



The Importance of Fences to the American Pioneer

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THE IMPORTANCE OF FENCES TO THE AMERICAN PIONEER¹

BY MAMIE J. MEREDITH

THE course of empire in America made its way westward by fences—literally. Before the extensive use of fences, landed property was marked out by stones, posts, trees or waterways. Such landmarks have been respected from the time of Moses—his law pronounced curses on those who removed their neighbors' landmarks. The stages of development from the primitive stone, brush or mudwall-and-ditch fences to the single-strand electric-wire fence of today can still be distinguished in various parts of the United States. In New Mexico, where some of the ranchers are pioneers who homesteaded their places, the fences are like those built a hundred years ago in what are now the midwestern states.

Not only did the pioneer fence mark ownership and confine cattle, hogs, sheep and other property but it also kept out the enemies—boar, bison, bears, wolves, coyotes, rabbits, snakes, and “humans.” The detailed instructions given in government reports and engineering textbooks of the 1850's, sixties, and seventies on the construction of fences show how vital they were to the pioneer farmer. A “scientific” farmer was quoted in 1858 by Dr. John A. Warder, editor of the *Western Horticultural Review* of New York, on the importance of constructing fences. This farmer felt strongly the need of legislation on the subject. He said, in 1830:

¹A Paper read before the annual meeting of the American Dialect Society, New York, December 29, 1950.

Without fear of contradiction from our experienced farmers, I pronounce this to be the leak which prevents the filling up of our cup of bliss: as things are managed in the Western country, it is worse than a leak; it is a sore, a blotch, the source of perpetual discontent, the 'fretting leprosy' of the land The mode of inclosing, as here practiced, and the urgent necessity there is for the strongest fortifications, in consequence of the barbarous practice of suffering stock of all kinds to run at large, keeps the farmer poor, and groveling, and ignorant, and creates more rustic quarrels than any other thing—whiskey not excepted.²

Much light is thrown on pioneer customs and economy by the laws relating to fences passed by the several states. These may be found in the Annual Reports of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, especially those of 1869 and 1871.³ The controversy between homesteaders and cattlemen came to a head when cheap and durable wire fencing became available in the 1870's. Before that time, according to the Report of 1871, the popular idea, logically interpreted, appeared to be that corn should be restricted to prevent depredations upon cattle.

The barbed wire fence (termed a "pureborn Americanism"),⁴ which replaced the pioneer fences of mud, wood, and stone, was very important in bringing the country out of the depression of the seventies, just as the building of railroads after the Civil War and the manufacture of automobiles in another period of our national economic life vitalized industry.

Pioneer fences were constructed of the materials at hand—rock and stone in the northwestern region; logs, rails, and brush used prodigally in wooded country and parsimoniously on the plains. Sods and mud or adobe brick walls, and ditches had to suffice when neither timber nor stones were available.

² John A. Warder, M.D., *Hedges and Evergreens* (New York: Orange Judd Company, 1858), p. 15.

³ U. S. Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1869, pp. 369-399; 1871, pp. 497-509.

⁴ *Newsweek*, May 22, 1950, p. 68. Description of the forthcoming *Dictionary of Americanisms* edited by M. M. Mathews, which includes "barbedwire fence." Dr. Mathews' source was the *Congressional Record*, 1946, Appendix A4019.

Important as was the fence in pioneer life, little attention has been paid in dictionaries to the nomenclature. The Webster *New International Dictionary* notes the stake and rider of "Western United States." Thornton's *Glossary of Americanisms* (1912) gives illustrative citations of corral, Virginia fence, worm fence and woven brush fence. The *Dictionary of American English* (completed in 1944) has, as might well be expected, more entries for fence names than the other two combined. W. P. Webb in the chapter on "Transportation and Fences" in *The Great Plains* (1931) quoted a writer of 1871 who told of fences "with names hitherto unheard of—Shanghai, leaning, and bloomer." Webb added that we now have no means of knowing what these fences were like.

