

*The Thorn Creek  
Hoxie Farm*



### **The Kickerts at Hoxie Farm**

This picture show Dick Kickert with his wife, Bessie Witvoet, who is holding their daughter Gertrude. Their son, Neal, is standing beside her. They lived on the Hoxie Farm from about 1907 to 1914, in the red managers house, which was near the main house.

*(Photo courtesy of Gertrude Messmaker)*



Mr. Richard Kickert and family. Member of Committee.  
(See signature). Mr Kickert is Manager for the famous  
G. H. Hoxie Thorn Creek farm, near Chicago.

## THE HOXIE THORN-CREEK FARM

### THE HOXIE FAMILY

#### Facts on John R. Hoxie, developer and owner of the Thorn Creek Farm

1. Parents were Cornelius and Ann (Brawnell)
2. He was in cattle breeding and marketing since the 1870s.
3. By 1878, he had made his fortune in securities.
4. He acquired the San Gabriel Ranch in Texas from a second cousin, Asa Hoxey, whom previous owned the ranch, and of whom he was an heir.
5. Besides the Thorn Creek Farm and San Gabriel Ranch, he owned the Flag Spring Ranch in Texas.
6. The Andrea's' 1884 History of Cook County notes that:

“John Hoxie was born of Quaker parentage in Wayne County, New York on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1832. His father carried on a large farm and was an extensive cattle/stock raiser. The subject of this sketch had been engaged in cattle trade since he was 15 years of age. On April 4, 1859, he came to Chicago and was employed as a livestock agent at the old Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Stockyards. In 1860 he became one of the partners in these yards, and in 1865, the formation of the Union Stockyards and Transit Company when the stockyards amalgamated. Mr. Hoxie became a stockholder in that company with which he was still connected, being one of the largest western stockholders since 1859 and he had been general livestock agent for the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad. Mr. Hoxie is one of the leading enterprise businessmen in Chicago. He was one of the organizers of the Union Stockyard National Bank, and was one of the largest stockholders, and is also largely engaged in livestock and other interests in Texas. He is president of the First National bank of Taylor, Texas, and he has large interests in railroads and real estate enterprises in Chicago and Galveston, Texas. Mr. Hoxie was in the battle of Gettysburg, and he was appointed to a special committee to establish a line of transportation from Chicago to Washington for horses and cattle.”
7. John R. Hoxie was elected director of South Side St. Railway, Jan. 18, 1886, This was in the Annals of Labor and Industry. The 1886 Chicago directory lists his home at the corner of 45<sup>th</sup> and Michigan. (4440 Michigan.) His wife's name was Mary. (There was a street named Hoxie in South Chicago. It was between Torrence and Calhoun Ave. by the Calumet Iron and Steel on the Calumet River.) He was a stock agent at the stockyards.
8. He died November 21, 1896 in Chicago, at the age of 64. Following his death, his son, Gilbert, took over the management of the farm until the property was sold.

#### Other Hoxie family members listed in the 1898 Chicago phone book.

1. Gilbert H. Hoxie who was a student in 1898 became 2<sup>nd</sup> vice-president of Mallory Com. Later his place of business listed him at 52 Exchange Bldg. (Stock Yards) and his home address as 4440 Michigan, Chicago
2. John R. Junior also was living at 4440 Michigan.
3. Frank Hoxie Broker at 240 LaSalle House at 3814 Indiana, Chicago

Notes from 11/14/1998 Newberry Library

1. Mary Eliabeth Hoxie died 3/3/1929 in Whiteside County
2. Mary E. Hoxie died 1931 Winnebago County

## THE HOXIE LAND

The Hoxie farm was located on a sandy ridge about fifteen feet above a stream. Records by early settlers indicate that as late as 1850 this stream was navigable by small boats and that the lowland to the north and east was a swampy areas that attracted many birds and other animals which provided food for the table, not only for the settlers, but the Indians that were on the land before them. To the south and southeast and across the stream were fields suitable for agriculture. Thus this site, with sandy soil that provided good drainage and dry footing for houses; land for cultivation; water for household needs and transportation; and an abundance of wildlife for food; satisfied all the requirements of the Indians and early settlers who had to utilize every resource in order to sustain their basic needs.

Prior to J. R. Hoxie's acquisition of this property, it belonged to Judge Frances Webb, from 1860 until 1880. A 1886 area map of this property does depict Hoxie ownership. 1889 map shows 75 acres north of the creek and south of the toll road, just north of the old cemetery belonging to Mr. Hoxie and a 1894 maps shows ownership of >700 acres.

The 1920s saw the decline of the farm. Fire destroyed at least one house in 1935, and as the other buildings deteriorated, they were torn down. The 'basement barn' was taken down piece by piece and moved to South Holland, on Indiana Ave., next to Smitty's Heating and Plumbing where it stands today (1987's narrative by Gerrit J. Witvoet). By the 1950s, the only building remaining was a dilapidated small red brick building with windows. Today there are still some remnants of foundations.

Maps after Hoxie's ownership show the land belonging to the Grand Truck Railroad; and finally the Cook County Forest preserve purchased it. The Calumet Council Boy Scouts used an area by the creek for a time in the 1950s; it was called Camp Hoxie. A concrete slab and nearby water pump mark this area today.

## THE HOXIE ERA

Henry and John R. Hoxie's land parcel was approximately 785 acres, which included most of the land south and east of Thorn Creek to Vollbrecht Rd (Stony Island) and to Thornton-Lansing Rd. including some land on the south side of Thornton-Lansing Rd. This area is now known as the Wampum Lake Forest Preserve. He also owned land west of the creek to Chicago Road by the cemetery (Mt. Forest Cemetery, See map)

Walter Diekelman, a Thornton historian, relates that Hoxie was on the stockyard board in 1865. It was Hoxie's idea to have the stockyards on his land since he was certain Chicago would not allow the stockyards to be built in Chicago with the 1893 World's Fair coming. Hoxie already had a railroad yard laid out with stakes but this was never carried out since Hoxie was wrong; Chicago did get the stockyards and so this property was used to raise prize cattle for the stock shows. There were many stock farms in Northern Illinois during this era and slightly over one-fourth of all the beef cattle in Illinois in 1890 were high-grade stock (cattle in which the blood of pure-bred animals had exercised a strong influence for improvement.) Raising cattle was easy and profitable. The total cost of raising cattle was six dollars a head, at the end of which time they sold at about twenty-five dollars a head. Since the railroads, furthermore, discriminated in favor of the livestock business, there was considerable profit in this method of growing beef. Mr. Hoxie's affiliation with the railroads definitely was an asset in the ability to transport the feeder cattle from Texas to his farm. Illinois's corn and the Hoxie pastures helped to fatten the cattle quickly so they could be sold at the market sooner. J.R. Hoxie was known for his prize thoroughbred Hereford and shorthorn Durham cattle. Hoxie also used the farm as a place to entertain his friends from Chicago who were anxious to see his spread; it was common during this era for Chicagoans to have summer homes in this area to relax and entertain.

