

## **Rief's Hall**

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I wrote this in April 2007 with slight revisions in April 2016 prior to porting it to my website.

Rief's hall, standing from around 1887 to around 1927, was located in Section 6 of Hazel Dell Township about 10 miles north of Council Bluffs, Iowa on the road between Crescent and Honey Creek. During its lifetime, it was used as a dance hall, country store, and post office.

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## **Rief's Hall**

### **To find the Rief's hall site:**

Take the old highway from Council Bluffs up North Broadway through Crescent. (When first paved in 1927, this highway was US 30A, the Lincoln Highway alternate route. Later it became Iowa 183. In 2007 I believe it is maintained by Pottawattamie County and known as the Old Lincoln Highway.) About three miles past downtown Crescent, just after descending into the Pigeon Creek bottom you'll pass the unmarked location of the old flour mill run for many years by members of the Reel, Paris, and Wager families. Shortly after you cross Pigeon Creek, the highway tends to the left and county road L36 goes off to the right. Rief's hall was on the right hand side at this intersection, between L36 and Pigeon Creek.

### **What I know of Rief's hall:**

Rief's hall was a two-story building, 46 by 60 feet with additions, built by Sievert Rief Sr. about 1887 and destroyed by a windstorm around 1927. Dances were held on the second floor. During much of its lifetime, Rief's hall also contained a general store and post office. I have always assumed the store and post office were on the first floor of Rief's hall, that the storekeeper ran the post office, and that there were living facilities for the storekeeper on the first floor, perhaps in the addition.

Fragmentary recollections of Rief's hall: Evelyn Sherbondy remembers that her parents Henry and Ellen Larsen went dancing at Rief's Hall. Derald Blois has heard that in the winter time young people such as Edwin Driver's siblings would sometimes skate down North Pigeon Creek and Pigeon Creek to Rief's hall. Orville Larsen has heard that at one time there was a racetrack, presumably for horses, near Rief's hall. The track may have been taken when Pigeon Creek was straightened between 1902 and 1913.

I know of the following storekeepers at Rief's hall: the builder, Sievert Rief Sr.; his son-in-law William Southern; and the last owner Minnie Laveck.

## **Sievert Rief Sr. and His Family**

### **Sievert Rief Sr.:**

Sievert Rief Sr. was born in 1840 in Erfde, Schleswig, now part of Germany to Sievert Rief and Wiebke Schrum. He emigrated about 1864. Sievert first lived in Chicago, and came to northwestern Hazel Dell Township about 1868. He started out cutting wood and doing small-scale farming. With money made from cutting wood, and with the support of Perry Reel, a nearby neighbor, Sievert Rief began buying groceries in Council Bluffs and reselling them to farmers in the area. Starting from 40 acres bought before 1870, Sievert Rief became a large landowner, eventually owning around 800 acres in Hazel Dell, Rockford, and Crescent Townships.

Sievert Rief Sr.'s first wife was Caroline Magdalena "Lena" Witt, whom he probably married in Chicago. She was a sister of the Witt brothers who settled in Boomer Township several miles further north and northeast of Sievert. Sievert and Lena had nine children.

After Lena's death, Sievert married his first cousin Emma Rief (marrying cousins was common in those days). Sievert and Emma had five children.

All 14 of Sievert's children lived to adulthood. Sievert and Emma are buried in Walnut Hill Cemetery in Council Bluffs. Lena is buried in Reels Cemetery in southwest Boomer Township.

I don't know the location of Sievert's first residences in Pottawattamie County.

Around 1900 Sievert built a house on his farm about a half mile northwest of Rief's hall. Sievert's daughter and son-in-law Emma and August "Gus" Bonnes lived in this house for many years. In 1960 Orville Larsen bought forty acres of Sievert's former holdings containing this house from Helen Hawes, the widow of Wayne Hawes. Orville lived there until 1996. In 1969 Orville tore down Sievert's house and built a new house where Orville's son now lives. Orville's daughter lives in a second house which Orville built on the property. Orville has a nice photograph of Sievert's old house taken before Orville tore it down.

Around 1906, Sievert moved to one of his farms just southeast of Honey Creek. His grandson Ralph Hohneke still lives on this Honey Creek farm. There is a photograph of a Sievert Rief family reunion taken in front of this house.

Between 1915 and 1918 Sievert and Emma and their four daughters moved to Council Bluffs, where Sievert died early in 1919. After Sievert's death, his widow continued to live in their house at 315 North 7<sup>th</sup> St. until her accidental death at home in 1930.

