

**The Stone House**  
**Research by Cynthia Bose**  
**1977**

## DESCRIPTION OF WORK IN THE FIELD

### Inspection of the House

The first step when I arrived home was to go to the Stone House to measure and inspect. I took my mother, Amy Johnson, along and she did the sketch on the cover of my project.

Mrs. Herman Lubeck, owner of the house, had written to me so I would not be disappointed when I saw the house. She wrote: “The flood of June 1966 ran the water, mud and rocks from the hill to the north and east of the house, right through the house so the floor is under all this dirt now and it’s hard to tell the doors from the windows almost. Also we have used it for shelter for cattle and horses so they’ve rubbed walls about down.”<sup>1</sup>

I was prepared for the worst and was surprised to see the house still standing after such a description. Some stones had been rubbed away in two places but the walls were not nearly as bad as I had imagined.

My mother had not read the letter and she exclaimed at how low the ceilings were before she realized the floors were covered with two feet of silt!

The house, as Mrs. Lubeck had mentioned, has been used as a shelter for cattle and horses and the results are as one might expect. The second story has been used recently to store hay.

There are no fixtures or furniture left in the house today. There is some wood molding left around windows and doors. The room partitions are still standing but most of the plaster on ceilings and walls has been knocked down. In places there is still some evidence of wallpaper. The stairs are in very poor shape – but considering how narrow they are, they were probably never very safe! The floor of the second story is still secure. All the windows are gone from the house and only part of the front door remains.

### Informants and Interviews

The first evening home I began calling to set up my interviews. Two of the interviews ended in rides to the country to look at rock quarries with might have been a possible source of stone for the house. These interviews were three to four hours in length. The shortest interview was a five minute phone call but the average length was an hour. Invariably when I ended an interview, the informant gave me the name of another person I might contact.

The following is a schedule and summary of my interviews:

1. I called the Herman Lubeck home (present owners of the Stone House) to let them know I was in the area and would be looking at the house. (I had received permission earlier via letter.) I asked about the abstract and was told I

would need to go to the county courthouse to look up anything I need.  
(7/4/77)

2. I called Mrs. Edith Johnson of Stamford and asked about her mother who had kept house in the Stone House. Mrs. Johnson knew very little about it and regretted that they had not asked their mother more questions about that time in her life. (7/6/77)
3. Howard Hewett met me at my husband's parents' home where we discussed the Stone House and his research. My father-in-law then drove us to a rock quarry which might have been the source of the stone and, later, drove us to the Stone House. (7/6/77)
4. Clarence Dake owns the stone quarry mentioned above. He gave us a tour and told us much of the history connected with the quarry. We decided the stone did not come from this quarry as it was much too hard and could not have been easily worked by hand. (7/6/77)
5. My father suggested I call Joe Williams of Stamford to ask about the rock quarries southwest of Stamford which had been mentioned in the history of Stamford. I could tell from the phone call that he might have some good information for me, so I set up an interview. (7/6/77)
6. I met with Miss Grace Capron Johnson who had a scrapbook her mother had made in 1885 which included a history of Harlan County to 1876. She also had the story J. M. Johnson, an early settler of the area, had told her of the Stone House. (7/7/77)
7. I spent one afternoon in the county court house with Mrs. Verne Dahlstrand searching through old records. The abstract was not available to me and I greatly appreciated the help in this part of my research. Mrs. Dahlstrand is a real estate agent and has had the experience of drawing up many abstracts. Her family was among the first settlers in this area so she had both the knowledge and the interest I needed for my research. (7/7/77)
8. I interviewed Bill Dunlay and Ernie Kuhl who were in the authors of the Orleans Centennial. (7/7/77)
9. I called Neal Roberts who at one time had inquired about the possibility of obtaining the house for the local historical society. He had done no research on the house. (7/7/77)
10. I met Joe Williams in Stamford's local café for coffee. It was a very interesting and worthwhile visit. My father drove us to the country to look at rock quarries and stone foundations his father had built. The tape of the interview contained so many stores of his childhood when we were finished that I sent it to his son. (7/8/77)

