



Madison County Genealogical Society



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Articles by Alice Leffler

Remembers When Hoppers Made Farmers Quit Land by Alice Leffler

Work, while possibly no harder in early days was much different than now, according to Mrs. F. A. Preuss, whose people homesteaded in Green Garden, where she was born. Because the grasshopper damage was so great for seven years in that vicinity, her grandfather and an uncle returned to Iowa. Again coming to Madison, they found their homesteads had been taken up by others, so they did not remain.

Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. August Buettner, stuck it out as did two uncles, Martin and Gottlieb Buettner and their families. Among other neighbors who weathered this difficult period were the Polenske, Maurer, Schwartz, Wells and Teske families.

The cost of a 160 acre homestead was only \$16.50 but this small sum was more difficult to pay than the cost of land today, for it was so hard to get hold of even a few cents. Timber claims were given to those willing to plant 80 acres, or half of the land, in trees. Seedlings were scarce, it was hard to get the trees to grow in the newly turned sod and only two persons to the knowledge of Mrs. Preuss, ever attempted to get a tree claim until the government lowered the number of acres of trees to be planted to 40 acres.

None of the Preuss stock was lost in the blizzard of 1888, although she believes her father had a close call himself while trying to get the stock into the open sheds. He fell into a soft drift and his brother had to assist him out. In the morning the cattle were safer, but huddled in the rear of the shed which was otherwise packed with snow.

One year there was no market for barley and, after Mr. Buettner had taken a load to Columbus where he could find no buyer, his impulse was to empty it on the prairie rather than make the team haul it home. Thriftiness revolted at the waste so he cached it in the granary and the next fall again attempted to see it to have room for his new grain. To his surprise it brought 75 cents a bushel, as breweries using barley had begun operating.

A fall task was making mattresses of the soft inner husks of corn. The men would snap a load and the children would shred the husks and restuff mattresses. Instead of comforters, many families used feather ticks and all but the softest of downy feathers were stripped. In stripping feathers, one pulls the fuzz from the quills which are discarded.

Women knit socks and mittens, many of them using a spindle to work wool into yarn. Men's clothing was also handmade by many pioneers before sewing machines came into general use, or store clothing was low enough in price to permit the poorer people to get it.

Mr. Preuss was born in Germany and came to Madison county when a small boy. His parents lived in the neighborhood of Battle Creek, having a log house until shortly after he was married, when they erected a frame structure. There were not many log houses in the territory, but many sod shanties, some of which were plastered and all of which were warmer and in some ways more comfortable than frame buildings.

A cyclone which came through here in the early days, doing considerable damage in Madison, destroyed the Charles Preuss homestead. It lifted a granary building off the fanning mill which was undisturbed. A grass mower, much heavier than the mowing machines of today, was ruined. The Young place was torn up and Mrs. Young injured. She was found by Mr. Weinberger.

Mr. and Mrs. Preuss farmed in this vicinity until they retired and moved to town.

Source: Madison Star-Mail, Thursday, January 15, 1942, page 3.

Mrs. Mattison Recalls Long Life In Community by Alice Leffler

Mrs. Frances Mattison has prepared a sketch of the lives of herself and of her parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. Joseph K. Pracher, who were natives of romantic Czechoslovakia, coming to this country about 1870, both of them being in their teens, her father 18 and her mother 16, both leaving their parents in the homeland.

They spent about five weeks crossing the Atlantic ocean, being overtaken by a severe storm, which was when they first met, although they did not live far distant.

Mrs. Mattison's father was the son of an extensive land owner, while her mother was a daughter of a prominent business man of Prague, and was going to Chicago where she had relatives.

Mrs. Mattison's father first located in Chicago, Ill., later leaving for the west where he settled near Crete, purchasing a ranch on the Blue river and where he and his bride set up housekeeping.

Upon leaving of the opportunity which Madison county offered, he loaded his family in a covered wagon and in three days arrived at Madison, locating one mile west on 160 acres for which he paid \$10 per acre. This was about 1886. In 1909 the land sold for \$100 per acre and in 1915, \$200, while in 1920 it brought \$243. On this farm Mrs. Mattison spent her childhood days.

Mrs. Mattison's favorite country school teacher was the late Mrs. Minnie Coope Burnham, who, among other things taught her needlework which became her hobby until it was displaced with the love of reading.

Mrs. Mattison's sister, Mary (Mrs. Michael Ambroz) was an ardent admirer of horses and became a fine horsewoman. She did not hesitate to mount any horse that could be bridled and became the proud possessor of a side saddle and bridle, also a riding habit which included a long skirt and flowing veil.

Although Mrs. Mattison feared horses and, in fact, any farm livestock, she has a good word for the intelligence of a horse, which she had a chance to test during a flood. While driving a single horse to visit a friend 10 miles west of Madison a cloud burst descended before she could reach home, About four miles west, the low ground was flooded to such an extent that for about 40 rods the road, including a small bridge with low railing could not be seen.

Mrs. Mattison undertook to guide the horse to where she thought the bridge was located but the horse refused to respond, so she released the lines and the horse, after a moment's hesitation, changed the course and crossed the bridge.

After reaching unflooded ground, Mrs. Mattison was met by Frank Scheer who marveled at the feat of crossing that stretch of undulated ground.

Mrs. Mattison graduated from the Madison High School with the class of 1898 at which time each graduate was called upon to write, memorize and deliver an oration.

