

The background of the page is a collage of historical photographs. At the top, a man in a straw hat and dark coat is shown in profile. Below him, a woman in a light-colored, high-collared dress is visible. The bottom half of the image is dominated by a large, dark, grainy photograph of a group of people, likely a family, standing in a snowy or blizzardy environment. The overall tone is historical and somber.

Great-Great-Grandfather Gascho and the Blizzard of 1888

by Papa

*Great-Great-Grandfather
Gascho and the Blizzard of 1888*



Papa, Jed, Nana (back row); Maggie, Annali, Eriselle (front row). November, 2015.

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Joe woke up at 6 o'clock that morning, just like he did every morning. He did not need an alarm clock—he always just woke up, always at 6 o'clock. And anyway, there was no alarm clock in the house.



The rooster in the barn crowed every morning, in the summer before Joe woke up and in the winter after he woke up. The rooster did not wake Joe up in the summer because he always slept so well.



Joe snuck out of the bed in which he slept with two of his brothers, Chris and Jake.

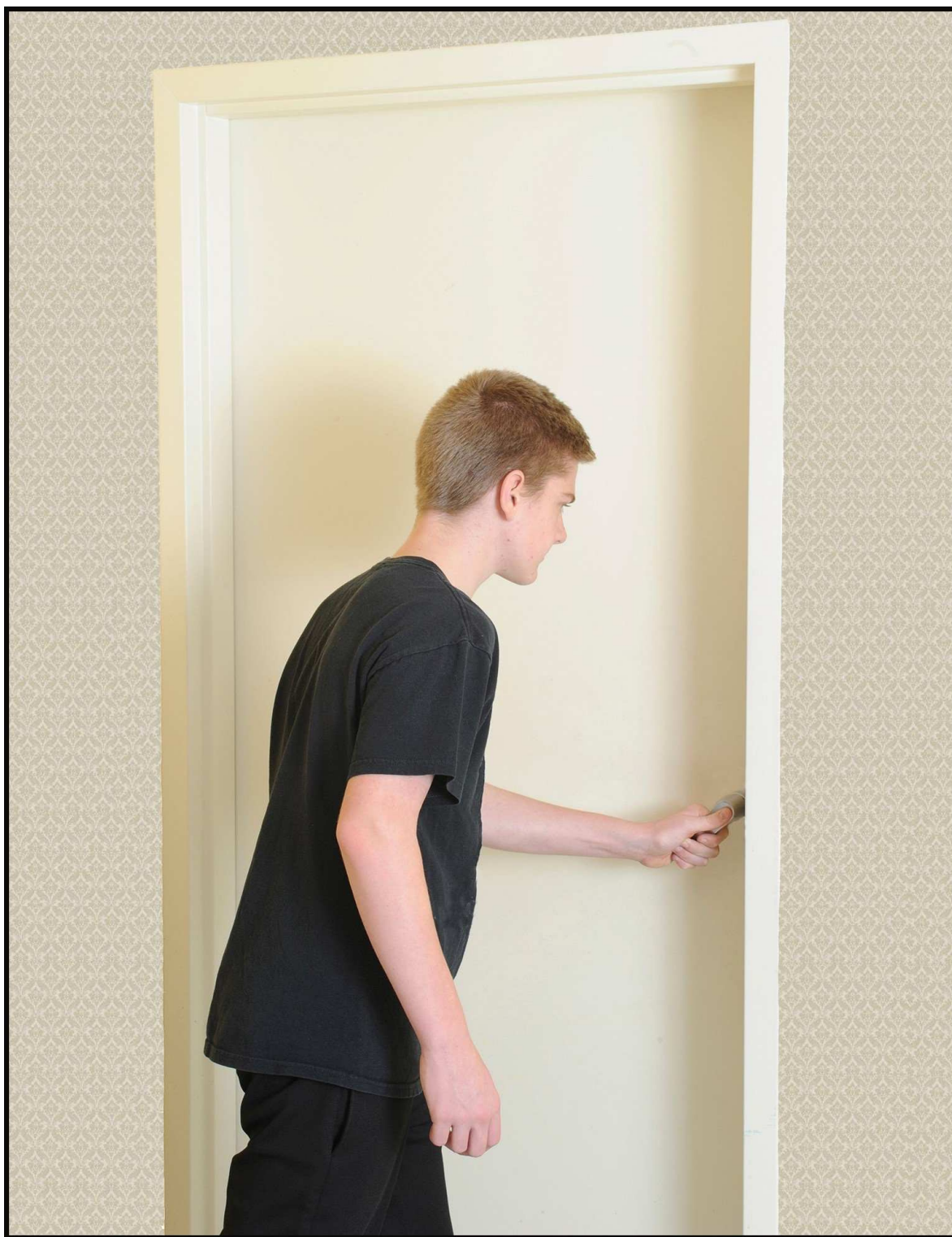
Ben and Billy, who were much younger, slept in another bed. Joe never slept in the middle because he always got up first, and he slept next to the window because he always got up before his brothers.



