and '75. My owner cut cedar posts and hauled them to Grand Island, and bought flour, sugar, coffee, and a few clothes with the proceeds. Deer, elk, antelope, and the numerous prairie chickens provided meat in plenty, and the sale of the surplus at the Fort and at Ord gave some ready cash for emergencies.

The year 1876 came with promise of rich harvests. I exerted my growing powers to the limit to produce abundantly for my family, in compensation for two years' loss of crops; but when all was lush and beautiful, came a black cloud from the southwest that bombarded my broad, green acres with balls of ice until nothing was left standing and I was all but lifeless.

"What shall we do, Min?" cried my brave soldier-homesteader. (I had learned that he was a Civil War veteran.)

"Three years of crop failure is one too many for my cash resources."

He smiled bravely, but I noted that his usually erect soldier bearing was less confident.

"Would you dare stay here with the children while I take a wagon-train of flour to Deadwood, in the Black Hills? I hear that the gold discovery makes a brisk demand for flour and other supplies. The trip will take six weeks at least, but in this way I can grubstake us till another harvest."

"Yes. For myself I do not fear. We are near the Fort and the Indians are no longer on the war path. But Mel, for you I greatly fear. Do you think it safe to go through that wild country unprotected?"

"Yes, my dear! With God's help, I can take care of myself."

He went, and after six long weeks returned with a buckskin bag of gold dust. I listened eagerly to his story of adventure and high finance. The flour he had purchased in Grand Island. At Deadwood the miners thought his prices too high and refused to buy.

"I went to the local dealers and bought their entire supply before they were aware of my intentions. I had a corner on flour and they must perforce buy my entire stock at my price—\$8 per hundred. Very reasonable too, considering."

His pleasant face wrinkled in a contagious smile, and all his family and neighbors, gathered to welcome his safe return, laughed heartily with him.

It was near Christmas, and the Goodenows planned to hold open house with a tree, a feast, and a dance on the newly laid cedar puncheon floor. I always rejoiced when the hard-working, resourceful homesteaders were happy. I gave freely of my best to produce for their comfort and prosperity. The party was a great success, and lasted all night.

And at last my family were happy, prosperous, and—as always—industrious. Mel (as his wife and all his homesteading neighbors called him) delighted in the cultivation of my rich black soil, studied its needs as to texture and drainage, allowed no needed rainfall to escape, and rotated his crops and planned his production in such way as to increase the fertility of my acres.

To me this was a constant source of satisfaction. Some nearby quarters complained that they had been “corned to death.” Others said their owners never paid the slightest attention to contour plowing, planting and cultivation on the slopes of the low-lying bluffs. Heavy rains washed gullies in the newly tilled slopes, and much of their rich surface soil was washed into the canyons. I profited by this, however, because my canyon drained several hillside farms.

Other of my neighboring quarters complained that, not satisfied with “corning us to death,” their owners had cut all the corn for fodder and left the fields bare to the high winds peculiar to March weather in Nebraska. This practice was responsible for the loss of priceless top soil that Nature had spent centuries in building. “Gone with the wind,” indeed!

One quarter grieved without ceasing because the straw-stack had been fired and the flames spread to the stubble field, burning it bare. Many others said that the manure accumulating on the farm was shoveled into great piles, its values unrecognized, instead of being spread on the elevations of lighter soil.

To all my neighbors I answered happily that I had nothing like this of which to complain.

In the year 1878 Mrs. Goodenow and the children, now three, went to the old home in Iowa for a visit. While they were absent the dreaded prairie fire swept over the hills and south part of the valley. Mel fought desperately and kept the blaze from the buildings, but a flying ember caught in the haystack against the cattle shed, and soon the entire structure (including the barn and log cor-

ral) was in flames. Only by superhuman effort were the log cabin and the stock in the barn saved from the conflagration. Mel was minus his coat and much of his hair and whiskers when finally the fire died down to great heaps of glowing coals—but I rejoiced that the cabin and the stock were saved.

The wife and children returned to the Nebraska cabin, and Mel sought feed for his stock in the forks of the Loup and the Calamus a few miles west of the Goodenow Homestead.

It was not long until my owner, like the good father he was, began to build what he was pleased to call "The Goodenow Mansion" on the cedar-surrounded site he had selected a decade earlier. He freighted many loads of building material from Paultown (later named St. Paul), and with gold from his pouch paid men to erect a comfortable, roomy, pleasant home for "Min and the children." This he confided to me as he dug the cellar of the house in my soft warm soil, and I rejoiced with him in the happiness that was to be.

Came a day when there was great sadness and weeping in the newly erected farmhouse. Two daughters had been born to the family since their coming to me. Four happy children, a handsome son and three bonny daughters, now lived on my prodigal bounty and brought great pride and joy to the pioneer father and mother. But now, the last born, scarcely over a year old, had sickened and died.

I hoped that they would bury the child within my embrace, for I loved her as much as though I had given her life. In some measure, at least, she was mine, but I too had to let her go. Sadly I saw them leave the cedar-enclosed farmstead and take the little white casket away.

"Marilla was laid to rest in the Ord cemetery," the teacher said to the young man who came to call on her at the Goodenow home.

I was now considered one of the best and richest farms in the county and my owner "very well-to-do." The Burlington railroad had been built across the farm near the new house—in fact, it cut between the house and the barn. My family rather objected to this, but a railroad was necessary to the development of the rich farming territory and there was nothing to do but accept the situation.

Personally, I greatly disliked the grade and the iron rails that cut my far-flung acres in two. The jarring, rumbling iron monster, that several times daily rushed madly across my green surface, was terrifying at first and always very annoying. But when I learned that this convenient means of crop and stock transportation brought more riches to my family, I swallowed my objections and made the best of it.

