



## Life in a Nebraska Soddy, A Reminiscence

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Photographs / Images: families in front of their soddies (5 views), a soddy used as a school, the town livery stable, the town baseball team

# LIFE IN A NEBRASKA SODDY

## A REMINISCENCE

BY CHARLES S. REED

SOMETIMES I wonder what impelled the Nebraska pioneers to leave their home ties and migrate to what was then called the "Great American Desert." My parents probably decided to move from Chicago to Nebraska because of the promise of free land. They came by train to Weeping Water where my father's mother, sister, and brother lived. There they secured a covered wagon, three horses, a cow, a dozen chickens, and a shepherd dog, and started west with my oldest brother and my sister. Sister celebrated her first birthday in the covered wagon.<sup>1</sup>

They located a homestead in Logan County about seven miles west of Arnold (Custer County) early in 1886, with just ten dollars in cash left to start life on the plains. The land was treeless and bare except for buffalo grass. Their first home on the prairie was a hole in a bank that my father dug out on three sides with a spade. The wagon

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<sup>1</sup> The author was born near Arnold in 1896.

*Charles S. Reed, an Omaha attorney, was born in a sod house in Logan County. This paper has been prepared from a talk given by Mr. Reed as president of the Sod House Society at the annual dinner meeting of that organization, June 8, 1957.*

cover staked to the ground served as a roof, with mother's good carpet covering the open space.

The nearest usable timber was along the Dismal River forty miles up in the Sandhills. Father drove there with a team and wagon to cut down and trim cedar trees to be used to support a roof of corn stalks and sod on the twelve by eighteen sod house he planned to build. Before he had finished any shelter for the livestock, an early fall storm caught him, and for a time the family shared its quarters with the team of horses. By the time I was born in 1896, however, we had a good sod house as well as a sod barn and chicken house.

There were three ways of acquiring title to government land when western Nebraska was settled. Under a federal act of 1841 one could acquire pre-emptive rights to 160 acres of public land at a cost of \$1.25 per acre. Then in 1862 Congress passed an act enabling settlers to file on a homestead of 160 acres and acquire a patent by living on and improving the land, and in 1873 Senator Phineas Hitchcock was the author of the "Timber Culture" Act which enabled a homesteader to acquire title to an additional quarter section by planting forty acres of trees and cultivating them for ten years. (Later the required planting was reduced to ten acres and the cultivation period to eight years.) So, for a time after 1873, a settler could get a total of 480 acres of government land, by proving up on a homestead, buying 160 acres for two hundred dollars, and planting and cultivating trees on a third quarter section. In the country where I grew up various pieces of ground would be commonly described as "Joe Smith's homestead," "Tom Brown's pre-emption" or "Joe Cook's tree claim."

When I was about ten years old, Moses P. Kinkaid, Congressman from Nebraska's "Big Six," sponsored the Kinkaid Act which gave everyone who had not taken any government land the right to homestead a full section of 640 acres. This law also gave anyone who had previously taken less than a section of public land in Nebraska the right to

homestead additional acreage to give them a full 640 acres of government land.<sup>2</sup>

The sod house was typical of pioneer life in Nebraska. There are several reasons for that. Lumber and even trees for logs or poles were very scarce in much of Nebraska. People were poor, and many settled so far from the railroad that it was virtually impossible for them to buy building material. Probably the most important factor was that Nebraska sod was peculiarly adaptable for use in building. In most places in Nebraska the pioneers were able to locate patches of "blue-stem" grass, whose root growth made the sod so tough and firm that slabs of it would not fall apart in handling.

Nowadays few people have the least idea of how a sod house was built. First, the sod had to be prepared. The first step was to "break" the ground, which was done by turning the sod over with a "breaking plow." These were "walking plows," i.e., a plow pulled by two or more horses with a man walking behind it holding on to its handles. A breaking plow differed from a "stirring plow," used generally in preparing land for cultivation, in that the moldboard of a breaking plow consisted of three curved rods that turned the sod over grass side down, instead of a solid metal plate.

