

THE FRONTIER

HISTORY OF THE DAYS THAT ARE GONE, WRITTEN BY THOSE WHO LIVED AT THAT TIME

First Installment

For the past year or more Tom Hannaberry and Dean Selah have been collecting data from the files of the county, under the WPA for the purpose of writing a history of Holt county. In their research they have secured many valuable manuscripts of former residents, in which the real history of this city and the county is written. These stories were written by M. D. Long, one of the pioneer residents of the county and a former county clerk and leading democratic war horse of this section of the state; Monsignor M. F. Cassidy, long the beloved pastor of St. Patrick's parish in this city and a resident of this city and county for many years; Bartley Blaine, one of the pioneer ministers of the county and John P. Prouty, who lived on the corner where the Burlington Roundhouse now stands, when we came here in 1877. All of the characters in the story have passed to the great beyond, but they made history while here. The following story was written by Mr. Selah, who copied the diaries and historical sketches of the authors.—Editor.

It is extremely difficult for one to write any sort of history fifty or sixty years after the events have occurred and get it as true as at the time they actually happened. There are always many unauthenticated stories, many of them passed on from one generation to another becoming garbled at each telling until unrecognizable. They are true tales and believed even yet, though many of them are viewpoints of different individuals who don't see the same occurrence the same way and are confusing.

Therefore, when men who lived in that day, when the stirring events took place and wrote of them or noted them in their own personal diary, one is able to get a more accurate picture.

It is with great pleasure that in the following article I am able to give you words from the diary of John T. Prouty, and from the pens of M. D. Long, Monsignor Cassidy and Bartley Blaine.

Therefore may I submit first the words of M. D. Long, in his "History of Northwest Nebraska and Holt county," written in O'Neill, Nebraska and dated December 6, 1901:

From a historical view point Holt county and all that portion of Nebraska lying between the counties west and north boundaries and the west and north boundary lines of the state, and embracing all that territory comprised in the present counties of Boyd, Keya Paha, Rock, Brown, Cherry, Sheridan, Dawes and Box Butte and Sioux—aggregating 16000 square miles of country was primarily identified in its evolution as a howling wilderness. It was the home of the buffalo, elk, antelope, deer, festive jack-rabbit and their prey, the coyote, the lean and hungry wolf, and the wildcat who barked and mewed to the majestic silence of the lonely and unpeopled prairies, together with the fantastic painted and picturesque aborigine who wandered unmolested by the pale face, before the companionship of the "sooner and settler," who had not yet arrived. It was an arid region where in it was supposed rains were as scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth and as far between as angels visits and water more precious than diamonds.

It is a fact, however, that in a few isolated instances Holt county had been penetrated a few miles along its eastern boundary by some hardy and invincible pioneers, for by research it is found that an old man a Mr. Ford settled upon land in the spring of 1870 followed in May of the same year by James Ewing, C. Gunter, J. M. Davidson and S. Clemmens. Then in March 12, 1872, John Ryan, May 1, 1872, Geo. W. and Mary Howe, Sept. 1, 1872, Thomas Kieley and Dec. 1, F. S. Wentworth. In the spring of 1873, July 13, H. H. McEvory, Frank Bitney, John T. Prouty, Eli Sanford, John Sanford

and Eli H. Thompson reached the Elkhorn about a half mile below the present site of O'Neill.

J. T. Prouty writes that on the 13 day of July, 1873, we found ourselves after forty-three of traveling, settled on a squatter's right, housed in a covered wagon in the beautiful Elkhorn Valley in its wild and uninhabited state. The price of government land was \$1.25 and you could take all you wanted.

The Elkhorn river at that time was very low. One could step across it in places and not get one's feet wet. The water was clear and pure like the spring brook at its fountain head. The fish were free from mud or foul taste, some so large that they could be thrown out of the shallow water with pitchforks. In the fall and early spring ducks and wild geese were plentiful as were antelopes, coyotes, prairie wolves, deer and elk. Plenty of Buffalo horns were scattered about, but no Buffalo. Owing to lack of rain and sweeping prairie fires the landscape represented a barren waste of the old American desert. Mirages were frequent when towns at a distance of a hundred miles could be seen at a delightful advantage. Prairie fires, with clouds of smoke in advance of the fire were so real that no difference could be told from the original.

