

# Phelps Helps



Volume 18, Issue 1

Spring 2010

**Meetings held at the Nebraska Prairie Museum on the first Monday of the month at 2:00 PM.**

**The public is welcome!**

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## Phelps County Courthouse Was Just a Packing Box to Little Johnnie Edlund

- 1933 Phelps County Newspaper

“What you got there?” shouted a barefoot pioneer lad, carrying a plow-share across the dusty prairie to the Pearson blacksmith shop near Moses Hill, as a sled passed them on the slippery grass, loaded with what looked like an old packing box.

“There?” yelled the driver, a man named Stonefelt, prodding his team on, “That’s the courthouse.” And he disappeared in the direction of the few straggling houses that marked Phelps Center.

The lad was little Johnnie Edlund today, one of Holdrege’s pioneers, who’s most interesting story is the tale of the earliest courthouse move, from Williamsburg to Phelps Center.

The later move, when the county seat was brought to Holdrege is a much more familiar tale, but belongs to a later day.

The first county proceedings printed, show that the first courthouse was located in Section 14, Township Eight, North of Range 19, West of the Sixth P.M., and it was there that little “packing box” stood.

Mr. Edlund says it was just big enough for a man to get inside, sit down and check his books, while the first taxes were paid in through the window. It was five or six years later that without formality of an election, several of the settlers ordered Stonefelt to bring it down to the little Phelps Center settlement.

## New Officers For Holdrege Area Genealogy Club

Congratulations to the 2010 officers for Holdrege Area Genealogy Club! We appreciate all our club members. Your support is so important for our organization to be successful. Please let your officers know of any new projects we could work on or books or microfilm that would be helpful to your genealogy.

President – Virginia Lindstrom  
Treasurer – Ada Hinson

Vice President – Sandra Slater  
Secretary – Margaret Stutheit

## New Members

Robert T. Kellner  
362 Cokain RD  
Harrisville, PA

I am looking for information on Samuel Young who was born in 1822 in Pennsylvania, resided in Phelps county Nebraska in the 1880s then returned to Pennsylvania

## New Books Donated To Our Library

### Patti Simpson

- ◆ Images of American Stanton County
- ◆ Norman B. Barr Camp 1909-2009

### Sandra Slater

- ◆ Nebraska Ancestry, Fall 2008 & Spring 2009
- ◆ Heritage Lines, the First 100 Years by Ruby Coleman

### Dick Dyas

- ◆ Harlan County Churches
- ◆ Phelps County, Nebraska Marriages
- ◆ Complete Membership of the Atlanta Methodist Church, Atlanta, NE 1893-1984
- ◆ Atlanta Centennial History Book 1883-1983
- ◆ 100 Years of Remembrance Sprague, 1888-1988
- ◆ Sprague Community Church, 100 Years of History 1893-1983
- ◆ Passenger lists from Ireland
- ◆ Cemetery Inscriptions, Poultney, Vermont
- ◆ The Detroit Society for Genealogical Research magazine
- ◆ The Beginner's Guide to Danish Genealogical Research
- ◆ The Family Heritage Book by Dyas

### Dorothy Richmond

- ◆ Tennessee Records
- ◆ Early Pennsylvania Genealogical Research
- ◆ Pennsylvania Genealogical Research
- ◆ Jewel County, Kansas Cemeteries, Vol. 1 & Vol. 3
- ◆ Heierich Steiner and Verna Ehrisman Family Book
- ◆ Presenting the Steiners 1774-1979
- ◆ Arlene Eakles Research Notebook Virginia
- ◆ A Handy Guide to the Genealogical Library and Church Historical Department by Ronald Cunningham and Evan Evans.
- ◆ Gateway to the West – Ohio July 1977
- ◆ Immigration Digest 2 by Arlene H. Erkle
- ◆ The South Carolina Magazine of Ancestral Research Spring 1977
- ◆ Ohio Genealogical Guide 4th Edition by Carol Willsey Bell, C.G.
- ◆ National Society Daughters of the American Revolution in Nebraska Lue R. Spencer Memorial Library in Edith Abbott Memorial Library
- ◆ Sommerholder Family History, by Jacob Sommerholder and Elizabeth Gieger
- ◆ The South Carolina