There were many buildings located on this farm-most of them by the Wampum Lake area-and included at least three houses. The "big house" was a light-green wood frame two-story with a cupola on roof-which was accessible by a ladder. This was used frequently by Mr. Hoxie to survey his land and keep an eye out for anything happening on his place and the men would also use the cupola as a place to toss out clay pigeons-which were stored in large barrels-for target practice. The "big" house also had a beautiful open stairway leading to the second floor. The house also had a dirt-floor basement and an unfinished attic. Other houses were: the Green house or guest house, the two-story Red house-where the Kickerts and John Witvoets lived, and a big two-story white frame farm house that the Piels later lived in. At the end of Hoxie lane, a fence with a gate, guarded the "Big House" and a hitching post stood near-by. (See the description of the main house, "Sunnyside", in the Hoxie San Gabriel Ranch section for a more thorough description of this amazing house).

The "green" house or guest house was used frequently for entertainment. It was a beautiful glass building with French doors on two sides and a fireplace on each end. When there was entertainment and dancing, the food for the guests was prepared up at the big house and then brought down to this house. This house was situated just east of the Piel house with a drive or street leading from Thornton Road. A road also led to the Piel house. A wooded area in back of the green house separated this part of the farm from the main house and other buildings on the Hoxie farm. The horticulturist, a relative of old Judge Webb, lived on the street near the green house in a little building.

The house and farm that the Piels later rented was on the land that the first picnic area (going east from Thornton) is located. Their home sat to the right of this area, with a long shed, part of which they used for chickens, almost directly in back of the house. A long yellow barn was in the back on the left and a silo behind it. They farmed the low land behind this area and also some of the land directly across the Thornton road. Although a windmill was once on this property, it no longer functioning when the Piels lived there; they used a hand pump to bring the water up from a deep well. (John Piel)

Several large red barns sat on the farm; one was near the cul-de-sac where you turn around at Wampum. One massive red barn, with an attached silo, was 250 feet long and 65 feet high on the peak. You could put 3,000 tons of hay in the hayloft and cattle down on the bottom. Another barn, a "basement barn" was built in the side of the hill and was used for the cattle also. Although the "basement barns" are now outlawed, they were known to be warmer. And since Hoxie had many fine horses, a -hitching barn was needed for them, plus long sheds for the fancy wagons and buggies. All these buildings were located near Thorn Creek on a hillside.

Other buildings and erections on the property included a windmill to pump the water to the thirty-foot wooden water tank, which was supported with an iron ring and four pillars and a smokehouse to cure the meat, which would be needed during the winter months.

The land was not only used for raising cattle. Cherry, apple (early, mid-season, and late apples to name a few) pear and peach orchards, along with blueberry and blackberry bushes dotted the landscape. There were even grapevines that were probably used for jam and homemade wine. Vegetable gardening supplied the cupboards and root cellars with a bounty of food that would be needed to feed the families that lived here and hay was grown for the cattle ponies and horses. There was enough available land to try to have plane take off and land. At one attempt, six men diligently tried to get an open-air plane in the air by pushing it. Although the plane did get a few feet off the ground, they were not ever successful in keeping it up in the air.

After the Hoxies no longer came to Thornton, the families that rented the land took advantage of the varieties of fruit that grew there and the kids from Thornton would raid the apple and cherry orchards. Where Lake Wampum is now located many a bushel of blueberries were picked. It was full of blueberries and "stuff". The kids would pick them after school with water pails and pick the blueberries until the pails were full. It was not unusual for families to go home with two-three buckets full of blueberries. (From W. Diekelman's story.)

## ENTERTAINMENT

Mr. Hoxie did a lot of entertaining for his friends from Chicago. His guests would take the train to the Thornton station. At the station they were met with the "tallyho"-a big wagon with a lot of horses in front-to take them to the big house or to the green house. When it was too difficult to get to the big house with horses, they were brought to the bridge in Thornton where they had a steamboat waiting for them. From there the boat took them to the Hoxie Farm bridge, which connected to a road. (This road was sometimes impassable because of the sand and nearby quicksand). Later, with the arrival of airplanes, there was plenty of room for them to land here.

Saturday night dances were a regular weekend event. If they weren't using the green house, the dances were held in the main house.

## THE WONDERMENT AND THE WITVOETS

What a wonderful and amazing playground this farm was, not only to the owners, but also to the children that grew up or visited the Hoxie farm. They had great fun fishing and swimming in the creek. A rope was hung on a big tree limb and was used to swing them over the water where they would then let go and fall into the creek. They also put an iron bar between two trees and used this to do chin-ups (a homemade monkey bar). The Witvoet girls had great fun turning around the "turning pole" which formally was a hitching post (located in front of the main house) for the horses. There were always plenty of friends to play hide and seek, tag, and ride the horses and ponies. Mae Witvoet amazed all the other children when she rode her pony standing up on the pony's bareback. In the winter they had great fun sledding down the hill, onto the frozen creek below. Buckets of water poured on the snow really made it slick. Throughout the years, the boys hunted rabbit and pheasant with their fathers to help supply food for the table. As they got older, some even found sweethearts, as Gerrit Witvoet did with Irene Mossell, "the girl next door".

With all this property, cattle, horses, and houses to take care of, the Hoxie farm employed many workers, managers and foremen. Richard Kickert was manager for the Thorn Creek Farm from 1907 to 1913. His wife was Bessie Witvoet and their daughter Josephine was born here in 1908, in the red house. Gertrude Kickert-Messmaker remembers the Hoxies coming. Her mother would have to fix the meals, which was never a problem since the cellar was always stocked with canned goods. Bessie had a maid to help her out with the household responsibilities.

