

# Phelps Helps



Volume 18, Issue 4

Winter 2010

**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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## Oregon Trail Was “The Way West”

(Souvenir Historical Edition,  
Holdrege Daily Citizen—June 1958)

There were more Indian scares during the years that followed the massacre of 1873 but most of them were only false alarms and no killings resulted, at least in Phelps County. Probably the last bad scare was that of October of 1878. As it turned out it was only a false alarm in Phelps County but it did have some real basis in fact.

The northern Cheyenne's, who had been forcibly removed from their hunting grounds in western Nebraska, broke loose and left the Cheyenne and Arapahoe agencies on September 9, 1878. About 300 of them crossed the Kansas-Nebraska line on October 1st, heading for their old home in western Nebraska.

Although only one killing was reported in Nebraska, that of George Rowley on the Stinking water (near the present town of Wauneta), the Cheyenne's did massacre several people in north western Kansas.

The immediate cause for the scare in Phelps county was given by

James Sweezy, Phelps County sheriff, as follows: “It seems that a hunting party was driving a herd of antelope and by someone at a distance were taken for a party of Indians and away went the story that the whole tribe of blood thirsty savages were sweeping over the country burning property and murdering settlers.

Rumors of the coming of the Indians spread like wildfire across the prairies of Phelps County, and most everyone pulled up stakes, loaded their families and most precious possessions into wagons and headed for Kearney.

One interesting account of the flight to Kearney was told by T. M. Hopwood, who later became editor of “The Nugget.” At that time however, he lived in a sod house east of the present town of Holdrege.

After a hurried consultation with Mrs. Hopwood we decided to go. I tied the cow behind the wagon and tied the dog to the little 6x8 sod dwelling while Mrs. H. put in the

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*(Oregon Continued from page 1)*

feather bed, some quilts and something to eat, and away we went leaving the cat, dog and chickens to their fate. The door of the house being a quilt, of course unlocked.

“Darkness soon hid us from the view of the Savages which we supposed to be approaching, but we trudged along as fast as a cow is able to lead. As we passed our neighbors we gave the alarm and they joined us. But by the time we got into the sand hills we made quite a train, but we were defenseless. We had guns but there was little, if any ammunition in the party. We drove to within sight of the Platte bottom and then by common consent all stopped and camped until near morning. A man and wife with an ox team came along and scared us again by stating that the Indians were coming for sure, and they had traveled all night and came to near Phelps Center. We were all up and going in a few minutes and did not stop until we crossed the Kearney bridge. Here we stopped, unhitched and took lunch. Then some men went into Kearney to secure guns and ammunition but found that Kearney People scared and they would not part with munitions of war for love or money and our men came back disgusted. Among them were John Morehouse, Ben Morehouse and Henry Banzet and T. M. Hopwood.

In the meantime freighters were coming from the Republican Valley and we learned from them that no Indians had been seen and that it was all a big scare...About noon the train started back home.

Many of the Phelps county folks returned home to find their farmsteads and crops more of a

shambles than marauding Indians might have left. During the night a prairie fire was started by some means in the vicinity of Spring Creek, in the southwestern Phelps County. The fire, racing ahead of a strong southwest wind had reached the Platte River by noon. About that time the wind changed and a heavy gale set in from the northwest and the fire swept to the south leaving black desolation in its wake. As the party of Phelps folks drove through the sand hills between here and Kearney, the fire raged all around them, but they pressed on praying that the fire had not leaped across the fireguard surrounding their sod homes. Some arrived home in time to hold off the blaze; others found their farms a mass of blackened ruins.

Mr. Hopwood, who so vividly described the flight to Kearney continued his story on how the fire destroyed his home east of Holdrege:

“.....We hurried to our own home which we thought was so well guarded that it was perfectly safe, but imagine our feeling when we discovered that our unpretentious little home (it was all we had on earth) was a blackened mass of ruins.

“The little pile of corn we had raised was still burning. The chickens had their pen on the plowing, and they were alive and had gathered into their little sod coop for the night. The Kitten we had left so white and clean and happy, and now alas, a flood of sorrows had come over it. Its hair was torn and gnarled and twisted, and once beautiful eyes were sightless and swollen, and yet it lived, but such a sight. It had to be killed and we finished its suffering with a fell stroke. And the dog-had he lived, what a tale of woe he could have unfolded, but brave little Casablanca, had stood as

*(Oregon Continued on page 3)*

*(Oregon Continued from page 2)*

his post and perished in the flames, and his remains were still smoking in the ruins. We made haste to save what little corn was left in the still burning pile while Mrs. H. sat down upon the ruins and wept. Her nerve was gone and her brave heart was almost sunk within her. Reader, could you blame her? Only a year before she had emerged from college as a classical graduate, a bright, light-hearted girl.

