

Phelps Helps



Volume 17, Issue 2

Summer 2009

**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/p/psdesigns>



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Special Donation From Bernice Lindgren Estate

Bernice Lindgren, a long time member of the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club has donated \$10,000 to the Donald O. Lindgren Library. Bernice passed away on January 22, 2009.

Bernice Lindgren and her husband, Don were the driving force in getting donations to build the Phelps County Museum now known as the Nebraska Prairie Museum. At that time Don stated that the museum must include a

library. Without his vision, we would not have the excellent library that has been developed over these several years. In the library are several volumes of Phelps County historical data compiled by Bernice and Don after years of research. All this material has been indexed for easy research.

We thank the Lindgren family for this wonderful donation.

Come Visit Your New Enlarged Genealogy Library!

As many of you know we have enlarged our library space and continue to expand our genealogy resources. We are so happy to have more space to work in and invite our members and all who are interested in genealogy and history to take a day to visit us.

We have a large flat screen television in our new addition to show DVDs and we also have wireless Internet available.

The library is staffed on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. If you wish to come another day, please contact us and we will try and make arrange-

ments to have a volunteer assist you.

We encourage genealogy groups to plan a genealogy trip and visit us. Nebraska Prairie Museum has many wonderful displays and have the Camp Atlanta German Prisoner of War Camp archive and a wonderful display of artifacts from Camp Atlanta. We know you will have a wonderful time visiting our museum.

The museum's telephone number is 308-995-5015. You can also contact Holdrege Area Genealogy Club: slater68949@rcom-ne.com or genealogy68949@gmail.com.

Memorial Gifts To The Don O. Lindgren

In Memory of RoDonna Harden

- Sandra Slater
- Virginia Lindstrom
- Ada Hinson
- Agnes Johnson

In Memory of Sara Olson

- Sandra Slater

In Memory of Wilma "Jean" Bibby

The Bibby family has given Jean Bibby's Memorials of \$445 to the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club. This money will be used to buy Harlan County Newspaper on microfilm.

In Sympathy

*"Earth has no sorrow that
Heaven cannot heal."*

New On The Bookshelf...

Donated by Roger Peterson

- The Nebraska Capitol, Election Laws of the State of Nebraska, 1899
- Holdrege, Nebraska 1906

Donated by the National Sod House Society

- Pogue, Pollock, Polk Genealogy
- "As I Remember" by Mary Anderson
- Mother O'Nine (Fishers and Reynolds)

Donated by Harold Marshall

- Canadian Post Cards

Donated by Ben and Dixie Boell

- Index to Yadkin County, North Carolina Historical Land Grant Map 1979
- Esbon, Kansas 1887-1987
- Rural Directory & Plat Book of Jewell County Kansas 1977
- Bicentennial Pictorial Atlas 1776-1976, Thayer County, Nebraska
- Unknown
- Fridhem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Funk, Nebraska 1879-1979

Donated by Dick Dyas

- The Trek of the Jayhawkers, By One of their Sons, E.W. Mecum

- Migration Trails By John Insley Coddington of Bordentown, New Jersey
- The Manley Travels from Illinois to Nebraska
- Phelps County and Harlan County, Nebraska Cemeteries 2005-2008
- Signers of the Mayflower Compact, Stephen Hopkins, Fourteenth signer
- The Families of the Bantas & William Johnson
- The Doolittle Family

Donated by Sally Massey

- Industrial and Agricultural Review of Nebraska 1917

Donated by Mary Kay Nelson

- National Genealogical Society Quarterly, December 2008

Donated by Sandra Slater

- Nebraska State Genealogy Quarterlies 2009
- 2004 First United Methodist Church Directories, Holdrege, Nebraska

Donated by Dorothy Carlson

- First Methodist Church Booklet

Donated by Ken Mossman

- Vital Records of New Durham and Middleham, New Hampshire 1887-1998

- Colonial Era History of Dover, New Hampshire
- Early Marriages of Strafford County, New Hampshire, Supplement 1630-1870
- Vital Records of Wakefield, New Hampshire, 1887-1938
- Digging for Genealogical Treasure in New England Town Records
- Home Life in Colonial Days
- Country Folklore 1920s-1930s and That's The Way It Was
- Genealogical Writing in the 21st Century
- Shaking the Family Tree

Donated by Dan Wells

- Bertrand, Nebraska High School Year Books 1978, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1994, 1996

Donated by Dorothy Peterson

- Roster of Soldiers & Sailors and Marines of Nebraska, published in 1925

Welcome Our New Member:

Barb Endorf
1912 West Charles
Grand Island, NE 68803

Eliza Suggs of Orleans, Harlan County,

Below are some excerpts from the book, "SHADOW AND SUNSHINE" by ELIZA SUGGS of Orleans, Nebraska.

