

# Liberty Township

Liberty township, located six miles east of Geneva, is bounded on the north by Exeter, on the west by Madison, and on the south by Glegary townships, and on the east by Saline County. Turkey Creek winds from southwest to northeast through its southeastern corner. This stream has running water the year round, and some of the best bottom lands lie along it. There are 35 irrigation wells in the township, and more coming up. There are also three sandpits which provide gravel for county roads as well as good fishing.

The township is crossed from north to south by Nebraska Highway 76, which follows the first section line east of the Madison township border. The Fairmont-Helvey branch of the Burlington slants diagonally from northwest to southeast across Secs. 19 to 34.

The main crops are wheat, corn, oats, milo, and alfalfa; alfalfa is raised for both feed and seed. Livestock consists mostly of stock cattle and hogs; feeding cattle is not a major operation in Liberty township. A few sheep are raised. Almost every farm has some poultry; many poultry raisers contract eggs to hatcheries.

A historical marker between Secs. 10 and 16 in Liberty township reminds us of a young mother who passed away and was buried there while they were en route west in a covered wagon. The inscription on the tombstone at the grave site reads:

Melissa Wife of  
G. G. Montz

February 21, 1872 Aged 31 years 1 month and 12 days

The first Czechs came to Fillmore County in 1867. They came directly from Europe and settled along Turkey Creek in order to have firewood and water. Usually only one member of the family came; he would work at various jobs until he had money enough to send for another member of the family. It was often a long time before some of the larger families could be united again.

## SCHOOLS

District No. 2 was founded on December 4, 1871, when G. W. Gue, county superintendent, set aside Secs. 29, 30, 31, and 32 of Liberty township and Secs. 35 and 36 of Madison township to constitute this district.

Date	Teacher	Salary	Director
1872-73	Helen Loghry.....	\$12 mo. for 3 mo.	
	F. A. Calven.....	\$30 mo. for 4 mo.	
1873-74			C. H. Bassett
1874-75	Shadrack Doty.....	\$30 mo. for 4 mo.	C. H. Bassett
1875-76	Sophia Lee.....	\$72 mo. for 3 mo.	C. H. Bassett
	William Dyer.....	\$30 mo. for 4 mo.	C. H. Bassett
1876-77	L. L. Covell.....	\$28 mo. for 3 mo.	C. H. Bassett
	W. R. Wait.....	\$30 mo. for 4 mo.	C. H. Bassett
1877-78	Ellen Burke.....	\$38 mo. for 1½ mo.	C. H. Bassett
	Jennie English.....	\$38 mo. for 1½ mo.	C. H. Bassett
1878-79	Samuel Browning.....	\$35 mo. for 5 mo.	C. H. Bassett
1879-80	W. P. Evans.....	\$25 mo. for 3 mo.	C. H. Bassett
	S. D. Purviance.....	\$28.33 mo. for 3 mo.	C. H. Bassett
1880-81	Ella Kinrade.....	\$25 mo. for 3 mo.	O. D. Wilson
	Eva M. Dawes.....	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	O. D. Wilson
1881-82	Samuel Browning.....	\$27.50 mo. for 8 mo.	A. C. Tucker
1882-83	Anna Kinrade.....	\$27.50 mo. for 8 mo.	A. C. Tucker
1883-84	Anna Kinrade.....	\$28 mo. for 4 mo.	A. C. Tucker
	Nancy Robertson.....	\$28 mo. for 4 mo.	A. C. Tucker
1884-85	Nancy Robertson.....	\$28 mo. for 5 mo.	A. C. Tucker
1885-86	James Painton.....	\$40 mo. for 4 mo.	A. C. Tucker
	Celia B. Grier.....	\$30 mo. for 2 mo.	A. C. Tucker
1886-87	Kithe Putney.....	\$32.50 mo. for 2 mo.	R. B. Tucker
	Cyrus J. Trauger.....	\$35 mo. for 3 mo.	R. B. Tucker
	M. J. Dwyer.....	\$33 mo. for 3 mo.	R. B. Tucker
1887-88	S. D. Purviance.....	\$37.55 mo. for 6 mo.	John Kennedy

There are no records from 1889 to 1919, except of the school directors who were O. D. Wilson in 1896; J. P. Baroch from 1897 to 1900; Charles Ondrak from 1900 to 1903; and James Krejci from 1903 to 1908.

Date	Teacher	Salary	Director
1919-20	Emma Barta.....	\$80 mo.	Mary Sluka
1920-21	Sylvia Placky.....	\$100 mo.	Mary Sluka
1921-22	Anna Kuska.....	\$100 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1922-23	Anna Kuska.....	\$100 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1923-24	Alice Kohler.....	\$70.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1924-25	Rose Chudly.....	\$70.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1925-26	Lillian Sluka.....	\$70.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1926-27	Lillian Sluka.....	\$80.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1927-28	Edna Buck.....	\$70.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1928-29	Helen McPeck.....	\$80.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1929-30	Vlasta Krupicka.....	\$72.50 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1930-31	Helen Kucera.....	\$67.50 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1931-32	Vlasta Krupicka.....	\$75.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1932-33	Vlasta Krupicka.....	\$60.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1933-34	Vlasta Krupicka.....	\$50.00 mo.	Frank M. Kohler
1934-35	Vlasta Krupicka.....	\$50.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1935-36	Vlasta Krupicka.....	\$50.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1936-37	Rose Suda.....	\$45.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1937-38	Rose Suda.....	\$50.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1938-39	Viola Soukup.....	\$38.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1939-40	Irene Bures.....	\$38.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1940-41	Irene Bures.....	\$40.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1941-42	Rita Votipka.....	\$40.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1942-43	Elaine Tesar.....	\$65.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1943-44	Maxine Havel.....	\$75.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1944-45	Dorothy Bures.....	\$100.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1945-46	Eleanor Kassik.....	\$100.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1946-47	Evelyn Hromadka.....	\$125.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1947-48	Darlene Koca.....	\$150.00 mo.	Edw. Uldrich, Sr.
1948-49	Vivian Luzum.....	\$150.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1949-50	Vivian Luzum.....	\$175.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1950-51	Janet Sladek.....	\$165.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1951-52	Janet Sladek.....	\$190.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1952-53	Janet Sladek.....	\$235.70 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1953-54	Janet Sladek.....	\$240.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1954-55	Norma Koca.....	\$225.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1955-56	Shirley Hall.....	\$240.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich
1956-57	Willa Jean Kotas.....	\$250.00 mo.	Raymond Uldrich

District 2 merged with the Milligan school system in 1966.

District No. 5 was founded on January 6, 1872. George W. Gue, county superintendent, set aside Secs. 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of Liberty township to constitute this district.



Photo from Louis Krejci  
Taken the day after a tornado, on June 14, 1924, destroyed the school house of District No. 5. The school board was going to build a new school and was trying to decide what to do with the old building when the tornado destroyed it.



Photo from Lou Vavra  
District No. 6 Schoolhouse (February 22, 1941).

On petition of Peter Youngers, County Superintendent G. W. Gue set aside Secs. 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, and 36 of Liberty township to constitute **District No. 6**. The election of officers took place at the home of D. H. Dillon on January 13, 1872.

Date	Teacher	Salary	Director
April 1872-73	William Dyer	\$16.60 mo. for 3 mo.	William Dyer
		\$20.00 mo. for 3 mo.	William Dyer
		\$20.00 mo. for 3 mo.	William Dyer
1875-76	William Shirley	\$27 mo. for 3 mo.	Peter Youngers
1876-77	Solomon Browning	\$30 mo. for 4 mo.	Peter Youngers
1877-78	Laura Bock	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	Peter Youngers
1878-80	M. Nicholson	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	D. H. Dillon
		\$30 mo. for 6 mo.	D. H. Dillon
1880-83	Mrs. M. Youngers	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	D. H. Dillon
		\$29.00 mo. for 3 mo.	Frank Kucera
		\$29.75 mo. for 5 mo.	Frank Kucera
1883-84	Viola Mosher	\$30 mo. for 5 mo.	Frank Kucera
1884-85	Erma Gabel	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	Frank Kucera
	Viola Mosher	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	John Hromadka
1885-87	B. J. Ryan	\$32.50 mo. 2 terms	John Hromadka
		\$35 mo. for 8 mo.	John Hromadka
1887-88	Julia Reid	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	Anton Becwar
1888-89	M. J. Dwyer	\$30 mo. for 3 mo.	Anton Becwar
1889-90	Hattie Madison	\$30 mo. for 5 mo.	Anton Becwar
Sept. to Dec. 1890	Emma Sage	\$133 1/3 for 4 mo.	Anton Becwar
March to June 1891	Emma Sage	\$133 1/3 for 4 mo.	Anton Becwar

In the summer of 1891, a new schoolhouse was built one-half mile south of its old location so as to make it more central.

Date	Teacher	Salary	Director
1891-93	Emma Lane	\$130 for 4 mo.	Anton Becwar
1891-93	Edmund Lane	\$33 for 1 mo.	Anton Becwar
	Edmund Lane	\$105 for 3 and 5 mo. terms.	Anton Becwar
1893-94	Kitty Cully	\$280 for 3 and 5 mo. terms.	John Kasak

1895-96	Emma Lane	\$32 mo. for 3 and 5 mo. terms.	John Kasak
1896	Charles Smrha	\$64	John Kasak
1900-01	A. B. Hromadka	8-month term	John Kasak
		(Salary not available; 45 students enrolled, ranging from 5 to 18 years of age.)	
1901-02	E. J. Kotas	8-month term	John Kasak
		(36 pupils enrolled)	
1902-04	Lillian Spirk	Two 8-mo. terms	Mike Becwar
1904-06	Nellye Hanabery	Two 8-month terms at \$35	Mike Becwar
1906-08	Lillian Kotas	Two 8-month terms at \$35	Mike Becwar
1909-10	Esther McDonald	\$40 mo for 9 mo.	Fr. F. Lovegrove
1910-15	Emil Soukup	Started at \$50 mo. for 9 mo.; raised to \$60 and \$65	Fr. F. Lovegrove
1915-16	Rose Brt.	\$50 mo. for 9 mo.	Fr. F. Lovegrove
1916-17	Agnes Vavra	\$50 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1917-18	Valasta Krejci	\$50 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1918-19	Marie Sourezný	\$50 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1919-20	Marie Novacek	\$75 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1920-21	Lilian Placek	\$110 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1921-22	Effie Peterson	\$90 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1922-24	Alice Laun	\$75 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1924-25	Tena Vavra	\$75 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1925-26	Alice Votipka	\$80 mo. for 9 mo.	Fred J. Kucera
1926-31	Mamie Loukota	\$80 mo. for 9 mo.	Louis Vavra
1931-37	Helene Kucera	9 mo. receiving \$60 mo. for 3 years; \$50 mo. for 2 years; \$55 mo. for 1 year.	Louis Vavra

(Enrollment of only 5 students for the past five years.)

