

Steen Halbert Nelson

Steen Hakbert Nelson was born in Waushara county Wisconsin, Nov. 22, 1854. His parents were natives of lower Telemarken Norway, and came to America because of the hardships there, and to better themselves in a financial way. They made their first home at Heart Prairie Wisconsin. Two years later they filed on land in Waushara County. This Homestead was on what was known as the "Indian Land" and the date of entry was 1850, or there about; The family consisted of ten children, all born in Wisconsin, of which Steen was the third. Here he attended the common school more or less irregularly. When he was old enough to be of service on the farm his schooling was limited to a few months in the winter. The country teachers in those times were no better than usual and so, his lack in educational advantages he tried to make up to his children.

Why he came to Dakota.

At first wheat was the staple crop, but as the years went by the yield fell to three or four bushels per acre. These scant harvests were pieced out by work in the lumber woods in the winters or harvesting in Minnesota. His story of how and why he came to Dakota is continued in substantially his own words as follows: "In the summer of '79, while working on the north Wisconsin railroad, we read of the great prospects of the Red River Valley. So we agreed among ourselves to send Steen Gunderson to investigate. He came to Fargo, and sent back to us such glowing reports of this new western country that a number of young men, ten in all, including myself, all of us old neighbors concluded to come and look the country over ourselves, and choose from the many chances offered--homesteads, preemptions and tree claims."

About this time Mr. Nelson had found his life partner in Miss Bertha Maum, and they had been married about two weeks when the start was made. This was the spring of 1880. There were ten teams in all, and as there was free transportation to where they could all get work on the rail-road at Volga S.D. they took advantage of that offer and shipped to that place. Continuing, Mr. Nelson says, "When we arrived at Volga S.D. we found very little hotel accommodations, and no barn room, so we had to sleep out under the wagons. One night a roaring blizzard came up, which hurled the snow in drifts about the wagons and the shivering horses. In the morning there certainly was six inches of snow upon our beds." There was such a rush for work at this point, and men and teams came in such numbers that the food supply ran low, which came near causing a riot, but in due time, things were in better shape and they worked there about three months. In substance the narrative continues: "Seven of us in company, with our teams, having feed for our horses, crackers, bread and coffee for ourselves, started from Huron S.D. for Fargo, following the James river. Coming along we would milk the ranchers cows when they would stand for us, so we had crackers and milk for a change. Many towns were platted along the river, and all were called cities. These "cities" consisted usually of a shanty occupied by one or two locators who tried hard to get us to take land, but nothing would stop us from seeing the great Red River of the North.

We left the Jim River at the City of Columbia, which consisted only of a hotel and a store or so, and started northeast towards Wahpeton. We slept mostly under our wagons as only two of them were covered. During the night smudges had to be kept going all the time to drive off the swarms of mosquitoes that tormented man and beast. So we changed off, and while six were asleep the seventh was up tending the fire. Thus we passed the night, and on the morning of the third day out from Columbia, a streak of green was seen in the distance. At sight of this we all mounted our wagon seats, and standing in them sent up a glad shout. The Red River of the North was before us. The object of our dreams since leaving Wisconsin more than three months previously, was before us. Then that bride, whose honeymoon had been cut short, was to join her husband at Fargo. And on July 8th 1880, there was a happy meeting between Mr. Nelson and his young wife. After this the men went to work on a ranch east of Moorhead and worked until it froze up. While working at this place they heard of the

Steen Halbert Nelson

Cooper settlement in Griggs County, and leaving their teams took the train for Tower City, and went south to look for land. They went as far as Lisbon, and turning back they followed the Sheyenne River to Valley City. There were seven of them on foot, and so found it hard to get food and lodging in the country. At Valley City they met "Pioneer Nelson", who was then living on the Sheyenne, the first permanent settler of the county. He persuaded them to go and take land near him. Again starting out on foot, the company which consisted of Gunder Gunderson, John Eagan, George Ashley, Steen Nelson and his brother Ole, stopped the first night with Mother Hacket, living on Getchel Prairie, where they were kindly entertained. About three o'clock the next afternoon they had reached the the- log cabin of Christ and Ole Bolkan on the Sheyenne. It was erected by a man who had preceded the Bolkans. This is the first known human dwelling ever built in Griggs County. It was on 34-146-58. The Bolkans were living alone and Ole was cook. There were seven hungry, healthy men to feed but there was ~~enough~~ enough and to spare, and that dinner was long to be remembered. That night they reached their destination,, and were hospitably received by the "Pioneer". This was in Nov. 1880, and after looking over the land all returned to Fargo. And the next spring (1881) five of them filed on claims in what is now Greenview township Steele County. While stopping at Fargo Mr. Nelson went home for a short visit, and while there, a man had come eighteen miles to deliver a telegram stating that his brother Ole had been shot. This brought him back in haste. The shooting was an accident and not fatal.

In the spring of 1881 a log house was built and pioneer life began. There were six children born to Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, of whom four are now living (1909). They are Norris, Stephen, Arthur, and Lulu. Mrs. Nelson died April 9th 1896, leaving the father to act the part of both, in keeping together bringing up and educating the children.

During this time he has held various town offices, was one of the first elected Commissioners of Steele County. He held the office of County Treasurer for two terms. and was Representative in the State Legislature for two terms. As County Commissioner he helped to win battles against graft and the liquor interests.

