



Serving the
South Loup River Valley

The Arnold Sentinel

CUSTER COUNTY, ARNOLD, NEBRASKA 69120

(USPS 032480)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2016

VOLUME 99, NUMBER 32

They've a Story to Tell

11th in a Series on Arnold's
"Young at Heart"
Residents

By Darlene Rimpley

She's 92 years young, and still mows her own lawn, scoops snow, plants and tends a garden, and freezes produce every year. She's an Arnolite, born and raised, and lives in her own home by herself.

Virginia Brown was born on October 21, 1923, to Earl and Leila Brown east of Arnold in what is commonly known as the Fred Vogel place. As was common in those days, they moved often, so Virginia and her siblings, Robert, Darlene and Anna Mae, lived in several different homes.

When Virginia was in third grade, and although they still lived in the country, the children started school in town. She got the privilege of riding behind her brother, Robert, on his horse, one she didn't really enjoy.

Virginia graduated from Arnold High in 1942, and shortly after graduation she began going with a local boy, Elmer "Bub" Geiser. They were married on October 3, 1943, at the United Methodist Church, with their only guests, and their attendants, both sets of parents.

Their first home was a bunkhouse that sat on school lease land. No bathroom, no running water, no electricity; they lived in style. One time a skunk got under the bunkhouse, and advice from brother-in-law Bing Wilson was not to shoot it. So very ingeniously, they pushed a cage under the house, and when the skunk went into it, they used one of the "chicken catchers" that is familiar to us older residents, pulled the cage out and took it away to release the



Virginia and Elmer "Bub" Geiser pictured at a celebration of their 60th wedding anniversary. Virginia worked by Elmer's side on the farm, while raising their five children. (Courtesy photo)

skunk.

The two of them did all of the chores that went with the ranch that Bub's parents owned.

Virginia's parents, Earl and Leila, had moved to Grand Island to help out with the war effort by working at the Cornhusker Ordnance Plant that was built there by the Army. Leila worked in the cafeteria and Earl worked in Bldg. 10.

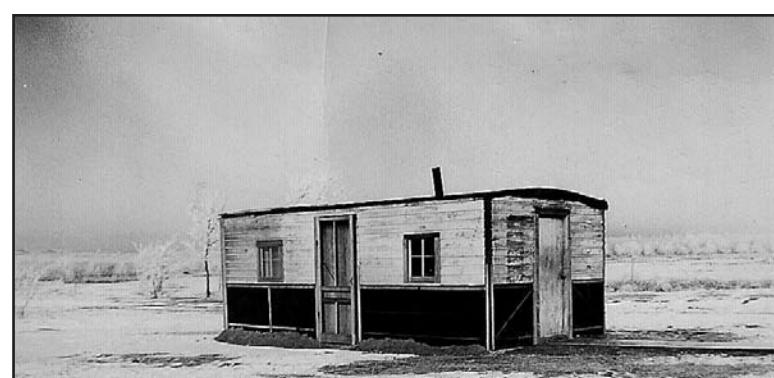
I want to include some of the history of the Cornhusker Ordnance Plant, because it will bring back memories to many of us and let others know of its existence.

The Grand Island plant was one of 60 built by the Army, and was probably the largest. At peak employment there were 4,229 people working there on three shifts. Wages of 70 to 80 cents per hour were some of the best in the state.

Bldg. 10 was a three-story structure built out of concrete and cement blocks. On the top floor they mixed TNT and other ingredients in huge, hot vats, and then the mixture was piped down to the main floor where it was poured into bomb and shell casings. TNT was a toxic, dangerous substance to be working with. This was where Earl worked.

On May 25, 1945, Bldg. 10 exploded, sending the roof into the air, estimated at approximately 1,000 feet and rained down in chunks. The water and steam pipes were broken, spewing water and steam all over. Nine workers were killed in the explosion, including Virginia's dad, Earl.

Upon hearing the news of the accident, Bub and Virginia, Robert and his wife, Ardis, and Anna Mae and Bing Wilson went to Grand Island. On the way home, a storm came up



This photo shows the bunk house that Virginia and Elmer called home early in their marriage. Handwritten on the back of the photo are the words: "Home - Bunk House. Snow & a heavy frost on January 1944."

and the rain came down in torrents. The country roads were impassable, so they would go to another location to see if they could get by and eventually ended up west of Arnold about seven miles. At one time, they had to be pulled across a stream that was more like a rushing river by a team of horses.

Bub was inducted into the Army in September of 1945, and went for basic training to Camp Fann at Tyler, Texas. After a short time, they decided that Virginia should join him in Tyler. So Virginia, who had never been out of the state of Nebraska, boarded a train at North Platte and eventually reached Tyler, to find no Bub to meet her. They did make connections, and she rented a small "apartment" in Tyler. Bub would come into town to see her as often as he could.

One time, he came to see her when he had orders not to leave base, but knew he could get back before they knew he was gone. He and several others boarded the bus to go back to base, but they ran into an accident on the way there, were late getting back and were discovered! Punishment was loading ammunition belts with the ammo, pushing the bullets in one at a time.

Virginia was back in Arnold by Christmas time, and Bub was sent to Baltimore for further training, and then to Germany. He was discharged in 1947 to return home and the couple went back to bunkhouse living.