1937-42	Anna Hromadka	\$45 and \$50 mo. for 9 mo.	Louis Vavra
1942-44	Rita Votipka	\$70 and \$100 mo. for 9 mo.	Louis Vavra
1944-45	Darlene Becwar	\$95 mo. for 9 mo.	Louis Vavra
1945-46	Mrs. Willard Steyer	\$125 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1946-48	Arlene Laun	\$125 and \$135 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1948-49	Lorene Tesar	\$130 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1949-50	Lorene Tesar	\$150 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1950-51	Lorene Bedlan	\$160 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1951-52	Janelle Sladek	\$170 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1952-53	Betty Slezak	\$200 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1953-54	Shirley Vavra	\$200 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1954-55	Miss Merryman	\$200 mo. for 9 mo.	Ed Vavra
1955-56	Mrs. Mildred Tesar	\$225 mo. for 9 mo.	Ellsworth Maresh
1956-57	Mrs. Mildred Tesar	\$250 mo. for 9 mo.	Ellsworth Maresh

District 6 merged with Milligan in 1962.

On March 3, 1872, County Superintendent G. W. Gue set aside Secs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 of Liberty township to constitute **District No. 25**.



Fiftieth Anniversary Picnic, School District No. 6 (August 17, 1941).

Picture from Lou Vavra



District No. 25 (taken in 1930's)  
 Left to right: Rosemary Erdkamp, Shirley Jansen, Rita Becker, Teacher, Bobby Zeleny, Dick Erdkamp, Francis Biba.

District No. 33 ("Elm School") was founded in March, 1872, when County Superintendent G. W. Gue, by his deputy, G. W. Burrow, set aside Secs. 21, 22, 27, 28, 33, and 34 of Liberty township to constitute this district. The school did not go into operation until 1876.

Date	Teacher	Salary	Director
May 1, 1876.....	Grace Crooker.....	\$100 for 4 mo.....	L. W. Clark and N. Devel
March 12, 1877.....	S. Browning.....	\$90 for 3 mo.....	L. W. Clark
Dec. 10, 1877.....	John Beardsley.....	\$90 for 3 mo.....	L. W. Clark
March 16, 1878.....	J. B. Sexton.....	\$90 for 3 mo.....	L. W. Clark
1878 .....	Sewell May.....	\$78 for 3 mo.....	S. O. Hubbard
April 7, 1879.....	Lou Nicholson.....	.....	S. O. Hubbard
April 5, 1880.....	Lou Nicholson.....	.....	S. O. Hubbard
1880 .....	Sam Browning.....	\$120 for 4 mo.....	S. O. Hubbard
April 11, 1881.....	W. R. Teagarden.....	\$78 for 3 mo.....	S. O. Hubbard
1881 .....	Minnie Butler.....	\$75 for 3 mo.....	S. O. Hubbard
1881-1882 .....	H. P. Wilson.....	\$84 for 3 mo.....	S. O. Hubbard
April 10, 1882.....	Marietta Avery.....	\$75 for 3 mo.....	J. S. Beardsley
1882-1883 .....	Minnie R. Stone.....	\$90 for 3 mo.....	J. S. Beardsley
April 18, 1883, to	.....	.....	.....
June, 1883.....	Marietta Avery.....	\$56 for 40 days.....	J. S. Beardsley
Nov., 1883, to	.....	.....	.....
March, 1884.....	Eva Sheibley.....	\$120 for 4 mo.....	J. S. Beardsley
April, 1884, to	.....	.....	.....
Aug., 1884.....	Miss A. L. Jackson.....	\$97.50 for 60 days.....	J. S. Beardsley
April, 1885, to	.....	.....	.....
Aug., 1885.....	Nancy Robertson.....	\$90 for 3 mo.....	J. S. Beardsley
July, 1885, to	.....	.....	.....
Oct., 1885.....	Etta Hamilton.....	\$120 for 80 days.....	S. O. Hubbard
1885 .....	Celia B. Grier.....	\$108 for 60 days.....	S. O. Hubbard
July, 1886, to	.....	.....	.....
Jan. 1, 1887.....	Nancy Robertson.....	\$80 for 60 days.....	S. O. Hubbard
Jan. 1, 1887, to	.....	.....	.....
July, 1887.....	Nancy Robertson.....	No record.....	S. O. Hubbard
July, 1887, to	.....	.....	.....
Sept. 30, 1887.....	Nancy Robertson.....	\$96 for 3 mo.....	J. L. Jackson
Nov. 21, 1887.....	P. H. Ryan.....	\$144 for 4 mo.....	J. L. Jackson
April 3, 1888.....	Lillian Donovan.....	\$90 for 3 mo.....	Thomas Durkan
1888 .....	B. J. Ryan.....	\$90 for 2 mo.....	Thomas Durkan
Jan. 21, 1889.....	B. J. Ryan.....	\$108 for 3 mo.....	Thomas Durkan
1889 .....	Miss Pivan.....	\$20 for 1 mo.....	Thomas Durkan
March 6, 1889, to	.....	.....	.....
June 28, 1889.....	B. J. Ryan.....	\$132 for 4 mo.....	Thomas Durkan
July 8, 1889.....	C. L. Tallmadge.....	\$144 for 4 mo.....	Thomas Durkan
Feb. 17, 1890.....	Ida B. Walton.....	\$90 for 3 mo.....	Thomas Durkan
July 1, 1890.....	Ida B. Walton.....	\$210 for 7 mo.....	G. Girch
July 20, 1891.....	Ida B. Walton.....	\$60 for 2 mo.....	G. Girch
Aug. 21, 1891.....	Jennie Hussman.....	\$56 for 2 mo.....	G. Girch
Oct. 30, 1891.....	Jennie Hussman.....	\$120 for 4 mo.....	G. Girch
Feb. 29, 1892.....	Jennie Hussman.....	\$60 for 2 mo.....	G. Girch
Aug. 27, 1892.....	Jennie Hussman.....	\$60 for 2 mo.....	G. Girch
Dec. 5, 1892, to	.....	.....	.....
April, 1893.....	Charles S. Holmes.....	\$140 for 4 mo.....	G. Girch
April 10, 1893.....	Charles S. Holmes.....	\$70 for 2 mo.....	G. Girch
Sept. 11, 1893.....	Ida B. Walton.....	\$60 for 2 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Dec. 4, 1893.....	Ida B. Walton.....	\$140 for 4 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
March 7, 1894.....	Mary Janda.....	\$60 for 2 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
July 31, 1894.....	S. L. Bleuvelt.....	\$130 for 4 mo.....	Frank Rozanek

Date	Teacher	Salary	Director
Nov. 9, 1894.....	S. L. Bleuvelt.....	\$195 for 6 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Sept. 27, 1895, to	.....	.....	.....
Sept. 1896.....	Charles Smrha.....	\$50 for 2 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
.....	.....	\$112 for 4 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Sept. 6, 1896, to	.....	.....	.....
Oct. 26, 1896.....	Fannie Motis.....	\$56 for 2 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Jan. 26, 1897, to	.....	.....	.....
May 21, 1897.....	E. J. Motis.....	\$150 for 5 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Sept., 1897, to	.....	.....	.....
May 3, 1898.....	E. J. Motis.....	\$240 for 8 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Oct. 1, 1898, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1899.....	Anna Smrha.....	\$240 for 8 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Oct. 11, 1899, to	.....	.....	.....
Dec. 24, 1899.....	W. G. Williams.....	\$140 for 4 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
Jan., 1899, to	.....	.....	.....
May 18, 1900.....	W. G. Williams.....	\$160 for 4 mo.....	Frank Rozanek
June 25, 1900.....	.....	.....	Emil Kubicek
(Information is missing from 1900 to 1906.)			
Oct. 3, 1906-07.....	Maxie Holmotz.....	\$140 for 4 mo. \$190 for 5 mo.	.....
Sept., 1907-08.....	Tom F. Hanabery.....	\$360 for 9 mo.....	James Stetina
Sept., 1908-09.....	Iva A. Mitchell.....	\$400 for 8 mo.....	James Stetina
Sept., 1909, to	.....	.....	.....
Jan., 1910.....	Tina D. Erving.....	\$23.75 for 4 3/4 mo.....	James Stetina
Jan., 1910, to	.....	.....	.....
May 13, 1910.....	Iva A. Mitchell.....	\$250 for 5 mo.....	James Stetina
Sept., 1910, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1911.....	William Biba.....	\$450 for 9 mo.....	James Stetina



Photo from Lou Vavra  
 Before Convertibles and Snow Tires. As late as 1940, the teacher in District No. 6 sometimes got to school by this kind of emergency transportation. (Mr. John Hromadka and team.)

