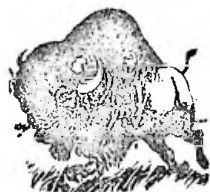




Buffalo Tales



Volume 10, No. 3

Buffalo County Historical Society

March, 1987

THE HIGGINS HOMESTEAD (The Jochem Farm)

By Dan Reese

Dan Reese is a Kearney State College student from Kearney. The following article is based on a project he prepared for a History Class. Dan is a grandson of Elizabeth Jochem and William Henry Reese.

Samuel Higgins claimed the first homestead in Cedar Township in Buffalo County. Higgins was born in Maine on March 30, 1811. His father, William Higgins, served in the War of 1812. In 1837 Samuel set out to see the country, spending time in several states and finally settling in Grant County, Wisconsin. His first wife Matilda gave him nine children. His second wife was Priscilla Ellen Wamsley Ewer. They were married in Wisconsin on November 26, 1865. Mrs. Ewer had five children from her first marriage, and Samuel and Priscilla had two offspring, but one of them died. The Higgins family arrived in Buffalo County on November 10, 1872.

Higgins, a carpenter, built a small shanty near Gibbon to house his family while he sought out a claim. He found his farm on the East Half of the Southeast Quarter of Section 22, in Cedar Township, built the usual dugout in the side of the hill, and took up residence. Occasionally Indians passed through begging for food and feed for their horses. One night some difficult Indians tried to break into his dugout, but Higgins succeeded in driving them off. Shortly after the Higginses arrived, John Davis and his wife settled in Section 2, also making a dugout in which to spend the winter.

The building of a place to live was not easy in those first years in Cedar Township. Even for a dugout, the materials used were either those at hand or had to be transported some distance, usually from Gibbon some twenty miles away. As des-



Home of Samuel Higgins, front view. Photo Courtesy of Evelyn Kreutzer.

(Continued on Page 3)

BUFFALO TALES is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P. O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848. It is sent to all members of the Society.

Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the history of Buffalo County and its people.

Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

- Basic Membership \$ 7.50
- Institutional Membership \$10.00
- Supporting Membership \$25.00

Life memberships are \$100.00 for an individual; \$150.00 for husband and wife, jointly.

Officers and Directors: President, Chandler Lynch III; Vice-President, Margaret Hohnholt; Secretary, Alice Howell; Treasurer, Leo Henricksen; Directors: Glen E. Wisch, Frances Link, Barb Avery, Merlin Berglund, Philip S. Holmgren, Minnette Steinbrink, Henrietta Rhamy, Edna Hehner, Robert Stubblefield and Marian Johnson. Publications Chairman, Alice Howell.

WITH THE SOCIETY

Thanks to the family and friends of the late Allen Stover, longtime member of the Historical Society, for the generous memorial gift to the Society.

.....

The Lincoln Highway (#30) will be the subject of the program at the March meeting, to be given by Verle Dority of Shelton. The meeting will be held on Sunday, March 22, at 2:00 o'clock at the Kearney Woman's Club Home, 723 West 22nd Street, in Kearney.

.....

A symposium on the Constitution will be held at the Kearney Public Library on Thursday, April 9. The event is sponsored by the Friends of the Library and funded by the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities. The Buffalo County Historical Society is one of several organizations which are co-sponsors.

Scheduled are two afternoon sessions: 1:00-2:30 and 3:00-4:30; and two evening sessions: 7:15-8:15 and 8:45-10:00. Symposium speakers will be Donald Hickey from Wayne State College, David Haberman from Creighton University, Kent Kirwin from UNO, and Arthur Witner from UNL. We encourage Historical Society members to attend.

.....

WAGONS WEST Celebration at the Museum on May 30-31.

NEW LIFE MEMBER

Mrs. Allen Stover Riverdale

Notice to Members of Buffalo County Historical Society ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, April 26, 1987, 5:30 p.m.

at Chef's Oven, 1010 3rd Avenue, Kearney

The annual meeting of the Buffalo County Historical Society will be held at Chef's Oven, 1010 3rd Avenue, in Kearney on Sunday, April 26, 1987. Dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m., followed by the business meeting and program at 6:30. Cost of the dinner is \$6.35, which includes tax and tip. Reservations must be made and paid for in advance.

On the agenda for the business meeting is the election of four 3-year directors. A report of the year's progress will be given, and acknowledgments and recognitions made.

