

GOVERNOR'S COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD NOMINATION

Name of Community or Multi-Community: Bassett **Population:** 636

Name of Project: Bassett History DVDs

Project Contact Person: Korla Keller

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Category: Community Development **Subcategory:** Arts, Humanities and Cultural Experiences

Please identify which projects are also nominated for Special Project Awards: Yes

Date Project Started (mo./yr): Fall 2009 **Date Completed (mo./yr.):** May 2010

Is the project Annual/Ongoing? Yes _____ No X

Volunteer Hours: 100 **Number of Volunteers:** 40

1) Please provide a brief description of the project.

The City of Bassett, in its efforts to promote the community, hired Johnson Audio Video Productions, LLC to make a video showcasing Bassett. The video was to be used on the website so visitors could see what Bassett has to offer and get a feel for the community. In the process of doing this project, community leaders thought it would be a good idea to video some of the senior residents of Bassett to document many of the personal histories and stories of senior residents. The thought was that many of these stories would be lost if not permanently documented. Bassett was incorporated in 1887 and Rock County in 1888, so the personal histories and stories could still be told and those could be compiled into a DVD. Proceeds from sales could be used for the Q-125 Celebration that would be held in 2012 or 2013.

2) Identify the planning and implementation of the project.

Promoting the community had been identified in various community surveys and at Chamber and Economic Development Committee meetings – the need for getting young families to make Bassett their home was intense. As with most small communities, the population was dwindling and young families were needed to help fill the gap created by the loss of the senior community members. Committee discussions on promoting the community revolved around projects that could be implemented to make Bassett more attractive to young families such as more access to technology; better housing; green and alternative energy sources and job opportunities that would fit the younger generation. In all these discussions the committee would question.... “How do you suppose they did that 100 years ago?” and all that fit with the goals of the NCIP committee of moving forward, but remembering the past.

To that end, the Council and Mayor of Bassett authorized the Clerk to meet with Doug Johnson of Johnson Audio Video Productions to discuss subject matter for the histories and personal stories, and several categories were selected:

- 1) Life in Bassett
- 2) Retail Stories
- 3) The Dirty Thirties

- 4) School Stories
- 5) World War II
- 6) Personal Stories
- 7) Homestead Stories
- 8) Farm and Ranch Life
- 9) Making Hay
- 10) Early Utilities
- 11) Early Phones
- 12) Blizzard of '49 and
- 13) Airplanes

It was decided that the goal of the project would be to document as many personal histories and stories of residents of Bassett in the specific categories selected. This would help preserve the history of the community and give the next generations a glimpse into the past and reveal a small part of what many of the “old-timers” endured and survived in order to make a life in Bassett and Rock County. Homesteaders to the area had two good hands, a strong back, and determination beyond belief. People were few and far between and those that were here relied on each other for moral and physical support when necessary. The community became like a large family.

3) Describe volunteer involvement in planning and implementing the project.

The Clerk and city secretary took responsibility for getting a list of possible volunteers for telling historic or personal stories. Visits were made to the Rock County Senior Center and Rock County Long-Term Care Facility to obtain names of possible interviewees. Once a list of compiled, letters were sent asking Bassett/Rock County residents if they would consider being interviewed and the various categories were suggested. They were also told to spread the word and if anyone else was interested to contact the City and get their name on the list.

The letters were followed up by personal phone calls to talk to the residents, see if they were interested in being interviewed and to see if they knew of anyone else that might be willing to participate. Sometimes these phone calls were rather lengthy as generally there were one or two stories that were related. Once they felt comfortable about telling their stories, most committed to being interviewed.

Forty (40) residents consented to be interviewed and interview dates were selected. Phone calls were made to get everyone in a time slot and the interviewees put a lot of time and effort into what stories they wanted to relate. In the end, thirty-seven (37) individuals were interviewed for the videos.

Once all the interviews were completed, Doug Johnson of Johnson Audio Video Productions, went through all the interviews, sorted them into the various categories and produced a 2-DVD set which is approximately 6 hours of history and personal stories about Bassett and Rock County and its residents. The videos were reviewed by the Clerk and President of the Chamber for content and any duplication of content.

4) Identify Project Outcomes.

The community wanted a permanent historical record so our young people would understand how much times have changed. The intention was to document some of the personal history of residents and to assist with a fund-raising project for the Q-125 celebration. Residents that did consent to be interviewed talked about the project at the Senior Center and other gathering places and prompted the best discussions about “Do you remember.... when, what or how...” and stirred many memories that had all but been forgotten. Some people that didn't feel comfortable being interviewed on camera were quick to suggest that their friend or neighbor or relative had a

great story to tell or they would relate the story to one of the interviewees so it would get included in the taping session.

