THE FISTIC CHAMPIONS

THE noted sporting authority "Macon" thus recalls the champions in the fistic arena.

James, alias "Yankee" Sullivan, was the first champion of America. He was born in the County Cork, Ireland, but left his country for his country's good in his youth having been transported to Van Dieman's land for several crimes of petty character. He escaped and landed in California when it was a Spanish possession. He went to England where he was taken up by Jem Ward, its then champion, and pitted against Hammer Lane, then regarded as the best ten-stone man in England. Lane broke his arm in the contest and Sullivan defeated him. He wore the American colors around his waist in this fight and thence derived his soubriquet. Yankee Sullivan was not long in this country before he defeated a clever English boxer named Vener Hammond. He then defeated Professor Billy Bell, Tom Secor, and Bob Caunt, who was a brother of Ben Caunt, who was champion of England. Sullivan's claim to the American championship was resented by the nativistic element, and eventually he was pitted against Tom Hyer. They fought for the championship of America, February 7, 1849. The stakes were $5,000 a side, $10,000 in all, which up to that time was the largest stake ever fought for. Hyer stood six feet, one and a half inches tall and weighed 175 pounds. Sullivan's height was five feet, ten and a half inches, and he, being overtrained, only weighed 145 pounds. Hyer won the fight without much trouble..

John Morrisey was the next aspirant for the championship. He had been almost beaten to pieces by Yankee Sullivan, but got the decision on account of Sullivan not heeding the call of "time" while engaged in a fight in his corner. Meanwhile Dominick Bradley and Sam Rankin had fought for the title. It was a battle, too, between the Orange and Ribbon factions of Irishmen in Philadelphia. Rankin belonged to the former. He was brought from Londonderry to whip Bradley, but he failed to do it, and Bradley was called "the champion of America" for a couple of years.

John Morrison and John G. Heenan fought for the American championship in 1858. Morrisey won but soon after resigned the title and Heenan became the champion by default. He beat Tom Sayers for the International championship of the world in 1860, but was defrauded of his victory and the battle was declared a draw. Afterward Heenan fought Tom King in England. He was drugged and again robbed of a victory which he had practically won, as he had King out at one time had time been called promptly. It was not done, and Heenan was whipped.

Joe Coburn was the next American champion, winning the title from Mike McCool. He held it a few years, and then McCool and Tom Allen fought for it. McCool won by the aid of his gang. He and Coburn were to have fought for the title, but Coburn was ill and himself arrested, and the match fell through. McCool next fought Aaron Jones for the title, near Hamilton, Ohio, and defeated Jones most signally.

Johnny Dwyer, of Brooklyn, was the next champion. He won the title in a fight with Jimmy Elliott, which took place in Canada.

Then Tom Allen and Joe Goss fought for the honor over in Kentucky. Allen could have won but he was overawed by the gang, and to save himself from its vengeance he struck Goss three foul blows. Joe Goss was then the American champion.

Paddy Ryan, a stalwart Trojan, defeated Goss near Pittsburg, and he became the American champion and held the title until beaten in 1882 by John L. Sullivan. The latter despite his many glove fights, only defended his title formally three times. He fought a draw with Charley Mitchell in France, and beat Jake Kilrain in Mississippi. He lost the title to Jim Corbett, in New Orleans a year ago last September.

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THE SUPREME COURT

(Part of the material in the following sketch is taken from an article written by the editor of THE COURIER and published in the Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society, volume IV, 1892.)

DURING the period in which the transition from territorial to state government occurred the most important and interesting epoch in the short life of Nebraska—there is a special dearth of authentic records, and for the incidents and experiences as well as the history of this time one has to rely largely upon the personal recollection of those who were residents of Nebraska prior to the adoption of the constitution of 1866. The dates are easily enough arrived at, but there is little other accurate data on record. The early history of the Supreme Court did not escape the general neglect, and if this brief sketch does not abound in details it is partly due to the remissness of the early Nebraskans who were somewhat helter skelter in their methods.