That night was dark indeed for us. The blackened earth, the moonless night, and the dismal future, all conspired to drive the last hope from us, but when the fire brands were scattered, we tied the old cow to a post and sought shelter at Morehouse's, three miles away. Here we stayed all night and the next day moved into a dugout a mile from the ruins of our own home."

The fire was one of the most disastrous to sweep across Phelps County.

## "Warshing" Clothes Recipe...

Never thought of a "warsher" in this light before. What a blessing!

"Warshing Clothes Recipe" -- imagine having a recipe for this !!!

Years ago an Alabama grandmother gave the new bride the following recipe: this is an exact copy as written and found in an old scrapbook -- with spelling errors and all.

**WARSHING CLOTHES** Build fire in backyard to heat kettle of rain water. Set tubs so smoke wont blow in eyes if wind is pert. Shave one hole cake of lie soap in boilin water.

Sort things, make 3 piles

1 pile white, 1 pile colored, 1 pile work britches and rags.

To make starch, stir flour in cool water to smooth, then thin down with boiling water.

Take white things, rub dirty spots on board, scrub hard, and boil, then rub colored don't boil just wrench and starch.

Take things out of kettle with broom stick handle, then wrench, and starch.

Hang old rags on fence.

Spread tea towels on grass.

Pore wrench water in flower bed. Scrub porch with hot soapy water.

Turn tubs upside down.

Go put on clean dress, smooth hair with hair combs.. Brew cup of tea, sit and rock a spell and count your blessings. **END**

Paste this over your washer and dryer next time when you think things are bleak, read it again, kiss that washing machine and dryer, and give thanks. First thing each morning you should run and hug your washer and dryer.



For you non-southerners--wrench means, rinse ;-)

**AND WE THOUGHT WE HAVE IT ROUGH**

## Andrew M. Brown Hollenbeck

This is the story of homesteading in the state of Nebraska by the Hollenbeck and Mortimer families, as told in remembrance of his wife, Edith, by Andrew Hollenbeck in the winter of 1964-1965. He was 89 years old.

In the early spring of 1878, leaving from Johnstown, New York, on April 10, my father Andrew Hollebeck, my uncle George Mortimer, and his brother Robert Mortimer, went on train to Nebraska. They were looking for land, because they could not make a living on a small farm in New York where they had been working on shares with the owner, and both families had been living in the same house. There was little or no market for their farm produce in that section of New York State, also prices were very low.

When they arrived in Kearney, Nebraska, they found they had to go to Keene. They started to Keene, about 30 miles. They had to walk. A man overtook them with a team and wagon with just the running gears. As he was going to Keene, he offered them a ride. He sat in the front bolster, and they sat on the hind axel. They had to stay at Keene that night, which was a ranch, and they slept in a hay stack. The next day, Mr. De Keene took them with a team to the land, and they put up stakes. It was on Section four, Township 5, Range Seventeen, about 35 miles from Kearney. They went back to Keene and slept another night in the haystack.

The following day they went to the Land Office at Bloomington to file on the land. The state of Nebraska is laid out in sections. A section is 640 acres with a highway on all sides, four rods in width, and one hundred and sixty acres a quarter.

Dad chose the southwest quarter of section, Uncle Rob the southeast quarter, and Uncle George the Northeast. Sometime later the northwest was taken by a man named Lundquist and ten acres of trees.

The land was quite level, just earth and sky, not bush, tree or stone. There were several lagoons which were spots where buffalo had wallowed after the rain. Some lagoons were small, some as large as five acres. When it rains in that country, the rains often come as heavy downpours and many times I have seen the ground covered with water. I expect that was when the buffaloes did their work. These lagoons were about two feet deep. The topsoil was gone in them. So when they dried up and homesteaders came to put crops in there, they found the land not fertile. We never saw any buffaloes. Many were killed for meat when the railroad was built.

When we were first there, there were no roads. We just drove to the nearest point. We were the first settlers in the area four miles around.

At the time dad, uncle George and Uncle Rob were in Bloomington making the filings, they met a man named Smith who had come to that part of the country some time before them. He had a farm and log house on Turkey Creek, which is several miles north of Bloomington, but between it and the homesteads. He offered them the use of his farm for the summer, if they would look after his stock and crops while he took his trip east for a visit. Dad and Uncle George were glad of the chance, and took turns staying there.

