

*Beola Hunt*

SOME INTERESTING ARTICLES WRITTEN BY  
ANZONETTA HUNT MILLS

## HISTORY OF THE PIONEERS

Atty. H. Halderson

### MR. AND MRS. HORN HUNT

Horn Hunt, a Civil War veteran, and his wife, a southern Ohio school teacher, decided to come west in the spring of 1871. Mr. and Mrs. Hunt made all necessary preparations for the expedition and left their Ohio home with the family and all their possessions on April 3, 1871, traveling by steamboat and railroad to Omaha, a team and covered wagon, bought in Omaha, brought the family and baggage to Norfolk, Nebr., on May 3, 1871. They located temporarily--about a year-- on a claim near Pierce, from which place Mr. Hunt made several inspection trips, seeking a favorable homestead location in that region. He settled on a homestead seven miles north of Tilden, then an unorganized territory which is now a part of Antelope County, Nebraska. Logs from the Elkhorn Valley woods were procured and used to erect a large log house, which became an educational and religious center for the community. He organized school district No. 14 in Antelope County in 1872 which was probably the first in that County. He was the first school director of district No. 14, the Hunt School, and a member of the first grand jury in Antelope County.

The Indians, roving in hostile groups through that region, had to be dealt with in a diplomatic way. Mr. Hunt had acquired some knowledge of their language, gained their confidence and established friendly relations between them and the white settlers thus removing as much as possible one of the hazards of pioneer life.

The Hunt family is identified with the history of Madison County, being connected with many organizations, activities and events in three Madison County Towns. ~~connected~~ Mr. Hunt was a member of the I.O.O.F. of Tilden, also the G. A. R. Norfolk was his trading point and he was well acquainted with its early settlers and with pioneer events in that city.

His daughter, Nettie Hunt, now Mrs. Nettie Mills, taught her first school in Antelope County in 1880, Bunker Hill District, when she was sixteen years old. She attended the first 4th of July celebration in Tilden, and at an earlier date, the first 4th of July celebration held in Oakdale. (She taught a school north of Meadow Grove in 1881.) She was well acquainted with the Hopkins family, and took great interest in an Indian arrow which was shot through Hopkins' arm in a battle with the Indians. The Hopkins home was on the county line and a son of this family, Allen Hopkins, was the first white child born in the settlement. His horse Pet, was shot in the shoulder by an Indian. This happened in the fight with the Indians near Battle Creek under Gen. Thayer.

Nettie Hunt went to Norfolk in June 1881, for examination before E. M. Squire, a Newman Grove resident who was then County Superintendent of Schools. He failed to attend that day in Norfolk. She wrote him enclosing her Antelope County certificate and he endorsed it, making it valid in Madison County. Mrs. Hunt's sister from Ohio taught the first school during the first years in Antelope County. Nettie Hunt Mills held a teacher's certificate in Antelope County, Pierce and Madison Counties. She visited Norfolk during the flood of 1881 when people had to live in upper stories and travel around in boats.

She recalls various of the business places in Norfolk in 1871, Olney's Mill, McClary's Store, Rogers Hotel and the tar paper shack used for a printing office. She became very familiar with the pioneer scenes, such as stage coaches, herds of Texas cattle, bull train freighting to the Black Hills, and herds of antelope ~~horn~~ bounding over the prairies.

George W. Mills, husband of Nettie Mills, came from Pennsylvania in 1878, where he had been employed as a school teacher and a book keeper. In 1883-84 he taught a five months term in the district where Meadow Grove is now located. Many of his former pupils reside in the vicinity and recall incidents of their school days over fifty years ago. Mr. Mills passed away in 1926 and his widow, Nettie Mills, resides in North Platte, Nebr.

John Hunt endured many unusual hardships during the early days. He was stricken with a serious illness during the winter of 1871-72. A brother-in-law, John Wright, went for a doctor, horseback to Norfolk.

## HISTORY OF THE PIONEERS (Continued)

A German physician was called, started out across the roadless region, seventeen miles to the Hunt place, encountered a roaring blizzard, shoveled his way through, and finally reached and saved his patient.

There were ten children in the Hunt family, and the head of such a family, contending with bands of Indians, with grasshoppers, blizzards, and illness, had several causes for worry unknown to the present generation. Hohn Hunt was the first Justice of the peace in Elm precinct in Antelope County. A young couple had requested him to perform their marriage ceremony, and when they found that they were in the wrong county, drove across the county line in their lumber wagon and were married standing up in the wagon.

Mr. Hunt was a boy recruit from Ohio in the Civil War, serving in the Union Army. Mr. and Mrs. Hunt departed this life many years ago but the result and the influence of their activities for the welfare of the County will extend to future generations.

## CHRONICLES OF THE ALTRUISTS

### BEING A CHAPTER OF MODERN HISTORY IN ANCIENT STYLE

Anzonetta Mills

Aug. 26, 1931.