Sept., 1912, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1913.....	Estella Krejci.....	\$450 for 9 mo.....	James Stetina
Sept., 1913, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1914.....	Edward Chudly.....	\$400 for 8 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1914, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1915.....	Bessie Selement.....	\$405 for 9 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1915, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1916.....	Bessie Selement.....	\$405 for 9 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1916, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1917.....	Elizabeth Kelly.....	\$450 for 9 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1917, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1918.....	Frank Votipka.....	\$495 for 9 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1918, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1919.....	Mollie (Mrs. Frank) Votipka.....	\$495 for 9 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1919, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1920.....	Agnes Ondrak.....	\$675 for 9 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1920, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1921.....	Agnes Ondrak.....	\$1,035 for 9 mo.....	James Slezak
Sept., 1921, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1922.....	Emma Kuska.....	\$900 for 9 mo.....	James Pracheil
Sept., 1922, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1923.....	Katherina Kuska.....	\$900 for 9 mo.....	James Pracheil
Sept., 1923, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1924.....	Katherina Kuska.....	\$855 for 9 mo.....	James Pracheil
Sept., 1924, to	.....	.....	.....
May, 1925.....	Alice Laun.....	\$585 for 9 mo.....	James Pracheil

Date	Teacher	Salary	Director
Sept., 1925, to			
May, 1926	Frank Tesar	\$675 for 9 mo.	James Pracheil
Sept., 1926, to			
May, 1927	Alice Vavra	\$630 for 9 mo.	James Pracheil
Sept., 1927, to			
May, 1928	Alice Vavra	\$720 for 9 mo.	James Pracheil
Sept., 1928, to			
May, 1929	Milton Pracheil	\$675 for 9 mo.	James Pracheil
Sept., 1929, to			
May, 1930	Dorothy Dumpert	\$675 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1930, to			
May, 1931	Dorothy Dumpert	\$765 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1931, to			
May, 1932	Dorothy Dumpert	\$675 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1932, to			
May, 1933	Anna Hromadka	\$540 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1933, to			
May, 1934	Anna Hromadka	\$405 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1934, to			
May, 1935	Anna Hromadka	\$405 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1935, to			
May, 1936	Anna Hromadka	\$405 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1936, to			
May, 1937	Anna Hromadka	\$405 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1937, to			
May, 1938	Rita Votipka	\$405 for 9 mo.	Stephen Kovanda
Sept., 1938, to			
May, 1939	Rita Votipka	\$495 for 9 mo.	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1939, to			
May, 1940	Rita Votipka	\$450 for 9 mo.	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1940, to			
May, 1941	Arlene Tesar	\$360 for 9 mo.	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1941, to			
May, 1942	Arlene Tesar	\$360 for 9 mo.	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1942, to			
May, 1943	Dorothy Bures	\$45 for Sept. and \$55 mo. for 8 mo.	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1943, to			
May, 1944	Dorothy Bures	\$765 for 9 mo. \$6.40 for Income Tax	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1944, to			
May, 1945	Maxine Havel	\$855 for 9 mo. \$8.60 for Income Tax	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1945, to			
May, 1946	Maxine Havel	\$1,035 for 9 mo. \$15.40 for Income Tax	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1946, to			
May, 1947	Helen Chudly	\$1,035 for 9 mo. \$11.60 for Income Tax	Wm. Slezak
Sept., 1947, to			
May, 1948	Helen Chudly	\$1,260 for 9 mo. \$15.70 for Income Tax	Raymond Uldrich
Sept., 1948, to			
May, 1949	Lorene Buzek	\$1,215 for 9 mo. \$13.40 for Income Tax	Rex Votipka
Sept., 1949, to			
May, 1950	Lorene Buzek	\$1,575 for 9 mo. \$17.70 for Income Tax	Rex Votipka
Sept., 1950, to			
May, 1951	Lorene Buzek	\$1,575 for 9 mo. \$21.31 for Income Tax	Rex Votipka
Sept., 1951, to			
May, 1952	Lorene Buzek	\$1,800 for 9 mo. Feb.; Emil J. Filip filled vacancy \$24.30 for Income Tax	Rex Votipka till
Sept., 1952, to			
May, 1953	Delores (Mrs. Leonard) Becwar	\$1,800 for 9 mo. \$20.30 for Income Tax	Emil J. Filip
Sept., 1953, to			
May, 1954	Betty Slezak	\$1,890 for 9 mo. \$30.90 for Income Tax	Emil J. Filip
Sept., 1954, to			
May, 1955	Anna (Mrs. Giles) Hanson	\$2,250 for 9 mo. \$35.40 for Income Tax	Emil J. Filip
Sept., 1955, to			
May, 1956	Anna (Mrs. Giles) Hanson	\$2,250 for 9 mo. \$25.40 for Income Tax	Emil J. Filip
Sept., 1956, to			
May, 1957	Elaine E. Betka	\$2,025 for 9 mo. \$30.70 for Income Tax	Emil J. Filip

It may be interesting to note that a father, mother, and daughter all taught in this school: Mr. and Mrs. Frank Votipka (both deceased) and their daughter Rita. They all graduated from high schools within Fillmore County. Mr. Votipka graduated from the eighth grade in District 33.

District 33 merged with Milligan in 1966.

On March 16, 1875, John A. Dempster, county superintendent, set aside Secs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of Liberty township to constitute **District No. 72**.

**District No. 95** was founded on November 18, 1893, when County Superintendent J. J. Burke set aside Secs. 1, 2, and 3 of Liberty township and Secs. 34, 35, and 36 of Exeter township to constitute District No. 95.

On July 1, 1953, Districts 5, 25, 72, and 95 consolidated with District 20 of Exeter township.

Districts 2, 6, and 33, as previously noted, consolidated with Milligan.



Photo from James Barbur District No. 95, about 1913 or 1914. *Back row, left to right:* Willie Eurich, Tommy Rose, Ruth Horne, Lloyd Steyer, Frank Krejci, Sam Eurich, Johnny Krejci, John Barbur, Mabel Rose, Alvina Eurich, Mildred Dyer, Louise Diekman Downey, teacher. *Middle row left to right:* Mamie Loukota, Lucile Barbur, Lizzie Eurich, Gladys Dyer, Frank Loukota, Harold Dyer, Emily Horne, Mary Krejci. *Seated:* Dorothy Horne, Henry Miller, Jimmie Loukota, Ernest Dyer, Ruthie Lane, Vera Miller, Alice Miller, Lillian Miller.

## FAMILIES

Mr. and Mrs. **John K. Barbur**<sup>1</sup> came to Fillmore County in October, 1870, from Woodstock, Illinois, and located in Sec. 3 of Liberty township. They came with a wagon and team; they were five weeks on the road and were laid up one week because of bad weather. Upon recommendation, Mr. Barbur bought a filing without going to see the land. They used a sod shanty near Turkey Creek until their dugout home, dugout barn, and cellar were ready for occupancy in January, 1871.

<sup>1</sup>The accounts of the Barbur, Coates, Downey, Dyer, Eberstein, Howarth, McGhie, Murphy, Nolan, Nugent, Ramsdell, Songster, Stephens, and Ziska families are taken, with minor alterations, from *Pioneer Stories*, by G. R. McKeith, of Exeter, Nebraska.



Photo From James Barbur One of the first frame houses in Liberty township.

# Liberty Township Homestead Map

Henry Sheldon	William McGhie Samuel H. Abbott	5 Railroad Land	Chester C. Stephens	Thomas Powell	James Horne	3 Railroad Land	John Walton	William Downey	Sarah Anne Coates	1 Railroad Land				
Joseph Kolar	Charles Hole Patrick Murphy		Calvin A. Songetter	Napoleon Wilson			Charles H. Vroman	William Ramsdell						
Alexander McCarthy														
7 Railroad Land	Alfred S. Keller	Joseph S. Thompson	9 Railroad Land			John Ryan	John K. Barber		John Geesler	Phillip Marquart				
	Amasa W. Jacobs	Dikens W. Jacobs	Elias Peterman		Henry L. Morgan	Charles C. Houder	Martha Houts	George P. Wakeman	John Kolar					
									Alexander Parks	Leonard B. Sage				
Robert C. Joyner	John Dempsey	17 Railroad Land			16 School Land	15 Railroad Land	Martin Jeffrey	Thomas G. Gooden		13 Railroad Land				
	George Nugent						John F. Shirley							
Levi Butterbaugh	William Logan						Francis M. Shirley	Martin P. Burge						
	Willard Logan							George Isaac						
19 Railroad Land	Eugene F. Morse	A. O. Morse	Francis M. Shirley		21 Railroad Land			Caleb S. Jordan	Theodore W. Allen		23 Railroad Land			
	Albert G. Riegold		Patrick Lygne				John S. Beardsley	John Lindon		Samuel C. Oaks	Joseph Pospisil	Thomas H. Lovegrove		
							R. R. Instrument			Otto Otenberg				
Elias Bean	Owen D. Wilson	George W. Stultz	John Toomey		James Kennedy	Holmes Marshall	James Nolan		Peter Youngers Sr.	Peter Youngers Jr.	Patrick Kelly, Jr.	Patrick Kelly, Sr.	25 Railroad Land	
Henry A. Chapman	Owen D. Wilson	George W. Stultz	Harmon Stultz		Wilber Deuel	Thomas Nugent		Matthew Youngers		Frank Beckwa	John Karl			
31 Railroad Land	Peter McKenna	Ferdinand Stuka	Ferdinand Stuka	Karl Petrik		33 Railroad Land			Solomon O. Hubbard	Josef Sladek	Joseph Jes		35 Railroad Land	
	William McKenna	Frank Kebrille	Wencel Wollin	Anton Uldrich					Gottlieb Girmus 160 A	Anton Vavra	Matthias Kubicek	Kate Rusicka		36 School Land

The Barbur opened their home for religious purposes and had the first preaching service held in Fillmore County. The Rev. Mr. Whiting, a Free Methodist, was the preacher. In the Barbur home was organized the first Sunday School in the county. A Mr. Snowden came from Lincoln for that purpose, bringing with him 20 books to start a library.

The first year of farming was not very encouraging. They had planted sod corn, buckwheat, squash, turnips, and beans. Everything looked very good until a hailstorm struck the farm and dashed everything to pieces except the turnips. Then Mr. Barbur longed for home and wanted to go back, but Mrs. Barbur refused. She believed they could fight it out, and so they remained. In spite of drawbacks, they could at least at one time boast of "high living" in having venison for meat. This was considered so good that some hungry Esau came around when the Barburs were away from home and stole half of the precious deer.

Mr. Barbur killed several antelope and received a share of buffalo meat from Palmer Lancaster. Mr. Lancaster on one occasion secured, with his own gun and Mr. Barbur's shotgun, 13 out of a flock of 14 wild geese. During those early days, the geese and cranes were so plentiful that he paid a man a dollar a day to kill them, or they would have no crops.

The Barburs, like others, suffered from the grasshoppers. A black cloud appeared in the north, and soon grasshoppers

began to fall. A cornfield of 100 acres quickly was nothing but a patch of short stalks.

