

Sod home has more than a century of cherished memories

By Carol Sloper

Memories of living in a sod house are all in the eye of the dweller. For my dad, Junior Knorr, growing up in a sod house was miserably hot in the summer time and cold in the winter time. For me, staying in a sod house with Grandma and Grandpa Knorr was quiet times with a warm corn cob stove in the winter time and sitting on a swing swatting flies on the outside of the house in the summer time.

The sod's history goes back to 1888 when Samuel Webber homesteaded the property. It is located southwest of where Salem Lutheran Church stands today.

The house is not technically "sod," but rather constructed of rock from nearby streambeds and mud. The walls were constructed 18 inches deep with plaster applied on the inside and stucco on the outside. It has stood through all the weather that Kansas provided: the dirty wind of the 30's, blizzards, hail, rain, floods, and even tornados.

Several different families lived in the home prior to 1920 when David and Catherine Knorr bought the home from Jacob Miller. Their son, August Knorr, took residence in the house where he and his wife, Adelheit, raised three children and hosted nine grandchildren over the years. All three of their children were born in the house with the assistance of a midwife: Norma (Berry) in 1931, Junior in 1932, and Kenneth in 1938.

Electricity was not available until the early 1950s when the Rural Electric Administration finally brought power to the house. Kenneth recalled that they could not put wiring through the sod walls, so all of the wiring is on the inside of the house.

Despite the introduction of electricity, the house was really cold in the winter time. Junior recalls cold winter nights taking

a glass of water to his bedside in the attic, only to wake to a frozen glass of ice. The use of iron hot water warmers under piles of blankets was how Kenneth remembered keeping warm upstairs. They both recalled being able to see the sky through the slats in the roof.

Since the only source of heat in the house was from the kitchen corn cob stove in the early years, the main bedroom was right off the kitchen. With a feather bed made from the down of the farm chickens and geese, those lucky enough to stay in the master bedroom were usually warm enough on the cold winter nights. Of course, all of the spoiled grandchildren never had to brave the cold attic as Grandma Knorr always let us stay with her in her warm feather bed.

In the summertime, heavy blinds were drawn to keep the sun out until the need for a breeze was absolutely necessary. Then, opening all of the windows for any breeze that would come along was a must.

Also, there was no running water until the 1960s. A hand pump, which still exists, was used to pump water and was brought into the house in buckets for drinking, cooking, washing dishes, and bathing. As with all scarce resources, even the dirty water was saved to water plants.

When water was finally added to the house, the front porch was remodeled and a portion turned into a bathroom. This required some ingenuity to set up according to Kenneth: the water pump outside pumped into a cistern, then routed to a hot water heater in the cellar, and finally to the bathroom. Junior Knorr recalls what a luxury it was to have a bathtub with running water and especially an indoor toilet. No more cold jogs to the outhouse. The kitchen has never been equipped with running water.

Most recently, in the 1980s



HOMESTEADED IN THE LATE 1800's, the sod home on the Kenneth Knorr farm northwest of St. Francis was built by the Samuel Webber family.