He looked out the window and saw the moon. Ever since he had been five years old he liked to look at the moon; he looked for it every morning. This morning it was almost full. He knew that tomorrow it would be a completely full moon—his father kept a calendar that had the picture of the moon on the day it was full. And today, there was a ring around the moon. He had seen that before. He thought, "I wonder if it will snow?" He remembered the last time he saw a ring around the moon. It had thundered and lightened and hailed that day.



Joe knew exactly where his clothes were. He always piled them on the floor before he went to sleep. He put on a blue shirt and black pants and black socks and a pair of black shoes. He laced up his shoe laces and double tied them. And then he decided he would not wear the blue shirt and so he changed into a black shirt.



He tiptoed across the room to the door, being careful not to step on a board that would have creaked had he stepped on it. He didn't want to wake up Chris and Jake. He opened the door, snuck down the hall and down the steps. He opened the door to the outside and was surprised that it was much warmer than it had been the night before.



He walked out to the barn and let Bessie, the Holstein cow, in. He pulled down some hay for her. While she chewed on it, he sat on a little three-legged stool next to her and pulled on her teats. The warm milk rushed into the bucket. He squirted some of the sweet milk at the calico cat who sat across the stall. She opened her mouth, swallowed it, and started to purr.



He brought the pail of milk into the house.
His mother was up. She smiled at him and
took the milk and poured it into a big bowl.
Soon Maggie and Chris and Jake and Ben and
Barb and Katie and Billy were up, and they
sat down at the table and ate fried potatoes
and mush. His mother and father slurped on
black coffee.



Mother packed six lunches and sent the six children off to school. (katie and Billy were too young and stayed home). She made them put on their winter coats and wear their hats and checked to be sure that there were gloves in their pockets. She said, "I know it is nice this morning, but it is January and you can just never tell when it will get cold." In each dinner pail was a cheese sandwich and a red apple. It took the children 30 minutes to walk to school. They met Jerry and Mary Hostetler first and then the four Yoder girls right before they got to school.

Joe Gascho

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. conscience | 11. different |
| 2. friendship | 12. afford |
| 3. business | 13. daffodil |
| 4. tropical | 14. doubtful |
| 5. beautiful | 15. grimace |
| 6. adoration | 16. brilliant |
| 7. independent | 17. opportunity |
| 8. continent | 18. triangle |
| 9. American | 19. steeple |
| 10. diligent | 20. recieve X |

19/20 Very Good

Before recess Joe had arithmetic. He was the best in the class. He liked long division and had learned how to figure out the square root of any number. After recess the teacher talked about the Nile River in Africa. He ate his sandwich and traded his apple for a baloney sandwich. He played Send. During the first period after lunch he took a spelling test. He spelled nineteen of the twenty words right, he missed "receive"—he forgot that the "e" came before the "i". After the last recess, he recited a poem about an old man and a tree with only one leaf left. He had learned it the night before.



