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NEBRASKA FOLKLORE

— Proverbs. prophecies, signs, and sayings —

NEBRASKA FOLKLORE

PROVERBS
PROPHECIES
SIGNS AND
SAYINGS

PAMPHLET
NINE



FEDERAL WRITERS PROJECT
NEBRASKA OCT. 1, 1937

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NEBRASKA FOLKLORE PAMPHLETS
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Number Nine
 PROVERBS, PROPHECIES, SIGNS AND SAYINGS

Lincoln, Nebraska
 October 1, 1937
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Editor's Note:

A Nebraska origin is not claimed for the proverbs and sayings in this pamphlet. They are, however, used in Nebraska, and have been collected by field workers on the project, volunteer contributors, grade and high school pupils over the State. They have been confirmed by numerous consultants, persons of all ages and occupations. The more familiar this material is to Nebraskans the more truly does it merit its place in Nebraska folklore, and the more its value will increase with the passing of time.

WEATHER SIGNS

A clear sunset is a sign of fair weather for the next day.

If muskrats build large thick houses the winter will be severe.

If animals have heavy fur coats the winter will be severe.

Green in a cloud indicates hail.

If hair curls more than usual it is a sign of rain.

A red sunrise is a sign of rain.

If you can hang a powder horn on the lower part of the crescent moon the weather will be rainy.

Mackerel sky, mackerel sky,
 Never long wet, never long dry.

If all the food on the table is eaten the next day will be fair.

If a rooster crows before he goes to bed,
 He will get up with a wet head.

Sunset red and morning gray
 Sends the traveler on his way.
 Sunset gray and morning red
 Keeps the traveler to his bed.

If the sunset is red the following day will be windy.

If smoke goes straight up the day will be fair.

A red sunrise foretells rain before the day is over.

If it rains before 10 o'clock it will rain every day for a week.

Rain before seven, quit before eleven.

A ring around the moon is a sign of storm and the number of stars within the ring indicates the number of days before the storm.

If pigs gather straw it is a sign of storm.

If swallows fly close together it is a sign of storm.

Rainbow at night, sailors' delight,
Rainbow in the morning, sailors take warning.

Thick corn husks foretell a severe winter.

A black Christmas, a full graveyard.

If it rains on Easter Sunday it will rain for the following ~~seven~~ Sundays.

Rain when the sun shines, rain all day tomorrow.

If March comes in like a lion it will go out like a lamb;
If it comes in like a lamb it will go out like a lion.

If the groundhog sees his shadow on February second there will be six weeks more cold weather.

If flies bite hard it is a sign of rain.

The first three days of spring rule the spring months.

If the first of July be rainy weather,
'Twill rain off and on for four weeks together.

A rainbow is a sign the rain is over.

CHARACTER SIGNS

Big ears indicate generosity and small ears stinginess.

A person with a pointed nose is meddlesome.

Red hair is the sign of a hot temper.

If your eyebrows meet you will become wealthy.

A high forehead is a sign of intelligence.

Eyes set close together indicate a bad temper.

Large eyes signify intelligence.

Monday's child is fair of face,
 Tuesday's child is full of grace,
 Wednesday's child is loving and giving,
 Thursday's child works hard for a living,
 Friday's child is full of woe,
 Saturday's child has far to go,
 But the child that is born on the Sabbath day
 Is blith and bonny and good and gay.

A person with a pointed chin is snooty.

A large mouth is a sign of generosity.

Blue eyed beauty do your mother's duty,
 Black eye pick-a-pie turn around and tell a lie,
 Green eyed greedy-gut turn around and eat the world up.

A person with little eyes is shrewd and treacherous.