All who watched the interviews were awed at the hardships and tragedies, the celebrations and joyful occasions and the camaraderie that bonded the community together. Watching the DVD's, the older generation has reawakened their sense of pride in the community and in their accomplishments – some of which were achieved in spite of horrible odds and under the worst conditions imaginable. The younger generation, having grown up with all the amenities such as electricity, indoor plumbing, telephones, 4-wheel drive vehicles, tractors, hay balers, just to mention a few, were awed at all that their grandparents or great-grandparents endured to establish a home in Bassett or Rock County. When things get tough, they have an idea of what Grandpa had to endure to feed cattle in the dead of winter or a raging blizzard; or keep ice through the summer so you could put a block in the ice box; to get children home from school in the midst of a blizzard when there are 10 children and 1 horse; or dealing with a band of gypsies where you are the only one in the store. They are also reminded that sometimes the simple things bring the most joy - going fishing with your friends; being able to call your neighbors when you are stuck in the house during a blizzard; or a community 4th of July celebration.

The DVD's are selling and many are being sold to return customers. Mom buys one and then comes back to buy one for each child. Once you start watching the videos, it is very hard to stop. The history of the community, as related in these stories, is spell-binding. Anyone who watches the videos will have a deeper respect and admiration for those that came before and made this community what it is today.

5) Describe how resources were identified and used to successfully implement the project.

The City of Bassett provided the funding for this project and the only person to receive monetary compensation was the videographer and his company. All others volunteered their time and talents to the project. The Chamber of Commerce will receive all proceeds from the sale of the DVD's to help fund the Q-125 celebration.

6) Future Plans

Q-125 plans are being discussed. One of the projects will be getting written personal histories from area residents. Although not the same as being interviewed and having a DVD to watch, the community book will provide documentation and history of the families that have been in the community for a short period of time or for 125 years... or more.

People watching these videos cannot help but understand that it took a great deal of independence and a tremendous amount of determination for the first generation of Sandhillers to establish a homestead and build a life that could be passed on to the next generation. The younger generation will know that it still takes those qualities to be able to live in the Sandhills. Being in north central Nebraska where the population is approximately 2 people per square mile and you are at least 125 miles from the nearest Walmart, you must have a sense of self-reliance and independence or you'll soon move back to the city.

In marketing our community, we must target individuals who have a solid sense of self, who are independent and have the determination it takes to make a life in the Sandhills. If you manage to live in the Sandhills for long, you soon find yourself falling in love with the life and lifestyle and you couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

7) Please describe what aspects (if any) of the project were especially unique or creative?

Of the interviewees, one woman brought about 5 telephones to the interview – her first telephone (a crank phone that hung on the wall), several in between, and her latest cell phone. One woman related coming to the

community in a covered wagon. Stories were related about flying supplies to area ranchers during the blizzard of '48 and '49. Many stories were told about school teachers riding to school on horseback and having to start the wood stove so the building would be warm when the children arrived and stories about taking care of all the children when they were caught in a blizzard during the school day. The REA (Rural Electric Association) didn't come to the area until the late 1940's and telephones came shortly thereafter. One woman brought an electric egg cooker that was given to her mother by the REA as a promotional gift for signing up for rural electricity – and it still worked! Stories were told about wind-chargers and how ranchers were able to provide electricity to their homes prior to the REA. Stories were told about haying and ranch work and how it was done before modern tractors and other equipment was available. One story was told about the first 4-wheel drive pickup in the country – now almost everyone has a 4-wheel drive vehicle. One woman related her story about going off during World War II to be a “Rosie the Riveter” and help build airplanes. A Bassett resident invented a hay stacker and the “Sorey Stacker” became one of the best in the business and was manufactured in Bassett and sold regionally.

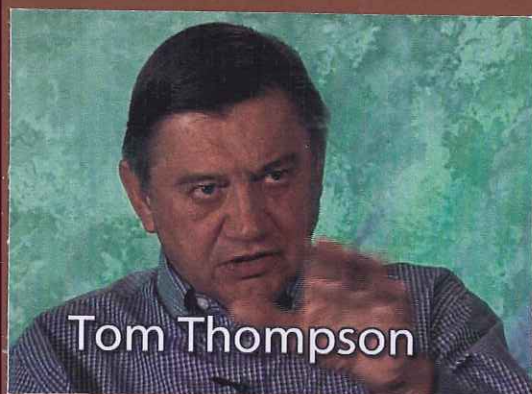
It was amazing to see the transformation of many of the seniors that related their stories. When the stories were told and the memories brought to life, the emotions connected to those memories were also brought back, and sometimes, watching the interview process, you might see a couple reach for each other's hands or you'd see a few tears and sometimes joyful laughter.