Breaking plows had an adjustable foot that ran on the surface of the ground and regulated the depth of the sod cut. The length of the cutting plate that ran underground regulated the width of the furrow, so that a good breaking plow operator could turn over a sod strip of uniform thickness and width. By means of horse-drawn sod cutters (driven across the overturned sod at right angles to the swath) or by the use of sharp spades, the overturned sod was cut into pieces of uniform length. Pieces of sod used in building were usually about three inches thick, twelve inches wide, and thirty inches long. The slabs were taken

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<sup>2</sup> The Act, passed in 1904, applied only to thirty-seven counties in western Nebraska.

to the building site on the "running gears" of a lumber wagon, after some poles or boards had been laid lengthwise of the running gears to support the load.

The mechanics of building a sod house were fairly simple, but it required good workmanship to put up a good one. I have never built a sod house by myself, but as a boy, I cut sod and helped as a "flunky" on a good many sod buildings, so I remember how they were built. The first tier of sod was laid grass side down on the virgin ground site. If the building space was not level, the lower corners were built up by sod so that the upper tiers of sod in the wall would be level. The sod floor of the building was leveled by excavating on the inside at the high corners.

In erecting a wall, the slabs of sod were crisscrossed so that the joints would be broken all the way up the wall. Thus each layer of sod (all of which were laid grass side down) was laid into the wall differently from the layer below it, just like bricks are now laid, so that the mortar joints are broken.

If you kept the walls straight, it was pretty easy going until you reached the top of an opening where a window or door was to be. A door opening was provided by just not laying any sod in the door area, and a window opening was provided by running the solid wall only up to the bottom of the window and then leaving an open area the size of a window. The top of a window or door opening required special care. It was necessary to place some flat boards across the top of the window or door opening to support the wall that had to be built on top.

Early Nebraska sod houses had half-length windows, i.e., windows that didn't move up or down. The window opening in the sod wall was shaved off just enough to allow a one-sash window frame to be inserted and then the cracks around the window would be chinked up with mud or home-made plaster. For a door you placed upright boards on both sides of the door opening, installed a sill board at the bottom, and a cross brace at the top. Then a plain slat door

was made and hung on ordinary barn hinges. The door was fastened on the inside or the outside by the use of an ordinary hook latch or by a wooden turn peg. It was very rare for any sod house door to have a lock of any kind. Doors were set close to the inside wall while windows were near the outside of the sod wall to leave a wide window ledge.

The most important thing about a sod house was its roof. The common sod house had a gable roof, a roof that sloped two ways from the center ridge pole, so while the side walls were level on top the end walls always ran up to a peak. In my country, getting a good ridge pole long enough to reach from the top of one outside end wall to the other end of the house, or even to a sod cross partition, was quite a job. In the early days such a piece of timber was never bought at a lumber yard, but always a long tree trimmed down. If the builders were lucky enough to have flat boards, one end of the board was nailed to the top center of the ridge pole and then extended down over the side walls about two feet. Then paper (tar paper if they could afford it) was placed on top of the sheeting boards and then sod (grass side up) was closely fitted together so as to form a slanting roof down to the end of the eaves. This made as good a roof as you could build unless you could afford wooden shingles. As a matter of fact, many of the early settlers couldn't afford flat boards to support the sod roof, and when this roof sheeting was not available, poles would be run down from the ridge pole to extend over the edge of the walls placed close enough together to support straw or hay on which paper was laid, and then the sod was laid on top of all this. These roofs were quite leaky.

Flooring varied. In most of the earliest soddies the ground on the inside of the house would be leveled and swept free of any dust, and then the hard dirt surface would be covered by homemade rag carpets or often used bare. Most of the sod houses I remember, however, had at least rough board floors.

Sometimes the interior would be just the plain ends of the sod smoothed off. However, most people tried to im-

prove this, and would cover the inside walls with paper, cloth, or plaster. The plaster wouldn't be anything that was purchased. Instead it was a mixture of sand and clay troweled onto the sod wall. This sort of plaster usually stuck pretty well for several years and when it began to crack, it would all be knocked off, and the job would be done over again. People who were lucky enough to afford cement would put it into the plaster mix, and this made fairly permanent plaster. Generally speaking, the outside walls were left plain, but a few people plastered the outside. Some that could not afford to plaster the wall on the outside with cement would put a fine mesh wire over the outside walls.

Most people visualize life in a soddy as being very dirty, but actually a sod house could be kept quite clean. A good sod house was always comfortable. As the old timers said, "they were always warm in the winter and cool in the summer." Sod houses were durable, too. A sod house about five miles west of Arnold where I lived for a time as a lad is still standing and occupied.