Magazine of Ancestral Research

- ◆ The Ohio Genealogical, The Report
- ◆ National Genealogical Society Quarterly
- ◆ Handy Tips to Your Genealogical Research in Southern Records
- ◆ Keys to the Courthouse, Vol. III, Unusual Records
- ◆ Kansas History, A Journal of the Central Plains
- ◆ Catalog of Books, AFRA Genealogy Circulating Collection, Jan. 1987
- ◆ Ultimate Search Book. Worldwide adoption and Vital Records 1998 Edition

### Russell Junkin

- ◆ Story of the Western Railroad
- ◆ Crazy Horse – The Strange Man of the Ogallalas
- ◆ Letters of the Women Homesteaders
- ◆ Lost Trails of the Cimarron
- ◆ 1964 Phelps County Directory
- ◆ Bertrand, Loomis & Smithfield Telephone Directory 1963

### Marge Melroy

- ◆ Phelps County Hero Flight, Sept. 25-27, 2009

## Eliza Suggs of Orleans, Harlan County,

Part 2 from the book, "SHADOW AND SUNSHINE" by ELIZA SUGGS of Orleans, Nebraska.

OMAHA, NEB. 1906

### Sketch of Father Cont'd.

In the year 1879 father went to Kansas as an evangelist. This was the year of the great drought and grasshopper scourge. There was a colony of colored people, who had come from the south and settled in Graham county, Kansas, naming their little settlement Nicodemus. Father went to preach to these people. He found them in a suffering condition, nearly starving, and with scarcely enough clothing to cover their nakedness. Father visited Hon. John P. St. John, at that time Governor of Kansas, to see what could be done for these people. The governor sent him back to Illinois to solicit aid for them; for, said he, "After you have provided for their temporal needs, then they can hear your Gospel." He solicited accordingly in Illinois, and sent back barrel after barrel of clothing to the people.

He afterward took up a homestead in Phillips county, Kansas, and in the year 1885 brought his family to Kansas. He was now almost constantly in the work of the Lord. He often said, "I would sooner wear out than rust out," and surely God granted him the desire of his heart.

But while he was thus working earnestly to build up God's kingdom, Satan was just as busily at work to hinder and destroy his labors. Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee." Ah! here was Peter's only strength, "I have prayed for thee." In the power of those prayers, and in that alone, could he overcome. The same old enemy is in the world today and his

**NOTE:** The Phelps Helps Newsletter highlights Harlan County in this section. With many of our subscribers interested in and from Harlan County, and since Harlan County is a connecting county to Phelps County, the Phelps Helps will publish history information on Harlan County.

hatred and spite toward God's children is just as strong as it was in Peter's day. He still desires to have God's little ones that he may sift them as wheat.

The powers of darkness were now turned loose upon father. Wicked men laid hands upon him and took him to prison. This occurred on the camp ground at Marvin, Kansas. One afternoon, after he was through preaching, some one came up to him and said, "Brother Suggs, some one wants to see you." He was led out supposing he was going to have a talk with some old friend or with some one who was inquiring the way to God, as many such came to him for counsel. He found himself being handcuffed and being hurried away between two disguised detectives, who accused him of being one Harrison Page, an escaped murderer. In vain he pleaded innocence. "You are Harrison Page," said his accusers. "Your name is not James Suggs. You are a murderer." Imagine his surprise! But the Lord blessed him right there, and as he was led away, he was heard praising the Lord. The last word he said to the brethren was,

"Take good care of old Dollie, and see that she has plenty of water, take her home, and tell wife I will come out all right." One looking on observed, "Any man in such a condition as that, arrested and accused of murder, taking thought of an old horse like Dolly, surely can't be a very bad man, Suggs is innocent." Rev. C. M. Damon was tireless in his efforts for father's release, and with characteristic foresight, telegraphed a friend in Topeka to see the Governor, and wrote to ex-Governor John P. St. John and to father's old neighbors in Princeton, Illinois. Rev. E. E. Miller, now in heaven, pursued after the captors, the brethren made up money to pay his ex-

*(Suggs Continued on page 4)*

*(Suggs Continued from page 3)*

penses and kept him right after them, until father was proven innocent and set free.

