

# Phelps Helps



Volume 20, Issue 4

December 2012

Meetings held at the  
Nebraska Prairie  
Museum  
on the first Monday  
of the month at  
2:00 PM.

**The public is  
welcome!**

Visit us on the Web!  
Phelps Helps Web Page via  
[http://users.atcjet.net/p/  
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**Holdrege Area  
Genealogy Club  
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## Time To Send In Dues for 2013

It is time to send in your dues for membership in the Holdrege Area Genealogy Club and to receive the Phelps Helps Newsletter for next year. Your support is so important for our club and our Genealogy Library. We continue to add books, microfilm and CDs to our collection.

All members can submit queries for the newsletter and stories that are pertinent to Phelps or Harlan County, Nebraska history. Please let us know if you have a suggestion for an article for our newsletter. Perhaps you would like to write a family story to include in our newsletter.

**Dues for 2013 are \$10**

Our address is Holdrege Area Genealogy Club  
Box 164  
Holdrege, Nebraska 68949



*Holdrege at Night—1907*

## New Members

### **Sharron Hobbs**

**6006 Tumbleweed Terrace**

**Manhattan, Kansas 66502**

I am interested in any family history on George and Agnes (McLellan) Cowdrey family that moved to Williamsburg Township, Phelps County, Nebraska from Reatfrew County, Ontario, Canada in 1880.

### **Bill Squire**

**P.O. Box 468**

**Calistoga, CA 94515**

Can any help us with information on Thomas & Mary Jane (Parnell) Squire who immigrated from England? They had children in Morrison, Whiteside County, IL before moving to Phelps County, Nebraska area about 1875. They were also in Buffalo and Kearney County, NE. Thomas Squire was the postmaster in Sherwood, Cottonwood Township in 1877. His wife, Mary Jane Squire died in 1877. One of Thomas's sons, William Parnell Squire was a civil war veteran and was the Enrolling Clerk for the Nebraska Legislature in 1882. William and his brother George (with Thomas in tow) migrated to Oregon. William and his wife Emma Frances moved into San Jose, California, where Raymond More Squire was born. Raymond married Ethel Rose Wells and had two children, Margery and Raymond Parnell who is the father of William Francis who married Rita Northup and had two children, Jeanette Louise and Melissa Magdalene. Jeanette married a David Pauls and had two daughters, Kayleen and Brenna in Calistoga, CA. Submitted by Rita Squire.

### **Jane Settle**

**858 Heather Way**

**Carlsbad, CA 92011-4733**

I am searching for Information on Walter (1890-1973) and (Minna "Minnie" (Akerson) (1895-1983) Johnson. Their son Evald died at twelve years of age from a Tractor Accident in 1942 in Phelps County, Nebraska. Their Daughter Marilyn married William Wieman on April 3rd, 1942 and moved to California. William Wieman was a soldier at Camp Atlanta, a German Prisoner of War camp in Phelps County, NE. Walter, Minnie and Evald are buried at Prairie Home Cemetery near Holdrege, NE.

### **Ethel Basile**

**Mission House Vue Apt. 200**

**406 East Mission Vue**

**Bellevue, Nebraska 68005**

Ethel Basile has rejoined Holdrege Area Genealogy Club and we have found research items for her on many different families so she has sent information on how some of these families are related:

Ella Reed Rowland's parents are Orlando Reed and Sophia Louisa Brown Reed. Ella Reed married George D. Rowland, his parents were John Rowland and Catherine Ferris. Ella Reed and George Rowland were born in Wisconsin. They are related to John Drummond and Katie Reed Drummond who lived in Alma, Nebraska. The Drummonds both passed away and are buried at Naponee Cemetery, Naponee, Nebraska.

The Porter family is related to the Silver

*(New Members Continued on page 3)*

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family. They lived around Phelps County, Nebraska and Oregon. There was a Silver that married into the McNeil family south of Holdrege, Nebraska. I am doing research on Kenney McNeill. Anyone researching these families might want to contact Ethel Basile.



## **The Fraser Story—by Linda Crandall**

*From the Williamsburg United Methodist Church Centennial Book 1885-1985*

Andrew Fraser and Jane (Steward) Fraser left their home in Scotland to come to America with their son John and daughters, Jennie and Jessie in 1873. They lived for five years in Newark, N.J., where John worked as a master mechanic and met his bride-to-be, Ella Cowan. Eliza had joined her older sister, Ann Cowan, in Newark also in 1873. According to accounts written by Ann's daughter, Annie Gilbert, Eliza and John were married April 8, 1878, and the following evening John left for Nebraska. His health had been poor and he thought working outdoors farming might improve his physical condition. Seven months later, John sent for his family. He was in such splendid health, they hardly knew him. Annie continues the story.

