

Pioneer Ministers Knew Hardships

First Sunday-School Convened at Prouty Home on December 14, 1873

By **ROMAINE SAUNDERS**
Editor-in-Chief
Diamond Jubilee Edition

It was sometimes said that when the pioneers of prairie-land crossed over the Missouri river reverence and religious forms were left behind. It has been the genius of the Christian religion to send its apostles "far hence to the Gentiles." The restraints of ingrained training may be cast aside for a time but mankind in the end will lay hold upon that which transcends his own feeble resources. So on the prairies of Holt county there was a need for spiritual guidance. There, too, were brave souls among the Eastern clergy who discerned the need in homesteadland and leaving the security of ministering in an established "charge" cast their lot with the homesteaders, certainly not for any financial reward but for what good they could do.

Who was the first clergyman to bring words of solace and instruction to the O'Neill community may never be known. And by community it should be understood not merely the limits of the town.

Bartley Blain, a pioneer preacher and as I recall the county's second superintendent of public instruction, compiled early records of the community.

Among these records is the story of the first Sunday-school started at a place just down the river from O'Neill called Rockford. This was held at Prouty's home on December 14, 1873, and prayer-meeting at the same place on December 21 the same year, and these were continued until 1875, when Rev. S. P. Van Doozer came back to Rockford and preached the first sermon on April 20 at the home of Elijah Thompson. At this time a church was organized with five members: Frank Bitney, classleader; Clara Bitney, Will Dickerson, M. S. Prouty and Jennie H. Shultz. The Rockford church was supplied services every three weeks by a preacher from Oakdale. In the Summer of 1876, Rev. J. B. Maxfield, the new presiding Elder of the district, came to Rockford and held first communion service.

Rev. Blain thought the first Methodist preaching service in the Northeast part of Holt county was at Steel Creek school house by Rev. Hurt, living at Walnut Grove in Knox county, in the Autumn of 1879.

It was largely through the efforts of Bartley Blain that the Methodists got a church building in O'Neill in 1883. He was a homesteader as well as a preacher, lived in a tent near Middle Branch for some weeks before having a shanty to move into and was gone from home several weeks at a time looking after isolated church interest. Mrs. Blain was one of the brave pioneer women who bore the hardships, the loneliness and desolation with fortitude and courage. Histories recount the story of what men have done. Not upon the limits of a page, not within the confines of a chapter, but let us dedicate a sacred volume to the quiet fortitude, to the calm patience and the steadfast faith of our pioneer mothers.

The Blain family came into Holt county in 1880, the same year The Frontier was established. This bit of pioneer hospitality, social interest and designs of a preacher comes down to us from Mr. Blain's history:

"While looking for a place to make a home we called at the sod house of G. W. Jones. While talking other landlookers came in. Mr. Jones said: 'I got some lumber yesterday for a floor for my house and intend to put it in today.' A young man who had just come in said: 'It will be a good place for a dance then, won't it?' 'Yes,' said Mr. Jones, 'if the people want to come here and dance they can dance, and if a preacher comes along and wants to preach he can preach too.' I said to myself, 'if I settle in this vicinity I will preach in his house.'"

G. W. Jones was George Jones, father of Mrs. D. N. Loy and Hurley Jones of O'Neill. About 1886 the Jones family came to O'Neill and Mr. Jones operated a livery and feed barn located just east of where the Ford sales room now stands.

It was because of the courage of Mrs. Blain he left home early one morning on horseback and headed for Kearney in Buffalo county to attend a church conference. Of that trip he writes:

"Having ridden about 50 miles I found entertainment at the home of a congregationalist whose treatment was cordial. On leaving next morning I asked what I should pay. He said: 'Have you twenty-five cents?' I handed him the amount. He took it and placed a half dollar in my hand saying: 'I like to encourage such as you, who are trying to make the world better.'"

