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Notes From The History of O'Neill As Prepared By The Late Judge J. J. McCafferty

The Frontier, through the courtesy of Mrs. R. E. Gallagher, is permitted to give its readers some reminiscences of the very early life of this part of Holt county as gathered by the late John J. McCafferty.

These reminiscences are taken from the notes prepared by Judge McCafferty for a history of O'Neill and Holt county the compilation of which the Judge was engaged at the time of his death.

On the 12th of May, 1874, General John O'Neill landed his first colony on the present city of O'Neill. It is needless to say that the town is called in honor of the General, notwithstanding the claim set up by Patrick Fahy, who claims General O'Neill was in his pay and service and that he (Fahy) named it after Red Hugh O'Neill who flourished in Ireland in the time and reign of Queen Elizabeth. His followers consisted of Neil Brennan, Patrick Hughes, Timothy O'Connor, Henry Carry, Thomas Connolly, Michael Dempsey, Thos. Kelly, Robert Alworth, Ralph Sullivan, Patrick Brennan, Thos. Cain, Henry Carry, Patrick M. Karney and others, but many of them returned back when they saw the raw and barren nakedness of the vast and virgin prairies undisturbed by the habit of man or the sign of human life. O'Neill advertised the country pretty thoroughly in the east and although there were a few trappers and nomadic settlers in the northeast and northern part of the county and the McEvony settlement a few miles east of O'Neill, the thorough and systematic settlement of the county starts with O'Neill's first colony, if it may be so called.

The original colonists dropped out one by one until there was only left in the fall or autumn, Patrick Hughes, Neil Brennan, Tim O'Connor, Tom Connolly, M. H. McGroth, and Thos. N. J. Hines. Robert Alworth went back east but afterward returned and settled twenty miles above here in the Elkhorn valley. The McEvony settlement was effected on July 13, 1873, and consisted of H. H. McEvony, Frank Bitney, John T. Prouty, Herman Hoxsie and sons, Henry and Wilson and E. H. Thompson, and in the autumn of the same year they were joined by David Wisegarver and Sam Wolf. The next spring Eli and John Sanford came.

It is said that years before any of the present settlers came to the county there was an attempt to settlement near the mouth of the Redbird creek by some discharged federal soldiers who selected claims and built cabins out of cedar logs cut and dressed on their own claims but were continually disturbed, horrified and finally put to flight, and at least one of their num-

ber killed by Sioux Indians who had a reservation and lived just across the river "qui court" or "Running Water" now the Niobrara. But the first settlers who stuck to the claims and maintained their posts of honor on the frontier were Wm. T. Berry who came in June, 1874, and T. H. Berry and J. B. Berry who came in the fall of the same year. J. B. was a man of family who accompanied him but T. H. was a bachelor. In 1875 Emery Belezure from Iowa, moved his family there. Ryland Parker and wife, two sons and daughters moved in from Wisconsin about this time and a little later Clement Lamereaux.

The old settlement was called Tory but about that time the star of A. S. Paddock, one of the pioneers and early statesmen of the state, and a very worthy citizen, was in the ascendancy, and so, hence, the settlers discarded the historic name and adopted the name of the popular Senator Paddock.

On November 1, 1874, Rody J. Hayes, Jas. Ryan, John Reddy arrived in May, 1875. General O'Neill came with his second colony, consisting of Patrick Hagerty, John J. and Thomas O'Neill, his nephews, John Cantlin, Michael Ryan, Michael Castello, D. P. O'Sullivan, Herman Strasburg, Wm. O'Sullivan and others, a few bringing their families. In the spring of 1876, General O'Neill brought in his third colony consisting of 102 men, women and children; and in 1877 his fourth colony consisted of about 70 people all told.

As those were grass hopper years these new arrivals scattered in all directions, many returned to their former homes in the east accompanied by some of the former colonists and homesteaders all the way down the valley from here to Wisner.

In speaking of the grasshoppers, I was of the opinion before I came here that they were natives of the high and dry regions of the Rocky Mountains. I read that their natural home and habitat was comprised between longitude 43 and 53 north, and latitude 103 and 114 west, but you may guess at my astonishment when I tell you that one afternoon in the later part of July, 1876, I went to the house of Mrs. Patrick Murray, whose claim later comprised the McCafferty addition to O'Neill. We were all batchelors and most of us got our washing done and our bread baked by her as she was the nearest woman. As I passed south of her home I saw a field of corn on second breaking, of the most luxuriant growth that I have ever seen. I may have been in the house ten or fifteen minutes when all of a sudden everything became dark and when we rushed out the door, we were ankle deep in a mass of grasshoppers and they were still alighting. We were all awed and

dumb-founded when we cast our eyes in the direction of the beautiful and healthy field of maize which I had just passed a few minutes before. Not a vestige of green growth, not even a stalk was left, all were downed in less time than it takes to tell the dismal story. The hoppers continued to alight for hours 'till the ground was covered to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. The aerial flight of the insects was about one and one-half miles to two miles wide and lasted for nearly two days.

