

Phelps Helps



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Winter 2011

**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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Our Genealogy Library: Gosper County Resources

This will be our first installment listing the genealogy resources we have of other counties in Nebraska. We especially specialize in locating books and microfilm in our surrounding counties, but we also have some good resources for other states and counties. This issue we will tell about our Gosper county resources.

GOSPER COUNTY MICROFILM

Gosper County Marriage Records
Dec. 1891 through 1994.

All available Federal Census
Records through 1930.

Federal Census Soundex for 1880
and 1900.

1885 Nebraska State Census for Gosper
County.

Elwood Bulletin Newspapers
Aug 31, 1899 through July
15, 1954.

The Smithfield Enterprise
Newspaper May 8, 1908
through July 17, 1913.

GOSPER COUNTY BOOKS

Gosper County Cemetery Book—
We have indexed it.

1890-1990 Smithfield, Nebraska—
Small Town-Big Heart.
We have indexed it.

Farm Directories—1942, 1962,
1965, 1968, 1970, 1972,
1973, 1977 and 1980.

Copy of A Proud Heritage—By
Gladys Shafer.

Copy of A Heritage of Faith by Mary
Lou Weber.

Service Record—World War 2 Book
for Gosper County.

Elwood Bulletin Anniversary Edition
Sept 12, 1935.
We have indexed it.

Elwood Bulletin Gosper County
Centennial 1873-1973.

Gosper County 1904 Atlas—missing
first few pages.

Gosper County 1957 Atlas.

Cora Little—A Woman Dentist in Holdrege, NE

Perry, Iowa, December 9, 1916

To the Editor of the Progress:

It was with pleasure, I respond to your kind invitation to a talk with my friends of Phelps county, Nebraska. 'Since leaving Holdrege in July of 1915, I have spent a year in New Mexico, a wonderful place for health seekers and a state of boundless wealth in livestock and minerals, the home of a great many Mexicans and Indians, so that it seems almost a part of old Mexico. At Laguna we were in the Rockies at an elevation of six thousand feet with Mr. Taylor to the northwest ten thousand feet, and other peaks from thirty to fifty miles distant that could be seen on clear days. There was magnificent scenery, beautiful especially on cloudy and rainy days when dampness brought out wonderful colors in the rock and light clouds, varying in lights, gave great color effects. Laguna is a Pueblo Indian village, built before the discovery of this country, on a rocky hill side, and over this hill there are grooves in the rock worn by the feet of these people on their errands about the place. They are peaceable, always have been except when harried by the Navajos, who are great thieves and seem content to live in ignorance and for themselves. Even after receiving some education from government schools, they prefer on their return to go back to Indian ways.

The government has workers among them all the time looking out for their interests, teaching things in schools and in their homes and fields.

But after a year there, I came back to Iowa, to the town where my maternal grandfather was a pioneer, in the seventies. This is the most wonderfully productive part of the finest part of U. S. corn

country, a wealthy country where there is an automobile for every ten inhabitants, most as many as in Phelps County, Nebraska The land is rich, but they have no gravel on the roads to make them passable in bad weather, and since November 1st, it has been too cold for riding with comfort. Give me good old Nebraska, with its dry air and milder climate and hustling people. There is more wealth here, but that is not always the best thing for people. The women of this state have been asking for suffrage for forty years, but are not as near receiving it as Nebraska women.

With Kindly regards and heartfelt wishes to all for a pleasant Holiday season and a prosperous New Year, I am Cora F. Little



Three Towns Battled For Survival with Orleans The Victor ~ Written in 1997, Author Unknown

Residents of Orleans will be busy Saturday, June 14, celebrating their community's 125th Birthday but according to History the towns birth wasn't all that easy.

Initially the region had three towns planned within a radius of three miles: Napoleon, Orleans and Melrose with Orleans and Melrose "locked in a death struggle with only one survivor." However, an aggressive nature and entrepreneurship pushed Orleans to the forefront.

Schools and school districts were the center of the battle and a growing population had one early commentator saying, "the stork is always with us." Also the battle of the county seat status was prominent with results of 1872 election challenged by at least three towns, Republican City, Alma and Orleans. The competition from Orleans eventually began the disintegration of Melrose with two men, Mike Manning and T H. Manning moving a total of five business houses from Melrose to Orleans.

