

[I've put a number by each of the questions or other red markings in your draft copy and made my comments here- MA]

1. Literaries or Literary Societies

(general background from what I know of Nebraska, and especially Buffalo County, history about literary societies - Mardi Anderson)

Literary Societies were common in Nebraska, at least in Buffalo County, from the 1870's through the 1920's when the car came into common use. These were not necessarily formal organizations with elected officers but rather a form of socializing and intellectual stimulation for adults, centered around their school district. Homesteaders usually lived some distance from a town. They were close enough to take a day to drive in, using a wagon and team of horses, buy supplies, and be home in time to do the evening chores. But they were too far away to go in for a social evening. The local school district served this purpose.

The school often became the social center of a rural area. Once a schoolhouse was built it was frequently used for worship services on Sunday until a church was built. In some cases Grange meetings were held here until a Grange Hall was built.

The Literary Societies were an outgrowth of the school, the "adult education" of the day for the parents of the district. The Society would meet in an evening, sometimes once a week, sometimes once a month, or periodically as those in attendance decided. The program would vary from meeting to meeting. It might consist of readings of classical literature or poetry or of essays and poetry of original composition. There might be an oration. There might be a debate of some current issue of the day with chosen individuals taking opposing side. A drama might be presented. Occasionally the children would be included in the program, reciting something they had learned at school.

In articles about schools which have been published in *Tales of Buffalo County*, frequent references are made to literary societies.

Vol. II, p 69 - "Bertha Haug Hayman: School Teacher" by Maxine Hayman Schroeder. Mrs. Hayman taught in rural schools from about 1904-1928. "During the winter months there were the Literaries usually on the last Friday evening of the month, and quite often the school children had a part in them."

Vol. II, p 75 - "Recollections of Buckeye Valley School" by Ruth Gitchel Anderson - This article includes stories and recollections from 1885-1900. "The school house also served as community center with meetings of the Literary Society and Grange."

Vol. II, p 142 - "Kearney Junction 1872: Business and Businessmen - Part II" by Gene E. Hamaker - Cunningham's newspaper building, a two story wood structure, was one of the first buildings in the new town of Kearney Junction. The printing press was on the second floor. The first floor was use for the "first school, first literary society, the Presbyterian Sunday meetings, and so on."

Vol. III, p 34 - "The Community of Stanley" by Irene Mollard. This article covers the time period from 1873 when the first homesteader came to the community through the 1880's. "The early residents of the community enjoyed entertainments such as dancing. Aden and Albert Fellows often provided the music with their violins. An oyster supper

usually followed a dance and often these lasted into the morning hours. There were also rabbit hunts for the men and literary meetings for all the family. A plain, old neighborhood gathering didn't cost much money, nobody had much. The Literary Society met every Tuesday night at the school house. Some of the topics discussed were 'That the United States Owes Her Greatness to Her Geographic Position and Not her Form of Government.' Another topic was 'That the School District Should Furnish Text-Books and They Should Be Uniform.' Then there was the grand clash between the debating teams of Riverdale and Stanley on March 6, 1885 when the subject was 'Courts are Bigger Frauds Than the Railroads.' " [Stanley, later renamed Amherst when the railroad branch line was built, is located 6 miles south and 13 west of the center of the Majors community]

2. Majors, a community in Cedar Township, Buffalo County

Go to this address on the internet: freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~stovepipe This is a website designed and operated by Rod Stover. His family comes from Beaver and Cedar Townships. He has collected a great deal of information about the Poole/Majors area and its early settlers which he shares at this site.

Majors never was a town or even a village, rather it was a community of people. There was a church and cemetery located in the northeast quarter of Section 15, and a school, and a post office all in the area but not all grouped together in one location. I've included a copy of a map Buffalo County showing the townships and one of Cedar Township. These should help you get a feel for the location. By placing the locations of property described in the copy from Bassett about the settling of Cedar Township, the relationship of neighbors to each other can be seen. The earliest plat map we have at the archives of Buffalo County is located in an 1885 Atlas of Nebraska.

