

Reminiscences of a Wayfarer

Some of the Important Events of the Pioneer Days of Richardson County and Southeast Nebraska, as remembered by the writer, who has spent fifty-one years here.

A LITTLE ABOUT EVERYBODY.

"Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this."

The preacher, as the author of the above is styled in the sacred volume, was right in his conclusion that it was unwise to say that former days were better than these, the present, as all days and times, whether old or new, are just the same, and were intended to be. Yet, all the world likes the old days, live very much in them, and take an especial pleasure in their recall to be lived over again in memory as they passed in actual presence in another and a lost time. Nevertheless, all times are said to be good when they are old. Whether this is true or not as matter of fact, it is certain that most people act upon the hypothesis that it is; and in all the departments, callings, and ramifications of this variegated life of ours, we are constantly seeking in the past acts of men and nations for precedents for doing something that otherwise might not be done, notwithstanding these days are assumed to be better than the former. The living, acting generation in any age and in all times, is forever controlled whether knowing the fact or not, by two nonentities—the dead of the past and the unborn of the future—the one historic, the other prophetic, but whose invisible hands lie heavy on all that is done by those active toilers at the ceaseless, never ending loom of life, ignorantly but surely weaving the garment of God we know him by—history. The poet speaks of a day that is dead. There is no such day, any more than there can be a void time. All days, past or to come, in the councils of the eternal, make up the everlasting now, the only division of time or duration possible in the economy of the infinite.

In these desultory papers I use the word "history" in its comprehensive and generic sense. As applied to a person, a community, a state or to anything else of an organic nature, it includes all the processes of integration or growth from their emergence from a state of non-existence till they disappear again in the imperceptible or non-being. In the synthesis of organic life the aggregates partake of the nature and characteristics of their units. A good house cannot be built of bad material, nor can a good community of people be produced from a bad or immoral population. The family is the living prototype and model of that larger family, the state, and from the output of the aggregate of all such miniature communities, the political edifice is constructed. The moral fiber in the one, determines it in the other, and hence, it has been the effort of the controlling civilizing forces in organized society to reach down to the fountain, the masses, and purify that, or do what may be done to that end, and the stream will take care of itself.

I have heretofore spoken of individuals only, but now it comes in my way to speak more generally of the people who laid the foundations of the great and growing state of Nebraska. When I became one of its citizens in the day of its pupillage for statehood, there were, all told, about twelve thousand people living within its confines, of which, proximately, one of those thousands inhabited Richardson County. It is inter-

esting to me to pass in review the leading people, both men and women, of which that pioneer community consisted, and to take note of the many changes the coming and going of the years has brought about. It is, of course, common to all communities, but as I have not lived in all of them, I know of only one in my world (we all live in one of our own), and of that alone am I competent to speak, if indeed I am competent to do that, which I, think myself, is doubtful.

It was Voltaire, I believe, who taught the true mode of writing history, though it is not certain that historiographers have generally followed his suggestions.

He believed that history should deal with the people of a nation, as well as with its rulers, statesmen, battles and great events—should tell how the people were housed, clothed, fed and treated by the laws with which, in their enactment in most cases, they had no voice;—what they were taught, what they believed in or hoped for; their fireside traditions, their prevailing religion and their folk lore, which may be said to comprehend all, or nearly all the others. The trend of modern thought has not been in accord with the teachings generally of that intellectual giant of the eighteenth century, but in that one particular at least, he is believed to have been right. Let me imitate the great writer in a small way, and tell of a past order of things in a day that is old, and of a people who have largely passed away, but who in their day and opportunity did their whole duty as citizens, and that is the best epitaph that can be written for anybody.

The first family to locate in Falls City was that of David Dorrington. He and his good wife were natives of old England, from which, with their two little boys they emigrated to the United States in 1842, locating at Whitesboro, a little village near Utica, New York, where they remained till the troubles in the territory of Kansas were settled and in the spring of 1857 they removed to it settling in Doniphan County, where they fell in with the Burbanks and General Lane, and at their instance came to Nebraska and helped to found Falls City, and where they passed the remainder of their lives. In the troublous days during the many contests over the permanent location of the county seat, the town acquired a hard name, but the moral integrity of those people from over the sea, and others of like character, went far to mitigate its effect with the general public, like the minimum ten, for which, if the old patriarch could have produced them, the cities of the plain would not have been destroyed. They sleep side by side, along with their two oldest sons, in the family vault in the beautiful city of the dead over to the west, and forty two descendants rise up and call them blessed.