In an attempt to define these "unheard of" names and to compile a glossary of the American pioneer fence, I have assembled approximately 100 terms, from very many sources, oral and printed, in addition to those included in the special and general dictionaries. This glossary will be available in the June issue of the *Southern Folklore Quarterly* edited by Professor A. C. Morris of the University of Florida. Photographs of a dozen of the most characteristic of the fences will be reproduced. I have been helped in my descriptions of the pioneer fences—outlived and forgotten—by photographs from the files of the Nebraska State Historical Society at Lincoln, by the United States Department of Agriculture, and by personal friends. The publication of my definitions will, I hope, bring corrections and additions from readers.

I have limited my assemblage of terms to utilitarian farm fences of the past. The examples of the woodworker's art to be found enclosing estates in the Northwest, and the handwrought metal fences in New Orleans, constructed by slave labor, are a subject in themselves. I have sought the typical rather than the unusual. The wagon-wheel fence in Nebraska, the fence built of empty beer bottles featured in the play, "Suds in Your Eye," the old Spanish cannon serving as fence posts in Cuba, the use of a half mile of yard-wide cheesecloth to build a corral for penning wild

sheep on Catalina Island in 1912, and similar novelties are not recorded here.

I pass over in this brief paper the terms dealing with the legal aspects of pioneer fencing, the laws passed by the various states defining the types of land and water fences that were constitutional and what was judged to be trespassing, infringements of property rights, and the like. In some less settled regions there were no constituted authorities and the pioneers themselves decided the disputes over boundaries and over the demands of the stockgrowers for open or free range. The court records in Nebraska reveal that such disputes sometimes resulted in violent deaths.⁶

When one considers that the expense of fencing his fields might cost the young homesteader in the prairie states 100 times the \$200 at which his land was valued, as was pointed out in the Department of Agriculture report of 1871, then one recognizes how momentous was the question of fencing.⁷ In Nebraska, the pioneer evaded the fence problem when he could by herding cattle—a boy on a pony was cheaper than a fence.

Corrals, the inclosures which were built in many sizes and of various materials, from heavy posts to a length of rope, were used for numerous purposes. Charles Nordhoff, writing in 1872, commented that a makeshift brush corral was a protection against wild beasts, which “are too cowardly to venture after dark over even a low fence.”⁸ The word

⁵ W. P. Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931), p. 285.

⁶ Bayard H. Paine, “Decisions Which Have Changed Nebraska History,” *Nebraska History*, XVI (October-December, 1935), 199-208.

⁷ “When a score of young farmers ‘go West,’ with strong hands and little cash in them, but a magnificent promise to each of a homestead worth \$200 now, and \$20 in land-office fees, they often find that \$1,000 will be required to fence scantily each farm, with little benefit to themselves, but mainly for mutual protection against a single stock-grower, rich in cattle, and becoming richer by feeding them without cost upon the unpurchased prairie.” USDA, *Annual Report*, 1871, p. 497.

⁸ Charles Nordhoff, *California for Health, Pleasure and Residence* (1872), p. 234; quoted in C. W. Towne and E. N. Wentworth, *Shepherd's Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945), p. 72.

corral had many figurative uses. A. K. McClure illustrated its popularity at some length in his book *Rocky Mountains* (1869):

In all classes, from the most learned to the least favored in letters, the same expressive Westernisms are in common use. If a man is embarrassed in any way, he is *corralled*. The Indians *corral* men on the plains; the storms *corral* tourists in the mountains; the criminal is *corraled* in prison; the tender swain is *corraled* by crinoline; the business man is *corraled* by debt, or more enterprising competitors; the unfortunate politician is *corraled* by the mountaineers, the gulchmen [miners] or the settlers; the minister is *corraled* when he is called to become the pastor of a congregation; and the gambler *corrals* the dust of the miner.⁹

The subject of the hedge fence is a large one, with various complicated plans for looping, inter-looping, plashing, pegging down, and wettling. "Hundreds of miles of hedges are grown without any protection . . . on the open prairie . . . in three of four years," stated Dr. Warder, whom I quoted earlier, in 1858.¹⁰ In 1867, Kansas offered a bounty for hedge fences and continued the payments until 1887. In "Kansas language," a hedge entitled to the bounty must be "hog tight, horse high and bull strong."¹¹

⁹ A. K. McClure, *Rocky Mountains* (Philadelphia, 1869), p. 210.