A flag station named "Goodenow" was established. One night the west bound freight slowed down to let off a passenger, a neighbor living close to my family. He failed to get off until the train was again gathering speed and then he jumped at a point where the grade was high. He landed on his head and his neck was broken when he hit the grade and tumbled into the ditch. This was the first time a dead man had lain on my bosom since more than a century before, when Indians had attacked and left dead (and terribly mutilated) a trapper who had ventured too far into the hunting grounds of the fierce, war-like Sioux.

Came the Spanish-American War. I deeply regretted that the Goodenow son, like his sire during the Civil War, felt the urge to go to Cuba and fight the battles of the weak, even though right. In the training camp at Chattanooga he caught the fever that all but devastated the camp. He was brought home and skillfully and tenderly nursed, but he, too, died; and now two of my beloved family were resting in the Ord cemetery. Again my family wept. My owner, now middle-aged, must carry on alone. No longer had he a son to continue the name and fame of the Goodenow clan.

The family sorrowed much, and the father never again trod my beautiful, productive fields with so light and firm a step as had been his custom. Now, he hired help to till the fields, and rented to tenants a part of the land. This I did not like, for even though the owner saw to it that the farming activities were of the best, I missed him in the fields with his careful touch and appreciation of my continued rich productiveness.

Years of prodigal crop production passed, and my owner, Melville Beverly Goodenow, became one of the rich farmers of Valley County. I rejoiced in his steadily increasing bank account, but silently mourned when age curtailed his farming and stock-raising activities.

Came a morning when he failed to rise with the sun. I listened for his voice and awaited the pressure of his footsteps as I had first known them a half century before, but I neither heard his voice nor thrilled to his accustomed tread.

Then there were weeping, hushed footsteps, sad faces, in the Goodenow home, and I knew that the man I loved was dead. Friends and neighbors came by the hundreds to do him honor.

I thrilled with pride, yet shuddered in lonely grief, when the minister read a wonderful eulogy for the departed, and I recognized its truth even though it fell far short of all my hero's virtues. I greatly regretted that nothing was said of how he loved me and how I had richly responded to his love by giving him my very best.

I longed greatly to have his brave old body placed in my protecting earthy bosom, there to cherish and in time to reproduce it in tree and grass, as countless numbers of creation had been since the beginning of man's walk upon the earth.

My longings were denied, my desires unfulfilled. My beloved was laid to rest in the Ord cemetery by the side of Claude, his soldier son, and his infant daughter Marilla. A heartfelt prayer for his soul was spoken, a volley fired by the G. A. R., and the bugle sounded "Taps."

I was inconsolable. For more than fifty-six years this man had been my lover. I had been his mistress in the sense of responding to his love with all my prodigal gifts of crop production. Now he was gone and none could take his place.

Days of change came and brought much discomfort and unhappiness to me. The valley now had fine gravel-surfaced highways replacing the rutted trails of pioneer days. The state, to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for speedier roads for the streamliner doing a hundred, must straighten and shorten the highway (that had followed the section lines) by paralleling the railroad grade. This plan necessitated the removal of the Goodenow home and the destruction of the group of beautiful cedars my master had planted in anticipation of the "Goode-now Mansion."

The old house was removed to the site of the log cabin, across the canyon. The cedars were torn out by the roots with a huge, powerful tractor, and left to die.

I shudder even now as I recall the agony I endured when the far-reaching roots of those memory-fraught cedars were torn from my bosom. It seemed that my very heart-strings were broken.

Now, in this Year 1938, after five years of drouth, dust storms and snowless winters during which I have produced almost nothing—though my richness is in no way depleted—I am still filled with a keen desire to produce large yields of corn, wheat, oats and alfalfa.

I know that within my bosom are stored all the rich elements necessary, but the rain falls not at all. The federal government, at a cost of more than a million dollars, is building irrigation ditches to make the North Loup Valley the "Nile of Nebraska."

Sometimes I long to have the waters of the river turned into the ditch and to feel its cooling, reviving touch on my rich soil; again to feel the surging of life within my bosom, to know that I am again producing wealth.

Then reaction follows, and I feel as old and dead as are many of the beautiful trees I produced, planted by the careful hand of my lover and master. He is gone—why should I longer care?

A pioneer friend of the family composed and gave to the mother, Emily Minetta Coffin-Goodenow, and to the oldest daughter, Maude, a poem that closes with the following lines, which conclude this tale far better than can I.

“The brave sweetheart of a soldier lad,
The pioneer wife and mother, the widow left
Lonely upon a weary way, knew not her loss
As of grim death and cold, dark grave. Rather
She knows her soldier man, her pioneer mate,
Again has journeyed into the New Country.
Full soon a Messenger will call and bid her come,
And hand in hand again they’ll wander by the river,
Forgetful of the past, and happy in the present
With God, friends, departed loved ones—reunited
groups.

Her age-dimmed eyes see not the desolation
Five years of drouth have wrought on field and tree
And shrub. Her thoughts dwell largely on the happy
past.

Content, and blest with lavished love of kindred,
She waits the welcome coming of the Messenger.
The days pass swiftly by, and, be they few or many,
Serene and filled with quiet joy she rocks and dreams.”

(Editor’s Note: This poem was in fact written by Thurman A. Smith, and later appeared in a collection, entitled “The Pioneer’s Wife.”)



THE HOME IN THE CEDARS

By Florence B. Kortman, Madison, Nebraska

Second Prize, 1938 Contest
Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska

A snowstorm sweeping across the prairie in 1871. A covered wagon moving slowly along, trying to follow the trail. The driver peering anxiously in every direction. Where would there be shelter? Suddenly before them appeared the welcome sight of a sod house, to which they made their way.

This one-room sod house, twelve feet square, was the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Peter Braun* and their family, consisting of two sons, John and Hubert, and two daughters, Anna and Rosa.