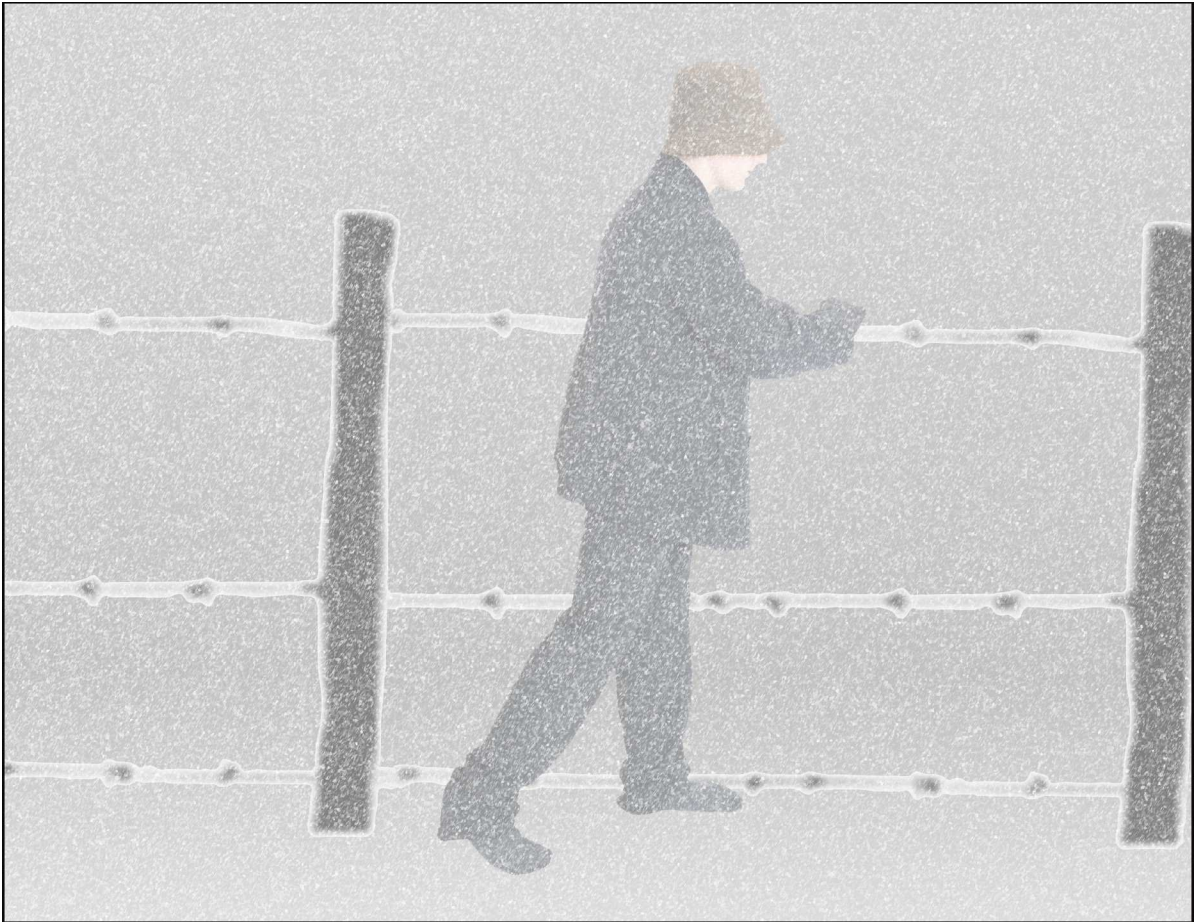
All the other children left for home as soon the teacher, Miss Larsen, rang the bell. Joe stayed to help the teacher clean the school. He did this every Thursday. First he got the broom out of the closet in the back and swept the floor. Then he took a rag, dipped it in water, and washed off the blackboards. Then he wiped off the teacher's desk. He was tempted to open the drawers, but remembered how upset he was when Chris had opened the special box he kept under his bed. By the time he was ready to go home, Miss Larsen had left.



