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EARLY DAYS IN O'NEILL.

Reminiscences of This City's Pioneer Days.

BY J. J. McCAFFERTY.

[Thirteen years ago the Ladies of the Methodist Episcopal Church of O'Neill, under the leadership of Mrs. A. C. King, now of Orchard, Nebraska, published a sixteen page edition of the Holt County Independent, thereby adding a neat little sum to the church treasury. A few weeks ago we conceived the idea of again issuing a souvenir paper and we wish here to thank all those who have so willingly and helpfully aided us in our plans. We have tried to have everything of worth represented in this issue of the Frontier and we have words for all from many old friends and old residents of the community, and we hope that you will find this issue of The Frontier interesting and worth keeping. In the paper published by the Ladies in 1901, J. J. McCafferty of this city had quite an extensive article calling up early history in the state, county, and city, and he has kindly consented to our using this article again, with some additions.—Editors.]

Lady Editors: You impose a task on me, in asking for the early history of O'Neill, as I have never kept a diary nor even a scrap book and as it is nearly half a century since I rode in here on James Stephenson's buckboard, and much local history has been made if not written since that time.

Before coming here I read much of "O'Neill City" in the newspapers, so you may guess at my surprise when we drove up to the door of John T. Prouty in the town of Rockford (where the Short Line roundhouse now stands), and the far famed "city" was pointed out to us, consisting of one poorly built sod shanty then decaying into ruins, as the people who had lived in it were living on their farms at the time of which I write.

Holt County then had but thirty families all told. James Ewing, C. Gunther, John Davidson and F. Kirby lived at Ford, the old name for Ewing. Mr. Morrison, James McFarland, Mr. Davis, the Juds, Joseph Leany, W. H. Inman lived at Twin Lake. H. W. Erving, the Sanford brothers, I. R. Smith, E. J. Thompson, the Wolfes (Sam and brother), Dave Wisgarver, C. Mitchell, Frank Bitney, William Dickinson, J. T. Prouty, Pat Hagerty, Neil Brennan, John Grady, the Fallons (John and Bill), Tom Cain, the two Gallaghers (Tom and Pat), Pat Murry, Tom Hynes, M. McGrath, Tim Connors and Pat Hughes and Wm. Joyce and the two Tom Connallys all lived in the O'Neill settlement, and the Berry brothers, (Back and Tom), the Rosses, Smiths, E. Whiting and the Balzores lived at Paddock.

We were all on a perfect equality then, and lived chiefly on slapsacks and black coffee. Mush and milk was a luxury that the writer once traveled seven miles for a mess. We were all neighbors and knew everyone in the county, and in fact everybody between here and the Black Hills.

The first wedding in the county was that of Tom Berry to Miss Smith, and the first marriage here was a double one in which Sam Wolf and Neil McIlreavey married E. J. Thompson's two girls. Joe Ryan, who now buys hogs on the O'Neill market, was the first white child born in the community. And John Grady was the first of the O'Neill colony to get married though William Fallon was the first of said colony to get married here.

There were many Indian scares, but no serious trouble ever resulted therefrom, as most of them originated in the wildest canards. In those days all the people in this settlement got their firewood in the canyons of the Eagle and its tributaries, and hauled it home with ox teams. I was then "batching" with my friend, Mr. Hughes, and he and I yoked up a couple of ox teams one day and started for the Eagle for wood; but when we got within a few miles of camp we saw men and teams rushing homeward in the greatest confusion. We advanced until we met the flying wood haulers, who informed us that five hundred Indian braves were on the warpath, not more than three miles behind. We prevailed on some of them to calmly wait and investigate matters before rushing back to the settlement with alarming news of dismay and uncertainty. We were on the high table land and had a commanding view of the brakes of the Eagle valley for miles. But after hours of patient investigation we failed to see any signs of the red-skinned warriors on the warpath, tho Simon Deal and Mary Mitchell protested they saw hundreds of them and that they were so close to them that they eyes. They drove back to the settlement they could see the whites of their ment and reported that the Indians were in hot pursuit, and that the people with oxen were at their mercy (they had horses). After waiting a short while we pushed on slowly, and as we saw no Indians we cut down and loaded our logs, spent that night in camp, (a log house), and got back

home next day to find the whole settlement converted into a military camp, with Major McGrath in command.

