

REMINDER

The PCHS Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 5, 2009 at the Nebraska Prairie Museum with the Program beginning at 7:30 p.m. followed by the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

PHELPS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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SPRING & SUMMER HOURS

Monday - Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM
Saturday - Sunday, 1 PM to 5 PM

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www.nebraskaprairie.org

From Our President

It finally happened. I had the perfect Sunday. Well, I had better explain what I mean. When it is your Sunday to operate the Museum nothing is worse than not having any visitors. Sunday March 29, 2009 was the best I've ever had from an attendance standpoint. Over fifty visitors and for a variety of reasons.

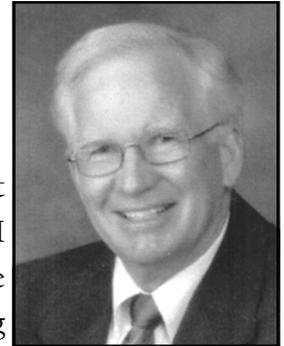
When I arrived shortly before 1:00 PM there were already four or five cars in the parking lot. The Furnas - Gosper County Historical Society was meeting here at 1:00 to tour the museum,

Election Notice

The Phelps County Historical Society will hold their election at the Annual meeting on Tuesday, May 5th. Four incumbents are up for re-election: Bob Vandell, John Ivey, John Thorburn, and Nancy Morse.

have a society meeting, and most important of all to see what we had done with the art work they had given us from the chapel at Camp Atlanta. There were eighteen visitors as soon as I unlocked the door. They were extremely pleased with the magnificent oak framework display Bill Perry had constructed for the art work. They also were very complimentary of the museum and the Phelps County Historical Society and hope to someday start to develop their own set of buildings. The Donald O. Lindgren Library and Genealogy area were also something they really admired.

At 1:30 PM members of another group started to arrive. These were relatives and family members of the Guthrie family from the Wilcox and Holdrege area. They were meeting at the museum to celebrate a couple of birthdays and enjoy a pleasant afternoon. There were about twenty-five of them. They really



Bob Butz, President

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(President Continued from page 1)

enjoyed themselves and felt it was a great place to meet because of the areas of interest for all ages and tastes. Some of them even had items in the museum they had donated.

Karen and Cecil Lindstrom brought Karen's sister and brother and their spouses to tour the museum and see the Beauty Shop display that Karen helped design and assemble. They ran out of time and plan to come back. Karen's brother-in-law was particularly interested in our broom making machine because he makes brooms back in Iowa.

Arlynn and Andrew Aldinger from the Wilcox area spent some quality father and son time together at the museum. Bob Slater and his grandson, Robby, were also spending time together at the museum. There also was young couple on a Sunday afternoon date enjoying the many interesting exhibits.

Two couples from Kenesaw were also visitors. The younger of the two couples had visited before and knew their friends would really enjoy our museum. When they were trying to decide where they would go for a ride on Sunday afternoon, we were it. They loved the museum, but when they went in the library and started to research the Adams County section and found information on some of their family they decided they would return and learn more about genealogy.

My hope is not that you will be impressed with the number of visitors we had, but to learn the many reasons the visitors were there. Hopefully you will follow their example and come visit our museum and encourage your friends and relatives to do the same. Come enjoy our new exhibits, library addition, DVD library of veteran interviews and other historical videos.

Funeral Homes of Phelps County

by Patti Simpson

This year, 2009, will mark the 100th anniversary for the Nelson-Bauer Funeral Home here in Holdrege. This occasion made me wonder just how many different Phelps county funeral homes had there been? When I began my search, I thought the list would be short, but it turns out, in fact, there have been several.

When the first white settlers came to Phelps county in the 1870s, there were no funeral homes. Families had to take care of their own. The deceased were placed in homemade caskets and usually displayed in the family parlor until the time

of the funeral. In the 1880s that began to change.

