

Jim's Perspective...

Life on the Nebraska Prairie

The Lincoln Journal Star newspaper moved this fall from its building at 9th and P Street to a new location in the Telegraph District in downtown Lincoln. A Lincoln newspaper has been published at the 9th and P location since 1881. As I previously mentioned, my dad worked there as editor of the Lincoln Star from the late 1950's until the early 1980's. Over the years, he occasionally took me down to the paper to show me around the place. I also worked there part-time as a reporter for the sports department for a time while I was in college.

The newspaper building and a large printing press building are both going to be demolished and replaced with new apartment buildings. It is sad for me to see the newspaper building at 9th and P removed from the downtown landscape. I have so many wonderful memories of that building. The newspaper held a public "garage sale" of newspaper personal property about a month ago, and I went to it and looked around, and bought a few things. In particular, I knew from my time at the paper that they had a pretty large library of reference books that reporters could consult in conjunction with an article they might be writing. I bought some of these old books.

One of my purchased books was titled, *Tales from the Prairie*, written by Dorothy Weyer Creigh. She was a founding member of the Adams County Historical Society which was formed in 1965, and located in Hastings, Nebraska. The Adams County Historical Society was the subject of how to build a good local historical society in the book, *A Primer for Local Historical Societies*, also written by Dorothy Weyer Creigh. This book was published by the American Association for State and Local History, and Ms. Creigh was nationally involved in this organization including being an elected member of the national Council of the AASLH. The Adams County Historical Society became the primary model for the establishment of local historical societies across America. Pretty neat! Below is a summary of an article found in Ms. Creigh's book, *Tales from the Prairie*, about a woman who lived in the prairie of Nebraska. Every three years back in the 1970's, The Society published a book like Ms. Creigh's that contained local articles about people in Adams County. Ms. Creigh's book has about 35 articles.

Ellen D. Harn was born in 1829 in the closing months of John Quincy Adams' presidency and lived to be a little over 101 years old when she passed away. She eventually lived in Kenesaw, Nebraska, and was a public school teacher for fifty years. She was one of the first women public school teachers in the United States. Her father was a veteran of the War of 1812; she herself lived through the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. She grew up in Maryland. At that time, very few women ever went to school, but her father sent her to a "pay school," a private one where she finished grade school and high school. She later went to Cedar Hill Seminary earning her diploma in 1852, as valedictorian of her class. She taught school in Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia and Ohio. Her sister and her husband, Dr. A. D. Williams, settled near Kenesaw in 1872, living in a covered wagon on the prairie until they could get a house built. Ellen moved to Kenesaw in about 1882. She bought ten acres of

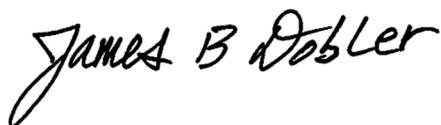
railroad land, paying \$5 an acre for it. This land was adjacent to her sister's home, she built a home on this land and lived there for the rest of her life. She became principal of the Kenesaw schools and eventually retired after 50 years of working in public schools.

After retirement, Ms. Harn did not slow down. She became involved in many public affairs. She strongly supported the suffragette movement to extend the vote to women. She became president of the Kenesaw group that proposed both women's suffrage and Prohibition. To promote woman suffrage, she took her first airplane ride at age 90. Burgess Creeth, one of the barnstorming pilots who flew out of Nebraska cow-pastures after World War I, flying in a war-surplus aircraft, invited Ms. Harn to fly with him on October 18, 1919. She wore a leather helmet and sat in the open cockpit of the plane and carried a woman suffrage banner that said, "Votes for women." As the airplane flew over Kenesaw, Ellen dropped the banner over the little town.

In 1920, after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, Ms. Harn was a guest of honor at the last great suffrage banquet in Chicago. She was the oldest worker for the cause there and was called upon to speak. She was also a friend of Susan B. Anthony.

Because of her fifty years of teaching in public schools, Ms. Harn knew how to talk to youngsters. For the last dozen years of her life, Kenesaw school children helped celebrate her birthday, either going to her home at the edge of town or inviting her to school, where she would talk to them. Also, on her birthday during the last ten years of her life, Hastings newspapers carried interviews of Ms. Harn, getting her views on education, on bobbed hair, on Prohibition, and on public speaking. She had served as coach for contestants in the Women's Christian Temperance Union public speaking contests in the Hastings area and her contestants had won top honors in the state many times. When she turned 100 years old, the Kenesaw schools closed so that the students might attend her birthday party at the Methodist church and visit with their friend. She made two speeches that day, one to the adults and another to the children. So many people were there that there was no longer any standing room in the church and participants lined the steps outside the church, standing in the cold January weather to listen to what she had to say. She passed away, April 30th, 1930. At the time of her death, she was the oldest woman in Nebraska.

Sometimes, it might be assumed that life on the prairie years ago was desolate and boring. Great, or important people, are developed at big institutions that have a big reputation amongst the intelligentsia, but, alas, as Ms. Harn demonstrates, success, or a fulfilling life, can exist anywhere in America, including the enormous great prairie that stretches across the Midwest and Nebraska.



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