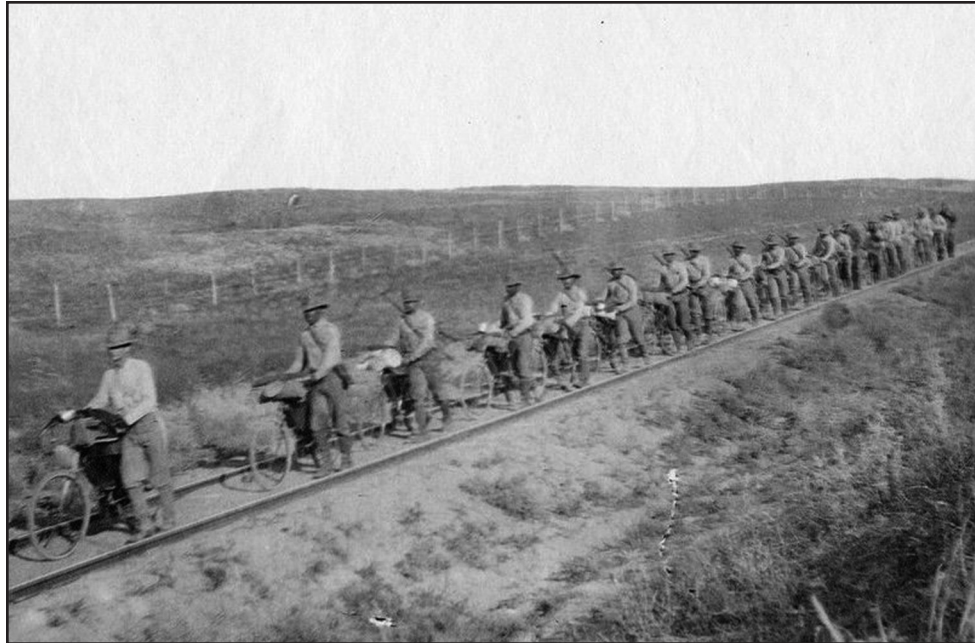


Bicycling in the Sandhills



COURTESY PHOTO

Black soldiers bicycling in the Sandhills.

By Larry Hardesty

Editor's Note: Larry is a graduate of Stapleton High School and a longtime historical contributor to The Stapleton Enterprise. Larry spends months researching and writing stories about many interesting facts and events that took place in Logan, McPherson, Grant and surrounding counties. The following story will be published in several parts over the next few weeks.

Those of us of a certain vintage remember well the country singer/song writer Roger Miller's 1966 hit single, "You can't roller skate in a Buffalo Herd." He probably had a point. Nevertheless, a hundred and twenty-five years ago in the summer of 1897, a corps of Black soldiers (or "Buffalo Soldiers" as Indians called them) attempted an almost equally daunting task of bicycling in the Sandhills of Nebraska.

It is hard to imagine now the popularity of the bicycle in the 1890s. While the bicycle had been around since the 1860s, the early high wheelers had perilously forward center of gravity that made them rather dangerous. With the invention of the "safety" bicycle in the 1880s a worldwide bicycle craze ensued as both men and women obtained a greater freedom and mobility

through the bicycle. Individuals no longer remained dependent on saddling up a horse or hitching a team of horses to a buggy or wagon, or on the routes and schedules of stagecoaches, streetcars, and trains. Both men and women could easily hop on a bicycle and travel to wherever their legs could take them.

Even in the western outpost of Missoula, Montana, the bicycle became very popular. By early 1894, the Missoula city council considered it necessary to pass an ordinance prohibiting the riding of bicycles on sidewalks. To which the editor of the local newspaper *The Missoulian* [or also known as *The Daily Missoulian*] responded, "Good enough" (*The Missoulian*, January 6, 1894). Beginning with the April 23, 1894, issue, John M. Lucy, "Furniture Dealer and Undertaker" advertised in *The Missoulian* "And Sole Agent for the Celebrated Columbia, and Western Works (Crescent) Pneumatic Tire Bicycles. All sizes; and Suitable for Lady, Gentleman or Child's Use." The editor of the newspaper did not miss the oddity of the rather eclectic services being offered by Mr. Lucy and commented, "John M. Lucy has an interesting announcement elsewhere in this issue. If you want a bicycle, set of fur-

niture, or wish to be embalmed or buried, call on him." Articles about bicycles appeared in the *Grant County Tribune* as early as March 15, 1894, and by 1896, the newspaper carried advertisements offering bicycling through Yellowstone National Park (July 11, 1896).

