

THE FRONTIER

INTERESTING CHAPTER OF HOLT COUNTY'S EARLY HISTORY Second Installment

(Prepared by Dean Selah and Tom Hannaberry from historical data written by former pioneers.)

Mr. Long says that all of this vast extent of country including Holt County belonged to the Sixth Judicial District and was presided over by Judges Griffy and Valentine, being very disorderly for several years which of course was to be expected amongst a people so constituted and composed of ranch followers, cow boys, soldiers, Indians, horse and cattle thieves, gambling desperadoes, and all of the other reckless characters who flock to new and undeveloped countries. Numerous were the violent deaths which occurred in those stirring and exciting times, among the most notable of which might be mentioned the murder of ranchman Moorehead in the winter of 1878, on Snake Creek by Indians. Also the killing of Lt. Cherry, of the U. S. Army stationed at Fort Niobrara, and after whom the county of that name was christened. The killing of the Lieutenant happened in the winter of 1879, on Minnehadusa Creek and was perpetrated by Indians.

In connection with the murder of Moorehead one particular incident is worthy of record. H. W. McClure, now a resident of Sioux City, was foreman on the Kountze, Yates & Co. ranch, situated on Snake Creek about 75 miles south west of Fort Niobrara.

Mac, as soon as he learned of the murder of Moorehead started forthwith for Columbus, Platte County, on horseback to procure arms and ammunition necessary for the defense of the ranches against any future incursions by the marauding Sioux. His ride was a famous exploit for it is related that he covered the distance in two days and one night of continuous riding. Fresh relays of horses were provided him along the route by friends however.

In the summer of 1880, an Indian scare occurred in Holt county which drove all of the settlers in the northern and western parts of the county to O'Neill City for protection. The excitement reached a high tension and lasted for several days. Some ranchmen on the Keya Paha observing Indians in quite large bodies by the river in their war paint and feathers and later seeing U. S. Troops from Fort Randall reconnoitering, came to the conclusion that hostilities were contemplated by the Sioux. They accordingly rode through the widely isolated settlements of the northern section of the county, spreading the alarm. It turned out to be a fluke, however.

The life of the big cattle ranches were short however. The first of them was established about the year 1876, and continued to increase and flourish until the disastrous winter of 1880-81, when the severe cold and deep snows caused about eighty per cent of the herds to perish.

The F. E. & M. V. Railroad reached O'Neill in 1881 and immediately proceeded up the valley for the west, its objective destination being the Black Hills country. As it forged into the west and country became rapidly and thickly settled, the transformation which took place in the physical aspects of the country within the space of a few years was truly wonderful to behold. Old timers of but a few years previous could hardly believe their eyes, the changed scene rivaling in miraculousness the exploits of Aladdin in the Arabian Nights Tales. The vast wilderness had become a smiling and beautiful garden as if by magic.

Before the advent of the railroad, connecting the country with the eastern markets, the big cattle ranches to the west furnished a good and ready market for all surplus products of Holt county and much employment was furnished the early settlers in freighting this produce to the ranches, when the farmers were not occupied on their farms. All business with the ranches was a cash transaction and usually the unsophisticated gangster on the return trip came back

loaded with fence posts obtained on the Long Pine or other most convenient places.