* In some mention of this family the name may be found written "Brown," which is the correct pronunciation but incorrect spelling.

The occupants of the covered wagon were Mr. and Mrs. William Dittberner and little daughter, Mandy, now Mrs. Philip J. Knapp of Alliance, Nebraska, who were on their way from Columbus to take a homestead in Madison County. They were obliged to remain with the Brauns for three days. Later that winter Benjamin Read from the Township Farm, riding horseback, was snowbound there for three days.

The hospitality extended to the Dittberner family and to Mr. Read has been a characteristic of the Braun family through three generations. No one has ever been denied shelter and food.

Mr. and Mrs. Braun, descendants of French people, had come from Germany to the United States in 1848, settling in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. There Hubert Braun, who has related the events in this story, was born on September 10, 1859. After living sixteen years in Milwaukee County the family moved to Dane County, Wisconsin.

The interesting, descriptive letters of a former neighbor, Joseph Jordan, who had moved from Dane County to Nebraska and settled in Platte County on Shell Creek, induced the Braun family to emigrate to Nebraska. They, with their daughters and Hubert, came by train, arriving in Columbus on the 15th of October, 1871. John Braun came in a freight car bringing four horses, a few chickens, and other family possessions. These included a melodeon, a sewing machine, a box churn, some farm and garden tools, machinery, and their sled runners. He had been a teacher in a parochial school and could play the melodeon and sing well. The sewing machine, while similar in style to those used to-day, sewed seams from left to right instead of from front to back as now. The box churn had an inside reel, turned from the outside, which churned the cream into butter. Freight cars were brought across the Missouri River at Omaha by ferry.

Another son, Joseph Braun, attending college, re-

mained in Wisconsin for a year before joining the family in the new home in Nebraska.

Mr. Braun made his selection of land at the office of Speice & North in Columbus, taking as a preemption the *Northwest Quarter of Section Eight, Township Nineteen North, Range One West of the Sixth Principal Meridian*. His son John took as a preemption the southwest quarter of the same section. Clark Cooncey accompanied Mr. Braun from Columbus to locate for him the land he had selected. He counted his horses' steps as a measure of distance. There the sod house and a sod barn close by were built.

One Sunday in the fall, O. A. Stearns, a neighbor who lived two and a half miles away and often helped the pioneers to locate, came to the Braun place and suggested to Mr. Braun that his buildings might be too far west to be on the northwest quarter of Section Eight. Such mistakes were not uncommon. Mr. Braun, his son John, and Mr. Stearns set out to find the indisputable location stake set by the government surveyors at the section corners.

These stakes were set diagonally across the adjoining corners of four sections, and on each side of a stake the number of the section was cut. Earth was shoveled around the stake from the four corners, making a mound of earth more plainly visible than a single stake would have been.

Finding such a marker and measuring accurately from it proved that the Brauns had built off their own land. It was late to begin a new set of buildings. They dug a cellar on their own land, in which they stored their potatoes. The sod barn had no roof when snow began to fall. They made good use of their sled runners that winter, although they had been advised when they left Wisconsin that such things were not needed in Nebraska.

When spring came in 1872 their second sod house was built. *The Northwest Quarter of Section Eight* had begun to fulfill the purpose for which it was made.

Whereas it had been unnamed and unclaimed, simply marked with an identification number, henceforth it would be known as "Braun's Place." A family would live on the land, and from the land must come the provisions for sustenance, education and pleasure. The plowshares would soon turn the sod where wild animals and Indian ponies had been free to run.

Section Eight was one of the sections inside the railroad land grant. On these sections only eighty-acre homesteads could be taken by the settlers. When Mr. Braun had paid for his preemption he and John decided to exercise their homestead rights, so the quarter-section previously taken by John as a preemption was divided into two eighty-acre homesteads for both father and son. Small settlers' cabins were built on both homesteads, where the men spent their nights to comply with the homestead law. When the timber-claim law went into effect in 1873, Mr. Braun took the northeast quarter of Section Eight, Township Nineteen North, Range One West of the Sixth Principal Meridian as his timber claim.

One of the first necessities was a well. Mr. Braun set to work to make a boarded well three feet square. He dug to a depth of seventy-five feet, then hired Peter Ripp from St. Anthony's to complete the well, digging it to a depth of one hundred fourteen feet. This was "the old oaken bucket" style, with a pulley and rope with a bucket on each end. Later Joseph Braun constructed a windlass which could be turned to bring up the buckets of water. In time this was replaced by a bored well, and later by the windmill, which marks the place where the sod house stood.

Lovinus Leach, with his wife and family, came to Platte County in the spring of 1872 and took a homestead about five miles north of the Braun place. The Hellbusch family lived a few miles to the east and the O. A. Stearns family located two and a half miles to the south. These were the first neighbors of the Brauns.

A new town named Madison had been platted in Madison County, and a store, surveyor's office and a few houses built there in 1871. With the idea of serving meals and lodgings to the pioneers of Madison and Antelope counties as they journeyed back and forth to Columbus, Mr. Stearns advertised his place as the "Half-Way House". He plowed a few furrows on the quarter-section line west of his home to make a new road, shorter than the old trail from Columbus to Madison. Mr. Braun continued the plowing, making furrows along his quarter-section line, and this came to be the well traveled road.

The plow which had been brought from Wisconsin did not scour well in Nebraska sod. In exasperation one day Joseph remarked, "I would like to take the ax to this plow!" Realizing that good implements were a necessity, Mr. Braun went to Columbus and bought a Moline plow. Then both corn and potatoes were dropped into furrows and covered by the next furrow. Some wheat was planted that spring, but the soil had not been properly prepared. The yield was small and the stems short. Pumpkins were raised in great quantities.

Indians were numerous but not troublesome. Bands of them went by on their hunting trips. Often they came to the house begging bread, flour, or melons in season, which were always given to them.