In the early history of the county the colonists were over a hundred miles from civilization and many of them over fifty miles from a post-office. The nearest railroads were at Wisner, Nebraska, and at Yankton, South Dakota, and the supplying post-office was at Frenchtown in Antelope county.

We had neither, clergy, doctor or school teacher excepting one Father Bedard, who was a combination of priest, farmer and pedagogue in the village of Frenchtown on the north side of the Elkhorn river east of what used to be called the "Yellowbanks."

A postoffice was established in O'Neill about the time I came here in 1876, and Patrick Hagerty was the first mercantile store in the county and at one time did a vast business employing from ten to twenty hands all told; at time he took in \$1,000.00 per day. He was an old soldier, a student of men and possessed a college education.

When Sanford Parker, who was the first active county clerk, brought the books and records from Paddock to O'Neill on August 1, 1879, he located them in a little building 10x12 feet, standing, I think, about where Robert Morrison's grocery now is. And by the way, that was a very historic and important landmark and building, being O'Neill's first court house, the first school house, the first drug store, the first grog shop, the first law office and seat of justice as it was the place when Chas. O'Neill opened his office and where was held O'Neill's first suit of litigation before passing into the hands of the Wilcox Lumber Co., to become their office and hence O'Neill's first lumber office and is now a part of the establishment of O. O. Snyder & Co.'s office.

In 1880 Neil Brennan, the senior member of the old O'Neill hardware firm of Brennan & McCafferty, built the house in which he now resides and the county commissioners rented it from him and moved the county offices into it. It then stood on the block south of Douglas street and on the east side of the original townsite and the first important legal proceedings transacted in it was the trial of "Kid Reed" for the murder of Holt County's sheriff, Barney Kerns. Through his attorney, Mr. Cowan, Reed made a favorable showing in his plea for a change of venue, which was granted and the case set for trial at the county seat of Antelope county. That was the first time I ever saw John O. Cowan, who defended the prisoner Reed and finally got him acquitted. When the trial was called in O'Neill it was a very hot day and when

the big Omaha attorney arose to address the court he took off his coat and vest and removed his necktie and rolled up his shirt sleeves like as if he was going to do a hard days work with a shovel, hoe or ax; and when he got warmed up with his subject and began rolling his big eyes and shaking his black locks of curly hair, there was a stream of eloquence and oratory freely flowing and which has never been surpassed since or before in the precincts of a Holt county district court which is saying a great deal too. Well Mr. Cowan gained his point, got the change of venue, and the trial was sent to Neligh, where, at the next term of the Antelope district court he got Reed acquitted and it was said W. A. Paxton, a big and burly ranchman, living in Omaha, paid him (Cowan) a big fee of five thousand dollars (raised by subscription from the owners of the big western ranches). The size of the fee was commented on far and wide and it was said to have been the largest ever paid for such a purpose up to that time in the history of Nebraska. But whether the fee was the largest or not the trial of the suit stamped John C. Cowan as a great criminal lawyer, in which branch of his profession he had no successful trials for several years, though he finally gave up the practice of criminal law and devoted his entire time and attention to the commercial branch of his profession, in which he has gained for himself a monument of fame and a large fortune.

JERRY HOWARD SAYS GEN. O'NEILL REMAINS CAN BE MOVED HERE

Jerry Howard, of Omaha, writes Hon. T. V. Golden, president of the organization that will transfer the remains of General John O'Neill from its resting place in Omaha to O'Neill, that there will be no particular opposition to its project.

Following is a copy of the letter received by Mr. Golden:

Omaha, Neb., June 28, 1924.

Hon. T. V. Golden, Chairman, General John O'Neill Association, O'Neill, Nebraska:

Dear Sir: The ideals of the Irish is a puzzle to many of those not of the Irish race, perhaps that is the reason why Vicar General Colaneri does not look with favor on this national project to transfer the remains of General O'Neill, the hero of the Battle of Ridgeway, and the monument erected to his memory, from Omaha to O'Neill, the city founded by this Irish Martyr patriot.

The sentiment that prevailed in transferring Colonel John O'Mahony, O'Donovan, Rossa, Rev. Father O'Growney and other Irish patriots from this Republic to the Irish Republic prevails in this national movement. The Irish World in its issue of June 7th stated that the readers of that great paper are interested in the movement.

History repeats itself, General O'Neill writing to the Irish World during the colonization period of O'Neill stated that the greatest opponents to his policy of getting the Irish away from the cities were the politicians.

It is unfortunate for Ireland that these politicians are everywhere. "Tim" Healy & Co., replace Keogh and Saddler in infamous memory. These rascals, too, often deceive the clergy. However it is consoling to learn that the hierarchy is getting on to the political grafters. The latest report, the new Bishop of Cloufret, Ireland, the Most Rev. Dignan has arrayed himself on the side of the Irish Republic.

There are some small editions of the despised and hated "Terrible Timothy" in our midst, who through their nefarious intrigues are able to influence some of the clergy to look with disfavor on any genuine Irish movement.

It is universally known that there is a pro-British Irish element (Shoenens) in America, who are opposed to arousing any Irish agitation that may disturb the ulterior motives of the Wilsonian politicians.