¹⁰ Warder, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 20—"Nothing in the way of inclosure, from the yawning ditch to the sharp picketed iron fence, . . . can equal the perfect live hedge . . . absolutely impassable to man and boy, to boar or bison, to fox or rabbit: as to pigs and poultry, they will for ever remain in profound ignorance of what is transpiring in the outer regions." In 1858 one man in Nemaha County, Nebraska, had set out a hedge of Osage orange enclosing 160 acres, stated Dr. E. N. Dick in *The Sod-house Frontier 1854-1890* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1937), p. 81.

¹¹ Cecil Howes, *Kansas City Star*, n.d. "Development of Fences Parallels the Shift from Grass to Farming in Kansas." This valuable article was called to my attention by Mrs. H. W. Scrimsher of Talmage, Nebraska. Her clipping was not dated and the *Star* was unable to give me the information. Mr. Howes died recently. This expression evidently caught the public fancy, for I have found a number of variants, such as the following:

"An old man had a mortgage on his land that was 'bull-proof and pig-tight.'" *Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser*, March 17, 1895, cited by Margaret G. Figh, in *Publication of the American Dialect Society*, Number 13 (April, 1950), p. 12.

A stump fence was nicknamed a "hell fence" in S. Weir Mitchell's novel *Roland Blake* (1886), p. 21: "Yes, sir, that's what they

Dr. Warder, after extensive investigation, recommended three native hedges for the North: the buckthorn, Washington thorn, and Maclura or Osage orange,¹² The latter is that most widely used. Because of the toughness of its yellow wood, the western Indians used it for bows, hence its name *Bois d' arc* or bowwood. It was also known by the corrupted terms *Bodark* and *Bodock*.

In the southern states, besides the Cherokee and McCartney Rose, the strong growing varieties of cactus were much used for fences in Mexico and Texas, and the huisache hedge in western Texas. The Spanish bayonet or yucca, its long stiff leaves armed with sharp spines, served for fences in Florida and Louisiana.

To save time, I omit description or discussion of other so-called "live fences," those of bushes or shrubs or trees, simply listing the leading ones.

The dead-hedge was built of dead plants, as opposed to the live-hedge or quickset. Varieties of it were the plain dead-hedge, the plaited hedge and the stake-and-rice.

R. H. Thornton in his *American Glossary* (1912) misinterpreted woven fence. He placed it under worm fence, made of split rails, instead of with hedge fences. His illustrative citation came from *Memorable Days*, published in London in 1823: "He has only dead fences, and no quicks or green hedges; all *woven fences*."¹³

The author quoted by Thornton, William Faux, was without doubt referring to woven hedge, probably a wattled or plaited fence.

call 'em here,—'pig-tight, ox-proof, hoss-high, stumps upside down.'"

"One or two strands of electrified fence hold in stock that used to require miles of fencing 'horse high, hog tight and bull strong.'" (Glenn Stewart, editor of *KVP Philosopher*, Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Co., Michigan), [September, 1942], p. 2.

Mrs. H. W. Scrimsher of Talmage, Nebraska, quoted her grandfather's description of his stake-and-rider fence in Iowa: "hog-tight, bull strong and horse high . . . I have settled more lawsuits due to livestock encroaching on a neighbor's crop than all other causes put together."

¹² Warder, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 108.

¹³ William Faux, *Memorable Days in Americas: Being a Journal of a Tour to the United States* (London, 1823), p. 134.