The settlers were mostly made up of large families with a view of getting homes for one and all. The nearest trading point was Norfolk, ninety miles distant, or Yankton, about the same distance. The nearest railroads were Wisner and Columbus and the nearest postoffice Frenchtown, in Antelope county thirty five miles distant. Doctors, preachers and lawyers were booked in advance. Houses were of sod and logs with sod roofs, half dugouts, hay stables and pole and brush sheds covered with hay. The dread of severe blizzards, like the spring of 1873, which swept the entire west and held for three days and nights, killing nearly all the stock and in which many lives were lost, was always with them.

The army grasshoppers continued their raids through the years 1874-5-6, devouring nearly everything green within their reach. One year they flew over in great swarms for nearly three weeks, dropping down just long enough to devour crops, appearing like thunder clouds and obscuring the sun.

The boundary lines of the county were established by the legislature in 1873, the act going into effect March 3, and it was designated Elkhorn county. In 1874 Postmaster General J. W. Marshall appointed Mr. Prouty as postmaster at Rockford, Elkhorn county. These names were afterwards changed to O'Neill, Holt county.

The postmasters salary for one year was \$1200. The distance the mail had to be carried was thirty-five miles and back, or seventy miles once a week, which was also the duty of the postmaster. To get roads established from one settlement to another, mounds of earth were thrown up within seeing distance.

Mr. Prouty says my residence built after my arrival at Rockford, in 1873, was a large 14x18 foot long with a peeled log over the center named the "ridge pole" to give the desired pitch to the roof, thus the inside was 12x16 feet. During a heavy thunderstorm the bedding and clothing was put under the bed and covered with oil cloth. Then they would stand under the ridge pole sideways to keep dry.

The first Fourth of July celebration was held at Mr. Prouty's at Rockford in 1876. The women of the colony made the flag from bed quilts, the clothing they wore and any piece of cloth they could find, while the men found and selected the flag pole and Old Glory floated to the breeze for the first time in the new county.

In the meantime Monsignor Cassidy says in his "History of St. Patrick's Parish, Holt county Ne-

braska," that in the early seventies General John O'Neill, of Irish and American national fame as a military hero and benefactor of his race, conceived the idea of locating one hundred or more Irish Catholic colonies on the fertile prairies of the west. With that laudable end in view, he at once commenced the agitation of Irish immigration throughout the eastern and northern states.

M. D. Long writes that as early as the year 1871 he, General O'Neill, had taken to the lecture platform advocating the immigration of his countrymen from the mines of Pennsylvania to the beautiful prairies of Holt county, Nebraska.

Father Cassidy goes further and says that "Imbued with that spirit General O'Neill, in the year 1874 collected together in the east twenty-five families and proceeded with them in person to the west, crossed the Missouri river at Omaha and thence to the northwest up the beautiful valley of the Elkhorn, establishing them on the government domain at O'Neill City, Holt county. This community prospered and continued to grow until in the year 1888 it contained no less than two hundred Catholic families. He continues that St. Patrick's Parish comprised nearly all of Holt County and that the early history of the colony is practically the history of the Parish."

First Catholic service was held by Father Redard at the residence of John Hannigan in the O'Neill Colony in the summer of 1875. Father Bedard was pastor of a French-Canadian Colony at Frenchtown, Antelope county, Nebraska. He located at that place about two years before Gen. O'Neill's first colony at O'Neill and continued his visits, celebrating mass in log houses and dugouts, until the year 1877. Then a small frame building 18x36 was built at a cost of \$1200.00, material being very high owing to the long haul by ox team of 125 miles. General John O'Neill contracted a fatal disease in the winter of 1877-78 and died at Omaha, Nebraska.

Father Cassidy says of him that, "In the death of Gen. O'Neill the Irish race lost a true, valiant, and noble hearted champion of the freedom of the Irish people from English domination. He was a counselor and benefactor, who ever held in view, the broadening and elevating of the national character and aspirations toward the betterment of the social and religious condition and welfare of his countrymen."

Again Mr. Long writes that, about the time of the arrival of Gen. O'Neill's first colony and for some years thereafter, trails leading to the Black Hills were established from some of the towns along the Missouri river, notably Omaha and Sioux City, which passed through the little village of O'Neill City. Many picturesque caravans traveled over those highways of commerce, heading for the land of gold and fabulous wealth and rivaling in grotesque equipment the historic caravansaries of the Orient, read of in ancient annals.

