

# Phelps Helps



Volume 20, Issue 3

September 2012

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

**The public is  
welcome!**

Visit us on the Web!  
Phelps Helps Web Page via  
<http://users.atcjet.net/psdesigns>



**Holdrege Area  
Genealogy Club  
Officers:**

President:  
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Vice President:  
Sandra Slater

Secretary:  
Margaret Stutheit

Treasurer:  
Ada Hinson

Phelps Helps Editor:  
Patti Simpson

## Our Genealogy Library Is Full Of Activity



*This donation was given by the Leroy Brown family and was a collection of material research by Dick Dyas.*

The boxes in this photograph are one of the largest donations we have received and took several months to archive. Included in this collection were family genealogies of several Harlan County families including the surnames: DYAS; TANNER; RICHARDS; BROWN; THRASHER; BROEKER; BLOOM; KEARNS and POPPERT. It also included many photographs and school memorabilia.

Our volunteers sort through many newspapers and historical documents weekly. This has helped us become an excellent library for south central Nebraska. The

Holdrege Area Genealogy Club will be ordering another \$1,000 of Harlan and Phelps County newspaper microfilms for our library. We will also be purchasing a genealogy library sign that will be put up near the entrance of the museum.



*Library volunteers Susan Perry and Sandra Slater assisting a student, Darianne Newman from Axtell High School who helped us in the library last winter.*

## New Members

**Bonnie J. Redman**  
**16473 S. Hattan Rd**  
**Oregon City, Or 97045**  
**Brrred1@gmail.com**

I am researching for information on D. A. Vermillion who owned land in Sacramento, Phelps County, Nebraska in 1888.

\* \* \*

**Eugene C. Falk**  
**1237 Oak Island Ct.**  
**Fort Collins, Colorado 80525**

I am researching for information on the Salem Methodist Church that is located across the road from Phelps County in Kearney County, Nebraska. I would like to correspond with any family members of this church.

\* \* \*

**Rose Schmidt**  
**810 Mission Place**  
**Berthoud, CO 80513**

I am looking for information on Pat and Sarah Sullivan that homesteaded in Anderson Township in the 1880s. His wife, Sarah died in 1897 and Patrick remarried to Viola Louderback in June of 1900. Patrick and Sarah's children were Ida Belle (Sullivan) Rowan and James Rubin Sullivan.

\* \* \*

**Ethel Basile**  
**Mission House Vue Apt 200**  
**406 East Mission**  
**Bellevue, NE 68005**

I am researching information on Claude C. Porter (1874-1944) son of Fred and Mary Porter from Defiance, OH.

## New Books In Our Library

- Growing in Grace, First Presbyterian Church of Holdrege 125th Anniversary, given by Patti Simpson
- A History and Genealogy of East Dent County, Missouri Families, given by Lyra Johnson
- Pictorial Atlas of Gage County, Nebraska, given by Lyra Johnson
- The La Grange Legacy, given by Bruce I Schindler
- 14 Ragan, Harlan County, Nebraska year books from 1942 to 1961
- Nelson Reunion books which includes photographs, news articles and history of Edward and Minnie Bjorklund Nelson and their descendants.

## A Haunted House ~ September 25, 1895

On the north side of a lonely land running one-half mile south of the little village of Funk, Phelps County, Nebraska stands a little old dilapidated sod house, being one of the few in existence that are left in Phelps County of the early pioneer life. Built in the early settlement of the county, no importance has been attached to it. It being to the passerby merely one of the fast fading remembrances of life on the border. But of late, strange and gruesome stories are being whispered about the neighborhood bearing upon the fact that ghostly inhabitations are in and about the place.

