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# **The Burr Family Broom Factory**

**Chapter I..... Early Broom Factory's in Clay County**

**Chapter II. .... Merrick S. Burr Broom Manufacturing**

**Chapter III. .... Burr Brothers Broom Manufacturing.**

**Chapter IV. .... William S. Burr, Third Generation**

**Chapter V. .... End of a Historic Broom Factory.**

**Chapter VI. .... Memories from Roger McCambridge.**

**Chapter VII. .... Obituaries and g\Genealogy**

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**Chapter VIII. .... History of the Burr Broom Factory.**

**Chapter IX. .... Survey of the Brick Burr Broom Factory.**

## **Introduction**

**In the early days of homesteading in Clay County, South Dakota, important needs were very scarce. This is the history about one simple item that was not readily available in the local stores. It could be ordered and shipped by steamboat coming up the Missouri River, which would take considerable time. There were many steamboats coming up the Missouri River, but to get an order for the next steamboat could take a long time to get an order down the river and get the product on the next steamboat coming up river, which could be a month or longer.**

**Merrick S. Burr homesteaded about 1-1/2 miles north of present day Vermillion, South Dakota, in 1865. This site is now 2309 North University Road, South Dakota. He was a broom maker and he could see the need for the simple household product. Brooms were becoming available at the local stores in Vermillion, but at a very expensive price. He planted broomcorn and started manufacturing brooms in the fall after the broom corn was mature and ready to be converted into brooms. Local homesteaders and early residents Vermillion were only too anxious to buy very well made brooms at a reasonable price.**

**Broomcorn is a type of sorghum. It produces heads of fibrous seed branches that are up to 36 inches long. It is used to make brooms and whisks brooms. It thought to has originated in Africa, spread to Europe in the dark ages and introduced by Ben Franklin to the United States in the early 1700's.**

**A few other people also saw this opportunity and tried to produce brooms, but they would only last a few years. The Burr Broom Factory grew into a large producer of brooms. They produced warehouse brooms, household brooms, children brooms and whisk brooms. There were different sizes of the first two brooms. They sold retail locally and wholesale in surrounding towns. They also sold wholesale to Sioux City, Iowa and Sioux Falls, So. Dak., where larger broom factories were producing even larger numbers of brooms. However the Burr brooms were of the quality that would keep stores and wholesalers ordering larger amounts and more often. The rest of this story lasted for three generations and just over 100 years.**

## **Chapter I.**

### **The Early Broom Factories in Clay County**

**The first reference to broom making in Vermillion appeared in the Dakota Republican in October, 1870 in the form of an advertisement by B. F. Lee, announcing he was able to fill orders on short notice. His home on the bluff provided space for the “factory.” The following summer he disposed of his property and moved away. This is the only instance that has come to light when brooms were entirely made on a custom basis. Apparently, little broomcorn was grown in Clay County at the time. All this was to change within the next few years as more land went into production of broom corn and the population increased.**

**According to the Clay County Register, R. J. Stanley opened a broom factory in December 1875 in the brewery building that had been left in an unfinished state two years earlier by J. W. Crawford in the ravine a short distance north of the log schoolhouse, on what is South Dakota Street now. Two months earlier, the newspaper had reported that Stanley, who had homesteaded in Riverside Township in 1869, was raising a large crop of the raw product and contemplated starting a factory in Vermillion. The following May he was, reportedly, still turning out fifteen dozen each day from the raw material raised on his Riverside Township homestead. The project was apparently in operation for only a season. I**

**During the summer of 1876 – as reported by the Dakota Republican - Silas Kidder was raising forty acres of broomcorn on his farm several miles north of Vermillion. This was followed a few months later with news that he had set up a factory in some building near the railway depot where he was converting his crop into brooms, some of them intended for the Black Hills trade. According to the Vermillion Standard, he left for the Black Hills, accompanied by George Porter, during the last week of March, 1877 with a wagonload of local products that included butter and eggs. II**

**M. E. Spooner, who operated a farm near Burbank, was, likewise, engaged in the broom making business from the fall of 1878 to the spring 1880. According to advertisements appearing in the Vermillion Standard, he was manufacturing all the different kinds of brooms in a factory located on Broadway opposite of the St. Nicholas Hotel. According to a Standard news item on March 6, 1880, he had disposed of his entire output and returned to his new home on the James River.**

*I- Russell J. Stanley farm legal - NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Nw  $\frac{1}{4}$ , section 14, Riverside Twp and SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of SW  $\frac{1}{4}$ , section 11, Riverside Twp. Both in Clay County, So. Dak.*

*From - 1884 homesteader map of Clay County, So. Dak.*

*II - Silas Kidder farm legal - SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 4, Vermillion Twp, Clay County, So. Dak.*

*From - 1884 homesteader map of Clay County, So. Dak.*

## **Chapter II.**

### **Merrick S. Burr Broom Manufacturing**

**Merrick S. Burr, who homesteaded in Clay County in 1865, began to make brooms during the late 1870's, sharing the market with other individuals who, from time to time, carried on small-scale operations for local trade, raising their own raw material. The Burr broom factory saw it's hey day during this period. During this period and forward Merrick S. Burr was growing and processing broomcorn, and manufacturing brooms. However, unlike the other broom manufacturing competitors, who were very temporary. The Burr broom was destined to continue manufacturing brooms through three generations, spanning the years from the middle 1870's to the early 1980's.**

**The second generation of the Burr family was represented by William S. Burr, although a brother Newton was at times associated with him. By 1900 the Burr family had expanded operations sufficiently to turn out as many as ten dozen brooms a day during certain periods of the year, selling most of the product to a Sioux City jobber, "a wholesaler". Although this rate of production continued only a few years, The Burr family remained in business through three generations. During the busiest years much of the broom corn was imported from Illinois and Oklahoma, supplementing the product grown locally. Although broomcorn production increased appreciably during the 1890's, the Burr family remained the only grower within Clay County to fashion from it a household commodity of commerce.**

**The broomcorn crop found a ready market within the general area that included Sioux Falls and Sioux City where broom making establishments were of sufficient size to be classified as factories by the federal census of 1890. This also included a firm at Parker. The largest broom factory in the state at the time was maintained at Sioux Falls by the Kuh Brothers, who were making twelve different kinds of brooms and whisks, and supplying the greater part of the products used in the neighboring territory.**

Enough broomcorn was grown in the northwestern part of Clay County to warrant the use of a mechanical device at a Wakonda elevator to scrape the seed from the stalks. The Monitor on October 5, 1900 described operations at the Morfield elevator, whereby a force of men were removing the seed through the use of a wooden cylinder constructed with projecting nails and made to revolve by means of motive power by a horse. Broom corn at the time was commanding a value of \$75 a ton – a stimulus to production. Quite a few farmers were devoting as many as ten acres to the crop.

The Vermillion Broom Factory was launched during the fall of 1885 on the Burr farm by a 23-year old son- Newton P. Burr. With an increase in production and the procurement of new machinery during the fall of 1886, enough brooms could now be made to serve both the local and outside markets. This included shipments to the territorial penitentiary at Sioux Falls. H. H. Hurst, who was associated with Burr at the time, also delivered a large consignment to a Sioux City retailer during January 1887. An advertisement in the Dakota Republican on November 4, 1886 and repeated for several months – one of the few instances the Burr firm resorted to newspaper advertising – called attention to N. P. Burr as a manufacturer of brooms and brushes who gave prompt attention to all mail orders.

*The History of Clay County By Herbert S. Schell*  
*Copyright – Clay County Historical Society - 1976*

## **Chapter III.**

### **Burr Brothers Broom Manufacturing**

The broom factory was so successful that by the end of the decade, Merrick Burr, its owner, was seriously considering the advisability of moving it into the town. Following the death of the elder Burr in January, 1892, the broom works were continued under a partnership formed by Newton with his brother William S. Burr who was carrying on the farming operations.

Despite competition from other small establishments in the area, including one at Beresford, as well as larger commercial operations in Sioux Falls and Sioux City, The firm of Burr Brothers succeeded in building up an extensive market for its products. A two-story brick building, erected during the summer of 1895, provided the room for additional equipment procured at the time. With nearly thirty acres devoted to the crop in some years and a yield of over seven tons of the raw material as in 1897. The firm was enabled to expand its business appreciably. At the height of the season during the winter months, it generally employed a crew of five men.

In the manufacturing process, it was necessary to soak the stiff broom straw first in boiling water for some time and then later place it in a boiling mixture containing a green aniline dye. These were the preliminaries to an intricate process, which, while not consuming an undue amount of time, nevertheless required expertness in placing the straw onto wooden handles and fashioning it into a finished product. The broom was then trimmed and otherwise readied for the market.

