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HISTORY OF LYON COUNTY

Lyon County, in fertile rolling prairie west of the Minnesota River in the southwestern part of the State, was one of the last outposts of southern Minnesota's frontier life. Its very name recalls this vanished day for it is the namesake of General Nathaniel Lyon. General Lyon was a soldier who helped patrol the frontier of Kansas, Dakota, Nebraska, and Minnesota during the years of 1853-61, and was greatly liked by the few scattered white men who lived there.

Less than 75 years ago the 708 square miles included in Lyon County were the happy hunting grounds of the Sioux Indians. Today broad fields of grain and corn witness the conquest by the white man of its fertile soil. These crops have brought prosperity to the farmer and have made possible the modest frame dwellings with their huge barns, granaries, machine sheds, silos, and windmills, so characteristic of all the farms in this section. Characteristic too are the surrounding groves of trees, some of natural growth and others planted for wind-breaks against the tornados and blizzards that often sweep across the prairie.

Good gravel and concrete roads connect these farms with villages and with the busy trade centers, Marshall and Tracy. Traveling over these roads the rural mail carrier sees the farmer plowing, seeding, reaping, and harvesting, all with the aid of the latest equipment in farm machinery. The postman's car is heaped high with bags of letters and packages from mail order houses, and he passes many a farmer on his way to deliver cream, grain, or livestock to the nearest village cooperative. Since the coming of the automobile many farmers motor often to trade centers in neighboring

counties; Yellow Medicine, Lincoln, Murray, and Redwood which border Lyon on the north, west, south, and east. Sometimes they take their families to visit the department stores and larger markets of the Twin Cities, a six hour drive away.

Because of its rich soil and its modern farming methods, Lyon ranks among the counties having the highest income from agriculture. The advantage of diversified farming was quickly learned and today most of the county's income is derived from livestock and livestock products. Many farms are electrically lighted, and porcelain bathrooms, running water, and oil pumps make farm living quite as comfortable as that in the modern cities and picturesque villages. Children on farms go to consolidated schools and the county's 4-H Clubs take an active part in the State's sport meets, drama and debate.

These comforts and opportunities, however, were won only after many privations endured by the pioneers. Courage and persistence in the face of pestilence, drought, death dealing tornados, and blizzards have made the early history of Lyon a saga of heroic adventure.

PRE-PIONEER PERIOD

Story of the Glacial Age

Many thousands of years ago huge glaciers rolled down over Lyon County and formed its undulating prairies and plains. By studying the different kinds of soils, the surface of the land, and the currents of streams, geologists have been able to retrace the story of this ancient time.

In Lyon County streams in the southwestern corner flow to the south and the southwest. These are the streams south of the hilly plateau, Coteau des Prairies, which ends in this southwestern region. All other streams, including the Yellow Medicine, Cottonwood, and Redwood Rivers, have their source in the Coteau and drain to the Minnesota River basin.

A deep channel connecting the northeast corner of Eidsvold Township

with Westerheim, is believed to be an old river bed, fed by a lake and flowing into Lac qui Parle River. After the ice was all melted the lake disappeared and the river dried. Because this channel is a mile and a half long and a half a mile wide, scientists say that the river must have been very large. The kind of soil and gravel in the channel also bear out this story. Other channels exist in our county; one in the town of Omro and one in Stoney Run.

The glaciers left thick layers of finely ground rock partly covered with muddy water. When the water was drained off vegetation began to grow. As the vegetation died year after year or was burned over, the top layer of powdered rock became a thick coating of black loamy soil.

First Explorers, Officials, and Fur Traders to Visit the Indian Paradise

The first white man known to have visited the vicinity of Lyon County was the French explorer, Le Sueur. Le Sueur was with Perrot near what is now Wabasha in 1689 when Perrot claimed all the upper Mississippi country in the name of the king of France. He had a fort on Prairie Island near Red Wing in 1695.

While he was there the Indians told him about some blue clay in the upper Minnesota River country which they used for paint. For some reason, Le Sueur thought this clay was copper ore.

So in 1700 he built a fort on the Blue Earth River near Mankato and started a mine. The next spring he took two tons of the clay down the Mississippi River and across the ocean to France. When he got there he found that the clay was worthless.

Soon after Le Sueur and his men built their fort, the men went on a hunt and killed four hundred buffalo. This hunt probably brought these brave Frenchmen into Lyon County.

After his return to France, Le Sueur helped to prepare a map of this region. On it the Minnesota is called the R. St. Pierre or Mine-Sota.

All the early visitors and those who came later describe the country as gently rolling prairies drained by rivers into the Minnesota basin and dotted with lakes and sloughs. There were many acres of timber, oak, base and sugar maple, in scattered groves. In every marsh lived otter, mink and muskrat that yielded fur in abundant quantities.

Indians, in this native paradise, were happy and care-free. Wide plains were dotted with prosperous Indian villages and their adjoining burial grounds.

A mound found in Lyons Township in Lyon County, which old settlers call the Knob, is one of these burial places. Human bones have been unearthed by wolf hunters. It is believed that dirt was carried there by Indians to make an observation post, as an Indian trail led through timber to the mound and thence to Wood Lake.

After the Louisiana Purchase the United States Government sent an official expedition to explore the Minnesota and Red Rivers. In this expedition was Major Stephen H. Long and a group of scientific men, one of whom was Professor William Keating of the University of Pennsylvania. In his papers, he refers to the Redwood River and the red pipestone that was said to exist on its banks, a three day journey from its mouth. Other familiar points mentioned were Paterson's Rapids (in Renville County), Pejehata Zeze Watapan (Yellow Medicine River), and Beaver Dam rivulet (Lac qui Parle River).

An Englishman, G. W. Featherstonhaugh, a United States employed geologist, explored parts of the Coteau des Prairies during the year of 1835 but his exact route is unknown.

The first white man who lived in Lyon was the fur trader, Joseph La Framboise. Employed by the American Fur Company, he came with his family

in 1835 to establish a fur post in the Lynd Woods on the Redwood River. There he stayed for two years trading with the Indians.

George Catlin, the artist, visited him and spent the night while on his way to the sacred red pipestone quarries. Traveling with Catlin were Robert Serril Wood and O-Kup-Kee, an Indian guide. These red pipestone quarries were guarded jealously for many years from the white man by the Indians, and at several Indian villages Catlin was warned to turn back. But he persisted in his search and at last reach the quarries.

In writing his memoirs, Catlin refers to his old friend, Joseph La Framboise of the Lynd Woods, and describes the countryside as a series of swells and terraces with not a bush in sight but with ground covered with green grass five and six inches high.

In 1838 the region was visited by a party which included Joseph Nicholas Nicollet and John C. Frémont. Nicollet had already explored the streams which flow into Lake Itasca. Frémont was a famous explorer of the Rocky Mountains and other regions and was known as "The Pathfinder." He was later to become a Mexican and Civil War general and the first Republican candidate for president of the United States.

This exploring party started out from Mendota near the mouth of the Minnesota River to explore the Minnesota Valley. Proceeding up the valley of the Cottonwood on the north side of the river to the site of the present town of Lamberton, they crossed to the other side and worked their way west passing through where Tracy now stands and around the north end of Lake Sheteck.

In describing the Coteau, whose northeastern slope ends in the southwestern corner of Lyon, as a "beautiful tract of land, diversified by hills, dales, woodland and lakes," Nicollet said, "there can be no doubt that in future this region will be the summer resort of the wealthy of the

land" and "other portions of the Coteau, ascending from the lower latitudes, present pretty much the same character, with the remarkable difference that the woodlands become scarcer and the open prairies more extensive." This prairie land, including broad acres of Lyon, he refers to as the "Undine Region."

Sibley, a close friend of Nicollet writes in his memoirs of the glowing terms in which Nicollet describes this undine region characterizing it as "the garden spot of the northwest, and as destinied, at no distant day, to be the happy home of an industrious, and enterprising population." Concerning the flora and fauna native to the region Nicollet said, "among the interesting specimens of vegetation of this region, as trees: the American red elm, lime tree, burr oak, white ash, leafed maple, nettle tree, large American aspen, as shrubs; the hazel, red root, peterswort, etc., as herbs; alum root, tuffed and American vetch, wood sorrel, sedge and pasture grasses, Canadian cinquefoil, germander, Southern lily, button snake root, Virginia strawberry, buffalo clover, pink milk vetch on arid slopes, mustard and silver-leafed psoralia (Indian turnip)."

Captain James Allen came up the Des Moines River in 1844 to Lake Shetek, named it Lake of the Oaks, and used it as a base while he explored various parts of southeastern Minnesota.

James W. Lynd started a trading post in the Lynd Woods around 1855 but shortly after returned east with his family. Aaron Meyer and family lived for a time near the Cottonwood River before moving to Lake Shetek outside of the county. At this time Charles Hammer called "Swede Charlie" trapped in the woods, but there is no record of his later whereabouts. J. H. Ingals, a widower with four children, lived for a few months on the Cottonwood near Nobles Stables, not far from Russell, a relic of the camp used by workers who in 1856-57 built the Federal wagon road between Fort

Ridgely and the Mississippi River.

Saratoga Townsite

In 1857, the Dakota Land Company laid out a townsite near the Meyer cabin in the present township of Custer and named it Saratoga. A house was built, and John Renniker, a Dutchman, was put in charge. Renniker, used the opportunity for selling whiskey to the Indians. This proved his downfall as he lost his position and Saratoga was left without a resident.

Renniker did not leave the vicinity but moved into the Meyer home where he did odd jobs for his board and room. One day Meyer sent him to New Ulm for supplies. In spite of a friendly warning to buy no liquor, Renniker bought a 10 gallon cask of whiskey. John Campbell, a marauding half-breed, saw him make the purchase, and collecting a band of Indians, overtook Renniker on his way home, murdered him, and seized his goods. "Swede Charlie" together with Hoel Parmelee from Lake Shetek went in search of the body. They found it near Nobles Crossing of the Cottonwood and buried it north of Meyer's home.

Political Identity

The territory of the upper Mississippi was claimed by France by right of discovery. France ceded the land west of the river to Spain in 1762 and lost the land east of the river to England in 1763. Spain gave the land west of the river back to France in 1800. But the wars in Europe were taking much money from the French treasury. Besides this Napoleon who was ruler of the French knew he would have a hard time defending the area from his enemies in time of war.

So he sold this vast tract known as Louisiana, of which the present Lyon County was a small part, to the United States government for the sum of fifteen million dollars.