Even our own loved and famous Gen. Custer passed through here with a part of his command in 1876 on his way to his last and fatal campaign against old Sitting Bull in the Big Horn and Yellow Stone country. Reaching O'Neill City he called upon Gen. O'Neill, whose guest he was for a short time at the O'Neill homestead. General Custer entertained a very high regard for the soldierly, brave and intrepid General O'Neill.

After Governor Silas Garber and Secretary of State Bruno Tschuck had declared this a county by proclamation on June 29, 1876 and named the acting county officials, Mr. Long says, the first meeting of that body was held on October 21st, and that the temporary county seat remained at Twin Lakes near the present town of Inman until Febr. 6, 1877, when it was removed to Paddock, remaining there, under many vicissitudes until August 1, 1879, then being moved to O'Neill City. The first meeting of the county board at O'Neill City occurred on August 4, 1879. Previous to the organization of the county and while it was yet unorganized territory it was attached to th counties of Knox and

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SOUTHEAST BREEZES

By Romaine Saunders

Remember when they threw in a pair of "galluses" with the new suit you bought?

It is said the radio will not be quite perfected until you can hurl an egg instead of turning a knob.

With over six and a half million families classed as indigent, America seems to be moving in a body "over the hill to the poor house."

Holt county at one time was good for a front page half or full column most any day in the big papers, whereas now the only mention it gets is of a measly basket ball match or a line about the weather.

The Frontier Editor probably had a Waterbury watch on him the morning that Jan. 12 blizzard struck as he states it was 11:30. It was just after 10 at our house. Of course, after 51 years, hours and minutes are not important.

Sniffing noses and sore throats again reminds us that medical science is still helpless in the treatment of a "common cold." As Doc. Eisenman, an early day O'Neill physician, used to say a woolen sock soaked with kerosene around your neck was as good as anything.

One Nebraska county is said to have 95 per cent of its rural families on some form of federal relief. If the present mood for curtailment of spending prevails in Congress we are going to have to again learn the principles of the pioneers—root hog or die.

The proposal of northwest Nebraska's Congressman Coffee for increased tariff rates is a retreat from the traditional free trade ideas of his party. But the president has not retreated but repudiated his platform and election pledges of '32 and '36, introducing that new thing in federal spending known as pump priming. Mr. Coffee favors a stiff tariff on farm products.

Since the story of the wild cats got into the papers I have been asked if Holt county is a frontier region infested with beasts of prey. It is astonishing how you can "get away with it," when you say we have grey wolves, grizzly bear, now and then a cougar and deer and elk abound. Notwithstanding it is the age of the automobile and trailer, many are in blissful ignorance of anything beyond the street they live on.

A barber on east O says he has been trying for seven years to make enough money to get back to Keya Paha county. I haven't taken the trouble to investigate whether his estimate of the financial outlook of the trade is representative of the profession throughout the city, but he makes it definite, unmistakable and understandable by saying "fifty cents is lots of money to a barber." At any rate, barbering is not what it once was, when a rack covered half the side of the room with such sentiment as "Forget-me-not" in fancy lettering engulfed in floral decoration. You might have to sit from half an hour to an hour awaiting the call "next," but there was the Police Gazette and other similar publications to hold the interest of customers. All these are absent from the present day barber shop and may have something to do with the cash receipts.

Continental Oil Company Favors Newspaper Adv.

Newspaper advertising will again be the backbone of Continental Oil Company's 1939 advertising program, the largest in the company's history, it was announced at Ponca City, Okla., last Monday by A. J. Rabe, advertising manager.

"While we feel that we have a well-rounded program for the year," said Rabe, "assigning a fair appropriation to every important advertising medium, by far the largest share of our 1939 budget will be spent for newspaper space."

Continental's current newspaper advertising presents the new form of "Zig-zag" reading. In this proposed reform for relieving eye-

strain, the type of each second line of copy is arranged with the words in reverse order—so that the eye can read from left to right on the first line and from right to left on the second line—avoiding the strain of long eye sweeps between lines. This "Zig-zag" advertising is not intended as a reform, but is presented merely as an interesting game or contest for readers.

Almost a Unit in Protest Against City Spending

Petitions have been circulated in the city the past week protesting against the proposed improvements in the northern part of the city advocated by the city council and most of the property owners affected have signed the protest. It is proposed to gravel the streets and put in a curb and gutter of cement. Some say that the cost for both the curb and gutter would be 35 cents per running foot. We do not know where they get their information. We had a curb and gutter put in front of our building when the street was paved a couple of years ago and it cost us \$40.00 for 28 feet, which amounts to considerable more than 35 cents per foot, in fact over four times that amount. If they get their new curb and gutter for thirty-five cents per foot those of us who were stung for four times that amount should have a rebate coming.

