

# LOUIS GREBE YOUNGEST AMONG OMAHA PIONEERS OF '56

Story of a "Boy" Whose Fifty-One Years of Life Have All Been Spent in and Around Omaha in Active Work Connected With the Courts and the Law's Administration

**L**OUIS GREBE is 51 years and 3 months old. He has lived in Omaha fifty-one years and one month. He is the youngest of the living pioneers of Douglas county. That is only one of his claims to special distinction. Another is that he knows practically everybody in the county, and who does not know "Louie" Grebe, district court bailiff and terror of criminals and evildoers for nearly thirty years? Whose spirit has not been cheered with his perpetual good humor and optimism? "Louie" is an apostle of good cheer, a messenger of joy, a winged Mercury of happiness, a dispenser of light and airy persiflage that cheers but does not wound.

Bluegrass, Scott county, Iowa, is the town which claims to be Mr. Grebe's birthplace and there are no other towns to dispute the honor. The date was April 18, 1856. (It will be observed that this was precisely a half century before the great San Francisco earthquake, which occurred April 18, 1906.) Apparently the child was a prodigy even from birth. In his extreme youth he cast a prophetic eye toward the west and gravely advised his parents that Nebraska was the land of opportunity. When he had reached the mature age of six weeks he bade his parents get ready and follow him across the plains to where the great Missouri pours its turbid waters toward the south. And his parents, never doubting his wisdom for a moment, followed him. Down the clear Mississippi river they went to St. Louis. There they took another boat and steamed for days up the muddy Missouri until they arrived at a busy settlement on the west bank of the river. There young Grebe advised his parents to tarry, and there they left the boat. It was the infant settlement of Florence.

The above is a sample of Mr. Grebe's light and airy persiflage. Translated it means that his parents came to Nebraska in 1856. They settled in Florence June 11, 1856, and there Grebe, pere, built a home with lumber which he had purchased in St. Louis and brought up on the boat. One incident Grebe, fils, relates with gusto, though he points out that he has it only on heresy, to use a court expression. His mother, he says, had allowed him to get too much of the damp river air and when the boat arrived at Nebraska City, Grebe, fils, was very ill. Theroupon Grebe, pere, had to walk ten miles down the river to a place where a doctor lived and where paregoric abounded. "In all my adventures with criminals, I don't believe I ever came as near getting killed," says Mr. Grebe, "as I did that time. My father told me often that he had the biggest kind of notion to throw me into the river because I was so much bother."

## Played With Papposes

As soon as the Grebe home was finished the family moved from its temporary abode at the Willett house to the little shack. The elder Grebe opened a wagon shop and from this source he had a good income. For those were the days of the Mormon migration and there were thousands of the faithful in Florence every day during the season. They arrived there from the east footsore; and they rested. They arrived with wagons and pushcarts dilapidated and broken; and they had them repaired—at the Grebe Wagon and Carriage shops. He did a thriving business. Louie grew into a toddling youngster and his favorite companions were the little brown papposes of the Indians whose tepees were only a hundred yards distant. "I used to be afraid of white boys," he says. When I saw one coming I'd run with all my might. But I wasn't a bit scared of the little Indians. We used to have all kinds of fun, even playing at war with each other."

In 1860 the Mormon migration was over. There were no more wagons and pushcarts to be repaired. Omaha was forging rapidly ahead of her northern rival. Then the wagon builder decided to move. He did so in February, 1860, renting a building which stood on the site of what is now 1414 Douglas street. He conducted his wagon shop in the front of the building, while the family occupied the rear as a home. He remained in the same business all his life, though he was honored with many high offices. He was a member of the territorial legislature four terms, city treasurer of Florence, member of the Omaha council, sheriff of Douglas county from 1869 to 1873. He was also a deputy sheriff for more than fifteen years. His death occurred in 1894. Louis grew up in Omaha, helping his father in the shop, going to school and laying the foundation of his broad and cosmopolitan acquaintance with citizens. As a boy he was one of the town's enthusiastic base ball players. He was pitcher for the "Resolutes" in 1873 and 1874. This team was the third in the state to boast uniforms, the "Clippers" and the "Elkhorns" having preceded them in this distinction. Young Grebe was one of the witnesses of that awful base ball slaughter when the Red Stockings of Cincinnati crossed bats with the Omahas at the old state fair grounds in 1869. The result was a score of 69 to 1 in favor of the visitors. Pitcher Fay of the Omahas made the solitary score.