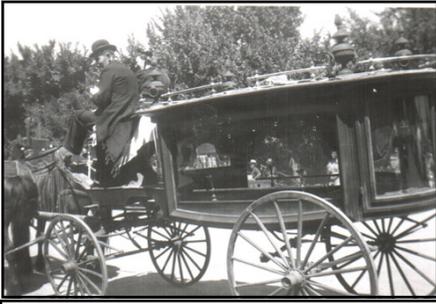
Businessmen opened local furniture stores that supplied ready-made caskets to families. It is believed that the first furniture store of this type was probably located in the



Photo of the C.A. Baker Funeral Home hearse at Otto Johnson's Mother's funeral in 1913. Mr. Baker is next to the hearse and Clair Baker is the driver. Pall bearers were Wm. Roos, Gust Gustafson, Leonard Gustafson and Claus Gustafson. Photo courtesy of the Donald O. Lindgren Genealogy Library at

(Funeral Homes Continued on page 3)

(Funeral Homes Continued from page 2)



This is a photo of the C. A. Baker Funeral Home's hearse. Photo courtesy of the Donald O. Lindgren Genealogy Library at the Nebraska

town of Phelps Center, Phelps county's original county seat. Then the railroad came through and the city of Holdrege was born in 1883. Many businessmen,

probably including those in the furniture/casket business, literally picked up their belongings and moved from Phelps Center to Holdrege.

Bertrand Funeral Homes

In Bertrand, the firm of Samuelson & Sandstrom Furniture and Undertaking was established in 1892. Andrew John (A. J.) Sandstrom purchased Mr. Samuelson's interest in the business and changed the name to the Sandstrom Funeral Home. A. J. Sandstrom's brother, August Sandstrom joined his brother in the business in 1905. A. J. Sandstrom's son, Carl Sandstrom joined firm in 1927. This business was ran by the Sandstrom family until 1980 when it was purchased by the Nelson-Harris Funeral Home in Holdrege.

Holdrege Funeral Homes

The first undertaking business in Holdrege is unknown, but from researching old newspaper ads and obituaries there were at least two in Holdrege in 1886.

John C. Rundstrom opened Rundstrom Furniture and Undertaking business in 1886. Mr. Rundstrom's

obituary noted that he was involved in the business until he and his family moved to Idaho in 1911. The firm must have merged prior to 1890 because it was called Rundstrom & Johnson Furniture and Undertakers in the 1890 and 1891 Gazetteer.

According to his obituary, James E. Cooper and his brother also opened Cooper Brothers Furniture and Undertaker Supplies in Holdrege in 1886. James Cooper sold the business and moved away for two years to Colorado in about 1896 and then returned to Holdrege in 1898-1899. At that time, he and Mr. Oscar Hopkins purchased the store of A.S. Watson Furniture and Undertaking. Then, a few months before Mr. Cooper's death in 1900, Mr. Hopkins retired from the business. At that time, Mr. Cooper was assisted in the business by his son, Will Cooper and the business was known as J. E. Cooper & Son Furniture and Undertaking.

In March 1903 the Rundstrom & Johnson business listed above combined with the Cooper business and Rundstrom & Cooper Furniture and Undertaking was established. This new business may have lasted until Mr. Rundstrom moved to Idaho in 1911. It is unknown if he sold his business before moving to Idaho.

Another early funeral home was the Jackson & Son Furniture and Embalmers found in a September 1905 advertisement. There is nothing more known about this firm.

In 1896, a well known Holdrege businessman and entrepreneur, Morten Johnson purchased a furniture store in Holdrege, which he persuaded Rudolph Godfrey Borchert to operate. It was known as the Johnson & Borchert Furniture and Undertaking Co. This firm existed from 1896 to 1907, when it was then purchased by Clifford A. Baker and

(Funeral Homes Continued on page 4)

(Funeral Home Continued from page 3)

became the C. A. Baker Funeral Home.