The demise of the Hoxie farm began after the Kickerts left the Hoxie farm. This was the end of the "glory days". The country was changing; World War I was on the horizon. As a result a metamorphosis began at the Hoxie Farm. For unknown reasons, the sons of J.R. did not continue their father's interest in the farm and the property was rented out to various families. John Witvoet moved into the red house with his family. He did some farming (he sold vegetables at a stand on Thornton road) and took care of the cattle, horses and ponies. Some of the ponies that were boarded here belonged to a big Chicago hotel-that was owned by a man named Bielfield-that used them for polo.

Other known renters were the Piels and Mossels, Pluymerts, Tienstras, and Oppenhuis. The Piels rented 150 acres, which included the orchard and some land across the road where they grew hay. Down in the flat land (the valley down by the river, which would flood at times) this family also grew pickles until blight came in which ended the pickle deal. Then they planted onion sets, sugar beets, cabbage and so forth. (Noted by Henry Piel). The Mossels rented 40-50 acres, which they farmed. Joe Tienstra and his wife, Winnie Witvoet, lived on the Hoxie farm for about four months (with the Pluymerts, in the "big house"). Gert Swets and John Piel relate that a Mr. Diekman and collected the rent for Gilbert Hoxie.

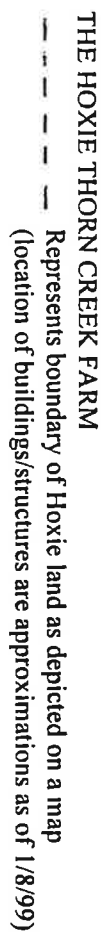
The Hoxie Farm in those days could be also called the Honeymoon Haven. When someone got married they just picked a room and moved in, because sharing the bathroom was never a problem; but sharing the outhouse was; but not if you kept the chamber pot under the bed! Josie Witvoet and Teunis Swets; Gerrit Witvoet and Irene Mossell; and others not only started their married life here, but their families also. Quite a few Witvoets came into the world on this land.

### THE HOXIE THORN CREEK MANSION

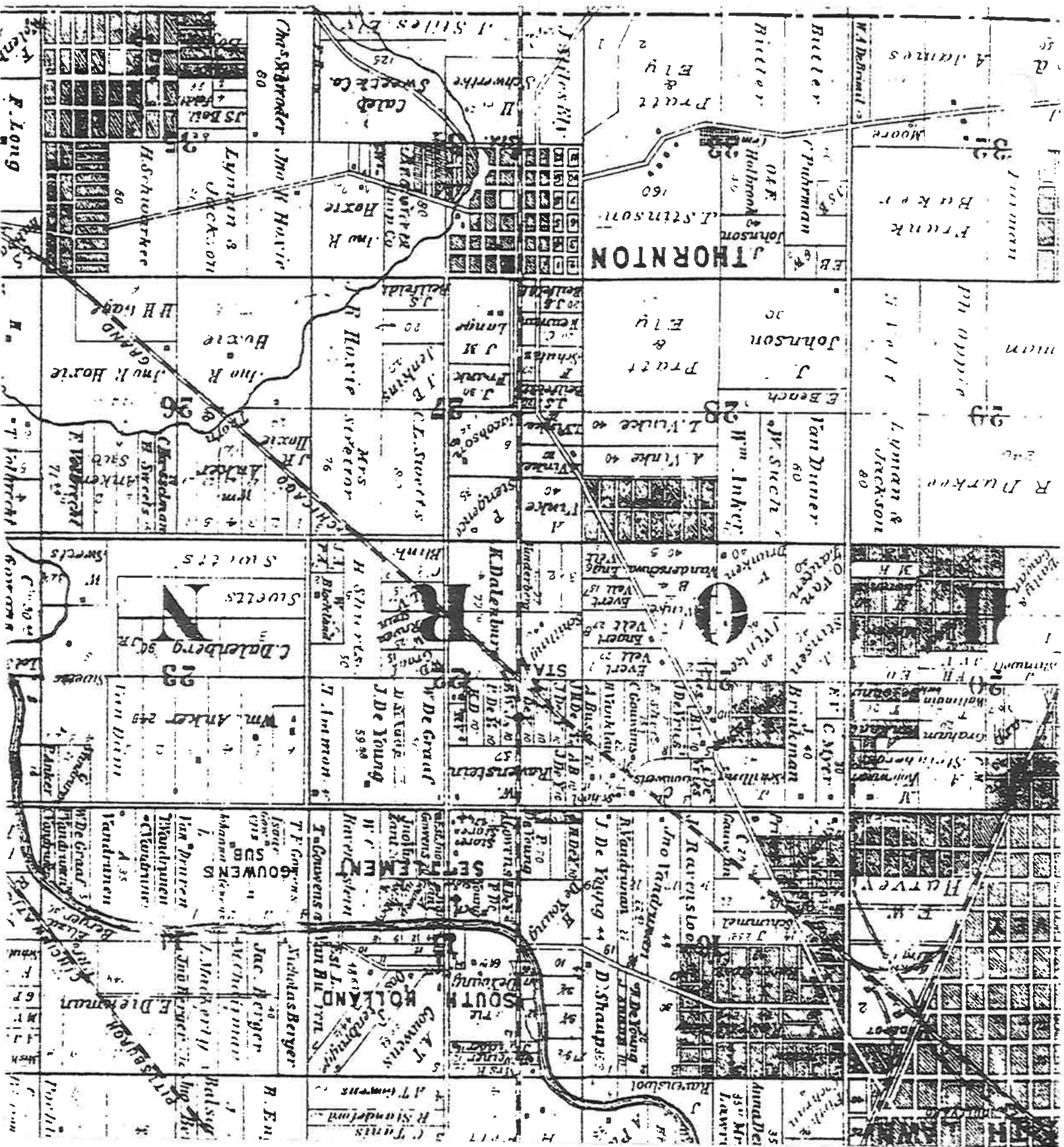
An unknown photographer took this picture around 1920-1921. The east side of the house is on the right. The front of the house is on the left and it had a southern exposure- the same as Sunnyside. It clearly depicts the wrap-around porch, basement and attic.