Poole is located three miles north and one east of the Majors cemetery (the church building has been removed). It was once incorporated as a village, but has dropped its incorporation status in recent years. Today it is a few houses which, with the surrounding farms, make up the Poole community. The railroad is gone, as is the post office. The school district has consolidated with Ravenna although the school building still stands.

3. The Oregon Trail did not cross the Platte River. While the wagon trains started at various points along the Missouri River, Independence being one of the main starting points, the trails had all converged on the south side of the river by the time they reached Ft. Kearny. This fort was constructed in 1848 to protect members of wagon trains from Indians as they came through this part of the country. There were also stagecoach routes and the Pony Express route through Ft. Kearny. Meanwhile, those traveling on the north side of the river were following the Mormon Trail. There was not a great deal of crossing over because the Platte, "a mile wide and an inch deep" was full of shifting sand bottom - quicksand - and not all that safe to drive a wagon across.

Note the spelling of "Ft. Kearny". This fort was named after Stephen Watts Kearny, military hero, uncle of Phil Kearny after whom another fort in Montana was named. Soon after the fort was established here on the Platte, due to sloppy handwriting or ignorance of the correct spelling, some document or correspondence to Washington, D. C. included an extra "e" before the "y". From then on during the lifetime of the fort it

was spelled “Kearney”. When the area was established as a Nebraska state park and historical site, descendants of Stephen Kearny requested that the correct spelling be used. This request has been honored. The city of Kearney, however, named after the fort long before the spelling was corrected, has chosen to retain its original spelling. So, today, we have Kearney, NE located on the north side of the Platte River and the site of Ft. Kearny on the south side.

4. Construction of the transcontinental railroad through what is now Buffalo County was completed during the summer of 1866. After the entire Union Pacific was completed in 1869, the wagon train traffic slowed to a trickle. There was no longer a need for Ft. Kearny. It began to phase out and was closed in 1871. At the same time, a decision was made by the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad to construct a route across southeast Nebraska and form a junction with the Union Pacific at a point east of the 100th Meridian (Cozad, NE today) where the UP route dips the farthest south. A B&MR agent came to Ft. Kearny in April, 1871, went across the river to the UP line, and designated the spot where the two tracks would meet. This site was settled as Kearney Junction and incorporated as the City of Kearney in November, 1873. The county began operation with elected officers in 1871. Before that, county business was handled by Hall County in Grand Island.

5. **[footnote 2]** True. They were very fortunate to have wood. The only trees grew along streams. There was wood on the islands in the Platte which the soldiers at Ft. Kearney had used for some of their buildings and for firewood. The large trees along the Wood River and as far north as the Loup in the Ravenna area had been taken for use as ties when the railroad was constructed. So there was very little of an already scarce item left.

6. **[footnote 3]** Yes, we certainly would! It would really be kind of you to share a copy. I was going to ask until I saw this footnote.

7. Early Residents of Cedar Township

From Bassett’s History of Buffalo County, Vol. I, 1916

Homestead Claims Before 1880

Cedar Township - Town No. 11, Range No. 15

1873 - M.A. Young, I. Bates, Joseph Clayton, S. A. Marshall, S. Kinsey, E. West, E. W. Carpenter, Joseph White, S. J. Houston, J. M. Treichler, S. Higgins, J. Dance.

1874 - A. St. Peter, J. McCool, J. Rink, H. Luce, J. E. Miller.

1878 - W. C. Tillson, J. Mapes, C. H. George, V. Vater.

1879 - A. Barker, J. Barker, G. W. Duncan, J. M. Shields, A. J. Stover, C. W. Putnam, D. McCool, W. Bigsty, T. Hunnegbun, G. A. Tuppan.