## Some Boyhood Memories

Mr. Grebe says that with all his hustling he never moved so fast as he did on one occasion in 1868. He was one of the spectators at a fight between a bear and a bull which was arranged in the fall of that year to take place at the present intersection of Twenty-third street and Capitol avenue. But instead of attacking the bull, "Grizzly Joe," the bear, ran for the spectators, who melted away before him. He was captured at Florence lake by Mexican Sam, a "cow puncher" employed by George W. Forbes. Another sporting event of the early days which he remembers is the prize fight between Steve Watson and Sam Moore. The men fought continuously for fifteen minutes, and then Moore was knocked out. He was hauled away by ex-Sheriff Sam Reeves in a farm wagon to the creek beyond the fighting ground and there brought back to life. This fight took place on the west part of what is now the high school grounds. The articles were signed and the purse was hung up at the Club saloon on Fifteenth street between Farnam and Douglas streets.

After young Grebe completed his education at the high school he worked for a time in his father's shop. Later he entered the Union Pacific shops and learned the trade of machinist, at which he worked for several years. Then began his career in the courts when he was appointed bailiff by Judge Eleazer Wakeley and Judge Neville, who occupied the district bench at that time. He was a bailiff for more than twenty years. During that time he had charge of some juries on noted cases, including that of John Lauer, who was accused of killing his wife at Twenty-sixth and Douglas streets; also that of Libbie Beecher, who killed Henry King at the Paxton hotel in 1888.

It was while he was bailiff in Judge Wakeley's court that he took unto himself a wife. This event occurred June 11, 1889, and the lady was Miss Nona Reeves, whose parents were also pioneers of Florence. An indication of the esteem in which he was held is the fact that a purse of \$175 was given him as a wedding present by the judges, bailiffs, lawyers and clerks with whom he was associated in his daily duties. Arrangements had been made on this occasion to have Mr. Grebe arraigned before the court on the charge of "getting married." A mock trial was to be held, at the conclusion of which Louie was to be sentenced to accept the purse of \$175. But, the newspapers of the day relate, two long-winded lawyers took up the noon hour with argument on a small case and therefore the arraignment had to be dispensed with.

## In Pursuit of Criminals

How he ever came to be a hounder of criminals, Louie scarcely knows. It always had an attraction for him, he says. He may have inherited the taste from his father, who served so long as sheriff and deputy. At all events he has been a faithful and efficient officer of the law. He has been a terror to criminals and a swift Nemesis upon the trail of such as have violated the laws of man. It is his proud boast that he has never come back without his man when he set out to secure him.

He arrested John Q. Thomas on February 29, 1890. Thomas



LOUIS GREBE.

was wanted for the murder of a conductor on the Youtville & Nashville railroad; also for stabbing three other men. A special agent tracked the desperado to Florence and to a log house out in the woods half a mile west of the town. Thither he went with the special agent. Carefully concealing his star of office and his weapon he approached the door of the cabin. He knew his man the moment the door was opened. He asked whether he wanted work chopping wood. "But Thomas declined the proffered job. He had work, he said. Grebe gave a signal to the special agent, he appeared and they made a rush for Thomas. After a terrific struggle they threw him to the floor and clapped the bracelets on him."

