

**HISTORY OF HARLAN COUNTY
FOREWARD**

1870 - 1967

I have written a brief History of Harlan County and also include stories of early pioneers and reminiscences of my own. I am indebted to my brother, E.E. McKee, for much of my information, to attorney D.A. Russell for the use of his copy of early Biographies of Harlan County and to the United State Corps of Engineers for the facts concerning the Harlan Dam and Reservoir. I am not a historian, please pardon any errors or omissions.

Jean McKee Rogers (Mrs. Thomas C.)
Alma, Nebraska
April 1967

If additional research is desired, the Nebraska Historical Society at Lincoln has endless information and are very willing to lend their assistance if you inquire at their office.

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HISTORY OF HARLAN COUNTY

Named for Honorable Thomas Harlan

1870 - 1967

Population 1960 census – 5,081

The boundaries of Harlan County were defined in 1871, previous to this time it was a part of Lincoln County. It is bounded on the west by Furnas County., on the north by Phelps County, on the east by Franklin County and on the south by the State of Kansas. It is twenty-four miles square and is divided into sixteen townships namely Springrove, Albany, Scandanavia, Antelope, Emerson, Rubin, Washington, Turkey Creek, Sappa, Orleans, Alma, Mullally, Fairfield, Eldorado, Prairie Dog and Republican City. Each township is six miles square. The average altitude of the County is 2,000 feet above sea level.

The County is well watered by some very fine streams. The Republican River enters the County about eighteen miles north of its southern boundary and flows in a southeasterly direction across the County. On the south side of the river are several tributaries, two of which are more than one hundred miles in length. One of these, Sappa Creek, enters the County about ten miles from the southern boundary and flows east entering the Republican River near Orleans. The Prairie Dog Creek entered the County from Kansas, flows northeast end entered the Republican River at Republican City before the Harlan Dam was built, now it flows into the Harlan Reservoir. On the north side of the river are a number of tributaries. Spring Creek is in the western part of the county flowing almost straight into the river near Oxford. Turkey Creek flows a southeasterly direction across the northeast corner of the County and finally enters the river just across the border of Franklin County at Naponee. Other streams which played an important part in the settlement of the County on the north side of the river are Flag Creek at Orleans, Rope Creek halfway between Orleans and Alma, Cook Creek at Alma, Methodist and Tip Over Creeks between Alma and Republican City, Mill Creek at Original Republican City and Eureka Creek east of Republican City. These streams are all fed by springs and bordered with timber. The most common variety of trees are elm, ash, hackberry, boxelder, walnut and cottonwood.

The Republican Valley is broad, fertile and level as are the valleys of the other larger streams. The uplands are generally slightly rolling with the rougher land in pasture. Buffalo grass is the native grass mostly found in the pastures. However, other varieties of grass are being introduced on farms where rougher ground is being taken out of cultivation and reseeded to grass. This project is under the Soil and Water Conservation office and is called the Great Plains Plan. Level land is found in the northeastern section of the County.

The soil in the valleys or on the uplands is rich and fertile and capable of producing any kind of crops grown in this area if we have enough moisture. In recent years more fertilizer has been applied to the soil and irrigation is used in many areas of the County. Our rainfall in the year 1966 was 19.14 inches. Some years it is greater but we are subject to drought hence the crops are lighter some years than others.

We have ditch irrigation, the water being taken from Republican River reservoirs or other streams. Pump irrigation has become very popular. The wells vary in depth from over two or three hundred feet in the northern part of the county to various depths, some as shallow as twenty feet in the valleys. There is an abundance of water underlying the entire county. The deep wells are very expensive to drill, plus equipment and leveling of the ground will cost as much as \$12,000 or more. Of course, shallow wells are less expensive and the leveling of the ground varies greatly on different farms. Not as much leveling is

required for a sprinkler system. The principal crops of Harlan County are milo, wheat, corn and alfalfa and a few soy beans raised on irrigated land. Livestock is raised on almost every farm. Cattle and hogs play an important part in the income of the farmers.

Previous to 1870 what is now Harlan County was the home of countless herds of buffalo, many elk, deer and wild turkeys. It was the favorite hunting ground of the Indians. Buffalo were so numerous it required little effort to slay hundreds of them. Wild grass and water were in abundance.

The buffalo provided food, clothing and shelter for the Indian, even the bones were used for making spoons, needles, etc., so it is no wonder they relinquished this area only after a long bitter struggle. Many cruel deeds were committed by the Indians, but also many Indian braves were killed and their women and children, also their ponies captured by the soldiers sent to subdue from Fort Hayes, Kansas on the south and Fort McPherson on the north. The danger from attack by the Indians was so great no settlements were made.

The last Indian Massacre in the county was in the summer of 1869. Buck's party of United States Surveyors were attacked while surveying Town 2, Range 19 in Harlan County. All were killed. This massacre took place near the mouth of the Sappa Creek south and west of Orleans. A sort of Indian War had been in progress for many years. Then General Carr stationed at Fort Hays, Kansas assisted by Buffalo Bill as Chief of Scouts and Major Frank North with his famous regiment of Pawnee Scouts, attacked the Sioux and defeated them overtaking them on the Platte River July 11, 1869. They were completely annihilated, hundreds of women, children and ponies were captured. This practically put an end to Indian troubles in Harlan County.

The Homestead Act was approved May 20, 1862 and in affect January 18, 1863. Harlan County land was filed upon under this law. The first homestead in Nebraska was at Beatrice. Under this law it required applicants to be 21 years of age, head of a family, a citizen of the USA or had declared his intentions of becoming a citizen and had not born arms against his country. This of course excluded members of the Confederate Army. The law provided 160 acres of land free except for a small filing charge. The settlers must make improvements, cultivate five acres of land the first year and live upon the 160 acres five years before he could obtain title to it. Later the law was liberalized so that a Union soldier could count the time served in the Civil War against the five year period. Also if you had the money, land could be purchased for \$1.25 per acre. Later a timber claim of 160 acres could be added if you planted 10 acres of trees in four years and a certain percent of the trees must live. Hence a great many of the homesteaders in Harlan County were Veterans of the Union Army of the Civil War.

