

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: An Oral History and Archeological Study of Nineteenth-Century Dugouts and Sod Homes in Frontier County, Nebraska

Connor Cottrell, Master of Professional Studies, 2023

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Frontier County, Nebraska, founded in 1872, was one of Nebraska's furthest westward territories at the time. It was founded in response to an influx of European settlers during westward expansion largely inspired by the Homestead Act of 1862. Some of the most prominent archeological sites attributed to this time period in Nebraska are those of dugouts and sod homes. Many of western Nebraska's counties, such as Custer and Lincoln County, have a distinct array of oral history collections and archeological surveys of dugouts and sod homes published and readily available to the public. Frontier County shares the same rich history of Euro-American westward expansion and homesteading, but lacks a similar wealth of oral histories and archeological surveys. How do oral histories, as intangible heritage, articulate with tangible cultural landscapes and historic sites? How can oral history support the identification of unrecorded archeological sites representing historic sod and dugout structures? How can oral history help interpret sod structure sites? This research identifies a Frontier County family with homesteading roots, presents three oral history accounts of the family's life in a dugout and sod home, uses archeological methods to identify a potentially unrecorded dugout structure, and presents an example of how oral history has articulated across Frontier County, Nebraska in the last 150 years.

AN ORAL HISTORY AND ARCHEOLOGICAL STUDY OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY
DUGOUTS AND SOD HOMES IN FRONTIER COUNTY, NEBRASKA

By

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2023

Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful grandmother Nadine (1938-2022). Nadine was the true embodiment of a Hinton, full of wisdom and grace, and always positive. She loved her family and her community in Frontier County, and always had a story to tell. She kept the Hinton heritage alive for anyone who would listen. Her influence can be felt on every page of this thesis. If I could hear her version of the Hinton story one last time, I would listen for as long as I could.

Acknowledgements:

As I began to formulate an outline of this project and what I wanted the legacy of my time at the University of Maryland to be, it was clear that I needed to go back to my roots roughly 1,500 miles away. I was born and raised in Nebraska, growing up in the small town of Curtis. Curtis is located in Frontier County, which is the focus of this thesis. I had heard countless stories about the familial history of the Hintons, whom I was related to. I had worked on our family's farmland many times (though not as much as I should have), and had seen collapsed wooden homes, cement foundations, and eroded barn walls dotting the landscape. It was not until I was an adult that I realized the potential my family land had for archaeology and the fascination I had for our oral history. Our familial history had been reiterated throughout my life, and I had only now begun to listen. I had a lot of catching up to do. It is my hope that the work compiled in this research can help make up for lost time.

First and foremost, I want to thank the participants of this study, whose oral histories made this project possible. Your willingness to share your story and bravely put your voice out into the world is inspiring. Nick Brown, Marlin Perks, and Letha Perks, thank you for sharing your life and entrusting me with your words. You have created a permanent legacy for your family and inspired a new generation of storytellers.

To my advisor Dr. Mathew Palus, thank you for instilling confidence in me and pushing me to uncomfortable places. It is never easy taking the lead on a project, but you prepared me for anything with your professional guidance and experience. You had just as many late nights

reading this thesis as I did, and it did not go unnoticed. Thank you for your commitment to my project and success.

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Lastly, I want to thank my wonderful fiancé, Emily. There were many sleepless nights, tiring mornings, and frustrations poured into these pages. Emily, you always believed in me, held me up on my bad days, and held me down in my over-confident days. I could not have done this without your support. Thank you!

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Chapter One: An Introduction to Nebraska and Homesteading in 1862

The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 made the windswept plains of Nebraska an enticing option for prospective farmers, adventurers, and land-seeking families from across the early United States. With a distinct lack of timber, these early settlers relied on the earth for shelter. They constructed two types of temporary earthen homes: dugouts and sod homes, or “soddies” as they were known. These were the first source of shelter for Nebraska pioneers in the late nineteenth century. But as “History Nebraska” aptly notes, there are only a few written accounts from the time homes were being built, and the only descriptions of these homes are found in written records (History Nebraska, n.a:1). With the absence of this historically significant information, archaeologists and historians must turn to oral histories to help document these earthen structure sites. How do oral histories, as intangible heritage, articulate with tangible cultural landscapes and historic sites? How can oral history support the identification of unrecorded archeological sites representing historic sod and dugout structures? How can oral history help interpret sod structure sites? As this thesis will demonstrate, our intangible oral history can often be supported by tangible history, but the details can be evolved based on who is telling the story and who the listener is.

The significance of this thesis lies in the swift surface erosion of evidence of these earthen structures and the aging demographic of their witnesses. The first dwellings that were constructed on the prairie were not built for luxury, but for immediate shelter and survival. The conditions of the Great Plains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were harsh. Over one hundred and fifty years after the Homestead Act of 1862, not much has changed. The Great

Plains are still known for their rapidly changing weather, cold winters, and harsh droughts. This thesis will demonstrate the difficulty of interpreting these sites today and the need to utilize oral history and archaeological methods to document new sites before their surface evidence has vanished. Most notably, this thesis explores the relationship between oral history and archeological evidence and how intangible familial history can contextualize tangible surface evidence, and how the sites of sod and earthen dwellings are mobilized as a part of intangible heritage today. To answer these questions, this body of work gathers significant oral histories of pioneering families in Frontier County, Nebraska, from the last generation that witnessed these homes. The preservation of these accounts is imperative for Frontier County and its descendant community as the U.S. Census Bureau highlights a continuous decrease in population in the county since 1970. This decline in population, coupled with the rapid erosion of surface evidence and aging demographic of the last generation of dugout and sod home dwellers, makes recordation of any information especially important.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note the difference between a sod home and a dugout. Sod is described as a decomposing material that was susceptible to rain and wind, causing deterioration quickly (Fortney, 2016:48). Sod homes are significant vernacular building type constructed from hand cut blocks of loamy, clayey soil that is fastened together by a dense root system from the soil's grasses (Kampinen 2008:6). Dugouts were similar to sod houses, but the floor of the shelter was dug into the ground at variable heights. Some dugouts were completely underground while others were only a few feet below the surface with an upper portion of sod. They were most notably constructed by either digging straight down into the ground or by digging directly into the face of a hill (Richards, 1995:1). Dugouts often

incorporated supplemental material such as wood planks, logs, or stone to line their walls. These remnants are often found in the archeological record of dugout investigations.

Figure 1.1 provides an example of a sod house, located south of Curtis, Nebraska, pictured in 1912. Joseph Brown, a relative to the Hinton family, lived in this sod home for a short period of time. The home is constructed with sod bricks with a wood framed door, glazed sash windows, and a potential stove pipe on the left side. It appears to have cracks in the sod and has a prominent slump due to leaning walls. The roof is supported with wooden rafters, covered with wood sheathing and a thin layer of sod.



Figure 1.1: Sod-built dwelling in Frontier County, photographed in 1912. Personal photograph used by permission of Nick Brown

The oral histories collected in this thesis and the subsequent archaeological investigation focus on Frontier County, Nebraska. Frontier County, formed in January 1872, is located in southwestern Nebraska, and is one of the state's ninety three counties. Stockville is the

designated County seat. When passing through Nebraska and the Great Plains, one can expect to encounter picturesque rolling hills of endless prairies, scenic rows of planted corn, and livestock dotting the horizon. Beyond these sights, far from Interstate 80 and tucked away from the public's view, one may come across peculiar rectangular dugouts in the earth. These cuts of shaped earth, often found burrowed into hillsides, are all that remain of the shelter that early Great Plains pioneers constructed in the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. One of these rectangular dugouts, hereby known as the Hinton Family Sod Site #1, once housed a family of homesteaders whose descendants can still be found less than fifteen miles away today, in Frontier County, Nebraska. No photographs exist of this family's first dugout, but Figure 1.2 depicts members of the Hinton family in front of a sod home, similar to one they would have built after living in a dugout. On the far right, one gentleman holds a scythe, a tool for harvesting cereal crops. Two young females are holding a length of stout chain attached to a dog, ensuring that the dog is included in the family portrait.



Figure 1.2 Hinton family members and friends pictured outside a sod home in an unknown location. Personal photograph used by permission of Nick Brown.

The three interviews presented in this thesis were all conducted with descendants of the Hinton family, who homesteaded in Frontier County in 1886. Marlin Perks was born on September 30, 1935, and has lived in Frontier County all of his life and recounts his family journey from dugout, to sod house, to frame home. For most of this transition, he was present and helped construct the abodes. His own hands built the home he raised his family in, the same home he comfortably retires in today. He recounts his life's journey here, detailing his vast work experience from farming to the U.S. Postal Service. Marlin maintains a sharp mind that is able to

recall his early life surrounded by sod homes in Frontier County and his relationship with the Hinton families who lived within them.

Marlin's wife, Letha, originally from Alma, Nebraska, was born April 13, 1939. Alma resides approximately 85 miles from Stockville and approximately 95 miles from Curtis, Nebraska. Letha describes her move from Alma to Curtis, Nebraska, and highlights the career of her father, Leo Wolf, who was known as an inventor and "forwarder thinker" in the agricultural world, according to Letha. No archival information could be found on Leo Wolf, making Letha's oral history account a permanent piece of his legacy. Letha herself never lived in a sod house or dugout, but her transition from Alma to Curtis helps shed light on the frontier at the advent of modern technology, detailing the transition to indoor piping and electric lighting.

Finally, Nick Brown provides the third oral account recorded. Nick Brown comes from two distinguished families in Frontier County's history, the Browns and the Hintons. His family has carved out their own plots of land throughout Frontier County, and while Nick laments that pieces of it have been sold throughout the years, he still maintains 534 acres of land that has been in the family since 1884. Nick is an avid researcher, spending much of his life tracking his vast familial genealogy from Nebraska, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and even across the Atlantic to Europe. He helps organize family reunions that draw over 100 Hintons and Browns each year. He has a vast collection of archival photos and family writings that give firsthand accounts on Hinton homesteaders. Nick's passion for his family extends to the past, present, and future, and his collection of knowledge ensures that the Hinton and Brown family history will survive with his five children and, of course, anyone else who will listen. In this thesis, Nick helps define the current scope of the Hinton family, helps navigate his land to show where he believes sod homes and dugouts were located, and provides oral history for the founding Hinton homesteaders.

Significant portions of these oral histories are presented in the Results chapter. Archival information is provided to lend support to their stories and solidify their contributions to dugout and homesteading research. Their perseverance and unrelenting passion for family history has helped preserve their legacy for future scholars and family members alike. In addition to oral history recordation, an archeological survey was conducted of a potential dugout site based on oral history. While the limitations of this thesis did not allow for a more intensive archeological excavation, a comparative study is presented that demonstrates a potential for the site to be the remnants of the Hinton's first shelter.

In the following chapter, the historical background of Nebraska and Frontier County is explored. The importance of the Homestead Act for Nebraska settlement is presented and the origins of sod homes and dugouts on the Great Plains are examined. Archival literature detailing construction methods for sod homes is provided. The founding of Frontier County introduces the time and setting for historical context. Finally, a brief examination into the use of oral history and it's growth in the field of archeology is also provided.

Chapter Three considers how we share and contextualize our memories as a part of intangible heritage, including a theoretical background on the transfer of stories from the teller to the listener. This is followed by a review of contemporary research on sod homes and dugouts to be used as comparative data. Data on multiple dugout excavations from Minnesota to Kansas are summarized, including their material culture and archeological footprints. The variability of dugout and sod structure surface conditions and how remains of these structures can be identified is reviewed as part of the theoretical background for this thesis.

Chapter Four presents the methods and data collection used in this thesis. This chapter details how, where, and when the oral histories were recorded. The archeological methods

employed to evaluate a potentially historic site are laid out, as well as the process of recording a standing reconstruction. Finally, plans for archiving the oral histories are discussed.

Chapter Five presents the results of the oral history testimonies and archeological field survey. Select questions and excerpts that were deemed most valuable to this thesis are transcribed and provided with notes from the author. Data from a field survey in an area where familial history indicated a dugout was located is examined, and a comparison between the site and known archeological dugout sites is presented. A reconstructed sod home by the Perks family using modern techniques is explored through oral history and a field survey.

Chapter Six is an evaluation of all the data gathered by this thesis. The oral histories are assessed and significant examples of how certain intangible histories have persevered over the last 150 years, even when tangible historical documents are available, are identified. The concluding chapter evaluates the results of the fieldwork carried out for this thesis, and returns to the desire for tangible data to support the intangible heritage represented in the oral history accounts collected in this thesis.

Finally, Chapter Seven offers a final interpretation of this body of work, blending the oral histories, field surveys, and theories to answer the research questions. Additionally, the limitations of the thesis are discussed and the need for more archaeological field work is highlighted.

Chapter Two: Historical Background and Context

The presence of traditional dugout and sod homes rose exponentially in the late 1800's with the passage of the Homestead Act, which accelerated westward expansion onto the Great Plains. The Homestead Act was one of the largest and most successful land distribution programs by the United States government. For Nebraska, the Homestead Act was a crucial factor for both its growth and its founding. Historian Homer E. Socolofsky, an expert on Great Plains history in the 1900's, explains that

“....ownership of 74 percent of the land available for homesteading in Nebraska was actually achieved either through the Homestead Act or the Timber Culture Act, with their privilege of commutation. In Nebraska, the number of homestead entries totaled 167,797 by 1905 when 90 percent of the land had been occupied... By 1910 under the regular provisions of the law, 48 percent of the homesteaders got the patent for the land, a figure which rose to 57 percent... (Socolofsky, 1968:104).

Nebraska was formed as a territory by the Kansas-Nebraska Act on May 30, 1854. However, the land was inhabited by indigenous hunter-gather groups for at least twelve thousand years (Archer, et al., 2017:33). Extensive archeological research has revealed nearly one hundred Paleo-Indian sites across the state (Archer, et al., 2017:33). By the nineteenth century and arrival of settlers, the most prominent Native peoples included the Omaha, Pawnee, Ponca, and Oto. The Lakota-Sioux are also a prominent tribe in the Great Plains and Nebraska region. These tribes were primarily located in what would become eastern and central Nebraska. Lithic artifacts, such as projectile points and stone tools, are the pre-contact material cultures most commonly excavated by archeologists that date this time period. Historic-period sites and artifacts associated with westward settlement and earthen housing generally date to the 1800s.

