

# Phelps Helps



Volume 16, Issue 4

Winter 2008

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

**The public is welcome!**

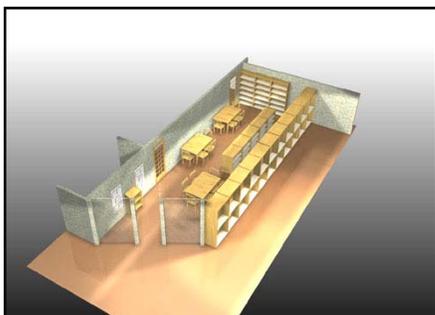
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## Update on New Addition to the Donald O. Lindgren Library at the Nebraska Prairie Museum



Our library addition is starting to take shape. The new shelves arrived a few weeks ago. Bill Perry is assembling them and will be building in a new display area and a glass front. It will probably be several months before we reshelf the books. We are going to enjoy having additional room in the library.

Please stop by often and check out all the new things going on with YOUR Holdrege Area Genealogy Club!

## Street Post Proves to be a Hazard

### *1967 Centennial Issue of Holdrege Daily Citizen*

Several young men were returning from a trip to the Platte River in May of 1886. It was about 9 p.m. and coming into town on Grant Street in Holdrege, they stopped to say good-night to one of their friends.

When the team drawing the buggy started up again, it ran into a post set in the middle of the street. The post was set up near the W. H. Richardson's place to keep the public from driving over the corner of his lot.

"The post was not set firmly, the Nugget said," "and yielded to the pressure of the wheel and threw the

buggy sideways."

Lew Weber, Jr., was thrown from the vehicle and the buggy apparently ran over him. "His right limb was broken about four inches above the ankle," the paper reported.

After the carriage stopped, the team broke away from the buggy; J. A. Burnett had to climb upon the back of one of the animals to stop them.

"We are informed that the post was set 16 feet into the street,": said the Nugget, "and several accidents have been narrowly escaped heretofore, at the same place, so says Dame Rumor. A possibility of a suit for damages adds further interest to the affair."

## Holdrege Works To Get Observatory

### From Holdrege Citizen June 10<sup>th</sup> 1983 Centennial Edition

Holdrege may not have been a logical site for U. S. Navel Observatory, but that didn't stop the city from pursuing it in 1947.

Captain Guy W. Clark, head of the observatory, had announced that the facility would be moved from the crowded, dusty

and smoky Washington D. C. to a spot with two degrees north or south of the present latitudinal position of 38 degrees, 55 minutes.

"Other qualifications should be that the air be as transparent as possible and temperatures relatively constant," the Citizen said.

The observatory was housed in 55 buildings and would require a site of 100 acres.

Cletus Nelson, secretary of the Holdrege Chamber of Commerce, wrote to Clark, asking him to come to Holdrege.

It only cost a three-cent stamp to try," the optimistic Nelson said.

## Donald O. Lindgren Library News

### NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE

Jim Almquist of Colorado has sent an indexed copy of the records of the Congregational Church at the community of Freewater, Harlan County, NE.

### MORE MICROFILM HAS BEEN PURCHASED

When the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club first organized there were people at the meeting

from not only Phelps County but from Gosper and Harlan Counties as well. Thus the name of Holdrege Area Genealogy Club was chosen. We have since tried to acquire area research material along with Phelps County research material.

In keeping with this, the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club has added to our Marriage Records Microfilm. We have had the Phelps County Marriages Records on microfilm covering marriages from March 1879 through 2001.

We have now added six

rolls of microfilmed Harlan County Marriage Records which covers marriages from 1873 through 1994.

We have also added three rolls of microfilmed Gosper County Marriage Records. These cover marriages from 1891 to 1994.

This is a nice addition to the microfilm that we have available for researching. Our microfilm is housed at the Donald O. Lindgren Library at the Nebraska Prairie Museum in Holdrege, Nebraska.

## Welcome New Members!

Pat Craig  
521 Morton St.  
Holdrege, NE 68949

Violet Craig  
521 Morton St.  
Holdrege, NE 68949

Shad Dahlgren  
2940 North 42nd St.  
Lincoln, NE 68504  
Sdahlgren@nebr.rr.com



# Harlan County, Nebraska

## Pioneer Crossing in the 1800s

By Lourie Johnson

A wagon Train led by Andrew Wilson and family followed by his brothers, Barnie and Adolph (called Pete) and seven other wagons. They had heard many stories of the rich land and many deer and other animals along the creeks and rivers. They left from Nebraska City and headed west to the land of plenty. After traveling for many days they were crossing what later was called Harlan County but were defeated by the steep banks of a stream (which was later called Turkey Creek.) It was decided to stop and somehow make a crossing that would be safe for their wagons.