Pioneers came from two sources to Harlan County - the states to the east of us and from northern Europe. Land grant railroads carried on a very active campaign in Europe. The Burlington Railroad maintained colonizing offices in numbers of European countries. The railroad was eager for the area to be settled with farmers who would be potential shippers to increase the railroad business. The Burlington offered reduced passenger rates over its lines to purchasers of its land and made refunds to them for goods and stock shipped to their new homes. The Burlington was financed by capital from Boston and owned land in the Republican Valley.

The steamship companies also made reduced rates from northern Europe to the United States for prospective settlers.

Harlan County received its share of the immigrants from northern Europe. The Swedish people settled near Ragan, the Belgians south of Stamford. The Germans and the Scotch settled north of Orleans,

Republican City and Naponee. The Irish, English and Scotch were in the areas of Alma and Republican City. We owe a lot to these sturdy industrious people in settling our county.

Our earliest homesteader claims were acquired through the Lowell Land Office east of Kearney. The balance, about three-fourths, were handled through the Bloomington Land Office. The original, Bloomington Land Office is on display at the Frontier Museum at Minden, Nebraska.

In August 1870, a party of men prompted by the glowing reports of the Republican Valley came from eastern Nebraska. The party consisted of 110 men and 9 wagons. Countless herds of buffalo roamed the area. The Sioux Indians had just been driven out and annihilated in the famous battle on the Platte River. Among this group from eastern Nebraska was J. W. Foster who chose a claim on the southeast where Cook Creek joined the river. To J. W. Foster belongs the distinction of building the first real home in Harlan County. He resided on his farm until his death. His request was to be buried on his homestead. His grave remained there until the building of the Harlan County Dam. It would be submerged by the lake so was moved to the Alma Cemetery. On the Foster farm is the place where General Sidney Johnston's army sent to Utah to subdue the Mormons, was camped for sometime. For years pieces of metal etc. left by the soldiers were found on their old camp grounds on the Foster Farm.

F. A. Beiyon and ten or fifteen of his friends remained and built Melrose Stockade and they spent the winter of 1870-71 there. This land is now known as the Korte farm. Indians were camped and engaged in hunting some twenty-five miles west of the Stockade on the Republican River. They gave the Stockade no trouble except stealing a few ponies. It was a large party of Sioux Indians.

Frank Hofnagle, a relative of the Lennimanns now living in Harlan County, was also a member of this group who came from eastern Nebraska. Mr. Hofnagle took a claim west of Orleans. He lived in a dugout as early settlers did. He had been to Kearney City for supplies - he returned to find the Indians had ransacked his dugout. He had one sewing needle, it was gone. He felt he could not stay through the winter without a needle to repair his clothes. He slept in his wagon that night. He returned to his dugout in the morning for his morning prayers. While he was kneeling in prayer, he noticed a shadow cross the sunlight steaming into his dugout door. He knew it was an Indian, but remained kneeling in prayer. The Indian went away. Mr. Hofnagle arose to his feet and looking toward the door he saw his missing needle glistening in the sunshine. This priceless article being found enabled him to stay through the winter and finally prove upon his claim.

Andrew Ruben was also a member of this early group coming from eastern Nebraska to Harlan County in 1870. He was the first settler in what is known as Ruben Township and which township was named in his honor. He bore scars received in his struggle with buffalo of which he killed two or three hundred. One of his accomplishments was building a log cabin for his family. This log cabin has been incorporated into a fine farm home. It is occupied by the Neil Collins family. Mrs. Collins is a great granddaughter of Mr. Andrew Ruben.

Dugouts were just as the word implies, the first homes being dug out of the side of a creek bank or canyon. Sod houses were next. The prairie grass sod was plowed and placed in layers to make a wall two feet thick. The floor would be of dirt. The roof always leaked. When pioneers could afford it the roof and floor were made of native lumber sawed at a mill on the river or some of the creeks. This made quite a comfortable one room home with perhaps two windows and one door. Walls were plastered when possible. These sod houses were cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Stables were also made of sod to protect the stock. Rattlesnakes were often found in these dugouts and sod houses.

I remember of Mrs. A. H. Gould, who with her husband took a claim on Tipover Creek in 1871, telling her experience. One day she heard the rattle of a snake, turned and saw a rattlesnake coiled on the shelf above her baby lying on the bed. Fortunately she rescued the baby, then killed the rattler. Another day Mrs. Gould was frying pancakes. An Indian appeared in the door of her dugout. She was terrified. The Indian pointed to the pancakes then to his mouth. She quickly fried all the batter for him. He grunted and went away peaceably. Joseph Gould with his son Albert came to Harlan County in 1871 in a covered wagon. They had reached the creek west of Republican City - no bridge - the banks were steep and in attempting to cross the tongue was broken out of the wagon. With only 25 cents in their pocket they were compelled to stay and homestead. The creek was named "Tip Over" because of the Goulds experience. Garvin Gould came the following year (1872) and homesteaded nearby.

Mr. J. S. Gifford had taken a homestead across the river from where the Goulds were unloading. There were very few trees along the river then. They looked across seeing some women in the Gould party. They immediately waded across the river to see them. White women were very rare then, so you can picture the excitement.

Also In Februarys 1871, a party was organized in Cheyenne, Wyoming to explore the Republican Valley. They came to Fort Kearny. A guide brought them to Turkey Creek which they followed to the Republican River then west to Foster's house on the banks of Cook Creek. It was the only house outside the Melrose Stockade in the County. They were greatly impressed with the Republican Valley. They returned to Cheyenne, organized a large group and retraced their steps to the Republican Valley and Harlan County. This group arrived later in 1871. In this group was Thomas Mullally who located on Turkey Creek and for whom Mullally Township was named. Thomas Harlan for whom Harlan County was named and N. P. Cook for whom Cook Creek was named were in this party. The City of Alma was named for Alma Cooks, their daughter. The Cooks homesteaded on Cook Creek at the east end of the present Main Street of Alma. Mr. W. P. Carr came also with the group from Cheyenne in the spring of 1871. He was one of the very first settlers in Alma.

