

Brass Band Followed Sod Plow to Holt

Incidents in County's Cultural Awakening 60 Years Ago

By HOMER O. CAMPBELL, Seattle, Wash.

While virgin soil still was being turned on the prairies, back about 1884, the three larger towns of Holt county almost simultaneously felt the need for associated musical endeavor—certainly evidencing early cultural awakening.

Not only so, but strangely the respective spokesmen of these towns had in mind a kind of community ensemble that could be developed largely from those without previous musical experience—a group, too, whose inherent nature would set the pitch for celebrations of civic festival occasions. Of course, nothing could serve these objectives half so well as a brass band.

Atkinson, O'Neill and Stuart thereupon became centers of brassband enthusiasm, with immediate appointments of committees on membership, leader, instruments, uniforms, etc., followed by rehearsals in remarkably short time.

Lady Luck smiled on Atkinson when the Sturdevant family, including four key bandmen, located there and brought with them Arthur Crossman, skillful drummer. Joseph Sturdevant, E flat cornet, was the competent leader of a band of some 15 members.

In O'Neill the prime mover was Fred J. Herre, experienced leader and E-flat cornet player, who started practically from scratch with mostly inexperienced personnel.

At Stuart, 18 or 20 embryo bandmen were organized under the leadership of a musicianly colored barber whose name I have forgotten. In the group were Editor John Wertz, Banker George Bowring and other leading citizens, including also a number of teen-age boys.

County's First Band Contest

Indicative of the progress made by these groups, in the Fall of 1885 they took part in a competition called a "band contest," featured at the county fair held in O'Neill.

In this contest the Atkinson band, bearing themselves more like professionals than amateurs, wearing neat blue uniforms and feather-decked helmets, easily won first prize.

O'Neill did well enough to be awarded second place. Among the original membership now remembered were Fred Herre, Fred Pfunder, John Smool, Reese Mays, Charlie Colligan, Sam Schram, Jimmy Riggs, and George Trigg.

At 15 I started my band experience as a drummer. We must have had at least eye appeal in our uniforms of gray and scarlet, with long tails, brass buttons, fringed epaulets and plumed caps. My mother treasured my boy-size coat for many years afterward.

The Stuart band seemingly had too little time in which to attain the degree of musical proficiency hoped for and also lacked the oomph imparted by colorful uniforms. However, their courage, which all must have admired, was attested when, as Bill Nye once remarked about a church choir, they undertook their most difficult number.

Bandmen Had Good Time
Up to 1890 the O'Neill band's membership changed almost completely several times. A considerable turnover in leaders also took place, those succeeding Fred Herre being Prof. Seeley, Prof. Gill, Ben Locks and myself. The group pictured elsewhere, taken in 1887, has none of the original members except myself.

Notwithstanding its ups and downs, membership in the O'Neill band was lots of fun, rich in lively experiences and friendly associations. So marked were these qualities, in fact, that for these bandmen the Gay Nineties began in the middle of the Sedate Eighties.

There were a number of out-of-town trips, including a visit to Fremont, where we were guests of the parents of Fred Herre; an autumn celebration at Norfolk, and a Fourth of July engagement at Minneola. Besides, whether in broiling heat or in cold that froze our instruments, we never failed to respond to the call of civic duty.

Daddy Cook's Celebration

In those days Holt county had its share of "characters," one of whom sought the help of the O'Neill band to celebrate his 60th birthday. Does anyone of this generation remember Daddy Cook, eccentric homesteader, whose outer garment was a mother Hubbard instead of con-

ventional male attire? Anyway, Emmet was his hometown, and there the celebration was held on a Sunday in Summer.

About noon the carryall conveying the band was parked near a clump of spindly cottonwoods, and forthwith a parade, with Daddy at the head robed in mother Hubbard and sunbonnet, moved several hundred yards toward the solitary general store, thence to the Elk-horn depot, and back again to the carryall, under which in the meantime a keg of beer had been tapped and iced pop made available, along with baked ham, fried chicken and loaves of bread.