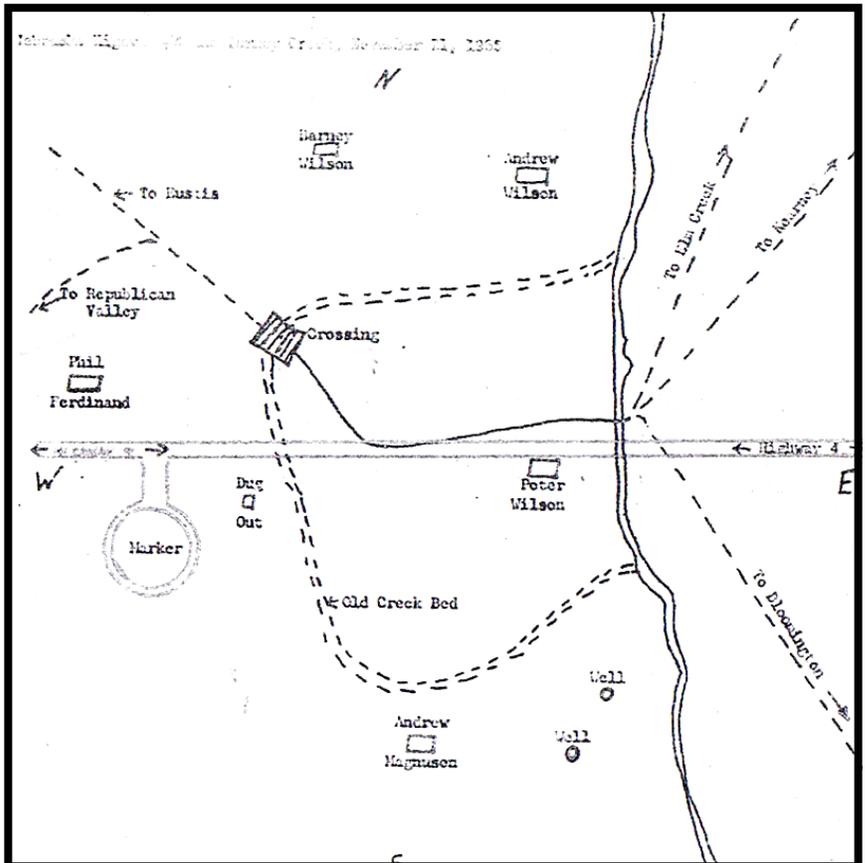
This was a challenge for these pioneers for they only had shovels to cut down a very steep bank and create a slope for the wagons. This took a long time and during the process, they more and more liked the looks of the area and decided to make this place their home. There was wood and water available, the area seemed good for cattle grazing or farming. Some made dugouts along the banks of the creek and others built sod houses. The dugouts were made by digging into the bank of the stream, as far back as needed to house their family.

The roof was made by laying the ridge pole across the center and placing smaller poles close together crosswise, then covering these first with a layer of hay, and then with two or three layers of sod. A door was rough boards going up and down. Most had brought a stove so a stove pipe ran up through the roof which was quite long - fire was always a danger. All projects were done by cooperation of everyone. The first well

**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.

was 4 x 4 feet, and 110 feet deep. Two men would dig and one man was on top side to bring the buckets of dirt up. That must have looked like an impossible task, but they managed and fresh clear water was available to all.

Next on their list was a place of worship. They started a church in February 1879, and it was ready for use in June of that same year. In 1903 this church was sold to the Seventh Day Adventists and moved to Ragan. The second church was built on the north edge of Scandinavia Township. Land was donated for a cemetery by Swan Peterson and sadly the first burial was his 16 yr old son. The church was started and finished in 1903. Mr John Sjogren was a carpenter and given the job of head carpenter. For this he was paid one dollar a day, all



(Harlan County Continued on page 4)

*(Harlan County Continued from page 3)*

other work was donated. In 1913 a dining room was added. All the lumber for these churches had to be hauled from Kearney by horse teams. Rock was hauled by Ox teams from Orleans.

