

AND THERE HE SAT, A HAPPY MAN, HIS DREAM COME TRUE

THE CABIN BOOK

THE STORY OF THE ROY AND ANNABELLE SMALTZ FAMILY
AT BLIND CHARLIE'S CORNER
USTICK TOWNSHIP, WHITESIDE COUNTY
ILLINOIS

THE CABIN BOOK

Put Together By
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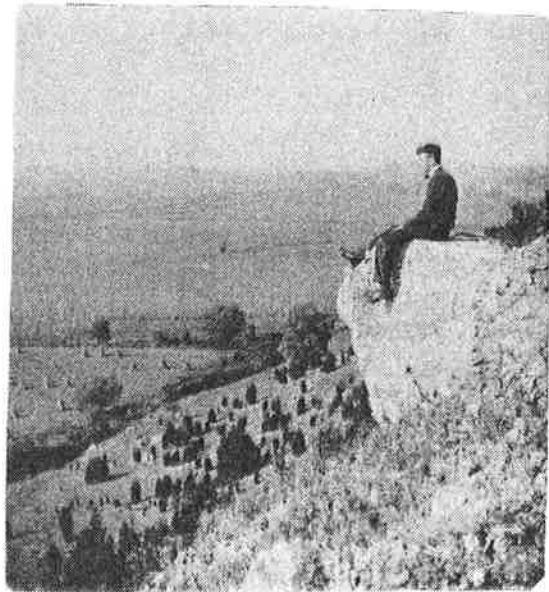
1419 N 21st St #4
Bismarck N D 58501

1991

HISTORY OF THE SITE

"The Bluffs" is a limestone ridge on the eastern edge of the old flood plain of the Mississippi River. It has outcroppings of limestone on partially eroded heights and extends intermittently the length of the river. The portion of "the Bluffs" in Ustick Township was always a place of interest for the Smaltzes. Hiking there on a Sunday afternoon was a favorite passtime when Roy, Jay and Ellsworth (Happy) lived on the farm at Union Grove when they were young men.

The 70 acres at the junction of Penrose, Union Grove and Smaltz Roads was acquired by Roy Smaltz in 1947 from Bert Hollinshead of Fulton. Twenty acres are in Section 19 and 50 acres are in Section 18 of Ustick Twp., Whiteside County. There is a drainage pond high on the hill which Roy called Lost Lake. It is not visible until one has topped the hill and walked back into the woods. Some folks say that it was larger in early days and may have been spring fed before changes were made in the drainage patterns in the flood plain below the hill. Presently it is fed by run-off from cultivated fields to the east of the property and is consequently filled with soil from the fields. The water, when there is any at all, is only inches deep.



Jay Smaltz, about
1907

The land had been used for pasture. There were no farm buildings. There were some large oak trees, hackberry, locust, a few large cedar trees and many small ones, gooseberry and hazel brush. The cedars were not plentiful there until the latter part of the 19th Century, according to Wayne Bastian in Whiteside County, 1968. There has been a gradual displacement of prairie grasses and flowers with undergrowth

of scrub varieties of trees, weeds, thistles, etc. In the days before the area was settled with homes, prairie fires kept down the underbrush and destroyed small trees before they could take over the land. A few large trees survived these prairie fires, but between them were wide spaces for the sun to encourage grasses for forage. The fires were caused by man's bonfires, by lightning and later by ash and cinders from railroad engines.

I remember that in the 1920s when our family drove from Union Grove to Fulton we would often see heavy smoke from fires, some intentional and some accidental, in the area of the bluffs and the flood plain. Occasionally one would see men with wet gunny sacks beating at the fires, but often they were left to burn themselves out. The flood plain of the Mississippi River was known locally as "The Cattails". It was swampy and wet, not cultivated as it is now. Ditching and tiling have reclaimed most of the land for corn and soy beans.

Pioneer History

Because of its proximity to the Mississippi River, this area was settled early. In the 1830s people began to come to farm. What is now Smaltz Road was a part of the main stagecoach thoroughfare connecting Albany, Fulton, Mt. Carroll and other river towns. From Whiteside County, Wayne Bastian, 1968:

"A very early route was the one laid out along the Mississippi River. It encountered fierce competition from the luxurious steamboats. The coach line traveled on the Rock Island-Galena Road which was usually called the Albany-Fulton road in Whiteside County. Various companies operated the carriers.

"Inasmuch as the carrying of mail was an important consideration the successful bidder for the postal contract was also the carrier of passengers. In July 1854, the contract was advertised.

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"The mail was delivered three times each week and M. O. Walker finally received the contract. After passing through Fulton and fording swamp the stage coach went east to what was called Blind Charlie's Corner in later years. Near the crossroads at the bluff was Oliver Baker's farm. It was designated officially as Ustick Post Office in 1854. The route extended north along the bluffs and then to Savanna". (Page 91 of reference)

Charlie Baker's home and store was the only building, as far as we know, ever lived in on the property until Roy built the cabin. In the 1950s Augie Fontenoy built a small house across from his father's farm on Smaltz road. It was a temporary arrangement and the house was moved. There is probably a well at the south end of the concrete remains of the foundation.