The historic worm fence, made of rails split by hand, was ranked as the "national fence" in the Department of Agriculture report of 1871, though it was recognized as temporary, "giving way gradually to kinds requiring less lumber, and covering less land, as well as making a less awkward appearance, not at all indicative of the straight-forwardness of the American character."¹⁴ The *Dictionary of American English* has a citation for *worm fence* dated 1652, and other references tell of the early colonists building the fence in Virginia. It is clear from the many citations I have assembled that the term *worm fence* has been used to designate two types. The more primitive, found only in heavily-wooded regions, employed no posts or rails for support and no nails or thongs for fastenings. Professor John Scott of England in his book on *Farm Engineering* (1885) described this Virginia crook or worm-fence found 300 years ago.¹⁵ Snake fence seems to be another name for the worm, Virginia crook or zigzag fence, for the complaint was made that the stock could push off the top rails. The stake-and-rider rail fence overcame this last fault. It represented the second, better developed type. References may be found to fences having from two to fourteen rails.

Other varieties of the rail fence, which I shall not distinguish, are: the herringbone, the Van Buren, the log, the cap and bunk or stake and bunk, and the hurdle-fence.

The bloomer, as described in the 1871 USDA report, had only three rails, supported by stakes. The Shanghai likewise had three rails. Shanghai, when used attributively in

¹⁴ USDA, *Annual Report*, 1871, p. 506.

¹⁵ "In America a still more simple fence [than rail] is commonly met, even in districts that have been settled for a generation or more. It is known as the 'Virginia crook,' or worm-fence, and consists of nothing but cleft rails, similar to those employed in the cleft post-and-rail fence, and these are laid down in zigzag fashion and one rail placed above another to the desired height, no posts, no stakes and no nails being used. It forms a very strong fence, though a rough one, but it occupies a great deal of ground. It is, however, easily taken down and rebuilt again, while it will turn any and every description of stock." (John Scott, *Farm Engineering* (1885), p. 82).

other phrases, meant hasty or awkward; hence, perhaps, the fence name.¹⁶

Ingenuity had to be exercised in prairie regions to invent fences which would make the wood go a long way. Such was the Jack and pole or "Jack" fence which was indigenous to the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. It was a dry-area type, probably the only distinctively Western rail fence, straight not zigzagged. The pitchpole made a similar economical use of scarce timber. It was formerly found in New England, later in mid-America.

Corduroy fence utilized poles, nailed to posts. The Indian or forked fence had rails supported at the corners by forked posts, and was "good against cattle only." The leaning fence used in Kansas, Iowa, and Minnesota, had posts set at an angle of forty degrees.

In 1871 the Department of Agriculture reported that the board-fence was widely prevalent over the United States, except in Minnesota and Nebraska. There were fences of post-and-bar, post-and-board, post-and-chain, post-and-ditch, post-and-log, posts and palings, post-and-pole, and post-and-rails. A variant was the Pieux fence of cypress slabs, the prevailing style in the Creole section of Louisiana.

The rough and ready fence, devised by Missourians, was made by "setting rough posts, dressed with an axe on either side." In Missouri, too, was found the Yankee board fence, made of post-and-plank.

¹⁶ Settlers in Nebraska put up Shanghai fences, we learn from Gen. James F. Rusling, who in 1874 wrote in *Across America* (Sheldon & Co., N. Y.), p. 299, of the swarms of Plains grasshoppers encountered near Fort Kearny. The settlers complained of them bitterly: "Said a butternut Missourian: 'The pesky varmints! They eat up all my corn, and tobacco, and then when I cussed 'em for it; they coolly sat on the Shanghai fence thar, and squirted tobacco juice at me!'"

Dr. Dick described briefly the Shanghai fence in *The Sod-House Frontier*, p. 81: "One type of rail fence was called the Shanghai fence. If the farmer did not desire a fence clear to the ground, a stake was driven for the rails to set on, thus allowing a space below the bottom rail like the common barbed wire fence."

Brush fence was unmistakably a pioneer fence. It was related to the dead-hedge but antedated it.¹⁷

The so-called Mexican fence erected in Texas in the sixties must have resembled a fortification. It was constructed of logs and mesquite brush, piled together eighteen inches in thickness.¹⁸

The stump fence was a symbol of settlement. It is still used in the jackpine regions of Canada and until recently in Pennsylvania. F. L. Nichols described a New England farm fenced with stumps. In his *Forty Years of American Life*, published in 1874, he wrote, "The fences were made by placing these stumps—extracted from the ground with great labor and the aid of machinery—on their sides, with their gnarled roots stretching into the air."¹⁹ The expression, "as homely as a stump fence," was the epitome of unattractiveness.

