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History of Gosper County,

Nebraska

A Thesis

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty of the

Fort Hays Kansas State College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of

Science in Education

by

William Main, B. S.

Fort Hays Kansas State College

Date

July 22, 1941.

Approved

Raymond L. Welty

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a history of Gosper County, Nebraska, from the time of the first authentic journey across the county until the present time.

Regardless of the fact that I have had many sources of information and not withstanding that all whom I have interviewed have been very kind and helpful, my history is not complete. There are gaps in the narrative that I have been unable to fill in the time which I could devote to it. Many records have been lost or destroyed. Many of the early settlers are dead.

Official records and newspaper files have been my chief sources but both of them were incomplete. The Nebraska State Historical Society was especially helpful in furnishing both primary and secondary source material. By his kindly suggestions Mr. H. S. Robinson, State Historical Society Statistician, helped locate much valuable information. The county officials of Gosper County were very kind in their cooperation. They gave me many useful suggestions as to the location of valuable records.

Some of my history of Smithfield has been obtained in interviews with the older settlers there (not the original settlers) who have graciously helped me. Mrs. Bigelow's accounts have been very helpful. All accounts have been substantiated by not less than two non-interested sources.

There are a few controversial events that some people may disagree with and claim that such and such was the case. I have tried to be fair with events and believe my accounts are quite

accurate. There are doubtless mistakes but I have tried to prevent them. The fact that I have always tried to get two or more disinterested and reliable sources in controversial cases should help to prevent mistakes. The location and date of the first school in the county, the first person to be born in the county and the locations of Plum Creek Massacres' were especially difficult topics. In the case of the first school and first white person born in the county, I believe that my thesis is correct. In regard to the Plum Creek Massacres the more time I spent on the topic and the more data I collected the more confusing the topic became. I am satisfied that our knowledge concerning these Massacres is too meager and too inaccurate.

I have for the most part kept away from the spectacular events and have tried to give a true picture of the economic and social conditions of the county especially since the formation of the county.

To Prof. Robert Lincoln Parker who helped me develop a love for the truth, to Dr. Raymond L. Welty, my major professor, who has aided and guided me in my work and to all others who have aided me, I give my sincerest thanks.



# HISTORY OF GOSPER COUNTY, NEBRASKA

## Chapter I.

### Introduction

	Pages
A. Description of early Gosper County.....	1
B. Histories dealing with County.....	1
C. Location of County.....	2
D. Topography and Climate.....	2
1. Climate.....	2
2. Topography.....	6
E. Native Fauna and Flora.....	7
1. Native fauna.....	7
2. Native flora.....	9

## Chapter II.

### History before Settlement

A. Claims of European Nation.....	11
1. "Nebraska" first used.....	11
2. French claims.....	11
3. Spanish claims.....	11
4. English claims.....	11
5. Transfer of territory from nation to nation....	11
6. Transferred to the United States by Pawnee Indians.	12
B. Exploration & Trails.....	12
1. Exploration.....	13
2. Trails.....	15
C. Indians.....	18

## Chapter III.

### Settlement of County

A. Reasons for settlement.....	20
1. Earliest ideas of region.....	20
2. Purpose of settlement.....	21
B. First Settlements.....	21
1. Plum Creek.....	22
2. First homestead.....	24
3. Second homestead.....	24
4. First permanent settlement.....	25
C. Extent of Settlement.....	25
1. First settlements along creeks.....	25
2. Population in early period of settlement.....	25
3. Frontier tragedy.....	26
D. Other events.....	27
1. Railroad accident.....	27
2. Jesse James's lost treasure.....	28

## Chapter IV. Economic & Social Conditions.

	Pages.
A. Homestead life. ....	29
1. Early homes. ....	29
2. Planting crops. ....	29
3. Food and drinking water. ....	30
4. Grasshoppers. ....	30
5. Drouths. ....	31
6. Blizzards. ....	32
7. Prairie fires. ....	34
8. Dust storms. ....	35
9. Importing horses. ....	35
10. Destitution. ....	35
11. Buffalo bones. ....	36
12. Property valuations. ....	36
13. Popular belief regarding rain. ....	37
B. Education. ....	37
1. First schools. ....	37
2. Description of early school. ....	38
3. Early teachers' institutes. ....	38
4. First County Superintendent. ....	39
C. Churches. ....	45
D. Amusements & Recreations. ....	48
E. Homes. ....	48

## Chapter V. Organization of County & County Seats.

A. Organization of County. ....	49
1. Organization of the county. ....	49
2. Proclamation for organizing county. ....	50
3. Courthouse authorized. ....	51
4. Petition for vote on new county seat. ....	53
5. Special election, 1883. ....	53
6. County records in clerk's home. ....	53
B. County Seat fights. ....	53
1. First courthouse proposed. ....	53
2. Courthouse bill passes. ....	53
3. Courthouse authorized. ....	53
4. Petition for vote on new county seat. ....	53
5. Special election. ....	54
6. County seat to Elwood. ....	55
C. Courthouses. ....	55
1. Daviesville. ....	55
2. Homerville. ....	55
3. Elwood. ....	56

## Chapter VI. Towns.

A. Plum Creek. ....	59
B. Daviesville. ....	59
C. Homerville. ....	60
D. Ceryle. ....	62
E. Hoteling Flats. ....	62
F. Gosper. ....	63
G. Tracyville. ....	63
H. Smithfield. ....	63

1. Elwood.....	74
----------------	----

## Chapter VII. Economic and Social Conditions

A. Agriculture.....	81
1. Soil.....	81
2. Rainfall.....	83
3. Crops.....	85
4. Prices, incomes, carloadings, etc.....	89
B. Roads.....	90
1. County roads.....	91
2. State highways.....	92
C. Irrigation.....	95
1. Early settlers' crops. ....	95
2. Crop failures. ....	95
3. Subsoil moisture.....	96
4. 1934 - 40 drouth.....	96
5. Irrigation.....	96
6. Tri-County approved.....	98
7. Cost & financing project.....	98
8. Extent of project.....	99
9. Johnson Canyon Reservoir and Power Houses.....	100

## Chapter VIII. Conclusion.

A. Period before settlement.....	101
B. Period of settlement.....	102
C. Period of development.....	102
D. Period of restardation.....	102
E. Tri-County.....	103
F. Future.....	103

Maps .....	103ff
------------	-------

Bibliography .....	Maps ff
--------------------	---------



# HISTORY OF GOSPER COUNTY

## Chapter 1.

The first history to mention Gosper County was The History of Nebraska, its Advantages and Drawbacks,<sup>1</sup> published in London, England in the year 1875. This history encouraged settlers to come to Nebraska. It tells that persons with a thousand pounds (about \$5,000) can secure suitable locations in southwestern Nebraska to raise cattle and sheep which can winter without hay. The second history was written by Harrison Johnson<sup>2</sup> in 1879 and the third history was by A. T. Andreas in 1882,<sup>3</sup> Since then the author could find no evidence of a serious effort to write the history of the county.

The climate, the soil, the native vegetation, the native animals and the people have determined the history of the county.

Edele M. Ballard has written a very good description of the country in early times. She wrote:

Prairie fires...blizzards in which people lost their way and their lives between their barns and houses and were found frozen to death within call of their homes...hot winds that burned the crops and cooked milk in the tender young corn...winds that blew three days from the south and then turned in its tracks and blew the sand and dust back again leaving plenty top-soil on the way...a country where life itself depended upon whether the rains would come in time.

A country where the insane asylums were mostly filled with women from the ranches...where more than a few brides found

1. The History of Nebraska, its Advantages and Drawbacks, London, England, 1875.

2. Edward Johnson, History of Nebraska, Omaha, 1879.

3. A. T. Andreas, History of Nebraska, Chicago, 1882.

torturing sanctuary inside grim walls. Could anyone forget a strait-jacketed young woman at the station being taken by her keepers to an asylum and muttering over and over again, 'Th' butter won't come...th' butter won't come.' Or another asking in a toneless voice, 'Does it look like rain? Does it look like rain?' That, until Death came like a friend and touched them on the shoulder...Can one ever forget, entirely, those early days of pioneering?

But there was another side. Can anyone forget the lovely summer mornings...Driving across the wide unfenced prairies, pass little sod houses with sagging roofs on which weeds grew in a discouraged fashion...looking at the corn with its broad tropical leaves glistening in the sun and rustling in the breeze; corn upon which our prosperity, our life and our civilization were built and for which we are indebted to the original settlers--the American Indian.<sup>4</sup>

Gosper County is in southern Nebraska in the second tier of counties north of the Kansas-Nebraska line. It is bordered on the south by Furnas County, on the west by Frontier County, on the north by Dawson County and on the east by Phelps County.

The county is nearly rectangular in shape. The county is 34 miles or four townships long north and south and it is 18 miles or three townships wide, with the exception of along the southern tier of townships it is four townships wide. It has an average width of about 19½ miles. Its southern boundary is approximately 190 miles west of the Missouri River.<sup>5</sup> The area is 464 square miles or 296,960 acres.<sup>6</sup>

Gosper County has a continental climate; that is, the summers are hot and the winters are cold. In the summer the prevailing wind is a hot dry southwest wind and in the winter the pre-

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4. Edele M. Ballard, The Bertrand Herlad, (50th anniversary Edition), Sept., 6, 1935.

5. Session Laws of Nebraska, 1891, p. 215.

6. W. J. Moran, Soil Survey of Gosper County, Nebraska, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Series 1934, No. 8, May 1936, p. 28.



ing wind is a strong, cold northwest wind sometimes accompanied by a heavy snow. Such a storm is a blizzard.

The average rainfall over a period of 46 years is 22.8 inches. During 20 of these years the rainfall has been above average and during 21 of these years the rainfall has been below average.<sup>7</sup>

The summers are characterized by warm days and nights, which favor the growth of corn. The average length of the frost-free season, April 30 to October 8, is 161 days. Killing frosts have occurred as late as May 24 and as early as September 11 in the 43 year period from 1893 to 1933, inclusive.<sup>8</sup>

The following table, compiled from records of the United States Weather Bureau at Holdrege, in Phelps County, gives the normal monthly, seasonal, and annual temperature and precipitation at that station. These records are fairly representative of climate conditions in Gosper County.<sup>9</sup>

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7. L. F. Gary, Compiler, Bulletin 311, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Oct., '37. p.11.

8. W. J. Moran, Soil Survey of Gosper County, p. 3.

9. Ibid., p. 4.

Month	Temperature			Precipitation			
	Mean	Absolute maximum	Absolute minimum	Mean	Total am't driest year (1934)	Total am't wettest year (1915)	Snow average depth
	F	F	F	Inches	Inch	Inch	Inch
Dec.	28.3	70	- 18	0.66	0.61	0.35	4.7
Jan.	25.5	70	- 26	.42	.10	.59	4.0
Feb.	22.9	79	- 43	.78	1.19	1.15	7.6
Winter	27.6	79	-43	1.86	1.90	2.09	16.3
Mar.	38.3	92	- 10	1.04	.17	1.76	7.9
April	50.9	101	- 10	2.80	.36	3.63	2.0
May	60.6	102	19	3.80	.67	6.99	.5
Spring	49.9	102	- 10	7.64	1.20	12.38	10.4
June	71.3	108	38	3.74	3.06	9.13	.0
July	76.9	111	42	3.20	1.66	7.38	.0
Aug.	75.3	108	42	2.90	1.36	6.20	.0
Summer	74.5	111	38	9.84	6.08	22.81	.0
Sept.	67.1	115	23	1.96	2.28	2.60	.0
Oct.	53.7	96	7	1.55	.65	.50	1.2
Nov.	39.1	88	8 <sup>10</sup>	.80	1.70	.35	2.1
Fall	53.1	115	8	4.31	4.63	3.45	3.3
Year	53.1	115	-43	26.65	13.81	40.73	30.0

10. On November 11, 1940, a record cold of - 10 was reached. This cold killed much of the wheat and many of the fruit trees.

Nearly 80 per cent of the rainfall comes between April 1 and October 1, but much of it is *terrential*, which causes rapid erosion and results in considerable loss through surface runoff. In only one year (1934) has the rainfall fallen below 14 inches.<sup>11</sup>

#### Rainfall of Gosper County.<sup>12</sup>

Gosper County	May-August Average	July-August Average	August	Period of yrs.
	13.3	6.15	3.90	41 yrs.

#### Amount and variation of precipitation in Gosper County.<sup>13</sup>

County	Period	Annual average	Annual variation	May-Aug. average	variation
Gosper	1895-1933	22.8 in.	24.6%	13.3	36.1%

The rainfall reaches its maximun in June, then gradually declines the remainder of the year.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the area of Gosper County constitutes a watershed for two drainage systems; there is a short slope northeastward toward the Platte River. There is a long southward slope toward the Republican River. The long slope is drained by three small streams, the Elk, the Muddy and the Turkey Creeks; all of which flow into the Republican river.<sup>15</sup> Plum Creek is the only stream of any importance although there are numerous small creeks in the

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11. W. J. Moran, Soil Survey of Gosper County, pp. 3-7.

12. L. F. Gary, Bulletin 311, Oct. '37, p. 11.

13. Ibid., p. 11.

14. Geroqe Evert Condra, Geography of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1923, p. 35.

15. See map, p.1. Nebraska State Planning Board, Water Resources of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1936. p.1.

canyons which comprise most of the western part of the county.<sup>16</sup> Plum creek enters the county about four miles south of the northwest corner of the county, flows toward the northeast until within a mile of the northern boundary, then flows southeast parallel to the Platte River until within four miles of the east boundary and then once again flows northeast until it leaves the county in the extreme northeast corner. At the place of leaving the county, the creek is only a few rods from the Platte River.<sup>17</sup>

The largest nearly level tracts are in the northeast one-third of the county, where the surface of the old plain has not been greatly modified by erosion and lies at or near its former level. One of the least eroded areas comprises about 50 square miles east of Smithfield. Here the upland is nearly level. One finds that the drainage ways are poorly defined and there are many shallow depressions in which water accumulates in wet seasons. Westward of this area much of the land has been reduced to a series of steep slopes and sharp ridges. This eroded area constitutes about 85% of the total area of the county.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout most of the southern two-thirds, the nearly level area of the old plain has been altered to a succession of north-south flat-topped tongues, from one-fourth to three-fourths of a mile wide, separated by narrow and deeply entrenched drainage ways whose canyon walls, at places, are nearly vertical.<sup>19</sup> On most of these canyon walls are "cat-steps" and often yucca or soap weeds.

16. "Geography of Gosper County," Lincoln Evening News, March 4, 1910.

17. Moran's Soil Survey of Gosper County, p. 28.

18. Ibid., p. 25.

19. Moran's Soil Survey of Gosper County, p. 1.



Usually the bottom of the canyon is nearly flat, covered with a thick coat of good grass which is usually mowed and cured for hay.<sup>20</sup>

The average elevation of the county is about 2500 feet above sea level. The altitude ranges from 2765 feet at Elwood to about 2,200 feet on some of the canyon floors in the southeast corner. The elevation of Smithfield is 2,647 feet.<sup>21</sup>

Well water in good quality is readily obtainable in all parts of the county. The depth of the wells range from 30 to 70 feet on the alluvial land to 400 feet on the upland.<sup>22</sup>

The animals native to Gosper County were characteristic of those animals of the Great Plains. They were the antelope, black-tailed deer, jackrabbits, coyote, wolf, buffalo, prairie dog, brush rabbits, badger, skunk, the beaver, and numerous smaller animals. Reptiles of which the most common were the bull snake, the rattlesnake and the garter snake were common. Frogs and toads were found along the streams and ponds. Prairie chickens, grouse and quail were plentiful.<sup>23</sup> There were also a few wild turkeys along the streams<sup>24</sup>

The coyote, wolf, antelope, jackrabbit, prairie dog and buffalo are true plains animals and are usually not found in other regions. These animals exhibit common characteristics:

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20. Personal observation.

21. W. J. Moran, Soil Survey of Gosper County, p. 2.

22. Ibid., p. 2.

23. William A. Salisburg, The Elwood Bulletin (50th Anniversary Edition), Sept. 12, 1935.

24. Old timers tell about them.



1. All, save the coyote and wolf, are grasseaters.
2. All can get along with a small water supply. The prairie dog and the jackrabbit need none. The antelope exhibits great ingenuity in finding water and, by virtue of its speed, can travel far for its supply.
3. The antelope, the jackrabbit, the coyote and the wolf are noted for their speed. The antelope and the jackrabbit depend primarily on speed for safety.
4. All these animals are extremely shy, and must be hunted with long range guns. All possess great vitality.
5. Most of them have been misnamed: the buffalo is a bison, the prairie dog is a marmot, the jackrabbit is a true hare and the antelope is a pronghorn.<sup>25</sup>

Each of these misnamed animals is especially adapted for this region. The prairie dog's food is grass. Not only do they eat the blades but they dig up the roots, destroying vegetation, root and branches. He seeks safety in the ground.<sup>26</sup>

The buffaloes can travel long distances for water. They travel in herds. Their horns and feet are cruel weapons for defense and offense. Their long thick hair on their heads and shoulders protects them from the storms and unlike cattle which turn away from the storm, they face the blizzard.<sup>27</sup>

The antelope is peculiarly well fitted for its chosen environment. First, it can detect danger at an immense distance.

25. Walter P. Webb, 1931, The Great Plains, Chicago. pp.42-43.

26. Walter P. Webb, The Great Plains, p. 39.

27. Personal and friends' observations.

Second, it is the swiftest runner among wild animals on this continent. Third, the antelope is equipped with a signal system which enables it to communicate danger at great distances. This is a white patch on the rump, lighter in color than the body. When frightened or interested in anything unusual the antelope contracts its muscles and the patch becomes a flare of white. Fourth, the antelope possesses great vitality.<sup>28</sup>

The jackrabbits have certain qualities that well fit them for this region. Their long ears give them a keen sense of hearing "and all they ask of a coyote is a fair start and an open field".<sup>29</sup>

The 98th meridian separates the vegetation of the East from that of the West. West of the line there is a scarcity or complete absence of timber.<sup>30</sup> Since Gosper County is west of the 98th meridian we do not expect to find many trees. This is true, there are few trees, these trees are mainly along the streams where we find trees typical of the Plains Region, the most common being the cottonwood, box elder, scrub oak, willow, ash, and the wild plum. These are trees typical of the eastern forest.