Mr. Barbur helped to organize Fillmore County, at a meeting in Col. McCalla's dugout, and helped to secure the placing of the county seat in Geneva.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Becwar migrated to the United States from Czechoslovakia by sailing ship in 1868, arriving in November. They came by train as far as Lincoln. There they hired a wagon and driver to bring them and their possessions across the prairies to the Kral homestead north of Milligan (E 1/2, SE 1/4, Sec. 26). After paying their fare to the driver, the family had only 75 cents left.

The Becwars took a homestead on the 80 acres west of the Kral homestead (W 1/2, SE 1/4, Sec. 26). The family consisted of mother, father, son (Anton, aged 7), and two daughters (Josephine, 4, and Agnes, 2). Later three more children, Barbara, Mike, and Mary, were born to this union. On the homestead they made a dugout, using an animal hide to cover the doorway, for a home.

Mr. Becwar was a cabinet maker. On their way to Liberty township they had stopped in Pleasant Hill, where a mill was being built, and he was promised work the next week. He walked back to Pleasant Hill where he worked for some time at 50 cents a day. He helped build the first William Smith flour mill on Turkey Creek at Pleasant Hill. He walked 25

miles to work, staying during the week and coming home on week ends. At the end of his first week, he walked home on the Saturday night carrying enough lumber for a door for their dugout. On other weekends, he would follow the well-worn path across the prairie carrying groceries, once including a 50-pound sack of flour.

The first years of living in this country were very hard. Living in the dugout was unpleasant, as it was hard to heat. Beds were made on the floor, and often snakes were to be found living with them. They ground corn by using two stones; cornbread was one of their major items of food. A certain weed that grew along Turkey Creek was gathered to make into a tea, the only beverage available besides water. Their principal meat was prairie chickens, which were plentiful and were usually shot on trips home from work. The following spring they bought a heifer calf with Mr. Becwar's carpenter earnings. They broke the calf to yoke and used it, with a neighbor's horse, to break the sod. They planted corn and watermelons. Melons grew as large as half-bushel baskets.

In 1870-1871, Mr. Becwar was employed building the B. & M. Railroad. The main line was completed through Fillmore County in 1871, after which the towns of Exeter and Fairmont were laid out and grew rapidly. In 1871, Mr. Becwar bought from the railroad the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 23, Liberty township; this farm was handed down to Mike Becwar, Sr., who in turn gave it to Mike Becwar, Jr., in 1922. At present Leonard Becwar and family live on this farm. As of 1967, this farm has been in the same family for 96 years.

Indians came through occasionally begging for food. Mrs. Becwar usually gave them homemade bread. The Indians, being friendly, would settle for that. However, usually several Indians would come to the place at once, and while one was at the house others would pick up whatever they could get, and the woman of the house would be too scared to do anything about it.

Rustlers were a real problem. They would come through stealing cattle. The Becwars' cow had a calf. The cow was turned out to graze and the calf was tied up at home. Rustlers came and took their cow, along with neighbor Zelenka's cow. During the night the Becwars' cow ran away from the rustlers and returned to her calf, but the Zelenkas never did recover their animal.

The children of the Frank Becwars married and lived in Kansas and Nebraska. Agnes and Josie settled in Kansas; Barbara went to Nelson, Nebraska, and Mary to Sunol, Nebraska. Mike Becwar, Sr., and Anton stayed in Fillmore County.

Anton Becwar, son of Frank and brother of Mike, Sr., was born in Czechoslovakia on June 16, 1861. He came to America with his parents and lived to manhood with them. He was united in marriage to Marie Bures on November 27, 1883. They had 11 children. After their marriage Anton and Marie moved into a new frame house on the parents' homestead. In 1895, they bought the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 23 for \$10,000. This was a very modern farmstead for its day; the barn, corn-crib, and hog house still stand. However, two Becwar children, Charles and Anna, contracted diphtheria on this farm from eating creek ice at a school picnic and both passed away on the same day. Their father, not wanting to live there any longer, sold this farm to Joe Domling. Anton and his wife then bought the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 19, Liberty township, and lived there the rest of their lives. Anton passed away January 31, 1937, and his wife Marie on October 9, 1933.

Children of this union still living are: Katherine Kuska and Antonia Stofer, of Fairmont, Josephine Menke, of Exeter, and Mamie Miner, of Dorchester.

Mike Becwar, Sr., was born in the family dugout in 1872. He was married in 1897 to Josie Beck. They had eight children: Mike, Jr., Frank, Barbara (Mrs. James Tesar), Mrs. Anna Foster, Mrs. Rose Svec, Mrs. Emma Koca, Mrs. Valasta Moore, and Gus (who passed away during World War II in Cairo, Egypt).

Mike Becwar farmed in Fillmore County until 1923, when he moved near Tobias, Nebraska, where he farmed for

21 more years. He and his wife then moved to Geneva, where they lived four years and were privileged to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. Then they moved to Milligan to be closer to their children. His wife Josie passed away in 1951; he followed her in 1962. His farming operations included the usual ones: raising cattle, hogs, and chickens, and wheat, oats, and corn. He served for more than 20 years on the school board in District 6.

He recalled his mother's telling them about the cattle rustlers who got, but lost again, their family cow, though the same rustlers took several steers from the near-by Krals. He also remembered her account of the grasshoppers in 1874. They dropped from the sky, eating everything green, including his dad's jacket.

District 6 schoolhouse was first located in the northeast corner of the section where it is now. Mike Becwar, Sr., went to this first school on the corner. Mrs. Peter Youngers was his teacher. This schoolhouse was later sold to a Mr. Nichols, and a new one was built  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile south of the same farm. The new schoolhouse served for many years, and in 1941 celebrated its 50th year in service.

—Mike Becwar, Jr.

Albert Biba came to America with his parents in 1878 at the age of six years. His future wife, Josie Kovanda, came in 1886 at the age of 18. They were both from Czechoslovakia. They were married August 18, 1890, at Geneva. To this union were born nine children: William, Albert, Anton, James, Edward, Fred, Mrs. Joe Kuska, Mrs. Earl Manning, and Alice.



Albert and Josefa Kovanda Biba—taken on their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1940.

Thomas Coates was a native of Yorkshire, England. His home was near the county line; their nearest important town was Worksop in Nottinghamshire. The district is one of the most interesting and beautiful in England. In this historic and beautiful countryside Thomas Coates was born and raised. In July, 1848, he was married to Sarah Annie Johnson. Up to the time he left England, he worked in the limestone quarries and rented a farm; this was often done by enterprising men.

The Coatses came to this country in 1871, bringing with them a young family of seven children, five boys and two

girls. They arrived in Lincoln in May. The B. & M. Railroad was then laid as far as Lincoln. They stayed there until the track was laid as far as Crete; then they made their way west. Mr. Coates bought some railroad land on Sec. 18 near Turkey Creek in Saline County. They lived there until 1873, when he bought the homestead rights of the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 2, in Liberty township, Fillmore County, where they resided until the time of their deaths. Mr. Coates died in 1888 and Mrs. Coates in 1911.

We are indebted to Joseph Coates, the fourth son in the family, for the following information. He remembered very distinctly the farm home in England as well as experiences of pioneer life on the prairies. When they came to this country there was plenty of wild game. One day he came on a large herd of antelope lying in a ravine. When they saw him they made a rush which seemed to shake the earth. This was the apparent effect caused by that particular kind of animal as it ran. Prairie fires were the terror of their lives. A fire could be seen for three days before it reached their place and could be seen for three days after it had passed. This gave ample time to make fireguards, but these were often jumped.

He would often visit the campfires of the Indians and sit in their circles, watching their mode of life and listening to their war songs. The Indians always seemed happy as larks. Life seemed a real pleasure, and they made the best of their conditions.



"Grandma Coates" and her home in Liberty Township.

One day Mr. Coates was out hunting rabbits. Quite unexpectedly an Indian came up to him and took his gun away from him. After looking it over carefully, he handed it back without making any remarks. On another occasion, he went with a party to hunt antelope. They saw a lone antelope, and as soon as the dogs saw it they gave chase, caught it, and killed it. The next day they saw a herd of 14 antelope, but the dogs would not touch them. The hunters were without their guns, and so the antelope herd ran away.

Among the peculiar stories of early years are those about a tornado which completely destroyed the house and farm buildings on the Wadman place near Turkey Creek. When the tornado struck the house, Mrs. John Wadman (née Mary Coates) and her two children had retired for the night. They were lying on a feather bed which lay on a mattress on the bedstead. They were carried away by the storm and afterward found in a ravine about four rods away. They were lying on the mattress, but the feather bed and bedding had disappeared.

The brother John and the hired man were also in bed. John was carried and thrown into a large pond four rods from the house. While he was in the water, a roof was pressed down against his neck and back, and then just as suddenly taken away. When found by his brothers, who had come to the rescue, he was clothed in the neckband of his nightshirt.

The hired man was found with a large cut over his eye. To show the power and mysterious force of a tornado, we mention the fact that a bull wheel from a large header, which would have taken some time to be removed from its place by a practical machinist, was instantly removed, without any other damage to the header, and was carried to a spot half a mile away. Mr. Wadman was raising white-faced cattle and had a thoroughbred bull tied to a hitching post in the middle of the yard. The bull was not touched or moved.

Mrs. Coates — "Grandma," as she was usually called — will long be remembered for the great service she rendered to families in the district. She often acted as doctor and nurse. She visited the Old Country three times, and Mr. Coates also crossed the Atlantic three times.

**William Downey**, a native of New York State, went with his parents to Michigan, where he grew up to manhood. He came to Nebraska in May, 1871, with Messrs. Ramsdell, Stephens, and Krader, the latter settling in Dodge County. They traveled all the way with wagons and teams and were six weeks on the road.

Mrs. Downey and the children stayed near Lincoln about nine months. Mr. Downey and Mr. Stephens came to this district and sought claims. Mr. Downey homesteaded in July on the W  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec 2, T7, R1W, but did not go onto the claim until June, 1872. A sod house was built, in which they lived for some time without a floor. Their frame house was built 15 years later.

On their way to Nebraska, they would camp over Sunday in some suitable place. Mr. Downey was careful not to travel on Sunday. One Saturday they camped near a woods in Iowa, where the women did a washing. They were told it would not be a suitable place to camp in case of storm. In spite of Mr. Downey's protests, they decided to travel on Sunday. After traveling 12 miles, they camped about three o'clock in the afternoon near a large woods just before the coming of a storm, which they could not see coming up because of the trees. A spring wagon in which Mrs. Krader and her twins were riding was placed between two large trees. They had just got out of the wagon when a large limb fell from one of the trees and another tree fell, smashing the wagon. Mr. Krader was able to repair the damage, but the time lost for the repairs, to say nothing of the danger to life and limb, amounted to more than they had tried to gain by their Sunday travel.