They purchased the farm that belonged to David Simms and built a basement, probably a 30'x60', and with a family of five children, lived there until

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"The Roan Horse"

When Virginia was a little younger, she and Robert had ridden his roan horse to take water out to her dad, who was discing in the field. When Robert got off, he left Virginia sitting on the horse. Suddenly the horse gave a great shudder, and Virginia slid off, hitting one of the newly sharpened disc blades. It cut a great gash down her leg from knee to ankle. Her mother thought the gash would need stitches, so they took her in to town to Dr. Burnham's office. The doctor happened to be gone, but his wife, who was a registered nurse, was there, and she said, "No, it doesn't need stitches, we'll just hold it together with tape." She proceeded to put adhesive tape to cover the entire gash. Virginia still remembers the pain when they took the tape off.

Bills Affecting Firefighters, EMTs in Legislature

NSVFA President Dell Cerny Reports One Advances



Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association (NSVFA) President Dell Cerny of Arnold (left) had the privilege of introducing Governor Pete Ricketts (right) at the recent legislative appreciation banquet hosted by two Nebraska fire associations. (Courtesy photo)

Each year the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters (NSVFA) and Nebraska Fire Chiefs associations host a legislative appreciation breakfast for Nebraska's state senators when they go into session. This year's breakfast was held on January 19 at Lincoln. NSVFA President Dell Cerny of Arnold was in attendance, and said some important bills relating to rural EMS personnel and firefighters were discussed.

"It's our opportunity to provide something for our senators, get to know them, and learn about the bills," said Cerny.

The NSVFA has a lobbyist who presents the bills, and Cerny said the three bills presented all look promising. Four senators introduce the bills, including senator Al Davis, who is on the committee.

The first bill, LB 136, prohibits flying lanterns, and would make the sale, possession and use of these type of devices a Class V misdemeanor. The bill advanced.

"The advancement of the flying lanterns bill tickled us pink," said Cerny, who described the lanterns as a miniature hot air balloon made of tissue-like paper that holds a flammable liquid. Once the lantern is in the air, it's destiny is determined by the wind.

"Here we basically have a candle floating in the wind," he said. "In Nebraska, quite a few trees and a couple of houses have caught fire because of these lanterns. We tried to get them banned last year, classifying them as fireworks, but we had to change the wording to get it into the legislature this year. We were all tickled pink that the bill advanced."

LB 886, known as the Volunteer Emergency Responders Incentive Act, and LB952, if advanced and passed, will be

critical in the future to recruit and maintain the services of volunteer EMTs, and give rural communities a voice.

Cerny explained that EMTs used to be taught through the Nebraska Fire Marshal's training division and only 80 training hours were required. The Department of Health and Human Services then took over, and now EMTs take their training at community colleges.

Over the years, the number of training hours has increased to up to 180 hours. Fire departments pay for the training and now transportation, since the training isn't local as it used to be.

Another concern is that now, EMTs must pass the National Registry Test so it can be determined how much the student has retained. Cerny said that would be fine, but the student has to wait two to three months to take the test.

"If they allowed the test to be taken within one or two weeks, it would be fine," he said. "After all that time of waiting, they go in and flunk, and have to start training all over again. You're only going to retain so much. Experience is your best teacher."

Cerny said that the associations are looking for in the passage of this bill is dropping the number of training hours to no more than 140 or 150 hours, and to be able to take the registry test within a couple of weeks. They are also trying to get more voice in the Department of Health.

"There's maybe three representatives on the board from Omaha, two from Lincoln and one from out-state," he said. "We're letting all of the people from Omaha and Lincoln make the decisions. We want more (board members) from out-state, so the board knows more

about what is happening in the small communities.

"We're looking at retaining more EMTs and firefighters. Small communities are losing them. More and more people are working out of town, and there's no one to answer the call."

Cerny said all three bills are pretty high in the legislature to becoming law. Maybe not this year, but next.

"Senator Matt Williams is not on the committee, but I spoke with him quite a bit, and he is very in favor of our bills," said Cerny.

The two fire associations have achieved a lot in the past few years, Cerny said.

Due to the big fires in the state in 2012, the fire associations got legislation started that same year in getting a multi-state compact signed that allows firefighters to continue fighting fires across state lines, at that

state's expense. Before that bill, firefighters would stop at the state line due to the expense. Through a lot of negotiating through the compact, Nebraska now has an air water tanker stationed in Chadron.

"Now if we get any big fires, we can call the water tanker to fight from the air. We used to have to be in jeopardy to get that type of service," said Cerny.

College Scholarships Helping Recruit Young EMTs and Firefighters

Another avenue that might encourage more of the younger generation to become EMTs or firefighters is a scholarship program provided by a \$1.6 million government SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant.

Cerny explained that any graduating student can qualify for a \$4,400.00 yearly scholarship if, after receiving their degree, they go back to any Nebraska community and serve on a volunteer fire department.

Students apply for the scholarship on a year-to-year basis, agreeing to actively serve two years for every one year of receiving the scholarship.

"Take Arnold, for example," said Cerny. "We had 11 fire calls and 34 ambulance calls last year. Divide that up by 365 days. How much did you work for that \$4,400.00? It's pretty cheap. That's how I look at it."

Not all of the grant goes to scholarships. Advertising and orientation expenses for students is also paid out from the grant proceeds. Cerny said the scholarship program is working, with most of the money spent. The grant was received four years ago, and the NSVFA will be applying for another grant to continue this important program.

For more information on the scholarship program, visit the NSVFA website.