11. I visited Miss Mabel Aggson, author of the Stamford History, in the hospital. She knew little more about the house than what she had already written. (7/8/77)
12. I called Mrs. Lois Tams who is presently writing another history of Stamford. She had mailed what information she had to Lincoln. (7/9/77)
13. I received a letter from my husband's uncle, Tuck (M.L) Bose who mentioned that his grandfather who had lived north of the Stone House and was a stone worker may have helped build the house. (7/11/77)
14. I called another uncle of my husband's, Bud (C.A.) Bose who has done much research on the history of the Bose family. He informed me that it would have been impossible for their grandfather to help build the house as he had not moved to the area until 1893. (The home was built earlier.) (7/13/77)

My family was extremely helpful in researching this project. My parents, Merle and Amy Johnson and my husband's parents, L. J. and Violet Bose, helped locate many possible informants for me as well as driving me around the country looking for one landmark or another. When I became discouraged over lack of material, they all maintained their enthusiasm and kept me on the trail!

My brother-in-law, Lee Bose, spent one afternoon at the Stone House looking for important points of construction that I might have missed. I appreciated another viewpoint.

#### Equipment Used

One of my biggest disappointments in the project was the photography. My husband is an amateur photographer and we had planned that he would drive to Orleans the weekend of the 8<sup>th</sup> to take the pictures inside and out of the house with his 35mm. I had purchased plenty of Ektachrome film as I knew I would want the slides processed quickly.

As it turned out, my husband could not get home that weekend and I was forced to use an instamatic camera. Ektachrome film is not in demand in a small town so I had a difficult time finding the film I wanted. Finally, only the pictures taken outside turned out as the lighting inside the house was so inadequate so I am lacking pictures of the inside of the house. I had wanted pictures of the molding, hardware, stairway, etc.

I used the tape recorder (cassette) for the longer interviews with Joe Williams and Howard Hewett and took notes for the rest of my interviews. I was not satisfied with the quality of my tapes and if I were to do more field work, I would buy, beg or borrow a better machine.

## **THE OLD STONE HOUSE**

The legal description of the Stone House west of Orleans on Highway 89 is: the Southwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter of Section 13, Township 2 North, Range 20 West of the 6th Prime Meridian, Harlan County, Nebraska.

### History of Ownership

Stephen B. Robinson received the patent for this land from President Rutherford B Hayes on November 5, 1878. Little is known of the Robinson family. Miss Mabel Aggson mentions in her history of Stamford that: “A man by the name of Robinson who homesteaded the farm where the stone house east of town is located, did some prospecting for coal in early days. He sank a shaft about two hundred feet deep into the shale but finally gave up the search.”<sup>2</sup>

It is assumed that Mr. Robinson built the house. There is some problem with dates as the patent was granted in 1878 but Mr. Howard Hewett tells that in 1876, his father “as a lad of seventeen had saved enough money to come visit his sister, who lived east of Beaver City. He had a ticket ride on the train, to its end, which was at Superior, Nebraska, and from there on the Stage Coach. They had stopped at the various little settlements, the last being at “Melrose” which was out on the “Bottom” just NW of present Orleans, but were to change horses at the Stone House, and to see such was such a surprise after the dug-outs and soddies along the way. The folks who lived there took care of the horses to be exchanged, but provided no lodging, nor had meals... his home been in Eastern Iowa, which was heavy timber country, and to see the open prairies was all very new and strange to him.”<sup>3</sup>

Later, in an interview, Mr. Hewett asked, “Why would they go to all that work and move all that stone in and build that prior to that time – before it was ever homesteaded or patented?” The answer to that question may be lost forever with one hundred years gone by.

In October of 1884, Stephen B. Robinson and wife sold the piece of land with the Stone House to William C Brown for \$500.