Luke Simpson and his accomplice, Rose, were two more of Grebe's victims. They were suspected of robbing a store in Whiting, Ia. Grebe found two trunks filled with silks and other valuable merchandise at the Webster street depot. He laid in wait until Simpson came to have the trunks removed. Then he captured him and turned him over to the sheriff in Onawa. Then he took a rig and drove to Decatur, where he captured Rose. In his house he found goods which

had been the property of a Decatur merchant whose store had been burned the same night as the robbery in Whiting.

The coolest man in accepting his fate when the strong arm of the law, represented by Deputy Sheriff Grebe, was laid upon him was Jeff Haywood, colored. He was charged with murder in Denver. In spite of the fact that he had a stiff neck and was therefore easy to identify, he escaped the authorities for many months. Finally word came that he was in Omaha. Grebe was put on the case. He found by an underground means that he was a waiter at a local hotel. The officer went to the hotel and had no difficulty in getting speech with the man. "You are under arrest," said Grebe, as he clapped the handcuffs on the fellow. The colored man looked bewildered for a moment. Then he exclaimed: "Ah sure done ought to knowed better'n stay here. Ah jest felt something gwine to happen 'cause Ah done lost mah rabbit foot last night."

Mr. Grebe served Uncle Sam as a special deputy United States marshal under United States Marshal Frank White during the Coxe army agitation in 1894. This was the time of the country's

most distressful industrial plight. Factories were shut down everywhere; business failures had reached an unprecedented height. The army of the unemployed had never been so big before. It was, moreover, a great time for the industrial and political agitator. Yellow newspapers bristled with articles speaking with an amazing adjective display of "blankets of mortgages smothering the little flame of life so tenderly nurtured by a million men upon our boundless plains," "millions of acres irrecriminably in the grasp of hireling aliens," "children starving at the breasts of half-dead mothers; strong men, frantic with horror, bogging fruitlessly for bread."

## Scattering an Army

At this crisis the idea of Coxe had been hatched. It was the materialization of the theory that the world owes a living to all men. It was an industrial revolution, which only lacked size and strength to overturn the existing form of government. "Why," asked the leaders in the movement, "are the producers of food hungry? Why do the makers of clothing go in rags, and why do the builders of palaces live in hovels?" And the obvious answer was that the masses were being oppressed by the classes. Then came the political Moses to lead the people out of the Egypt of bondage and of oppression. It is well remembered still how the armies rose from all parts of the country, from Maine to California, and set out on their march toward Washington. Their demand was three-fold, namely: Government employment for unemployed citizens, prohibition of immigration for a period of ten years and prohibition of aliens from owning land.

It was with a detachment of this army which set out from Denver that Mr. Grebe had to do in his capacity of deputy United States marshal.

"These fellows had started from Denver in boats at the time when the river was high," says Mr. Grebe. "They had built a lot of light boats, intending to float down the river to Kansas City. But when they were passing a railroad bridge near Sterling the boats struck some barbed wire which was strung across and spilled them all out and lost the boats. Then they walked to Julesburg, and they were good and tired when they got there. They tried to take a train of freights there, and that's what called us out, because the Union Pacific was in the hands of a receiver then, and therefore it was Uncle Sam's duty, you see, to protect it from any lawlessness. Well, they hurried us out to Julesburg, and there we were eating dinner one day when the word come for us to drop our knives and forks and hike to Big Springs in a special car. We did so and surprised the army and arrested them. There were about 250 in the detachment. They were taken to Fort Sidney, and there we turned them loose, about ten of them every day, sending them in different directions, so as to get them scattered."

## Other Official Duties

Mr. Grebe was the chief of police of the Douglas county fair for ten consecutive years, and in 1894 he was chief of the blue coats at the state fair. Among the gruesome duties which have devolved upon him during his career was the hanging of Ed Nell, who had cheerfully murdered an aged couple west of Seymour lake in order that he might drive their stock to South Omaha and sell it. Mr. Grebe selected the lumber, constructed the engine of death and then purchased the fatal hempen cord from a man in Cincinnati who manufactured rope for the especial and exclusive purpose of hanging wicked men. Mr. Grebe declares that the weeks preceding this event were terrible ones for him. He was haunted even in his dreams with visions of the work. His appetite failed and he says he got down almost to a diet of bird seed. It was also his duty to assist at several other similar functions.