OMAHA, NEB. 1906

Introduction.

While attending a camp meeting near Alma, Nebraska, during the summer of 1895, my attention was drawn to a little colored girl sitting in a baby cab, who appeared to take a deep interest in the services. I was told that it was Sister Eliza Suggs, who, amid deep affliction, was developing into a strong Christian character.

While the reader will be touched by the scenes of suffering related in this narrative, he will be impressed that Eliza does not belong to the despondent class. She is evidently of a cheerful temperament, possessing an overcoming faith which gives her the assurance that the God whom she loves and serves, intends to provide for and sustain her until life's journey is ended. She saw light where others would have seen only darkness; she cherished hope where others would have felt only despair; and fearing it might displease her Master, she rejected offers of worldly gain which others would have eagerly grasped. Of humble parentage, limited advantages, physical embarrassments, she is shedding rays of light along her pathway, and making impressions for good on the hearts and lives of those with whom she associates. What a marvel of grace!

It is not strange that one into whose life a kind Providence has brought so much of comfort, amid suffering; so much the world her life story. I believe much amid privation, should desire to give to of joy, amid sorrow; so much of blessing good will be accomplished by the circulation of this simple narrative, written, as I believe it to have been, purely for

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.

the glory of God. It will serve to forcibly illustrate how one in sore affliction and deep privation may possess the grace of perfect resignation to the will of God, and be ready for any service he may require. — BURTON R. JONES.

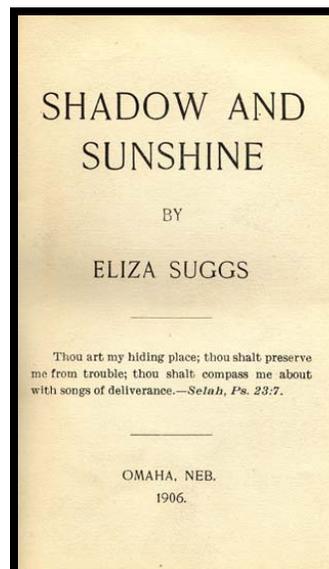
Personal Reminiscences and Testimony.

C. M. DAMON.

With much pleasure I learn that Sister Eliza Suggs, colored, of Orleans, Neb., is to bring out a book or biography and reminiscences of her parents. I know nothing in detail of her plans, but I shall be surprised if the book is not one of thrilling interest. The author is a most remarkable young woman. Born of such heritage of physical infirmity as is seldom known, she has surmounted incredible difficulties and made progress in education, light labor, and the development of Christian character, that is the astonishment and admiration of her multitude of friends. She is a mite of body—apparently less than the upper third of a normal growth.

Carried in arms or wheeled about in a carriage, her frail hands and well developed head have accomplished wonders, obtaining a fair education, which makes her a valuable assistant, sometimes as secretary of religious organizations and work. In former years she assisted her father,

(Suggs Continued on page 4)



(Suggs Continued from page 3)

more or less, in evangelistic work, and she has presided in public meetings with marked dignity and ability. Carried on the platform and moved about as occasion required by kind and willing attendants, I have perhaps never seen more clock-like precision than the execution of an interesting program, at which she presided in a public temperance meeting in the M. E. Church, during my last pastorate in Orleans.

She is one of several sons and daughters of most estimable Christian parents, who were born in slavery, whose thrilling story will be told in the book of which this may form a brief chapter. Her father was one of the ablest and comeliest preachers of his race whom I have known. He considered himself of unmixed blood. His manly form, fine countenance, and strong and melodious voice, made him attractive, both in speech and song.

