

Sarpy County loner battles ‘county hall’

Woman challenges assessor, gets lower values for property

By Theresa Wulf

In this corner, the southwest corner of Sarpy County, is a feisty 78-year-old who’s not about to accept the county’s valuation of her property.

In the other corner is the Sarpy County assessor, commissioners and appraiser who told Dorothy Crocker she had to accept the valuations given her.

But Crocker’s daddy taught her to defend herself since she was a little girl, she said. And she used those long-ago lessons to fight “county hall.”

Crocker and county came out fighting, but five months later, they’ve settled their differences and shaken hands.

When county assessors came out to value her property for the tax rolls, she chased them off, Crocker said. She came to the county commissioners’ Dec. 7, 1987 meeting to protest the valuations given her property.

RAY LIND VOTED to have Crocker’s property re-valuated, but the other four commissioners voted to keep the assessor’s valuation.

“They all turned me down – every g--d---ed one of them,” Crocker said.

She didn’t give up, though, and now Crocker has started paying taxes on her property valuations that are about two-thirds lower than the original figures.

One of the commissioners wrote Crocker a letter after the meeting and told her she could still protest the valuations.

“That didn’t make no difference,” Crocker said. “I was going in anyhow.”

As those at the Dec. 7 meeting found out, Crocker’s language sometimes is saltier than a sailor’s. Her brusque manner and speech remind movie-goers of the woman who played Clint Eastwood’s chimp-fighting mother in the “Every Which Way But Loose” films.



Dorothy Crocker drives a 1968 International Scout to get around her Platte River property. (Photo by Rod Nogosek)

JEANS, A SHIRT, work boots and a “bonnet” – otherwise known as a cap – are Crocker’s usual attire. Some days she works from light until dark, she said, but other days she doesn’t feel like going out at all.

She drives around her Platte River property in a 1968 Scout that has about 17,000 miles on it. With her in the Scout is her shotgun.

“I always carry a shotgun,” Crocker said. “We’ve got rattlesnakes down here. I don’t carry the gun on the highway, and I don’t kill people. The gun is for snakes, not intruders.”

But it’s helped turn more than a few people away from her locked gate, including the county officials who came out to assess Crocker’s property.

“They said they wanted in,” she recalled, “and I said keep off unless they wanted to pick buckshot out of their asses.”

Crocker flips through a spiral-bound

notebook – her diary – to refresh her memory about the details of the last few months. “In here it tells what kind of SOB’s they are,” she says about county officials.

EVENTUALLY, CROCKER invited county assessors back out to her property to re-valuate it. They looked up close at the sheds that had holes in the roof and no floors and took a second look at her home.

Crocker also provided receipts to prove she didn’t make major improvements to her home until 1986, and valuations were adjusted accordingly, said Paul Hackney, county assessor.

“We didn’t charge her for a good house when she didn’t have a good house,” Hackney said.

“Things worked out pretty decent,” he said. “She’s gotten fair treatment from this office and, as far as I know, every other office in the courthouse.”

Crocker, too, said she was happy with the way things eventually worked out.

“It’s great,” she said. “If they would have come to me in the first place and acted like men instead of jacks, this never would have happened.”

HACKNEY SAID the county could have added valuations back to the 1920s, when the first buildings were on the property.

“They say the house has not been on the tax rolls since 1921,” Crocker said. “That’s not true. This room (now the kitchen) was down there for a sawmill shack. The other building up here was a tarpaper shack.”

Crocker eventually moved away from Nebraska. She said she was married “too g-- d--- many years. I didn’t realize how nice it was to be by myself.”

She has a daughter, three grandchildren and six great-grandchildren scattered throughout the country, she said.

But the best way for her to live, Crocker said, is alone.

"I DON'T BOTHER nobody else. I don't stick my nose in anyone's business. . . . I don't know a thing about my neighbors and I like it that way. They leave me alone."

Pointing out the window to an old railroad signal in her yard, she said, "They should put a sign up on that thing: 'Bull of the woods - this way.' "

Her current home is a five-room house. When her brother died, he'd been living in a two-room shack with peeling paint.

"I inherited it after I got through fighting the bank, a senator and four or five others," Crocker said. Her brother had three other wills, but signed another on his deathbed. "The banker

busted his ass to get that filed."

Her leukemia-stricken brother, Crocker admits, "was off his rocker. I should have taken him to court, but I was his sister and didn't have the guts to."

Since her return to Nebraska, "I feel picked on all the way through, from the time of my brother's death," Crocker said.

"I'M NOT SORRY I came up here. I was born and raised here, and I wanted to croak here. Everyone's buried there in Greenwood Cemetery."

Aside from fixing up and adding on to her brother's shack, Crocker also has repaired a shed and barn.

Her brother used to feed cattle on the rest of the land, she said, but now it isn't good for much of anything but being pretty. Crocker calls it swampland.

"You couldn't even go out and raise hell on it," she said. "And they were gonna charge me all that g-- d--- money for all that g-- d--- swamp."

She's settled her tax problems for this year, and Crocker said she's ready for next year's go-round with the county assessor.

"If he's fair with me, I'll be fair with him. I can go to court, by God, just the same as they can."

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