

Madison County Remembers...

A Publication of the Madison County Genealogical Society

Volume 32, Issue No. 151

Published at Norfolk, Nebraska

May-June 2011

President's Message

What is your ultimate goal in doing your family research? I asked myself that the other day. Mine is to get pictures of my great grandfather, Mathias Perske. I want to know what he looks like and what of his characteristics have passed down. If and when I find a picture, my research will come to an end. My next project will be to bring to life for my kids, their aunts and uncles, grandparents etc. You may want to set some goals for yourself. It's later than you think!

Our May meeting is coming up, May 21, to be exact. We are going to be guests of Marge Fuhrmann, 1215 Meadow Drive. Go north on 13th Street turn left on Benjamin and it is the street going south. Its one of the first houses on that street. Marge will have a good program for us.

Prepare now for the meeting on August 20th. We will be traveling west to Goose Lake to learn about the black homesteaders. Dennis Vossberg the author of the book, Hectors Bliss will be our guide. We will send out more info later and share the plans with you at the May meeting.

Frances Beck and I attended the Genealogical Spring Workshop. We learned everything you ever wanted to know about Ireland and how to research there. We also learned about FamilySearch, a service provided by the Church of the Latter Day Saints. FamilySearch is the largest genealogy organization in the world. We will share the internet sites at the May meeting. We also had the opportunity to have our favorite antique appraised. Unfortunately I didn't take one along. And by the way I won a great door prize which I wish to share with you at the May meeting.

Our trip to Omaha included a stop at an old cemetery south of Dodge. Very interesting Frances and her niece were familiar with it. It was by far the windiest cemetery I've ever visited. Good thing the residents were all six feet under ground or they would've blown all over the Bohemian Alps. Where we go a little excitement goes too. Passengers in suspicious looking vehicle parked nearby and gave us the evil eye. By the way a map showing the names of the burials was posted on the side of an old shed. Now that's class!

I am working out now to get ready for my trip to Snowy Range in Wyoming. Dick and I tented in this area for several years. Never thought I'd get to see those mountains again. This is a belated birthday gift from my daughter and husband for my 80th birthday. I received for Mothers Day a fancy hiking stick and mountain cap. It will take more than that to get me going.

Ever looking to see you all on May 21st. I'd like to hear from some of you none of us have ever met. I'll share them with the local members. My e-mail address is: bohaclou@cableone.net or street address is Betty Bohac, 1111 Longhorn Drive, Norfolk NE 68701.

Betty Bohac

THE STORY OF THE HISTORY OF NORFOLK is a story of its people, those descendants who came from the cold wintry north—a state called WISCONSIN. They were a group of Germans migrating to America to start a new life. We are the lucky ones because of dissatisfaction with that cold country they traveled to Nebraska. Nebraska greeted them with grasshoppers, drought, severe cold and floods, but they stayed!

The stories I share with you are some of their triumphs and some of their heartaches. Seven times in all, the grasshoppers came. The worst invasion came in 1874. Suddenly between the hours of 1 and 2 o'clock in the afternoon on July 20th, farmers noticed great clouds piling up in the west. They expected a thundershower, but soon discovered the darkness and the roaring was caused by millions of grasshoppers. They dropped to the earth and went about satisfying their destructive hunger. By 5 o'clock there was not a head of wheat or a bit of growing green anywhere. They ate the bark off the trees after the tender leaves were gone. They took all the corn and followed the stalks into the ground and ate the potatoes and onions. Some of the farmers recruited their families in attempt to save their wheat but to no avail. The grasshoppers covered the workers, ate their clothes and gummed up the machines. Not satisfied, the grasshoppers pierced holes in the ground and laid their eggs to hatch the next year. Many would have abandoned their homesteads had it not been for A. P. Pilger who carried his customers for more that \$100,000 dollars and pleaded with machine companies not to foreclose.

The little town of Norfolk received a great impetus of growth in 1879 when the railroads came. Before this time the residents were dependent on their own teams or on the stagecoach. It was to cost the county a bond issue of \$40,000 and the commissioners were not in favor. However the railroad companies went ahead without the aid of the county. The coming of the railroad meant a great deal to the economy of the county. On the 18th of September 1879, three flat trains rolled into Norfolk amid the cheers of most of its 500 citizens.

The town was also plagued by many epidemics. Among them was smallpox and diphtheria. One of the incidents involved a Negro lady "Aunt Jane Gordon". She had a bad reputation involving fortune telling and passersby stopped frequently at the small structure she called home. She lived in a small shanty just big enough to cook and a door that was wide enough to bear a sign "Fortune Teller". The house was saturated with smallpox germs. Since it was almost impossible to separate the house from the germs, it was condemned by order of the City fathers. The date was March 12, 1903 and Jane was ready to quit the town and shake the dust of Norfolk from her feet. At 4 PM one of the fire companies and Mayor Jack Koenigstein drew up to the house and Jane walked out into the street to stand by and watch the house burn. A couple of cans of kerosene were poured over the floor, a bunch of hay was chucked into a hole in the wall, and a match was struck. It didn't take long for the house to be wrapped in flames. Jane stood, hands on hips, a broad smile on her face because where on earth could you find an easier way to earn \$45. Fifty women and a group of children stood in south Norfolk that day to watch the smoke curl up into the sky. Jane stood nearby like Nero and simply declared "Holy Smoke". Jane left Norfolk to live with her mother in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. And now the rest of the story: Jane returned to Norfolk in September 1906 to have the last rites performed over her dead colored body. Instead of hurriedly and unceremoniously being buried without a tear to drop on the casket of "Aunt" Jane Gordon" a real funeral with a real sermon and real music was held through the efforts of women who lived as social outcasts but insisted their friend should be given a decent burial and followed up their

demands with funds to pay the expenses. Jane was buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery. May she rest in peace.