The year 1873 was a very busy one for all the members of the Braun family. More of their land was broken and planted to farm grains and garden. Mr. Braun and John went to the "Township Farm" in Stanton County to get apple trees to start an orchard. Mr. Braun, doing his own carpenter work, replaced his sod house with a frame house, twenty-four by twenty-four feet, a story and a half high. The ground floor was divided into four rooms, but the upper floor was left in one room, fourteen by twenty-four feet, in which were placed eight beds.

The Braun land was to feel the wheels of various machines that summer. When the wheat was ripe it was

cut with the Wood's Self-Rake, brought from Wisconsin. This reaper was similar in style to those in use now, but it had no canvas nor did it bind the bundles of grain. The wheat was caught by an arm on the machine and tossed behind this reaper. Men followed, each gathering an armful for a bundle, binding it with a twist of straw or "straw-band." Ad Alderson, with his horsepower threshing machine and crew of helpers, was hired to thresh that summer's crop.

The self-rake was replaced the next year by a Marsh Harvester. Hubert and Rosa Braun did the binding. Tons of hay were cut by Mr. Braun with a scythe and raked with a hand-rake before he sent to Wisconsin to have a Wood's Mower, which could be made a part of Wood's Self-Rake, sent to him.

Wheat was the farmer's principal crop and had to be hauled to Columbus to be sold. Most of the hauling was done through the fall and winter months. These were long trips, often made in weather so cold that the drivers would walk and ride alternately to avoid complete numbness. Food and rest must be obtained along the way. The Brauns began serving meals to travelers, and soon "Braun's Place" was a popular stop-over, as well as the Stearns "Half-Way House."

Mr. Braun charged seventy cents for supper, breakfast and bed, and hay for one team. Twenty-five cents paid for a single meal. The preparation of food for an unknown number of hungry travelers required careful planning and hours of work. Homemade bread must always be kept on hand. Home butchering provided the meat and lard. Plenty of potatoes, cabbages and turnips were always kept in the cellar. Pumpkins were plentiful and were cut and dried for making into pies. Wild plums and wild grapes could be found on Shell Creek. Molasses was bought in five gallon kegs, apples by the barrel; "Arbuckle" roasted coffee in packages soon replaced the merchant's bulk coffee, which had to be roasted and ground at home. Mr. Braun took a license for the sale of tobacco and always had a supply on hand. He kept a

strictly temperance place, and on rare occasions had to deal with some man who had imbibed too freely in Columbus.

While the men who stopped might have appeared rough and uncouth, they were honest. Through all the years the only article taken from the house was a blanket. But on one occasion Hubert Braun, out with his father with their lanterns to help their guests get teams hitched for an early start, discovered the lines gone from his harness. He spoke of this to his father, who called out:

“Have any of you men made a mistake and taken my lines?”

The replies came back, “I don’t have them,” “I have only my own lines,” and one voice louder than the rest: “Come look through my things if you want to; I don’t have your lines.”

A few days later Rosa found the lines, evidently tossed into the weeds during the denial.

One time a transient who came afoot late at night arose before anyone else and rode away on one of Mr. Braun’s horses. He was apprehended at Lone Tree, taken into custody, and the horse was returned to Mr. Braun.

In 1874 Mr. Braun had a large addition built on the east side of his house, and with this additional room could provide beds for twenty-two persons. The mattresses for those beds were ticks filled with hay or straw. The pillows were filled with “pillow flakes.” Never a bit of goods, cotton or wool, was wasted, but was cut into tiny scraps to fill those pillows. On two occasions thirty-six people spent the night under that roof. Those who could not be provided with beds slept on hay on the floor of an adjoining room or sat up all night.

Twisted hay or slough grass provided most of the fuel for early settlers. Occasionally Mr. Braun would get a load of wood over on the Loup River or buy a fallen tree from a neighbor on Shell Creek. J. O. Trine, who came to Madison County in October 1868 and has

lived many years just across the county line in Stanton County, remembers having been at the Braun place. He said: "Braun used hay a good deal in the heater in the large room where their wheat-hauling guests were entertained. One night when I was stopping there, some of the boys thought the room uncomfortably cool and proceeded to do some firing. The method of preparing the hay was to take a large handful, twist it, then double it like an old-fashioned doughnut. The boys got a good supply of these 'twisters' and then filled the stove nearly full. After smoldering awhile it blew up, throwing the lids into the air, opening the stove door, and filling the room with smoke and ashes."

Settlers began coming more rapidly to take the land between Columbus and the Elkhorn River. Traffic on the road was heavy. Farmers who hauled their wheat to Columbus to market were beginning to return with loads of lumber to replace their sod houses and to build churches and school houses. Merchants went for stocks of goods; loads of lumber and building materials were hauled to Madison; agents, well diggers, the mail and stage driver traveled the Columbus road. This brought patronage to the Braun place. Hubert Braun stopped his plowing one day to count eighty teams in sight. He recalls the names of scores of men who were regular patrons at his father's home.

Frequently the men who spent nights at Braun's would play checkers, but most of them were content to visit and enjoyed discussion of crops and stock raising, land laws, taxes, improved machinery, possible railway service, politics and news.

The exchange of methods and ideas and the friendships formed at these gatherings were of incalculable value to these early settlers.

On the 30th of December in 1879, the Union Pacific Railroad began making daily round trips from Columbus to Norfolk. The days of heavy overland hauling on the Columbus road were over.

The grasshopper invasion which came in July 1874 completely devastated the crops and gardens on the Braun land, except the field of wheat which they were binding when the grasshoppers came. That was passed up for greener food. "All that was left in our garden were the empty shells of turnips in the ground." Life-saving relief from the eastern states consisted of food, seeds and clothing. This was apportioned by the "Aid Society" at Columbus and distributed over the country by the school director in each district. Mr. Braun had charge of the work in District No. 30.