By 1881 the Orleans Courthouse committee built for \$2,000, a two story, four room structure hoping to move the county seat to Orleans from Alma.

On top of these early civilized issues, wolves were a predatory problem---not coyotes, the Buck massacre in 1869 by Sioux Indians was still on everybody's mind's, and the grasshoppers only two years later would destroy every crop regardless

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.

if it was green in color and then return in 1875 and kill it all again.

A book published in 1972 at the times of the Orleans Centennial and written by Ernest Kuhl and William Dunlay tells that

Napoleon, in 1872 was a town in name only, while that summer a survey crew owned by Charles Colt and James McGonegal had been hired to survey the town site of Melrose. Oddly enough, the present highway was west of Orleans, Highway 136, was to have been the south boundary of Melrose.

An editorial written for the Herald on March 12, 1874 mentions that Orleans (originally known as Flag Creek) and Melrose were only one mile apart and that Orleans has a "remarkable history" in that, "it was founded by a pious preacher who prayed a pious brother of Crete out of some \$40,000; who will deny the effect of prayer in the face of a fact?"

Melrose - Which is noted still throughout the Orleans area - Melrose Creek is located between Orleans and Oxford, and the Melrose Village Inn on Orleans Main Street is today owned by the Orleans Chamber of Commerce President, Mrs. Val (Charlene) Hunt - was to be a beautiful city of 787 lots with 80 foot wide east-west streets. The streets were named after eastern colleges and academies and Main Street was 100 feet wide to accommodate hitching posts for oxen and horses

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along the business district.

But some wise entrepreneurs surveyed and platted Orleans almost overnight and, “through the instrumentality of D. N. Smith, was soon to become a fierce rival of Melrose and had much to do with its eventual demise.”

With Smiths help, the Orleans plat as recorded nearly two months ahead of Melrose which the Centennial book said occurred December 28, 1872. Smith, a town site locator for the Burlington and Missouri Railroad, is said to have incurred the animosity of many of his efforts. Although Melrose was as close to the planned railroad as Orleans, the ultimate decisions as to the location of the depot would be up to the railroad people.

Both communities began building in earnest in 1873 and the Omaha Republican news story dated February 18, 1873, stated that Orleans had ten buildings at that time and Melrose had seven and it added that there was a deadly feud between them. The county could not support both and one must go down, the Centennial book said.

Wild buffalo herds were roaming the plains and Indians such as Whistler, his son Fat Badger and Hard Smeller were causing problems, and in 1869 Buck Massacre by Sioux Indians near the present location of McCook, was still on the minds of the settlers.

The battle between Melrose and Orleans continued in March 1873, with more forward thinking by Orleans residents as they formed the Orleans School District and boldly included Melrose in the new district, something the citizens of Melrose and vicinity took exception to. They

petitioned a Mr. Luce, the county superintendent for the formation of a separate district which he granted December 6, 1873.

In politics, the November 8, 1881 general election didn't go the way the Orleans Courthouse Committee wanted it, and legal action eventually took the case to the Supreme Court in 1884 which resulted in Orleans being declared the winner over Alma. But, the high court's decision also said the entire election was invalid citing that the county commissioners had no authority to call an election unless portioned by an adequate number of voters, so the result was that nothing was changed as to the county seat location.

But Orleans citizenry didn't let this slow them and by December 27, 1881, the petition of John R. Kennedy for the vacation of Melrose was granted and Orleans was the victor.

Orleans entrepreneurship and pioneer drive took the reigns of leadership and by 1888 voted bonds of \$8,500 to install a water system in the city and installation of a pump house.

The first 24x6x6 deep steam yacht the “Minnie B” sailed up the Republican River from Orleans in 1904, the Orleans Mill and Elevator Company would in time manufacture 120 barrels of flour per day, the town would have upwards of nine newspapers and among other prominent business places developing was the Mitchell Hardware Company, which in 1972 was the oldest business establishment in Harlan County.