The stories told have aroused the memories to the old settlers and many of them can now remember many strange and mysterious things that have happened in the years that have gone by. In the early days of the settlement, two of the most reputable citizens were passing the house on the way home from "the Center," the then county seat of the county, when opposite the house, a series of ghostly noises seemed to come from the house. The horses became frightened and ran away, and strange to relate, the wagon went backward with great speed instead of forward. While in this dilemma the men seemed to be raised bodily into the air by some strange supernatural force and deposited on the prairie a few rods from the road. The self-binder they had on the wagon, by some ghostly means, escaped and cut a swath through the prairie for half a mile. With the exception of the loss of a few teeth, the men escaped injury. They finally succeeded in rounding up the horses and binder and made their way home and have since given the house a wide berth when obliged to travel in the night. A few

years after this occurrence, the farm rented by a man named Larson and the neighbors noticed that the sod shanty had a tenant. This man, who was a bachelor, seemed utterly devoid of fear and when told that the house was haunted, laughed at his informers. Nothing was heard of the ghosts for a long time, but one night he was awakened by what seemed to be a large herd of horses running around the house. Hastily dawning his clothes he ran out, but what was his surprise to see nothing and nothing could he heard, but the soft breeze as it sighed through the branches of the cottonwood trees. No sooner had he sought his couch of repose again, when the same sounds were repeated. Again he rushed out and again nothing did he see. Night after night these ghostly manifestations were repeated and nothing but the man's magnificent nerve prevented him from fleeing the premises.

Later, the supernatural visitors began operations inside the house; first by strange noises and then by opening and closing the doors. They became so bold that it became impossible for him to keep any bed clothing over him as the ghosts would keep continually pulling them off. The visitations finally became so frequent and their operations so vigorous that the man's iron nerve became weakened and he threw up the place and moved out of the neighborhood.

The next man to move in was another bachelor, familiarly known as "Nels." He was a giant in stature and looked the equal of any half dozen ghosts that might appear. Things went well for awhile, but one night, happening to look out

*(Haunted Continued on page 4)*

*(Haunted Continued from page 3)*

the window, he wondered who had built a large fire in the barnyard. Hastening out he proceeded to investigate, but the nearer he approached, the smaller the fire became and coming to the place, it appeared to be a shining twenty-dollar gold piece. Upon picking it up, it proved to be nothing but an old rusty two cent piece. Nels still has the piece to show in verification of the story. The ghostly magnification continued in various ways until he too vacated. He says he could stand the ghostly illuminations and all that sort of thing, but when in the dead hours of night his fiddle would get out of

the box and stand on its head and play "The Devil's Dream," he thought it was time to vacate. Since he vacated and told his experience, no one had the hardihood to spend the night in the gruesome place and the ghost and hobgoblins are holding high carnival there nightly. The young men of the neighborhood take a circuitous route in going home from town after night and the children of the town sit silent and breathless while the mother's talk to each other about the ghostly visitations. These stories can all be vouched for by reputable citizens, and there is no doubt that Funk, along with many other attractions, can boast of a genuine haunted house. Brix — End

## Nels Nelson—Civil War Soldier

*10 April 1862*

*This Letter, written originally in Swedish was donated by Mary Pearson of Holdrege, Nebraska. It was translated by Bernice Anderson.*

*Mary (Ekberg) Pearson's grandparents were John and Julia (Nelson) Ekberg.*

*Nels Nelson would have been Mary's great uncle.*

*Nels Nelson was in the battle of Shiloh when he wrote this letter at Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. There were 23,000 casualties in this battle*

*Additional Research would indicate that Nels Nelson was in Company C, 43rd IL Infantry serving 3 years.*

*In 1878 he was residing with his wife, Sarah in Galesburg, Illinois in the grocery business.*

Dear Sister Julia Nelson,

Now that I have time I want to write a few lines telling about the big battle we have had in the recent days. Know that it is interesting for you to know who are at home.

Here are many troops so our camp is very large and extensive. Our regiment is located in the south near the camp of the enemy. The enemy came from the south so we are consequently with the first that was attacked. The enemy came on Sunday morning between 6 and 7 o'clock in the morning just as we have had our breakfast, then were commanded to stand in front of the leader as quickly as possible, which we did in a big hurry and when we came outside the bullets whistled over our heads.