On the steep canyon sides are occasional red cedar and pine. These trees are typical of the western forest. With few exceptions the cedars and pines were cut long ago by the early settlers. Recently many of the deciduous trees have been cut due to the poor financial condition of the people. This cutting is partly due to

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28. Walter P. Webb, Great Plains, pp. 35-36.

29. Walter P. Webb. Great Plains, pp. 37-38.

30. Ibid., p. 27.

the fact that previous to 1933 most of the farmers depended largely on corn cobs for most of their fuel, and since 1933 there have been few cobs to burn.

When the first settlers came there were no trees on the uplands. A man standing on the tableland could not see a single tree. After the country became settled most of the farmers and townspeople planted trees about their homes. These trees grew, if well cared for, until the 1934-40 drouth. During this drouth nearly all trees on the tableland have again died and been cut down for firewood until once again the plain is a nearly treeless plain.

Most early settlers mention that "bluestem" grass grew as high as the horse's and cattle's backs in the canyons and valleys<sup>31</sup> and that it grew three feet high in the shallow basins on the upland. The drier regions were covered with a thick coat of buffalo and grama grass. Today the native grass is nearly destroyed. The grasslands have been plowed and the remaining prairie has been overgrazed until the upland pastures are nearly barren of vegetation and the lowland pastures have "grown up" to weeds. In addition to the plants already mentioned, wild turnips, peas, buffalo beans and wild onions were sometimes found.<sup>32</sup>

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31. The writer observed bluestem grass growing along the irrigation ditches fully as high as early accounts indicate.

32. John Paska, The Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

## Chapter 11.

The first use of the word "Nebraska" in history, as far as known, is in the explorations of Veniard de Bourgmond, French commander of the Missouri River region, about 1717.<sup>1</sup> But it remained for Secretary of War, William Wilkins, is his annual report, dated December 1844, for the title "Nebraska" to be officially given to this territory.<sup>2</sup>

Three great European nations have struggled for what is now Nebraska. France claimed the region as part of the country belonging to New France. Spain claimed the region as part of her New World possessions. England claimed the region as part of her New World Empire. The king of England gave grants of land to English settlers along the Atlantic coast. These grants extended west to the Pacific. In 1606 James I gave permission to the London Company to settle Virginia and gave them a charter granting them the land westward.<sup>3</sup> They claimed all the land between the 34th and the 41st parallels.<sup>4</sup> In 1806, James I gave a charter to the Plymouth Company. It claimed all the land between the 38th and 45th parallels westward to the Pacific.<sup>5</sup> Thus not only do we have three great and powerful nations claiming the region but also two companies of one of these nations laying claim to the region.<sup>6</sup>

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1. A. E. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 154. (printed in La decouverte du Missouri, edited by Baron Marc de Villiers, Paris, 1925.)

2. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 230.

3. Smith Burnham, The Making of Our Country, Chicago, 1930, p. 50.

4. David S. Muzzey, A History of Our Country, Chicago, 1737, p. 50.

5. David S. Muzzey, History of our Country, p. 50.

6. A. E. Sheldon, Nebraska Old and New, Lincoln, 1937, map, p. 75.



By the secret treaty at Fontainblau, near Paris, on December 3, 1763, Louis XV gave Louisiana to Charles III of Spain. The secret cession of Louisiana was not transmitted to the people of Louisiana until April 21, 1764, when the King of France sent a letter to the governor of Louisiana that the providence had been given to Spain and that he should turn over the control of the providence and all public property to an officer whom the king of Spain had sent. The news reached New Orleans in October, 1764.<sup>7</sup>

In 1803, on the eve of another war between Napoleon and England, the United States purchased the country for the sum of \$15,000,000. Thus we have three nations actually owning what is now Gosper County. In place of the swarthy Spanard and passive mesitozes of the Latin-American nations or the sturdy peasant from France, Americans settled the county. To the region have come hardy settlers from the eastern states and the more progressive nations of western and northern Europe.

In 1833, the Pawnee Indians ceded the country including what is now Gosper County to the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The next year, by the "Indian Country Act of 1834" all white men were forbidden to enter this region except upon special military permit. This acted as a legal barrier against lawful settlement. White tradesmen, hunters, trappers and frontiersmen disregarded the law.<sup>9</sup>

Probably the earliest recorded description by a white man of a Gosper County landscape is that of Robert Stuart, of the W. A. E. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 163.

8. A. E. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 92.

9. Ibid., p. 220.



little party of returning Astorians. In April 1813, these seven men leading an old horse, obtained by barter from the Snake Indians, after the Crow Indians had robbed the Astorians of all their horses, crossed the Platte River from the north about where the north end of the boundary line between Gosper and Phelps counties lies.

Stuarts says, "We crossed the river where it was divided into ten channels, with a bed of such quicksand that it was difficult for our horse to get over though the water was in no place more than two feet deep."<sup>10</sup>

The party passed Plum Creek "twenty yards wide with some willows and where it issued from the hills about four miles above a few trees (of the pine species)".<sup>11</sup> The banks of the Platte had been treeless for the last two days of their march along its north bank, but a few cottonwoods could be seen on the small islands, with which the stream abounded. Near here they found a straw hut in an old Indian encampment inhabited only by three Pawnee squaws. The squaws were much alarmed by the party and told them nothing that they could comprehend except that there were white people in the country at no great distance.<sup>12</sup>

These weary travelers tramped their way eastward until they reached the island of Grand Island and then on to an Otoe village where they traded their horse for a canoe and continued their way back to civilization to report their hazardous journey. These people left no trail for future Americans to travel, they simply made known the way. After them fur traders, forty-niners and

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10. Philip Ashton Rollins, editor, The Discovery of the Oregon Trail, New York, 1935, p. 46.

11. Rollins, The Discovery of the Oregon Trail, Robert Stuart's narratives, p. 46.

12. Ibid., p. 46.

settlers on horseback and afoot followed nearly the same route on their way to seek gold in California, silver in Colorado and rich furs in the Rockies.<sup>13</sup>

Major Long<sup>14</sup> may never have been in Gosper County but he came so near that he no doubt looked across the Platte at the high bluffs that are a short distance south of the river and since the party stopped nearby to hunt buffalo he may have crossed over to the Gosper County side of the valley as the canyons and bluffs made an ideal place to hunt the great beasts. Regardless of whether he visited the county, he had considerable influence on the county because he labeled the region, "The great American Desert". Edwin James, the scientist, who accompanied Major Long wrote that all the region west of the Missouri Valley was only suitable "for habitation by Indians of the plains and desert animals."<sup>15</sup>

In 1823 General William Ashley, of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, while traveling on the Lewis and Clark route to Oregon, suffered severe losses at the hands of the ~~A~~Kiickarees in the Dakota territory. Desiring to avoid further trouble, he sought a new route to the fur fields in 1824, whence he led the pack train through to the mountains.<sup>16</sup>

On April 10, 1830, Wilton Sublette with ten wagons and one milch cow left St. Louis, and returned to St. Louis the same summer, bringing back the wagons loaded with furs and the faithful

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13. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 186.

14. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1925.

15. "Report of William Sublette," Senate Executive Documents, No. 39, 2nd Session, 21st Congress, pp. 21-22.

16. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 212.

cow which furnished milk all the way. 'Thairs' was the first wagon on the Oregon Trail.

In 1830, three of Ashley's lieutenants, Jedidiah Smith, Daniel E. Jackson, and William Sublette, took a train of fourteen wagons over the route laid out by Ashley and known as the cut-off trail to the mountains. This trail (soon known as the Oregon Trail) crossed the northeast corner of Gosper County.<sup>17</sup>

Again in 1832 William Sublette returned to Gosper County guiding Nathaniel Wyeth of Boston and a party of eight men and three hundred horses over the Oregon Trail to the west, thru the South Pass. The wagons traveled 15 to 20 miles a day thru Nebraska. They followed Bonnerville's trail. Captain Bonnerville went through with twenty wagons in 1832.<sup>18</sup>

By 1835 the Oregon Trail had become a well established route to the Pacific. In the 1840's and 1850's thousands of travelers crossed the corner of Gosper County. One of the most famous of these, Francis Parkman, Jr., entered the county in the first week of June 1845. While taking a southward course to the Republican River, he noted "gray wolves and herds of elk and buffalo. He was impressed by the extensive prairie dog villages," "wherein dwelt owls, checkered snakes and prairie dogs."<sup>19</sup>

Lieutenant John C. Fremont, with a party of twenty-seven, mostly French trappers and frontiersmen, but including Kit Carson, left the mouth of the Kansas River June 10, 1842, and traveled along the Oregon Trail through Gosper County up the Platte Valley.

In 1843 the entire party returned down the Platte River. In  
17. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 212.

18. Ibid., p. 212.

19. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 226.

Fremont's description of the country, he called the Platte River by its Otoe name "Nebraska", the first appearance in print of that name since 1714 when it was used by the French explorer Bourgnond.

On May 18, 1849, Major Osborn left Fort Leavenworth and traveled the Oregon Trail to the mouth of the Columbian River.<sup>20</sup>

After the discovery of gold in California there was a rush to the gold fields. The principle overland route was the Oregon Trail. The rush to California began in 1849 and for years afterwards a stream of goldseekers and other emigrants crossed the northeast portion of the county. Most of the people traveled in wagons although many went horseback and some even walked and either carried their personal property on their backs or pushed a loaded cart before them.

The wagons used for these trips were called Prairie Schooners. The wagons used for freighting were extra strong, carrying about 7000 pounds of freight. The emigrant wagons were especially built to carry sleeping, furniture and kitchen outfits. Their bottoms were shaped like boats and were used as such to cross the rivers. At night all travelers camped in a circle for protection. The wagons placed end to end also served as a corral for the livestock. It was a great life--new friends, new scenery, births, deaths, weddings, Indian attacks, songs and dances. During the summer months, it was not unusual for from 700 to 1000 wagons to pass by in one day.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 229.

21. Mrs. Charles Phillips, "Old Willow Island Pony Express," The Cozard Local, Sept. 13, 1936.

The Plum Creek-Norton Center Trail extended from Norton, Kansas to Lexington. Coming north from Arapahoe, the first stop was at Homerville, where horses were changed and mail and passengers were dropped off and a new load picked up further north. After Elwood was laid out and built up, horses were changed at Elwood instead. The stage also stopped at Union Ridge Postoffice, located where George Critchfield now lives, where Isaac Haworth was postmaster; at Meeks' Postoffice located just north of A. B. Herkenlively's residence, where M. B. Reed served as postmaster; at Arbuta Postoffice located on the A. S. Ashley homestead, now known as the Swan Swanson farm, where Mr. Ashley was in charge; and at Hilton Postoffice on the Platte Valley, located just east of the Delmar Anderson farm, about where the school house now stands. William Cross was postmaster at the Hilton Postoffice. The fare from Arapahoe to Plum Creek was \$3.00,<sup>22</sup> a very reasonable price. The Plum Creek-Arapahoe Stage followed the Norton Center <sup>Plum</sup>Creek Trail.

Robert Lee Bragg<sup>23</sup> drove the stage from Plum Creek to Arapahoe. George Phillips was the first owner. Albertson and Eastburn purchased the line from Phillips. Chris Frickey purchased the line from Albertson and Eastburn. The regular run from Arapahoe to Plum Creek required five hours, three to Elwood and two more to Plum Creek. Oregon horses were used and were driven at a gallop.<sup>24</sup>

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22. Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

23. Robert Bragg died in April 1941. At the time of his death he was county sheriff having served in that office longer than any other man in Gosper County. The Omaha World Herald claimed he he was the oldest and most beloved sheriff in the state.

24. The Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.



Gosper County was almost free from Indian wars, massacres or Indian scares. Until recent years few Indian camp sites or villages were discovered. In the last few years many ancient camp sites and villages have been unearthed and much has been learned about the Indians' methods of killing buffalo. Recent excavations show that the Indians often drove the buffalo up steep-walled canyons to the end of the canyon where the buffalo, being surrounded by walls too steep for them to readily escape and the narrow entrance to the "pocket" held by a band of hunters, were slaughtered by the hunters.

There were four definite and easily tracable Indian Trails across the county in a north and south direction. These trails followed the larger creeks and canyons from the Republican Valley to the headwaters of the canyons or creeks flowing northward to the Platte Valley. The camp sites were usually a few miles apart and located either on the first or second bottom from the creek. These camps were so located that the Indians could break camp about 8 o'clock in the morning and leisurely walk until 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon before pitching a new camp. All the larger camps were near fresh water with the exception of the camp on section 11, township 7, range 23. This camp was west of Elwood and on the tableland. There are indications that the depression nearby held water throughout most of or all the year when the region was covered with grass. Other important Indian camps were: The Indian camp on section 1, township 5, range 22. This is on the old Dodson farm on Turkey Creek. Here there were either a series of Indian camps or

one large Indian town stretching for three miles along the creek. There were two important Indian camps on Elk Creek, one on the Jack Chambers farm, section 23, township 5, range 23, and the other on the old Siman farm, section 11, township 5, range 24. Only one large Indian camp has been found on Plum Creek. This was at Horse-shoe Bend on the old Schwartz farm, section 4, township 7, range 21.

These Indian camps were usually Pawnee but weapons of other Indian tribes are also found among the Pawnee remains. Some of these remains indicate that they belonged to dwellers before the Plains Indians came. Parched corn taken from the fire pits in some of the camps along Turkey Creek and Elk Creek belong to the Republican era, some possibly even to the lower Republican era.<sup>25</sup>

After the white man came and Nance county was made an Indian Reservation, the county was the hunting grounds of various tribes, principally the Pawnees. Starting in Nance County, the bands traveled rapidly along the north bank of the Platte until they crossed the Platte River Ford at the creek (Plum) and entered the present area of Gosper County. From there, they moved slowly south and west toward the Frenchman River, hunting and curing the meat of the elk and the buffalo as they went. Their enemies, the Sioux, Cheyenne, and the Arapahoe, disputed their rights to the region and made frequent attacks, stealing meat, horses and their women as they moved southward and westward along the streams.<sup>26</sup>

25. County Attorney Frogge, (authority for location of Indian camps).

26. William M. Bancroft, "Plum Creek, Now Lexington," Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscence, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1916.

## Chapter 111.

For many years white men regarded the region as unfit for human habitation. Edwin James, the scientist who accompanied Major Long on his expedition through the Nebraska territory in 1820, did much to develop this concept.<sup>1</sup> On the uplands there were no trees for shelter or fuel and water was so deep down in the ground that it was almost impossible for the early settlers to dig wells. Often after digging 300 feet or more the hole proved to be dry. There was little protection for livestock from the blizzards and bitter cold except in the deep canyons. The canyons which are so very narrow and steep sided were sometimes almost drifted level with the surrounding country so that stock which sought shelter were often entirely covered and either smothered or starved.

As early pioneers winded their way westward from eastern states seeking new frontiers to conquer, many a prairie schooner containing these sturdy families stopped along the creek in a territory that was later to become Gosper County.<sup>2</sup> These people were attracted to the region for several reasons. They came here to profit from the Oregon Trail travelers. They built ranches and stations, supplied the travelers with food, shelter, fresh oxen and horses, and other supplies. Others plundered and robbed the unfortunate travelers whom they caught on their way to and returning from the west.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Reuban Gold Thwaites, Early Western Travels, Cleveland, Ohio, 1905-1912, Vol. XLV., pp. 213-213.

2. Who's Who in Nebraska, Pub. by Nebraska Press Association, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1940, p. 489.

3. The Oregon Trail, Federal Writers Project, New York, 1939, p. 71.

Some settlers came for adventure. Returned Civil War Soldiers often found home life too tame after years in the army and other adventurous young men also came west for excitement.

Free range attracted men who wished to make fortunes in the cattle business. This was the time of the great cattle drives from the southwest and sudden cattle fortunes.

Many settlers came from the eastern states because of free land. In parts of the eastern states the original fertility of the land was gone while out here the land was better since it was virgin.

It was during this time that many poor but industrious immigrants were arriving from western and northern Europe. Most of these people wished to own homes of their own. Here in the west they could get them free. Most of these immigrants came from Sweden and Germany.

Many people came here because game was plentiful. With a minimum of work, a small patch of corn and tobacco, a garden and now and then a deer or antelope with quail and prairie chickens, the less industrious could eke out the bare necessities of life.

The first settlement in the county was the result of increasing traffic on the Oregon Trail.<sup>4</sup> This settlement was before 1861, the exact date is unknown. It was on the south side of the Platte River or near the Indian Ford near the northeast corner of the county.<sup>5</sup> It became a Pony Express Station. A family named Humphries kept the station. In 1861, or early in 1862, Daniel Freeman

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4. Mrs. Daniel Freeman, "Recollection of the First Settler in Dawson County", Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences.

5. The Oregon Trail, Federal Writers Project, 1939, p. 71.



started a little store across from the station and began buying buffalo hides for shipment to the East. In the spring of 1862, Mrs. Freeman and her three children drove out from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in a stage coach. She set up a bake shop which sometimes used one hundred pounds of flour a day. Bread was sold at fifty cents a loaf and meals were priced at two dollars a plate.<sup>6</sup> Soon a busy town grew up around the station, which consisted of a postoffice, a blacksmith shop, a resting place for travelers and other places. At about this time, Plum Creek, as the station was called, became a rendezvous for outlaws who plundered travelers going to and returning from the gold fields. These outlaws took refuge in the canyons to the south and west.<sup>7</sup>

In April 1941, Mr. Richardson, in whose pasture the remains of this station is located, Mr. Wallace and the writer again inspected the place. The old walls of the buildings are easily seen. An old stockade is easily traceable as also are old rifle pits and stables which extend down to a slough which contains clear water. This was the end of a telegraph line. The old cedar posts are still lying at regular intervals across the pasture. These posts are a few feet from the old Oregon Trail and extend only to the station. All buildings faced the trail which extended in a northwest and southeasterly direction and which appears to have been the main street.

It was east and south of here that the Plum Creek Massacre took place. No accounts seem to fit all the circumstances and descriptions

6. Mrs. Daniel Freeman, "Recollections of First Settler in Dawson County," Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscence, p. 43.