When the Cheyenne group reached Fort Kearny they were joined by the Blum brothers from Wisconsin who were coming to Harlan County to take homesteads. One brother died but Carl Blum and wife, the former Anna Bartelt, lived many years on their homestead one mile west of Alma. Mrs. Blum was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Bartelt. Mrs. Bartelt was the first white woman to settle in Harlan County. The Bartelts came in 1870. Their daughter Mary born in 1871 was the first white child born in Alma Township. The Bartelts, wishing to go farther west and seek a newer frontier, drove oxen to their new frontier home in Spokane, Washington in 1877. The Carl Blums erected a log cabin on their homestead as they were near the Republican River where timber was available. Indians often came to their home begging for food. They were afraid of the Indians and often shared their food supply to be sure of their friendship. Some early settlers had been scalped when they refused to share their food with the Indians. However, Blums were never molested by the Indians. Their descendants have contributed much to the settlement of Harlan County. Mr. and Mrs. Carl Blum's daughter, Mrs. Barney Kauk, was born in their covered wagon near Fort Kearny while on their way from Wisconsin to Harlan County. At the recent Centennial Style Show in Alma, Carolyn Kauk wore an original house dress of her great grandmothers and displayed a strand of beads now in the possession of Mrs. Calkins which were traded to Blums by the Indians in return for food.

John Nicholas Neil Bear, W. O. Coe and Wm. Shipman and their families came in covered wagons pulled by oxen from Freeport, Illinois to Harlan County arriving June 2, 1872. They took claims on Rope Creek halfway between the present towns of Orleans and Alma. Their first homes were dugouts along banks near the creek. In a few years all three erected comfortable brick homes for their families. Charles Bear remembered by many people was the first white boy born in Alma Township who lived to be grown.

Charles was born in their covered wagon, just twenty three days after their arrival on Rope Crook before they had completed their dugout. Sacks of seed corn brought with them from Illinois were the only seats available.

The McArthurs were early settlers on upper Methodist Creek. One day Mr. and Mrs. McArthur had gone to Republican City for supplies leaving two children at home. No sooner had they left than a band of Indians rode into the yard and camped. When the McArthurs returned they were terrified when they could not find the children. They finally made the Indians understand their concern. One big Indian said, "Squaw take papoose, go up creek." The McArthurs hurried up the creek and found their children hiding in the bushes unharmed.

Mr. George F. Gehley came to Harlan County in 1871 and took his claim in Orleans Township. He was born in Prussia and came to America with his parents in 1856. They lived in Mississippi and Iowa. He enlisted in the Union Army as a Teamster and from Illinois came to Nebraska in 1871 and settled near the Melrose Stockade. He was the first U. S. postal official in the county being sworn in July 1871. Mr. Gehley carried the mail from Adobe Town near Fort Kearny to settlers of Harlan County at 15 cents per letter. This mail service was highly important to the first settlers. Later a Star Route was established.

Prairie Dog Creek, having a good steady flow of water, with some timber on its banks and luxuriant grass attracted many of the earliest settlers in the county. Two of these early homesteaders from Iowa came together, Gilbert R. Parish and his brother in law, George W. Gipe. In June 1871, they took claims in Prairie Dog Township. Mr. Parish erected a log cabin 14x18 feet. Buffalo, deer and wild turkey furnished their meat. Indians from Otoe, Pawnee, Sioux and Winnebago tribes roamed through the valley in the summer on their hunting expeditions and frequently camped on the banks of the Prairie Dog near his cabin. Having lived among the Chippewa Indian's in upper Michigan, he learned their habits and knew how to deal with them. Consequently, he was never afraid or molested beyond their begging and stealing trifles. His first crop consisted of fifteen acres planted to corn, potatoes, squash and melons. He was bothered greatly by the Indians pulling off the corn tassels and sticking them in their horses' bridles for ornaments and carrying off the melons and squash through curiosity. He sold milk at 10¢ per quart and butter at forty cents a pound to the regular soldiers passing through. The first year he had to go to Beatrice, one hundred seventy-five miles for his mail, requiring eight days to make the trip. He purchased the first bill of good ever bought in Republican City. His son was the first white boy born in Harlan County.

Mr. George Gipe, as stated before, came from Iowa to Nebraska settling on the Prairie Dog in June 1871. The first year he broke out six acres, but on account of the drought and Indians, was unable to raise much of a crop. In 1874 he had twenty-two acres of crops totally destroyed by the grasshoppers. 1874 is known as the "Grasshopper Year". They came in a vast dark cloud like a storm, swarming over the country, destroying all vegetation in their way. They settled in the tops of the trees in such numbers that the limbs would bend over and often break off entirely.

Mr. Jabez Cobledick, an early settler on the Prairie Dog, spent several years roaming the world, England, Australia and the China Sea. He landed in America in 1848 and in 1871, although fifty-five years of age, decided to leave Illinois and go west to grow up with the country. He was accompanied by his son Jabez S. who also took a claim beside his fathers homestead. They suffered the hardships of the early settlers drought and grasshoppers. Buffalo and deer were their source of meat. After the country became more settled, the rains came more often and making a living became easier. The Cobledicks had a family burying ground upon their homestead. This land is all under water since the dam was built. The graves were moved to the Alma Cemetery.

In 1872, J. F. Ziegler joined the homesteaders on the Prairie Dog. He had served in the Union Army, lived a few years in Illinois and came to Nebraska. He came by rail as far as Sutton then walked up the Republican Valley to Harlan County. He devoted most of his time the first year to hunting, killing one elk and fifty buffalo. He dried the meat, selling it and the hides and thus made quite a sum of money to help finance the first years on his claim. He was very active in politics and held numerous offices in his township. Among other men who came in the early seventies to the Prairie Dog area were George W. Joyce, E. H. Kiser, Print Pond, Milt Irwin and R. E. Heth.

Mr. John F. David was the first man to take a claim in the north half of the county. He came from Illinois in the spring of 1872. He saw the prairie black with buffalo. At one time there were 800 Indians camped on his homestead. During the terrible Easter blizzard, April 13, 1873, his stable was buried under fifteen feet of snow. He organized the post office at Bainbridge and was postmaster five years. Most of his land lay in Turkey Creek Valley.

Mr. John T. Rhinehart and Ferdinand L. Seick came among the early settlers also Griffey Van Dike in the northern part of the county. They all had great courage. The drought and grasshoppers of the early seventies were the worst hardships. These men located in Washington and Mullally Townships.

Mr. William Schluntz came from Oldenburg, Germany to Plattsmouth, Nebraska, then to Harlan County in 1873. He homesteaded on Turkey Creek nine miles northeast of Original Republican City. The original sod house was located 1/4 mile south of the present house. One of their early hardships was surviving the grasshoppers. They heard the grasshoppers were coming and spread sheets over their garden, hoping to save the garden. The grasshoppers ate the sheets as well as the garden.