Next was buiding better homes. Three were built of bricks which had been made close by. They had discovered clay and also fine sand which was the best for making bricks. The first house finished in 1882 and two others the following year. All were 1 and ½

stories high. The window and door sills were sawed out of silica rock with a cross cut saw and done by hand. This rock came from a mine south west of Orleans. These houses stood for many years, the last was still occupied in 1963. More and more immigrants passed through Wilson's Crossing as it was known in the beginning, so to not make it appear to be a privately owned crossing they changed the name to Pioneer Crossing as it still known to this day.

## Surprise! Swedes Still Dominate

The Daily Citizen in 1948 discovered to no one's real surprise that Swedes were the largest racial group in Holdrege.

Almost 43 percent of the population was from Swedish stock, the newspaper said. In the county, there were 490 Swedish families.

Holdrege figures showed

that there were 516 Swedes, 107 Danes, 98 Germans in town while 435 were unclassified.

"These figures were taken from the local telephone books and were arrived at by names," the Newspaper said.

The city's population estimates were also released about that time. The estimate was

5,158 people—an increase of 41 percent over 1940 census.

The average size of a family was 3.2 persons. There were 44 houses with only one person living there. Those single-person dwellings were about evenly divided between men and women and all were older than 50.

## Raccoon Loses His Home In Store

*1967 Centennial Issue of Holdrege Daily Citizen*

One furniture store in Holdrege put up with an unwelcome visitor for many years.

"For several years a coon has made his home under the upper floor of the furniture store on East Avenue." The Citizen reported, "from where he made

nightly excursions for food and efforts to entrap him were in vain." This morning Messrs, Reeves and Cooper concluded to capture him, so they took up two of the floor boards up stairs and shut up some of the holes Mr. Coon was in the habit of using.

The coon soon came out into the room, Reeves and Cooper replaced the floor boards and his

coonship captured though he would not surrender without a bitter fight.

The coon was kept roped upstairs. The newspaper describes as one of the biggest specimens it had ever seen.

"If he was not so sassy he would make a fine pet," The Citizen said, "but at present he won't stand much fooling with."

# Holdrege 50 Years Or More Ago

**Holdrege Citizen,  
January 13, 1940**

## Addenda by Frank Hallgren

Frank Hallgren located all these emigrants on government land. The land could be acquired from the government under the Homestead, Timber Claim and Pre-emption laws. At first the settler could secure 80 acres only as a homestead unless he was a war veteran, in which case he could secure 160 acres. Later this was changed to 160 acres for all settlers. A homesteader was required to build a home, break at least ten acres the first year, and live on his land five years.

Under the timber-claim act, the settler was first to plant 40 acres of his land to trees, which were to be 12 feet apart. Later this requirement was reduced to 10 acres with the trees four feet apart. The amount of land was increased from 80 to 160 acres.

Under the Preemption act, a settler signified his intention to purchase a tract of land, which he agreed the purchase for \$1.25 per acre. He had 33 months in which to complete his purchase.

Mr. Hallgren states that he located the first emigrants as follows:

A. P. Anderson on the E ½  
12-6-19

Fridolf W. Stenfelt on the SW 1/4  
22-7-19

Andrew Olson on the NW ¼  
32-7-18

John S. Salgren on the N ½ SE ¼  
14-7-19

August Carlson on the NW ¼,  
14-7-19

Charles Nelson on the SE ¼  
2-6-19

Carl Carlson on the S ½ NE ¼  
30-7-18

Johannes Anderson on the NW ¼  
30-7-18

Anton Peterson in Lake township,  
Phelps County

Frank Boge in Lake township,  
Phelps County

Alexander Danielson o the SW ¼  
30-7-18

John M. Dahlstrom had purchased Section 23-7-19 from the Union Pacific R. R. Company and as Rolf Johnson explained in his diary under the date of March 21, 1876 his father, John Johnson, made an entry on two quarters on Section 24-7-19, one as a Pre-emption and the other as a Timber Claim.

Mr. Hallgren remembers well the day of March 14, 1876. He drove a team and wagon to Kearney to Williamsburg and on to the Emigrant House at Phelps Center. Charley Nelson drove a team belonging to Hallgren. Andrew Olson had his own team. The wagons of Hallgren and

Nelson were loaded first with lumber, and with household goods on top. Olson had household goods and coal.