"Father Fraser and John purchased a team and covered wagon. With their purchase of \$150, they planned to migrate farther south and west. They headed for Beaver City, but when they got as far as Republican City, they met people fleeing east in all sorts of rigs and carriages---some were even

on horseback---saying that the Cheyenne Indians were on the warpath. The family returned to Kearney, where they were safe.

"After a scouting expedition, the Frasers found a suitable location south of the Platte River, some 25 miles from Kearney.

"A claim purchased by Father Fraser for \$150 included 160 acres (25 acres broke), plows, cultivators and a harrow. Eliza's husband met a man by the name of Dan Lute who wanted to sell out, so John bought his claim relinquishments, which included, besides the land, a cook stove and other kitchen equipment for \$10. Shortly after the transition took place, the men set about to make a soddie, already existing on the land, more livable. The Soddie was 14 X 20 feet, made of sod, with a hard earthen floor.

"Before the soddie was completely finished, John and Eliza were spending a rainy night in their new dwelling. Early in the evening the roof began to leak, so the young couple made a bed under a heavy table which John had made. The

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roof supports were not strong enough to support the damp sod. As the sod absorbed more and more moisture, the roof gave way. Since the young couple had made their bed under the table, they were uninjured. John dug the way out for this wife and baby.

“Though it was raining extremely hard, the little family started to walk to Father Fraser’s house for shelter. They found three draws or creek beds completely flooded, so John swam them with his wife and child on his back.”

Andrew Fraser was born in Wisham, Scotland, November 15, 1830 and died March 11, 1921 at the age of 91. May Marshall told me stories of how she used to walk to his house when she was a young girl and see the cabinets and furniture he was making. His wife, Jane died August 15, 1891. Their daughter, Jessie married John Grieve and lived in Kearney until she died in 1930. They had nine children.

John and Eliza had five children: Jane, who married Henry Schellhase; Eliza, John Andrew,

Margaret and Willie. Eliza (Lizzie) married Clarence Larson, who was a son of Swedish pioneers, Eric and Emily Larson, about whom the book “Homestay” was written. The author, Edla Gourley, was Clarence’s sister. Clarence and Lizzie had one daughter, Luzetta. She married Earl Pashby and they had three children: Pamela, Sharon Petrozzi who resides in California and Doug, who lives in Lincoln, Nebraska. Eric, Emily, Lizzie and Clarence were all members of the Williamsburg Church. John Andrew married Hilda Lundgren of Kearney. He was a cement contractor and was killed in a truck-train accident in Kearney in 1952. Margaret (Maggie) married Ebbe Sear and lived near Kenesaw, Nebraska. They had one son Harris Dean. William and his wife Millie lived in California and had Willis, Maurice, Arnot, Lucille and Stanley. John and Eliza lived in Williamsburg for 17 years. He was postmaster before moving to Kearney in 1895 to work in the cotton mill. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary April 7th, 1928 in Kearney, Nebraska. Eliza died August 12th 1930 and John on November 16, 1938.

## Attitude

“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our Attitudes.”

*Charles Swindall*

## John Hunt Finds Clues of his Relatives in Nebraska Prairie Museum Displays

Member Jon Hunt of Albuquerque, New Mexico came on his annual visit to the Nebraska Prairie Museum. He saw again his grandmother, Ellen Marie (Carlson) Peterson's wedding dress in the Funk room display, but also discovered his grandparents, Nils Peterson & Ellen Marie Carlson Peterson's wedding portraits on the wall in the meeting room and a picture of his grandfather, Anton Peterson's sod house was also on display.

He states:

"The photo of the sod house is that of my great-great-grandfather, Anton Peterson. I had a Xerox copy, but needed the original, which you

were able to retrieve so quickly. My great-grandfather Charles Peterson is one of his sons.

"Nils Peterson is also a son of Anton, so Nils is my great-grand uncle. (Nils and Ellen had 7 children, but only Rosceal married [Luther Anderson] and they had no children.) I was surprised to see their portraits on the wall and knew immediately who they were. Just mentioned that Ellen's wedding dress is in the Funk display, as I was aware of that, and that I was able to provide you with their wedding photo.