Doubtless it was the intention and expectation of the enemy, in making this bold accusation, to silence father forever from preaching. But in this he overshot the mark. Father never ceased preaching on this account; but on the other hand, it gave him new opportunities for preaching the Gospel. Even in jail he held meetings, and one man who heard him was converted and called to preach. Father lived convictions on his accusers. He talked to them about their souls and their hard hearts melted. They knew he was innocent, and really wanted to get rid of him before they could do so. His accusers were afterward arrested and brought to trial. After father was cleared and released, and while waiting for his accusers' trial, he started a meeting in Osborne, Kansas. Thus God caused the wrath of man to praise him, and opened new and unexpected doors for the spread of the Gospel.

This arrest and seizure of father, and the suspense which followed, were a strange and hard ordeal for the family at home. My mother has been through the fire, but the same God who was with her in slavery days was with her at this time. Father was mercifully restored to his family, all safe and sound, and went on his way rejoicing. Doors of usefulness were opened to him on every side. He was quite widely known within the bounds of several different conferences, the Illinois, Iowa, West Iowa, Kansas, West Kansas, and Nebraska conferences, each having claimed some share of his time and labor.

Attracted by the Free Methodist Seminary at Orleans, Nebraska, and desiring for his daughters the advantages it afforded, he moved his family thither in 1886. But he did not settle down or superannuate because he had moved to a community that was well

supplied with preachers and Christian workers. It was only for convenience and the welfare of his family that he was led to take this step, and not with any intention of dropping out of the Lord's work. From this as a center, he went out to different places for evangelistic labors, and kept the revival fire burning brightly in his own heart through the heat of summer as well as through the cold of winter.

The last winter he was on earth, being the winter of 1888-89, he was engaged in a protracted campaign against sin, on the Sappa Creek, in Norton County, Kansas. He pitched his tabernacle on the farm of "Father Neimyer," and here once more set

the battle in array. He banked up the tabernacle on the outside, and put in it two stoves, which made it very comfortable. The attendance and interest were good, and souls were born into the kingdom of God. After closing this series of meetings in the tabernacle, he held others in the neighboring schoolhouses, and thus put in the winter solidly for



*Eliza Suggs, Age 16*

God. It was the privilege of my mother and myself to be with him in all these meetings. How little we realized that these were his last on earth!

He returned home from his winter's campaign, weary and exhausted. He decided to rest a little and be ready to go again. After resting a few weeks he went on an evangelistic tour east, but soon returned home again sick, and took his bed. His disease baffled all the skill of the physicians, and after an illness of about five weeks during which he manifested great patience and resignation, on the 22nd of May, 1889, he passed peacefully home to God. His

*(Suggs Continued on page 5)*

*(Storm Continued from page 4)*

funeral at Orleans was largely attended, not only by his brethren and sisters in the church, but by the citizens of Orleans who thus showed their appreciation and respect.

But none knew his worth so well as his own family. He was the strong staff upon which mother and all of us had leaned. How should we ever learn to walk alone? "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," we have since learned to mount up on wings as eagles over all our difficulties, to run the Christian race and not grow weary, and to walk with the Lord and not faint. Father, we miss thee--as much now as ever we did--yet would not recall thee. Rest, weary soldier, rest from thy labors! Thy works shall follow thee. Thy reward shall be sure. A part, at least of your family is traveling the road our father trod. We have caught the spirit of your loved battle song, and sing with you.

"We'll end this warfare,  
Down by the river;  
We'll end this warfare  
Down by the riverside."

By and by God shall say to each one of us, as he said to you, "It is enough; come up higher."

"And when the battle's over  
We shall wear a crown  
In the New Jerusalem."

And then, when the last battle has been fought, and the last victory has been won, and the last enemy has been destroyed, then and not till then, shall we lay our armor down, and through all eternity,

"We will walk through the streets of the city  
With our loved ones gone before;  
We will stand on the banks of the river,  
We will meet them there to part no more."