In November of 1886, Anders F. Johnson agreed to buy the land from William C. and Mary C. Brown for \$1,200 and to assume a \$300 mortgage. Mrs. Edith Johnson of Stamford related that her mother, Mary Berg Hanson had been hired by a Swedish family to stay with the mother and children in Sweden while the father came to America to find the family a home. She later came with the family to America in 1886 and lived in the Stone House with them three months until she married. Mrs. Johnson did not know the name of the family her mother had lived with but her mother always pointed out the house when they passed it. Mrs. Johnson knew that the Swedish family did not stay there long for they never stopped at the Stone House for a visit. Her mother could only speak

Swedish and, the people who lived in the house as long as Mrs. Johnson could remember did not speak Swedish.<sup>4</sup>

The records show that the Anders Johnson family did, in fact, stay only a short time. In October of 1889, Anders and Christina Johnson sold the land for \$1,200 to John H. Willford who agreed to assume a \$600 mortgage. The increased mortgage might indicate that farming had not been profitable in those years and might explain why the Johnsons moved on.

John Willford sold the land in April 1896, to John Gapen who paid \$1,000 and assumed the \$600 mortgage. This transaction took place in Wyoming.

John Gapen probably owned the Stone House when Joe Williams used to go by it as a boy of five. He told me, “. . . Father would go by this house about every Saturday and I could get to come along if I helped with the dishes and one thing and another. Some way or another, I’d have a nickel about every Saturday. I liked to go with my father and I’d get him to let me go. I was born in 1892 and my grandfather died in 1897 when I was five years old and this house was there then. This story about the man falling out the window is the only reason I remember it. He worked at this house and he slept upstairs. He walked in his sleep and he walked out this window and he fell down on these rocks that they had around the house (every house had rocks laying there; they hardly ever hauled them away). “so, the dogs came in and licked him in the face and brung him to. The neighbor dogs all came and one of the dogs barked all night.

“That story came to me as a five year old boy. Every time I went by that house it was spooky. They would tell stories at card parties and I was just a kid trying to remember it all. They would talk for years and years about that fellow falling out of the house!”<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Gapen eventually sold the land to John and Lizzie Caffrey for \$900 and they assumed the \$600 mortgage. (Note the continued decrease in the land value.)

It is no wonder the land changed hands so many times in those twenty years. In reading the accounts of early settlers in Harlan County in the Orleans Centennial, I found story after story of the hardships encountered by the farmers. L. J. Gronquist, who came to the area in 1872, said that, “For the first four years the grasshoppers took everything we planted. After that, drought and hot winds and cinch bugs took the crops at different times,”<sup>6</sup> Another early settler wrote that the Orleans Methodist College “folded due to the panic in the early 1890’s and the seven years of drought that hit the agricultural area.”<sup>7</sup> With such hard times, the families did not seem able to pay off the mortgage and eventually had to move on.

The Stone House was owned by the Caffrey family until 1956 when it was sold to John Lubeck. Most people remember the Stone House as the Caffrey House.

The Caffreys owned the Stone House when Howard Hewett took the trip in 1904 which sparked his interest in that landmark. “My first knowledge and interest came into being in the year 1904, perhaps about the middle of July. Harvest was over; the corn ‘laid bye’,

pastures in such shape that my folks felt we could and should ‘take some time off’ and go ‘clear down’ to Republican City” to visit the relatives. “As the first rays of light streaked the early dawn we were well on our way down the valley, and by noon we were clear down to the Old Stone House with the mammoth shade trees under whose shade we could take our rest and lunch, and Papa was happy to find there was a pump by the horse-trough where we could get fresh water for selves and pump extra for the horses to drink before he hobbled the one before letting them graze along the road.”<sup>8</sup> Mr. Hewett said that his father then told the story of seeing the Stone House for the first time in 1876.