"The museum and research center along with the staff are really top notch!" Jon Hunt



# 1890 Biographical Souvenir

## 1890 Biographical Souvenir of Buffalo, Kearney, Phelps and Harlan County, Nebraska

Mrs. Mary Morgan is the editor and manager of the Valley Beacon, published at Alma, Harlan County, Nebraska. The paper was organized in 1888 and the first issue was April 6th that year. It is now in its third volume. It is published in the interest of prohibition and has done much in the furtherance of that cause. The financial standing of the paper is A Number One. Mrs. Morgan is the wife of John F. Morgan, an old soldier and most estimable citizen, who owns and manages a large stock farm in the southwest part of the county. He and his wife came to Nebraska in 1878, settling in Alma, Harlan County where they have since resided.

Mr. Morgan entered the Union army, November 14, 1861, enlisting in Company A, Sixty-Sixth Ohio. He was in the following battles in addition to many less important engagements: Port Republic, Va., June 9, 1862; Antietam, September 17, 1862; Chancellorsville, May 1, 2 and 3, 1863; Gettysburg, July 1, 2 and 3, 1863; Lookout Mountain, November 25, 1863; Missionary Ridge, November 26, 1863; Ringgold, November 28, 1863; Resaca, May 2, 1864; and all the fighting around Atlanta. He was severely wounded at Antietam, being shot through in the neck and the right shoulder. After he recovered sufficiently to take his place in the field, he was promoted to the First Duty Sergeant and later to

First-Lieutenant to his company. He was honorably discharged at Louisville, Kentucky on July 20, 1865. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan were married, November 1865.

Mrs. Morgan was superintendent of the public schools of Harlan County, from 1881 to the close of 1887. She is now serving her second term as President of the Woman's Relief Corps, G.A.R., of Nebraska. Mr. Morgan is a member and past Commander of Van Meter Post G. A. R. No. 94, at

Alma. Both are active and efficient workers in their respective organizations.

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This couple is buried in Alma Cemetery, Harlan County, Nebraska. John Foster Morgan was born March 16, 1844 in Ohio and died November 14, 1927. Mary (Ashbaush) Morgan was born September 3, 1846 in Ohio and died January 9, 1921. The couple came to Fairfield Township and homesteaded in 1878. The 1885 Nebraska State Census lists Joseph Quin as their 8 year old son. There is also a daughter mentioned in other records named Maggie Morgan. Maggie Morgan was born in 1866 and died in March of 1885 of Typhoid fever and is buried with her parents.

**NOTE:** The Phelps Helps Newsletter highlights Harlan County in this section. With many of our subscribers interested in and from Harlan County, and since Harlan County is a connecting county to Phelps County, the Phelps Helps will publish history information on Harlan County.

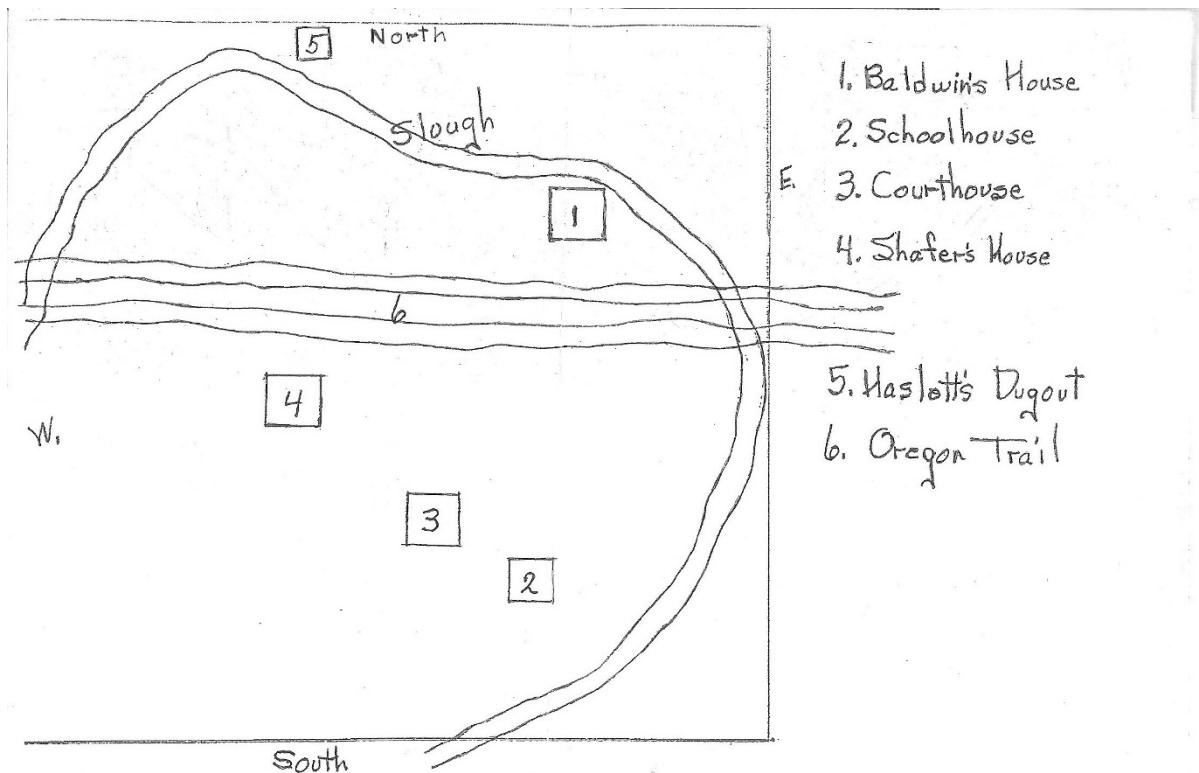
# Williamsburg Township Phelps County, Nebraska

