

## Horse Races Main Attraction of Early Fairs in Holt County

By ROMAINE SAUNDERS  
Editor-in-Chief  
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By 1884 agriculture in Holt county had reached the point that loyal citizens decided there should be a fair. To effect an organization, a meeting was held.

By motion Patrick Fahy was elected president; James Skirving, vice-president; W. D. Mathews, secretary; D. L. Darr, treasurer; also the following vice-presidents from the various precincts of the county:

Atkinson—Frank Bitney,  
Beaver Creek—Geo. T. Bastedo,

Center—John Cronin,  
Butler—C. O. Patton,  
Deloit—W. H. McDonald,  
Ford—J. E. West,  
Emmett—P. G. Gauble,  
Inman—H. D. Austin,  
Iowa—H. J. Heaton,  
Keya Paha—D. M. Dow,  
Saratoga—J. C. Collings,  
Paddock—W. E. McRoberts,  
Stuart—S. Sagendorf,  
McClure—B. F. Cleveland,  
Turtle Creek—J. E. Roberts,  
Steele Creek—W. V. McElhaney,

Wyoming—T. V. Norvell,  
Logan—James H. Perry,  
Blaine—Barrett Scott,  
Sand Creek—S. Twing.

"The following board of directors was then elected: Peter Freeley, John McBride, James Marker, Jacob Davis, Cargil Graham.

"A constitution was adopted and the president instructed to file notice of the organization of the society with the county clerk 'so that the society may secure the county aid, which is three cents for each inhabitant of the county.'

**Association Membership**  
It will be of interest to this later generation to read the names of the men who became members of this association for the promulgation of the agricultural interests, and these names are given below:

Patrick Fahy, Ed E. Evans, John McCann, A. E. Rice, C. M. Cleveland, D. L. Darr, C. C. Millard, J. T. Prouty, W. V. McElhaney, Ed. Hershisher, John J. McCafferty, T. N. J. Hynes, Thomas Carlon, W. D. Mathews, Jas. H. Riggs, A. E. Akin, J. W. Wertz, G. T. Bastedo, Neil Brennan, B. F. Cleveland, M. M. Sullivan, J. T. Smith, M. D. Long, W. E. Adams, Michael Flannigan, Patrick Haerty, W. C. Townsend, P. W. Green, Patrick McCoy, Frank Campbell, Ed. F. Gallagher, M. P. Kinkaid, S. P. Miller, B. Welton, E. S. Barnett, J. S. Collings, J. P. Kinch, John P. O'Donnel, John Mann, John Hecker, A. H. Corbett, T. V. Golden, John McBride, S. Sagendorf, P. S. Hughes, E. S. Kelly, James Skirving, B. F. Roberts, C. D. B. Eisaman, Peter Greeley, C. J. Schram.

**Attractions and Incidents**  
I was probably the only kid that had a legitimate "free pass" to that first fair. John McDonough, publisher of the Tribune, got out a daily edition of the sheet 9x12 and I had the job of peddling these on the fair ground but business lost its attraction when the horse races were on. Of the running horses Al Heilman and Jimmy Wynn entered the two speediest nags and the trotting matches were won some times, by Ed Thompson's Hambletonian and at other heats John Plank pocketed the winner's stake.

One day Heilman brought grief to a sister from the country whose dog had followed her in. As Heilman's little roan and Wynn's spotted shavetail bounded toward the finish the woman's dog leaped out onto the track after the horses. Heilman drew his six, which he always carried and shot the dog. The lady sobbed.

Boxing, wrestling, foot races, clown performances, fast horses and slow mule races comprised the afternoon programs of those early fair exhibits and the evenings were made chivalrous by the Grand Army fife and drum corps rendering martial music at the camp fires.