1893 MAP OF HOXIE PROPERTY



### THE HOXIE SAN GABRIEL RANCH by Martha Freeman

While searching for information on the Hoxies, I came across a book, which was written by Martha Freeman for the University of Texas at Austin around the time of 1948. The interest for the book came because in 1938 it was realized that the Hoxie Ranch was something of an enigma.

While reading this book I noticed that there are many similarities between John Hoxie's ranch and his farm in Thornton, especially the mansion which seems to be almost exactly the same as the Thornton mansion.

The following information below is taken from Martha Freeman's book, which is available for viewing at the Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois.

"It is likely that Hoxie also came to Taylor in the spring of 1886 to oversee construction of his new house on the San Gabriel. Although the date when construction on the house was initiated is not known, the Taylor newspaper described the erection of the residence as "just completed" on January 24, 1887, and the Granger newspaper a few months earlier had mentioned the mansion as a new and great attraction in Williamson County:

The Hoxie mansion 'Sunny Side,' built on the banks of the San Gabriel about seven miles south-east of this place, occupies quite a prominent place in the view in its direction, from here, and is visited by numbers of people daily from all parts of the country. It and the 10,000 acres of land surrounding it, make one of the finest agricultural and stock farms in the state of Texas (*Austin Daily Statesman*, 9/1/1886).

At the time of its completion, the Hoxie mansion was a two-story, frame Italianate structure, with a stone basement, attic and cupola. It was situated on a high bluff overlooking the San Gabriel River, and according to all reports, was seen easily from locations ten miles distance. With the exception of the McFadin residence up river towards Circleville, Sunnyside was the most impressive domestic structure between Hoxie Community and Granger.

A fairly accurate picture of the house can be obtained from information volunteered by various families who lived in it after 1900. The basement, for example, was one large room with a dirt floor and plastered stone walls. Entrance was by way of stairs, which led from an enclosed closet in the kitchen on the first floor. Furnishings consisted of butcher blocks, two large refrigerators, meat hooks, and a large stove, which was used for cooking and preserving fruits and vegetables.

As time passed, the first floor of the Hoxie mansion became the area that was used most often by various residents. A one-story covered gallery extended across the front, or south side, of the structure, as well as over the east and west sides. Stairs led up to a front porch, through double doors, and into a wide hall which ran the length of the house, north/south, and ended in a kitchen which was oriented east/west. Sliding doors led off of the main hall into four rooms, two being on the east and two on the west. One of the rooms served as a parlor, another as a phone room, and a third as a dining room; the fourth room was a large, all-purpose space, which eventually was, used a bedroom by the families that lived in the house in the 1920's.

A fireplace in the phone room and a large stove in the dining room provided heat. All residents of Sunnyside remember, however, that the name could not have been more inappropriate, as the thin, plastered wooden walls and high-ceilinged rooms proved impossible to heat. As one resident expressed it, living in the Hoxie House in 1930 'was no romance.'

It exceedingly high ceilings and the enormous size of the rooms presented problems of cleaning and heating. Each succeeding winter seemed abnormally long and bitterly cold and altho' the fireplaces were mammoth, the lugging in of the logs up the near six foot high porch was a job for two strong men.

The second floor of the house was composed of another wide hall with bedrooms leading off of it. At the top of the stairs that led from the first to the second floor, was a guestroom that contained two double beds, two marble-topped dressers, and three marble-topped tables. Another bedroom used by a member of the Allison family, was furnished with a bed, marble-topped dresser, and matching table. The only bathroom in the house also was located on the second floor, and included a commode and bathtub. (Water was supplied by a cistern located just outside the kitchen, and a windmill that was situated to the east of the house. Light was provided by carbide lamps.)

Above the second floor was an unfinished attic, and above it, a cupola that could be reached by way of a ladder. Entrance to the attic was through a narrow service stairway, placed against the east wall, and leading from the attic to the basement.

Furnishings in the house were massive, and generally excellent in quality. At one time, pieces include beds, washstands, a writing desk, sideboard, sofas, dressers, settees, various chairs, a large dining-room table, and a hatrack with a mirror and marble top that stood in the first-floor hall. Some of the furniture, such as the piece now in the possession of Earnest Malek of Taylor, was similar to that manufactured by C. H. Booth of Wheeling, West Virginia (who with Hoxie, was one of the organizers of the First National Bank of Taylor, Texas.)

If the Hoxie House was architecturally impressive, the buildings that surrounded it were equally notable for their size and number. A white, one-story frame house with a front porch on the south lay directly to the north of the main house. East of this smaller structure was a long, narrow building that was used as a commissary or store by people who lived on the Hoxie Ranch. To the north, between Sunnyside and the San Gabriel, was a stable or horse stall, built into the side of the hill, and capable of holding up to a dozen horses. A barn was located directly above the stable.

In the late 1880's, the Hoxie San Gabriel Ranch had reached its peak of development and included the mansion, numerous outbuildings, and over 8,000 acres of land. Stock included horses, sheep, hogs; and thoroughbred Herefords, shorthorn Durham, 4,000 acres, included cotton, corn and alfalfa. As the Taylor newspaper reported on January 24, 1887, shortly after Hoxie House was completed, 'this is decidedly the best improved and best stocked farm in Williamson County.'

Despite the charms of his new house, John R. Hoxie's stay there was very brief. His wife and children professed never to have cared for the building and its surrounding; and by 1887 Hoxie was involved in new business dealings in Fort Worth, leaving his nephew, Mortimer Hoxie, to manage his Williamson County properties. (Mortimer Hoxie became well known for his abilities with cattle breeding. At the Dallas State Fair, May 4-6, 1887, the Hoxie ranches, managed by Mortimer, won prizes for best Holstein cow and bull, best Hereford shorthorn cow. Other prizes included a blue ribbon for all-purpose stallions and a second place for a thoroughbred Hereford bull between the ages of two and three.)

Hoxie's death foreshadowed the demise of the ranch and of Sunnyside. His wife, Mary administered it till 1910, and then sold it to three persons, one of which was her son Gilbert H. Hoxie.

