



~ **Part 2** ~

## **Reflections on a Common Theme Patterns of Ethnic Settlement**

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**This is the second in the series featuring information about the six counties in the SV24 Alliance. Correspondents addressed the pattern of ethnic settlement in their portion of the Solomon Valley. Carldon Broadbent, 766 K-14 Hwy, Beloit KS 67420, coordinates this series. Readers may submit information about their counties to him. The theme for the autumn issue: early academies and schools. For winter: brief biographies of historically significant persons.**

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### *Patterns of Ethnic Settlement*

THE groups settling the Solomon Valley reflect more than ethnic or national origin patterns. They also were inclined to settle together by the strong bonds of religious affiliation. These stories, representing our six SV24 counties, provide insight into the strengths of the early groups settling here, and their continuing impact today. Active settlement patterns tended to be from the east to the west, the series is presented in that order.

#### **Cloud County**

[Represented by the Czech pioneers, compiled by Marvin Prochaska, 2009, and submitted by Jan McClellan.]

Over a century and a fourth has passed since the first Czech pioneers arrived in North Central Kansas in the search for a better life in a new country. Most of these Czech immigrants arrived in America at New York harbor in the Ellis Island vicinity after crossing the Atlantic from Europe on passenger freight ships.

They congregated near cities in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania. Because they could not speak English, friendly organizations helped them select railroad routes to Kansas. They finished their journey by securing horses and wagons or walking to their destinations in northwestern Ottawa county. Here they established homesteads and built their homes in the colorful hills and dales of the region.

Many crossed the county line to live in Lincoln, Mitchell, and Cloud counties. Some of the sturdy pioneer families first lived in hillside dugouts. Later they quarried limestone rock and hauled it in lumber wagons to build warm dwellings and schools for their children.

Limestone rock was used to build shelter for their livestock and fence posts for fences. Each pioneer used a pick, shovel, rope, and buckets to dig a water well for his home and livestock. These wells were walled up with limestone rocks.

By the start of the 20th century there were dozens of happy households nestled amongst these Bohemian Hills as the rolling country was called. Common Czech family names were Andria, Antene, Balaun, Blaha, Boucek, Bozek, Cerveny, Jaros, Jindra, Kadlick, Keim, Koller, Komin, Kopecky, Kosar, Krizek, Kropac, Kunc, Matous, Matya, Neidl, Papes, Prochaska, Schramek, Sieter, Smejkal, Sponer, Srna, Stoklas, Svatopolsky, Veveida, Vodrazke, Weiner, Wesley, Wolf, Yager, and Zeigler.

Many of these names are still quite familiar. The trading post or towns of Coursen's Grove, Simpson, Glasco, Delphos, and Ada were located on the outskirts of the thriving community.

The first Czech pioneers to die were buried in the First Creek (Baldwin) Cemetery. However in the 1880s area residents met and selected a cemetery site and cemetery board. An acre of land with a deed was donated by Mary Antene for the Bohemian National Cemetery in 1889.

The first Bohemian Hall was built in 1905 on a square acre of land. In the spring of 1909 Mr. and Mrs. Anton Stransky of Munden, Kansas came to organize a Czech Fraternal Order in the vicinity. On March 28, 1909, a group of 37 of these pioneer settlers received their Charter for Lodge Kansasky Vysherad (Kansas Castle), Number 209 of the Zapadni Ceska Bratrska Jednota. The home office was located at Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The lodge secured a lifetime lease on the Bohemian Hall where their meetings have been held each month. These monthly meetings were conducted in the Czech language for many years.

Besides the lodge meetings other activities held at the Bohemian Hall included wedding dances, public dances, plays, programs, supper parties, card parties, church services, and funeral services. At this meeting place the community has been able to preserve much of its Czech culture and customs such as music, songs, language, dances, and foods.

A new hall was completed in 1937 with lumber salvaged from the old hall, the Delphos Opera House, and a large livery stable in Barnard, Kansas. Starting in the fall of 1936, at least a score of lodge members gathered to do the salvage work. During the winter of 1936 and 1937, this group of members built the new hall with the help of carpenter Joe Prickett, mason Scotty Schultz, and plasterer Dave Campbell.