### **Sievert Rief Sr.'s 14 children:**

- Wiebke Christine "Phoebe" m. Lars Jensen; lived in Boomer Township & Council Bluffs.
- Julia Margaret "Maggie" married William Southern; lived in Iowa & Nebraska.  
William Southern was a farmer who is said to have run the store at Rief's hall from 1898 to 1902. In 1907, William Southern had a store at Honey Creek, and later he returned to farming, but in Clay Township in Harrison County.
- Sievert Jr. married Minnie Page; lived in Crescent Township & Council Bluffs.
- Lena Carolina married Albert Page; lived in Boomer Township; died at age 41 in 1916.
- Joseph married Rosie; lived in Kansas.
- Perry married Blanche; lived in Nebraska, Idaho & Washington.
- Emma married Gus Bonnes; lived in NW Hazel Dell Township.
- George Peter married Daisy Aird; lived in Dawes Co., NE.
- Dora married Charles Olsen; lived in Boomer, Rockford & Neola townships.
- Henry Hans married Minnie Wehrli; lived in Council Bluffs.
- Mary Anna married Otto Hohnke; lived in southeastern Rockford Township.
- Olga married Ray Emerine; lived in Council Bluffs.
- Minnie married Carl Rief; lived in the Grand Island / Dannebrog, NE area.
- Effie married Bill Schaupdach; lived in Dannebrog, NE.

### **Sievert Rief Sr.'s brothers:**

Apparently all five of Sievert Rief's brothers immigrated to northwestern Pottawattamie County.

- Sievert's brother Juergen, also known as John, lived for many years in northeastern Crescent Township. His farm straddled the road about a mile and a half north of Crescent. He married Christina Vogt, and after her death Antonia Edger. He had eight children who survived to maturity, all of whom married. He still has descendants in the area.
- Sievert's brother Peter briefly lived near Juergen, and then moved to the Council Bluffs area.
- Sievert's brother Johann probably never married and died young.
- Sievert's brother Hans lived in the Underwood area until moving to Los Angeles Co., California between 1900 and 1905. He had five children, but apparently none lived to maturity.
- Sievert's brother Claus probably never married and died young.

**Sievert Rief Sr.'s uncles:**

Two of Sievert Rief's uncles figure into the early history of northwestern Pottawattamie County:

- Hans Rief immigrated to Grand Island, Nebraska about 1869. I know of eight children, all of whom also immigrated to the Grand Island area. His daughter Minnie was Sievert Rief Sr.'s second wife.
- Peter Rief remained in Germany but his two sons listed below immigrated to Hazel Dell Township.

**Sievert Rief Sr.'s cousins:**

- Sievert's first cousin Peter lived for many years in northwestern Hazel Dell Township about a mile and a half south of Rief's hall. He married the widow Sophia (Mandeklo) Bracker. He raised her two sons and they had four children of their own. Don Thompson from Silver City is a great grandson.
- Sievert's first cousin Jacob was a bachelor farmer in Hazel Dell Township who probably lived near his brother Peter.

Several individuals are working on the history of the Rief family, including Ken Jensen of Texas, a great-grandson of Sievert Rief Sr. through his youngest child Effie, and Mark Hadlund, a great great grandson of Juergen Rief.

## **Minnie Laveck**

Minnie McNelly and her first husband Ovela Laveck had six daughters (Bessie, Nell, Elva, Lyal, Geraldine, and Leona). Sometime between 1910 and 1915, Minnie and Ovela divorced, Minnie bought a parcel of land containing Rief's hall, and Minnie moved to the hall site with her six daughters.

In the 1920 census, Minnie is listed as a storekeeper, and in the 1930 census as a farmer. After Rief's hall was destroyed around 1927, Minnie built a small house and continued to live in Reels. Between 1920 and 1924 she married a Mr. Bauer, and between 1925 and 1930 they were divorced. Aunt Ethel Torneten, who from 1930 to 1934 taught at the country school in whose district Reels was located, Hazel Dell #3, remembers two of Minnie Laveck's grandchildren attending her school for a time.

From 1949 to 1951, Derald and Gladys Blois lived in a small house back in the field about a mile north of the Rief's hall site. Derald remembers Minnie driving a jeep. She milked about 25 Holstein cows with the help of John Murphy. (John Murphy owned 38 acres of land northwest of the Rief's hall site in Rockford Township Sec. 36. This may have been where Minnie kept her cows. Later Lloyd Danielsen bought this land.)