"On the second day out I dined with a farmer on a creek several miles West of Albion. This man directed me to go past a blowout in the sand hills several miles South. 'Near that you will see the tracks made by two wagons some time ago. Follow that until you reach a valley, along which there is a fairly plain road.' That afternoon I saw but one living thing besides my horse, a lone meadow lark. Near sunset I reached the valley and there found a plain road which I followed for several miles. There was a small creek running down this valley at the left. Presently I saw a lantern near the creek and asked the man for entertainment. 'How are you traveling?' was the reply. 'On horseback,' I replied. 'The creek is mirey, you can't cross here. Go down the road half a mile where you can stay,' he informed me. I rode on horse and rider both tired until the barking of a dog was a very welcome sound. I rapped on the door of a shack, 'come in,' I heard in broad Irish as I opened the door, and asked for entertainment for the night. 'No sor, I'm away from home myself and the folks here are away, he informed me. 'I have been riding all day and my horse is tired; I must stay either in the house or out of it. I want some feed for my horse and a place to sleep,' I said. 'Well I think I can find some feed for my horse,' he answered. The horse was fed and we went in. 'I can sleep on the lounge here,' I said. 'Oim goin, to sleep there myself, sor. Oim here helpin' with the potato harvest an bethought me to write a letter while fifteen miles nearer the post office than my home is,' he informed me. I said I could sleep on the floor. 'Alright,' replied mine host. 'I tried it but found it rather lively sleeping as there seemed to be two or three fleas on each of my limbs playing hipptyhop with each other the whole night. Was finally glad to get up rather than be a playground for a flea circus. The grandmother and several children were discovered to be at home an I had a good breakfast.'"

"Started Southward and soon fording the Cedar was obliged to hold my feet up as high as possible to keep them out of the water."

"I found a fairly plain road but was obliged to ride toward all points of the compass among the sand hills. Darkness overtook me in a strange land with no human habitation in sight. Not long after dark, I heard boys laughing in the stillness among some small timber. I called to them and asked if I could get lodging for the night. 'Go on to the house and they will tell you, they shouting.' A few rods further I saw a light in a window almost under my horse's feet. Going a little further I rapped on a door. It opened and I saw a well filled table surrounded by half a score of people all enjoying their evening meal. One of them was a Seventh Day Adventist minister whom I had known a few years before in Minnesota. I was cordially entertained."

"Before night the next day a fairly large prairie was reached of several miles in extent. Considerably improved near the South side of this prairie was large farm with a house octagonal in form and two stories high. This was also a hotel the largest room of which was also a general merchandise store, well filled with goods."

"Late in the afternoon of Thursday I reached Kearney, and found the M. E. Church fairly well filled. I saw only one familiar face, that of Mrs. Mary C. Ninde, of Winona, Minn. Here on the first day of the session of a new annual conference they organized a Women's Foreign Missionary Society."

The matter used in this story taken from the Blain Historical records was first published in The Frontier in February, 1939.

Why General O'Neill Promoted Colonies

Discerning the question in the minds of some, Gen. John O'Neill, as quoted in Monsignor Cassidy's history of St. Patrick's parish, puts the question into words: "Now, why have I gone to the trouble and expense, why have I taken such interest in Irish immigration to the West?" "Simply and solely," he says, "because I have always believed the next best thing to giving the Irish people their freedom at home, is to assist and encourage such as are here or who may come of their own free will in procuring homes for themselves and their children in the free land of their adoption."

"Voice of The Frontier . . . WJAG . . . 780 on your dial."

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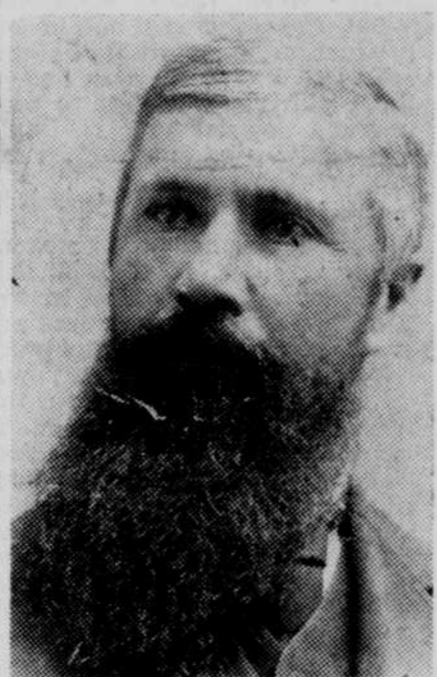


Company M of the Third Nebraska infantry regiment, composed entirely of Holt countyans, entrained at O'Neill for service in the war with Spain. The unit trained for a time in Florida before going to Cuba.