Out on the claim, on one occasion a bed had been made on the floor of the sod house. A buffalo robe was placed beneath the bedding. On the following morning, when the bedding was taken up, a rattlesnake was found among the bedclothes. The snake had evidently come into the house through a mouse-hole in the sod wall. During the great blizzard they found it necessary to bring the chickens into the house.

Mr. Downey died on March 30, 1901. Mrs. Downey then made her home with her son Herman, and spent some time with other members of her family, until her death on January 14, 1923.



Old Downey home, last soddy in Fillmore County.

**William Dyer** was born in Hambridge, Somersetshire, England. He came to America in 1871, bringing with him his wife and child (Robert Dyer, later an implement dealer), and came directly to Exeter. He bought some railroad land in Saline County, but in the fall of 1872 he homesteaded on Sec. 24, Liberty township, where he farmed for several years and taught school in District 6 and other places. Railroad land at that time was worth about \$6 or \$7 an acre. They lived in a dugout until 1880, when he built a frame house; but in that year his wife died, leaving him with their five children.

In the early days, Indians were sometimes seen passing along on their hunting expeditions. The men rode their shaggy mustang ponies, which were fitted up with two long poles reaching behind, on which they carried their camping outfit. What they were unable to load on the ponies was carried by the squaws. One day Mrs. Dyer had just finished bathing the baby and had placed it in the crib when she turned around and saw some Indians standing in the room. They came into the house very quietly. They wanted permission to hunt beaver along the creek and also asked for bacon and rice. It was her first experience with the children of the plains.

On another occasion, while she was busy making bread, she looked around and found three Indians in the room. They wanted bread, which she showed them was not yet baked, but she promised that they would receive some by night. When Mr. Dyer returned home from his school and learned of the Indians' visit, he took them three loaves of bread. It was two miles east along Turkey Creek to their camp.

During a blizzard the windows and the door of the dugout were completely covered with snow. Mr. Dyer and his family lay in bed until 12 o'clock noon wondering when it would be daylight. They had no idea of how late it was until they noticed a streak of light shining into the stove, the chimney being a straight one.

Mr. Dyer gave up farming in 1887 and worked for the Home Insurance Company of New York. He located in Exeter, though his insurance interests extended over a very large area. He was recognized as a faithful and industrious worker, doing a large business, including auctioneering and serving in the J. N. Cox store. He was an active worker in the Congregational Church until his death in September, 1901.

**Henry Eberstein**, who settled here very early but later went to Wichita, Kansas, was born and raised in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In the winter of 1863-1864, he enlisted in the First Michigan Cavalry and served in the Army of the Potomac under Custer and Sheridan until the close of the war. After the Grand Review at Washington, the Michigan Cavalry Brigade was shipped to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and began the march to Salt Lake City. Other parts of the brigade were sent by another route. During this expedition they protected the "Ben Holladay" overland stage line from the Indians, and when winter came they moved to the city.

The Mormons at that time were bitter enemies of the government and never missed an opportunity to insult the soldiers or the Flag. One incident was often recalled. A sermon was preached by Brigham Young, who knew that the colonel of the Brigade, Peter Stagg, was present. So he boldly proclaimed, "Brave boys are they! but a dozen of my women with broomsticks can put the whole regiment to flight."

It seems that the colonel challenged an attack from the broomstick squadron. The next day he mounted the regiment, strung the column out to a mile in length, and headed toward the city, which was an unusual act. Those who had heard the talk the day before understood and passed the word along the line, and there was fire in the air. They marched and counter-marched in the principal streets with colors flying, and for once the rule of "Silence in the ranks" was suspended. There were shouts of "Danger in front," "Danger in the flanks," "There she comes!" "They have got the colonel," "The coward won't fight," etc., etc. Half of the brigade would have surrendered had they come.

On March 16, 1866, the men were discharged and became citizens. They were two thousand miles from home, with

nothing but a daily stagecoach for transportation. There were no two-cent fares or cheap lunch counters in those days. Instead, it was 25 cents per mile and "Jump out and push, boys!" on the steep hills. After 13 days and nights, nine passengers landed at Atchison, Kansas, not much worse for the experience, Eberstein among them.

Two years later, Mr. Eberstein returned to Nebraska and on May 30 homesteaded in Glengary township, Fillmore County (NE ¼ of Section 34). The family now consisted of three bachelor brothers who worked and lived together for some time. They built a log house on the claim, rolling the logs up to the place by horse power. Having no funds for glass doors, they hung a blanket over the entrance, and one night a rattlesnake came in without knocking. A sister, Mrs. Ramsdell and her child, were staying there and sleeping on a mattress on the floor.

They broke prairie with five yoke of oxen hitched to a 24-inch plow and often argued as to which of the three could drive them best.

With the advent of the railroads, other monopolies began to flourish in the West under the protection of the "Big Elephant." The Burlington "swiped" half of the land along its line for 10 miles on either side and wrote a freight schedule that caught poor "Rube" coming and going. To illustrate: An enterprising Grafton farmer who thought to cut out the "Elevator Trust" loaded and shipped a car of wheat direct to Chicago; but with the returns came a claim for \$15 more to balance expense charges.

The price of a pound of coffee at Taylor's pioneer store in Exeter equaled the market value of 3½ bushels of corn. If you were prejudiced against burning corn for fuel, you might swap 150 bushels of corn at Lou Robertson's elevator for a ton of coal; or you could step over with plenty of collateral and warm your family through the banks at 36 per cent interest.

The Henry Eberstein family spent their last winter in Nebraska mining in the snowbanks. A long horizontal tunnel was dug to the chicken house and a short perpendicular shaft on to the haystack. Theirs was a feat of engineering for a time. They could almost oil the windmill standing on a snowbank, and the apple orchard was out of sight. They decided to leave and picked up and moved to Kansas. Afterward, they read of schoolteachers and children freezing to death on the way from school, and they wondered if it was foresight or providence that led them out of the wilderness.

Both parents of **Herbert Howarth** came from England. He was born in a dugout in Saline County; his parents also lived for a time in a one-room frame building. Brought to Fillmore County in 1882 at the age of two years, he lived in Liberty township until 1943. He was married in November, 1923, to Nell Pflug of Exeter; they had no children. Before their marriage his wife taught school for 17 years.

He farmed in northeast Liberty for more than 60 years, raising hogs and cattle, averaging 100 head of cattle and 200 head of hogs yearly. He was a member of the North East District Weed Board of Fillmore County and sprayed weeds for Exeter, Liberty, and Fairmont townships for more than 10 years after moving to Exeter. He was affiliated with the Congregational Church until his death on August 23, 1956.

**Walter Howarth** came to this district on April 1, 1872, and homesteaded half a mile north of Turkey Creek on the county line. A native of Bolton, Lancashire, England, he came from a densely populated community to live on the lonely prairie.

When Mr. Howarth landed there was no depot at Exeter or Friend. They were merely flag stations. How different the country looked! Nearly all the settlers lived in dugouts or sod houses. In those days the Indians came up the creek every winter trapping, and often he went in company with other young fellows and would sit in one of their tents in the evening to see their mode of life although not to be edified by their conversation. Only some of their younger boys could speak a little English, and they never spoke unless spoken to; but they made them welcome and gave them a seat by the fire, more especially if they came with a gift of tobacco.



Nearly every time Mr. Howarth met with the Indians, their medicine man, a tall, intelligent-looking Indian, was orating to them. Whatever the story was, it seemed to interest the Indians greatly, for they listened with rapt attention, occasionally breaking into a ripple of smiles. For an hour at a time the medicine man would talk on and on, never stopping except to fill the pipe, as he seemed to have charge of the tobacco and always had the first pull at the pipe before passing it around the circle.

One of the settlers on the creek had lost a number of turkeys with cholera and had thrown them into the bushes, and this same lot of Indians — Omahas and Pawnees — found the turkeys and ate them.

One night he was sitting in the tent next to a particularly good-looking Indian maiden, when she got hungry. Putting her hand under a pile of buffalo robes on which they were sitting, she pulled out a big cow's liver which someone had given them, and, cutting off two or three slices with a dirty-looking butcher knife, threw them into the fire in the middle of the tent. When they were just barely warmed, she drew them out and began to eat. This, and other things he saw, crushed all the romance for Indian life out of Mr. Howarth: no such cooking for him.

During the time Mr. Howarth was teaching school, one day one of the girls who lived near the schoolhouse (a sod affair) stayed at home to help her mother wash. About the middle of the afternoon, she ran into the schoolhouse, crying as if her heart would break. "Oh, Teacher!" she said. "Will you and the big boys come over? Papa's house is full of Indians!" Of course they went — and found 15 or 20 Indians in possession.

Houses in those days were wonderfully elastic affairs; and though this house consisted of only one room, yet it held the beds and furniture of an average family, and, in addition, a stock of groceries. The Indians were taking these from the shelves and asking for them. After the rescue party got there, the Indians bought and paid for a few things and soon left; but there was no more school that day. The girl and her mother were in no personal danger; but no doubt, without the men, the Indians wouldn't have left without taking more; and, as one of the Indians was sharpening his hatchet on a little grindstone which stood near the door, poor little Jennie thought her last day had come.

That schoolhouse, crude affair as it was — with sod walls, homemade desks, and planks for seats — turned out two or three pupils who afterward became very successful teachers. They didn't have a little smattering of Latin or algebra or botany but were well grounded in the essentials, the Three R's.

One spring morning Mr. Howarth was busily at work in the yard. He had finished teaching the week before — here let us say that in the five years he taught, the school term was six months and \$25 per month was the highest salary he received — and had just drawn all his back pay. It was a beautiful morning, the kind of day which makes one glad to be alive, and he was singing, at the top of his voice, "Come where my love lies dreaming," when he happened to turn around, and there stood a six-foot Indian close to him. The moment he saw him the thought of his money came to mind, for he had taken his purse from his pocket and thrown it into the cupboard. The house door was open, and so was the cupboard door. So Mr. Howarth grabbed up his hatchet and ran to the house. He then invited Mr. Indian into the house and had a visit. The Indian couldn't speak much English, but he could beg, and proceeded to do so.