In the far west there lieth a land which was called by its ancient inhabitants, "The Land of the Smile of God". And through it floweth a river called also by these people, "The River Of The Soft Sands". Now in the latter days a fair city was builded besided the river and many dwelt therein. And there were churches for worship and divers sects and classes for the teaching of the people. Among the followers of one Wesley, there were certain devout women who gathered on the Sabbath Day to read the Scriptures and consider ways and means whereby they might doo good. And they visited the sick and afflicted and spoke words of good cheer to such as were in trouble. Then saith their leader, "Behold; those who serve in the chyrch are in need of gold. Though the tithes and offerings have been gathered in, yet it is not enough and they continually cry more." So they said, "Let us find each one some labor of our own hands that we may do for hire and when we have gained each one a coin of the land, we will gather together and make an offering and tell, also, what manner of work was done for it. And they went each one to her own place.

Of their number was one Anzonatta, a widow, who dwelt in a hired house with her son, who was the child of her old age. He was one of the prophets of the weather who are learned in sighs and omens of the clouds and wind and heat and cold. They sent out messages and warnings to such as go up in the skies in ships of the air, being appointed by the rulers to keep watch out side the entrance of the city.

The the widow said, "How shall I gain money for this cause, seeing I am no longer young and daily bread is of my son's bounty? But she took much joy of the work of her needle and made ready the food which hers son did eat. And with her son was one sent from a far city and he lodged in her house. Now, when his garments were rent and the fastenings thereof were gone he said, "Who will alter these for me, for they cumber my hands?" Then Anzonetta answered, "That will I do". So she counted the hire as a part of her own offering and likewise for her own son did she fashion certain garments and they did please him, so he gave her pleasant words of praise. But she said "Give to me of the coins of silver known to your generation as 'Thin Dimes', that I may increase my offering." Also there dwelt near to the house of Anzonetta a woman whose name was Claire, which had a husband and one son. With her own hands she served them and swept and garmished her house, but she liked not the work of the needle. And she came to the widow and said "Behold I rose early and went into the city and did buy from those who sold fine raiment a garment of fair linen but the fashion of it pleaseth me not. I will pay thee a fair price."

And the widow did bake small loaves of the wheat and little cakes for her household. When beheld these she said, "Give me of these loaves and the little cakes, that I may serve my son who is but now returned from the field of sports, for they are sweet like honey to his taste and their smell is even as the smell of the spices of Araby". So she gave to Claire a part and she put in her hands small coin's.

And she gathered all together and said, "Lo, all these are the hire from mine own hands and like the widow of old will I cast them into the treasury".

MY FIRST SCHOOL  
THE PIONEER SCHOOL -- Anzonetta Mills.

My first school, a summer term, began in June 1880, in a sod school house at Bunker Hill district number ten, Antelope County, Nebraska. I was sixteen years of age, holding my first teachers certificate, granted by County Superintendent of Schools, D. F. Merritt, at a public teachers' examination held in Oakdale in April of that year. These summer schools were held even in districts where they were able to hold winter sessions, since the younger pupils and those who lived far from the school could not attend regularly in winter. School had been held in district number ten earlier than this, but the building used for the purpose had been loaned by a homesteader. The sod house had been very recently completed when I arrived, the sod still damp, the grass in the crevices of the walls still green. There was not a tree on the hill, no plant larger than the lovely wild roses growing on the slope, no house nearer than a half mile, and the nearest ones were of the sod and dug-out styles. There was one small outbuilding of sod. As yet there was no coal shed, no shelter for the ponies the children might ride or drive. One family of boys often rode a large old mare from their farm house. He was tied near the house with a lariat and it was a happy moment for them when he lifted his head and gave a long loud bray. The pupils brought lunches in tin pails or paper packages, and drinking water was carried from a farm a half mile away, where it was drawn from an open well with two heavy pails, a rope and a pulley.

Superintendent Merritt visited my school once. He was a peculiar man, old fashioned for his time. He walked from one school to another and asked the farmers to entertain him. He asked me to take him to dinner at my boarding place, and the price of his meal was added to my bill. However he had received his education in a New York College.

It was but three weeks after school was opened when a young man from an adjoining district organized a Sunday School in Bunker Hill School House. He drove a team to a two-seated carriage which was loaded with his relatives who were interested in religious work. An invitation was given me to teach a class and to lead the singing, but I could not sing. There was no musical instrument. The people did not seem familiar even with old hymns. Many of them had not attended religious services for many years, so the music was not so good.

Books for the classes were a difficult problem, as Nebraska had not then enacted the law that provided liberally for the purchase of books for the pupils from public funds. Some families bought a few new books at a drug store at the county seat, some bought odd copies of old books that their parents or friends had used in their own school days. These were the work of various authors in various states compiled at various dates. Many complained bitterly of the cost of new books. Being acquainted with these conditions in the pioneering country, I had taken my own small store of text books with me and these I lent to my pupils.