Although the house was a symbol of wealth and prestige, the significance of the Hoxie San Gabriel Ranch, then is not so much Sunnyside itself, which disappeared from the scene, but the lives of the people who built it and developed the ranch. For this reason, it is important that the merits of the Hoxie family members as significant local, state and national figures be recognized, and the relative value of the cultural site to the history of the family be kept in mind.

Information on the appearance of the house comes from informants who lived in or visited it before it burned in 1938, as well as photographs made of the structure ca. 1900-1910."

Figure 3

- A. John R. Hoxie, from a "Customers Draft" form of the First National Bank of Taylor Texas. Courtesy, Dr. Charles C. Allison.
- B. South elevation of Sunnyside. Courtesy, Dr. Charles C. Allison.

JOHN R. HOXIE AND "SUNNYSIDE" AT THE SAN GABRIEL RANCH

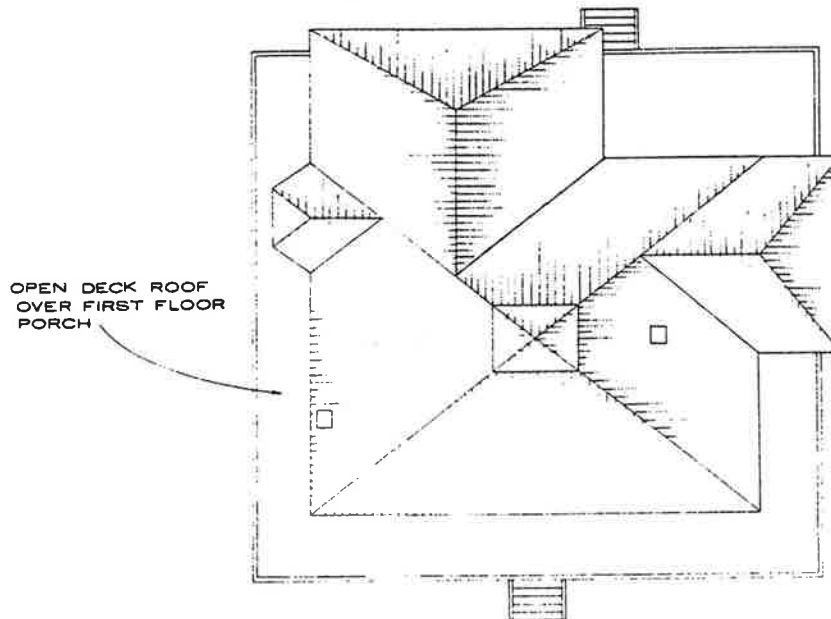


A

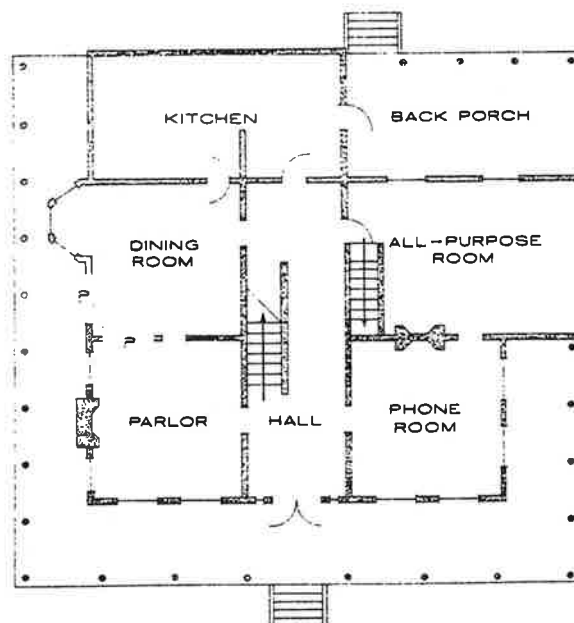


B

"SUNNYSIDE" AT THE SAN GABRIEL RANCH



ROOF PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SUNNYSIDE

NOT TO SCALE



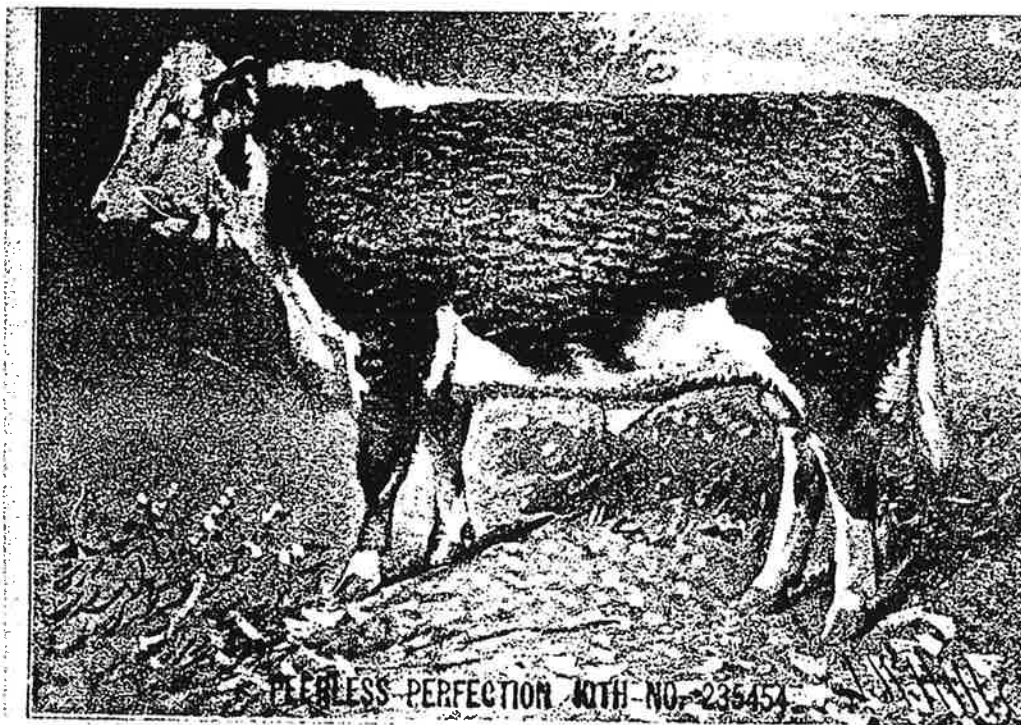
PRIZE CATTLE OWNED BY THE HOXIES



PERFECTION 92891

Among the prize winners sired by Perfection are Defender, Perfection Fairfax, General Manager, and General Manager 2nd, Peerless Perfection 10th, Thorn Creek Perfection, Perfection Yet, and others.