No serious accidents have occurred on this farm, nor has prairie fire swept across the plowed land to damage their buildings since the Braun family have made it their home. But an incident happened which might have had disastrous results.

"Mr. Tracy came to buy hay. Brother John loaded the wagon and drove away to take it to the Tracy farm. Mr. Tracy lighted his pipe and carelessly tossed aside the match, then noticed the hay in the stack had caught fire. He tried to pull out the burning hay, singeing his hands and face, then ran to the house calling, 'Braun, Braun, the hay's afire!' He ran to the well and began pulling up buckets of water. Father grabbed buckets of slop standing near the kitchen door, and the girls ran with water as fast as Mr. Tracy could pull it from the well. Father brought a pitchfork, got on the stack and turned the top over, putting out the fire. Mr. Tracy willingly paid for the burned hay—quite an expensive smoke for him."

Mr. and Mrs. Braun realized that land could provide work and recreation for the physical development of their own and their neighbors' young people, but that plans must be made for their educational and religious development. Mr. Braun organized School District No. 30 in Platte County and was the first director in the district. Joseph Braun had taught one term in the log school house in the Arntz district on Shell Creek. His brother Hubert was one of his pupils for five weeks.

When Mr. Braun built the frame house in 1873, Joseph Braun gathered the children of school age in the district into one room of the house for a summer term of school. Those who attended were the children from the Tracy, McCleary, Wieser and Krause families. Another summer term was held in the Braun home with Joseph as teacher, before the small frame school house was built in 1876. Mr. Braun sold a half-acre of land from the northeast corner of the *Northwest Quarter of Section Eight* to the district for the school ground. Their first teacher was Miss Sarah Fitzpatrick. The school house has now been sold and moved from the land.

The Brauns were desirous of having their family attend a nearby Catholic church. Mass had been held in the sod house with their family and in the frame house with neighbors joining them. The priest, Father Ewing, came from West Point. Mr. Braun offered to donate the land and one hundred dollars toward a building fund. Mr. Eimers, who had recently moved from Iowa into the neighborhood, offered ten acres of his land and one hundred fifty dollars. His offer was accepted. Mr. Braun and Mr. Glass Cerner built the first church, a frame building, in 1875. A parochial school was built in 1881. As the population in the parish increased, church and school were replaced with more commodious buildings. Brick was used in building the church (1924), school (1908), and the priest's house. All have their places in the well kept yard. Services are held on Sundays and five week days.

One after another, the family of John Peter Braun left the parental home until the son Hubert, alone, remained with them. John Braun had established a home on part of Section Six and, exercising his inherent love of trees and shrubs, had made of the place a veritable nursery. In 1882 his catalog listed 500 varieties of plants and trees. Joseph Braun, the former teacher, made a home for his family near Humphrey. Anna Braun married Ignatz Zach. Rosa Braun had joined the Sisters of

Precious Blood in Missouri. These four have passed away.

In September 1879 the land may have experienced a new thrill, for a bride came to live on it, a new family life began. Hubert married Miss Mary Delsmann from Manitowoc, Wisconsin, who had come visiting her relatives in Columbus and in the vicinity of the Braun home. Through the following twelve years children's feet pressed the soil, played under the trees, trudged down the lane to school. Happy, busy years.

In time John Peter Braun and his wife gave up active management of the home they had established and moved to Humphrey, Nebraska. They passed away there many years ago. Later a shadow fell over the home, for the young wife's health failed and in December, 1892, the wheels of a solemn cortege passed along the driveway taking her to the final church service and to her resting place. Her paramount interest to the last had been the care of her children, and she had taught her husband homekeeping ways even to baking the bread.

The years from 1890 to 1895 were years of drouth, crop failures and hard times. Many banks failed. The few crops the farmers could raise brought lowest prices. Attention began to turn to producing new crops—alfalfa and winter wheat. When it was proven that these were adaptable to Nebraska soil, land prices began to rise.

The land of his farm was not only planted for grain and garden products, but space was allowed for beautiful trees and flowering shrubs and a blue-grass lawn with flower beds. Hubert Braun bought twelve red cedar trees to plant north of his home where six of them still stand, three on each side of the walk. From the seedlings of these trees Mr. Braun has set more than three hundred red cedars on his place. He has set walnut, thornless locust, blue spruce, elm and other varieties also. Lilac, spirea and snowball bushes had their places, and peonies, tiger lilies and iris added to the beauty of his yard. He arranged a pipe line from the water tank

to irrigate his yard, but the prolonged dry seasons and the grasshoppers have destroyed much of its beauty.

This fertile farm has produced good crops when there was sufficient moisture. Mr. Braun recalls the great oats yield of fifty bushels to the acre in 1895. In years of normal rainfall their corn produced forty bushels and wheat twenty to thirty bushels to the acre, and there were three heavy cuttings of alfalfa in a season. Mr. Braun has not planted the much discussed hybrid corn some farmers are testing this year.

In May, 1894, Hubert Braun and Miss Mary Lohaus were married, and the home responded again to a woman's hand and heart. Children came to bless this union. The farm was producing bounteous crops. A new organ replaced the melodeon. New machinery came into use. A cream separator was added to the household equipment. It could be expected that Mr. and Mrs. Braun might enjoy many years of companionship, but Mrs. Braun failed to recover from an operation and on August 10, 1912, passed away in St. Mary's Hospital in Columbus.

Mr. Braun has continued his residence on the farm, for through inheritance and purchase it has become his possession. In 1915 he bought his first automobile, an Overland with self-starter. He comes and goes when it pleases him to do so now, driving a Ford coupe. He has always been interested in politics and new laws. He served one year as township supervisor and has served nineteen years as township clerk in Grand Prairie Township.