The Alpha Club

The Alpha Club met with Mrs. George Robertson on Wednesday, June 11 with all members present and one guest, Mrs. Clarence Wrede. This meeting was for the election of officers and the following were elected: Mrs. Lillian Drayton, president; Mrs. Laverne Robertson, vice president; Mrs. Ruby Morton, treasurer; Mrs. Louise Robertson, secretary. Mrs. James McNulty was taken in as a new member. The hostess served a delicious lunch. Mr. and Mrs. Herman Widfeldt entertained the Alpha Club members and their husbands also at a large number of their friends to an oyster supper Friday evening at their home.

St. Mary's Cage Team Has A Busy Week

St. Mary's basket ball team played five games in the last four days of last week with rather indifferent success. On Thursday they played Orchard and lost 26-22. Friday and Saturday they were at the Holt County Tournament, where they won two out of three. They defeated Chambers 25-16, lost a 21-20 decision to O'Neill and beat Page 31-24. On Sunday they played Spalding Academy and Spalding kept its winning streak unbroken by carrying off a 23-17 decision.

Let Us Have A Couple Of More Whistles

O'Neill is nothing if not up to date. We now have two fire whistles, but they are both in the Second ward. What is the matter with the other wards in the city? The first ward should have a couple and the Third ward, where most of the firemen reside, should have at least two. How about it?

O'Neill Woman's Club

Woman's club met at the home of Mrs. C. J. Malone Wednesday afternoon with a large membership present. Mrs. Elmer Stolte gave two very fine musical selections, "He was a Cinderella" and "He Stoops to Conquer." Mrs. Ira George reviewed "Dark River." It was a splendid review. Discussion was general. The next meeting in February will be at the home of Mrs. E. E. Parkins.

The Weather

This section of the state has enjoyed nice weather the past week with a little snow that gave us .15 hundreds of an inch of moisture. Following is the chart for the week:

	H.	L.	M.
Jan. 12	43	30	
Jan. 13	41	23	
Jan. 14	36	20 .07	
Jan. 15	20	10 .03	
Jan. 16	20	9 .05	
Jan. 17	27	15 .02	
Jan. 18	37	5	

J. O. Walker left Wednesday for Omaha on a business trip.

Another Pioneer Passes R. P. Wagers Dies

Rufus P. Wagers died at his home in Page last Saturday, after an illness of several weeks of ailments incidental to old age, at the age of 81 years, 2 months and 15 days. The funeral was held last Monday afternoon from the Methodist church in Page, Rev. Carpenter officiating and burial in the Page cemetery.

Deceased was born in Grant County, Wisconsin, on October 10, 1857. He came to this county about 1882 and located on a homestead near Page, where he lived for several years. On December 24, 1886, he was united in marriage to Miss Clara Kendall. To this union five children were born who, with their mother, are left to mourn the passing of a kind and affectionate husband and father. The children are: Mark Wagers, Newman Grove, Nebr.; Agerty, Page; Blanche, Page; Nellie Snyder, Page; and Gladys Sterner, O'Neill.

Mr. Wagers was one of the real pioneers of the eastern part of the county and for many years took a prominent part in the civic affairs of his section of the county and the county as a whole. He was a good citizen and had the respect of a large circle of friends in his section of the county, who will regret to learn of his passing.

Omaha Brags, But O'Neill Has the Goods

The Wednesday World-Herald carried a double deck head announcing that four Omahans secured numeral grid sweaters at Nebraska. These sweaters were issued to Athletes who were regular at practice sessions and scholastically eligible at the close of the season. Omaha, with a population of over 200,000 and several hundred students at the University secured four in the honored roll, while O'Neill, with a population of 3,000, and with a little over a half dozen in school, secured one of the honored trophies. The winner was Jack Vincent, of this city, and we will all be looking for Jack to do something for Nebraska U. when the next foot ball season comes around. Jack is a real foot ball player and we look for him to enter the name of O'Neill high in the sport line before he finishes his course at Nebraska University.