Probably everyone knows about Grant School in Norfolk. It still exists with classes but has been threatened with closure because, ironically, of a similar problem that existed in 1898. In October of that year, the new Grant building came very close to being destroyed by fire. Although the new building was ready for occupancy the heating arrangements were not in working order owing to the fact that the heat jackets for the furnace had not been built. The fault was due to the complacency of the Board of Education. Instead they turned to oil stoves which were lit by the janitor. He turned them up went to breakfast, returned and turned them up to capacity. It was while he was tending to other duties and not long before smoke billowed out of the second story windows. The oil stove exploded and thus the blaze started. No lives were lost or endangered except for the janitor's singed whiskers and blackened face. The present heating system is in question today.

How many times do I go to see if the mail has arrived? Mail service is sometimes not up to our expectations. The Postmaster Inspector arrived in Norfolk on July 25th, 1902. He was here for the express purpose to ascertain if the condition of Norfolk was respecting of free mail delivery. This was his fourth visit and he stated in no uncertain terms that he was not coming back. He had previously expressed to Postmaster Hayes that three conditions must be met before free mail delivery within the City. The street names had to be posted at the intersections, the sidewalks must be repaired and businesses and houses be numbered. The City had failed previously because the census had revealed that there were not 5,000 residents numbered in the City. The Postmaster Hayes said they would comply and feared failure to do so would mean no delivery. Everything was in readiness and the first delivery was made in March 1902. Civil Service examinations were given in April for the offices of Clerk and Letter Carriers. Norfolk had completed another leap to becoming a real City.

Remember the song "When the Lights Come on Again All Over the World"? I used to sing that on the way home from country school. It was my way of scaring off the feeder cattle that lined my route home. On July 20th, 1903, the lights came on all over Norfolk. The mayor and council met that day to report the committee report was accepted and adopted. Lamps to be located as follows: First Ward one arc light, Second Ward three arc lights, Third Ward one arc lamp and eleven gas lights, Fourth Ward one arc light and seven gas lights. And now we have light –maybe too much light on 1111 Longhorn Drive.

Now you know how progress was made by those energetic Wisconsin Germans who landed on the shores of the Elkhorn River.

(This information was made possible by articles from the Norfolk Daily News collected by Betty Bohac) Enjoy!!!!

Membership Reminder: The date above your name on the mailing label shows when your memberships expires. Membership renewals will be for one year after your expiration date.

Information and queries: mcgs@telebeep.com

Membership and newsletter: nzaruba@kdsi.net

Memberships are \$15 per year.

Research Requests: \$10 and a family group sheet to:
MCGS, PO Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031

Website: www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/

2010-2011 Officers

President: Betty Bohac

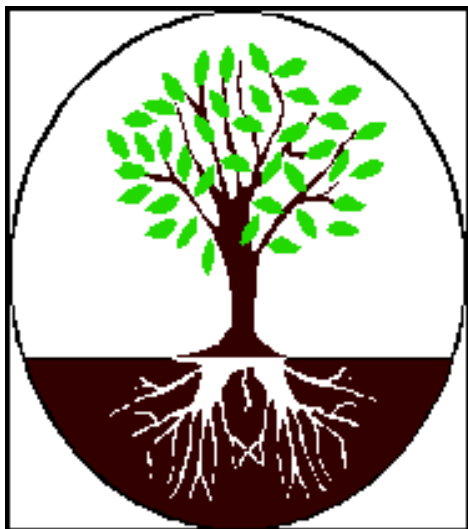
Vice-President: Phyllis McCain

Secretary: Frances Beck

Treasurer: Bernice Walters

MADISON COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031



The date on your label is your membership renewal date. Please check it and renew to save postage/printing costs.

TEMP RETURN SERVICE FIRST CLASS

MCGS Meeting Announcements

The May program will be presented by Margie Fuhrmann at her home at 1215 Meadow Drive at 9:30 am.

At this time no meeting is scheduled for June or July. Elections will be handled by mail. If you wish to hold an office please contact Betty Bohac, 1111 Longhorn Drive, Norfolk, NE 68701 or Madison Co. Gen. Soc., PO Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031. The August meeting will be our annual outing which will be to Goose Lake and environs as detailed in the book Hector's Bliss by Dennis Vossberg, the author. Dennis will give us a personal, guided tour leaving from Neligh about 10 am on August 20. More details later.

HECTOR'S BLISS: Black Homesteaders at Goose Lake by Dennis Vossberg

This book is about the first ex-slaves who rolled into the desolate, rugged Sand Hills of northern Wheeler County, Nebraska, after the Civil War. They must have thought they had landed at the end of the earth. Among other things, they had been told that their land contained abundant coal deposits, and that ample rain would follow once the sod was opened up by plowing. These black pioneers had little choice but to desperately make a living on 160 acres of dry, sandy soil that was barely suited for grazing. An ironic twist resulted in the community to be named "Bliss", so called because a local family by that name had the first Post Office. A determined few stuck it out until the end of World War I. Then they all simply vanished. The book continues through their burial in a lost Negro cemetery by peaceful Goose Lake. Dennis has spent many years researching the story of these people.