**And There Was a Wedding**  
The present Holt county judge, Louis W. Reimers, supplied the writer with a certified copy of the marriage license and return in which a young couple was married at the fair ground and constituted one of the main attractions of the 1889 fair. On September 26 of that year Elmer M. Merriman, 25, and Hanna L. Walker, 21, were united in marriage. Rev. N. S. Lowrie, pastor of the O'Neill Presbyterian church, officiating. James Merriman and William Hulbert and wife were the official witnesses. The bride and groom received a purse of \$150.

**Holt County Shown Off At the State Fair**

It was about this period that W. J. Dobbs, the railroad agent at O'Neill for what is now the North Western, became active in promoting an exhibit to take to the state fair at Lincoln. The old skating rink was taken over with an exhibit that amazed the natives themselves.

The exhibit necessarily was made up without any-

thing with horns or hoofs and Mr. Dobbs received much merited praise for his masterful work in getting the exhibit together. It proved to be the best at the state fair that year.

Unfavorable crop seasons for a time put an end to fair exhibits in O'Neill and the fair grounds were abandoned. Later other grounds were started south of the railroad and flourished for a season or two. The next move was on the hill to the northeast and a few races run there by Peter Duffy horses and trotters from Dave Stannard's stables. The county fair is now in the hands of able managers down at Chambers.

## GHOST DANCE INSPIRES MILITIA

There was at least one occasion when O'Neill entertained the governor of Nebraska. In the old skating rink, opera house, community auditorium or what was it, there was a brilliant scene enacted the night of January 17, 1894. At that time Governor Crouse in person mustered into the state militia Company F, Second Nebraska Infantry regiment.

Through the courtesy of Col.



In 1908 the pupils at the O'Neill public school will enjoy picking themselves out in this photograph. Building later gave way for a new building (pictured on page 4, section G.) — Photo courtesy Mrs. L. G. Gillespie.

W. J. Atkinson at the adjutant general's headquarters at the statehouse in Lincoln, the writer was furnished a list of the personnel of that organization, which the colonel had office girls prepare for me while we exchanged pioneer stories and experiences.

Colonel Atkinson's grandfather was one of the first settlers in the Cozad community, at a period when the settlers found it expedient for safety from Indian attacks to erect a fort or place of refuge to flee to when the redskins were rambunctious. They build a large sod building to which the Indians could not set fire. That building still stands in Cozad and has been preserved

by covering it with concrete. The militia company in O'Neill had its inspiration among local patriots at the time of the Sioux ghost dance movement when the Indians at the north border of the county became restless.

The support the proposal to organize a militia received from such men as Neil Brennan brought it to a reality. Governor Crouse made Brennan a member of his staff and Neil carried the title of Colonel with pride.

Following is the list of members of that company with the date of enlistment. Meredith was chosen captain, Hall and King lieutenants, and the next

following six names were the company sergeants with the corporals named following the sergeants:

- COMPANY F**
- Meredith, John H. 12-15-93
  - Hall, C. E. 12-15-93
  - King, Clyde M. 12-15-93
  - Cronin, Dennis H. 12-15-93
  - Lappan, John S. 21-15-93
  - Evans, Edward E. 12-15-93
  - Thompson, Samuel S. 12-15-93
  - Saunders, Romaine 12-15-93
  - Merriman, Elmer M. 12-15-93
  - Sullivan, Philip 12-15-93
  - Coykendall, Marian A. 12-15-93
  - Adams, Harvey H. 12-15-93
  - Brennan, Neil 12-15-93
  - Cole, Charles N. 12-15-93
  - Cronin, Martin F. 12-15-93
  - Clark, George W. 12-15-93

- Davis, Gilbert 1-5-94
- Davidson, James 12-16-93
- Davidson, John 1-4-94
- Dwyer, Timothy J. 12-16-93
- Fallon, Michael 1-10-94
- Gibbons, Miles F. 12-15-93
- Gallagher, James F. 12-16-93
- Hewett, Allen Leeman 12-16-93
- Hough, Walter Scott 1-15-94
- Horiskey, Joseph 1-15-94
- Hunt, Dennis 12-15-93
- Hurley, Timothy J. 1-10-94
- Jones, Charles L. 12-15-93
- Kirwan, Michael F. 12-15-93
- Kirwan, Philip J. 12-15-93
- Kirwan, Cornelius P. 12-15-93
- Lowrie, William J. 12-15-93
- McNichols, Joseph L. 12-15-93
- Marsh, Robert J. 12-15-93
- Mann, Frank W. 12-15-93
- Merithew, Charles A. 12-15-93
- Mills, Rufus H. 12-16-93