She taught her first school in what was known as the Wehenkel school. One of her pupils was Otto Scheer, the present mayor of Madison and with whose parents, Mr. and Mrs. Valentine Scheer, she boarded.

Teaching programs were different than now as pupils took the subjects they wished, to a more or less extent. Salaries were different, also, as one received \$30 per month salary and paid \$10 per month for board.

However, the country school days were not as dull as one may think. Literary societies were organized and programs consisted of debates, dialogues, recitations, community singing and spelling bees.

Mrs. Mattison recalls her first auto ride, which was in a Brush, with open sides and high pressure tires. As there were no smooth roads, passengers were obliged to hang on tight. Worse than the jolting was the noise it made, causing people to open doors for inspection as the car went careening past.

Fourth of July was an outstanding yearly event. Later, the county fair became popular. Christmas was a quiet, family affair. Mrs. Mattison has in her possession an ABC plate which was her first Christmas gift. It took less to please and satisfy children in early times, she says, than it does now. Most toys were homemade and sweets consisted of stick candy.

Finally Mrs. Mattison realized the ambition of her life, that is, to travel. With her late husband, J. J. Mattison, all of the states in the union were visited, and several trips were made to Canada as well as to Old Mexico, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and the Gulf of Mexico.

While in Atlantic City, N. J., they decided to walk the Board Walk, which is about 20 feet wide and five miles long, but gave it up as too big a job.

Source: Madison Star-Mail, February 26, 1942, page 4.

Tintype Photos Were Made Quickly, Mrs. Varner Says, by Alice Leffler

Tintypes were among the popular kinds of pictures when the late Ezekiel Rowlett operated a picture gallery in Madison, according to his daughter, Mrs. H. A. Varner. As she recalls the procedure, four tintypes were made simultaneously, the picture being imprinted directly upon the tin which was immersed in a developing fluid, a fixing solution and then varnished to prevent scratching and fading.

Farmer women and girls would have their pictures taken when first arriving in town, then call and receive them before leaving in the late afternoon. Mrs. Varner does not remember the price, as she was a school girl when her father was Madison's photographer, but says they were cheaper than photographs, the popular priced photo being \$2.50 a dozen.

While the tintypes were slipped into a folder with a paper fly-leaf to protect the face, the photographs were pasted upon a fancy card. It took longer to make photographs then, than it does now, as the sun developed the pictures and one had to watch---well, here was the process:

There was a wooden frame with a glass face and a back which was hinged about two-thirds up and locked by means of a clamp. One placed the negative next the glass, then put in a sheet of

sensitized paper, then firmly locked the back in place so the paper could not slip on the negative and blur the picture.

This was done in the "dark" room which was light, but so-called as only a red light was used for illumination in order to protect the sensitive paper. The frame would then be carried out of the "dark" room, care being taken that the opening door did not destroy exposed paper. The frame would be set in a sunny window for an approximate number of minutes, the exact time depending upon the brightness of the sun, the time of day and the condition of the glass plate, which corresponds with the present camera film.

Mrs. Varner has often tried to figure out the exact location of her father's gallery but can not owing to the changes in Madison during the years when she lived in the vicinity of Warnerville and Enola.

She recalls that James and Marion Thomas had a general grocery store when her parents first came to Madison, and Mr. Prince operated the hotel. Later, Gillespies had a store; Earl Fichter ran the livery stable and W. J. Brinkman was the druggist. That was back in '82, her father, a Civil War veteran, living in Seward county prior to that time, settling there in '76.

Mrs. Varner attended school in Madison the winter her father homesteaded southwest of Warnerville, then known as Munson, as buildings had not been erected.

Literaries, in which the children and adults sang, spoke pieces, debated, had spelling matches and play parties, were among the early day amusements for both Mr. and Mrs. Varner. Mr. Varner also enjoyed dancing, of which Mrs. Varner's parents did not approve, but the Methodist church which she attended provided considerable entertainment in the form of sociables.

Mr. Rowlett helped build the Warnerville church which was dedicated in 1906 by the Rev. W. R. Peters, who was a circuit minister, serving Bega, Warnerville, Hoskins and Dover school district.

Dr. Tyndall, presiding elder, preached the dedicatory sermon. The Rev. Kimball of Madison and previously preached at Warnerville, Hoskins and the Dover school district.

Mr. and Mrs. Varner, after their marriage in '88, farmed and kept store in Enola then moved to a farm near Enola and subsequently to Madison.

Tom Malone and his son, Fay, were among the prominent builders in Enola, for whom the town was named. They built several houses still standing, Will Stork; J. C. Hartford and Howard Miller occupying three of them. Ernest Diefenderfer was one of the first settlers.

Mr. Varner was a director of the Enola school which was first housed in a small building later moved away that a two-room building might be erected, the plan being such that two rooms later were added, completing the original plan.

Mr. Stork was an early day postmaster, housing the government work in the office of the grain elevator which he and Paul Renner, Sr., owned. Mrs. Tobalo, now of California, and her six children lived in Enola.

Howard, the youngest of the Varner children, was born in Enola and is now with George Callies in the tire and battery business in Madison. The elder son, Harley, lives in Seward county and a daughter, Mrs. Fred Wakeley, near Hartington. There are ten grandchildren of the elder Varners and two great grandchildren.

Source: Madison Star-Mail, February 12, 1942, page 3.