One of the first homesteaders in the eastern part of the county was H. M. Luce early in 1871. He chose his claim just east of the original town site of Republican City. He was elected the first County Superintendent of Harlan County. He also had the first drug store in Republican City. His nephew C. A. Luce came to Republican City in 1878 and took over the drug business. C. A. Luce was very prominent in politics serving on village and county boards and in the State Legislature in 1885.

Mr. G. T. Vermillion came to Harlan County in 1878 taking a claim in the Bethel neighborhood. His mother and stepfather King came later. In 1880 he was married to Emma Cleaver. Their first home was a sod house. They experienced two serious prairie fires. The first year they raised 25 bushels of wheat which sold for \$1.00 per bushel. Money was scarce in those days. Mrs. Vermillion knit fly nets for the horses, sold them and made \$35.00. The Vermillions later moved to Alma where Mr. Vermillion traveled for a wholesale grocery company of Omaha. They were among the early members of the Christian Church.

The Cleavers came to Harlan County in 1879 from Waukegan, Illinois, making the trip in two covered wagons. They too took a homestead in the Bethel neighborhood. Then the family later moved to Alma. Mr. George Cleaver was one of the early Clerks of the District Court and also operated the Burr Hotel in Alma.

Mr. J. A. Piper came to Alma in 1872. He was just twenty-one years old and able to file on a claim north and east of Alma. He became active in county government. He held the offices of Sheriff, County Clerk and County Superintendent of Schools. He organized the county into school districts while serving as County Superintendent. He taught several years in the county, two years in the Alma School. Mr. Piper married Jennie Proctor in 1877. After leaving Alma in 1894, they moved to Lincoln. In after years, one of their daughters, Elsie Ford Piper was the Dean of Women at the University of Nebraska. Even after moving to Lincoln, Mr. Piper made frequent trips to Harlan County. He never lost interest in this area.

In the beginning there were only three county commissioners. Today seven men comprise the county board. There have always been sixteen townships. The first county board meetings were held in the homes of the county commissioners which, of course, were built of sod. For a few years county business was transacted in Melrose. The first courthouse in Alma was furnished by Frank Shaffer. He had built a two story house on his homestead 1/2 mile east of Alma. He donated the upper story which was moved to Alma and placed on the lots east of the present Christian Church. This was in the year 1875. This building was used for three years. John Guyer built a log store in 1877 and the county business was conducted in the Guyer building for two years. In the year 1880 Alma Township constructed a two story frame Courthouse on the lots where the Dr. Kerr house now stands. This building was 16x24 feet with a 12 foot ceiling. In the year 1888 the first brick Courthouse was erected by Alma Township and presented to the County. It was later stuccoed, the steeple removed, a furnace installed to replace individual heating stoves in each office and lights and water added. The yard was in alfalfa first, but later seeded to bluegrass. This building was erected in the center of the square where the present Courthouse stands. It served the County well for seventy-six years. It became inadequate to meet the county's needs. The county offices were moved into downtown buildings, the old brick building was demolished. Our now modern Court House was constructed in the years 1964 and 1965. The approximate cost of the new building was \$290,000 plus furnishings \$30,000 making a total cost of \$320,000. The County Board had ruled a certain amount to be set aside each year in a Building Sinking Fund., This amounted to \$167,598. Bonds were voted to the amount of \$137,000. Total building fund \$304,598. Cost of building was only about \$15,402 more than estimated. Mr. Chris Lien of Holdrege, Nebraska, was the general contractor. The county offices were moved from the temporary downtown offices into the new Courthouse on February 1, 1966. The new structure is of modern design, air conditioned and has a very efficient lighting system. The District Court Room has beautiful walnut paneling used on the walls and is carpeted. There is a reception room equipped for serving light refreshments. This room is available to all county organizations. The vaults have marvelous storage space for all county records. The jail is within the building adjacent to the sheriff's office. The building is very adequate and very complete in every detail. It was necessary to remove all of the trees in the court yard to construct the new building and they were also too large for the style of architecture. The yard has been landscaped in keeping with the new building.

Consumers Public Power furnishes electric current for Stanford, Orleans, Republican City and Huntley. Alma has a municipal power plant.

The natural gas used throughout the county comes from pipeline of the Kansas Nebraska Gas Company. Orleans, Stamford, Republican City and Alma have their own water systems. The water is supplied by each town's city wells.

Orleans has a municipal sewer system. The United States government constructed sewer systems for Republican City and Alma at the time the dam was built.

Every town in the county is putting forth a great effort in planning many special festivities celebrating the Centennial of our State. Something has been planned for almost every week by some town or community. Orleans is having an Old Settlers Picnic in June. In years gone by The Old Settlers Picnic was the event of the year in Orleans. Stamford had a huge crowd in April honoring their oldest citizen, Mr. A. J. Woodruff, who is 104 years old. One big disappointment for Mr. Woodruff, who is now being cared for in the Senior Citizens Home at Oxford, was being unable to attend. Huntley and Republican City have several special affairs planned. Alma's special project is to have an old fashioned "Fourth of July Celebration". Some of the earlier events which have had a place in the history of our county are as follows:

The first Fourth of July Celebration was held in 1871 in the J.W. Foster grove southeast of Alma. Thos. Murrin read the Declaration of Independence and N. P. Cook gave the oration. Fifty-six persons were in attendance. A big dinner, all seated around one table, was supervised by Mrs. Reynold and Miss Susie Friday. The day was saddened by the first death. Mr. Wm. McBride was deliberately shot, by a drunken soldier named Costello, during a controversy. Costello was stationed at Melrose Stockade with Captain Spaulding's Company of U. S. Cavalry. Location of McBride's grave is unknown today, he was buried somewhere in northwest Alma.

The first prairie sod broken in the county was by Thos. D. Murrin who came with the group from Cheyenne in 1871 on land later known as the John E. Myers farm southwest of Alma.

The first grain mill was conducted by Carl Boehl in 1873 on his homestead on Sappa Creek. W. P. Carr has been credited with making the first shingles in the county in 1871. His mill was located in Alma. Early in 1872 Joseph Snyder had a shingle mill at Republican City. These shingle mills made it possible for the sod houses to have a shingle roof which was a great protection against rain and snow. The sod roofs were not durable and often leaked badly.

The first sermon preached in the County was also in Foster's grove on July 4, 1871. Rev. John Whiting of the Free Methodist Church was the minister. He was a one armed veteran of the Civil War. His homestead was located on Methodist Creek.