At the turn of the century, despite an expanding production in the locality, the firm found it necessary to look to outside sources for additional raw materials. In January 1901 the Dakota Republican noted the departure of William S. Burr for the south to buy a quantity of broomcorn since the local supply was insufficient to fill the needs for a bigger stock. Most of the imported crop came from Oklahoma although, at times, some was acquired from Illinois.

The greater part of the finished product found a market locally as well as in the surrounding areas. Numerous items in Vermillion's weekly newspapers note the departure of the factory's owners for nearby towns, frequently on overnight trips, to dispose of their wares to various retail merchants. During March 1898, Newton Burr, for instance, was reported making an overnight trip to Lennox and Worthing, using a brand-new covered wagon for the transportation. During a single trip to Sioux City in December 1899, his brother delivered an order for a hundred dozen brooms to a firm. Occasional orders also came from distant points, including Pennsylvania and Oregon. A number of out-of-state patrons were former Vermillion residents. Some orders followed receipt of sample brooms mailed out to potential customers.

The partnership was dissolved in 1907 when Newton Burr assumed a four-year residence on a homestead near Quinn, South Dakota, capitalizing on his skill as a broom maker in the meantime by raising small crops of broomcorn which he worked up for the local trade during the winter months in a small shop he erected in town. His connection with the Vermillion factory had, in fact, become quite nominal subsequent to 1900 through short-time residence established first in Idaho and later in Oregon. He had, however, returned temporarily at one time during a two-year period from 1902 to 1904 to resume supervision of the Vermillion plant.

The Burr factory, following the dissolution of the partnership in 1907, continued at the same level of activity a few years longer, under the management of William S. Burr. The entry of his son Fred into military service during the summer of 1917 forced a drastic reduction of operations that was to continue until his demise in 1936. Only a small acreage was devoted to broomcorn - merely enough to provide the raw material for a few dozen brooms made occasionally during the winter months for a few special customers among local merchandising firms.

*Quinn, South Dakota was about 15 to 20 miles east of Wall, South Dakota on Hiway 14.*

## **Chapter IV.**

### **William D. Burr Third Generation Of The Broom Factory**

Following the death of his father, William S. Burr, William D. Burr was prevailed upon by numerous friends and former customers, to reopen the establishment in which he had been giving assistance. He, accordingly, resumed small -scale operation during 1937. He began with a small number of products for a purely local trade and then gradually increased his output so as to supply the town of Vermillion and the surrounding area for a whole year.

He, generally, devoted three or four acres to the crop, normally producing a ton of brush, which could be worked up into a thousand brooms of assorted sizes. Occasionally, he supplemented his stock with the purchase a bale or two from St. Louis or Mattoon, Illinois in order to keep up with demand. Among the types of brooms made during the 1950's – in addition to two sizes of regular household brooms – were warehouse brooms, whisk brooms and children's playhouse brooms, all processed during the winter months.

No broomcorn was grown on the “Burr Farm” farm after about 1977. Burr brooms, however, continued to remain on the market for a few select customers in Vermillion. Broom stock was imported from other states as needed. Problems in procuring certain auxiliary items needed in the manufacturing process, added to the difficulties involved in continuing the industry.

Although the “Burr Broom” was slowly disappearing from the market-place, the old two-story brick structure near the highway 1-1/2 miles north of Vermillion remains standing during the early 1980's as a reminder of a local industry that had continued in operation for well-nigh a century.

*From - Clay County Chapters Out Of The Past*

*By Herbert S. Schell*

*Copyright 1985 Vermillion Chamber of Commerce*

## **Burr Factory to Continue Manufacture of Brooms**

**The Burr broom factory, one of the first manufacturing plants in Clay County, is to continue manufacturing brooms, according to William D. Burr, who has taken over the plant following the death of his father, William S. Burr.**

**This factory has been manufacturing brooms for over fifty years in the same location, one and ½ miles north of Vermillion. It was formerly operated by W. S. Burr and his brother, Newton, who moved to Vermont some years ago. The output has been curtailed some in recent years owing to the difficulty of raising broomcorn in dry years.**

**The present proprietor plans on shipping in the necessary materials and manufacturing brooms for almost every purpose.**

*From - the Dakota Republic,  
Vermillion, South Dakota - November 5, 1936*

## **William D. Burr's Broom Factory Proves . . . American Heritage**

**America's heritage, the spirit of free enterprise, is well illustrated by the functioning of the William D. Burr broom factory in Vermillion. Following a family tradition, Mr. Burr is proud of his profession. He has just cause for his feelings. A Burr broom is the work of a master craftsman; an artist's creation; a task well done.**

**Vermillion citizens owe the presence of the Burr Broom factory to a group of persistent neighbors who encouraged Mr. Burr to carry on in his father's footsteps. Upon the death of Mr. Burr's father, William S. Burr, in 1936, the broom factory went out of existence. After many special requests by those who religiously use home products, Mr. Burr reopened his father's industry. The present production of two to three dozen brooms a day has developed from those requests to supply just a few.**

**Mr. Burr informs us that the actual work involved in putting a broom together is not the labor it would seem. He says that it takes no more than fifteen minutes to weave a broom from loose straw to the finished product. To our amazement, Mr. Burr proceeded to weave a broom for us. The finished product was as solid a broom as possible to conceive.**

**Each year, three or four acres of broomcorn are planted on the Burr farm. Broom corn grows well in South Dakota climate, according to Mr. Burr. "It has its good years and its bad years, depending on the weather," Mr. Burr says. Those three or four acres yield approximately one ton of brush, which makes up into one thousand brooms of assorted sizes. On explaining, he said that the number of brooms made from a ton of brush fluctuated each year, depending entirely on the quality of the broomcorn. "No inferior brush is placed in a Burr broom", he said.**

**Broomcorn must be harvested very carefully and threshed even more carefully to meet the Burr standards. "This process," Mr. Burr says, "is what nearly kept me from being a maker of brooms." As a youth, it was his job to harvest and thresh the broomcorn. Today, as in his father's time, hand cutting and hand threshing are**

tedious tasks are not pleasant since the work must be accomplished so carefully. Only by close supervision and hand methods can the finest materials be made available.

With the harvesting and threshing out of the way, Mr. Burr relates the remaining work is a pleasant wintertime interlude. The brush is sorted for the size and uniformity, then baled. Before commencing his winter work, Mr. Burr arranges his supply of straw in an orderly fashion so that once actual broom making begins, there will be no interruptions.

The process of putting a broom together from this point on is a hobby with Mr. Burr. For ease in shaping the straw, Mr. Burr tells us that it is necessary to soak the straw in boiling water. Once this is accomplished, the straw is woven onto a wooden handle with the aid of a vise, which holds one handle in place and a wire feeder which feeds wire from a spool to the straw and binds the straw securely in place. The straw is fed by hand and shaped by hand. The handle vise and the wire feeder serve as the third and fourth hand for the broom maker.

This part of the process completed, the broom is placed in a vise which holds the broom in shape while Mr. Burr ties a series of knots in the upper part of the straw to insure a uniform shape during the life of the broom. The bottom of the broom is trimmed and after drying, the product is ready for market.

Among the types of brooms made at the Burr factory are two sizes of household brooms, warehouse brooms, various sizes of whisk brooms and children's playhouse brooms. Supplies of brooms are made up during the winter months when farming problems are not so numerous. Mr. Burr has succeeded in making enough brooms during four months of the year to supply Vermillion and surrounding community for a 12-month period. There have been no plans to increase production, and Mr. Burr does not intend to formulate any. A hobby can occupy only so much time, according to Mr. Burr.

With the amount of attention afforded each straw that makes up the broom's composition, it would seem that the price of Burr brooms would exceed that of mass production line brooms. Yet, Mr. Burr has kept his prices below those of prevailing big factory prices proving to himself and community that a small enterprise in a worthwhile community is truly a wonderful virtue of American life.

