



## Where to go

### Scotia Chalk Mine Louis E. May Historical Museum

**H**APPY JACK HILL has a secret. Hidden under the massive hill is the Scotia Chalk Mine. Hidden also in the old hill's history are legends of Indian raids and pioneer bastions. Not-so-hidden is a fantastic view from atop the area's highest hill, Happy Jack Hill. To reach the State Wayside Area, drive north on Nebraska Highway 11, 6 miles from Cotesfield. A side road is tucked away on the left side of the highway. A 45 mile-an-hour speed limit sign is its only marker. A tiny parking lot nestles at the hill's foot. Developed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the attraction boasts picnic tables, drinking water, and restrooms.

Early settlers are reputed to have used Happy Jack Hill as a lookout point, a kind of advance-warning system for spotting marauding Indians. Legend has it that the hill was named for Jack Swearingen who lived alone on those bluffs overlooking the Loup River.

Early settlers in Scotia used chalk for foundations, but such use became impractical when the farmyard pig population began eating them. In 1878, a store in Scotia was built from chalk. Then in the 1890's commercial mining began in earnest. Dynamite blasted the mineral from its 7-foot vein. In 1902, Edmund Van Horn was killed in a cave-in. His son, Ernest, operated the mine for a time. He tried unsuccessfully to

make bricks from the chalk before he closed the business.

In the early 1930's, an Omaha paint products firm reopened the mine and used the chalk in manufactures. Although nearly 80 uses were found for the chalk, the mine closed shortly thereafter, when it was found that materials could be shipped in more cheaply from England.

Now the cave is an interesting maze of dark tunnels haunted by pioneers and miners.

Anyone entering the mine should be sure to carry a flashlight. A hard hat is good protection from the low ceilings. Duck low and watch carefully for lowering ceiling levels. If entered carefully and sensibly, the cave is perfectly safe.

Railroad half-ties make a crude stairway from the mine to the peak's summit. The view from there is a broad vista including the swift Loup River. Trees turn from the green lace of budded limbs to verdant growth to the torch of fall. A majestic purple of more distant hills flows through the fabric of Happy Jack's view.

Like the pioneers who kept watch from Happy Jack Hill and found so many uses for chalk, eastern Nebraska settlers left their mark on the state. The Louis E. May Historical Museum in Fremont is just one example of that mark.

The huge old mansion was the residence of one of Fremont's founding fathers, Theron Nye. Behind the big Georgian columns is the gracious past preserved in brocades and oak. The house is not a restoration, it's a museum. Although some rooms have been restored to 19th Century decor, many of

the old rooms are display areas for extensive collections of memorabilia.

Among the historical objects is a grasshopper warrant, the only known one in existence in the United States. Such warrants were once somewhat like draft calls. They called all able-bodied men to a designated place at a certain time to fight the grasshopper plague.

One spacious second-story room houses an extensive collection of antique dolls. From a prize-winning "Plain Jane" to a fanciful French doll dressed in period costume, they seem to await the laughter of playmates of old.

In a room resplendent with masculine pride, heavy trophy cases display the prizes of many years' hunting success. Heavy oaken beams crisscross the ceiling and dark wooden hounds' heads of the same material guard the walls, prepared to grasp the lanterns intended for their mouths.

The old mansion is packed with memorabilia, attractively restored and displayed. Nineteenth Century clothing, cookwares, and furnishings fill the many rooms of the house. Closets, too, have been turned into display areas.

Sewing machines and dressmaker's dummies were a little different than today. The museum traces their evolution in one of its upstairs rooms.

The basement is being converted into an old-time general store filled with goods no longer found in any but antique shops. Mason jars, cracker barrels, and crockery will be part of that area.

History in Nebraska is preserved from border to border be it a chalk mine or a museum.

THE END



The Scotia Chalk Mine is maze of dark tunnels haunted by pioneers and miners



Louis E. May Historical Museum is old mansion with past memories