Walter Howarth died on March 22, 1926.

**John Hromadka** came to the United States in 1876, leaving his family of three brothers, two sisters, and his parents in Austria-Hungary (now Czechoslovakia). His destination was Exeter, Nebraska, then a small railroad town. He came as a laborer, and was met by a Mr. Sluka, whom he had known in the old country, but his trade was that of a blacksmith and horticulturist, which he had learned while serving in the Austrian army.

All the neighbors helped him put up a blacksmith shop

and purchase tools. The anvil and hammer are still in use. After he was well established in his shop, located in Sec. 35 of Liberty township (where his grandson John Hromadka now lives), he started, from twigs, many cottonwood trees, which are still standing. There he also made a sod house. Blacksmith work was profitable, as many of his patrons came from miles away. He was able to purchase the land from his father-in-law (Joseph Kral), 80 acres for \$600. Later he bought seven more 80's. He married Anna Kral in 1879, and the couple had seven children.

August Hromadka became a surgeon in Santa Monica, California. He received his early education in Milligan, and went to Iowa and Northwestern College. Before entering medical school, he taught District 6, his home district. During World War I, he served in France as a captain in the Medical Corps. His widow Ethel and his sons still live in Santa Monica. John Hromadka is also a surgeon, practicing in Santa Monica. The other members of the Hromadka family were Julia Zerzan, Frank Hromadka, Jenny Kubicek, Pauline Bures, Mary Capek, and Rose Votipka.

John Hromadka, Sr., was a large raiser of pure-bred stock. He also produced vineyards and orchards. In later years he moved into Milligan. Mrs. Hromadka passed away in 1922 and Mr. Hromadka in October, 1931.

Frank Hromadka (son of John) married Anna Herynk of near Milligan; they made their home on a farm northeast of Milligan, on Sec. 36 of Liberty township, now farmed by Milo Hromadka. The original homestead is still in the family and is farmed by John Hromadka.

**John Kolar** was born in this country in 1881. His parents came from Czechoslovakia to America in 1871 and homesteaded in Sec. 10 of Liberty township. His father was married twice in the old country and had five children, three boys and two girls. John Kolar, whose father died in 1896, began farming in 1904. He was married to Emma Havel in June, 1905. Two daughters were born to this union, Viola and Helen.

He lived on the same place for more than 75 years. Among his prized possessions were two large illustrated Bibles, translated from the Hebrew language into the Bohemian, and a book giving biographical sketches of all of the saints of olden times. He passed away on December 25, 1959.

—Data from John Kolar

**Joseph Kral** came to the United States (the promised land) in 1860. The trip across the Atlantic took six weeks in a sailing ship. Their first stop in Nebraska was Nebraska City. After they settled near Milligan, the Kral's went to Nebraska City by ox team to do their shopping.

Mr. Kral served in the Union Army before taking a homestead, and then homesteaded the place that is known as the Hromadka place (Secs. 26 and 35 in Liberty township). They had two daughters. One (Mrs. John Jesse) came with them from Austria-Hungary; the other (Mrs. John Hromadka) was born on the homestead.

The settlers' hardships were many. Often their possessions were taken away from them during the night. Rustlers would take their oxen and many other valuable possessions. Wild game — deer, antelope, buffalo, and turkeys — roamed these prairies. Friendly Indians used to camp there near Turkey Creek.

Mrs. Kral was a midwife for many of the pioneer women in the locality. She also grew her own herbs and made her own medicines and ointments. In her later years she is said to have had a confection shop; but further information about this versatile pioneer woman seems to have been lost with time.

Mr. and Mrs. **Frank Krejci**, Sr., with a family of 10 children, came to Omaha from Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1879. They lived in Omaha until June of that year, when they came to Fillmore County. They purchased the SW ¼ of Sec. 13 in Liberty township, 5 miles N of Milligan, from the Burlington Railroad for \$4 an acre.

There was nothing but prairie land in all directions when they came. Mr. Krejci bought a yoke of oxen and broke the sod and built a sod house. They experienced all the hard

times known by the rest of the first settlers in the country. But after some two or three years times got better.

Frank Krejci, Sr., farmed the place until 1899 when he retired and rented the farm to his son John, who owned and lived on the NW ¼ of the same section. When his wife (Mrs. Frank Krejci, Sr.) passed away in 1908, he sold the farm to his son James, who then rented it to the James Betka, Sr., family, who farmed it until 1913. Then James' son Edward Krejci farmed it until 1917, when James sold it to his brother John Krejci. In 1939, John Krejci transferred it to his son Fred Krejci, who is the present owner. Fred Krejci became Fillmore County's "native artist;" the *Sunday World Herald Magazine* used 20 of his pictures for magazine covers between 1951 and 1961. —John Krejci



Frank Krejci family

John Krejci was born in Czechoslovakia in 1868. His wife, Annie Kucera, was born there also. His parents came to America in 1879, in a ship that was half steamer and half sailing vessel; they were 20 days at sea. They came to Omaha, where they stayed for three months. It was hard for them to get work because they could not speak English. They came to Fillmore County later in 1879.

Mr. Krejci, 11 years old, was put to work tending cattle. The cattle had to be staked out morning and evening. Water for them was drawn from a bored well with a bucket. At 13, he started to work for John Zelanka at \$6 a month. There he had 16 head of cattle and 5 head of horses to water. John Zelanka had 160 acres of wheat; Mr. Krejci shocked the crop at the same rate of pay per month. A man named Lovegrove had 60 acres of wheat which Mr. Krejci and his two sisters shocked in two days; they received \$6 for the whole job.

The parents of John Krejci had 10 children, six boys and four girls. A cousin named John Luksik came with them. He had managed to get out of four years of compulsory military service there by paying the government \$10. The elder Krejci had sold his land in Czechoslovakia for \$4,000. In converting this sum to American money, he had to pay \$2.60 for each \$1 in return; this greatly reduced his cash. In Fillmore County he bought railroad land at \$4 an acre. Then he bought two oxen for \$100 and a cow for \$17 and started farming. He broke 10 acres. Old man Ziska (John Ziska) helped him with meat and corn meal. They lived on this for two years; in the old country they had lived mainly on potatoes.

For four years Mr. Krejci worked for his father, and when work at home was finished he helped others with the harvest, feeding threshing machines. He was married at the age of 26 years, and to this union were born five children, three boys and two girls: Charles, the oldest boy, and Bessie, the oldest girl, and Fred, Louis, and Anna Mae. After he was married, he started farming for himself.

The first year he did not raise anything. It was a dry year, and the family ran out of money. Once his wife asked

him to bring home 15 cents' worth of raisins. He did not want to let his wife know how little money he had; he managed to buy the raisins on time, though the grocer was very reluctant to let him have them. On another occasion he was to bring home a sack of flour, and he also asked for this on credit. The grocer said he would let him have two sacks (flour then sold for 85 cents a sack) if he would pay for it soon. He got the sacks and went home and sold a horse for \$2.50 to a man who agreed to pay for it right away. However, he did not; so Mr. Krejci told the man's daughter, who was going to school, that if her father did not send the money for the horse by the next day, he would go down there and take the horse back. He sent the money, and Mr. Krejci paid for his two sacks of flour.

Louis Krejci still has pictures of the sod house that his grandparents lived in when they first came out here, of the oxen and cart which they used, and of an old-time binder. This was not a self-binder but one where two people stood and bound the bundles by hand as the grain was cut.

—John Krejci

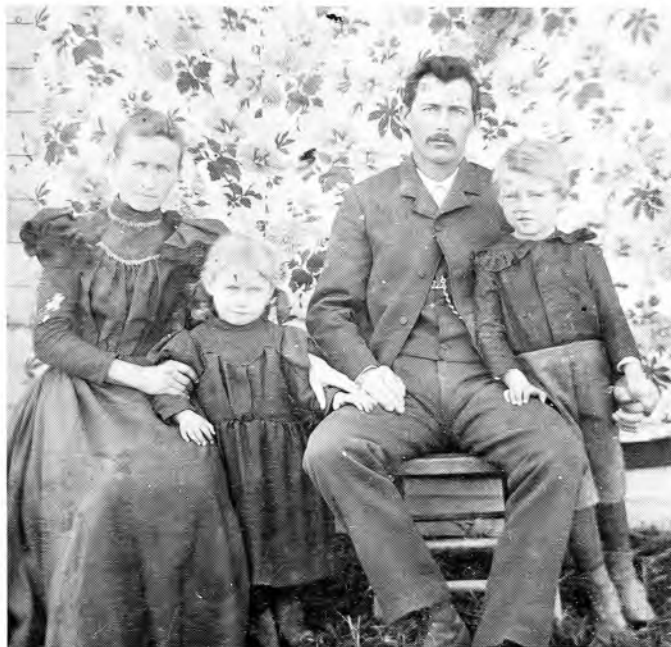


Photo from Mrs. Albert Biba  
Mr. and Mrs. John Krejci, Bessie and Charles.

Anton Kucera came to this country with his parents from Bohemia in 1883, when he was five years of age. His father, like other boys in the old countries, was required to take military training, which took four years. His parents, who farmed in the old country, settled in Liberty township, where they bought railroad land. Mr. Kucera was married to Ebba Gephart in 1907. They have three children: one boy, Charles, and two girls, Edna and Ruth.

Mr. Kucera remembers very well the Pleasant Hill Flour Mill, which was in Saline County, about 19 miles straight east of his place, from which they got their flour. Sometimes they carried it home by the sack. He also remembers vividly his sister Emma's taking a few dozen eggs to Exeter in a small pail and getting 25 cents' worth of sugar and other small articles. Eggs were then 10 cents per dozen. She walked the entire nine miles back and forth. He also remembers that famous Sunday School picnic on Turkey Creek, a never-to-be-forgotten event to this day. Some railroad workers, a bunch of toughs and roughnecks, who had also come to this picnic, were celebrating with beer and liquor. For some reason, they got into an argument and then a fight. Shooting followed, and Thomas Rook killed Frank and John Novak. The date, August 21, 1887, marks a grim highlight in the otherwise peaceful and rural annals of Turkey Creek. —John Krejci

William McGhie was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, and worked around the farms on the outskirts of Aberdeen. In the year 1878, he decided to try his fortune in America, and so he set sail with his wife and four children. They made their

way direct to Exeter and bought railroad land from Dr. H. G. Smith about three miles south of town, where they lived for a time; later they moved one mile west. His first experiences were not very encouraging, and he thought of going back to Scotland, but his wife refused to give up.