The first wedding took place March 1, 1872. John Ballou and Mary Smith were married, Rev. John Whiting officiating.

The second death in the County was George Waudell. He was accidentally shot while hunting. He was the grandfather of the present Rev. Morris Mathews of the Evangelical Free Church in Alma.

The third death was a Mr. Burdick gored to death by a buffalo. The first newspaper, the Sentinel, published in the county was in Orleans in 1873. It was moved to Melrose for a short time and then moved back to Orleans and was known as the Republican Valley Sentinel. In 1875 the third paper in the County, the Republican City News, was published. Alma had the fourth newspaper the Alma Standard, published first in 1879. A number of other newspapers have been published in the County, among them the Alma Record, the Ragan Journal, the Republican City Ranger and the Stamford Star. Today we have one paper, the Harlan County Journal, published in Alma. It was consolidated with the Alma Record, July 1, 1925, the Orleans Chronicle, April 1, 1961, and the Stamford Star, May 1, 1964. The Harlan County Journal was established March 3, 1897. The years 1904 to 1940 were edited by H. C. Furse, His sons the Furse Bros., H. G. and G. T. Furse, have published the Journal since 1940. The Journal has a wide circulation within the County and many non-resident subscribers. It covers the important events and local news in a very creditable manner.

Mr. R. L. Keoster completed the first telephone line in the County June 16, 1899. It extended from Alma to Orleans. Through the years he expanded to build exchanges in Alma, Orleans, Republican City, Beaver City and Bloomington in Nebraska, Long Island and Woodruff in Kansas. Rural lines were constructed on all said exchanges. It was called the Farmers and Merchants Telephone Company. In those days the telephone operators at the switchboards were the chief source of information. Upon inquiry, they would give the correct time, weather report, location of fires, keep track of the doctors calls when they were out of the office on house calls, or any important event in the community. Today we have modern dial systems and can dial direct almost any town or city in the USA yet at times we miss the contact with the operators at the switchboards.

FIRES

All towns in the County had many serious fires in the early days. The buildings were frame and no fire fighting equipment. The last major fire was the Zulauf Furniture Store in Alma in April 1961. The fire was kept under control in the one building. The fire departments from Orleans, Republican City, Franklin and Holdrege came to help and saved the rest of the block. All city fire hydrants available were used. A hose line was laid to the lake and water pumped from the lake. It was the cooperation of all fire departments which kept the fire from spreading.

Several rural areas have been organized and have fire fighting equipment. Thus the county is very well equipped today and trained firemen to use the equipment. Residents feel much more secure.

Prairie fires were numerous in pioneer days and would travel the length of the County or until they would reach a creek. Fire guards were plowed around the improvements, hoping to check the prairie fires and they did help. Sometimes these prairie fires even threatened the towns.

ROPE CREEK WRECK

The worst wreck in railroad history in Harlan County was April 27, 1888. A flood had weakened the bridge. The train approached, the engineer saw the water over the track, but thought he could cross the bridge safely. The engine did make it across, but many coaches were derailed as the bridge crumpled. The number of lives lost has always been a question. Scandal says a man who was noted for doing unlawful things for the railroad disposed of many of the bodies especially Mexican workmen on the train. Thus the railroad was saved thousands of dollars as no proof of death by the wreck.

KIDNAPPING

The only kidnapping by the Indians happened on Prairie Dog Creek. Gilbert Parish had homesteaded along the creek. They had a small boy named Byron. The Indians came through one day and picked up this small boy playing near the cabin. The family discovered the boy was gone and searched everywhere, but could not find him. The next morning Mr. Parish went farther west a few miles up the creek where a band of Indians were camped. He found Byron sitting in an Indian Tepee unharmed. The Indians gave the boy back to his father without any trouble. This Byron Parish is the father of Abe Parish, the auctioneer in Alma.

ORIGIN OF NAMES OF CREEKS

Eureka Creek east of Republican City was named by H. M. Luce. He came from Adobe City, a frontier trading post near Fort Kearny, exploring the Republican Valley looking for land to homestead. He was so impressed by the area of a creek flowing into the river, he exclaimed, "Eureka, I've Found It. This is My Home." So the name of Eureka was given to the creek.

Mill Creek within the town of original Republican City was used for power for the first saw mill and grain mill and was called Mill Creek for this reason.

Cook Creek at the east edge of Alma was named in honor of N. P. Cook who came with the Cheyenne group in 1871 and took his claim along the banks of this stream.

Methodist Creek was named after the Methodist preacher, Rev. John Whiting, who preached the first sermon in the County July 4, 1871. His claim was located along the banks of this creek. There was some

dissension as to whether the creek should be named Whiting or Friday, another homesteader. A compromise was reached and the creek was named Methodist, an honor bestowed on Rev. Whiting for his work in the Free Methodist Church in very earliest days.

Rope Creek received its name because the stream winds and twists as a rope and because its banks were so steep. The wagons had to be pulled up the banks with ropes.

Turkey Creek was named because of the many flocks of wild turkeys being found in the area.

Prairie Dog Creek received its name because of the many prairie dog towns along its banks.

Crow Creek had so many crows nests and crow roosts in the trees along its banks it was called Crow Creek by the early settlers.

General Victor Vifquain who came with the party from Seward County and created the Melrose Stockade is responsible for the name of Flag Creek which flows through Orleans. The general camped on this stream on July 4, 1871. To be patriotic he fastened the U. S. flag to a tree and thus the creek became known as Flag Creek.

Sappa Creek is an Indian name meaning Beaver. When the government named the two creeks Beaver and Sappa, Beaver Creek was given the English name Beaver and the Sappa was given the Indian name Sappa.

The Republican River was named for the Pawnee Indian, Republic.

The early post office of Bainbridge was named for Bainbridge, Ohio. J. F. David was the postmaster and his name was accepted as name for the new post office, but J. W. Walker suggested name be changed to Bainbridge his old home town in Ohio. His suggestion was accepted. Bainbridge is not in existence today. It was located east of Huntley.

Eva Post Office was named by Frank Stevens for an old sweetheart he left in New York. It is not in use today. It was a few miles southeast of Ragan.