After the United States acquired this territory, Lyon County, with the adjacent region, belonged to many territories of the Union. In 1804 it

was included in Louisiana district of Indiana territory. It became a part of Louisiana territory in 1804 and of Missouri territory in 1812. From 1821 to 1834 it was more or less officially forgotten and then became a part of Michigan territory. It was transferred to Wisconsin territory in 1836 and thence to Iowa in 1838. From 1846 to 1849 when Minnesota territory was created it was known as "no man's land." Minnesota territory became a State on May 11, 1858.

All this southwestern prairie in Minnesota was known for a time as the Blue Earth region. Then in 1855 the western part became Brown County; in 1857 Cottonwood, Murray, Pipestone, Nobles, and Jackson Counties were taken out of Brown. Redwood County emerged from Brown in 1865, and through many changes its area became Yellow Medicine, Lac qui Parle, and Redwood. In 1869 a part of Redwood became Lyon, and finally in 1874, Lincoln was separated from Lyon.

EARLY SETTLEMENT

Incentive And Land Office

The nearness of Lyon County to the Indian reservation along the Minnesota River delayed the settlement for several years after the pioneers were filling up the counties further east. Even when the Sioux were expelled from the State after the Indian Uprising of 1862 roaring bands from Dakota continued to hunt here.

Two Moore brothers settled in Lake Marshall Township in 1864 but became alarmed and left. Only Alex and Joseph La Framboise, sons of the first white man living in Lyon, and a few families of Indian half-breeds stayed on.

The only way land could be held at this time was by squatters rights. After a small group braved the terrors of the lonely prairie in 1867 to form the first permanent settlement along the Redwood River, surveyors ran lines to help incoming settlers in the selection of their lands, but it was sometime

before plats were recorded and these claim fillings could be registered at the land office.

The Federal Land Office for this region was first in New Ulm. Here settlers in southwestern Minnesota registered their claims prior to 1872 when the office was moved to Redwood Falls. But the office was not very busy during this time. Land seekers were afraid to venture too far away from the frontier. Even land speculators were chary of profits that might cost them their scalps.

So in Lyon there was no wild stampede for land, fevered matching of brawn and wits, or claim jumping such as occurred in areas east of the Mississippi. Although all the land in Lyon was fertile and rich, settlers filtered but slowly into the district. Then in 1872 came the railroad. Immigration now began in earnest and reached its peak during the next few years. Because of the influx the land office was removed from Redwood Falls to Tracy on May 22, 1880. Many of the land seekers came by train but the caravan of prairie schooners grew steadily longer for this was still the cheapest form of transportation for long journeys.

Many of these immigrants were attracted by the advertising campaign conducted by businessmen in the State. McClung in his "Minnesota as it is in 1870" a pamphlet written to encourage settlement, gives an interesting picture of the times. Here was described the best way to secure good claims. "Besides an inquiry at the land office in person or letter, an application to settlers in the neighborhood selected will often reveal the fact that many excellent claims that have been filed on have never been occupied, or if occupied have been abandoned. The papers are full of notices to such claimants, that the claim is contested and trial ordered at the land offices. The cost of these trials are $10 or $15 according to the original entrance fee.

"The prairie breaking cost $2.75 to $3 per acre, oak openings timber or bush land, $5 to $8, according to the amount of grubbing to be done (contract prices).

"Time to break prairie, June and July preferred--the sod not rotting so well earlier or later. In strictly timbered land, without the tenacious sod, earlier or later breaking will do. The farmer may break for himself at less cost. Two yoke of oxen or two span of horses working abreast, with 'eveners' or double trees, with a 12 or 14 inch plow, and one man to manage, will break from an acre and a half a day. This presupposes the land to be grubbed. If not, a heavier plow and from three to six yoke of oxen are required, according to the size and number of grubs--also an extra hand to drive. On the prairie a much lighter team will answer. With an 18 or 20 inch "red plow," with a rolling cutter, three yoke of oxen will break from three to four acres per day.

"Unless it is the first year, and the farmer requires to plow in May and plant for his living, no small grain is planted, but corn, potatoes, rutabagas, broom corn or corn for fodder. The potatoes are plowed in, the corn inserted in the sod, in an opening made by an axe or other implement. The only cultivation is generally by a cultivator or hoe. The crop is generally more than sufficient to pay for the breaking. Two or three inches is the depth preferred for new breaking, the object being to rot the sod. By the next spring the land is in order for a wheat crop, which is sowed with or without further plowing as the farmer prefers. If cross-plowed, a heavier crop pays for the labor.

"In almost any county in the State, wild lands held by speculators may be purchased at from $2 to $5 and $10 per acre--part cash, and 3 to 5 years credit; railroad lands within six miles of any of the railroads, from $4 to $10--small cash payment and 5 to 19 years credit; school lands in almost any of the oldest settled counties, at $5 to $8--fifteen percent cash, and credit to suit--not over 20 years. Seven percent interest or deferred payment; on any class of land.

"The average assessed value of all taxable lands in the State in 1868 was $3.83. Average rate of assessment about half of the cash value."

Coming Of The First Settlers

Permanent settlement began in Lyon after A. W. Muzzy, a man of deep religious convictions, decided to brave the terrors of this lonely prairie. He wanted to found a colony to which his son-in-law, an ordained Methodist minister, might act as spiritual leader. He arrived in Lyon in the fall of 1866 while scouting for a favorable site, and was delighted by the rich land and the beauty of the Lynd Woods along the Redwood.

The only inhabitants were a few half-breeds. Muzzy purchased a claim from the son of Joseph La Framboise who was living in a log cabin formerly used by James Lynd. After remaining a few weeks, Muzzy returned east for his large family and began his permanent stay at Lynd in June, 1867. He was accompanied by his friend E. F. Langdon who took up a neighboring claim.

In the meantime, while Muzzy was absent gathering his household goods and his family, T. W. Castor built a home on section 34 in Stanley Township. His property included land over the line in Redwood County. He had been long familiar with the vicinity through his service as a scout under General Sibley during the Indian War.

Castor was one of those roving pioneers who followed the frontier outposts. At one time Register of Deeds in Olmsted County, he became a pioneer of Redwood Falls, and intending to raise stock, pushed westward to Lyon, and became the first resident of the new settlement.

He began his stock raising with one cow and hauled supplies from Redwood Falls on a hand sled drawn by a Newfoundland dog. His son, Hugh Wilson Castor was the first white child born in the county.

During these early years, while he accumulated a large herd of cattle, his home was a welcome resting place for Lynd settlers on their way

to Redwood Falls for supplies. They often traveled the 50 long miles on foot. They were always warmly greeted by Mrs. Castor and the offer of a good hot meal and a bed, and they were sure of entertaining fireside conversation, for their host, a graduate of Oberlin College, was a man of original theories and philosophical ideas.

At Lynd, often called the settlement of 1867, the pioneers quickly increased in numbers and were able to dominate political affairs in Lyon County during the early years. Nine more families came that first year and nineteen more the year after. During the year of 1870 there were isolated families scattered throughout the county on claims in Amiret, Custer, Lake Benton, Vallers, Lyons, and Lake Marshall. The official census taken that year credited Lyon County with 268 white inhabitants.

Covered Wagons

Most of these first families traveled to Lyon in old wagons drawn by oxen and crowded with their household possessions. They were the independent land seekers and were led to settle here for various reasons. Charles E. Goodell, arriving in 1868, had hunted with his cousin, Fred Stone, on the prairie as early as 1866, and at that time had attempted to float logs during high water to a mill in Redwood Falls.

A few of the arrivals had separated from a caravan of land seekers traveling in covered wagons. Four wagons containing families from Olmsted and leading an extra saddle horse, appeared in Lyon in 1869. They had examined the land near St. Cloud, Benson, and Hutchinson, and finally came to this region on the advice of Abner Tibbets, Register of the United States Land Office in St. Peter.

Later when the railroad advertised the fertility of the land, the arrival of long caravans of covered wagons became a daily occurrence. Many families had lived in these wagons for months while they traveled about the country in search of the best land.

A white bow canvas top protected them from the weather, and in the wagon box were packed needed household possession. Over these were spread heavy quilts upon which members of the family slept. To cook their meals they had to stop near a brook or stream and gather firewood, and on the primitive trails beyond the frontier they must be always on guard against lurking Indians. Families usually joined with others going the same direction, making long caravans. There was greater safety in numbers.

But the life was adventurous and many found it attractive. The beauty of the wilderness was wholly unspoiled and many close friendships were made. As the creaking wagons came to a halt for the night, campfires were built. The men unyoked the oxen, watered and tethered them to graze, while the women bustled about preparing the evening meal. Soon the appetizing smell of food rose to mingle with the fresh scent of the prairie and wood-smoke.

Perhaps bubbling in a family pot would be a plump partridge or rabbit shot by the head of the family; or a pan of trout, caught by a boy, might be browning crisply over the fire. After the meal all gathered around the fire and Yankee speech mingled with the broken English of Europeans, as they talked over their common problems and hopes.

Wagon Roads and Indian Trails

Most of the early explorers and visitors to Lyon had traveled by the water highways and Indian trails. But although the settlers had not yet come, the United States government built a well-constructed wagon road in Lyon County in 1856-57.

This Federal road extending westward from the Mississippi, spanned the southern part of Lyon County. It was built under the direction of Albert H. Campbell, General Superintendent of the Pacific Wagon Roads. The road entered Lyon close to the line that now separates Amiret and Monroe Townships;

crossed the Redwood River near the present site of Russell, passing near Lake Benton on its way to the Missouri River.

Colonel Nobles, supervising the work, spent one or two years with his men at the crossing of the Cottonwoods, where he built a permanent camp beside a fresh water spring. In this camp was a house, stable, corral, and a fenced-in garden for vegetables. One of the finest bridges on the road was built here, and Nobles Spring still bears the name of the field commander.

In 1861 "Old Steve," a lawyer from Dubuque, Iowa and Hoel Parmelee laid out a road between New Ulm and Sioux Falls connecting the two settlements by way of Saratoga on the Nobles road.

Some of the early explorers of Lyon County mention the old Indian trails in their memoirs, especially the trail from the Lynd Woods to the Pipestone quarries about twelve miles away. The settlers who came later also discovered these trails. C. H. Whitney followed an Indian trail down the Redwood River to Big Bend near Mankato on the Minnesota River. Later he took the Lac qui Parle trail north to the Minnesota River, and east to another trail between Minnesota Falls and the Big Bend. Going back across country to Lake Marshall, he discovered another Indian path to the Cottonwood River and Lake Shetek.