Among them was a new geography which had cost me two dollars, as I well remembered. It contained some full page maps of the world, of the two hemispheres and one of each continent. Having neither globe, wall maps nor geographys except of the primary type, I removed these maps from my book and fastened them on the rough sod wall. Then I prepared a list of questions and answers and gave a daily drill to the whole school, being much pleased with the interest that the pupils showed and the progress that they made in one short term.

The men of the school board and a 6x4 blackboard from rough lumber, smoothed and painted it, provided a box of white crayons and one of colored crayons for maps, and two erasers. It was in constant use. There was no desk, no chair for the teacher. A small cupboard was made for the teachers books from a store box, with doors and a small padlock. Hats and sunbonnets were hung on nails driven into a narrow board back of the door, and in the vacant space below this, the dinner pails and water pail and the one drinking cup were placed. Near the center of the room was a small box stove and a small supply of wood was cut ready for the occasional chilly days of wind and rain. The room was about sixteen by twenty feet in size.

MY FIRST SCHOOL  
(Continued)

There were forty pupils enrolled but attendance was very irregular, and the full number was never present at one time. The patrons of the school were very friendly, inviting the new teacher to visit their homes, saying it was the custom for the teacher to spend one night each week with one of the families. She was entertained pleasantly and a lunch was prepared for the teacher to eat with the hostess's children the next day at school. The teachers duties included the janitor work and there was an old shovel to use as a dust pan and there was a broom with which to clean the floor, which was that portion of the surface of Old Mother Earth that was sheltered by the well remembered school house.

The families of the community were of so many types that it would be impossible to classify them, either as to nationality, religion or mental ability. Some were native Americans, and the others, whether they came from Germany, Holland or neighboring countries, were all called "Dutch" by the Americans. The family with whom I boarded, and their various relatives, came from the shores of Lake Michigan. Another family was from the Ozark Mountains, the wife and mother so homesick that her only topic of conversation was "I want to go back to Missouri." Finally the husband abandoned his homestead and took her home. One couple whose daughter was a teacher in an adjoining district, had kept a drug store in the city of Boston. The district was a typical melting pot in which the melting was in progress.

Some of my patrons were subscribers to papers, chiefly the local paper from "back home". "The Chicago Inter Ocean" the leading weekly of that time, I found in one home.

Aside from the regular routine of the school, there were many puzzling problems. There was a young man several years older than his teacher who came only part time. He had to take a place in the "second reader class" and was no way worried when he failed there. He was unruly and planned to "tease the little teacher" as he expressed :

Reaching the school house early one morning, I found on the doorstep two small, fat, black-eyed girls, who appeared to be twins. They seemed utterly unable to talk. I could not decide whether they could talk. I led them in, gave them welcome in the language of signs, and when the school was called to order, asked if any one knew them or could speak their language. One German boy who could speak English said that they were German, that their parents lived in a sod house a mile away and went to work early every day for his father. They were five and six years of age, brought their lunch and spent the long day. It soon became my pleasure to teach them, with the older boy acting as interpreter, until they learned what was expected of them.

There was a sort of neighborhood feud among a few families of the district which caused some disagreement among the pupils. The director of the district came to visit the school, advised the children that my rules were law and gave me a stout switch cut from an elm tree, telling me to make good use of it. I used it as a pointer for the blackboard.

The most popular amusement of the times was neighborhood dances. The old timer's fiddle seemed to speak a language common to almost all of the settlers. Cowboys from ranges farther west came to town to spend the winters and their summer wages and they enjoyed the dances. There were no planned social organizations or amusements in summer for people of the country district. Farmers usually made their necessary trips to town on Saturday; driving teams or riding on horseback. Family parties often went together, bought their supplies, got their mail, heard the news, some men visiting the saloon or billiard hall.

Baseball clubs were organized in both neighboring towns, and some farmer folk attended the games, which were usually played on Saturdays and holidays. One of the pupils of my school, a boy of my own age, was a member of a base ball club in town, proud to be the champion pitcher so baseball was often played on our school ground at the noon hour and sometimes I joined them myself. Strange to say, I could outrun all in the game.

## MY FIRST SCHOOL (Continued)

On the Fourth of July a few families gathered at one of the sod homes where there were some young trees and served an out of doors picnic dinner. They they prepared the farm wagons by adding more seats of boards and blankets and took the party to Tilden, eight miles away. The railroad had been built through the Elkhorn Valley the previous winter and a small depot had been built at Tilden, also a store with the post office in one side, and a few other small buildings scattered near.

But there was a beautiful grove on the adjoining farm and a "Bowery" had been built for the celebration. There the exercises of the morning were held and it was given over to dancing and music during the afternoon and evening. There were a few small stands where firecrackers, candy and lemonade were sold. Then a circular swing was in operation. It must have been the fore runner of the merry-go-round, and the propelling power was one horse. The seats were high backed affairs with foot rests and were padded then coved with bright flowered calico.