By 1910 the “Electric Theatre” opened and on May 16, 1917, the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepting Masons of Nebraska laid the cornerstone of the Cordellia B. Preston Memorial Library.

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Growth and prosperity wasn't always the norm with the Friday, May 31, 1935 rains up the Republican River causing the region's largest disaster with over ten foot of water destroying lives, homes, businesses and farmland. Most of the region's residents were given no warning.

Today in 1997, there are many families living in town, a twist from the founding years where many of the towns' business people had taken claims near the town and were living on them. "Thus they had stores in the town while living in the country. Many of today's farmers live in town and go daily to their farms, quite a

contrast, the Centennial book's author's noted.



Early Orleans Street Scene

Auction Will End 45 Year Unwritten Contract

1942

John Forsberg Farmed 45 years without a Contract Just a Hand Shake

When John Forsberg and his son Harold, hold their farm auction sale next Friday, September 4th, it will end a unique tenant landlord arrangement that had continued by verbal agreement for more than 45 years and through two generations of contracting parties on both sides.

It was back in March of 1897 that John A Forsberg, now retired from active farming, shook the hand of W. A. Forsythe to bind a verbal tenant and landlord agreement and that has continued in operation to the present day.

The farm in question was a half section of land three and a half miles west of Loomis. There have never been any written agreements and every question of operation of the farm has been settled by verbal agreement.

The older Forsythe passed away several years ago, but that did not affect the arrangements

between the two families. The verbal agreement continued as to the tenancy of the farm between Evald M. Forsythe, who inherited the property from this father.

A few years ago, having worked hard all his life, John Forsberg decided to retire but his retirement didn't affect the continued amicable relations between the two families and young Harold 'Forsberg became the tenant under a verbal agreement with the younger Mr. Forsythe.

The Forsythes' lived in Lincoln during all that time and many years passed. In which they were unable to visit the farm but satisfactory arrangements were always made.

But Friday's auction will end that long arrangement and the elder Mr. Forsberg will move into Loomis while Harold Forsberg will go to Grand Island, where he will be employed in the future and a new tenant will have to be found for the Forsythe farm.

* * * * *

Our Swedish Citizens—From the Nebraska

Holdrege, Nebraska, September 6, ---
(Special Correspondence JO)---

Businessmen of Lincoln and all other Nebraska people who are keeping tab in the southwestern part of the state will be interested to know something of the Swede colony in Phelps County, which has been instrumental in making this county one of the richest and most developed communities in the state. Impressions either favorable or unfavorable are easily created. Many people go through the world wrongly informed because they have wrong impressions of men in localities. Shaping their business plans according to those erroneous impressions they fail to accomplish as much they would if they were correctly informed. The crop failure of last year is but a mere incident, such as has happened in every community in the whole country in different periods in its history and should not be the basis of any man's judgment on this part of Nebraska. It is not what happened in the year, but what has happened in a series of years that should regulate the degree of confidence that a people or locality is entitled to. The people here and all over the western part of state admit now that the over advertizing of the crop failure was a great mistake and that the actual distress, when the story got outside the state, was magnified tenfold. Whoever was responsible for this blunder is not now material, but the impression created was erroneous, was bad, and gave the public a false view of the actual condition of the people, the value of the country, and it is a good time now to commence correcting the mistake and undoing the wrong that has been done. I will describe the Swede community. Not because they

are Swedes, but because they are here and what they are and what they have done in the last fifteen years as an example of what other communities can do in the next fifteen years in other locations in western Nebraska, where farm development is yet as crude as it was here fifteen years ago.

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In 1880, Phelps County, 200 miles west of the Missouri river; was twenty-four miles square and smooth prairie, dotted sparsely with little, low sod huts, without a railroad, without a town, without a dollar of capital or credit with a scattered settlement of dreamy pioneers, scratching the ground over in little patches here and there, beginning the crude developments of farm industry. Some stout-hearted Swede mechanics of Moline, Illinois, who were tired of breathing smoke in the plow shops there, came to this county, looked at the land and liked it, settled on it, wrote others who followed from Moline, Galesburg, Bishop Hill, Chicago and other places all over Illinois, Iowa and Indiana. There are now gathered here between 5,000 and 6,000 Swede people, who are on the farms they developed, in the homes they have built, in the trees they have planted, in the harvests they have gathered and the peace and plenty they now enjoy, are an example of thrift that ought to shame into activity every homeless, dreaming man who doubts, who takes and thinks only of droughts and floods and chinch bugs and cut worms and who lives and dies without a home, a slave on some other man's land or in some other man's workshop. What a Swede can do and has

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done in Phelps County, other men with the same energy and economy can do in other localities of southwestern Nebraska.