During these first years the pioneers used these old trails and roads when they could. But many settlers, miles inland from even these crude highways, had to make primitive roads of their own over the prairie. One such road which began in Lincoln County and led to Marshall by way of Three Mile Creek, was cut by heavy ox-drawn wagons in the summer and by stone boats on sleds in winter.

Life on the virgin prairie was not always joyous during these first years of settlement in spite of the beauty of the country and the rich fertile soil, which had brought men westward. Gay birds, the slender reeds warning

and whispering in the marshes, bright wild flowers in pattern of color along the trails and in the meadows, did not always make up for the hard life and the back breaking soil.

Yet the land was generous. The settlers could build their cabins and sheds with logs from the timber groves near the streams; or if they found this too hard, there was sod to make shanty walls snug and warm. Firewood was to be had for the cutting.

Wild fowl was abundant and helped replenish the scanty larder. In the fall the reed houses of the muskrat filled the marshes, and the trapping of muskrat and mink added to family incomes.

In the Lyon County Reporter of February 4, 1879, C. F. Case says of hunting in those days: "A man of resources had little trouble to live on the Minnesota Frontier at that time. The air was full of meat. Ducks and geese were frequently so thick that even we could shoot toward heaven and bring down this manna. The first goose that fell a victim to our sporting habits met with a flat refusal from our better half to cook the bird, for she insisted it must be sick or we could never have shot it. The prejudice died out later when we came home from a hunt and reported that three of us had shot fourteen geese at one shot. That was good hunting, and we felt a very natural delicacy for many months against confessing that when the fourteen fell our gun didn't go off."

Big game disappeared soon after the coming of the settlers. The first people in the county found many buffalo bones, and occasionally saw a few stray bison. One of these was killed with a load of bird shot in 1869 by two Norwegian boys who were hunting near the fork of two branches of the Yellow Medicine River. The last elk seen in the vicinity was shot by a mixed blood Indian near Lake Marshall in 1870. Deer stayed a little longer in the woods along the streams. In 1880 several were shot in the Lynd Woods and more were seen in the vicinity.

But the settlers could not live entirely on game, and other food was scarce as there was so little land yet under cultivation. The nearest markets were about a hundred miles away. At that time the railroad stopped at Mankato, and the boats on the Minnesota River could reach New Ulm only at high water. Supplies were hauled by team from New Ulm, St. Peter, or Mankato, and in the winter heavy snows made such trips practically impossible. For lumber, logs were hauled to the sawmill in Redwood Falls, a distance of fifty miles. Men with no teams often walked this distance for supplies, and were grateful for the chance to rest half-way at Mr. Castor's house. A. D. Morgan walked to Redwood Falls in one day and returned the next, carrying a plow-lay on his back to the blacksmith there, and bringing it home again. The settlers were glad to trade with the peaceful Indians of the prairie, especially for furs and ponies.

Fortunately an actual pioneer has described the homes and the conditions of this time. Mrs. Fellows of Lynd wrote her first-hand account and read it at an Old Settlers Gathering in February, 1885: "The first time I saw Lyon County, in the dark days of 1869, there were about a dozen in our settlement, scattered along the Redwood River in the timber. Another settlement nearly as large as ours, was on the Cottonwood River and another at Lake Benton .....The settlers lived in small, low, miserable log houses, some of them were originally Indian tepees remodeled to suit the emergency. Some were without floors, except the solid earth covered with prairie grass; after it became dry and broken, it was raked off and fresh grass cut and spread down. Of course, the floors needed no sweeping, and that was something saved, as there was a chance to economize on brooms. Economy, rigid economy, was the rule.

"A roof made of shingles was almost unknown. The houses were roofed, some with hay, some with earth, but the prevailing fashion was a shake roof. I fancy only the initiated have seen or heard of the shake roof. It consisted

of flat, clumsy pieces of wood, all sizes and widths, and, as nearly as I can remember, about three feet long, split and shaped and smoothed with a broad-ax, over lapping each other shingle-fashion. It served as a mere covering, keeping out the sun, but afforded little protection. The wind and snow and rain and flies and mosquitoes and gnats and all other nice things had full liberty to come and go at will.

"In those days there were blizzards, too, real genuine blizzards. The winds were not tempered to the shorn lamb, not by a good deal. After the blizzard what a picture our houses presented! Floors, beds, everything, were fancifully covered--decorations enough to have satisfied the most esthetic. Here and there and everywhere were festoons and wreaths and garlands of every imaginary thing of the snow, the beautiful snow, filling the house, above and below. We didn't enjoy it a bit, however. With the mercury frolicking among the lower twenties, the poetry in our natures was entirely frozen out. Even a board to make a door or case a window was of inestimable value. Flooring, not the best quality by a number of grades, sold for $50 per thousand.

"Thanks are due to a Maine Yankee for introducing an improvement in our architecture. Sod houses made an appearance, and they were much better, being more economical. Here we lived, deprived of every luxury and most of the comforts and necessities of life, trying to be happy and keep homesickness away, which would occasionally trouble us notwithstanding all efforts to prevent it.

"We were, so to speak, at the jumping-off place, as another leap would have landed us among the savages. We depended wholly upon Redwood Falls for everything we had, and that a poor trading place, indeed. A spool of thread, a sheet of note paper, a pound of tea or sugar had to be hauled 50 miles."

Yet conditions in Lynd were almost better than those in Vallers

Township, still farther away from civilization. In the spring of 1871, three men went from Mower County to Mankato, and from there walked, pack sacks on their backs, all the way to their claims in Vallers. They built sod shanties staying, meanwhile, with settlers living along the Yellow Medicine River, then they went back to Mower to get their families, their oxen and their goods. These three men were Ole Broughton, Johannes Anderson and Johannes Stensrude.

Their homes were dug out caves or cellars roofed with split logs. They did have one luxury, however, windows fitted with glass brought from eastern Minnesota. All three had large families and there had been room in the ox-drawn wagons for only a few possessions. These included a cast iron stove, a few kerosene lamps, and cooking utensils. The new homes, therefore, were meagerly furnished. Rude tables and a few chairs were made from boxes. Bed frames were made of split logs with springs. There was not always oil for the lamps and they had to burn "witches," twisted rags coiled in bowls of melted lard. Such light was smoky and dim.

In Vallers water had to be hauled from the Yellow Medicine River. Occasionally a shallow hole was dug in the ground and seeping water scooped in buckets. Rain water was hoarded in those days, and later almost every farm home had its soft-water cistern. A few shallow wells were dug but the water from them was not good for much except to water stock.

The first three farmers in Vallers had only the most primitive tools. A hand plow had been brought from eastern Minnesota and they made three cornered drags with wooden pegs. First the turf was broken and then broken up with the drag. Wheat was sowed by hand and then the field was dragged again to cover the seed. When the grain was ripen, it was cut by hand with a cradle scythe and tied into bundles. It is no wonder that backs grew stiff and bent and hands were hardened.

Grain was hauled to a mill in New London about twelve miles north of

Wilmar in Kandiyohi County, to be ground into flour. It took ten days over Indian trails to make this trip even without mishap, and often the load would bog down in creeks, swamps, and ravines. In New London they bought molasses and salt pork, and an occasional packet of tea or a bag of dried apples and other simple necessities for home and farm.

Many privations were suffered during these years. Money was scarce and must be hoarded for the absolute necessities which could be bought only for cash. During these first years, with only a few acres broken, the harvest was light. After their own crop was stored, the three first settlers then walked all the way to Rochester, Minnesota to work in the harvest fields. This meant a trek of five days, each way, and carrying their knapsacks of food on their backs.

But although there were not many comforts, the pioneers gained strength and courage by wresting a living from the prairie, upheld by the steadfast purpose that had brought them westward.

First Post Office

Getting the mail was at first a community affair. Anyone who made a trip to Redwood Falls would collect his neighbors' letters, also. In 1868 D. M. Taylor, of Lynd was made postmaster and a weekly mail service was begun. William Jackson who was the first male white child to be born in St. Paul, brought the mail from Redwood Falls to Lynd. This first post office was just a large box with a padlock in Mr. Taylor's home. In 1870 a post office was installed in an old log building near Marshall by Dr. G. W. Whitney. The cabin was the home of his brother C. H. Whitney. A small stock of merchandise was kept in these first postoffices, also. Farmers of the western townships got their mail at a similar post office at Lake Benton, established in 1871.

First Church

The first religious service in Lyon County was held at the home of A. W. Mussey whose daughter was married to Rev. C. I. Wright of the Methodist

Church, and who had written many letters urging settlers of that faith to come into the County. The Rev. Mr. Wright preached the sermon. In 1871 when more settlers had come into the community, a church was built on M. V. Davidson's claim. It was made of logs with a shake roof and dirt floor. Here the Rev. Mr. Wright continued to hold service. Besides preaching the first sermon in the county, he officiated at the first wedding, that of Henry Nichols and Ida Hildreth of Lyons Township.

A lay preacher, Rev. W. T. Ellis, had a good deal of influence in Lyon County at this period. He was a man of much resource, pioneering at Camden and at Lynd as minister, storekeeper, and promoter. He had many unexpected quirks of character and at times must have been a thorn in the side of the orthodox Rev. Wright. A description of Ellis, was published by C. F. Case in his newspaper in 1898.

"Probably this Rev. Ellis was for a time the most celebrated man in the county. We remember him as a preacher of some talent and a good deal of originality. Governed almost by impulse, it was a wild guess what might be expected of him next. At a revival meeting he would make pictures on the wall weep for the sins of the world, and as a Sunday School teacher he would fire the pupils with ambition to walk in the footsteps of Moses and the prophets, but, he would also run horses on Sunday for the whiskey, beat his best friend in a trade, and swear like a Spanish pirate when he got mad. Being overheard by a lady dancing his cattle away up in G. he apologized by saying that he had bought them from a very profane man and that he had to quote the language they were accustomed to before they would heed his admonitions. Since leaving here he has been illustrated in the Police Gazette for trying to break up a seditious church meeting by pounding the congregation with a pulpit Bible."

First Store

Aside from the small supply of necessities kept at the two post offices, the first general store was opened at Lynd in 1871 by "Squire" Ellis,

the lay preacher, with enough merchandise to supply several communities. It became a popular center as well as a trading place, for Ellis drew an audience as honey attracts flies. There were never any vacant places on his cracker barrels, and if there was a dearth in topics for conversation men were never tired of watching the antics of his famous kicking mule.

