



The **FILLMORE COUNTY STORY**

Edited by

Wilbur G. Gaffney

Geneva Community Grange No. 403

Geneva, Nebraska

1968

The Geneva Community Grange expresses their appreciation to the Fillmore County History Committee, comprised of Mr. and Mrs. Guy Brown, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Warren Lefever and Mr. and Mrs. Darrel Hughes, for the many hours of work and thousands of miles driven in collecting and compiling the material contained in this book.

The Grange and the History Committee acknowledge with gratitude the time spent by the many contributors without whose efforts this book would not have become a reality.

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PREFACE

This history of Fillmore County was begun a full fifteen years ago, in 1953, stemming from a suggestion of County Agent Ivar Lindstrom. His idea, taken up by the various people who have subsequently worked on this project, was that the history of a pioneering community could best be told in the words of those pioneers still surviving, or of their immediate descendants, while memories were fresh.

The Geneva Community Grange appointed a committee, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. William Lauenstein and Mr. and Mrs. Albert Johnson, to organize people to collect and write up historical information about each of the sixteen townships. Soon a sizeable group of diligent volunteers had begun collecting, township by township, village by village, the often short, often simple—but always interesting—annals of the people who had settled the land and built the county.

Although Fillmore County was not formally organized until 1871, it was already being settled, however sparsely, by 1867. Those pioneers who first faced the treeless prairies—the vast, unbroken seas of grass—and the hazards of an unfamiliar, and often dangerous, climate, are worthy of being honored in this post-Centennial year of Nebraska statehood.

Fillmore County is only one of the 93 counties that make up the state. But it has the special distinction of being *ours*. The people who settled here—who endured the blizzards, the drouths, the grasshoppers, the tornadoes, and the mortgages—made this local countryside what it is, what we have inherited, what we hope to make even better in the next hundred years. Many of these people were our own ancestors; many of those who were not are either more distantly related to us, or have left their marks on the lands that we now prize as ours.

In our school days, many of us perhaps felt that “history” was something distant and remote, suitable only to make dreary those days when blue skies, spring winds, the sight of waving fields, the smell and touch of animals, all invited us to ignore the printed words in books.

But history is not really that distant; it is not, it is never, something that happened far away and long ago to people who are merely names on printed pages. History is *people*—including the people we know, and those who have just preceded us. With this idea in mind, the writers and compilers of this book felt that history should be captured as close to its own moment as was possible, without waiting for future researchers to extract it at distant second hand from the dusty and crumbling pages of newspapers, or yellowing documents, or palely-readable microfilm.

We are only two or three generations removed, at most, from the earliest sources of Fillmore County history. We have therefore tried to assemble what we can know of our local past from “old inhabitants” directly, so far as possible, or at least from their still living offspring, while the memories of pioneer parents and grandparents are still fresh among us.

After more than ten years of assembling the information, we chose the Centennial year of 1967 as a fitting time to bring out this book, the first full-scale history of Fillmore County. That it did not in fact appear in that year reflects certain unexpected magnitudes of the task. The present volume is approximately 33 per cent larger than the manuscript turned over to the editor in the spring of 1966, and contains twice as many pictures reflecting various aspects of the life of the county.

The information in this history has been supplied by many people, over a period of 15 years. There is, therefore, considerable variety in the manner of expression and in the arrangement of the material. There are some repetitions: for example, the Great Blizzard of 1888 was *one* event, taking place in a short period of time; but it was experienced in a variety of ways by different people. There may here and there be inconsistencies or inaccuracies; but the compilers (and the editor) have felt that if people are to report their own local history, they should certainly report it in their own individual ways, to tell it as it happened to them.

Where old, original accounts were available, these have been reproduced exactly, except for perhaps minor changes in punctuation, for clarity; there has been no “editing” to “pretty-up” the accounts. For example, one highly valued contributor—since deceased—apparently felt that the ancestor would be revealed by his language as somehow undignified, and rewrote substantial passages into more or less modern diction. Luckily, the original manuscript was still available; the editor took upon himself the editorial liberty of going back to that, and restoring the original wording, with all the color, flavoring, and “feel” of the 1870’s.

Later accounts taken from newspapers, or supplied by the host of kind and willing contributors to this volume, have been left, as nearly as seemed practical, in the wording of the writers themselves; verbal editing has been deliberately kept to an absolute minimum.

The information about the various townships has been supplied sometimes by a few, sometimes by a great many, persons in each precinct. It is not possible to give full and exact credit, line by line or page by page, for each item or section; and many more persons have contributed, in one way or another, than those we can name or could hope to name. So many individual persons have been involved that the most we can do is to extend our sincere thanks to all who have in any way been touched by this enterprise.

Some of the accounts remain very nearly in the words of the original writers, the only changes being in verification of facts or in the addition of facts discovered since the original writing; these accounts carry the signature lines of the contributors. Others, for one reason or another, have been through so many hands in the intervening years that it is not possible to assign a name or identification to the original writer; these, inevitably, in the form in which they appear, must be accepted as re-written and edited, and sometimes then re-written, by the compilers or the editor. If a credit line for some writer still living has been thus lost, the compilers can do no more than extend their gratitude to the accidentally anonymous original writer.

When this book was first conceived, in 1953, the intention was to make the year 1957 the basic cut-off date. Broadly speaking, that date still stands, although we have tried to bring up to date some of the more obvious developments (such as, for example, the progress of irrigation and the surfacing of roads), and to acknowledge the passing away of several of the older generation, who were still with us when we began. Within the limits set by this co-operative process of gathering our material, we have attempted to get the history of Fillmore County into shape for ourselves, for our children, and for the next generation of historians.

