

# Fast Horses, Packing Plant Have Trials

## Building of Chicory Factory, Flour Mills and Railroads Require Promotion

By ROMAIN SAUNDERS  
Editor-in-Chief  
Diamond Jubilee Edition  
About everything from fast horses to packing plant has been given a try-out at O'Neill. It may be that not many who see that picture of a chicory field in this issue of The Frontier know what that is all about. (See page 2, section F.)

Chicory was a root crop when processed, ground into a meal and put up in pound packages at the factory that was built just west of town with a rail spur built to its doors. It was a substitute for coffee. The senior Mr. Bazelman, father of Fred, of O'Neill, was experienced in the culture of chicory in his native land of Belgium. He was put in charge of the field work by a local company that was managed by G. C. Hazlet. The enterprise flourished for a few seasons but when the price of coffee dropped about one-half the market for chicory disappeared. There was more "kick" in a cup of black coffee.

Down along the railroad tracks—there was but one railroad in O'Neill at the time—another enterprise was started. The country was producing a lot of livestock, why not have a packing plant? That, too, bloomed forth, flourished for a minute when it was decided no, that's not the thing for our location—we'll ship our meat on the hoof to the big markets. After it had expired as a packing plant the home guards got into it as a drill center.

Well, let's have a creamery, a flour mill, a brick yard, an artesian well, a coal mine, a race track and a few other things.

The hustlers kept on the go. T. V. Golden, secretary, published a call for a meeting at the court house August 6, 1894, to meet with a "gentleman from New York" and formulate plans for the development of an irrigation canal.

The meeting was well attended. M. P. Kinkaid was honored with the job of president of the Niobrara Irrigation District, the route of the canal from Cherry county to Antelope was laid out, finances to be provided by proposed bond issues, Holt's share being \$1,266,000, Rock \$980,000 and Brown \$90,000.

The "gentleman from New York" may have been from Sioux City and was interested in the proposed bond issue.

With the coming of Spring, 1895, nature took a hand, soaked up the country and irrigation was forgotten and the cattle business has flourished through the years.

There were rain-makers abroad in the early '90s. O'Neill would try anything. A contract was made with a rain-maker and he missed collecting his fee by an hour or two. He was to produce at least one-quarter inch rain within a stated period or no pay. The period expired and a few hours later rain fell. I do not recall what the tin vessels that were made at McCafferty's tin shop and placed at a few points by Tom Golden showed the rain fall measured.

From remote times to the present O'Neill has been the commercial, professional and cultural center for a large territory, and today has about everything that a city of 100,000 can offer.

Among the various undertakings there was pulling of strings at the seat of the federal government. O'Neill fellows like Fahy, McCafferty, Brennan and some others went after the United States land office and got it. In '88 it was moved from Niobrara to O'Neill. A. B. Chard as receiver and John R. Markley, register, coming with

it. There were changes in officials from time to time, B. S. Gillespie and A. L. Towle succeeding Chard and Markley.

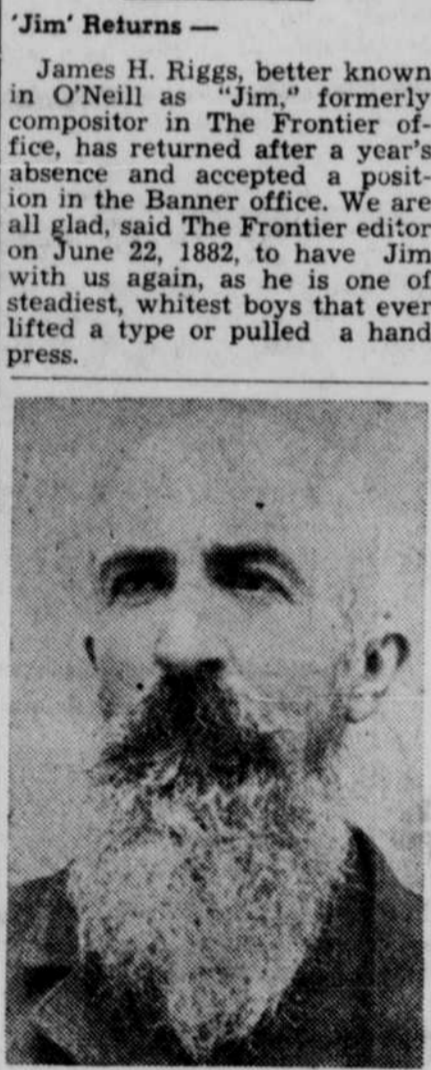
Others who performed the duties of register and receiver during the years the land office was in O'Neill were: Doc Mathews, John Harmon, S. J. Weekes, Clem Deaver, Dick Jenness, Sanford Parker, Brantley Sturdevant, Parnel Golden and possibly some others. The office was moved to Alliance and eventually discontinued. The romance of the homestead was over.