Sod house types ran from dugouts to rare two-story houses. A dugout was a sod shanty where one or two sides of the house would be on the bank of an excavation. The side hill "dugout" usually had a flat roof. The common experience was for homesteaders to start out with a dugout and then build a regular sod house. Usually a sod house was only one room wide. More elaborate houses were rare, but I knew of one two-story sod house in Custer County, and it had sod towers at each of its four corners.

Not only did most of the homesteaders in central and western Nebraska start out in sod houses, but for a time all farm buildings, barns, chicken houses, privies, sheds, and even pig pens were built of sod. The early schools and churches in the sod house country were soddies, and county governments began in sod houses in some cases.

Early settlers in Nebraska had some problems that people don't have now. The main handicap that my folks



Above—" . . . the almost daily chore was to load some barrels into a horse-drawn wagon, drive to a river or a water hole and fill the barrels. . . "

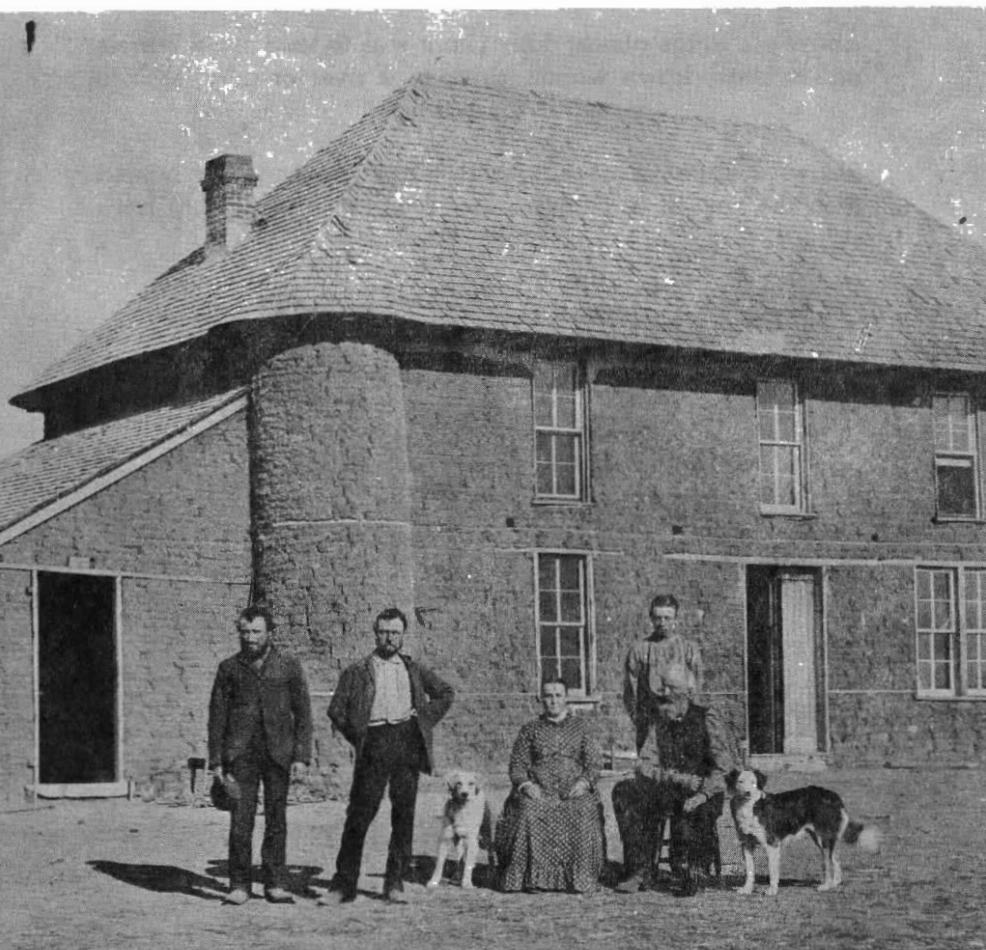
Below—"Water for cooking and family drinking was hauled from the well of a neighbor who was lucky enough to have such a convenience."







"Sod house types ran from dugouts to rare two-story houses."





"Not only did most of the homesteaders in central and western Nebraska start out in sod houses, but for a time . . . the early schools . . . were soddies."





