

Prairieland Talk

'Honesty' Increases Temptation

By ROMAINE SAUNDERS, Retired, Former Frontier Editor

LINCOLN—Assuming that Nebraska patriots are dishonest, maybe the governor goes at the taxation situation at the wrong end with his "operation honesty" scheme. Trim down the top-heavy government oversight of our lives and thus reduce the need for assessing pens and pencils.



Romaine Saunders

Any incentive there may be to shortchange the assessor might thus be eliminated. The way the taxpayer is being hit he can hardly be condemned for holding out on the assessor. And now that the arrangement is what amounts to the property owner assessing himself, that becomes a real temptation.

I recall when the late Rafe Shaw was assessor down there in Swan precinct nobody was expected to list anything for taxation that went to make up the household comforts or little personal belongings. Somehow enough money flowed into the county treasurer's office from the citizens of the county to pay the salaries and other claims.

Prairieland Talker has had the thankless job of precinct assessor a few times. I recall one instance when on the rounds assessing in Francis precinct in Wheeler county, as I was leaving one place I was handed an onion as an expression of what that gent thought of the assessor.

But even he, as all the others, made an honest return of assessable property. As long as it comes to nothing more serious than an onion, the assessors and tax collectors are safe.

Just to what extent are parents responsible for "juvenile delinquency"? I was passing a home yesterday when the mother in that home came out and in a harsh, scolding voice blew up at her little girls standing by a log that had been left lying where the tree had fallen when cut down. The children were doing nothing to harm anything or anyone, but the mother went after them roughshod instead of in a kindly, pleasant way showing them what she wanted them to do. Children resent such treatment, though at the time not able to define their childish reactions. Resentment grows with repeated experiences, then rebellion, this logically ending in "delinquency." Who is the delinquent—the child or the mother? Four Lincoln youths drove to Omaha Sunday evening and spent the night there releasing their urge to "do something" by starting parked cars down hills to see the smashup at the bottom of the hill. The escapade landed them in jail. Maybe that was another thrill. Perhaps these boys could have fathers who have been remiss in their duties as parents. The calling of parenthood is a job. A little girl went to her father with a book and asked him to read her a story. Dad was reading the paper and didn't want to be bothered. After a time the little girl asked again for a story but the story was never read. The little one went to bed and in the night became fatally ill. The next night that father sat the night through by his dead child with a story book she had asked him to read from.

A large group representing the state farm bureau took over the Lincoln hotel late in November and spent four days visiting and discussing matters pertaining to agriculture. The gathering resembled a group of corporation managers, secretaries and stockholders. Caution was manifest, respecting the touchy subject of price supports, the president of the bureau in his talk leaning toward the principle of supply and demand to govern prices. Neligh sent a delegate, Arthur Weatherbeck, who appeared to be qualified to hold the handles of a plow.

Another leaf torn from the calendar. Flowers are no more only as the florist can provide. The wind blows out of the north today as if to sweep along the march of time. Scarcely a twig with faded leaf clings to denuded trees, dun-colored stalks are all that remain of corn fields and the landscape stretches brown and sear to the distant horizon. Thrush and barn swallow and bluebird and robin are gone and the little brown winter birds have come, cock a friendly eye at you as you step out the back door expecting a crumb to be dropped for them. Summer is gone, the bright days with the floral bloom and green verdure have merged into the season of changing colors, flaming sunsets after the short day and the long winter's night time spreads its mantle dotted with countless stars over our heads. But the cedar and the pine tree defy alike winter frosts and summer heat and wave their emerald plumage as seasons come and go. The clock ticks a warning that blizzard days are ahead and Prairieland Talker recalls his contemplated departure for the sun-drenched Pacific slopes when winter lays the white blanket over prairieland.

Is the Honorable Adlai carrying the torch for the downtrodden or merely trotting about in defense of his friend of the fair deal? As the raving against "McCarthyism" goes on, the suspicion lingers that there must be something to cover up.