*From – The Plain Talk – Jan 6, 1945 – Anson Bigelow*

## **Chapter VI.**

### **The End of a Historic Broom Factory**

**The Burr Broom Factory of Vermillion was not your typical factory with large smoke stacks belching smoke into clean South Dakota air. Nor was there buildings filled with large, noisy machinery or long lines of people punching in at the time clock.**

**So, when the Burr Broom Factory closed recently there was no big layoff of employees. Neither was there a big effect on the local economy because of the loss of a substantial payroll.**

**Nonetheless, the factory and its products are missed by the retail outlets that handled the brooms as well as the customers that came and purchased them directly. It is also the passing of something unique that had been operating quietly, in the community for many years.**

**W. S. Burr and N. P. Burr started to make brooms in the small factory back in the late 1880's. W. S. Burr passed away in 1936 and in 1937, William D. "Bill" Burr, who is now 80, in 1983, took over and has been running the operation ever since. "I hated to close up and disappoint my many customers," Bill said, "but I told them all good things had to come to an end."**

**Unlike most products on the shelves today, the Burr operation didn't have middlemen. They were sold mostly through local stores and a few independent salesmen who would pick them up and resell them in their territory. People from all over the area would also come and buy them at the factory.**

**It was not your typical, mass production type of factory. That's what made it so different. It was the care and attention given to each broom that mattered to Bill Burr. And, according to Bill Burr, he could prepare for the "finishing touches" about 2 ½ dozen brooms a day. Bill said, "I have no idea how many we made over the years, but it was many thousands."**

**Howard Morse of Morse's Market, (one dealer who the sold brooms), is quick to agree that the Burr Broom was something special.**

**Howard, in talking about them, said, "When**

**you buy a regular broom and use it a lot you can plan on using it for maybe a few weeks. With the Burr Broom it was different. You wouldn't have to buy one but every two to three years."**

**Mr. Burr said another reason they closed was the high cost of doing business. "Broomcorn which goes into the sweeping part of the broom comes from Mexico and other southern areas had increased in price and suppliers wouldn't ship it in less than carload lots," Burr said. He also said the quality of the handles had declined and were rough and crooked.**

**So, if you are lucky enough to have a Burr Broom in your home, take good care of it. You have something of quality you may never be able to find again. Or, if you are not inclined make a "clean sweep" of things, sit back and enjoy some of the Burr popcorn which is available on the market. That's also hand packaged and prepared with care.**

*Editor's note - Merrick Burr who homesteaded at this same location in 1864, started making brooms for local people sometime in the 1870's.*

From - Vermillion Plain Talk \_\_?,1983

## **Chapter VI.**

### **Letter from Roger McCambridge**

Maxine and Sharon Johnson salvaged a few bricks from the demolished Burr brick building. Maxine mailed one brick to each of the three Elizabeth McCambridge siblings.

The following letter is a thank you and some old memories from Roger McCambridge

Letter dated October 17, 2018 From Suamico, Wisconsin

**Sorry it has taken me so long to get this to both. Jan and I were out of the country most of September on a motorcycle trip through parts of Spain, Andorra, France, and Italy. It was a wonderful trip with a nice group of people from different parts of the world, great roads for riding, beautiful scenery, very nice hotels, and amazing food. One of those “bucket list” trips that we will always remember.**

**Thank you so much for the brick from the old Burr broom factory/farmhouse, and Maxine the very thoughtful column you wrote reminiscing about the homes we grew up in and the good neighbors we miss. I have many fond memories of Grandma Grace’s and Grandpa Elwood’s farm growing up in Vermillion, particularly of that old farm house. I can still see my Great Grandma Burr in her rocking chair in the corner of the living room, watching the small black and white television perched up on a high stand in the corner. There was a big dining table that could seat the whole family, covered in a red and white checkered tablecloth, the table set with Jewel T dishes. Grandma’s kitchen was dominated by a big wood-burning cook stove; we used to throw Grandpa Elwood’s dead hearing aid batteries in the stove to hear them explode in the heat. There was a dry sink with a large bowl and pitcher of water next to it. I can still see Aunt Frances washing her hands before dinner in that bowl.**

**The brick portion of the combined building had been converted from the broom factory to a living space long before I arrived on the scene. There was a parlor area on the main floor with an old pump organ in the corner that Mary Beth, Doug and I used to “play”, though not all the keys worked. My uncle Harold moved that organ to his home in Minneapolis and I believe had it restored to its former glory. There was a bedroom off the parlor and more bedrooms upstairs that were used by Aunt Frances, Uncle Bill and Great Grandma Burr. Both the original brick building and the wooden add-on portion were built with very little insulation; each room had its own small heating stove. In the winter the rooms were very warm near the heaters, but progressively colder**

as you moved away from the stoves. And there was no indoor plumbing, bathroom duties meant either a trip to the outhouse, or using a chamber pot during the night that was kept under each bed.

As kids we spent many a long day on the farm; there was so much to do there. Uncle Bill's broom shop and the workshop in the back were always a source of interest. Whenever the Minnesota Twins played, Uncle Bill would have the game playing on the WNAX on a crackly old radio in his broom shop. Broom making was set aside during the game and Bill had a bench he sat on, leaned back against a sack of seed corn and listened quietly as he chewed on a piece of straw. He never got very excited about the games, didn't cheer when they scored or say much when they struggled, but you could tell by the look on his face if the Twins were winning or losing that day. One of my regrets is not taking the time to learn how to make brooms, that family tradition that started back in 1870 died in 1985 with the passing of Uncle Bill. I am very thankful Bill's broom equipment ended up at the W. H. Over Museum and is on display there.

I hunted many a rabbit and squirrel on the farm, and Grandma Grace would fry them up for me if I cleaned them. Not many pheasants there though; we got more pheasants on Fred Maude's farm just to the north, Art Loomis's farm a few miles away, or at my Uncle Ralph's farm up near Centerville. I still have Dad's old double-barreled shotgun that he always hunted with.

Uncle Bill and Grandma Grace had amazing gardens that supplied the whole family with fresh vegetables. I remember digging up potatoes in the fall and hauling them to the root cellar for storage. And I have vivid memories of the fall broom corn harvest. The broom corn was first cut and laid over to dry in the field. The stalks were then gathered and the seeds were knocked off the heads by holding the stalks against this rotating drum with hundreds of long nails sticking out of it. The drum was spun by a long, wide belt connected to the power take off pulley of a tractor. The entire contraption was a dangerous OSHA nightmare that we wouldn't think of letting our kids near today! Then there were stages of dyeing, drying and trimming before the broom corn was ready to be woven into a broom. In later years Bill found it cheaper and much easier to buy the broom corn he needed for brooms he was still making, instead of growing it.

Another memory of the farm was riding our motorcycles all over the property. I remember giving Mary Beth her first ride on the back of my first motorcycle, a little Honda 55. I was very inexperienced and when I had to stop quickly to

front brake, locked up the front wheel and proceeded to dump the bike and both of us on the wet grass. As we gained experience, the bikes got bigger and faster, but we kept that little Honda for many years. It was the bike I got my motorcycle driver's license with and Mary Beth learned to ride on. And I still enjoy motorcycling to this day.

I had mixed emotions after Mom passed and Mary Beth, Doug and I decided to sell the farm. After all it was the land the Burr family had homesteaded back in 1865. But we each had made our lives in other states and had no expectations of returning to Vermillion, so it was time to let it go. The Merrigans had long been good neighbors and Mom had given a first right of refusal to purchase the property if/when we decided to sell it. I am glad it went to Cody and Dana; they have been great stewards of the property. Jan and I stopped by the farm last fall while we were driving home from the Black Hills. They have done so much to clear out the old buildings, replace the old trailer house with their home, and make the property their own. I am sure it looks even better now with the old farmhouse and broom factory gone.

Thanks again of the Burr brick, and the thoughtful comments on where it came from and why those memories are important. The brick is going to have a place of honor in our home.

Warm regards and blessings to you all,  
Signed - Roger McCambridge

## **Chapter VII.**

### **Obituaries and Genealogy**

#### **Fred Burr**

**Funeral Services will be held Saturday, May 15, 11:00 p.m. for Fred Burr who died May 11, at Dakota Hospital, after a short illness. Visitation will be Friday, 7 – 9 p.m. at the Wagner-Iverson funeral home. The memorial services will be at the United Church of Christ with Rev. Reginald Barrow officiating. Burial will be in Bluff View Cemetery.**

**Organist will be Rosalyn Miller. Vocalist will be Marlys Miller. Selections will be “How Great thou Art” and “the Lord’s Prayer.”**

**Honorary casket bearers will be Morrison Barton, John Paul Jones, Earl Lein, E.T. Michels, Harvey Hubert, Herbert Lee, Walter Scott, Ralph Lawton and Charles Stark.**

**Active casket bears will be Russell Heikes, Wayne Merrigan, Lyman Lewison, Leonard Scholten, Bill Radigan and Robert Stark.**

**Mr. Burr was born in Vermillion on Dec. 8, 1893. He was retired farmer and spent his entire life in the area. He served during World War I with the 355 Infantry. He was a member of the United Church of Christ, A charter member of the VFW, a member of the disabled American Veterans and he received a Purple Heart for his war deeds.**

**Mr. Burr married Mae Harrington in 1919 in Vermillion.**

**Survivors include the widow; two sons, Robert of Topeka, Kansas; and Donald of Tacoma, Washington; five grandchildren; two great grandchildren; four sisters, Mrs. Francis Gay, Mrs. Viola Donner and Mrs. Grace Sauer of Vermillion and Mrs. Ralph Tice of Centerville; William of Vermillion and several nieces and nephews.**

**Military graveside rites were by Clay Post 3061**

**From the Vermillion Plain Talk - May 13, 1976**

**Elwood B. Sauer, 59, Vermillion, S. D died September 26, at the hospital in Vermillion,**

suddenly. Funeral 2 p.m. September 30, First Methodist Church. Burial in Bluff View Cemetery, Wagner- Iverson Funeral home.

