

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.

AN OLD TIME ELECTION

The Clifford tragedy up the Muddy will have to await its turn, as other matters claim precedence in the order of their occurrence. The political entity of Nebraska, like other embryonic states in the governmental polity of the United States, was vested by its organic law, which, for all purposes of local administration was its constitution, with executive, legislative and judicial powers. The executive and judicial officers were nominated by the president and by and with the advice and consent of the senate, appointed to their several stations, while the legislative consisting of two distinct bodies, the council or upper house, and a house of representatives, were to be elected by the people of the territory. It comes in my way just now to describe the first election for members of the territorial legislature that came under my observation. It is proper to say that while the legislature of a territory has the power to legislate on all matters affecting the local interests of its people within the scope of the grant of such power in the fundamental law, its acts nevertheless, are subject to be set aside or annulled by the congress of the general government, much as the judiciary of a state may do the same with the By-Laws of a municipal corporation for unreasonableness etc. The reason for this is furnished by the fact that a law is a rule prescribed by the superior power in a state, and is distinguishable from a by-law of one of its governing agencies by the further fact that the courts are bound to obey it as well as the individual citizens. In that sense the acts of a territorial legislature and the By-Laws, or ordinances of cities, and other municipal corporations of a state, are in the nature of police regulations, and not being prescribed by the superior power, are subject to repeal or annulment by it, if in its judgment they are unreasonable or otherwise objectionable. As these familiar principles are quite as well known to the readers of the Tribune as they are to me, I need not further enlarge upon them.

In 1858, the annual election occurred in August, and the voting place of the people of the interior part of the county east of Salem, was at Archer.

The fact is, at that time Falls City was of so little importance that it was not only not a voting precinct, but it had no post office until some time later, and no mail service until a still later period. All that summer we could only get mail, at the Archer post office and then only once a week, and somebody had to be pressed into service to go over to Archer every Thursday, and nearly always on foot, to fetch the mail for the people of the town. It fell to my lot many and many a Thursday to perform that duty, and right willingly was it done for it usually brought me one or more letters from home—home: deserted, dismantled, or shelters the stranger, the empty nest from which all the birds have flown, play-ground of my youth with its familiar surroundings, all gone; but the old home that once existed as an objective and physical reality, exists just as real as a subject in my memory, and always will while conscious remembrance remains a part of my life. Mr. Thompson may own the fee simple title to the land, may have dominion of the houses, barns, lots and fields that once made up the old home-

stead, but he does not own the heart strings that were engendered there in another day, nor the associations that cluster about it and reach out from the graves of the dead to every throbbing heart of the living members of that shadowy community, that memory gathers forever in solemn convocation on the same spot, as something indestructible and eternal.

Richardson and Pawnee counties formed both a council and a representative district. It was entitled to one councilman and I believe three representatives. There were three candidates for the council. Mr. Charles McDonald, a citizen of Salem, and then a member of the council seeking re-election, E. S. Dundy, who if he had any particular residence it was at Archer, and Wm. P. Loan, an uncle of our worthy townsman, J. R. Cain, who lived some of the time at St. Stephen, but mostly at the home of his brother-in-law, William R. Cain, who lived on his farm a few miles in the country from St. Stephen.

McDonald had a real fight on his hands. He had but recently done the business for Archer by taking the county seat from it, and locating it at Salem. That put all the people at Archer and in the Muddy settlements against him, but it solidified most of the west end for him. The balance of power was in Pawnee, and it was there that Dundy got in his best work.

Table Rock had been founded by a colony of Methodists from Pennsylvania, headed by a shrewd, clear headed, conscientious gentleman and minister of the gospel, of the name of Charles H. Ciddings, and Dundy went in for his support. I am not prepared to say that Dundy was a Methodist at both ends of the district, but he some how impressed the people of Table Rock and Pawnee generally with the fact that he was a great friend of religion, and if not exactly a Methodist, he was just the kind of fellow who might be. And besides, Dundy had been for most his life, a citizen of Pennsylvania, and that fact helped him immensely with Mr. Giddings and his co-Pennsylvania colonists. But there was one question that had a political explosive in it, that had to be handled as gingerly as people now a days do the fulminate of mercury, gun cotton, or dynamite. I mean the slavery question. In the west end of the district they were nearly all abolitionists, and just the reverse in the east. The question of temperance was one of importance, though little was said about it in the east end. So important was it at Table Rock, that Mr. Giddings caused to be inserted in every deed conveying a lot in that town, a clause prohibiting the sale of intoxicating liquor on it, and providing that in case that condition should be broken by any owner of the lot in the future, his ownership should then immediately cease, and title to the property should *eo instantur* revert to the original donor.

Dundy was a crafty fellow and up to political snuff with the best of them, and so managed his cards as to get the support of all those antagonistic and warring elements in sufficient numbers to beat his two opponents with a very satisfactory majority. It requires some kind of political ability not easily described, to yolk up the moral sentiment of the country represented by the churches and church going people, with that other element represented by those devil's recruiting offices

the saloons, and get the support of both. But as that unique specimen of political legerdemain was successfully worked on the people of Nebraska at the last November election, we must admit that the trick can be done, and that there are moral(?) and political mountebanks actually in the flesh amongst us, who can pray as loud and long as any Pharisee, and "sup kale with the devil" without any spoon at all, though the Scotch proverb has it that most people should have a long one, who undertake that gastronomic feat, with his Satic majesty.

