



**THIS PAINTING OF SLAB CITY FARM** (above) was completed several years ago by the late Garrah Gaumer, a Jennings artist. The original barn burned and this barn was built by John and Antonia "Tonie" Tacha. Their son, Elmer "Dutch" Tacha, and his wife, Helen, bought the farm from his parents in 1946

and they and their daughter lived there. Edward Fiala (below) and his cousin, Elmer "Dutch" Tacha are shown at Slab City Farm around 1925. The barn and machine shed are in the background.

—Judy Vaughn and Lila Jennings photos

# Slab City farm used as post for settlers

By MARY LOU OLSON

Before the railroad, the first store and post office in the Jennings area were at Slab City.

Early in 1873, the Warren Jennings family arrived from Iowa to homestead in the newly organized County of Decatur, then on the western frontier.

The Jennings homestead on the Prairie Dog Creek is on Section 19 of Pleasant Valley Township, about 1 1/2 miles northeast of the present site of Jennings.

The family built a two-story frame home with lumber hauled by team from Kearney, Neb. In 1874, a small trading post was established on the Jennings homestead and on Oct. 22, 1874, a post office, both under the name of Slab City.

According to information by the late Elmer "Dutch" Tacha, told to his daughter, Judy Vaughn, he said that in April 1873, eight Bohemian families settled in the area, including the Cileks, Macharts, Heilmans, Steffens, Kaspars and Shimmicks.

The house at Slab City included a full basement and the walls were poured with cement for insulation, Mr. Tacha said. The house, which was later the home of Mr. Tacha, his wife, Helen (Hess) Tacha, and daughter, still stands.

The book of Kansas Post Offices, published by the state Historical Society, lists the appointment of Walter W. Hopkins as the first postmaster of Slab City.

Settlers, buffalo hunters, trappers and, at times, friendly Indians, exchanged news and bargained for such staples as coffee, flour, salt pork and tobacco at the trading post. Mail was delivered by horseback from Norton. Mr. Tacha told his daughter that on Saturdays, one or more members of a family would walk to this trading post to get their mail and buy staples.

Liquor was shipped in 16-gallon barrels in those days, and although neither beer nor whiskey was sold at Slab City, it could be purchased at other trading posts, such as Jackson or Shibboleth, both west of Slab City. Going to Slab City's trading post on one of these Saturdays saved many lives along the Sappa Creek when the last Indian Raid occurred, he said, since many were not home



**THE SLAB CITY HOUSE** (above) shows the barn in the background. The house was built by Warren Jennings. The house and barn still stand on the Slab City Farm.

—Lila Jennings photo

when the Indians came through.

Slab City was also the site of a sod schoolhouse built with a straw roof and dirt floor. On Sundays, the schoolhouse was used by the Slab City Union Sunday School.

As business started to decline and the railroad came through south of Slab City, settlers had to take their produce to Jackson, where Sol Rees, a former Indian scout, operated a general store and Samuel Alonzo Beers served as postmaster. The Jackson community also provided a school, a feed and flour mill and church services.

Mr. Tacha said that on Oct. 15, 1879, the post office at Slab City closed and on the same day was moved to the present location of Jennings with Warren Jennings as its first postmaster.

The town of Jennings was located on property owned by Oscar Munson. The plan was to name the town Munson, but Mr. Munson, a modest unassuming individual, did not approve. Finally, the town was named in honor of Warren Jennings.

The house, known in those days as Slab City and later as Slab City Farm, was the first frame house built in Decatur County, according to Mr. Tacha. The name may have come from the slabs of leftover boards lying around after the house was built, he said. In 1902, John and Antonia "Tonie" Tacha, parents of Elmer Tacha, bought the property and built several outbuildings. A washhouse, about 30 feet to the northeast side of

the house, was built from lumber from the old Big Timber schoolhouse. The first barn was destroyed by fire when the Tachas' two older children, Julius and Clara, were playing with a small stove in the hayloft. A new barn was built and it stands today with the legend "Slab City Farm" still faintly visible.

Elmer Tacha and his sisters, Nora Tacha Gross and Ruth Tacha Harris, were born in the Slab City house. Their brother, Julius, was 1 and a sister, Clara Tacha Carper, was about 3, when the family moved to Slab City Farm.

The hand-dug well still exists. It supplied water to early settlers and those traveling a wagon trail that runs south to north by Slab City. A wooden windmill was erected but several years later, Mr. Tacha replaced it with a steel model.

On a hill north of the house, according to stories passed down through the years from the pioneers who settled near Slab City, is a cemetery where several children of covered-wagon families are buried.

In 1946, after serving in the Navy during World War II, Elmer Tacha and his wife, Helen, bought Slab City Farm from his mother and moved there to live and raise their daughter, Judy. She attended the Jennings Schools and graduated in 1959. She married Gary Vaughn in November 1959 and her parents remained on the farm until 1967, when Mr. Tacha was elected probate judge for Decatur County and they



**WITH NEW TREES ADDED**, the Slab City house (above) was modernized and enlarged when Elmer and Helen (Hess) Tacha and their daughter, Judy, lived there. The farm is 1 1/2 miles northeast of Jennings.

—Lila Jennings photo

moved to Oberlin. He retired in 1985.

Although the Tachas remodeled and modernized the Slab City home, the original frame house is still there, along with two additions. A fire destroyed parts of the house in the early 1970s, and no one has lived there since. Elmer and Helen Tacha both died in 2001 and their daughter

inherited Slab City Farm.

"Although time has worked its destruction on the house and other buildings," she said, "it is still there after 130 years."

"Oh my, what stories we would hear, if only those old walls could talk. Most of the four original walls are there — desolate, but nonetheless, there."