Scriptures 8 p.m. September 29, funeral home. Odd Fellow graveside rites.

Born February 4, 1911, Lancaster County, Penn. Came to the area 43 years ago. Married Grace Burr December 24, 1933, Pleasanton, Nebraska.

Past Clay County auditor, South Dakota Department of Audits and Accounts past 13 years. Past Grand Master Independent Order of Odd Fellows, AF & AM. Member Commandery of Masonic Bodies.

Survivors: Widow; daughter Mrs. Byron (Betty) McCambridge of Vermillion; son, Harold A. of Vermillion; sisters Mrs. Pauline Jorstead of Anville, Penn., Mrs. Marion Erb of Centre Hall, Penn., three grand children.

From the Vermillion Plain Talk  
September ?, 1970 re-typed

## **Results of a Brief Illness Fatal To Pioneer of the Vermillion Township**

Seventy-two ago Wm. S. Burr, then a little boy seven years of age, came with his Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Merrick S. Burr, and settled with them on a homestead two miles north of Vermillion. On that same place Mr. Burr, at the age of 79 years, passed away Wednesday evening after an illness of only ten days.

Mr. Burr was a native of Ohio, but left there at an early age with his parents. Who settled first in Iowa and then in Clay County in 1864. Mr. Burr received all of his schooling which he was to have in the old log school house at the foot of the ravine hill.

For many years Mr. Burr and his brother Newton, followed the trade of broom making, in addition to farming and fruit raising, and Burr brooms have been known widely for many years.

### **Funeral Friday**

Funeral services will be held Friday afternoon at the Elmore funeral home, unless the arrival of relatives may cause a delay. Rev. Sauer, now of Nebraska, but formerly pastor of the Star Prairie church, will conduct the funeral services. Burial will be in the Bluff View cemetery.

Mr. Burr is survived by his widow, two sons, Fred and William B., both residents of Vermillion Township, and four daughters, Mrs. Ray Gay, of Boseman, Montanna, who is expected to arrive tonight; Mrs. Hazel Tice, of Centerville; Mrs. F. A. Donner, of Jacksonville, Florida, who was here this summer and who is unable to come now; and Mrs. Grace Sauer, who lives on the hone place. Another son Frank died in 1915.

Mr. Burr is also survived by his brother Newton, who was associated with him until 1914.

Newton now lives in Gaysville, Vermont. He is not very strong and not expected to come to the funeral.

Mr. Burr has always been active and energetic citizen, taking an interesting part in the affairs not only in his own precinct, but in state and national affairs. He was universally liked and respected by the people with whom he had come in contact during his long residence in Clay County

*From Vermillion Plain Talk  
October 17, 1936 and  
Dakota Republic October 17, 1936*

## **Rites for Mrs. Burr**

Funeral services will be held a 2:30 p.m. today at the Elmore -Wagner funeral home for Nellie Burr who passed away Tuesday evening Aug 21, at the Dakota Nursing Home, following a long illness. Mrs. Burr was 89 years of age.

Last rites will be conducted by Rev William England, Interment will be in the Bluff View Cemetery under direction of Elmore –Wagner.

Nellie Donaldson was born March 26, 1873 at Salineville, Cloumbiana County, Ohio, the daughter of John and Francis Donaldson. At an early age she came with her parents to Cumminsville, Boone County, Nebraska.

At the age of 19 she came to Vermillion to the home of Mr. and Mrs. M. S. Burr, pioneer Clay County residents. She was united in marriage to William S. Burr on August 6, 1892 in Vermillion.

They established their home on the Burr homestead a mile and one half north of Vemillion, where, they lived until two years ago, when she became a resident of the Dakota Nursing home. She was preceded in death by her husband in 1936 and son Frank, in 1915.

She was a charter member of the Happy Birthday Club and a member of the Methodist church.

Survivors include two sons, Fred N and William D. of Vermillion; four daughters, Mrs. Rau Gay (Francis) of Bozeman, Montana; Mrs. R. W. Tice (Hazel) of Centerville; Mrs. F. A. Donner (Violet), Tampa, Florida and Mrs. Elwood Sauer (Grace) of Vermillion; one sister , Mrs. Hazel James, Lincoln Nebr. ; five grandchildren and 12 great - grandchildren.

Casket bearers will be Wayne Merrigan, F. Eugene Ridenour, Rex Ashmore, Fred Maude, J. Arthur Johnson and Charles Dension.

*From the Vermillion Plain Talk  
August ?, 1962*

## **Mae Burr**

**Mae B. Burr, 91, of Vermillion, died at her winter home in Mesa, Arizona.**

**Mae Harrington was born Jan. 1, 1898 in Clay County. She was graduated from Vermillion High School then attended the University of South Dakota for two years. She married Fred Burr at Vermillion in 1919. He died May 11, 1976.**

**She was a member of the United Church of Christ and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, serving as state president in 1951.**

**Survivors include five grandchildren; six great – grandchildren; and one sister, Mrs. Rex (Elsie) Ashmore, Vermillion.**

**Services will begin at 2:00 p. m. Thursday in the United Church of Christ, Vermillion, with burial in Bluff View Cemetery.**

**Iverson- Siecke Funeral Home at Vermillion is in charge of arrangements.**

*From the Plain Talk*  
*? - 1989*

## **William Burr**

William D. Burr 82, of Vermillion died Saturday, November 30, 1985 at Dakota Hospital following a short illness.

He was born February 17, 1903 to William S. and Helen Donaldson Burr and spent his entire life here.

Mr. Burr was a gardener and for a number of years operated the Burr Broom factory north of Vermillion. He was a member of the Sioux Valley Horse Shoe League.

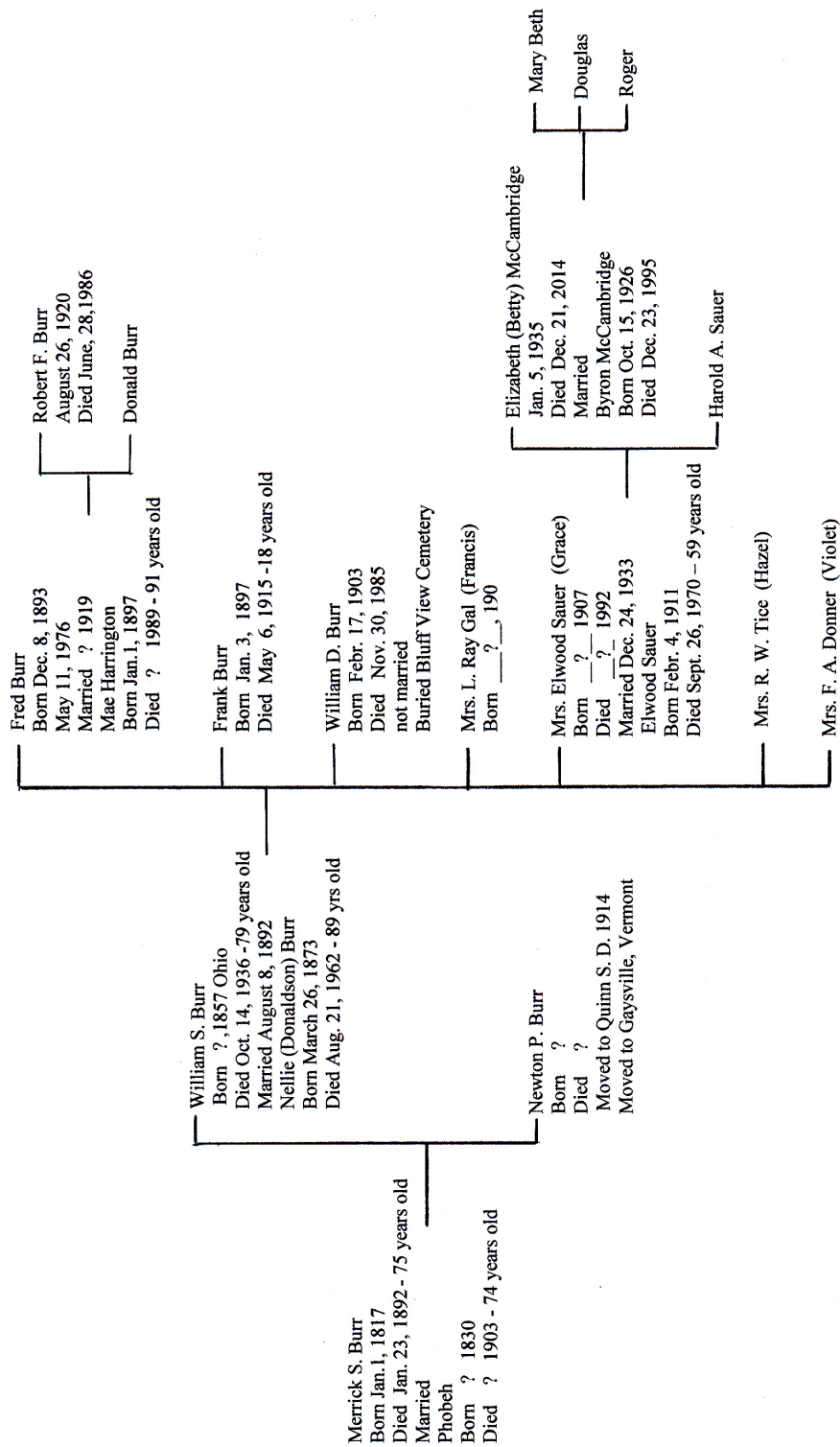
He was survived by four sisters Frances Gay, Viola Donner and Grace Sauer, all of Vermillion and Hazel Tice of Centerville.