Mr. Hallgren said he, Nelson and Olson left the caravan at Williamsburg and went to Phelps Center. When they came near the Dahlstrom place, snow commenced to fall straight down in big flakes. Soon the wind started, and the snow began to whirl and there was little visibility. By standing on his wagon and sighting on the black spot which was the Emigrant House, Hallgren led his friends to the house. There they unloaded to make a more secure floor, set up an old cook stove they had, put the horses in the house, and kept a hot fire in the stove all night with their coal. He says they stood up all night by the stove, turning first one side and then the other to the fire.

The following day was extremely cold, and the granulated snow was blowing across the burned prairie. The three men hitched up their teams and made their way back to Williamsburg. Their trip was not without difficulty. In attempting to get through a draw which had drifted deep with snow, one of the teams balked, broke the wagon tongue, and it was necessary to return to the Emigrant House for scantlings to repair the tongue.

## Business Failure Shocking To Town

*1967 Centennial Issue of Holdrege Daily Citizen*

Business failures were not uncommon at any time in Holdrege's history, especially during the 1890's. But one seemed particularly surprising.

This one was of the Einsel Brothers, who had been in business in Holdrege since the early days of the town.

"While it was known to many that these gentlemen were hard up," the Citizen wrote in September of 1891, "yet none

realized how seriously embarrassed they were... The Einsel Brothers had been connected with the city since it started and here they have hundreds of friends who regret their downfall."

Inability to pay loans was apparently the cause of the business failure. "The cause of the failure seems to have been that they had carried on a large part of their enormous business on borrowed money." According to the Citizen. "And the hard times of the past year combined with the illness of J. H and the attention

and time E.E. had to devote to him instead of business caused the trouble."

"Still it looks as if they could have weathered the storm if they had not lost heart as they had friends both in the state and elsewhere who would have come gladly to their aid if they had known of their danger. But their reliant and resolute natures caused them to prefer to go down alone than to be carried along by their friends. We hope that prosperity may again crown their efforts," the Citizen concluded.

## Nelson Won't Run Against Father

*From Holdrege Citizen June 10th 1983 Centennial Edition*

Clarence Nelson decided in 1947 that his opponent in the city council election was too tough. His opponent was his father C. S. Nelson

In those days, local political parties chose candidates through the caucus system. C. S. Nelson, an incumbent councilman, had been nominated for re-election by the Temperance Party.

The Peoples Party, at its caucus, decided to nominate Clarence.

Clarence wasn't consulted about the nomination and didn't want it.

## Word of Nylons Leads To Crowded Store

*From Holdrege Citizen June 10th 1983 Centennial Edition*

The end of World War II meant the end of many shortages. For many women, it meant the nylon stockings were available again. And when the Brown-McDonald store announced women could register for nylons in the spring of 1946, there was a run on the store.

"When the doors opened this morning at 9:00 a.m., 500 people jammed the street in front of the store." The Citizen reported. "With more arriving all the time, lines extended from the east door to the alley and from the west door around the corner."



## Historical Sketch of Holcomb by Hazel Edgren (1967)

*Settling of Holcomb Community  
Continued from the last issue of  
Phelps Helps:*

### PART II

The first thing any settler did was to find lodging for himself and his family then he looked for a place of worship and a school. They were a religious people and they brought their Bibles and psalm books with them. Many times worship was held in the home at first then a school was built and used as a meetinghouse until a church could be built and organized. The first school in the area was in the Solomon Linder residence just north of Moses Hill in 1876. However, in this Swedish settlement churches had been established when the Larson's arrived. The Moses Hill Swedish church was established in 1877, and the Swedish Free Mission group was meeting at Phelps Center in the Hall above the store. It was to this later group that the Larson's and Bloomquist's joined in worship.

Phelps Center had been planned as the Metropolis of the prairie. We heard the account of one of the travelers by state from Kearney to Phelps Center, "I was most impressed with the village of Phelps Center and its influence. I felt that the village of 25-30 buildings would rapidly increase with the expected coming of the

railroad." A large school was located here, too, and pupils came from as far away as the Lundvall's who lived where Dean Hendrick's do now, a distance of seven miles to school. However, instead of the railroad going straight west as expected, the Burlington Railroad curved south and missed Phelps Center by six miles. This was quite a blow to the town. In 1884, the county records were stolen by night and removed from Phelps Center to Holdrege, the town that had been established on the railroad to the south. The Lincoln Land Company in Holdrege offered free lots and those who would move their buildings from Phelps Center to Holdrege, or who would build there. So Phelps Center suffered further defeat. In two months 100 buildings were in Holdrege. We who have been involved in school redistricting problems in latter years realize how important to a town are its school and churches.