7. The Oregon Trail, Federal Writers Project, 1939, pp. 71-72.

do not agree. There are the remains of three settlements in the course of four or five miles and three sets of graves, one burial ground in Gosper County and two in Phelps County. There were at the least two and possibly several massacres here. The first so-called massacre was the Mortons' who had been warned of great danger but having made several trips safely, were not afraid of the Indians. It is believed that this "Plum Creek Massacre" was in Phelps County.<sup>8</sup> This is called the August Massacre because it occurred in August, 1864.

The "Second Plum Creek Massacre" was definitely in Gosper County. A party from Fort McPherson were returning with a sick officer. As they neared the place where Plum Creek emptied from the hills into the valley, Indians appeared from the east and the little party thought they were doomed. One of the soldiers knew of a nearby deserted dugout in the hills and they hastened there, using their grain bags to block the door against the expected attack.

To their great relief a wagon train appeared about this time and the attack was made on it.

They always believed that the glare of the setting sun had prevented them from being seen by the Indians, and they witnessed that seventeen men in the wagon train were killed. From the distance it appeared that the women may have been taken prisoners.

8. Mrs. Morton's daughter and granddaughter, accompanied by Clyde Wallace, visited the supposed site of the Plum Creek massacre and the supposed graveyard. In the grave yard the bodies lie for the most part together in pairs and not in a common graves as all descriptions give. Also one of the graves had a granite marker giving the date of death, age and name of the lady whose body lies there. Neither the date of the lady's death nor her name fit the descriptions of the Morton party.

Later, women (other than Mrs. Morton of the August Massacre) was claimed to have been captured at the Plum Creek Massacre were ransomed. Being but a small party with one sick and helpless man, and a woman, the party was unable to assist the fellow whites but were forced by circumstances to watch the butchery.

After having killed the men, plundered the wagons, and set them afire, the Indians rode away.

When they felt safe, some of the party ventured forth to the mournful business of burying the victims. Leaving the sick man in the dugout, the rest of the party buried the dead in a common grave rather than leave their bodies to the ravages of the coyotes and buzzards.<sup>9</sup>

In the early '70's settlements began to form along the Muddy, Elk, and Turkey Creeks in the south part of the county, as well as along Plum Creek in the northern part of the county.<sup>10</sup>

James Hindman filed the first homestead claim on April 28, 1870. This was on Section 1, Township 5, Range 23 West. The entry was canceled and the claim pre-empted by T. W. Russell, April 16, 1874.<sup>11</sup>

James W. Misner filed on forty acres of land in Section 7, Township 5, Range 23 West, paying \$1.25 per acre. This was on

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9. Mrs. Chas. Phillips, The Cozad Local, Sept. 13, 1938.

A Mr. Freeman, now a feeble old man, son of Daniel Freeman at the Plum Creek Station was interviewed several times a few years ago by Clyde Wallace. He claimed to also have witnessed the massacre while herding cattle between the massacre site and the station. Mr. Wallace was unable to confuse him by questioning him.

10. Who's Who in Nebraska, p. 487.

11. United States Land Office Records, (for Nebraska) Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Vol. 76, p. 168. (1854-1933).

The patent was granted October 1, 1880.<sup>12</sup>

The first homesteader on the divide north of Elwood was Peter Brill who in 1879 filed on a quarter of land in what is now known as Bethel precinct.<sup>13</sup>

Otto Renzie made the first permanent settlement in the county in the fall of 1871.<sup>14</sup> A few others came in the spring of 1872. These settlers located along Plum Creek<sup>15</sup> and in the greater portion of the fertile eastern part of the county.<sup>16</sup>

In 1873 there was quite a heavy immigration to the eastern part of the county so the people decided to organize.<sup>17</sup> The region to the north, the east, the south and the west had been organized into counties.

By the year 1874, the population had reached 100 and by 1875 it was 261.<sup>18</sup>

By 1879 the population had increased to 624. Divided into precincts it was:

Turkey Creek Precinct.....	165
Elk Creek Precinct.....	164
West Muddy Precinct.....	118
East Muddy Precinct.....	155
Robb Precinct.....	22
Total	624

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12. United States Land Office Records, Vol. 76, p. 182.

13. Who's Who in Nebraska, p. 487.

14. Harrison Johnson, History of Nebraska, Omaha, Nebr., 1880, p.362.

15. Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

16. Andreas, History of Nebraska, p. 930.

17. Lincoln Evening News, March 24, 1910

18. Harrison Johnson, History of Nebraska, p. 362.



Of these 624 settlers 354 or 56.7% were men, the women and children numbered 270 or 43.3%.<sup>19</sup>

Thus we see that the early settlements were mainly along the creeks in the southern part of the county, and along Plum Creek in the northern part and that the level table land in the north-eastern part was not settled until later.

The population increased slowly but steadily as time went on so that by 1882 it numbered about two thousand. Most of the settlers engaged in farming or stockraising or combined farming and stockraising.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of the steady increase of population, Andreas in his History of Nebraska wrote, "the population can never be very great, as a combination of crop and stockraising must be the chief industry for all time to come."<sup>21</sup> Andreas also wrote, "There are a few country stores and a number of postoffices, but the greater part of the trade of the county goes to Plum Creek on the line of the Union Pacific, to the north, and to Arapahoe, <sup>22</sup> on the line of the Burlington Missouri River Railroad, to the south.

About this time a tragedy occurred which shocked the county. The following account is taken from the Gosper County Citizen.  
Elwood, Nebraska, Friday, November 13, 1885.

Last week Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Nelson and their two children, aged three and five years, arrived from Dewitt this state to visit the family of E. S. Usher, to whom they are related. Mr. Nelson's and Mr. Johnson's children went down into the canyon west of the house to play and when they returned some two hours afterward, little Johnny Nelson was

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19. Bayard H. Paine, The Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

20. Andreas, History of Nebraska, p. 930.

21. Andreas, History of Nebraska, p. 930.

22. Andreas, History of Nebraska, p. 930.

discovered to be missing and upon questioning the other children it was found he had gone north up the canyon. Search was at once commenced though at the time no alarm felt, as it was supposed he could soon be found, but a careful search of the canyons where he had last been seen failed to discover him. The alarm became general and the father, who was in Elwood, was sent for and he hurriedly departed for Mr. Usher's, accompanied by Harry Barber. As soon as the news spread in Elwood a large company of searchers started for the scene through the heavy storm of snow and sleet which had set in about night fall. All night long the unseccessful search was continued and the hopeless look of sorrow on the faces of the parents as each new arrival of some searcher to relight his lantern or bring news, was such as to bring tears to the eyes of the sympathizing. All hope of finding the child alive had long been adandoned, for it was such a storm as the little child, unprotected, could not have possibly survived. The search has been continued almost without cessation but up to going to press no word has been received of the child having been found.

Later -- The child's tracks were discovered this evening some three miles north of where he started. Some are of the opinion the tracks were made yesterday and that the child lived through the storm of the night before. It is generally believed he will be found tomorrow morning. A blood hound has been telegraphed for and is expected sometime tomorrow to assist in the search.

Johnny Nelson's body was not found until either the sixth or seventh day after he had wandered away. The child was found, lying in a washout in a canyon about three miles northwest of where he was last seen.<sup>23</sup>

Since the time of the Plum Creek Massacres the county has been remarkably free of tragedies. The only really serious tragedy was the train wreck between Smithfield and Bertrand on the morning of October 15, 1916. The accident occurred when the third

23. Will Usher, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

section of the stock train No. 136 ran into the rear of the second section which had stopped between the two towns. Neither train was running with headlights. In the caboose of the second section were crowded 32 men.

The Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad had also failed to provide station agents at night so that the trains were unable to tell the location of each other. Of the thirty-two in the caboose, eleven were killed, and four seriously injured. The others upon hearing the roar of the oncoming train had escaped by hurriedly jumping out and running to safety.<sup>24</sup>

There has existed a story that Jesse James passed through Gosper County on his return trip from Minnesota and because he was being closely pursued he buried a pot of gold in southern Gosper County. Many attempts were made to find the gold.

A few years ago a group of men, who were working roads, were digging a cut through a hill. Near the top of the hill and buried several feet they found an iron kettle but there was no gold in it. The kettle was badly rusted and evidently had been buried a long time. A. I. Phillips has the kettle in his collection of relics.<sup>25</sup>

In 1935 the stratosphere balloon, which had ascended in the Black Hills passed over the Northeastern part of the county.

It fell to earth near Loomis.<sup>26</sup>

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24. Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

25. The author visited E. L. Philips in April 1941 and saw the kettle.

26. Several people in Gosper County upon seeing the balloon descending followed in their cars and reached the place where it came to earth shortly after the descent and were able to pick up pieces of it.

## Chapter 1V

When the settlers first came to Gosper County they found a scarcity of wood with which to build their homes but plenty of good sod, so following the example of the Pawnees they constructed sodhouses, but since the settlers came from a region of log or wood houses which had right angled corners, the settlers made their sod houses fashioned with right angles and not round as did the Pawnee. These sodhouses were usually of one or two rooms with sod walls and log or board roofs, on which a layer of grass was placed. Over this sod was laid to make it as nearly water-tight as possible.<sup>1</sup> The logs were obtained from along the creek and canyon banks. Many settlers made "dugouts". These were partly caves and partly houses usually located on the south banks of a canyon or creeks.

As soon as the house was completed the sod was broken with a special plow called a "breaking plow". Sometimes a neighbor was hired to help break the prairie. The usual price was a dollar an acre. This work was far from dull as rattlesnakes were often plowed out and they were usually much annoyed by this sudden intrusion. Since many men walked bare-footed, an angry rattle snake demanded some quick stepping on the settlers' part.

After the sod was broken, the land was harrowed and then was ready for the corn to be planted. The more fortunate had planters. With these planters one drove while the other sat farther forward and worked a lever at regular intervals which dropped the corn.<sup>2</sup>

1. Evert Dick, The Sod-House Frontier, (1854-1890) New York, 1937, p. 114.

2. Mrs. George Junkin, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.



This was often done by an older child or by the settler's wife. Some settlers had small hand planters, but some of the less fortunate used a hatchet with which to chop a hole in the ground and then the seed was dropped into the hole.<sup>3</sup>

Wells were dug with a spade and shovel. The dirt was hauled to the surface with teams or by man power. Later augers, similar to present day augers used to dig post holes, were used to dig wells. Although this was still hard work, it was much faster and was not dangerous. The water was drawn directly from the wells with rope and bucket.<sup>4</sup>

The pioneers did not have a large variety of foods. In addition to a few native and garden fruits and vegetables, they were able, if they had the money, to buy dried apples, currants, also prunes at the local store.<sup>5</sup>

Wild horses were driven from Oregon but were nearly worthless in this country as they nearly always died before they could be broken and used.<sup>6</sup> About 500 Texas ponies were driven up from Texas in 1883.<sup>7</sup> Most horses regardless of whether they came from Texas, Oregon or the East were of little use the first year.<sup>8</sup>

Drouths and grasshoppers often ruined the crops. The grasshoppers were one of the pioneers worst enemies especially during the dry years. In dry years the Rocky Mountain grasshoppers with  
3. Mrs. George Junkin's, Smithfield, Nebraska.

4. Mrs. Bertha Hesser, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

5. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dobner; Bertrand Herald, Sept. 6, 1935.

6. Mrs. John Forester, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

7. Frank J. Bean, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

8. Jake Way and others, Smithfield, Nebraska.

their slender bodies, gray wings and enormous appetites soon ate up the vegetation in their native region, then took wing and blown by the westerly winds appeared in the distance like a grayish black cloud. As the cloud of hoppers passed over, millions of them dropped to the earth where they devoured everything green with the exception of broom corn and sorghum cane. The worst hopper visitation came in July 1874. The noise made by their wings filled the air with a roaring sound. The sun<sup>was</sup> hid by them. All the corn was eaten in a single day. Where green fields waved in the breezes day before, all that remained were stumps of stalks swarming with crawling hoppers. The bark of fruit trees were eaten. They followed potatoes, onions and other root crops into the ground.

In the spring of 1875 the ground was literally covered with young hoppers. But nature came to the aid of the discouraged remaining settlers. Cold rains followed rapidly one after another. The young hoppers were drowned and frozen to death. Parasites attacked them. By the end of 1876 most of the Rocky Mountain hoppers were gone.

Again in the '90's the hoppers came but not as bad as in 1874.

Drouths have occurred at irregular intervals of about 20 years in Gosper County. The '70's were dry years, as were the '90s', the early 1910s and the '30s'. In 1933 the Great Drouth began. The people did not realize a drouth was upon them until 1934 when the drouth became so severe that almost no crops were raised. Since that year, every year has been deficient in rainfall until 1941. In this year the rains seem to be coming back again and once more the rainfall is above average and once again the people who have

stayed have faith that again they can raise crops and not live in dread of the awful drouth with its privations and suffering.

Gosper County has had three blizzards that stand out in the memory of its pioneers above all others. These are the Easter Blizzard of 1873, the November Blizzard of 1880 and the January Blizzard of 1888.

Easter Sunday of 1873 promised to be a beautiful day. The sun came up bright and continued to shine until about noon when the sky became overcast and rain began to fall. By mid-afternoon the rain changed to a wet snow, the wind swept down from the northwest at a speed of forty to sixty miles an hour. Soon a blinding blizzard was in progress which continued for three days and nights.

People who ventured out of the house were compelled to use cords or ropes in order to guide them back again safely. The storm was unparalled in its fury, considering its duration and amount of snow. Many human beings and thousands of cattle and horses and domestic and wild fowl succumbed to its blinding fierceness. Many pioneers brought what livestock they could into their own crude shelters and many of those living in dugouts found the snow had entirely covered their homes so that they were compelled to shovel their way out. Heavy drifts of snow covered the prairies stretching from a slightly northeast direction in an irregular line to the southwest. The fact that the weather did not get very cold prevented a much greater loss of human life<sup>9</sup> but thousands of cattle and horses succumbed to its blinding fierceness.<sup>10</sup>

The blizzard of 1880 came to Nebraska in November. The sun

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9. Jake Way, Smithfield.

J. S. Fitzsimmons, Elwood, Nebraska.

A. E. Sheldon, History of Nebraska also gives the mild temperature as the main contributing factor in preventing a heavier loss of human life.

10. Elwood Bulletin, April 22, 1909.

rose as a great ball of fire, red as before a storm. The weather was warm. Men were on the prairie in their shirt sleeves. About 10 o'clock a black cloud came up in the northwest. It looked like a thunder storm. The storm struck very suddenly and raged about three days and two nights. Before sundown the third day the sky cleared and the sun shone brightly. The smaller canyons were drifted full. Stock on the prairie suffered greatly and much of it perished by drifting into these canyons from which they were unable to extract themselves. Many people had narrow escapes by falling into these canyons.<sup>11</sup>

The winter which followed was one of the most severe experienced by the early settlers. There were heavy storms and much snow covered the prairies throughout the winter.

The winter was a desperate one for those who had cattle since the snow buried the range and much stock perished. Stockmen further up the river tried to drive their cattle east to where the settlers had a little corn and hay.<sup>12</sup>

The Blizzard of 1898 is known as the Children's Blizzard. This is because it struck while so many children were either at school or on their way home. Again we find the day unusually mild, men worked or rode about in their shirt sleeves and livestock grazed on the prairie. Again the wind suddenly changed to the north and a black cloud swept down and blinding snow engulfed everything in its path. Men driving their teams could not see their horses' heads. The roads and landmarks were blotted out so that travelers became lost.<sup>13</sup> Men even lost their way in going from house to barn or barn to house and

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11. Jake Way, Smithfield, Clyde Bodewell, Lebanon, Nebraska, and others.

12. Sno. O. Carson, The Bertrand Herald, Sept. 6, 1955.

13. Clyde Bodewell, Lebanon, Nebraska.  
Jake Way, Smithfield, Nebraska, and others.



and perished. Children not already on their way home remained at school houses and in many places burned the school furniture to keep warm. The storm and the intense cold which followed lasted three days and was almost immediately followed by another blizzard. The bodies of many people were not discovered until the snow melted in the spring.

The worst blizzards all seem to have lasted about three days and two nights or more. There is no reason to believe that these early years' storms were any more severe or any longer than storms of recent years. They only appeared worse. This is due to several reasons. The people were not prepared for them either in clothing or shelter. Often their clothing was unsuited to the severe climate and their shelters were small and poorly constructed. There were few fences or other landmarks to guide the traveler in the storm. Travel was slower, places further apart. There were no telephones or radios to warn the people, the people had not learned to be prepared for these storms and finally, time and memory play strange tricks.

Almost of equal calamity with the blizzard was the prairie fire--a spectacle never to be forgotten. April was the worst month for prairie fires. It was the month when dead grass and tumble weeds were swept by the high spring winds across the wide stretches of the plains, carrying destruction to the tinder-dry grass awaiting the smallest spark from the Indian or careless pioneer to set the plains flaming.

On several occasions prairie fires swept from the Platte to the

Republican River. Settlers prepared fireguards around their buildings. This was done by plowing a strip across the plain wide enough to prevent fire from jumping across. This strip was plowed frequently to keep it clear of vegetation, otherwise the fireguard would not be effective.

In the spring of 1935 Gosper County was visited by "Black Blizzards". Previously to this there had been no severe dust storms. During these dust storms traffic was paralysed, people caught out in cars had to abandon their cars or run the risk of accidents. Sometimes the cars refused to go because of so much dust. Many people caught out had narrow escapes from suffocation and dust pneumonia became common.

The '70s' were a period of hard times. An idea of the amount of destitution in the county may be gained from the following:<sup>14</sup>

"Of the 250 in the county, it is thought 200 of them will require aid."

In the Beatrice Express, November 26, 1874 under the heading "Destitution in Gosper County reported by General Dudley" we find:

"The following dispatch was received at General Ord's headquarters Wednesday."

Ft. McPherson, Nebraska  
November 17, 1874

To Maj-Gen. D. Ruggles, Acting Assistance General,  
Department of the Platte, Omaha, Nebraska

Major:

Your telegram requesting me to telegraph to the best of my information the amount and kind of clothing required by the grasshopper suffers,.....I have given the matter careful consideration and from my notes have arrived at the following estimates.