Previous to and continuing through the period above depicted, the county had been kept in a constant state of turmoil and internal disturbance through the nefarious activities of organized bands of horse thieves and cattle rustlers, the most alert, bold and desperate of all being the famous Doc Middleton and his gang of horse thieves. Middleton himself was captain and was ably assisted by his two lieutenants, Black Jack Nolan and Little Joe Johnson. This lawless band of marauders infested the county from 1876 to 1879 and were finally broken up through the capture of bold Doc in August of that year. A reward of \$5000.00 being on his head and for his capture dead or alive, a half dozen of the leading detective agencies in the country started in to shadow him. The reward was offered by the Union Pacific Railroad Co., Middleton having been implicated at one time in a holdup and robbery of one of the trains on that road. Doc however, was a game fellow, full of fun and humor and time and again nibbled at and even devoured the baits set for him by the canny sleuths. Many times out of sheer levity and daredevilness had himself and two lieutenants caused the non-plussed ferreters of crime to dance a merry bolero to the music of a 45 bulldog, the staccato measures being indicated by volleys directed at the boot heels of the pitiful performers. But the best laid plans of mice and men "gang aft aage" betimes, and even charmed lives run out their courses and at the end submerge their dupes. Doc was no exception, for in the month of August 1879, his career was brought to a close in a very sudden and tragic manner. The Doc, had been trying and parleying with the relentless and resourceful sleuths for a considerable time, who, finally becoming exasperated at the way matters were dragging out, arrived at a decision that if they were to capture him at all, they would have to take him dead. Therefore, detectives Lowellen and Hazen, of Omaha and Likens, of Cheyenne, a cousin to the celebrated Kit Carson, started from Stuart in Holt county to Middleton's rendezvous near the old Morris toll bridge on the Niobrara River north of Newport in Rock county. On the way out Likens was placed in ambush in a clump of small timber near the Middleton trail where the same crossed the head of Ash Creek. An understanding existed among the men that Lowellen and Hazen would proceed to the outlaw's camp and decoy him back to Stuart, and in the advent of being successful in this design, they would return the same road which they had traversed to the camp, and as they passed the spot where Likens was in ambush, Likens was to shoot him. The scheme worked like a charm, and the intrepid Doc, accompanied by Lowellen and Hazen, each on horse back, wending their back to civilization, was sure enough shot and desperately wounded as he passed the fatal place. Quick as a flash Middleton turned on his two companions, who happened to be riding some little distance behind him, supposing that one of the two had fired the treacherous or cowardly shot, he opened a fierce hot fire on them. His was a deadly aim and at the first discharge from his trusty pistol he brought down Detective Hazen, whom he also shot a second time to make certain that he had surely killed him. In the meantime and during the time of this deadly dueling, Detective Lowellen had turned his horse to the southwest and galloped out of the range of the desperate Middleton's deadly missiles and never let up until he reached old Fort Hartsuff on the Loup River in Blaine county, where some United States Troops were garrisoned which was a distance of about 65 miles from the scene of the desperate combat. Lowellen immediately secured an escort of a company of troops at this place and set out for Middle-

ton's camp, where the redoubtable Doc after a siege, was captured, placed in an improvised ambulance and brought back to civilization to have justice meted out to him in the courts. A little later on he was tried in the United States Court at Omaha and found guilty as charged and sentenced to five years in the U. S. penitentiary at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where after serving about three and one-half years he was pardoned and liberated.

Doc, after getting his freedom returned once again to the theatre of his former exploits but has since conducted himself as a fairly average frontiersman does, who settles down to browsing on our Uncle's wild and woolly western domain. He now resides at Ardmore, South Dakota. During recent years he has not been prominently in the glare of the general public notice until the summer of 1893, when he once more became conspicuous by his participation in the famous cowboy race from Chadron to the "World's Fair in Chicago." He did not succeed in carrying off the trophies on that spectacular event however, John Berry, of Valentine winning the race and the prize.

"We further wish to relate, says Mr. Long, that on the day of the mortal combat at the head of Ash Creek, Middleton after shooting and wounding Detective Hazen, turned and dragged his horribly punctured carcass to his haunts on the Niobrara, receiving succor from friends and confederates on the way, who immediately dispatched in haste Matt Owens, a small ranchman who lived on the river to O'Neill for medical assistance. Doctor Daggett, of O'Neill responded to the call and went and dressed his wounds. Owens rode Middleton's famous charger "Black Prince" on the errand and covered the distance between the camp and O'Neill, which was 75 miles in four hours. When Middleton left the field of battle on Ash Creek, Detective Liken, who had been in hiding when he fired the shot that wounded him, came out from cover and hastened to the help of his wounded companion Hazen. Medical aid and an ambulance was secured and the horribly stricken detective was returned to his home in Omaha, where he afterwards fully recovered and is still living in comfort and happiness.

After the capture of Middleton the gang was pursued incessantly by the officers of the law until all of the principal ones were either killed, apprehended or driven out of the country. Although the leading band of desperadoes had been dissolved, never the less a saturnalia of murder, theft, crime and vice in all their numerous varieties followed, perpetrated by other smaller bands and numbers of reckless individuals.

The romantically spectacular Texas cowboy next occupies the center of the stage in the drama of every day existence, and in a theatre in which the numerous shifting scenes exhibited, were if not of a dazzling splendor, or at least thrilling and awe-inspiring to the heart and quite sufficient to satisfy the most blood-thirsty spectator.