The population was growing. Nearly every section now in the 1880's had four families established, one on each quarter, and they were for the most part young, growing families. The 1887 school census for Ash Grove, District No. 9, which was located a half mile north west of the Larson's, listed 34 families and 85 children in the district. In 1893, school records show that there were 43 pupils attending the six

month term in Dist. No. 9. The Hall that had been used for a meeting house at Phelps Center was no longer adequate, so a meeting was called to discuss plans for building new church. This was in the latter or middle 1890s.

These early settlers had strong characters, and they were grim and determined or they wouldn't have stuck out the hardships of grasshopper, drought and other difficulties. But now the traits were called "stubborn", and tact was lacking. Certainly, the humanity of man rather than the spiritual traits of love and patience and forgiveness prevailed. This was a time they shunned remembering. When Dad told me about it, he said it should be forgotten. Wounds that were made were long healing. Larson, Bloomquist and the Dahlstroms (C. J. & J. M) were probably the most outspoken among those who thought that the church should be built farther north. After all, there were already Swedish churches organized at Moses Hill in 1877, (and that was scarcely two miles away); Westmark about 1880; Loomis in 1886; Holdrege in 1889; and Union (New Emmaus) in 1892. The Williamsburg Methodist was ministering to that area. There were feelers out for donations of a church site to the northeast, but

*(Holcomb Continued on page 8)*

*(Holcomb Continued from page 7)*

that was an element, and in the absence of other offers Bloomquist offered to donate land if the church were built on that. Olson, Sampson, and Swanberg were the spokesman for the opposition. They wanted the church built at historic Phelps Center. The Orphan's Home had been established east of the Hall at this time, and they argued that the home needed the church. So the group was split and both groups built new churches that year less than three miles apart. A. G. Larson headed the carpenters at Holcomb. Although feelings were hurt, the two groups continued co-operating Union Big meetings or Evangelistic services. (We would call them "Crusades" today) Usually these Big Meetings, it seems to me, were held in big tents on Phelps Center grounds with speakers such as Gust F. Johnson, C. O. Sahlstorm, and Fredrick Franson who was influential in establishing many Free Churches of this area. While the church at Holcomb was better built, services were held at the Ash Grove School, Dist. no. 9. Toward the end of the summer of 1899 the church was ready for occupation. Among those attending the first service was Charlie Lundvall and George and Will Lyon. They tell that planks were set up in place of pews. E. A. Halleen had been called as pastor but hadn't yet arrived. Rev. C. O.

Sahlstrom, who called this area home, having lived on the quarter west of Jack Waller's, was speaker for this first service. Reverend Halleen arrived in October and in November the first funeral was held at the church, that of George Johnson who was accidentally killed with the Rough Riders.

On the 5th of December, 1899, the new Swedish Emmanuel Free Church at Holcomb was incorporated. The church was named from the Post Office that had been established by Governor Holcomb in 1895 in the Larson residence. When Winston's tore down the old house the framework of the post office was found behind the bedroom wall. (So it can honestly be said that the post office was found behind the bedroom wall. So it can honestly be said that we five younger kids were born in a post office!) The first officer's of the church were J. M. Dahlstrom, chairman; C. J. Dahlstrom; secretary; Aaron Bloomquist, elder; A. G. Larson, J. A. Hanson, and C. A. Lyon, trustee; and C.O Anderson, treasurer. There were 62 charter members. Erika Larson was the first organist and Mrs. Justus Johnson was the first choir director. Mrs. Johnson remained a member until her death, and she was the last surviving charter member. The Swedish language was used exclusively until the First World War, when a transition was slowly made from Swedish to American. It took

about ten years for this transition to be completed, until in 1928 all services were in the American language. The meetings must have been quite informal, because at the conclusion of the message it was the habit of John Erickson (commonly called "Boston" Erickson) to stand and add his comments to the sermon. A service was held each Sunday afternoon by the Holcomb minister at the Rose Hill School joined with those at Holcomb for worship, about in 1920.