Incident in High Finance

The public-spirited citizens of O'Neill initially made generous contributions toward the purchase of instruments and uniforms. Not only so, but in further support of the band they pledged through a subscription list individual contributions of from 25 cents to \$1 per month.

At the time under consideration is devolved upon me as leader of the band to collect the subscriptions and act as a sort of business agent. For these services I received \$25 per month. It was while acting in this multiple capacity that I engineered a notable transaction in high finance.

About noon on a lazy Summer day I was startled by the recollection that a widely-heralded baseball game was to be played that afternoon in Atkinson between the home team and a highly-touted Antelope county outfit.

The regular West-bound freight was due within a half hour. Not a minute was to be lost. My feet started toward the depot, when a terrible afterthought stopped me in my tracks; I was broke. (Quick thinking—ah! the subscription list—the most likely prospect, Moses P. Kinkaid.) My feet started for the future Congressman's office in the Holt County bank building. There he was in his swivel chair. Before I could speak he handed me a silver dollar.

Legal Battle Over Horn

A lawsuit in justice court to determine ownership of "one silver-plated E-flat alto trombone" (the identical instrument, by the way, held by Pat Biglin in the picture herewith taken 60 years ago) was the arena as well of a scintillating legal battle between the veteran Blackstonian M. F. Harrington and a dynamic redheaded newcomer to the Holt county bar named Dickson. The issue was whether possession of the trombone after the band had disbanded for a time constituted ownership even though

the band subsequently reorganized.

My good friend, Denny Hunt, relying on the well-known nine points in law, at least as an Irishman's excuse to get into a fight against odds, bantered and defied said reorganized band or anybody else to take said horn away from him.

The trial, which lasted through a Winter afternoon, could not have been conducted with more gravity if the constitution of the United States were in jeopardy. At its conclusion the justice of the peace in effect ruled said trombone was, is, ought to be and shall remain the property of said plaintiff. The verdict notwithstanding, it was more or less a standoff all around: Mike Harrington had the thrill of winning but lost his fee (no charge). In the course of losing Newcomer Dickson won a lot of friends. And Denny's loss was merely technical, for he still belonged to the organization that won.

Band Split on Political Lines

At the windup of the political campaign of 1888 final rallies of both parties were held in O'Neill on the same night. The democrats, it seems, had engaged the O'Neill band for its demonstration. On the afternoon before the rally, however, it developed that politics had divided the band along party lines, and that half of the members had decided to play for the republicans. Even more to the embarrassment of the democratic bandmen, the split had left them without a lead, or solo cornetist.

Now, as a plain fact, the "oom-tuturata" part of a march standing alone isn't particularly musical. It needs to be blended with a goody proportion of "tootle-tootle-tootle." This fact in its bearing on the present predicament of the band, together with possible implications, were explained to the democratic central committee. It gave them plenty to worry about. What if the voters should interpret this "oom-tuturata" to mean something else?

Anyway, when the committee and the bandmen came out of a huddle it had been decided to draft—me. I was at the time employed as a printer on the Stuart Ledger. Their telegram reached me only four and a half hours before the parade was scheduled to move.

A team and driver had been ordered from a Stuart livery stable, stated the message, to take me on the first leg of the trip to a point midway between Atkinson and Emmet, where a relay would pick me up for the last 15 miles. Since the distance from Stuart to O'Neill is 30 miles, over rutted sandy roads in those days, it meant lively going for harness horses. But so well were good teams driven we arrived in time for a cup of coffee before the blare of brass and the boom of drums signaled the start of rival political columns milling in the torchlighted gloom.

Personally, the experience lacked neither excitement nor thrill. And to add to the nice feeling, my good friend, Frank Campbell, leading democrat, slipped me a \$5 bill.

Pioneer Rough Stuff in Gillespie Story

The issue of The Frontier of January 13, 1881, introduced a story of pioneer rough stuff by saying:

"B. S. Gillespie is a practical surveyor and follows that business for a living. In his line he is called upon by all classes of people and we believe endeavors to do the best he can for all, without thought of politics or religion."