At the introduction of the Homestead Act, the United States was actively fighting with the Sioux, Arapaho, and Cheyenne tribes, respectively. Resources on the Great Plains were limited, and First Nations were forced to fight to retain their ancestral homeland. The territory that would become Nebraska was no different and became engulfed in the long-running American Indian Wars. By the 1870's, the Federal Government had removed most Native American tribes from Nebraska and located them in reservations to the southern part of the state. Today, Nebraska is home to the Pine Ridge Reservation, Santee Reservation, Winnebago Reservation, Omaha Reservation, Sac and Fox Nation Reservation, and the Iowa Reservation. It is also home to numerous Federal Land Trusts, and borders Native American reservations in Kansas and South Dakota.

Before the arrival of American settlers, the territory was part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Journals of explorers such as Stephen H. Long and Zebulon Pike reference Nebraska as the "Great American Desert." Nebraska has a small permanent population until the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862, owed in no small part to its unappealing nickname as a desert. . Homesteaders is a common term used to describe those families who came west due to qualifying for the Act, which granted adult heads of families 160 acres of surveyed public land for a minimal filing fee and five years of continuous residence on that land. The enticing offer of land drew families from across the eastern U.S. and towns began to be form. As westward expansion boomed, railroads, post offices, and local municipalities followed. On January 17, 1872, Frontier County was organized. The 1880's brought an increase of farmers and ranchers to the County, settling the lowlands in the search of fertile grounds. The County's archival records offers the following historical note:

Frontier County, Nebraska, located in the southwestern portion of the state, was organized on January 17, 1872. The early history of the area was dominated by stock-raising. The cattlemen's desire to make the surrounding area "stock country" induced them to urge organization of the county. A small community, Stockville, was designated as the county seat simply because it was the only location where records be maintained.

Settlement into the area was slow through the 1870s. By the 1880s, however, farmers began to settle the fertile lowlands which were conducive to farming operations. This trend continued and increased the following years. Frontier County reached its peak population in 1940 at 6,417 persons. Stockmen remained the most influential factor in the county.

Unlike most areas of Nebraska, a considerable number of settlers had arrived in the county prior to the coming of the railroad. The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad connected the county with the rest of the state in the 1880s. Soon after several town sites were platted by the enterprising "Lincoln Land Company.": One of these towns, Curtis, possibly owes its very existence to this company. Col. Harry Phillips, secretary of the Lincoln Land Company, persuaded most of the residents and businesses of Stockville, then the county seat, to move to Curtis. Today Stockville is the county seat of Frontier County, and the site of the Nebraska School of Agriculture (Frontier County Archival Records, provided with permission from Darla Walther, Frontier County Clerk).

Curtis, Nebraska, approximately 11 miles north-west of Stockville, is mentioned in this historical note and both towns were important to early pioneers. Like Stockville, Curtis, Nebraska is frequently referenced within the oral histories. The families interviewed and potential dugout investigated in this thesis fall between these two towns.

The origins of dugout and sod homes and their introduction to Great Plains pioneers is difficult to pin down, but research has shown that the building type emerged on the Great Plains in the mid-nineteenth century (Kampinen 2008:1). The referenced building types that emerged at this time were primarily utilized by pioneers seeking shelter in a timber-less prairie. As the Midwest became more populated and railroads were introduced, settlers were able to access building supplies like sawn lumber that quickly negated the use of dugouts and sod homes.

Although frequently associated with the homestead movement, archaeology has indicated that earthen homes are not unique to the Midwest, nor original to Anglo settlers. A study on Hopewell Mounds in Missouri yields evidence that Great Plains sod construction was being practiced long before the arrival of American settlers. The presence of upturned sod blocks found at these Hopewell sites support that it was an important earthen construction material on the Plains, recognized since at least 100 A.D. (Nest et al. 2001:645). Going back even further, scattered sites across Illinois that date back to the Middle Woodland period of 2000-1700 B.P. have been found to have sods that have a dark, 3-10 cm A horizon with a non-existent B horizon, an indicator that soil was removed and stacked on the surface (Van Nest et al. 2001:645). These studies provide evidence that sod construction has been a practical and effective building technique long before it was popular with Euro-American settlers in the Midwest.

In Nebraska specifically, sod structures were frequently constructed within and adjacent to the “Sandhills,” a geographic phenomenon in north-central Nebraska where sandy soil has been stabilized by abundant grass (Turner, 1975:22). The Great Plains are known for their extreme weather including cold winters and harsh droughts. Described as the ‘Heartland of Extremes,” Nebraska is known for experiencing extremes in precipitation, ranging from droughts that become dust bowls to widespread flooding (Dewey, Mogil 2017:6). For example, March has been recorded as seeing temperatures well below 0 degrees Fahrenheit and heat as high as the 90s (Dewey, Mogil 2017:6). This varying weather demanded quickly built and stable structures for humans and livestock. Wood was a scarce resource, so sod that could be cut and stacked by hand provided the building material. Many pioneers migrating from Iowa, Missouri and Kansas found a harsh reality once they arrived on the Nebraska plains. The woodlands they had been

accustomed did not extend this far west, and a new challenge was at hand (Gates 1933:352). Sod was the only abundant construction material on the prairie.

The construction methods of sod structures, such as dugouts and sod homes, is well documented in historical texts. Early to mid-1900's literature on the basis of sod home construction describes the technical details well. "Cutting plows," as the tool was often referred to, were used to cut blocks of sod from the earth that were strategically placed nestled into the side of slopes in the rolling Plains. (Dunbar, 1969). These blocks averaged a foot and a half in length and two feet wide, weighing around 50 pounds (Smithsonian's History Explorer, n.d.).

While sod homes tend to follow similar layouts and building techniques, no two sod houses are the same. *The Sod House* by Cass G. Barns and *Sod Walls: The Story of the Nebraska Sod House* by Roger L. Welsch are both timely examples of texts that describe how pioneers should lay sod. Both of these novels excel in their first-person perspective of life on the plains and dwelling in a sod home. *Sod Walls* by Roger L. Welsch stands out as a premiere source of sod house construction literature, shaping our literary understanding of sod construction techniques. As reviewer Henry Glassie writes, Welsch delivers a fine description of the building of a sod house, from the cutting of the sod to the laying of the blocks (Glassie 1969:87). The stacking of the sod bricks and their size is consistent with the information provided by the Smithsonian Institute. Often referred to as the definitive text on this subject, Welsch's work demonstrates the construction of sod homes in detail.

One of the families who were brought to Nebraska through the Homestead Act and utilized sod structures for survival was the Hinton family. William Hinton settled his family in a series of dugouts in Frontier County in 1884. "History Nebraska" has compiled a database for the Nebraska Homestead Land Records. The records are archived from approximately 1860 to 1954.

The “Tract Books Index” is compiled to allow both family members and researchers to locate references within the 163 land tract books that list the first owners of land in Nebraska obtained under the Homestead acts (History Nebraska; n.d.). Search results include name, section, and range, and provide the reel number to find the original document. A search using the name of Hinton results in thirty-one entries for Hinton family members, some individuals appearing more than once, often with adjacent tracts (Table 2.1). Many of the Hintons described in the oral accounts below can be identified, including William Hinton, Joseph Hinton, and James Hinton.

Table 2.1: 1860-1954 Tract Books Index Search Results

Search Parameters: Name=*Hinton*, Section=, Township=, Range=

Name	Section	Township	Range	Reel
HINTON, JOSEPH H	1	6	28W	10 or 10A
HINTON, CHARLES E	12	28	15W	28
HINTON, DIEDERICK W	2	33	33W	13 or 14
HINTON, ERVIN N	19	6	27W	20
HINTON, EZRA	7	6	27W	20
HINTON, FREDERICK W	1	33	33W	13 or 14
HINTON, FREDERICK W	3	33	33W	13 or 14
HINTON, JAMES J	23	3	39W	11 or 12
HINTON, JAMES J	24	3	40W	11 or 12
HINTON, JAMES M	31	7	27W	20
HINTON, JAMES M	6	6	27W	20
HINTON, JAMES W	20	35	10W	27
HINTON, JEREMIAH	6	6	27W	20
HINTON, JOHN	20	28	40W	11 or 12
HINTON, JOHN	28	28	40W	11 or 12
HINTON, JOHN	29	28	40W	11 or 12
HINTON, JOHN W	19	2	30	18
HINTON, JOHN W	2	14	31W	18

HINTON, JOHN W	20	2	30	18
HINTON, JOHN W	20	2	30W	10 or 10A
HINTON, JOSEPH E	27	33	33W	13 or 14
HINTON, JOSEPH E	28	33	33W	13 or 14
HINTON, JOSEPH H	1	6	28W	10 or 10A
HINTON, JOYCE	21	28	40W	11 or 12
HINTON, MARY A	1	6	28W	10 or 10A
HINTON, MARY E	18	10	34W	13 or 14
HINTON, SAMUEL	20	18	9E	40
HINTON, SAMUEL W	18	29	21W	24
HINTON, WILLIAM	5	6	27W	20
HINTON, WILLIAM D	17	25	27W	20
HINTON, WILLIAM D	17	25	27W	22

All three interviewees were selected in part because they can trace their familial tree back to the original homesteading Hinton family in 1886. Figures 2.1 and 2.2, below, depict scans of both William Hinton and Ezra Hinton's land patents granted by the Homestead Act, though they are almost ineligible. All oral history participants for this thesis are related to one of these two Hintons.

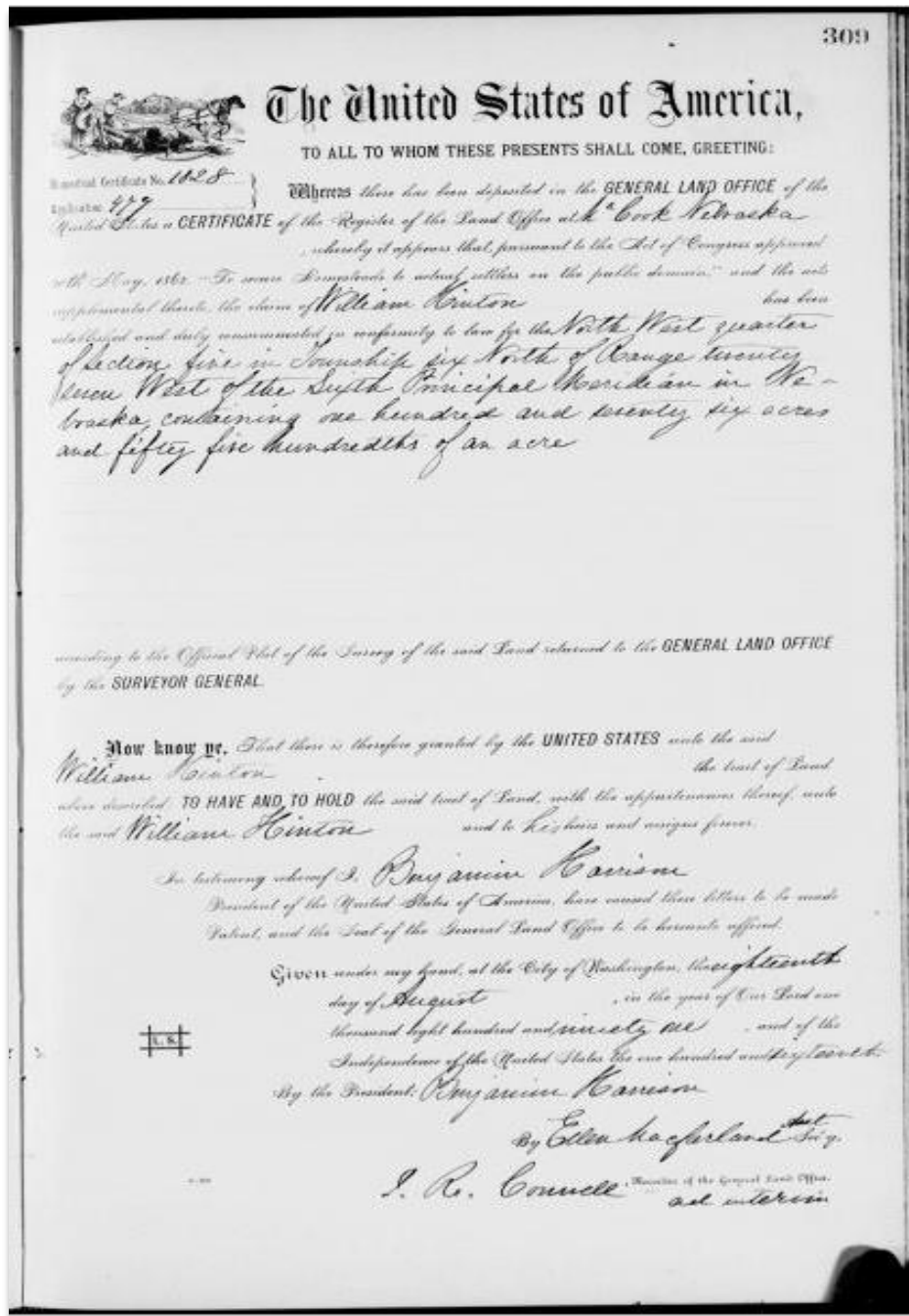


Figure 2.1. William Hinton's 1891 land patent provided as an open source from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

