

O'NEILL ON 'TRACK' 1,000-MILE RACE

Berry's Horse First to Reach Bill Cody's Stand in Chicago

Bill Cody, a Nebraska buffalo runner and half barbarian, with his aggregation of Indians, cowboys, rifle shots and other wild West stuff, put on his first show in the 1880s after a rehearsal at Columbus. The home of Frank North, the Indian scout. He at once became the rival of P. T. Barnum in the show business, developed the "greatest show on earth," had his day in the stellar realm of popularity and passed out of the picture.

But the greatest undertaking in the way of a horse race was the enterprise of North Nebraska owners of horse ranches. It might be called a sort of "swan song" of the horse business.

In 1893 there was a world's fair in Chicago, Ill. Buffalo Bill was there with Annie Oakley, Sitting Bull, Frank North and the rest of his greatest show on earth.

On a June day in that year nine horsemen swung into their saddles up at Chadron and started on the 1,000-mile race that ended at the Buffalo Bill headquarters at the world's fair in Chicago. O'Neill was on the "track" and some local color attached to the exhibition of horse and man endurance as one of the town's former notables, Doc Middleton was piloting two horses through on the race.

Toward evening of a warm day the first rider coming down the dusty road from the West into O'Neill, was a gent called "Rattlesnake Pete," a Kansas cowboy. In they came one by one for a period of two days. A crowd had gathered at the Evans hotel and greeted each incoming rider with cheers the first day.

Jo Gillespie, 58, a Chadron ranchman, the "rattlesnake," whose name was James Stevens, and John Berry became close contestants for the winner's prize—\$1,000. By the time the Mississippi river was reached something happened to one of Stevens' mounts and he was left out. Middleton tarried too long with former cronies in O'Neill and finished the race with his two horses in a stock car.

The race started at Chadron at 5:30 p. m. on June 13 and John Berry rode in first at Cody's headquarters on a buckskin bronc called Poison on June 27. Gillespie arrived at 1:30 and Charley Smith, a South Dakota cowboy came in third at 1:47 that night. Oddly enough, Berry was a railroad man, at that time being right-of-way agent for the Northwestern at Chadron. Smith and Gillespie tarried overnight at an Eastern Iowa point while Berry rode on into the night into Illinois, and covered the last 150 miles in 24 hours. The audacity of the adven-



SULLIVAN STORE IN '90s . . . This photograph shows the interior of the M. M. Sullivan general store—one of O'Neill's earliest stores. In the photo, taken in about 1896, are: Mrs. M. M. Sullivan, Doris Sullivan, Mrs. Levi Starr, Jackie Sullivan and Mr. Sullivan (in shirt sleeves).—Photo from the Felix R. Sullivan collection.



SULLIVAN FAMILY 'AT HOME' . . . Members of the M. M. Sullivan family are pictured on a leisurely afternoon at home. The family lived in a handsome red-brick dwelling in the Northeast section of the town. The house, built by Doc Mathews, stands there still.

ture perhaps lacked the spectacular features of the old Roman chariot races but it showed the endurance of a hardy breed of Nebraska horses, flavored with the spirit of frontier daring.

The writer of these lines had an opportunity to take two splendid brown geldings through on that ride and has had some regrets that circumstances at the time prevented him from so doing.

T. F. Nolan, O'Neill Man, Recalls Life at Ft. Randall Where Sitting Bull Was Held

By T. F. NOLAN
of O'Neill

The old abandoned Ft. Randall, S. D., is located about 40 miles North of O'Neill as the crow flies. The fort was established June 26, 1856, and the last troops were withdrawn from there December 7, 1892.

The first commanding officer at Ft. Randall was First Lieutenant D. S. Stanley, of the First United States cavalry, who occupied the fort in January, 1856 with a first sergeant and 100 recruits. In July, 1856, Lieutenant George H. Page, of the Second United States infantry, arrived and succeeded to command. In August, Col. Francis Lee assumed command of the following forces at the post: field staff and companies D, E, H and K, Second Dragoons.

In July, of 1892, the post was commanded by Lt. Col. William J. Lyster, Twenty-first infantry, with the field staff and companies F and I. The force was gradually withdrawn. Lieutenant Colonel Lyster being succeeded in turn by Capt. Willis Wittich, in August; First Lieutenant F. E. Elkhead, in September, and Second Lieutenant Samuel Gray, in October. Lieutenant Gray remained in command until abandonment in December, 1892.

My father, the late John Nolan, soldiered at Ft. Randall in Company C, Fifteenth United States infantry. He arrived there in November, 1881, and was discharged in March, 1889. He served part of two enlistments there.

I heard him tell about his outfit being moved from Southern New Mexico where the climate is mild, to Dakota territory in the cold winter of 1881. Dakota Territory was divided later and admitted to the Union as two states. They traveled by train from New Mexico to Sioux City and from there by boat to Ft. Randall.

Upon their arrival, the weather turned very cold and most of the soldiers who walked guard had their ears, nose and fingers frozen. They did not have the proper clothing to cope with the cold Dakota weather and they were stationed there for about six weeks before they got warm clothing.

