

# Phelps Helps



Volume 19, Issue 3

Fall 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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## Holdrege Area Genealogy Club Publications For Sale

### CHILDREN'S HOME BOOK

(This books was published in 2009) \$30 plus \$4 for postage and handling. All "home kids" will pay a special low price of \$20 plus \$4 postage and handling.

### PHELPS COUNTY NEBRASKA MARRIAGES, Vol. 1, 22 Apr 1877-22 Aug 1923

Compiled by Dick and Marjorie Dyas, Published by the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club. (\$15.00, 90 cents NE tax, if Nebraska resident, \$4 postage and handling. Outside the United States add \$7 for postage).

### PHELPS COUNTY NEBRASKA MARRIAGES, Vol. 2, 13 Aug 1923-29 May 1976

Compiled by Dick and Marjorie Dyas, Publish by the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club. (\$15.00, \$90 NE tax if NE resident, \$4 postage and handling. Outside the United States, add \$7 for postage)

### PHELPS COUNTY CEMETERY BOOK, VOLUME 1

Includes all Phelps County Cemeteries except Prairie Home Cemetery. (Updated to 1999, \$20.00, \$1.20 Sales tax of NE resident, \$4 S&H, postage and handling. Outside United States add \$7.)

### PHELPS COUNTY CEMETERY BOOK, VOLUME 2

Includes Prairie Home Cemetery (This is the largest cemetery in Phelps County. It is located near Holdrege, NE. \$20, \$1.20 tax if Nebraska resident) plus \$4

postage and handling. Outside United States add \$7, updated to 1999)

### HARLAN COUNTY CEMETERY BOOK

Compiled by Ben Boell, Republican City, and NE. Published by the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club. \$20, \$1.20 tax if residing in NE: \$4 shipping and handling)

### HARLAN COUNTY MARRIAGE BOOK, VOL 1, 1873-1936

Compiled by Ben Bell, Published by Holdrege Area Genealogy Club. \$20, \$1.20 tax if NE resident Plus \$4 S&H)

### IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CEMETERY, Harlan County, NE

Harlan County, NE (\$3.50, \$.21 sales tax if NE resident, plus \$1.25 for S & H. outside United States add \$3.50). This book includes a small history of the area and a photograph of the church and cemetery.

### A SUPPLEMENT TO THE FIRST CHILDREN'S HOME BOOK IS BEING COMPILED

Ken Mosman is gathering information to publish a supplement to the Children's Home book that was published in 2009. We are requesting anyone who has corrected or new information about the children that resided In the home between 1889 and 1954 contact Holdrege Area Genealogy Club, Box 164, Holdrege, NE 68949.

## Burned In A Barn

*Phelps County, Nebraska*

Last Thursday forenoon the people of the city were much surprised to hear that Ezekiel Johnson's large barn on his farm some five miles northeast of here had been burned, together with its contents, and that Leonard Craig, his hired man had disappeared.

Later came the news that the charred remains of the unfortunate man had been found in the ruins and later the bones of the unfortunate man was brought in and left at Watson's undertaking rooms until it was learned what disposition should be made of the body. The sight of the body was a sickening one for it was hard to realize that it was the remains of a human being as the head, legs and arms were gone and little beyond the charred bones of the trunk remained. A piece of the Jaw and a few teeth were about the only way that the ordinary observer could discover what the mass of bones represented.

The whole affair is surrounded in mystery and as near as we can learn the particulars were as follows: Craig came home that night from attending meeting at the school house and put out his team. He was heard to come in the house, where he set down the lantern burning on the table, and it is supposed that he went to bed, but his roommate said he did not come to bed at all. So he must have returned to the barn again. A couple of hours later the fire was discovered as the light waked some of the folks in the house up, but it was too late to save anything in the barn. Besides the barn which cost about \$1,200 a large amount of the property was

consumed, including nine horses, two or three cows, forty tons of hay, 400 bushels of oats and some farm implements.

Various theories have been suggested to account for the affair, none of which seem very satisfactory. It might be that when the lantern was lighted, a match was thrown down and the fire was not discovered till he had got to the house when they rushed out to put it out, but it seems strange if that was the case no outcry was made. The idea of suicide was also advanced and it was reported that he had acted queerly for a couple of days before this. Others advance the idea of foul play, and in support of that theory point out the fact that a hammer left at the windmill the afternoon before was found near the body, also that no trace has been found of his watch and a search is being made for it. His Jackknife was found under his body; the whole affair seems mysterious and probably always will. Later, the watch was found yesterday and it would seem to disprove the theory of foul play.

