

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.

SOMETHING LIKE THE LAST. There were considerable settlements on the Muddy and the small streams emptying into it, such as the McElroy branch and the Sardine further west, but I am able to give the names of only a few of the most prominent families.

On the McElroy creek in addition to those already mentioned were the McCoy's and the Joneses. With the McCoy's there was a young man who afterwards attained a somewhat equivocal, but decidedly notorious reputation as a guerrilla chief in Maryland and Virginia, during the Southern Civil War. His name was Harry Gilmore. He was a harum-scarum, dare-devil sort of fellow, and in the spring of 1859 came near having a shooting scrape with a certain Dr. T. J. Dunn, then a resident of Salem, and if he was to be believed, something of a desperado, though I have no certain evidence that he ever shot anyone.

On the occasion I refer to he drew his revolver and pointed it at Gilmore, who was unarmed, or there might have been some shooting. The trouble occurred in front of a house, near where Wanner's drug store now stands, that was in course of construction. Two or three men were on top—the house was only one story, and about ten feet high—and they said after the trouble was over, that if Dunn had shot Gilmore they would have killed him with their hatchets, as they were in striking distance, and ready to act. I have no recollection what the row was about though I was near them when Dunn drew his revolver, but as that kind of heroic displays were of frequent occurrence, especially where the other fellow had no gun, the circumstance attracted little attention, and was regarded as a perfectly harmless pastime.

It is both interesting and amusing to recall some of the ridiculous antics of a class of young men, many of whom were in evidence one time and another from 1858 till actual war commenced in 1861, in this and other towns in the territory. They were anxious that the people should know and keep in mind, the very important fact that they were southern gentlemen, (most of them were from over the Missouri river in Holt and Andrew counties), from the first families in the chivalric south, and that any one of them was a full match for any five of the ordinary yahoo's, who had been so unfortunate as to have first seen the light north of Mason & Dixon's line. These young Don Quixotes usually went armed to the teeth—loaded with big revolvers, one on each side, much as sea going people load a ship, adjusting the cargo so that the vessel would maintain its balance and right itself on the stormiest seas to be encountered. The balance, however, in many cases, was now and then disturbed by additions to the armament in the shape of a murderous bowie knife strapped to the person of the warrior, and in nearly all cases by a plentiful supply of irregularly stowed ballast of forty rod whiskey.

All these were cheap imitations of an order of things that had grown up in the south where distinctions had been inaugurated between the slaveholding planter class and the poor white trash, among whom, in a way, the aristocracy thus established, had come to associate the non-slave holding people of the north; and the young bloods of that exclusive and

self styled superior caste, had sought, on all occasions of contact with the mud-sills of the north—that is the name they were known by—to impress them by all manner of insolent bravado, with that unpalatable fact. This foolish and false notion was spreading wider and wider as time passed, and the two sections of the country were rapidly becoming more estranged and hostile, and the absurd cheap John exhibitions indicated, were the natural effects of such a cause.

In another day, and under another social order not unlike that in vogue in the southern states in ante-bellum days, one of the privileged classes who had killed another of the class of no privilege, had the lawful right to be tried for the offense by a jury of his peers, that is, a jury composed of his class, to the exclusion of all others. Such a right did not exist in the south by express statute law, but it did by a custom more universally observed and enforced, than any law ever was. There came a test of personal courage and fighting qualities among the people of the two sections, and it was found that there were just as good men on one side as on the other, and all controversy on that head ceased long ago, and the question of class privilege has also been settled and settled right. But I have been digressing.

There were several other families on the Muddy of whom no mention has been made. Ben Leachman was among the early settlers, and his oldest son has the honor of being the first white baby born in the county. His name is Frank, now past the middle age, and with his brother, the only surviving members of the family, are still living on the old homestead three or four miles north of Falls City. William McK. Maddox, a brother of Wilson M. mentioned in these papers, came here in 1859, married and bought all the land adjoining his home farm a little south of the Leachman place; raised a large family, most of which are still in life and citizens of the county, and departed this life about two and a half years ago.

Isaac Clark opened a farm a little west of the Harkendorf homestead, and a certain Mr. Arnett located a little west of Clark and was a justice of the peace most of the time he lived there. I didn't admire the man, nor was I at all sorry when he left the country.