Old Sitting Bull, the war chief of the Sioux, was in the guard house at Ft. Randall when the four companies of the Fifteenth infantry arrived there and it was

one of their duties to guard the old Chief till he was turned over to the federal authorities.

I lived at Ft. Randall with my parents until I was past five years of age, and, of course, I do not remember a great deal about the fort or army life.

But I well remember the old stone church and IOOF hall. This building, my father said, was finished by the Fifteenth infantry and that he, like most of the other soldiers, worked and helped build the structure. I also remember the artesian well, Randall creek, the parade grounds and the soldiers' quarters. I also remember the soldiers' drilling, the firing of the sunset gun, and taps.

I remember, after we moved to O'Neill, seeing the soldiers and mule teams that came over here to Holt county to get provisions for the fort. Many of the soldiers called at our home here to visit with my mother and father.

The last remembrance I have of the army life at Ft. Randall was going with my father to the grove just South of the North Western railroad depot here in O'Neill to see the soldiers that were camped there to take the train next day as they were being moved from Ft. Randall to Ft. Sheridan, Ill.

This was not the same outfit that my father served with but there were several soldiers that he knew.

The only people that I know at the present time that lived in Ft. Randall and are living within reasonable distance from the old fort is Frank Shears, of Gregory, S. D., whose father was a tailor there, and Thomas Donlan, of O'Neill, who was a teamster.

I well remember the time Tom came with a team up to the house where we lived with water the morning after the stables burned. The water for the fort came from the Missouri river as the water from the good flowing well was not fit to drink as it contained mineral and smelled like the odor from a rotten egg.

The Indians who lived across the river from Ft. Randall were around the fort continuously. The squaws would cut or rather split the stove wood as that was the fuel used at that time as there was no railroad to ship in coal. They were around our house and the neighbors so much

General Miles, General Custer, General Shafter and Dr. Corvus. It is an old land mark of the West and a protection for the pioneers who developed Southern South Dakota and Northern Nebraska. May its memory live along with the memory of the good and noble men who once lived there.

Berries Carried on Horse Become Jam

On a June day in 1882, Mrs. H. N. Gould, of Inman, expected to handsomely surprise The Frontier family, and so when her liege lord was about to start for O'Neill she picked a nice mess of delicious strawberries and gave strict injunction that they be brought safely to this office. The score was horseback and in some way he crushed the berries into a jam, so we were derived of having a filling of this delicious fruit. "Mrs. Gould will please accept our thanks for her good intentions," the editor wrote, "if at first you don't succeed, etc."

A Splendid Collection of Things Good to Eat

A highly enjoyable and pleasing affair occurred at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. P. C. Dewey, in Saratoga precinct, on Wednesday afternoon, April 20, 1881. Mr. Thomas McMath led to the matrimonial altar the accomplished daughter of the house, Miss Sarah S. Dewey. A number of invited guests were present. A splendid collection of things good to eat was provided in Mrs. Dewey's best style and a good time had all round. (And then followed the complimentary remarks that only newspaper men of disappeared generations knew how to write them.)

No Discrimination

Henry Rustmeyer has been employed by County Treasurer Meals to collect delinquent taxes in this end of the county, said the Ewing Item in a November, 1887 issue. With his sack of books and papers under his arm Henry resembles the ubiquitous and urbane book peddler of cast iron countenance and unpleasant fame. However, they say Henry is a rustler in the pursuance of stern duty, practices no discrimination between the men who voted for A. J. Meals and the men who did not.

The sight of old Ft. Randall is of historic note and many of our famous army men were at one time stationed there, including

HAY BURNER AN INSTITUTION

Natural Grass Is Most Important Product in Holt

The most important natural product of prairieland has been and still is the native grass. The early settlers depended upon it for both fuel and feed and shelter for their livestock.

The hayshed was as common as the sod house. Used as fuel at first, it was brought into the homestead abode by the arms full and bunches twisted into knots and these fed into the old fashioned cast iron cook stove which served to cook hot meals and warm the one or two rooms.

A method of using the hay for fuel developed later was the hay burner. This became an institution out on the prairie where there was no timber, and for some years was an industry in O'Neill and other towns in the county. The hardware establishments of J. J. McCafferty and Neil Brennan maintained departments where these were turned out by the score, furnishing employment to a number of men. Among these were: Jim Davidson, Tom McVey, Patsy Gallagher, Billy Hagerty, and a number of others.

The hay burner was a glorified wash boiler made of sheet iron and held when well packed about 20 pounds of hay.

It was set on the stove with lids to the firebox removed and the open top of the hay burner resting over the firebox. In sections of the county where there was timber along the streams the settlers burned wood.

Grass is still the wealth of Holt county. The hay burner disappeared and the hay baler took over, making a market for the hay and providing a cash with which to buy coal. Corn was also used for fuel in an early day. Levi van Valkenberg and his brother, of Inman, were the first to tie a bale of hay in Holt county in the late '80s.

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