Above—"The town livery stable was the 'Men's Club.' "

(C. H. Hagaboon Livery Stable, Broken Bow, 1887)

Below—"During the baseball season, the town team would be at home about every other Saturday."

(Baseball Team, Anselmo, 1892)



had when they first moved to western Nebraska was the lack of water for themselves and the livestock. In those days you didn't have modern well-digging machinery available which could be used to go down several hundred feet to water gravel. Those who didn't live where water could be reached by dug wells, had to depend on rivers, lakes, or water holes and those living away from a river, had to haul water in the summer time. In those days, you didn't have tank wagons and tractors, so the almost daily chore was to load some barrels into a horse-drawn wagon, drive to a river or a water hole and fill the barrels, a pail full at a time, place canvas over the top of each barrel, secure it by a hoop, and drive home with the water slopping out of the top of the barrels. This chore was necessary to provide enough water to keep the bawling cattle and the squealing pigs alive. Water for cooking and family drinking was hauled from the well of a neighbor who was lucky enough to have such a convenience.

Another handicap was the distance to markets. All the produce my father sold was hauled by horses or mules to the nearest railroad point at Callaway, thirty, rough, tough miles away. We did not have any graded roads, with the tops of the hills cut off and the valleys filled in. Instead, we followed rutted trails up one side of a hill and down the other.

With a wagon load of hogs or grain, it was a long day's drag to the railroad. In hot weather the hogs would die of the heat unless they were cooled off in the double wagon box, so we took a bucket along and whenever we passed a stream or a water hole, we threw water over the hogs' backs and soaked down the binder canvas tied over the top wagon box. It took four horses to haul a wagon load of hogs or grain over the hilly ungraded road to market. Usually, in going to the railroad, my folks drove four horses "strung out," i.e., one two-horse team ahead of the other. In areas where the roadway was wide enough, teams were more often driven "four abreast."

Before the days of trucks there were virtually no commercial haulers to take stuff to and from the railroad market. Farmers from our part of the country hauled their own produce to Callaway and took loads of freight back to Arnold, which was then an inland town. In Callaway the men always slept in the hayloft of the livery barn where the horses were stabled, thus saving hotel bills. If they went to the hotel, it was to eat a meal at the "twenty-five cent" table. Only the white-collared local businessmen and the "drummers" ate at the "traveling man's" table, where the same food cost fifty cents—the only difference being that the plutocrats had a white table cloth.

In our country fuel was a real problem. We didn't use a shovel full of coal during my early boyhood. There was very little wood to burn, and we were lucky if we had a few sticks on hand for kindling. We burned corn cobs, ear corn, and cow chips. Of the three, cow chips made the best fuel for cooking and heating. Every summer, during the dry season, we would take the lumber wagon and go pick up chips to be piled up and stored in a dry shed. If we were lucky enough to have any gunny sacks on hand, we would sack some of the cow chips and pin the sacks together with cactus pins. Cow chips were sacked because they dried out better in the sack pile in the shed and also were easier to take into the house. A few of the early settlers burned hay and even corn stalks. It was quite an art to twist the hay into a solid mass to hold the fire.

Skilled medical care was an exception. There were very few doctors in the country and absolutely no hospitals. All the children were born at home, and surgery was performed there, usually on the kitchen table. Arnold was fortunate to have "Doc" Robinson who had graduated from McGill University in Ontario, Canada. He came from a well-to-do family, but a pair of weak lungs had forced him to go to a dry country to get back his health which had failed during his medical training. He happened to come to Custer County where he met and married a ranchman's daughter and set up the practice of medicine. While he had one room in his

house that he called his office, he saw most of his patients on home calls. It was nothing unusual for him to drive twenty or even thirty miles to set a broken leg or to take out an appendix. Doc Robinson had some very fine driving horses. He usually kept three teams, and when word of sickness or accident was brought to town by horseback (no telephones then), he would take off. My older brother would often go with Doc during the slack work season. Weather was no deterrent to their travel. If it was snowing or even blizzarding, they would put the curtains on the buggy, take plenty of blankets, put in a couple of hot soapstones and a lighted lantern and take off straight across the country. The doctor always carried wire cutters, splicers, and staples, and if the short way ran through a range fence, he would cut the fence, drive on through and then splice it behind him. We moved into town about the time I was ready for high school, and I made a few trips with Doc myself. Once I drove him up into the Sandhills, where, as I recall it, a woman had had a gall bladder attack. After the doctor had made the diagnosis, he decided to operate. He had me put the extra leaves in the kitchen table, spread a sheet over it, and get him some hot water and a clean dishpan. Having studied a little physiology, I asked Doc if he thought that was a sanitary place to operate. Doc grinned and said, "Son, this woman is used to these germs—they won't hurt her," and they didn't. He not only located and deleted the offending gall bladder, but took out her appendix for good measure, with the comment that he didn't want to have to drive back up there for that. The patient recovered and outlived the doctor.