The family of Jesse Crook and his venerable widow, one of the pioneer mothers of the country, is the only other, resident in Falls City in 1858, that has among its citizens today, members and descendants in the direct line. Those of Isaac Crook and Wilson M. Maddox, over by and in Arthur, are quite numerous and are among our best citizenship. Others came to us at a later date, and some of them are with us yet.

Anderson Miller and his excellent wife with their two or three small children, came in

1859, purchased the Joe Baker claim adjoining the town site on the west, and have made it their home ever since.

The land was owned by a Mr. McMillan, when Miller purchased it. They had the best house in town and the only one that had a plastered room in it, in the whole place. I remember this fact for a particular reason. Judge Miller of the territorial district court was in poor health in the spring of 1860, and it was not thought prudent for him to be quartered while holding court in the poorly constructed and furnished hotel up town, and at the solicitation of E. S. Dundy (afterwards Judge,) Mrs. Miller kindly placed at the disposal of the invalid Judge her best room for his comfort and accommodation, for which he and the members of the bar (Dundy and the writer,) were thankful indeed. Judge Miller died shortly afterwards at his home in Ohio. Judge Dundy is dead with most of his family, with never a survivor left in the state. And so with numerous others who have been with us and gone away leaving no track or trace behind them. No family on earth has all its members on the same side of the river. Mr. Miller and his good wife are with us still, in the quiet enjoyment of hale old age, with their children (except those gone before,) and their grandchildren, about them, waiting like the balance of us, for the ferryman on the Stygian pool.

Wingate King and family came here early, but I don't know just when. He was elect-

and healthy children, served his people with honor and usefulness in the legislature and has grown old as gracefully as a seer. Time has been good to him because he has been good to it, and as the shadows lengthen to the east and the days of his active exertions recede in the past, he has given up the farm and come to town for a quiet rest. He has earned it, and besides, he deserves it.

On the Nemaha was the Boyd family, consisting of several branches, Joseph the elder and his two nephews, David and Abner. Some of their descendants are among our people, as well as those of Jacob Stumbo; but the Simpkins people are all gone. On the Muddy was Joseph Forney, yet in life, but far up in the eighties, one of the real pioneers, and among the strong men of the early days.

Further up the Muddy were the Lambs, the Minchalls and the Nances, all of the heads of their families gone, but with many of their descendants still among our people. Still further up stream were John Harckendorf, Louis Mispais, William G. Goolsby, L. B. Prouty, Zeddock Stephenson, Ed Swim, Sam Allerton, Steve McElroy and others whose names I cannot recall. Some of these families have disappeared entirely, while others have many representatives in the county.

The year following many others settled in the same neighborhood and further up the Muddy, and to the Nemaha County line of whom I will write later on.



David Dorrington

ed to the legislature in 1857, and was in the row that took place the following winter at Omaha, when a part of the members of both legislative bodies rebelled and went to Florence, a small hamlet four or five miles north of Omaha, and organized an independent legislature. Of course it was an illegal body, but as there was no quorum left in the regular houses at Omaha, no valid legislation could be had by either, and the session for that year came to nothing. It was the result of an old fight against Omaha, and between the north and south Platte sections of the territory. Mr. King buried his wife here at a later period, and sometime afterwards removed back to Missouri. A. J. Deshazo, his son-in-law, surveyed and platted Falls City, but he, at a subsequent time went to Missouri also and the family ceased from among our people.

