

# 'God's Country' Made Appeal

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Editor-in-Chief, Diamond Jubilee Edition

On a visit to the metropolis of Southern Holt country in late April, on a hunt for information reaching back into the creative period, when the foundations of Chambers were laid on virgin sod of the charming prairie land between the South Fork and the Cache, I was greeted by old friends. After interviewing a number of citizens I met Mrs. Letha Cooke, who directed me to Miss Lorna Coppoc, the local historian.

I found Miss Coppoc in her pleasant little home in the North part of town and was graciously received. Miss Coppoc wrote a comprehensive history of the first 25 years' ministry in the community of the Baptist church, which is closely identified with, indeed, identical, in some respects, the history of the town. Miss Coppoc has kindly loaned her story to The Frontier. From this, with the aid of other sources of information, this brief history of Chambers is undertaken.

In the early 1890's a copy of The Frontier, containing Doc Mathews' vivid word picture of "God's Country", fell into the hands of R. C. Wry, after reading which he took off for Holt county. In after years he said he never regretted coming to this prairie land.



REV. J. L. COPPOC

From Miss Coppoc's history it is learned that Mr. Wry was college bred, a graduate of Amherst college, Amherst, Nova Scotia. He taught for 20 years in Joliceur, New Brunswick, Canada. In 1879 he started with his family for California, stopping in Macon, Franklin county, Nebraska, to visit at the home of a sister of Mrs. Wry. They went no farther, the California trip being abandoned in favor of a place in the Macon schools as an instructor, which Mr. Wry filled for two years. The next move of the Wrys was to Diller, in Jefferson county. Here Mr. Wry read "God's Country." Whether it was the title of that story that appealed to him in view of his solid Baptist traditions or other considerations, he pulled up stakes for Holt county, took as a homestead the land on which the town of Chambers took root.

Why named Chambers and not Wry? With a store carrying a meager stock of necessities where Lee Baker in the middle '80's had a drug store, a blacksmith and a few sod house homesteaders there was need for a postoffice. A mail route was authorized out of O'Neill by the postal department, but a postoffice must have a name. As none was furnished by Mr. Wry, the first postmaster, the department put the office on the map as Chambers, in honor of a gent by that name who was carrying the mail to and from O'Neill with a pair of bronchos.

Dr. T. V. Norvell, Rev. J. L. Coppoc and Mr. Wry and their families were the founders and first members of the Baptist church as well as having much to do with the development of the community. Dr. Norvell was a graduate of the Ann Arbor Mich., medical college. He ministered to the sick in pioneer days but later turned to horticulture, as did Rev. Coppoc, who combined that with preaching. He was the first pastor of the Baptist group. H. R. Henry and son, Ernest, of Minneola, started a paper, the Chambers Eagle, which Mr. Wry later took over. There was a rival town and a rival newspaper, the Shamrock Pickings, started North of Chambers which town and paper folded up while the other town grew and the paper flourished under a change of management from time to time. Starting as the Eagle, the name was changed to the Bugle and then became known as the Sun, which recently suspended publication.

Chambers and country thereabout is a community of church-goers and supporters of education. A fine high school is maintained and three flourishing churches. The Methodists and Lutherans have each long been established with commendable places of worship. Miss Coppoc's story of the organization of the Baptists is interesting. She says:

"Mrs. Bower, Mrs. Farrier, Mrs. Brown, John Walker, Mrs. Edw. Adams are those the writer recalls still in Chambers who came out of the pioneer period. Perhaps there are others.

There were the Hubbards, Frank Charles, Clark Hough, Bebee, Lee Baker, the Smiths, the Adams and Doughty, who

each had a part in taming a wilderness, and by common sacrifices and united endeavor have brought to fruition the dream of pioneers for homes and security in a quiet God-fearing community where men and women and children live and labor, laugh and play, and unite their voices in song and praise.

Mrs. Leo Adams, a granddaughter of the Wrys, and Miss Coppoc form a link connecting the present with the past in the Chambers community.

Charlie Millard has returned from his Iowa trip and reports having had a good time, observed The Frontier 69 years ago. And adds: "He ought to have got spiced and assisted in multiplying the population of O'Neill, but didn't and deserves the censure of all good people for this dereliction of duty."