Here at one of their lodge parties you can still eat Bohemian Wieners, sausages, sauerkraut and dumplings, Czech kolaches or poppy seed cake. You may still enjoy listening or dancing to songs such as the Prune song, Blue Skirt Waltz, Beer Barrel Polka, or the Flying Dutchman. The lodge and its members are very grateful for the wonderful heritage on which it was built and will strive to preserve much of this heritage for future generations.

On its 100th Anniversary, Lodge 203 remains active with over 200 members.

## **Mitchell County**

[Represented by German settlement in Beloit and Tipton, submitted by Carldon Broadbent, 2010.]

In 1877 the first Catholic Mission in Beloit was led by Father Temphouse. He had advertised extensively in the German papers of this country and the old country, as an eager way to attract new settlers. The result of his efforts was forty new families who settled in the country around Beloit. Even before they came, Holy Mass was offered in what was known as Willow Springs, later called Beloit, by a pastor of St. Joseph's church, which was located south of Clyde. Beloit for the most part was founded by settlers from the eastern states with Aaron Bell, and Tim Hersey of Abilene, starting the town in the late 1860s. So by the time the German immigrants came, Beloit was mostly Protestant, with the Methodist having the first church building.

The Catholic German families first worshipped in the large upstairs room above the grocery store of Williams and Finnegan. This stone building is still standing and is occupied by McGrath Publishing Co. Father Mollier, a French pioneer priest from Clyde, was the traveling priest back then in 1873. The Catholic families built their first church of rock, about 80 ft. by 40 ft. This was located where the present beautiful edifice stands today.

This history of the Catholic parish is paramount in understanding the Germans of Mitchell County. Many of these families were farmers east and north of Beloit. The Eresch family became prominent later as bankers, after farming near Scotsville. The First National Bank which they began, celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2009. In 1953 four peal bells were given by the Eresch children.

They were cast in Aarle-Hixter, Holland, and placed in one of the two towers. They are named after their homesteading parents, St. Peter, and St. Josephine, and St. George and St. Carl, named after their brothers.

Clement Heidrick and wife arrived in the beginning. They had a large family and lived east of Beloit in the Solomon Valley. A genealogy chart of their family hangs in the Mitchell County Museum. There must be about 900 names on it as of the 1960s! Today there are nine listings still in the Beloit phone book.

Another large family that settled north of Beloit, was the Eilert family. Later several of the third generation visited their cousins in Germany. There are still about 12 families listed around the area. Other names who came in the 1870's were Ludwig, Engelbert, Carrico, Bollman, Heiman, and Gengler.

Many of these German families were farmers. So their main foods were what they raised on the farm, their gardens, their livestock, and poultry. Meat was what they butchered: beef, pork, and chicken. The women baked wonderful bread, rolls, and cakes. After school, children could depend on hot pieces of bread, spread with sweet cream and sprinkled with white sugar. For school lunch pails, there were sandwiches of sliced bread spread with peanut butter and layered with sliced dill pickles.

When building the two-towered Catholic church which stands today, the farmers were responsible for hauling the stone from quarries in the countryside. Father Heitz, who came in 1898, assigned each family the number of loads they were to deliver to the site. The Medieval Romanesque style church he built was a copy of an old convent church of Europe. It was the first in the United States of stone vaulting with groined arches. The roof is stone and is braced with flying buttresses. Father Heitz came from Alsace-Lorraine and was pastor of 26 years. He supervised all details of the construction, training the stone dressers with supervision of Architect Marshall and skilled masons. Although there were complaints from some of the men assigned a number of loads of rock by Father Feitz, others bragged on the number they hauled to Beloit. Paul Zimmerman claimed to have hauled 80 loads, and he lived for some years over the age of one hundred years!

From 1900, it took four years to complete the church. Although much too large for the congregation at the time, it has proved to be space needed in the twentieth century. Recently, around two million dollars were spent to replace the roof, retuck the rock, and stabilize the foundation.

Another revealing example of parish cooperation, is the furnishing of eggs for the interior decoration. Two Italian artist brothers used a secret method of mixing their tempera paint with egg whites. The farmers supplied eggs by the dozens and carried the shells away by the bushels. It took two years and a lot of eggs to get the pictures painted. There are eleven large paintings done in the plaster.