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14. Beatrice Express, November 19, 1874.

Gosper County. Send to Arapahoe, care of G. H. Beeks, thirty pairs of shoes, one third for women and children; ten pairs of woolen pants, three hundred yards Kentucky jeans, twenty-five wool shirts!

Gosper County at the time was the home for thousands of buffalo. As these animals perished they left their bones scattered across the prairie. When the settlers needed money they commonly picked up wagon boxes of these bones and horns and sold them at Arapahoe and Plum Creek for as much as \$1.25 a load.<sup>15</sup>

In 1879 the total property and its assessed value for taxation was 83,313 acres of land at \$1.27 per acre of which 1,735 acres were under cultivation. There were:

275 horses valued at	.....	\$5,616
31 mules       "       "	.....	879
819 cattle       "       "	.....	6,685
2313 sheep       "       "	.....	1,388
234 hogs       "       "	.....	185
182 wagons       "       "	.....	1,579
Furniture       "       "	.....	515
Money and Credits	.....	225

The total value of all property in the county in 1879 was \$126,131.95.<sup>16</sup>

People who became discouraged because of the hard times often left their homesteads to go back to their former homes. In 1882 and 1883, they began to resettle.<sup>17</sup>

Fortunately for the settlement of the county it was believed that as soon as the country was settled and trees planted that rain would increase.

15. Nels B. Bernston, and others, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

16. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

17. John Paska, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

C. S. Harrison<sup>18</sup> wrote,

Forests give humidity to the air. Our lakes give moisture by evaporation and our forests by the respiration of their foliage. The forest is at work leading the air with moisture silently pumped up from the surface cistern.

Rain falls on the young trees lately planted in Egypt where it was never known to fall before. Portions of Utah, considered rainless, have been watered with showers since trees have been planted. There is some foundation for the belief that rain follows the white man.....The mythical desert will doubtless be covered with beautiful orchards, even to the base of the Rocky Mountains.

The first school in the county was at Daviesville in 1874.<sup>19</sup>

The building was located about one-half mile east of the town and was made of sod. In the same year an abandoned building owned by Mr. Charlie Robbins was rebuilt by Charlie Robbins, a Mr. Rolles, John Way and his son, Jake Way. Mr. Robbins had a tree claim and a homestead. After the survey he found his soddy on the tree claim and not on the homestead as the law required. In order to keep the homestead he had to live on it, so he told his neighbors that if they would help him at building a new soddy on the homestead they could use his old soddy for a school house. They made the children's seats from the native timber which was cut down and hewn into rough benches, and the teacher's seat was a large tree stump, The books kept in a trunk as protection against the mice was necessary.<sup>20</sup>

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18. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 41. taken from Nebraska Board of Agriculture, Jan. 4, 1873. Essay on "Tree Culture" by Rev, C. S. Harrison.

19. Report of County Superintendent Calihan to State Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Capitol, Lincoln, Court Report File; also Jake Way and others.

20. Mrs. Mary Robbins, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.



Often schools were held in homesteaders' abandoned sod houses from which people had left "to go back home".<sup>21</sup> Ellsworth Paine describes an early school on Turkey Creek with these words:

In another week I was teaching school in a half dug-out on the east bank of Turkey Creek. This school was picturesque, both on the inside and out. On approaching it from the southeast, it appeared to have bulged out and up from the ground to a height of four or five feet. A rusty stove pipe protruded through the top of a dirt roof. The roof was supported by timbers and the adjacent background. Two partially transparent windows broke the monotony of the low sod wall. The door facing the south was approached by a short trench from the creek bank. This door of undressed boards was especially designed for timid school ma'ams who desired to inspect their room before entering. By applying the eye to one of the copious cracks, one was able to command a very good view of the interior. In those days the most dangerous visitors were skunks, mice, toads, snakes and centipedes. Without stopping to take a peek let us boldly lift the latch and step inside. Take notice that there is no fire in the stove; yet it shines with a delightful brick-red glow. The floor is of earth. Now turn your attention to the furniture. The pupils' seats have been fashioned by hand.

In 1875, there were 40 pupils; in 1876, there were 56 pupils and the average length of the school terms were 65 days; 1887 was the first year in which tax receipts for schools were collected, they amounted to \$122.68. Expenditures were the same.<sup>22</sup> By 1879 eight school districts were established, six of them having school houses, all but two of them sod houses. The total value of all school property in 1879 was \$170 and in that year there were 119 school children, 66 boys and 53 girls, four qualified teachers resided in the county and earned average wages for school teaching of \$138.88 per year.<sup>23</sup>

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In the summer of 1884 County Supt. S. B. Yeoman, held the first  
21. John Poska, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

22. Calihan's Report.

23. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

teachers' institute in the county at Homerville, then the county seat.<sup>24</sup> The institutes soon developed into two or three days affairs. They were usually held in August. In those days many of the teachers had no opportunity to attend normal school and most of their training in methods of instruction were obtained at the institute. Model classes were held and the teachers coached on the principles of good teaching.

The methods of transportation being slow, most of the teachers came to town and stayed the entire length of the institute, rooming and boarding with the people of the town. The best homes in the town were opened to the teachers. A few teachers rented rooms and did "light house keeping".

When the institute was held at Homerville a girl and her brother brought a cow along. The grass being high all around the town, the cow was staked out and milked night and morning.

Entertainments provided the teachers by the county superintendent and the town consisted of receptions, ice cream socials and concerts. Most of the teachers had no other vacations and enjoyed this time spent at institute. Many times the members of school boards would come to the institute to select a teacher.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Ellsworth Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

25. Mrs. Willard and Mrs. J. S. Fitzsimmons, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

The Nebraska School Report, 1887-1888,<sup>26</sup> gives this information about Gosper County Schools: Expenditures for the year ending July 9, 1888. Paid male teachers, \$1627.37; female teachers, \$4348; paid for buildings, sites, repairs, furniture, etc., \$3556.77; paid for all other purposes, \$837.78; paid for indebtedness \$269.48; total expenditures for the year including amount on hand \$13,194.57.

Qualified teachers employed; males 12, females 49, aggregate number of days taught by all qualified teachers; males, 1020 days; females, 2688.

There were 659 males and 615 females in the county of school age (5 to 21 years), 485 males and 446 females attended school during the year. The average attendance was 551.

There were no bricks or stone school buildings, there were 14 frame buildings and 29 sod buildings. Their total valuation was \$7625.90. The books and apparatus were valued at \$676.70.

The county superintendent (John W. Thomas, Homerville) was employed 107 days and received \$3.50 per day. He made 12 visits to the schools.

The teachers institute was held during the summer of 1888 at Elwood and was conducted by E. Healey for a two week period. Thirty-seven teachers attended.

The school terms for the year 1887-88 ranged from three to

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26. State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nebraska School Report, 1887-1888, State Capitol Building, Lincoln, Nebraska, pp. 22-117.

nine months with an average of seven months. The teachers wages ranged from thirty to forty dollars a month in the rural schools and from forty to sixty dollars in the village schools.<sup>27</sup>

Below is a copy of a notice of teachers institute appearing in the Elwood Bulletin, October 22, 1896.

"A joint meeting of the teachers of Phelps and Gosper County will be held at Bertrand, Saturday, November 7th. The following program will be presented:

School Government,	C. H. Bigelow
Advantages of Noon-Recess Play,	J. W. Smith
Child Study and its Importance to the Teacher,	
A. K. Wilson	
Language,	T. H. McDowell
Child Study,	Miss Nora Case
History,	Jas. R. Faulk
Vocal Music,	Miss Minnie Child
Lecture at night,	Prof. Caldwell of the state Univ..

Signed,  
C. A. Yoeman.

The first county superintendent was Fred Prosser. He was appointed by county commissioners to the office on November 26, 1873.<sup>28</sup>

Gosper County schools have kept step with the schools of other counties in Nebraska. From the sod house and dugouts with their dirt floors, homemade backless benches, short winter sessions, few books, limited course of study and often poorly prepared teachers, they have progressed to a rather complete educational program.

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27. Nebraska School Report, 1887-88, pp. 162-177.

28. County Commissioners Records, Vol. 1, p. 29. Elwood, Nebraska.



Fifty years after the school year of 1887-88, there were 425 boys and 431 girls of school age (5 to 21).<sup>29</sup> Of these boys and girls 225 boys and 227 girls were enrolled, these boys and girls attended a total of 63,961 days of school.<sup>30</sup>

There were 53 rural teachers, one male teacher who received \$360 and 52 female teachers who received \$22,341 for salaries. The rural school buildings were valued at \$58,744.80; the textbooks at \$6,750.80; the maps, charts and all other apparatus at \$10,698.80.<sup>31</sup>

The two village schools, Elwood and Smithfield, employed 14 teachers, they had 137 boys and 125 girls enrolled with an average daily attendance of 234.51.<sup>32</sup> The Elwood School is the larger of the two schools, employing ten teachers.

The first four school buildings in Elwood were frame buildings. The first building has long ago been torn down, the second building is now used by J. B. Chambers as a grocery store, the third one burned down having been struck by lightning, the fourth one was used until 1908 when it was replaced by the present grade building. This fourth building stood on the site of the R. L. Bragg barbershop until it was sold to the Odd Fellow Lodge (I.O.O.F.) when it was moved to its present position. The grade

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29. Charles Taylor, (State Superintendent of Public Instruction) Thirty-fifth Biennial Report, Jan., 1937 - Jan., 1939.

30. Ibid., p. 288.

31. Ibid., p. 301.

32. Charles Taylor, Thirty-fifth Biennial Report, p. 305.

building cost \$12,607.<sup>33</sup> It was used for all the grades from the primary through high school until 1929 when once again it became necessary for the Elwood community to enlarge their school plant. In 1929 after considerable discussion, bonds were voted for the construction of a new \$32,000. high school building. The first graduation exercises, when the school had grown to ten grades, were held in 1898. F. W. Montgomery was principal.<sup>34</sup>

The first Smithfield School was on the southeast corner of the J. S. Dowler tree claim. When it was moved to town a new frame building was built just east of the present building. The first teacher was C. A. Yoeman of Elwood. There were so many pupils that it was necessary for the teacher to send the beginners to their homes at the close of the morning session. In three years, two teachers were hired. Because there were no churches at this early date in Smithfield history, Sunday School and church services, as well as all social gatherings were held in the school house.

In a few years the old wooden building was unable to hold longer the pupils so the present brick and tile building was constructed. In 1941 both fresh fruits and hot meals were served free to the Smithfield High School pupils and also meals were served in some of the other schools in the county.

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33. Peterson Bros. of Hastings were the contractors. The building cost \$11,310 exclusive of heating apparatus which cost \$1,297, making a total of \$12,607. Elwood Bulletin, Oct., 22, '08.

34. Claude Smith, The Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

In 1939 there were 65 school districts<sup>35</sup> in the county,<sup>36</sup> the enrollment had increased to 1,086 pupils<sup>37</sup> and 67 teachers were employed.<sup>38</sup>

High school courses (1941) in teachers training subjects, commercial subjects and general college preparatory subjects are offered. The Elwood High School is fully accredited to the University of Nebraska and the Smithfield High School is also approved to the University. Graduates of both schools are admitted to all colleges and universities in Nebraska upon passing an intelligence test.

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35. The Hardscrabble district northeast of Smithfield organized in 1907. It was the last district to be organized.

36. Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1939, p. 281.

37. Ibid., p. 289.

38. Ibid., p. 289, p. 305. This large increase in the last two years may have been due to workers and their families moving in to work on the Tri-County.

Gosper County is well supplied with churches. The first religious meetings were held before the county was organized. The Rev. T. G. Davies, a Baptist minister, conducted the first meetings at his home on Elk Creek.

In the early days school houses and private homes served often as churches. Because of the sparse population a resident minister could not be supported by any single community, so the ministers traveled from community to community, holding their services. When services were to be held one or two boys or horseback went from neighbor to neighbor spreading the information and gathering the neighborhood news along the way.

Each of the little towns and communities built their churches with the expectation that at some time in the future their population would be large enough to support the church and a resident minister properly. Also in the race to draw settlers a church and a school located in the community was a valuable asset in drawing permanent settlers.

Smithfield has had four churches, the Friends' church, the Methodist, Baptist and Catholic. The Friends church in Smithfield was organized and built in 1890. The second church was the Baptist church. Rev. J. H. Reeves of the Free Will Baptists was the first minister and organizer. Because of the drouth and hard times then, much of the money for the material was obtained from Iowa, Minnesota and other states to the east. The people of Smithfield donated most of the work on the building. <sup>39</sup>



Later the Methodist church in Smithfield was built in 1903 during the pastorate of Rev. W. E. Uncapher.<sup>40</sup>

The Catholic church was organized in 1897. This was a missionary church.

The Tracyville church was organized July 16, 1882 with a membership of nine by Geo. S. Miner, pastor at Plum Creek. On the evening of April 1, 1909 at a Women's Christian Temperance Union program (as it was about to start), the church accidentally caught fire from the lights which were operated by gas. The building was so badly damaged it could not be used again without costly repairs, so a new church was built in Bertrand. The Congregation then went either to the new church in Bertrand or to the Methodist church in Smithfield.<sup>41</sup>

The first church services held in Elwood were conducted in the driveway of an elevator. By opening both doors to the driveway the congregation was always sure of a breeze, plenty of shade and was away from the thriving and quite often noisy business section.

The Methodists were the first to organize in Elwood. The first appointed minister of the Methodist conference was Rev. A. H. Guiles in the year 1888. In 1888 under the administration of Rev. Blackburn the church was built.<sup>42</sup>

Early in the year 1886, a Mr. Manchester and eleven other associates, called a meeting which had for its purpose the organization of a Christian church in Elwood. This was Elwood's first  
40. Mrs. E. T. Bigelow, Smithfield, Nebraska.

41. The Bertrand Herald, Sept. 6, 1933.

42. Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

church. M. B. Reid was the elder of the group and A. C. Lash and George Wood were deacons. Services were first held in what was known as Union Hall and here two years later R. C. ~~M~~arrow held the first revival.<sup>43</sup>

The Union Evangelical Church, whose meetings were held in a sod house or church was organized in Union Township in 1882, the Valley Union Church and a Mennonite Church in 1892, the Highland Union in the extreme southeast part of the county in 1901, the Pleasant Grove or Gosper Church in 1890, the Hope Lutheran in 1891, the St. Mathews Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1915, and the Fantor Union Church in 1917. This was the last church to be organized and built in Gosper County. It is located eight miles south of Smithfield.<sup>44</sup>

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43. The Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

44. Taken from the unpublished Directory of Churches in Nebraska, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Kansas.

The pioneers amusements and recreations differed somewhat from present day recreations. In reading old Smithfield and Elwood papers, items announcing and comments on base-ball games, horse races, coyote hunts both with and without hounds, hunting, foot racing, mock trials, home talent plays, socials, neck-tie parties,<sup>45</sup> dances and tea-socials<sup>46</sup> were found. In those days people had to provide their own amusements, they could not buy them, there weren't any to be bought in this new country. Boys and girls grew to manhood and womanhood without enjoying many of the pleasures now common to our young people.

Homes in those days were much simpler than present day homes. They were usually "soddies" or dugouts of one or two rooms. Dirt floors and bare walls. The furniture was simple and often homemade, being hewn from nearby trees. Kerosene lamps furnished the light when a light was used. Fuel was cobs, wood and buffalo or cow chips. In a few instances straw or hay was burned in a special stove called a "straw burner". With all these inconveniences and hardships the early homes were more of a home than many present day places. In those days making a home was a family affair, all the family helped and had an interest in the home.

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45. Elwood Bulletin, March 31, 1910.

46. Ibid., Feb. 24, 1910.

## Chapter V.

The Gosper County boundaries were not established and Gosper County was not named until 1873. The area was surrounded by four counties laid out and named by the legislature so that when Gosper County was organized it was the territory not claimed by the other counties.<sup>1</sup>

The increase in population in the early '70's and possibly because the surrounding territory was organized led to the organization of the county government. In 1873, after the receipt of a petition from the settlers, Governor Furnas issued a proclamation setting August 29th as the date for the election of county officers.

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1. Papers of the Nebraska Governors, "Government, County", Box No. 35, (1867-1913), Vault 22-A, State Capitol Building, Lincoln, Nebraska.



# Proclamation Organizing Gosper County:

## PROCLAMATION

State of Nebraska  
Executive Department

Whereas, a number of citizens of the unorganized territory of this state to be called the County of Gosper have united in a petition asking for an election be called for the purpose of choosing county officers preliminary to the organization of this county:

Therefore I, Robert W. Furnas, Governor of the State of Nebraska by virtue of the authority in me vested do hereby order that an election be held in said county at the residence of Rev. John Davies in section one (1) Town six (6) Range twenty-six (26) West shall declare on Friday the twenty-ninth (29) day of August A. D., 1873, for the purpose of choosing three (3) county commissioners, one (1) county clerk, one (1) county treasurer, one (1) sheriff, one (1) probate judge, one (1) surveyor, one (1) county superintendent of schools, one (1) coroner, three (3) judges of election, and two (2) clerks of election:

And I do hereby appoint John Davies, A. M. Odell, and R. C. Gordon as judges, Fred H. Beach and Geo. E. Torney as clerks to conduct said election in accordance with "An Act for the Organization of Counties" approved June 24, 1867 and the Election Laws of this state.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska.

Done at Lincoln, this eleventh day of July, A. D. 1873.