This area has been important in the work of the Free Church of America. As there were so many Swedish people who had ties of the Free Church and were much interested in evangelism, evangelistic services were held. One of the outstanding young men who made a definite imprint on this area was Frederick Franson. He aided in beginning several churches as well as being the founder of the Evangelical Alliance Mission. He was also a missionary to Utah as well as making several missionary trips abroad. In the fall of 1893, a meeting was called in Phelps County for a conference for all Evangelical Free Church pastors. There were 35 pastors in attendance. They decided at that meeting to organize a Ministerial Association, and the first steps were taken to implement it. Committees were appointed to

*(Holcomb Continued on page 9)*

*(Holcomb Continued from page 8)*

draw up working plans and write a constitution. They were to meet in Boone, Iowa, and in May 1894 to perfect the organization. Among those who assisted the organization was C. O. Sahlstrom.

People weren't isolated in this area in these early days as we often picture it. Neighbors were near; there were almost one on every quarter section. So it was more closely populated than today. The neighbors co-operated closely, in the absence of preserving facilities, neighborhood butchering were common, giving all a chance to fresh meat. The women of the congregation would gather at the parsonage each fall with gallons of milk and have a "Cheesing for the pastor."

Eben Howard, a son of Frank Gustafson, just north of the Larson's ran a telephone line with Ed Larson's help on the barb wire in the 1890's. Soon they also connected Boston Erickson's, Nels Erickson's and Bloomquists to the line. Their next expansion included the parsonage and Jonas Erickson's south of the parsonage. Then a line was run to Holdrege, and the Plug Board was inaugurated. It was located in Gustafson's home. They expanded the switch board to cover at least eight lines and several towns. Mrs. Frank Krohn was operator.

As more settlers arrived,

Grandma held open house. The first one she befriended was John Erickson, an uncle to Mrs. Rueben Samuelson, who came shortly after the Larson's arrived. Grandpa advised him not to build on the corner as he'd have all the beggars stopping there, so he built in the very center of his quarter, where Wes Hasselquist's now live. Grandpa built along the road himself. Then came Grandma's half-brothers, one at a time: Nels, Andrew, and Carl. John Magnuson also made this home there until he got settled. When Nels came he was rather put out to arrive in Kearney with Grandpa not there to meet him. He caught a ride out, then asked Grandpa, "Why weren't you there to meet me when I wrote and asked you to?" Grandpa answered "All I got from you was a love letter" Yes, even in those days a young man could make the mistake of writing two letters and getting them switched in the envelopes. I wonder what his girl friend thought when she got the letter in Sweden asking her to meet him in Kearney. It likely was the last of the courtship because that wasn't the girl he married.

You might wonder as I did about the Indians in those days. The last of the big Indian raids of this area were in 1869. With the coming of the railroad they moved out of the area. But when I was little my aunt Erika and I went for the cattle in the

pasture. There was a perfect ring of lush grass growing, about twenty feet across. In the middle was a hard packed barren ground. The grass outside this ring grew like the rest of the pasture. I asked why it grew like that. Erika told me that she remembered that was where the last Indians she remembered lived. There was a remaining family of a tribe left when the rest moved on. They were friendly, but soon moved on, too. Before pastures were broken up and leveled, in many places there were tracks overgrown with grass about as deep as lister furrows. These were the remains of the wagon trails across the prairies. In the Sandhills these trails can still be seen.

I wish Grand's trunk could talk. I wonder if that trunk wasn't sent directly to Phelps Center, as the address shows, while they had their stop-over in Chicago. Maybe the trunk was the real drawing-card that brought my family to these parts.

## Couple Surprise Town With Wedding

*1967 Centennial Issue of  
Holdrege Daily Citizen*

It seems hard to keep secrets in Holdrege, so in May of 1892, the townspeople were totally surprised to learn that C. A. Beghtol and Julia E. Necker had been married for three months.

The news came in the form of a card announcing the marriage. "They were still more shocked when they read the date February 12th" the

Citizen said. "The event transpired in Hastings... Both the parties have a host of friends here, but few if any of them suspected that for more than three months they have been husband and wife.

"The groom has carried on the jewelry business as if nothing unusual had happened while the bride had been attending school as if there was nothing more than school duties to interest her," the Citizen concluded.

### TIME TO SEND IN DUES FOR 2009

We do so appreciate our members who are scattered through out the United States, Sweden and here in south central Nebraska. Your support is so important for our club and our Genealogy Library. We continue to add books, microfilm and CDs to our collection.

All members can submit queries for the newsletter and stories that are pertinent to Phelps or Harlan County, Nebraska history.

Dues for 2009 are \$10. Our address is Holdrege Area Genealogy Club, Box 164, Holdrege, Nebraska 68949.

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Holdrege, NE 68949

PO Box 164

Holdrege Area Genealogy Club