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Now get up into the cupola of the courthouse at Holdrege and take a look at these people, for you can see nearly all over the county from that point. Here they are, about 5,500 strong. One thousand are in the town and the other 4,500 are out on the farms, mixed up with about as many other farm people, who are about as good. Only I am talking about Swedes. They look just like other people. The young men and young women look bright, are bright, and many of them are fine looking people. The old men out in the country are sunburned, withered and bent over, but you don't blame them for that. The man who has carried a heavy load all his life through sun and storm and has at last lifted himself and his family out of an environment of early poverty into comfortable conditions, generally look pretty well used up. And the old women! They totter to the door of the farmhouse and greet you with kind courtesy that shows a sweet disposition and a nature refined and good. They are all religious. They have fine church buildings in Holdrege where 1,200 of them worship every Sunday, and out in the country where religion always seems a little sweeter than in the town, they have here and there little old fashioned white painted churches, where they gather every Sunday, the old women in the front pews looking kind and good, the old men with wrinkled necks and draggley, grass colored whiskers, looking serious and subdued as if religion was a hard row to hoe, and the younger sit in the back seats trying to look pious, but feeling chock full of fun, singing hymns and making love

sometimes.

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The Swedes are mostly Lutherans because that is the national church in Sweden, but they also have organizations of Methodist, Baptists and Free Missionists, whatever that means. I don't know the difference between these creeds and I don't want to know. I only know that they are sincere and I like them for that, and I respect their religion because it helps to make their characters sweet and their lives happy.

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Speaking of religion, I will turn aside just a moment to say that there are two kinds of men who I dislike to meet. One is the religious bigot who bores you with his creed and sickens you with his pretentious piety. The other is the critic who hacks and pecks at religion because he doesn't believe the creed. One thing is true of Phelps County religion: it smoothes off the rough corners of personal character and imparts a general favor of kindness and good manners that religious cities might imitate. In earlier years, when the country was newer than it is now, religion helped to soften the hard conditions. When neighbors were few and the prairies were brown and lonesome, religion was an agreeable companion. Before the shade tree grew or the orchards blossomed or the birds and bees came, religion tempered the hot summer wind and made music for the homesick woman on the lonesome farm. It sweetened life in the old sod home. And now when the new house has come and the books and the pictures and the piano or organ is there, and when the little white-headed, barefooted Swede girl who gathered vegetable fuel in a

(Swedish Continued on page 8)

(Swedish Continued from page 7)

gunnysack fifteen years ago, has grown into a bright and happy woman, the old pioneer religion is still good, and it will send you out from these farm homes men and women who will not lower the standard of citizenship in this state.

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But all this about personality of those people is immaterial, except that it shows the general trend of their lives and suggests the substantial character of the community. As in the material conditions; the sordid business mind who values man or a community or people as it does a horse, only for what it can produce, here is a scene that will satisfy it. The brown prairie of fifteen years ago is snow yellow with grain stubble and green with pastures and cornfields. Every acre is in use, either as pasture for cattle or crops. There are no lazy or unproductive acres here. In a drive of half a day through the county, I only saw only two quarter sections of unimproved land. The low sod hut and the little cheap frame shanty of fifteen years ago have disappeared from view, and in their stead on every farm is a neat, well painted dwelling house, a large red-painted barn and out buildings, and towering above each little cluster of buildings is the tall shapely windmill, whirling gracefully and noiselessly round and round, day and night bringing from the exhaustless water strata eighty feet below, an abundant supply for man and beast. As you look out over this scene of comfortable homes you are reminded that the people who inhabit them are foreigners, and that in their domestic relations, they still use the Scandinavian tongue. But whatever language is spoken on the farm, the trees are planted, the houses are built and the farms are all arranged on the

American plan. Looking into the faces of these people, you don't see that low brow forehead, that distrustful sour and sullen look which makes some classes of foreigners so repulsive.