Quite a number of flags were in evidence and very small ones, sold on the grounds, were worn in hat bands, buttonholes, and belts, adding color to the scene. Altogether it was a gay time for people who seldom had a holiday or any amusement.

Until that year, when the railroad came with one train a day, the mail had been brought to the post office by the stage coach three times a week, so this even was as much to celebrate the coming of the railroad as it was to honor our National Birthday.

Fifty years later, visiting near there, I went again to spend the afternoon of the Glorious Fourth at Tilden. All towns for miles around were joining with them in observing this anniversary. Special trains, busses, automobiles, brought crowds estimated at twenty thousand people. With every form of display, amusement and decoration that the city water works, electric light and power, phonograph and radio could provide, the town turned into one great parade and carnival. But to my mind, there seemed lack of the hearty good fellowship and kindly spirit to the gathering of pioneers that I had witnessed a half century before.

## OLD TIME STORIES OF NEBRASKA

### OUR FIRST WHITE GOOSE

By Nettie Mills

The There was our incident of early years on the homestead, which has not been told for too long a time and since our brother Sammy was the hero, his family will be glad to have the account of it. He may have remembered it in connection with the old long rifle which his son Paul has now, at his home in Newark, Calif.

It was a rather cold and windy day with a considerable snow on the ground. Father was not at home, either away on a trip or hauling wood, as he did much of his time in wintry weather. Whether it was fall or spring, I am not sure, but believe, fall.

The wild geese had been flying, we could hear and see them pass overhead but we were four or five miles from the Elkhorn River and they did not stop near us unless they could feed in the fields. The storm seemed to have confused them and they flew in scattered and broken lines, not the orderly "V" formation of their long flights. We were staying closely indoors. Sam and Lester opened the door to go outside and saw a white goose resting on the well curb. It was the kind that we called "Brandts" some called "Canadian Geese". White with black wings. It sat very still and Sam wanted to shoot it. Father's long rifle, loaded as always then, ready for any emergency, hung in its place on the heavy cross beams of the room out of the childrens reach. Mother hesitated. She never handled the guns. She had never taken a shot except, pulled the trigger when some one was practicing, "Shooting at a mark" once or twice.

The boys begged frantically. Mother lifted down the gun, helped balance it across a wooden bench placed across the open door. She steadied it with her own hand. Sam took careful aim, pulled the trigger and the goose fell fluttering to the ground. Soon it was still and we all went wild with excitement. It was the first white goose killed by our people. The first one we ever saw nearer than flying over, and Sam was eight years old, his first shot at game. His first kill. Over and over the story was told and neighbors all showered him with congratulations and praise.

After father's return mother dressed the goose, saving the black wing tips for dusters, used more like whisk brooms. The fine feathers were saved to help fill a pillow. Father went to Will Mosbargers home about two miles away and invited them to spend Sunday with us and share the dinner, where the goose was the chief attraction. The meat was somewhat disappointing. It was rather tough, not at all fat and we were not accustomed to the wild game flavor. Of course the big bird was worn from the long flight, was lost from the flock. Some of the party said it was probably snow blind, a trouble they were just learning to know. It was a jolly day for us all and Sammie was both blushing and smiling from the attention given him.

In later years we saw many geese. The white and Gray wild geese would light in great flocks in fields where corn was ripe or where the stubble grew green from the grain scattered in harvesting. There were no trees or shelter for hunters to hide in and they grew wild and hard to reach.



## THE SOD HOUSES OF NEBRASKA PIONEERS

Mrs. Nettie Mills

My home has been on the prairies of Nebraska since the spring of 1871, when I came with my parents from our home in southern Ohio to settle on government land. We spent the first year on a homestead taken early in 1870 by my uncle John Wright, in Pierce County, three miles north of the site of the present county seat of Pierce.

In April, 1872, we moved to Antelope County, where my father John Hunt had located his claim in the fall of 1871, though the county was yet unorganized at that time. When we came to that new and strange country, I was a child of seven and a half years. Now, almost sixty three years later, I have seen many changes in the country, the people and in their customs. In nothing is the difference more noticeable than in the homes that they occupy. Among the homes of the pioneers there were many makeshift houses, but the much talked of "Sod Shanty" was later in appearing than log houses, dug outs and frame houses, in localities with which I was acquainted.

The first settlers had choice of the better land and followed the streams, where a border of timber, at least had escaped destruction by prairie fires and logs could be found for building purposes. The log cabins in our vicinity were rather crude and rough compared with those seen in forest countries where finer timber may be secured. Our native timber was tough and rugged, often bent and twisted by wind and storm, the logs by no means, perfect. Some of the better built houses were of hewn logs with roofs of boards and shingles, brought by team from long distances; but many were related to the sod shanty, since the roofs were made of poles or rough boards covered with sod, the floors were only the hardened earth, and they were banked up for winter by piling earth all around the foundation to keep out the wind and frost.