The whole scare was as follows: Tim Connors lost his oxen, as he neglected to picket them out on grass. When he found them they were a couple of miles from the place he left them and in an unfrequented quarter having neither wood nor trail, and when returning to camp over one of the high hills, against the horizon, he and his moving oxen were mistaken for an army of savage warriors, and the further the news went the greater the number of Indians was said to be.

The first dance I attended in the settlement there was only one girl in attendance and four at the second, and the fellow who could engage one of them for a future set was in high feather; some of them were said to be engaged for eight sets ahead.

'Twas then that the big ranches west of us started, and for the next few years the cowboys were the social lions of Holt county society. About that time Cowboy Reed killed Sheriff B. Kearns.

Most of you knew Cy Buck, who died some time ago. He was then a jolly young man, light hearted and full of fun, and was engaged in freighting to the upper Niobrara river ranches. He attended a dance in O'Neill one night at which he seemed perfectly at home. A nice young girl, blooming into womanhood, had just come out from the east to her folks, and it was in honor of her the dance was given. There was a strange, tall and peculiar acting man there, who appeared in O'Neill for the first time, and seeing the headway Mr. Buck was making with the young folks, he walked up to him and asked to be introduced to the newcomer, and gave a fictitious name and stated he was an up-country rancher. Mr. Buck did as requested, and the stranger danced several times with the newly arrived young lady, to whom he was all attention, seemingly to the satisfaction of her parents, who a few days after were swearing vengeance against both the stranger and Buck when it became noised around that the "up-country rancher" was none other than the notorious "Doc" Middleton, horse thief and desperado.

Like all new counties, we had a scrap over the county organization, officers and county seat, and one pitched battle without any serious result beyond a badly splintered wagon. The Special County Clerk, W. H. H. Inman, appointed by Governor G. Garber, when he found he couldn't have everything his own way, left the county and carried all the papers in the case with him, so that in most parts of the county the election was let go by default, but some voted for Paddock as county-seat, and it was so declared as county seat with a full set of officers. The people of the other parts of the county ignored the whole business, and the controversy finally resulted in the above mentioned battle, in which B. Fallon was leader on O'Neill side. To get the tangle straightened out, the writer rode a mule from here to Ponca to see Judge Valentine who was at that time holding court in Dixon county, but he refused to act in the matter beyond advising recognition of both officers and seat of government and rectifying the wrong at the next election.

When the fight was ended the county seat was located in O'Neill, and Sanford Parker, the first county clerk, did business in a little 10x12 building of historic memory, which stood where M. D. Long now offices (1901), and it was also the first school house in these parts, and I think it was in the same house that Dr. Daggett first sold whiskey and drugs.

The settlement of all new counties develops strange characters and ours was no exception to the rule, as we had several of which volumes might be written but I will only glance at a few. You all have heard of Judge Malloy, who was moderately well educated and witty beyond the average wits, but unfortunately had contracted a pronounced desire and taste for strong drinks. When he was county judge, H. M. Uttley and G. M. Cleveland were arguing a case before him. Uttley stopped short in the middle of an eloquent period, and Cleveland asked the cause of the short stop, and Uttley said he was waiting for the court to sober up. Then the Judge opened his eyes and said in the blandest manner possible that he was not drunk but simply lost in admiration of the learned Uttley's eloquence.

B. J. Capwell, who built the Bentley place, ran a general store there for years, and was prosecuted for selling whiskey. Judge Malloy and Captain Cassidy were brought in as unwilling witnesses. C. C. McNish was district attorney and J. D. Barnes, of Norfolk, was district judge. Court was held in the little cottage just north of the Methodist Episcopal church, and when the case was called and Malloy put on the stand, McNish strove in vain to get the old man to swear he drank whiskey in Capwell's. When Malloy was closely pressed for a distinct answer, he said his people were plain