After his long career in dealing with bad men, Mr. Grebe thinks the methods of Sherlock Holmes are useful only for the purposes of fiction. "They're no good in running down a real man," he says. "You might strike it right that way and then again you might not. I always just went out and hunted for my man and inquired everywhere, and I always got him just as sure as Sherlock Holmes ever did, and never made half as much noise about it."

Mr. Grebe's last official position was that of messenger under County Judge Silbaugh. It was his duty then to look up all cases of murder and burglary and other evil doing and law breaking. He held this position until the close of Judge Silbaugh's term, the first of this year. Since then he has been in the real estate business. He now resides in Florence, having moved out there a year ago. Mr. and Mrs. Grebe have two children, a daughter, Maude, and a son, Howard. The latter is an electrician in the employ of the street railway company.

Mr. Grebe has been a member of Beech camp No. 1454, Modern Woodmen of America, for seventeen years. He was a member of Omaha's volunteer fire department for ten years. He has two brothers, Henry and Theodore, both of whom are citizens of Omaha.

# Vacation Time Spent at Home May Be Pleasant

**P**EOPLE who have acquired the summer vacation habit and are obliged to forego the customary outing can extract some comfort and content from the calm philosophy of one of their number whose resourcefulness and skill in making home take on a summery vacation atmosphere commands two columns of detail and commendation in the New York Evening Post.

The action of the story revolves around the wife. Her husband is around somewhere, though invisible. In spite of her yearning for out-of-door life and the allurements of the coast, the lakes and mountains, she contends that it is possible, with a "little ingenuity and artifice," to transform the six rooms of her modest apartment and the resources of the city into a fair substitute for any one of the three, the only essentials for the transformation being imagination and a contented spirit. "Bawn and bred," not in Br'er Rabbit's briar patch, but in a slumberous, elm-shaded village, where summer meant a garden gay with posies and a round dozen of dimly frocks to wear when sitting on the front porch with a party of jolly friends, it was a bit disconcerting when the first summer of married life found business in such condition that no vacation was possible for her husband. But she had a good deal of Br'er Rabbit's resourcefulness and his cheerful acceptance of a situation, no matter how bad, and she stuck to her post gallantly, and won out with honors. Just how she did it is partly her own secret, but some of her methods are known to her friends, and have been helpful to others in like case.

Naturally, the most essential thing for comfort in hot weather is a cool house in which to live, and the secret of having such a house she had learned from her mother. The average woman believes that the best way to keep her house cool is to throw open all windows and leave them open during the day, thus allowing the hot sun to pour in and the hot air to fill the house. But that this method is ineffective is too often proved by the stuffy rooms and heat-laden atmos-

phere. A better way is the one substituted by the woman who had learned by the wisdom of her elders.

After a thorough airing of the entire apartment, at about 9 o'clock, when the first shafts of sunlight began to pour into her bed room windows, she closed every window tight, first lowering the awnings, then pulling down both light and dark shades. How often she sighed for the heavy green outside shutters of her old home! They had been so effective in keeping out the heat. Now she had shut in the cool morning air and shut out the hot sun, and her apartment was well aired and twilight dark until nearly 6, when she opened wide every window. Many times a day she wished that the man of the house was working in the moderate temperature of his own apartment, instead of in the glare of a wide-open office. But, at least, he could come home at 4 to the quiet, shaded coolness, more delightful even, by contrast.

After securing freedom from heat, another requisite of pleasant living was attractive, summery-looking rooms. Nothing is simpler if you have good taste, for luckily for those not possessed of the purse of Fortunatus, it means, in brief, doing without things, or substituting cheap for expensive furnishings. All draperies came down, save protecting white cheesecloth curtains in bath and bed rooms; heavy rugs were packed away in tar paper and matting substituted. Linen covers went over chairs and couches, and this was the only item involving much expenditure. But, as everyone knows, once bought they last a lifetime. One thing one model summer housewife did not do. She absolutely refused to swathe the pictures and chandeliers in mosquito netting, after the fashion of some ultra-fastidious housekeepers.