There were many stories told of Ellis and his store, many of which he told on himself. A favorite was this one: One day he said he went to New Ulm for a load of goods, and on the way back was caught in a heavy rainstorm. His load was soaked and the dried apples swelled and pushed all the rest of the groceries into the road. He had a hard time salvaging his supplies which he had bought on credit and could not afford to lose, but finally got them home. The wet codfish had to be recured so he strewed it over his pasture to dry. The smell of codfish saturated the entire settlement and even reached the Flandreau Indians. They thought it came from the camp of an enemy tribe planning a surprise attack and made immediate preparations for the warpath.

First Hotel

Before the coming of the railroad Luman Ticknor opened a hotel at Lynd but there were very few guests. Travelers, except for an occasional band of Flandreau Indians camping in the woods, were few.

First Mill

Milling was not an important industry in Lyon County. Jacob Rouse and James Cummins dammed the Redwood River at Upper Lynd in 1868 and built a sawmill. But there were too few settlers to make it a paying business and the following year it was changed to a grist mill, flour being more essential. In 1872, C. H. Hildreth began milling a few miles from the present site of Russell but the mill was destroyed by fire and the proprietors did not rebuild. In 1874 the Kendall Mill was built at Marshall. Two mills built in 1880 by Blake and Berry were destroyed by a blizzard and fire after running a few months.

Frontier conditions were at first so hard that schools were almost impossible. Even the younger children were needed for the endless tasks at home, and travel over the prairie was too dangerous for them, especially in winter. In the more settled area at Lynd, however, a small informal school was in session as early as 1868, and in Vallers a small parochial school was established a few years later.

In 1871, after the county was organized, the Board of County Commissioners built two district schools and appointed G. W. Whitney, Superintendent. From this small beginning grew the excellent modern school system existing in Lyon today.

One of the early teachers, whose work in education is much admired in Lyon County was Mrs. A. C. Tucker. She and her husband were early pioneers, settling near the present site of Marshall before the village was platted. To provide education for her small son Adelbert, she invited neighboring children to share his first lessons and taught them in her home. Her little school was so successful that after the district school was built she continued teaching, leaving her eldest daughter in charge of the smaller children at home.

County Organization at Lynd

After Lyon County was created by legislative act in 1869, the settlement at Lynd dominated political affairs for some years. Outside this settlement there were only a few isolated families, in the county. So the officers named by Governor William R. Marshall to organize the county were naturally from Lynd. The men selected were A. W. Muzzy, E. R. Horton, and Daniel Williams as commissioners; Edmund Lamb, auditor; and Charles Hildreth, sheriff.

Later Levi S. Kiel was appointed commissioner to replace an absent member of the board in order that the county might be organized in time to take part in the general election. These officials met at the home of Luman Ticknor in August, 1870 and Mr. Muzzy was elected Chairman of the Board of Commissioners. At a later meeting the county was divided into election precincts and the Judges

of election were appointed.

This first election was on November 18, 1870 and although there were five election precincts, Saratoga, Marshall, Upper Medicine, Lynd, and Lake Benton, in only two of them, Lynd and Marshall, was there any voting. At Marshall the polling place was C. H. Whitney's sod shanty; at Lynd, an old claim shanty built by mixed blood Indians many years before. These polling places were so small that the men had to stand outside; they wrote their own tickets. Seventy-eight votes were cast and the county officials elected were: George E. Keyes, auditor; A. R. Cummins, treasurer; James Cummins, sheriff, W. H. Langdon, register of deeds; A. W. Muzzy, judge of probate; W. M. Pierce, county attorney; A. D. Morgan, clerk of court, James Mitchell, Sr., Timothy S. Eastman, and Daniel Williams, county commissioners.

There was no campaigning for office, as men could not spare the time from their personal affairs. Besides salaries were so low they were hardly tempting. The county auditor received $100 per year; the superintendent of schools, $20; the county attorney, $25. In 1875, when the county attorney's salary had been raised to $100 per year, the total of all salaries paid to county officials was $1,200.

In spite of the small salaries, Lyon County often had no money in its treasury these first years as there was little taxable property. The county was often pressed by creditors. In 1872 when Sheriff James Cummins presented a bill for $552.40 for expenses incurred in the arrest and imprisonment of four men for horse theft, there was no money in the treasury to pay the bill. These first years the county often borrowed money from merchants to pay off debts. When enough settlers had arrived to provide a wider tax base, bonds were issued to meet obligations and provide funds for road building and other necessary improvements.

Coming Of The Railway

Settlers in Lyon did not have long to wait for the railway. They

did not experience the long years of anticipation and vain speculation the citizens of the older counties lived through. In western Minnesota no oratory was needed for promoting the railroad. It arrived almost with the first settlers.

In 1872, the Winona and St. Peter Railway Company, now a branch of the Northwestern system, began laying tracks in Lyon County which reached the Redwood River that year. Lynd, the only settlement and the county seat naturally expected the railroad to come its way. But the railway company chose a less direct route in order to get more of the land the government gave to all railroads along the right-of-way. Lynd was left high and dry and soon dwindled in importance, while Marshall heretofore only virgin pasture land, almost over night became a flourishing village.

On April 14, 1872, the first train to come into Lyon County left New Ulm in the morning and reached Marshall at four in the afternoon. The distance of eighty miles was covered in seven hours. John Ward, Marshall's first station agent, and a crowd of settlers greeted the train's arrival. There were twenty-five freight cars, baggage car, and coach hauled by engine No. 26.

During the year 1873 the tracks were extended to Lake Kanepeska, but trains were not put on the line for two years, as there were too few settlers to make it profitable. In order to hold the land grant, however, every Sunday an engine and caboose made the trip to the end of the line.

Lyon County's second railway was built in 1879 by the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company. In January construction material was shipped to Tracy and work was begun in June, but was hindered by labor troubles.

A major strike began on June 16th, 1879, with a crew of shovelers working four miles west of Tracy. A demand for an increase of wages was refused and thirty-one men laid down their shovels. Instead of going to Tracy for their pay as directed, the men went west and incited the next camp to

join the strike, and this continued until all camps were enlisted.

After men at Lake Benton joined their ranks, they began a march back to Tracy from their camp on the Redwood River, and the rumor spread that they were waging war on the settlers. Actually very little damage was done, but Sheriff Hunter swore in twenty deputies, armed them with muskets, and took them by noon train to Tracy. When learning that two hundred men were fifteen miles away, a call was sent in for the militia. The strikers reached Tracy bearing a huge sign imprinted with the slogan "Railroad Strikers .....$3.50 per day and $1.50 per day."

Strikers and contractors met, and it was agreed that money to pay off the men would come from Marshall by train. But the train, when it came did not stop at Tracy, and the men began to threaten violence. However, within one hour the train with the militia pulled in, and the strike was ended. Only thirty of the workers took their wages; the rest returned to work. When the governor, John S. Pillsbury, arrived next morning the strike was over, and he returned to St. Paul within a few hours.

The third railroad built in Lyon was begun by the Willmar and Sioux Falls Company, locally organized in March, 1886 by the people of southwestern Minnesota. Surveying began the first year, but the work stopped and was not resumed until the Willmar and Sioux Falls Company was acquired in 1887 by the Manitoba road under the direction of James J. Hill. When it was known that Jim Hill was backing the road, the townships voted a bond issue amounting to $35,200 to be paid to the company if the line were completed by January 1, 1888. The road was not finished before October of that year, and the company accepted $30,000. Railroad service to Marshall began in August, 1888 and trains operated north out of Marshall and south as far as Pipestone by October. In 1900 this road became known as the Great Northern Railway.

Minnesota Western Railway Company built the last railroad in Lyon County between Evan, in Brown County, and Marshall. This road which is now

a branch of the Northwestern reached Marshall in July, 1902 and trains began running August 13.

The first railroad brought about many changes in community life, in the secluded experiences of the first small settlements. A horde of immigrants began pouring into the vicinity around Lynd. Not only by trail, but caravans of prairie schooners drawn by oxen moved toward Lyon in response to rumors of a boom caused by the new railway.

Isolated families in Vallers Township also heard of a new town that was being built on the railroad. Not knowing the name of the town or its location, these pioneers set out, in excitement to investigate, although it was mid-winter and travel was almost impossible. They had three or four home-made sleighs drawn by oxen, and they scattered willow branches along the trail in order to find their way home over trackless drifts. After a full day journey, they found the tiny town of Marshall, with it a log store building, some sod shanties, and a few dug-out caves in which families lived.

Despite the coming of the railroad, and the land agents, speculators, traders, and merchants whom it brought, the new frontier received one blow these first few years from which it was slow to recover. The locusts came. Clouds of them came down upon the fields laying the country waste. This was in 1873 and was a serious setback, coming when agriculture and every other enterprise in Lyon was just beginning and when the settlers had no reserve crops or finances with which to meet the plague. Immigration was lessened for a time especially in 1874-76 when the scourge here was at its worst.

But gradually the loss suffered during the grasshopper years was overcome, and by 1876 most of the government land had been taken. A bountiful crop in 1877 started a new boom, and the railroad lands were placed on the market.

These new arrivals were better off financially than the first homesteaders, and they brought not only the railroad lands but the holdings of

speculators, and the claims of discouraged first settlers.

Building of farm homes and buildings brought wagon trains of building materials and many farm implements were sold. Everyone was building, plowing, sowing, reaping and harvesting. There was little time for reading and in some homes boxes of books brought from the east lay packed away in boxes under the beds.

In 1879, the assessed valuation of county property was more than a million and a half dollars. There were four mills in the county, one of them, that in Marshall, a steam mill. The following year the wheat crop averaged 35 to 40 bushel to an acre, and the United States Census credited the county with a population of 6,242.

The coming of the first railroad created the city of Marshall and began a bitter rivalry between it and the village of Lynd, which, although the only village in the county at the time, was not included on the line.

Previous to the coming of the Railway in 1872, there were only a few sod shanties in the neighborhood of Marshall. The first settlers in the vicinity were C. H. Whitney and C. Upton who arrived in 1869. In 1870, no one had even thought of a village at this prairie intersection of Indian trails. Two years later, the new railroad passed up Lynd in favor of Marshall.

A townsite company was formed in 1872 by the civil engineers of the railroad, and C. H. Whitney who owned part of the land on which the village was platted. This company purchased the claim of Milo Morse, whose sod shanty thereby became the first house in the village, and half of the land of Mrs. U. S. Stone.