EXPRESSIONS OF COMPARISON

As big as life	As easy as pie
As bitter as gall	As easy as falling off a log
As black as your hat	As empty as air
As blind as a bat	As fast as a horse can trot
As blue as indigo	As fast as you can say "Jack Robinson"
As bold as a brass monkey	As fast as greased lightning
As brave as a lion	As fat as a pig
As bright as a dollar	As fair as a lily
As brown as a nut	As fine as frog's hair
As broad as it is long	As fit as a fiddle
As busy as a bee	As firm as a rock
As busy as a cranberry merchant	As flat as a pancake
As black as the ace of spades	As free as a bird
As black as a crow	As frisky as a colt
	As full as a tick
As clear as a bell	
As coarse as a horse's tail	As gentle as a lamb
As cool as a cucumber	As good as his bond
As common as an old shoe	As good as gold
As contrary as a mule	As graceful as a swan
As crazy as a hoot owl	As green as grass
As crazy as a loon	As green as a gourd
As crazy as a bed bug	
As cross as two sticks	As hard as a rock
As cross as a bear	As hard as flint
As crooked as a dog's hind leg	As happy as the day is long
As crooked as a ram's horn	As harmless as a kitten

As dark as a pall	As heavy as load
As dark as Egypt	As hungry as a wolf
As dead as a door nail	As high as a cat's back
As deep as a well	As hot as blazes
As dirty as a pig	As harmless as a fly
As drunk as a lord	
As dry as a sponge	As independent as a hog on ice
As dry as a bone	As innocent as a babe
As dry as tinder	
As dumb as an ox	As light as day

(To be concluded)

OMENS OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

If a girl takes the last piece of bread on the plate she will be an old maid.

If your shoestring comes untied your sweetheart is thinking of you.

The girl who catches the bride's bouquet will be married next.

If the bridegroom carries the bride over the threshold of her new home, it will bring luck, and happiness to the couple.

Happy is the bride that the sun shines on
And woe to the bride that the rain rains on.

For good luck the bride should wear something old and something new, something borrowed, something blue.

Married in red, wish yourself dead,
Married in black, wish yourself back,
Married in blue, you'll always be true,
Married in green, ashamed to be seen.

The first man who walks across the threshold of the door above which the lucky part of a wishbone has been placed will be the future husband of the one who put it there.

The first man a girl meets after walking seven rails without falling off will be her future husband,

Name the four posts of a bed in which you are sleeping for the first time with the names of the four men you like best. The one about whom you dream will be your future husband.

Have a friend snap and name the apple you are about to eat. When you reach the core take out one seed at a time, saying:

One I love, two I love, three I love I say,
Four I love with all my heart, five I cast away,
Six he loves, seven she loves, eight they both love,
Nine he comes, ten he carries, eleven he courts,
twelve he marries,
Thirteen they quarrel, fourteen they part,
Fifteen he dies of a broken heart.

By naming the buttons on a girl's gown with the following verse you may learn the occupation of the man she will marry:

Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief,
Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief.

To find out if your sweetheart loves you pluck the petals of a daisy, saying as you pluck one petal, "He loves me," and as you pluck the next, "He loves me not." The last petal gives the answer.

Where cobwebs grow, beaux never go.

If two persons each make a wish and pull on the sides of a dried wishbone of a chicken until it breaks, the one getting the larger part will get his wish.

Change the name and not the letter, change for worse instead of better.

If your knees are ticklish you like the boys (or girls).

If you put your shoes on the table you will never be married.

Married in white, chosen all right,
Married in gray, go far away,
Married in brown, live out of town,
Married in blue, your mate will be true,
Married in white, quarrel and fight.

A girl that whistles or a hen that crows, always catch the nicest beaux.

Dream of a wedding, you'll hear of a death.

If two forks, knives or spoons are accidentally put at your place at table, you will be married soon.

Marry in haste and repent at leisure.

Marriages are made in heaven.

True love never runs smoothly.

The longest way round is the sweetest way home.

'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

Two is company, three is a crowd.

All the world loves a lover.

A woman's "no" means "yes."

All is fair in love or war.

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Love is blind.

Love will find a way.

Put a ring, a penny, and a thimble in the wedding cake. When it is cut, the one who gets the ring will be married next, the one who gets the penny will receive money, and the one who gets the thimble will sew for a living.

Distance lends enchantment.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

There are just as good fish in the sea as ever were caught.

If a woman cuts thick slices of bread she will make a good stepmother.

Cold hands, warm heart.

If you sleep with a piece of wedding cake under your pillow your dream will come true.

It is bad luck to postpone a wedding.

The one who takes the last piece of bread or cake on the plate will remain single. The one who takes the next to the last piece will marry a rich mate.

Three times a bridesmaid, never a bride.

It is bad luck to take off the wedding ring.

Peel an apple without allowing the peeling to break. Holding it in your right hand over your head, circle it around you three times and drop it over your left shoulder. The letter it forms is the initial of your future husband.

If you walk downstairs backward at midnight while looking in a mirror, your future husband will look over your shoulder.

Hold a burning match. The burned end will turn toward your sweetheart.

If you find a stem in your tea it indicates a beau. The length indicates his height. Bite it and lay it near the thumb of your left hand. Double your fist (right hand) and strike the stem with the part of the fist next to the little finger. Each time you strike it name a day of the week beginning with the present day. Your beau is coming to see you on the day you name when the stem sticks to your fist.

If you sit on the table you will be married before you are able.

To sit on the table is a sign you want to marry.

If four people cross hands in shaking hands, some one of them will be married soon.

If you spill dishwater on your apron you will have a drunken husband.

If some one sweeps under the chair you are sitting on you will be an old maid.

Write your sweetheart's name below yours. Strike out the letters that are the same in both each time they occur. To find out the state and relation of affections first say on the uncanceled letters of each name: "Love, hate, friendship, courtship, marriage."

Stamp a hundred white horses and you will marry the first man with whom you shake hands. To stamp, lick your right thumb, touch your left palm with it, strike your right fist on the place your thumb touched.

If you break a needle when sewing a garment, you will be married before it wears out.

If you see the new moon over your right shoulder, say:

"Now moon, true moon, pray let me see
Who my husband is to be.
The color of his hair, the clothes he is to wear
The happy day he weds me,"

and the man you dream about that night is the one you will marry.

MISCELLANEOUS METAPHORICAL PHRASES

A horse of a different color
A bitter pill
Salt of the earth
Look daggers
Sheep's eyes
Raining cats and dogs
Raining pitchforks
Two jerks of a dead lamb's tail
A gay young blade
A tough hombre
A lady killer
A horse laugh
Hell bent for election
Once in a blue moon
Green-eyed monster
The straw that broke the camel's
back
The last straw
Small fry
Up in the air
Hayseed
High hat
Penny wise and pound foolish
An axe to grind
On the fence

Indian giver
The pit of the stomach
Take the bit in your teeth
Cast a fishy eye
A fish story
Escape by the skin of the teeth
A close shave
To the bitter end
The widow's mite
A bed of roses
A bolt from the blue
A square peg in a round hole
No respecter of persons
Rob the cradle
Caught red-handed
A yellow streak
When patience ceases to be a virtue
Chatter like a chipmunk
In the twinkling of an eye
Playing with fire
Putting on dog
Born with a silver spoon in one's
mouth
Swelled head
Swelled up like a poisoned pup

Out of sight, out of mind
 Like looking for a needle in a
 haystack
 Bites the hand that feeds him
 Work your fingers to the bone
 Kill two birds with one stone
 A bone of contention
 Penny minded
 From "A" to "Izzard"
 My soul and body
 Run like lightning
 Scared out of a year's growth
 Out of the frying pan into the
 fire
 Stick-in-the-mud
 Wet blanket
 On easy street
 On top of the world
 The Slough of Despond
 The seventh heaven
 Itchy feet
 Sticky fingers
 Long fingered
 High and dry
 Hide your light under a bushel
 Hot money
 Apple sauce
 Blarney
 Soft soap
 Feeding one taffy
 Stringing one
 Kidding
 A stiff upper lip
 On a bender
 Three sheets in the wind
 On a tear
 Lit up
 Got your fingers burned
 Ride a free horse to death
 Pull your chestnuts out of the
 fire
 As clear as mud
 Poor fish
 Pay the piper
 Pay the fiddler
 Spick and span
 More holy than righteous
 Blue Monday
 A red letter day
 Easy come, easy go
 Full of beans
 Devil take the hindmost
 The world with a fence around it
 Lead a dog's life

Since the year one
 The die is cast
 Crossing the Rubicon
 Like a long lost brother
 A pig in a poke
 Talk turkey
 Get down to brass tacks
 Knock your ears down
 A rose between two thorns
 Rats in your garret
 Bats in your belfry
 Walking on air
 Dark horse
 A mouse in the corner
 Scum of the earth
 Wall flower
 The nerve of a brass monkey
 On your high horse
 To feel one's oats
 Not worth the candle
 Not worth a continental
 Not worth a tinker's darn
 Knee high to a grasshopper
 Drink like a fish
 To worm one's way through
 Cackle like a hen
 Cook one's goose
 Fly the coop
 Bull in a china closet
 Like a red flag to a bull
 Take time by the forelock
 Kick like a bay steer
 Look like a dying calf
 Take the bull by the horns
 A bear hug
 A wolf in sheep's clothing
 Keep the wolf from the door
 Like a rat in a trap
 Get the cart before the horse
 Root, hog, or die
 Fleece anyone
 Water under the bridge
 Enough to make a dog laugh
 Since Heck was a pup
 A dog in the manger
 Dog days
 Dog eat dog
 To dog his steps
 Fly off the handle
 Hot air
 Every man for himself and the devil
 Something rotten in Denmark
 The morning after
 Lick one's chops

MISCELLANEOUS OMENS

A scratch on the arm indicates a journey.

If your nose itches you will kiss a fool.

If the soles of your feet itch you are going to travel.

If your right hand itches you are going to shake hands.

If your cat washes its face you will receive visitors.

If a knife falls on the floor a woman visitor is coming.

If you take bread when you have some, someone who is hungry is coming.

If you dream of the dead you will hear from the living.

If a fork falls a man visitor is coming from the direction toward which the prongs point.

If a spoon falls on the floor a child is coming.

If a dish towel falls on the floor an untidy person is coming.

If a broom falls across the doorsill a stranger is coming.

If you sew on Sunday you will have to rip it out with your nose.

If you walk in one door of a residence and out another you will bring company.

If you play with a toad you will get warts.

If a child smiles in his sleep he is talking with the angels.

CUSTOMS

Hanging May baskets

April fool

Thanksgiving turkey

Easter eggs

Turning a mirror to the wall

Flipping coins

House warnings

Hazing

Hanging up the stockings

Jack-o-lanterns

Giving the bride away

Easter lilies

Kissing the bride

Fireworks

Carrying good luck coins

Shower parties

Stopping a clock when a death occurs

Kissing under the mistletoe

Drinking when invited

Husking bees

Counting out

Christmas trees

Christmas gifts

Charivari

Serenades

Rice at weddings

Old shoes at weddings

Clinking glasses

Christmas window decorations
 Hallowe'en
 Valentines
 First New Year's greeting
 Quilting bees
 Wishing rings on fingers
 Spitting on new shoes
 Blackball

Santa Claus
 Shamrocks
 First Christmas greeting
 Wakes
 Blowing out birthday candles
 Birthday spankings
 Tolling bells
 Orange blossoms

BIBLICAL PROVERBS

The poor you have always with you.

The wages of sin are death.

The way of the transgressor is hard.

What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his soul.

Whatsoever a man soweth so shall he reap.

Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.

A soft answer turneth away wrath.

A good name is better to be chosen than great riches.

A little leaven leavens the whole loaf.

Get thee behind me, Satan.

The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.

He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone.

It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Judge not lest ye be judged.

No man can serve two masters.

A house divided against itself cannot stand.

A little child shall lead them.

Pride goeth before a fall.

Spare the rod and spoil the child.

 NEBRASKA FOLKLORE PAMPHLET Number Ten will be issued on or before October 15, 1937, and will contain further Proverbs, Prophecies, Signs and Sayings.

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