Will Davis and wife came over from Sioux Falls, S.D., where Will had been employed as a printer, to spend the first week of December, 1905, at the parental home of Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Davis, before going to Sheldon, Ia., where they made their home for a time. Will acquired skill as a compositor in the old Frontier plant when the type cases stood by the south windows that looked out upon a disorderly but at times interesting back yard of Noah and Sina Gwyn's and later the battle ground of Con Keys and his lady love. Will visited O'Neill again in the late 1930's and at that time was making his home with Mrs. Davis at Oakland, Calif. . . . A story came from Washington on December 5 of that year stating that President Theodore Roosevelt had removed James C. Pettijohn as register of the land office at Valentine and demanded the immediate resignation of A. L. Towle as receiver. Mr. Towle had previously been an official in the government land office in O'Neill. And a story came out of Valentine at that time of a wonderful new river that had formed in the sandhills and was flowing southeast, a half mile wide in places. A John Maher story.

Twenty-six letters and a few punctuation marks—all printers, writers and speakers have to work with, but see what has been done with these! Books, papers, printed matter, orators, spellbinders and just every day trade talk and social flatteries fill the world with human wisdom and nonsense, tell of the activities of life, the good, the noble, the sin and the shame as mankind writes the daily record. I go to a funeral this afternoon, the last rites for a 91-year-old pilgrim of earth who leaves no estate that can be converted into money but what transcends money value, his son and daughter have the heritage of the example of a noble life of one who had been careful in word and deed. The 26 letters we use sometimes unadvisedly day-by-day were not used by this old patriarch as long as I knew him to dip into the gutter or defame another.

That Missouri couple who go to the death chamber a day this month to lay each his life upon the altar as a sacrifice to their evil deeds trace their crimes back to the bottle. The nation licenses the bottle and demands the life of the human product of the bottle. Consistency, thou art a jewel.

Out of Old Nebraska . . .

Foolhardy Young Officer Ambushed

80 Soldiers Die at Hands of Indians

By JAMES C. OLSON
Supt., State Hist. Society

A serious problem facing soldiers stationed at military posts on the plains was that of securing wood, both for construction and for fuel. In many instances, wood was so scarce that the early posts were built of sod or adobe. The adobe structures lasted very well as is evidenced by those still in existence at Ft. Robinson and at Ft. Hartsuff. Wherever possible, though, wood was used.

In his valuable book, the Indian wars of 1864, Capt. Eugene F. Ware tells of going up into the canyon near Cottonwood Springs to secure cedar logs for use in construction of the buildings at Ft. McPherson. He describes the organization of the wood details: "Six of our men had worked in the pines and were excellent ax-men. They went to work as three couples to fell. Their axes were sharp, the weather stimulating and they tumbled the trees rapidly. Other squads trimmed the branches; others with a cross-cut saw worked in constant relief, cutting the logs the right length. Our quarters had been planned to be built of 20-foot logs. These logs were about a foot in diameter. We had our pick. After getting down a lot of the logs, we organized squads with our team mules to sneak them out of the canyon. The men made rapid work, and every night every man who had worked in the canyon got a good snifter from my barrel of 1849 whiskey."

The soldiers at Ft. McPherson had it relatively easy as far as wood was concerned. Cottonwood and cedar grew in plentiful quantities in the immediate vicinity of the fort.

Those at other posts were not so fortunate and wood trains had to be sent quite a distance to secure necessary wood. Assignment to the wood detail was more than an interesting break in the monotony of garrison life—it was highly exciting and at times extremely dangerous. The slow moving wood trains provided an easy mark for Indians and in hostile country, a guard detail had to be sent along with the wood trains. Even when the train operated under heavy guard, disaster might occur.

One of the most notable incidents involving a wood train was the Fetterman massacre of 1866.