At a distance bullets fell on the left side of our company and wounded one of our boys before we

*(Nels Nelson Continued on page 5)*

*(Nels Nelson Continued from page 4)*

were ready to do anything against the enemy. Then came four cannons that were called on our side against the enemy. Then we began to shoot and they shot Carl Samuelson from Andover and Sven Olson from Knoxville, both were shot in the head and several others, then we had to fall back a little but stood by our cannons until the rebels came on all sides of us then we had to leave the canons and run so we couldn't be captured.

We took the artillery and fled leaving the cannons immediately in the enemy's hands. We had to run a short piece and then we made another attack and then the enemy began shooting their cannons quite heavily but we stayed as long as possible. Guns spit right and left real fast. Then our corporal and our other commander were shot badly in the leg and by then we were surrounded by the enemy again. Then we had to fall back again and had to run some over half a mile before we could attack again and we advanced toward then until we met the enemy and began firing again. Penetrating so we drove them back a small way but then our regiment was out of ammunition.

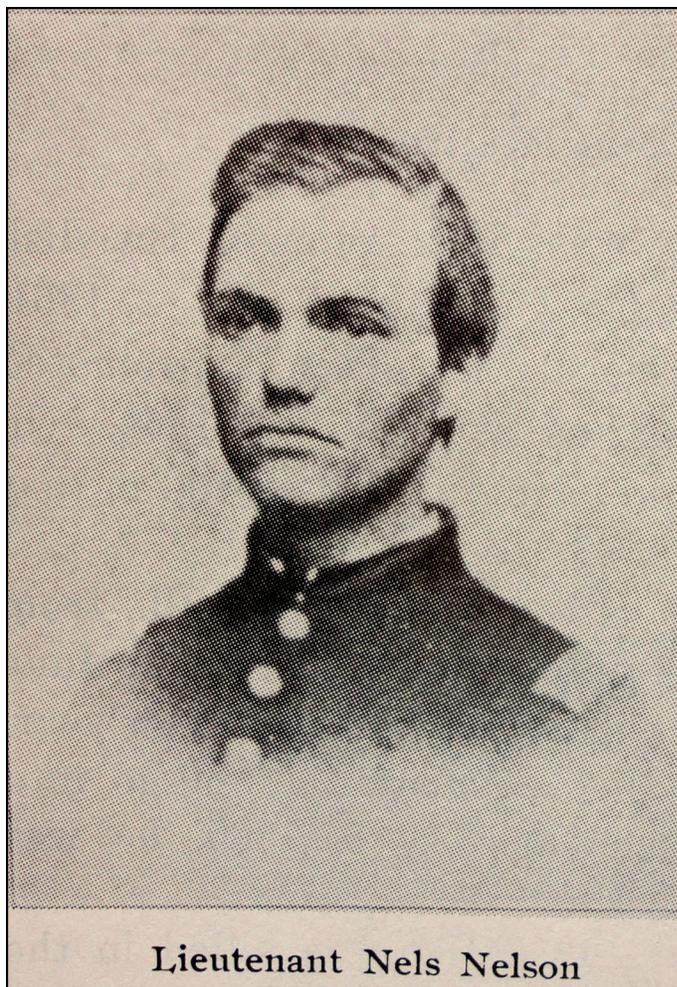
It was three in the afternoon and then at 3 we got some more ammunition. Then we ate some to give us strength and when we had rested some we fought again. Then it was between four and five in the afternoon. The enemy didn't advance any more so we rested over the night. We slept on the ground. When we had laid there for a few hours it began to rain and thunder real hard so we were soaked, but had to be there until morning.

We went forward until we met them again, we fought for two or three miles with cannons and ammunition so the earth danced. Then we fought from morning until three and four in the afternoon

and then they began to fall back real fast so we got our camp back. On Monday afternoon between five and six we were only about 75 men left in the regiment but some came back again so we didn't lose as many as we had thought.