Mr. Euochs of Overton, a cousin of the deceased, came over Wednesday and got the remains of the unfortunate man.

We understand that Mr. Johnson had \$900 insurance on the barn, but have not heard in regard to the rest of the property. The loss these hard times is a severe one to Mr. Johnson.

## Killed Instantly Without Warning

*HARLAN COUNTY NEWS*

*Alma Tribune, Alma Nebraska*  
July 12, 1892

On 6:00 p.m. on Monday July 4, the report was heard on the streets that one of the circus men had been killed by a fellow worker. A Tribune representative at once returned to the scene and found George Liser, a canvas man laying dead having been shot in the face with a revolver, the bullet entering the left side of his nose and coming out in the back of the head. The weapon was in the hands of Alfred Calkins, a cook, at the time of its discharge. They were sitting at the supper table with a number of other circus hands and all agree the revolver was lying on the table, having been cleaned a short time before the two men who were principals in the tragedy. It seems that the revolver had been cleaned and that Calkins, who did the shooting, went out for something. During his absence Kiser, or someone, loaded the revolver and laid it down again. At supper a joking conversation occurred between Kiser and Calkins, when Calkins picked up the revolver, supposing it empty, and slapped it in the face of Kiser saying I will kill you. There was a discharge, Kiser fell and never spoke again. Calkins realized what he had done and at once told his companions that he was ready to give

**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.

himself up and suffer the penalty. He was taken in custody by officers and Coroner Bowman at once empanelled a jury, which after hearing the evidence brought a verdict charging Calkins with criminal care-

lessness.

The man who fired the fatal shot appears to fully feel and regret an awful thing that has happened and public sentiment seems to favor letting



him go. At 2 o'clock tomorrow, he will be given a preliminary hearing.

The body of the victim was interred in the Alma cemetery on Tuesday evening, being followed to its last resting place by a number of our best citizens, who no doubt thought of their own children and how they would like to have them treated under similar circumstances.

The parents of the unfortunate man live in San Antonio, Texas. Both of the unfortunate men were but little past 20 years of age and are said to have been warm friends.

Taylor, the owner of the circus, left money to defray the funeral expenses.



## Visit To The Orphan Home

*Holdrege Citizen, June 15, 1900*

Last Monday we visited the Orphan Home at old Phelps Center, Phelps County, Nebraska and were much pleased with what we saw of the way things were managed there and the wholesome training that the homeless children there, were receiving. There are now 42 children who have their homes there and they range in age from tots to three and four years and up to fourteen or fifteen.

The home receives children between two and ten. Although the home is under the control of our Swedish people, homeless children are not confined to that nationality, but all nationalities are welcome. Nor are the children who are given the privileges of the Home, confined to Nebraska, as one child was pointed out that came from Texas, another from Oklahoma and another from Chicago. So it will be seen that its sphere of usefulness is quite extended, alt-

hough it is only eleven years since the home Started.

Parents who have been unfortunate and are not able to take care of their children are allowed to put their children in here and then when they are able, take the children out again.

It is vacation time now, and the regular teacher, Miss Hulda Swanson, is having a vacation, but the children are utilizing their time learning to read Swede, being thought by the older children. We watched them for a time at their study and noticed how well the girls kept order and interested the children in their work.

We were conducted over the Home by Miss Mary Anderson of Denver, who is charge while the matron is away on her vacation attending the mission conference at Minneapolis. Everywhere there was

*(Visit Continued on page 5)*



*Christian Children's Home ~ October 14, 1895*

*(Visit Continued from page 4)*

neatness and order, showing that the children were being trained in that regard as well as in many other directions.

Since the new addition was built, the home has had its much needed additional room. At the present time they are not able to use the bakery, which makes additional work to bake the bread on the stoves instead of in the bakery. The large two-story building contains, besides the dormitories, offices, school and play rooms, kitchen, bakery, laundry, bathrooms, store rooms, etc., making a very complete plant.

We inspected the home from cellar to attic and everywhere we saw evidence of cleanliness and care in providing for the welfare of the children. One need at present is money to put in hot and cold water in the bathrooms, as all the water has to be carried in pails.