A wood train sent out from Ft. Phil Kearny on the Little Piney in Wyoming sent word back that it was being surrounded and needed help. Capt. William J. Fetterman with mounted infantry, accompanied by cavalry under Lt. H. S. Bingham, was sent to the scene. Captain Fetterman's force proved insufficient, however, and Colonel Carrington, then at the post, had to come out with a large force to rescue the guard detail. Even so, Lieutenant Bingham and two men were lost in the skirmish.

Captain Fetterman, smarting under this defeat, was anxious to wreak vengeance upon Red Cloud's warriors, who were making every effort to close the forts on the Bowsman Trail and stop white traffic north of Ft. Laramie. Captain Fetterman, unfamiliar with Indian warfare or the ways of the frontier, had boasted that he could ride safely through the Indian country with 80 men.

When on the morning of December 21, 1866 the wood train again signaled an Indian alarm, Captain Fetterman insisted, as senior captain at Ft. Phil Kearny, that he be allowed to lead the expedition against them. He had just 80 men in his party—the number he had declared would be sufficient to carry the day.

Moreover, he had very specific orders from Colonel Carrington not to go beyond a point known as Lodge Trail Ridge. In disobedience of those orders, however, he allowed himself to be enticed beyond Lodge Trail Ridge and into an ambush. He and his men fought gallantly but not a man survived.

Thus the difficulties of a wood train—combined with the rashness of a brave but foolhardy young officer—provided the setting for one of the greatest tragedies of the frontier.

Orchard Cadet Makes Dean's List—ORCHARD—Cadet Robert L. Lafrenz, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Lafrenz of Orchard, was recently named on the dean's list

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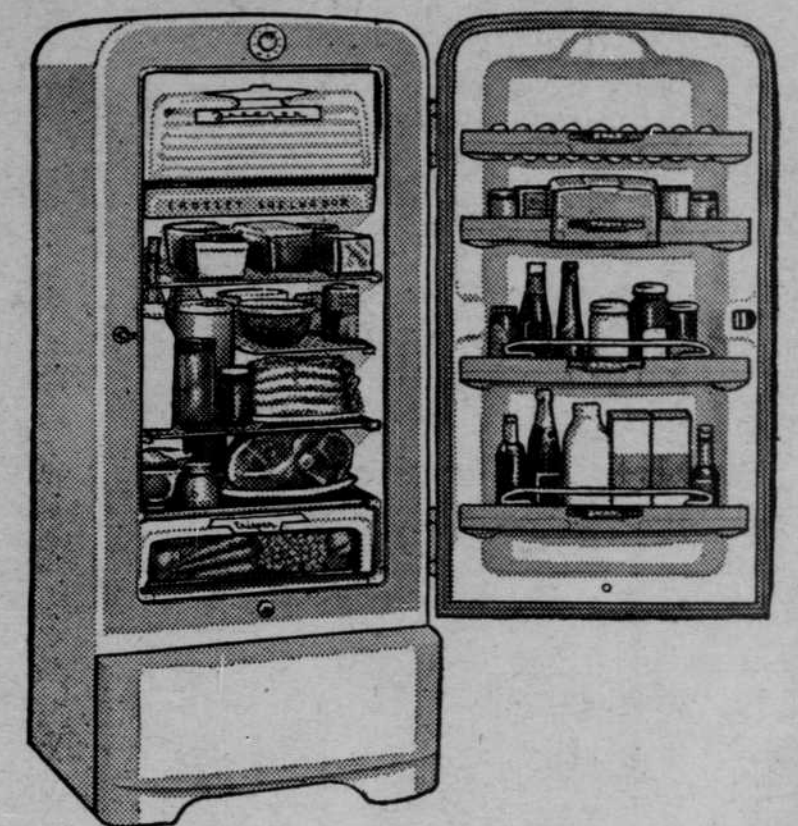
Stopover Here—Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Ray of Loveland, Colo., and Mr. and Mrs. McCoy Rhodes and family of Cody arrived Wednesday evening, November 25, and enjoyed Thanksgiving at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Elgin Ray and daughter, Mary. The Hugh Rays remained here for several days. They were enroute back to Loveland after having spent 10 days in Wisconsin visiting relatives.