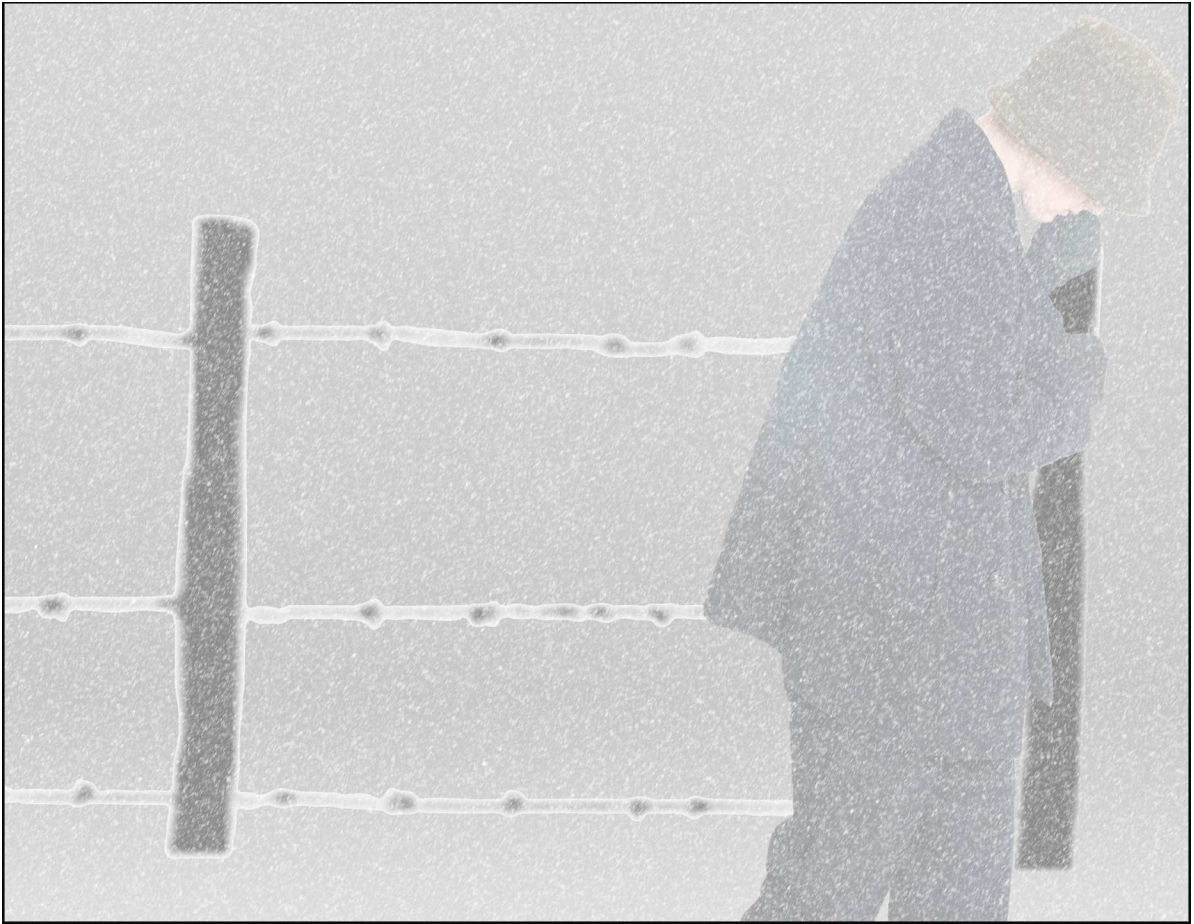
The sun had been shining all day but by the time he had walked fifteen minutes, clouds suddenly covered the sun. And all of a sudden it became very cold. Joe buttoned his coat all the way to the top and pulled his cap down tight on his head and jammed on his gloves. He was so happy his mother had made him wear his coat to school. He thought to himself, "I must thank her tonight."