*Perfection Hereford Sale Gilbert H. Hoxie 6-13-1907 Thornton, Ill.*



Junior Champion at Kansas City American Royal 1906. Also one of best pair of calves winning special prize.



PRIZE CATTLE OWNED BY THE HOXIES



One of best pair of calves at Kansas City American Royal 1906, and second prize winner at International 1906, and always way up in her class.



*Judge Albert Webb, son of Francis Webb, born 1863*



**GRASS IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR THEM**

## FRANCIS WEBB.

**F**RANCIS WEBB, an early and successful business man of Thornton, was born at Cirencester, Gloucestershire, England, February 17, 1830. His father, Frederick Webb, conducted a high school in Cirencester, and on leaving that place became steward for a wealthy nobleman at Coln St. Aldwins. He had three sons, Frederick, Richard and Francis, and his four daughters all died of consumption. Frederick became a civil engineer, and was engaged in building the "Great Eastern," and also in tunneling through the Malvern Hills. He died in England. Richard came to the United States, and engaged in the manufacture of straw paper in Massachusetts. His close application to business and the use of chemicals undermined his health, and he returned to England, where he died.

Francis Webb was educated in his father's school, where he studied the classics, in which he became very proficient. After graduating he opened a dry-goods store at Burford, in Oxfordshire, England, in which he was very successful. In 1861 he visited Montreal, Canada, on a vacation trip, and thence went to Detroit, where he decided to engage in business, opening a bank and renting agency.

✗ In 1861 he came to Chicago to take part in a cricket match, and, being very much impressed with the possibilities of this section, purchased a farm of eighty acres east of the present village of Thornton, subsequently owned by John R. Hoxie. He also purchased the store of Floras Young, who was a very early settler in that region. Mr. Webb put in a stock of dry goods, boots and shoes, and conducted a large and suc-

cessful business until his death, which occurred March 21, 1880. During this time he continued to operate the farm, and was considered one of the most successful business men of the community, as well as one of its most progressive and intelligent citizens.

Mr. Webb was not a member of any church, but was a very sincere Christian in belief and practice. He based his religion on the Bible, and was liberal to all denominations. He always "set the Lord's table in his own house on Sabbath mornings." He was an industrious Sunday-school worker, and for many years superintended a very successful union Sunday-school which was held in the Thornton Town Hall.

October 26, ~~1866~~, at Detroit, Mr. Webb was married to Miss Amelia Wheeler, daughter of John and Mary (Griffin) Wheeler. Mr. and Mrs. Webb were the parents of four children, two of whom yet survive. Albert Francis, the eldest, received a high-school education and was engaged in contracting in Chicago for some time, and now has charge of the Stinson Stock Farm at Thornton (see biography in this work). Mary Florence died November 3, 1876, aged seven years; and Alexander Frederick passed away at the age of six years, July 17, 1880. Bessie is the youngest of the family, residing with her mother in Thornton.

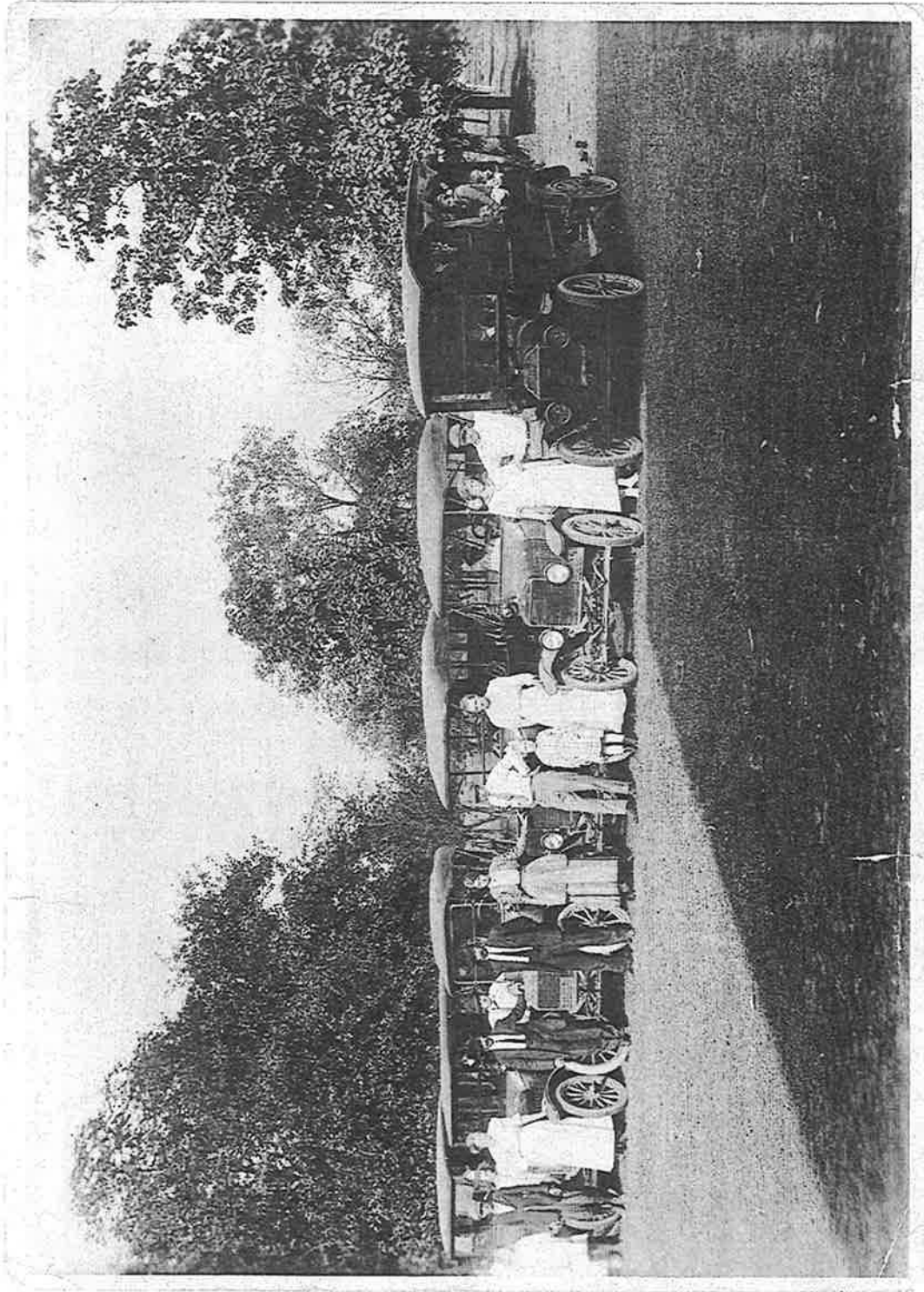
In 1882 Mrs. Webb married Fred Lorenz, of Thornton. She is a woman of remarkable intelligence and business ability, and continued to conduct the store at Thornton for some time after the death of her husband, later taking up real-estate operations. She has been instrumental in carrying out most of the important real