BLIZZARDS, SNOW AND DUST

One of the worst blizzards recorded was on November 16, 1871. It had been a beautiful warm autumn and that day dawned equally as fine. But by noon the clouds became very heavy, snow was falling with a high wind which lasted three days and nights. Many buffalo hunters perished, One group returning from Grand Island abandoned all supplies, mounted their horses and fled for their lives. Others rolled in their blankets, the snow drifted over them and they survived. Some were not so fortunate and their bodies were never found. Five men perished on the divide between the Republican and Solomon Rivers. Cattle were lost by the hundreds, drifted ahead of the storm into canyons and frozen. Their carcasses were not found until spring when the snow melted. Then the great Easter blizzard, April 13, 1873, took its toll. Drifts were fifteen feet high from the storm. The blizzard of 1888 is called the Schoolhouse Blizzard as children were marooned in the schoolhouse for three days. In the years 1948 and 1949 we experienced the worst snow storms since 1888. Our city streets were next to impassable most of the winter. The snow was piled so high at the sides you could not see a car driving down the street.

Dust storms, in pioneer days, often lasted three days and nights forcing people to stop at farm houses for shelter. But the dust blizzards in the thirties were the worst of all. A dense dust cloud would appear

suddenly with very high winds and last for hours. The dust was drifted as snow along fences, in yards and porches, penetrated all houses and business buildings. These dust blizzards covered the entire middle-west, ruining much of the land which took years of care to restore its fertility. In the past thirty years the dust storms have been much loss severe, disagreeable at times, but not so damaging.

FLOODS

The Republican River, Prairie Dog Creek and Sappa Creek were always flooding the bottom land. Some of the worst floods occurred in the years 1911, 1915 and 1935. In the year 1911 we had eleven inches of rain one, afternoon from McCook to Red Cloud. The River was from bluff to bluff, water over the top of freight cars on the railroad track. The railroad was washed out for miles, bridges gone and damage to the land. Again in 1915 the River was out of its banks five times. It changed its course completely south of Alma, leaving the bridge and making a new channel farther north. No crops on the river bottom that year. Railroad was again washed out very badly. Bridges were gone in so many places. Then in 1935 came the most devastating flood. This flood came as a wall of water eight feet high in the night from eastern Colorado to Superior. There were 104 people drowned between McCook and Alma. Twenty-five people lost their lives in Harlan County. Oxford, Carter and Orleans areas were where the greatest loss of life occurred. Alma had one woman, Mrs. August Bohling, drowned. Some bodies were not found for days partly buried in the sand, other bodies were never found. Dead livestock were everywhere. The Nebraska National Guard came in to help find the bodies of the dead, burn dead livestock and help clean up the land in general. Of course many farm homes, barns, furniture, implements, trees and bridges were all washed away. The water was from bluff to bluff, the roar so great you could not converse with the person beside you standing on the edge of the rushing torrents of water. Everyone was inoculated against typhoid fever. The American Red Cross spent millions of dollars in our county helping rehabilitate the people who suffered so desperately in the flood.

The most recent destructive flood was on the Sappa Creek the summer of 1966. The worst damage was done in Stamford and on down the creek bottom until it flows into the Republican River. The water was the highest known to the early settlers. Crops were destroyed, however, the greatest damage was to the railroad. The tracks were upended or washed out many feet, the grade was ruined for miles. Two young men in a car were forced to abandon their car and swim for their lives. The railroad put a big gang of men to work repairing the grade and tracks. With all the modern machinery and equipment the railroad was in operation again within a few weeks. The flood occurred too late in the season to replant the crop where the water stood too long, so some of the farmers suffered a great loss.

DROUGHTS

Some of the worst droughts were in the years 1873 to 1877, also 1894 was a very serious drought and again in the 1930's. Strangely the drought and national depressions seemed to go hand in hand. And, of course, the grasshoppers came in 1874 and again in the thirties, but not in black clouds devouring everything as in 1874.

THEN AND NOW

Harlan County has had many good years of crops and our farmers through the years have prospered. Nebraska weather has always been unpredictable but the farmers have learned better how to cope with it by newer methods of tilling the soil as summer fallowing, rotating crops, etc. Farming methods have changed drastically. First we had oxen to pull the breaking plows. Then horses were used to pull all farm machinery. Now we have huge tractors used for power using diesel or gasoline for fuel. Self propelled combines, one man harvesting his small grain is a great difference from the hand cycle or scythe, reaper

binder or header. Horses are used only for pleasure as riding in a parade or being a member of a saddle club. Automobiles, trucks and pickups are part of the equipment on every farm. Hybrid seeds and newer improved varieties of small grain are used by every farmer. REA has revolutionized farm life. Electric power for pumps elevating grain, also for drying grain are among its many uses. Electric lights are installed in houses, yards and barns. Skelgas or natural gas is used for heating or cooking on many of the farms. Modern homes, modern household appliances and modern farm equipment are being used today. The early pioneer used buffalo chips or cow chips for fuel. They made a hot fire, little blaze but lots of ashes and an odor. It was very time consuming to keep enough chips ahead for bad weather or carrying out the ashes. One pioneer said, "The only time I ever see my wife is when we meet as I am carrying in the chips and she is carrying out the ashes."

The very first means for a light was a piece of cotton cloth twisted and placed in a shallow dish of grease and lighted. Then came candles, a better light. Today candles are used for decorations or special candle light services. Next in use was the cord oil lamp. This was a big improvement but it was a daily task to fill the lamps, trim the wicks and keep the chimneys shining. Then, glass chimneys were very fragile, one drop of water splashed against a hot chimney meant it was broken. Bracket wall lamps were used in the kitchens and hanging lamps in the "parlor". Some of those hanging lamps were very beautiful and are now quite a collector's item. The gasoline pressure lamps were quite an invention. They made a splendid light but had to be "pumped up" with a hand pump. The mantles used were very fragile. Today we have many kinds of electric lights, fluorescent lights, indirect lights, different strength bulbs, floor lamps, table lamps, ceiling lights, anything you could wish. There is a T. V. in every home.

Air conditioning is used to cool all the business houses and the majority of our homes. Central heating, gas furnaces have taken the place of coal furnaces, heating stoves and baseburners. Charcoal grills are used for outdoor cooking, instead of the campfires. Coal is not even for sale at the lumber yards.

Our early pioneers had trouble following a dim trail across the prairie. Then roads became more common, but were mostly either too muddy or too dusty or drifted full of snow. Gradually section lines were established, fences were built and roads were on a more permanent basis and even graded. The first gravel roads were a big step to keep us out of the mud. Automobiles were becoming so common better roads were demanded. Today we have paved highways from north to south and east to west across our county with paved spurs leading into Huntley and Ragan.