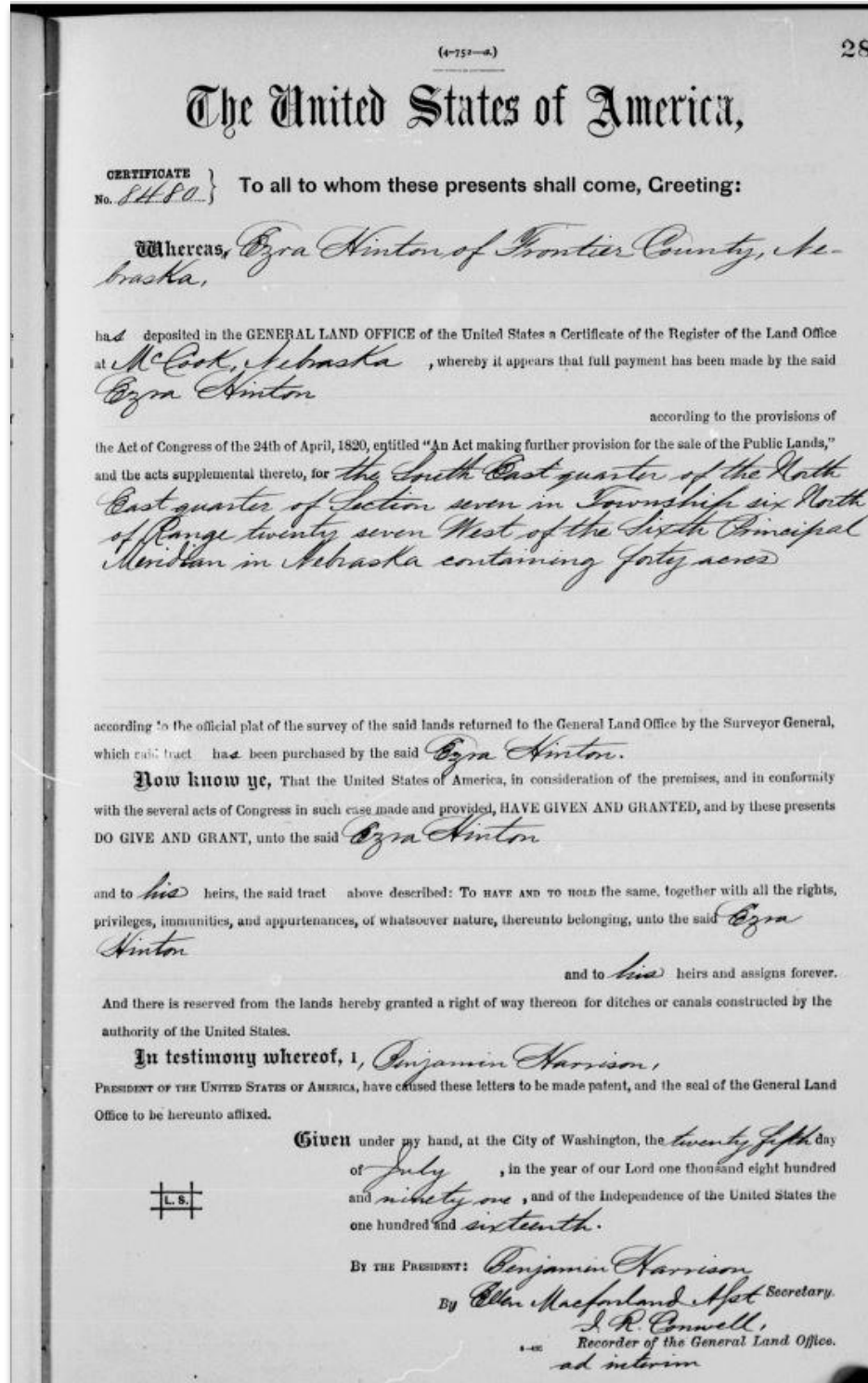


Figure 2.2. Ezra Hinton's 1891 land patent provided as an open source from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

This thesis presents the Hinton's oral history from different familial perspectives, weaving the accounts into a factual history and uses other supplementary documentation to verify them. As will become apparent in the oral history and archival data of this thesis, the Hinton family was vast and continued to mingle with other homesteading families (Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3. Depicting the wedding celebration of Clarence and Nettie (Hinton) Young. Personal photograph used by permission of Nick Brown.

William Hinton was the first Hinton to begin homesteading in Frontier County, as referenced in the National Archives Tract Index and oral history of Nick Brown. Figure 2.3 depicts William and Sophia's daughter Nettie marrying Clarence Young on March 7, 1901, in Stockville, Frontier County, Nebraska. Clarence Young was the son of James McCourtney and Lydia (Mack) Young. To this union nine children were born: Harold, Cecil, Walter, Nathan,

Marvin, Francis, Mabel, Iva, and Esther. Nick Brown was able to provide photo evidence of this marriage and had the list of their children. Significantly, it is easy to see how a homesteading family tree could outgrow what any one person could remember. Because of this, oral history from multiple sources works to piece together a complicated puzzle. Oral history has not always been an acceptable form of archaeological evidence, but since the turn of the 21st century the importance of family stories with documented history have become more apparent. In the case of Nebraska homesteading, family oral histories are often all that remain of that brief window in time.

Before globalization and the widespread availability of writing and recording instruments, all history was oral history. Many cultures around the world still utilize oral history as a definitive documentation of their history. The acceptance of oral history in American academic literature, however, has a long trajectory. Though orally transmitted history had been traditionally accepted, the late nineteenth century saw a sharp decline in the legitimacy of oral history in the scientific communities (Sharpless, 2008;8). It wasn't until the 1940s and 1950s that oral history became more widely accepted in the academy.

The "Oral History Project" founded at Columbia University in 1948 was a significant step for oral history in the American academy. Founded by Allan Nevis, the Oral History Project brought manuscripts of real, human conversations conducted by Nevis to the forefront of research, archiving accounts of laborers in fields such as oil wildcatting and the timber industry (Sharpless, 2008;10). As the Oral History Project gained success, the 1950s and 1960s saw other notable universities kick starting similar programs. The University of Texas, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of California at Los Angeles are just a few of the

universities who opened oral history archives in this timeframe. The first university-based oral history degree programs in the United States were operational by 1960 (Sharpless, 2008;11).

Historian Hubert Howe Bancroft recognized that the written history of western North America lacked the stories and memories of those who participated with the development of the West (Sharpless, 2008:8). Popular works such as that of the great Willa Cather, Laura Ingels, and Cass Barns are all based on oral accounts (Kampinen 2008:8). These fictitious stories are supported with first-hand accounts. This type of oral history is significant for capturing the history of the Great Plains and Nebraska homesteading.

This chapter has outlined the beginnings of Nebraska with the rise of the Homestead Act in 1862. Before this, the territory was populated with numerous First Nations, but the increasing demand of American settlers pushed them, often violently, from their lands. In 1872, Frontier County was officially established and early records indicate the importance of Stockville and Curtis, two towns founded in the early days of Frontier County which still stand today. The origins of the earthen structures, including sod homes and dugouts, and their necessity to pioneers, were explored; factors in their use such as the extreme weather of Nebraska and the lack of timber were also considered. While the use of these structures could last anywhere from months to decades with proper maintenance, most were temporary and replaced as more traditional building materials became available. This has created a unique preservation issue as these abandoned structures have deteriorated over the last century. Additionally, the origins of the Hinton family and their documented land records were presented, to be further expanded on in the Results chapter.

Chapter Three: A Theoretical Examination of Perceived History and Relevant Archeological Research on Sod Structures

This chapter explores how humans perceive familial history and evaluates the relationship between perceived history and archival history. This chapter also presents a broader reflection on our tangible and intangible heritages, defined within the context of Nebraska homesteaders. This theoretical research is followed up with surveys of previous research on Midwest sod homes and dugouts, as well as a showcase of select arrays of oral history accounts of nineteenth-century homesteaders. As will become apparent with the presented research, these once-prominent structures have rapidly decayed. It is nearly impossible to fully explore these structures and their historical significance without written and oral accounts. Sod structure sites demonstrate the importance of oral history where potential informants are aging and original structures are no longer in existence. Additionally, they provide an opportunity to view how homesteading stories are shared and experienced. This thesis expands on what other research has been done by first building a foundation. Much like a sod home or dugout, a foundation is the best place to start.

Tangible history refers to history that we can physically see or have physical evidence of, such as archeological sites, artifacts, and monuments. Intangible history is akin to familial stories, traditions, and expressions that groups associate as part of their heritage. Familial heritage can be both tangible and intangible, but often the oral histories associated with them fall within the latter category. But how do these stories percolate through a families' generations, and how do they change? Transmission of the past often manifests with family members telling stories and their listeners receiving the stories, retelling the stories, and often subconsciously altering the stories (Linde, 2009:11). Oral historian Charlotte Linde defines a life story as “as a

temporally discontinuous unit told over many occasions and altered to fit the specific occasions of speaking, as well specific addressees, and to reflect changes in the speaker's long-term situation, values, understanding, and [consequently] discursive practices (Linde, 1993:51)." In this body of work, we will be defining familial stories of heritage the same way.

Familial heritage lends credence to our sense of self; it tells us why we are the way we are and how we became this way. In some instances, it may even allow us to glimpse who we may become. More importantly, these stories are how we communicate a sense of self to others and advocate for our belonging in certain groups or cultures (Linde, 1993:3). Familial stories are often intangible heritage, manifesting with memories of previously heard stories. This intangible heritage can sometimes be fitted with tangible heritage, and sometimes not. Just because no tangible evidence of a familial story is available does not necessarily negate its credibility. Because much of familial heritage is often intangible stories, their primary method of conveyance is peer to peer. Familial narratives bring the past to the present and create a relationship between the narrator and the listener, who may go on to be the narrator (Carr, 2010).

How does a family materialize a significant event or story? In the twenty-first century, technology such as cell phones and video cameras may come to mind. But these are often used in a controlled setting. Everyday life, and the happenings that become part of familiar history, is more often spontaneous, episodic, and unpredictable. In these cases, it is natural to look towards tangible history to accompany the intangible theater of mind in one's memory. But as researchers have previously theorized, these stories and familial narratives are passed from teller to listener, and the listener goes on to be the teller. The story may evolve to match the times, or evolve to match an overall narrative. What we want our family history to be in intangible stories, and what our tangible familial history reveals, can be different.

It does not take much time in Frontier County conducting oral history interviews to feel the intangible desire to belong to a homesteading history. Through the stories unearthed in this thesis and the subsequent fieldwork, there exists a strong need to contextualize these stories of ancestors with tangible evidence. But as the previous chapter has shown, these sod structures are not permanent. Their surface evidence is scarce. But the stories they have invoked in their descendants and listeners is the opposite; they are permanent staples of heritage. To study the phenomena on how oral stories have evolved alongside tangible histories for Frontier County homesteaders, and how they can lead to a tangible need for physical monumentation, we must first document the intangible histories. The focus of this thesis is on sod structures and the Hinton homesteading family. Recording this intangible history provides context for the time period and sod structure life. To understand how these familial stories relate to tangible history of sod structures, similar archeological studies are needed to provide tangible context.

Archeological investigations have provided important data on the construction and use of sod structures in Midwest states, but Nebraska-specific studies are rare. Accruing data from other Midwest states, such as Minnesota and Kansas, can help set the tone for this Nebraska project. In 2005, archaeologist Donald Linebaugh and his team excavated the dugout house of Anna Byberg in west-central Minnesota. Their research found that the Christopherson dugout was occupied for almost 10 years, a clear departure from the common notion that dugouts were temporary abodes (Linebaugh 2005:76). That said, research into other dugout sites indicated that many were actually used up to 5 to 10 years.

Much like the Hinton site in Frontier County, the project was motivated by familial interest in preserving their family history. The investigated site was identified in part by an earthen depression ranging in measurements of approximately 7 x 10 ft. to 18 x 24 ft. with site

measurements of 18-20 ft. north/south by 13-15 ft. east/west, concluding with a variable depth of 4 to 6 feet (Linebaugh 2005:64). Alongside the traditional archeological investigation, a rich oral history was also unearthed. Almost sixty family members contributed to the project. The excavation and study of this late 1800s dugout blends both family history and archeology, helping a family turn their passion for history into a recorded archeological site. However, the published work for the dugout house of Anna Byberg and Christopherson Goulson (Linebaugh 2005, 2014) do not provide any formal recorded oral histories for the reader.

Linebaugh demonstrates the most important steps of excavating a dugout, including collaboration with family members, gathering oral history, identifying depressions in the earth for excavation, and collecting cultural material. Notably, the artifacts collected were principally structural objects such as nails. While the artifacts were not exactly indicative of the inhabitants' Norwegian heritage, they do provide data on Great Plains homestead life (Linebaugh 2005:63). The lack of non-architectural artifacts found during excavations of the site denotes that material possessions of homesteading inhabitants were few and far between. It demonstrates that in a time where homesteaders needed earthen homes just to survive, material possessions were not of major concern.

The second example comes from fieldwork directed by Flordeliz Bugarin at a site outside Nicodemus, Kansas.. Documenting a site much closer to Nebraska, the Kansas Archaeology Training Program excavated an 1877 dugout in 2007. Author Sherda Williams notes that “the dugout measured approximately 40 by 33 ft. in size (Williams, 2008:85).” The site was located by Bugarin based on the bowl-shaped depression left by the approximately 19½ x 23 ft. cellar. Feature 1077, inferred to be an early dugout, was dug into the side of the sloping face of a hill (Bugarin, 2007:9). The surface depression was clear, and the study did find

evidence of a trash midden, theorized to be related to post dugout activity. This theory cited association with a thin layer of ash as evidence of controlled burning (Bugarin, 2007; 9). Both Bugarin and Linebaugh propose evidence that abandoned dugouts were used as trash middens, disposing trash into the dugout and burning it once a new shelter had been built.

Bugarin's 2007 excavations again demonstrate the use of surface evidence of mounds and depression within hillsides to identify dugouts, documenting excavated evidence of structure. Bugarin also records the layer of ash and trash midden, further revealing how these dugout pioneers managed their day to day lives. The project found mostly architectural artifacts, but other artifacts were present. Bugarin highlights an architectural evolution of the dugout home to the sod home and to the timber frame home. The dugout excavation contained minor architectural artifacts, but the sod home excavation and house structure unearthed greater quantities of artifacts from material household goods including a thimble, the base of an 1800's sewing machine, and various glass bottles. As late nineteenth-century pioneers became more established, their housing type and material comforts evolved toward more permanent structures and increased consumer goods.

In 2001, the Kansas City District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers investigated what is referred to as the Fort Ellsworth Site (14EW26). Located in Ellsworth County, Kansas, this investigation identified and excavated multiple dugouts within the site area. The investigation identified a 30 x 50 ft. shallow depression that is believed to be the location of a dugout building (Ziegler, 2001:9). This investigation is important to this thesis because it records a technical archaeological investigation of a dugout from 1864-1867. The dugout investigated was constructed only a few decades earlier than the Hinton's dugout and was located in a neighboring

state. Archaeologist Robert J. Ziegler identified the above-mentioned depression, noting that it was nestled into a hillside overlooking the Smoking Hill River (Ziegler, 2009:i).