Soon they built three one-room sod houses and most of the necessary furniture. Uncle Rob,  
*(Hollenbeck Continued on page 5)*

*(Hollenbeck Continued from page 4)*

because of his trade as a blacksmith, always had a little money, and he built a small blacksmith shop. As soon as the shop was known to the settlers, they came to him for all kinds of repair work. They came as far as 25 miles to have plowshares sharpened, and they had to be sharp to cut sods for their buildings. Uncle Rob had a well put down; it was a tubular well, built of boards, and was about a hundred feet deep. The houses were in the corners of the homesteads in the middle of the section, so all three families could make use of the one well. I think they had Smith's mules to cut the sods, and to draw brush and poles for their roofs, because there were cottonwood trees at Spring Creek.

The houses built, they were ready to have their families come. We were three days and three nights on the train. We had a basket of food. Mother had five children, Lura, nine years old; Lige, seven; Jake, five; and Willie was a baby. Aunt Sate, who was dad's sister, Sarah, Uncle George's wife took charge of me. I was three years old that September fourth. I lived with Aunt Sate and Uncle George all the time. I can't remember whether Uncle Rob's wife, Aunt Martha Jane, came then or later; they had two girls and a boy. I remember how excited we were to get started for our new home.

I wish I could remember how we came by our first horses and cattle. Anyway, each family had a cow. We saw many antelope, but they kept far away. The guns we had were not powerful enough to kill at that distance. We tried, for we needed the meat. We did get prairie chickens, quail, and jack rabbits. We must have built a barn

that first year, and put up hay for the cows.

In the fall we had a prairie fire. I can remember seeing that wall of fire and coming fast. The cows were tied out to feed. Mother and Aunt Sate ran for the cows and took them into the house. There was a fire break plowed all around the buildings, but the fire jumped it and burned the haystack and the room off the barn. It was awful as long as it lasted. The houses had sod roofs, so we were alright. When we came out, the ground was black as far as we could see. Dad and Uncle George were not home. I think Uncle Rob was, but he had all he could do to look after his own.

We had an Indian scare too that summer. Dad was down on the Turkey Creek at the Smith farm, but he heard about it. He got so worried he walked home in the night. He took a straight course with just the stars to guide him. We were alright, and had not even heard about the Indians.

The winter of the first year, Aunt Sate got so homesick she took me and went to New York State for a visit, but I don't remember too much about the trip, other than we went.

In our first year or two on the homestead, many emigrant wagons stopped at the well to water horses, or whatever other livestock they had, even chickens. One time a covered wagon stayed overnight. After the people left in the morning, a big white drake came quacking to the house. We got a mate for him, and after that we had occasional duck to eat in the winter.

The winters were pretty severe. One time Dad and Uncle George went to Kearney to get a load of coal. We had a real blizzard come up, and

*(Hollenbeck Continued on page 7)*

## Merry Christmas—Gud Jule

From the Orleans Centennial Book 1872-1972

The settlement of the Swedes along School Creek were making plans for Christmas in pioneer days they couldn't go to the super-market to choose a fir tree or a ponderosa pine hauled in by truck from the forests of Montana. Evergreen trees were not native to this portion of Nebraska so with pioneer ingenuity they would provide a good substitute. Several young fellows would hike along the creek until they came to a plum thicket and there choose the most shapely one for a Christmas tree. Being careful not to break the branches, they cut it off near the ground and carried it back to the log church. There they anchored it in a small log slab so it would stand upright and their Christmas job was done.

Trimming the tree was the job for the girls. Green tissue paper had been purchased at the store and with mother's precious scissors they cut long fringed strips to wind around the branch. Next they strung popcorn with an occasional cranberry into yard long strings. With these on the tree, it was a thing of beauty they remarked how much prettier it was than the ones wrapped in fringed newspaper of a few years before. A few candles placed at the tip ends of the branches had to pass inspection by the older so there wouldn't be a tragic fire.

One of the highlights of the Christmas season was the candy treats. Each family gave 25 cents and one gave 50 cents so he was the star of the community. The committee took this money and went to Stromburg store in Orleans and

**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.

brought a wooden bucket full of hard candy which they took to one of the homes and filled the sacks for the children's treat.

The log church was filled to capacity for the entertainment. The log branches

used for school in the same building were supplemented by chairs brought from home. The men would sit on the north side and the woman at the south. A pot Belly stove in the center provided comfortable warmth especially to these who sat nearby. The bracketed lamps with their reflectors proved lights to see that all came dressed in their best.

The program consisted of recitations by the small children and singing by the grown folks accompanied by music from the organ. The scripture was read by the father who had studied for the ministry in Sweden. (Santa Claus did not appear until a few years later).