One of his first business transactions was the purchase of a team of horses, and for that purpose he returned to Lincoln the day after their arrival in Exeter. A man wishing to show interest in the stranger chided his friend Alexander for encouraging him to go to Lincoln for such a purpose, for, "Depend on it," said he, "the sharpers of Lincoln will skin him if he begins to buy a team there." Mr. Alexander admitted that the caution was not to be despised, but thought that "If the sharpers of this country are sharper than the horse-dealers in Aberdeenshire, and their word any less to be relied on, then his friend had a good chance of being skinned." But they did not skin him, for he secured a fine young team for which he paid \$170 — such as some of the young Scotch lairds would fancy for carriage horses. His next experience was tethering them out to grass. This seemed accomplished all right; but the young horses fancied a dance through which they pulled up the stakes and made off like the wind. Fortunately, a party coming along caught one of the horses and Mr. Alexander, mounting one of his own horses, set off over the prairie to try to catch the other. However, the beast had about two miles' head start. But Mr. Alexander continued the chase and was fortunate enough to find him the next morning stabled by a friend.

Six years after their coming, Mr. McGhie's wife died, leaving a young family to care for. He was equal to the task. His own death occurred on October 8, 1914.

**Patrick Murphy** came to this country from Dunmanway, County Cork, Ireland, in 1866, landing at Castle Garden, New York City. For four years he lived near Rochester, New York, and learned the nursery business. In April, 1870, he came to Omaha and worked for a time on the telegraph lines. Later in the same year, in company with three other young men, he bought an ox team, a covered wagon and batching outfit, and some tools and set out to look for homesteads. They journeyed to Lincoln, then to Beatrice, and along the Little Blue to Spring Ranch and Red Cloud on the Republican River. Not being satisfied with the country in those parts, they returned to the edge of Saline County and camped near Turkey Creek. Two were then appointed to stay by the goods while the other two went and sought out claims. Having obtained the numbers of vacant claims, they then went to Beatrice for their mail. The other three young men received letters from their railroad employers saying that their jobs were still open to them if they would return. This temptation was sufficient; they decided they had seen enough land, and returned.

Mr. Murphy had enough money to buy their interests in the outfit. He drove them to Lincoln, where they said goodbye, and that was the last he saw of them. Mr. Murphy was now on his own. He laid in a supply of flour, lard, and lumber and started out for his homestead. He reached his destination on December 1, 1870, and within a week had a dugout ready for occupancy. The roof was made of poles from Turkey Creek, slough grass, and dirt, with an upper layer of sod.

During those early days, he went 16 miles for a load of hay, and had to cross the creek twice to bring it home. There were no bridges west of Crete. He would also go to Beaver Crossing, a distance of 16 miles, carrying a sack of meal and flour.

He worked on the railroad from Fairmont to Hastings before Fairmont was a town. He saw the erection of the first house. During the winter of 1870-1871, Indians were camped along the Little Blue and many white settlers were scared because of their presence. There was no stove in his dugout; he did his cooking in a fireplace and his baking in a dutch oven. One night during the visit of these Indians, Mr. Murphy, lying in bed, heard the sods of his chimney falling into the fireplace. He was soon up and dressed. Securing his loaded rifle, he carefully opened the door and peeked out to

look for the enemy. To his surprise and relief, he found it was his ox, on the bank side just in reach of the chimney, hooking away the sods with his horns.

Mr. Murphy grafted the first trees at the Crete Nursery and planted most of the trees in the Exeter Cemetery.

Ten years after homesteading, he married; 10 children were born to the couple.

This worthy pioneer from the Emerald Isle represented Fillmore County in the State Legislature during two terms, 1907 and 1909, on the Democratic ticket.



Photo from Mrs. George Lovegrove  
Picture of Robert H. Lovegrove and family (1907). This farm (E ½ of NE ¼ Sec. 24 Twp. 7) was homesteaded by his father, Thomas H. Lovegrove, in 1872.

Mr. and Mrs. **James Nolan**, later of Cambridge, Nebraska, were among the pioneer settlers of Fillmore County. They came by wagon from Iowa and settled on a homestead 6 miles S of Exeter on June 12, 1871. They brought along with them nine head of cattle and four horses. They were fortunate in having a good supply of meat and provisions, which lasted them until fall. After landing on the prairie, they took off the wagon covers and used them to sleep under. They cooked their food by campfire and hauled all their water from Turkey Creek, a distance of two miles. Mrs. Nolan made her first butter out on the prairie and sold it to Dr. Smith of Exeter.

Their house consisted of one room made out of logs, sod, and grass, and had one window and one door. The lumber to build the house had to be hauled all the way from Lincoln. Their well was dug with a spade. During the time they were digging the well, Mrs. Nolan's mother, 75 years old, who made her home with them, broke her leg. Their furniture had not yet come, and so a bed had to be made of logs and boards and a doctor called from Crete. One day after her bed had come, a little house dog insisted on barking and making a big fuss over something he saw under the bed. On investigation, they found that a large rattlesnake was coiled up on the floor. They knew it must be got out without letting the mother know. So some of them gathered around the bed and her son took it out with a pitchfork.

Fifteen acres were all that was broken up the first year, but each year more land was farmed and some trees and shrubs set out. Then a new sod house with a shingle roof was built.

One day in August, when Mr. Nolan was away from home, his wife saw a great prairie fire about a mile west, and, fearful for her mother lying helpless in the house, she went out to fight the fire. She worked hard all day. Then, when she reached home at sundown, she saw another fire close to the house, coming from the east. But by this time Mr. Nolan was home. He plowed a fireguard which saved them from harm.

The first snow came at night and sifted in all around the house and open spaces, so that when they awakened in the morning they found themselves covered with a blanket of snow.

Their first Christmas morning on the homestead found everything covered with about two feet of snow and not an ounce of flour in the house. Mr. Nolan had to go after pro-

visions on horseback. It was his custom to place a lantern on a pole in front of the house so that when he had to come home after dark his wife could light the lantern and he could find his way. At that time there were no roads.

The second year, they had 15 acres of wheat all ripe and ready to cut, and so Mr. Nolan went to Fairmont to buy a harvester. That night there came a heavy rain and hailstorm, and in the morning no harvester was needed, as all the grain was lying flat on the ground.

In the year of the grasshoppers, Mr. Nolan was fortunate in having his wheat in the shock; but his corn and the contents of a small garden were eaten in about an hour. Only stumps of cabbages remained. Mrs. Nolan's brother, George Nugent, had a small patch of tobacco, and they took it all.

The first schoolhouse in the township was built on the southeast corner of their claim. It was used as a school, a church, and a place for public gatherings.

At that time, the Indians were roving over the plains. One day just at noon one of them came to the door and wanted his dinner, and so they gave him bread, butter, and coffee.

During the blizzard of 1873, they had in the house a calf, a colt, and two dozen chickens. The fuel got scarce and they chopped up the bed and other furniture to keep warm. Three times the Angel of Death visited their home and carried away their loved ones, but never did they think of leaving the place they called home.

**Thomas Nugent** came from County Galway, Ireland, in 1866, to Scott County, Iowa. In the spring of 1871, he settled on a homestead south of Exeter in Liberty township. When he came to Nebraska, he drove a horse team and wagon and brought some cattle. Money and employment were scarce when he came to the community, and so he walked for miles to such places as Beatrice and Lincoln looking for work. He worked for the B. & M. Railroad for some time, grading where the town of Fairmont is now located. He would at times seek work in the West, thus using up the time allowed off his claim.

During those trips he experienced some thrilling adventures. On one occasion, when returning over the prairies, his mate and he took turns driving the team, or sleeping in the bottom of the wagon. Once they were surrounded by a band of 300 or 400 Indians. He knew that two could do little in self-defense and thought that his end had surely come. To their great relief, one of the Indians rode up and presented a piece of paper by which they made it known that they were friendly Indians. They were begging, however, and would not accept buffalo meat; they could kill that for themselves. "Give us bacon," was their request. It was no uncommon experience to meet with large herds of buffalo, from 500 to 1,000 strong. Mr. Nugent declared that it was a great shame the way these animals were killed off; the dead animals were seldom put to any practical use.

Mr. Nugent was caught out in the great blizzard of 1873 and had to take shelter for three days in a windowless and doorless dugout. It was simply impossible to get home through the storm.

**William Ramsdell** was a native of Michigan. His first visit to Nebraska was in 1865, when he came as a soldier assigned to deal with Indian depredations. He, with his company, arrived in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on June 17. From there they went to Fort Kearney, Nebraska, and then crossed the state to Fort Laramie, Wyoming. As soon as the Indians knew of the presence of the government soldiers, they wanted peace. It will be remembered that the Sioux Indians had taken advantage of the lack of soldiers in the West. They tried to drive out the white people and secure their ancient hunting grounds.

Peace was restored, and Mr. Ramsdell was soon able to return to Michigan, arriving there in December of the same year. While journeying from June to November they did not have enough rain to wet their shirt sleeves. In March, 1871, he returned to Nebraska, inspected land, and decided to settle here. There had been many changes during the five years

since his first visit. He went back for his family and returned in July.

They lived near Walnut Creek until November. He secured a claim in Liberty township to the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 2, T7, R1W. This is 3 miles S of Exeter and 3 miles E of Exeter. On November 14, 1871, he went up to his claim to build and make ready for settlement. Mrs. Ramsdell did not go until later. She was living in a log house that was "chinked" but not mudded or plastered. The evening of that day saw a change of weather. It began to snow and snowed all the next day and next night. The snow drifted into the house and covered Mrs. Ramsdell, as she lay in bed, with a 16-inch blanket. She was finally liberated by her brother.

The cost of boring a well was one dollar per foot. If it had cost only 10 cents a foot, the Ramsdells could not have undertaken it, as they had no money. They got their water from Turkey Creek, a distance of two miles. They went 14 miles for firewood.

The Ramsdells had two sons. Dayo, the eldest, was in the first class graduating from the Exeter High School. He became a physician in Kansas City, Missouri. Glen became an optician in Moline, Illinois. The daughter, Gertrude, born January 8, 1872, was the third white child born in Fillmore County.