Data recovery investigations identified that the dugouts investigated were intended to be temporary and constructed from materials on hand (Ziegler, 2009:1). The presence of deteriorated lumber lining the walls confirms that it is a dugout as opposed to a sod home. The material collected was largely architectural, but the presence of a stone oven and other kitchen goods differentiates the site from the others presented in this thesis. Ziegler proposes that this particular dugout was used as a kitchen for army staff staying at the fort (Ziegler, 2009;x).

Some Nebraska counties, such as Custer County, have literature on sod structures recorded by historic preservationists. For example, “*The Sod Houses of Custer County, Nebraska*” (2008) is a remarkably deep dive into the history of sod homes and an extensive survey of sites across Nebraska’s Custer County. Author Andrea Kampinen evaluates these sites as a historic preservationist, documenting construction methods and layouts of each uniquely built home. Kampinen records important data that finely built works of exceptional craftsmanship do exist (Kampinen 2008:146). Their survey of sod homes in Custer County, Nebraska, found that many of the structures constructed as family shelters were built with such precision and durability that, when reinforced with concrete, plaster, and modern roofing, continue to stand today (Kampinen, 2008:50).

Exploration of neighboring South Dakota sod homes in 2016 reveals just how many sites appeared to have been in recent use (Rozum 2016:297). Author Molly Rozum wanted to study folk architecture and set out to survey sod houses scattered throughout South Dakota. Expecting to find patches of sod and mostly eroded pits, she instead found decaying but still extant sod homes across the plains, and even more families still living in modern homes not far from these

dugouts (Rozum, 2017:297). Surface investigations found signs of habitation until at least the 1950's. Many original sod homes are now covered with siding and interior paneling walls, complete with a functional, leak free modern roof (Rozum, 2017:323). As evidenced by this architectural recordation project, many sod structures were impressive displays of frontier architecture that were worthy of upgrading when families had the financial capability to do so.

Back in Kansas and shifting to more technical research, archaeologists Dean Presley and Flordeliz Bugarin of Kansas State University and Howard University conducted a soil morphology, provenance, and decomposition test of a sod house site in Nicodemus. Their research presented techniques to identify sod blocks in soil layers, and discovered valuable information on the soil from macro and micro analysis (Presley, Dean, 2016) These findings highlight the need for more work on early sod home sites, as the surface evidence of their locations will not last forever, and without visual clues, archaeologists will have a near-impossible task of identifying sod blocks in the soil (Presley, Dean, 2016).

To overcome the deterioration of surface evidence of sod dwellings, archaeologists are increasingly relying on oral history. The most informative archaeological investigations on sod structures, such as those explored above, are frequently accompanied by some form of oral history. The merging of oral accounts and archeological investigations are key to understanding pioneer life in dugouts and sod houses. A wide array of oral accounts on life in Nebraska dugouts and sod homes are available to the public. One of these accounts comes from Nebraska native Flora Dutcher, who reflects on her grandfather's sod home in McCook, Nebraska. McCook is located approximately forty miles from Frontier County, Nebraska. Dutcher remarks that during her time, their home was considered modern (Dutcher 1949:1). Flora is not without humor, stating that these homes had what Dutcher calls "air conditioning," albeit a natural air

conditioning in which the thirty-inch walls of the home kept it cool in the summer and warm in the winter (Dutcher, 1949:1). Similarly, the cold rain that would often leak through the roof during wet periods was humorously described as “running water” (Dutcher, 1949:1). Dutcher helps confirm the long-standing notion that dugouts and soddies weren’t exactly the pinnacle of comfort. Even these hardy settlers were able to see the humor in their temporary abodes.

Author W. H. Miles writes in his book *Early History and Reminiscence of Frontier County*, originally published in 1910, that life in early Frontier County was lonely as settlers came and went (Miles and Bratt, 2010). Miles explains that as of 1893, Frontier County had “108 school districts, 115 schools, 3328 children of school age, seventy-two schoolhouses, three log and twenty-seven sod buildings” (Miles and Bratt, 1911:n.p.). This early publication is one of the few recorded accounts of the County at such an early time in its development. It provides information on a number of sod homes in Frontier County in 1893. The continued references to loneliness, hard labor, and a promising community paints the picture of Frontier County life.

When considering all this information, it is clear that an oral history-based approach to researching the Hinton Family story and Sod Site #1 is essential. The studies discussed above present the importance of oral history for investigating a sod home and dugout. Based on these previous research methods, there is a clear strategy to identify surface erosion for dugouts that has worked in Kansas and Minnesota. This thesis will provide documentation that these surface signs may be found in Nebraska as well. Most importantly, it contributes three more oral accounts for sod home and dugout life in Nebraska and preserves the homesteading story for a new generation of listeners.

Chapter Four: Methodology of Oral Histories and Archaeological Fieldwork

The initial goal of this research was to gather oral histories pertaining to late nineteenth and early twentieth century sod homes and social life in Frontier County, Nebraska. The selected informants provide a wide range of accounts on early Frontier County life, especially those living in soddies and dugouts. Their accounts have never been recorded or published, providing this thesis with previously unheard histories.

The oral history and descendant community knowledge recovered by the author was used to determine what surface evidence remains for a selection of sod homes and dugouts in Frontier County, Nebraska. This research has been done in collaboration with the Frontier County descendant community and includes a pedestrian survey of a potential dugout site in the county, complete with archival research, field data collection, and site interpretation. The research provided is used to determine the location of the Hinton Family Sod Site #1. The collected oral histories and archaeological pedestrian survey in conjunction with previous archeological research provide important information on homesteader life in earthen dwellings.

Comparative data was used to determine the size and location of the dugout or sod home, geo-locate the site, determine how these structures degrade over time, and record oral accounts of how late nineteenth and early twentieth century homesteaders lived in Nebraska. The data provided is adequate to meet the goals of the project and research question. A wider collection of oral accounts and additional Phase I, II, and III investigations are recommended and encouraged for future research.

In addition to existing archival data, new oral history interviews with Frontier County community members and the descendant community were conducted. The oral accounts preserve the memories of community members who have invaluable knowledge of the layout of sod homes across Frontier County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They provide important perspective to the pedestrian survey and archival data collected to corroborate the social dynamic of Nebraska homesteading communities.

Oral History Interviews

Three oral history interviews were conducted over the course of this research. On November 20th, 2023, the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board determined that the oral history project was exempt from IRB review. These oral history interviews vary in length, from 30 to 60 minutes. The length of each interview is affected by the natural progression of each conversation. The interviews were conducted in each interviewees' home. Each interview was one-on-one and located in a quiet area of the home. The interviewees each signed a consent form acknowledging that their interview was to be recorded and that their testimony would be used in this body of work and will be available to the public through the University of Maryland or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Oral interviews were captured digitally on flash memory, using a lapel microphone and personal laptop. The sound files were initially stored on the same device and will be archived for future research. A suitable repository for the oral history collection will be identified to house the collection permanently. A secondary recording intended as a backup was captured and stored on the author's cellular phone. The oral accounts are transcribed by the author as dictated by the

recordings and supplemented by “iTranscribe.” All transcriptions were reviewed by the author to ensure accuracy, and excerpts from the transcripts are further edited for clarity in the body of this thesis.

While each oral history is unique and variable, a basic structure was laid out to ensure that the research question of this body of work could be explored. Participants were encouraged to speak on any subject they deemed relevant or wanted to share. Questions were determined for each interviewee based on their relationship to the community and knowledge of homesteading. For example, both Marlin and Letha Perks were asked about sod home construction and the social dynamic of growing up in a community with sod homes. Locations of undocumented sod homes, sod home construction methods, and life in Frontier County were discussed from memory. Landowner Nick Brown elaborated more about his family history and the history of the area and Brown dugout and sod homes. Elaboration on certain subjects was encouraged and the interviewer fostered an open conversation environment. Strict adherence to the designated questions was not encouraged.

Archaeological Field Work

A pedestrian survey of the Brown family home site was conducted by the author and four volunteers on sod home and dugout sites within a two and a half (2½) mile radius of the Hinton Family property home off frontier County Road 737. Nick Brown served as the primary source and locations were reached with a mix of foot and vehicular travel. Photographs of both the remaining structures from the nineteenth and twentieth century and the approximate location of sites with no visible surface remains were taken by the author with a cellular phone.

Interpretations of these sites are provided in the Analysis chapter. Tools included a tape measure, trowel, stakes, string, line level, trowels, and shovels.

The intention of the field work was to identify and geo-locate earthen home sites on land owned by the Brown family in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The field work used pedestrian methods to survey and photograph standing vernacular structures, as well as photograph land that was previously occupied by a sod home for which but no surface evidence remains. The location of both extant and non-extant homes were determined based on Nick Brown's experience with the land, the oral histories documented, and archeological pedestrian survey. Photographs of the existing sites detailed below and their implications are presented in the results and analysis chapters. Through the use of corroboration, oral history, and pedestrian survey, evidence pertaining to the previously unknown location of the Hinton Home Site #1 is presented. Maps and photographs of these sites are presented in the results section.

Perks Family Restoration Projects

Marlin and Letha Perks are both avid homesteading history collectors, amassing an impressive collection of antiques and displaced artifacts. However, the Perks' passion for history extends beyond antiques to include a property containing reconstructed prairie church, one-room schoolhouse, and sod home. The sod home, constructed starting in [year], is described as a passion project by the Perks, and their oral histories detail its construction and inspiration. While the Perks took many modern liberties in its construction, the measurements used for their sod blocks and the building technique matches the work described in Barnes' 1930 work.

Modern liberties, such as including the use of heavy equipment for handling sod, stucco within the interior, and a lean-to wall of sheet metal for support (though that was not needed when the home was originally built) have helped Marlin and Letha preserve their sod home. While it is not indicative of nineteenth and twentieth century sod homes, documentation of the Perks home serves as excellent comparative data, correlates their oral histories, and helps preserve Frontier County history and Nebraska homesteading history for the next generation.

Archival Data

The owner of the surveyed property, Nick Brown, has collected a variety of photos showcasing multiple Brown family and related family sod homes in Frontier County. These photos capture both the Browns and related families living in Frontier County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The archival data helps identify the surrounding land and capture physical evidence of everyday life within a sod home. Many of these photos serve as reference points used to identify possible sod home locations with the pedestrian survey. The Hinton Family Sod Site #2, for example, is presented in the results chapter and compared to a pedestrian survey photograph to corroborate its approximate location.

These photographs have been digitized and are presented as figures throughout this body of work. Nick Brown has graciously allowed the photographs from his personal collection to be published in this thesis. Together, the methodologies provide details on how the data employed by this body of work was measured and recorded. The results of these methodologies are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Oral History and Field Work Results

The oral histories and field results are recorded in tandem with the archival research gathered for this thesis. The archival photographs present valuable insight to homesteading life in Nebraska. The photographs bring the oral accounts to life and lend credence to the names and events described. These photos capture moments in time for the Hinton family homesteaders and related family members. They supplement inferences about life on the Hinton family homestead made using other data. Many photos display geographic features that can be used for archeological investigations. The field survey presented within this thesis demonstrates the need for a combination of oral history, archeological survey techniques, and archival research. The identified Hinton Sod Site #1 is inferred to be the remnants of the family's first dugout, and its location and identification are presented through the archived oral histories and archival research.

Oral Histories:

In total, three oral history accounts were recorded. All three interviews were with life-long community members of Frontier County, Nebraska with knowledge of homesteading. Each interviewee has a family connection to the Hinton family. Marlin Perks was interviewed first for approximately 45 minutes. Letha Perks was interviewed second for approximately thirty minutes. Lastly, Nick Brown was interviewed for a total of one hour and three minutes. Each interview is variable and captures specific memories from descendant community members. In

this results chapter, the questions deemed most valuable to the research question are presented for each of the three oral history interviews.

Question #1: How did your family first come to Frontier County, Nebraska?

Marlin Perks:

Marlin Perks was the first to be interviewed, and jumped right into the question. Below, he explains his grandfather Ezra Hinton's journey to Frontier County and his experience with the Homestead Act:

“My granddad come to this country, and he wasn't old enough to homestead a 160 acres, but could preempt 40 acres. And then he bought other ground around him, which we now have 520 acres, so that's there. And the first couple of years on his preempt in the groundway, he lived in a dugout for a couple of years and then they built a sod house, and then we think in 1908 they built the old yellow house here on the farm. He got his patent on the original 40 acres in 1889. Whether they had to live on the ground for it, and, you know, improve on it for a couple of years or something, I-I don't know for sure right.”

Marlin is a descendant of Ezra Hinton, whose land patent displayed in Figure 2.2 confirms that he received a preempt 40 acres. Marlin also describes his family's transition from a dugout, sod home, and timber home. He then recounts to a story about his family in 1901, approximately thirteen years after Ezra received his land patent:

“Then, I think in 1901, there was the story that... 30-some neighbors took covered wagons... Money was short here, and there was a cousin that was down in Texas that

had some connection with the railroad down there. And, he told them that they could come down there and work on the railroad. So there was 30-some of them went down there [in] covered wagons. And they... worked for a year, a year and a half down there. And then, when they was coming back, why my grandparents stopped in Wichita, Kansas, to visit some friends and family down there. And, they never came back to the, to the farm. But, my mother, after she was married, boy, her and her husband come back to the farm up here. And in the meantime, where they had been, they had rented the farmhouse and the buildings there, the farm out to a neighbor or cousin.”

Marlin describes harsh economic conditions in 1901, matching other descriptions of poverty amongst homesteaders at the time. Notably, he refers to their journey to California as a “story,” providing an example of familial heritage. He recalls a number of Hintons who left and did not return. He then brings the conversation back to his family’s legacy on the property he still lives on today.

“... actually, the farm has been in the in the family since 1889. And I guess a young man, my grandpa and his dad had a blacksmith shop in Stockville. And they said that they [would] walk, they walk morning and night, back and forth to work, really every day.”

Figure 5.1, below, is an archival photo provided by Nick Brown that may display the blacksmith shop referenced by Marlin. He discusses the County Seat, Stockville, in its early years and the hardships that pioneers faced when traveling from their patented land to nearby towns. Overall, Marlin provides keen insight into his familial heritage and is able to convey his families’ origins in Frontier County in a precise way.



Figure 5.1. Hinton blacksmith shop south of Curtis, possibly the one referenced by Marlin Perks. Personal photograph used by permission of Nick Brown.