When the author of this book was very young, I was witness of a most exciting episode in his remarkable history. We were on a camp ground in western Kansas. On Sabbath morning the service had closed and many had retired from the Tabernacle. Bro. Suggs had not yet left the platform where he had been speaking. He was tapped on the shoulder and requested to step outside when three men quickly handcuffed him and rushed him from the grounds. I was instantly notified that he had called for me and Rev. E. E. Miller. I reached him about forty rods away as they were ready to drive off the ground. He held up his manacled hands and with unaffected indignation, exclaimed: James Suggs, a murderer!" I inquired the meaning, and was informed he was a suspect from Ohio for whom a large reward was offered. The fearful blunder of a bungling detective and his assistants was apparent; but that did not help in the excitement of the

moment. I assured them of the error, asked what word I should send his wife; was requested to look after his horse tied on the ground, and they were gone. While others sought his release by legal means, unavailing, as he was so swiftly driven from one county to another, I telegraphed a friend in Topeka to see the Governor, and have the Ohio requisition refused, if it should be presented, as seemed probable. I then wrote Ex-governor St. John, who had employed him and the refugees which had poured into Kansas during the noted exodus from the South, and informed his old neighbors of Princeton, Ill. All this proved unnecessary, for in a day or two

he was taken before a Justice in Osborne county, and speedily demonstrated their mistake. The false arrest cost the detective severely, and it would have gone harder with him but for an error in the accusation under which he was confined for some time and brought to trial. An account of this singular affair may be detailed elsewhere. My efforts, occasioned by the excitement of the hour, served to bring out varied testimonials to his worth and high esteem in which he was held.



Eliza Suggs, Age 16

By the excitement of the hour, served to bring out varied testimonials to his worth and high esteem in which he was held.

Bro. Suggs has long since joined the throng of the ransomed ones, while his companion remains an honored and beloved pilgrim among the saints of Orleans.

One other thought comes to mind in this connection--his realization and enjoyment of what he sang so beautifully, the first time I ever heard it, "The Toils Of The Road Will Seem Nothing When I Get To The End Of The Way."

(Suggs Continued on page 7)

Holdrege's 'Elegant' Opera House Entertainment Center Of The Area

From 1958 Centennial Edition of the Holdrege Citizen

The quest for the finest in entertainment goes back to Holdrege's very beginning. No sooner did the town acquire a voice with the newspapers they were established than the need for an opera house or a meeting hall of some sort was being publicly proclaimed.

It was probably several months before the need was at least partially met and within a little over six years Holdrege had an opera house that was without question the finest and most elaborate in this part of the state.

Holdrege people, however, were able to enjoy a variety of entertainment even before a hall was built. Traveling troupes of players halted in Holdrege to augment the home talent offerings of the Holdrege Thespians, the lectures and political speakers. These entertainments were held in various building about town, sometimes at the courthouse, at the room known as Anderson's Hall and probably there were other rooms that were large enough to accommodate small audiences.

Shows that were stock entertainment in those days included *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Ten Nights in Bar-Room*, *Peck's Bad Boy* and others. Matinees were presented and windows had to be covered during the show to darken the room.

Then there were the street entertainers. For Example the Kickapoo Indian Show which dispensed Indian Sagwa for "Dyspepsia, Liver, Kidneys and Blood." The editor commented: "The Indian show had left us and the familiar cry of 'Sagwa! Sagwa!' Is heard no more. Lo, the poor Indian has gone, likewise the Squaw and little Papoose and our streets have once more become quite as of old with scarcely nothing to excite the interest of the small boy or the stranger..." There was much in their show that one could find to laugh at but some parts have better have been left out.

Anderson Hall was the scene of a showing of Lew Ginger's Famous Merrymakers Troupe, with a grand ball following the performance. Sometimes the appearance of these traveling troupes were gala occasions. When Uncle John Spruceby played Holdrege, the company numbered 35 people including two bands and an orchestra of 12 solo musicians. A street parade and concert at noon opened the showing.

The Cooper Grand

In June of 1885, Cooper and Moore let the contract for a furniture store 24x100 feet in size to be built on the west side of East Avenue between Third and Fourth Avenues. The location was described as a little north of the center block, which might have put it in the approximate location of the present building occupied by Anderson Heating and Plumbing Co.

Mr. Cooper suggested that the second floor of the building would make a fine opera house. A stock company was formed and the \$25 shares were all quickly taken by a Holdrege man. According to the initial plan, a "good and large stage" was to be erected, a parquet and dress circle formed and the back of the room so arranged the gallery room might be improvised to accommodate extra large audiences to a capacity of 1,000.

The building was built and the second floor came to be known as the "Cooper Grand" although it was not quite as "grand" as its first planners envisioned. However, it was the Holdrege show spot for several years, until the construction of the opera house and was in use for several years after that as a dance hall. The "Cooper Grand" occupied the second floor of the building at first and later was moved down to the first floor after the furniture store ceased operation.