The call to defend the United States reverberated across the land in 1917. Joseph F. Braun was called in the first draft. He went from Columbus to Camp Funston, where he was made a corporal; thence to France, a member of Company D, 137th Infantry, 45th Division, American Expeditionary Forces. There he served in some of the decisive battles of the World War, including the drive on Verdun and five days and six nights in

the drive on the Argonne-Meuse. He returned from France to Camp Dodge, where he received an honorable discharge. Minnie and Josephine Braun, nieces of Hubert Braun, offered their services as nurses and went overseas.

Six sons and six daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Braun have grown to manhood and womanhood on their grandfather's preemption and are taking their places as good citizens in the communities where they reside. Each one of them learned to speak, read and write German as well as the English language. The girls of the family played the organ, and every boy was a member of the band. Their land felt the rhythm of dancing feet, for that was one of their diversions. Kodaking was another of the family pleasures.

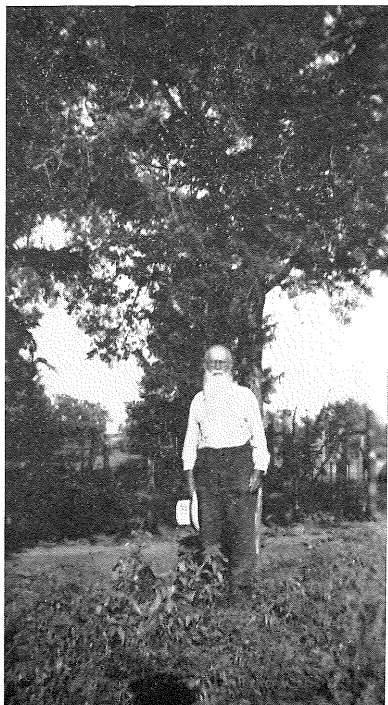
Katherine, the oldest daughter, lives in Omaha. One daughter, Gertrude, now Sister Mary Romana, took training and has been a nurse in the Franciscan Sisterhood for thirty years. At present she is supervisor of night nurses in the St. Francis Hospital in Grand Island, Nebraska.

Three sons and one daughter of Hubert Braun have married three daughters and one son in the Henry Krause family. Another unusual relationship is that of Mr. Braun's son and one of his grandsons, who have married two sisters in the Magseman family. One might ask, "When is a sister not a sister?" or "Who's who in this family?" One son, Ignatz, and his family live two miles from the home place. Louis Braun with his wife and children live with Hubert Braun.

All of Mr. Braun's sons and daughters were christened in their neighboring St. Mary's Church. All were confirmed there and all who married, with the exception of one son, were married in that church. Their wedding days meant gatherings of many relatives and friends. Hubert Braun has sixty-seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Mr. Braun is interested in the happenings of the day, the problems of unemployment and relief and crop restrictions. One of his nephews has been enrolled in a Civilian Conservation Camp in Colorado and he is interested in their work, although he has not needed the C. C. C. boys to do soil erosion work, tree planting or contour farming on his land.

So we leave him, this August afternoon in 1938, standing under one of his red cedar trees on the land that has been glorified by hospitality to man, affection to family and reverence to God.



THIRTY-TWO, TWENTY-ONE, SEVENTEEN

By Marcia C. Smith, Taylor, Nebraska

Third Prize, 1938 Contest

Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska

In 1854 I was an unknown quantity in the vast Nebraska Territory, midway between ranges of hills of every conceivable form of wind sculpture—sand-hills on the north, clay-hills on the south.

My valley is cut in twain by a friendly, constant river of the Loup family. Triplet sisters, they are: the South Loup, Middle Loup, North Loup. The North Loup meanders lazily down the valley, traced for miles by the deep verdancy of willows and plum brush, here and there entwined into thickets with wild grape vines; so near me I can hear the waters lapping the low, grassy approaches.

I was just a piece of raw land; treasures lay dormant in my fertile soil. Wild roses, sweet peas, blue bells, dainty little Quaker-lady violets in their season emerged like jewels from my emerald turf.

Sioux Indians on their marauding treks pitched their tepees within my present boundaries (I had no boundaries then), their weird war-chant reverberating beyond the mute and isolated uplifts.

For a decade the trails along the Platte River had been studded with the white caravans of a restless people pushing westward in the hope of finding wealth, or seeking homes of their own in the "free land" of the west.

In 1867 I was an unnamed but component part of the great territory admitted to Statehood on the first day of March of that year. Lying a hundred miles north of the Grand Island settlement, the dome of silence above me was unbroken until surveyors' outfits cleft the monotony. Stalwart men, versed in the science of delineating contour and legal boundaries, set corner stakes and designated me as the *Northeast Quarter of Section Thirty-two, Township Twenty-one, Range Seventeen.*

Rumors of my fertile valley spread rapidly. A stream of land-seekers came into the North Loup country.

Back in Iowa, a young man by the name of David Gard, working at the carpenter trade, heard of Nebraska, the land of opportunity. He was an ex-soldier, having enlisted in Company B of the Second New Jersey Infantry, in the Army of the Potomac. He was wounded at South Mountain and captured at Vicksburg, but escaped.

With his family this young man came to Grand Island, where he worked at his trade for a year. Then tales of the rich valley land in the North Loup country, still open to whoever might partake, lured him westward.

David Gard was intensely interested in me from the time he set foot on my broad acres of luxuriant grass that presaged productive soil beneath.

"So beautifully level that every foot is available for tillage," he told his wife, "and wonderfully rich soil."