**Picnic at the Hoxie Farm with the Tienstra and Kickert families,  
taken by Joe Tienstra, 1912**

*Left to right: Winnie Tienstra holding John T., Gert K., Gerrit T. Neil K., Julian T., & Josephine K., Bessie Kickert holding Gerard*  
*At the table on right: Gert T. is in back with Gert Ammon in front* *At the table on left: Amelia T. in back, Jeanette T. in front.*



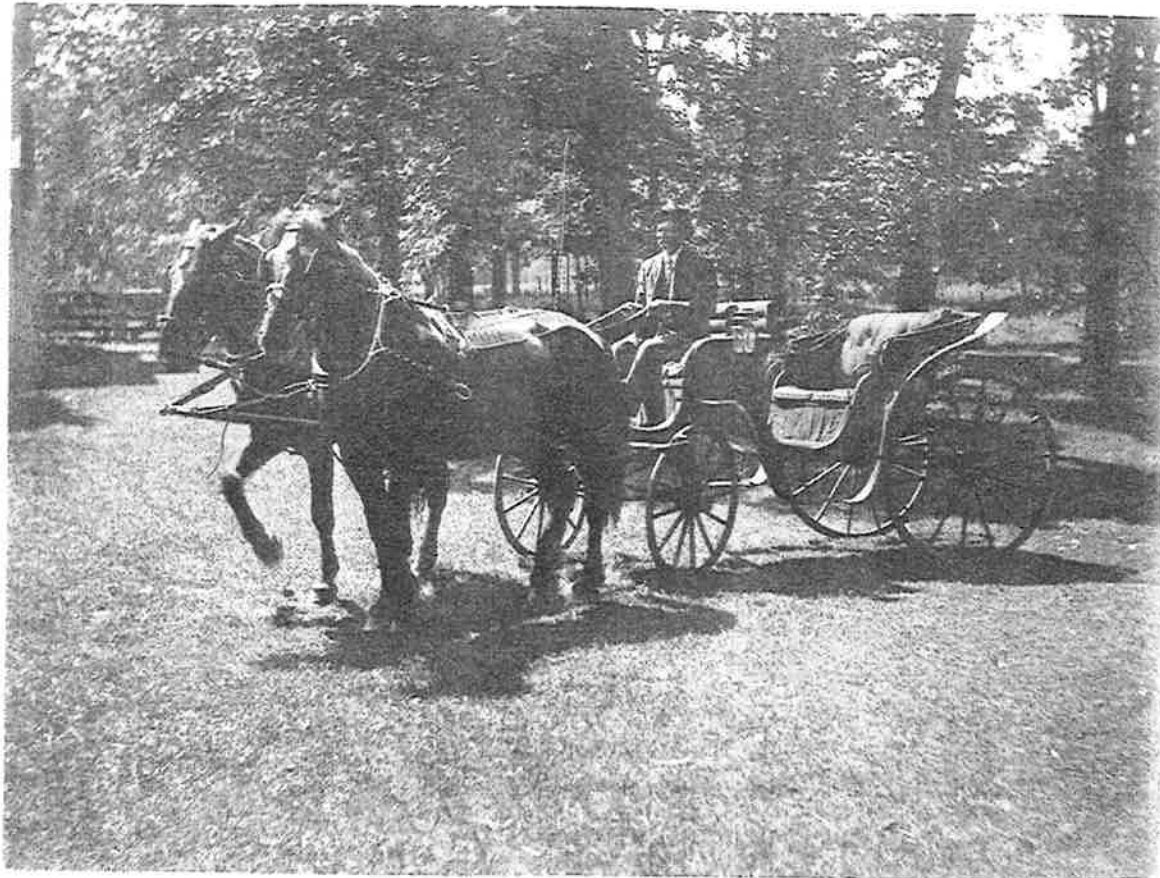
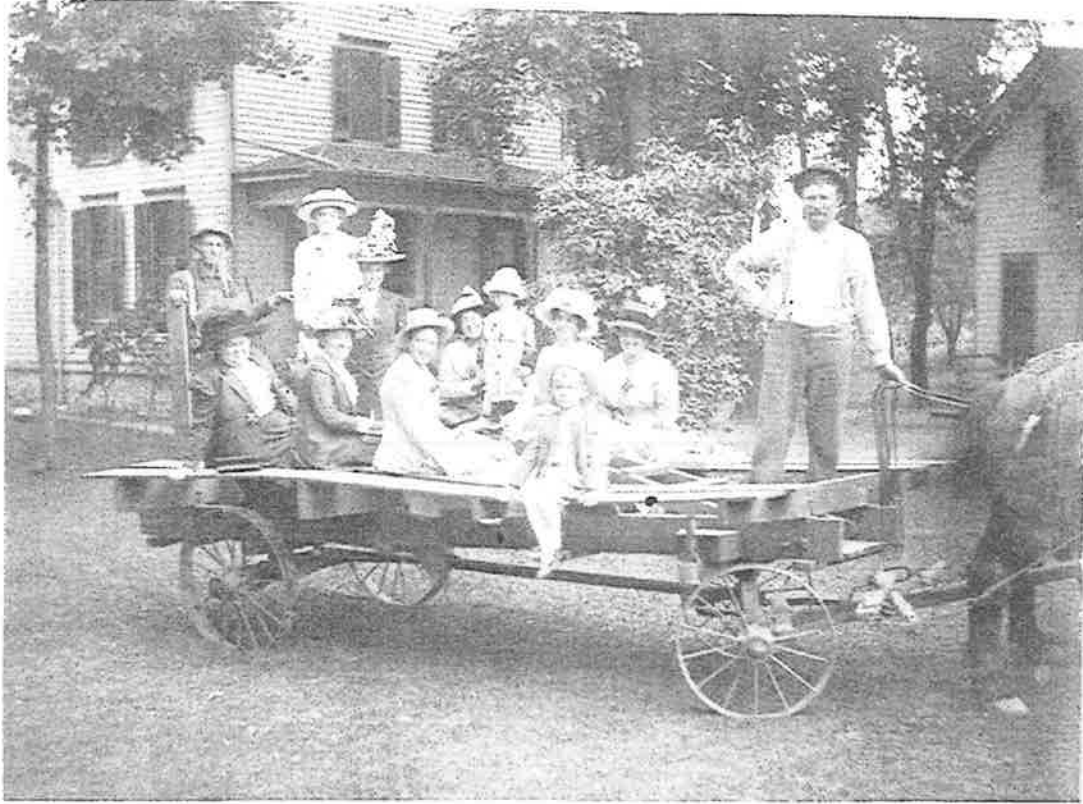