Our country was infested with rattlesnakes. Since most of the youngsters went barefoot around the barns and in the fields, snake bites were quite a menace. In case of a rattlesnake bite, the best thing that could be done was to have someone slash the wound and suck out the venom. Then the patient would be loaded into a buggy or a carriage and raced to the doctor. I remember after telephones had been installed, a call came that a Ricketts boy had been bitten by a rattlesnake and his folks were bringing him into

town. The boy's father had a very fine coal black buggy team. About everybody in town watched for them to arrive, and I recall seeing the racing team come down the main street, both of them white with foam, and swing up to the doctor's office. The boy recovered, but neither one of the horses was ever any good after that. The horses were used only for light work, but both of them lived the life of Riley until they died.

When I was a boy, the most terrifying thing to me was a prairie fire. These fires usually came through from the Northwest when the range was dry, mostly in the late fall or early spring. We happened to be located at the southeast edge of the Sandhills and practically every spring you could see and smell smoke in the air, and often the skies would be lit up at night. We always plowed strips known as fireguards and burned the grass between the fireguards to provide a barrier against prairie fires. However, when a big fire got started in a heavy wind, it was almost impossible to check its progress. Burning tumble weeds rolled along the landscape and embers were carried hundreds of feet in the wind.

Often a fire burned for twenty-five or fifty miles before it could be stopped. Lots of livestock and some lives were lost in these grass fires. Hay stacks would be lost and good pasture and hay land would be burned over. Fire destroyed not only the grass crop that was growing, but damaged the hay land or range for some time to come.

All the men of the community would fight a fire, going in spring wagons or on horseback to join the common effort. They would take breaking plows and plow a strip and then backfire on the side from which the wind was coming. This was done by burning a narrow strip on the windy side of the plowing and then burning back toward the wind until you had a burned-out strip that you hoped was wide enough to stop the fire. The fire fighters worked hard and fast in making these barriers ahead of the fire. Sometimes they would plow at a trot and as soon as they had a strip wide enough, someone would ravel out the end



of a throw rope, soak it in kerosene, light it, and then race a horse back and forth on the windward side of the plowing to burn out a barrier. People could be severely burned when a fire jumped a guard or when they were trapped when the wind changed its direction. I remember one fellow that had his ears and most of his nose burned off. He was a horrible looking sight with his hands and his face a mass of scar tissue.

Occasionally they still have prairie fires in western Nebraska, but the increase in cultivated land and faster transportation and communication facilities have taken away their terrors. Nowadays, a prairie fire of any size is front page news.

I remember two winter storms that were "humdingers." Both of them were during the time we were living in a sod house in Arnold. During the first one I was on Christmas vacation from grade school at my brother's place. The blizzard raged for three days, the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday after New Year's Day. I had not missed a day of school for years and on Sunday, which was terribly cold, I insisted on riding my pony the nine miles back to town. My brother and his wife tried to persuade me not to start, but I was firm and finally set out with all the clothes I could get on.

It was necessary to ride through several pastures to get home, and my brother was worried about whether I could get back on my horse after getting off to open and shut the wire gates I had to go through. That turned out to be no problem, since I found snow drifts over every fence hard enough and high enough for me to ride over. I will never forget how cold I got, though. I froze my nose, toes, and cheeks and when I finally rode up to our house, I had to yell for someone to come out and get me off my horse.

The most destructive blizzard I remember was in the early spring, about 1910. It started with a warm rain that soaked all the pasture stock and then changed to a howling, swirling mass of sleet and then snow. It was so bad that



all range cattle drifted with the storm. They would go with the wind until they came up to a fence where they would pile up and freeze. In some places the cattle actually got over pasture fences walking on top of cattle that had gone down in the fence corner. Cattle drifted on southeast until they hit a bend of the South Loup. At that place there was a south bank that the cattle could not get up, with the result that the river bend was full of dead cattle after the storm. So was the Union Pacific Railroad cut west of Arnold. The Black's Ranch up in the hills lost half its cattle in that storm.