Robert W. Furnas, Gov.  
John J. Gosper, Secretary of  
State

This is the earliest official record of Gosper County.<sup>2</sup>

The settlers elected G. G. Jones, E. G. Vaughn and R. A. Willard, County Commissioners.<sup>3</sup>

Thus a de facto government was formed on Aug. 29, 1873 for Gosper County.<sup>4</sup> This government functioned without the proper

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2. Bayard H. Paine; Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

3. Papers of the Nebraska Governors, "Government, County".

4. A. E. Sheldon, History of Nebraska, p. 595.

authority until March 2, 1881, a period of over seven years,<sup>5</sup> when it was legalized by the legislature. Acts of the various county officials were declared to be legal and binding.<sup>6</sup>

On November 25, 1873, the county commissioners met in a special session and appointed the following men as officers of the county:

County Clerk.....	E. G. Gordon
Treasurer.....	George H. Beck
Probate Judge.....	John Davis
Coroner.....	J. V. Davis
County Superintendent.....	Fred Presser
Surveyor.....	Ansor C. Rogers
Justice of Peace.....	E. R. Hall
Assessor.....	E. K. Vaughn
Road Supervisor.....	J. T. Wise
Judges of Election.....	J. S. Holloway
	John Dodd
	J. R. Rexby
Clerks of Election.....	J. T. Trip
	W. S. Wise
Constables.....	E. W. Cesner
	E. T. Gregory
	B. A. Foote

They adjourned to meet the first Monday in December.<sup>8</sup>

For more than ten years after the organization of the county in 1873, there was no county seat because there were no incorporated towns in the county<sup>9</sup> so the records were kept in the homes of the various county clerks.<sup>10</sup> There were a few county stores and a number of postoffices.<sup>11</sup>

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5. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935. Authority given by State Legislature.

6. Session Laws of Nebraska, 1881, Ch. 36, Sec. 1, p. 215.

7. Papers of Nebraska Governors.

8. Records of County Clerk, E. G. Gordon, Daviesville, Gosper County, Nebraska, Nov. 26, 1873.

9. Lincoln Evening News, March 24, 1910.

10. Mrs. Lydia Russell Willard, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

11. Lincoln Evening News, March 24, 1910.

Messrs. John Baugh and W. L. Gordon were appointed commissioners to view and locate a road commencing at the town-site of Daviesville and running eighty (80) rods west, thence one-hundred-sixty (160) rods south, thence one-hundred-sixty (160) rods west, along the section line of section Fourteen (14) Township Five (5) North of Range Twenty-four (24). This was the first officially laid out road in the county.<sup>12</sup>

An order was given John Davies<sup>13</sup> to purchase a county seal together with stamps and stationary for the use of the county. On motion Judge Davies was authorized to make the motto or device of said county seal.

Adjourned to first Monday in January, A. D. 1874.

The first official bonds were voted December 8th, 1873.

Daviesville, Gosper Co., Nebr.,  
December 8th, 1873.

Commissioners Court met per adjournment.  
Present: G. H. Jones, E. G. Vaughn.  
Absent: H. A. Willard.

The following business was transacted:

First official bonds of:  
John Davies, Probate Judge.  
H. A. Willard, E. G. Vaughn and G. H. Jones, County Commissioners.  
John Baugh, County treasurer.  
S. R. Judd, justice of peace.  
B. K. Vaughn, assessor.  
R. G. Gordon, county clerk.

Were approved by the honorable board of county commissioners.

Soon afterward Rev. G. H. Chase was elected County Commissioner and later County Judge.<sup>14</sup>

A bill was passed for the erection of a court house upon the

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12. Records of County Clerk, R. G. Gordon, Nov. 26, 1873.

13. Later John Davies left the state and took the county's seal with him. It was necessary for the county to send a man after him to get the seal.

14. G. B. Chase, a county commissioner, a judge and a minister was a member of the company that captured Jefferson Davis. Mike Parks, Nebraska in the Making, Published by the Omaha World Herald, Nov. 22, 1938.

townsite of Daviesville, Gosper County, Nebraska, but no appropriation was made for same.<sup>15</sup> Dimensions of said court house were twenty-four (24) feet long and sixteen (16) feet wide, the walls to be nine (9) feet high. Roof to be constructed with split timbers laid closely together and covered with earth, with door in south end. House to stand north and south with two windows in each opposite each other, double sash, four panes, each 12 x 14, house to be painted inside and out.

By an act of the legislature passed in February 1875, Franklin, Phelps and Gosper counties were formed into a district and declared entitled to one member to the Constitutional Convention.<sup>16</sup>

A survey for a railroad through the county via the new town of Homerville having been made, a movement to re-locate the county seat in Homerville was launched.<sup>17</sup> In June 1883, the county board received a petition from three-fifths of the voters as provided for by the Session laws of 1875<sup>18</sup> requesting that the question of the location of the county seat be submitted to the electorate.<sup>19</sup>

Under the law, therefore, the county board was required to call immediately a special election which was held July 16, 1883. None of the five places for which ballots were cast received a three-fifths majority.<sup>20</sup> The law at that time provided that since three-

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15. Records of County Clerk, R. G. Gordon, Dec. 8, 1873.

16. H. S. Robinson, Research Statistician, Nebraska State Historical Society; also Beatrice Express, May 6, 1875.

17. Claude Smith, "Gosper County", Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

18. Session Laws, 1875, p. 159.

19. County Commissioners Record, Vol. 1, p. 130.

20. County Commissioners Record, Vol. 1, p. 134.



fifths of the votes were against Daviesville there must be a new election.<sup>21</sup> Therefore the county board called a new election to be held August 20, 1883.<sup>22</sup> The number of sites for which ballots could be cast was limited to three.<sup>23</sup> These three places were Daviesville, Homerville in the S. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the N. W.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 19, in Township 6, north of range 22, West; and Moteling Flat in the S  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the S. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 18, Township 6, north of range 24, west.

In this election, Homerville received the highest number of votes.<sup>24</sup> The new town was platted<sup>25</sup> and the residents donated a new court house. This courthouse was a small structure.<sup>26</sup> The lumber used in the building was hauled from Arapahoe.<sup>27</sup> The county officials moved their offices from the soddy, which had served as the court house during the new building's construction, and records to the new building and Homerville became the proud new county seat of Gosper County.<sup>28</sup>

In 1888 a bitter fight between Elwood, then three years old, and Homerville began. After a bitterly contested election, Elwood

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21. Session Laws, 1875, Sec. 2, p. 160.

22. County Commissioners Records, Vol. 1, p. 134.

23. Session Laws, 1875, Sec. 2, p. 160.

24. County Commissioners Records, Vol. 1, p. 147.

25. County Commissioners Records, Vol. 1, p. 147.

26. Claude Smith, "Gosper County," Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

27. William A. Salisbury, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

28. Mr. and Mrs. James H. Courtright, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

won. Homerville supporters promptly obtained an injunction which delayed the removal of the county seat until the spring of 1889.<sup>29</sup>

The Lincoln Land Company which owned the land upon which Elwood was located did its share in removing the county seat from Homerville by offering free lots to all Homerville residents who would move to Elwood.<sup>30</sup>

One night, between the time of the County Seat Election in 1888 and the final removal of the records in the spring of 1889, the county judge thoughtlessly neglected to lock up records and some enthusiastic Elwood boosters generously transferred these records to Elwood without any expense whatsoever to the county and were more than willing to take up the rest of the county records. However these same records were quite promptly returned to Homerville without any legal action.

The "Minute Men of Homerville" were now organized and held nightly dances in the district court room on the second story of courthouse. Some of these men guarded the county records until the county records were legally moved to the new county seat.<sup>31</sup>

In the spring of 1889 the courthouse at Homerville was moved to Elwood. This was a difficult task due to the lack of proper equipment. Especially was great difficulty encountered in going through Devil's Gap just southwest of Elwood.

Although the county commissioners in December 1873 passed a resolution for the erection of a one story sod court house 16 by 24 feet, no court house was ever constructed there.

The first Gosper County Courthouse was erected at Homerville in 1883. The soddy was soon replaced by a two story wooden structure which was moved to Elwood in 1889. While the building remained

29. Claude Smith, Gosper County.

30. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

31. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

at Homerville the lower story was occupied by county officers and the upper story was used for social gatherings.<sup>32</sup>

This structure continued to serve as the courthouse until it was destroyed early in the morning of November 14, 1895. At 4:30 that morning the citizens of Elwood were awakened by the fire alarm and found the courthouse in flames. In an hour the building was in ashes. The building was insured for \$3,000 in the Connecticut and \$1,500 in the Phoenix of Brooklyn.<sup>33</sup> This insurance was used to help pay the expense of building the new courthouse.<sup>34</sup>

The burning of the courthouse and the subsequent events are best told in the following article:<sup>35</sup>

News of the destruction of the Gosper County Courthouse by fire reached State Auditor Moore yesterday in a telegram from C. A. McCloud, one of the state examiners whose duty it is to inspect the books of each county treasurer. McCloud was at Elwood for the examination. Reports of file in the state auditors office show that County Treasurer W. E. Aldrich settled in full last January. His office was examined November 23, 1893, and the report showed that there was a discrepancy of \$427.26 between the books and the cash, but in a footnote the examiner explains that this was accounted for by the treasurer anticipating his commission on the collection of state taxes.

When the treasurer's vault was opened part of his records were missing. There were enough records left from the fire, however, to show that Mr. Aldrich was short \$28,176.43. Aldrich was reported to be a heavy drinker of intoxicating liquors and may have been mentally unbalanced at the time of the crime. He fled to the Pacific Coast and was variously reported to have committed suicide in Denver and later to be alive in Alaska.<sup>36</sup>

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32. Mrs. W. A. Willard, Mrs. Chas. Hibbs, Chas. F. Frank, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

33. State Journal, Nov. 15, 1895.

34. County Commissioners Records, Vol. 2, p. 164.

35. State Journal, November 15, 1895.

36. Lincoln State Journal, February 27, 1896.

In January 1896 the county commissioners accepted plans and orders of bids to be advertised for the building of a new courthouse on the site of the old building which had been destroyed by fire.<sup>37</sup> This wooden building served the county until November 1939, when the records were moved to the present courthouse.

On the first Saturday of September 1935 the county commissioners met for the purpose of passing resolutions asking for a grant and loan for the purpose of building a new courthouse.

It was decided to petition the Public Works Administration for \$75,000 for the purpose. The county clerk prepared the application and sent it to Washington. The commissioners had before them a petition signed by 162 taxpayers, asking that the projected application be submitted. They had a second petition containing 55 names not to consider same.<sup>38</sup>

E. T. Phillips, county clerk and Hugh McClure, architect were appointed to furnish the Public Works Administration with any information necessary.<sup>39</sup>

The Public Works Administration agreed to furnish \$36,000 for the construction of a \$76,000 structure. In the following election the voters of the county endorsed a bond issue of \$42,000 to match the Public Works Administration grant. The new courthouse of concrete and brick was dedicated November 9, 1939.

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37. Lincoln State Journal, January 17, 1896.

38. The Bertrand Herald, (Golden Jubilee Edition) Sept. 6, 1935.

39. The Bertrand Herald, Sept. 6, 1935.



The new courthouse is located on Smith Avenue at Rochelle Street. It is a two story structure and a basement. It measures approximately 100 X 55 x 30 feet. The exterior consists of a brownish, rough faced brick and white cast ornamental stone. The building is modern and neat. In the interior the office furniture and woodwork is of oak with a natural finish with the exception of the district court room, which is finished in dark walnut. The building is nearly fireproof.

## Chapter VI.

Plum Creek was the first settlement in the county. Its exact location and size are controversial. Three separate remains each have claim as the location. Descriptions of its location by various people fit all three locations, but none of them are entirely satisfactory.

Daviesville was named after the Rev. John Davies, a Baptist minister. It was located on Muddy Creek in the southwest part of the county in the S.E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the N. W.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 19, Township 6, Range 22, West.<sup>1</sup> The first postoffice in the county was established here, by 1879 there were three other postoffices in the county, located at Plum Creek, Vaughn's and Judson's ranches.<sup>2</sup> In 1873 Daviesville became the first county seat and continued to be until Homerville won the distinction. In 1873, Daviesville had two good general stores, a hotel, a school house, a blacksmith shop and several homes.<sup>3</sup> Daviesville prospered until the removal of the county seat by the special election of 1883. It appears that the town remained the county seat until 1884.<sup>4</sup>

The Nebraska State Gazette, 1884-1885, p. 128, gives this information about Daviesville:

"The county seat of Gosper County is located in the southwest part of the county and surrounded by good grain and stock-raising country. The population numbers about 200.

The county officers are:

Treasurer, ..... F. A. Salisbury.  
Clerk, ..... S. J. Morman.  
Judge, ..... A. L. Burke.

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1. County Commissioners Records, Vol. 1, p. 1.
  2. Bayard H. Paine, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 15, 1935.
  3. County Commissioners Records, Vol. 1. p. 1.
  4. Nebraska State Gazette, 1884-1885, Vol. IV, p. 128. and Wm. Salisbury, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

Sheriff,..... Thos. Fitzler  
County Superintendent,.... S. P. Yoeman  
J. B. Chambers,.....Surveyor

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Business Establishments:

Alstat Thim,..... saloon  
Sarah E. Bryan,..... postmaster  
J. Bennett,..... hardware  
Clark and Hull,..... flouring mill  
L. Clute,..... general merchandise  
Mrs. Clark,..... milliner  
J. Finch,..... general merchandise  
J. Robertson,..... agriculture implements  
E. Warner,..... justice of peace  
L. F. White,..... physician & druggist  
Wright & Morton,..... attorneys.

All that remains of Daviesville today is the cemetery.

Homerville was named after Homer Walt. It was located in the S. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the N. W.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 19, Township 6, Range 22, West. In the spring of 1883 a railway right of way was surveyed through the southern part of the county. In anticipation of the coming of the railroad a new settlement grew up at Homerville. In the special election that August, Homerville won the privilege of becoming the county seat.

Homerville has the distinction of having Custer County's first fair. This fair was held Sept. 25, 26, and 27 in 1894. Prizes were given for the best horses, cattle, mules and hogs as well as farm products, and settlers from all over the county were proud to compete for these prizes. The women brought in a great display of fancy needle work with a beautiful collection of quilts and rugs, making an "Art Exhibit"

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5. Nebraska State Gazette, 1884-1885, p. 128.

In the Community Church Building. Great interest was shown in horse races, good prizes having been offered which attracted horses from a considerably distance. This fair proved an incentive for better horses in the county.

The officers of the fair association were: H. H. Brumsteter, president; J. C. Sherwin, vice-president; G. F. Webster, secretary; and H. H. Benston, treasurer. The board of managers consisted of M. E. Dunn, G. D. Chase, J. L. Parkyn, H. Moore and Thomas Goodwin.<sup>6</sup>

Advertisers in the premium list consisted of the following establishments in Homerville:<sup>7</sup> Mrs. W. E. Manspeaker, millinery and fancy goods. Fred Smith, carpenter and builder. George Mason, real estate and transfer agent. C. L. Isaacs, proprietor of "The Old Reliable Store". C. E. Wilcox, dealer in hardware, implements, wind mills and pumps, and was located on the south side of the square. L. A. Keys was a real estate agent whose address was Tracyville. Sinclair and Coon, lawyers of Plum Creek. Robertson and Willard, proprietors, City Drug Store, at the southeast corner of the square. E. Manspeaker, Star Livery Bar, Dr. H. Robertson, James Johnson, blacksmith and wagon maker. Trohee and Albertson, proprietors of the "headquarters" for general merchandise.<sup>7</sup>

The first settlers near Homerville were: A. Marquardt, C. Wendland, F. Melchert, C. Bloch, J. Ziebell, J. Scheivelbein and W. Scheilbein with their families, all from Washington County, Nebraska. In and after 1886 another colony moved in from Washington

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6. First Annual Premium List, issued by the Agricultural Association of Gosper County, Sept., 11, 1884.

7. First Annual Premium List, Gosper County Agricultural Fair, Homerville, Nebraska, Sept. 11, 1884.



County, Kansas. They were: H. Helms, W. Katoff, C. Manter and H. Manter and families. They chose places along Elk Creek because of water and wood.<sup>8</sup>

At one time there was a post office, a general store, a drug store, a hotel, a newspaper, (The Gosper County Citizen, owned and published by C. B. Lee),<sup>9</sup> a blacksmith shop, three livery stables, an implement dealer, three lawyers, and one doctor in the town besides a two story frame courthouse and the homes of Homerville residents.<sup>10</sup> When the county seat was moved to Elwood in the spring of 1889 many of the business establishments and houses were moved too.

The wooden buildings were moved across the canyons and over the hills and across Devil's Gap. The courthouse was cut into sections, placed on wagons, moved to Elwood and assembled. The buildings were left behind to fall into decay and become another ghost town. Today, a church, a school and one house is all that is left of a once prosperous and flourishing town.

Ceryle existed more in the imagination of men than in reality. In the courthouse fight in 1883, there were those that had visions of Ceryle becoming the county seat and a thriving city. About all that ever existed there was a store, a postoffice and two or three other buildings. Ceryle was located north of Edison in the exact middle of Sec. 22, Range 22, W, Township 5, N. A school house marks the city of yesterday.

Hoteling Flats was to be located on a flat piece of land on the east side of Turkey Creek and just south of the Bragg place. The

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8. Martin Schabacker, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 15, 1935.

9. Mrs. W. A. Willard, Mrs. Chas. Hibbs, Mr. Chas. F. Frank, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 15, 1935.

10. Encyclopedia of Nebraska Newspapers, State Historical Society, Capitol Building, Lincoln, Nebraska.

railway survey from Holdrege to Arapahoe was going through there. It was named after the surveyor, Hoteling.<sup>11</sup>

Gosper was located in the S. E.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the Section 27, Range 23, West, Township 6, North. A post office was located there in the early '80s'.<sup>12</sup> Later a church was constructed. Today at the cross roads an old post office building, a school, a church and a cemetery mark the site of Gosper.

Tracyville is about half way between Smithfield, and Bertrand in Phelps County. It is approximately one-half mile south of the highway and the Burlington tracks. The first building in Tracyville was a church built in 1882. Tracyville never grew much beyond a church, a school, a general store and a few houses. All that remains is a small frame schoolhouse. There are two pupils.<sup>13</sup>

The land for the townsite of Smithfield was purchased May 29, 1890 by the Lincoln Land Company of Lincoln, which was the agent for the railroad company. This land was purchased from E. B. Smith and wife, owners of what had been a homestead taken in the early '80s' by Wm. Bellamy. The town was laid out in the midst of a field of corn. This is a reason for the name, Smithfield.

A little incident occurred which nearly caused the station which grew into Smithfield to be located on the adjoining homestead just east, owned by Mr. Ashbury Pool. The Lincoln Land Company represented by their agent could not agree with Mr. Smith on a price for the land, so the land company representative made an agreement with the adjoining homestead owner, Mr. Ashbury Pool, to buy enough of his land for the site. This site is just south of the present Geo. C. Junkin

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11. Jake Way, Smithfield, Nebraska; and others.

