

FIFTH AND FINAL CHAPTER OF HOLT COUNTY'S EARLY HISTORY

Written By Early Pioneers

History of Days Gone By In Holt County (Continued From Last Week.)

In many parts long distances stretched between residences many of which were of prairie sod. Near Thursday noon we came in sight of a beautiful new church and priests residence near it. The young priest was very cordial when we asked for dinner. A good dinner was soon ready to which we did ample justice. Bidding our hospitable host goodbye we proceeded and that night found entertainment with a farmer who was pushing the work of corn husking. A good nights rest with breakfast and we were off again in a slight mist, driven by a north-west breeze which increased until near noon when it changed to snow. A Nebraska blizzard was upon us.

Fortunately a near by farm house furnished shelter and food the stable sheltering three horses. The blizzard continued into the night. In the morning the snow had ceased falling but was still drifting badly. Before noon we learned that our kind host had no shelter for his cows while our horses were in his stable, so after dinner we drove on. We were obliged to trample down several deep drifts to enable our team to pull the carriage through them. We drove twenty-six miles before we could find shelter for our horses, where we were entertained by two young bachelors, who gave us the best they had. Slept well in a soft bed of shavings in the cellar of a new house that they were building. Sunday morning was cold but we drove eight miles where we spent the day and night. We expected to reach my new homestead on Saturday but the storm had delayed us but on Monday night we were on the Verdigris eight miles from home. The weather was becoming pleasanter so we drove over the hills near the Middlebranch. My boy, aged ten, whom I had left sick came running over the snow drifts with his sister, who was a little older, to greet us. Ours was a happy reunion, proving that God is good."

Rev. Balin was one of those determined pioneers who risked everything for a purpose, to bring the word of God to a new country in order that Christian religion and fellowship should be preserved. After he had built the O'Neill M. E. church, in October 1883, he became County Superintendent of Public Instruction and served in that capacity for two and a half years. James H. Riggs, publisher of the O'Neill Frontier said that, "Bartley Blain may justly be called the Father of the Schools of Holt county." In that period he formed 120 school districts and changed the boundary of 40 others. He preached his last sermon in July 1915, at the age of 83 years and died at Page, Nebraska, October 17, 1918. Thus ended the long and useful career of a man whose devotion to his fellow men never allowed him to shirk dedicating his lifetime efforts to their spiritual and educational development, in the days when our west was new, and needed his help.

Father Cassidy goes on and says, "In October, 1877, Rev. John T. Smith was installed as the first resident pastor of St. Patrick's Parish, and took up his abode at the farmhouse of John Cronin, likewise residing at the residence of Dennis Doly, and J. P. O'Donnell in O'Neill.

During the year 1879, the first parochial residence in the parish was built by Father Smith. It was a frame building, 18x30 feet, one and a half stories high and cost \$1400.00. It was erected on block four, city of O'Neill a little west and adjacent to the church building (which had been built in 1877), the last half of said block for the purpose of a site for the church and parsonage, together with some other settled lots in the townsite, which were to be converted into funds, the proceeds of which were to be applied toward building the church.

At or about the time that Mr.

Fahy donated the lots for church and residence purposes, General O'Neill and Patrick Hagerty donated all of block number (here Father Cassidy does not give the number) O'Neill and Hagerty's Addition to the City of O'Neill, for a catholic cemetery.

Temporary official organization of the parish was effected in the year 1877 and two trustees were selected and appointed.

In the fall of 1880, Bishop O'Connor visited the parish for the first time, and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to ninety-one persons.

The church now in use in the parish at O'Neill (meaning the one prior to the present one and replacing the first small 18x36 ft. one), was erected during the administration of Father Smith in 1884, and cost about five thousand dollars. It is 40x100 feet and has a seating capacity of four hundred people, being heated by a hot-air furnace. During the progress of construction, a violent storm occurred which razed the building to the ground, partially destroying the work which had been accomplished, and inflicting considerable damage generally. Again a short time after its completion, it was damaged, being wrenched and twisted from its foundation, during the visit of another furious hurricane.

During the administration of the parish by Father Smith, Reverends Thomas Cullen and P. Brophy were associated with him, part of the time in general parish work as regular assistants and resided with him at the parochial residence.

At the time of Father Smith's administration the parish was in a flourishing condition, it being possessed of a large, commodious church building, a handsome parochial residence, a fine organ for the choral residence, a fine organ for the church services had been purchased and paid for, and an excellent choir, which had been organized amongst the members of the parish and existed for a considerable time. The parish was entirely out of debt, in fact had a balance of \$430.00 to its credit in the treasury. There were one hundred and sixty-five families enrolled upon the parish register, and a large Sunday school was organized and in good working order, showing a good average attendance of pupils.