Please make your reservation by April 21. Send check to cover the dinner cost to the Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848. (Check should be made payable to the Historical Society).

cribed by Harry Crawford, in *Where the Buffalo Roamed*, p. 62:

. . . An excavation was made in a bank or hillside deep enough to make sides and one end, at the outer end a door and window frame were set up and sod chinked with wet clay was laid to complete the walls. A heavy log was laid lengthwise, supporting smaller poles for rafters. Brush was laid on these, then a layer of coarse hay, and finished with sod and clay to turn the rain. As to the floor, dirt was the common thing in such habitations.

The spring of 1873 brought other settlers to the area—the Joseph Whites, Eleazer W. Carpenters, Irwin Bates and Samuel Kinsey. On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, nature unleashed on the settlers one of the most devastating snowstorms recorded in the history of the area. The morning was still and balmy and the sun shone bright and warm. John Davis left in the morning to walk to Grand Island, planning to return the following day. His wife was to spend the night at the Carpenter home. The Whites spent the day with the Higgins family, but started home when the weather became threatening at about four o'clock in the afternoon. The storm came without warning and raged from late Sunday afternoon to Tuesday evening. The Whites barely made it home safely. The Higginses lost their cow, which smothered under the snow, but a calf was dug out of the snow four days later, alive but hungry.

When Mrs. Davis did not arrive at the Carpenter home, neighbors investigated on Wednesday after the storm and discovered that the roof of the Davis dugout had collapsed during the storm. Mrs. Davis could not be found and a search party was organized. Her body was found on Thursday, barefoot and scantily clad. It was thought that she must have crawled through the window of the fallen-in dugout, thinking that she must somehow get to the Carpenter home for shelter.

In 1874, Higgins built the house that stands yet today. The unique house was



Side view of Higgins-Jochem home, 1917, Henrlette Jochem in foreground.
Photo Courtesy of Evelyn Kreutzer.

built into the side of the hill. The lower brick story contained a large kitchen, a small bedroom, a storage room, and a pantry. The upper wood frame story included a large parlor, a large bedroom, and two small bedrooms. The kitchen door exited to the south and the upstairs parlor door to the east. The home is much like the earth homes of today, the lower story is cool in summer and warm in the winter.

Trying to raise a crop was difficult. Grasshoppers destroyed the first three corn crops. Samuel set out many cottonwood, ash, maple, and boxelder trees on the western half of the quarter section, and later filed a timber claim on it. His wife also planted apple trees near the house. Today a large grove of trees still stands along the creek that cuts through the farm. Near the house stands at least one apple tree. Priscilla, on January 29, 1874, also filed for the Northwest Quarter of Section 22 in Cedar Township on behalf of the children of her first husband, Rural Ewer, who died while a soldier in the Civil War.

Samuel and Priscilla later separated, Samuel moving to Kearney to live with a daughter from his first marriage. Priscilla and their son Sampson Grant Higgins remained on the farm. By June of 1892 the land was transferred to Sampson. In return he agreed to care for his mother for the rest of her days. Priscilla (Ellen) Higgins died on March 20, 1897.

In April, 1897 Sampson deeded the farm to one of Samuel's daughters, Nancy Higgins, and soon thereafter, title was transferred to Charles and Lucinda Israel. The Israels mortgaged the land to William Dean in 1905 and Dean purchased their remaining interest in 1906. Dean then sold the farm to John and Helen Anson in 1911. After John Anson's death in January of 1915, the farm was sold at auction on January 20, 1916. Karl Jochem, acting for his mother Henriette, was the top bidder. The sale was finalized and Henriette's name was placed on the title in March of 1916. The Jochems had lived on three different farms in the neighborhood in the previous five years.



Handhewn Beams in northwest room of lower story of Higgins home, in foreground, 10x12 inches; others, 6x6 inches. Photo Courtesy of Evelyn Kreutzer.