This book owes a good deal of its content, in some ways, to *Pioneer Stories of the Pioneers of Fillmore and Adjoining Counties*, collected and published in 1915 by the Rev. George R. McKeith, of Exeter. Mr. McKeith's "Preface" contained a paragraph which is worth quoting, by way of remarking on the pitfalls of all who attempt to write histories: "To the piecemeal fashion of the project, in building up the book, must be attributed many of the mistakes and inefficiencies to be found in the text. In many cases, especially in the beginning, the proof sheets were not corrected, neither did we anticipate the need of an index, otherwise the pages would have been numbered and an index provided."

We have attempted to profit by Mr. McKeith's rueful notes: both the manuscript and the proof sheets have been read with diligence; our pages are numbered; and we do have an index.

University of Nebraska
August, 1968

But to go on to Mr. McKeith's more optimistic closing paragraph, we feel that we can do no better than to close with the words of this more or less pioneering historian of our communities: "It is therefore with a distinct consciousness of many faults too easy to be found that we send forth the *Pioneer Stories*, believing, however, their intrinsic worth will be appreciated, and prove a source of pleasure to the present generation, and supply a foundation of facts for future history."

And once one has admitted the many errors that compilers, editors, printers, and proofreaders are automatically heirs to, what more can be said—except once more to offer heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed written accounts, or pictures, or even less visible but none the less important efforts, to the development and—at long last—the completion of this history.

Wilbur G. Gaffney

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FILLMORE CO.

Scale: 1/2 Inch to 1 Mile.

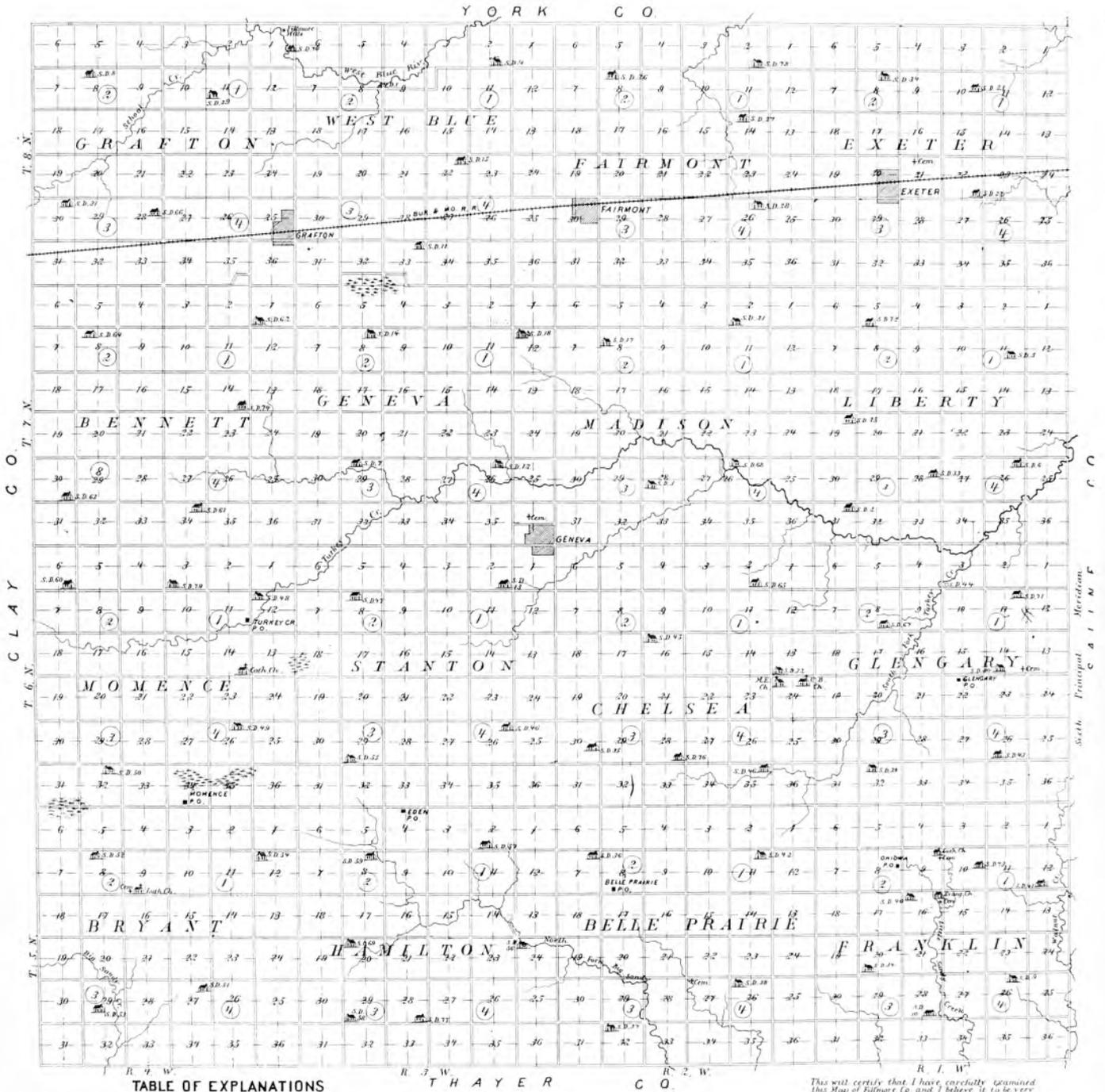


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This will certify that I have carefully examined this Map of Fillmore Co. and I believe it to be very accurate & correct.
 Aug 12, 1884.
W. S. Crawford
 Co. Surveyor.

Map of Fillmore County as of August 1, 1884

Official State Atlas of Nebraska (1885)