In the opening paragraph mention was made of fast horses. Ed Thompson had a stable of Hambletonians and Clyde King and I worked for days getting out printed pedigrees of Ed's fast nags. Dave and Matt Stannard were horsemen that knew how to handle a fancy stepper. Ben DeYarman spent most of his time on a sulky, while Hugh McKenna and Pete Duffy got into the picture in later years. These were the professionals. The town was full of fast horses and races were a daily event.

## Col. Woodward Fined for Using 'Abusive' Language on Streets

While riding a wild and vicious bronc, Andy Gallagher sustained a broken leg when the horse fell. Drs. Shore and Conolly set the limb. . . . Neil Brennan takes possession of his new house opposite the skating rink. . . . Gus Doyle and Frank Campbell went to Omaha to serve on the federal grand jury. . . . P. C. Corrigan bought of the First National bank the brick building adjoining the bank, consideration \$6,000. . . . Col. Woodward, of the Chambers Pickings, was fined \$5 by County Judge Lowe for abusive language, on an O'Neill street directed to the venerable ex-Judge Roberts. . . . As a "man of destiny" County Clerk Hazlet will compare favorably with the most fortunate men of our times. He was recently re-elected to the clerkship by an overwhelming majority, and following close on the heels of this popular approval he is now the father of twins, both girls, all within a week, and the mother and welcome offsprings are in excellent health.

'Jim' Returns — James H. Riggs, better known in O'Neill as "Jim," formerly composer in The Frontier office, has returned after a year's absence and accepted a position in the Banner office. We are all glad, said The Frontier editor on June 22, 1882, to have Jim with us again, as he is one of the steadiest, whitest boys that ever lifted a type or pulled a hand press.



J. T. PROUTY  
(Story below).

## Prouty One of Holt Holt Organizers

I, J. T. Prouty, was one of three freeholders who organized Holt county, Nebraska. Was elected county clerk at the first election held December 27, 1876. Was notary public in and for Holt county four terms, commissions of appointment dated as follows, viz: June 26, 1874; September 9, 1879; September 9, 1885, and September 28, 1891. Was appointed postmaster at Rockford, Elkhorn county, Nebraska, commission dated June 18, 1874. Names changed to O'Neill, Holt County. Was appointed postmaster at Paddock, Holt county, June 13, 1882, also on May 31, 1889. My wife was assistant each time. Was deputy treasurer for Elijah Thompson, who was county treasurer of Holt county, Nebraska, in 1878. I kept the county treasurer's funds in a secret combination vault in the shingled roof of my dwelling house at Paddock, the county seat. This vault was merely a narrow board of the sheathing two feet long with a groove cut in the upper side. The groove was covered with oilcloth. Was U. S. census enumerator in unorganized territory North of Holt county in 1880 and in Holt county in 1890. This biographical sketch is given to the Old Settler's Picnic Society as a souvenir of early settlements. Untold millions of army grasshoppers devoured most of the crops as late as 1875. This once known desert was at that time unprofitable for cultivation. Since then the climate has changed. Now it rains.

September, 1917.

Signed: J. T. PROUTY.

The foregoing is copied from the back of a portrait of Mr. Prouty that has been framed and hung in the county treasurer's office. The portrait is shown herewith.



Judge R. R. Dickson . . . symbol of law and order . . . helps build Holt county courthouse.

## Judge a Friend of Errant Youth

Robert R. Dickson, eldest son of John and Margaret Dickson, was born at Lima Center, Wis., on Nov. 21, 1863, and died at his home in O'Neill on June 18, 1941. His parents were born and married in County Derry, Ireland. Soon after their marriage they came to America and settled in Wisconsin. In the Spring of 1870, the Dickson family moved to Osago, Ia., where Judge Dickson acquired his early education in the public schools of Mitchell county, Iowa, following which he pursued a course at Cedar Valley Seminary. Having decided upon a professional career he studied law in the office of L. M. Ryce, a prominent attorney in Osago.