In the month of July, 1886, Father Smith was transferred to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and the writer here of, then pastor at Rawlins, Wyoming, was assigned to this jurisdiction to succeed him.

Upon assuming charge of this parish I at once set about to increase the seating capacity of the church by adding ten new pews, thereby enlarging it to a capacity of five hundred. The church being without a tower or other receptible for a bell I caused to be erected in the fall of 1886, in the center of the front of the church a substantial tower 12x12 at the base and ninety feet in height to the top of the large gilded cross by which it is surmounted. This addition gave to the church a decidedly handsome and improved appearance in conjunction with the utilitarian purpose it was intended to serve. A bell was then purchased and placed in this tower. The new bell with the iron frame in which it is set weighs four thousand pounds, and was tolled for the first time for the early mass of Christmas 1886. The cost of the tower and improvements amounted to \$1125.00 for the tower and \$594.00 for the bell.

November 9, 1886, St. Patrick's church, O'Neill, Nebraska, was regularly incorporated under the laws of the State of Nebraska, at Omaha, the incorporators being Rt. Rev. James O'Connor, Bishop of Omaha, Very Rev. R. A. Shaffel, Vicar General, Rev. Michael F. Cassidy, pastor and Patrick Hagerty and John McBride laymen. The officers are a president, secretary and treasurer. The Bishop being ex-officio president, M. F. Cassidy, the pastor, was selected treasurer, and Patrick Hagerty, layman, was

appointed secretary. Article two, of the articles of incorporation limits the indebtedness of the corporation to ten thousand dollars.

In the summer of 1887, Bishop O'Connor again visited the parish, and administered confirmation to a class of 172 persons and the following year, the Jesuit Fathers held a very successful mission of eight days in the month of September. During this year also (1888) the parish attained to the greatest membership the enrollment of families aggregating two hundred.

David Fitzgerald, of Lincoln, Nebraska, donated to St. Patrick's Church, O'Neill, two beautiful statues of the "Blessed Virgin," and "St. Joseph," in the summer of 1888.

Now the parochial residence in use proving inadequate for the decent accommodation of the pastor and assistant and the numerous visiting clergy, it was decided to remove and sell the same and replace it with one which would compare more fully with the importance and dignity of the parish, and adequately meet the accommodations and requirements of a modern residence. Accordingly in the summer of 1888, the old residence was removed and later in 1890, was sold for nine hundred dollars and the present residence, a frame building, 45x54, two stories high with attic was erected on the site formerly occupied by the old one at a cost of \$3500.00.

About this time also, a strong and universal feeling existed throughout the parish, that the time had arrived for, and the exigencies and necessities of the situation demanded the establishment at O'Neill, of an Academy for young ladies, wherein should be taught the higher branches of learning, music and the arts, the same to be placed in charge of and conducted by one of the more popular orders of instructors to be found among the sisterhood of the church. Subscription books, for the purpose of raising funds, were therefore opened to the public, and voluntary contributions solicited, which met with a generous and prompt response by the people, fully assuring the success of the project. Meetings and conferences were held from time to time to devise ways and means, until the summer of 1890, when matters assumed real tangible form. In the late summer of that year, a contract was entered into for the erection of a brick building, with a 75 ft. front and 45 ft. deep to contain four floors, viz: Basement, two full stories, and attic, the same to be equipped with all modern appliances, and heated by steam. The building to be erected on the west half of block four, O'Neill City. The institution was to be known as St. Mary's Academy.

Work on this building was commenced in the early autumn of that year, the corner-stone being laid September 13, 1890. Father John Jeannette, of Omaha, officiated as celebrant, owing to the recent death of Bishop O'Connor, and the Episcopal See being still vacant. Father Jeanette was assisted by Rev. Joseph F. Nugent, of Des Moines, Iowa, H. Hoehsel, assistant pastor and your humble servant, the pastor of the Parish. Father Nugent delivered the discourse. Work was pushed along rapidly in the building until the fatal day, February 19, 1891, at high noon, when it was totally destroyed by fire, originating in the basement, through the carelessness of workmen.

At the time of the occurrence of that appalling disaster, \$14,000.00 had been expended on the building and its heating plant. Suit was instituted in the District Court of Holt County against the contractors and their bondsmen to recover the amount paid on the contract, and a judgement for \$14,000.00 and costs obtained. The case was appealed, by the bondsmen, to the Supreme Court of the state. That court reversed the judgement of the District Court. The suit was then dropped.