This township has a rich history and is situated on the north central border of our county with the great Platte River on its northern border. The Oregon Trail, later known as the Overland and California Tail came across the northern border of Williamsburg Township. In 1830 the first wagon train consisting of ten wagons crossed the trail. Higher and higher numbers of emigrants traveled the trail and in the year of 1849 twenty thousand people and 60 thousand animals traveled across this area.

The township was named Williamsburg by Caleb Dilworth who started Phelps County in 1873 in honor of his son William. An old

freighter, George B. Skinner who had lived in Lincoln and formerly run a wagon train along the Platte, told Mr. Dilworth that nothing could be raised on the Platte Valley except Indians and alkali and he would give him a dollar for every ear of corn he could raise in the valley west of Fort Kearny. The idea that this valley was not productive was so strong and unanimous among the old freighters that it influenced the railroad people. The railroad people took samples of soil all along the valley and had them analyzed by a chemist in Boston. Even though the chemist reported the soil to be very rich and capable of

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Plat of old Williamsburg, Nebraska  
as it was in 1876.

Drawn by  
Grace C. Johnson  
Directed by her Father Tuctus Johnson

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producing anything that would grow in this climate with the necessary amount of moisture, the railroad company went before congress and obtained permission to change the point of connection with the Union Pacific from the 100th meridian. It was decided that Burlington's new connection with Union Pacific would be Kearney. Because of the change of the route of the Burlington road, the line was never constructed as originally contemplated.

Mr. Dilworth had invested all he had before knowing of the railroads change of plans so with a positive outlook, he laid the foundation to start Phelps County. The first county seat of Phelps County was in Section 14 in Williamsburg Township. The village was also called Williamsburg. Little is recorded about this town but by 1878 there were eight homes built in the area. Early accounts record fires took their toll here and newspaper articles describe burned out houses with only basements left marking where they stood.

In 1875 there were a total of 110 persons residing in all of Phelps County. There was little or no money to run the county. The land tax amounted to \$4 per quarter.

From Rolf Johnson's diary: March 11, 1876: From Williamsburg: "This morning we started for Phelps Center, as the site of the new colony is called, with four loads of lumber. Besides Dahlstrom and I there were two loads of lumber for the erection of the Emigrant House in Phelps Center by Rylander and Hallgren. These teams were driven by Frank Hallgren and Charley Nelson. After crossing the Platte we turned and drove up the valley some twenty miles when

we came to Williamsburg, the county seat of Phelps County containing four buildings – a schoolhouse, courthouse (an unpretentious frame building) and two dwelling houses. One of the latter belonging to A. S. Baldwin, has been opened as a temporary hotel by a man named Albert Hanson and his wife. Here we put up for the night. We found but one other guest and he was an important personage, General Caleb Dilworth, District Attorney and Commissioner of Phelps County. The other house in town occupied by ex-sheriff John F. Shafer."

The courthouse, described as a very small wooden structure, was so small in fact that the safe stood outside of the building. In 1879, the courthouse was moved to the center of the county and the second county seat, Phelps Center began business.

In the 1880s a number of English, Scots and Canadians came to homestead or buy their land.