The C. A. Baker Funeral Home was located at 718 East Avenue which is the current home of Phil and Pam Soreide. From 1908-1910 he also sold furniture at 320-322 East Avenue, the current location of Bruce Furniture. In 1947, Clifford Baker sold the funeral home business to Mr. Wayne Harris of Holdrege. Mr. Harris then re-established the business at the corner of Fourth and Burlington Streets and it became known as the Harris Funeral Home.

Another Holdrege funeral home was A. E. Roach Furniture and Undertaking. Originally located at 317 West Avenue, this firm was established sometime prior to 1907. Then in 1908, Carl S. Nelson stopped in Holdrege on his way to Seattle, Washington. He came to town on a Saturday evening and had a lay-over until the next train departed for the west. Mr. Nelson stopped in front of A. S. Roach Furniture and Undertaking and engaged the proprietor in a conversation. He told Mr. Roach that he had learned the undertaking business and obtained a state license while working in Osceola, Nebraska and he that he planned to remain in the same work when he arrived



This is a photo of 718 East Avenue where the C.A. Baker Funeral Home was located. Photo courtesy of the Donald O. Lindgren Genealogy Library at the Nebraska Prairie Museum.

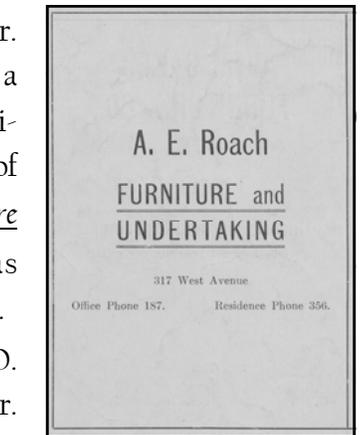


on the West Coast. Mr. Roach offered to sell a part interest in his business, and the firm of Roach & Nelson Furniture and Undertaking was established in early 1909.

In 1910, Mr. F. D. Swanson purchased Mr. Roach's interest in the business and the name changed to Nelson & Swanson Furniture and Undertaking. It was at this time that the business moved to the Masonic Temple Building at 413 West Avenue where The Connection is currently operating their business. Then in 1920, Carl S. Nelson became the sole proprietor of the business and the name changed to C. S. Nelson Furniture and Undertaking.

In 1931, the second generation of the Nelson family, Clarence S. Nelson entered the business. It was at this time that the funeral home split from the furniture business. The Nelson Funeral Home then moved to 621 East Avenue where Das Gasthaus (The Guest House) is currently located. It remained there until 1966. In 1943 the furniture part of the Nelson business moved from 413 West Avenue to 322 East Avenue where the Bruce Furniture store is now located.

Keith B. Nelson joined the family business in 1963. In 1966, the Nelson Funeral Home purchased the Harris Funeral Home located at 401 Burlington Street and moved into the Harris building



(Funeral Homes Continued on page 5)

(Funeral Homes Continued from page 4)

establishing the Nelson-Harris Funeral Home. This was now the only funeral home in Holdrege.

In 1977 the Nelson-Harris Funeral Home purchased the Mitchell Funeral Home from George Mitchell in Oxford, Harlan County, Nebraska and renamed

this branch office the Mitchell-Nelson Funeral Home.



This is an early photo of the residence at 401 Burlington Street, later known as the Harris Funeral Home. Photo courtesy of the Donald O. Lindgren Genealogy Library at the Nebraska Prairie Museum.

In 1980 the Nelson-Harris Funeral Home purchased the Sandstrom Funeral Home in Bertrand and kept the Sandstrom Funeral Home name for this branch office.

In 1981 the Nelson-Harris Funeral Home then purchased the Mitchell Funeral Home in Orleans, Harlan County, Nebraska and also kept the Mitchell Funeral Home name for this branch office.