Very soon after a settlement was made, a portable steam sawmill would be brought to some suitable place on a stream and the settlers then hauled their logs and had them sawed into rough boards. Many of these boards were used for finishing log cabins, dugouts and sod houses. Frame work, doors, roofs and floors were made of them as well as most of the furniture. All available varieties of timber were used in this way, including the native cotton-wood, box elder and elm.

There were rough frame houses built of this lumber, first a light frame work of two by four material with boards arranged vertically and joints or cracks covered with narrow strips called battens, sawed for this purpose. The roof was made in the same way. These were sufficient shelter for the summer and fulfilled the requirements of the homestead law, that a house should be built during the first six months. Later these were sometimes covered with heavy black tar paper, fastened by nailing on battens or other strips of wood. In other cases, a wall of sod was built up against the wooden wall, and the roof also was sodded.

The dugout was made by digging a pit like a cellar or in case it was located on a hill side, like a basement, with the front door built of logs or sod. This type was more convenient for door and windows. Roofs were usually covered with poles laid side by side, overlaid with brush, then covered with sod. Often this was heaped with earth until a sort of mound was formed making a better watershed. These houses were a shelter from the heat of summer and the cold of winter, as well as a protection from windstorms, hail storms and blizzards. Not much could be said as to their neatness or convenience. They were said to be "bachelor's Houses", but many families lived for a time in them.

As the settlements spread into the rolling prairies and into the valleys where there was little or no water, lumber was not to be found for the houses and the real sod house appeared. There were as many types of these as there were of character and ability of the builders. A man who cared only to "hold down his claim" until he could secure his deed and hurry back to civilization, was usually very careless in the construction of his shack. But one who hoped to found a home for his family and provide the most comfortable quarters possible, would do surprisingly well.

The finest home of this kind that it was my good fortune to visit, was built in 1878 on a farm some fifteen miles southwest of Oakdale, Nebraska. With some friends, I attended a housewarming party there, soon after it was completed. The walls were most carefully

## THE SOD HOUSE OF NEBRASKA PIONEERS (Continued)

laid of sods uniformly out, the roof was of shingles and the eaves sloped far out over the walls as protection from rain and storm. Doors and windows were well framed and set deep in the walls, which were three feet thick at the bottom and narrowed to one and one half feet in thickness where the roof rested on the walls. The wall was cut back in curves at the sides of the doors and windows. The inside walls had been raked, using garden rake and pitchfork, until the grass roots in the sod were exposed, and then plastered. I recall two large rooms, walls white and very good new floors laid. This lady had brought from her old home, furniture, curtains, fancy lamps—all beautiful to us.

My first experience as a teacher was in a new sod school house in the summer of 1880. This was in the southeastern part of Antelope County, about eight miles from the town of Tilden. There, south of the valley of the Elkhorn River, is a section of the bluffland of our state, the soil of dark clay, with a fine variety of grass that is cut for hay. The school was called Bunker Hill School, being located on the highest point for miles around. Today, located on the same site and called by the same name, is a fine modern consolidated high school, the pride of the community.

The sod school house had been built by the volunteer labor of the patrons of the school, who were confronted with the necessity of providing a building for which there were no funds. It was of the primitive type. The homesteaders, with a few teams, wagons and a breaking plow, broke up the sod, and hauled poles and willow brush from the banks of the river some miles away. With a very few rough boards for narrow frames for the door and three windows, and a saw and hammer or two, they soon had a good sized room. The roof, covered with poles and scattered over ~~the~~ with the brush with its leaves and twigs still green, was overlaid with sod. The door was hand made of rough boards, each window had one sash of the old fashioned small panes of glass. For ventilation in warm weather this sash was taken out and leaned against the wall. Both seats and desks were built of long boards nailed to cross sections of round logs, cut to the desired height.

How long these sod houses lasted I can not say, never having visited them in later years. In the year of 1923, we made a cross-country trip from our present home in North Platte to Beaver and Elkhorn Vallies. In some sections between Broken Bow and Spaulding Nebraska, we saw sod houses, counting about twenty along our route. Some were occupied by families, some deserted and fallen to ruins, others used as sheds, chicken houses, or cattle shelters, while near by were good homes in modern smile, where the farmers live now.