J. J. McCAFFERTY READS EDITORIAL

Then He Leaves Cheyenne and Departs for Head of Elkhorn

By **MRS. JOHN MELVIN**
Daughter of J. J. McCafferty
"To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die." I asked my father how he came to settle in O'Neill in the first place. He said he was roaming around in the Black Hills, always looking for something better. When in Cheyenne, Wyo., stopping at a boarding house, he



J. J. McCAFFERTY

picked up a copy of the Omaha Herald and read an editorial giving General O'Neill and the O'Neill City settlement such a "puff" as could come only from the pen of a good writer.

He had never heard of O'Neill City but at once made up his mind to come to Holt county and cast his lot with the new settlement. So next day he took the Union Pacific train out of Cheyenne for Fremont and when he stepped off the train at Fremont he asked the first man he met about the O'Neill settlement and in what direction it lay.

That man was none other than Geo. W. E. Dorsey, the financier and politician who later went to congress from North Nebraska.

My father said Mr. Dorsey treated him like a prince and lauded General O'Neill to the sky, saying there was a bright future for the new settlement up toward the headwaters of the Elkhorn. That settled it for my father, who arrived in O'Neill in the late Summer of 1875.

His clothes pretty much in rags, he took a homestead on what is now the townsite of O'Neill. Patent was issued to father for this land in 1881 by the United States government, Chester A. Arthur signing the document as president. Father said after making pretty much of a failure at farming he had platted into blocks and lots the territory known as McCafferty's Addition and sold some lots. My sisters and I retain a number of lots that were in father's homestead and by which we feel a justifiable pride. John Robert Gallagher has his home on a part of his maternal grandfather's homestead also.

My father and Neil Brennan formed a partnership in 1878 and opened a hardware and furniture business. This partnership was later discontinued and each member of the firm continued in separate locations. Mr. Brennan dealing only in hardware while father dealt in both hardware and furniture besides furnishing

coffins in which the dead were buried.

The first settlers in the immediate vicinity of O'Neill were a few men from Wisconsin apparently under the leadership of H. H. McEvony. This settlement was made in 1873, and 10 months later, in May, 1874, General John O'Neill came up the Elkhorn with the first group of colonists and what is now the city of O'Neill began to take shape. This was followed two years later by three more groups of colonists. When O'Neill came with first group of 13 men they put up a sodhouse that was the living quarters of all in the group for a time.

Securing a map of the country which showed where timber could be had, the Red Bird was selected as the place to get timbers for the roof of the sod building.

Six men were selected for this undertaking. There was no road over the open prairie, so as a means of finding their way back to the starting point a load of willow branches was cut down at the Elkhorn and on the way to the Red Bird branches were set in the ground at such intervals as would enable them to follow the trail back.

Those 13 men moved into their sod house in the Spring of 1874, put out some crops, went to Eagle Creek and got logs with which to build on their claims. The building of O'Neill proper started with the arrival of General O'Neill's second colony.

On October 7, 1882, O'Neill was incorporated as a village. The articles of incorporation were adopted by the county board of commissioners. A majority of the taxpayers had signed the petition to the county board, which named the following as the board of trustees of the newly-formed village: E. E. Evans, Patrick Hagerty, Sanford Parker and J. J. McCafferty.

Inman Originally Designated Yorktown

What later became the village of Inman started out as Yorktown, some New Yorkers so designating their settlement. Ewing was first known as Ford but in 1881 took on the name of the community's first postmaster, Mr. Ewing.

Ezra Moore was a lad of 10 in 1881 when his people settled in the Inman valley. He recalls today his childish fear of the cowboys, whose plaything was the 44 six-shooter and their target most anything not seen before. Inman got going in '81 with a store operated by Clayton Roth, who also acted as the postmaster. A depot and section house stepped into the prairie picture the following year. Then the Graves lumber yard got under way with a few sticks. The townsite was laid out on land homesteaded by Bert Smith. A school was established, Methodist and Presbyterian churches organized, business enterprise undertaken, homes built and by the middle '80s another flourishing village was on the map of Holt county. Among those instrumental in developing the community were the Cross family, D. L. Pond, the Moore family, L. T. Shaner, the Hallorans and the Gorees.