Marshall boomed from the start. By fall of 1872 business was in full swing. Three general stores, operated by Everette and Company, D. P. Billings, and J. A. Coleman were doing a brisk business distributing the merchandise brought into the county by rail. W. M. Todd had a lumber yard and Daniel Farquar the blacksmith was busy at his forge. As immigration had already

commenced in good earnest, two attorneys offices, Wakeman and Pierce, and E. B. Jewett, took care of the legal side of business and land deals.

That same fall C. H. Whitney built a hotel but even in spite of it, housing room was a problem. A man was fortunate to share a third of a bed, and the railroad men were sleeping in haystacks. So many hungry people came to Whitney's hotel that at one meal time the floor broke through and the guests found themselves scrambling among the potatoes in the earthen cellar.

The boom continued and J. C. Ervin moved a printing plant to Marshall, and started the Prairie Schooner. This first newspaper adopted the name suggested by General Pierce and became a vital witness to the growth of the community. Its columns are a record of the rapid expansion of Marshall's business, civic and social life.

Two new hotels advertised in the new paper; Marshall House built by C. Woodbury and Traveler's Rest own by P. Van Sant. There were also announcements by Dr. S. V. Grosbeck who opened a drug store; of J. P. Watson's and J. W. Williams hardware stores; Mrs. E. Burrall, the milliner; A. C. Underhill, confectionery; Langdon and Laythe, lumber yard; J. Bagley, meat market; Turner and Loope, lumber, furniture and machinery; E. Fuller, photography; and L. Nichols, livery. A kiln owned by C. H. Whitney burned 85,000 brick during the season and that year J. F. Reighchart built a brick business block of two stories. A Masonic lodge was organized, a school was taught by D. Wheeler, and the Congregational Society erected a church on Main Street. All this in a very short time after the coming of the railroad. In 1874 the Kendall Mill was built and a cheese factory was started by Major I. W. Blake and the business boom continued.

The railroad affected lives as well as towns. When C. H. Whitney chose his land in the wilderness, he did not expect to be one of the builders of a new city; he came to Lyon County to secure farm land. Yet he became a

member of the Marshall townsite company, the town's first postmaster, a manufacturer, and a hotel keeper.

Other towns launched by the coming of the railway were Amiret and Tracy platted in 1874; Minneota, in 1876; Ghent laid out in 1878 by Mr. Jacoby, and Balaton in 1879. Although all these villages continued to serve their communities, Tracy became the most important and was later incorporated as a city, rivaling Marshall in population and as a center of trade.

After the railroad reached the Redwood River in 1872, a movement developed proposing to divide the county, making the western part Lincoln County, and to change the county seat of Lyon County to Marshall. Lynd protested but without the prestige of the railroad she could do nothing. It was decided to submit the proposal to a vote in the general election of 1873. There was a strong coalition between two factions, against which Lynd was powerless. The citizens around Marshall agreed with the western faction to vote for the division of the county if the western faction in turn would vote for the removal of the county seat. The vote decided in favor of both changes. Thus in 1873, the county seat was removed to Marshall and Lincoln County was created, and Lynd in spite of her early prominence, never grew any larger than a cross road village.

In one week of February, 1888 one hundred arrivals came to Marshall by train. The five hotels of the town could not accommodate the crowd. Each bed in the town had four or five occupants, and even a haystack was rented as sleeping quarters.

Travel on the roads opened in April, and prairie schooners began to arrive 20 to 60 each day, with herds of cattle, horses, and sheep in tow. Not all of them stopped in Lyon County. Some of them pushed on to government lands farther west.

The Railroad and Colonization

One of the most interesting colonies in America was the small group

which left Iceland in 1870. These people, of an ancient vital background from which the "Edda" came, and who had contributed much to the culture of northern Europe, decided to come to America, plant small colonies and there keep to the Icelandic traditions. They first migrated to Canada and formed a settlement, Gimli, in Manitoba. Gimli is a word in their language for paradise. But the privations and hardships suffered these first years made the name Gimli an ironic one. Some of the settlers migrated in 1873 into more settled areas of the frontier, to Pembina and Cavalier County in North Dakota. In 1875 fifty Icelanders came to Westerheim Township in Lyon County. Two years later two hundred more settled around Minneota, and from time to time the colony was increased by new arrivals.

The Icelanders contributed much to the growth of these communities. Finding that their theory of isolation did not work in practice, they have taken an active part in the religious, social and political life on Minneota, and of the State. One of them, Gunnar B. Bjornson, born in Iceland, was publisher of the Minnesota Mascot from 1900, served as a member of the Minnesota Legislature (1913-1915), and was a member of the Minnesota Tax Commission in September 1925 to 1929.

Two sons, each having served their turn as editor of their father's paper, continued in newspaper work in Minneapolis. Hjalmer Bjornson for sometime on the editorial staff of the Minneapolis Tribune, is now in Washington, D. C. Valdimar (Val) Bjornson daily analyzes current news of the day over a Minneapolis radio station. A third son, Bjorn Bjornson, is now editor of the family newspaper at Minneota.

Colonization was hastened by railway advertising of the fertility of the western lands of Minnesota. In 1879, a group of Catholics formed an association for the purpose of buying some of this western land and aiding Catholics living in cities to establish themselves on the land. This colon-

ization movement had $100,000 with which to purchase railroad lands in Minnesota and Dakota.

Archbishop Ireland, in charge of the project, decided to settle one of these Irish colonies in Lyon County. He bought about 10,000 acres of railroad lands in Westernheim and Grandview townships. Later the association purchased land in Eidsvold, Nordland, and Vallers.

In Westernheim and Grandview, the first Irish group arrived under the parish supervision of Father M. J. Hanley. These new arrivals settled on farms, breaking 2,200 acres of land the first year. Later they went into other enterprises of the community.

In 1883, in response to favorable reports made by Messrs. Letourneau and Regnier, who had arrived in Lyon in 1882, fifty French settlers came from Illinois to settle in the vicinity of Ghent. Among these French colonists were Messrs. Paradis and sons, Suprenant-Lord, Lord Paradis, Anthony Paradis, Suprenant-Prairie, Metty, Carron, Lebeau, Padnaud, Duchene, Nevell, and Emilien Suprenant. Later, Father Cornelius visited Europe and induced more settlers to join, many coming from Holland and Belgian, as well as France.

Hazards of Prairie Life

Early explorers and fur traders roaming the prairies of Lyon before the time of the pioneers told of the beauty of the rolling plains with scattered groves of woodlands along the Redwood and other streams. Bright flowers in the green waving turf edged trails, lakes and marshes with a glory of color. Bird song, like solos from a flute, rose clear above the murmur of the reeds and grasses. Tiny white clouds sailed the azure sky by day, and vivid stars lighted the canopy of night.

Fragrance of swelling buds in spring, the warmth of ripening grain, the tang of autumn frosts, a winter's snow clad knolls and plains made Lyon a healthful place to live. A hunter's full game bag, valuable pelts from

small animals living in the marshes, and black soil worth its weight in gold made Lyon a paradise indeed.

But even this Utopia had its flaws. It was not until the first settlers came with their goods and chattel that the hazards of prairie life became apparent. Hazards so unexpected and deadly that for a time Utopia was transformed into a valley of anguish. These hazards were partly conquered in time, by knowledge gained through costly experience. Before the lessons are learned, many homes were destroyed, properties lost and lives taken.

Prairie Fire

Few settlers in Lyon County today have any personal memories of prairie fire. The early settlers were not so fortunate. Prairie fires occurred practically every fall as the long grasses dried. The villages were threatened; every man belonged to a fire brigade. At times even women and children turned fire-fighters.

Strips of plowed ground encircling the home, called "fire-breaks" helped to save many a farmers possessions those first years. But in a wind the blaze might jump the barriers. Sometimes "backfire" or fighting fire with fire was the method used. A fire would be started by the farmers themselves close to the buildings, small fire, that could be beaten out on the side nearest their property. This little fire would meet the oncoming flame, and both would die from lack of fuel. But sometimes this method miscarried by a change of wind and the settlers would have to fight their own fire, beating at the flames with sopping bed quilts or bags as flails.

These prairie fires, though they left the land blackened, sometimes were magnificent to see. Even the settlers losing all their property were enthralled by the spectacle. High leaping flames traveled with the wind, while a haze of smoke and cinders darkened the sun by day, and at night, high walls of fire stood against the sky.

In 1871, a farmer burning stable refuse started a conflagration in Lyons Township that blackened the prairie south to the Cottonwood River and north to the Redwood River. The fire traveled east to Redwood Falls, destroying hay and grain, and many homes. Stock was fed that year on rations secured from a small patch of grass near the Redwood River which escaped the flames.

A daughter of James Armstrong living on a claim that is now part of Marshall, died the day before the fire and the community was getting ready for the funeral. C. H. Whitney was making the coffin when the fire was sighted. The settlers fought the flames and by night Mr. Whitney had lost everything he had, his crops and a frame house which was almost completed. He was prostrated from smoke, in his frantic efforts to fight the fire. That night his wife finished making the coffin.

Doubly sad was this funeral attended next day by families who had lost nearly all their possession. They clung more closely to their own spared loved ones, and their sympathy for their neighbor's sorrow was deep. They had not counted on such grim tragedies when they started their caravans westward.

In August 1873 another fire broke out in which much property was lost and several lives taken. The new settlers who had come in since the coming of the railroad the year before, were discouraged and terrified. The most destructive fire of all, which burned in both sides of the Redwood, occurred in September 1877.

Marshall was threatened by fire on October 4, 1879. But the settlers determined to save the town had used every known method to fight it. Every man was on hand with brooms, wet rags, shovels, pitchforks, rakes, hoes, anything they could find to fight the fire. One man used the tailboard of a lumber wagon. They wielded their weapons with a vengeance, however, and the

flames were soon extinguished.

Prairie fire raged also in 1888, near Russell. One woman lost her life in this fire.

As the grass of the plains was ploughed under, widespread prairie fires were less and less a danger to the settlers of our county.

Summer Storms

Wind sweeping over the prairie not only carried fire. In its own strength, and with lightning and hail storm, it swept away buildings and destroyed the growing grains. In a summer windstorm even today, the sky is anxiously watched for the funnel cloud of a cyclone.

One of the first things a settler did was to plant a grove of trees, to serve as a windbreak for his home and buildings. But this partial protection could not always save the stock, and the farmer.