And thereby hangs a tale.

The home of the Gillespie family was out in Saratoga precinct. In that section lived Al Hileman, son-in-law of Orlando Dutcher. He had taken a timber claim and the entry was under contest by a man by the name of Perry Dewey. Dewey engaged Mr. Gillespie to survey the ground that had been broken and this was found to be less than the required acreage. Bad blood resulted from the filing of the contest and Hileman accused Gillespie of instigating the contest. Gillespie had done the surveying, and was paid for the work, in the course of his occupation as a surveyor. The story is continued by The Frontier scribe of 68 years ago:

"On the night of the 1st of November a mob was organized and a visit made to Gillespie's house with the evident intention of doing Mr. Gillespie some bodily injury. Failing to induce Gillespie to come out of doors by representing that they were parties looking for land and meeting with resistance at the door one of the panels of the front door was broken in and several shots fired into the house.

"Naturally Mr. Gillespie, his sick wife, and small children were badly frightened. An old shotgun left in the house by some one was taken down from the wall; one charge failed to go off, the other was fired through the door. The result we all know: the death of Stephen Keys.

"There being no other means of defense Gillespie took to the woods by getting out of a window and was followed by some of the mob but was not captured."

It should be noted in this connection that rough frontiersmen would not harm women and children, the remnants of chivalry forbid such a course.

"Gillespie gave himself up," the story continues, "and upon examination before Justice Doty of Keya Paha was discharged. Shortly afterward Hileman, Orlando Dutcher, Peter Dutcher, Homer Dutcher, Rene Dutcher and J. A. Swift were arrested, were charged with participating in the attack, and were discharged; again arrested and all discharged except Hileman, who was placed under \$500 bond to appear for trial in district court."

They were still seeing red out there in the gulches. A harness belonging to Dewey, the cause of the mob movement, was cut to pieces and one belonging to Barney Welton, who acted as constable in the arrests, was stolen from a stable in O'Neill when Welton had come in from Brush creek and had put up for the night at the Valley house. That was on January 3.

The original complaint against Hileman and the Dutchers charging felonious assault was filed with the justice of the peace in Cleveland precinct. The men were taken, not before the Cleveland justice, but before County uJudge Maloy, where no witnesses appeared, and were discharged. All but Hileman were indicted by a jury, convicted of unlawful assembly and fined \$100 each.

The original mob raid now seems to be dropped by The Frontier scribe and the harness affairs taken up.

"The sheriff arrested a young fellow, Ed Connolly, who was in town with Hileman on the Monday in question. When arrested Connolly 'squealed' and said that he and Hileman took the harness from the stable and told where they had secreted it in a straw stack West of Barnard F. Kearns."

Hileman was arrested at Mr. Hargrave's place on the Eagle and brought to O'Neill for preliminary examination before Wil-

liam Maloy, county judge. O'Neill & Williams, of this place, and Charles Huntington, of Oakdale, appeared for the prosecution, and H. M. Uttley, of O'Neill, and D. A. Holmes, of Oakdale, for the defense.

Connolly repudiated what he

had admitted to the sheriff when taken into court. Concerning this The Frontier said: "It is one beauty of the government of Holt county that we have no jail in which to confine and punish prisoners and wit-

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O'NEILL'S SECOND BAND... Author of the "Brass Band" story on this page, Homer Campbell, is seated in the center of the above photograph taken in 1887. Others in the photo are: Standing (left-to-right)—Sumner Adams, Hugh Gallagher, Sanford Parker, Jack Kearney, Harry Hecht, Louie Bannon; center—Jimmy

Trigg, drum major; seated—Denny Hunt, Professor Seeley, Mr. Campbell, Dennis H. Cronin and Pat Biglin. (Editor's note: The Jubilee editor believes that the gentleman Mr. Campbell has identified as Sanford Parker actually is a Mr. Evans, a relative of the late Mr. Barnett, of the Barnett & Frees Lumber Co.)