That awful calamity shattered for the time being, the fondest aspirations and most cherished ambitions of the parish, but severe as the shock was, it did not entirely annihilate the hopes and determinations of the people to replace the beautiful structure, that had been

the pride of their hearts for a day, with another equally as handsome and substantial, sometime in the near future.

Along in the winter of 1890-91, a nice frame church 22x36 ft. was erected at Stafford, on the eastern side of the parish, at a cost of \$1000.00, the ground for the site having been donated by Daniel O'Donnell of that place. This church is served from O'Neill and mass is celebrated there once a month.

On June 28, 1891, Rt. Rev. Bishop Scannell visited the parish for the first time since assuming the episcopacy of the diocese of Omaha and confirmed a class of 172 persons.

In this year also, that part of Boyd county being between Lynch on the east and Butte on the west, was attached to this parish as a mission and mass was celebrated at Spencer for the first time during that year.

January 1, 1892, Father Havelberg was appointed resident pastor of the Boyd County Mission. He established his residence at Spencer and continued his charge of that mission until October 1894 when he was transferred. Since then the mission has been attended from O'Neill. A frame church was built in Spencer, part in 1892 and part in 1896. It is 18x56 ft. and cost \$500.00. Mass is celebrated there once a month.

The Passionist Fathers visited this parish in the month of October, 1892 and held a very successful mission, which lasted eight days.

Now we come to the widespread and severe drought that extended over the agricultural states of the Northwest in 1894 and 1895.

Father Cassidy says of it, that it inflicted much suffering generally and in many instances even severe destitution among the poorer families of the parish, more especially the outlying mission of Boyd on the north.

The charity of the well-to-do and more fortunate, both at home and abroad, was diligently invoked in behalf of the suffering poor, and, I am proud to acknowledge, responded to with noble generosity.

Here he gives long lists of names of donations and their amounts together with what they were expended for, too numerous to mention here.

He goes on however and says, "In the month of June, 1896, a 'League of the Sacred Heart' was organized. With much pleasure it is recorded that the League has been highly successful from the start in obtaining members. The organization is now at this writing, in a vigorous and flourishing condition, having on its register an enrollment of four hundred members. Bishop Scannell, in the discharge of his duties again visited the parish October 6, 1896 and confirmed a class of 155 people of various ages.

From the first settlement of the parish to the first day of May, 1898 there have been 1412 baptisms, 189 marriages, and 326 deaths, 286 of which occurred since August, 1887, and about 40 previous to that time, including the pastorate of Father Smith.

The Sunday Schools of this jurisdiction are in a progressive and satisfactory condition, an excellent state of discipline being enforced and maintained, with little friction. The average attendance at O'Neill numbering one hundred, at Stafford twelve and at Spencer, twenty-five. According to the last census of the parish taken in October, 1897, there are residing within its territorial environments, 125 Irish three German, and four Bohemian families, who I am exceedingly pleased to say, faithfully adhere to the church, through storm and sunshine, good report and evil report. The above statistics do not include the families belonging to the Boyd county mission. About 34 families worship in the church at Spencer. They are mostly Bohemians and Germans, with a considerable sprinkling of Irish.

Since July, 1886, when I first assumed the pastorate of this parish to the date of this writing, May, 1898, the following priests have been associated with me in the capacity of assistants at various intervals viz: Fathers Charles Mugan, Julius Debove, H. Hoehsel, and M. F. Sheehan."

In the foregoing Father Cassidy

has given a very accurate and thorough account of the early history and struggles of St. Patrick's Parish. In this book of 300 pages he goes on and tells much more of which I do not have time or space to set down, bringing it up through the years from 1898 to 1933, the time of his passing away from our midst. For forty-seven years he had served his people and made history. In writing of him Father Leahy says in this book, "His work is done and of him truly it could be said: 'Ece sacerdos magnus, qui in diebus suis placuit Deo.'" The magnificent Church, the Rectory, and the great St. Mary's Academy, all of which owe their existence to his inspiration and labor, but more than these, the strong Faith in the souls of the people, give rich and abundant testimony of the faithful and fruitful Pastorate of Monsignor Cassidy."

"May he rest in peace."

May I add again that I am sorry that I cannot give you the complete story which is so interesting and take you through the many struggles so aptly told by the beloved Monsignor up to the time of his demise.

In conclusion I would like to go back to 1884. In the Holt County Banner of January 5, Vol. 2, No. 45 of that year, I found the following interesting articles which might clear up some questions.

