

Ehlers, Hans, Farm
F Street
Papillion 18 Damsite
Millard vicinity
Douglas County
Nebraska

HABS No. NE-42

HABS
NEB,
28-MILL.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
PO. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

ADDITIONAL
PHOTOGRAPHS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HANS EHLERS FARM

HABS No. NE-42

Location: 2.5 miles west of Millard, southeast of the intersection of 156th Street and F Street, Millard vicinity, Douglas County, Nebraska. UTM Coordinates, 736940 Easting, 4566490 (?) Northing, Zone 14, Douglas County, Nebraska.

Significance: A distinctive product of German-American culture and an example of a nineteenth century agricultural settlement, the Hans Ehlers farm shares a number of features with other German-American farms in Nebraska, such as the Retzlaff, Sautter, Stork, and Michael Witt Fachwerk houses. German immigrants to the Great Plains brought with them a distinctive style with certain features in common. Among these are a half-story loft, boxed ascending stairway, and centrally located chimney or stove flue. Another trait is the loose arrangement of the farmstead buildings into a courtyard shape, a pattern found in northern Germany and the Lower Rhine area. Placement of doors into the main house reflects this central European heritage. The formal entry leads into the parlor, a room not extensively used which faced away from the farmyard court. Inhabitants commonly used an entry into the kitchen, which led from the courtyard. Czechoslovakian settlements also exhibit this similar traffic patterns, as in the Pavelka house in Webster County

The history of the farm can be considered characteristic of the region as a whole. Several individuals speculated on the land, including Henrietta Caldwell, wife of the future mayor of the town of Millard. Hans Ehlers, a Prussian immigrant listed in a local directory of the time as a laborer, bought the land in 1881. Apparently a successful farmer, Ehlers owned 200 acres at the time of his death in 1917. The Martin family purchased the farm from Ehlers' family; members of the Martin family owned the farm until purchase by the Corps of Engineers.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of Erection: Farmhouse built circa 1880. Exact date unknown, but Ehlers mortgaged the land in 1884, probably to raise the money to build the house. The barn was built in 1920 to replace an earlier barn which collapsed. The summer kitchen was built approximately the same time. Remaining outbuildings were built between circa 1920 and circa 1950, but no exact dates are known.
2. Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title of the land occupied by the farmstead are located in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Douglas County Courthouse, Douglas County, Nebraska.

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- 1865 Deed, September 1, recorded in Numerical Index of Deeds, Township 14, 15, 16 and Range 11: United States to Henrietta M. Caldwell
- 1876 Deed, May 17, recorded in Numerical Index of Deeds for Township 14, 15, 16 and Range 11: Henrietta M. Caldwell to Theodore Malchart and wife
- 1881 Deed, May 2, recorded in Numerical Index of Deeds for Township 14, 15, 16 and Range 11: Theodore Malchart and wife to Hans Ehlers and wife
- 1919 Deed, March 1, Recorded in Numerical Index to Deeds, Volume 3, Hans Ehlers to Frank Martin and wife
- 1925 Deed, May 5, Recorded in Numerical Index to Deeds, Volume 3, Frank Martin and wife to Esther Martin Baker and husband
- 1934 Deed, October 15, Recorded in Numerical Index to Deeds, Volume 3, Esther Martin Baker and husband to Guy R. Baker and wife
- 1935 Deed, May 17, Recorded in Numerical Index to Deeds, Volume 3, Guy R. Baker and wife to Esther Martin Baker
- 1973 Deed, November 20, Recorded in Numerical Index of Deeds, Volume 3A, Esther M. Baker to Baker-Martin Farms, Inc.
- 1984 Deed, June 29, Recorded in Numerical Index of Deeds, Volume 3A, Baker-Martin Farms, Inc. to Irving M. Baker et al.
- 1985 Declaration of Taking, February 6, Recorded in Numerical Index of Deeds, Volume 3A, Irving Baker et al to United States

B. Historical Context:

The original owner of the land, Henrietta Caldwell, also was wife of the first mayor of Millard. The Caldwell family perhaps acquired the property as part of other land speculations.