12. Mrs. Bertha Hesser, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 15, 1935.

13. The school term of 1940-41.

estate and some eighty rods southeast of Smithfield. Mr. Pool did not keep his promise, not to tell of the agreement. When Mr. Smith learned of the agreement, he hurried to Lincoln and settled the business by agreeing on a price.<sup>14</sup>

In September, 1891, J. J. Hicks, who was only 18 years of age, was sent to Smithfield to serve as Smithfield's first railroad station agent. He located this first Smithfield depot a few rods west of where the elevators were later built.<sup>15</sup> He was given a small box car to use as office and station. Until the arrival of Mr. Hicks anyone wanting to board a train had to flag the train himself. Often the individual had a long and tiresome wait as the trains were usually late, sometimes the freights were late several hours, and since there was no way of knowing whether the train was on time or hours late, the would-be passenger had to be either at the stop at the time the train was scheduled to arrive or at some place sufficiently close to be able to flag the train when it did arrive. In the case of the men the wait was not so long and tiresome as for the ladies. The tracks are not far from the business section of the town and the train can be seen for a considerable distance in either direction, so the men could stay up town until they either heard or saw the train approaching, then they could rush down to the tracks in time to flag the train.

While Mr. Hicks was still agent for the Burlington and Missouri as the line was called then, the present two story red depot was built. This was in 1892. The bachelor apartments of Mr. Hicks (located in the second story from the ground, directly over the station

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14. From the records of the Burlington Missouri R. R. Co., Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 15, 1935; also Mr. R. T. Bigelow.

15. The station was about where the coal sheds are now.

office and passenger waiting room) must have been lonesome because in 1896 he married Miss Edith Strickler, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Caleb Strickler.<sup>16</sup>

Later that same year Mr. Hicks, because of poor health, transferred to Verango near the Colorado-Nebraska State Line and Mr. O. S. Bowen of Venango came to Smithfield. Later the Hicks returned and Mr. Bowen eventually went to Maywood.<sup>17</sup>

G. B. Chase came to Smithfield in 1891 from his farm south of Elwood and erected for his family the first residence on the lots where J. H. Sulief now has his home. The second home was the residence of Mr. Currier which he built for himself and family. As there was no place with hotel accommodations, the Currier's furnished rooms and meals for all their customers was very convenient for those desiring them. Because of the many prospective settlers coming to look at the country, the Curriers did a good business. The Currier Hotel became widely known for the excellent meals served and the clean comfortable beds furnished. The Currier home is now the residence of Russel J. Junkin, a well-to-do land owner and manager of the Farmers Co-operative Elevator.<sup>18</sup>

The first business building to be erected was a livery stable built by Walt Currier for Mr. Smith. Mr. Currier managed the business, which prospered during the period of the final settling of the country, for many years. The business was managed by several

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16. Mrs. Bigelow; J. h. Sutlief.

17. Mrs. Bigelow.

18. Mrs. Bigelow; Jake Way.



men between the date of the erection of the building and the date when the building burned down in 1909. At the time of the burning, the building was owned by J. H. Sutlief.<sup>19</sup>

The burning of the livery barn was not as great a loss in 1909 to the community as it would have been a few years earlier, for by that time the automobile began to replace the team and buggy. Some of the people residing in the level areas had begun to buy automobiles even though at that time they weren't so reliable.

The first car to come to Smithfield was a little one cylinder, white "Brush" car. It had no windshield, the one cylinder seven horsepower engine was started by cranking by hand, the ignition was furnished by four one and one-half volt batteries (commonly used in telephones), the head and tail lamps used kerosene, there were no doors on the car, it had two speeds, foreward, and one speed backward. On the level road it could go at a terrific speed of about 20 miles an hour. If the car struck high center on the trail-like roads of those days, the driver, if he were a strong man, could lift one end of the car out of the track, then go to the other and lift that end out. He was then ready to proceed again.<sup>20</sup>

The first car to be owned in Smithfield was the new Reo car, purchased by J. M. Cramer.<sup>21</sup> Soon after (1909) the first small garage and repair shop was built by N. B. Bernston,<sup>22</sup> and by the 1920's the livery barn had become only a memory, replaced by the garage.

The first carpenter and contractor was J. E. Dunlap, who came

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19. J. H. Sutlief.

20. Several old settlers tell about the first car. The author has seen a photograph of it.

21. Mrs. Bigelow.

22. Smithfield Enterprise, November 9, 1909.

to Smithfield in 1892 from Plattsmouth. He built many of the first buildings in the surrounding community.<sup>23</sup> About this time Charley Woodring came to Smithfield and became the first mason. For several years he had a good business.<sup>24</sup>

Ed. Metcalfe built the first blacksmith shop. Later W. H. Moore had a blacksmith shop on the east side of the street about where the filling station is located. L. E. Frazell moved into town from his home on Turkey Creek in about 1904 and bought the shop from Mr. Moore. Mr. Frazell operated the shop for several years before selling the business to Mr. J. Snodgrass.<sup>25</sup> Mr. Frazell became a rural mail carrier.<sup>26</sup> The first barber shop was operated by I. W. Anderson in 1896. He was followed by Guy Smith and H. R. Harmon.<sup>27</sup>

In 1902 Frank Rhorbacker established the first pool hall.<sup>28</sup>

Bernard Glenn, a farmer, who came to the community was the first live stock buyer and cattle and hog shipper. His son, J. T. Glenn, assisted him and carried on the same business after his father's death. In addition to buying stock, Mr. J. T. Glenn and his brother established the Glenn Brothers Meat Market.<sup>29</sup> On the west side of the street stood the market. A little later they built a new building on the site of the Chase-Bolen Store, which had burned. The

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23. Mrs. Bigelow.

24. Mrs. Bigelow.

25. This was between March 9th, and April 20th, 1911. The Smithfield Enterprise; March 9, 1911 has Mr. Frazell's Advertisement and the April 20th issue has Mr. J. R. Snodgrass's advertisement.

26. Mr. Frazell is still rural mail carrier.

27. Mrs. Bigelow

28. At the present time there is a village ordinance prohibiting pool halls.

29. This was Smithfield's first meat market.

Farmer's State Bank Building now occupies the site.<sup>30</sup>

G. B. Chase was the first postmaster. He erected a small building on the east side of the street. He used one side of the building as a post office and the other side as a drug store. Later he and Mark Dingee put in a general grocery store. Not long ago George H. Bolen bought the interest of Mr. Dinges. They then built a larger and better building, where the Bank Building is now located, and enlarged their stock of groceries and dry goods. This burned down in a few months. In 1883, Mr. Chase was elected county judge and moved to Elwood.<sup>31</sup>

James Anderson became the second postmaster and moved the post-office into the Caleb Strickler store. C. H. Bigelow succeeded him in 1889. In October of that year the post office became a money order service office. J. J. Hicks became postmaster in January 1899. He remained in office until December 1912, when E. T. Bigelow received his commission. He was in turn succeeded by the present postmaster, Earl Whitford.

While Mr. J. J. Hick was postmaster three rural mail routes were established. Delivery of mail on the first route began in 1904, with Elmer Strickler as regular carrier and Chas. Strickler as substitute. Soon afterward, (1905) J. H. Sulief became the second mail carrier. In 1905 route three was also organized and the patrons were served tri-weekly by A. L. Birt as regular carrier until the summer of 1908, when Mr. Birt was appointed to route two and Frank Brand served route three as temporary carrier until James Knuter was

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30. John Sutlief, Mrs. Bigelow, J. T. Glenn.

31. Mrs. Bigelow, J. H. Sutlief.

appointed in August of that year. Mr. Birt resigned in 1917 and Mr. Knuter was transferred to route three and W. E. Frazell became regular carrier on route three. He now served the consolidated routes two and three. Mr. Sutlief resigned his route in 1940. More than thirty applicants took the examination in June for his position. "Jackie" Jackson served as carrier until Fred Holthus became carrier in May, 1941.

In 1917, Mr. Jackson took the examination for rural carrier, received the highest grade and was appointed carrier. During the interval from the time of the examinations to the appointment Mr. Jackson volunteered for service in the army and at the time of the appointment was in the army camp. He could have resigned from the army and taken his position as rural carrier, this he did not do, but went to France and saw several months service. Upon his return he was given no route so entered business. He did not take the carrier's examination in June, 1940, but received a commission as temporary carrier which he held until May, 1941.

In 1906, J. L. Biesecker, who was one of the merchants of the town, installed a telephone system which developed into the present mutual company. The messages were carried over barbed wire on the fences to and from the countryside. This system was known as the Barbed Wire Telephone Company.

In the late '90s', James Glenn and J. J. Hicks built a private telegraph system between town and the B. Glenn home. Later they



connected another farm or two to the system, and after learning the Morse code amused themselves.

In 1893, a young doctor, N. J. Lease, came from Indiana, erected a new home for his bride, set up his office in his residence and began to practice. This house is now the house owned by Julia Brand.

Dr. Lease was followed by Dr. E. W. Rudolph in 1896. He moved to Elwood in a few years. Then came Dr. W. E. Bridgeman who in turn followed by the Charleston brothers, both doctors. The last doctors to practice in Smithfield were the Vanderslice Bros., Rank and A. M.

In the '90s', Walker Smith, J. E. Dunlap, H. Selby, Wm. Bellamy, George Bolen, R. T. Bigelow, E. Metcalfe, G. W. Simpson, Wm. Hanson and others built new houses. Smithfield promised at that time to become a thriving city.

The Knapp and French elevator was erected soon after the town started. G. W. Simpson came from Vanango to manage it. The elevator burned down in 1911, but was rebuilt. The Olive Rogers and Company built the next elevator and hired George A. Bolen for its first manager. Later the McConughery Grain Company of Holdrege purchased the elevator. It was torn down after the farmers organized and built the Farmers' Co-operative Elevator.<sup>32</sup>

Smithfield has had two newspapers. The first paper was the Practical Farm News, established April 10, 1896. Suspended April 23, 1897. (Vol. XXIII No. 1). The origin of the volume number is a mystery as the village was not started until 1890, and the Nebraska Gazette reports no newspaper there in 1907.<sup>33</sup>

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32. Russell J. Junkins, Smithfield, Nebraska.

33. Encyclopaedia of Nebraska, Newspapers, Nebraska State Historical Society, p. 207.

The second Smithfield paper was the Smithfield Enterprise. It was established April 3, 1908 and suspended in 191<sup>34</sup>2. Exact date unknown.

When the Smithfield Enterprise was first published it was an eight page paper. During the first week in August 1910 it was reduced to a four page paper.<sup>35</sup>

In the first week of November, 1910, Monty Smith succeeded Mr. Glen as publisher.<sup>36</sup>

In the January 30, 1913 edition was an announcement that C. N. Ironside was the new publisher,<sup>37</sup> and that the paper would be independent in politics and be devoted "to advancing the interests of the town of Smithfield and of the county of Gosper."

At one time Smithfield promised to become a manufacturing town. North of town was a brick factory which did some business for a few years before it was abandoned.

In the late '90s' Richard Dowler built, from his own plans, a steamboat merry-go-round that ran on a large pivot in the center with ropes extending to the outer points of the boat. Seats were placed on the upper deck. A steam engine was used for power. After the merry-go-round was completed a sham battle with an improvised fort was held at a celebration, using fireworks for ammunition. The merry-go-round was the chief attraction at celebrations. Mr. Dowler attempted to move it to Fairbury to make a run there but abandoned it near Hastings because of expense, for it had been badly

34. Ibid., p. 207, The Encyclopedia claims that the last issue was in 1911, but the author has copies dated as late as 1913.

35. Elwood Bulletin, Aug. 4, 1910.

36. Elwood Bulletin, November 3, 1910.

37. Smithfield Enterprise, January 30, 1913.

wrecked in the moving. Sometime later, L. H. Hamlin made another merry-go-round using several small boats, these being on a frame so that they went round and round. He used horse power in the beginning, later a steam engine. This machine afforded much amusement during the warm summer evenings.

In the late '90s' a loom was set up by Mrs. Pickering to manufacture rag carpets and rugs. For several years Mrs. Pickering did a good growing business, supplying the surrounding region as long as there was a need for such.

In the early 1900s', J. E. Biesecker purchased a machine for making cement blocks. He made blocks for and erected several buildings in town and surrounding countryside.

Lester Ryan constructed the building occupied the last twelve years by the Ecklund Bros. Store, for the purpose of manufacturing air cooling refrigerators and ironing boards which he had invented and upon which he was attempting to get patents. His business failed before he could begin operations.<sup>38</sup>

From the advertisements in the Smithfield Enterprise we learn much about the town and its business. We read that Edelman and Co. opened their store in April of 1908, and that they handled dry goods and groceries and bought produce. Woodring and Major manufactured cement blocks and did a general cement business.<sup>40</sup>

Mr. W. H. Walters opened a new butcher shop with a complete line of fresh and cured meats; W. J. Gainsforth was the proprietor of the new "Smithfield Hotel and Cafe"; and Charles Poole was starting a new

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39. Mrs. Bigelow, compiler; also other early settlers.

40. Smithfield Enterprise, April 3, 1908.

dray line and auto delivery.<sup>41</sup>

In the January 5th, 1910, issue is an advertisement:

Grant Wolcott, Prop.

"The Smithfield Hotel". Meals and lunches at all hours. Fruits, Pies, Cakes, Bread. Cigars, Tobacco and Soft Drinks. Barber shop and Pool Hall in connection.<sup>42</sup>

In the October 13, 1910, issue we find:

"Monty Shields, Editor, Smithfield Enterprise, Democratic to the backbone."<sup>43</sup>

In the December 8th, 1910, issue an editorial:

"Call this a free country, do you? There are nine corporation lawyers who comprise the Supreme Court of the United States. Did you help put them there?"<sup>44</sup>

In the April 8th, 1911, issue is an advertisement:

"Geo. Hendrix, Prop. Pool and Billiard Hall. Bring in your cream and get cash.", also: "Grant Wolcott, Prop. Smithfield Hotel." "Board and Room by the day or week. Lunch counter and confectionary, Barber Shop and Hair Dressing Parlor."<sup>45</sup>

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41. Smithfield Enterprise, Nov. 4, 1909.

42. Ibid., Jan. 5, 1910.

43. Ibid., Oct. 13, 1910.

44. Ibid., Dec. 8, 1910.

45. Ibid., April 8, 1911.



The Smithfield Enterprise gives these market prices.

	Nov. 4, 1909	Jan. 5, 1910	Oct. 13, 1910	Mar. 9, 1911	Jan. 30, 1913
Wheat.....	.86	.77	.38	.71	.72
Shelled Corn..	.48	.33	.38	.35	.41
Corn on ear..	.46	.30	.33	.32	.38
Oats.....	.33	.25	.25	.25	.30
Rye.....	.60	-	-	-	.55
Butter.....	.30	.25	.20	.13	.20
Chickens.....	.18	.07	.09	.19	.10
Hogs.....	7.00	7.25	7.50	6.25	6.70
Cattle.....	3.50	4.00	3.50	4.00	4.00
Cream.....					.25

Evidently the village election was not always quiet. In the April 6th, 1911, issue of the Smithfield Enterprise is an editorial which reads:

The village election held in Smithfield, Tuesday, was a very tame affair, different in many ways to what it was a year ago. It now begins to appear that old town will settle down to business, as the clans have buried the bloody hatchet and we hope they have not left the handle sticking out.

Elwood owes the beginning of its origination to the Lincoln Land Company and the Burlington Railroad. In 1884 J. H. Harris purchased the section on which Elwood is situated with three others in Bethel precinct, from the Union Pacific railroad, paying the sum of \$5,736.12. In May 1885 a Mr. Morris sold this section to the Lincoln Land Company for \$7,200.46.

The townsite was immediately surveyed. The survey was made by A. B. Smith for the Lincoln Land Company. The plat was certified to on June 15, 1885, in the office of the county clerk and dedicated to the use of the public, the streets and alleys therein laid out.

Elwood derived its name from a peculiar incident, the authenticity

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46. Claude Smith, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

Mrs. T. L. O'Hara, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

of which is vouched for by several old time residents. One day while Smith was surveying, it was hot, gusty and windy. Smith was not at all well impressed with the country in general and was trying to decide a name for the new town. Elwood Thomas, a young homesteader, who resided nine miles southwest of the settlement, was riding to the postoffice for his mail, and perhaps a plug of tobacco and a few groceries. He met Smith at work and stopped to pass the time of day. Smith finally approached Mr. Thomas on the problem of naming the new town. Thomas did not know a suitable name, and finally Smith said; "Young man, what is your name?" Thomas replied, "Elwood Thomas." "Good, we'll name the town Elwood," replied Smith, and it was recorded as such.<sup>47</sup>

In July, 1885, the first lots were sold.<sup>48</sup> The first deeds to be recorded were filed for record on September 5, 1885 and bear the date of July 31, 1885. One of the deeds by the Lincoln Land Company of lots one, two and three in block nine, to Fred. H. Schroeder, where he built one of the first lumber yards to be erected in Elwood, this being the same location as now occupied by the Elwood Coal & Lumber Co. At the same time transfer was also made to him of lots three and four in block twenty-seven.<sup>49</sup>

In August 1885 the railroad was built in order to reach Elwood and for a year the village was a terminal. The roundhouse was built west of town. The building of the line was done by the "Nebraska & Colorado Railroad" which was incorporated under the general law of Nebraska, the certificate of authorization being dated July 24, 1882,

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47. Claude Smith, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 13, 1935.