And then it started to snow, first just a few flakes but within three minutes the snow was coming down from the sky like six men were shoveling it off a wagon. Then the wind started to blow, very hard, so hard that for a second Joe thought he would be knocked off his feet. When he had started to walk he could see his house, a mile down the road. But in five minutes he could not even see his hands.



Joe thought to himself, how am I ever going to get home? I cannot see what is even one foot in front of me. Then he remembered something. He turned to his left and ran as hard as he could. He went down into the ditch beside the road, then up the other side and ran into the fence that he knew was there. He grabbed onto the top wire and started to walk towards home.



It got colder and colder. Within ten minutes there was an inch of snow under his feet. But he kept walking. He came to the end of the fence. He thought, "I am home now!" But then he remembered the fence stopped at a lane, before starting again on the other side. Joe was frightened that he would lose his way and not be able to find the fence again.



He took in a big breath, jumped forward three big steps, stuck out his hand. No fence. He took two more steps and reached out his hand. No fence. He lost his balance and fell down. He was so cold he could hardly get up. But when he did finally get up he bumped into...the fence. He started to walk again.



His ears started to feel like ice. And then he couldn't even feel his ears. His hands felt like blocks of stone. The snow was caking his face. But still he walked and walked. And he walked until he reached the end of the fence. This time he knew that he was almost home.



But he knew that there were still many steps between the end of the fence and his house. He knew how hard it had been to find the fence when it had only been a few steps from the end of the first section of fence and the beginning of the second section of fence.



Meanwhile...Joe's father was very worried. He thought for fifteen minutes and then went to the basement. He pulled out the rope that he had used to tie chairs to the wagon. He put on his big coat, overshoes and hat. He tied one end of the rope around a post outside the door, wrapped the other end of the rope around himself, and started to walk. He knew the rope was fifty feet long and that the fence was forty feet away. So he walked to the end of the rope and when it was tight, he turned to his left and kept walking, always keeping the rope tight. He finally ran into the fence. And he waited. And waited...and then... he ran into



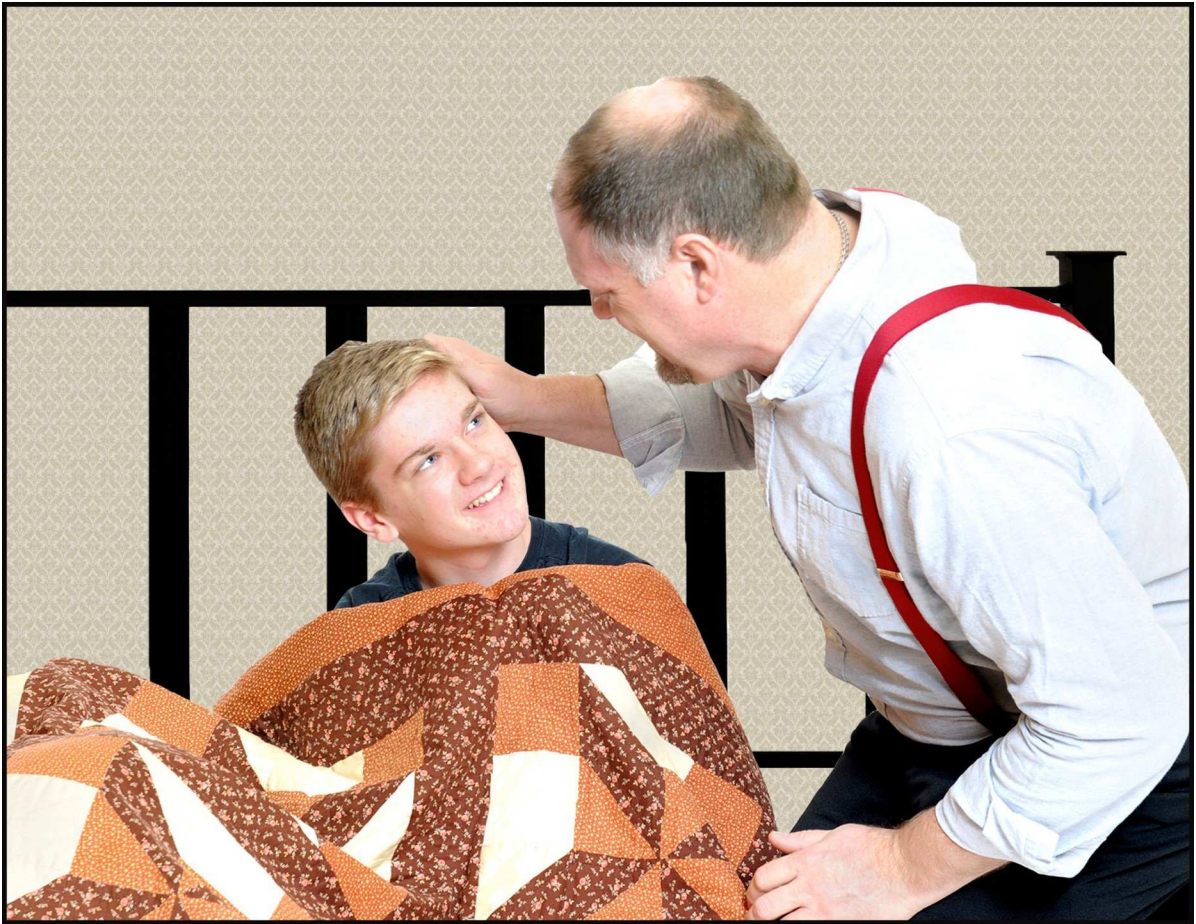
a body...and wrapped his arms around it and squeezed it tight. The wind was roaring but he heard a voice scream, "Daddy!" The body was Joe!



