

This article was written by Charles F. Kostman (January 27, 1876 to March 3, 1966) of Cozad, Nebraska, as told to him by his father, Carl Kostman.

My father and mother immigrated from Germany to Eastern Iowa and settled at Alkader, Iowa. Mother's parents and one brother had come to America two years before. They had bought 80 acres of land--mostly heavy timber that had to be cleared. This land was along the Turkey River. Dad and Mom lived in Alkader in a log house on 10 acres, which Dad had bought half cleared, so Dad farmed the cleared land and raised big crops on it.

It didn't keep him busy, so he went out to help other people clear the timber off their land. He didn't get much for his work, so in the winter he made bob sleds which the people used a lot to haul logs on and for other uses. Snow stayed on nearly all winter them days. Dad had learned the carpenter trade in Germany. He put old wagon tires under the runners so they would last for many years.

There was an old blacksmith in town. He told Dad one day, "Why don't you put axles under the sled so they could raise it off the ground and put wheels under the sled so they could use it when there wasn't snow." So the blacksmith made the axles and Dad put them on. They had a land office business for three years and made good money. And then a man who had a kind of implement shop shipped in some wagons. They were made somewhere in an Eastern state, so the people who had made a little money and were better off bought wagons so the axle business under the sleds was a dead horse. By this time people were building better houses, so Dad followed the carpenter trade and saved about \$1200.00 in the next seven years.

Dad and Mom knew some folks in Seward, Nebraska. They had been writing each other. They had been schoolmates in Germany. Their name was Kramers. They were well-to-do. Mr. Kramer had a small grocery and clothing store. He wrote to Dad to come to Seward. There was good, cheap land. So Dad took a trip to Seward to look the country over. Mr. Kramer handled a little real estate and sold land on the side. Lots of people came to Nebraska them days.

Mr. Kramer had a buggy and a shan of nice bay horses, so they drove around to look at land for Dad. He showed Dad an 80 acres halfway between Seward and Milford in the Blue Bottom. The man that bought that 80 had built a five room house on it and a barn for four horses and a lean-to for four cows, a hen house and some fence. Mr. Kramer said the man who had put the improvements on it was so deep in debt that he turned the 80 back to the mortgage holder and left everything, and left after night, so the land was for sale. He said to Dad, "If you haven't got the money, I will let you have some to buy some horses, milk cows, two sows and chickens and get you started. It will take quite a little money. You have to have some furniture."

"Well," Dad told Mr. Kramer, "I will go back home to see whether my wife wants to come out here and leave her folks." Dad said, "I have four children to feed. Will take quite a little. I have to sell my 10 acres back there."

"Well," Mr. Kramer said, "look what you get. Improvements. Ready to move in. I'll let you have all the money you need to start out until you get a crop. Just think, no rocks or timber to clear off. That's a lot of hard work."

So they drove back to Seward and talked some more. Kramer said, "You can't wait. The man wants to sell pretty bad. He has more land that he owes on. He

only wants the balance on the land. I know a man here in town who will let you have money on long terms, say five years."

"Well," Dad said, "can't you pay him \$100.00 to hold it til you hear from me?"

"Yes, that will be all right, but let me know right away when you get home and talk it over with your folks."

So Dad took the train back home the next day and told them everything he found out. Mom said, "Let's move out there. Sell everyting and buy what we need out there. Only take our clothing and bedding and dishes." So she talked it over with her brother.

He said, "You go out there and in a year or so I will come out, too, and bring the folks along. After a year you will know how you like it out there and I will come and look it over."

So when Dad came home that night, they decided to sell the 10 acres of land and go to Seward, Nebraska. Dad had no trouble to sell his place. He got \$600.00 for it. Mom said if we didn't like it out there, we can always come back here."

"Yes," Dad said. "Sommany people comming to that country, land will soon get higher in price there, too." Mom said he had better write Mr. Kramer right away that they were coming. It was in June, the tenth, we would be there.

Mr. and Mrs. Kramer met us at the depot and had us stay with them two days until Dad had everything, stove and furniture, ready to move in. Dad had carpenter Tools, bedding, dishes, and clothing that we had shipped. Dad hired a man with a team and wagon to haul the stuff to our new farm and Otto went with him.

Mr. and Mrs. Kramer took Mom and us three kids out in their buggy, so they had coffee and lunch with us. Mom was so happy about the house so big and nice and a good eellar, too, but not many trees, only along the Blue River. My folks were used to heavy timber, but they soon got used to that, so Dad bought feed and seed to get ready for spring. Mom planted a large garden and flowers around the house so they were quite contented and busy with their work, so on June the eleventh I had another baby brother. We called him William, so we were five children; Otto, Anna, Freda, myself and my baby brother. Later on we called him "Willie". All were born in America.

Everything looked green, wonderful. The land was new. Dad seeded 40 acres to wheat, 30 acres to corn and that left 10 acres for pasture on low ground, too wet to farm. He had bought a pair of oxen. They were red in color, four years old and well broke. They minded to a word--Gee & Haw, Getap & Whoo. Would walk fast as horses.

At noon he would turn them on grass. After they had their grain, he would let them on grass about an hour and a half. When it was time to go in the field he would put the yoke on his shoulder, one bow in his hand. He would put two fingers in his mouth and blow a shrill whistle. They would look up and the big ox would come walking fast and walk under the yoke. They would put the bow on him and the little ox would follow. Then he walked ahead of them. They would follow him to whatever he was going to hitch them to. If he would holler, "back", they would back right now! They had long horns.