On the other side of the Muddy and about where Verdon now stands, Mr. Asbury Walmsly located, though I think his quarter section was pre-empted by a man named Sloan, from whom Walmsly purchased it. Walmsly enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil war and died in the service. He left a widow and several children. His son, Christ Walmsly is with us, and is one of Richardson county's most successful farmers. I do not know of any other member of that family.

Further up stream and on the same side, two brothers, John and Charles Cornell settled at an early day. They were from the state of Maryland, liberally educated, and descended from the old Revolutionary stock who believed in the rights of the individual as well as in the rights of the state; and above all they believed in that kind of liberty that guarantees to each of God's creatures the right to earn his or her own bread and to eat it in peace. They established excellent farms in that neighborhood, did

their whole duty as citizens, and left many descendants, some of whom are still citizens of the county. John F. Cornell, son of the elder John, was Auditor of State for Nebraska, during the last four years of the last century. He died some two or three years ago. Charles Cornell has a son still in the same neighborhood, and I think is living on the old home farm, though I have not the pleasure of his personal acquaintance. I think his name is Beacher Cornell.

There was another early settler up there of the name of Cunningham. At this moment I cannot give his christian name, though I knew him intimately and well in the early days. He was a man of great learning, a scholar and a classic, but he chose to come to a western territory, help to build the future state and devote himself to rural pursuits as well as to his books. He has long been one of the silent majority. One of his sons, Thomas C. is yet a citizen of the county, honored and respected by all. For many years this son was prominent in the political and business affairs of the county and state, has been honored by the people with many public offices of trust and confidence, and in every instance discharged the duties imposed, with scrupulous honesty. There are no better men than he in all Nebraska. Mr. Cunningham has not lost interest in public affairs though in later years he has devoted his whole time to improving his farm and caring for his family, and in obeying the great command to love his neighbor as he loves himself.

He has a brother living in South San Francisco, California, who, thirty years ago was the most conspicuous figure in the current political and legislative fields of this state. He subse-

quently abandoned politics to engage in mining ventures in the western gold fields and finally settled permanently in the vicinity of the great Pacific City. The brother's name is E. E. Cunningham, who is well known to a large part of the people, not only of this county, but of the whole state.

Among others of the old settlers whose names occur to me are Amos Frank, Oliver Fuller, and Harrison Mark. They were early on the ground and they are here yet, hale and hearty, with every promise of many years of active usefulness. They are among our best people and in years past contributed their full share towards making the country rich and prosperous. In their day, they, with others, bought land from the government for \$1.25 per acre, and have lived to see that same land grow in value till it is now worth in the market, from \$100 to \$125, per acre; have lived to see school houses and churches dot the country like mile stones on some familiar road—as they really are on the great highway of intellectual and moral progress that runs all the weft of human history like a golden thread—have seen the country gridironed with railroads, those heralds of the ever advancing tide of civilization, reaching out with their Briarian fingers in all directions, from the shores of the stormy Atlantic, over plain and mountain to the peaceful sea in the west; from those mighty inland seas in the north, to the placid waters of the Southern gulf, binding the country together with thews of steel never to be broken by the machinations of uneasy and ambitious political adventures.

What I write here will perish, will find its way to the waste paper baskets and rubbish heaps of the country, but if it is pleasant to travel in memory, in a reverse

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order, the road that has been made long by the flight of years, it is just as pleasant to commit the attendant incidents of the journey to writing, for, while in their telling the memories of others, who were fellow travelers and are plodding still, may be refreshed, the same service is being performed in my own case, and thus ultimate forgetfulness, the certain fate of all things human, will be deferred a little longer.

Further up the Muddy, and about where Mr. Andy Tynan's farm is—but as Andy owns most of the land up there this designation of the place is anything but definite—there occurred, in

the winter of 1858 and '59, one of those awful crimes that blacken the world, pollute humanity itself, stain the fair name of any christian community, and savor only of the furies of hell. I have not the leisure, nor the space in this paper, to recount the facts of that horrible transaction that resulted in the murder of a man and the forcible expulsion of a woman from the house in her night dress to freeze to death on the bleak prairie within two or three hundred yards of her home. As I was connected professionally with the prosecution of the man devil who did the mischief, the woman's husband, I am sufficiently advised of the facts, so far as they were ever known, to recite them in another paper.



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