Early in 1887, Judge Dickson came to Norfolk and was employed in the law office of D. A. Holmes and that year was admitted to the bar of this state. On September 10, 1887, he came to O'Neill and began the practice of law.

He successfully practiced the profession of law until elected district judge of the Fifteenth judicial district in November, 1911. He entered upon the duties of that office in January of 1912, and served the people of the district until his death, at which time he was the senior judge of the state. During this period he sat as an associate judge with the State Supreme court whenever the need was urgent, and the record of his decisions written into the law books on those occasions will be quoted by the bar for many years to come.

During World War I, Judge Dickson was chairman of the county council of defense, of the Liberty loan drives, and in a great measure was responsible for the patriotic feeling that existed during the war among the people of his district.

Judge Dickson married June 14, 1900, Miss Marion Skirving, daughter of John and Caroline Skirving. Her father was a Union soldier during the Civil war and for a time was confined in Libby prison as a prisoner of war. He was with Sherman in the march to the sea.

The three daughters of Judge and Mrs. Dickson, all born at O'Neill, are Marjorie MacElroy, Marion Dorothea and Nancy Roberta.

Judge Dickson was a Republican in politics but never held any official position except that of judge, and mayor of O'Neill in 1893-'94.

He was a master Mason, having served the local lodge in various offices and in 1924-'25 was grand master of Masons in Nebraska. He was a Presbyterian by church connection.

He was interested in agriculture, devoting some time to gardening and flowers and had a flock of chickens.

Up until about 1900, there were times when lawyers, editors and other cultured gent were involved in fistfights, and "Dick," as he was universally known, did not escape in the turbulent times incident to pioneer life. "Dick" combined in his more than six-foot stature the force and fury of

the ox and the gentleness of the lamb; magnanimous but just.

He once told the writer the way to get along with neighbors was to neighbor with the folks on the other side of town.

The modern building that adorns the well-kept grounds on upper Fourth street, the Holt county court house, may be said to stand as a monument of Judge Dickson's crowning work.

There is a full page picture of Judge Dickson and a write-up of him by the late Addison M. Sheldon in "Nebraska, the Land and the People." When a news hound was prodding Judge Dickson at one time for a write-up with some impatience, the judge turned in his swivel chair, reached for Dr. Addison's work, handed it to the reporter with the remark, "I do not know what he says about me and I haven't looked at the picture yet." From this work the following quotations are taken:

"There never was a man with a keener sense of duty than Judge Dickson. In wartime he mounted a grain binder and harvested 160 acres of grain. He was Holt county chairman of the council of defense (World War I) and trouble loomed on every side. His deft handling of tangled situations, loaded with anger, racial hatreds and all the human venom we work into, were erased away by a master hand until there was no trouble.

"In his younger days, many used to assail the judge in and out of court. Today few try this or have grounds for an argument with him. Who could strike up a serious argument with a judge who sometimes allows a case to stand in abeyance for months after it has reached the sentencing stage for fear of making an unjust legal pronouncement?

"As juvenile judge he seems to understand the youngsters even better than some of their guardians. Many a boy and a few girls have been before him in bitter tears and felt the depths of humiliation, only finally to throw back their shoulders, smile and thank a friend found where they had expected contact with some deadly dragon."

### Attorney Wields

### Poker in Court

In pioneer days the dignity and decorum of judicial sittings were sometimes upset by the lawyers. A case involving the lease of a certain body of land in which two settlers were after the land was being heard in the justice court of Mike Slattery. R. R. Dickson was representing one of the parties the other, Dickson's client at one stage of the hearing handed him a paper which contained the written contract for the land. Dick placed the paper on the table beside him, when Murphy reached over to take it, Dick grabbed a stove poker and, in language more forceful than elegant, told Murphy to keep his hands off of that paper, threatening him with the poker.

## NEIL BRENNAN AMONG EARLIEST

By BERNADETTE BRENNAN  
Daughter of Neil Brennan

Born to John and Sarah Brennan in 1850 in Killebags, Ireland. Began work in engineering shops in Scotland. Sent wages home to his parents and saved overtime pay for passage to America. Landing in Quebec, tarried but few days before going to Boston. Here at the age of 19, he found work in a sugar refinery and promptly spent the last of his British money to secure American citizenship papers.