The first thought of these homesteaders, as of all others, was a house to live in. Sod was practically the only building material available for ready construction, so the Gards made a temporary soddy which they soon replaced with a roomy log house boasting up-stairs rooms and a shingled roof, if you please. The upper part was reached by a two-way staircase, boxed in, leading from the main room below. Later the logs were enclosed with lap siding painted white, and I was readily acknowledged the *best* improved homestead in the val-

ley. The Gards planted red cedars in a bee line along my south side facing the trail up and down the valley, now State Highway Fifty-Three. Cottonwoods outlined the drive into what would some day be an attractive farm home. They beautified me with shady lanes and leafy nooks and glorified me with the first orchard trees in the country.

The earliest attempts at agriculture in this remote valley were the raising of corn and gardens. The folks worked hard breaking my soil. They used a hand planter, toiling steadily until forty acres of sod corn was in. Then grain was broadcast over my level fields from the rear of a wagon. The cloud curtains shed happy tears upon me and I blossomed bounteously with grains, gardens, fruits and forage.

But adversity comes to the best of us, and one day in late June a bank of black fury charged the heavens. The ears of my owners, so proud of the fine crop I was struggling to produce, were assaulted by the crashing of hailstones hurled by the enraged and shrieking wind. A few minutes later they emerged to view the dynamic destruction of a Nebraska hail storm. Stones larger than goose-eggs lay in driven piles. My beautiful, bright green blanket of lusty corn and bearded grains, yellowing for harvest, was reduced to pulp. The damage was irreparable. Gone were their dreams of an abundant winter; they witnessed the devastation in mute misery.

Did they give up? I say not! Like many another, my pioneers had indomitable courage.

David Gard made the long drag to Grand Island along with several of his unfortunate neighbors, taking from ten days to two weeks for the round trip with teams and wagons, to purchase seed. Then they plowed a patch for spring wheat, and also broadcast some rye for late forage. They reset broken trees, and from the depth of my soil I gave all I had to help.

For a long time I heard whisperings of a town called Kent. My southeast corner was ideal for a town, people

said. Things began happening in a big way. People bought lots of my owner, freighted lumber and other construction materials from Grand Island, and buildings went up like wildfire. A post office, the main vertebra of a western settlement, general store, hotel and livery, drug store and doctor's office, hardware and implements shop, blacksmith shop, lawyer's office, and a newspaper—the *Clarion*—soon followed. I was now quite famous. Far and near people talked of Kent and the fine Gard farm.

On January 12, 1883, David Gard made final proof, having discharged all the government requirements under the Homestead Act, and the Land Office issued him a patent transferring permanent and absolute title to me.

With my ear always to the ground I heard all the rumors, and one concerning a civic organization seemed to gather impetus as it floated about. My very capable owner was appointed temporary county clerk, and an election to vote upon the location of the county seat and the county officers was called for May 3, 1883. Kent, my active and promising little town, had two aggressive competitors—tiny, unplatted settlements called Taylor and Almeria, both nearer the center of the unit. People gossiped, sectional groups argued hotly, but at length the vote of people settled the controversy. My cherished little town of Kent lost to Taylor (the present county seat of Loup County) by two votes.

Subsequent to the organization of School District No. 1, on August 13, 1883, a framed school house, with a large assembly hall, two entrances, and three ante-rooms for school convenience, was my fondest dream come true. David gladly deeded land for a permanent school site on my east line near the village activities. From then until now the children of that district have secured their first eight years of education in that same school building, enlarged by a class-room on the north.

On Sundays the homesteaders and their families gathered at the school house for Sunday-school and religious worship. The first church services were held by

a pioneer preacher, Benjamin Harvey. Mr. Harvey made one hundred ten round trips with ox team to Grand Island. Yet with all his strenuous labors and adversity, he was the spiritual comforter of our people.

Tragic bereavement smote us on the day seventeen-year old Johnnie Gard passed away of intestinal inflammation which today undoubtedly would be pronounced appendicitis and speedily remedied by skilled surgeons. Tenderly they laid him at rest in the beautiful hillside cemetery overlooking the valley, which had gathered several pioneers to its earthy bosom.

Kent flourished, and the routine of village life, happy and otherwise, was an inspiration to those who came into the country. But the election results could not be evaded. Kent must concede its county-seat activities to Taylor and sooner or later would be only a memory.

During these years I was producing the best yield possible in view of the weather conditions. Rain was abundant, but hail was a constant menace. One day I heard the family discussing an item in the *Loup County Clarion*:

It is pleasing to know that the destruction of the season's hail storms was not absolute. We have seen some very good corn grown in the vicinity of Kent; and by the way, we have seldom seen as fine farms and as fine a district as that around Kent. The village itself is well located and indicates energy and enterprise on the part of its inhabitants.

The horsepower checkrower gave corn planting an amazing lift. By changing teams twenty acres could be planted in a long day. Some advantage over the step-by-step corn jabber, I assure you!

The reaper also made the raising of small grain profitable. Our oats yielded from fifty to eighty bushels, wheat twenty to forty bushels. The six- or seven-team threshing machine turned out about 500 bushels of wheat and probably 800 bushels of oats a day from abundant fields of grain. Most of our grain was consigned to the big ranches in Cherry County such as the Cross L Bar and Figure Four, and quantities of it

went to the fort at Niobrara. Some was hauled even as far as Grand Island.

When the bridge was made across the North Loup River at Kent, neighbors north of us visited Kent regularly to receive their mail, to trade and enjoy the companionship of the village folk. In those days friendship suffused our people.

As pioneering went, my family were well sheltered and well fed. But they were far from the higher institutions of learning and wanted to educate their children. The time came when my owner, though attached to me and proud of my achievements in reward for his years of labor, decided to retire from the strenuous work of the pioneer farm. He bore the effects of five serious wounds during his army service. This was not without its injurious effects as the years advanced, and so it was that in 1887 my family bade me farewell and departed to make their home in the thriving little city of Ord. I missed them greatly.

Gradually, after that, the places of business at Kent were abandoned and the buildings spirited away until nothing was left but the school house (a permanent institution), the post office, and a general store on the corner.