country farmers who simply taught him the use and rule of the three R's, but that chemistry was not a part of his education, and lacking the ripe and varied experience, in drinking, of the learned district attorney he could not or would not swear that he drank any whiskey there. (McNish, too, was a free drinker), when Cassidy was called to the witness stand he said he didn't like to testify, but was told by McNish that it was his bounden duty to do so and tell all he knew, regardless of consequences, to which he angrily replied that it was an insult to his manhood and an indignity on clan Cassidy to even ask him to become a spy and informer on his friend and fellowman; and as to him fearing consequences, he did not; then, shaking his armless sleeve at the prosecuting attorney, he shouted: "I never feared, God, man nor the devil—not even when in the forefront of the enemy I fought 'Johnny Rebs' for four years on twenty southern battlefields!" And he walked out of the room. Then the prosecution collapsed and Capwell kept open house that night, with Judge Malloy and Captain Cassidy holding the posts of honor.

Mr. Patrick Hagerty was O'Neill's first postmaster, as he was for a time its entire population, but as the town and settlement grew there were others who thought they could better satisfy the wants of the people and the wishes of Uncle Sam than Mr. Hagerty, and Dennis Daily, who organized the first republican club in the county, went after the office and got it, too, but didn't hold it very long, as it was said he forged names to his petition in order to get it. Hagerty got a copy of Daly's petition and when examined it was signed by nearly every name in the settlement. One old farmer out north went after Daily pretty hard for using his name without authority, and when out of breath by calling him all the names he could think of, Daly turned around and asked him if he had a patent on his name.

right on his name, and coolly stated that the signer of that name was an emigrant on his way to the Black Hills.

The next claimant for the office was Doc Matthews, the present editor (1901) of the Little Rock, Arkansas, Republican, another gentleman of shiftily principals and easy morals. He got it, and Hagerty sent two prominent citizens (then and now) of O'Neill to look after his interests. Either Matthews or Daily, or both, warned the Washington detectives that two dangerous cranks had left O'Neill bound for the national capital, with the desire and purpose of killing the president and other government officials. Their photos were sent. The detectives lay in wait at the depot till the O'Neill citizens landed, then told them they were wanted at the central station, and were conducting them there to, when they met E. K. Valentine, the big congressman from the big Third Nebraska district, who explained the situation to the satisfaction of all except the practical joker, who was foiled. But Matthews continued to write "P. M. of O'Neill" after his name for a long time.

Patrick Hagerty was O'Neill's first resident, merchant and postmaster. Brennan and McCafferty were the first hardware and furniture dealers and undertakers; Dr. Daggett was the first druggist and Dr. Shore the first physician. Murphy and Kearns and John P. O'Donnell were the first hotel keepers, Mike Tierney the first blacksmith, C. C. Millard the first liveryman, John Mayberry and John McBride and Darwin Sparks were the first carpenters and builders; Joe Hall was the first saloonist and Noah Gwinn was the pioneer watch maker. John Mann and W. Dahly were the first harness makers. Mrs. N. Martin was the first milliner and dressmaker. Millard and Toohill were the first exclusive flour and feed dealers and the Ellises were the first butchers. The Wilcox Brothers were the first lumber dealers and Conrad Mitchell the first exclusive coal dealer, and Martin Farrell was pioneer drayman. Cheney and Adams started the first bank and G. W. Palmanteer the first National bank. The Holt County Record was O'Neill's first newspaper and the first west of Neligh. Miss Ellen O'Sullivan, now Mrs. A. Barrett, was O'Neill's first school teacher. Kate Mann was teacher when the school was graded and John Bland was the first principal of O'Neill's High school, and S. J. Weekes was its first graduate.

Father J. T. Smith was O'Neill's first Catholic priest. Rev. Bartley Blain was the first Methodist preacher and N. S. Lowry the first Presbyterian minister, three of nature's noble men. William Nolkammer built Holt county's first grist mill and the Vanvalkenberg Brothers started the County's first creamery and pressed the County's first baled hay. T. V. Golden and Company were the County's first abstracters of land titles and T. N. J. Hynes was O'Neill's and the County's first notary public. Ed Moffit, Sr., was the first justice of the peace of the community.