David McCormick of the Internet site HistoryNet has noted that by mid-April of 1894, the *Daily Missoulian* observed, "Like in Missoula, half of the people at the fort [Fort Missoula] are on bicycles and a person without a wheel is out of the times as it were." In September 1894, *The Missoulian* (September 4, 1894) reported on the use of the bicycle by the German Army, "The bicycle will form a part of the equipment of each infantry corps, and each battalion will have a detachment of trained riders and also experts to train them." David Kindy, writing in for the *Smithsonian Magazine*, wrote, "Militaries in Britain, Spain and other countries tested bicycles and found they were well-suited for reconnaissance and delivering dispatches across a variety of terrain." They also found bicycles less expensive and easier to maintain than horses.

Into this environment entered young 2nd Lieutenant James A. Moss (1872-1942). A West Point graduate and avid cyclist, he also held the Black enlisted men under his command in high regard. Moss set about looking for problems for which the bicycle was the solution, and within a month of his arrival at Fort Missoula, he had informal bicycle drills being practiced. Lt. Moss had plenty of ground to make up. While he had the distinction of being the youngest cadet to ever complete studies at West Point, he also had the dubious distinction of being the "goat" of the class. That is, he had graduated last in his class from the institution. As such, the Army assigned him to one of its lesser desirable and remote posts and in command of Black troops, which was sometimes considered an undesirable posting for white officers. A white southerner born in Louisiana, Moss's reports often reflected the times, but he also described the Black soldiers under his command as, "About as fine looking and well-disciplined lot as could be found anywhere in the United States Army."

Memorial Day Celebration At Purdum



Story & Pictures By Linda Teahon

The day started out cloudy, but then cleared off beautifully. Visitors came to decorate the graves of their loved ones at the Purdum cemetery Sunday, May 28.

A delicious meal was offered by the Purdum Ladies Auxiliary at the church and following was the memorial program hosted by Pastor Coral Parmenter. Hymns "O Beautiful for Spacious Skies" and "Faith of Our Fathers" were sung by the congregation and accompanied by Linn Baxter.

Kay Lynn Bestol delivered a most insightful talk about WW I and how Memorial Day came to be.

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Sandhills FFA Students Help With Museum Project



COURTESY PHOTO

Museum board members, Blaine County Farm Bureau members and the FFA students gather for a photo. Pictured in the front row are Sandhills Public School students, l-r: Ella Stithem, Shelby Schukei, Kora Winkelbauer, Cora Martindale, Kathie Martindale and Ross Martindale. Back row, l-r: Linda Teahon, Andrea Petersen-Smith, Michelle Valdez, Jim Roseberry, Vickie Webb, Libby Burk and Amy Schneidereit.

Monday evening, May 22nd Five students of the Sandhills High School FFA visited The Sandhills Heritage Museum in Dunning Monday evening, May 22. Others present were members of the museum board and Blaine County Farm Bureau.

The purpose was to have the FFA students design eight native grass plots for the museum grounds. They had a budget to work with compliments of Blaine County Farm Bureau. It didn't take long for the participants to come up with a plan.

Some items already on the grounds need to be moved and put in place then students could proceed.

A picnic supper was enjoyed by all that attended. It was a nice way to get to know each other.

Music From Around The World Summer Program

The program "MUSIC FROM AROUND THE WORLD" will be presented on Thursday, June 15, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. (CT) at the Thomas County Library. David Marsh is an experienced musician and presenter who has delighted Nebraska audiences for many years. Please join us for his program. The program is free to attend and is suitable for all ages.

Humanities Nebraska (HN) provides major funding for this program. HN receives support from the National Endowment for

Humanities, the Nebraska State Legislature, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and private

donations. The Central Plains Library System also sponsors this program.

HN

HUMANITIES
NEBRASKA



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Front page of Harper's Weekly.

Continued
Next Week