Every mail route is graveled. The mail is brought every day except Sundays and holidays by Rural Free Delivery to every farm home. In the early 1870's mail was so uncertain. It meant a long hard trip to Beatrice first, then to Kearney, until the railroad was completed about 1880.

Reading material was very scarce in the earlier days. Today we have a splendid library in both Orleans and Alma. Another great advance in Harlan County is now a member of the Central Regional Library Project. The center of the Project is at Holdrege. The Bookmobile visits every town in the County. A stop is made at the schoolhouses in Stamford, Huntley, Orleans, Republican City and Alma and a designated place in Ragan since the school is closed in Ragan. The Orleans and Alma libraries are on the itinerary also. 2020 books were checked out in March 1967. Books are available from any library and the Nebraska Public Library Commission at Lincoln. The Holdrege Center has a complete record of all books available and a direct line to Lincoln to order all books immediately.

DOCTORS

Doctor John S. Hoyt was the first doctor in the County. He came from Missouri to Melrose in 1872, opened a drug store and practiced medicine for three years, then moved to Orleans and opened an office

for the practice of medicine and surgery. Other doctors came to Orleans through the years. Among them were Dr. W. H. Banwell, Dr. J.O. Hoffman whose son Lloyd became a very fine surgeon in Omaha, Dr. R.W. Rundle, Dr. A. J. Gardner and Dr. K. O. McGrew who is practicing today in Orleans.

Dr. J. N. Campbell will long be remembered as a very fine doctor in Stamford. Dr. Dan R. Rogers practiced forty-six years in Ragan. Dr. E. E. Rider was associated with Dr. Rogers when he first graduated from medical school. He later practiced at Bertrand and Lincoln. Dr. Dan R. Rogers was given a reception by the Harlan County Medical Association honoring him for fifty years of practicing medicine. Doctors from Omaha, Lincoln and all over the state were in attendance. Dr. Rogers had practiced four years in West Virginia before coming to Nebraska.

Doctor George Deans began the practice of medicine in 1874 in Republican City. Among the later doctors were Dr. J. W. Vallicott, Dr. E. Talcott and Dr. J. L. Pennington.

At one time Dr. Massey practiced in Huntley and Dr. Hoylman in Naponee.

Dr. Samuel Sadler came from Hastings to Alma in 1881 and began the practice of medicine. Dr. George Deans moved from Republican City to Alma in 1882. Other doctors who came later were Dr. G. S. Ginrich, Dr. Earl Conklin, Dr. S. M. Baker, Dr. W. C. Bartlett, Dr. F. F. McCarthy, Dr. J. F. Sigafos, Dr. L. K. Pohl, Dr. W. K. Bennett, Dr. R. H. Kerr, Dr. Minder, Dr. H. B. McConahay, Dr. Agee, Dr. Eckhardt and Dr. Hiram Walker. Our present doctors in Alma are Dr. James S. Long and Dr. William J. Simic, both graduates of the University of Nebraska, School of Medicine.

Dr. W. C. Bartlett celebrated his sixty years of, practicing medicine in Harlan County before his death in January 1965.

Dr. Edward Saub began his practice of optometry in Alma August 20, 1954. Dr. Neil Stuhmer took over the practice of Dr. Saub in August 1965. Owen Anderson, an audiologist and hearing aid consultant became associated with Dr. Saub in August 1961, and has continued this connection with Dr. Stuhmer.

Dr. Gil Wright veterinarian located in Alma in 1960 soon after his graduation from Kansas State University at Manhattan, Kansas.

Dr. H. J. Hill, Dr. Etta Patton and Dr. E. R. Batty were among the earlier dentists in our area. Dr. George Boehler practiced dentistry in Alma a number of years then located in Omaha.

Dr. G. E. Stoddard, a graduate of Dental College at Creighton University at Omaha., began his practice of dentistry in Alma in the spring of 1919. Dr. C. B. Johnson opened his dental office in the year 1924 and Dr. Paul Huebner located in Alma in 1963. Doctors Johnson and Huebner are both graduates of the Dental College of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Orleans was the location chosen by Dr. John Stewart to open his dental office in the early 1900s. Also Dr. J. D. Hamilton practiced dentistry in Orleans for years. Dr. Paul O'Brien is the present dentist, but his office has been closed for some time as he is unable to practice. He is a patient in Veterans Hospital at Grand Island.

ATTORNEYS

There was a great demand for attorneys. Among the early members of the Bar practicing law in Harlan County were J. D. Stoddard in 1876 and A. E. Pinkney in 1879 at Republican City. Lewis H. Kent in 1877 at Orleans, A. M. Beresford, A. E. Harvey and C. T. Simpson in later years at Orleans.

The early attorneys at Alma were Thos. Harlan, early 70's, John A. Dawson in 1878, C. C. Flansburg, 1879, Hon. George S. Fisher, 1879 and J. M. Hiatt 1879. Fletcher and Courtright opened a law office in Alma in 1882. A few years later the following attorneys practiced law in Alma, J. G. Thompson, R. L. Keester, T. L. Porter, John Everson, W. A. Myers, L. D. Hunt, E. C. Boehler, B. B. Webber, C. T. Mahn, D. S. Hardin, W. J. Furse, D. Campbell, Frank H. Strout, Gomer Thomas, John Starr and O. E. Shelburn. Of these attorneys O. E. Shelburn had the distinction of practicing law in Harlan County for over fifty years.

Bar dockets were lengthy. District Court was in session weeks at a time. Jury terms created quite a stir. If a big crowd in town, people remarked "Court must be in session". A few murder trials were held. Many disputes over fence lines and roads were tried in court. This county seems to be more peaceable today. District Court is a short session and seldom is there a jury case. The members of the Harlan County Bar today are C. C. Sherwood and Thos J. Waldo of Orleans, D. A. Russell and Robert McKelvie of Alma. C. C. Sherwood opened his office in Orleans over fifty years ago.

Mr. E. E. McKee observed the anniversary of his fifty years in the abstract business in Harlan County in September 1966.

Mr. Harry Richman and son Mitchell, have recently observed the 50th anniversary in the grocery business in Harlan County.