The candles on the tree were lit and the treats passed out. The parents brought gifts for the children. An orange was a special treat. A pencil and tablet were a luxury to supplement the slate and squeaky slate pencil. Handkerchiefs, hair ribbons, pictures and pocket knives were common gifts. One little girl who was teething received a wax doll and spent the rest of the evening crying about her doll.

Christmas was a happy time for the pioneer children and when it was over they began looking forward to the next one.

Written by Eleanor Ibsen.

*(Hollenbeck Continued from page 5)*

they had to stay all night. Mother burned all the fuel and was looking around the house to see what she could cut up, when Uncle Rob came with some wood and put it through the window. The door was blocked by a big drift. The snow was not deep if it had been spread out on the ground, but the wind blew so hard it piled the snow in deep drifts.

The second year (1880) Dad got a contract to carry mail from Kearney to Alma, about 60 miles. It was a two-day trip. About this time too, Sacramento was started, Sands built a sod store and a post office. When Dad went to Kearney to get the mail, Lige went along with another team. Dad would load the wagon with freight for Sand's store, and Lige would drive back alone. The Burlington railroad was completed to Holdrege in 1883, and the tiny trading village of Sacramento was moved two miles north to the railroad.

One day Mother was walking to Sacramento, then four miles from our homestead, with a basket of eggs for trading. One thing she needed was a lamp chimney. She saw a rattlesnake, and lacking anything to kill it with, there were not sticks or stones on the prairie, she teased it with her umbrella until it bit itself and died.

Land was being taken up fast. That year the first homesteader to settle near us was John Watson who came from three miles west of Mayfield, New York. He was a good neighbor and good man. Dad had contracted to carry the mail for five years, but it kept him away from home and the farm so much he was looking for a substitute, so John Watson took over half the route. The families came from Ephratah, New York, the Putmans, with four children and the

Whitlocks, with two children. From Johnstown, New York, there was Leypard, a single man. The queerest of all was a family by the name of Shipp from Pennsylvania. They came there drawing their few belongings on a hard cart. They said they had bad luck all along the way. They made a dugout, and lived in it all the five years they were there. When they got a deed to their land they promptly sold out and went further west, this time with a team and wagon. They were always asking for help. And the neighbors did help them.

There were many Swedish homesteads near us, but along, the last New Yorkers to come were Mr. and Mrs. Cook Durkee and three children from Mayfield. Mrs. Durkee was John Waton's sister. After they had deed to their property, they sold and moved to McCook. They started a store there, and were there for years afterward. The Rettings settled two miles north of Uncle George. They took up two quarters, as their son was old enough to homestead. Also there were the Dunbars. I think Mrs. Dunbar was a relative of the Rettings.

There were so many families by now and so many children something had to be done about a school. A Smith family who had lived in a dugout until their house was built said we could use the dugout for a school. The men got lumber and made some benches. The young homesteader said he would teach. His name was Jerome Yearons. I was one of the little ones in school. We sat straddling the bench, with books, slates, and pencils in front of us, and played with the ones next in front and next behind us. I don't remember how long we had school in the dugout, but it was until the day a calf walked on the roof and fell through.

*(Hollenbeck Continued on page 8)*

*(Hollenbeck Continued from page 7)*

About this time 1882-1883, Dad and Uncle George built new three-room sod houses out on the highway and put down wells with new windmills to do the pumping. People were beginning to build fences and travel the highways. Mother said we could have school in her front room. Laura Gorden was the teacher. They moved the benches in, but I think they must have had to use that room as a sleeping room at night. I wonder how they managed. After a while the men got together and built a sod schoolhouse on the school section (8). It was one mile north and one mile west of us. Some of the children lived quite a distance away, so they often rode horses and drove a wagon.

The winter of 1883-1884, Dad and Mother, my brothers, Willie, George and Elmer was a baby, Uncle George and Aunt Sate and I, Uncle Rob and family all went to New York State to visit. I think that was the only time Dad ever came to New York. Mother came after his death, the last time in 1918. Lura, Lige and Jake stayed at home. John Watson helped them along and looked after things. We visited all the folks while Uncle Rob's went to Vermont. While we were in Johnstown,

the folks visited Hannah Hollenbeck, widow of Eli Hollenbeck. She said as a joke, "Don't you have a man for me in Nebraska? I would like to come out and see the country." They said, "Yes, we have just the man for you." So when they came home they told John Watson, and he wrote to her. A year later John came to New York and brought her back as his bride. She was a good sport, always happy and having a good time. She was lot of fun for us kids, even played Santa Claus for us at school.

John and Aunt Han, as we called her, did well. They built a nice home and lived in Nebraska for many years, at last they came back to Johnstown, where they had a nice home, well furnished, and one of the first automobiles in the city. They made many trips to Nebraska to visit all their friends and their relatives in McCook.