He was brought up in the Lutheran faith, but claims to have been converted by a Methodist Preacher named Christian Oman in 1883. Since that time he has been an active Church and Sunday-school worker, as well as a successful farmer.

During his pioneer days he has been lost several times in blizzards, once lying for a long time wrapped in his fur coat, but never allowing himself to go to sleep. Each time he succeeded in reaching home without serious harm. He has all these years clung to his old home, improved and beautified, it is true, but at this date the old log house still stands, an eloquent witness of early struggles and achievements.

Biblog. ~~Old Settlers Association~~ Old Settlers Association records.
By H. A. Bemis in 1909

Steen H. Nelson

Steen H. Nelson of Greenville twp, Steele Co. was born on a farm in Hashara Co. Wis., Nov 22, 1854. He was the oldest son + 3rd child of 10 children, born to Nels and Anna (Anderson) Nelson. He is still living (1900) on the old home farm where Steen was reared and worked until his 20th year. He worked out for several years, then worked in the woods in Goodhue Co., then to Wisconsin until 1880. In the spring of 1880 he went to S. Dak with a team for the purpose of looking over the country with a view to locating there. But after his arrival there he worked on the Chicago + Northwestern Ry. He wished to look further before taking land, and with several companions crossed the country to Fargo by team. They were young men who had been reared in wooded country, and the trip across the prairie was not only pleasant but novel in its experiences. So-called city after city was passed, though consisting of 1 or 2 shanties and the inevitable sign in glaring letters, "land office."

Mr. Nelson selected the land of his homestead in the fall of 1880, and filed claim to the land in the spring of 1881. He then moved to his farm accompanied by his wife, and his brother, and he built a 16 x 20 foot shanty, which was

S. H. Nelson

his home until his 16 X 26 log house was built.

Mr. Nelson was married in the spring of 1880,
to Miss Bertha Marum, born in Norway. She died
in 1896.

Six children were born: Bertha, deceased,
Bertha, deceased, Norris, Steven, Arthur and Lulu.

Bibl. Condensed from Compend of Hist. + Biog¹⁹⁰⁰ pp 516-7

S. H. Nelson

S. H. Nelson, farmer, Sec. 20-146-57, P. O. Mandell
Griggs Co. is the son of Nelson Nelson, who settled in
Haushara County Wisc., many years ago, and
is now a good farmer and respected citizen of
the same county and state. Both parents and a
brother are living there. S. H. Nelson was born
in Haushara County, Wisc. in 1854 and his brother
O. C. Nelson who resides on the adjoining farm
in Dakota was born in 1857, in the same county
and state. The brothers received their education
in the county common schools of their native state,
and learned the business of farming. They came
to Dakota, to that portion of Griggs County, now
included in Steele County, in the fall of 1881, and
located on government land, two and $\frac{1}{2}$ miles
east of the Sheyenne River, where they now have
one section of excellent land with neat and
commodious buildings, good stock of cattle and
horses, farm implements, and the best well water
in all the country. The younger brother O. C. is
unmarried. The elder, S. H., was married to Bertha
daughter of H. O. Marum, a farmer of Winchester, Wisc.
They have had two children, both deceased. The brothers
have had excellent crops. In 1883, they raised 2300
bushels of wheat, an average of 23 bushels per acre.

From, Atlas of Dakota, 1884. p 242

Upon leaving Tower City there was not a hut to be seen. The only things was the stakes set by surveyors that could be seen till the Sheyenne River was in sight. Once in a while they would come to a settler that had homesteaded in 1878 or 1879.

In those early days the first thing the settlers looked for was a place for shelter, and fuel. There was no person that had not heard of the dreaded snow storms or blizzards. No one could imagine what they are like unless he has witnessed one. A person could not face it for more than a few minutes and then had to turn his back to the wind to get his breath. It was always extremely cold.

One instance is: An unmarried woman lived in a small house. She had some goods, furniture, shipped up from Minnesota. This came to the nearest station, Valley City. She proceeded to look for someone to take her down and get the goods. This was in February. The trip to Valley City was successful, but on the way back they were overtaken by a blizzard. The woman sat in the box and the driver in the spring seat. A short while after the storm had commenced he heard her talk. He turned around and saw her holding a bottle of whiskey. They said the whiskey saved their lives that day.

The pioneer built the sod stable and hay stack close together so that he could get at his hay easier without getting lost in the blizzards. The only way to get the hay into the stable was to carry the hay in the arms. It was almost impossible to get water during these blizzards. Sometimes the livestock had to go without water for two or three days.

The houses built were mostly sod houses, but some would dig into the side of a hill and put a rough board floor and a roof on.

Along the Sheyenne River the houses were built mostly of logs

with roofs of bark and sod.

During the early eighties the farmer or pioneer had to get his supplies for winter early. They would go sometime in November to Valley City and Tower City, the closest cities to purchase their goods.

The worst enemy of the pioneer was the frequent prairie fires in the fall. They had to carry matches at all times so they could start a backfire. The fire could be heard for miles.

These fires were of great damage because the grass was burned off and then the snow would not stay. This was the cause of the several dry years that followed. The only place the snow would stop was by the farm buildings. Many times they would almost be covered. All the machinery would be snowed down.

During the pioneer days, the pioneer was never into a restaurant to eat. He would take his lunches along and go behind the buildings and eat. Women did this as well as the men. They also would take hay and feed for their horses or oxen. People also had to do their own doctoring and nursing.