The last sod house that I have seen was yet standing in the autumn of 1933 in Brown County, Nebraska. Its location is a beautiful spot near the banks of the Long Pine Creek. Only a few rods away, the old Black Hills Trail crossed the stream and the ruts cut by the wheels of the freight wagons are still visible. The house was built square with what is called a hip roof of shingles. Though the walls are crumbling and it has been robbed of doors and windows, it still reminds one of the comfort and protection it afforded those who passed that way. There is also a ruined cave or storeroom that was cut into the bank and finished with sod. I did not learn when this sod house was built or how many years of service it gave, but I have been told of some that lasted for twenty years. One advantage of these houses of sod and logs that seems to have been forgotten, was the safety they promised in case of an attack by Indians. Often during the seventies, my father and the neighbors who were settling about us discussed these points. The heavy walls would be proof against Indian arrows or any guns these Indians would carry, also, they would be practically fireproof. It was a well known practice of Indian warfare to set fire to the buildings of their enemies. If some of their party could hold the attention of those with guns at one point others would creep up at accessible place and set fire to the walls.

Our own home was of heavy logs with all bark removed, rough hewn, with the crevices plastered, the foundation banked with earth, the board roof covered with sod. There was no window on the north side, and in the summer of seventy-three, my father sawed out an eighteen inch section of one log, rather high in the wall, arranging it to be taken out and replaced at will. He explained that it was for extra ventilation but we had heard many rumors of war with western Indians and I knew this to be a reason also.

## THE SOD HOUSES OF NEBRASKA PIONEERS (Continued)

The following winter of seventy-three and -four, a young man who lived alone on his claim in a house built of cottonwood lumber, came to board with us, bringing his yoke of oxen and his gun. He staid until time for spring work. The family was not told of any reason for the change except that it was lonely for him and that my father had feed for his oxen, but I had overheard some of their planning, the talk of safety and of how much better a fight two men and two guns could make in defense of the family. I never told mother, but I understood the sudden calls to "be quiet" and listen, when there was any unusual noise at night.

The quality and duribility of sod as a building material differ greatly with the soil and the variety of grass it produces. In the heavy clay soils the grass is finer and its roots spread in a mat-like form which holds together rather firmly. In the sandy and dry lands, a coarse grass called bunch grass is produced. Its roots are strong but grow in clumps, separated by vacant spaces in the soil, so do not cling together well. Walls built of this sod are not so substantial.

A neighbor who settled with his family in McPherson, County in 1905, says that there are at the present time many sod houses in use. The greater number of homestead houses in that locality were of sod. As a boy, he helped haul a distance of twenty-three miles because of the better quality of the sod to be had in that locality.

After the first home was secured, the most pressing problem for the settler was shelter for his team and the other stock. Usually the same material as that used for the house, being most available, was used for the barns. A sod wall high enough for shelter from wind would have a roof or poles or slabs covered with hay or sod. The canvas from the covered wagon was often stretched over for the first summer's service.

One settler of earlier days built a sod house and dug a pit under the bed as a possible retreat in case of attack by Indians. He believes that some of the "Soddies" were occupied for more than thirty years. He sometimes visits a house built of sod with a chimney and open fireplace of the same useful material. It is in the neighborhood of Ringgold, McPhearson County, Nebraska.

I am also informed that new sod houses have been constructed during the past year in favorable localities. Having had no opportunity of seeing these new "Soddies" it is impossible to describe them, but I believe that they would include many features not known to the originators of these monuments to the pioneers of Nebraska.

A few years ago the town Kearney in central Nebraska, celebrated Old Home Week, and in memory of the first homes built there by the settlers, a typical sod house was built in the Amusement Park. The interior was not furnished, but outside the door stood the wooden bench with the tin water pail, dipper, and wash basin, so well remembered by the old timers. Against the wall on the other side of the door, leaned an old time ox yoke.

It is a fitting tribute to the brave men and women who ventured thus far into the wild west at an early day, that we should preserve some knowledge of these homes that are now scarcely more than a memory. Any available record of their daily lives and the means whereby they provided the necessities of life and protected their families from the dangers of the strange country, should be prized by those who follow them and enjoy the benefits of their work.

OCTOBER 28, 1934.

The story entitles, "An Early Day Prairie Fire" consists of less than the required 600 words.

Written by Mrs. Nettie Mills at North Platte, Nebraska and typed by Ronald M. Mills of the Weather Bureau at Airport, North Platte.

No names or dates are given. The fire, the first that we saw in Nebr., occurred in the early fall of 1871. The place, a Homestead on the North Fork of the Elkhorn River three miles north of the present town of Pierce, County seat of the county of the same name. There was at that time but one small building there and Norfolk, at the junction of the rivers, was seventeen miles away. The homestead mentioned was taken up in the spring of 1870 by John Wright from Gallipolis, Ohio. He was a very young soldier boy in the later part of the Civil War. He spent the larger part of his life in Nebraska, later living at Plainview, where he married some years later. He died and is buried at the National Cemetery near Grand Island, Nebr. The family of the story was my father, John Hunt, my mother Martha Hunt, myself and three brothers Samuel, who died recently in California, Emerson, now E. E. Hunt D. D., of Kansas and Lester of Harvard, Nebr.