Gillespies Entertain—Thanksgiving dinner guests in the home of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Gillespie and family were Mrs. Della Eby and her son, Robert, of Omaha, Robert arrived Wednesday night, November 25, accompanied by Robert Cavanaugh of Omaha and Theil Gubber of St. George, Utah. They spent Thanksgiving at the Charles Cavanaugh home.

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Editorial

Short View of White Case

The Harry Dexter White furor has subsided somewhat, but it appears to us the lines have been drawn for the 1954 off-year elections provided Harry S. Truman continues in role of titular head of the democratic party.

The republicans, of course, prefer it that way. And they'll try to sell the idea they're cleaning "communists, cronies and crooks out of government." This will detract from some of the domestic issues, including balancing the budget and relatively lower prices for agricultural products.

Democratic leaders, on the other hand, will have to defend Trumanism and, very likely, will stand four-square for high supports. Our guess is they'll tend to ignore the national budget as was characteristic of the 1933-'52 regime.

Truman defenders most frequently ask: "Why haul the White case out of mothballs now? Did Atty-Gen. Herbert Brownell time it to turn the tide after the republicans lost important congressional seats in the East?"

The Omaha World-Herald summed up the answer in a pithy four-line paragraph the other day:

Critics object that republican exposure of the White case is badly timed. Does this mean one should not report flames in the living room during fire prevention week?

President Eisenhower, apparently, doesn't want the commie question to be an issue next year or in 1956. But it's obviously out of his hands with hard-hitting Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisc.) bearing down with intensified vigor. Joe said the republican administration will be remembered as the one that drove the commies, crooks and cronies out and the Roosevelt-Truman-Acheson-Hiss crowd as the administration that took them in.

McCarthy hints there are other shockers a-comin' in his probing—and that suggests the White case happens to be only one in a long series in flushing the reds out of government. And, if this be the case, Brownell's so-called "timing" is not too important. McCarthy claims some 1,500 security risks already have been dropped from the government payroll.

Poor J. Edgar Hoover, the G-man who was appointed under a republican president (Coolidge) and put in a long stretch of service (20 years) for the democrats (Roosevelt-Truman), got into the White case rather spectacularly. The head of the federal bureau of investigation, who has earned tremendous bipartisan respect for himself and his agency and has always managed to stay aloof from politics, apparently was pushed right into the middle of the White case.

Traditionally the FBI has been an investigative agency under the department of justice and has neither attempted to make policy or evaluate its findings.

But Brownell's blast and Truman's rebuttal forced Hoover out into the open with the FBI's findings on White (and other subversives) and brought Hoover before the congressional committee, all of which proves Truman's white house knew all along how the FBI stood on White and some other important security risks and "sleazy characters."

These are a few short-view observations since the Harry Dexter White issue came to the fore more than a fortnight ago. History, no doubt, will duly record the rest of a sordid, odoriferous story.

Comes now the official word from Lincoln that the state highway department will receive bids in March, 1954, for letting contracts for the hardsurfacing of U.S. highway 281 both north and south of O'Neill as well as a stretch of state highway 95. This will mark the first major road improvement in the O'Neill region for 10 many years—nonetheless the word is being received with rejoicing.

Grit Magazine reports Helen Keller, 73, is planning to visit other countries and begin work on a new book. Miss Keller, who now lives in Westport, Conn., is writing the book on her teacher of many years, Anne Sullivan, who was with the deaf and blind Miss Keller from 1888 until 1946.

Only 17 shopping days until we can exchange all those gifts we're going to get.

Ord Quiz: Pretty girls can get by without too much mathematical prowess.

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