It was truly an amazing process and we found out ... the 90 year old man that struggles to get around was the young pilot who delivered supplies and mail to snowed in ranchers and picked up sick children in his plane and flew them to area hospitals, and put skis on his plane so he could land on snow and ice. Everyone has a story and sometimes we just fail to take time to listen to those stories.

Since the interviews were completed, several of the volunteers have passed away and the committee was very grateful that their stories had been documented.

The rights to the DVD's were turned over to the Bassett/Rock County Chamber of Commerce and they have begun to sell the DVD sets to help raise money for the Q-125 celebration. Several sets have been put in storage and a set of the un-cut interviews will be placed at the library for residents to view.

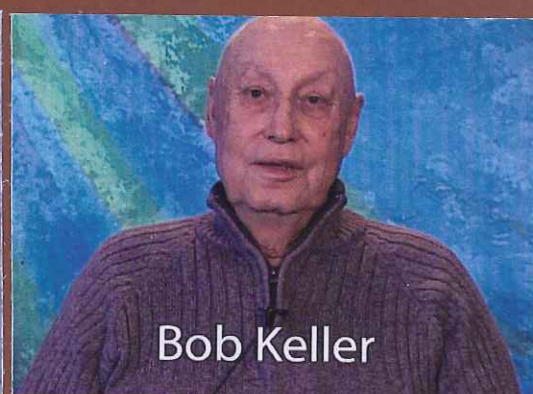
Do You Remember When...