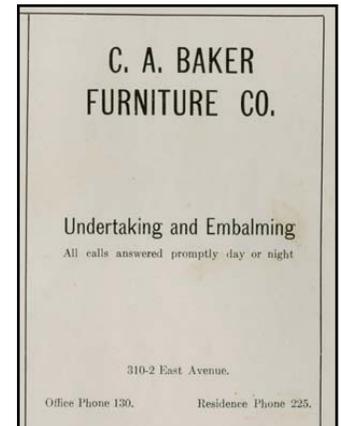
In 1998, Lexington natives, Ryan L. Bauer and his wife, Jody relocated to Holdrege to began working with the Nelson's and assumed management in January of 1999 at which time the Nelson family sold the business to The Keystone Group. In 2004, the Bauer's acquired ownership of the Nelson-Harris Funeral Home and the associated branches in Bertrand, Oxford and Orleans and have continued to extend the same unsurpassed service that south central Nebraska has grown accustomed to.

Ryan and Jody renamed the funeral home in Holdrege to Nelson-Bauer Funeral Home to reflect the new ownership as well as holding on to the long community tradition of the Bauer's predecessors. Besides the main location in Holdrege, the Nelson-

Bauer Funeral Homes, Inc. continue to operate the Sandstrom Funeral Home in Bertrand, the Mitchell-Nelson-Bauer Funeral Home in Oxford, and the Mitchell Funeral Home in Orleans as a vital part of their business.

The Bauer's continue to offer the very best care for families and all the guidance and support needed during the most difficult time of our lives. According to their website, their mission is, "When hearts are heavy we will assist your family by showing tender care and encouragement in caring out your wishes and planning a personalized and memorable tribute to celebrate your loved one's life."

From horse drawn funeral coaches to reading obituaries on the internet, a lot has changed over the last 100 years. It makes me wonder - what will the next 100 years bring?



Current photo of the Nelson-Bauer Funeral Home located at 401 Burlington Street in Holdrege.

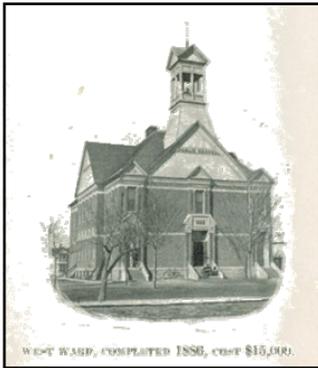
School Year Books Can Provide Good Information On The Early Life Of Your Relatives

By Sandra Slater

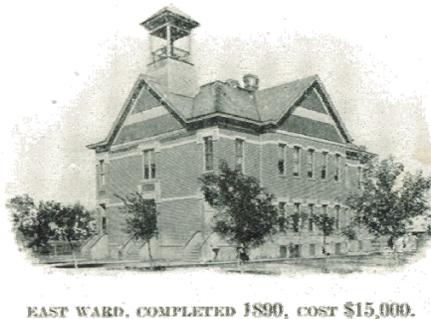
The earliest Holdrege yearbook in the Don O. Lindgren Library is a 1908 Holdrege Sand-Burr. It is filled with interesting pictures, drawings, history of the school, students, teachers and even past graduates from Holdrege dating back to 1890. A declaration in the book states, "This year book is intended to take the place of the usual senior orations". Why the yearbook was called Sand-Burr is unknown as there is no explanation on how the name was decided. These Sand-Burrs' continued until

1928 and were published in two or four year time spans.

Holdrege School District was organized on March 14, 1884 with school being held in a building at 521 Garfield. The first school building



was built in the winter of 1886-1887 on the same grounds that Erlandson's Square is located on the south side between Blaine and Tilden Streets. This building was called West Ward School and cost \$15,000. East Ward School was built in 1890 on 5th and Logan Street for about the same price.



The first graduating class of 1890 is listed in this 1908-year book. The 1890 graduates who were listed are: Edward O. Barr, listed as deceased; Ernest E. Barber was proprietor of roller mills in Lincoln, NE; John E. Fleener was a business man



in Raton, Mexico, Alex H. Sheldon was an agriculturist near Lincoln, Nebraska and Minnie E. Smith was now Minnie Julian and resided at Mishawaka, Indiana. In fact, this Sand-Burr has this type of listing available for all graduates mentioned between 1890 and 1907.