Memorial services will be held at the First United Methodist Church at 2:00 p. m. Friday, December 6. Rev. Calvin Peterson will officiate.

The body will be cremated.

Obituary from - Vermillion Plain Talk  
December 4, 1985 - Re-typed

## Genealogy of Burr Family



## **VIII.**

### **Sweeping up a bit of Vermillion's History**

#### **Exhibit demonstrates simplicity of local broom factory**

**People attending Sunday's Christmas Festival at the W. H. Over Museum also received a glimpse of a unique part of Vermillion's past.**

**On display in the museum are many of the original trappings of the Vermillion Broom Factory, which goes down in history as one of the longest, continual operating family operations in the community.**

**"This is the complete contents of this business that functioned here for almost 100 years within one family," said Larry Bradley, president of the board of directors of the W. H. Over Museum and chairman of Anthropology Department at the University of South Dakota.**

**The exhibit includes three main pieces of machinery from the Vermillion Broom Factory. "the first piece of equipment actually turned the broom and you would apply the broom corn to it and it would wrap the wire around it, A second machine here would flatten the broom, and allow you to hand stitch it.", Larry said.**

**The third piece of equipment from the factory would allow workers to make either a straight or angled end of the broom.**

**Bradley said "from start to finish, a worker could make a broom using that equipment in 20 minutes. Some of these kinds of operations could make 6,000 brooms a year," he said.**

**According to Burr family members, most of the time the factory was a one man operation. At times when demand was heavy, however, up to 10 people would work at the business.**

**"A series of brooms were made, all the way from whisk brooms to hearth brooms to what they called "trailer house brooms" and warehouse brooms - all different sizes," he said. They were all totally made by hand. There was no electricity used, except for later in the factory's**

operation. They did use electricity to power equipment to get the seeds off the broom corn.”

“This equipment was made in 1870,” Bradley said, further explaining the contents of the museum exhibit, “and the most powerful machinery was foot-powered. Everything is still functional, so we still could make brooms with it today.”

The display includes a timeline that points out the development of this unique Vermillion industry. In 1865, Merrick Burr homesteaded 1-1/2 miles north of Vermillion. In 1885, his son, Newton, launched the Vermillion Broom Factory.

Merrick died in 1892, and soon after, William S. Burr, brother of Newton, joined the partnership. A two-story brick building housing the factory was built at 2309 N. University Road.

In 1907, the partnership of William S. and Newton Burr dissolved. William S. Burr died in 1936. The next year, his son William D. “Bill” Burr resumed the broom factory’s operations.

The factory was busy manufacturing brooms until 1983, when it ceased operation.

It’s likely that the broom factory wasn’t the first manufacturing establishment in Vermillion’s long history.

“I’m sure that there were a lot of other operations where people were manufacturing something,” Bradley said, “but this lasted probably longer than any other one, and with the same equipment.

A wide range of people helped make this exhibit possible at the W. H. Over Museum.

“Most of the staff here at the museum has worked on it,” Bradley said. “and the university students have spent time on this off-and-since early summer.”

One of the students was working on a master’s degree in anthropology. “This was one of her projects,” he said, “and we have other students from a museum studies class that have helped out.”

**The Burr family donated the equipment featured in the display to the museum. “Some of the material itself, some of the extra labels, even one of the electric lights that hung in the building were donated, Bradley said, “so we have the entire operation as it was when it was shut down.”**

**More than a quarter century has passed since the last Burr broom was manufactured. The building on University Road that housed the factory is still standing. “A lot of people in town have Burr brooms, and they remember going to this particular location. He (Bill Burr) sold popcorn as well – a lot of people would go out there to pick up popcorn, and they would play horseshoe games in the area.**

**“Apparently, part of the attraction of it was that it just served as a gathering place from time to time,” he said.**

**The Burr family initially grew the special corn needed to make brooms. Eventually, they began importing the broomcorn from other areas in the United States. The demise of the factory, in part, came about when supplies of the broomcorn became inadequate.**

**“Eventually, he (Burr) couldn’t get enough broomcorn, and that’s when the business kind of collapsed,” Bradley said. “What makes this display so interesting is that we have the original equipment from day one when they were in operation, and it’s also interesting because it was a specific family operation and it lasted so long.”**

**Megan Olson, a graduate student from USD, who is working on her masters degree in interdisciplinary studies, helped make the museum display a reality.**

**“Instead of doing a thesis, this was my project,” she said, “which was a lot more fun than writing a thesis. And, I’m a lifelong Vermillion Resident, so it was fun to learn something about Vermillion history.**

**Olson treasures the opportunity she’s had in the last year to work with the Clay County Historical Society. “And the USD graphics department really came through for us. It was fun that this project touches on an important part of Vermillion history, and it coincides with the city’s sesquicentennial.”**

**She was happy to see many people stop by the exhibit, look over the equipment and other items on display, and learn about an important piece of the community's past.**

**"I think it's great to bring all of that information out," Olson said. "This factory was here for almost 100 years, and maybe some people didn't know that."**

**Olson, herself a Vermillion native, learned new things about her hometown's past thanks to this project.**

**"It was a great experience, and I'm glad I could this," she said. Olson was 1-year old when the factory closed, so she had no personal knowledge of it's operation when she began her work on this project.**

**"My family, of course, had heard of the broom factory, and when I brought it up and told them who I was contacting, they knew them," she said.**

**"Even though this equipment is what we would term archaic and old and so on, it was hand powered or foot-powered, all of it, and it was functioning right up into the 1980's, and provided income.**

**"It did not have to be electrified," Bradley said.**

**Other than a single-bulb electric light that hung from the ceiling, and a single piece of electric-powered machinery late in the factory's history that removed the seeds from the broomcorn plant material, the only other thing that was plugged in was a radio that Bill Burr operated while building brooms so he could listen to ball games.**

**Chapter IX.**  
**The following pages are the survey done in August 2018**  
**For the Clay County Historical Preservation Commission**

This survey can also be found on the web site - CCHPC .org

\*SURVEY DATE: July 31, 2018

\*SURVEYOR: Jim Stone

\*ADDRESS: 2309 North University Road

\*COUNTY: Clay

\*CITY: Vermillion

LOCATION DESCRIPTION: From Vermillion, South Dakota Highway 50 bypass and University Road Intersection, North about ¾ mile, on the right, East side of University Road.

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Burr Homestead Exc. S 62.26 of the W350' in Govt. Lots 1 & 2 NW of NW ¼, Section 7 – 92 – 51, Vermillion Township, Clay County, South Dakota

\*QUARTER 1: NW1/4

\*QUARTER 2: \_\_\_\_\_

\*TOWNSHIP: Vermillion

\*RANGE: 51

\*SECTION: 7

ACRES: 61.28

OWNER NAME: Thomas P. & Mary L. Merrigan

OWNER ADDRESS: 2309 North University Road

OWNER CITY: Vermillion

OWNER STATE: South Dakota

OWNER ZIP: 57069

QUAD NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

OWNER CODE 1: P

OWNER CODE 2: \_\_\_\_\_

OWNER CODE 3: \_\_\_\_\_

## **HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

\*DOE: \_\_\_\_\_

\*DOE DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

REASON INELIGIBLE: \_\_\_\_\_

REGISTER NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

MULTIPLE PROPERTY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NOMINATION STATUS: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE LISTED: \_\_\_\_\_

REFERENCE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

HISTORIC DISTRICT RATING: C or NC

PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

CATEGORY: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL 1: N S L

SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL 2: N S L

CRITERIA 1: A B C D

CRITERIA 2: A B C D

CRITERIA 3: A B C D

CRITERIA 4: A B C D

SIGNIFICANCE NOTES: Site homesteaded by Merrick S. Burr in 1865, owned by three generations (Merrick S. Burr, William S. Burr and William D. Burr). All were producing corn brooms and whisk brushes. A forth generation Elizabeth Ann (Burr) McCambridge inherited the property in 1994 and sold it in 2015. The property was in the family for 150 years. They manufactured brooms from the late 1870's to 1983 for about 100 years.