Coming into Beloit from the south, looking down into the valley toward Beloit, the first sight above the trees is the two Medieval Romanesque towers, and along with the courthouse tower and the elevator towers, one is reminded of an ancient Italian village. The German immigration of these families has contributed much to the prosperity of our county and state. Beloit is a better place because of their hard work, and although many have moved out of the area, many descendants remain here to live and work.

### **Tipton -another German settlement in Mitchell County.**

Southwest of Cawker City in Mitchell County, is a neat appearing village of 227 persons, which was settled between 1870 and 1890 by German immigrants who came from around Essen, Germany, and from eastern states of the United States. They arrived by rail to Wilson or Beloit and then went on to Tipton by oxen or horses. They chose this location because of the favorable farm

location, just west and north of the Blue Hills. They left Germany because of the free land and freedoms that America offered.

The town was originally named Pittsburg in honor of an early settler named Pitt. Because the postal service requested a name change, the name Tipton was chosen. Some say it was merely the words NOT PIT spelled backwards, hence Tipton!

The main occupation was farming this fertile valley, but some were stone masons, leather workers, and carpenters. The type of German stone masonry was very sought after, as lying under the soil is a fine limestone layer of about eight inches thick. Before 1900, these craftsmen were employed all over the area building houses and barns with their unique German skills.

The settlers being for the most part of the Catholic faith had at first to travel to Cawker City where once every three or four months mass was offered. From 1875 to 1880, mass was offered by a Beloit priest, until the first church was built in Tipton in 1884.

On January 18, 1952, a fire completely destroyed the St. Boniface Catholic church. While the new one was being built, the people met at the Knights of Columbus hall. The church was completed in the fall of 1954. It is of a beautiful purple tan brick, in the Roman style.

The parish supports two buildings for grade and high school education. The St. Boniface church patrons hold an annual picnic to raise money to finance the school system. It is a crowd-drawing event for the town. Families come from Beloit, Osborne, surrounding towns, and out of the area, as this event functions as homecoming. German foods such as German sausage made in Tipton, green bean and dumpling soup, cinnamon rolls, bierocks, and kucken are served at home and at celebrations.

Family names who settled the area after 1870 are Arnoldy, Beck, Carl, Ellenz, Gengler, Gasper, Gradig, Hake, Koenigsman, Kier, Koster, Mick, Pestinger, Reinert, Streit, Thummel, Eck, Shulte, and Thille.

Thrifty German descendants continue to farm, run several businesses, manufacturing firms, and a unique firm which supplies thousands of newly-hatched pheasants and quail for the hunting industry. These descendants continue to add greatly to Mitchell County's prosperity.

## **Osborne County**

[The focus is on Alton, by Carolyn Williams, 2010.]

An early homesteader who had the fortune of visiting with both Lyman T. Earl and "General" Hiram Bull, cofounders of Bull City, later changed to Alton, stated, "Through the years, the Alton community has had the reputation of being one of the finest you could find anywhere and we always credited it to the fact that Bull and Earl had a great deal to do with who settled there. They were good judges of human nature and did much to help those whom they wished to come to the area to live."

Although Alton is now known for the Bohemian Cultural Center/Homestead Restaurant, the Bohemian influence in Alton is only one of the three components that makes Alton the community it is today.

The Rehors, Schlanskys, Polres, Cjekas, and Lala made the Czech settlement a viable community in the area south of Claudell in Dor Township, 16 miles north of Alton in Smith County. Their close family ties and membership in the western view Lodge #246 continued there until in the late 20th century when just a few families remained.

The old Bohemian Hall out on the prairie stood without modern conveniences to attract activities. When there arose a need for a viable building to encourage economic development in the form of

restaurant in Alton, the lodge members deeded the title over to the local community foundation, BCCF, on March 23, 2001.

The restaurant has hosted various Bohemian activities such a Polka Dances, Kansas State Bohemian Lodge meeting, regular monthly meetings, and on occasion, has held Bohemian buffets featuring the well-known kolache pastry the people of that culture know how to make. Only Poore, Lala, and Schlansky names remain of original settlers. However, a new family, the Treceks, originally from the Cuba/Agenda Kansas area, have settled north of town. They are an asset to the Alton community, representing their culture as well.