In 2007, Elmer Muell lives at the Rief's hall site.

## **The Reel Family**

William A. Reel came from Reelsville, Putnam County, Indiana in the early 1850s and ran a flour mill along Pigeon Creek south of the Rief's hall site (they may have bought the Benson Mill, which was active before the bulk of LDS people living in the area moved to Utah.). William died in 1860 leaving his widow and several children, including his son Perry, in the area. (William Reel's brother Henry settled in the Logan area and his nephew John Allen Reel in the Missouri Valley area.)

Perry Reel's farm appears to have been across the Crescent-Honey Creek road from Sievert's farm. Perry Reel was away in Council Bluffs serving as county sheriff or treasurer for twelve years between 1867 and 1881. He died in 1889 at age 51. Long before his widow, Millie, died in 1935, Perry Reel's farm had been sold to Arthur Price. (Perry Reel's son, Clay D. Reel, lived on the old Acton farm in Boomer Township before Julius Schroder bought it.)

The flour mill along Pigeon Creek evidently was in operation for a long time. In addition to the Reel family, members of the Wager family and the Paris family were involved in its operation.

Evidently Perry Reel was held in high esteem both by the general community, and by the Rief family. For instance, Sievert Rief Sr. had a son and a grandson each named Perry.

The post office in Rief's hall was called "Reels", presumably in honor of Perry Reel. The post office location is marked on Pottawattamie County plat books from 1885 through 1919, even though by 1919 the post office was long closed.

The Reels post office was in operation from 1884 to 1904. After looking at the 1885 plat book, I suspect that it was first located on the Perry Reel farm and moved down the road to Rief's hall after Rief's hall was built around 1887. The post office probably closed because of the advent of rural free delivery mail service in the area. (The Pigeon post office in central Boomer Township had closed in 1902.)

The Reel family also put their name on an early small cemetery on a hilltop in southwestern Boomer Township about a mile north of Rief's hall. Many members of the extended Rief family are buried on the Reel's Cemetery.

## **Peter and Rachel Peterson**

From 1879 to 1884, before the Reels post office opened, Peter and Rachel Peterson had a post office at their farm in Boomer Township Section 31 about a mile northeast of the Rief's hall site. For reasons I don't understand, Peter Peterson's post office was called Harrison.

Peter Peterson was a Danish immigrant who had worked in mining in California in the 1850s. He was perhaps the first Danish settler in northwestern Pottawattamie County, around 1863. He married his housekeeper, the Civil War widow Rachel (Cady) Shadden.

About 1912, Peter and Rachel Peterson's house was burned by an agent of the outlaw Ernest Bush, or possibly by Ernest Bush himself. The arsonist first stopped at Rief's hall to ask directions to Peter Peterson's house. He was directed to the wrong house; he wanted to burn the house of Peter T. and Karen Petersen, who lived in Boomer Township Section 30 two and a half miles northwest of Rief's hall. Unfortunately the arsonist later rectified his mistake and also burned Peter T. Petersen's house.

Peter and Rachel Peterson's farm later became the Grossmann place. Peter T. Petersen was the father of my late uncle, Victor Petersen. The replacements houses built around 1913 still stand, on the former Peterson and Petersen farms.



## **Sources for the *Rief's Hall* report**

- Thanks to Franklin Hemmingsen, Derald Blois, Orville Larsen, and Ken Jensen for their assistance.
- The 1891 Lewis Biographical History of Pottawattamie County contains a biography of Clay D. Reel, the son of Perry Reel. The 1907 Field History of Pottawattamie County contains biographies of Sievert Rief Sr., his brother Peter Rief, and his son-in-law William Southern.
- Orville Larsen had written about the history of the Rief's hall area.
- Ken Jensen has a painting which we believe is of Rief's hall. Robert Christiansen has a copy.
- Franklin Hemmingsen, born in 1913, was the only known living person who might have remembered Rief's hall. A relative of his (maybe his niece Diane) may have a photograph of Rief's hall.
- I have made heavy use of the United States and Iowa censuses, which are available through ancestry.com, and of Rief family trees in ancestry.com and provided by Ken Jensen.
- I have used Pottawattamie County plat books for 1885, 1902, 1913, 1919, 1939, and 1967.

### **April 2007:**

- I sent copies of the preliminary Rief's hall document to Mary Ann Burke for her cousin, to Derald Blois, to Orville Larsen, to Ken Jensen, and to Elmer Muell.