48. Ibid., Several old settlers also vouch for this story.

49. Ibid.

and filed with the Secretary of State on July 30, 1883. The authorization covered the construction of a railway from Beatrice, Nebraska to the Colorado-Nebraska State Line. Although the line was constructed by the "Nebraska and Colorado Railroad", it was actually always exclusively operated by the Chicago Burlington and Quincy (called Burlington and Ohio in 1883) until the lease expired February 15, 1908. On that date the property was deeded over to the Burlington.<sup>50</sup>

A. C. Holdrege was the first station agent. W. T. Heaton took over the duties of the depot in 1887 and remained there 13 years. He was followed by several others and in later years C. T. Coate served as agent. G. E. Winger served for about twenty-five years.<sup>51</sup>

Hallock & Howard Lumber Company put in a yard, as also did the Freeze & Hockwell Lumber Company. <sup>52</sup>

Sam Fish moved the Elwood House up from the Homerville and F. D. Lee moved the Commercial House up from the same place. J. L. Trobee, then a merchant in Homerville, moved his stock of merchandise to Elwood from Homerville and conducted one of the first mercantile stores on the location where the Odd Fellow hall now stands. Linninger & Melcalf were early pioneers to the implement field.

Elwood's mill was built by W. W. Goodman in the winter of 1885 and stood where the east elevator now stands. The first eating house to locate in Elwood, was located on the north side of the railroad and west of the depot; it was operated by C. A. Talcott and his wife and was known as the Talcott house.

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50. H. F. McLaury, advertising agent, Chicago Burlington & Quincy.

51. Claude Smith, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

52. Claude Smith, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

on the system that year and it was completed as rapidly as possible. Several major improvements have been made in later years in new wells and pumps.

Two or three years later the citizens became dissatisfied with the several antique methods of lighting their homes and stores and the question of installing an electric lighting system was raised. This brought out quite a debate for and against electric lights, and for a long time the idea was given considerable discussion. Finally in 1911 the election was held to vote bonds for the plant and after much work on the part of advocates of the system the bond issue totaling \$7,500 carried for the construction of the system.

The first plant installed was the latest in lighting at that time. It was a direct current system with storage batteries, and a 35 h.p. Alamo oil engine. The engine operated from 7 to 11 p. m. when the street lights were turned on. During the balance of the night and during the day-service was obtained from the battery system. The first cost of electric current was 25¢ a kilowatt hour. Certain days were set aside for the ladies to do the family washing and certain hours were designated when electric irons could be used. The plant manager did not stand for any deviation from the hours set for the use of appliances and any times the ladies would try to outguess him and hook up the iron, he would promptly call them to account for this.<sup>57</sup>

Later, when the first plant had been used so long that it was wearing out, and the demand for more electricity became urgent, the board purchased two Primm engines and discarded the battery set. These engines were operated during the peak load in the evening and a 10 h.p. International<sup>58</sup> oil engine was installed to run all night to furnish

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57. Claude Smith, Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 12, 1935.

58. Ibid.



service. Later the load became heavier and a 15. h. p. Fairbanks was added in place of the International.

This system operated for a number of years and service became so poor that the board faced a problem of rebuilding the plant. Not a dollar had been set aside as a reserve for replacement, and the plant was worn out. As a direct current system it was out of date and the proposition of scrapping it entirely and rebuilding with a modern A. C. current was discussed. But the cost was prohibitive and an investment of around \$25,000 would be encountered. Finally, after much discussion, the Western Public Service Company made the village board an offer, which was attractive. In march, 1928, the board sold the old plant to the service company, granted them a franchise, and they constructed a modern lighting system.

C. P. Boyaton and H. W. Stanley and W. B. Albertson also had a part in the early history of Elwood, the former being one of the first hardware dealers, his hardware was located on the corner now occupied by the stock show building. H. W. Stanley was one of the first grocerymen and was also a druggist. His place of business was located on the lot north of the Fish Implement Store. W. B. Altertson also moved up from Homerville and ran one of the early livery barns. He also served as one of the early deputy sheriffs in the county.

The first bank to do business in Elwood was known as the Gosper County Bank and was built and owned by P. H. Schroeder on the corner where the Independent Filling Station is now located, and was managed by J. C. Post. C. L. Cotting of Red Cloud owned the drug store, then located where the Dow Store building now stands and it was managed by Charley Brown.<sup>53</sup>

W. T. Perkinson also ran one of Elwood's first mercantile establishments on the south of the Fish Implement store. R. D. Ferguson came here from Red Oak, Iowa, and ran a store on the corner where the Home Bank is now located, across the street from the Commercial House, then located on the lot where the community Improvement building is now located.

The petition for the incorporation of the village of Elwood was signed by C. L. Brown and 224 others and was granted by the board of county commissioners consisting of W. F. Wagoner, M. B. Reid and A. B. Perry. H. A. Willard was then county clerk. M. B. Reid ran the inland postoffice located across the tract, just north of the A. B. Heckenlively farm, a little sod house known as Meek station. When the town

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53. Claude Smith, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 12, 1935.

of Elwood was established Mr. Reid became the first postmaster of Elwood.<sup>54</sup>

The first trustees for the Village of Elwood were designated and appointed by the board of county commissioners and the following were so named: C. P. Boynton, B. Mathews, H. W. Stanley, W. B. Albertson and P. W. Wirts.<sup>55</sup>

The first water supply for the village was hauled into town in tankwagons and sold to hotels and residents for 25¢ a small barrell. Later a public well was sunk and served the populace for a while, and other wells were put down in different parts of town to help along the water needs.<sup>56</sup>

New families began moving in and the Lincoln Land Company gave lots to residents in Homerville who moved here.

As time went on other citizens began moving to the thriving town. They were Amos Corey, J. S. Hatcher, W. B. Miller, C. E. Champe, D. B. Gano, E. Shellenberger, A. M. White, H. W. Hare, W. A. Weller, C. J. Laurent, G. M. Cochran, L. Lydiatt, C. F. Smith, J. C. Haworth, Geo. N. Bolen, L. M. Millen, C. A. Branshaw, O. E. Bozarth, A. M. Patterson and others.

As time progressed and business increased the water supply became a big problem and some talk was given to building a water system in the village. It was debated for several months and finally in 1907 a special election was held to vote \$12,000 bonds for the construction of the plant. The vote was not unanimous, however, quite a number voting to retain the wells and inadequate method. Construction was start

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54. Smith, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 13, 1935.

55. Ibid.

56. J. S. Fitzsimmon, Elwood, Nebraska; and others. From other source the author learned that Mr. Fitzsimmons was the first person to make water-carrying a business. At the time Mr. Fitzsimmons was 16 years of age.

As near as can be learned the first religious services in Elwood were held in the drive-way of the west elevator; later a building which is now occupied by the Central Market, was built.<sup>59</sup> This served as a church, community hall and lodge from that time on for many years. The preaching services were supplied by ministers of various denominations and were union meetings.<sup>60</sup>

Telephone service in the Elwood community dates from 1903 when five families of farmers formed an organization known as the Elwood Barbwire Telephone Company. Service was entirely local and had no connection with other communities.

The first telephone line from an out side point was built in 1905. Mrs. Stewart Lexington had a line built between Lexington and Elwood and established a telephone exchange in Elwood with about 25 customers. The switch board was located in Mrs. Hilyard's residence south of the printing office. Mr. Hanline installed the board, Mrs. Tracy was the operator. Mr. Tilson maintained the lines. Soon afterward a line was built to Smithfield.<sup>61</sup>

On April 13, 1895, Dr. Brittain, one of the oldest physicians in Gosper County was shot and wounded. The assassin escaped. The doctor claimed that he knew who did it, that it was an old enemy and that he had been receiving threatening letters.<sup>62</sup> The doctor recovered and thus maintained to this day Gosper County's record of being free from murder since the county was organized.

For a small town with only about fifty years of history, Elwood has had several newspapers. The Encyclopedia of Nebraska Newspapers

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59. Rev. H. T. Slagg, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 1935.

60. Rev. H. T. Slagg, Elwood Bulletin, Sept., 1935.

61. Compiled from interviews.

62. State Journal, April 14, 1895.



lists the following newspapers of Elwood:

Elwood, Gosper County (formerly Meek. P. O.) Bulletin.  
Oct. 29, 1896 to end of that year.

Elwood Bulletin, Established Aug. 6, 1896.

Elwood Independent, Established 1892.

Elwood Record, Established 1886. Suspended 1890.

Elwood Republican, Established Jan. 1893. Called the Western Eye from Sept. 9 to Oct. 14, 1879. Took place of Elwood Republican about November 5, 1896.

Gosper County Citizen, Established December 1884.  
Absorbed by the Elwood Republican about November 5, 1896.

Gosper County Enterprise, Established June 15, 1899.

People's Advocate, Removed December 1891 to Maywood and became Maywood Eagle.

Independent Citizen, 1895, probably formed by merging Independent and Citizen.

The Bulletin, established October 29, 1896, followed by the Elwood Bulletin. Suspended December 10, 1896.

The Elwood Bulletin, Established January 1, 1897.<sup>64</sup>

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63. Encyclopedia of Nebraska Newspapers.

64. The author has an issue of the Elwood Bulletin, Vol. 1, #2, dated August 18, 1896 (Thursday), Harry E. Moore, Pub. & Ed. Evidently the date January 1897 is incorrect and August 6, 1896 is the correct date for the establishment of the paper.

## Chapter VII.

The agriculture of a region depends almost entirely upon the fertility of the soil and the rainfall. The soil of Gosper County is productive as the following table shows:

Fertility of Soil Classified.<sup>1</sup>

Gosper County	Product- ivity index	Acres	% all land	% all land cultivated	% each grade cultivated
I		17,912	6%	37%	85.2%
II		119,412	40%	57%	80.0%
III		8,956	3%	4%	70.0%
IV		89,559	30%	21%	40.0%
V		62,691	21%	8%	21.0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>298,530</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>56.0%</b>

When the first settlers came they found the land covered with a good growth of buffalo grama and bluestem grasses. These settlers plowed up this native vegetation which was adapted to the climate. For centuries it had added humus to the plant nutrients found in the soil forming material. The vegetative carpet had retarded run-off during the infrequent rainstorms and had caused moisture to be stored in the soil. During the early years of cultivation the reserve of decaying vegetable matter left by the native grasses held the soil particles together so that rainfall was easily absorbed. The mineral elements in the soil, the humus content which supplied nitrogen, and the reserve subsoil moisture all contributed to crop yields. Unfortunately the productivity of the land has declined with cultivation and its earning power has decreased. The silty soil is losing or has lost its virgin porous structure, and is less receptive to rains than it was. The surface is powdery. It forms an inferior

1. Bulletin 311, Oct. '37, p. 15.

2. I is the most productive soil and V is the least productive. II, III, and IV are intermediate in productivity.

mulch and loses water more rapidly. Wind and water erosion changed conditions, having taken their toll of fertility, and as a result of these changed conditions, it probably takes more water to produce a pound of dry matter in crops than it took under virgin conditions.<sup>3</sup>

A Of all the crops raised alfalfa probably takes as much moisture from the subsoil as any other crop. When a stand is left for a six year period the moisture is removed to a depth of from 20 to 35 feet. Normal rainfall may not replace a like amount of water for at least a generation. As the fertility of the soil declined, more and more of the land was sown to alfalfa with a subsequent depletion of the subsoil moisture.

We have seen how the prairie and its sod was broken, how the sub-soil moisture was depleted, the effects of alfalfa and now the purpose of the humus which was largely destroyed by the continuous cropping of the land in corn and small grains and the effort to replace this humus by alfalfa. This humus performs three important functions. In the first place, this decayed organic matter binds the soil particles into granules so that the erosive effect of wind and water is naturally materially reduced. In the second place, humus has a large water holding capacity and absorbs rainfall in much the same way that a sponge takes up water. Lastly, humus nourishes bacteria which make nitrogen available for plant growth.

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3. Bulletin 311, Oct. '27, p. 9.

4. Bulletin 311, Oct., '27. pp. 9-10.

Gosper County is in the Great Plains. The distinguishing climatic characteristic of the great plains' environment from the 98th meridian to the Pacific Slope is a deficiency in the most essential climatic element -- water. This deficiency accounts for many of the conditions of plant, animal, and human life and institutions. The deficiency representing the line of the 98th meridian makes a contrast between agriculture east and west of that line. West of that line the precipitation is often below twenty inches and less than 20 inches of precipitation is not enough for farming and the farming region between the 98th and 100th meridian in which Gosper County is located suffers the deficiency.

But precipitation is not the only factor that must be taken into account in determining climate with reference to rainfall; seasonal distribution and rate of evaporation are of vital importance. From the standpoint of utilization, particularly agricultural utilization, the seasonal and the monthly distribution of rainfall is important. Fortunately in the Plains, the rain falls in the summer months, beginning in April, approaching a maximum in May or June. During the summer months much of the rain falls during violent thunder storms and much of the water runs off. In the Plains region the crops are also in danger of being destroyed by hail.

At intervals "dry" years have occurred. In these dry years crops either wither and die, grasshoppers ravage the country, streams dry up, people become discouraged and leave. Until the 1934-40

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5. Walter P. Webb, The Great Plains, 1931. Chicago, Ill. pp.-17-19.

6. Webb, The Great Plains, p. 19.



drouth, that of 1894 was the most infamous. After each drouth and grasshopper devastation the people that remained suffered great hardships. After the drouth of 1894, Gosper County was compelled to vote \$40,000 bonds for feed and seed loans.<sup>7</sup>

During these dry years the Platte River became dry. In the Elwood Bulletin, Oct. 13, 1910, we read:

The dry bed of the Platte River is fast becoming converted into a forest reserve, the surface of half the bed now being studded with cottonwood trees, some of them seven, eight or even ten feet high, but the majority smaller. Another growth is coming up and unless the river fills up with water soon the entire width will be covered with this young forest. There is no surface flow in the Platte until you get east of Grand Island.

Below is a weather report for August, 1933, the last year before the drouth hit Gosper County.<sup>8</sup> This report is by E. E. Stoll, Weather Observer, Gosper Station.

Total precipitation.....	4.92
Number of days with more than .01 inches.....	14 days
Greatest precipitation in 24 hours.....	1.28 in. on August 24th.
Prevailing wind.....	Southeast.
Number of thunderstorms.....	10
"    "    foggy days.....	3
"    "    clear days.....	12
"    "    partly cloudy days.....	6

Total precipitation for year to date is above average.

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7. State Journal, (Lincoln, Nebraska), February 26, 1895.

8. Holbrook Observer, Sept. 5, 1933. E. E. Stoll, Weather Observer, Gosper Station.

Below is a table showing the annual precipitation, rainfall during the growing season, and acreages and yields of alfalfa and barley in Gosper County.

Year	Alfalfa <sup>9</sup>	Yield in tons per acre.	Barley <sup>10</sup>	Yield in bu. per acre
	Acreage in thousands		Acreage in thousands	
1910	4.0	1.7	.1	9.0
1911	4.0	2.1	.1	10.6
1912	4.0	2.0	-	10.0
1913	4.0	1.6	-	27.7
1914	3.0	3.0	.2	35
1915	3.0	3.3	.2	25
1916	3.0	3.2	.3	17
1917	3.0	1.7	.3	13
1918	3.0	2.2	1.3	26
1919	2.1	2.9	.9	28
1920	4.0	2.6	1.5	24
1921	2.4	2.2	1.3	13
1922	2.5	1.8	2.0	26
1923	3.0	2.6	3.0	21
1924	3.0	1.8	3.0	21
1925	3.0	2.0	.7	10
1926	3.0	1.4	.6	30
1927	3.0	2.3	.5	29
1928	3.0	2.2	1.2	30
1929	2.1	2.2	1.7	29
1930	2.5	2.8	4.4	30
1931	2.4	1.7	4.4	22
1932	2.2	1.9	3.2	23
1933	2.0	2.0	5.6	16
1934	2.6	.3	1.7	-
1935	2.4	2.3	2.8	26
26 year average	2.9	2.2	1.8	21.9
10 year average (1925-35)	2.52	1.19	2.72	21.9

9. Bulletin 311, Oct. '38, p. 17.

10. Ibid., p. 19.

Throughout the years corn has remained the principle crop. The farmer sold part of the grain from his corn crop as a cash crop, the remainder he kept to feed his livestock and for use as seed, the cobs were used for fuel and the stalks were "fed out" during the winter months. Sometimes in years when the price of corn was very low, the corn was used as fuel.

Here are a few crop reports showing the crop conditions at different times in the '90s'.

"The principle crop is corn; increased acreage this year, prospects good. Wheat, oats and rye almost a failure. Will not average one-third of a crop, owing to dry weather."<sup>11</sup>

"Can not expect more than half a crop of corn; rye is killed."<sup>12</sup>

"Small grains growing rapidly but are very weedy. Corn very weedy."<sup>13</sup>

"Corn is making rapid growth. A few fields abandoned on account of weeds. Wheat on new ground will make a half a crop."<sup>14</sup>

"Small grains looking fine; corn has been damaged some by cut worms; too cool for corn but fine for wheat."<sup>15</sup>

"Warm weather has brought the corn along; some pieces of rye will do to cut in two weeks; all crops doing finely."<sup>16</sup>

"Corn is damaged 25% by the dry weather."<sup>17</sup>

"Corn is looking fine and has made good progress; oats a fair crop; hay a good crop."<sup>18</sup>

From these reports it is easy to understand that corn has been the chief crop, that greater interest was taken in its condition than any other crop and that it had the power to recuperate from adverse conditions better than the other grains.

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11. Omaha Bee, June 26, 1893.

12. State Journal, June 12, 1895.

13. Ibid., June 19, 1895.

14. Ibid., June 20, 1895.

15. Ibid., June 9, 1897.

16. Ibid., June 16, 1897.

17. State Journal, (Lincoln, Nebraska) Aug. 11, 1898.

18. Ibid., July. 17, 1898.

Below is a table showing the corn acreage and yields from 1910 to 1935.