Hans Ehlers, the next long-term owner, probably came to the United States before 1867. An 1883 Omaha directory lists a Hans Ehlers as a laborer in Millard. By 1884 he is listed as a farmer in rural Millard. Evidently he had success as a farmer, for at the time of his death he owned approximately 200 acres: the northwest quarter of section 3 and the east quarter of the southwest quarter of section 3, Township 14 North and Range 11 East.

Frank Martin bought the land, and it stayed in his family until acquisition by the Corps of Engineers. At the time of taking, Fred Citte rented the farm.

The group of farm buildings was always part of a working farm similar to thousands of others in the state and region. The owners probably followed a mixed-use strategy, farming as well as raising some livestock for slaughter and dairy production.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Ehlers farm is an example of a rural vernacular style showing German-American building traits. Many similar buildings currently are being destroyed to make way for more modern living structures in the greater Omaha metropolitan area.
2. Condition of fabric: At time of recording, the house was in fair condition; the eight outbuildings ranged from fair to poor in condition.

B. Description of Exterior, Farmhouse:

1. Foundation: The house rests on a brick foundation. A basement underlies the north side of the house and appears to have been constructed after the house. The north wall of the basement is made of cement block, while the remainder is brick.
2. Walls: The house is sheathed with 6 inch beveled drop siding.
3. Structural System: House has a balloon frame.
4. Porch: A pedimented entry canopy was located on the door on the south side, but it was removed sometime during the past.
5. Chimneys: House has three brick chimneys. One is on south wall of the kitchen; a second, the east wall of the living room. Both of these apparently were built at the same time as the house. The third chimney is in the south part of the house and seems to have been built later. None of the chimneys is associated with a fireplace; all were used only with stoves.

6. Openings, Doorways, Windows: The house has four-over-four double-hung windows, except for the south facade, where an original window was evidently replaced with a larger living room window. The south facade, or "architectural front" of the house, apparently lost a pedimented entry canopy over the front door. The east side of the house contains a door leading into the kitchen.

7. Roof: The roof of the house is composed of relatively new asphalt shingles over one, or possibly even two layers in some sections, of cedar shingles.

C. Description of Interior, Farmhouse:

1. Floor plan: The house has an L-shaped floor plan with a living room and bedroom/parlor in the southernmost wing and a kitchen wing projecting to the north. A bedroom was added to the kitchen wing after the initial construction. The porch east of the kitchen was enclosed as extra dining space and an interior bath was added. A change in the trim boards on the north facade indicates the additions. Also, the enclosed porch are a different age and size than the ones in the rest of the house. The second floor has three rooms.

2. Stairways: The house has one stairway, located in the center of the house and separating the kitchen wing from the living room/bedroom wing.

3. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The walls of the first floor are painted plaster over lathe. The ceilings on both floors are also painted plaster over lathe. The walls of the second floor are the same material, with wallpaper in some rooms.

4. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Made of painted wood contemporary with construction of the house.

b. Windows: As described above. All window casings are of painted wood.

5. Mechanical and Electrical Systems: Electrical wire and plumbing were added to the house sometime after construction. The bathroom seems to have been built during the 1940s and includes a shower, toilet, and sink. Stoves heated most of the house until recently, although there was a furnace located in the basement which had a single heat register for the entire house.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house and outbuildings are distributed in a loose courtyard arrangement. F Street is located north of the house and the areas immediately west and south are surrounded by trees. A small intermittent stream that feeds into Papillion Creek is located east of the farmstead; Papillion Creek is north of the farmstead. Low, rolling hills surround the farm.