Thomas H. Marshall, originally from Ontario, Canada, writes in an 1890 family history, "On the 29th day of March 1880, Mr. Marshall purchased 29 tickets for Nebraska, many being for his neighbors who decided to accompany him to the "States." The little colony settled in the valley of the Platte, in the northern part of Phelps County, some purchasing railroad land and other settling on homesteads. They found the country new and very much unlike the one they had left. There were no railroads, no churches, in fact nothing. Mr. Marshall immediately set out to start a Sabbath-school and his efforts were successful."

No doubt, losing the county seat in 1879 sealed Williamsburg's fate, but there was still several families in Williamsburg Township. In

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*(Williamsburg Continued from page 8)*

1880 when John and Gust Marshall moved from Canada, Gust had started a store near Williamsburg post office and later the post office and store were combined under his management. So now the settlers could buy their groceries, get the mail and go to “Literary” all at the same time. There was also a “hall” at Williamsburg where the young folks gathered for occasional dances. It appears that the hall was moved a couple miles south of its original site in later years and used for a meeting hall of the Modern Woodsmen of the World organization for several years and a community meeting place.

Today, the beautiful Williamsburg Methodist Church still stands with church services every Sunday. Beside it is the well kept Williamsburg Cemetery with its memorial stones standing to remind us of the brave pioneers that came to this area to start a new life in the Williamsburg Township.

## **Rolf Johnson Diary**

### **Christmas 1878 in Phelps County, Nebraska**

December 24 – Christmas Eve – Got a letter from Swan Nelson at Wood River in which he tells me that my favorite in that place, Rosa Jesop, is married to Fred Risland.

Spent the evening with Tilda Danielson, Annie Allen and Anna Maria at the Danielson homestead.

The old folks had gone down to School Creek to spend the holidays and the girls had fixed up a Christmas tree (a small straight cedar, which I brought from the bluffs) with candles, gilt paper and rosettes presenting a pretty and attractive sight. We had an elegant supper and a pleasant evening.

December 25th – I slept at the Danielson’s last night and this morning we got up at 5 o’clock and Tilda, Annie, Allen and I went over to the Emigrant House to attend “Jul-otte,” a time honored custom in Sweden. There was quite a press of people and the house was prettily lighted with large number of candles.

The services were over about 9 o’clock a.m. and I went with Nick Brunzell home and stayed for breakfast and dinner.

Took supper with Tillie this evening at Johannes Anderson home. The weather was pretty cold.

December 26 – Father (John Johnson) and Emil and I took a sleigh ride to church. We brought Tilda D., Julius, Oscar and Tilda Carlson with us home to dinner and had a pleasant afternoon. After supper Julius and Oscar went away and I accompanied the two Tilda’s over to Danielson’s where we spent the evening in wild Christmas frolic.

# Team of Horses Tumble Twenty Feet Into Silo

*Date Unknown*

Escapes from injury are miraculous at times, there was such an escape on the farm of John E. Erickson southeast of Funk last Friday when a team of horses backed into a silo which was being dug, toppling over backwards and falling into the pit which was twenty feet deep. Mr. Erickson and a hired man, Fred Gump, was in the newly-dug silo, but succeeded in averting injury to themselves by flattening out against the silo wall when they saw the team falling.

The silo was just being dug, and Mr. Erickson and his man were in the pit digging. The team was hitched to the dump cart above them hauling away the dirt as fast as it could be excavated and hoisted to the surface. Holes had been dug in the ground so that the dump cart would not come back so close to the brink of the silo pit, but in the course of the work these depressions had been filled up with loose dirt from the cart. The team was being backed up so that the cart could be refilled. They came too far, and cart, horses and all went into the pit.

The team came down together, both horses hitting on their backs. Had they come down one at a time, he thought they would have been hurt in the bottom of the pit. As it was, with a twenty-eight hundred pound team, harness, dump cart, two tubs, shovels and two men things were a bit crowded in the pit that was only twelve feet in diameter.

Neither horse was hurt from the fall and after the team got on its feet again they were left standing in the bottom of the pit.

The silo had been plastered as the workmen went down so it was almost ready to be filled. Mr. Erickson said that he had intended gong a few feet deeper, but since this happened they would complete the job next year. The team was down in the pit from early Friday morning until Saturday morning. They were fed and watered in the silo. The horses were never scared while the silo was being filled, but began to show signs of life when their heads began to show above the brink of the pit.

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Holdrege, NE 68949

PO Box 164

Holdrege Area Genealogy Club