- Mullen, Patrick D. 12-15-93
- Mullendall, Horace F. 12-15-93
- McBride, William F. 12-15-93
- McLaughlin, John 12-15-93
- O'Connor, William J. 12-15-93
- Shellhart, Fred G. 2-8-94
- Shellhart, George W. 12-15-93
- Shellhart, Ira L. 12-15-93
- Smoot, John C. 12-15-93
- Trigg, James W. 12-15-93
- Baker, Charles C. 12-15-93
- Tirney, Edward C. 12-15-93
- Welton, John H. 12-15-93
- Welsh, Michael, J. 2-8-94
- Newman, John 5-9-94
- Ryan, Jay Willis 5-10-94
- Bellamy, Fred R. 6-23-94
- McLaughlin, James W. 2-2-94
- Harding, Charles L. 1-1-95
- James, Walter S. 2-2-95
- Hartman, Lea 2-2-95

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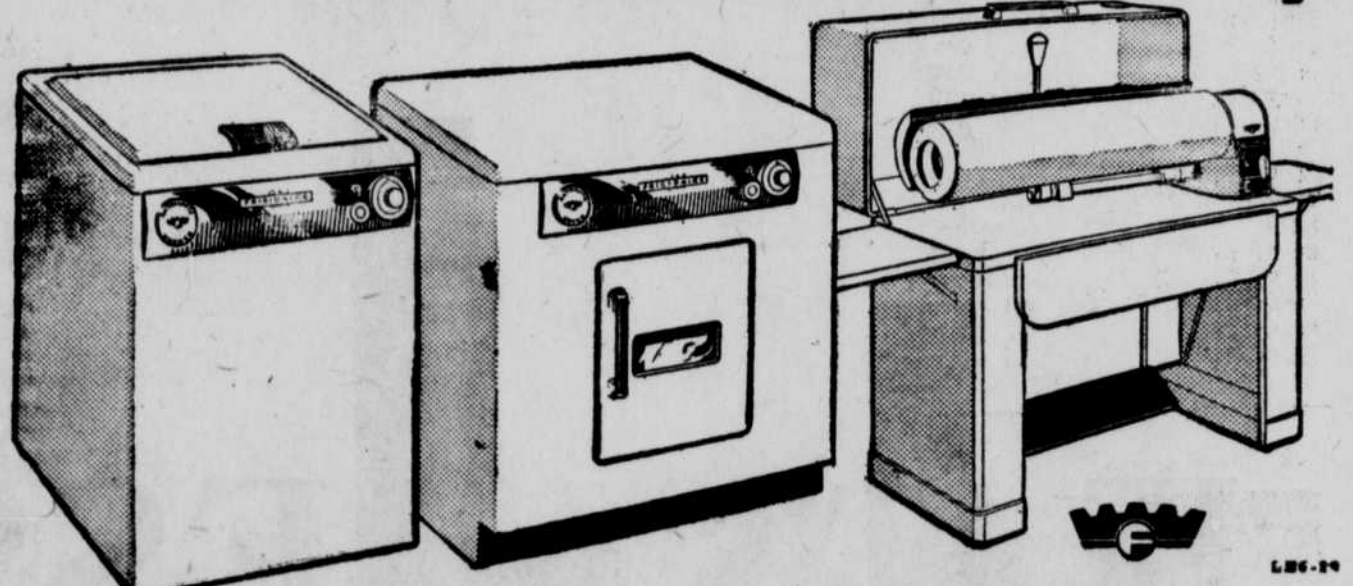
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