He held him tight and they followed the rope back to the house. Joe's mother grabbed Joe and rubbed his hands and feet. She pulled a brick out of the oven, wrapped it in a big towel, and laid it on Joe's belly. She made him a big cup of very hot chocolate. She used the milk he had brought in to her in the morning.



Joe's father told him how very smart he was to follow the fence and how proud he was of him. Joe's mother did not say anything but just smiled and laughed and then cried and then smiled. Joe told his mother "thank you" for telling him to take his coat and gloves to school.



The next morning Joe's father came up the steps and into Joe's room, just before 6 o'clock. He told Joe he had milked the cow. He told Joe to stay under the covers and sleep in a little longer.



But when his father walked back down the steps, Joe crawled out from under the covers and walked to the window. The stars were out. And he could see the moon. It was full. There was no circle around it. Joe crawled back in bed and pulled the covers up and slept for another hour. His mother had called up the steps and said, "No school today!"

The End

This book is based on the supposedly true story that Joe Gascho, grandfather of the author, Joseph Gascho, and great-great-grand father of Jed and Maggie Gascho and Annali and Eriselle Cooke, was caught in the Great Blizzard of 1888. This blizzard is also called the Children's Blizzard because many children were caught in the blizzard which hit during a school day, on January 12 (supposedly it reached the Lincoln, Nebraska, area at about 3 p.m.). It is not to be mistaken for a second devastating blizzard that struck the east coast in March of that year. The Midwest blizzard struck very quickly; the temperature, over a very short period of time, dropped from slightly above freezing to as much as -20 to -40 degrees below zero. The wind velocity was very high. Visibility dropped to nearly zero.

The story told in this book is based on the author's imagination of what might have happened that day.

Joe Gascho, born on February 11, 1871, near Flanagan, Illinois, was the next to the oldest of the twelve children of Joseph and Mary Birkey Gascho. At the time of the

blizzard, the youngest three had not yet been born and the oldest, John, was deceased.

In 1888 Joseph and Mary and their family were living near Milford, Nebraska, about twenty miles from Lincoln.

The hutch/dry sink, shown in the kitchen on several photographs in the book, was built by Joe's father, Joseph, and given to Joe when he married Phoebe Roth, on December 15, 1898.