**The Witvoet families gather to say good-bye**

to Joe, Ralph and Gerrit Tienstra before they left for their three week journey to Florida in 1920, quite a achievement in that year. The second and third cars from the left were the cars that took them to their destination. Among the well-wishes were the De Youngs and Millers.

### **Richard Kickert, Manager of the Thorn Creek Hoxie Farm**

Dirk (Richard or Dick) Kickert, Manager of the Hoxie Thorn Creek Farm, 1907-1914. Shown here with the teams of horses, which pulled the Hoxie carriages and wagons during this era. The people in the wagon picture are cherry pickers (well-dressed cherry pickers). His expertise with the horse teams prepared him for his business venture-transporting children to school-Kickert Bus Line. (Photos courtesy of Gertrude Kickert-Messmaker).



## The Hoxie Farm Gypsies

Approximately 100 or more gypsies started camping in the woods-down Hoxie lane and along the creek-at the Hoxie farm every summer about the time of World War I. They picked a spot, pitched a tent and then went about picking pockets and a few other things. If you ever watched the old movies that had the gypsy caravans in them, that is really what they looked like; with horses and ponies and painted wagons. Later they traveled in style with fancy cars such as Pierce Arrows and Rolls Royce to name a few.

They were very good at their trade. One woman challenged John and told him she would steal his pocket watch, which was inside his coat pocket. He told her that would never happen. But one day, to his amazement, she dangled it in front of him. Of coarse she gave it back to John, since he let them camp there.

Not everyone was as cool as John was with the gypsies. Mothers and grandmothers would herd the children into the house whenever the gypsies were around because everyone knew that the gypsies might kidnap them and they would never be seen again. Almost everyone owned chickens, ducks, cows, pigs etc. and since there weren't any telephones to alert the police, these farm animals were easy targets; the gypsies just waited for the chance to rustle whatever they could.. The owners had to stand watch with a shotgun until the gypsies left. Once the gypsies were gone, the chickens and the children were safe. Walter Diekelman tells us that: "The women folk did the begging and the thieving. The men folks, they just lollygagged back in their camp and what have you, and then the women folks would bring in the spoils." He related one gypsy woman came to their store and asked for ten cents worth of liver sausage for her baby.

The king of the gypsies died while they were in this area. He, along with his wife, is buried in the Washington Cemetery in Homewood, Illinois. It is worth the visit to see the wrought iron fence with an arch, and the marble bench and tombstones that are on the grave-sites. It is easy to find, since these are the most elaborate grave-sites in the cemetery. When the gypsies visit, they leave different types of tokens and food on the graves. A stainless steel box in the shape of a church with candles and matches inside probably is lit when their families visit.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF GYPSIES FROM *THE WORLD BOOK ENCYCLOPEDIA*

Gypsies, also spelled Gypsies, are a group of wandering people whose ancestors originally lived in India. Today, Gypsies live in almost every part of the world. Some have settled down, but many are still nomads living in tents and other portable shelters.

No one knows how many Gypsies there are, because they are organized into small groups-called bands or tribes- and usually avoid contact with official census agencies. Estimates of the Gypsy population throughout the world range from 1 million to more than 6 million. The largest numbers of Gypsies live in Eastern Europe. There are many groups of Gypsies, including the *Cale* of Spain, the *Manouches* of France, and the *Sinte* of Germany. The best know Gypsy groups in the United States belong to the *Rom* tribes. The *Rom* is the largest groups of Gypsies and live in nearly every part of the world.

Culture: A *Rom* family consists of a husband and wife, their unmarried children, their married sons, and the sons' wives and children. In many cases, a group of related families forms a band that lives together and cooperates in economic matters. The highest authority is the *kris*, a system of rules of conduct based on *Rom* religious and philosophical beliefs.

Most Gypsies speak the language of the people among whom they live. However, many also speak their own native language, often called *Romany*, which belongs to the Indo-Iranian group of languages. *Romany* varies from place to place.

Gypsies have long been noted a musicians and dancers. They have borrowed from and added to the music and dance of other peoples. Large number of Gypsies follow traditional Gypsy occupations, such as fortunetelling, metalworking, horse trading, and animal doctoring. However, many have other vocations. The Gypsies left India bout AD 1000 and began to wander westward through the Middle East. They first arrived in Western Europe during the early 1400's, claiming to have come from a country called Little Egypt. The work Gypsy is shortened form of Egyptian.

The Europeans welcomed the Gypsies at first. But they soon turned against the Gypsies as the newcomers wandered through Europe, telling fortunes and begging. The Gypsies stayed in Europe despite growing prejudice against them. After Europeans began to colonize the Americas, some Gypsies settled there.