## AN EARLY DAY PRAIRIE FIRE

It was one of Nebraska's most perfect autumn days--when the sky was clear, the sunshine warm and the wind only the softest breezes. The early frosts had come; the green prairie was turning brown; the heavy ears hanging from the sturdy stalks in the corn fields were opening ready for the husking.

A party of Indians had visited us and eaten the last of our summer melons. Our mother carefully gathering seeds from the fading plants in the garden said, "It must be Indian summer." and father wondered when it would be time for Indian Summer in this wild new country.

After the noon dinner, we children hurrying out to our play notices ver pretty soft clouds rising above the live of the rounded bluffs lying north of the valley. Later they seemed to darken and change so fast that we went indoors to ask our father whether a storm was coming. Stepping outside he started in surprise saying, "Why, it looks like smoke;" but catching up a bridle he ran to where the team stood beside the farm wagon and mounting a horse started to the crest of the bluffs three or four miles away to find out what it meant. Very soon we saw him racing on the return trip, calling to everyone to help get ready for the terrible fire that was coming.

Our nearest neighbor, from a log cabin about two miles away, came out to investigate the smoke. Our uncle went to meet him asking whether the corn in the field would burn. He answered "We can't tell--we do not know how dry it is now". Quickly they decided to try hitching the team to the breaking plow, turning some furrows and lighting "backfires". The neighbor hurried to his own home, uncle made all possible haste with our team, while father came to the house warning us to stay in the garden, the spot clearest of weeds. Since I was the "Big Sister"--then almost eight years old--I was to keep the three younger ones together, watch for sparks, and let no one run away in case they became frightened. It was thought that the household goods would be safer if left inside.

Father and mother hastily carried away some cornstalks which had been cut and leaned against the walls all around the house to bread the wind which had been cold a few days earlier. They had little time to work.

The sky gree darkax, wild birds of different kinds flew here and there with queer frightened cries. The wind ceased entirely. There was a moment of suspense,--Suddenly roaring winds swept down from the north where a wall of fire was rushing with incredible speed directly toward us. Dense smoke rolled toward the sky, the air was filled with blazing fragments; heat seemed scorching us. Mother ran to us; father rushed across the field to help with the frightened team. The the "Headfire" had passed. The air beg to clear. We found ourselves safe--the house still stood--fire had only reached a few rows about the edge of the cornfield.

## AN EARLY DAY PRAIRIE FIRE (CONTINUED)

Hardly hesitating at the river the fire rolled across the valley to the south leaving blackness and desolation in its path. Long after nightfall we watched it crossing the southern hills, many haystacks blazing like signal fires along its trail.

### Note:

A great amount of hay had been cut and stacked in the valley, which here was nine miles wide, by parties of settlers from near Norfolk who camped there for the work and expected to haul it home later in the season.

The old elkhorn has been treasured by the family of John Hunt for almost sixty-six years. The great elk was killed in the early part of the winter of 1871 and 72—in November, I think, with the long gun and on the spot where Osmond, Nebr. now stands. It was our first winter in Nebraska and we were living in the cabin of Uncle John Wright, two miles north of the present site of Pierce, the county seat of Pierce County. A prairie fire in the fall had swept the surrounding country clear of grass. There had been an early blizzard, leaving a heavy blanket of snow that filled all depressions and lay in drifts like the waves of the sea.

Near where we lived there was some scattered timber, mostly willow, along the river banks which had escaped destruction by fire, and there were some larger trees in scattered groves. Our wood for fuel was gathered in these places and Father took his gun on all of these trips. Sometimes he took Sam and Lester with him. This was near the North Fork of the Elkhorn River and the shelter and water made a fine refuge for game. The rivers had been named before our time, so it is likely that many elk had roamed over the valley in earlier days. The long rifle was new then, as Father had had it made to order shortly before leaving Ohio by the gunsmith, Lewis Wickline, called Uncle Lewis by the family as he was a brother-in-law of Grandfather Wright. The bullets for this gun were made at home and carried with other materials for loading, in a bag called a shot pouch. There was a powder horn, also a long ram rod. Uncle John had a shot gun, double barreled and of the latest make, bought, I think, in Nebraska. He used buck shot for larger game and fine grades of shot for birds. Both men had experienced difficulty in estimating distances and in adjusting their sights to the new atmosphere of Nebraska, but a little practice soon overcame this difficulty and they became crack shots. Father's first kill was a fine fat antelope shot from the door yard of the little house when a herd of eleven, much frightened, rushed by. Uncle John killed first a pair of mallard ducks, later a prairie chicken, and that winter a large white-tailed deer.

There were two families of German neighbors living in good log cabins two miles east of us. One family, the Koltermans, had a rather large black and white spotted dog that, was trained to be useful about the farm and that was much loved by the family. There was a son, Ferdinand Kolterman, a big manly fellow, and he, with the dog, was invited to go with Father and Uncle John on the day of the hunting trip destined to be so long remembered. The men had a new sled made from the wood of young trees carefully selected from those growing up the river. It was drawn by the young team that had been shipped from Ohio and that had brought us in our covered wagon to the homestead.