The election of Dundy and some other decidedly able men in other parts of the territory, was fortunate for the country at that juncture of its history, as besides, being without a criminal code, it was also pretty nearly without a civil code, as well. At the first legislature portions of the Iowa code had been adopted, but it was so illy arranged as to be more confusing than otherwise, and the administration of justice had become disultory, uncertain, and wholly unsatisfactory. The governor convened the new legislature in extraordinary session in the following October, and some of the best legislation was enacted the territory and state has ever had.

But I must go back to the election and give some account of the candidates for the lower house. There were three places to fill and more than a dozen candidates, four or five for each place, appeared in the field for the people's suffrages and favor. I will not record their names here, first because I do not remember all of them, and second because none of them are still in life, and only two or three were known to any of the present residents of the coun-

ties composing the legislative district. There were no conventions in those days, and each of the aspirants was a self-nominated candidate and upon a platform of his own construction. In after years, and when I had come to know them, and the people, with a more intimate acquaintance, I was better prepared to pass judgment upon what I saw and heard in that campaign; but for the purpose in hand, it only lies in my way just now, to relate what I saw and heard, and what I saw and heard was just as good, if not a great deal better, than any circus I ever attended, and that is saying much indeed. There were two distinctive characters in the bunch, one an old man away up close to the half century mark, and a native of Missouri, in which old state as he called it, he took a commendable pride, and being myself a wanderer from another state for which I entertained the same filial affection, I thanked and respected him for it, if for nothing else. The other was a young man not above thirty, and a bright fellow he was too, who had been elected a member of the first territorial legislature, upon which fact, and his record in that body, he based his principle claim to re-election.

These people canvassed the district in a body, all on horseback, and all loaded with a speech for every center of population, which each one delivered in his turn, much as the boys used to deliver declamations on Friday afternoons in country schools, before everybody became university bred.

Some of them could neither read nor write, and what was most unusual, to me at least, seemed to felicitate themselves on that circumstance. I didn't know then how nearly right they were in thinking they could

legislate about as efficiently without education as with it, but I think I do now, and if I could, I would frankly ask pardon of those would be law givers, for any harsh judgment of mine, touching their ability and fitness to legislate for the people.

I attended one meeting of the candidates for the house, with their constituency, and only one. It was held over at Archer and occupied most of the day. Twelve or fifteen such rambling speeches cannot be delivered in an hour or two, and in this case it took all day. I will give an excerpt from one of those speeches, as it was a little out of the main order that generally prevailed. It was by the man from Missouri, and was something to this effect. Of course I cannot give a verbatim report of the old man's talk, but it was so different from all others, and so original withal, that I could as well forget that I was in Nebraska that day, as to forget that speech and its salient points. The old man came to the scratch after everybody had had a drink and his dinner, and held forth for as much as an hour, hear him:

"Feller citizens, I'm a candidate for the legislater, and I want your votes, an I come to ax you fer um. I haint got no book larnin and never had eny. I was born down in old Calloway county, Missouri, where they had but one school house and it were tu fur away fer me to go, but my wife who was a gal then, lived closer an went a few, she larned how to read an rite an sifer and that's all the edecation anybody ort to hev. I don't know A from a deer's trak, but I know how much a hunard bushel ov corn comes to at two bits a bushel, or how much a steer weighin a thousand comes to at five cents a

pound, and that's all the larnin I care to hev, an I know what my folks up on the run (creel) wants from the legislater, an what they want you want, an that's what I cal'cate evrybody wants and I'll giv it to um if you elect me. And I want to say furdur that I'm fer the herd law, and fer a humsted law just last and all the time. We must hev a place fer the wimin an chilern that the sheriff can't take fer the ole man's debts. It's a purty how-dy-doo fer the sheriff to come along with a execution and slice off a pece of a feller's claim here an a piece ther, and keep on whittlin' it down till he has little lef, an maybe the ole women has planted some flowers in the front yard to mak things look purty round ther place, an the ole man gets in debt agin, an long comes the sheriff and cuts off his yard an then what will the ole woman say? I'm agin this Shilurk pound of flesh business and don't like it no how," etc. This is a fair sample of his harangue and the rest may be omitted.

The old man from Calloway was not elected, but all the same the homestead law was passed exactly as he would have passed it himself, and was as liberally comprehensive as he wanted it. The same body enacted another law providing for the permanent location of the county seat of this county by vote of the people, and then ensued a acrimonious struggle that lasted for years, and created more bad blood and wide spread ill feeling among the people, than they were able to get rid of in the life of a generation. But, like everything else, in time it had an end, viz., after nearly all the combatants had gone to their graves. The other candidate, the younger one, will receive attention hereafter.

The speeches of the other candidates were little else than unintelligent gibberish, flamboyant nonsense, and concentrated ignorance, mixed with a great deal of the ridiculous and the absurd.

There always have been soda crackers;
there always will be soda crackers

But

There never were and never will be
any other Soda Crackers to equal

Uneeda Biscuit

The Soda Crackers of

National-
Biscuit-
Goodness

NATIONAL
BISCUIT
COMPANY



Sold Only in
Moisture Proof Package