From Bassett’s History of Buffalo County, Vol. I, 1916

Early Settlement of Cedar Township by Hon. James E. Miller, page 300-302

(see photocopied article)

From Bassett’s History of Buffalo County, Vol. II, 1916

[biography] Hon. James E. Miller, page 140-142
(see photocopied article)

Tales of Buffalo County, Vol. IV
The Higgins Homestead, by Dan Reese, page 11-15
(see photocopied article)

8. Census of 1876 - This was probably a school census. It was done every June. We have school census records beginning in 1880. Unfortunately, the records from 1871-1879 have been lost. A very good friend of mine who was the County Superintendent of Schools for several years searched and searched for those records but could not find them.

9. Assessor – Jury Duty - The only record we have of real estate and personal property tax assessment for Cedar Township at this time was done by James Miller in 1877. He probably did one earlier (maybe 1876) which has not survived. Bassett mentions only the first jury called in the county. Actually there were two at that time, a jury and a petit jury which heard the cases involving smaller matters or lesser value. Treichler probably serves 2-3 years later.

10. Information on Higgins - See the photocopied Higgins article from *Tales of Buffalo County*.

11. J. Miller and wife - See the Miller biography from Bassett, Vol II

12. Venue – This would have all been done in their homes or at the school. (See comments on Literary Societies above)

13. John Dance residence in Iowa - I am not familiar with Iowa so I cannot answer this question.

14. Record of purchase - I have to admit to some confusion here. According to the records in the Register of Deeds office (photocopies included here) James Treichler made a final \$8.00 payment on his land on Oct. 2, 1876 and then he either sold or mortgaged it to C. H. McCormick of Cook County, Illinois, the following day for \$127.14. He received his Homestead Certificate on March 1, 1877 and a copy was filed Feb. 22, 1910. He signed a Quit Claim Deed Oct 19, 1904 (which proves he was still living then). Maybe the reason I am confused is because ownership to that land was not clear and that's why he signed a quit claim in 1904.

15. Location of John Dance - See the Bassett account of the settling of Cedar Township. John Dance was located about a half to one mile east of Treichlers, depending on the location of their houses on their quarter sections.

16. Other families – We do not have any other family histories other than what has been provided in photocopies here, except I have been in contact with a descendent of

Alex Young. So far he is collecting information, has not written a family history yet. I've included a copy of the information we have on him.

17. The Story – The perspective is interesting. To you, from the perspective of eastern seaboard history, 1871 seems fairly recent. To me, a Nebraskan whose history of settlement did not start until about 1850, 1871 is a long time ago and early in our history.

Farming, at least here in Buffalo County, was done with both horses and oxen. I did notice that in the tax assessment for Cedar Township in 1876 there were no oxen listed as personal property. James Miller had a pair of mules. Other than that, only horses were listed. Some men did not even have horses which indicates how bad things were at that time.

I do know that oxen were used for pulling wagons west by those going to the west coast for exactly the reason you gave here. They could eat grass along the trail so grain did not have to be carried along like for horses. However, many of the homesteaders to Nebraska came from Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin. They could load their farm animals on the train so whatever they used there, they used here. Or if they came by wagon, and many did, it was not as far a journey and again, they were bringing their farm animals. On the other hand, for breaking sod, the stronger oxen worked better.

18. Teaching Certificate & building a schoolhouse - John Swenson was the County Superintendent of Schools for Buffalo County. You will notice that Jim Miller, in his account of the settling of Cedar Creek Township, confirms your information about the building of a sod schoolhouse in the summer of 1876. It would have certainly been ready for use that fall. It only took a week or two to construct a sod house.

19. Exodus - The grasshoppers having made their visit, I believe it would be safe to say there was no crop to harvest. This would explain why they left in August rather than later in the fall. Those grasshopper invasions were devastating, eating everything in sight, even fabric, and leaving bare ground. Many barrels of clothing and other supplies were shipped here to Buffalo County by churches back east to be given out.

20. [Footnote 6] – Unfortunately we do not yet have the records from the recently-closed County Superintendent of Schools office so we do not have records of teachers.