Hon. John R. Dowty came to Falls City early in 1859. He had lived for some time in Nemaha County, but liking things in Richardson better, came down and became one of us, and has been so ever since. After taking care of Uncle Sam's building interest on the Indian Reservations in the near vicinity under the regime of Major Burbank, for a few years, he did the sensible thing, got married, built him a splendid farm out on the Muddy in the Goolsby neighborhood, reared a family of bright

In Salem there remains but three families represented in our midst, who lived in that town in 1858. They are the Lincoln, the Holt and the Oliver families. J. C. Lincoln, now dead, and John W. Holt, now a citizen of this city, were co-partners in business, practically all the time from the spring of 1857, till Mr. Lincoln's death in 1893. His wife died about the same time, leaving surviving them two daughters, one of whom, Mrs. Spurlock, still lives in Salem, the other, Mrs. Lawler, is located somewhere I think, in Colorado.

The only representative of the Oliver family that I know of, is Mrs. John W. Holt, and of course, resides with her husband in Falls City. If A. S. Russell was living in Salem in 1858, I am mistaken to that extent, but I don't think I am.

Mr. Lincoln was a blood relation of the great president, and resembled him very much both in his physical make-up, and in mental and temperamental peculiarities. If there was a funny or ridiculous side to anything, and there usually is, that came under their observation, they were sure to see it. Billy Mann—there are not many left who remember him—was county clerk, and came to Falls City with the public records after the county seat was located here by act of the legislature in February, 1860, and when the first election was held afterwards,

to permanently locate the seat of government, showed me a letter from Lincoln giving a report of the vote at Salem. It read: "One hundred and six for Salem and six fights." Of course the six fights didn't figure in the tally sheet of the poll, but they figured in the fun Cass got out of the election, and he could no more refrain from associating the fights with the votes, than he could refrain from making the report itself.

The firm of Lincoln & Holt was the main standby in commercial business in the central and western parts of the county for a quarter of a century, though the town of Salem was badly situated in the matter of easy access, except from the west. It was surrounded on the north, east and south by the marshy valleys of the two Nemahas, and by that of the greater river formed by the confluence of the two smaller streams, and for a considerable part of the year these valleys were almost impassable. These natural disadvantages were not easily overcome, and the business of the town suffered in consequence. But Lincoln & Holt were Salem while they lived in it, and their families are the last of its old inhabitants.

The Hares, the Roberts, the Walkers, and others I could name, have drifted away, or died out, and strangers have taken their places. This is the way of the world for it is always moving, whether we take note of it or not.

John W. Holt has been a fixture in Richardson County for more than half a century, and during all that time has been intimately and prominently connected with its business, social and political affairs. Thirty-one of those years were passed in this city, where official duty as county treasurer brought him in 1878, after he had served a term as Senator from this county in the state legislature. After the close of his second term as treasurer, he, with Mr. S. B. Miles, a man well known to all the people of the country and of great wealth, together with his life-long associate J. C. Lincoln, and perhaps one or two others, established the First National Bank in Falls City, and for twenty-five years, he was practically the head and controller of the institution. Whatever it is, he made it.

Mr. Holt is peculiarly a product of the frontier. His father, Dr. Holt, was the first representative in the Missouri legislature from that district of country in the northwestern part of the state, known as the Platte Purchase, away back in 1841; and Holt County, over the river, was so named in his honor. He has seen the country, on both sides of the Missouri, grow up from a wilderness and a waste to be as fine agricultural districts as can be found anywhere in all the great Northwest, and no one contributed to that result more than he. He is now in retirement, but is just as much the good citizen he has always been. It is something of a relief to have a live man to talk about, for I feel lonesome groping among the shadows of things that have been, and calling up in memory the faces of men and women I knew in the long ago, but whom I shall see nevermore, while the world stands. The fact is, I seem to have broken into some vast graveyard where only phantom memories lie buried, whose uneasy ghosts are doomed to continuous and perpetual resurrection, for they haunt me at every step.

I am not doing exactly what "Old Mortality" did with his chizle and mallet, for the dead covenanters in the land of cakes; nor singing peans as Coleridge did, in memory of the heroes of the chivalric ages:

The Knights are dust
Their good swords are rust
Their souls are with the Saints
I trust.

but, I am trying to do something that partakes a little of the nature of both, and if I succeed only partially, I shall feel amply repaid for the labor expended in the doing.

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