On July 26, 1876, **Joseph Rozanek** and his wife Mary purchased the W  $\frac{1}{2}$ , SW  $\frac{1}{4}$ , Sec. 27, Liberty township, from the B & M Railroad. On this land they built their home, a dugout.

On March 24, 1884, they purchased the adjoining 80 to the north. After the death of Joseph Rozanek in 1889 the title passed to his widow, Mary. In 1891 the farm was deeded to their son Frank. Since the death of Frank Rozanek the farm has belonged to his daughter Stella Hospodsky.



The Joseph Rozanek Farm in 1880.

**C. A. Songster** came from near the town of Centerville, Appanoose County, Iowa, in 1871, and settled on a farm  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles S of Exeter. He brought with him his wife and two children, a girl and a boy. We are indebted to this son, Mr. A. A. (Bert) Songster, for the information recorded here. The father died April 8, 1898, and is buried in the Exeter Cemetery.

Bert Songster was about four years old when they came to Nebraska. He remembers with interest their crossing the Missouri River in a ferryboat to Nebraska City. After they arrived on the claim, they lived in a tent until a dugout was made. Later a sod house was built, which proved to be a very comfortable home. It was plastered throughout and was warm in winter and cool in summer.

The first school of the district was held in the Songster home. At that time the cattle roamed the prairies at will, and grass known as bluestem grew as high as a horse's back, which made it dangerous for children if they strayed from home. The chief bird music was the mournful tones of the prairie chickens, heard usually in the early mornings. These are about extinct and, like the antelope and deer, may soon be a thing of the past. Palmer Lancaster had a blacksmith shop south of the Songster place and kept a pet antelope

which was of special interest to the children of the neighborhood. It would follow him to town, where it was sometimes frightened by the dogs and would run off at a lively rate and make its way home.

Mr. Songster hauled from Lincoln the lumber for the first house and store in Exeter, owned by Dr. H. G. Smith. A little girl of the Songster family was one of the first children to die in the area; she was buried in the Exeter Cemetery.

**Chester C. Stephens**, brother of Mrs. William Downey, was born in Pennsylvania but lived for some time in Michigan. He came to Nebraska in 1871 and located on the NW ¼ of Sec. 4, T7, R1W. His first home was a dugout 10' x 12' square where he later built his house. Its construction was such that he might reasonably be called one of Nebraska's early cave-dwellers. Before he made this cave, he used his wagon cover as a tent. One warm night he lay sleeping with the cover up, thoroughly enjoying the prairie air, when he felt something cold against his face. He discovered a prairie wolf with its paws upon his bed while another wolf was sitting on her haunches a short distance away. He reached for his revolver, but before he could fire a shot the unwelcome visitors had made their escape.

About two months after he came to the county, he had been busy at the Ramsdell home, and the return help was to be given at his place. Mr. Ramsdell had gone to secure the services of J. K. Barbur, and Mr. Stephens was coming home with Uncle Jim Horne and were traveling homeward in a northwesterly direction when they saw a herd of 12 deer coming in a northeasterly direction. Neither men nor deer changed their course, with the result that they came within 12 feet of each other. The deer seemed quite tame, and, as the men made no attempt to interfere with them, they walked quietly away. This was one of the most pleasing and interesting experiences of their prairie life. In these days the Ramsdells were living in the Henry Eberstein house. On one occasion in the springtime, they found a large rattlesnake under the bed. It was soon killed.

One of the worst windstorms ever experienced by Mr. Stephens was when he was trying to make his way from Camden to a place near Crete where he had previously camped. He failed to reach the place and had just crossed the railroad and unhitched his team when the storm came up. The wind was so strong that he had to use lariat ropes and chains to keep his wagon in place.



Photo from Mrs. Ray Ainsworth  
Frank Lovegrove family when they resided on the Younger's Homestead in Liberty Twp. (1905). Baby—Ruth, Mrs. Lovegrove, Edith, Peter, Marion, Nellie, and Frank.

**Joseph Vavra**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Anton Vavra, was born in Czechoslovakia on August 27, 1864. He came to this country with his parents, one brother, and two sisters in 1872, at the age of eight.

In November, 1877, he was married to Katie Kontensky, who had been born in Czechoslovakia in August, 1861, and



Photo from Lou Vavra  
Haymaking on the Vavra Farm in 1925. Joe Vavra (by team), Jim Soukup (on stack), Ora Miner (holding Melvin), Joe Sobotka (on rack).

came to this country in 1877 at the age of 16. They became the parents of 11 children: Mary Soukup (deceased); Anna Matejka; Joseph Vavra, Jr.; Agnes Goodding; James Vavra; Louis Vavra; Fred Vavra; Tena Kreener; and Edward Vavra, who lives on the home place. Two children died in infancy. The farm has been in the family for more than 80 years.

Joseph Vavra purchased 160 acres of railroad land in Sec. 35 of Liberty township at \$11 per acre. They lived in a dugout in the north bank of Turkey Creek, which cuts to the south edge of the land, for about five years. Then they built a two-room frame house.

In the early days, the eldest son Joe recalled, Indians had a camp on the same section. They used to come to the farm home to beg for food. They would pack dead hens and even eat dog meat if they could get it. In fact, they would eat anything they could lay their hands on. He also recalled the grasshoppers destroying everything, and the drouth of the 1890's.

They worked with oxen for several years when they started farming, breaking all sod. Eventually they purchased two horses to replace the oxen. Their first harrow was made in a V-shape out of trees, with spikes driven in for harrow teeth. Binders were hand-tie, drawn by two or three horses. They made a five-foot cut, with two men tying. Bundles were tied with straw. Threshing machines were horse drawn and fed by hand. The straw had to be pitched away, since the thresher had no blower. Six teams of horses were used for the one machine.

—Lou Vavra

**John Walton** homesteaded the NW ¼ of Sec. 2 in Liberty township in June, 1872. His daughter Ida was born on the homestead in September, 1872. Ida Walton Stephens lived in Fillmore County from 1872 to 1950. Possibly the oldest living person born in this county, she made her home after 1950 with her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Allen Blakeslee of Rochester, Minnesota. She died there on June 2, 1962.

**John Ziska**, born in 1812, came from Bohemia in 1853, bringing with him his wife and family. In the old country he had been a coachman for a baron who, in appreciation of his faithful service, promoted him to a position of overseer over the serfs on his estate. Owing to the doing away with serf labor and the unsettled condition of things in Bohemia, he decided to come to America. After a six-week sea voyage they arrived safely in this country. He then made his way to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While he was looking around for a location and something to do, a Jew who was known to Mr. Ziska advised him to buy some swamp land near Milwaukee. He could then cut the wood and sell it for a living. The suggestion was anything but acceptable at that time and was therefore declined. But that land is now the center of the city of Milwaukee.

Instead, he bought 120 acres of land about 30 miles south of Milwaukee, on the Fox River in Racine County, and farmed it for 10 years. At that time some friends from the St. Louis coal fields visited the Ziska farm. Their reports regarding the work and the wages there seemed so much of an

improvement on farming that he decided to sell his farm, stock, and implements and try mining. He made his way to the coal fields, where he worked for seven years. But at the end of this time he had made no progress; in fact, he was financially poorer as a result of his venture.

In the spring of 1869, he came up the Missouri River on a steamboat to Nebraska City and was nine days on the trip. He then bought two yoke of oxen, an old government wagon, and some other things, and started out West. He had met a fellow countryman in Nebraska City who gave him information about the country. He left his family near the Blue River and then made his way west on foot and secured some land on the county line, in Fillmore County.

Mr. Ziska returned for his family, and they came to the new location on May 10, 1869. They rented an old dugout in Saline County until their own dugout was ready. He soon began breaking sod and had 25 acres ready for sowing. When he went to Lincoln for provisions he filed a claim for his 80 acres on Sec. 24, T7, R1W. They moved onto the claim in September, and on their first night in the new home there was a great flood. Turkey Creek became 1½ miles wide, causing the loss of much property and many cattle. One poor woman lost her cow and calf, which were all she possessed, and so the Ziskas and other neighbors helped her out. Two years later, this same woman, whose husband was a carpenter and working in Nebraska City, had her cow stolen and was again helped by these friends. There was another neighbor for whom Mr. Ziska plowed some land and mowed the wheat without making any charge, so as to help him along. Later, when Mr. Ziska needed the loan of a plow, this neighbor refused, saying he did not wish to have his plow dulled. How often it is that people fail to learn that "One good turn deserves another."

The last buffalo killed in Fillmore County was in 1868. Two Indians followed it down Turkey Creek and killed it — on the spot that afterward became the Ziska homestead. When they came, Dan Dillon, who homesteaded in 1868 on the same section, was the only white man they knew in Fillmore County.

Mr. Ziska had put in 15 acres of buckwheat. He then went to Lincoln, leaving Fred at home to drag the land. Dan Dillon had a pair of Texas cattle and two other large oxen which came over and hooked the Ziska cattle very badly. Mrs. Ziska was advised by the neighbors to get some turpentine to put on the injured oxen. So she sent Fred on a journey of 18 miles on foot to get 25 cents' worth of turpentine. He reached home again about nine o'clock that night and was so stiff and sore that he could not get out of bed the next morning. Fred never forgot the time when he was 14 years old and his mother needed turpentine for the oxen. John Ziska died in 1896 at the age of 84.



Photo from Mrs. Mike Becwar Jr. The wedding picture of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Becwar, married in Czechoslovakia.

## LODGES

The Z C B J Lodge was organized in 1902. The first officers were Vaclav Krejci, Jim Matejka, Jim Svoboda, and James Stetina. Members from Rad Rabie in Milligan transferred to Z C B J to start the lodge in Liberty township.

The first members besides the officers were John Krejci, John Kuska, Sr., Albert Biba, Sr., Joseph Zeleny, Joseph Krejdl, V. J. Loukota, Anton Votipka, and Henry Kolar.

The officers at present (1967) are Ed Krejci, president; Ed Biba, financial secretary; John Kuska, recording secretary; and Albert Biba, Jr., treasurer.

This lodge was organized and still meets in the hall in Liberty township.



Photo from Mae Krejci ZCBJ Lodge hall in Liberty township in 1914.