A prairie storm is an exciting and beautiful thing, seen especially from a lonely farm house. Sometimes a settler might watch a storm pass by to strike a few miles away, or see rain streaking down on a neighbor's farm leaving his own fields dry. Or the storm clouds might sweep straight for his farm growing blacker as they came nearer. Purple and black clouds, now close at hand, seem to touch the earth and the wide prairie horizon dwindles to a small circle with the settlers little farm house and buildings engulfed by the storm.

Settlers may watch without fear if the rain falls straight, even when lightning rips the clouds for an instance apart and the house trembles with the roll of thunder. It is the wind of which prairie dwellers are afraid.

Many settlers in Lyon County remember the cyclone of July 22, 1890. Most of the damage was in a narrow twisted lane running through Eidsvold, Westerheim, and Grandview townships. Along this land, fields were stripped, homes demolished, and lives lost.

Toward evening a strange cloud was seen about 7 miles north of Minnesota. Drifting clouds were gathering into one huge shape like a human head, wind gushing from its mouth like fire from a dragon's head. This storm center traveled east about a half mile, then twisted south, passing outside the village of Minnesota and taking a southeasterly course, gathering speed as it went. In this section, grass, grain, and dirt were flattened or scattered but buildings escaped. In Westerheim, on the farm of B. L. Leland, roof and walls were torn from farm buildings but the house remained unscathed. Then the cyclone reached its peak, smashing the home of Felix de Reu, and burying the entire family under a heap of kindling.

Only the baby escaped. The storm lifted him, carried him about 200 yards and gently eased him back to earth. The storm descended again on the farm of Andrew Opdahl in southwestern Westerheim. Here house and farm buildings were whirled into the air and scattered into bits. Two horses flew through the air, like Pegasus of old, into a neighbor's field. They landed unharmed after a flight not often experienced by plow horses.

Mr. Opdahl was returning from Ghent and saw his home swept away. Fortunately, though his wife and child were carried away with the house, they suffered only bruises.

The cyclone, now nearly spent took a chimney off a blacksmith's shop in Ghent before it vanished.

Another tornado and cyclone caused wide spread damage in Lyon when it wiped out most of the village, Tyler, just over the line in Lincoln County, August 21st, 1918. Thirty-six people lost their lives most of them living in a small area in the west end of the village. They were buried at a community funeral held in the grove near the Danish Church in Danebo, the small Danish village joining the north end of Tyler.

After every cyclone many tales were told of freak escapes and curious incidents.

The day before the cyclone of 1918, Mrs. Magdaline Bystrom an energetic little lady of 85 years, who lived in a cottage in Tyler, came to visit her granddaughter on a farm in Lyon County about seven miles from Tyler. The graddaughter, Mrs. Henry Cupp, persuaded her grandmother to spend the night. That night the Cupp farm was visited by the storm.

Lightning struck the barn killing 2 pigs and a horse and the barn began to burn. Mr. Cupp aided by his wife and her mother, put out the fire --a task made easy now because of blinding rain. They went to the parlor to rest after this fire, so as not to see the blue streaks of light dancing and crackling around the telephone on the kitchen wall.

Then came a deafening crack and a blue light flashed from the wall back of the piano. Now the house was afire. Everyone rushed for water buckets except grandmother. She quietly began to gather her belongings and made ready to leave the house, chiding them, "such entertainment on the first night I come to sleep at your house."

She did not know then that if she had stayed at home in Tyler, she might have been swept away with her cottage, which at that moment was piled in fragments in a neighboring yard. Her son and two granddaughters got out of the house a moment before it sailed away. The two girls clung to each other on the ground, and Andrew Bystrom clung to a tree which fortunately was not uprooted. The grandmother probably would have been too frail and feeble to withstand the fury of the storm.

The village of Tyler was paralyzed by this cyclone. The State militia had to come to protect the citizen's against thieves and souvenir hunters. The First National Bank was entirely destroyed except the vault. In this vault was a tornado insurance policy, the only one in the village. It belonged to Mrs. Smith who lived in the outskirts and whose home was one of the few to escape damage. Today, nearly all Lyon County farmers have their crops and property insured against loss by lightning, hail, or wind.

Winter Snows

Those who live in Lyon County with the bitter cold winters of 1935 and 36 still in mind, may think they know all about winter storms. These more recent years saw snow heaped high on the telephone wires, and it may seem to modern residents that the pioneers could have had no worse weather to endure. But modern equipment and modern communication have tempered the hardships of the prairie winters. Huge caterpillar snowplows clear the main highways, large barns protect the cattle and well built, well heated homes in staunch groves of trees protect the people. In deepest snows, some may have to go by team instead of by automobile to the village creamery, and the daily mail may be held up for a week. But neighbors are close and telephone and radio keep them in touch with the outside world.

The pioneers of the plains had a different story to tell. Even the American explorers and trappers did not know how to weather the prairie snow storms until the "coureur de bois," French Canadian explorers and woodsmen, taught them how to dress and otherwise protect themselves from frozen death. Imagine then the toll taken from the first settlers who were still less familiar with the hazards of the prairie winters. Even the immigrants coming from the countries of northern Europe had to learn by bitter experience. During the late sixties and early seventies, settlers in Lyon County were learning. There was no term in the English language to express that sudden whirling snowstorm so the settlers adopted the word "blizzard."

There are many stories as to its origin, different regions claiming the word was coined in their vicinity. Early settlers in Marshall insist that the word was born in the old Whitney hotel during the historical blizzard of 1873, when 70 lives were lost throughout Minnesota.

The Lyon County News for March 2nd, 1883 tells this story. The word blizzard was first used in Marshall, Minnesota by an American settler

now residing in Iowa. It was in the storm of 1873, at Charles H. Whitney's hotel, and the man was Deacon Seth Knowles, who was a settler nearby. Those present were discussing the terrible storm raging outside and one man said no word could express its severity. Then the deacon who was a German scholar, said, "its a blitzard!"

The word caught on. They asked the deacon to write it for them and, during the three days they were prisoners of the storm, and the wayfarers used the word with great satisfaction again and again. After the storm abated they repeated the word in their communities and soon everyone was calling it "blitzard." Common usage contracted the word to blizzard, which term spread rapidly over the State.

While this is an interesting story the dictionary tells us that the word blizzard meaning a violent blow, a volley of shots or a sudden shot had long been in use before it was used to mean a sudden and violent snow storm.

The terrible "blitzard" of 1873 began on January 7th, the gale blowing for three days at a speed of thirty to forty miles an hour. Fine snow filled the air and crept into every corner and crevice of the rude shelters. The fortunate ones hugged the stoves indoors. Of those who were caught outside, many perished while seeking shelter.

It began after a beautiful morning when the sky was blue and clear and the air almost balmy. That winter storm after storm had piled the snow high on the prairie and bitter cold had kept the settlers prisoners at home. So on this morning many seized the chance to go for a load of firewood and lonely people decided to visit their neighbors. By eleven in the morning the prairie was spread with a haze and by noon a white sheet of snow traveling in a gale began sweeping the entire northwest.

Speaking at an Old Settlers Meeting, O. C. Gregg told of this blizzard, which happened, he said while he was still a "tenderfoot." Think-

ing the winter was breaking into a January thaw, he paid a neighborly visit that morning, not even bothering to wear an overcoat. While chatting with Uncle Marcyes...."all of a sudden a wind came from the northwest with a wailing sound such as I had never heard before--the terrible roar that preceeds a blizzard being then new to me." Borrowing an overcoat he started for home but, before he had gone many rods on his way, was caught in the whirling blinding sheet of snow. In the woods he could not see the next tree, nor even his own hand held two feet in front of him. By good fortune he reached Kiel's hotel in Marshall, and joined the party of wayfarers huddled inside.

William Durst, then 17 years old, and his younger brother were coming from the Lynd woods with a load of fuel when halted by the storm. William put his small brother on the south side of the load and told the lad to keep his hand on the wood while he led the team. Feeling every footstep of the way they finally reached the Bellingham cabin and thawed out their frozen toes.

William Taylor headed for the grist mill at Redwood Falls that fine morning with a load of grain. Near the present site of Russell on the river, he caught the brunt of the storm, a gale which hurled sleet and snow like pelting bullets upon him. Unloading, and unhitching his team he crept under his sleigh box which he had turned upside down. It is thought that he spent the night there and part of the next day. Then, almost frozen he freed one horse and rode the other in search of better shelter. Later his horse was found dead, by searchers who traced Taylor's wanderings for forty miles, without discovering his body, which was not found until the next winter.

A Lynd family, returning from Redwood Falls also lost their lives in this storm, and Asle Olson and a man called Knute, getting wood near Tracy, met their death in the woods.

Lyon County was in the heart of the blizzard country and every

few years one or more lives were taken.

Yet in the great blizzard of 1888 which took 200 lives throughout the State, there were no deaths in Lyon County, although there was another event, in this storm, which might have led to tragedy.

A train from Huron was due in Tracy at 7 o'clock that day. A snow plow traveled ahead of the train but bucking the wind so so difficult that a freight train was side-tracked at Lake Benton and its engine added to the passenger engine to give double power. Another plow coming from Tracy met the train at Balaton but four miles out of Balaton the train stalled in snow and ice. Trainmen tried for two hours to free the train but could not do so. Snow filled the tracks and prevented the engineers reaching the train where fifty passengers were now marooned.

The engineers decided to go on to Tracy as their fuel was almost exhausted from trying to break out the ice. At Tracy they telegraphed Balaton the plight of their passengers, and Balaton sent out seven teams with sleds to rescue the passengers.

About half of the passengers started back to Balaton on sleds but the others elected to stay on the train instead of risking the cold, as there was still a two-day supply of fuel.

That four mile journey back to Balaton took three and a half hours and there were many times when the passengers thought they would never arrive at the village.

There was no trace of the road. Women huddled under blankets on the sleds while the men got out and vainly tried to find the road. Finally it was decided to keep all teams close together and to follow the railroad to the village. The little caravan moved slowly, the drivers leading the horses. One of the sleds overturned and had to be left behind. A man became hysterical and snatched all the covers from the women nearest him, crying that he was going to die and must get warm first, warm for just one

minute before he died. The rest of the passengers kept their heads and those in the other sleds made room for those from the sled that had overturned. For hours citizens of the village were firing guns and keeping the school bell ringing to guide the lost ones, but the roar of the wind was so terrific that these sounds did not carry. When the passengers finally arrived, everyone was ready to give them aid and shelter.

Those who remained on the train spent three miserable nights before help arrived, but on Saturday they were brought by train to Tracy, while those who had gone to Balaton arrived the next Tuesday.