... **The End—Eliza Suggs' book,  
Shadow And Sunshine**

## Queries

**Sara Firehammer**  
**17108 Mayfair Ct.**  
**Granger, IN 46530-7488**

Would like to share information with anyone researching these Phelps and Harlan County, Nebraska families: Skoog, Bergstrom, McNiel, Leney, Powell, Lindstrom, Magnusson and Hainey.

Looking for descendants of John August Johnson (1834 Sweden- 1915 Nebraska. Married 1st. ? son Carl Alfred Johnson; married 2nd 1880 Nebraska Sophia Abraham; daughter Adla, Adla's half-brother was Emil Nelson; Associated surnames: Borg, McNeil, Leney.

**Dorothy Richmond**  
**718 Miller Street**  
**Holdrege, NE 68949**

Searching for descendants of Rueben Conway Madison born 1839? Married 3 Apr 1859 to Louisa Perrin, born 1839 probably lived in Alabama or Virginia. Children: Susan; Francis; James F.; William M. and Joseph Columbus born 3 Jan 1862; died Apr 1949; married 1882 to Louise Virginia Hunter.

Searching for descendants of Peter Kauable. His son John died 1859, age 94, buried Athelstan, Iowa, John married Elizabeth Schmitt/Smith. Resided I PA, IN, OH, and IA.

# Congregational Churches in Phelps County

*\*The date of this article is unknown*

Darlene Samuelson, a volunteer at our library has just completed a index of Congregational church members in Phelps County, Nebraska. The communities include Holdrege, Loomis and Bertrand. We do not have the records for the Urbana Congregational, a country church that was located in the Rock Falls Township, Phelps County but do have good information about this church.

The first Congregational organization in Phelps County was brought about by Samuel Eveland, a theological student from Chicago Seminary, sent into Phelps County by the American Board of Home Missions. He arrived in Phelps Center in June, 1883 and, with his coat over his shoulder, walked to Whitewater P. O. kept by S. M. Millard, one mile south of what is now Bertrand.

In this locality were several families from Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois with no church organization. Rev. Eveland stayed in the community for a short time holding meetings in the homes. From the interest thus created, a Congregational organization was formed on September 23, 1883 in the Millard Schoolhouse with the assistance of Rev. W. H. Forbis and State Superintendent C. W. Merrill. Out of these efforts came the organization of the Urbana Church in 1884 with the Pierce, Griffith and Thomas Families as its

members. The Whitewater organization was disbanded and the members took part in organizing the Bertrand Congregation in September 1885. Rev. C. H. Huestis, the first pastor, was called

and a church building was erected.



*Congregational Church ~ Loomis*



*Congregational Church ~ Holdrege*



*Congregational Church ~ Urbana*



*Congregational Church ~ Bertrand*

## Pierce Reunion ~ June 1984

The memory of a man who figured deeply in the religious life of the Urbana community southeast of Bertrand was recognized Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

The 100th anniversary of the coming of Rev. Robert S. Pierce was so celebrated by a group of descendants over a three-day period.

After coming to America in 1869 to Oshkosh, Wisconsin where he became a lay preacher, the Rev. R. S. Pierce and family moved to Braidwood, Illinois in 1874. In 1878 they moved to Columbus City, Iowa where he was ordained on June 11, 1884.

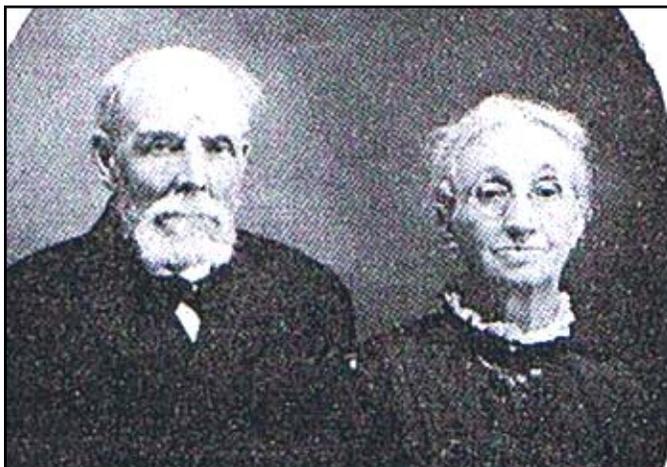
In July 1884 the Rev. and Mrs. Pierce and family arrived in Phelps County, Nebraska to homestead the last quarter available in Union Township known as the Urbana Community. The Welsh settlement had been early named after the town of Urbana, Illinois.