In those days O'Neill was quite a prominent frontier town and was for some years the principal rendezvous in the northwestern section of the state for the festive cowpuncher. His was the predominant spirit and everything bended to his will.

Joe Hall and Johnnie Smith, two of the leaders, owned and ran a saloon and gambling house in town. In those times numerous were the daring and thrilling feats performed within the precincts of the little village with gun and horse, one of which resulted in the tragic death of Bernard J. Kearns, sheriff of the county and an older brother of the present Senator from Utah, Hon. Thomas Kearns, of Salt Lake City, who in those days was a farmer lad and lived about seven miles north of O'Neill; and severely wounding his deputy James Connolly. A cowboy by the name of Billy Reed was the perpetrator of the dastardly crime. Immediately after the shooting Reed secured the fleetest horse owned by his cowboy friends and fled to the west. He was pursued by a posse of citizens of O'Neill who overhauled and captured him

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Mellor Motor Co. To Change Hands On March 1, 1939

A business deal of some magnitude and one that will cause the retirement from business of one of the oldest business men in this city, in years of service, is being consummated this week, final papers to be signed before the week is out. It is the sale of the J. B. Mellor Motor Company to H. J. Lohaus, of Omaha, who is to take possession March 1, 1939. The new firm will be known as the Lohaus Motor Company. Mr. Lohaus has been engaged in the oil and gas business at 41st and Dodge street in the city of Omaha for many years and is thoroughly familiar with all phases of the business. Mr. Mellor retains possession of his garage, which will be rented to the new owners. They have purchased all the stock of cars on hand, all supplies and mechanical equipment in the garage and the bulk stations along the railroad tracks. They will handle the Ford cars, gas and fuel oils and the bulk plant here. Mr. and Mrs. Lohaus and son, John Lee, expect to arrive in the city about the middle of February to be in readiness to step into their new business on March 1st. Mrs. Lohaus is no stranger to the people of this city as she was born and grew to womanhood in O'Neill. She was formerly Miss Bessie MacLeod, daughter of Mrs. Mary MacLeod, and her many friends in this city and county will be glad to welcome her and her husband back to the "old home town."

J. B. Mellor is one of the oldest business men in this city. He has been a resident of this city for over fifty-one years and during his entire residence here has been actively engaged in business. He has been in the automobile game for twenty-seven years and feels that it is about time to retire and let younger men take up the burden.

Jess has been remarkably successful during his business life and he has amassed an abundance of the world's goods and has extensive real estate interests in this city, county and other sections of the state, so that he feels he will have plenty to look after when he gets out of the auto game. Most of his financial interests are in this county and he expects to continue to make his home in this city where he has resided for so many years. His many friends hope that by getting rid of the auto part of his business he may have more time to enjoy a well-earned rest.

The Weather

Following is the weekly weather chart. A trace of snow fell on Monday, starting at 9:25 and stopping at 10:45.

	H. L.
Jan. 19	43 21
Jan. 20	50 29
Jan. 21	48 25
Jan. 22	35 2
Jan. 23	38 23
Jan. 24	38 28
Jan. 25	46 20

Stock Water Important

Development of stock watering places properly distributed over the range area is essential to grass conservation. According to the records of the Holt County Agricultural Conservation Association, Holt county ranchers have developed 46 additional stock watering places in 1938 under the Agricultural Conservation range program. These additional watering places consist of one dam and 45 wells.

"One of the direct causes of range depletion in the past has been absence of sufficient watering places. The concentration of livestock around a few available watering places has resulted in serious depletion of adjacent range lands, while outlying, unwatered range areas have not been used to their maximum capacity."

By providing additional watering places, ranchers have been able to rotate their pastures, rest the more seriously depleted pastures during the growing season, and use pastures which had not previously been used because of lack of watering facilities.

During the past year of the range program, a total of 39,931 acres of range land in the county have been rested during the growing season under the deferred

grazing provision of the program. In addition, 206 acres of trees were planted, and 200 acres of depleted pasture land were reseeded under the range program.

Gubbels-Rohde

Married, at St. Mary Magdalene church in Omaha on January 21, 1939, at 8 a. m., Anthony J. Gubbels, of Randolph, Nebr., and Miss Margaret R. Rhode, daughter of Mrs. Bridget Rhode, of O'Neill.