Many of our residents, especially those who live south of town, are of the Quaker/Friends persuasion. This particular group has continued to grow and flourish since the Mendenhall, Beals (Bales), Gregory and Stanfield families emigrated to the Mt. Ayr area. They came to the Kansas territory from Penn's Colony, Pennsylvania, when it opened for settlement in 1854, to escape religious persecution and to extend their freestate beliefs, hoping to stem the tide of slavery. With the trials of pioneer life and the calm spirit and the effort to "do good," the Quakers survived and thrived. Their spirit continues to permeate the community.

The third ethnic group to settle in the Alton community was the Seventh-day Adventist Church which emphasized understanding of prophecy, the soon return of Christ, and Sabbath Day observance on Saturday.

One of the more noted names from the Adventist group is Lyman T. Earl, the cofounder of Bull City. His descendants, the Nichols, still live in the area.

The Adventists were industrious people, building and maintaining a mill along the South Fork of the Solomon River. Cornmeal and graham flour were staples there and soon "a very good store and a good dwelling house" were established on the bank.

Family names from the Adventists tradition were Korb, Adams, Smith, Clevenger, Curtis, Wilhite, Pearce, Stevens and Jaycox. In the course of eight or ten years schools built and supported by the denomination were in abundance, often making use of the existing building on Saturday for the Sabbath meetings. Unlike the Bohemian and Friends cultures, the Adventists moved on. Now, little is left of their settlement but the cemetery along Highway 24 east of Alton.

Today, Alton is a blend of these three as well as the evangelical fervor of the old-time Methodists who helped to evangelize the frontier at the same time as the others. Only the United Methodist Church, a merged entity of the Methodist Episcopal and the United Brethren churches, remains in town. However, the Mt. Ayr church, six miles south of Alton is a thriving church reaching many who were not formerly connected with the Friends tradition. The community is continuing the tradition of encouraging people of good character to settle here and "doing good," making it one of the more active towns along Highway 24.

## **Rooks County**

[The focus is on Damar, submitted by Roger Hrabe.]

On October 8, 1884, President Grover Cleveland signed the document which entitled Francis St. Peter to 160 acres of land on the western edge of Rooks County for the consideration of \$4.00. By 1880 most of the government land had been "taken up." Francis St. Peter had hauled ammunition during the Civil War and like so many other veterans was lured to seek the free land made available by the Homestead Act. The purpose of the Homestead Act was to promote speedy settlement of the public lands as a means of producing revenue which was badly needed by the Union. Senator Samuel C. Pomroy of Kansas promoted the idea that the government should not derive a revenue from the sale of the land, anymore than from the sale of the air or the sunshine.

Almost immediately other Canadian French Catholic people followed. They came by way of Illinois, then to Concordia, Aurora, and St. Joseph and on farther to the west looking for cheap land and a new home. The first settlers arrived in covered wagons drawn by oxen. Among the first arrivals were Ezra and Joe St. Peter, Peter Simoneau, A. D. Manny, Dave Plante, Leon Hebert, Charles Noel, Stenis Morin, Joe Kerouac, Frank Beamu, Daniel Dussault, Adolph Sennesac, Ambrose Desbien, Archie Saindon, Mitchell Morel, and Henry Berland. The first grains harvested were hauled by oxen to Ellis or Logan. The community became so solidly French in character that it was referred to as the Acadia of the West. It has retained much of its original tradition to this day. The first church services were held in the home of Ezra St. Peter in 1887. Mr. St. Peter then donated three acres for a cemetery and two acres for a church to the east of his home. The new community was first known as St. Petersville. However, the first post office located about two miles to the north east was named Ainsworth.

When the Union Pacific railroad passed nearby, the first small frame church was moved to the site of the present church. The post office moved also, to the railroad station. It was at this time that the new town became known as Damar.