Each teacher is listed with a history and their individual photographs, as are the seniors of 1908. The younger classes are in-group pictures.

Athletics were an important part of there activities. The boys played baseball, basketball and gymnasium, which we call gymnastics today. Girls also had gymnasium and a basketball team.

Music was enjoyed by having Quartets and a Glee Club.

The book is also filled with jokes, poems, mottos, class yells. The sophomore class yell was.

Bingalo! Bingalo! Bing! Boom Ben!

We're the class of 1910

We're the class that makes the scores

We're the Holdrege Sophomores!

In The Annals of the seniors we learn some of the achievements of the year.

(Sand-Burr Continued on page 7)

(Sand-Burr Continued from page 6)

*“In that golden month of autumn,
Stood Miss Smith before the students
In the morning exercises.
Stood she there and told unto them,
How they needed a piano
Both to sing and march by,
How it could be gotten quickly
If they each would earn a dollar.*

*Then the student concourse answered,
“We will do it, we will earn them.
Earn the bright round silver dollar.
On next Saturday we’ll earn them,
Gladly earn the silver dollars.”
Sure enough on Monday morning,
Brought they each a silver dollar.
With many cut and bruise accompanied,
Thus to prove they have earned them.*

Another part of the Annals stated - When they were sophomores in 1906 the high school was being built.

*“Now the new high school building,
Was not yet quite all completed,
So the scholars must their studies
Learn at home and just recite them
Where they could a vacant room find,
In the nearby Grammar building.
In their manner they continued
‘Till their new home was quite finished.*

*Then the juniors raised their colors,
But the sophomores raised them higher,*



SAND-BURR, ANNALS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL

*And they floated o’re the school house
During all the spring remaining,
Even far into the summer
Did they float there in the breezes?*

This indicates that the Roosevelt High School was completed in 1906. It stood at 515 Tilden for many years.

*Then there is the joke section.
“There was a small boy name Ray
Who sat in a very bad way
When his teacher reproved,
The little boy moved
To a posture quite prim, so they say*

And last are the advertisements that help pay for the yearbook. Here we see an ad for Max Uhlig’s Hardware Co. where a person could buy a refrigerator for \$8 and up, an ice cream freezer for \$1.35 and a lawn mower from \$2.60 and up.

The School year books are a history source we rarely think of but as shown here there are many items that may interest the family historian. We continue to try and complete your yearbook collection. Let us know if you might have one to donate.

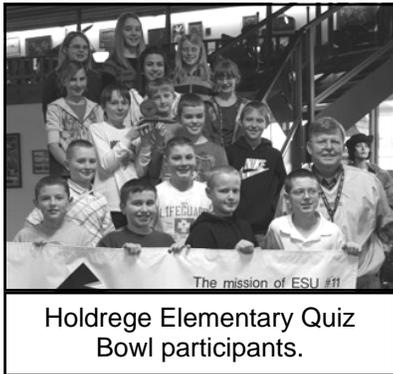


ESU #11 Holds Quiz Bowls at Museum

Earlier this year, ESU #11 held their Elementary and Middle School quiz bowls at the Nebraska Prairie Museum. Several schools in the ESU #11 area participated. The Museum will also be hosting the Senior High and State Quiz Bowls in late April. The Museum is able to host these activities because of our new sound system, projector, big screen, wireless access and video access. The video access was installed by Bob Hays. The

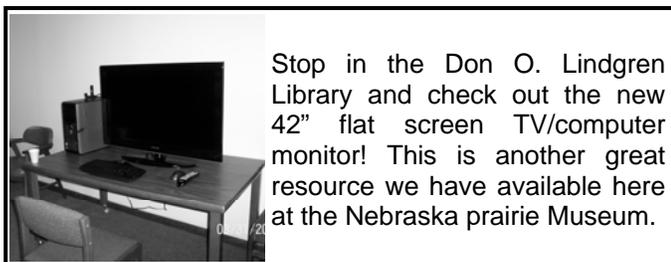


Bertrand Elementary Quiz Bowl participants.