Letha Perks:

When Marlin's wife Letha Perks was asked the same question during her interview, she provided a her maiden familial origin:

"My parents were at Alma, Nebraska, and when I was four years old, we moved to Frontier County, all dirt roads. We had no inside bathrooms, no electricity. And I started this school when I was four years old. Lived on the farm, and then we went to Curtis and lived in the dormitories to go to high school, went to some college and then got married."

Letha's response differs from Marlins in that she begins with her family already established in Alma, Nebraska. She quickly transitioned onto the topic of her husband, Marlin, and their early life together on the Hinton property. She also began to describe her love of restoration and their personal projects on the property.

“And Marlin was in the service and was sent to Korea for a year. And when he got back, then we lived on a farm southwest of Stockville. And when we could retire, we started building all these things, restored the little schoolhouse, and built the log cabin and the sod house. And finally got my church.”

When asked more about her family’s origins in Alma, Nebraska, Letha described her father and his side of the family.

“My dad's father came from England and settled here for a better life. And he was fortunate to get a lot of ground where it was real fertile. And he built a big, old house, and he had his own electricity, um, put a bathroom in it. And we have newspaper clippings saying Mr. Wolf was more advanced in his thinking. They even have an inside toilet. And then my parents lived there for a while, until they wanted to have something better of their own. And that's why they moved to Frontier County.”

Here, we can get better insight to the familial story of Letha Perks’ family. She notes her father came from England seeking a better life, sharing a common heritage of immigration. Letha was then asked more information on her father, Leo Wolf, whom she describes with pride and detail:

“And my dad was really advanced in agriculture and build his own terraces and dug his own irrigation Well, oh, all by himself. Um. And it didn't prove to be a good well, so he finally had somebody drill, and he had probably one of the best cattle herds around. And he did a lot of experiments of tracking insects with radar, and he had some attachment on a plane, and he could fly. And they went overseas, England and Italy, and all these places to trace the migration of insects. He called me one time and he says, ‘would you check on

your cows and see whether there's male or female flies on them?' I said, 'well, they must all be male, because I don't see any toot toots!' So yes, but you didn't call anything a bug. They were insects. And he did a lot of inventions, but working for the government, you don't get credit for that. They, they patented his ideas, but he didn't care if it was."

Letha's father, Leo Wolf, shines throughout her oral history testimony and was clearly one of Letha's favorite subjects. From her provided oral history, a clear familial legacy is displayed.

Nick Brown:

When landowner and Hinton relative Nick Brown was asked about his family's origins in Frontier County, Nick reflected back on William Hinton, whom he presents as the first Hinton. He is able to paint a picture of the family's origins before homesteading, from England to the east coast:

"The first of my family to homestead in Frontier County would have been William and Sophia Hinton. They came from Pennsylvania and were married in I think 1884 or 85'. They had begun moving west sometime after marriage and we know they moved to Ohio and Iowa. In 1879, the family moved to Fillmore County in Nebraska. It was in March of 1884 that William and his three oldest sons..., um, Jerry, Joseph, and James I think... and his son in law, Robert... Robert Cole... well, anyway they drove in a spring wagon to a location that was, oh, three to four miles southwest of Stockville, the County Seat. They actually located on their homestead that's somewhere here on the property... And then in October they came back with whole the family and that's when they built the dugout... as a temporary home for their families."

Figure 5.2 provides a visual aid to Nick's recounting of the Hinton's origins. It depicts a Hinton visiting another Hinton's gravestone located in Pennsylvania. Nick displays adept knowledge on his families' origins and their movement throughout the globe. He provides an account of William Hinton to mirror that of Marlin's account of Ezra Hinton.



Figure 5.2. Jack Hinton visiting his grandfather's gravestone, James Hinton. The location is in Bedford Pa., where William Hinton and his wife were born prior to traveling to Nebraska to homestead. Personal photograph used by permission of Nick Brown.

Nick then continues by providing details on the size of the homesteading Hinton's and how his family continued to expand exponentially shortly after settling in Frontier County.

“Well, William Hinton would go on and be married three times. So we have a big family, and it really all starts with the Hintons. Even today we have family reunions of upwards of 100 people. They used to joke about that, why there was only Hinton sod homes everywhere out here. That’s the short of it, anyway”

Overall, Nick provides a technical answer to the question with dates, names, and archival data to support the familial story he has inherited. He continuous the legacy as the “teller” of Hinton heritage, detailing family gatherings that keep the homesteading family connected today.

Question #2: Did you have family members who built and lived in a sod home or dugout?

Marlin Perks:

Marlin answers this question clearly, describing Ezra Hinton and the early Hinton dugouts similar to those Nick Brown described for William Hinton. He mirror’s Nick Brown’s statement that Hinton’s spread across multiple sections and lived in a dugout:

“Well, they, they would have been in, well, Grandpa started with the dugout. And then they built the sod house, and then they bought other ground around that 40 acres. And then, we think in 1908 they built the two-story house. It’s on the farm, still, still stands on the farm now. This, this whole neighborhood used to be basically Hintons. And that was my mother’s maiden name was, she was aunt and.. And anyway, they uh, about every quarter section where they had land, there would be a Hinton, in the sections around here. So, growing up I would have lived in the old house here. In 1960, oh, 1965, why we built this house. And my, my dad and our family basically built it all ourselves. He was 75 years old when he had moved into Curtis, and he come down every day and worked.”

Marlin again provides his personal history on the evolution of housing in Frontier County. He also contributes to the Hinton heritage by remarking just how many family members there were and how well known they were in every section across the County. When asked how many people helped build their home, Marlin stated:

“Well, basically it would have been, well, just Letha and our three kids. And, and then dad. One day, my father-in-law and brother-in-law came over on the day we put the rafters up, and they help put the rafters up. Otherwise, we've done it all ourselves.”

Marlin confirms that he hand built his home with his family. Though he insists that his home “isn’t much,” it serves as a tangible monument to his family’s heritage.

Letha Perks:

Letha did not grow up in a dugout or sod home, instead living in Alma and Curtis in timber homes. She answers the question with a simple answer.

“No, but we had no inside bathrooms, no electricity.”

Though brief, her response does provide a brief glimpse into the conditions of those early timber homes. Though they were more permanent, they did not initially offer much more than a sod home did.

Nick Brown:

Nick Brown was able to offer significant familial history on which Hintons built the first dugout and when. He also discusses the arrival of the majority of the Hinton family and their transition from a dugout to a sod home:

“It was in October 1884 that William Hinton and his sons each built a dugout. They were for their families and were supposed to just be temporary. Joseph Hinton and his wife and two small daughters, Calista and Cora, remained in the home during the winter and fall before the rest of the Hinton’s arrived in the fall. It was March 1885 before Mrs. William Hinton and the four youngest children arrived. They came by train on the new railroad that was built in Indianola (Nebraska). They were then escorted to their new homestead and in fact, William had furniture, horses, and farm machinery transported on an emigrant car.”

Nick provides detailed stories on how Hinton’s traveled to Nebraska throughout the early years of their patent. He continues to oracle the arrival of other family members as he has been told. Lastly, he briefly touches on the sod home of one of the family members, recalling familial stories of square dances and gatherings:

“Other family members came in by covered wagons. Jerry Hinton and his family took two covered wagons from Fillmore County for example. The Hintons did more than just live in their sod homes and dugouts, too. William erected a shop on his homestead where he and his sons made breaking plows and other general blacksmith work. They sold the breaking plows to other homesteaders, so we are pretty proud of that. Hintons are involved in a lot of homesteading families roots. It was only a few months before they were able to acquire lumber, and they chose to build a shop in Stockville. They would walk to and from the homestead to the shop every working day. There were a lot of hardships they endured, but the Hintons and their neighbors always held Church on

Sundays and had private dances for themselves and neighbors. And those would be in their soddie, enough room for them and the neighbors to square dance.”

Nick finished this question with a brief discussion of the blacksmith shop that Marlin recalled in more detail. The familial heritage is remarkably similar in both of their accounts. Each did not know that the other spoke of this subject, so an important familial story has been identified and retold by two different listeners who are now tellers.

Question #3: Why did you build your own sod home, and what was the process like?

Marlin Perks:

Marlin immediately answered this question with humor. He also noted that his inspiration and construction ideas came from his memory of neighborhood sod homes. This response will be evaluated in the Results chapter as it provides an example of intangible heritage becoming tangible.

“Well, if you wanna, it's not something you wanna do every day! That was, that was some of the family that, that gave us some ideas. But we had, we had seen some of the neighbors’ houses around that kinda stuck in our minds.”

The humor in Marlin’s response should be noted. The oral history of Flora Dutcher evaluated in the Theory Chapter also contains a form of humor when discussing hardship. This trait quickly becomes apparent in many familial heritage stories on homesteading. Marlin goes on to describe the building process, including the building techniques and tools that he and Letha used. He also highlights the difficulty of construction, even with modern tools.

“When, when we first started this, we was gonna make it bigger than what it is now. But after we got started, why, the side walls wasn't quite as high as what we wanted. So rather than making more dirt on the outside, we went inside and dug it down about a foot, right. We, we would plow the, this sod, and then we would take, well, we used a skid loader to carry it up there because we didn't have a team of horses with a wagon. But we would, you go along and you, you had to cut this strip of sod. We got them 36 inches long, and they were 16 inches wide, okay? So that made our sides, or side walls, at least 32 inches thick. It was a lot of hard work there to build that, even by using the modern techniques, the skid loader and the plows. The older folks, why they used horses and a solid plow to break their sod. But up inside it (their sod home reconstruction), it feels nice. In the summertime, we have a garden up there and we can go in and you can cool off. And in the winter time, right now, you and I can go up and, and we have a little cast iron stove in there that you could light and in 5 minutes it'd be warm. You could run around in your t-shirt. It's real warm.”

Marlin provides an insightful look into the construction process of his sod home. He provides measurements that will be used as comparative data in the next chapter. He completes his response by noting that the conditions in the home can be livable and comfortable in the winter if properly heated.

Letha Perks:

Letha answered the question by first describing the other restoration projects they have done, including a one room schoolhouse and log cabin. Like Marlin, she expresses a sense of pride in these projects, but is quick to point out the challenges of constructing a sod home:

“When we retired, we needed to have something to do rather than just sit or go play cards or whatever. And we wanted to restore the little schoolhouse first. And when we finished that, he bought all those poles off the UM telegraph line, and we built the log cabin, and we decided a soddie should be next I-I don't know why we did it it just but it was, a lot of work and I wouldn't recommend it again.”

When asked about where Letha and Marlin learned to build a sod home, Letha gives a significant response. Below, she describes receiving oral instructions from a “stranger,” demonstrating the transfer of intangible history in Frontier County:

“I didn't even know what a soddie was until we talked to a gentleman in Curtis that told us a lot of what we should do and what we shouldn't do. And he recommended putting a wooden roof on instead of a sod roof. Because he would tell us how it would rain in and soak through that sod and that snakes could get in there. So I didn't want any snakes around. And you have the schoolhouse out there and the church, yes. I-I think the reason we did the church where is because they disbanded and sold the church. And so at the auction, we bought a lot of the dishes, the cross and collection plates. So we needed a place to put our things. So then we built a church. Wouldn't do that again either, but we've been really fortunate. Our church at Stockville comes out about once a month, and we have church in it, and three of our great grandchildren are baptized in the church. Things get hectic. We just go in and sit and I can play the pump organ and relax, and then we're ready to go again.”

Here, Letha has provided insight into her connection with tangible history. The memories of her childhood and connection to her community are based on the structures she shared those memories in. Her desire to create a tangible monument to those memories and stories inspired

her and Marlin's restoration projects. As discussed in the Theory Chapter, this is an example of a desire to monumentalize our intangible heritage. Letha then described the tools and techniques they used to build their sod home. Her response is detailed and displays how memories of intangible history can remain with those who were once a listener and are now a teller.

“We had the regular sod busting plow, but the ground was so hard it, it didn't work. And so Marlin adapted his plow for farming, and could pull it with a tractor. And the sod all came just right east of the school house up there, and we would cut it in chunks of 18 to 36 inches. And usually it was four to 6 inches thick, very heavy. So we could only haul it with the skid loader to where we were building. And you stacked them like people would stack bales of hay, and you wanted it really firm, so that no cracks would be in the house. We put one window in for some light, and we were gonna have it much larger. But after we got started, our plans changed. And, and then for the roof, we did put a wooden roof on it and shingles. So I think that's made it last longer. And there's a wooden roof and just this dirt floor. And every so often it'll get dusty and we'll take the furniture out and flood that floor with water and then that helps it pack down again. And he may have told you that there was grass still inside the walls, and so he took a weed eater and cut the grass off. And then it was dark in there. So we got an attachment to, like, they do the popcorn ceilings with, and we put that all around. And so it's quiet inside, and it made it lighter. So, so that helped a lot.”

Letha has described a separate point of view to the building process. It lines up with Marlin's retelling and provides further details on the modern techniques that were used. When asked how long it took to construct the sod home, Letha offered the following:

“Probably most of the summer, because we got started and then stopped. And that was a lot of work, and if our family was here, they would help us. And then if there's any kind of holes where we didn't pack in well enough, you would mix up mud and pack it. Now, we use cement if we need to, and that's because cement's easier to work with than mud, but still it is just a lot of work. But I guess we're glad we did it.”

Again, Letha offers up a small bit of comedy to help describe the difficult work that building a sod home, even a small one, entails.

Nick Brown:

Nick Brown has never reconstructed a sod home, and has no plans of doing so. He instead provides a response on the subject of Hinton's sod home:

“Never done that. I know the Hinton's first broke sod in the spring of 1985. They used their own fields and broncos (Figure 5.3). All the water they used was hauled in barrels in wagons from springs that were about, oh, they always said, about forty rods southwest of a neighbor's home. That's how the family said it, anyways.”