YEAR <sup>19</sup>	C O R N		W H E A T		O A T S	
	acreage in thous- ands	yield	acreage in thous ands	yield	acreage in thous ands	yield
1910	71.0	12.3	40.0	6.9	15.0	9.5
1911	69	17.5	34	7.5	8	11.5
1912	79	14.	37	11.9	4	17.5
1913	77	1.7	39	10.4	5	15.
1914	83	12.3	37	13.2	6	15.
1915	76	20	36	20.3	5	32.4
1916	75	24.8	39	15.4	5	23.1
1917	91	18	6	11.	6	25.
1918	75	18	43	9.	6	11.
1919	72	31	45	10.	3	32.
1920	89	25	35	10.	3	31.
1921	80	17	45	8.	5	27.
1922	72	13	52	12.	4	15.
1923	90	30	20	12.5	4	23.
1924	95	22	25	14.9	5	22.
1925	102	14	22	13	3	23.
1926	99	6	21	7	4	9.
1927	100	29	21.	14.9	4	29.
1928	101	18	18.	17	4	31.
1929	107	17	16	12.9	4.7	30.
1930	106	31	18	20	5.6	28.
1931	108	22	16	19	5.4	29.
1932	113	12	14	8.9	5.8	18.
1933	108	24	9.4	14	10.	1.1
1934	91	12	15	33.8	8.1	34.
1935	71.9	7.7	16.1	13.5	14.5	34.
26 yr. Ave.	88.6	19.59	18.5	12.08	5.97	23.27
10 yr. Ave. (1925-35)		18.17	16.65	13.1	5.61	25.01



Below is a table showing yields of crops in favorable years of  
 20  
 alfalfa:

year	alfalfa	corn	barley	wheat	oats
1915	3.30	30.00	35.00	20.30	32.40
1920	2.60	25.00	28.00	10.00	31.00
1923	2.60	30.00	26.00	8.50	33.00
1930	2.80	31.00	35.0	19.00	40.00
aver- age	2.82	29.00	30.00	14.64	34.10
Ten year aver- age '26- '35	1.91	18.17	21.90	13.10	25.01

Below is the average crop yield ending in 1935.<sup>21</sup>

crop      Tons or bushels  
             per acre

alfalfa.....1.82  
 barley.....20.84  
 corn.....17.67  
 oats.....22.90  
 potatoes.....64.80  
 wheat.....13.00

20. Frank Miller and H. C. Willey, Bulletin 311, Oct. 1937. pp. 31-35.

21. Bulletin 311, Oct. '37, p. 1.

Land prices in the county range from a few dollars an acre for the roughest land to about \$125. an acre for good level land. The prices have depended upon the time and the location of the land. The prices have depend upon whether the land is rough or level to a great extent. L. E. Brown, former editor of the Bertland Herald has written a column of "Local History and Earliest Times" in that paper makes the following statement:<sup>22</sup>

At a conference of the assessors of Gosper County in 1899 they decided to assess level land at \$2 an acre and rough land, lagoon land, at \$1 an acre; horses \$5 to \$8 each; milk cows at \$3 to \$5 each; and other cattle at \$2 to \$5 each; mules \$6 to \$10; mule colts \$3 to \$5; hogs 50¢ per hundred pounds, and other personal property one-fourth to one-third the cash value.

An article in the Elwood Bulletin, Sept. 10, 1908 states:

"The S. B. Waffainger farm (160 acres) in Rebl precinct sold last week for \$10,000."

A report of the state valuation for 1910 shows Gosper County to be \$2,177,366, an increase for the past year of \$33,312.<sup>23</sup>

In the Elwood Bulletin and El. Public Mirror, rapakoe, are these market prices:

	<u>Elwood Bulletin</u>		<u>Public Mirror</u>
Date	11/1/00	9/5/08.	12/25/15
Wheat	.50	.75	.75
Rye	.25	.60	
Corn	.30		.77
corn (shelled)		.61	
Oats	.20		
Hogs	3.80	5.95	.46
Cattle		4.00	7.00
Butter		.16	.25
Cream		.18	
Hens		.06	.08
roosters			.13
springes			.07
Hides			.08
Eggs		.15	.27
potatoes		1.00	

<sup>22.</sup> Overton Herald, April 25, 1909

<sup>23.</sup> Elwood Bulletin, Aug. 4, 1910.

Ownership of the land has decreased steadily. In 1899 there were 636 full or part owners of their farms, 355 share tenants and 12 unknown.<sup>24</sup>

Thirty years later in 1929 there are only 290 full or part owners and 423 share tenants.<sup>25</sup> In 1899 there were 1,013 farms.<sup>26</sup> In 1909 there were 915 farms.<sup>27</sup> In 1919 there were only 882 farms,<sup>28</sup> and in 1929 there were only 364 farms.<sup>29</sup> While the number of farms has steadily decreased the average size has increased. In 1899 the average size farm was 277 acres.<sup>30</sup> In 1909 it was 309 acres,<sup>31</sup> and in 1929 it had increased to 529 acres.<sup>32</sup> Since 1929 the number of farms has decreased very rapidly, owners of land has decreased more rapidly and the size of the farms increased.

The population has steadily decreased since 1900 as may be seen from the following table.<sup>33</sup>

Year	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Popn.	5301	4983	4669	4287	3684

The value of livestock steadily increased until 1929 since then it has decreased due to the drought.

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24. Twelfth Census, p. 102.

25. 15th Census, 1930, Agr. III, part I, p. 961.

26. 12th Census of the United States, 1900, Agr. V, part I, p. 102.

27. Bulletin 211, Oct. '37, p. 49.

28. 15th Census, 1910, VII, p. 32.

29. 15th Census, 1910, p. 32.

30. 12th Census, 1900, Agr. III, part I, p. 927.

31. 15th Census, 1910, p. 32.

32. 15th Census, 1930, p. 927.

33. Bulletin 211, p. 46.

34. Nebraska Legislative Council, Lincoln, 1940, p. 285.

# Income from Cooper County livestock:

1899.....	428,307 <sup>35</sup>
1909.....	743,402 <sup>26</sup>
1929.....	1,244,562 <sup>37</sup>

Income from crops reached its peak in 1909 as the following table shows:

1899.....	878,325 <sup>58</sup>
1909.....	1,106,802 <sup>39</sup>
1929.....	695,141 <sup>40</sup>

Here is a table showing the carloads of freight shipments from Elwood and Smithfield.<sup>41</sup>

Year	Wheat	Corn	Other grains	Live-stock	Other carloads	Total of all cars.
1926	56	98	3	302	15	491
1927	51	122	1	238	2	417
1928	80	370	-	408	4	745
1929	71	187	2	312	2	621
1930	66	181	16	298	3	668
1931	9	396	1	295	23	624
1932	82	41	3	258	59	370
1933	8	112	1	235	27	438
1934	71	79	-	520	12	623
1935	71	1	1	118	1	192
Average	54	158.7	2.8	289.5	20.8	525.8

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35. 12th Census, p. 207.
  36. 15th Census, pp. 22-23.
  37. 15th Census, p. 945.
  38. 12th Census, p. 289.
  39. 15th Census, pp. 30-31.
  40. 15th Census, p. 725.
  41. Bulletin CII, p. 51.



The following table shows earloads of freight received at Elwood and Smithfield.<sup>42</sup>

Year	Lumber	Lime cement sand	Grain and Grain products	coal	live-stock	Total cars
1926	31	37	21	45	10	256
1927	21	8	26	60	3	221
1928	16	13	15	49	14	202
1929	17	11	6	66	12	230
1930	22	50	9	64	10	265
1931	10	4	2	37	28	154
1932	7	1	-	48	7	122
1933	7	5	-	33	11	97
1934	7	-	4	40	7	111
1935	11	2	15	48	3	142
Average	15.2	13.1	9.8	49	10.5	178.8

Trucks have not played an important part in the hauling, except local hauling, possibly because of the distance from markets. The principle reports of the county are livestock and grain. And this has been light since 1934 and it is since then that trucks have become an important factor in hauling grain and livestock over long distances. Since 1934, because of the drouth, most grains has been hauled into the county. This is largely trucked in from Kearney and other nearby cities having large facilities to handle grain. However, this imported grain is only a small fraction of the amount of grain shipped out before the drouth.<sup>43</sup> Considerable hay has been trucked in from the Platte Valley in recent years. Small shipments of livestock are trucked to nearby livestock sale rings. Wholesale houses mostly "truck in" their products, but because of only two trading centers in the county this is not a very big business. While the Tri-County was being built considerable rock was hauled in from along the Republican valley. This was contract

42. Bulletin 311, p. 51.

43. Russel J. Jenkins, Mgr. Farmer's Elevator, Smithfield is authority for statement that the total year's business is less than in one month.

work so local truckers did not profit to any great extent.

A good index of a place's prosperity may be gained from a study of the place's rate of increase or decrease in population. Gosper County's population grew very slowly during the '70s' due to the drouth, the grasshoppers and the inability of the newly arrived settlers to adapt themselves. Practically all of them came from regions of sufficient rainfall and did not seem to have realized that they had moved into a region that was often deficient to rainfall, and did not know how to adapt themselves to this new situation.

The '80s' were a period of prosperity. Rainfall increased, the people were adapting themselves to the county, their livestock and grains had become acclimated, land was very cheap and grains had become quite good during most of these years. It was during these years that the population made its greatest gain both relatively and actually. In 1880 the population had been 1,675, by 1890 it had increased to 4,816.<sup>44</sup>

The '90s' were a period of hard times. The farmers throughout the middle west suffered from poor prices for their products, high freight rates and drouths. The year 1894 was particularly hard on the people of Gosper County because of the severe drouth that year that almost totally destroyed their corn crop. The hot winds did not come until July which enabled them to raise some small

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44. This is an actual gain of 3,145 and a relative gain of 188%.

some small grain and hay. They were able to mow considerable hay in the canyons and low places. Much of the county was still grass-land and the following winter was mild. Most of the settlers turned their cattle and horses, with the exception of a saddle horse and a sick cow, loose on the range. Every few days a member of the family would ride out to look for the stock on the range and if they were too far from home, they were herded back nearer home. During the '90s' the population increased less than 500 so that by 1900 the population was 5,301, which, however was the largest population in any census.

Of the 5,301 people in 1900, 437 were Germans, 66 Swedes, 41 English, 26 Canadians, 26 Danes, 23 Swiss, 22 Norwegians and 7 Irish, thus making a total of 625 foreign born or about 12%. Twenty years before out of a total population of 1,673 there were 165 or about 10% foreign born.<sup>45</sup>

By 1940 the population had decreased to 3,664, a loss of 1617 or about 30% in the last 40 years. This is evidence that the natural resources of the county could not support as large a population in prosperity as otherwise. The more energetic and prosperous bought their neighbor's place and with better and more machinery were able to farm the enlarged acreage better than they could use the original farm with the inadequate machinery used the previous generation.

Most of the roads in the county are built on the section lines although not always. In the rougher parts of the county the expense of making and maintaining the roads on section lines would be so great that the roads have largely followed the old trails, made before fences were erected, which followed the ridges and canyons so as to make

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45. Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Population, Washington, D. C., p. 768.

roads with the least number of obstacles. The county roads are all dirt roads and for the most part graded. The only graveled roads are the two state highways No. 23 which extends across the northern half the county, following closely the Burlington Railroad and passing through Smithfield and Elwood. This highway branches at Elwood, one branch continues to follow the Burlington Highline and is designated as No. 23N and the other branch extends to the southwest and is designated No. 23S. The other state highway passes through the county in a north and south direction, passing through a town, Elwood, and following closely the Old Plum Creek-Arapahoe Trail. This highway is designated as No. 21.

The early settlers broke the sod and planted corn, oats, wheat, alfalfa and various other crops adapted to a rich soil with plenty of rainfall. In years of favorable rainfall the crops were meager or failed. Very naturally, these early settlers made no study of the average rainfall nor did they realize that over a thousand years before man came to plow up the prairie that nature had been storing up subsoil moisture and that although this average rainfall was more than the amount needed just for the growing of grass and there considerable moisture percolated into the deep subsoil, yet there was danger in growing crops requiring moisture beyond that which the region received.<sup>46</sup>

It was about 30 years ago that the concern with regard to the agricultural future of the region developed to a degree where individual citizens here and there throughout the area began to interest themselves in a very definite manner. By this time, they

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46. Geo., Johnson, Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District. pp. 2-3



began to realize that the soil moisture, which for ages of time before the white man came, accumulated was now being depleted because the average rainfall was not sufficient to grow the types of crops which the fine soil and favorable climate, but encouraged the early settlers to plant and thus there came the suspicion that the cause for the reduced crop yields might be a permanent condition that was settling over the area which would be a calamity as far as future economic program of the region was concerned.<sup>47</sup>

The livestock industry was being reduced gradually and the large number of abandoned farms, where the cost of improvements ranged from \$4000 to \$8000, stood out as a living example of a decaying agriculture and a losing struggle against forces which the individual could not control.<sup>48</sup>

It was at this time that an organization was formed, meets were held and finally appeal to the State and Federal Governments were made.<sup>49</sup>

The United States Department of Agriculture named Mr. A. Lincoln Fellows, Senior Irrigation Engineer at that time in charge of the Denver, Colorado office, to make an investigation of the district. In making this study with recommendations, Mr. Fellows had the cooperation of Dean W. W. Barr and Prof. J. C. Russel of the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture.

The result of this investigation was published in May, 1924, in which Mr. Fellows stated very frankly,

Without supplemental water, the writer believes that within a generation, the region under consideration will be obliged, in a great measure, to revert, first to dependence upon summer following, thus producing on a given tract of

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47. Johnson, Chipped, pp. 2-3.

48. Ibid., p. 3.

49. Ibid., p. 3.

land only one crop in two years, and later back again to grazing for the reason that the production of crops will no longer be possible.<sup>50</sup>

Nothing but irrigation would save the area and at the same there was annually hundreds of thousands of acre feet of Platte River "Gulf Waters" leaving the state unused and lost--water that would turn the region from a condition of agricultural despair to one of agricultural prosperity.<sup>51</sup>

On August 26, 1935, after over 25 years of real effort upon the part of the people to secure irrigation, Mr. Ickes of the Public Works Administration announced the approval of the Tri-County Project.

Various plans of construction had been proposed, but not until a plan had been devised wherein electrical energy would also be developed with the same water that was afterwards to be used for irrigation purposes, was it possible to consider favorably the building of the Tri-County Project for the reason that the cost of construction would be entirely too great for irrigation alone. Irrigation was imperative to save the agriculture of the region. Lighting up the abandoned homes with electricity would not save them, irrigation alone would accomplish this but irrigation was not possible unless the same water was used for making electricity to help pay the expense, and therefore the Tri-County Project is a combination of electricity and irrigation, and thus it is named "The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District."<sup>52</sup>

Here is a copy of the telegram received at 12:15 P.M. Sept. 25,

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50. Johnson, p. 3.

51. Ibid., p. 3.

52. Johnson, pp. 3-4.

1935, stating that the President had signed the bill for the Tri-County Project.<sup>53</sup>

12:13 P.M. Washington, D.C.  
Sept. 26, 1935

17 Gov't

Moritz Aabel,  
Holdrege, Nebraska

The President has just signed tri-county allotment, ten million. It is finished and I am flying home.

G. G. Bingerup

The Tri-County was approximately a \$36 million project, and was constructed without any bonds, mortgages or indebtedness incurred against any of the land that will be served. Forty-five per cent is an outright grant upon the part of the Federal Government, the remaining fifty-five per cent will be paid back by the users of the water and electricity over a long period of years at a reasonable rate of interest.<sup>54</sup>

The Tri-County has 529 miles of water carrying canals and will irrigate 220,000 acres of land within the Platte Watershed.<sup>55</sup>

Of the \$36 million spent on this project more than 6 million was allocated to Gosper County for constructing canals, dams, reservoirs and power plants.<sup>56</sup>

There are 32 reservoirs in the Tri-County System, 16 of them being near Rustic and Elwood. The largest reservoir in Gosper County is the Johnson Canyon Reservoir north of Elwood. This reservoir will hold 50,000 acre feet of water. About a mile east of the reservoir is the Johnson Canyon Power Plant, No. 1. This power

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53. The Bertrand Herlad, Sept. 27, 1935.

54. Johnson, p. 4.

55. Johnson, p. 4.

56. Claude Smith, "Gosper County," Who's Who in Nebraska, 1941, p.488.

plant has two 9,000 kilowatt generators operating under a gross head of 116 feet.

Johnson Canyon Plant No. 1 is a semiautomatic plant with supervisory control from Johnson Canyon Plant No. 2.

Approximately 5 miles further east down the Supply Canal from Johnson Canyon Power Plant No. 1 is located Johnson Canyon Plant No. 2, which has one 18,000 kilowatt generator, operating under a gross head of 146 feet. This power house is designed so that at a future date one additional 18,000 kilowatt generator may be added. Included in the Johnson Power Plant No. 2 are the supervisory control panels for the operation of Johnson Canyon Power Plant No. 1.

The total annual power production of the Tri-County District is 233 million kilowatt hours.

The first water to reach the Johnson Reservoir came early in March, 1941, and the first water in the canal known as E. 65 reached Smithfield April 1, 1941.



## Chapter VIII

### CONCLUSION

The history of Gosper County has been similar to that of most of the counties of southwest Nebraska. In the '50s' and '60s' thousands of adventurous travelers passed through a corner of the county on their way further west to seek fortunes.

In the '70s' and '80s' hardy pioneers began to settle along the creeks in both the northern and southern parts of the county. The level tableland was settled last due to the lack of wood and water. During the early years of the settlement only rather feeble attempts were made to carry on agriculture. Livestock raising was the greatest source of income and has continued to be an important factor of the peoples' income.

The period up to 1890 was largely the period of settlement of the county. It was in these years that the most of the people came into the county and either bought or homesteaded their land. From 1890 to 1920 was a period of development. It was in this period that Elwood and Smithfield made their greatest growth, that the fine farm buildings were mostly built, thoroughbred horses began to be used, and good herds of pure-bred cattle and hogs raised. The period from 1920 to the present (1941) has been a period of retardation. During most of this period the majority of the people have experienced difficulty in making a decent living due to the poor prices of farm products and the drouth of the '30s'. In this period about 25% of the people moved away and those that remained were usually not only unable to make extensive improvement but to keep their homes from deteriorating.

The most important single event in the county's history appears to be the building of the Tri-County project. This Public Power and Irrigation System promises to benefit the county enormously. The rural electric lines promise to make farm life easier and to bring comforts and luxuries into farm homes that were denied these privileges under the old system of private development. The use of the Platte River for water for irrigation promises to make the region to be benefited the garden spot of Nebraska. It should increase the population and make that population more prosperous than it could ever expect without the blessings of the Platte's water. But, unless resources, as yet undiscovered, are able to change the economic conditions of the county, the county, with the exception of those areas can be irrigated, can never support a large population and that population must be supported by a diversified agriculture.

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