Holdrege business men kept pressing for an opera house, and in the year of 1888 their plan began to take
(Opera Continued on page 6)

(Opera Continued from page 5)

shape. It was the summer of 1889 before actual construction was started on the new building. The opera house was located on the second and third floors of the "elegant brick and stone block" erected on the corner of West Avenue and Hayden Street. It was the handsomest building in this part of Nebraska and one in which all Holdrege citizens felt considerable pride.

The building was erected by Erickson and Johnson and furnished by Holdrege Opera House Co. who leased it for 10

years. Officers of the group were E. D. Einsel, president; H. O. Barber, vice president; F. A. Dean, secretary; L. R. Morris, treasurer, and these four officers with H. W. Scott were the directors.

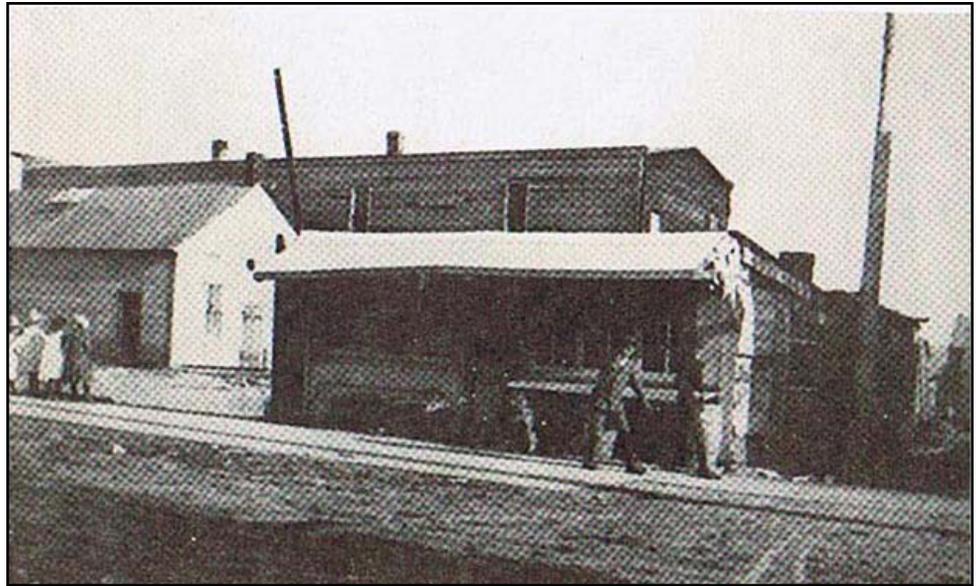
80 Incandescent Lights

The opera house was 49 by 87 feet in size, the stage 27x49, and there were three dressing rooms. The ceiling was 26 feet high with a dome having a 12 feet rise. It was heated by two hot air furnaces and lighted by 80 incandescent lights. The main entrance was on Hayden Street and was 10 feet width, while there was a stage entrance five feet wide on West Avenue.

The parquet and dress circles had 500 and the balcony 300 of the latest improved opera chairs. There were 10 changes of scenery.

The Andrew's Opera Company opened the house on Friday and Saturday of the week pending Christmas. The Andrews Company was considered one of the best show troupes on the road. The opera house seated 800 and filled to capacity each night.

The Holdrege Opera House came to be an entertainment center for the entire area and many a famous actor, actress or entertainer "trode the boards" there.



Fourth Avenue Street Scene. The large building in the background was built by Cooper and Moore in 1885 for use as a furniture store. They proposed that the upper story be used as an opera house and subscriptions were sold to local businessmen for necessary furnishings and seating. The opera house was called the "Cooper Grand." The small building in the foreground is located in the approximate location of 718 Fourth Avenue.

Shakespearean players, dramatic troupes, minstrel shows, opera companies and entertainers of every sort held forth from the opera house. Through the 90's and well into the early 1900s the entertainment presented there attracted large audiences from the immediate area as well as from towns up and down the railroads which led into the city. For many of the attractions, coaches were added to the trains to accommodate the many theatergoers coming to Holdrege.

First regular moving picture shows came to Holdrege in 1907. In August of that year Fred Hater of Hastings leased the north room of the opera house block and began operation of moving picture entertainment. The Citizen editor commented in an issue of that date: "Moving pictures are proving popular in other towns and will no doubt prove to be so here." There had been occasional showings here prior to that date of novel "animated pictures.