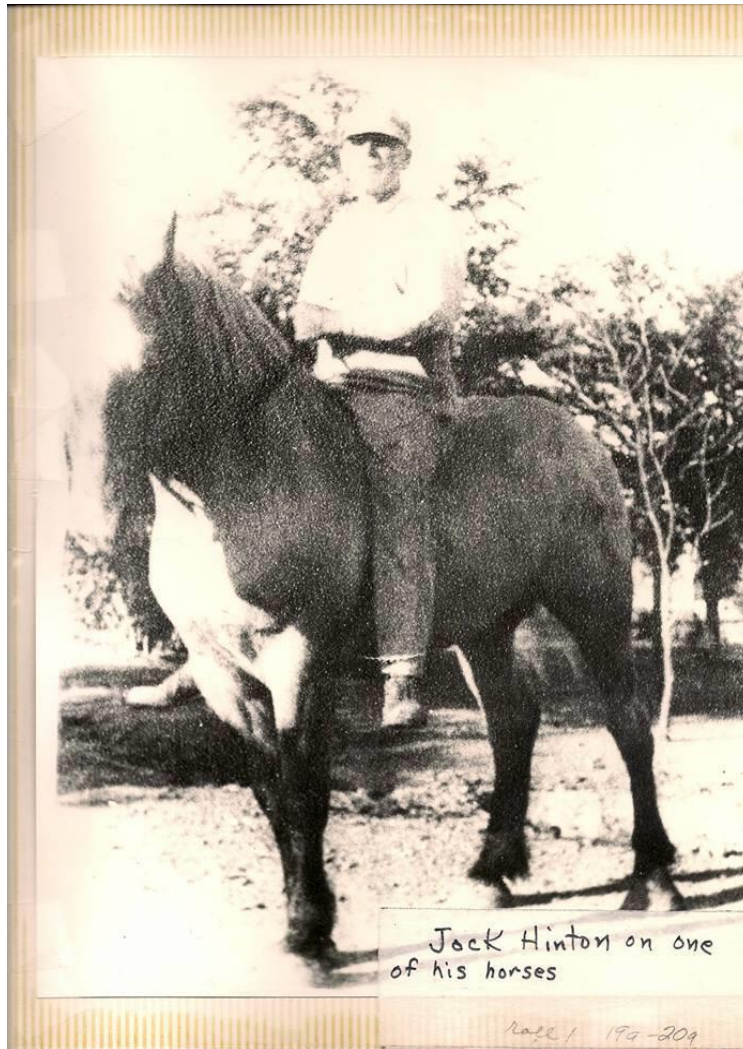


Figure 5.3. Nick Brown's great grandfather "Jack" Hinton atop his horse, a similar look to when the early Hinton family first broke sod. Personal photograph used by permission of Nick Brown.

Question #4: How was life in sod homes in Frontier County? What stories can you share from your childhood?

Marlin:

Marlin begins his answer with an oral story that was told to him, which he now shares as the teller. Note how Marlin is quick to compliment the resiliency of the early homesteaders.

“There was a fellow that claimed that when he was a kid growing up that they, had a wood roof on their sod house and inside they had a plank with some iron hooks on it. And if the wind was blown hard, why they would hook the iron hooks on a plank on whatever side the wind was blowing from, and they'd all settle on that plank to hold the roof on. And otherwise, they would blow the roof off. But because they weren't anchored down, it's amazing what they could come up with just to survive, really. This, this one is, it's anchored down. We use these rods like they anchor trailer houses down, and we screwed them down in the wall.

It is evident throughout his interview that he is proud of his ancestors. Marlin then brings the conversation back to the Hintons, describing the size of the family's sod home the way he remembers it. He includes descriptions of the rooms, their functions, and amenities found within:

“Your family, you know growing up why they (dugouts/sod homes) were about the size of the one we have out there. Well, they, they would be a little bigger. Little bigger than what ours is. I think the sod home of your great grandpa, Jack, I think it must have been, oh, maybe, 40 ft long, really, and maybe 20 ft. wide. And then they had had some rooms off that a-a lean-to on the back of those bedrooms because we used to square dance in the big main part. And I know you could get two or maybe three squares (square dancers) in that big room. And I think maybe that one the kitchen was added on to because there was a-a big thick wall between the kitchen. So they had more than just one room. This one up here we have, we got a wood burning stove and we got a table in it. And we've got a bed, which was my mother in laws. Her name was Mary, first married in the early nineteen hundreds. It was their bed, and it served as a sofa in the daytime. And they pulled it out

and made a bed yet. It would be comfortable to live in. I mean, just a man and woman. Or if you had, if you had a couple of kids, why it'd be a little crowded!”

Marlin notes the size of a familial sod home and recounts that it had more than one room. He then speaks to the authenticity of their own restoration, noting that some of its amenities are original. Finally, Marlin brings back the conversation sod home construction, detailing ways homesteaders could keep the space clean and protected:

“And they.... a lot of times, when they got a hard rain, why water would drip and run through the sod. But they usually... in the ceiling, they would get something that would be light to kind of keep the bugs and stuff from falling on your floor or on the table. This, this sod house here that we built, we sprayed the inside of the wall inside, used the white stuff like you would texture your ceilings. We sprayed it on that and that made it lighter on the inside than on the outside. But in in my grandma's house, sod house, a lot of people said used to just to sit and eat off of her floor as they would off of anybody else's table. She always kept it clean.”

Marlin’s remark on his grandmother’s cleanliness and her friends’ willingness to eat off her floor is unique. No other research on sod homes and their oral histories recalled such cleanliness from an inhabitant. When asked about how many sod homes he remembers in the area, Marlin is able to recall a remarkable memory of the landscape, citing locations and names of family members and their sod structures. Marlin also describes a transition from sod to cement, a construction technique that is not well documented in the archaeological record:

“Well, there were several sod houses that got turned, or somehow, into cements. And I don’t know where they got that cement at. Because the one over here, your (Hinton)

grandmas, those walls are cements. There was one a mile east of us across the canyon over here that had cement. It burnt down. But the walls were still standing there actually. And the walls in the old yellow house down here, that grandpa built (where Marlin grew up), they - they poured cement between the studs on the bottom, the bottom floor. There was a house that our daughter owns now over on the mile west to here, that's a cement house. The one over east here. They dozed all of it now. You wouldn't even know there was a house there now, really. It's just gone. A big gap. That's gone. Now, it's (private)'s farm. Now, you wouldn't even know there were several (sod) houses there. And that's where (Hintons) lived, over there. It was A-I don't know whether that's a cement wall on that house or not. There used to be, on the road over here going west a mile, used to be a dugout or a basement house there. And there was a house that was 2 miles south."

Marlin's insistence that many sod homes were converted to cement homes invokes a need for further research on the relationship between standing cement structures and eroded sod structures. He swiftly transitions into a familial story involving artifacts and sod structures that had already deteriorated in his youth. His accounts of family members falling into wells and finding artifacts while working demonstrates the variety of material culture in the area, the swift degradation of sod structures, and the dangers they may pose to those unaware:

"There was this dug well. And when grandpa was farming, he had a team of horses. And this day, they went over (accidentally) that dug well, and they fell in... and he was trying to cut his courses loose. He, he had just got a new set of harness', and before, when they didn't, why they used what we called, well just a strap that went around the rump or round under the tail to keep it... like... so your collar didn't get going down the hill, so it

didn't push up on (the rider's) head. Or, all up the whole back strap anyway. And grandpa, he just got the first set of horns he ever had to add that on. But he, he couldn't cut enough of the harness away to save the one horse that's still on top, and it ended up where both horses went down the well. Well, he had go down and take the harnesses off of them. And one time, I found a little doll about that tall (approximately two inches), a little black doll over there, a china doll around where this building (dugout) place was. And when we were irrigating, why we found where there was a dugout era dwelling and well over there. You could drop a clump of dirt down there and still hear it splash. There's lots of stuff out here that's just kind of buried.”

Marlin’s quote on the abundance of artifacts buried amongst Frontier County is a cornerstone of this thesis. When so much of homesteading heritage is intangible, accounts such as Marlin’s are vital for archaeologists to investigate what tangible resources may remain.

Letha Perks:

Letha begins by talking about what has become her favorite subject, her reconstructions. Her love of the church, and the memories she holds onto, are described in detail.

“I-I think the reason we did the church where it is is because they disbanded and sold the church. And so at the auction, we bought a lot of the dishes, the cross and collection plates. So we needed a place to put our things. So then we built a church. Wouldn't do that again either, but we've been really fortunate. Our church at Stockville comes out about once a month, and we have church in it, and three of our great grandchildren are baptized in the church. Things get hectic. We just go in and sit and I can play the pump organ and relax, and then we're ready to go again.”

Once again, Letha demonstrates her desire for tangible heritage to be preserved with intangible heritage. She then provides an awe-inspiring statement on what pioneer women liked, such as birds and flowers. In all of the archival research done for this project, no reference to these had been found:

“I think I told you that the pioneer ladies living there (in dugouts and sod homes), while the husbands were gone, they would be more content with the flower in the window sill and a bird in a bird cage. And having company. One thing that carried over to my time was the square dancing. I sewed for people and we square-danced. And if somebody needed a special square-dance outfit I could make it. And I know the Hinton’s square danced in their sod home, though Marlin would know more about that.”

Finally, Letha recounts the work that both the inhabitants and politicians of Nebraska went through to cultivate timber.

“Oh, my older brother, Dale, had to pay his way through college, and he took a job with the Game and Parks when they planted a lot of trees for wildlife and things. And he had to keep these trees clear of weeds. Well, rather than go hoeing, we had an old Jeep. And he rigged up a plow behind it, and then I would drive the Jeep so he could guide the plow and keep the trees weed free. I was probably twelve. And now, if you go down by the lake, you can just see all these big trees, and they planted a lot of choke cherry and different wild fruits, so the birds and animals would have forage.”

She again brings up another influential member of her family, a brother whose work with the Nebraska Game and Parks can still be seen today.

Nick Brown:

Nick Brown provides a more modern answer, describing the vast number of families with oral history just like the Hintons. He is able to provide a similar picture to Marlin of what the landscape may have looked like in the late eighteenth century, though his recounting is based on oral history:

“The stories are that there were dugouts and sod houses everywhere out here. I mean, everyone you ask seems to know there was one here, or south of here, or what have you. And it goes beyond sod homes, too. My dad and granddad could tell you where cement houses were, and we even have a few places on our property where you can see cement foundations. So they’re there, and I have found most of the time my dad and granddad were right! Even my mother said she was born in a sod home in 1938, but I haven’t been able to confirm that story. She did attend the North Star school, which I can show (the author) where the building is. It was brick, so it’s still standing in poor condition.”

Nick is able to weave the other half of his family into the conversation, speaking of his father Harold Brown and the impact familial history had on his youth. He also begins to describe locations that familial history has indicted sod structures where located and expresses a desire to have an archeological investigation done.

“My dad, Harold Brown, and my granddad had always showed me two areas of the land that they (the Hintons) had a sod home and dugout home. The sod home, they say it was there, but anymore it’s just a field. I haven’t been able to find much of anything really there that would be a sod home. We do have some photos (Figure 5.4) of

the family outside their sod home, and I can show you where it was supposedly located. And you can see multiple rooms in the photo, and the big family. There's a cement foundation of a barn there, I'm pretty sure. But I can take (the author) to where they always said it was. Here, I have some pictures of the sod home, I mean, it was bigger than you think. It had more than one room, which I think was more common than you'd think. I mean, you don't really hear about it. You have to look for information like that. But the dugouts were a little less ambitious I think."



Figure 5.4. The Hinton family outside their sod home. Personal photograph used by permission of Nick Brown.

Finally, Nick is able to demonstrate that familial history has indicated to him where certain sod structures were located. Nick showcases a strong desire to attach a form of tangible history to his intangible stories.

“As for William Hinton, we actually know the area where his dugout was first built. We don’t know where, well the exact location I mean, but there’s a pasture area where my granddad always said there was a dugout. I want to go back there and look with (author). There’s a lot washouts and what not, but I have always been told that the dugout was back there. Somewhere, at least.”

As he concludes, Nick denotes that he knows the general area that William Hinton may have built his dugout. Expressing a strong desire to attribute this tangible site to the Hinton familial heritage, a field investigation was initiated, detailed in the next paragraphs.

Field Results:

Two sites were surveyed on February 25 and 26, 2023. The crew consisted of author Connor Cottrell, guide Nick Brown, and volunteers Kelcey Cottrell, Bennett Cottrell, and Dakota Werkmeister. The properties surveyed were settled by the Hinton family before being sold in pieces throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Nick Brown, a direct descendant of the Hintons, still owns a large portion of the family’s land. Site locations were determined by oral interviews and Nick Brown’s family knowledge.

Nick Brown provided a tour of his property, a portion of the Hinton’s original homesteading patent. Mr. Brown demonstrated immense knowledge of the area and his family’s past, identifying sites that have been passed down to him through family history and oral history.

As he aptly noted, his parents, Harold and Nadine Brown, instilled a sense of importance to the land and family history. As this thesis presents, the vast majority of the sod structure knowledge in the County is oral history tied to landowning families. There are easily accessible recorded sites in Frontier County, but many landowners can point out where their family was said to have lived in a dugout or sod home. Nick Brown was no exception and was able to provide two locations for an archeological survey, shown as an aerial view in Figure 5.5.



Figure 5.5. Map depicting Site #1 and 2. Data Attribution at time of authorship - Map data © 2017 Google. Edited by author.

These investigated locations will hereby be known as Hinton Family Sod Site #1 and Hinton Family Sod Site #2 for the purposes of this thesis. A third site, referred to as Perks Family Sod Site #1, is a modern recreation of a sod home site on private property. Marlin and Letha Perks were gracious enough to allow this recreation to be recorded, photographed, and presented in this thesis. Nick Brown also identified numerous historical structures, such as the

remnants of the early 1900's schoolhouse that served the whole parcel and multiple abandoned and deteriorating homes that may have started out as sod homes before being improved in-place.

These historical structures were located on private property and could only be observed from county roads. Thus, they could not be photographed or presented here. Nonetheless, it is a stark reminder of how much history lies in the hands, and minds, of community members across Nebraska. Aerial maps are provided for each site, including Figure 5.6 below.

Hinton Family Sod Site #1:



Figure 5.6. Aerial view of Site #1. Data attribution at time of authorship - Map data © 2017 Google. Edited by author.

The first site will be referred to as the Hinton Family Sod Home Site #1. On February 29, 2023, permission was received by the author to perform a survey on the northwest corner of Section 5, Township 6, and Range 27. Nick Brown guided the author and crew to the top of a finger located on the property. Nick noted that family history had identified a sod home and dugout had once been located here. The oral narrative was that a dugout belonging to William Hinton, the first Hinton to homestead the land in 1884, had been built and lived in at this location. The exact location of the dugout and whether any surface evidence remained of it was

unknown. Attempts by Nick and other family members had been unable to pinpoint an exact location.