Three were lost right away, then three more, two we knew surrendered and the third we don't know about so we have lost six. We haven't found but two bodies that belong to our company.

We know Sven Olson from Knoxville is dead, but we have not found his body. Those who are lost or dead are Charles Samuelson from Andover, Louis Berglof from Andover and Sven Olson from Knoxville. Nels Bodelson from Galesburg was



Lieutenant Nels Nelson

*(Nels Nelson Continued on page 6)*

*(Nels Nelson Continued from page 5)*

wounded and is away and Andrew Johnson from near Boston was wounded and is away and Claus Danelson from Andover is away, but no one knows if he is wounded or not and the others wounded are in the hospital. Captain Stall was wounded in the left arm; M. J. Holt was wounded in the right hand. Victor Erickson from Andover shot in the head, Gustaf Swenson from Ontario, in the arm, Olaf Hallfast from Bishop Hill shot in one foot. This is all that I know about from our Company that was hurt to a certain extent.

Many that were wounded and dead in our company total near two hundred, but I can't say for sure. The total of dead in this war goes up to 3000. The rebels also took many prisoners. We also took some prisoners.

I must soon stop. I received a letter from you yesterday with postage stamps which I thank so much. Even a letter from Nels Peterson yesterday. Don't know if I have time to write a few lines to my mother as we are waiting for the enemy again and know that will not be good. I will write as

often as I can and give you all the news I can. Nothing is sure. If this should be my last letter to you at home, then may we meet with God in heaven. If I should be called with my friends then I hope you won't mourn for me. I must stop for this time.

My address is Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. In haste, your devoted brother and son, Nels Nelson.

— End

## Orleans-Kearney Trail is the Oldest

*Holdrege Citizen  
April 1977*

*(This is the seventh part of a short history of Phelps County that was compiled and written by John E. Erickson.)*

The next oldest trail was the Kearney to Orleans Trail and it was important because of a rather large water powered flour mill located two miles west of Orleans at a place called Melrose. This was a

**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.

commercial mill and furnished a market from early settler's wheat crop. They shipped their flour to Kearney in wagons as that was the closest town at the time. Sacramento Lake was no doubt a popular camping place as that was about half way. There were two Kearney and Orleans trails and the

*(Orleans Continued on page 7)*

*(Orleans Continued from page 6)*

second was farther west and was started after Harlan County settlers arrived.

The next important trail was Rock Falls to Phelps Center, to Kearney Trail. This was important for Harlan County Settlers to get to Kearney to get supplies and to Phelps County settlers to get to Spring Creek to get poles for their sod houses and firewood.

The Spring Creek to Overton Trail served the west side of Harlan and Phelps Counties. It was possible to cross the Platte River near Overton or they would follow the Oregon Trail whichever way they wanted to go.

The later trail that started after the settlers came to Phelps County, was the Phelps Center to Bloomington Trail. The people who had filed homestead land or timber claims had to go to Bloomington as the Federal Land Office was there, so it became a well-worn trail. It was later extended northwest to Phelps Center to a post office called, Axelson.

The later trail went from Phelps Center to Kearney. There were other minor trails from place to place within the county and served the local people well.

The establishment of churches and schools had been developed as the land was settled. Schools and churches show the progress the people had made. The early settler hardships were past and there was general contentment and general satisfaction among the communities. Schools were well equipped and became social centers at that time. The churches were active in supplying the necessary means of worshipping God according to whatever the settlers chose.

The farm wagon was the universal means of conveyance and continued to be the farmer's most useful piece of equipment until the cars and trucks were invented. The early settlers relied on the wagon for most any type of hauling.

It was a high wheeled vehicle and the standard wagon box was ten feet long and three feet wide. The lower depth was fourteen inches and it would hold fifty bushels of dry grain.