The opera house held a showing of the celebrated "Birth of a Nation" when the road show with its accompanying orchestra traveled across the United States. It was probably the first "big" movie to appear in Holdrege.

(Suggs Continued from page 4)

The devotion to the author of her sister, Katie, for years a member of the Official Board at Orleans, is something interesting and touching. Hard working as she is at home and away, she seems never to tire of the care of her afflicted but honored charge. When Eliza, hidden in church behind the seats in front, would testify, Kate rises with her in arms, and she speaks clearly and forcibly. There is not a family among our people in the place more respected or more deservedly so. Boarding with them for eight months, with every care and kindness shown, the writer witnesses that he never saw an improper act or heard an improper word. Having heard from the lips of Sister Suggs many an incident of slave days and war times, I shall await with interest the appearance of the forthcoming book.



James Suggs

Sketch of Father

"Some suck up poison from a sorrow's core, As naught but nightshade grew upon earth's ground; Love turned all his to heart's ease, and the more Fate tried his bastions, she but forced a door, Leading to sweeter manhood and more sound."

--James Russell Lowell.

My father and mother were slaves. Father was born in North Carolina, August 15th, 1831. He was a twin, and was sold away from his parents and twin brother, Harry, at the age of three years. This separation, at so tender an age, was for all time, as never again did he see his loved ones. In after years he had a faint recollection of his mother, and could remember distinctly the words of introduction with which he was handed over from his old master to his new:

"Whip that boy and make him mind."

A slave had no real name of his own, but was called by the name of his master; and whenever he was sold and changed masters, his name was changed to that of the new master. The parents gave his first, or Christian name, however, which was usually retained amid all his changing of masters. Father's parents named him James. So at this time his name was James Martin. He was sold by Mr. Martin for a hundred dollars, and taken to Mississippi. Afterward he was sold to Jack Kindrick, and again to Mr. Suggs, with whom he remained until the war broke out.

Father was a blacksmith by trade, and was considered a valuable slave. Mr. Suggs was a kind master, and as James was an industrious and obedient servant, he was allowed the privilege, after his day's work was done, of working after night for himself. He made pancake griddles, shovels, tongs, and other small articles, the proceeds from the sale of which brought in many a small coin. He was also allowed, in odd moments, to cultivate a small garden patch, on his own responsibility, and it was surprising what that little patch was made to yield. Naturally proud and ambitious, the money thus obtained was usually spent upon his person, enabling him to dress better and appear to much better advantage than his less enterprising compeers.

Slaves were not allowed to have an education. Father said he had to "pick up" what education he got, much as a rabbit might be supposed to pick up some tender morsel with the greyhounds hot in pursuit. When the master's children came from school, they would make letters and say, "Jim, you can't make that." But he would make it and find out what it was. Again he would say to them, "You can't spell "horse," or "dog," or some other word he wanted to would reply, "Yes, I can," and would spell it. All this time he was learning, while they had no idea that he

(Suggs Continued on page 8)

(Suggs Continued from page 7)

was storing these things up in his mind. Yes, he had to steal what learning he got.

While James was still quite young, Mr. Suggs bought a little slave girl, named Malinda Filbrick. In time, James and Malinda came to love each other, and were married while yet in their teens. The same pride of heart which had manifested itself in his own stylish appearance, now prompted him to lavish his extra earnings on his young bride. One instance of his extravagant indulgence was the purchase of a \$7.00 pair of ear-drops, which doubtless afforded him much gratification until the ill-fated day when they proved too strong a temptation to a party of Union soldiers, who carried them off as spoils. Another outlay of his surplus earnings was in the purchase, for his wife, of a remarkable quilt, made after the pattern known as "the chariot-wheel." This was truly a masterpiece of skill, and was highly prized by my mother. It seemed about to share the same fate as the ear-drops and was in the hands of a Union soldier, when the earnest pleadings of my mother prevailed upon the kind-hearted officer in charge to give orders for its restoration.