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In the original constitution approved February 9, 1866, it was provided that the Supreme Court of the state should consist of a chief justice and two associate justices, each to receive a salary of $2,000 per annum. The judges, it was also provided, should hold the district courts of the state. The state was then divided into three judicial districts. The first district comprised the counties of Richardson, Nemaha, Otoe, Johnson, Pawnee, Gage, Jefferson, Saline, Fillmore and Nuckolls; the second comprised the counties of Cass, Sarpy, Douglas, Saunders, Lancaster, Seward and Butler; and the third included the counties of Washington, Dodge, Platte, Cuming, Burt, Dakota, Dixon, Cedar, L'Eau-Qui-Court, Kearney, Lincoln, Hall and Buffalo. Each judge had one of these districts assigned to him by enactment of the legislature, and when the Supreme court was not in session at the capitol, most of the time of the judges was spent in making the rounds of their respective circuits. As the district courts were held alternately in the different counties the judges were kept very busy, although in the early days the dockets were not overcrowded with cases. During this period there were only two railroads in the state. Most of the towns along the Missouri river were accessible by rail, but the inland towns were only reached by long and dreary stage rides over the sparsley settled prairies and many an interesting story is told of these journeys. While the lot of these circuit riders was not an easy one, their life was relieved by frequent amusing experiences. Law, as it was known and practiced in Nebraska the first five years of the organization of the state, was not remarkably profound, and some queer scenes were enacted in the improvised court rooms of the pioneer days.

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The judges then, as now, served six years. The Supreme Court, until the new capitol was built, held its sessions in dingy and uncomfortable quarters in the old clap-trap state house. Work in the court of last resort did not accumulate very rapidly, as the records show that only twenty cases were filed for trial in the year 1868. It was several years before the number exceeded fifty. Beyond the clerk of the court no assistants were allowed, and the judges seem to have had no difficulty in keeping up with the work. Indeed, it is probable that the labor in connection with the district courts was much more arduous than that of the higher tribunal.

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Oliver P. Mason, George B. Lake and Lorenzo Crounse comprised the first Supreme bench. Mason was the first chief justice, although he was not elected to that office—in those days the chief justice was not chosen in rotation as now, but was elected as such. William A. Little, a democrat, was nominated and elected chief justice. He died however, before he could take the office, and Governor Butler appointed Mason. Lake and Crounse were elected in 1867. David Gantt and Samuel Maxwell went on the bench in 1873. Lake was re-elected. Amasa Cobb was elected in 1878. Maxwell remained on the bench until the beginning of the present year. M. B. Reese was elected in 1884 and served one term. Gantt died in 1888, while on the bench; Mason in 1892. The others are still alive. Lake is practicing law in Omaha, and Crounse, after having been clerk of the Supreme Court, congressman, United States revenue collector, and assistant secretary of the treasury, has finally lodged in the executive office. Cobb is engaged in the practice of law in this city, and Reese is dean of the law school at the University of Nebraska.

† † †

The convention of 1875 made very important changes in the constitution, some of which have since been deplored. Instead of being elected uniformly for a term of six years it was provided that the judges should be classified by lot so that one should hold his office for two years, one for four years and one for six years. The judge having the shortest term to serve, not holding his office by appointment or election to fill a vacancy, was made chief justice. This arrangement, however, as provided in the constitution, applied only to the judges elected at the first election after its adoption. Thereafter one judge has been elected every two years. Provision was also made for the division of the state into six judicial districts and for the election of judges of the same, thus relieving the Supreme Court judges of double duty. (The number of districts has since been considerably increased.) The salary, $2,000, was raised to $2,500, and provision was made for the appointment of a reporter who should also act as clerk of the court and state librarian. At the last session of the legislature the way was opened for the appointment of three Supreme Court commissioners, who now aid materially in expediting the business of the court. The court as now constituted consists of Chief Justice T. L. Norval, whose term expires two years from now; A. M. Post and T. O. C. Harrison, the latter having just taken his seat. The commissioners are Robert Ryan, John M. Ragan and Frank Irvine.

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Four years ago the court was only about 200 cases behind, now the number is about 1,400. The three judges and three commissioners are working very hard, and it is said that they are gaining slightly. Something like 900 cases are under advisement. Under a recent ruling, until the cases now under advisement are disposed of, submissions will be received only in causes in which rehearings have been allowed, criminal cases, those relating to the revenue, cases under the banking act, and cases where the state is a party, and has a direct interest. No case will be taken up out of its order except upon a satisfactory showing that important public interests demand it.

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