Lost Lake

Lost Lake is just a drainage pond and since the land which drains to the pond is cultivated, the water is heavy with silt and the depth of the "lake" is measured in inches. In 1950 or 1951 Roy had a bulldozer make two 8 foot deep channels in the dry lake bed. A 6'x30'x6' settling basin was placed east of the lake to catch the soil during heavy run-off. This helped keep the lake from filling up for several years. Bullheads were introduced and fishing was great. It was a favorite place for Roy and any children who came to visit. Many, now adults, claim they learned to fish "at Roy's" - but they liked the hot-dogs he cooked after the fishing even better!

Though the lake is often dry these recent years, even now after Spring thaw or heavy rains the ducks find it, and in summer the frogs set up an evening song.

Baker Cemetery

Located above Blind Charlie's Corner is a small cemetery named for the pioneer family, Oliver Baker who lived just west of the property.

Beginnings of the cemetery are not known but a legend has been passed along through the years that a child died during the Spring flood season and it was impossible to cross Otter Creek to get to Hollinshead Cemetery, a mile north. The tombstones indicate burials from 1848-1868, though there may be many missing stones and unmarked graves. In 1947 when Roy acquired the property there were 16 stones, mostly scattered with only two still standing, protected by the lilac bushes. One of the stones was stolen about 1954.

The area is described in the abstract giving measurements considerably larger than the present fenced-in area. Only two stones were standing in 1947. The scattered stones were gathered together and laid on the ground in the fenced area. One set stone (the base for a standing grave marker) was found in the ground fifty feet north of the fenced area indicating that the graves may cover much of the sloping area. This footage described in the abstract is considered a permanent cemetery. (See page 6)

Natural Wonders

The area north of the lake is largely untouched, used only for pasture. There is a large ditch running east and west through the property. To control the erosion CCC built a series of dams in the 1930s. Much of that work has now been washed away, but fallen trees have helped to slow erosion in later years. Beyond the ditch is a high bluff. In 1947 one could look out over the flood plain from Clinton to Savanna from this spot, but now cedars have grown profusely and blocked the view.

This rough area of the property has rich natural growth and beauty. There are Showy Orchis, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Poppy Mallow, Bluebells as well as Dutchmen's Britches and Violets. The Scarlet Tanager, a shy bird and rare, has been seen there. Indigo Buntings, Orioles, Rose-Breasted Grossbeaks are more common.

BAKER CEMETERY

Ustick Township, Whiteside Co.

Fulton, Illinois

Gravestones:

Eliza
Wife of Elias Sage
Died Sept 8, 1859
Age 32 years

Sarah J.
Daughter of M and A Pearson
Died September 9, 1861
Age 10 months, 21 days

Elizareth
Wife of H. Sage
Died September 5, 1848
Age 62 years

Jonathan C.
Son of A & M. A. Baker
Died September 13, 1860
Age 2 months

Asa Thomas
Died July 21, 1851
Aged 36 years

Charles E.
Son of W and N. E. Sage
Died July 9, 1858
Age 8 years, 7 days

Sarah J.
Consort of Asa Thomas
Died September 11, 1850
Age 39 years

Polly
Wife of O. I. Graves
Died March 29, 1849 or 1868
(unclear)

George B.
Son of B & E Sage
Died August 28, 1848
Age 3 years

Wm. H. Ackler
Died November 1859
Age 43 years, 5 months, 6 days

Catherine
Wife of Wm. Baker
Died March 22, 1868
Age 81 years, 5 months, 2 days

Arthur
Son of J & M Pearson
Died March 21, 1865
Age 1 month
Also infant daughter, Feb. 9, 18

"Weep not for me my children dear
To grieve it is in vain
Christ is my hope, you need not fear
We all shall meet again."

John L. Chambers
Died July 22, 1848
Age 36 years, 2 months, 10 days

Cory M. Baker
Daughter of (?) & M. Baker
Died January 18, 1863 (?)
Age 7 months

Eliza M.
Wife of S. J. Trefethen
Died December 29, 1854
Age 45 years, 2 months, 7 days

Thomas Baker
(This stone disappeared
between 1947 and 1949)
a child



* Obsolete word for spouse

Here, gathered in this quiet spot, apart,
Lie artist, pioneer, and weary heart;
Here, young and old his journey's end must find -
That end, which seems so grim, but yet is kind,
For, done with life, and all its changing ills,
The vast, enduring spirit of the hills
Enfolds these dead who rest in beauty here,
Forever free from sorrow, pain and fear.
Sleep sweetly here, beneath the open sky,
The past forget, while day and night drift by;
Soft bosomed in the mighty heart of earth,
To feel, with each recurring Spring, new birth.
With sun and wind and rain may you be one,
And gladly may you rest, your labor done.