The top of the finger was walked northward along the fencing line. The survey started at the corner of the property's southern and eastern fence line. At approximately 1,063 ft. from the starting point, a cut was identified in the hillside. Multiple washouts were found along the ridgeline walking north. However, a washout is identifiable by its variable size, lack of geometric conformity, and relative location to perennial water. The identified cut was more uniform than all identified washouts along the ridgeline. It will be referred to as Hinton Family Sod Site #1, or Site #1, in this thesis. Figures 5.7 through 5.10, below, capture the site facing all four cardinal directions.



Figure 5.7 Hinton Family Sod Site #1 facing east. Photo taken by author.



Figure 5.8. Hinton Family Sod Site #1 facing north. Photo taken by author.



Figure 5.9. Hinton Family Sod Site #1 facing south. Photo taken by author.

An unidentified wooden post is present.



Figure 5.10. Hinton Family Sod Home Site #1 facing west. Photo taken by author.

Site #1 forms an upside down “L” shape when facing north. Walking into Site #1 from the west and facing east, an entry path is visible. A worn cattle path and an abandoned fence line cross directly in front of Site #1 at ground level (Figure 5.11). No surface artifacts were found, but geographic indicators included an abandoned fence line and a discarded wooden post. It is estimated that 30% of the surface was covered with snow and not visible. Due to weather conditions, including melting snow, the surface conditions were not ideal for identifying surface artifacts.



Figure 5.11. Abandoned fence line running north to south along the eastern entrance to Site #1. Photo taken by author.

Site #1 is geographically distinct from the surrounding area. It is a depression cut into a hill side, which is not replicated anywhere else within the tract. There is a worn cattle path and abandoned fence line directly where the depression begins. The surface was snow and sod with no visible signs of cattle or human activity. A visibly degraded tree with clear indications of saw marks was laid across the entryway (Figures 5.12 and 5.13). There are few trees in the area, and no significantly sized trees of matching proportions within 200 yards of the site. Nick Brown later confirmed that he had not cleared brush in this area.



Figure 5.12. Felled tree, taken by author.



Figure 5.13. Felled tree, taken by author

Measurements were taken with a datum 6 inches off the ground using a combination of a tape measure and rolling tape measure. Site #1 begins with a 9 ft. 8 in. entrance that gradually opens up to over 15ft. in width. The back of the first rectangular area is measured at 63 ft. 3 in. back from the entrance. Site #1 then jugs directly to the south, creating the upside down “L” formation. From this point, it can be walked 81 ft. 6 in. back before reaching the end of Site #1 (Figures 5.14 and 5.15).



Figure 5.14 View of the south end of Site #1. Photo taken by author.



Figure 5.15. Ground view of the end of Site #1. Photo taken by author.

Figure 5.16, below, displays a closer aerial view of the site. The unique “L” is more apparent, but it’s distinct features when compared to the rest of the landscape is also notable.

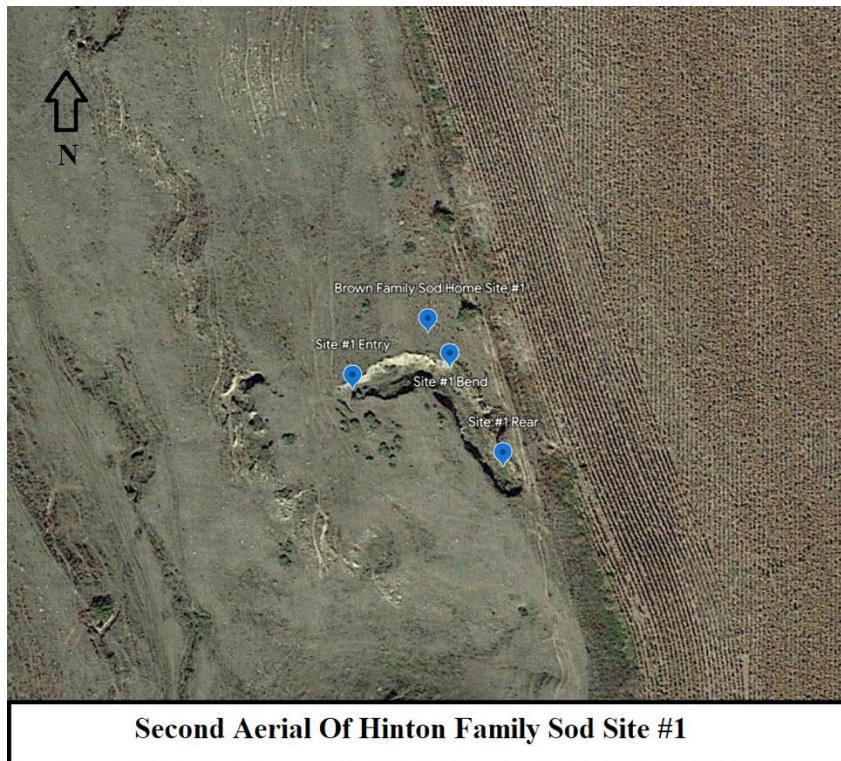


Figure 5.16. Closeup aerial view of Hinton Family Sod Site #1. Data Attribution at time of authorship - Map data © 2017 Google. Edited by author.

The south running half of Site #1 maintains a variable elevation for 48 ft. 2 in. Once 48 ft. 2 in. out from the leg of the entrance has been walked, the remaining 33 ft. 4 in. to the southern end becomes increasing more uniform in elevation. At 33 ft. 4 in., the ground surface of the site begins at 13 ft. 10 in. from the ground level datum and the middle and end run from 15 ft. 11 in. and 14 ft. 4 in., respectfully. The area forming the back end (33 ft. 4 in.) is a rough rectangular shape.

The oral histories and landowners suggest this may be the general location of William Hinton's dugout. Comparing the Hinton Family Sod Site #1 to other dugout excavations

presented in the Theory Chapter reveals some similarities to certain properties, but many outliers, demonstrated in Table 2.

Site Name:	Approx. Length of Dugout Depression	Approx. Width of Dugout Depression	Approx. Depth of Dugout Depression
Hinton Family Sod Site #1	Leg One: 63 feet Leg Two: 81 feet	9.5 - 16 feet	3-6 feet
Site 21SW17	18-20 feet	13-25 feet	4-6 feet
Nicodemus Site	40 feet	33 feet	N/A - Referenced
Fort Ellsworth Site (14EW26)	30 feet	50 feet	N/A - Referenced
Perks Family Reconstruction	14 feet	18 feet	N/A

Table 5.1: Table of Dugout Depressions created by author.

Site 21SW17, a Minnesota dugout from approximately 1868, is a recorded site measuring an area “approximately 82 ft. (25 m) north/south $\times$ 50 ft. (15.25 m) east/west, an area of approximately 4,100 ft.² (381.25 m²)” (Linebaugh, et. al, 2003:51). The depression of the dugout is noted at approximately 40 ft. north/south $\times$ 20 ft. east/west, and is measured 4-6 ft. deep prior to excavation (Linebaugh, et. al, 2003:5).

In 2007, over 140 volunteers attended a field school in Nicodemus, Kansas. The Kansas Archaeology Training Program excavated an 1877 dugout outside of Nicodemus, Kansas. Author Sherda Williams notes that “the dugout measured approximately 40 by 33 feet in size (Williams, 2008:85).” The site was located due to the bowl-shaped depression left by the approximately 19½ $\times$ 23 ft. cellar.

In 2001, the Kansas City District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers investigated what is referred to as the Fort Ellsworth Site (14EW26). Located in Ellsworth County, Kansas, this investigation identified and excavated multiple dugouts within the site area. The investigation identified a 30 x 50 ft. shallow depression that is believed to be the location of a dugout building (Ziegler, 2001:9).

Finally, the Perks family reconstructed sod home is measured 14 feet by 18 feet in length. Marlin and Letha were quick to point out that this was smaller than most soddies and dugouts. Their reasoning was simply an ease of work. Passion for history can only get you so far, as as their oral histories recount, most often work was done just the two them well into retirement. To help save time and energy, they dug into the ground about two feet to reduce the amount of sod blocks they had to stack. As a result, this created a type of quasi-dugout, merging both construction methods.

The Hinton Sod Site #1 falls within the area that oral history has indicated a dugout was located. Specifically, the field crew was lead to this area by the landowner who expressed the hope of locating it. Whether or not Site #1 is definitively a dugout, however, is inconclusive. The site has a greater length than the other comparative dugouts. The L shape is unique and does not match any of the descriptions of the other dugout studies. There are rare, recorded cases of dugouts being converted to animal shelters and barns. It is possible that the site served this function, with the old fence line serving as a controlled ingress and egress for livestock. There are examples of dugout homes and dugout barns being connected, which may contribute to the unique L shape of Site #1. Support from material culture evidence with a controlled stratigraphic excavation of test units is required. Sampled material culture from the site is needed to positively identify the dugout. A comparison of the assemblages from other dugouts discussed in the thesis

would help solidify the interpretation of the feature. Domestic artifacts, such as the architectural nails found in most excavations summarized in the theory chapter, would also aid the interpretation,. The Analysis chapter of this thesis explores the potential for Site #1 to be the remnants of the first Hinton dugout within the means of this research.

Hinton Family Sod Site #2 (Figure 5.17):



Figure 5.17. The Hinton Family Sod Site #2. Data Attribution at time of authorship - Map data © 2017 Google. Edited by the author.

The approximate location of Site #2 was determined by the family knowledge passed down to Nick Brown. Mr. Brown was able to guide the crew to the location that his family oral

history describes a sod home was built. The location has been farmed for over forty years. Heavy plowing and harvesting has removed any surface evidence of a sod home. The wall of a barn, estimated by Nick Brown to have been built in the late 1900's, was present (Figure 5.18).



Figure 5.18. Photo of late 1900's barn wall, facing north. Photo taken by author.

No evidence of a sod home or other nineteenth-century activity was found. No data was recorded for Site #2 aside from the site location and photography of conditions at the site (Figure 5.19). There was no surface assemblage of artifacts during the field survey outside of scattered concrete architectural debris.



Figure 5.19. Photo of Site #2 and the accompanying field. Photo taken by author.

Most archeologists are familiar with the saying “the absence of data is still data.” In the case of Site #2, this absence can be interpreted in many ways. The degradation of sod sites into unrecognizable soil, the miscommunication of oral history, and the impact of agriculture on the integrity of historic and archeological features are displayed here.

Perks Family Sod Site #3:

On February 29, 2023, permission was received by the author to photograph and analyze the Perks family constructed sod home (Figure 5.20). The details of its construction are presented in this chapter. The sod home sits roughly 200 yards from their primary residence and is nestled between a reconstructed prairie church, log cabin, and one room school. It was built by the family in 1993 and still stands in 2023.



Figure 5.20. Perks Sod Home. Photo taken by author.

The sod home is 14 feet wide by 18 feet long, measured from the outside corners of each side. The Perks constructed the home with sod from a nearby field. The sod was plowed and cut

into 36 inch long and 16-inch-wide bricks. The bricks were stacked lengthwise and then crossed, back and forth. Marlin described the process as similar to how you would “stack hay bales.”

The doorframe of the home runs 28 inches deep and the window frame measures 27 inches thick. The home is decorated with furniture of the time period, including the actual bedframe that Perks family homesteaders used. Modern liberties, such as a wooden roof, white stucco interior, and sheet metal along the south wall exterior and a wooden lean-to for support on the east are present (Figure 5.21).



Figure 5.21. Perks family Sod Home wall reinforcements, taken by author.

Both members of the Perks family commented that the home was nearing its lifespan and that it was increasingly degrading.

Chapter Six: Analysis of Oral Histories and Field Work

The oral data collected for this thesis broadens our knowledge about the Frontier County community and its citizens in the late nineteenth century. These accounts provide new insight into the everyday life of homesteaders and contribute to the research questions of this thesis. The research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis were “how do oral histories, as intangible heritage, articulate with tangible cultural landscapes and historic sites? How can oral history support the identification of unrecorded archeological sites representing historic sod and dugout structures? How can oral history help interpret sod structure sites?” To answer this, an analysis of the oral data and field data is required.

The oral accounts of both Marlin and Letha Perks provide valuable knowledge on the transfer of oral history and how they articulate with material culture. Their oral account of the creation of a new, more contemporary sod home demonstrates how this knowledge is passed on. The most fascinating analysis into both of their sod construction accounts is the transfer of oral knowledge in Frontier County. Letha Perks states that she “didn’t even know what a soddie was until we talked to a gentleman in Curtis that told us a lot of what we should do and what we shouldn’t.” Marlin notes that his inspiration came from growing up and seeing his neighbor’s sod homes still standing. These oral histories indicated that the construction methods used by the Perks were based on an oral account from an unknown individual and Marlin’s memory.

Profoundly, the methods they used almost perfectly resemble written records of frontier settlement from 1867-1897 presented in Chapter Two of this thesis. The Perks constructed the home in their own backyard with sod from a nearby field. The sod was plowed and cut into 36”

long and 16” wide bricks. The bricks were stacked lengthwise and then crossed, back and forth. Marlin described the process as similar to how you would “stack hay.” Similar sod sizes and construction methods are recounted in the Historical Context chapter of this thesis. The Perks were not familiar with any of these references yet were able to construct a sod home from memory and the second-hand account of a stranger.

As the Historical Context chapter demonstrated, knowledge on the construction of sod structures began as oral history. It wasn’t until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that texts were published to detail how to construct them. This time period saw the shift of sod structure construction from intangible oral history to tangible history. But as the Perks demonstrate, the intangible oral heritage of these structures was still used. Their sod home was constructed with intangible history and memory. Yet it resembles the brick measurement and brick laying techniques of *Sod Walls: The Story of the Nebraska Sod House* and other period pieces. The Perks give a first-hand account on how these techniques have evolved from intangible to tangible, but still transferred as intangible oral history today. There is a clear reliance, perhaps even preference, on oral and intangible history in the Frontier County homesteading community. And as the Perks demonstrate, the oral history and written history is remarkably similar.

In addition to providing analysis for the relationship between tangible and intangible history, the oral histories also demonstrate the wide variety of peoples and cultures that the Homestead Act of 1862 brought to Frontier County. Marlin Perks states that his grandfather came from Britain before he was old enough to qualify for the entire 160 acres promised by the Act. Marlin states that his grandfather instead received a preempted 40 acres in 1889. The farm has remained in the family for almost 134 years as of the writing of this thesis. Marlin’s oral

history recounts the hardships endured in these years, including an economic hardship in 1901 that required many members of the family to head to Texas for work.