There was a tip top box ten inches high that made the complete wagon thirty-six inches deep and it would hold seventy bushels of dry grain.

On top of the axle was a bolster. This had side braces that would hold the wagon box in place. Otherwise it was loose and could be lifted off and the running gear could be used for other purposes. The connection between the front and rear axle was called a reach and was adjustable for hauling lumber and poles. The reach was extended and made the running gear whatever length was needed.

For hauling hay or any bulky material, a rack that was called a hay rack was put on the running gear. This was used for hauling hay, straw or bundle grain. It was usually sixteen feet long and eight feet wide. The corners were built up four or five feet high.

For use in harvesting grain with a header, they had a special rack with tight sides and ends. The right side was about two feet high and the left side was five feet high. The header would run the grain directly into the header box.

—End

## The Sod House by Katherine Lappert

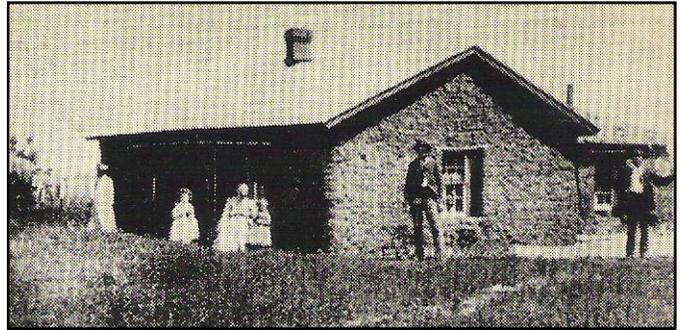
*Written in November of 1958*

I came to Phelps County when but a babe, but can remember incidents that occurred after I was three years old. I remember the old sod house that we lived in for a short time, and many other sod houses belonging to the neighbors with whom we visited. Some of them were very cozy with their whitewashed walls. Often the ceiling was just white muslin stretched neatly across the top of the room. House plants bloomed in the deep windows. When blizzards swept over the prairies, as they frequently did in those days, the old sod houses were warm and comfortable. In summer it was said they were cooler than frame houses. Sometimes on summer evenings we would build a small fire to smoke the mosquitoes away so we could sit out in the yard and enjoy the beauties of the twilight hour, when we moved to our farm with its new frame house.

In those pioneer days we didn't wait for formal invitations to dine with fiends. We simply hopped into the lumber wagon and angled across the prairies to our destination. Sometimes three or four families would "drop in" to spend Sunday with us. The menu usually consisted of the home cured meat, potatoes, gravy, raisin pie or stewed dried fruit of some kind, and layer cake put together with jelly that was purchased in



*Katherine Lappert wearing her pioneer costume at the Holdrege Diamond Jubilee celebration in 1958. The shawl was Grandma Anton's.*



*This is the sod house on the Alfred Lundquist homestead in Westmark Township in 1879*

pails at the grocery store. Vegetables grew in abundance on the newly broken sod. Game was plentiful. Sometimes father would see a flock of wild geese flying over and would get the gun and slip out in the yard and shoot several. He often hunted Prairie Chicken and seldom returned from a hunting trip without bringing me a quail.

We often attended literary or revival meetings at the neighboring school house and old and young joined in dancing the round dance and waltz while the "fiddler" played a lively tune.

In the early days of the history of the village of Loomis, Sunday school was held in the billiard hall, as there was no other building available. A wheezy old organ taxed the strength of the young lady organist while she played the old familiar hymns. Sometimes the Sunday school teacher seated himself on the billiards table while instructing his class and the young people amused themselves laughing at the misspelled sign which the old proprietor of the place had hung which all might read. The object of the sign was to discourage the use of the table for practice games which brought in no revenue to the owner. The sign read, "No practicing aloud."