Holdrege Elementary Quiz Bowl participants.

Nebraska Prairie Museum is one of only a few museums with both wireless and video access. If your organization needs a multi-purpose facility with up-to-date electronic capabilities, please consider holding your meeting here at the Nebraska Prairie Museum. We have a LOT to offer!



Stop in the Don O. Lindgren Library and check out the new 42" flat screen TV/computer monitor! This is another great resource we have available here at the Nebraska prairie Museum.

This I Remember

*By Leona Steele Johnson as told to
Alice Berg Johnson in the October 1978
Christian Homes Newsletter*

The brothers, Henry and August Steele settled on a farm 2-3/4 miles west of Loomis some time during the late 1890's. August Steele, his wife Ellen Olson Steele, daughter Leona age four (Mrs. Emery Johnson) Grandma Steele (August's mother) Grandpa Olson (Ellen's father) and Henry Steele lived together on the place which in later years became the Henry Steele farm home.

It was a hot and dry day the 23rd of March 1905. The stubble fields had grown up with 'tickle grass' (scientific name unknown) a light and fluffy type that burned like gasoline. The fire approached from the Republican Valley in a south wind that swept the area with hot flames and smoke. The Steele farm was unprotected and in its direct path.

August Steele lay ill at the time the fire was sighted and it was up to his wife Ellen to rush to the barn and release the horses so they could escape the oncoming flames. The other four members of the family took refuge in the cave which was a short distance from the frame house. In the mean time, Ellen hurried to the well for water which she poured on the wooden stairway that led down into the cave. If the steps burned, she feared they might suffocate from the smoke and could not make a safe exit later.

Ellen's last frantic thought was to save a few precious articles from the dwelling house; some important legal papers, a cherished picture album, and a few other treasures. She made it back to the cave in time through the intense heat and smoke.

(Steele Continued on page 12)

Annual Meeting Program to Honor Harry Dahlstrom's 90th Birthday

By Patti Simpson

The Annual meeting program will celebrate Harry Dahlstrom's 90th birthday and feature some of his framed black and white photography. Harry's



Harry & Evie Dahlstrom

photos include his military service experiences during WWII and his early life here in Phelps county with his wife, Evie.

Please join us on Tuesday night, May 5th at 7:30 p.m. to honor this special Phelps County Historical Society member!



One of Harry's WWII photos



Dan VanDyke

Executive Director's Message

By Dan VanDyke

One of the projects that the Nebraska Prairie Museum/Phelps County Historical Society has been working on is the Veteran Voices Project. Wayne and Warner Carlson have been interviewing Phelps County Veterans to record their memories of service in the different branches of the Armed Service.

Listed below are the names of the veterans who have been interviewed. These DVD interviews can be viewed in The Donald O. Lindgren Library. A new computer with a large monitor is available in the new library addition for visitors.

LaVale Allard, Wilbur & Ruth Black, Ben Boell, Joe Buettner, Milt & Irene Barker, Harry Dahlstrom, Lewis Fagot, Lester Harmon, Frank Hilsabeck, Warren Jacobson, Charles E. Johnson, Harold Johnson, Donald Kamtz, Warren Metzger, Delbert Moore, Rowland McClymont, Dick Mulliner, Roy Pearson, Bill Perry, Ray Reeser, Dean Salyers, Ernest Sweeney and Gerald Weber.

Wayne & Warner would like any veteran who would like to share their memories of service to contact them or The Nebraska Prairie Museum.

Unique Gifts at the Museum Gift Shop!

Are you looking for that "special" Mother's Day or Father's Day gift? Why not check out the Nebraska Prairie Museum's Gift Shop? They have several unique gifts including framed black and white photos taken by Harry Dahlstrom during his WWII service and early years in Phelps County. Come check us out!