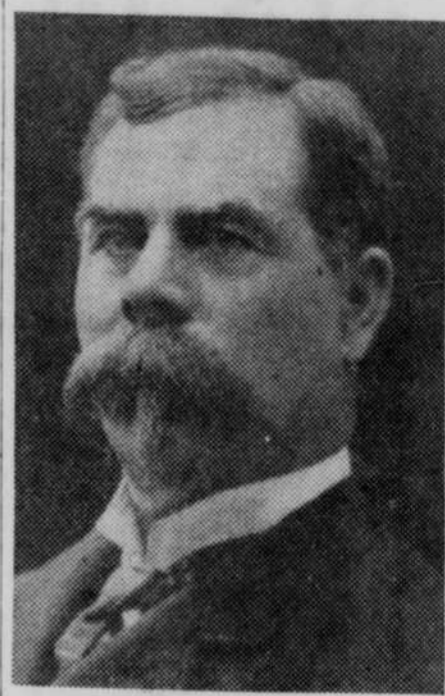
Joining the Irish organizations of Fenians and Clan na Gael, he was in the group which decided to take Canada from the British, was captured, and returned by General Meade.

Before long General John O'Neill advertised for Irishmen to go West and settle. Neil was the first to answer the ad. Others followed and the little colony came as far as Wisner, Nebraska, by rail and walked the remaining 125 miles, arriving here about noon of May 12, 1874.

Acquiring a team and wagon, Neil Brennan freighted supplies from Wisner and Yankton. On one of these trips, he met Margaret Keys, daughter of Thomas and Ellen Keys, and persuaded them to move on to O'Neill.

In 1877 he opened his own hardware store, and having help he continued the freighting business. One of the jobs which pleased him most was the bringing of material for the first Catholic church in O'Neill.

In 1881 Neil Brennan and Margaret Keys were married in St. Patrick's church in O'Neill. Together they



NEIL BRENNAN

worked to establish a home. To most couples raising a family of eight and running a store successfully would be a full time job—not to the Brennans; they were so determined to have good churches, schools, etc., they worked incessantly toward the betterment of the community in which they lived, as records of church and civic groups of that time prove.

Their combined hobby was a five acre plot of ground in North O'Neill—from a barren sand hill, they transformed it into what was recognized as one of Nebraska's most beautiful parks; trees and shrubs were brought in from other localities, water for this project was first obtained by hauling it by barrel from the Elkhorn river; later a well with an over all watering system was installed. On this site in 1909 was built their house, which they promptly turned into a well loved home.

In 1914 Neil Brennan suffered a stroke which confined him to his home. Being a semi-invalid did not stop the ment-

al process of planning, were he to get active enough to be able to carry on. This was not to be, however, and on August 9, 1915, he passed away.

His ideas were carried on by his wife, Margaret. Several good business houses were built on the streets of O'Neill; programs for city and county were aided by her unwavering support. In 1939 she saw her long dreamed of building completed, a most modern store, on the site of their original hardware store; within a month, she was taken ill, and on January 10th, 1940, death claimed her.

Organizations which paid tribute to these two pioneers were the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Alter Society, Royal Neighbors of America, Royal Highlanders, Modern Woodmen.

Living survivors are John T. Brennan of Salt Lake City, Neil P. Brennan, of Rapid City, Mrs. J. A. Pfeiler (Margaret) of Hot Springs, S. D., Thomas J. Brennan of Lincoln, Nebraska, and Bernadette of O'Neill. Mrs. J. B. Ryan (Sarah), Mrs. Ed S. Donahue (Nellie), and Col. Francis M. Brennan, having passed away.

Besides six grand daughters, there were 17 living grandsons—15 of these served their country in World War II; Lt. Thomas Pfeiler, serving in the Alaskan area, lost his life when his plane crashed into the sea.

## Boone Judge Looks for Ranch in Holt

Judge Riley, of Boone county, was in O'Neill in the Autumn of 1883 when he visited this territory looking for a location to launch a cattle ranch. Initial plans were to locate 10 miles South of town but the ranch was established in Wyoming precinct West of Amelia, and is still operating in the hands of the Riley family.

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