*Earliest photo of Stone House located between Orleans and Stamford in Harlan County, Nebraska  
Caffrey Family in front of their Stone House ca 1910.  
Charles Bernard Caffrey (b. 1834) and Mary Farley Caffrey (b. 1837) seated in center of group.*

Mr. Hewett had interviewed Ab Woodruff in 1963 when Mr. Woodruff was almost one hundred years old. Mr. Woodruff had come to the area with his parents in a covered wagon, He could remember “going to town” (Orleans) a few times a year for supplies and “they always looked forward to that stop in the shade at the Stone House.”<sup>9</sup> The fact that both Nr. Woodruff and Mr. Hewett were impressed by the trees and shade tells us a great deal about the quantity of trees in the area at that time. While many people stopped to rest and rump water at the Stone House, Mr. Woodruff said they never went near the house and that he didn’t have any idea who lived there when they were going back and forth.<sup>10</sup>

Tuck Bose remembers “very little about the Rock House below the hill straight south of our place except that I hauled water for the steam engine to thrash oats and barley in August every year from 1915-1922 and ate at least one meal in it each season. Then in September we came back and thrashed the wheat out of the stack. I remember there were no flies in the house. Most houses had flies in those years. It was too cold for them, I guess. They kept the doors and windows closed. It was just like an air conditioned house.”<sup>11</sup>

The Stone House has remained in the Lubeck family until today and is presently owned by the Herman Lubecks. It has not been lived in for many years now.

In 1963, Howard Hewett of Edison spoke with John Lubeck and representatives of the State Historical Society about preserving the house. Later, some representatives of the historical society in Orleans made some inquiry about preserving the house. So far, no more progress has been made toward this end.

### Construction of the House

There are many mysteries surrounding the construction of the Stone House which, at this late date, will probably never be solved. Why did this man Robinson go to all the work of building a stone house when all his neighbors were content with sod houses or dugouts? Where did the Robinsons live while the stone house was being built? How long did it take to build the house? Did Robinson have help building the house? Why did the family only stay eight years after going to all the trouble of building this house?

There are two theories concerning the source of the stone for the house. One theory is that the stone came from Sappa Peak southwest of Orleans, The other theory is that it came from a rock quarry southwest of Stamford,

### Sappa Peak

Many sources of information point to Sappa Peak as the origin of the stories in the house so at this point it is necessary to give some history of that local landmark.

Sappa Peak was mentioned in a journal by the topographical officer Lieutenant Volkmar June 21, 1869. Lt. Volkmar was a member of a Republican River Expedition led by General Eugene A. Carr. In his journal, Volkmar describes a “rising mound” which

has upon its top a figure of a man spread upon his back, with spear and shield; a medal is attached to his neck; all made, in outline from small pieces of limestone. This mound is about three miles south of the Beaver Creek and is about three miles west of the mouth of that creek. It is supposed to be an Indian place of worship. The mound was named by Lieutenant Volkmar, 5th Calvary who discovered the image, the “Homo Calcis” mound.<sup>12</sup>

Another description of Sappa peak was given in the Omaha Bee in 1875:



This is a very high peak, near the Sappa Creek. It can be seen for a distance of twenty miles, and is often called Guide Peak, as it used to serve as a guide to the trappers and early settlers. There are some queer stories or legends about this peak, one of which tells that it was built by a great Indian chief as a place in which he should be buried. The fact that at least thirty or forty feet of the top is of different soil from the base, seems to support the theory as above. Upon the top there is the figure of a man laid with rock. This figure is about twenty-five feet long, and lies with arms extended. It is quite perfect, and near it is a large heap of stones, supposed by some to mark a grave. This heap of stones and this image may have been the work of the earlier trappers or hunters, but it is certain that their construction is farther back than the knowledge of anyone here. Pieces of Indian pottery are quite abundant upon the peak, and a number of stone arrowheads have been found.<sup>13</sup>

Another history of Harlan County covering "From First Settlement to April 1st, 1876" again describes the figure of the man in stone and goes on to say:

There is also near by the remains of an ancient pottery establishment and some are very fine specimens of Indian or other handiwork, which have been brought away. There seems to be considerable evidence connected with the Stone Age, as numerous lance heads, arrow heads, slugs and other implements are found along the various streams.<sup>14</sup>

J. M. Johnson came to the Orleans area and homesteaded on the Sappa. "He lived in a dugout on the claim until he could build better quarters."<sup>15</sup> Mr. Johnson told Miss Grace Johnson that he had watched Mr. Robinson travel cross country toward Sappa Peak with his wagon and horses and bring his wagon back full of stones. It is believed that these were the stones which made up the monument of the man. Miss Johnson was upset that Robinson had destroyed what was already in the 1800's a historical landmark. I asked her if she thought the other settlers were concerned about this but she thought that people then were too busy trying to survive to give this man a second thought.<sup>16</sup>

While some of the stones undoubtedly came from Sappa Peak, Ernie Kuhl feels that probably only one third to one fifth of the stones came from there as the monument was at most twenty-five feet in length.