We usually had plenty to eat, but the family menu had little diversity. Calorie charts were unheard of. Mostly we ate what could be raised, gathered, and processed locally. Most families had chickens and some of them raised turkeys, ducks, geese, and guineas, so we had fresh poultry all year round. Prairie chickens and quail were plentiful, and wild ducks and geese were fairly easy to get in the season that they were in the country. We usually had fresh beef and pork in the fall and early winter and corned or dried beef and salt pork in the spring and the summer. There was little lamb or mutton. No beef, pork, or mutton was shipped in, since the local butcher slaughtered what meat he sold.

We kids always looked forward to the day we butchered at home. Every fall we would kill one steer and one or two hogs, cut them up and make sausage or hamburger out of the extras and then store the rest of the meat at home. Some of the beef and the pork would be canned, some of the beef would be dried or made into corned beef, and much of the pork would be salted and stored away in the family cave. No one had refrigeration, although people who lived near a river or pond put up ice.

Fresh vegetables were confined to those raised in the home gardens. Few people could afford commercial canned goods, and frozen foods were unheard of. Fresh fruits were usually those raised on the place. Oranges, grapefruit, and even bananas were seldom available. In the summer fami-

lies would enjoy watermelon, muskmelons and wild fruits, mostly plums, grapes, chokecherries, and sand cherries. One of the year's highlights was the day we went "berrying." We would take off in a farm wagon early in the morning and drive to some canyon where there was wild fruit and spend the day picking our winter supply for canning, jelly, and preserves. Of course we always took a picnic lunch and it was great fun unless you got into a patch of poison ivy. Corn was the staple food. One early settler said that he knew thirty-three ways of cooking corn.

The visit of the peddler always was an occasion for excitement. In his especially equipped wagon he carried almost everything, and from his stock "Mom" would choose the calico for her new dress and the goods for our Sunday pants and shirts. They usually carried combs, ornaments, buttons, thread, underwear, pots, pans, kitchenware, condiments, seasonings, and gimcracks for the kids. You felt lucky if the peddler decided to stay all night at your house. All of us kids would help him take care of his nice team in the hope that we would be given some bauble for our good deed.

Religion, too, came in wagons. Some of the denominations had ministers who traveled through the "short grass" country carrying Bibles and religious pamphlets. I distinctly remember one Baptist "colporteur" whose visits were always relished. Rev. James J. Judkins was a giant of a man physically, and whenever he stopped at a place he would pitch in and help in the field and with the milking. Meanwhile, word would be sent around the neighborhood that there were going to be religious services at somebody's house or at the schoolhouse, and everyone, young and old, regardless of religious affiliations or lack of same, would turn out for the evening's sermon and singing.

There were only three general community-wide holidays observed—Decoration Day, the Fourth of July, and Christmas. On May 30, the observance centered entirely upon honoring veterans of the Civil War. On the way into town people would gather wild roses, sweet peas, and other spring

flowers to take to the town cemetery to decorate the graves of the deceased members of the Grand Army of the Republic. A procession would form in town, and everyone would follow the local band on foot or in horse-drawn vehicles out to the cemetery. There everyone would gather around the Civil War marker for the formal services and when these were finished, people would scatter among the graves of their loved ones and then most of the country folks would gather with their families and neighbors for outdoor picnic lunches.

Personally, I was always more excited about the coming of the Fourth of July than any other holiday. Those that lived in town would be awakened early when the local boys began "shooting the anvil" at the local blacksmith shop. This was done by filling the hole in the anvil with black powder, placing another anvil on top of it, and then touching the fuse trail of powder with the red-hot end of a long rod which was poked in through the blacksmith shop door. It made a lot of noise and smoke, ushering in Independence Day. Standard events at our celebration were horse races, foot races, sack races, catching the greased pig, climbing the greased pole, bronco busting, and a baseball game. Great amounts of money were not necessary. I counted myself lucky to have a whole quarter for fire-crackers and confections.

In our community, almost everybody went to his church on Christmas Eve for Christmas services. There would always be a tree decorated with strung popcorn, cranberries, and homemade stars. The program consisted of recitations and Christmas singing, followed by the grand finale which was Santa Claus giving out the Christmas presents. We always had all our presents at the church "doings." Christmas gifts were practical. You felt lucky if you got a new cap or a new pair of pants. Our Santa Claus never gave out bicycles, boxing gloves, or electric trains.