Rock and stone were early used for fences in all parts of the country where they were available. As in the case of stumps, laying them up in boundry fences was often a way of clearing the land for crops.

¹⁷ E. E. Dale, "Wood and Water: Twin Problems of the Prairie Plains," *Nebraska History*, XXIX (June, 1948), 97, wrote of the brush fences: "Scarcity of wood construction and fuel were only two aspects of the problem faced by the prairie settler because of lack of timber. A third and very serious question was the age-old one of enclosures. . . . In the wooded area the pioneer had no such problem. Once a field had been cleared the branches were trimmed from the tree trunks with an axe and used to construct a 'brush fence' about the clearing which served reasonably well until such time as enough rails could be split to replace it with the more stable and permanent 'worm fence' properly 'staked and ridered.'"

The bush and pole fences mentioned in a letter October 22, 1875, to his Minnesota agent by President Ellwood of the Barb Fence Company, DeKalb, Illinois, were probably brush fences. (Earl W. Hayter, "Barbed Wire Fencing—A Prairie Invention," *Agricultural History*, XIII [October, 1939], 193).

¹⁸ USDA, *Annual Report*, 1871, p. 504.

¹⁹ F. L. Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1874), p. 8. Mr. Ralph Mueller of Cleveland in a letter to me in 1950 described a stump fence which he had seen recently in northern Ontario: "To clear the land the trees had been cut, leaving about a 3 foot stump. Then these stumps uprooted, and the root network was 7 or 8 feet in diameter. These stumps and roots were placed along the periphery of a field, with the adjoining roots, in a measure, interlaced or pushed together. Such a fence possibly wouldn't hold hogs, but it would hold sheep, cows and horses."

Raven I. McDavid pointed out some regional differences in fence terminology, in an article in the *New York Times Magazine*. He noted that: "The New England 'stone wall' becomes a 'stone fence' in Pennsylvania and western New York. The same fence becomes a 'rock fence' from West Virginia south, a 'stone row' in northern New Jersey."²⁰

The late Cecil Howes, staff writer for the *Kansas City Star*, found that the earliest fences in Kansas were board or rail.

"Then came the stone fences and there are hundreds of miles of stone fences to be seen in Kansas today . . . (though) it is doubtful if a new stone fence has been laid in the state in more than sixty years."²¹

The *Congressional Globe* in 1870 told of marble fences fashioned by border farmers.²²

I have not been able to determine whether the pepper-and-salt stone fences mentioned by F. S. Cozzens in his *Sparrowgrass Papers* were officially so named or merely described thus to show that there were light and dark tones in the stone. He wrote in 1856: "In one of those villages peculiar to our Eastern coast, whose long lines of pepper-and-salt stone fences indicate laborious, if not profitable farming, . . . in a stone chunk of a house, . . . lives Captain Belgrave."²³

²⁰ Raven I. McDavid, "The Way We Talk," *New York Times Magazine*, April 23, 1950.

²¹ Howes, *op. cit.* Mr. Howes explained how a ledge of limestone underlying four counties in Kansas received the official designation in geology textbooks of *fence post rock*. The Russian-German settlers in these counties did not have the money to buy both the barbed wire—when it was introduced in Kansas in the early seventies—and the wooden posts which had to be imported. But they were ingenious. They "dreamed up" the stone posts which may be seen in hundreds of miles of fencing in that section. They scraped off the topsoil and drilled holes into the limestone. "If it was wintertime they poured water into the holes and let a hard freeze break the rock. If in the summer they poured water into the holes and then drove in wooden pegs, which absorbed the water, became swollen and broke off the ledges into the proper sizes for fence posts."

²² The *Dictionary of American English*, quoted from *Congressional Globe*, 1870: "The marbles of our western border have heretofore served as 'chimney rock' for the cabin of the luxurious border farmer and for fencing for his field."