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You call at the farmhouse and knock at the door. Your summons is answered by a kind-faced old lady who smiles and bows and courtesies in an old-fashioned way which tells you that her manners were not fashioned on the modern plan. She is not one of the new women, but one of the old women, whom God created to be the salt of the earth and to make the home lives of its people happy. You ask questions, but her answers are unintelligible, only you know by her embarrassed courtesies that she is trying to explain to you her tongue was trained in another land, that coming to this country in middle life and being pressed with house cares she had no time or opportunity to learn our language, but she soon calls to her assistance, from another room a fair faced, fair haired, blue eyed little girl of twelve, who answers all your inquiries in as clean cut English as you ever heard. You learn from this little American girl something of the family conditions and history. She, herself attends district school nine months in the year and has already made good progress in the rudiments of a practical education. Her oldest brother, twenty-two has taken a business course in one of the normal colleges in Lincoln and is now in a good position with an important business house in Holdrege. The older sister, two years younger than the brother, has taught school, has also had several terms in a training school for teachers is now away from home attending a teachers' institute, but will soon

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return to teach the home school this fall and winter.

The house is comfortable and neatly furnished. The barn has room for many tons of hay, for oat bins, wheat bins, twenty head of horses, twice as many cattle. The windmill never stops a moment, but all the year round supplies a water system for the entire farm. There are clusters of grain stacks and the broad field of corn shows forty bushels to the acre.

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You may travel all over the Swede

community of farmers and everywhere you will find these solemn faced, sunburned men, those kind faced old fashioned women, those energetic and enterprising young people, these fair faced, pretty little girls and you will also find a large portion of the farms, good houses, big barns, broad cornfields and clustered grain stacks. I have watched the development of farm life in Nebraska and Iowa for twenty years. I know something of the progress made in the various western farm communities, but I know of no spot where economy and well directed energy has been better rewarded than among the Swedes of Phelps County.

Additional Research on Children's Home Continues

It is always exciting starting a new book project. In this case it is a supplement to the Children's Home book we published a few years ago. I am surprised at the additional information that has surfaced. Several of the former children's home residents have visited the museum and contacted Ken Mosman or members of the genealogy club.

Jane Dahlstrom Quinn along with a friend in Sweden have translated a 1909 Swedish history book, Written by August H. Modig of the Children's Home. All these years we have not known the contents of that book, so it very interesting to read its contents and relates how important it was to start this children's home.

Newspaper clippings and the early histories state that there were three children who had lost their mother in 1888 and that Rev. Nordin took these children to his mother to take care of. We are now in contact with Janet Debler whose grandmother Hulda was one of the children. Now

we have located a Moses Hill school census Showing Hulda and her brother Robert living in the Nordin home. We have located good information on their parents. We think this will be an interesting story to add to our book.

The 1890 District 14 school census called Moses Hill School has this listing: Rev. A. Nordin, guardian: Ester Saybye, age 10; Bessie Saybye, age 8, Robert Isacson, age 8, George Norton, age 6, Mina Hedlund, age 6, Marshall Anderson, age 6 Laurence Satter, age 7 and Ebba Erickson, age 7. There were probably other children below school age not listed. It is possible these children came from many parts of the country as this home was open to all children although the majority of children were Swedish. Perhaps someone will know who these children's relatives might be as we have little information on them.

Our address is: **Holdrege Area Genealogy Club, Box 164, Holdrege, Nebraska 68949**

Time To Send In Dues For 2012

It is time to send in dues for the Phelps Helps newsletter for the next year. Your support is important for our club and our Genealogy Library! We continue to add books, microfilm and CDs to our collection.

All members can submit queries for the newsletter and stories that are pertinent to Phelps or Harlan County, Nebraska history. Please let us know if you have suggestions for a news article.

DUES FOR 2012 ARE \$10

Our address is

**Holdrege Area Genealogy Club
Box 164
Holdrege, NE 68949**

*1907 Holdrege
at Night*



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