A store building 16x18 feet housing a stock of goods and Hostetter's Bitter dispensed over the counter by Edward Stringer was about all there was of Ewing until the Autumn of 1882. In the Spring of 1882 the postoffice was moved, a hardware store opened by a new comer by the name of Kay. Leroy Butler started a hotel and livery business. Bill Beck, Ed Perry, D. L. Conger, J. P. Spittler, Ames Bros., John Carmical, Trommer-shauser, Selah and others developed a lively town that continues to supply the needs of a large territory.



Stories of atrocities helped gather volunteers.—Pictures from the Charles Harding collection.

County Division and School Districts

Sixty-five years ago county division was being agitated by interested citizens in the West half of the county, who thought the empire of Holt should be split in the middle. The county board provided for the question to be voted on and for a period of 20 years one division scheme after another bobbed up. Then there was the school districting question. A. J. Doremus had published in O'Neill papers his

solution of the matter with diagrams that the printers laboriously put into form with the material at hand in the type cases. These diagrams were specimens of what the early day craftsmen could do with type as well as comprehensive outlines of proposed school districts. Sixty-five years later there is the agitation of the question of re-districting and consolidating school districts.

Rev. Bartley Blain, pastor of the Methodist church in O-

COLONEL BRYAN LEADS REGIMENT

Company M, Organized in O'Neill, Part of Famous Third

William Jennings Bryan, perhaps Nebraska's best-known son, commanded the Third regiment of the Nebraska volunteers of which Company M was a part. He held the rank of colonel.

Roster of Company M, as organized in 1898, follows:

Captain, Richard F. Cross, Atkinson.
1st Lieutenant, Charles E. Hall, O'Neill.
2nd Lieutenant, John W. Wertz, Stuart.

Sergeants: 1st, Arthur M. Coykendall; 2nd, Caleb J. Woods; 3rd, William H. Gallagher; 4th, Martin F. Cronin; 5th, Wilber Horton; 6th, George E. Lord.

Corporals: 1st, Oscar P. List; 2nd, William T. S. Ayer; 3rd, William R. Bitney; 4th, Charles L. Harding; 5th, Walter J. King; 6th, Ernest C. Nyrop; 7th, Wallace J. Fullerton; 8th, Michael J. Sherry; 9th, Alva S. Likens; 10th, John Olson; 11th, Richard Williams; 12th, Ulysses E. Pierson.

Musicians: John M. Sturdevant, Lester E. Porter.

Artificer: Gottfried Wyss.

Wagoner: Thomas Lynch.

Privates: C. Glenn Adams, George B. M. Alter, Charles Barber, Virgil E. Barker, Miles Bennett, Geo. Biegler, Frank E. Bishop, Fred Bitney, Andrew J. Brewick, James D. Brown, D. W. Cameron, Oliver W. Campbell, John Cantello, Charles S. Chenoweth, Walter Clark, Matthis Classen, Otto E. Clevish, Patrick Condon, McKinney S. Conover, William Coleman, Robert F. Corrigan, Samuel Coustan, Michael F. Cross, Marshall Custard, Rosco Doyle, Nils Drustrik, Frank J. Eaton, J. B. Farnsworth, Oscar F. Feelhaber, Henry Fleming, Fredrick W. Foster, John S. Foster, Forney L. G. Fox, Warren Galleher, Fred Gossman, Alonzo Graham, Bert Griggs, LeRoy Hanlen, William B. Hackett, Ole J. Hanson, Walter Houseman, John A. Hardy, Robert D. Heisler, William A. Hensel, Levi Hershisier, Robert D. James, Frank Judd, John Kanlen, Morris Klinessmith, Harry H. Leonard, Charles Madden, George Mayes, Joseph E. Maxwell, Joseph E. Maxwell, George E. McKee, N. J. Olson, Chris Peterson, Edmond C. Pickett, Jason L. Ratekin, J. Ross, James S. Short, John J. Slaymaker, Lewis Slaymaker, William C. Smith, Charles W. Stolze, Louis Sivick, Alfred D. Timmons, Andrew J. Trapp, James F. Updike, James Verplank, Frank Wagner, James S. Weaverling, Claude H. Weedman, Lawrence F. Whalen, Jacob Wiseman, Olander Wilson, Charles E. Wilson, Elmer Wise, Rudolph Wyss, Edward D. Zink

Neill, was also county superintendent and at the time the matter of districting was under consideration he published notices of teachers' examinations to be held in the country school houses.

Holt County Aberdeen-Angus Breeders' Association

FOURTH ANNUAL

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