During these years I was leased to tenant after tenant until 1901, when David sold my land to Heman E. Carter, then a lawyer at Tekamah, for the sum of twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars.

Later I learned that Mr. Carter had long been interested in stock-raising and agriculture; besides, ill health forced him to seek an outdoor life. In the late seventies he had served the State of Vermont as its attorney in the city of Hardwick, but the "call of the west" was strong within him even then, and in 1885 he brought his wife and two young children, Clifton and Marcia, to make a home in Taylor.

Taylor was then in its heyday. It had become the county seat, and there was almost positive assurance of an extension of the C. B. & Q. Railroad from the Sargent

branch. This encouraged Mr. Carter to build there the Pavilion Hotel (an edifice for these parts), known far and near for its size and service. I heard that it cost more than six thousand dollars, and the lumber was freighted by team from North Loup.

But, like a flight of fancy, the railroad rumors ceased, and Taylor seemed destined to remain a nonentity. In 1893 Mr. Carter moved to Tekamah to resume the practice of law and educate his children.

Prosperity waned for several years. Drought and partial loss of crops set our people back deplorably. Then the weather cycle changed. Rain fell plentifully again, hail came less often, and my soil yielded bountiful crops.

When in 1901 David offered me for sale—the famous old Kent townsite farm—Mr. Carter heard about it and went to Ord to see David. The exchange was soon made and Clifton, the only son of Heman and Mary Carter, just graduated from the University of Nebraska, came up to get acquainted with me. He received a fine appointment in the government livestock industry and Mr. and Mrs. Carter moved into my farmhouse in the year of 1902.

My production was increased remarkably by the methods of farming then coming into practice. The disk, lister, and double-row cultivator (called “go-devil” from its speedy technique, no doubt) set new standards of farming. The steam threshing machine supplanted horse power. Alfalfa, the new forage crop, was introduced to this vicinity by Heman Carter. Cattle and hogs were fed from the plentiful crops I grew. Every summer cloud drenched my soil.

During these years the post office at Kent was discontinued and the building bought and dismantled by my owner. The village of Kent that once flourished was but a memory now.

Happy years passed until 1909, when we were plunged into deepest sorrow by Heman’s sudden death just as he closed an address at the “Kinkaid Fair” in the

beautiful Hartford grove on the Calamus River. This fair was a unique celebration in the heart of the sand-hills, commemorating the Moses P. Kinkaid Homestead Act that passed the House of Congress granting homestead privileges for a section of Government land. Practically every section now had a family living on it, and new homes and communities were the result. Hence the celebration in September, 1909.

At that time Heman was serving as county commissioner, and was known far and wide as a fine speaker. The Board were appraising land in the vicinity, and he with the other members, Ward Moore and William Jamison, stopped incidentally to witness the celebration.

Immediately there was a unanimous shout, "Speech by Mr. Carter!" "Speech by Mr. Carter!"

He ate a hasty lunch and delivered the address of the day. In the midst of loud applause he closed with fitting remarks in honor of the author of the Act that had acclaimed the sandhills, yet doubtless was in great physical distress, for in less than an hour he passed away in an attack of acute indigestion.

After Heman's death the family devoted themselves to carrying out his plans. In the following year a fine farm home was built south of the primitive log dwelling, surrounded by the same magnificent shade trees my David had planted. The new house was fitted with one of the first Delco lighting plants in the country, and it was equipped with the first automatic pumping system. This was a wonderful labor-saving improvement.

The fine crops I was producing annually furnished the means to bring to this remote farm home the comforts and conveniences that city dwellers knew. I felt very proud of myself.

During the World War, and for several years thereafter, prosperity remained at its zenith. I had become the highest-assessed Quarter-Section in the county.

One day an interested stranger stopped at the house and inquired if the farm was for sale. He was anxious to

secure just such a place. My lady Mary was then in California and the only son in Texas, but the two daughters still lived on the farm. They told the stranger that so far as they knew, the place was not for sale. After many letters had passed between them I learned that none of the family were willing to let me go, even at the very high figure offered. I am still the family home, and they love me as I love them.

As time went on, fine mules and horses brought my acres under intensive cultivation. The tractor and automobile became established necessities.

Then came a disastrous decade of dry years, with 1934 as the climax. I shall not forget that year, for the death of my gracious lady was followed by much other trouble.

For a long time farmers had heard the cry: "Fertilize! Fertilize!! Build up your soil for maximum production." So my soil had been fertilized from the feeding yards, and my crops rotated to further increase my power to produce, and when drought and fiery winds swept across the land again and again, I was unable to cope with them. My valley was in a sad plight, though I do not believe you can find any soil made after a better recipe than mine. Highly productive under plenty of rainfall, it was anything *but* that during the years of drought. Only eight farms in the entire district survived without a mortgage. I am one of them.

The farmers sent to their Government appeal after appeal for irrigation, for they knew the spring-fed Loup River would not miss all the water needed to irrigate the valley.

Today, the eighth day of August, 1938, the canal has become a reality, and water was turned upon my thirsty soil today.

Last week we had threshers for the first time in several years. They brought a smooth-running, highly powered gasoline motor machine, threshing out one thousand bushels of grain in half a day. The barley

yielded fifty-three bushels an acre, but would have exceeded that with plenty of moisture.

Corn will make only a partial crop at this late day. Large crops cannot be expected until next year, but we know that when water is available as needed, and when the peculiarities of irrigation are understood so that farmers know how to supply water to the best advantage, the most plentiful crops will be produced once more.

As a further aid to progress, graveled State Highway Fifty-three, as smooth as mechanical devices can make it, passes my south line as did the early pioneer trail.

The Loup Valley Irrigation and Power High Line is building up the valley from Burwell, and every farm will soon be illuminated.

We firmly believe that prosperity is "just around the corner."