Father Gannon's paper, the True Voice, in this week's issue, has an editorial headed "How Strange" that throws some light on the schemes of these political trimmers.

Now, Brother Golden, the ecclesiastical authorities will not object to transferring the mortal remains of the hero of the Battle of Ridgeway to the City founded and established by this Irish Martyr patriot.

Yours truly,
JERRY HOWARD.

"AIN'T NATURE WONDERFUL"

(By Uncle Pete in Omaha Bee.)
O'Neill, Neb., June 29.—Doc Wilkinson expects to re-establish himself in the good grace of the horsemen of Beaver Flats at the races at O'Neill the Fourth of July through the accomplishments of Jack McKenna's running horse, Sapolio, which the doctor himself has entered in the races, paying the entry fee and all in an effort toward redemption.

Sapolio is the horse which although possessed of remarkable speed, also had a sheep's heart which caused him to quit at the last minute and come in behind the money to the great grief and financial embarrassment of his owner, Mr. McKenna.

Last fall, just before the county fair, the doctor endeavoring to overcome this defect in the animal's make-up for Mr. McKenna transplanted some glands into Sapolio from one of Glen Shively's string of famous relay

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horses, but by mistake got the glands from Rock of Ages, Shively's champion bucking broncho outlaw.

As a result when the jockey tickled Sapolio with the spurs in the finish of the Beaver Flats derby the nag threw his rider and kicked out several panels of the track fence, injuring one or two rail birds. The doctor's mistake nearly resulted in a suit for damages and malpractice, in Judge Kirwin's court by the irate owner of Sapolio.

Since then and to avoid the litigation Doc has been engaged in secret experimentation with glands of various animals and several weeks ago equipped Sapolio with a new set of jackrabbit glands taken from Charley Harding's racing rabbit. The horse with his new glands was given a try-out on the private track at the doctor's ranch just north of The Flats last week, and showed even better than his oldtime form.

He also has apparently abandoned his bucking proclivities and runs instead of sunfishing when spurred. On the outcome of the races in which Sapolio is entered at O'Neill the Fourth will depend whether or not the doctor and Mr. McKenna patch up their differences.

LOCAL MATTERS.

Rev. Father Kohler left Monday morning for a visit to his home in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Mrs. Nellie Frawley left for her home in Omaha after a three weeks visit with friends here.

Albert Herrick came up from Waterbury Wednesday to attend the Home Coming and Race Meet this week.

R. H. Lienhart and Frank Huston, from the South Fork country, transacted business in the city Saturday.

V. B. Jones and wife drove up from Sioux City Saturday night in their new Chandler. The roads are very muddy.

J. B. Ryan left Saturday for Cedar Point, Ohio, where he will attend a National Hay Convention held there this week.

Petersburg Index, June 27: Sr. Radekundis, of O'Neill, is visiting at the home of her father, Edward Everett, this week.

Petersburg Index, June 27: Mrs. Grant White and daughter, Carol Jane, of O'Neill, are spending a week at the Henry Hellrich home.

A new restaurant opened in the Joel Parker establishment in South O'Neill. The place has been thoroughly renovated and is a first class eating place.

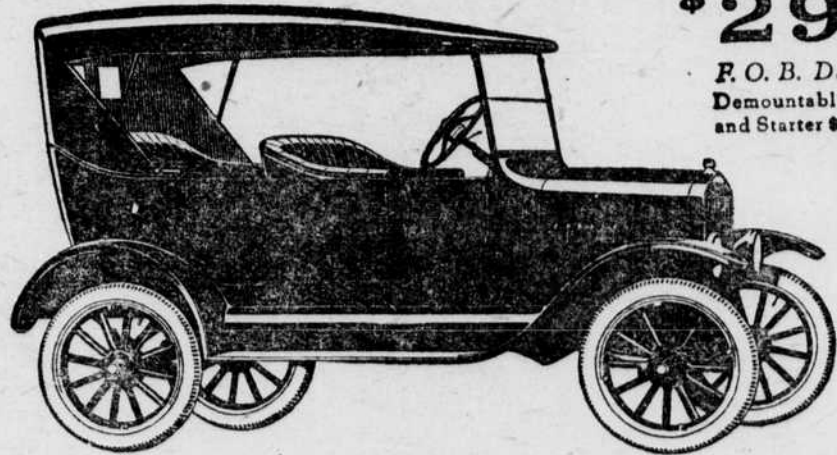
Emil Sniggs has purchased a large size tuba, in order to celebrate the Fourth of July and three days race meet and home coming in an appropriate manner.

Mrs. Jess Mills and two children, Shirley and Bruce arrived in O'Neill Friday from Omaha, for an extended visit with her father, Emil Sniggs and other relatives.

Dr. and Mrs. Vince Golden and their daughter, Miss Mildred, came over from Creston, Iowa, this morning for a visit with O'Neill relatives and to attend the Home Coming this week.

Valentine Republican: Upon the completion of the new Borman building this week it was promptly occupied by E. L. Davey with his pantorium. He has a large, light room for his work, with a tile building in the rear for his cleaning apparatus.

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