The bride is a graduate of the O'Neill Public schools and of St. Joseph's Creighton Memorial hospital School of Nursing, and has been following her profession in Omaha for several years.

The groom is a graduate of the School of Commerce of Creighton, Omaha.

The bridesmaid was Miss Mary Landon, of Omaha, and the best man was Stephen Wood, Jr., of Seattle, Wash.

The bride was attired in an ashen of roses dress with navy blue accessories. She wore a shoulder corsage of Tailsman roses and sweet peas. The bridesmaid wore a rose colored dress with a corsage of sweet peas.

After a brief honeymoon to the southland the happy couple will make their home in Omaha.

The bride has a large number of friends in this city and county who extend to her and the man of her choice best wishes for a long, happy and prosperous wedded life.

St. Mary's Defeats Ewing High School

St. Mary's basket ball team journeyed to Ewing on Friday where they met the Ewing high team and emerged victorious by a score of 41-19. Bill Biglin was high point man for St. Mary's scoring eleven points, while J. Shoemaker scored ten points. On Monday night they went to Inman where they met the Inman team and lost 26 to 22. During the Inman game, Shoemaker and Connelly were both high, scoring nine points a piece. St. Mary's plays their next game on Monday night meeting the Atkinson team in the local gym.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Finch, of Middlebranch announce the birth of a daughter on Monday, January 23.

Mr. and Mrs. Leo Fager announce the birth of a son, John Fredrick on Saturday, January 21.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Young announce the birth of a son, Kenneth Lyle on Tuesday, January 24.

Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose Rohde announce the birth of a son, James Vincent on Wednesday, January 25.

BRIEFLY STATED

Mrs. Homer Mullen left Saturday night for Omaha where she will visit relatives and friends for a few days.

Miss Marjorie Learner, who has been visiting friends in Omaha for the past week, returned Sunday night.

Mrs. John Dailey, and Mrs. I. W. Johnson, who have been visiting relatives and friends in Omaha returned home on Monday.

O'Neill friends have received word of the birth of a daughter, Jean Anne on January 17, to Mr. and Mrs. Earl Burtis of Lincoln.

Mrs. R. L. Arbuthnot, son Jack and Charles Reka and daughter, Mary Louise, drove to Omaha on Saturday on business.

Lutheran services will be held in the Episcopal church in this city on February 1, at 7:30 p. m., by Rev. Wm. G. Vahle of Atkinson.

Rev. C. A. Byersdorfer, of Deloit, and Rev. B. J. Leahy, of Genoa, were in O'Neill on Tuesday visiting friends.

Sheriff Peter Duffy returned Saturday from Lincoln where he attended the annual state meeting of County Sheriffs.

John Vandersnick, of Ewing was before County Judge J. C. Malone on Tuesday on charges of being intoxicated and under the influence of liquor, to which charge he pled guilty, and he was fined ten dollars and costs.

Tri-State Hatchery Will Enlarge Plant

The Tri State Hatchery is making arrangements to double the capacity of their hatchery, work to commence shortly. The addition will be about the size of the present building and will be equipped with new incubators and battery brooders. When completed the brooding capacity will be 5,000 chicks and the incubators capacity will be 100,000 eggs. The newest machinery on the market will be installed so that it will be one of the most modern hatcheries in the state.

Manager Ryan, of the hatchery, says they had a hard time last year to supply the demand for their chicks and poulters and that they were unable to do any custom hatching. With the new addition he says they will be able to supply the demand for their products as well as take care of custom hatching orders. He says they now have several orders billed for March and April delivery and he is of the opinion that the coming year will be a great one in the hatchery business.

SOUTHEAST BREEZES

By Romaine Saunders

"We are going to continue to fight for peace," declare the pacifists. I don't know of anything else that stands in the way of peace.

Doc Gilligan would tell the women who called for a bottle of peruni to get a good brand if they liked liquor. They are doing that now.

It is not just clear to a novice in finance how we are to make loans to other nations when about the last dollar that can be borrowed has to be raised to keep things going at Washington.

Maybe Mike Horiskey thought the shaving mugs should have been put in that rack. And as I noticed what the linotype did to a paragraph herein concerning a Lincoln barber I wondered what had become of those ornate lather mugs.

