

# LAND RECORDS: and YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

A FAMILY MYSTERY: Great-aunt Annie (“TOOTS”)

A PHOTO FROM HER EARLY YEARS

## THE FAMILY STORY:

- Toots had married someone, somewhere out west
- Location later determined by memory to possibly be in Nebraska
- Her husband and her two sons had died in a fire
- Another report said there was no fire and there were no children
- She had returned to Chicago to live with my grandmother (her sister) and the family after her husband died (no dates)

## Map of the United States

### FIRST STEPS

- Nebraska had been part of the dust bowl. What did I know beyond Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*? I needed to do some research. How much of Nebraska was involved? If that’s where they had lived.
- What did I know about Toots’ husband beyond his name (from family trees)? = Michael Jennings
- Began library search and discovered the Genealogy Room and the availability of people to assist. Met Nancy Pointer who recommended *Ancestry.com*, to which I added *Newspapers.com*.

- Nancy also recommended an appointment with Marie Overman, given problems I was having in my searches. And I did this!

## **Ancestry search:**

- Knowing only Michael Jennings name, I began with more than 2000 suggested names, thinking he was born in Nebraska; later learned he was born in Wisconsin
- Could immediately eliminate anyone born after 1900; later 1885 when I found out my aunt was born in 1887. This dropped the count to 614 names
- Found 2 obituaries that provided much information: date of marriage and the fact that he had two sons, both of whom died in their first year of life. It also mentioned my grandfather who had come for the funeral

## **My introduction to *Ancestry.com***

Finding Michael Jennings – now from 614

### **Obituary:**

**Dates:** birth, death, marriage

**Cause of Death:** heart problems

**Locations:** past and present

**Church /Cemetery:** St. Edwards

**Family:** wife, parents, siblings

**Visitors:** from out of town

## **Narrowing the fields**

### **Did Michael and Annie actually homestead?**

- Background research on homesteading, now knowing they actually lived in Nebraska
- Search of Ancestry.com: Search Catalogue  
Court/Land/Wills & Financials Land USA Nebraska  
1880-1889 Homestead Records 1863-1908
- Michael's parents were the original homesteaders; same names (Michael and Anna)

### **The Homestead Act of 1862**

- Provided 160 acres
- Price = \$10.00 (?\$14)
- Filed in the land office

#### **Requirements for a homesteader:**

- They had to live on the land for five years. Early homesteaders often built a sod house until able to build something more substantial.
- They had to prove having farmed a portion of the land
- At the end of the five years, they had to provide three witnesses

### **An early sod house**

## **Plat and Field Notes – 1887**

- **Homestead application**
- **Final Homestead Affidavit**
- **Witness to Jennings' homesteading**

## **How would Annie and Michael have met?**

- Mail order bride seemed a possibility for the time period, but not likely for my family. Annie had family in the Chicago area and she had apparently been working as a servant (per census information).
- My grandfather, Frank Roche, worked as a freight conductor for the Northwestern Railroad out of Chicago, which did have a stop in Albion, Nebraska.
- Michael's brother (Lawrence) worked at the train depot.
- Michael was the only unmarried member of his family. Annie was the only unmarried member of her family.
- Did the brother and brother-in-law arrange the meeting?

## **Nebraska Railroads, 1915**

### **Chicago to Albion**

### **Albion Depot**

### **Frank Roche**

### **Marriage Record**

## **Marriage Record Info:**

- Bride and Groom
- Location and Date of Birth
- Name of Parents
- Witnesses

## **The marriage years and After Michael's death**

- Nothing is known about the marriage beyond what was in Michael's obituary, i.e. they did have two sons who died within the first year of life.
- Michael was apparently ill for some time. (? "dust pneumonia")
- There are no letters or evidence of anyone in Annie's family visiting.
- It might be assumed that Annie did work the farm as she had grown up on one.
- The farm went into foreclosure upon Michael's death. This was very common in 1930 due to the drop in the price of grain.

## **1930 To 1935**

### **Probate and Foreclosure**

- Anna Jennings was deemed the executrix of her husband's estate on April 26, 1930; her husband died on March 15.

- Foreclosure was determined on February 6, 1935 with the Sheriff's sale to be on March 4, 1935 in front of the Boone County Court House.
- Arrears were: \$13, 738.45 + \$54 for accrued costs

## **Finding the Homestead**

### **Next Steps**

- I knew the Plat was in Boone County: Section 14, Township 20, 5 West, but where specifically was this? (in **Albion** north of Lincoln)
- Discovered there was the **Homestead U.S. National Historical Park** in Beatrice, Nebraska (south of Lincoln)
- I wanted to see the homestead site and explore the museum

## **Homestead National Historical Park**

- **PORTION of each state allotted for homesteading**
- **First Homesteaders**

## **The Homestead Act: 1862-1976**

- **First homesteader in the country:** Daniel Freeman. The story is he woke the county clerk up at 1201 am on January 1, 1863, to be the first to file his homestead before returning to his Civil War post.

- **Last homesteader:** Kenneth Deardorff. Returned as a Vietnam vet and moved to Alaska where he filed his claim in 1974 and completed the requirements in 1979, although he didn't receive the papers until 1988.

**Early one room cabin – 14 feet x 16 feet  
a family with 10 children**

**Inside the Cabin**

**Homestead Park Grounds**

**Finding Anna and Michael's Homestead**

**Township Plats**

**Junction of Route 91 and 320 Avenue**

**Likely site of their home**

**Final Resting Places**