I can remember arriving home from the trip to New York. Trains by that time ran into Holdrege and perhaps beyond it to the end of the track. Because we lived near the track and several miles east of Holdrege, the crew stopped the train out on the prairie and we walked home in the darkness.

**To be continued next issue**

## New Members & Queries

### MISSING ANCESTORS

Dorothy Richmond  
718 Miller St.  
Holdrege, NE 68949

### LYON

Need descendants of James LYON who married Nancy SLATER. Their daughter Eleanor was born 22 Jan 1831 at

Morgan County, OH; Married  
Howard CARTER.

### PERRY

Researching descendants of James J. PERRY who married Louisa PERRIN-MADISON and had children Victory; K; Mathew and Callie. Louisa born 1829 perhaps in Alabama area.

### ANOTHER NEW MEMBER

Deanna McQueen  
2130 US Highway 24  
Stockton, KS 67669-8704

Researching Paige Orville ANDERSON and Frank Victor HEDSTROM



## Hopkins Shot Near Atlanta—April 11, 1907

Attacked by Fugitive He Tries to Arrest  
WOUNDED IN FOOT Sheriff and Posse  
Surrounded Would Be Murderer Who Escapes in  
Darkness ---Is Pursued

A shooting affray, in which Earl Hopkins, a farmer, was wounded in the arm and foot, occurred near the quiet town of Atlanta yesterday afternoon. The affair caused great excitement in the village and resulted in a manhunt in which between thirty and forty men participated, animated by the hope of capturing the criminal. Word was sent to the Sheriff John Gustus who left the city immediately for the scene of the shooting.

The affair took place late in the afternoon when Mr. Pickering started into his timber claim to get some wood. As he entered the grove he was startled by seeing a man who appeared to have been there hiding suddenly rush out and run away.

Suspecting that there was something wrong he telephoned his neighbor Earl Hopkins, on the other side of the tree claim asking him to head the man off. Hopkins and a neighbor, Mr. Ambrose, started out to do so and came up on the man just as he was about to enter another timber claim. When accosted, the man fired two shots, both taking effect, one passing close to Mr. Hopkins arm and the other hitting his foot.

The man who fired the shots was about two hundred yards distant, so that he must of had a pretty good revolver. Both of the men who were after the fugitive were armed, but did not fire at him.

The man made his way to the trees and out of sight. Mr. Hopkins made his way home and the alarm was raised, as physician called and the sheriff summoned. A party of determined men started out to hunt down the culprit, with the

expectation of landing him in jail without trouble.

By nightfall the men had the fugitive surrounded in the timber claim, but he escaped under cover of the darkness as his pursuers decided to wait until daylight.

Sometime during the night, a bay mare was stolen from the farm of Harve Borden, one mile south and a half mile east of Atlanta, a mule from where the shooting took place, and it is all supposed that it was taken by the man trying to make the escape. Telephone messages have been sent in all directions, and this morning the men took up the hunt again. Sheriff Gustus, who came home during the night, started out again at 5 o'clock this morning by automobile. It was thought that the man was headed southwest and that he will be overtaken shortly. It is supposed that the fugitive is the man who stole money from the Kronquest residence Tuesday night.

Mr. Hopkins drove to the city this morning in order to have the bullet removed from his foot.



# New Books At The Library

- ⇒ *History of Darke County, OH 1817-1889*
- ⇒ *History of Fayette County OH 1810-1889*
- ⇒ *Ohio Journal of Genealogy*
- ⇒ *Abstractions from the Church Records of the Congregational Churches of Phelps County including Loomis, Bertrand, Holdrege and Urbana.*
- ⇒ *Crazy Horse, The Strange Man of the Oglalla's.*
- ⇒ A biography of Mari Sandoz

- Given by Russel Junkin**
- ⇒ *Lost Trails of the Cimarron*
  - ⇒ *Custom Built Rifles*
  - ⇒ *The Story of Western Railroads*

- From Dorothy Johnson Estate** (These books are all on Australia)
- ⇒ *No Man's Land* by Barbara James
  - ⇒ *Northern Perspective* Vol. 17. No.2 1994
  - ⇒ *Darvin's Hotel Victoria, It's life and Legends*, by Barbara James
  - ⇒ *Fit For The Gentler Sex*, a

social and site history of the settlement of Port Darvin and its environs, a commendation of the contribution woman have had to the territory. By Helen J. Wilson and Barbara James.

⇒ *Occupation: Citizen, The Story of Northern Territory Women and the Vote 1894-1896* by Barbara James.



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