The men had separated on entering the woods for better chances at game that might be scared out. The dog jumped up a magnificent elk that went bounding away ahead of Father but a shot from his rifle wounded it in the shoulder, and it almost immediately charged father, coming about three hundred yards. Father had not had time to reload, and so was helpless, but at the last moment jumped aside and the elk missed him; but Father had jumped into a deep hole that the water had washed at the head of a ravine. The elk returned to the attack and struck at Father with his horns, but the dog rushed to the rescue, caught the elk by the jaw or neck, causing him to strike the edge of the hole, missing Father and breaking off one horn. The elk then centered his attack on the dog and Father crawled out of the snow filled hole, loaded his gun and killed the elk.

When the men with the sled, the team, and the dog had driven away leaving Mother and us four children, we did not know what direction they would take or where the tracks of game might lead them. As the short winter day wore on and the sun was low in the west, Mother grew very anxious. We children watched from the window for any sign of their coming while she prepared supper and make all ready for the night as well as she could. It was nearly dark, it seems now, when they came. All were excited. They were cold and hungry. The elk was brought up near the door lying on the sled, covered, I think with the big canvas that had been the top of the covered wagon. It was left there over night. Ferdinand and the dog had to be hurried home, the horses cared for, and supper eaten. Father did not let me see the elk until next morning. Then I went out, lifted the cover from its head, and was so frightened by the dreadful looking face that I ran indoors and never looked at it again.

After the big elk was dressed, the meat was divided with the Kolterman family. The skull with the one horn attached was given to Ferdinand. The horn that was knocked off in the battle with the elk was kept and it hung out in the box elder tree on the Hunt farm for about fifty years. It is now in the possession of Paul Hunt at Newark, Calif.

The weather was cold enough to keep the meat of the elk well preserved. It was not ~~for~~ the best quality and we were as yet unaccustomed to the flavor of wild game. Then, too, the heavy snow and extreme cold had probably worn the wild animals down to a poor condition. In later years when Father went farther west on his hunting trips, we had the finest of meat from elk when young and fat. However we found the supply of meat very welcome, since aside from the game killed, the only meat we had that winter was one pig, which we had raised and fattened for winter butchering. Father had gotten it from some settler on the road to West Point, whither he had gone with team and wagon to get seed corn, oats and potatoes for planting.

One day mother had cooked pork for dinner, also, baked potatoes and corn bread. A kettle of the boiled elk was on the stove. A lone Indian came walking by and asked to come in and get warm. He sat by the stove while we ate. Mother gave him a plate of the boiled meat and corn bread. He shook his head. "Indian want hog," he said, and "no like", pointing to the corn bread. He signalled that he wanted a few slices of white bread. When Mother refused these, he took the plate and ate heartily.

From the exposure, the shock and the injuries sustained in the fight with the big elk, Father had a very serious illness and it was decided that in order to save his life, a doctor must be had at once. The weather was intensely cold and looked very threatening but delay would be fatal, so Uncle John mounted his best horse and rode through the storm to Norfolk, where the nearest doctor was to be had. As the afternoon drew on, Mother decided that she must go to the shed and bring in wood, to keep us from freezing during the storm. The wind was so fierce that Father was afraid that she would be blown away from her course, so he had her leave the house door open so that he could watch her progress. She was sturdy and managed the wood and milked the cow and fed the horses

Through all that wild, anxious night, they did not know whether Uncle John had gotten through or had been lost in the storm. Picture our relief when sometime during the next fore-noon, the Doctor, very much wrapped up in fur coats and mittens and robes was seen plowing through the snow in a buckboard drawn by two horses, bringing the much needed relief to our sick Father. Too much can not be said in praise of the courage and loyalty and devotion of our pioneer medical men.

At Norfolk there was much forceful opposition to Uncle John's returning to us through the storm, since he was on horseback and was almost sure to be frozen to death. But he knew that it was necessary for him to be at home to take care of the stock and of our little family. So they padded his body under his coats, wrapped and tied gunnysacks around his legs outside the other padding, put a big muffler about his head and neck and across his chest, and with cap and mittens added he made the return trip safely.

EMERSON E. HUNT SUPPLIED THESE FACTS ABOUT LEWIS WICKLINE, THE CELEBRATED GUNSMITH:

When Father and I were in Ohio in 1919 or 1920, he showed me the place where the Wickline who made his long rifle had lived. It was down Trace Creek from where Grandmother Rachel Wright lived most of her life time. Father also showed me a cracked rock from the crevices of which Wickline had dug lead with which to make his bullets. He made the lead into bars and sold it to others.

The log cabin in which Sam and Lester and I were born is about Forty Rods away from where Grandmother Rachel Wright lived.