The family temporarily lived in a dugout then built a sod home where they resided until 1907 when they moved to Holdrege in retirement.

Church services were first held at the Urbana, Sunnyside, Rock Falls and Keystone schools and also Loomis. Sermons were first preached in Welch but as attendance increased they were in English.

The Urbana Congregational Church was built in 1892 on a plot of ground given by Richard Griffiths. The Church was very active through the early years and at one time had the largest Senior and Junior Endeavor Society among the Congregational churches in the county. Sunday school attendance averaged over 70.

Before the village of Bertrand was established, the Rev. Pierce delivered the first sermon preached in the village in the unfinished



*Robert Pierce was born the son of Deacon William and Ann Pierce on September 16, 1842 in Rhysy Cay, Flintshire, North Wales. On February 12, 1862 his father and fifteen others were drowned in a mine disaster leaving his mother with seven children. He married Miss Sarah Edwards February 12, 1868. They had nine children.*

elevator of Wirt and Barber. The pastor was always mindful of the less fortunate and in the dry years of the 1890's gathered and delivered food and clothing for the needy. In spite of the years of great hardship the Rev. Pierce gave three daughters and one son college educations which was very unusual at that time.

After dwindling attendance and the dry 1930's the church was disbanded and the building sold to the Seven Day Adventists in Holdrege.

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the family's arrival, the Pierce cousins held a family reunion. Hosting, the July 27, 28 and 29th gathering were the John A. Pierce daughters and son who were born and raised on the family farm.

After registration a buffet supper was served at the home of Everette and Lorene Pierce Walters Friday evening. On Saturday at 10 o'clock brunch was attended by 56 at the farm home of Lloyd and

*(Pierce Continued on page 8)*

*(Pierce Continued from page 7)*

Jean Pierce High. After a social time, an afternoon caravan formed to visit the sites of the Urbana School, the Urbana Church and cemetery. At the homestead now owned by George and Helen Johnson, lemonade and Cookies were served at their new home. On Saturday evening the group gathered at Johnson Lake at the home of Jerry and Mary High Bergstrom for a beef barbecue dinner, homemade ice cream and cake menus, in keeping with yesteryear.

Sunday morning the group met at Bertrand City hall for a continental breakfast. Again a tour was formed to view the Rev. and Mrs. Pierce retirement home in Holdrege, remodeled Adventist church (formerly Urbana) and visited Prairie Home

Cemetery where the family burial plot is located. After placing a memorial flower bouquet, a short silent prayer was offered by all.

Family members then went to the Speakeasy for the buffet dinner. Members of the Cannon family that attended had lived in the Sacramento and Ragan areas.

Those coming a distance were from Concord, California; Edmonds, Washington; Ft. Collins, Denver, Aurora, Thornton and Englewood, Colorado; Overland Park and Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas; Austin and Taylor, Texas; and from Omaha, Lincoln, Imperial, North Platte and Elwood, Nebraska.

\* \* \*

## Pioneer Thomas Wait of Sacramento, Phelps County, Nebraska

Thomas Wait owned a sod hotel and livery in old Sacramento, Nebraska from 1878 to 1886. After Sacramento was moved two miles north of the old location in Lake Township, Phelps County, Nebraska, he started to farm the land his hotel was on. In 1907 his health began to fail and he went back to New York. He gave his Bible to Loren Lund's father for safe keeping until Mr. Wait could return. However, Mr. Wait died in New York and is buried there. The Bible is stored at the Nebraska Prairie Museum with the marriage records and Wait family genealogy.

Below is information found in the Wait Bible. Thomas Wait had no children.

### First Marriage

Thomas Wait and Emma Jane Junkett of Unadilla, New York were married on the 27 March 1861 by William H. Birdshall. Witnesses were Jarvis Smith and Sarah T. Smith.

### Second Marriage

Thomas Wait and Christina Lucas were married in Phelps County the 25 September 1890 by O. B. Chapin, official minister.