2. Outbuildings:

a. Barn: The barn is a rectangular, three-bay English or "Yankee" barn, resting on a foundation of cement blocks. Cement piers on the floor support beams which hold up the roof. The buildings has three windows on the north side, and three on the south side. Two sets of sliding doors provide access on the east and west sides, and a door on the west side upper story opens into the hayloft. The roof is gabled and covered with cedar shingles, oriented on an east-west axis with a roof projection over the hayloft door on the west. The southern roof extends over the animal stalls opening onto the old barnyard. (See floor plan and cross section.) This barn was constructed in the 1920s (?) to replace a barn which collapsed.

b. Summer kitchen: This structure flanks the house to the northeast. It is made of textured concrete block capped in a hip roof of cedar shingles. Both the east and west sides of the building contain three windows. The entry and one window are located on the south side of the building and two windows are located on the north side. The floor of the northern third of the summer kitchen is recessed 1.5 feet below the remaining part of the building and is currently filled with corn cobs. This recessed area may have been used as a pantry or storage area. A sink is located on the east side of the building. (See floor plan.)

c. Hog Shed: A wood frame hog shed is located on the western edge of the farmstead. The building has a foundation made of cement blocks with a balloon frame made of shiplap siding. The north and south sides of the building have a door at the center, with two windows on either side on the ground floor level and a window on the loft level. The west and east side of the buildings contain a band of windows. (See floor plans.) A series of small, vertically sliding doors is located on the east and west sides to allow for entry of the animals.

d. Corncrib: Located northwest of the farmstead, this is a one-story, rectangular wood-frame structure with a gabled roof oriented on a north-south axis. The shed is clad with angular open slats on the east and west sides and clad on the north and south side with shiplap siding. The building contains double sliding doors.

e. Shed: A large shed is located east of the house. It is a square, one-story wood shed with a pyramidal roof of cedar shingles. The shiplap siding is fenestrated with small four-lighted windows, two per elevation, and there are two sliding doors on the north side. Cement blocks make up the foundation, and the floor is poured concrete. A small chimney at the back of the structure at one time probably serviced a stove. The building may have served as a tractor shed or machine shop.

f. Chicken house: A small structure is located south of the farmhouse and is made up of shiplap siding over a balloon frame with a hip on gable roof with cedar shingles. A Door and window are located on the east side and three windows on the south side. This building may have been used as a chicken house.

g. Pump house and root cellar: A small pump house is located east of the house. It is a wood frame structure with shiplap siding resting on a cement foundation. The root cellar also lies to the east of the house.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Historical Documents: No historic drawings, plans, or photographic views of the structures were located.

B. Bibliography:

Haecker, George, and Dan Worth

1981 A "Ehlers/Baker Farm Investigation: Phase I Report."
Bahr, Vermeer, and Haecker, Architects. MS on file
at Omaha District Corps of Engineers.

1981 B "National Register of Historic Places Inventory
Nomination: Ehlers/Baker Farmstead." Bahr,
Vermeer, and Haecker Architects, Omaha.

Nebraska State Historical Society

- n.d. "National Register of Historic Places Inventory
Nomination: Retzlaff Farmstead."
- n.d. "National Register of Historic Places Inventory
Nomination: John Sautter Farmhouse."
- n.d. "National Register of Historic Places Inventory
Nomination: John Henry Stork Log House."
- n.d. "National Register of Historic Places Inventory
Nomination: Michael Witt Fachwerkbau."

Peterson, John E. and Robert Pepperl

- 1981 "Cultural Resources Investigations within Proposed
Structures 18 and 20: Papillion Creek Tributaries
Project, Douglas and Sarpy Counties, Nebraska.:
Division of Archaeological Research, University of
Nebraska, Lincoln.

These reports are available from the Omaha District, United
States Army Corps of Engineers.

Prepared by: Edward Brodnicki,
Archaeologist, circa 1986.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The Omaha District is currently planning to demolish the structures that
comprise the farmstead following acceptance of the HABS documentation.
The Omaha District, the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Officer and
the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation have entered into a
Memorandum of Agreement for implementation of the disposal action.

ADDENDUM TO:
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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