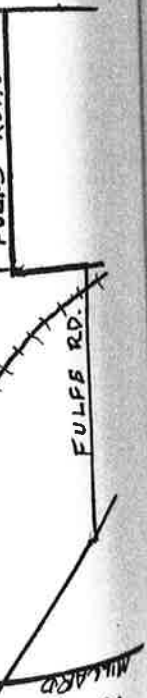
- Peggy James

Roy Smaltz selected this poem,
printed in Arizona Highways,
for the plaque at the cemetery.

FAMILY TOUR OF USTICK TOWNSHIP

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- #1, #2 - Location of Blind Charlie's Corner and site of Blind Charlie's store and home.
- #3 - Site of the Ustick Post Office, 1854.
- #4 - Site of temporary residence of August Fontenoy in the 1950s. Later removed.
- #5 - Hollinshead Cemetery on the bluff.
- #6 - Otter Creek
- #7 - Now a residence, formerly the Spring Valley Store. Before that a church. Across the corner, Spring Valley School, now a residence. Annabelle Smaltz taught here. Behind the store a small cemetery on the hillside.

Annabelle taught at Spring Valley School about 1903 and boarded with Mr and Mrs Harlow Yates who operated the store across the road. She drove a horse and buggy the 14 miles to Round Grove on some weekends. The red clay hills had not been modified by modern road-making equipment and there were no gravel or black-top surfaces. It was a hard trip to go home for a holiday or a weekend.

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- #8 - Site of the Creamery which was in operation around the turn of the century.
- #9 - Currently the Smit home, was the parsonage for the Spring Valley Presbyterian Church, quite likely built by Roy's father, Jacob in the early 1870s - diary mentions he worked on it.
- #10 - Cemetery where Mathias Smaltz, brother of Jacob is buried. In 1871 he went to Iowa to look at land, drank contaminated water and came home to die of typhoid fever. He was 21.
- #11 - Spring Valley Church (Presbyterian), now an Antique Shop. Jacob Smaltz walked across the fields to attend the church as a young man. His diaries contain many comments about the stove smoking, the Scots celebrating Bobby Burns' birthday overmuch, as well as comments on the sermons. Also when he lived on the Irion place when first married, some of the conservative

parishioners hauled the newly purchased organ out of the church one night and burned it on his land (east of the church). He found the keys the next morning in the ashes.

#13 - Site of the farm buildings where Jacob and Elizabeth Smaltz began farming. (No buildings there now)

#12 - Site of the Big Spring

#14 - The Smaltz Homestead where the family came from Ohio in 1865 to clear land and locate. Jakob and Anna Fichter Smaltz were parents of Jacob, Mathias, Christina, Dorothea, Mary, George, Louisa and Wilhelm. John and Anna died in infancy.

#15 - Roy Smaltz used to help with the farming at his grandfather's farm when he was a teenager. One day he was hauling grain and as he drove out of the barnyard and into the road he passed the orchard and was suddenly aware of how good an apple would taste as he drove to the next farm. He stopped the team and hurried through the fence to the apples. Just as he was climbing back over the fence the team started to move, slowly at first, but picking up speed as he ran toward the wagon. He almost touched the back of the wagon, but not quite. By this time the horses were going at a good clip and they continued, turned south on Creamery Road and went wildly until they tangled themselves in a ditch and a fence. They tore up the harness and wrecked the hitch on the wagon.

It was not easy to explain to his elders. Is it ever?

#16 - Roy liked to tell about going out with Lena Irion Burritt and taking her home with the horse and buggy. Her father kept a gaggle of geese and when you drove into the farmyard the geese would rise and honk and make a terrible racket and not stop until he left, which was quite soon. He figured they'd got rid of the geese by the time Walt Burritt came along.

#17 - Site of the Robertson School, now a residence, built by Jacob Smaltz about 1876.

#18 - Site of Ustick Store and Blacksmith Shop in late 1800s. Ustick Post Office was there until 1902.

- #19 - Summit Hill Cemetery, identifiable by lilacs at the top of the hill. John Smaltz, infant son of Jakob and Anna Smaltz, buried here in 1865.
- #20 - Ustick Town Hall where voting takes place.
- #21 - Aunt Cora and I camped out here in 1947. We arrived at the Hamilton's farm by break-in cart pulled by Goldy, the horse. Stayed overnight and returned to Morrison the next day.
- #22 - Jacob and Elizabeth Smaltz moved from #25 to this farm which they called "the Mahaney Place". Jay and Cora were born there.
- #23 - Site of the Gridley School which they attended.
- #24 - Site of the Red Brick Church (Mennonite)
- #25 - Farm where Roy Smaltz and sister, Phoebe were born. Phoebe died age 15 of consumption. Lena was born at #13 farm. Hap was born at Mead place in Mt. Pleasant Twp.
- #26 - Home of Joseph Jackson Gallentine and Phoebe Davis Gallentine, parents of Elizabeth Gallentine Smaltz.