Tom Thompson



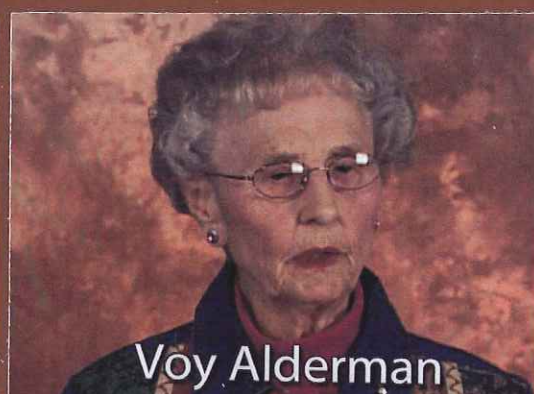
Berniece Kuchera



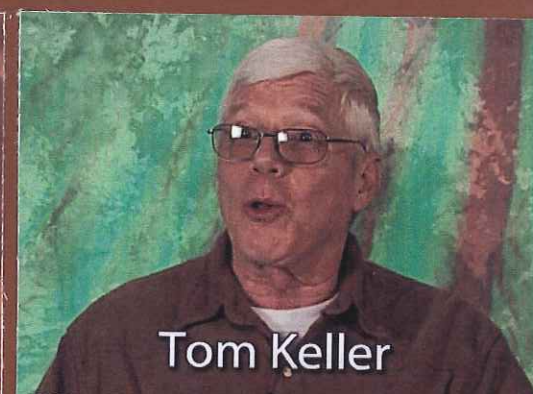
Bob Keller



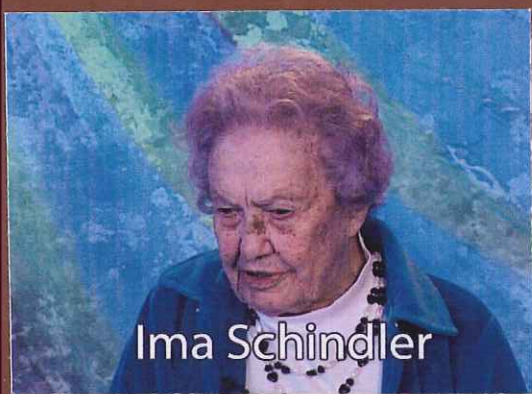
Miriam "Mim" Davis



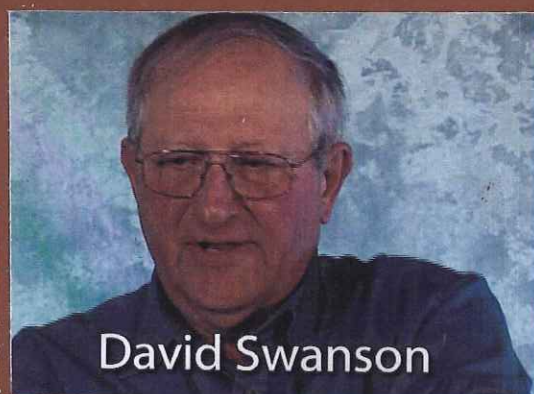
Voy Alderman



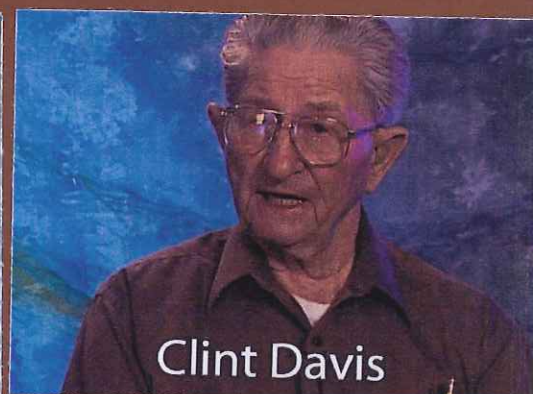
Tom Keller



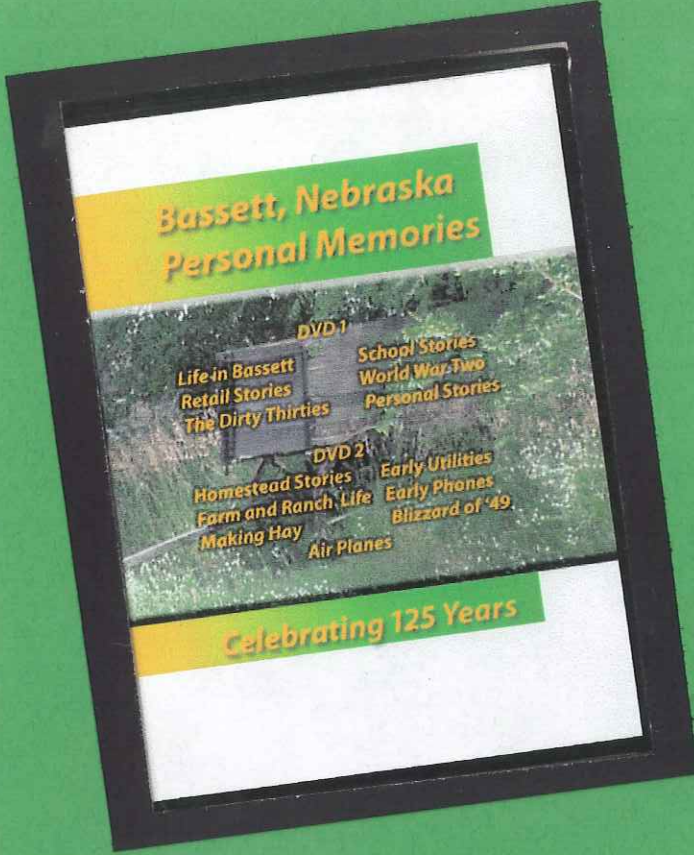
Ima Schindler



David Swanson



Clint Davis



FOR SALE

Bassett, Nebraska Personal Memories
"Celebrating 125 Years"

DVD---\$20

The Bassett/Rock County Chamber of Commerce met July 13, at the Clark Street Mall. The Chamber currently has 46 members.

The Farmer's Market started July 17 and will continue through Sept. 18, from 8 to 11 a.m. A few car washes have also been scheduled.

The Logo for the banner was discussed and Luke Armstrong will be contacted for ideas on maybe changing the logo since there are other communities currently using the slogan "Gateway to the Sandhills."

The Chamber will have a booth at the State Fair and some of the items to be displayed will be pens, brochures, tablets, pictures of Bassett, the DVD's and a week end in Bassett which includes, two nights stay at the Bassett Lodge, three meals for two, tour of the Niobrara by Carolyn Hall, tour of the buffalo ranch by Lance Kuck, one round of golf and ice cream from the Soda Fountain.

The fireworks stand was successful. The Chamber has sold 66 DVD's.

The free community barbecue will be held during the Rock County Fair on Aug. 13. During the barbecue, BC/BS will be presenting a health grant, totaling \$5,000.

The three people from the Nebraska Tourism Division will be in Bassett on Aug. 16 to visit various tourist attractions in this area. The Chamber tourism committee will be meeting with them throughout the day. The staff will give feedback on how to improve tourism within the community.

A county-wide meeting regarding the Q125 celebration will be held in August. The meeting is for anyone who has ideas or is willing to help out with this project.