Mr. Kuhl also told me that some people feel that the monument was not built by Indians but by Spaniards who had traveled north into Nebraska. This theory was promoted by the fact that the man was once adorned with a necklace of metal around the neck which they felt would more likely have been left by Spaniards than Indians.<sup>17</sup>

#### Rock Quarry Southwest of Stamford.

In her history of Stamford, Miss Mabel Aggson tells that the stone of the Caffrey house came from a quarry on the Newton farm. She said that chimneys were sawed, from the soft rock in this quarry.<sup>18</sup>

Joe Williams can remember several rock quarries Southwest of Stamford, Many knobs had outcroppings of limestone and he showed me one hill in particular which had once appeared white as it was covered with so much stone. Scarcely any stone can be seen on that same hill today, it has all been hauled away. Some of the rocks were so large it took two or three men to roll them over while some were small and square- -about the size of bricks. The limestone in that part of the country could easily be worked with hands and a hammer.

Mr. Williams' father, J. C. Williams, had been raised in Kentucky where they built a lot of rock houses and he had learned the craft as a boy. He then moved to Nebraska and homesteaded south of Stamford. The people would come to the Williams' farm to get a wagonload of rock. The price was around \$1.50 a wagon-load, but Mr. Williams said that books were never kept about such things. If his father was paid, he stuck the money in his pocket, sometimes he wasn't paid. Often the father would accompany the farmer home to help him build the foundation for his house or barn as he was a "rock quarry man" and interested in working with the rock. Some of the foundations J. C. Williams helped build are still standing around Stamford including the foundation of the Bethel Church.<sup>19</sup>

### The House

The Stone House is built of walls approximately nineteen inches thick. Some of the stones used in the house are that wide but for the most part they are smaller and have been fit to make a wall that thick. The problem in deciding the origin of the stone has been that the pieces above the windows and doors appear to be of a yellow stone which might have been post rock not found in the area.

I took a sample of a corner stone (which is of the same material of the pieces above the doors and windows.) A man in the geology department of the University found it to be concrete. He said that it was a very high quality concrete as most concrete that old would have disintegrated by now.

While examining the "stones" in question, my brother—in-law had come to the conclusion that these were concrete and speculated that they had been poured into forms dug in the ground. The edges were probably squared by placing boards in the hole. On the pieces above the doors and windows, you can see the imprints of the saw marks left on the boards, (See slides #1 and 7, Note that some of the larger "stones" are also of the same yellow concrete.)

The house sits at an angle with the front door facing the southwest. There is one more door in the northwest side. There are two windows on the first floor of each side but the southeast which has three windows. The windows are 39 inches by 25 inches and were beveled about six inches on the inside of the house to allow more light to enter. (Slide #11)

The lime for the mortar and the plaster for the house could have been obtained in a couple of ways. An early settler on the Lon McInturf farm made a good quality of lime from stone from the quarry. This lime was used for plastering sod houses and dugouts.<sup>20</sup>

Joe Williams said they could also have made their own lime by pounding the limestone fine and putting it in a six foot square box with water for about a week. It would eventually settle down to a lime mud and they could have used this in mortar or plaster. The finer the limestone was ground, the better. If the limestone was not ground fine enough, the building would not last as long.<sup>21</sup>

Wooden pegs had been forced between the stones at intervals to make it possible to nail the lath against the stone walls so they could be plastered. Partitions were built between the rooms of pine two by fours and lath were nailed to these, (Slide #4) My brother-in-law, Lee Bose, was quick to point out that these were “true” 2 x 4’s and not the skimpy 2 x 4’s you get today at the lumberyard. The plaster had, probably been made from lime, sand and had some hair mixed in with it.