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Donald O. Lindgren Library Volunteers

By Patti Simpson

Do you like to spend your volunteer time helping people and making a difference? Can you spare some extra time on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons? Do you like socializing and making new friends? If you answered YES to any of these questions, the Donald O. Lindgren Genealogy Library volunteers need YOU!

Library volunteers meet every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon at 1:00 p.m. at the library in the Nebraska Prairie Museum. Besides filing and organizing the library, they help researchers looking for answers. They also take a little time each afternoon to share a coffee break. Computer skills are helpful, but not required - just a love for volunteering.

Please consider this YOUR personal invitation to come join us!



A few of the Donald O. Lindgren Library volunteers sharing a coffee break on March 31st. Volunteers clockwise from bottom left: Virginia Lindstrom, Lourie Johnson, Ada Hinson, Sandra Slater, Mary Lou Abramson, Susan Perry and Mary Hammond.



**Phelps County
Historical Society
Memorials &
Honorariums
January 2, 2009 ~
March 31, 2009**

In memory of Lloyd Erickson

Olson Families of New Jersey and
Pennsylvania

Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Westerlin

Florence Skallberg

Donna Silver

Mr. & Mrs. Gary Mueller

Marcia Rost

Mr. & Mrs. Charles Wohlgemuth

Mr. & Mrs. Roger Tweedy

Barbara Malm

John B.C.