The reason he bought oxen was they were half as high in price as horses. Lots of oxen were used those days. He would hitch them to the wagon, the tongue fastened to the yoke. With no lines, he would drive to town, up to a hitching post,

tie a piece of grain sack to their horns and let it hang down over their eyes to scare the flies away. They would stand there until Dad would take the cloths off their heads, then they would back up and run out of town as hard as they could, to a pond about a mile out of town, along the river. They would run belly deep and stop, take a drink and switch water over their backs, then in about twenty minutes they would walk home. Then Dad would feed them their grain and turn them on grass.

It didn't keep Dad busy on his 80, so he took jobs to break prairie for newcomers who had bought prairie land. He got \$1.00 an acre, some \$1.25 an acre. He had a mold board breaking plow. Could break about 3 to 3 1/2 acres, putting in a long day.

Earley, a man from Iowa, brought into Seward a nice bunch of horses to sell, so Dad traded his oxen on a span of six mares, purchased one black and a bay that weighed 1700 each. The man guaranteed them to be gentle and good pullers, so they tried them out and Dad had to pay \$150.00 to boot on the oxen. Dad liked the horses better. These mares were fat and Dad kept them that way.

His wheat was good, but it rained so much each year when it was ready to harvest, he couldn't get on the field, the ground was so wet. The horses would sink down halfway to their knees and the wheat was ripe and going down more every day, so the only thing to do was to mow by hand. Cracked it with a scythe. Otto raked it into bundles. Mother tied it in bundles with the straw. The last 10 acres the straw got so dry and brittle they had to use twine. They got the whole 40 acres mowed, bound and shocked and stacked. After harvest it didn't rain any more. They finally got it thrashed.

It made 47 bu. per acre and he sold it for 37¢ a bu., so when he told Mom how much money he got, she laughed and said, "If it rains that muhh again next year, we will leave it in the field."

"Yes," Dad said, "I believe I will plant it all to corn next year." He planted 65 to corn and 5 acres he sowed to millet. Next year his corn made 80 bu. per acre and the millet made 60 bu. an acre and nice and dry to pick the corn. All was picked by hand. He sold the millet seed to a dealer for 50¢ a bu. and sold the corn to an elevator for 55¢ a bu. New commers would buy that wheat from the elevator for 85¢ to \$1.00 a bu. for seed next spring. Lots of people were moving in and going further West. Some shipped in by train.

Our 80 was really too wet every fall, so after three years Dad heard about homestead and timber claims. After you put a few improvements on a homestead and lived on it for five years, you could prove up and the government would give you a pattern or deed to it and the timber claim was yours by planting 10 acres of trees on it, whether they would grow or not, just so you made an effort. They gave a deed to it. The Union Pacific would sell you railroad land for \$2.50 to \$4.00 an acre, only paying 10% down and carrying the balance for 10 to 20 years. So Dad saw two of his neighbors and told them about it: if they would go along out West to look for homesteads. The neighbors finally agreed to go along. This was the first of August.

So they agreed to take two teams and two wagons, one to fill with feed for horses and some tools, such as axes and hammers and nails and the other wagon for bedding, extra clothes and provisions. They went to work and put bows over the wagons and covered them with heavy canvas so they could pull it in back and front. Dad made a big box with double walls. The walls were filled with sawdust to keep the heat out. Then they packed cured meat, such as bacon and ham, packed it in oats and took two 50 lb. sacks of flour so they could bake pancakes and biscuits. They had agreed to start the 10th of August from our neighbor's

place. Early in the morning each one's family was there to see them off. Then they bid their family goodbye. The women cried and waved as long as they could see their husbands go into the wilderness.

Well, they went West and Southwest of Seward so in two days they hit the Republican River. No railroad there then, lots of timber on that river at that time. The Trail was on the north side of the River. They drove about a half a day.

Some Indians met them. They stopped and they came up to their wagons. Dad and one of their men stood with their backs to the wagon and shot guns were along side, so they were handy. Revolvers were in their pockets, fully loaded. Dad told two men when the Indians got up to about 30 feet of them, he would step forward, make a bow and hold up his hand to stop them. They stopped dead still, looked at each other and grinned. The Indians kept watching their guns until one old Indian stepped forward. He could talk a little English. He made Dad understand that they wouldn't harm the white man. They wanted to be friends. So they bowed their heads and went on their way.

The further West, the more Indians. Big ranches. These white people were only squatters. They didn't own the land, would brand their cattle and let them roam all over the country, winter and summer. Lots of tough cowboys. They told Dad not to homestead there. They didn't want homesteaders there...go further West.

The further West they got, the more Indians and cowboys. Lots of game and no law to protect them. No game laws. They saw buffalo in large droves come down to the river to drink. Antelope in herds of 50 to 60. Prairie chicken, quail. The country was full of wild game, so one day the big man, the cook, said, "Why don't you shoot some wild game for us. I'm getting pretty tired of that bacon and ham." So Dad shot three chickens and four mallard ducks--nice and fat.

That afternoon they found a nice camping place. Good shade and plenty of grass for the horses, so they all three went to picking the ducks and chickens. They had them scrubbed nice, took the entrails out, cut them up and boiled them in a large pot they had brought along. All three men agreed the wild game tasted better than that fat sow belly, bacon and ham. The cook would always get up early to have breakfast ready.

The little man and I would feed the horses and harness them so we would get started on the road by sun up, when it was still cool. They drove about two miles. The cook said, "Carl, look. There are two deer." Dad told him to just drive on, he would sneak up behind the trees and get one. So Dad shot a big, young buck. Dad and the other two carried the deer to the wagon.

Dad said, "Now what will we do with him?" The cook said to skin the hams and shoulders and cut them up, he would salt them good, wrap them up and pack them in the box, covered with oats. They would keep a few days so the men could have deer meat for supper. That deal delayed them for two hours.

At night they would have to build a smudge to keep the mosquitoes away.