²³ F. S. Cozzens, *Sparrowgrass Papers*, p. 283, "Captain Belgrave." 1859.

If a pioneer lacked both timber and stone for fencing he often had recourse to earthen fences. The Department of Agriculture reported fences of adobe or unburned brick in New Mexico. My article in the *Southern Folklore Quarterly* will include a photograph unpublished hitherto, of an adobe-wall built in 1885 by the Mormons at Fort Lemlie, Idaho, which was still being used in 1938 to fence stock.²⁴

The mud fence must have been employed rather widely, to judge from the number of variants to be found of the expression "ugly as a mud fence." *Dialect Notes* reported from northeastern Arkansas, "ugly as a mud fence stuck with tadpoles."²⁵ I have heard a Lincoln, Nebraska, woman who formerly resided in South Dakota say, "ugly as a mud fence stuck with bullfrogs."

Mr. James N. Tidwell included the saying in *Publications of the American Dialect Society* among a list of expressions remembered from his boyhood in Texas, 1911-1929. He said that "homely as a mud-fence" was never used; the word was always *ugly*.²⁶ The most picturesque version comes from Dr. A. E. Wiggam's syndicated column, "ugly as a mud fence, staked and ridered with tadpoles . . . a homely Indiana expression."²⁷

The Department of Agriculture in 1871 reported that one fourth the fences in Hall County, Nebraska, were earthen walls three and one-half feet high. Scant traces can be found anywhere today of such fences, for obvious reasons, though the USDA file has a print of the remains of a soil fence in Oregon.

The sod fence or sod wall must also have been built by many settlers in the prairie states, though I have evidence of its use only in Illinois, Missouri, and Nebraska. The prize photograph in my collection is one from the files of the Nebraska State Historical Society, showing the settler, his

²⁴ Photograph taken in 1938 by Mr. R. J. Flint of Grove City, Pennsylvania.

²⁵ *Dialect Notes*, 1907. Published by American Dialect Society. See also *Publication of the American Dialect Society*, Number 2, "Word Lists from the South," (November 1944), p. 57.

²⁶ *PADS*, Number 13 (April, 1950), 20.

²⁷ *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), December 21, 1949.

family and livestock, posed before a genuine sod fence.²⁸

The furrow fence would seem to be the irreducible minimum in pioneer fences. It was a "furrow plowed around one's holdings." Yet Kansas recognized it as a legal fence and "passed trespass laws to prosecute anyone crossing the furrows."²⁹

Ditch fences and canals were of necessity employed in low lands, though ditches and embankments were generally abandoned as soon as practicable. The editor of the *Western Horticultural Review* told in 1858 of the legal provisions for them in New Jersey.

The ha-ha fence is a boundry trench or sunken fence, intended not to obstruct the view. The DAE has citations for it going back to 1712.³⁰ The ha-ha, ha-haw or haw-ha is still to be found on estates in the East. A few months ago,

²⁸ S. D. Butcher Photographs, Nebraska State Historical Society. E. N. Dick speaks of sod walls used for fences in *The Sod House Frontier*, p. 117, and in *Vanguards of the Frontier* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1941), p. 316. He says in the latter: "Few [stagecoach stations] west of Marysville, Kansas, were weather-boarded, and many through Nebraska were built of sod adobes with clay roofs. Small windows in the thick sod walls served the double purpose of letting in light and providing portholes from which to fire in case of an attack [by Indians]. Houses and barns were usually connected by high sod walls, and often a corral was enclosed by walls of the same material." Excellent photographs accompany the text.

²⁹ Ramon Adams, *Western Words* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), pp. 33, 133. E. S. Osgood mentioned the furrow fence several times in *The Day of the Cattleman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929): "Taking up their quarter-sections in a country of little or no timber, houses and fences were slow in appearing. A dugout . . . and a furrow turned around the claim was sufficient untill fencing could be procured" (p. 37). "By 1887 the grangers had arrived in force in western Nebraska Fences were too expensive and wood too scarce, so the granger turned a furrow around the margin of his homestead, and let it go at that." (p. 243).