What interested us most of all were the children themselves, who looked well and contented and showed by their actions they were just like other children. We could not help being impressed with the fact that they were being well trained and that when spoken to, they promptly obeyed. There was no noise or commotion anywhere, and everything went on as in a well ordered home. The children were neat in appearance, and a number came up to shake hands with us. Most of the children came in

and sang several songs for us and did nicely at it too.

While there we could not help thinking how much better it was for the children to be placed in a home out in the country where they have an abundance of fresh air and have a chance to see the beauties of nature, than to be in some city where most of such homes are located, and where the children are huddled together with limited play grounds, and with but little chance to see the beauties that mother nature has given her children. The idea of the funders is to give the children as near a Christian home as possible, where they will receive instructions that will make them useful men and woman.

In connection with the home is a farm of 240 acres which is carried on, and furnishes much of the food supplies. There is now a mortgage of \$1,000 on part of the farm. Outside is carried on by contributions given by people interested in the work being done there.

The people of Phelps County, with its fertile lands and fine homes, have many things to be proud of, but not the least of the things to be proud of, is the Orphan Home eight miles northwest of Holdrege. We hope our Holdrege people, whenever they will visit the home and become more interested, in the work being carried on there. The Swedish people should receive more help from the English speaking people in the work then we believe they do.

## Had Altercation With Pedler ~ August 6, 1908

### *Holdrege Progress*

Louis Smidt, employed as a shoemaker at Nelson Clothing Co. attempted to put the "higher law" into effect last Sunday afternoon and punish a peddler, who Smidt claims sold him goods not up to standard. The good peddler's name is Morris and he has been staying with relatives and in the city.

Smidt attacked Morris on the corner of

West and Fourth avenues last Sunday afternoon after a heated discussion of who had the greatest grievance against the other. Morris, in order to defend himself, picked up a board and retaliated. George Camblin appeared on the scene and both the combatants were confined in the city jail until morning. It was shown that Smidt started the trouble and was fined \$5 and costs by the court.

## Life As A Doctor

*Bertrand Herald, Thursday February 17, 1977*



*Dr. W. A. Shreck*

The following is reprinted from the Bertrand Viking. The story was written by Jane Fastenau, a member of the Creative Writing class and features the late Dr. W. A. Shreck. To get the facts of the story, she interviewed his son, Neal.

It was a cold night and the ground was covered with January snow when I visited Mr. Neil Shreck. A smiling man met us at the door, and the warmth of his handshake and amiable eyes soon invaded the coldness of the night. Mr. Shreck is in his seventies, and I can't say at all that he is an old man, although a somewhat youthful gray has found its way into his mustache and hair. My father and I entered a room and unconsciously I stood agape at what met my eyes. Mr. Shreck drew my attention to the one-hundred-fifty-year-old

furniture, antique lamps, and clocks. He pointed to a picture on the piano and indicated that it was his mother. Inside of an intricate oval frame was a beautiful woman. That woman and Mr. Shreck's father, William Ambrose Shreck, a pioneer physician in Bertrand, gave to Mr. Shreck experiences, sorrows, and beautiful memories of a struggling mid-western town in the early 1900s, memories of unceasing value which he shared with me.

Mr. Shreck's father Dr. Shreck, arrived in Bertrand in 1896. Dr. Shreck had been married that morning in Holdrege, and came to Bertrand for their reception. A man came to the reception and insisted that the doctor come and deliver his wife's baby. The young man became intensely persistent, and Dr. Shreck gave into his demands. The doctor assured his new wife that he wouldn't be long, but quite contrary to what he thought, the doctor didn't return until two days later. Neil remarked that this was their honeymoon.

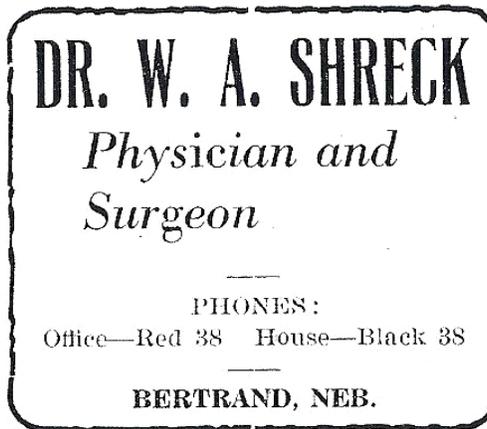
Transportation was limited to horse and buggy in this era, and Dr. Shreck had horses that could be readily harnessed in case of an emergency. He had one particular horse named Mack that he and his family had become attached to, and the horse served him well. The Shrecks were the first to buy an automobile in 1904, and horses were not used as much, so Dr. Shreck, not being able to part with Mack, gave him to a farmer to pasture and feed, but he asked that the farmer not work him. Mack had been tied in front of Dr. Shreck's office many times and one morning the doctor looked out in front of his office. The horse had jumped the farmer's fence and died, a tired and loyal horse, in the place where he had been ready to serve Dr. Shreck for so many years.