It is reported that at the examination of Kid Wade at "Back Berry's" the Kid told Henry Richardson, a member of the Brown County Company, that he was as big a horse thief as him (the Kid) whereupon Richardson wanted to shoot him while he was in shackles, but was prevented from doing so by Mike Coleman.

Also: The platform of the vigilantes is substantially this: Any person on whom suspicion is thrown, they require that he prove himself innocent; they are anxious that he prove himself innocent; if he does not he is turned over to the authorities to be dealt with according to law.

After "pulling" parties on whom suspicion is thrown they are usually taken to the "pen" on the Niobrara River near Paddock. The "pen" has two rooms in it and into one of these the men are taken and examined by a committee of regulators and if sufficient evidence is produced to justify they are taken before a justice, he occupies the other room, and have an examination and are usually bound over. If no evidence is found to justify them in holding a person, he is dismissed without further ceremony. The vigilantes have no intention of persecuting any innocent party intentionally and if there is anything out of place in the mode of procedure we fail to see it.

St. Patrick's was known as St. Joseph's church in 1883-84, under Father Smith.

Thank you and I hope you have found the foregoing very interesting.

—Dean Selah

4-H Club Winners To Receive Free Chicks

Marvin Stauffer, of Page, Vera Grutsch, of O'Neill, and Margery Rees, of Amelia, were presented this week with orders for fifty chicks free from the Tri State Hatchery in O'Neill. This offer was given as a result of their placing in poultry judging at the County Achievement Day last fall.

Marvin Stauffer will also receive 100 setting eggs as a prize for his placing in judging at the state fair.

Another Coyote Hunt Will Be Next Sunday

Another coyote hunt will be held next Sunday afternoon north of this city. This hunt will start five miles east and one mile south of the Midway store at George Hanson's; then three miles north to the John Glaze ranch; then three miles east to Redbird creek; then south past the Scottville hall to the Joe Schoolmeyer corner; then west to Hanson's, the point of beginning. The hunt will start promptly at 2 o'clock. Last week they succeeded in getting one coyote. Those who desire to attend the hunt if they go four miles east of the Midway store there will be a man stationed on the corner there who will tell them where to go.

Ex-Residents Organize An O'Neill Club In Washington, D. C.

Washington, D. C.—Former residents of O'Neill who now reside in Washington met at The Kenesaw for dinner last evening and organized the O'Neill, Nebraska Club, of Washington, D. C. Those present were: Mr. and Mrs. James H. Hanley, George M. Harrington, Donald Gallagher, Madeline Ullom, Mr. and Mrs. P. F. Ward, Mr. and Mrs. Luther W. Barrow (Barbara Boyle), Grace Campbell, Honorable and Mrs. Henry C. Luckey, and Mr. and Mrs. John J. Harrington.

Maxine Harrington, Mr. and Mrs. Thos. J. O'Brien (Ruth Howard), Dr. and Mrs. W. P. Hynes, Commander and Mrs. James Carney, Mr. and Mrs. T. W. Lanigan, Mary McGee, Grace McHugh, Helen Martin, Marguerite Doyle, Mr. and Mrs. James M. Buckley.

Donald Gallagher was chosen president, and Marguerite Doyle, secretary of the club.

James M. Buckley, Indiana newspaperman and author who is writing a story dealing with the life of General John O'Neill, gave an interesting lecture on the career of the founder of O'Neill. Mr. Buckley pictured O'Neill as a man of charm and tall, soldierly bearing, a man who was described even by one of his enemies as impressive.

From his very earliest career, O'Neill had to fight, Buckley said, and "no one ever got a better chance to fight or enjoyed himself more doing it." Born in Dunganon, Ireland, in 1834, a few weeks after his father's death, O'Neill early lost a mother's care, his mother taking her elder children and coming to Elizabeth, N. J., leaving John, the baby of the family, in Ireland. When O'Neill was fourteen, the terrible potato famine of 1848 forced him to come to America, and the boy made the long trip alone on a sailing ship of the type which transported emigrants at this period.

After discussing O'Neill's charge at Buffington Island, Ohio, in July, 1863, which may well have proved the turning point of the Civil War in the Middle West, Buckley discussed in detail the three invasions of Canada which O'Neill attempted in 1866, 1870, and 1871, on behalf of the Fenian cause. In 1866 he made the gallant invasion from Buffalo which resulted in the battle of Ridgeway.

Although the invasion was ultimately unsuccessful because of the application of neutrality laws by the United States which kept Fenians eager to join O'Neill inactive on this side of the border, O'Neill won such reputation at Ridgeway that he was chosen general of the Fenians a few years later.