James Ryan, Sr., was the first of the O'Neill colony to go into the cattle business and his son Joe was the first

exclusive hay buyer, tho Frank Shoemaker bought some hay on the O'Neill market before Joe started. William Fallon was the first cattle buyer and Frank Toohill was the pioneer hog buyer and shipper. H. M. Uttley was the first lawyer. Patrick Brennan was the town's first shoemaker, tho M. M. Sullivan made some shoes out in the country before Brennan started up in town and John Hunt was the pioneer plasterer and cement man, and the writer of these notes sowed the first blue grass in Holt county, planted the first apple trees and Jack pines in O'Neill and was the first licensed embalmer in northwestern Nebraska west of Fremont. John Smoot was O'Neill's first barber and the writer was the first man he shaved, which was on the night before I was married. Conrad Reka introduced O'Neill's first automobile; Clark Hough opened the first restaurant and John McBride was the city's first Mayor, though O. F. Biglin was first chairman of the O'Neill town council.

THE O'NEILL PUBLIC SCHOOL (Continued from page one.)

mestic science, including sewing and cookery, and a business course of two years.

The boys and girls who graduate from this institution are either equipped with a college entrance card and teachers' certificate, or with skill of hand and training of mind to earn a livelihood and to make an intelligent home.

A high standard of morals is maintained. The civic virtues of honesty, truth, loyalty and self control, and the business virtues of punctuality, industry, obedience and courtesy are insisted upon, and are secured to an encouraging degree.

The school by maintaining Normal Training and agriculture receives an extra state apportionment annually of \$1,600.00 and, also, receives tuition to the amount of \$500.00.

The money invested in schools is transmuted by divine alchemy of teaching into the immortality of character. It makes the community more desirable to live in, it enhances the value of property and is the richest paying investment of money wisely expended. The citizens of O'Neill have proven their business astuteness in the erection of such a school plant, and the maintenance of a school of this standard.

ST. MARY'S ACADEMY. (Continued from page one.)

Teresa Ketterer, Pierce, Neb.
Sophia Valla, O'Neill, Neb.
William Abbott, Okreek, S. D.
Liguori Abbott, Okreek, S. D.
Maurice Bates, Gordon, Neb.
Edmund Flannigan, Burton, Neb.
Robert Neiter, Sheridan, Wyoming.
Joseph Peters, O'Neill, Neb.
Edmund Sattler, Norfolk, Neb.
George Ketterer, Pierce, Neb.
Maurice Ketterer, Pierce, Neb.

The Alumnae Association.

The Alumnae Association of St. Mary's Academy was organized June 11, 1908. The objection of the association as embodied in its constitution is "to promote friendly relations among the Alumnae of the Academy and to further the interests of Alma Mater in such ways as may be considered best." The annual reunion and banquet occurs the last Thursday in June. Each graduate of St. Mary's is required to secure a first grade county certificate before graduation and, in consequence, eighty of the one hundred twenty-four graduates who have gone forth from St. Mary's are engaged in the profession of teaching. One is at present member of the faculty of the O'Neill Public School. Two are teaching in the Public schools of Seattle, Washington. One is a teacher in the Butte, Montana High School. Four are teaching at Atkinson, Nebraska one in Sargent, Nebraska, and so on to the end of the list. One is an efficient member of the corps of workers in the State Superintendent's office in Lincoln. Several have entered higher institutions of learning, while eleven are laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. Each one has made a marked success of her work and each has been true to the teachings of her Alma Mater, thus adding to the name and fame of St. Mary's.

The above is, in brief, the history and description of the present St. Mary's Academy, which has risen from the ashes of the old. Its rise, its growth has been a steady, healthful one. Solitary have been its bequests, but it has spread its confines through enthusiasm and sterling worth. There has been no faltering on the way, and it may be said, that "St. Mary's has but fairly begun as the great educational institution for which Almighty God has designed it."

Special attention is called to the many recipes published in this issue of the Frontier. The recipes are "true and tried" and many delicious dainties will be found among them. We have the privilege of including in the list one for "Creamed Oysters," by Mrs. L. B. Messacar, formerly Miss Fannie Millard. This recipe won the \$2.00 prize offered recently by the Omaha Bee. Try it.