To enjoy one's apartment summer resort to best advantage the wise contend that you must dispense with the services of a maid and have no cooked meals in the house. Breakfast in summer is always a light meal—in our typical instance, fruit, iced cantaloupe or red raspberries are ambrosia on a hot morning, a cold cereal, with fresh

rolls and coffee, if anyone insists, were all that were needed to provide a delicious, satisfying, healthful meal. Luncheon did not figure, for, with the men of the family out of the way, mere woman can content herself with small pickings and be happy. Dinner was a movable feast. Sometimes a tea room in the next block was their happy hunting ground; at others a downtown restaurant tempted them with luscious and delicious salads; and again, were the evening unusually warm, the family cook had seized the opportunity to prepare dinner at home. A cold roast, done in the early morning, a vegetable salad, and ices from the nearest caterer were the component parts of many an evening's meal. The crafty woman becomes adept in the preparations of cold, alluring drinks, if she is desirous of catering to the pet tastes of her men folk. A candle-light drawing room and the tinkle of ice in tall glasses are as effective as a chaffing-dish and a wood fire for promoting conversation. With cold tea as a basis, and lemons, citrons, raspberry vinegar, grape juice, oranges and some cucumber rind, fresh mint, ginger ale and lots and lots of ice, a score of delightful combinations are possible, and the labor involved is very slight.

Being housekeeper and maid both, even if the housekeeping is light, involves some work, and some planning so that the work shall not come in the heat of the day. Seven o'clock rising for the housekeeper in a small family made it possible to have breakfast over, dishes washed, beds made and marketing done by 9 o'clock. Then an hour more on special days, when any cooking was required, meant a holiday until 5 or 6. Of course this implies that all laundry work is taken out of the house and that the weekly heavy cleaning is done by a special arrangement. Marketing early means also getting the best of the day's supplies at the green grocer's.

But no corner table under an electric fan in a famous restaurant, no dim drawing room, no cool dining room, can ever hope to equal in attractiveness on a hot day a comfortable bath room.

Any bath room will do, but there are bath rooms—and bathrooms. A shower bath is, by all odds, the most desirable feature, and a needle spray for hot weather soul-satisfying in the extreme. A huge bottle of eau-de-cologne should be a prominent feature, and one of the large Japanese powder boxes, with a huge puff and a generous supply of powder, will be a grateful addition.

To combine comfort and taste requires no little planning. One wardrobe was so well thought out that it is worth recording, for it is not impossible for the average woman. There were three simple coat suits, a white mohair, a tan linen and blue rajah silk. Some pretty shirtwaists, and two linen skirts, three plain morning dresses of lawn and one rather elaborate, white princess gown of batiste and lace gave the owner the proper garb for every possible occasion in her unassuming position. A white sailor, an embroidered linen hat, a close toque, her best spring confection, and a white leghorn with her winter plume, made an imposing array, and she boasted six pairs of ties in white, tan and black. So shopping in summer may be a profitable, money-saving amusement. To start downtown at 9, walk leisurely through the shops, lunch, then rest in a department store parlor, in a big chair, before starting home, is neither fatiguing nor hot, and most women never know the joy of it—for shopping is usually either a mad search for the unattainable or an attempt to do forty errands in as many minutes.

If a contented spirit is to be one of the assets needed to make summer in town endurable and enjoyable, then there is one thing the experienced woman will warn you away from. By all means do not dwell upon the joys you are missing by not being in the country. Even a glance at the newspaper columns of summer resort arrivals and departures, and chronicles of good times, may upset an excellent equilibrium. Tempting they are, indeed, most tempting, but if one must, she can, and it is the better part of contentment to discreetly eschew all such literature if she cannot hope to share in the happy times.