The many romantic and thrilling stories of the less-known invasions of 1870, and 1871, which O'Neill led as General, Buckley discussed in detail. The story of how O'Neill's private Judas, Henri Le Caron, worked against the Fenian movement while holding one of the key offices in the organization, was told. Also mention in some detail was O'Neill's dash across Minnesota and North Dakota into Manitoba in 1871, in the hope of arousing the French half breeds to rebellion against Great Britain before news of his arrival could alarm British authorities. The Fenian leader had no way of knowing that the man with whom he was eating breakfast in a little restaurant was a British agent, intent on reaching Manitoba ahead of him.

Buckley told the club that he invited contributions on the early days of the city of O'Neill and the adventures of O'Neill in Nebraska from old settlers of Holt and Greeley counties. Buckley explained that he hoped to write a complete and colorful life of O'Neill the man, and of the history of the town which has lived after him and perpetuated his renown. Buckley said that any information which O'Neill residents would like to furnish will be gratefully received at the office of the Capitol Hill News Service, 214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Washington, D. C., Apartment No. 304.

After Mr. Buckley had finished his discourse, Dr. W. P. Hynes produced a copy of the first newspaper ever published in O'Neill and read many interesting items. This

paper was The Holt Record, published in 1879. James H. Hanley and Peter Ward recalled pioneer days. George Harrington and John J. Harrington reminded those present of the intense bond of friendship and loyalty that exists between O'Neill people everywhere.

John H. Slack

John H. Slack was born March 14, 1866, in the state of Missouri and passed away at his home near Dorsey, Nebraska, February 9, 1939, at the age of 72 years, 10 months and 25 days.

He was united in marriage to May Phelps, July 24, 1897. To this union six children were born: Howard and Forrest Slack and Martha Hisecock, of Dorsey, and Maude Huber, of Lynch, who with their mother are left to mourn his passing. The other two children preceded him in death. He is also survived by three step-children: Lloyd Phelps, of Redbird, Wilbur Phelps, of Deep River, Iowa, and Elsie Wilson, of Dorsey. Two brothers, Vene Slack, of Omaha, and Robert Slack, of Collinville, Oklahoma, and one sister, Mamie Gephard, of Pasadena, Calif., besides a host of other relatives, friends and neighbors.

He was a kind and loving husband and father and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

He was a member of the Penecostal church and was true to his faith. The funeral was held last Sunday afternoon from the Dorsey church, burial in Dorsey cemetery.

Card of Thanks

We sincerely wish to thank our many friends and neighbors for all their kindness and good deeds done for us during our hours of sorrow and we especially wish to thank all for the beautiful floral offerings.

Your kindness will never be forgotten.

MRS. JOHN SLACK,
and FAMILY.

James Leslie Summers

James Leslie Summers was born at Page, Nebraska, April 13, 1938, and passed away at O'Neill, Nebraska, February 9, 1939, after an illness of almost a month.

He leaves to mourn his passing, his mother, father, one sister and four brothers, Grandmothers and a host of relatives and friends.

Card of Thanks

We wish to thank those who were so kind during the sickness and death of our darling baby.

MR. and MRS. L. G. SUMMERS,
and CHILDREN.

A. L. Horn Takes Over West Side Conoco Station

A. L. "Pug" Horn, who has been the manager and driver of the O'Neill-Ainsworth and O'Neill-Grand Island Bus Lines here for the past six years has leased the Conoco filling station, in the west part of town, which was formerly operated by A. W. Tibbets. Mr. Horn will continue as manager of the Bus Lines for the present, but will no longer drive, giving all of his time to the operation of the station. Pug is well known in O'Neill, and all of his friends here, as well as along his bus route will wish him success and prosperity in his new venture.

O'Neill Woman's Club

The Woman's club met at the home of Mrs. F. E. Parkins. Mrs. Parkins gave two musical numbers, The Brown Waltz and the Minuet Waltz. Mrs. J. D. Osenbaugh reviewed the "Song of Years," by Bess Streeter Aldrich. Mrs. Harold Lindberg led in the discussion.

The club will meet in March at the home of Mrs. Ira George.

Does Not Pay To Be Ahead Of Time In The Nation's Capitol

In the city of Washington, D. C., it is the early bird that gets it in the neck. In its issue of January 28, 1939, the Washington Star tells about a 71 years old negro who was arrested on January 27 for having a 1939 license plate on his automobile. The law in that city fixes the date for the change of license plates as February 1.