Henriette Jochem was widowed when her husband Gustav died in July of 1915, leaving seven children: Gustav, Jr., George, Karl, Justine, Elizabeth, Samuel and Jacob. The Jochems were natives of Zeyer, West Prussia, and all but George were born there. Gustav Jochem had made three trips to America, the first shortly after his discharge in 1887 from the Prussian merchant marine. He worked as a carpenter in the Baltimore shipyards. He returned to Zeyer and married Henriette on November 15, 1888. Their first son, Gustav, Jr., was born March 21, 1890. Later that year Gustav brought his wife and baby son to Chicago. They lived in and around Chicago and Milwaukee where Gustav helped to build the Cudahy meat packing house. They returned to Germany in 1895 because of the national economic panic. By this time they had a second son, George, who was born February 21, 1892 in Peshtigo, Wisconsin. The family lived in Zeyer and farmed near Scharzdam for the next thirteen years. During this time the rest of the children were born. On March 22, 1907 the entire family returned to America, Gustav, Jr. leaving ahead of the others in order to avoid conscription into the military. The rest of the family sailed aboard the Gera, coming to Chicago where Gustav and Gustav, Jr. worked as carpenters building passenger cars for the railroad.

Daughter Justine, who had been ill for an extended time, died on April 19, 1910. The family left Chicago for Nebraska the next day. Justine's body was taken along and was the first to be buried in St. John's Cemetery in Cedar Township. When Gustav died from kidney failure on July 11, 1915 while on a trip to Truman, Minnesota, his body was returned and also buried beside his daughter in St. John's.

The Jochems set to work on their farm, adding a smokehouse cave, a large three-door machine shed, a sheep shed, and a barn to the existing corn crib, two chicken coops, and a small blacksmith shop. The barn built by Higgins had burned during the time that his wife owned the land. Framing lumber for the new barn came from a silo built by one of the previous owners. The Jochems sawed and sold lumber from the many trees planted by Samuel Higgins. They also replaced the wooden windmill with a newer steel model.

The second son George Jochem served with the American Expeditionary Force in France during World War I. He saw action in the battles of St. Mihiel and the Argonne Forest.

The parlor of the home was the scene of the remaining daughter Elizabeth's marriage on March 3, 1920. While a blizzard raged outside, she married William Henry Reese, a neighbor. Elsie Reese, William's sister, and Samuel Jochem were the



The family of Henriette Jochem, left to right: (back row) Karl, Gustav, George and Samuel; (front row) Henriette, Jacob and Elizabeth. Photo Courtesy of Evelyn Kreutzer.

Buffalo County Historical Society
Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848

Non-Profit Organization Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage PAID
Postal Permit No. 7 Kearney, Nebraska

witnesses to the wedding performed by Reverend A. R. Sander of the nearby St. John's Lutheran Church. Karl Jochem had married William's sister Frieda a year earlier. The three other sons either married or moved away from home. Gustav Jr. married Lena Jochem, George married Anna Gruhn, and Samuel moved on but never married. Jacob, the youngest, continued to live on Henriette's farm until the death of his mother on December 14, 1952. She was buried beside her husband and daughter in St. John's Cemetery.

After Henriette's death, Jacob bought the farm from his brothers and sister. For many years before and after his mother's death, Jacob kept detailed records of the farming operation. The farm books showed income and expenditures to the penny. Included were wages paid to numerous people from the neighborhood hired to help with the farming operations. He continued to farm the land until his retirement to Ravenna in 1968. Prior to his retirement, and during summers afterwards, he continued to live in the old house though it had never had electricity, propane heat, or a regular phone. A telephone was installed briefly but was thought too expensive and was removed during the depression of the 1930's. The old house was changed very little over the years, but has aged badly. The square nails barely hold some of the siding on, and the old shingle roof leaks in numerous places. The downstairs storeroom with its brick floor attests to the age of the structure with its hand hewn beam ceiling.

After Jacob's death on May 6, 1985 the farm was sold at auction. A great number of antiques and old farm machinery were sold at the all-day auction of July 20, 1985. The selection was large and over 350 bidders showed up to see what Jacob called "his junk". The crowd included antique dealers, museum representatives, and sightseers. Perhaps it was fitting that the family ownership, begun with an auction, should end seventy years later with another auction.

SOURCES

Where the Buffalo Roamed, World Publishing Co., Shenandoah, Iowa, 1967; Biographical Souvenir of the Counties of Buffalo, Kearney and Phelps, F. A. Battey & Co., 1890; Land Records, Buffalo County Register of Deeds; Buffalo County Cemetery Records; Memoirs of May Stover, Buffalo County Historical Society; Stove(r)-pipe(l)ne, Nos. 5 & 6, Rod Stover; Interviews with Nancy Wick, Riverdale, and Evelyn Kreutzer, Odessa.