## Pioneer Incidents . . . Amusing and Tragic

**Oxen to Break Prairie** — Fred Gatz, father of Mrs. Jack Vincent, of the Western Hotel, and the Gatz brothers, skipped from Germany to escape military service, came to America. He first hung his cap in Columbus and then pushed on to O'Neill when cow trails and foot paths served as sidewalks, opened a meat market and launched a trade with cattle.

Fred had an eye for business and for fun. And he would sell you enough beef steak or antelope meat for two bits to last a week.

He bought steers, stalled them back of the meat market and sausage grinder to sell as oxen to homesteaders. One Rev. Bargeit, who was holding down a claim five miles East of town, bought two steers of Fred, who cautioned his reverence that they had not been put in a yoke. The minister led the steers away and when he got home hitched them to a cart. The steers, lately from the freedom of the open range, battered the daylight out of things, ran away and smashed up the rig to which they had been hitched. With the sublime faith of one of the cloth, the preacher did not give up, captured the runaways, subdued their wild natures and trained them to pull a breaking plow. My one and only experience driving oxen was a half-day at prairie breaking with that same span of bovines.

**Posse Captures Reed** — Mrs. James Ryan looked out of her door at the family home several miles West of town and saw a lone horseman passing, his horse on a lope. The horse was evidently about winded from being ridden hard. That horse was carrying a fugitive.

An hour later seven horsemen rode into the Ryan place. Mr. Ryan was away. This party of men, led by Jack Hayes, explained to Mrs. Ryan that they were after Billy Reed, who shot Sheriff Kearns and they wanted fresh horses to continue the chase. The Ryans had many horses and Mrs. Ryan told Mr. Hayes to take what horses they needed. Unsaddling their hard-breathing mounts, saddles were thrown on fresh horses, bridled and the riders galloped away to the West.

When Mr. Ryan returned home his wife told him what had taken place and her letting some of their horses go. Mr. Ryan's only comment on the horses was that "there are plenty of horses."

Reed was caught. Returned to O'Neill and lodged in a makeshift of a jail, a little shanty at the Northwest corner of what is now Fifth and Douglas streets. There was a window through which Reed could be seen. An armed guard was posted outside and the suggestion made to him that he shoot Reed, which he refused to do.

Reed was taken to West Point and jailed. His trial in district court resulted in acquittal. He left the country to meet his end in a gun fight in Texas.

Kearns was killed at the old Arcada hotel that stood on the present site of the Knights of Columbus hall. The death of Kearns was the outgrowth of a combination of romance and remonstrance. Kearns and Reed were rivals for the hand and heart of a waitress at the hotel. Reed with other cowboys had been shooting down the clothes lines where they saw family washings hung out in the settlement and the sheriff remonstrated with Reed over this practice. Six shooters came into the dispute as the usual answer to all frontier squabbles. Kearns administered a blow on the head of Reed with his gun, himself receiving a mortal wound when Reed pulled the trigger. Deputy Sheriff Connelly received a leg wound during the death struggle.

The posse that captured Billy Reed was composed of the following: Jack Wynn, Walter O'Malley, Bill Cronin, Mike Tierney, Jack Hayes, Charley Kline and Mike Ward. A group picture was taken of these men at West Point when they took Reed to the Cumming county jail.

## Father of O'Neill Woman Brought Records from Paddock to New Countyseat

Fifteen miles North of O'Neill on highway 281, across the highway from the filling station was the childhood home of an O'Neill woman, Mrs. J. C. Harnish, now past four score years of age. Mrs. Harnish was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Jacobs, Mrs. Jacobs being a daughter of Ryland Parker, grandfather of R. H. and Joel Parker, of O'Neill, and father of the late Sanford Parker.

Ryland Parker was the first to be elected county judge but did not take office as the election, held in August, 1876 was illegal, but at the subsequent election held in December of that year his son, Sanford, was elected county clerk.

Paddock was the county seat and Mrs. Harnish recalls that her father hauled the records and safe in a wagon from Paddock to O'Neill when the county seat was permanently established there.