## **STRUCTURE DETAILS**

SHPO ID: \_\_\_\_\_

\*PROPERTY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT FUNCTION:	<u>Vacant</u>	FOUNDATION:	<u>Poured concrete</u>
CURRENT SUBFUNCTION:	<u>Vacant</u>	ROOF MATERIAL:	<u>Cedar shingles</u>
HISTORIC FUNCTION:	<u>Corn broom factory</u>	ROOF SHAPE:	<u>Gable</u>
HISTORIC SUBFUNCTION:	<u>Home</u>	STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:	<u>Brick structure</u>
		STYLE:	<u>Cross gable roof</u>
OCCUPIED:	<u>Yes</u>	TYPE:	<u>Factory and home</u>
			<u>Double brick walls,</u>
ACCESSIBLE:	<u>Yes with</u>	WALLS:	<u>2x4 studs, lath &amp;</u>
	<u>permission</u>		<u>plaster interior walls</u>
STORIES:	<u>2</u>	SIGNIFICANT PERSON:	<u>Merrick S. Burr, William S. Burr &amp; William D. Burr</u>
*DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:	<u>1895</u>	CULTURAL AFFILIATION:	<u>?</u>

ALTERED/MOVED NOTES: Demolished in August 2018. Pictures from 1978 show a wood frame home over the 13' x 14' basement 7'-6" East from the brick structure. A roof line on the East side of the brick wall show a roof connecting the two structures.

INTERIOR NOTES: Burr Broom Factory was in the basement. First floor was family living quarters and second floor was sleeping quarters. Basement brick walls are unfinished. The first and second floors were plastered over the brick. The interior dividing walls were 2x4 studs, lath and plaster. The ceilings on the first and second floors were lath and plaster.

OTHER NOTES: The exterior walls were double brick walls with wire ties to hold the two walls about 2" apart to stabilize the walls and create an insulation between the walls. Brick walls went up the gable to the peak. Windows and doors have a double soldier brick arch over each opening. Windows are 20x26 over 20x26 one light on the first floor and two windows on the West wall in the basement. The center window on the West wall in the basement is 24x26 over 24x26 one light. The windows on the second appear to be 20x20 over 20x20 one light, two on the North gable, one on the south gable and one on the East dormer. Double doors on the East wall of the first floor. 13' x 14' basement, 7'-6" East of the brick house. Evidence of a gable roof extending East to connect to a wood frame structure shown in a 1978 photo.

**\*PHYSICAL**

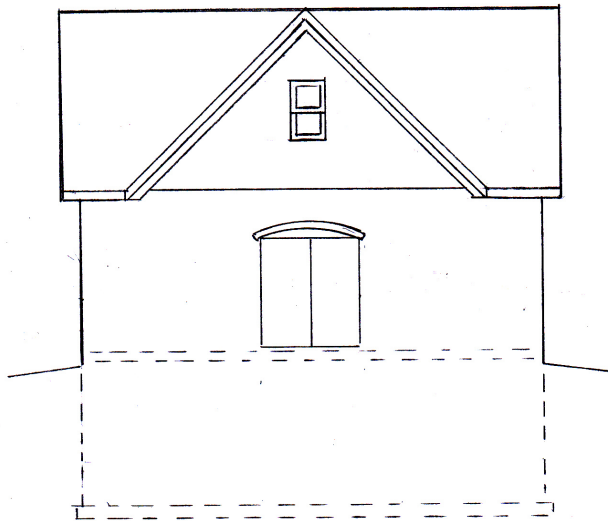
NOTES: Structure was in very poor condition

\*RESTRICTED: Y or N

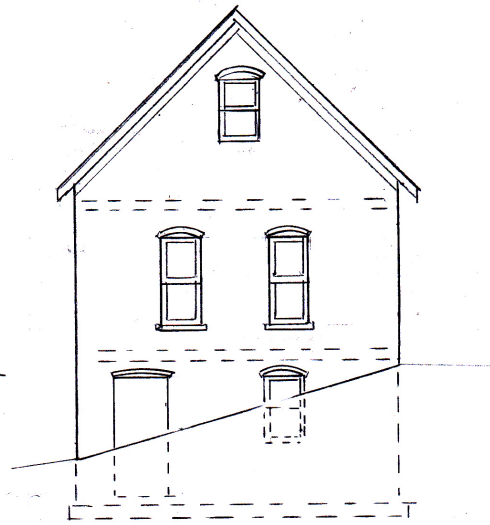
\*UTM EASTING: \_\_\_\_\_

\*UTM NORTHING: \_\_\_\_\_

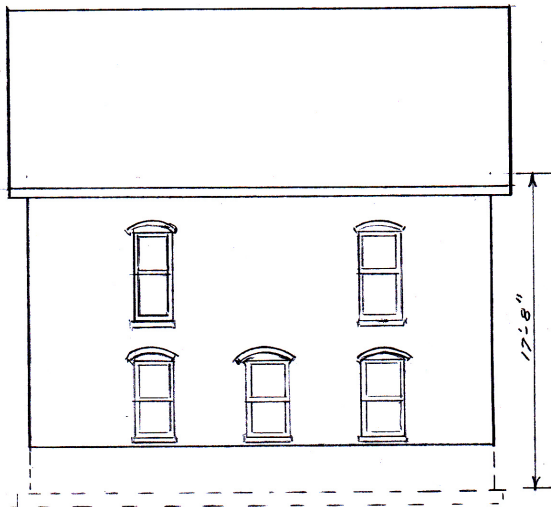
**\*\*\* SITE INFORMATION**



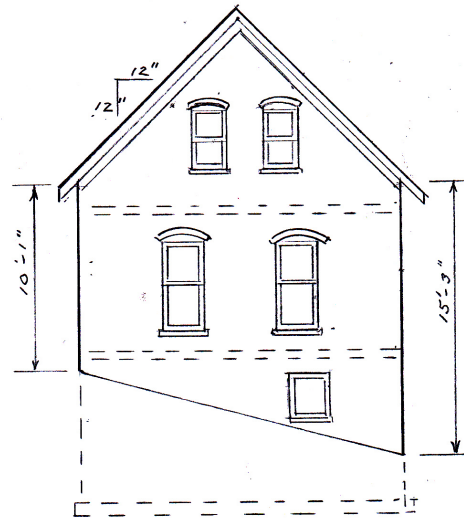
EAST ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION

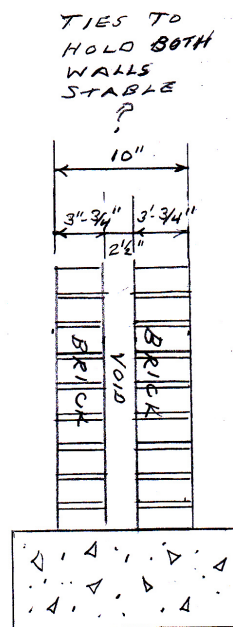
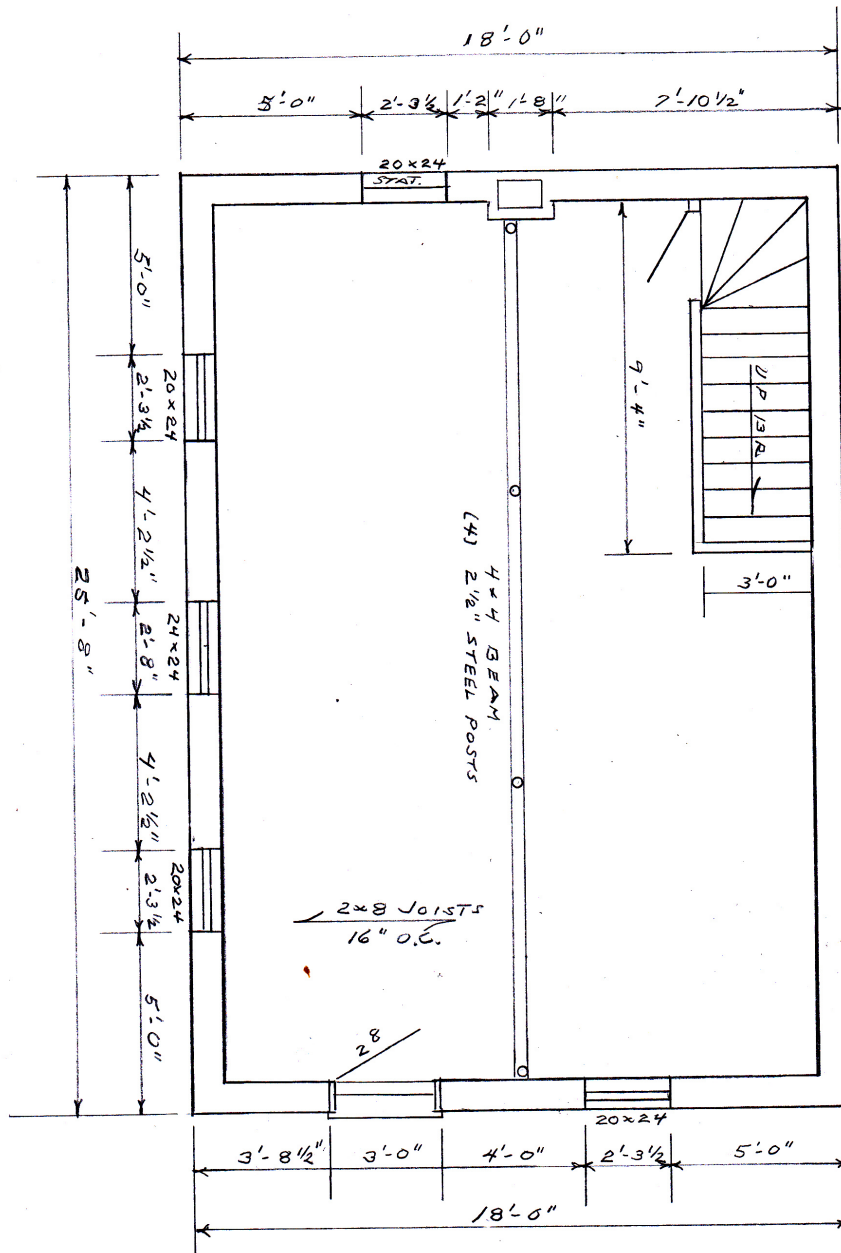


NORTH ELEVATION

A. J. S.

THE BURR FACTORY  
FAMILY HOME  
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

JULY 31, 2010



BRICK WALL  
SECTION  
SCALE  
1" = 1'-0"

A.J.S. BASEMENT FLOOR SCALE - 1/4" = 1'-0" JULY 31, 2018





PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 1  
 CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking NE, SW corner



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 2  
 CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking NW, SE corner



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 3  
 CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking SW, NE corner



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 4  
 CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking SE, NW corner



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 5

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking South, North wall



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 6

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking NE, North end of the West Wall



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 7

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking SE, Window in the living room on the south wall.



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 8

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking North, two windows on the North first floor wall.



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 9

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking NE, Stairs in the basement up to first floor



PHOTOGRAPHER: Jim Stone  
 DATE OF PHOTO: July 31, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 10

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking NW, West wall in the basement, center window is wider.



PHOTOGRAPHER: Unknown  
 DATE OF PHOTO: About 1990 to 2000

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 11

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking NE, SW corner, before the trees became over grown.



PHOTOGRAPHER: Larry Bradley  
 DATE OF PHOTO: August 29, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 12

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking West, North wall coming down



PHOTOGRAPHER: Larry Bradley  
 DATE OF PHOTO: August 29, 2018

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 13

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking West, East wall down, smoke from burning out floors and the roof



PHOTOGRAPHER: Director of Equalization ?  
 DATE OF PHOTO: 1978

ROLL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHOTO NUMBER: 14

CAMERA DIRECTION: Looking North, frame house on east side of brick structure, was connected to brick building. Building on the right in the background is a warehouse.

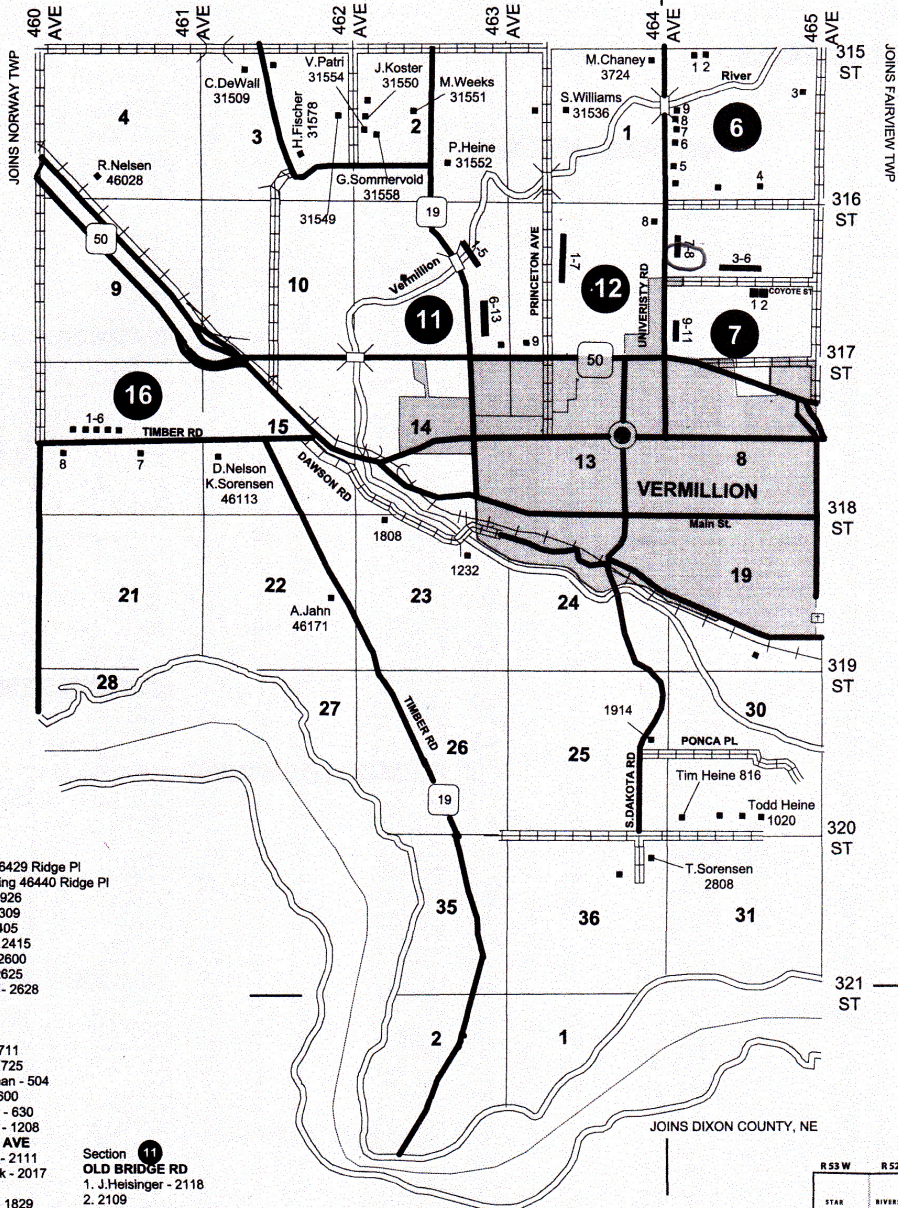
# VERMILLION TWP

T 92 & 91 N

RESIDENT

R 52 & 51 W

JOINS SPIRIT MOUND TWP



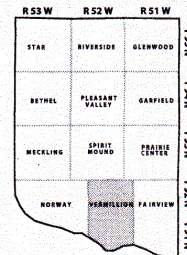
- Section 6**
1. E. Miller - 46429 Ridge Pl
  2. P&K Manning 46440 Ridge Pl
  3. J. Jensen - 926
  4. C. Clark - 2309
  5. J. Reed - 2405
  6. G. Nelson - 2415
  7. D. Russo - 2600
  8. A. Clark - 2625
  9. J. Berkhout - 2628

- Section 7**
- COYOTE ST**
1. T. Laitala - 711
  2. B. Waage - 725
  3. J. Zimmerman - 504
  4. H. Moser - 600
  5. C. Thatcher - 630
  6. T. Merrigan - 1208
- UNIVERSITY AVE**
7. A. Johnson - 2111
  8. R. Wheelock - 2017
  9. 1909
  10. S. Redlin - 1829
  11. K. Simons - 1421