*(Shreck Continued on page 7)*

*(Shreck Continued from page 6)*

Dr. Shreck often found himself in unique habitations and uncommon situations, one of which led him to a sod house on the south slope of a canyon south of Bertrand. The doctor was preparing to deliver a baby when he noticed a four-foot long bull snake wrapped around the rafter of the bedroom of the sod house. The doctor insisted that the snake be removed, but his request was to no avail. The farmer stated that the snake had been there a long time, that they hadn't had any mice, and that the snake was going to stay. Inevitable, the snake stayed and the baby was born.

Mr. Shreck first encounter with surgery was with his father, Dr. Shreck, and a surgeon from Minden. Mr. Bardshar, a quite large man, was stricken with appendicitis, and he was moved to the dining room table for surgery. The doctors were to make precautions against explosion from the flammable ether and kerosene lamps, so blankets were placed over the doorway with the patient's head in another room and the operation was performed by flashlight. The ether was applied by metal mask, and the amount of ether was regulated by the standard of how many drops were put on the gauze. Neither doctor wore a mask or protective clothing during the operation. The appendix was ruptured and general peritonitis had set in, making the intestines bright red. Dr. Shreck was afraid his son would faint, but Mr. Shreck stuck it through. After the appendix had been removed, Mr. Shreck recalls that the surgeon poured raw ether into the abdominal cavity and swished it around. The surgeon had been criticized for this, but the



percentages of deaths were comparatively low, and many years later, Mr. Bardshar died of old age in a Kearney nursing home.

Mr. Shreck often assisted his father in his work and sometimes found it quite painstaking himself. Mr. Vaughn, a farmer near Bertrand, was mowing the roadside one day when his team ran away. Mr.

Vaughn fell and broke his leg between the hip and knee. The doctor came and wished to administer some morphine to kill the pain, but Mr. Vaughn refused the shot. Dr. Shreck warned him of the pain and instructed Mr. Shreck to pull the leg. Mr. Shreck grabbed the foot and braced himself at the foot the bed. Mr. Shreck recalls, "I was looking at him straight in the eye and, yell, I never heard anyone yell so. I slacked off, and

Dad tore into me. He said, "The next time I tell you to pull, you pull, so I pulled, and I never heard such yelling in my life." Dr. Shreck had no access to X-rays as the nearest X-ray was in Lincoln, so had had to set the bone by feel while Mr. Shreck pulled on the leg.

Mr. Shreck recalls what he thinks is the worst fatal mishap he can remember occurring around Bertrand. This took place before World War I outside of Bertrand. Everyone would load their cattle on railroad cars on Saturday night and head for Omaha. The owners of the cattle got a free ride to Omaha in the caboose. One morning about 4:00 a.m. distress signal was heard from the train. An Agent called Dr. Shreck and told him to be ready. The agent called back and informed the doctor of the accident. Three stock trains following fairly close behind each other were nearing

*(Shreck Continued on page 8)*

*(Shreck Continued from page 7)*

Bertrand when a second train developed a hot box. It stopped, and before a signal could be set on the tracks, the third train hit the second train. The third train had a missing headlight. The caboose was jammed in between the two trains and was mashed to about six feet long. The floor of the caboose slid under the cattle car and cut the wheels off. The sides of the caboose went along the sides of the cattle car.

Dr. Shreck, Dr. Ryder, and Neil Shreck were the first to arrive and Dr. Shreck loaded a big hypodermic needle and crawled over the cattle car. Dr. Shreck said, "He didn't bother about coats; if he saw an arm, he just sent right through cloth and everything and just gave them a shot." Soon more people arrived and helped to recover those that were still alive. Mr. Shreck remembers that there was one fellow pinned from the waist down and was holding himself up with his arms. Mr. Shreck asked him if he was in pain, and the man said no. None at all, and he asked Mr. Shreck to hold him up to light a cigarette. As soon as the pressure was relieved and the man let go, he died. Another man had a piece of timber go completely through his abdomen, and one of the men found a man missing his leg. Mr. Shreck said, "We found the leg and it didn't fit any one else so we laid it beside his body. "We worked carrying them, dead and alive." The dead were taken to Sandstorm's Funeral Mortuary.