Sanford Parker was a colorful figure of the pioneer period. He tried gold mining and cutting timber in Black Hills, turned to banking in Deadwood, knew Wild Bill Hickok and stood by as the trap was sprung when Jack McCall, who shot Hickok in the back, was hung.

He knew Spotted Tail and was on friendly terms with the Indians, selecting a beautiful and cultured woman with Indian blood as his wife. He was credited with having a part in securing the admission of Dakota Territory into the Union as two states.

County clerk, member of the board of trustees when O'Neill became incorporated as a village, land office official and other posts of trust were filled by Mr. Parker and after a life spent in taming the West he and Mrs. Parker removed to Omaha where they lived in retirement until their death.

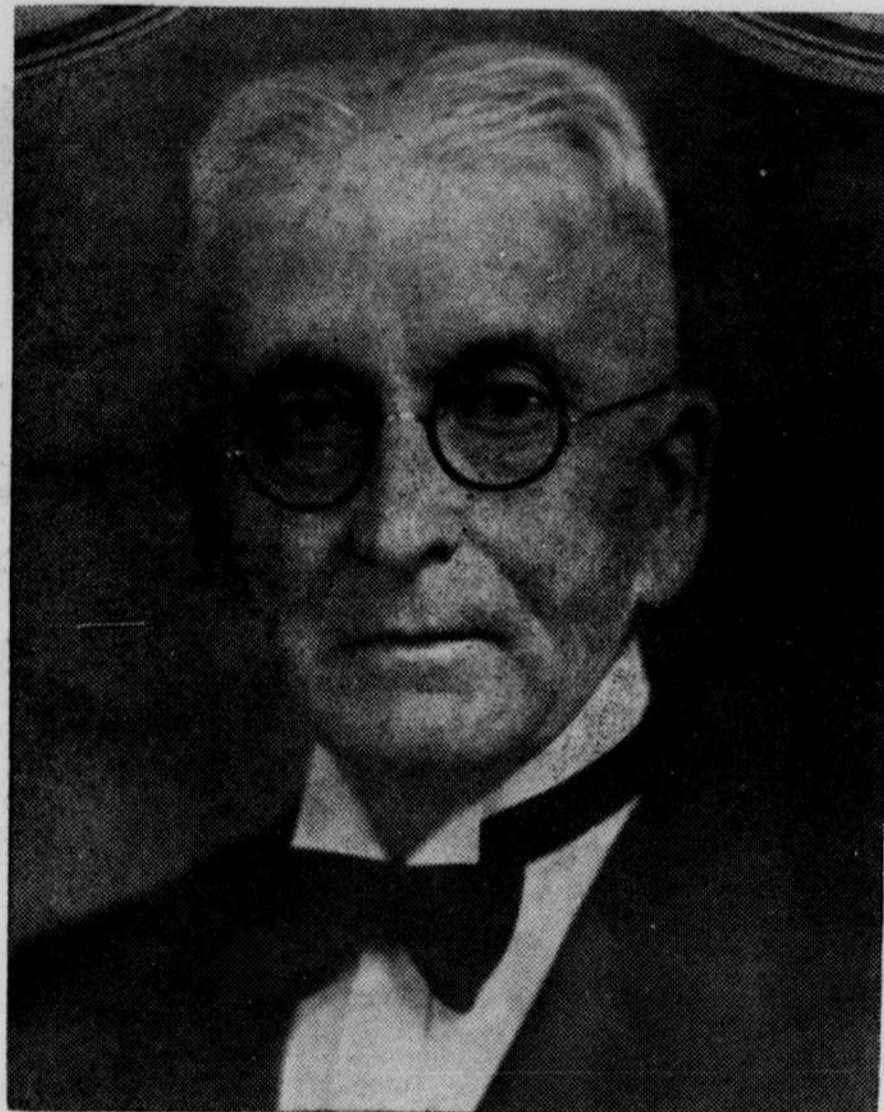
With the blood of a pioneer in her, a granddaughter of the Parkers and a native of Holt county, Louise Tinsley, was the first Nebraska woman to secure a pilot's license to navigate in the clouds.

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**MEN WHO CAPTURED REED . . .** These men were photographed at West Point after they had taken the illustrious Billy Reed. Bill Cronin is not in the picture. (See story at right.)