- Section 11**
- OLD BRIDGE RD**
1. J. Heisinger - 2118
  2. 2109
  3. R. McBride - 2102
  4. M. Gilbertson - 2021
  5. C. Campbell - 1919
- DEERFIELD TRAIL**
6. C. Robinson - 1121
  7. T. Basom - 1103
  8. P. Wingen - 1103
  9. C. Bock - 1017
  10. K. Bliss - 1009
  11. R. Brown - 937
  13. J. Thomson - 915
  12. 912

- Section 12**
- PRINCETON AVE**
1. J. Pasualucci - 2507
  2. J. Swallow - 2523
  3. J. Seller - 2427
  4. M. Mock - 2411
  5. G. Reeves - 1909
  6. B. J. Brady - 1829
  7. R. Jensen - 1735
  8. N. Merrigan - 2224 University Ave
  9. R. Dehner - 825

- Section 16**
1. T. Kober - 46004
  2. W. Myron - 46008
  3. R. Johnson - 46020
  4. E. Halverson - 46044
  5. D. Struckman - 46048
  6. D. Holoch - 46068
  7. D. Heine - 46067
  8. M. Bottolfson - 46003



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45

LAND OWNER AND RURAL RESIDENT MAPS

## **HISTORY**

This brick house was located in the NW¼ of Section 7, Vermillion Township, Clay County and was homesteaded by Merrick S. Burr in 1865. He soon discovered that brooms had to be ordered from Sioux City, Iowa. He knew how to make brooms and started to produce brooms for the local area.

In 1895 the two-story brick building was constructed (on what is now 2309 N. University Road), to handle the increased demand of the production of brooms and brushes. Newton P. Burr and William S. Burr were the owners at that time. Because of the increased demand for broomcorn and wooden handles, they were purchased from various sources within and outside of South Dakota. They encouraged local farmers to raise broomcorn as a cash crop.

In 1907 Newton P. Burr homesteaded near Quinn, South Dakota leaving William S. Burr as the sole owner, with his sons helping to produce brooms and whisk brushes. At this time they sold wholesale and retail. They were known in a large area for the quality of their brooms and brushes and sold a large percentage of brooms wholesale.

After William S Burr died in 1936, his son William D. Burr took over the business and operated the manufacturing until 1983. It was one of the longest lasting Vermillion business at that time, just over 100 years.

In 1994, Elizabeth Ann McCambridge inherited the property.

In 2015, Thomas P. and Mary L. Merrigan bought this property.

August 2018 the brick building that housed the factory and where William Burr lived, had been vacant for a long time. Subsequently, it became a liability and the owners decided to demolish the structure. Because of the importance of the Burr broom factory history in this area, volunteers from the W. H. Over Museum and some also members of the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission decided to document this structure. Jim Stone and Larry Bradley took measurements, made sketches and took photos. Evelyn Schlenker also took photos. Jim Stone drew elevations and floor plans to capture the history and to preserve this historic structure information for the future.

**The following article was featured in the joint news letter of the**

**W. H. Over Museum, Clay County Historical Society and  
Clay County Historic Preservation Commission  
Issue date fall and winter 2018**

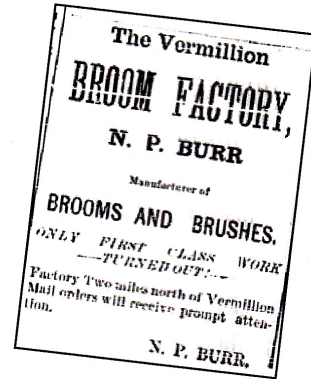
## The Burr Broom Factory: One of Vermillion's longest lasting businesses

This is the first part of a two part article. The first part deals with the Burr Broom exhibit at the W. H. Over Exhibit. The second part in the Clay County Historic Preservation portion of the Joint Newsletter is Jim Stone's documentation of the Burr brick building prior to its demolition.

### *Background to the Burr Broom Factory Exhibit*

In 1865 Merrick S. Burr homesteaded two miles north of Vermillion and began producing brooms from the broom corn that he grew. Starting in the 1880's until 1983, members of the Burr family operated a broom factory on the Burr homestead. In 1886 Newton P. Burr placed an ad in the Dakota Republican advertising his brooms and brushes. A reproduction is shown to the left,

In 1895 a two story brick building was constructed to increase the production of brooms and brushes by purchasing additional equipment. The owners of this factory were Newton P. Burr and his brother William S. Burr. Because of increased demand, broom corn and wooden handles were purchased from various sources within and outside of South Dakota. In 1907 Newton Burr homesteaded near Quinn, SD leaving William S. as sole owner of the factory with his sons helping to produce brooms and whisk brushes. After William S. Burr died in 1936, his son William D. Burr took over the business and ran it until 1983. The updated exhibit at the W. H. Over Museum consists of original equipment, supplies, and finished brooms donated the Burr family from the Burr Broom Factory. The other photographs in the exhibit show how the factory looked when it was operational and how equipment was used to construct brooms.

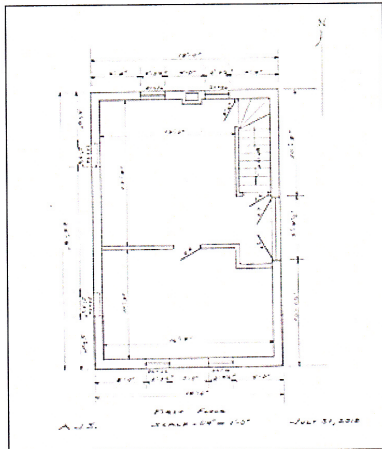


Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker

*Burr Broom Exhibit. The center photo shows William Burr holding one of the brooms he manufactured. ads for brooms are also shown.*

## Documenting Preservation: The Burr Broom Factory Brick House

Jim Stone documented this structure in August, 2018 prior to its demolition in late September. Included is a narrative describing history and characterization of the building.

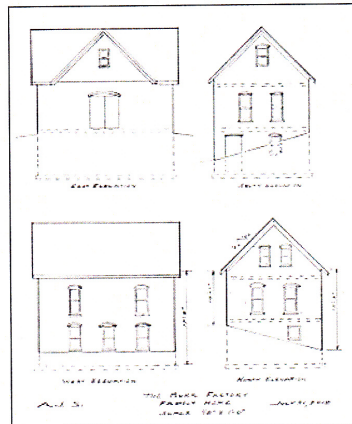


This brick house was located in the NW¼ of Section 7, Vermillion Township in Clay County on land first homesteaded by Merrick S. Burr in 1865. In 1895 the two-story brick building was constructed (on what is now 2309 N. University Road) to handle the increased demand of the production of brooms and brushes. Newton P. Burr and William S. Burr were the owners at that time. Because of the increased demand for broom corn and wooden handles these were purchased from various sources within and outside of South Dakota. The Burrs encouraged local farmers to raise broom corn as a cash crop.



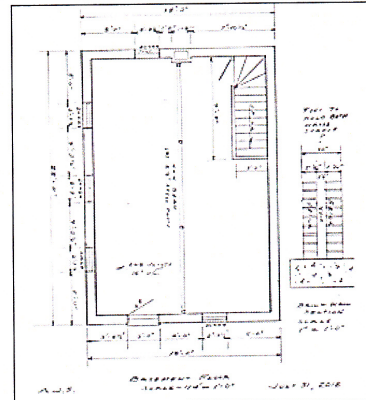
Earlier undated photo of the southeast corner of the building

In 1907 Newton P. Burr homesteaded near Quinn, South Dakota leaving William S. Burr as the sole owner, with his sons helping to produce brooms and whisk brushes. At this time they sold their products wholesale and retail. After William S. Burr died in 1936, his son William D. Burr took over the business and operated the manufacturing until 1983. It was one of the longest lasting Vermillion business at that time, just over 100 years. In 1994, Elizabeth Ann McCambridge inherited the property and in 2015 Thomas P. and Mary L. Merrigan bought this property.



Two photographs taken by Jim Stone illustrating the east and north elevations showing masonry, windows, and a dormer.

By August 2018 the brick building that housed the factory and where William Burr lived, had been vacant for a long time. Subsequently, it became a liability and the owners decided to demolish the structure.



Because of the importance of the history of the building, volunteers from the W. H. Over Museum and some also members of the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission decided to document this structure prior to its demolition. Jim Stone and Larry Bradley took measurements, made sketches and took photos. Evelyn Schlenker also took photos. Jim Stone drew elevations and floor plans to characterize the remaining structure. Below are floor plans and photos of the building. Only first floor and the basement plans are pictured, since it was impossible to access the second floor. The elevation sketches show architectural details of the building.