Growth Of The Community

It was the land that created the first settlement in Lyon and whose promise softened those first difficult years. It was love of the land that brought settlers of many nations to the prairies. It was love of the soil that made all the settlers kin.

No matter what language, customs or religion, love of the land and the serving of it blended these differences in one generation.

The land never failed. Pestilence might come; drought, fire, hail, and storm might destroy the crops, but the land was fertile. Panics, hard times, poor market prices, had their day, but the soil was rich.

Land dealers came to buy and sell. Lawyers arrived to scan and transfer titles. Newspapers were founded to tell the farmer about the outside world and the world about the farmer's problems. Hotels were built to shelter the immigrants while they chose their homesteads. Liveries rented horses and buggies for travel. Mills ground the farmer's grist. Doctors came to care for the sick. Workmen came to build, blacksmiths to shoe the horses and forge the tools and merchants to sell their wares. Roads were laid so the farmer might reach the market. Schools were built for the children, and churches were built that everyone might worship according to

his faith.

The earth was plowed year after year, and each year brought a better yield. Farms and more comfortable homes, new granaries, buildings for machinery, and larger barns for growing herds of cattle.

Lyon County grew, like the nursery game, "Farmer in the Dell" around the tiller of the soil. Less than 75 years after the coming of the first settlers in 1930, the county had a population of 19,326, divided into twenty townships. Of the seven incorporated villages, Minneota, Cottonwood, Balaton, Russell, Ghent, Taunton, and Florence, Minneota is the largest, with 918 people. The two cities in the county are modern in every respect, Tracy having 2,570 inhabitants and Marshall 3,250.

Tracy, in the southeastern corner is a junction of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway and grew in importance as a railroad town, becoming a railway division point in 1881. Tracy also secured the United States Land Office with John Lind, afterwards governor of the state, as Receiver.

In 1929 the St. Paul Daily Press carried a headline "Rich Farm Regions Help to Put Marshall in Lead Among County Seat Towns." Proud citizens read the story of the soft city water, its first class fire equipment, its paved streets, beautiful homes, and business blocks. The city is proud of St. Joseph's Academy and its fine public schools. Two "grand hotels" cost $100,000 and $125,000 apiece to build. Main Street's great white way is lighted with 50 electric signs and among its stores and business offices are two theaters and a Masonic Temple. Picnic hampers are unpacked in Liberty Park on the bend of the Redwood while children amuse themselves on the playground and the nearby tourist park has cabins with lights and running water. There is also a nine hole golf course and a city airport.

Farmers coming into trade these days take all this for granted. They are used to mechanical and creature comforts. Many of them have electric lights from their own plants lighting up the farmyard and buildings

and running water pumped by windmills to water their stock. Past discomforts have vanished with the dugouts that confronted those farmers from Vallers 65 years ago when they traveled on sleds through the prairie snow drifts to see the new town.

Good roads, coming from six directions in the State pass through Marshall making it the "hub of the highways" and ten passenger trains pass through the city each day. Good roads have aided industry. Because of Marshall's favorable position the State Highway Department made it the headquarters for the division servicing the fifteenth district. One hundred men keep up the roads as far as Ortonville, Montevideo, Redwood Falls, Sandborn, Slayton, Pipestone, and the South Dakota boundary.

Men driving trucks owned by the Marshall Bottling Works travel these roads in Lyon, Lincoln, Yellow Medicine, Murray and Redwood Counties distributing soft drinks to village stores. The sales net the company from $15,000 to $70,000 a year. An ice cream plant, valued at $80,000, sells about 100,000 gallons of ice cream each year using refrigerator trucks to keep the product fresh.

Although Marshall and Tracy are the important trade centers of the County and have grown accordingly, it does not mean that good roads, churches, schools, and social benefits are not to be had in less populated areas.

There are two Federal highways and five State roads besides the County roads in Lyon. Federal Highway US 14, a paved road crosses the county on its way to the South Dakota border and US 59, a gravel road, comes from Canada passing through Marshall on its way to the Iowa border. Three of the state roads in the county are gravel, one bituminously treated and one paved. Today everyone can travel, by automobile, bus, railroad or airplane. All the railroads have been merged into branches of the Great Northern and the Chicago Northwestern and together with the Northland Trans-

portation Bus Company cover most of the cities and villages of the county.

Since the first little church was built by the Methodists on the Danielson claim in 1871, many more have been built throughout the county of this and other denominations. Today there are about 40 churches many of them small edifices representing the Baptist, Catholic, Congregational, Episcopal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Norwegian Synod, Swedish Mission, and Presbyterian Churches. The six Catholic churches, founded by the early Catholic colonies, are in Marshall, Minneota, Tracy, Ghent, Green Valley, and Taunton but the Protestant churches are more evenly spaced.

While there are still little frame school houses in Lyon under one teacher, there are well staffed four-year high schools in Cottonwood, Marshall, Minneota, and Tracy and six-year undivided high schools in Russell, Lynd and Balaton. All these are accredited by the State Department of Education. Tracy also has in connection with its high school a Junior College. Working in harmony with the schools are the Parent Teachers Associations, to help in outside school activities, programs and parties, and the 4-H Clubs aiding the boys in things concerning farming and the girls in home making arts.

Early difference to public office felt by the first comers who had all they could do to get a living in the first years vanished during the heated campaign when the county seat was removed to Marshall. Year by year there has grown wholesome interest in public welfare and affairs.

Until 1880, when the Democrats first cast a few ballots, the Republican vote was the usual one in Lyon. It took some time for the second party to grow but in 1896 the free silver issue gained many converts. At the time John Lind, living at Tracy, ran for Governor and won that office.

That year the party elected many county officers and it also brought into public eye in Marshall a young law student, Tom Davis, who at the age of nineteen conducted a campaign for Bryan.

Tom Davis, passing the bar examinations in 1901 became county attorney the next year. He served as mayor of Marshall four years and in 1916 was elected to the State Legislature. His was a familiar figure in the little schoolhouse in rural Lyon during a campaign. Somewhat resembling William Jennings Bryan and dressed like a "circuit rider" Methodist preacher, his long hair and flamboyant gestures made him an unusual figure. His oratory held the farmers spellbound as he used all means to sway his audience. But besides oratory he had a high intelligence that later won cases in the highest courts of the land.

Although he changed to one political party after the other he was an able leader for many years in community affairs until he moved in 1919 to Minneapolis to practice his profession. First a democrat he later endorsed the non-partisan ticket and then helped to form the Farmer-Labor party running as attorney general upon that ticket.

The story of the building of the courthouse in Marshall shows changing times and the tide of prosperity. When the county seat was removed from Lynd in 1873 the townsite company gave a plot of ground to the county upon which to build a courthouse but it was many years before one was built owing to the lack of funds. Officials did their work for a time in the office of J. W. Blake but in 1875 this complaint was voiced in the Marshall Messenger, "Just now it seems, we are out of a courthouse room and our offices can be found lying around in cheap corners most anywhere."

A resolution was passed by the Board of Commissioners the year before setting aside a special tax for building a courthouse but the times, due to the grasshopper damage, were so bad and money so hard to get that this resolution and a later one was revoked and the money for the fund put to other uses.

Finally a small building 18 by 24 and 12 feet high was built on the site for the courthouse in June 1876 which served for a time. Then in 1881 a movement began to build a courthouse worthy of the name. A bill was passed

and approved in which the right was given to raise $15,000 by a bond issue provided it passed a vote of the people. But still times were hard and the people did not want to spend the money so the bill was voted down and a small building was bought from George Nichols for $1,500 for the use of the county officials.

Again in 1889 the courthouse problem was brought before the people. A. C. Forbes, while a member of the legislature, had the former bill repealed and introduced another bill proposing to spent $50,000 instead of $15,000 for a courthouse. This bill also had to be voted upon by the people.

It caused great discussion and most of them were against spending such an amount which would increase taxes. Tracy worked so ably to defeat the bill that no vote was taken. But in 1891 there was a surplus of $18,000 in the county treasury and this time the farmers introduced a bill through their alliance organization for a bond issue to spend $25,000 in place of the $50,000 for the courthouse. Tracy again contested the issue but this time the result of the special election was victory.

So contracts were let and the cornerstone laid. The new courthouse was to have been dedicated on January 15, 1892. But on January 8th the building was destroyed by fire and the walls only were left standing. It was finally completed with the sum ($14,622) collected from the insurance company.

The story of the courthouse shows that patience is needed to get things done in public domain. Yet Lyon, still a young county, ranks among the progressive ones in the state in agriculture and all its branches. It also keeps in step with the progressive social trend of the day. Here the county takes care of the poor and sets aside a tax rate of 4.52 mills to run a poor farm. A Child Welfare Board of three members work with the State Board of Control to safeguard the children to enforce the laws for their protection. The poor receive hospitalization and the county together with its neighbors supports a

tuberculosis sanitorium. Since the "new deal" administration in Washington it has launched a few projects under the Works Progress Administration. In 1934 Camden State Park was created near Lynd. Here about 470 acres of land was set aside along the Redwood River for picnic and camping grounds. Shelters are provided and bathing pools are for the use of those wishing to follow the forest trails that recall the Indian trails of the past.

So many aspects enter into community welfare. First there must be a way to earn a living and then all social, political, and economic forces must work for the general good.

Lyon was especially lucky in having a rich soil but the spirit of the people living in the county has made it one of the forward ones in Minnesota. They were not afraid to work for ideals, to begin again after defeat, and a neighborly spirit made them cooperate with each other.

The little settlement that did not even have enough money in its treasury to pay a sheriff's bill and had to borrow $100 in 1874 to aid suffers from the grasshopper plague, because of a strong local pride that made them put off asking state aid, had in 1931 a total valuation of $16,495,986, which yielded an annual tax of $714,758. While the value of the land was reduced in 1935 because of the ravages of the recent drought, better conditions will no doubt increase it to a still larger amount. Those in Lyon have suffered before from "acts of God" and world depression. But in light of past defeats and triumphs those of today cannot vanquish the spirit of its people.

The Story of Agriculture

Lyon County has fulfilled the early promise of the land. Agriculture became the leading industry for not only was the prairie easily cultivated, but the soil and climate were naturally suited for the growing of cereal grains.

The soil is a deep black loam upon a clay loam subsoil covering a rocky foundation of granite. It is uniform over the entire county with only

a few gravel knolls near Balaton and Russell and in the 12-mile glacial valley in Westerheim.

In the early days all this land, except the scattered woodlands and marshes, in which reeds and brown cat-tails nodded in the breeze, was thickly carpeted with a six inch turf. First settlers were grateful for this long grass which provided hay for horses, mules, and their slim herds of cattle, though backs were bent in breaking this stubborn matt of sod.

The growing season of this entire southwestern region is about 145 days and in Lyon the last killing frost in the spring is around May 9th and the first killing frost appears in the fall about October 1st. Government charts, kept for 25 years in the station at Tracy, also show that the average yearly temperature is 45.3 degrees and the average annual rainfall is 23.23 inches. Hot summers, cold winters, the moisture, and a long growing season is favorable for growing corn and all the small cereal grains.

It was some years, however, before the settlers considered corn to be anything but a breaking crop to prepare the land for the raising of wheat. First a few acres of land were broken by a plow drawn by a yoke of oxen or a team of horses. The soil was plowed only about two or three inches deep, to enable the sod to rot. To plant corn, potatoes, rutabagas, and broom corn for fodder, the farmer often broke the sod with an axe just enough to plant the seed. Even with only the rudest tools to cultivate this first crop, such as a hoe or hand cultivator, the product usually kept the farmer and his stock in food stuffs through the next winter. Then in the following spring, wheat was planted and farming began in earnest. But the story of farming is one of progress and serious set-backs as new lessons were being learned and new factors entered into agriculture.

Before the coming of the railway in 1872, there were few acres in cultivation as the population was scarce, only 268 white people living in

Lyon during 1870. But in 1874 as immigration came in with the coming of the railway, a census showed 676 acres producing a crop of 6,690 bushels of wheat, 5,274 of corn, 3,880 of oats, 165 of barley, 3,651 of potatoes, and 88 of beans. Also produced were 2,574 tons of wild hay, 7,166 pounds of butter and 4,850 pounds of cheese. The wild hay was more than sufficient to feed the 500 head of cattle and ninety sheep in the county.

The new farmers were just beginning to prosper when the great grasshopper plague of 1873-77 came to ruin their crops, especially during the years of 1874 and 76. It was very discouraging for the settlers, as they needed these first crops to pay for their land.

Grasshoppers descending like a cloud upon a field stripped it bare of grain, leaving black desolation. A farmer would be robbed of the fruit of his toil for an entire season in a few moments. There was at that time no way of conquering the pests. The entire state suffered. Finally Governor Pillsbury in the spring of 1877 appointed a day of prayer to be spent in supplication for freedom from this scourge.

One day in the summer the grasshoppers took flight and disappeared. No one knows what became of them. One old settler told of seeing a cloud of hoppers drop near a field on this day, and instead of taking the direction toward the grain they went in the opposite one to the river and were drowned.

However, it came about, the scourge was ended. Lyon County received $250 from the state to care for those in need, after the community's own fund for the sufferers was exhausted. The state also allowed an extension of taxes that year and granted seed loans to give these farmers, completely ruined, a new start.

Because of these discouraging odds, a grange of the Patrons of Husbandry was formed here in 1874 to consider ways and means to improve the farmer's lot. The same year saw the first County Fair at Marshall. This

seemed to renew the farmer's courage.

At this period of development in agriculture, wheat was the choice crop. After the grasshoppers left, wheat acreage increased year by year and in 1879 there were 22,400 acres of wheat sown in Lyon but the crop was somewhat injured by blight. But still Lyon took first premium that year and the two following at the State Fair for its exhibitions of grains. The next year most of southwestern Minnesota had excellent crops and enthusiasm rose. However, a great part of the crop could not be threshed until the next year because of heavy rains, and then it was almost impossible to market grains because of poor roads and interrupted railroad service.

But in 1882 a natural boom began. During the fall came train loads of land seekers who were eager to settle land and build homes. Immediately they prepared their land for wheat and in 1883 there were 26,307 acres sown with an average yield of 16.51 bushels per acre. There were only 3,541 acres in corn, 13,110 acres in oats, and 21,210 barley. Progress was unabated the next few years and this time is considered the most prosperous of the wheat growing period.

Now another factor entered. Farmers, about 1885, began to realize the benefits of diversified farming. Lyon was far away from markets and because of the high cost of shipping, farmers found it hard to sell their grain at any profit. By feeding it to fatten cattle and hogs for market, more money could be made, for beef and pork brought higher prices. So instead of raising only wheat, many acres were sown into oats, corn, and alfalfa and agriculture began to make great strides. Crops were rotated to replenish the soil. Dairy products were developed, but many farmers raised ensilage to feed their stock through the winter months.

November 20th in 1891 an article in the Marshall News Messenger declares with pride, "A season of healthfulness, a crop of remarkable bounteous-

ness, a year of unparalleled growth for Marshall and Lyon County, enormous trade of all sorts, unprecedented payments of mortgages and all debts, and most promising prospects for the future."

But the old Chinese adage that speaking of good fortune tempts the Gods of destruction seemed to prove true. The very next year a storm damaged the new courthouse which was being built in Marshall, and $2500 worth of labor and material was lost. A few days later, August 8th, farmers lost about half a million dollars from damage to crops by tornado and hail. In the same month another windstorm flattened most of the remaining grain and then the national money panic of 1893 destroyed market prices.

A crop failure in 1894 added to the misery and, though the farmers harvested good crops the next year, prices were so low that it didn't pay to thresh the grain or haul it to market. This cycle of bad luck lasted until 1897 brought an upward turn.

During these years of prosperity and depression farmers were slowly but surely improving their methods of farming aided by new farm machinery. Reapers were used to cut grain and threshing machines with giant separators appeared.

In out-lying Vallers, a community that had lagged behind the eastern and central townships in farming methods, Johanannes Anderson bought a self rake reaper in 1875 and for a time cut all the grain for his neighbors. The Stevens brothers in Yellow Medicine County threshed with an old horse-power threshing engineer. But it was not long before the farmers had improved reapers, better cultivators, and harvesting machinery, as well as adequate buildings in which to store grain.

After the depression of the early nineties the new cycle of good crops brought up land values in 1904 when the County Fair Association bought land near Marshall for permanent fair buildings.

As the farmers gathered each year in September to display their produce and stock, they discussed the new trends in farming. The cooperative movement was already well underway in other parts of the State, and it seemed a real answer to problems of the farmers of the southwestern prairie. By improving roads and establishing cooperatives in the village, every farmer would have a near market for produce and livestock. Farmers could sell cream for butter fat and still have ample skim milk to feed small pigs and calves.

Thus, after the turn of the century the cooperative movement gained headway in Lyon County. Previous to this general movement, two Icelanders, Sigbojorn Hofteig and Ole Kompeliem had tried a similar experiment in the 80's having built a cheese factory in Westerheim in which the neighboring farmers owned shares. But after a few years the factory closed. There were not a large enough local market to consume the cheese and the expense of shipping to distant markets was too great. But the expanding cooperatives overcame these problems and farmers aided by creamery checks every month, were able to perfect their methods of farming and marketing, and to increase production by new farming methods. By 1912 the value of land had increased to $100.00 an acre.

Farmers who wanted to increase their yield disliked to see the rich soil covered by the marshes going to waste. These fertile marsh bottoms could be reclaimed by draining off the water. So agitation for drainage began and soon private and governmental drainage enterprises were under way. The land was drained by ditches, tile drains and a combination of both. In Lyon all three types were used and by 1920, land reclaimed in this way amounted to 31,765 acres at the cost of about $989,480. In ten years more acreage reclaimed by drainage had increased to 94,148 acres at a money investment of $1,017,198.

So the early marshes vanished from Lyon County, and with them went the muskrat and other small fur bearing animals, and the wild game that used to be so plentiful. Mosquitoes almost disappeared, but so did much of the natural wild beauty of the land. Roads and trails were no longer lined with wild flowers, and the bright tiger lilies burned no more.

High prices were received for produce during the World War, to great was the need for wheat and other foodstuffs to feed the army. Production was geared in high and farmers bought costly gasoline tractors and other machinery to keep up with the abnormal demand. Value of land was inflated and taxes rose accordingly. Some of the older farmers in Lyon, tempted by high prices, sold out. They were fortunate, as they made a fortune from the increase of land value alone. But those buying at these high prices found themselves at a loss during the slump after the war.

Land bought at such a price could never pay for itself even in normal years, and these unfortunate farmers were in very bad shape. They could not sell nor pay interest to the bankers, and yearly sank deeper into the quagmire of debt until finally the banks and holding companies owned the land and they were only tenant farmers; and the sad results did not end there. Many of the small banks finding themselves swamped with so much land which they could not sell, failed.

Fortunately for Lyon County, not all the older farmers had sold out during the boom. These standbys in the community managed to weather the slump, as they had already paid for their land. Although they suffered from the depression, they still had faith in their land. Census figures of 1929 showed a total income from agriculture in Lyon to be $6,107,213 of which 39.81 percent came from livestock sold or traded, 30.25 percent from crops, 20.87 percent from dairy and livestock products, 9.02 percent from farm products used, and 0.031 percent from forest products.

Even the recent drought did not vanquish those farmers who clung to their homes. Many of them may have regretted spending such large amounts on drainage which had taken water from the marshes but the new cycle of moisture starting in 1936 gave them new courage and hope. Even though in 1930 there were 67 percent of the farms mortgaged in Lyon and 52.2 percent of the farms had tenants, the outlook for the future is good. When the farmers were burning corn for fuel to save money, Federal aid stepped in. And now that rain and snow are once more sufficient, the farmers are hopeful, and wiser from their misfortunes.

There are in Lyon County today, the factors to bring about recovery, good roads, modern farm machinery and excellent market facilities. There are six cooperative creameries in the county, and besides these, two nationally organized companies have centralizers in Tracy and Marshall. Livestock supports nine cooperative shipping associations and other farmers' cooperatives include twelve elevators, six insurance companies, five oil companies, one store, and forty-six telephone companies.

Most of the farmers use these local cooperatives for marketing their produce although some of the larger livestock owner ship direct to the stock-yards in South St. Paul, and a few ship stock to St. Louis, Mo.

Two local industries also buy livestock. Weiner Concern in Marshall reported in 1929 a yearly turnover of $500,000 and that same year Swift and Company took over the old Cargill mill at Marshall for a new produce plant.

The story of every farming community is one of accomplishment and defeat. Today the farmers in Lyon are better off by far than the first pioneers who used to divide a sack of white flour among neighbors that each family might have enough to thicken gravy for a stew. Farming has grown more complex with the changing times. But still the land fulfills its promise of fecundity to those who are willing and responsible enough to nurture it.

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