Fire-guards, or "fire-breaks" plowed by settlers, sometimes served as fences, according to E. N. Dick *The Sod-House Frontier*, p. 219: "The settlers attempted to protect their range and their homes [from prairie fires] by plowing around them Often they were used for boundary lines. Some of the more contentious forbade persons to cross their fire-guards, and the more timid were forced to go miles out of their way in traveling across country."

³⁰ *Dictionary of American English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 4 vols. 1938-1944).

an Ohio friend traveling in Virginia was told that the name derived from the surprise commonly expressed by one coming unawares upon such a fence.

Barbed wire, which is credited with enforcing law and establishing profit in the Old West, appeared in America in the mid seventies. The first barbed wire fence, patented in 1867 by a man named Dabb, had not been a success. Henry N. Rose devised a fence in 1873 that was the actual beginning of the barbed wire era. Joseph F. Glidden of DeKalb, Illinois, applied for a patent in that year and won out in court against other applicants.³¹ The colorful and crowded advertisement of the Glidden Steel and Barb Wire, 1877, of which I have a copy, has *barb* not *barbed* wire, it should be noted. The latter is now in commonest usage. It has been established that "barb wire" was born during the Civil War, "probably at San Antonio, Texas, out of one man's struggle to protect his orchard from wild herds of longhorns."³² *Steelways*, quarterly magazine of the American Iron and Steel Institute, in April, 1946, published an article that was later written into the *Congressional Record*. It was entitled "The Fence that Made Cattle History," and began, "Barbed wire is as American as pumpkin pie."

The Glidden patent was two braided or twisted wires with the brads woven at intervals between the strands of the wire. By 1881 patents had been issued for 1,229 different

³¹ Earl W. Hayter, "Barbed Wire Fencing—A Prairie Invention; Its Rise and Influence in the Western States," *Agricultural History* (October, 1939), pp. 189-207. Mr. Hayter, a professor at Northern Illinois State Teachers College at DeKalb, had access to the records of the best known of the early manufacturers of barb wire and prepared a comprehensive and compact account.

³² "H. B." "The Fence that Made Cattle History," *Steelways*, April, 1946. The story of the fence-cutter's wars or cattlemen's wars was well told by Mari Sandoz in the biography of her father *Old Jules* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1935). He was a *locater*, inducing many emigrants from his native Switzerland to settle in the Nebraska Sandhills, and was secured as a star witness by the government in prosecutions of ranchers who fenced government land. The Nebraska State Historical Society has in its files a photograph labelled "Wire-cutters, Kearney, Nebraska, 1885." The men look calm and firm, holding the cutting pliers (wire clippers) and other gear which were customarily used in building fences.

types of fences. Northwest Missouri State Teachers College in Marysville, has one of the largest collections of barbed wire in the country—105 varieties.

Fewer varieties of barbed wire are now being made, one manufacturer having only six types.

The controversy between homesteaders and cattle-growers over free versus closed range was hot in the 1870's and 1880's and resulted in feuds which have persisted in Nebraska almost to the present generation. President Theodore Roosevelt vigorously prosecuted ranchmen who fenced up government land with their own, thus excluding homesteaders. He sent law enforcement officers to cut the wire fences and roll up miles of barbed wire, which was then left to rust.

In recent years a new fencing system has come into use—a smooth wire fence with a light electric charge that has been found successful in restraining livestock. Once the animals have learned to avoid contact with the fence, the wire need not be electrified, one owner told me.

Dr. M. M. Mathews wrote me in May that there were nearly forty "rejects" for barb-wire fence in the files of the forthcoming *Dictionary of Americanisms* and that there are about sixty entries in the *Dictionary* with *fence* as the last element. Among them is *shad belly*, that I have nowhere encountered.

After surveying pioneer fences in America I agree with the conclusion reached in the USDA report of 1871: "The common forms of fencing are substantially alike in all parts of the country, yet varied everywhere."

I have cited all the approximately 100 names of American pioneer fences that I have amassed, but at the risk of monotony I have tried to mention those that are most characteristic.