Albion Restaurateur Will Open Cafe Here

Mr. and Mrs. Drew Murphy, of Albion, were in the city Wednesday and Thursday and this morning rented the Horriskey building on Douglas Street, recently vacated by the O'Neill Food Center, and will open up a restaurant therein in about six weeks.

Mr. Murphy has been engaged in the restaurant business in Albion for a good many years and has a reputation in that section of the state of operating one of the finest restaurants in Nebraska. He is still in business in Albion but we understand that he intends to move to this city and will make his future home here. The writer has eaten in his restaurant in Albion many times and he is the kind of a citizen that is a real asset to any city and The Frontier welcomes him to the business ranks of O'Neill.

Baby Dies of Pneumonia

Baby Barnes, the month-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Barnes, living about ten miles north of this city died last Monday night after a short illness of pneumonia. The funeral was held Tuesday afternoon at 2 o'clock and burial in Prospect Hill cemetery.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Cearns, of Dorsey, announce the birth of a son on Monday, January 16.

Wasteful Governments Tax, Tax and Tax!

"Many oil companies advertise the price of gasoline in this fashion: "Gas, 15 cents a gallon; state and federal tax, 6 cents; total 21 cents."

If similar methods of illustrating the price of all products were employed, we, the consumers, would get the shock of our lives.

When we buy a five-dollar pair

of shoes, a dollar or more is for taxes. When we pay a three-dollar electric bill, 50 or 60 cents represents taxes. When we buy a forty-dollar suit, close to ten dollars goes for taxes.

You can't dodge taxation—unless you're a hermit living in the hills. On a normal day, you pay taxes a dozen times, though you may not know it—when you drive your car, ride a trolley, eat lunch, or make a purchase. When the American people get this truth through their heads, there will be a drive for economy in government that will get somewhere. For ignorance of the facts is a wasteful government's best friend.—Glencoe (Minn.) Enterprise.

George Says He Has Observed A Robin

George Robertson is sure spring is about here. George says that he saw a robin last Tuesday morning, the first of the year, but he was fearful that it might have its toes frozen before spring really arrived.

Getting An Early Start In the Cattle Business

Eddie and Freddie Rector, sixteen months old twins of Mr. and Mrs. George Rector, of Middle Branch, are starting out early in the cattle business. Last week each one of the twins became the owner of a pure bred heifer purchased from the Lucas Herford ranch. This no doubt will prove a profitable increase in their investment and by the time they are of age they can be owners of a large herd of valuable cattle.

Adjudged Insane

Mrs. Meta Middlestadt, of this city, who was being held in the Antelope County Jail for forgery, was before District Judge Adolph Wenke, of Stanton, Nebraska on Monday of this week, on that charge and to which charge she pled guilty. She was placed in the custody of Sheriff Duffy of this county, the conviction of the district judge there being that she was insane, with instructions to hold an insanity hearing, and if she were found not insane, to be returned to Neligh for sentence. She was called before the insanity commission of this county on Wednesday morning and was adjudged insane, and given into the custody of the sheriff, pending her removal to the State Hospital at Norfolk.

Atkinson Wins The Basket Ball Tournament

Atkinson won the Holt County Tournament by defeating O'Neill 22-20, in an overtime period. St. Mary's won third, defeating Page 31-24. In the semi-finals O'Neill squeezed through with a 21-20 victory over St. Mary's while Atkinson chalked up a easy 29-17 win over Page.

Inman won the consolations, defeating St. Joseph, of Atkinson 26-10. The Sportsmanship Trophy was awarded to Amelia.

A player from each O'Neill school was picked on the all Tournament team. Bob Shoemaker, of St. Mary's and McKenna, of O'Neill, each won guard posts, while Boucher, of Atkinson, Stevens and Lewis of Inman completed the team.

Grattan Project Club

The Grattan Project Club met at the home of Mrs. Charles Lawrence for a very enjoyable afternoon meeting, Tuesday, January 10.

The lesson on "Storage of Clothing" was read and generally discussed. This was the most interesting lesson so far. There were also demonstrations of hat holders, clothes and laundry bags and other interesting articles. A delicious lunch of pie and coffee was served at the end of the meeting. The next meeting will be with Mrs. Ed Leach.

Marriage Licenses

Floyd H. Vequist and Miss Edythe B. Miller, both of O'Neill, were granted a marriage license in county court last Saturday.

John Krieger, of Atkinson, and Miss Florence Schneider, of Stuart, were granted a marriage license in County court last Tuesday.