The first floor of the house had a living room, bedroom (Mr. Hewett said this was probably for the “old folks”), a large kitchen (undoubtedly also used for a dining room) and a small room off the back of the kitchen which was probably the pantry. I was impressed with the large double door between the living room and kitchen. (Slide #3)

The stairway was at the back of the kitchen. The stairs were extremely narrow and were winding. Some of them began at 2” and widened to only 6”. Mr. Williams said that these old two story houses were called “woman killers” and if all the stairways were built this narrow it is easy to see why.

The second floor had a large landing and three bedrooms. Each bedroom had one window.

Each of the rooms but one showed signs of having been wallpapered at one time. One of the upstairs bedrooms had been plastered, papered, plastered again and papered again. The only room which did not appear to have been papered was the first floor bedroom which had been painted several times.

There is a chimney of brick in the house. A heating stove was probably located in the living room and a cook stove in the kitchen. There was some question as to whether the Chimney had been there from the start but we found brick built in among the stone on the southeast side of the house so the chimney was surely built as the house was. There were brickyards in Alma and Orleans at the time the house was constructed.<sup>22</sup>

There appears to have been two or three different lean-tos on the northwest side of the house. You can see the indication of such on slide #5. There is also turned post on the corner of this side which indicates that there might have been a porch here at one time. (Slide #5) At the left of the door on this side, the outer wall of the house has been plastered. At one time, the lean-to might have been used as another room to the house rather than a shed. (Slide #6) While some of the stone above the lean-to seems to be more yellow in slide #6, upon close examination it is a rust stain and not the true color of the stone.

The northeast side of the house is very interesting because of the different treatment of the Windows. Rather than a single piece of concrete as had been placed over all the other windows and doors, here the builder tried to make the windows more ornate. (Slides #8 and 9) He has used small concrete pieces to form an arch over each window but the lower left one. On the lower left window, he used a piece of oak. Was this the first side he built of the house and was he experimenting? Or was it the last side he built?

### Conclusion

This was a fine house. To think that someone would take the time to build such a house in the 1870's or early 1880's is incredible. This man not only finished the inside with plastered walls and wooden floors but, also, added the final touches of wood molding. He used a narrow trim around the windows and molding around each door with a nice five inch molding around the double door between the living room and dining room. There apparently was built-in shelving between the dining room and living room which was a nice touch.

There are no members of this Robinson family in the area to "pass down" the history of the Stone House. I believe that other early settlers were probably too busy "proving up" their own homesteads to pay much attention to this man Robinson and his Stone House. Therefore, few stories have been handed down about the house and its original owners and I must "speculate" about the answers to many of my questions.

One might assume that the Robinsons were used to the "finer things" in life because they built this grand home in the midst of sod houses and dugouts. The home must surely have seemed grand in the shade of huge trees on the prairie and with all its windows and rooms. Still, we know that the family must not have been independently wealthy as they found it necessary to mortgage the land even before they received the patent.<sup>23</sup> We also know that Mr. Robinson could not have been afraid of hard work if he was to haul all that stone and build a two story house.

The fact that Mr. Robinson went to the work of prospecting coal makes me think that he might not have been fond of farming and perhaps, in the end, he couldn't face the hardships one had to endure as a farmer on the plains. Whatever the reason, the Robinson family did not stay long in their Stone House.

When the Robinsons left, they left Harlan County a landmark recognized and remembered by people for one hundred years now. Many remember the house for its massive cottonwood trees which formed an arch over the road in front of the house. As one informant said, "The Stone House was always a landmark. Before there were good roads, people gave directions by saying to turn east, west, north or south at the Stone House."<sup>24</sup> Mr. Hewett summed it up: "No, we do not know who built it or when, but we do know (if the word of the pioneers is credible) that it is over a hundred years old and has met the forces of time beyond the memory of any living man. A monument to the Pioneers."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Footnote

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