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

Mr. & Mrs. Neil Grothen

Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Quincy

Mr. & Mrs. H.W. Sandell

Mr. William Johnson

Mr. & Mrs. Mark Brohman

Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Westcott

Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Fulk

Mr. & Mrs. John D. Abrahamson

Mr. & Mrs. Ed Schrock

Mr. & Mrs. Jack Waller

Mr. & Mrs. Joe T. Hays

Elizabeth A. McClymont

Mr. & Mrs. Ed Erickson

Mr. & Mrs. James Ostgren

Ruthyle N. Julien

Mr. & Mrs. Darryl Olson

Mr. & Mrs. Vernon Nelson

In memory of Sara Olson

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

Mr. & Mrs. James Ostgren

In memory of Delbert Wallander

Wallander Estate

Florence Skallberg

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Lofquist

In memory of RoDonna Hardin

Mr. & Mrs. Dean Anderson

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

Clark Lindholm

Mr. & Mrs. Roger C. Allmand

Mr. & Mrs. Jack Waller

Mr. & Mrs. Wilbur Black

Harry Dahlstrom

Jane Quinn

Mr. & Mrs. Ross Winz

Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Scoville

Joan Burbach

Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Lindholm

Mr. & Mrs. John Gustafson

Mr. & Mrs. Vincent Colgan

In memory of Dick Jensen

Mr. & Mrs. Dean Anderson

Harry Dahlstrom

Mr. & Mrs. Roger Allmand

Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Westcott

Mr. & Mrs. Larry Lindstrom

Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Fulk

Mr. & Mrs. Wilbur Black

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

Joan Burbach

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Slater

Mr. & Mrs. Vincent Colgan

In memory of Helen Bernt

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

In memory of Dale Morse

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

In memory of Bruce Christensen

Mr. & Mrs. Warner Carlson

Mr. & Mrs. Sam Stroup

Mr. & Mrs. Roger Allmand

Mr. & Mrs. James Ostgren

Mr. & Mrs. Bill Perry

Mrs. Milrae J. Christensen

Mr. & Mrs. Del Pearson

In memory of Bernice Lindgren

Joan Beckman

Virginia Lindstrom

Mr. & Mrs. Floyd Massey

Mr. & Mrs. Warner Carlson

Mr. & Mrs. Wilbur Black

Harriet Silvey

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

Mr. & Mrs. James VanMarter

Lucille Erickson

Mr. & Mrs. Jay Lillyhorn

Mr. & Mrs. Elvan Peterson

Mr. & Mrs. Steve Lindgren

Mr. & Mrs. Dale T. Lindgren

Mr. & Mrs. Lucas Bates

Carole Peterson

First National Bank

Mr. & Mrs. Dick Anderson & Tim

In memory of Robert Johnson

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

In memory of Darrel Fuesner

Mr. & Mrs. Lamont Englund

In memory of Dr. Robert

Anderson

Mr. & Mrs. Duane Rupkalvis

Mr. & Mrs. Wes Nelson

Mr. Robert Hardin

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

In memory of Dick Damrow

Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Westerlin

In memory of Deron Hardin

Mr. & Mrs. Vincent Colgan

In memory of Sharon Johnson

Mr. & Mrs. Vincent Colgan

In memory of Charles "Bill" Cole

Mr. & Mrs. Lamont Englund

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

In memory of Gary Johnson

Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Samuelson

In memory of Marcia Gewecke

Mr. & Mrs. Wes Nelson

In memory of Joyce Glendon

Janet S. Sarbou

In memory of Mary Tringe

Mr. & Mrs. Warner Carlson

(Steele Continued from page 8)

While the Steeles were in their underground shelter, a horse-back rider was speeding from the south to the frame school house (Dist 60) a short distance east from the Steele farmstead. He stopped his horse by the school house door and alerted the teacher to take the pupils and 'flee east' toward the town of Loomis.

On their way they came to the Gust P. Carlson home, a two-room soddy which was protected by a plowed field. The pupils and teacher went no farther. One of the little school girls was Miss Hilda Carlson, now residing at 416 Hancock Street in Holdrege, a daughter of the Carlsons. She recalls vividly the horseman at the door, (Robert Morrison) and the loud crackling of the raging fire in the corn stalks. The Carlson place is now the Forrest Morrison farm.

When the ravaging fire had somewhat abated, Grandma Steele wanted to leave the cave. Leona Johnson states how she and her grandmother crawled through wire fences and smoke over the charred ground to the Gust P. Carlson place. They were in need of food after the exhausting catastrophe.

Grandpa Olson was missing! He had been reluctant to leave the cave and was the last one out. Gust Carlson hitched his horses to a spring wagon and went to search for him. He found Grandpa Olson in the grass, succumbed from smoke due to a long condition, and with a last possession clutched in his hand, his money pouch. Hilda Carlson remembers well the sight of his charred body lying in the wagon by the sod house wall. He was later interred in the Steele burial lot at Moses Hill cemetery.

The two-room soddy was over crowded and the Steeles went back west to the Charlie Johnson farm place where a two story frame house had

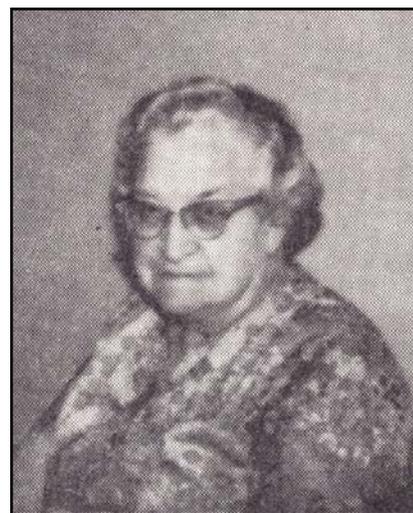
ample room for them to stay for a few days. This was the parental home of Fat Dave and Ted Johnson and is now the Carl Freeburg place.

Henry Steele who had driven earlier into Holdrege escaped the fire. He and his fiancé, Alma Nelson (now Mrs. Alma Steele at Christian Homes) returned later in the day to the devastated farmstead.

The air in a vast area was polluted with smoke and many farmers hauled buckets of water in carts, supplied with gunny sacks to help fight the flames where the fire continued.

Then as now, the neighbors in the area were ready to share the needs of a stricken family. A place to sleep and a place to eat during the months of rebuilding the farmstead was provided for them at the John Forsberg farm home. In spite of the loss of all their possessions, the Steele brothers, undaunted in their pioneer spirit, were determined to begin again.

The fire finally 'burned itself out' on its way to the Platte River Valley - a conflagration never forgotten by a little four-year-old girl.



Leona Steele Johnson ~ ca 1978