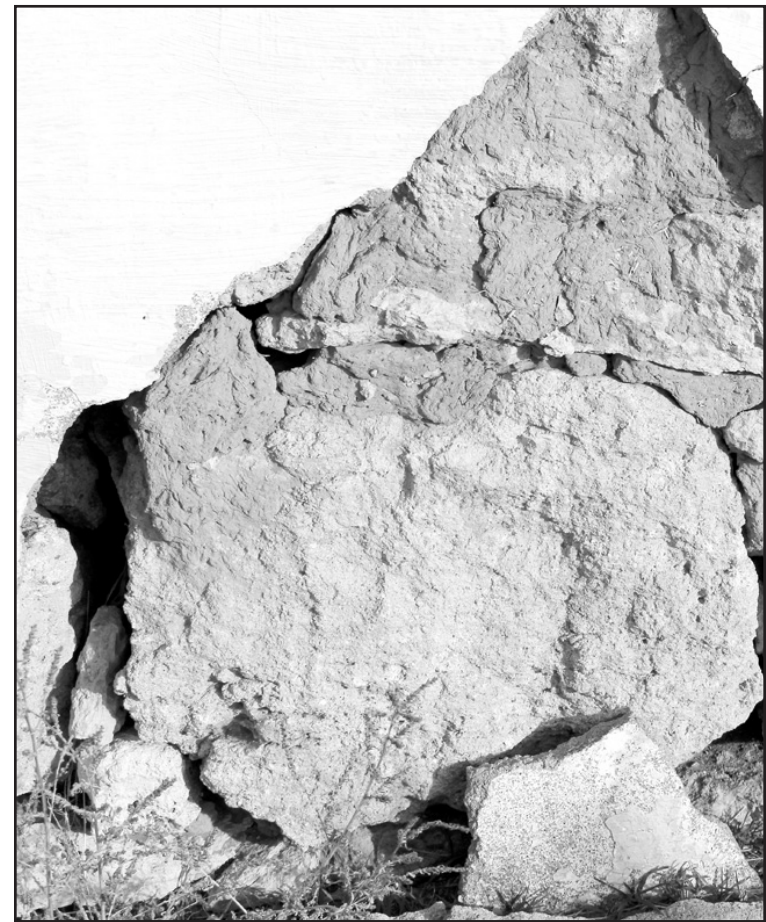
Herald staff photo by Carol Sloper

Kenneth and DeEtta Knorr, who inherited the house, lived on the farm with their two daughters, Karla (Mills) and Kim (Ritter) for two years. Kenneth recalls that the girls were always complaining that they could hear the mice running up and down the walls. Since the Knorr's moved into town, the structure still stands although now it's primarily used for storage.

The stories that this old sod house has to tell are endless. Each person that found its way through the front and only door,

has memories unique to them.

Depending on the living circumstances, such as Norma, Junior and Kenneth Knorr living through the dirty 30's with no heat, electricity, or running water, the memories are not so fond. For others, such as the Knorr grandchildren, the memories are fond and filled with nostalgia. The one constant in all the memories is a durable, small house made of the very earth it resides on provided safety for its families from the Kansas weather.



ROCK AND MUD were the primary construction materials for the Knorr sod house as evidenced by the crumbling stucco on the outside of the home. The rocks were thought to come from nearby Cherry Creek streambed.

Photo by Carol Sloper

Obituaries

Darlene V. Orchard

May 14, 1922 - Jan. 4, 2014

Longtime Kanorado, Kan., resident Darlene V. Orchard died on Saturday, Jan. 4, 2014, at the Goodland Regional Medical Center in Goodland. She was 90-years-old.

Darlene was born on May 14, 1923, in St. Francis, Kan., to John W. and Mattie M. (Price) Lindsten. She was the third of four children.

As a child, she was raised on a farm in St. Francis. She attended school in St. Francis. She graduated from St. Francis Community High School in 1941.

Darlene went on to Fort Hays University following high school and received her teaching certificate. She taught for two years at a country school and then taught in Kanorado.

On Sept. 23, 1944, Darlene married Rex D. Orchard at the Kanorado United Methodist Church. To this union, one son Gary was born.

She was a member of the Kanorado United Methodist Church. Some of her hobbies

included sewing, singing, playing cards, teaching, and she was a wonderful and dedicated mother and wife.

Darlene was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, two brothers and one sister. She is survived by her son Gary of the home.

As per Darlene's request private services were held on Thursday, Jan. 9, 2014, at the Kanorado Cemetery in Kanorado.

Memorials may be made to the Kanorado Senior Center and may be left at or sent to the Love Funeral Home in Burlington.

Friends may go to www.lovefuneralhomes.com to sign the family's online register book and to leave an online message of condolence.



Darlene Orchard

Alma Walter Zimbelman

July 16, 1920 - Dec. 6, 2013

Alma Walter Zimbelman died on Dec. 6, 2013, in Westminster, Colo. She was born on July 16, 1920, to Tobias and Barbara Walter. The youngest of six children, she grew up on a farm northwest of St. Francis and graduated from St. Francis Community High School in 1938.

On Nov. 5, 1941, she married Elmer Zimbelman. To this union, one daughter, Rita, was born.

They purchased a farm southwest of St. Francis where they lived until 1980 when they moved into St. Francis. When Elmer's health failed and he entered the Good Samaritan Village, Alma moved into one of the Village senior apartments to be near him.

In December 2012, Alma moved to Keystone Place at Legacy Ridge in Westminster to live near her daughter and son-in-law.

Alma was a member of the United Methodist Church and a member of the Women's Missionary Society for many years. She volunteered many hours of service to church activities.

Her hobbies included working in her garden where she loved

tending her flowers. She spent many hours quilting and sewing. In later years, Alma spent many hours completing jigsaw puzzles, taking daily walks, reading books on her Nook, and maintaining a very active life until shortly before her death.

Alma is preceded in death by her husband, Elmer; her sisters, Hulda Walter, Mildred Zimbelman, and Martha Zwegardt; and her brothers, Ruben and Robert Walter. Survivors include her daughter, Rita, son-in-law Stephen Prokopiak and grandson Stephen Christopher Prokopiak.

Alma was a quiet, kind and gentle person who touched the lives of many relatives and friends both in the St. Francis community, as well as new friends in Westminster and her caregivers in the last week of her life. Her gentle spirit will be missed.

A memorial service will be held at a date yet to be determined in St. Francis. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be sent to St. Francis United Methodist Church or to St. Anthony Hospice Foundation, 1391 Speer Blvd., #600, Denver, CO 80204.





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