Mr. Shreck had a deep dedication to his work and during the flu epidemic, he saved the lives of many. The flu epidemic was during the war and Dr. Shreck was the only doctor in Bertrand and many adjacent towns. He and his driver would start out, and he would stop at every house whether they called him or not. Mrs. Shreck knew his general location most of the time by a map she had drawn. The next day he would go in another direc-

tion. He would sleep while they drove and the driver would sleep while they stopped. Many days they worked twenty-two hours out of the day. Finally, Dr. Guy Clark came from Elwood to help, and then Dr. Shreck relaxed, he was unconscious for two weeks from exhaustion.

"In my day, I wouldn't turn down a call," Mr. Shreck remembers. When Dr. Shreck finally retired, he asked Ralph Holmquist to get him two baskets. He went through his bills and separated them into the two baskets. He pointed to one and said burn it." In the other basket was \$80,000 worth of bills people owed him. Mr. Shreck talked to Frank Brewster, a physician in Holdrege, and persuaded his father to move to Holdrege. Dr. Shreck had no hobbies---just service to the people. One day he was leaving the house for a home call when he fell and broke his hip, and his lifelong occupation finally halted.

Mr. Shreck was attending a Tri-County convention in Phoenix when his father fell ill. He returned immediately. The doctor had said that his father was unconscious and hadn't responded to anyone. Mr. Shreck said, I walked into the hospital and walked into the room, took hold of his hand and told him who I was. He turned his head and opened his eyes, looked at me, and said, "You be sure to take care of Mother." I said you know we will and I watched my father enter an everlasting sleep.

The courage and endurance of these pioneer doctors was incredible; they were on their own and conditions were not always sterile. They had to do what they could with what they had.

With quiet pride and proud humility, Mr. Shreck summed up his father's philosophy of life when he said, "My dad never stopped and never looked back."

## First Lutheran Church Near Funk Was Sod

*This Article came from a 1933  
Holdrege Newspaper*

Boys and girls of this generation will be interested in the sod church where their parents went to Sunday school. This was a fine large church for pioneer days and its services were well attended. Our family used to walk seven miles regularly to go to church. The sod church was one of the pioneer landmarks and this one was located two miles east of Funk.

Organized in 1879, the Fridhem Church celebrated their Golden Jubilee four years ago in 1929.

The Swedish people who took up homesteads in Anderson, Divide and Lake townships in the eighteen seventies used to meet in each other's sod houses to talk over religious matters and after the organization of Bethany Lutheran Church in Kearney County in 1876 and Bethel Lutheran Church in 1877 many of these folks united with the new churches which were at least 10 miles away.

When the first organizational plans were made a hundred names for a new church congregation were secured, but they offered to join with the Bethel congregation if they would locate a new church in Divide township. They were unwilling to



do this so January 29, 1879, the Fridhem Congregation was organized at the home of A. P. Falk, in Oneida Township, Kearney County about one half mile south of the present Salam church.

Rev. Elias Peterson presided and Alfred Johnson was elected secretary. Admission to the Lutheran Synod did not come until June of 1883 for there was a feeling that another congregation between Bethany and Bethel was not needed.

The 20 by 40 soddy pictured was built in 1879, whitewashed on the inside and fitted with plank seats. There was a floor of dirt. For years they worshiped there joyously, the present building not being erected until the fall of 1892.



## Welcome New Members!

Mike Simmons  
P.O. Box 740  
Henderson, CO 80640-0740  
mikesimmons@ccg-llc.net

Mike Simmons is searching these surnames in Harlan County, NE: GRISWOLD; WALKER, SLOAN and POTTER

Jill McLemmam  
3220 Chapman St., Apt. 8  
Oakland, CA 94601-2850

Jill is researching the Frank Brewster family. Frank was born in 7 Aug 1872 and died 17 Oct 1961. His wife Verna was born 22 Dec 1881 and died 11 Oct 1981. Frank Brewster was the first flying doctor, starting by assembling his first plane in 1919. Jill plans to write a children's book about his life.

## Supplement To The First Children's Home Book Is Being Compiled

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