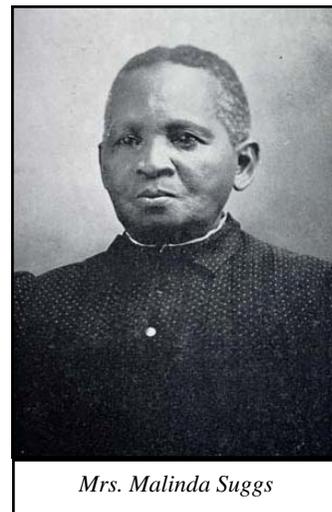
While still in slavery, father was wonderfully converted. Before his conversion he was a wicked young man. Pride in dress was not his only besetment. He loved to dance and drink, and have as good a time, from a worldly standpoint, as any human being could who was held in bondage. Whenever a slave wanted to go out to spend the evening he had to get a pass from his master; for there were more men called patrolmen, elected according to law, whose duty it was to seize and thoroughly chastise any slave who was so presumptuous as to venture out without a pass. If a slave was caught out after nine o'clock at night, without a pass, he was stripped to the waist and beaten thirty lashes on his naked back. It was against the law to whip a slave over his cloth-

ing. One night these patrolmen caught father out without a pass. He well knew what was to follow, and as they held him by the coat collar, he straightened back his arms and ran out of the coat leaving it in their hands. They got the coat, but James never got the whipping.

After he was converted, he would go to his master and ask to be allowed to go to meeting, and permission having been given, he would say, "And please, sir, may I have a pass?" At these meetings he would talk and exhort his fellow-slaves, until Mr. Suggs would say, "If James keeps on like this, he will surely make a preacher."

Father loved freedom; or at least he thought he should enjoy it. He never had been a free man, and hardly knew how it would seem to be free. But it is natural to every man, of whatever race or color, to want to be free. He used often to say to his young wife, "When the car of freedom comes along, I am going to get on board;" meaning that if he got a chance he was going to the war.

... Eliza Suggs' book, [Shadow And Sunshine](#) to be continued in the next issue of *Phelps Helps*



Mrs. Malinda Suggs

A Lively Fight At Latta's Barn

Fighting was probably one of the major causes of trouble in Holdrege and fights could break out over almost any reason.

In October of 1892, a broom cutter got into a tiff with brick yard worker.

The two had worked together briefly in the brick yard and apparently developed a grudge. One night, they ran into each other at Landstroms

Billiard Hall and got into an argument.

They went outside and ended up at Silas Latta's barn, where both the broom corn cutters and brick yard workers "went at it."

"Brick bats were flying in all directions," the Citizen reported, "several were hit and one of the brick yard men, Frank Peerson, was hit with a board having a nail in it."

After awhile, Charles Betz, the night watchman, was called in but no one told him there was a fight going on. When he got to the barn, something hit him on the side of the head, stunning him momentarily. He recovered quickly enough to chase the men, but all managed to get away.

Detective Work Goes For Naught

A Holdrege man put in a good piece of detective work in 1891, only to see the results of his work fly the coop.

It was February, when Elvin Price and Clarence Coplen notice a suspicious-looking man hanging around the depot. Clarence told his father and the elder Coplen decided to take a look. He recognized him as a man wanted in Saline so he notified the sheriff.

The man was taken to the county jail where he would be held for Saline County authorities. There was no mention of charges against the man but the Citizen noted that "on his person was found an ugly looking knife, razor, revolver."

That evening came the action that made Coplen boil. Here is how he described that, "A strange departure is made from the general routine."

"The writer, while in the army of the late war, spent a portion of his time guarding rebel prisoners. In the evening, we always doubled the guard and sometimes trebled (sic) it, but in this case

when night approached the guard was diminished and instead of putting the prisoner in irons or giving him a charge of two or three able bodied men, he was given in charge of an ex-soldier, one of the best men yet he was on the down hill side of life..." Three men could not cope with the prisoner in strength of body and muscle with a five or ten years term in the penitentiary looming up before him. Coplen said "It is insufficient to say that the prisoner escaped."

It was enough to make a man swear off detective work.

"When he plays the part of detective again," the Citizen said, "He will make the arrest himself or be very cautious in regard to whom he employs to assist.

Update On The Library Addition

Bill Perry has done it again!

Thank you, Bill for all your hard work and dedication to the entire museum!

We wish to thank Bill Perry for the building of the new addition to the library. The last few weeks he has added a sign-in podium with added storage and a book display for our publications.

We are making plans to reorganize and redesign the old library.

We are presently moving old books out of the storage area to make room for our files that will be incorporated into our cupboards.



Bill Perry



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Holdrege, NE 68949
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED