Pioneer Recollections - Nebraska Folklore

Federal Writers' Project
NEBRASKA FOLKLORE
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PAMPHLET TWENTY-FIVE

Pioneer Recollections

NEBRASKA · WRITERS' · PROJECT
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These reminiscences of life in Nebraska during the 1870's and '80's have been obtained through personal interviews with pioneers by members of the Nebraska Writers' Project. In the effort to preserve the flavor of the original word-of-mouth narration, editing has been limited chiefly to selection and arrangement.

A BUGGY RIDE

("A Buggy Ride" and the "Butchering Bee," two true stories of pioneer hoaxes, were told by T. L. Phillips of Lincoln. Mr. Phillips, who is of French-German descent, came to Nebraska in the 1870's.)

We had heard a good deal about the rough unvarnished life of the prairie settlers in Nebraska; so I came out to Otoe County in 1871 expecting to find a stern, strict class of people who had no desire or time to quit being serious. But they proved to be entirely different from what I had expected. They liked their fun and entertainment to a degree I had not even known myself. Jokes and monkeyshines were played on everyone who was handy and simple enough to go for them.

Take, for instance, a young fellow named Gus White who was new to the neighborhood. As I remember, he had yellow hair and gray-green eyes that, in addition to his tall lanky figure, gave him the appearance of a prowling tom cat. But it wasn't his soody appearance that irritated us; we were all soody in those days when our best Sunday wear was a pair of new overalls.

What got on our nerves was his smart-assky attitude. Gus thought he knew everything there was to know, that he alone could give the final answers.

Well, Gus received an inheritance from the East. I believe his grandfather had died in New York State; and the first thing he did was what every young buck was hankering to do—he got hold of a buggy and horse. He was pretty proud of it too because the buggy was now and shiny and the horse was a smart black with a star on its forehead. He used it a lot, because he got to going with a freckle-faced Irish girl who lived a ways up my road. The combination of a girl and buggy was bad, because Gus became more high falutin' than ever, zipping around the country with his girl.
The girl's father, fortunately, had not lost his Irish wit. He had always been full of the Old Nick, and after Gus had taken after his daughter he could hardly wait for an opportunity to play some whizzor on Gus. He finally got his chance when Gus came over one evening to take his girl to a dance. It was one of those gloomy nights when the Nebraska moon makes a bare showing through a layer of clouds. That was important, because the old man needed Nature's cooperation for his scenes.

Well, to go on with the story. While Gus was in the house waiting for his girl to get fixed up the old man slipped out and changed the buggy wheels around, putting one rear wheel on the front and a front wheel on the back. As you know, the back wheels of a buggy are larger than the front ones, so one big wheel in front on the left side and one little wheel in the back on the right side would cause the body of the buggy to set sort of lopsided and twisted. It tended to wobble, too, and the wheels wouldn't roll in a straight line.

The girl finally got through primping. She came out, dressed in a freshly-starched gingham dress, with Gus following her. After he had gotten her comfortably settled on the seat, Gus jumped in from the opposite side and gave the horse a whack with his buggy whip. The moon was well under now, so neither could see what had been done to the buggy wheels; the girl noticed the funny way the vehicle behaved but, it being a new rig, didn't say anything for fear of appearing ignorant. She probably thought, since Gus had the latest thing in buggies (he had told her so himself), that the new styles called for an "up-and-down" effect when riding. Still, she didn't like the buggy's behavior and felt a little awkward rolling back and forth, feeling half of the time as if she was on the high seas. But Gus, who was complacently holding the reins, didn't say anything, so she didn't either.

There were a lot of rigs in the yard when they arrived at the dance, so Gus, if he did suspect anything, did not examine his buggy to see what was wrong. Gus just hitched his horse and helped his girl get down.

When going home after the dance, the vehicle acted worse than ever because the horse hit it off at a good clip as he knew he was on familiar ground. The girl, after they got going on the home stretch, didn't know whether she was inside of a cyclone or a churn barrel. She was thrown from one side of the buggy to the other at every turn of the wheels.

The next day Gus found what was wrong and everyone else in the neighborhood did too—the old man had seen to that. "By golly, I never noticed any difference in the dangd thing," Gus told us when we confronted him. And I guess he didn't either, because it soon became known that he had popped the question that night to his girl as they wobbled along, and in her bewildered condition she had said "Yes."

A BUTCHERING BOX

A butchering box in the 1870's was a social event that involved the whole neighborhood. When practical jokes were added to the fun, it became a riot. Take, for instance, the time John Busch, our neighbor in Johnson County, do-
ecided to butcher six hogs. The butchering was to begin at noon, but a number of curiosity seekers came over in the morning to help prepare for the slaughter. Most of us who came at that time were near neighbors, who lived next door, so to speak. So, quite naturally, Dick Childs, who lived north of Busch's, came over. The first thing I saw when I drove up to the place was those two talking together. When I overheard Gus White's name mentioned, I knew they were figuring out some devilment. They had been wanting for some time to pull something on Gus, who, after marrying the Irish girl, had settled on a homestead a mile from my place. Gus hadn't been cured after his strange buggy ride, and still acted kind of smart-alky among us. He still thought he knew all the answers, and he not only thought so but told us so. Dick and Busch retired to the cowshed where, behind the manure pile, they got their heads together and finished rigging up a joke on Gus. Then, after everything had been settled, Dick Childs got on his gray pony and rode home. He was staying away from the butchering bee, and it was for a purpose.

After Childs had left, Busch got us together and told us about their latest monkeyshines; also telling us, when Gus came, to act natural-like so he wouldn't become suspicious.

Well, Gus showed up immediately after dinner. He was walking, and as we saw him coming through the brown cornfield, which had just been husked, he looked more like a tom cat than ever. His yellow hair was long, in need of a haircut; he hadn't shaved; and his blue overalls were not in their best possible condition. He certainly didn't look like a spruced-up married man.

But his appearance didn't bother Gus; he was as cocky as ever. He immediately suggested a new way to hold the knife when killing the hogs, a method which resulted in a bad cut in his right thumb. Still, Gus was not discouraged. The scraping of the hogs, with the use of liberal amounts of water, came next. Here Gus lost interest, saying he didn't think it was a job worthy of his talents. It wasn't until we came to the cutting up of the meat that Gus's interest revived. Here is where the hex came in, so we all whooped it up for Gus, trying in every possible way to make him feel big and important. He suggested a right good idea at that of cutting out an opening along the bones so the meat would be cured inside in good shape. Then Busch mentioned a meat augur as just the ticket for doing the business. Gus swallowed the meat augur idea hook, line and sinker, wanting to know who had one. Busch said he thought Dick Childs, who had been unable to come to the bee, owned one, and offered to loan Gus his mule if he would go after the augur.

Gus jumped at the idea, so he got the mule out of the barn and started out for Dick Child's place. He found Childs repairing the roof on his sodico. When Gus came up to his house, Childs, who had helped originate the joke, knew what to expect. In answer to Gus's question he said, "Yap, I got 'or all right except for the twister; you'll have to go to Ed Schoibert's for that."

Childs got down from his roof and walked over to his barn where he picked up a grain sack, into which he stuck a piece of log chain, an old brace and bit, a rusty cultivator shovel and a broken wrench. Gus heaved this load across the mule's back and started to Schoibert's, four miles away. Schoibert, who had been tipped off beforehand, took Gus's sack into the barn, where he throw in an old rusty stove lid and an extra heavy piece of cast iron.
Gus, as he started back to fix up the hams, had a good load. But he soon had trouble, too. You see one of the iron pieces in the sack, probably the plowshare, prodded the mule so much that she leaped and bucked until she threw Gus off. Then she gave another leap that threw off the sack. The end containing the stove lid struck Gus on the head, causing him to become crazed with pain. But, like Don Quixote, Gus's determination overcame his obstacles. He knew that the hams couldn't be properly prepared without the meat augur. But now it was the mule who refused to cooperate. She refused to wait for Gus; instead she kept on moving at her usual easy-going gait. So Gus, after he had sufficiently recovered from his fall, had to chase her for a quarter of a mile with the sack of heavy scrap iron on his back. Gus was completely exhausted after he had caught up with her. He threw the meat augur on her back but refused to ride her himself. One throw had been enough.

The hogs had been pretty well put away at Busch's butchering box and many of the people would have left for their homes if it hadn't been for Gus. They all wanted to see him arrive with the meat augur, although many were afraid he had discovered the hex and would never show up, since it was now late in the afternoon and Gus had been gone for over four hours.

Finally, when everyone had given up hope of seeing him, Gus showed up by the road that ran along the cornfield. His face was scratched from his fall; the stove lid had made a big bump on his forehead; his overalls were covered with yellow clay, and he limped. All in all, Gus was a sorry sight.

But in spite of his physical condition, Gus was still as choky as a young cock that had just learned to crow. He did not pay any attention to us, but went up to Busch and said, "Well, I got 'er all right, and I don't think anything broke when your ol' mule got skittish and threw me and the augur."

I tell you, we gasped. Gus's innocence was unbelievable. He still thought he had a meat augur. The boys and some of the women had to turn away, finding it impossible to keep their faces straight. Then someone suggested that maybe Gus could get them an oven stretcher so they could bake up a whole hog without the trouble of cutting it up. But Gus was now beginning to catch on. Pretty soon we missed him and had to finish what remained of the butchering without his advice.

Gus kept pretty close to his claim after that, because he was so mad he wouldn't speak to anyone in the neighborhood.

**PIONEER REMEDIES**

(Mrs. Albert Waybright of Ashland, who has always lived within 300 yards of the house she was born in—in 1868—claims to be a good authority on the subject of pioneer remedies. Her father, Joseph Stambaugh, was one of the first settlers in Saunders County. Another early settler in the county married a woman who, in later life, came to be known as "Queen Lil." It seems that the lady, after the death of her husband, tried to settle on another claim without filing papers. When the authorities tried to evict her from her claim, she wouldn't budge; so the neighbors gave her this nickname because the Government was having similar trouble, at this time, with a queen on one of its islands.)
Doctors, during the State's pioneer days, were a rarity because the villages, where they had their offices, were few and far between; besides, many pioneer families could not afford even the lowest charges for professional services. Consequently, the only aids in times of illness were those remedies that were suggested and exchanged between the pioneers themselves.

Dog fennel boiled with lard was used a great deal for sore throat; some families, however, thought that the quickest remedy for this ailment was a dirty stocking wrapped around the neck of the patient—the dirt was supposed to draw out the pain. Elderberry blossom tea was thought to be the best treatment for fever. Peppermint, which grew along the creeks, was dried and given for stomach aches. Chokecherry and honey was used for coughs and grog; this was sometimes varied with a hot foot-bath followed with a generous portion of red pepper tea. Skunk oil was commonly used for lung colds. A stubborn cough was often treated with a cough syrup, consisting of an egg placed in a bowl of vinegar in which it was allowed to stand until the shell had been eaten up. Then the remainder of the egg, with sugar added, was beaten until it became a syrup. Hourglass candy was a favorite for slight colds. A few drops of turpentine on a spoonful of sugar was taken internally for worms. A soap and sugar poultice was used for drawing out sores. Beef tallow was used for chapped hands.

Some people thought a wart could be destroyed by stealing and destroying a neighbor's dish rag. Another superstition was that rheumatism could be cured by carrying around a raw potato, which was supposed to absorb the ailment. Another belief was that eczema could be healed by washing the infected areas with vinegar in which 12 pennies had been placed for 24 hours. Mustard was used for swellings; vinegar and salt for sprains; sulphur, molasses and sassafras for a blood tonic. Pumpkin seed was supposed to be good for kidney trouble; sage tea for worms.

FUNERALS

(T. L. Phillips, of Lincoln, who told of pioneer pranks in "Buggy Ride" and "A Butchering Boo," gave, in addition, information on pioneer funerals in the 1890's.)

When someone died, the neighbors took upon themselves the business of being undertakers. I've dug many a grave and helped in other ways, even to fixing the glass jars filled with ice around the corpse. The body of a deceased pioneer was usually buried as soon as a homemade coffin could be built, since the only embalming facilities were of the temporary sort; stored crock ice placed inside of glass jars was kept next to the body in the summer; the cold weather in the winter was sufficient to keep the body for a few days. The coffins were constructed out of boards or crate lumber. Sometimes, when few boards could be found, the casket was shaped big at the head and small at the feet, causing it to resemble an Egyptian mummy case.

It was the custom, in those days, to keep night wakes near the body. Coffee and a light lunch was usually served at midnight. The casket was transported to its grave in a surrey or light spring wagon. A widow would usually wear her black veil and dress for six months after her husband had died.
FARM MACHINERY

(Mr. H. C. Van Boskirk, of Lincoln, settled in Nebraska in 1874, when he was 18 years old. Later, in Frontier County, he went into the farm implement business. It is with this period of his life—1882-1884—that the following reminiscences, "Farm Machinery" and "A Pioneer Medicine Show" deal.)

A close-fisted farmer, named Jim Shanks, who lived in our neighborhood, was always flamboucing someone in an attempt to save money. One of his favorite tricks was to obtain the use of farm machinery without paying for it. He would go to an implement dealer in his vicinity, or neighboring village, and pretend interest in a corn cultivator, saying he might buy it if he was given the opportunity of trying it out. Well, he would take it home, cultivate his corn crop, then return it again; saying he could not make up his mind about buying it. When the crop needed another cultivation, he would pull the same trick on another implement dealer. For the last cultivation, called "laying by," he would pull the same gag on still another.

There was a reason for his trickery—the lack of money. None of us had the tools we needed, so it was an ordinary matter to borrow what one looked from a neighbor who had it, and, in return, loan him the tools he needed. Work was exchanged in the same way. Binders, which were very expensive, were sometimes community-owned, although, like threshing machines, they were often rented.

A PIONEER MEDICINE SHOW

The old medicine shows that used to go through Nebraska in the '80's were a constant form of entertainment, although the pioneers were usually talked into buying more trinkets than they could afford. The Doctor, as the medicine faker called himself, specialized in the sale of electric bolts, which were constructed out of copper discs, flannel and leather straps. Many of the people had profound respect for these bolts. It was supposed that they set off electric vibrations that were the basis for all life and that they could cure illnesses.

The faker, who always came into town driving a horse and buggy, also sold a magic soap that he claimed would clean anything, regardless of how dirty it was. One of these outfits showed up at Hampton one day when I was in town. First the "Doctor" played music on a banjo. Then, as soon as a sizeable crowd had gathered around him he got down to business.

First he gave an emotional lecture on the virtues of his soap. Then he borrowed a handkerchief, a clean white one, from some one in the crowd, and hopped out of the buggy. He leached one of the rear buggy wheels and smeared the handkerchief with the grease on the axle, causing it to become a sorry-looking sight. Then he got up in the buggy and began washing it with one of the bars of soap he was selling. With very little effort the handkerchief came out as white as snow. This was enough for the crowd, who rushed up to buy as many bars as they could afford.

One of the boys who had purchased a bar tried it out by smearing his hand-
korchief with dirty grease from his buggy axles in the way the faker had done. Then he rubbed and rubbed with his suds soap, but the grease wouldn't come off. We learned later that the faker, before entering Hampton, had taken off the grease from one of his buggy wheels and substituted tar soap, which looked like axles grease, in its stead.

GRASSHOPPERS OF 1873

(Thomas J. Hartnott, of Hubbard, has lived in Dakota County since his birth in 1861. Mr. Hartnott, now nearly eighty, is a large, ruddy-complexioned man who likes to tell jokes.)

The grasshoppers came to Dakota County in such numbers, in 1873, that they hid the sun. A cornfield would be completely stripped of all vegetation inside of two hours. They tell a story about a man who, when plowing in a field, hung his work jacket with a watch in it on a post. When he came back to his jacket after plowing the field, all that was left was his watch. The grasshoppers had eaten his jacket.

They tell, too, about a man who left his team in the field while he went to his well for a drink of water. When he came back, the grasshoppers had eaten up the team and harness and were playing horseshoes with the iron shoes the horses had worn.

These stories are only exaggerated in their detail, because a swarm of grasshoppers, like a Kansas cyclone, could do anything.

WATCHING AN INDIAN MASSACRE IN 1876

(Elnor Dollett, of Lincoln, came to Nebraska in 1875. The most thrilling recollection of his life—he is now 84—was when he witnessed the Indian massacre narrated below. He was a pioneer farmer at the time.)

We moved out to Dawson County near Cozad in 1876. That year I saw Hawke, our nearest neighbor, his wife and three children killed and scalped by a band of 120 Rosebud Indians. The Indians, just before leaving, set fire to the barn, which had a thatched roof, and the house too. While the Indians were there, Major North and a troop of soldiers appeared, and I could see the smoke from their carbines off in the distance.

The buildings blazed up and the Indians rode off through Gallagher Canyon and on to Muddy Creek. Major North caught up with them, and when he came back he only had 16 live Indians. I asked him where the rest were and he said, "They're all good Indians now." Only a dead Indian, in those days, was called a good Indian.

I went to Hawke's place after the massacre with a man named Miller, and we found them all dead, five of them. They had all been shot and scalped. The Indians had only cut off a small part of the scalp, about as big as a silver dollar, from the top of their victims' heads. There were also three dead Indians there that Hawke, or his wife, had shot before they died.
A SQUASH STEAL AND A DANCE FIGHT

(Rush Meyers told these reminiscences in a little neighborhood grocery store he operates in a Lincoln suburb. Mr. Meyers came to the State from Pennsylvania in 1881. He was then 12. He lived in Johnson County until 1929, where the events, related below, took place in the 1880's.)

After we came to Nebraska, even though just a kid, I began to realize we were in a brand new world with people around us who seemed almost foolish in the way they trusted and helped their neighbors. Why, there was a man near Vosta, a kind of farmer and trader who, as far as I know, had never heard of my father before, yet, when dad told him he needed stock and food to get started, he told father to get what he needed. No note was signed and the bill was well over $100. And it was paid back, too. I'll bet he'd have a tough time collecting money under those conditions today. A grocery bill was almost a sacred thing in the 1880's.

School was a hit and miss proposition then and everyone had different kinds of books. The scholars furnished their own and got the kind it was the handiest to obtain. The girls all sat together on one side and the boys on the other. We did this in Sunday School, too, like the Quakers in church, only we didn't wear our hats like the Quaker men did. I never hear of a Sunday School picnic anymore but it used to be the big gift of the year, something to look forward to for months before it took place.

The boys, like the boys of today, didn't think some kinds of stealing were really stealing, such as taking watermelons and apples. To take a dealer's worth of melons out of a neighbor's patch would be nothing, but to steal a penny in money would be terrible. Our folks, though, thought one was as bad as another and were very strict about it.

One day my brother and I were shucking corn along a field that belonged to a neighbor named West Richardson. We saw a squash patch across the fence. We argued a while about taking one. Finally we decided to take it and told our folks Richardson had given it to us. It was a dandy one, and made our folks feel kindly toward Mr. Richardson for his generosity. Neighbors didn't have telephones or see each other every day, but we had a quilting bee a few days later and Mrs. Richardson was to be there. How I thought it would be nice to return the favor so we invited West and his wife over to dinner, which was always a part of the Bee. The women ate first; after they got through the men sat down to eat. At that time, when there was company, the kids waited until the grown folks finished and then ate at the second table.

Well, after we had all sat down, I spoke up and said, "Mr. Richardson, we sure thank you for the fine squash you gave the boys." Richardson looked kinda confused at us but didn't say anything. I saw it was going to take some explaining, so said, "Ma, you've gone and split the beans. We stole that squash." "You didn't either," answered Richardson, "don't you remember I told you to take some of them when you shook that down row along the fence? And there's some more of 'em there for you." Everyone laughed and I guess they caught on, although Richardson stuck to his story.

In these days different localities had their neighborhood gangs who banded together and were quick to fight. They weren't very friendly as a group and a
fuss between any of the boys would bring on bad feeling between the gangs.
Around where we lived were the Turkey Creek Boys and the Yankee Crook Irish. There was jealous feeling between the two outfits partly because the Turkey Creek Boys claimed that they had the best corn shucker. One night both gangs came to a dance at Vesta and the Yankee Crook Irish were spoiling for trouble.

A few of us boys had gone to look on and were sitting on a platform at one end of the hall. We called it nigger heaven, although it was just a stage used for entertainment. The dance got going and the Irish set into a couple of the sets and the Turkey Creek Boys were in the other. Then one of the Irish busted right out and said, "I can whip any man here who says he can shuck a hundred bushels of corn a day." Jack Sheehy of the Turkey Creek Boys took him right up and they went to it right there while the dancers were still going through the steps.

Then some more pitched in and the dance turned into a free for all. Why, even some of the rival girls pulled a little hair, although mostly the women let their men do the quarreling.

Ruf Pierce, a two-fisted, hard-fighting old timer, took a hand then and there into the fight. He had a neck yoke with which he knocked 'em right and left until the tough Irish decided they had had enough.

Nowadays they would call the police, but in the 80's the men took care of themselves without the use of outside interference.

RELIGION

(From Frank Faith, of Lincoln, who came to Garfield County in 1885.)

Meetings, before churches were built, used to be conducted by a circuit rider preacher who came through. Sometimes the pioneers would gather in schoolhouses; at other times, in the summer, services would be conducted on the open plains. I remember one time when we met a traveling preacher on the trail and all knelt down and prayed on the prairie. When schoolhouses were built close together, we held regular meetings in them; later, as the settlements grew, churches were built.

(Mrs. A. A. Bogor, of Lincoln, who tells the following story, settled on a claim in Saunders County with her husband in 1871.)

I was married in 1871 at the age of 16. My husband was a cattle breeder, stockman and farmer. I felt so bad about the lack of church facilities that I got on my horse and invited everyone for miles around to come to our house for a Sunday service. Then I asked a man to preach for us, but he didn't think anyone would attend the meeting, so refused. On Sunday morning our 16-foot square house was so filled with people that some of them were forced to sit on benches outside of the doorway. I, naturally, became very nervous with so many people and no minister. So the only thing I could think of to do was to read from a book of sermons my father had given me. I read one of my favorite sermons the best I know how. There was not a dry eye in the house after I got through. Later, for a number of years, a traveling minister held services in our house.
CLAIM JUMPERS

(Frank Faith, of Lincoln, who pioneered in Garfield County in the 1880's, had a number of contacts with claim jumpers.)

Claim jumpers, in the 1880's, were a worry to every homesteader. Sometimes they would take over a place when its owner hadn't gone any further than to town for supplies. After they had gotten a too hold they were pretty hard to get rid of, too.

I remember one old man, called Fuzzy, who had a claim north of us in Rock County. He had fixed it up with a good well, a shack and some other improvements. The old man used to go away and stay for three or four weeks at a time. At one time, when the old man was absent on one of his jaunts, a shift-eyed man took over his claim, shack and all. He said the old man had gone away for good and had turned the claim over to him.

We were worried about old Fuzzy. But in a month he showed up and tried to take over his claim. The jumper drove him off his own place with a rifle.

The old man then came over to see me. I took him to Horse Buster Hodge, a cowhand and settler, who was usually the leader when a "committee of force" was needed. The boys got together that evening and rode over to the claim, Fuzzy going along. The claim jumper was waiting for us outside of the cabin, gun in hand. He didn't say anything, just stood there.

Hodge had a coiled lariat hanging from his saddle. He took it off as he jumped down from his horse, then faced the claim jumper without saying a word, trying to stare him down. It made the claim jumper nervous, especially after Hodge began dangling his rope. Then Hodge, after a few minutes of silence, said, "This claim is his," pointing to old Fuzzy. "We're here to back him up. Got goin'!"

The tough guy muttered a few words, then laid his gun down, while the boys went into the cabin and pitched his stuff out. Hodge's parting words to him were that it would be healthier for him if he made tracks and made them fast. He was never seen again in that part of the country.

MIRAGES AND PRAIRIE VEGETATION

(Mrs. C. A. Frudio, of Lincoln, came to Nebraska from Indiana in a covered wagon in 1872. She was only 5 years old at the time, but still remembers the sodhouse her father built in Polk County. A special plow, called the "Grasshopper" because it hopped along the ground as it cut, loosened the sod. The sodhouse walls were then built up like bricks, with the grass hanging down. The grass helped to cement the various brick layers together. Tree limbs, hauled from the Platte River, supported the roof. Mrs. Frudio's description of a "sea" of prairie grass gives some idea of the lonely beauty to be seen in a land that was void of any habitation.)

I can remember looking at the rolling grass of the prairies, and how it used to make me seasick because it looked exactly like water. Sometimes I would see mirages in it.
The wild roses, in the 70's, were very thick with red blooms that could be seen from miles away. They had red berries on them larger than your thumb. These berries were good to eat, with a flavor very much like bananas. Buffalo could often be seen wallowing in the mud along small streams, where it was cool and the flies wouldn't bother them. Some people believed that later, when the buffalo rolled on the prairie grass to get the mud off, they changed the texture of the grass, causing it to become much finer than other grass. This, they said, was the way buffalo grass originated.

A PIONEER MEAL AND A BUTCHERING SUPERSTITION

(Robert Ratsorneier, of Lincoln, came to Nebraska in the late 80's. The butchering superstition, mentioned below, is not widely known.)

Food, in the early days, was good. Why, my family would eat a peck of potatoes to a meal. How we did eat! I've seen my wife fry 50 eggs for breakfast, of which I would eat 12 myself when I was feeling fit.

People, nowadays, talk about threshers eating. They should have been here in the 1880's. I've seen 'em sit down to a tub-full of mashed potatoes and a platter of sausage a yard long. That's the grub that sticks to the ribs and makes the bundles fly. Chicken's no good for hungry threshers. That's for Sunday, when there's little work, and tidbit snacks.

You've probably heard about people saying how a change in the moon makes a difference on the meat that is being butchered. Well, I know it to be a fact for I've seen it. If you butcher in the dark of the moon the lard will render out without foaming over the kettle--curing out clear and solid. If you do your own killing in the light of the moon the lard will foam up and run over everything. Nor will the meat be nearly as good, it will be flabby and soft. Moonlight does something to it.

AN EARLY TRAIN EXCURSION

(Sherman Delman, of Lincoln, has lived in Nebraska since 1869.)

A railroad excursion to Lincoln took place in 1870. The train has flat cars with willows stuck in the posts around the cars for shade. Railroad ties were used for seats. It took 3 hours to run the 35 miles from Syracuse to Lincoln. This same train was held up by a horde of grasshoppers in 1875. They were so thick that they greased the track, preventing the wheels from getting a hold on the rails. One of the sights I remember from the trip was the way quails got killed by the telegraph wires. They would hit the wires and then fly about a hundred feet before they fell and died.

PIONEER HOSPITALITY

(Minor Hinman, of North Platte, came to Lincoln County in 1869.)

The Nebraska pioneers had certain unwritten and unspoken codes of hospitality that, in a county that had few towns or hotels, were observed by every-
one. For instance, if a man was going through the county and came to a vacated farm house at nightfall he stayed there; even if all of the occupants were gone. He just opened the door and walked in. The door was never locked. The visitor fried some sowbelly, or whatever he could find, fed his horse, and went to bed. In the morning, after breakfast, he washed the dishes; then, if he had a piece of change he left it; if he was without money he wrote a note, saying, "I was here. Thank you," and shut the door behind him as he left. He didn't expect the sheriff to come after him, either.

Whenever we surprised a neighbor with a visit, we would take a basket dinner with us, since our neighbor's food supply might be low and, due to the distance to the nearest town, it might be difficult to replenish it. Besides we had no way of letting him know we were coming.

GERMAN COMMUNITY LIFE AND SUPERSTITIONS

(Charley Woods, of Lincoln, was born in Otoe County in 1863. He farmed, in the county of his birth, from 1875 to 1921. His coal oil story has special folklore value because it was a superstition actually believed by a number of the early settlers.)

Gosh, I wouldn't have anything to tell that would be worth anything to you. If I had gone around more and had the gumption to ask more questions in my time I would have known lots to tell. You see, just living on a farm I didn't get to see many people or talk much. We lived in Otoe County, about five miles from Dunbar. This was in the 80's.

The south line of our farm was a dividing line between the German community and the American settlers. Whenever an American sold out a German settler would buy his farm. In this way the Germans gradually absorbed the community. The two peoples mingled and neighbored, but mostly they stuck pretty close to their own kind.

The Mormons wintered near Wyoming, Nebraska, in the late 1860's or early 1870's. I remember them because the boys in our neighborhood used to go over there and chin the girls.

One of the big problems in the 1860's was head lice. It's funny, but everyone was afflicted, no matter how clean and careful he was. I remember having my hair filled with the insects, and every kid in school the same was. Our mothers were hard put to overcome the pests. Red porcupine was rubbed into our scalps, but it didn't help much. Some people tried coal oil, but my folks were scared to use it because of the many stories or superstitions about its bad effect.

One story, which I never believed, was about a woman who used coal oil on her head in an attempt to get rid of head lice. She kept up her coal oil treatment for a long time, many months, until she became sick with bad headaches. After awhile a liquid which looked and smelled like coal oil would leak out of her ears and eyes. As time went on she kept on becoming sicker and sicker until she finally died. Doctors, when they cut her open, found on her brain a pint of coal oil which had soaked through her skull.

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