Besides the holidays, we had other entertainments, too. There were basket socials, where a fellow was supposed to buy his girl's basket. It was tough when the other fellows

would gang up on you and "bid up" the basket of your best girl. A common trick was for two or three girls to make identical baskets, so you wouldn't know for sure which was the one you wanted to buy.

We also had literary societies and home talent plays. Some of the questions debated at literary societies were unique. I remember a long evening of debate on "which is more useful, the horse or the cow?" One of the debaters thought she had a clincher when she pointed out that the cow gave milk for family use, only to have one of her opponents claim that one of his brothers had been raised on mare's milk. Winter was the time for home talent plays. A group would rehearse for weeks with its homemade stage and squeaky curtains, and then put the show on, not only in the home town, but in several neighboring school houses or communities. The standard admission charge was a quarter.

There was always some excitement on Saturday afternoon during good weather—a horse race, bronco riding, or a baseball game. The horse breaking was not done out of chutes in a fenced enclosure in modern rodeo style. If you had a horse that no one at home could ride, you would take him to town to be ridden. When he was led out in front of the crowd, the ambitious riders would size him up and then someone would "pass the hat" to get a "pot" for the fellow who could ride him. Then they would twist a "twitch" around the horse's upper lip so that they could handle him and he would be blindfolded and saddled out in the open. When the rider got on and got set they would drop the twitch, pull the blindfold and turn him loose. It didn't take a flank strap to make those horses buck and bawl. A couple of "hazers" on horseback would try to keep him out of the crowd and head him out across the meadow back of the baseball diamond. There wasn't any ten-second rule; a rider had to stay on the horse till he was bucked out, to win. Sometimes the hazers wouldn't catch him for half a mile.

During the baseball season, the town team would be at home about every other Saturday. The crowd had no bleach-

ers to sit on nor, as I recall it, a backstop for foul balls, but just the same, there would be real "rooting" for the boys in their blue tight-fitting "Pop Anson" uniforms.

Generally there would also be a horse race—usually sprints between cow ponies but at times someone taking a thoroughbred through the country would be sucker enough to match his horse against a local pony in a short race. There was an old bachelor living up in the Sandhills who had a little sorrel, stocking-legged, pony named "Jimmy." He would lead Jimmy into town behind the farm wagon and ride him bareback. As far as I can remember, Jimmy was never beaten in a quarter mile or three-eighths mile sprint. In a few jumps after the starting pistol went off Jimmy would be so far ahead of the thoroughbred that he couldn't be caught before he crossed the finish line. I remember one time three of us drove a single driver twenty miles to Gandy to see the old boy swamp a touted race horse named "Home Sweet Home" in a quarter-mile match race. Little Jimmy was home before the thoroughbred was well started.

The town livery stable was the "Men's Club." Here all commercial transportation was arranged, teams and saddle horses were stabled in bad weather, fancy stallions were kept at stud, and Indian ponies were sold. With nostalgia I still recall the enchanting smell of a livery barn, with its rows of stalls full of horses, the harness and the saddle pegs sticking out on the end of the stall partitions, the hayloft where the freighters slept and the common feed bin with the "beat-up" gallon feed can. Another common meeting place for men was the local blacksmith shop. After the ground froze up in the fall until the spring thaw, the local smithy would be kept busy shoeing horses all day long and half the night. Our first blacksmith was Andy Cochran, an uncle of former Governor R. L. Cochran.

When the women folks came to town there wasn't much for them to do except to sell their eggs and cream and buy yard goods, clothing, and staples, for the family. Then they herded the tired kids while the men folks did their business, visited and waited their turns for weekly shaves in the bar-

ber shop. We owe the greatest debt to the pioneer mothers who cheerfully prepared food from their own supplies, made their own soap, rendered out the lard and made most of the family clothes from goods bought from small stores or peddlers. They raised the children without benefit of pediatricians or baby sitters. On the side they always were expected to help out in the haying and the harvest.

The sod house settlers paid a big price to give us our modern Nebraska heritage. But looking back, I cannot decide whether the things that I have seen come—television, automobile, electricity, radio, atomic power, or even the milking machine—have made the world any happier.