## **Graham County**

**[Nicodemus, Kansas: An African American Emigrant Town. Submitted by Angela Bates, Historian and Executive Director, Nicodemus Historical Society and Museum.]**

For the 350 souls who sought to experience real freedom in the Promise Lands of Kansas, Nicodemus became a dream come true. Although these African Americans had experienced the ugly institution of chattel slavery here in America, they knew when they sought freedom in the west, that they would have the greatest opportunity to achieve the American dream—a dream of land ownership and autonomy through self government in their own all black town. As newly emancipated slaves with little to build a future on, the homestead lands of Kansas proved to be the answer to their problem of self development and sustainability.

They emigrated by train from the Bluegrass area of central Kentucky, from the towns of Georgetown, Lexington, Midway, Sadieville, and others. In the spring of 1877, the Cincinnati Southern Railroad lay track south through the Bluegrass area to Nashville, Tennessee, establishing a direct rail to Cincinnati, where they could board trains headed west for Kansas. As this first group of emigrants boarded trains in Sadieville, September 5, 1877, those who remained behind sang "Sweet Bye and Bye." These emigrants left what was familiar to them, but what had offered little hope in experiencing real freedom, and headed for an unknown land, seeking a dream that finally came true with the spirit of determination and belief in themselves, as well as in God.

They arrived on the prairies of Kansas, September 17th, and settled in their new earth homes called "dugouts," along the north bank of the Solomon River, in Graham County. Named after the first African slave and prophet to purchase his freedom in America, the town of Nicodemus became the beacon of hope for other former slaves who wanted to seek freedom in the Promised Lands of Kansas. Subsequent groups arrived in the following years seeking the same experience of freedom as the first settlers.

Between 1885 and 1886, Nicodemus was at its peak with nearly 700 settlers. The town had two newspapers, a bank, doctor, and a bustling business district. When the hopes of acquiring the railroad failed, so did the spirit of those who had established its economic viability. Businesses shut down and moved to the nearby railroad camp and newly-established town of Bogue. Nicodemus had lost its potential for economic growth. During the hardship years that followed, with the Dust Storms of the Dirty Thirties and the Great Depression, Nicodemus continued to lose its residents. Over the years the decline continued until today there are less than 30 residents.

With the same spirit of determination as those first settlers, descendants, residents, and the community's historical society, worked for seven years to get Nicodemus designated a National Historic Site. In 1996 it finally became a unit of the National Park Service. Although Nicodemus is a quiet and sleepy town, along the slow banks of the Solomon River, it holds a unique title for our

nation– as the only and oldest all African American town west of the Mississippi River that represents the African American experience in the settling of the West.

## **Sheridan County**

[Township Patterns of Settlement, by Pearl Toothaker, submitted by Jennifer Spresser.]

The county's written history begins with the accounts of Spanish and French explorers who wrote of the Great Desert and the Plains Indians as early as 1546. When it was established there was not gold or loot of any kind to be found here explorers avoided the treeless, waterless plain and followed the Arkansas on the South or the Republican on the north. Neither Spanish nor French coveted the dry plain with its roving bands of Indians and buffalo, so the Indian was not molested for two generations.

Early settlers of Sheridan County were motivated by the Homestead Act. Homesteaders began taking up land in 1873. Trappers and hunters had been here for short seasons and some had made temporary homes. Early settlements were made along the streams. The northeast part of the county was settled first because of its wooded stream—the North Solomon River.

Families from England located ranch homes in Valley Township (Eastern Sheridan County) in the early 1880s. These English families established the towns of Studley and Tasco. Much of English culture has been preserved in good homes and a fine standard of living.

The first German settlements were made in the northwest part where they established Old Sheridan. Old Sheridan later moved to Selden.

Descendants of Germans who had migrated from their homeland to Russia, thence to America and in the 1880s to Sheridan County are generally called Russian but speak the German language. Their church has been the center of a prosperous community. German Russian homeseekers located in the southeast part of the county where they put down roots that have resisted drought and hardships.

German Lutherans began settlements in Parnell Township (Central Sheridan County) in 1889. They had a church and parsonage. This is a good farming community.

A large part of the population of Solomon Township (South West Sheridan County) is of German descent. Their community center is the town of Angelus. The history of Angelus is closely interwoven with the church. The church had its beginning in a sod house in 1887.