BANKS

Bradford & Burr purchased the bank at Alma from L. R. Grimes in 1880. Burton and Harvey formed a partnership in 1883 in Orleans for banking and loan business. Geo. H. Burton came to Orleans in 1880 and established the Harlan County Bank later to be known as the First National Bank in 1885.

Numerous banks were established through the years in each town in the County. Some were absorbed by other banks some were dissolved and others failed in the serious depression years of the late twenties and early thirties. Today we have the Stamford Bank at Stamford, The Republican Valley Bank at Orleans, the Harlan County Bank at Alma and the Commercial State Bank at Republican City. These banks are sound and conservative and efficiently conducted. The combined deposits are several million dollars. Miss Vesta McKee was given special recognition after serving as an officer for over fifty years in the Harlan County Bank.

SCHOOLS

At one time there were 80 organized school districts in Harlan County. Conditions and laws have changed this situation. In 1967 there are 11 operating rural district schools and 6 rural districts have contracted with towns to educate their pupils. There are four high schools functioning. Stamford District #22 which was organized March 28, 1874, has twelve grades and is approved by the State Department of Education. Republican City was the first organized district August 8, 1872. They have twelve grades. It is also approved by the State Department of Education. The Ragan District, old 41 which was organized June 20, 1878, became consolidated C2, May 20, 1924. It has been dissolved and they send their pupils by bus to the Wilcox Consolidated District. Huntley #70 organized in 1887 or 1888 voted this year to discontinue their high school but retain and teach the first eight grades. High School students of the Huntley district

are to make their own choice of which high school they wish to attend. The Orleans District #3 was organized in March 22, 1873. They have a twelve grade high school which is accredited to the University of Nebraska, and the North Central Association of Colleges. The Alma District #2 was organized August 21, 1872. Alma has a twelve grade high school which is accredited to the University of Nebraska and the North Central Association of Colleges.

Of interest in early history, District #9 southeast of Alma held its first school in a dugout.

THE HARLAN DAM AND RESERVOIR

Nothing has changed the topography of Harlan County more than the building of the Harlan Dam across the Republican River. The purpose of the Dam is for flood control, irrigation and recreation. This project was approved by Congress in 1944. Construction of the dam was initiated by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1946. Floods delayed the work some in 1947, however, it was completed on schedule in 1952. It was dedicated at ceremonies sponsored by towns and civic groups in the area.

The dam and relocations represents an investment by the Federal Government of 49 million dollars. An additional repair on the dam cost several million dollars. A very strong wind of 100 miles an hour lasting twelve hours caused the high waves to damage and undermine the dam. The water level was lowered greatly one entire summer to make the necessary repairs.

The lowest portion of the dam will be used for deposition of silt. Accumulation of silt is not expected to encroach upon the other storage allocations for many years. With increased soil conservation practices on the reservoir lands and in the upper Republican Valley, the rate of sedimentation will be substantially lessened and the usefulness of the project substantially lengthened.

The drainage area above the dam is 20,755 square miles, about 85% of the Republican River Basin.

The dam is 11,850 feet long. This includes 10,480 feet of compacted earth fill embankment and 1350 feet of concrete spillway and bulk head structure. The embankment is 750 feet wide at the base and 30 feet at the top. A 22 foot roadway extends along the top of the dam which is 107 feet above the streambed at the Spillway section. More than 13 million cubic yards of selected earth fill were used in the embankment.

The gates of the spillway are known as Tainter Gates. Each is thirty feet high and 40 feet wide and each gate weighs 32 tons. These gates are raised and lowered by electrically powered hoists, but are not used in ordinary operation of the dam.

Nine sluices or outlet conduits are provided in the lower part of the dam for emptying the reservoir at a regular rate. Each sluice is 5 feet wide by 8 feet high and each is controlled by individual gates or valves. Two additional outlets are provided to serve directly the irrigation canals, one on each side of the river.

The reservoir comprises 31,500 acres purchased by the Federal Government. The lake created by irrigation pool will normally cover 13,600 acres, extend 12 miles upstream and have a shoreline of about 58 miles. At full pool level, which would be a rare occurrence, the water temporarily impounded would cover about 22,800 acres. Above the permanent irrigation pool, about 12,000 acres have been leased out by the government for agricultural purposes.

Two towns, Republican City and Alma, were directly affected by the construction of the reservoir. The original site of Republican City, 2 1/2 miles west of the dam, is inundated by Harlan Lake. The majority of the residents of that city, about 350 population, voted to take advantage of Federal Government

assistance in relocating the city at a new flood free site above the full pool limits of the reservoir. New Republican City has been constructed and developed on a site about one mile northwest of the dam. Relocations and adjustments within the City of Alma with acquisitions of some lake frontage by the Federal Government have been accomplished.

Planting of over 50,000 trees and construction of 10,200 feet of erosion control dikes and 42,000 feet of water conservation terraces have already been started at the reservoir. The objective of such development is to provide reasonable shelter and shade to minimize wind and water erosion, to conserve moisture and soil, to create a more interesting shore line and landscape and incidentally to provide food and cover for wild life.

The Reservoir provides water for irrigating 90,000 acres of land in Nebraska and Kansas.

Railroad relocations made necessary by the construction of the dam involved portions of the St. Joe and Oxford and the Republican City to Oberlin branches of the C B & Q system. On the Oxford Branch approximately 21 miles of new track was placed between Orleans and Bloomington to carry the line to the north around the reservoir. On the Oberlin Branch, a new line approximately 12 miles long has been constructed from Long Island, Kansas to connect with the St. Francis Branch line 3 miles west of Orleans, providing service around the upper end of the reservoir.

Principal highway adjustment resulting from the reservoir is on the north south U.S. Highway #183-383 across the Republican River and the Prairie Dog Creek. A considerable portion of State Highway #136 east of Alma was relocated 2 miles north of its original location beginning one mile east of Alma and extending 3 miles west of town.

Since impoundment of water began in 1952, the project has been used and visited by increasing thousands some from near by areas and some from afar. Since 1952 visitors total 2,600,000; annual attendance 893,9000, peak day, 35,000 people. There are 11 access areas, 6 public launching lanes, 18 picnic areas, 2 swimming beaches, 925 tent and trailer spaces, 9 guest rental units, 2 organized camps, 56 rental boats and a reported catch of sport fish, 250,000. Boating and skiing are most popular.

Hunting pheasant, quail, duck and geese attract many sportsmen. There is also an open season on deer.