*(Lappert Continued on page 9)*

*(Lappert Continued from page 8)*

A spirit of friendliness prevailed. We were all strangers in a strange land. As God commanded Abraham to “Get thee out from thy kindred and friends and go to a land which I will show thee,” so our pioneers left houses and loved ones to build new homes for their children and gave them

greater advantages than ever enjoyed. Their dream came true, but who can say whether we are any happier than they?

*(This story won first prize in a pioneer story contest conducted by F. Johnson Company, Holdrege, Nebraska.)*  
—End

## **Wagon was Transportation—written by Mrs. Blanche Hollertz**

I have many memories of the Immanuel Lutheran Church. I moved with my dad and mother, the late George and Elsie Hedlund, from north of Holdrege to two miles west of Ragan when I had just had my sixth birthday in January of 1903. My parents belonged to the Methodist Church, but all the neighbors were members of the Scandinavian Lutheran Church, which was only about three miles from our home.

“We drove a horse and buggy to church, but when my sister, Violette, was born, we drove a spring wagon.

“My father helped build the social room, and helped install the furnace. He also was in charge of having the statue of Christ placed in the front of the church. I remember when he went to Holdrege to see the man to have him make it who made it in his home.

“In those days,” she reminisced, “it was a custom for women to sit on the left side of the church, and the men on the right. They used a large ‘pot belly’ stove for heat. I attended Sunday School there, spoke at Christmas programs, and was confirmed there at the age of 14. Our confirmation class of five read for two years in the Swedish language. “We sure knew our catechism and history,” she boasted. “When my husband, the late Albin Hollertz, was confirmed, the student

minister, Oscar Gustafson of Funk, stayed at our home during the summer months. That year the confirmation class numbered 21.

“The women had their meetings in the afternoons in the social room—and the young folks met in the evenings. We had a small choir, of which I was a member, but we only sang on special occasions. I was the organist and pianist for a number of years, and played at all the special gatherings.

“The Scandinavian community along with the historical marker is located about one-half mile west of the church, on the ground that my husband and I owned, and where we resided for many years. All our four children were baptized in that church, but as they grew older, the services were discontinued, so we joined the Methodist church in Ragan,” she concluded. — End



*Marker still honors area settlers of Scandinavia Township, Harlan County, Nebraska*  
“The Mark Shall Stand By The Roadside For The Memory Of The Pioneer Days As Long As Men Liveth”

# Addition to Children's Orphan Home Publication

Ken Mosman and Sandra Slater are working on the publication of a second book on the Children's Orphan Home.

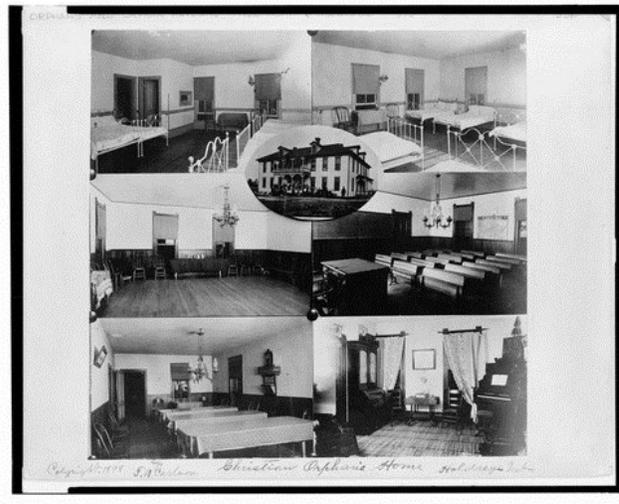
This publication will contain new information on a number of children who resided at the Children's Home and a translated English version of the Swedish book, "MEMORIES AND RECOLLECTIONS."

This book was originally written by August H. Modig in 1909 and is a history of the Children's Home in the early years of its existence.

Jane (Dahlstorm) Quinn and Ulla Vahlberg of Höganås, Sweden are in the final stages of translating this book.

Holdrege Area Genealogy Club appreciates the dedication of its members.

This book will be the ninth publication for our genealogy club.



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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