### Birth Records

Samuel Wait, born Aug 18, 1804

Thomas Wait, born 22 Feb 1839 ~ died 11 May 1908, aged 69 years, 2 month 19 days

William Wait, born 15 March 1840

Hiram Wait, born 21 December 1841

Thomas Wait and Christiana Lucas Wait's Probates are at the Nebraska Prairie Museum

Thomas Wait died 11 May 1908 at Unidilla, New York and is probably buried there.

Hiram S. Wait, a brother, was the only surviving relative after Thomas's death.

*(Wait Continued on page 9)*

(Wait Continued from page 8)

He and his wives had no children.

Christina Lucas Wait died 26 July 1907 in Phelps County. Burial at Westerville, Indiana. She died in Harlan County, 2 miles south of Sacramento.

### Location of sisters and brothers in 1907

Susan Barr – residence Montana

Cornelia Howell – Indiana

Rhoda Herrald - Indiana

Frank Lucas – Missouri

Jessie Lucas – brother

Grandville Lucas

Sarah Mathida Edgar – address unknown

Abraham Lucas – deceased in 1904

James Lucas – deceased in 1843

Mary Jane Lucas – deceased in 1868

George Lucas – deceased in 1904

Cynthia Lucas – deceased in 1887



## Dead On A Sandbar

### **An Unknown Man Found With Nothing For Identification 13 July 1900 Holdrege Daily Citizen**

From the Omaha World-Herald we learn that on Thursday of last week, Manlius Lucas, who lives three miles south of Elm Creek, found a floater on a sandbar in the Platte River near his place on the south side of the river. The coroner, Dr. Bennett of Kearney, found the corpse in badly decomposed state lying face down with part of his fingers on the left hand off, hair all missing. The body was clad in what was once a good black frock coat and vest, soft flannel, shirt, light corduroy pants and heavy laced work shoes, indicating a laboring man in good circumstances.

In his pockets were found a purse containing \$1.16 and a baggage check, No. 11347, and an account book containing various items, among them an account for labor for M. M. Cody, of Lincoln, Nebr., dated April 4, 1900, also a note of burning of Kansas City convention hall and date and a card with address of Miss Josie Bale of Omaha, also a good silver screw bevel case watch, with Elgin movement and metal chain. He was apparently of medium height, front teeth and side badly decayed. The body had probably been in the river for two months. It was brought to Elm Creek and buried in the Cemetery. This recalls the report that some two months ago a bicycle was seen floating in the swift current of the Platte River near the scene where the body was found.

# Urbana, Phelps County, Nebraska

Holdrege Citizen—Feb 4, 1891

To the editor of the Home Guard: Destitution with us in the canyons of the southwest portion of the county is one of the chief questions of the day, and should all hazards be made known. I would ask those who are indifferent to the facts how they would like to spend the cold days without coal, nothing but buffalo chips to burn and not even plenty of them. Knowing the facts, Rev. G. E. Taylor promised \$10 for coal. Dr. Walker and Mr. Dewey promised to pay for a ton each. But after a car had been ordered and the needy families notified, the answer came that no more free transportation could be obtained

till the appropriation bill had been passed, so twenty or twenty-five families were disappointed, and seven of three families to my personal knowledge have sickness.

The laws of nature will not wait for many bills to pass and these people are without coal. After the storm Thursday morning I started out on foot through the canyons and walked 20 miles visiting eleven families. Seven had no coal, one had to burn benches and boxes, one had no flour or meat, only a little corn meal, and two families had only enough for a few days. Clothing and bedding needed by several families.

I am accused of hurting the county because I make these things known. Far from it, I have the good of the county at heart, and know that with the exception of one corner of the canyons it is one of the finest counties in the state. It is this portion that needs help. At the best we cannot raise crops as they do on the Divide. Last year was a failure, and before in that particular locality we were partially hailed out.

I desire to acknowledge the generosity of Messrs. Hessig, Kiplinger, and Dewey of Loomis. Yet there is room for much more. —Robert S. Pierce



Holdrege Area Genealogy Club  
 PO Box 164  
 Holdrege, NE 68949  
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