Letha provides a similar account for her family, stating that her grandfather came from England in search of a better life. Letha remarks that her and her parents were in Alma, Nebraska, and moved to Frontier County when she was four years old. Letha provides that her father was known for his advancements in agriculture, building his own terraces and even having “an inside toilet,” as Letha remarks.

Nick Brown’s oral account of his family’s history also highlights the diversity of the area. William Hinton, who was the first family member to homestead the land in 1884, was born in Bedford County, Pennsylvania. As Nick explains, the family came from France and England and he believes the first Hinton’s arrived in the Jamestown Colony. The family can be traced to Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Illinois before their 1884 homesteading journey began. While sections of the original land have been bought and sold throughout the years, Nick Brown and the Brown family still retain much of the original Hinton homestead. The land is still used for farming and ranching as of the time of this thesis.

Secondly, the oral histories provide first-hand accounts to help interpret dugout and sod home sites in Frontier County. They also contribute to housing theories for Midwest homesteaders and provide context for the evolution of pioneer homes as presented in the Theory chapter. Marlin Perks states that his grandfather started out in a dugout. The dugout would have been constructed sometime in 1889 based on his grandfather’s arrival. Marlin knows that a sod house was built sometime after that, and by 1908 his family had constructed a two-story frame house with lumber. Marlin notes that the house from 1908 still stands today. In keeping with family tradition, Marlin, his wife Letha, and their three kids built their own home in 1965, with

the help of his 75 year old father. This broad housing transition is also documented by Bugarin's 2007 dugout excavation as referenced in this thesis. Marlin's identification of concrete homes and accounts on the transition of sod to concrete walls provides an oral history to accompany this housing trend for early homesteading families.

Letha had no personal history that she could recall within a dugout or sod home. As she notes, her family lived in a home without electricity or running water after she was four. Nick Brown, however, is able to offer a clear timeline of his family's transition to a dugout home. Nick's account indicates that William Hinton and his three eldest sons took a spring-wagon from Fillmore County, Nebraska to Frontier County, Nebraska in March 1884. The purpose of the trip was to identify their homestead. On a return trip in October, they settled and constructed a dugout home as a temporary home for their families. Nick notes that the exact site of the dugout is unknown, but the location has been speculated to be on a plot of land on Section 5, Township 6, and Range 27. The second Analysis section of this thesis focuses on an archeological survey and identification of what may be a Hinton dugout. Per Mr. Brown's oral account, the Hinton's broke sod for the first of their fields using broncos in the spring of 1885.

Finally, all three accounts provide insight into the everyday lives of Frontier County homesteaders and their resilience in the face of adversity. Both Nick Brown and Marlin Perks recount a family migration in 1901 to Texas for work. Nick Brown offers that the climate was dry, and the families of Frontier County couldn't rely on farming for cash that year. Letha is able to recount the innovations that her father brought to the field of agriculture, including terracing and patents for many designs. Both Nick and Marlin give similar accounts of family members opening a blacksmith shop in Stockville, Nebraska. Marlin remarks that they walked to and from the shop every day. Mr. Brown supplements that a blacksmith is the master of all workman, and

that his family made tools such as punches, drills, hammers, tongs, and nippers. Mr. Brown also claims that the family blacksmith, Ervin Hinton, invented and patented an election booth. Marlin, Letha and Nick all recount the importance of church on the prairie, the prevalence of music and square-dancing, and the importance of a strong community. The survival of these people and their stories is a testament to the resilience they shared and the resilience of oral history. Most importantly, it demonstrates the remarkable perseverance of the listeners who have now become the tellers.

Analysis of Field Work:

The Hinton Dugout Site #1 depression depth measurements demonstrate a resemblance to other dugout sites excavated across the Midwest but is distinct from all other categories of comparison. It's distinction from other dugout sites lies in its shape and length. The Analysis chapter provided comparative data to other dugout excavations, showcasing the comparative data in Table 5.1. A complete site excavation is not possible due to the limitations of this thesis. Further archeological investigations are required to delineate the exact location of the home. However, the comparative measurements of the depression provides insightful theoretical data relative to other dugout sites recorded and their measured depressions. The Hinton upside down "L" shaped dugout depression measured at approximately 63 ft. by 15 f.t on the first leg and an additional 81ft by 15 ft on the second. Such a shape is not identified in previous studies.

While conducting the fieldwork, the crew was led to the northwest corner of the Section/Township/Range archived as belonging to William Hinton. This was the same area in which the Hinton narrative history denoted a dugout was located. However, after a detailed desk

review, it was found that the location of Site #1 was .05 miles north of the northwest corner of Section 5, Township 6, and Range 27. This would place Site #1 just north of William Hinton's land patent, though there are no recognizable land markers to denote this change. While the comparative data between Site #1 and other dugouts is inconclusive, its location .05 miles north of William's property makes it difficult to say it was his dugout. The desire for a tangible site for Hinton's familial history from the landowners led the team to this location. Site #1 displays the need to make stories tangible with sites and monuments, and how that need may misconstrue the actual location of such sites. In the case of Site #1, it is not possible to say that it is a dugout or that it does belong to William Hinton. It does, however, demonstrate an almost impalpable desire to place a landmark on history.

A 1995 analysis of dugouts in Oklahoma found that one prominent dugout construction method was digging horizontally into the face of a hill (Richards, 1995:1). The nineteenth-century structures were found to be either completely underground or contain an upper portion above the surface. Hinton Site #1 contains the characteristics of late nineteenth-century dugouts noted above. The depth of the site is identical to dugouts with an upper portion above the surface and the dugout is located horizontally in the face of a hill. This evidence supports the claim that this site is the original Hinton family dugout. But it is not conclusive, and Site #1 has features that are not found in the archeological record.

Because the cellar of a previous dugout site, Site 21SW17, had been filled in, the depression had a vegetated surface. Hinton Site 1 had a vegetated surface that was periodically covered in snow. The hand sawed tree laid parallel to the entrance of the dugout may provide evidence that the structure was left undisturbed and protected. Landowner Nick Brown stated that no brush had been cleared in the area and that this was not a spot for stockpiling vegetation.

The still visible surface evidence of a wooden fence posts running parallel to the dugout's entrance. One theory that could explain why the site is shaped in such a way is that it was converted or expanded into a cellar. In some cases, once dugouts were abandoned, they were converted into underground storage or cellars (Goss, 1975:208). There is also evidence that some dugouts were converted to livestock barns. It is certainly plausible that one of these courses of action were taken considering that the oral histories emphasize that sod homes and concrete homes littered the area. The Hinton's are also known to construct multiple rooms in their sod homes, as the oral histories emphasize. Archival photographs positively identify this trend. It could be theorized that William Hinton's dugout was connected to a livestock dugout, creating a unique "L" shape. As Nick Brown's oral testimony identifies, William, his sons, and their families all started out in a dugout. The remnants of a larger, multiple room dugout could be present. The survey completed within this thesis provides data for possible identification, but further archaeological work is required to positively identify the site.

What Site #1 does confirm, however, is that oral history can be used to support the identification of potentially unrecorded archaeological sites representing historic sod and dugout structures. It also demonstrates how oral histories articulate with landscapes and culture, as the feature was discovered under the guidance of the landowner. There existed a strong desire to make the intangible familial story of William Hinton's dugout tangible with archeology. The oral histories can help interpret this sod structure should future archeology positively identify it. If a future archeological study disproves that Site #1 is a dugout, the U.S. Archives data still supports the location of a dugout in the township/section/range that oral history led this thesis to. All three oral histories identify historical sod structures in Frontier County and are able to give vague directions and descriptions of their locations. While Site #1's identity as a dugout is

inconclusive, the matching township/range location with archival data proves that these oral histories can lead the way to historic sod sites. If future archaeological studies were to conclude that Site #1 was the remnant of a dugout, it would signify that oral history can indeed help identify dugout structures in Nebraska. But oral history may not always be correct on who lived there, and who built it. Both sites, however, very clearly show that surface evidence is dwindling, if even existent, for many of these historic sites.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

The beauty of the field of archeology is that it fosters a mending between professionals, scholars, and community members. Successful investigations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sod homes and dugouts require this mending just as much as any other project. The Frontier County landscape, like so many other Nebraska communities, is a treasure-trove of dugouts, sod homes, and historical architecture. Their remnants and legacy dot the rolling hills and crisp valleys, slowly degrading under Nebraska's notorious weather conditions. More often than not, these structures are difficult, if not impossible, to identify with surface evidence alone. Private property rights, the expansion of high-use farmland and deep plowing practices, a lack of physical documentation, and the lack of surface evidence are all factors in their invisibility.

This thesis represents what can happen when Nebraska community members are willing to open up their private property and share their familial history. In many ways, Frontier County is the ideal place to continue this research. Everyone from direct Hinton relatives to county government officials were eager to contribute, providing valuable oral accounts and documentation to bring this thesis together. There is a yearning for more work in this community and many voices vying to be heard. Archeological evidence and community history is abundantly available for research and documentation.

As these earthen homes continue to break down and recede back into the soil, we must rely on oral history to continue to define and identify these sites. This thesis asked the questions: How do oral histories, as intangible heritage, articulate with tangible cultural landscapes and historic sites? How can oral history support the identification of unrecorded archeological sites representing historic sod and dugout structures? How can oral history help interpret sod structure

sites? The thesis questions can be addressed through engagement with a family willing to share its history with both oral context and archeological context. Three community members provided value insight into late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century homesteading life in Frontier County. Two of the interviewees, Marlin and Letha Perks, provided a colorful insight into homesteading life, the character of life in sod homes and dugouts, and early Frontier County's growing community. Marlin and Letha Perks were alive when the popularity of the sod home was on its final leg. The homes were in stark decline by the early 1900's.

With their own hands, they constructed a sod home on their property with modern tools that provides a contemporary example of this architectural achievement connecting humans and the earth. It is immensely telling that with a project so focused on oral history and the transfer of knowledge, it was discovered that Marlin and Letha learned how to construct their contemporary example of a sod home from an oral account of a community member. As presented in this thesis, their construction techniques were remarkably similar to those used in the 1880's by their family members. They both state in their oral accounts that they did not seek any additional published information on how to construct their sod home, yet their techniques match the written accounts of the 1900s. The exception is that the manual labor was performed with modern tools. Still, the sheer determination of the homesteaders of Frontier County ensured that the legacy of sod construction was passed down by word of mouth alone, as a part of intangible heritage sustained through the circulation of such narratives. Homesteaders have a definitive reliance, and possibly even preference, for intangible oral history.

Landowner and family historian Nick Brown was able to provide oral knowledge and first-hand archival data from his ancestors, the Hintons. He detailed their history prior to the Homestead Act of 1862 and their arrival in Nebraska. Mr. Brown also provides an array of black

and white photographs depicting sod homes, a blacksmith shop, and the large Hinton family living on the Great Plains. Most importantly, Mr. Brown provides access to his private property, a portion of which is the same property that the Hintons claimed in the 1880's. On this property, the depression of a potential dugout was found by the archeological field crew. Through the use of surface measurements and context clues, this thesis proposes that the depression is indeed the remains of the original Hinton dugout.

Through comparative data to other dugout depressions and excavations ranging from Kansas to Minnesota, the Hinton Site #1 is inconclusive. The location of a long-abandoned fence line, a large lumber post, and a felled tree may serve as clues for future studies. Family stories handed down to Nick Brown state that William Hinton lived in a dugout in the late 1880's when he arrived in Frontier County. Archival data on the Homestead Act indicates that William Hinton was granted land in the northwest corner of the same township, section and range that the Hinton Site #1 was initially thought to be located in. However, after a thorough desk review, it was found that the site was .05 miles north of that spot. With no physical markers of this property divide, it is impossible to tell where these sections begin and end while on the property. This seamless transition of geography may have been just as difficult to distinguish to William Hinton. Even if this is not his dugout, there is a clear convergence of oral history, archival research, and archeological data working in tandem to infer the identity of this site.

Finally, this thesis goes beyond what many other archeological publications for sod homes do and provides a select few questions and answers from the oral history of the site. The oral history accounts in their entirety will be available through the University of Maryland or University of Nebraska-Lincoln at the time of publishing. There is an impalpable desire from the landowners to attach a physical, tangible piece of history to their familial story. This thesis

attempted to do that but was met with inconclusive results. This need to tie familial history to tangible sites is not new, but as the last generation of sod structure witnesses disappear, and the listeners of their stories become the teller of their stories, the need has grown. The absence of a definitive dugout on the property does not take away or devalue the oral histories of the Hintons. In some ways, it enhances it. The research has showcased that much of Nebraska pioneer history is oral history and there seems to exist an impalpable preference to that. These homesteading stories don't need physical monuments to maintain their legacy or legitimacy; they simply need speakers and listeners that go on to be speakers.

The author acknowledges the limitations of this project, which most notably include limitations to the scope of fieldwork. The research questions and nature of this project are achieved by oral accounts and pedestrian survey documentation. Future archeological research is encouraged to analyze the proposed Hinton Family Sod Site #1. Support from material culture evidence with a controlled stratigraphic excavation of test units is required. Sampled material culture from the site is required to positively identify the dugout. A comparison of the assemblages from other dugouts discussed in the thesis would solidify this thesis' theory. Soil analysis for the degradation of sod home sites and their archeological remains, in the vein of Presley and Dean's 2016 work, is encouraged. Further expansion of this study utilizing Lidar testing could provide valuable below-ground data on sod structures that are not present to the naked eye. Expansion of the pedestrian survey to the entirety of the northwest section of William Hinton's patent would reveal other potential dugout sites that do not fall outside his range.

While the oral histories and community members were able to identify possible pioneer architecture, many other sites were located on private property or lacked documentation to confirm their use. In this, the true purpose of this thesis shines; one small plot of land in

Nebraska has captured its oral history and used it to identify a feature for a future archeological investigation. This body of work portrays the hope and need for Nebraska families to have more opportunities to display their familial heritage and record their private property sites before they return to the earth. As Marlin Perks aptly states, “there’s a lot of stuff out here that’s just kind of buried.” Only in collaboration with descendants, communities, and archeologists can we begin to unearth our heritage.

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