There has been about a foot of snow this winter in this section of the dry belt. Just now, early in the week, a six-inch blanket of snow spreads over the city, which meets with general approval as rendering late January what it ought to be, and easing to some degree the worry of merchants whose shelves have been piled with winter clothing that nobody has wanted.

The leper: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Jesus: "I will; be thou clean." Here is the shortest dialogue on record. Result: The bloom of youth restored in a diseased, dying body. And we use many words and do but little. The earth is filled with a confusion of voices. Could a giant hand be laid across the wagging tongues there would be a chance to think our way to sanity.

Reno has no monopoly of divorces. The Lancaster county court docket for February shows page after page of these symbols of broken homes. Whatever the background, the present age seems wholly unfruitful of the romance and poetry of life. The couple who started on the long road in the bloom of youth and are now going down the western slope hand in hand find inspiration to renewed devotion out of the fragrant memories of the past, conscious that should it perish from the earth they have had a measure if not the full fruition of "love's tender pain."

Again by airplane tragedy there has been removed from the life of the capitol city a prominent citizen. Don Miller, president of Miller & Paine, who was lost beneath the waves of the stormy Atlantic when the airplane in which he and Mrs. Miller were enroute from New York to Bermuda encountered a violent storm and went down. Mrs. Miller was among the survivors, her husband sinking with several others. Mr. Miller was best known in the city

not as an aggressive business man but as a modest, quiet philanthropist, who was ever assisting needy persons as well as worthy movements. "Lost at sea" are the most harrowing words in our language.

Many will be interested in the historical matter The Frontier is presenting. Those who write of local affairs of the past must not be discouraged when the sages and oracles bob up to set them straight. One point in a quotation is the first installment seems a bit incongruous. When you turn on the faucet of words to polish off the literary excellence this can happen. Depicting with pen of the classics the abounding wild life in north Nebraska when the first settlers arrived, we are then informed it was an "arid desert region." My personal knowledge of Holt county does not go beyond the eighties. At that period it was far from an "arid desert." The grass flats produced two tons where now less than one ton grows, and there was water in abundance everywhere.

Breaks Into Drug Store To Get Supply of Dope

A man with a hankering after drugs broke into the Reardon Bros. drug store last Monday night and got away with all of the morphine they had in stock. Entrance was gained by breaking out the rear window of the store, removing the glass and then crawling through the window. It is figured that after he secured what he was after that he walked out the front door, as he could easily open it from the inside. Mr. Reardon said that a careful check-up of the store revealed that morphine was the only thing taken.

Another Coyote Hunt Will Be Next Sunday

Another coyote hunt has been arranged for next Sunday. This hunt will start three miles east of highway No. 281, 11 miles north of this city and will cover the territory from the Harry Landworth place north to the Blackbird bridge and from the bridge east to Fred Rictors and from there south to the old Walt Spangler place, then back west to Landworth's. The hunt will start promptly at 2 o'clock and all loving this sport are invited to participate. At the close of the hunt all participants are urged to unload their guns, thus avoiding the chances for an accident.

Agricultural Notes

On Monday, January 30, there will be a meeting of all of the local committeemen at the old Court House in O'Neill for the purpose of instructing them in performance of their duties in the 1939 Agricultural Conservation Program.

The meeting will be held by Delbert F. Scott, Farmer Fieldman, and Ed Catterson, District Extension Supervisor. The 1939 Docket will be discussed, also the best method of getting signed applications. This year there will be a Statement of Intentions to be signed, and the local committee will try and show each operator how he can arrange his crops to earn the maximum payment.

BRIEFLY STATED

Joe Rotherham, of Springfield, Illinois, arrived in O'Neill Monday and is visiting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Cuddy.

Elja McCullough left Monday for Lincoln where she will attend the annual State Convention of County Superintendents, now being held in that city.

Frank Golden, who has been visiting at the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Parnell Golden of Omaha since the Christmas holidays, returned to O'Neill on Monday.

Mr. and Mrs. Oral Wittchen returned Tuesday from Galveston, Texas, where they had been visiting relatives and friends for the past few weeks.

Miss Mary Ann Meer, a student at St. Mary's Academy, spent the week end at her home in Valentine, her mother, Mrs. Mat Meer bringing her back on Monday.