The NCIP committee is finishing work on the book, which is due Sept. 1.

The next regular meeting will be held Aug. 10 at the Corral Bar.

MEMORIES



Reflections... By Kay Lynn Kalkowski

...Having missed attending the recent RCHS alumni banquet, I have been especially lonesome for all things (and people!) related to Rock County. As three of my favorite Lincoln people (daughter-in-law DaNay, Chris Mayr Laughlin, and Donnie Stewart) were in charge of planning the banquet, I had glimpses of banquet plans. That made me even more lonesome.

Then son and daughter-in-law Chris and Marsha brought me a copy of the DVD set "Bassett, Nebraska Personal Memories" back from their banquet trip to Bassett. I have only been able to watch one of the DVD's in the set so far, but I loved it! There on my television screen in my own home were dozens of old friends telling their stories and those of their families. The stories are wonderful. I especially enjoyed the ones about the use of airplanes to check cattle and deliver mail and supplies after blizzards. The expertise shared is remarkable. I listened in awe as "Uncle" Dick Mauch recited from memory lumber sizes and building dimensions used in slide hay stackers and former hay barns. How good it was to have all those people with me, especially those we have lost in the past couple of years. I strongly urge anyone who is reading this who has ties to Rock County to obtain this DVD set from the Bassett/Rock County Chamber of Commerce (Box 537, Bassett, or 684-3935!)

After receiving the DVD set, I had two opportunities on the same day to touch base with former RCHS students and their families in Lincoln. On Sunday afternoon, June 27, I attended a local S.T.A.G.E. (Student Theatre and Godly Evangelization) production that featured Nicholas Theisen, son of Dale and Kim Thompson Theisen. Nicholas, who will be a freshman in high school this fall, has been in several S.T.A.G.E. productions which are always part of a theatre camp. This summer's play "It's Elementary, My Dear" (written and produced by Lincolnite Lee Hottovy who also founded S.T.A.G.E.) was a spoof on the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson as well as the old board game "Clue."

Nicholas's role in the play was that of Colonel Dijon. Dressed in a mustard color facsimile of Teddy Roosevelt's hunting garb (plus the drooping mustache), Nicholas swaggered about the stage with his "hunting rifle" in total character. I, of course, was charmed when he broke into song!

From Nicholas's play at St. Teresa's, I drove to the St. Paul Methodist Church to join Pat and Annette Swanson McDevitt for their daughter Katelyn's "leaving for Europe" concert. Katelyn is part of the Midwest American

Honor Choir (under the direction of UNL's Director of Choral Activities, Dr. Peter Eklund) who had gathered in Lincoln three days earlier for intense rehearsals of music they had learned independently. On Sunday morning, they had performed at church services at St. Paul's; I visited with friends who had heard the choir that morning and come back to attend the evening concert that allowed parents and other guests to hear the repertoire of the touring program and tell their student singers goodbye.

The choir boarded planes on several separate flights from Omaha the following day. Their destination was Frankfurt, Germany, with their first concert in the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. From there, they were scheduled to sing in the Strasbourg (France) Cathedral, the Lucerne (Switzerland) Jesuitkirche, St. Mark's in Venice, St. Michael's in Munich, and the Franziskanerkirche in Rothenburg, Germany. The fact that I have had the opportunity to visit the first four churches on the choir's itinerary made me all the more pleased to think of Katelyn and her new friends singing in these beautiful settings.

In addition to performing, the choir students were scheduled to visit several European attractions, including the Palace of Versailles, the Louvre art museum, the Eiffel Tower, and Dachau concentration camp.

Pat and Annette and I shared the lovely music. I knew that concerns for Katelyn's safety were at the forefront of her parents' thoughts, but Annette confided that it was a little easier this second time. Katelyn's older sister Lindsay had made the same trip a few years ago. The time spent with Annette and getting to share her excitement about Katelyn's trip made me feel very close to home in Bassett.

Fortunately, on the heels of that Sunday was our annual trip back to the Sandhills for the Fourth of July celebration with the Buell family. Although the area rains made planning a route a last-minute consideration as we looked for roads where bridges had been repaired and the puddles were not too big, we were able to arrive in time for water play and fireworks before the skies opened once more Saturday night. And although Sunday the Fourth brought cloudy skies, the sun peeked through once again.

Rain or shine, it did not make any difference to me: I was home in the Sandhills with family and friends, and I had been buoyed by DVD images of friends and actual visits with old friends from home. My homesickness was abated. I can hold off for another month until the next planned trip home.