

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.

The Meek-Davis Tragedy.

There is something of the antiquary in everybody, more in some than in others, but a little in all. This predisposition for the antiquities forms the basis of the science of Archaeology so much prized and studied by dreamers and thinkers, who have spent their lives delving in the ruins of dead nations whose only history, or at least that which is most visible, is written in the carved rocks of their fallen temples, mighty in their decay. Where men have been other men are likely to go and from the things they have done intelligible to the senses, the explorer strives to learn the story of that precedent people—how they lived, were housed, and clothed; what they did, what religion they professed, and what altars they reared to their now forgotten gods. The impulse to do these things arises sua sponte out of the very nature of man, and cannot be resisted any more than he can resist the desire for continued conscious life.

Something very like it was at the bottom of that imposing pageant of the eleventh century called the Crusades, when the hostile nations of Asia and Europe, representing two contending religions, were armed against each other and disputing the empire of the world. For a thousand years annual pilgrimages were made from all over the civilized world to the Holy Land, by the followers of Christ, the ardor for which was increased under the reign of Constantine in the fourth century, until in the course of time the enthusiasm and fanatical zeal inspired thereby took possession of all the western nations, and the shout, "It is the will of God," was taken up all over Europe and the general movement, in which there was not the faintest glimmer of common sense, was made to the east to wrest from the infidel, the Holy sepulchre of the Saviour.

The same impulse takes us to the silent cities where the dead are at rest, whether they were ours in life, or only fellow mortals who once were but are not, as all now existant, one day will be.

Far away to the southwest where the great Colorado of the west mingles its waters with what the early geographers called the great South Sea, I once visited a spot in the midst of an everlasting desolation, and so lonely in its surroundings that, in the language of the Ancient Mariner,

"So lonely 'twas, that God himself Scarse seemed to be there."

At this spot two hundred miles from any civilized habitation and about a quarter of a mile from the ship yard by the sea, two men, "nameless here forevermore" who had died at that ship's landing years before, lie buried out on a salt marsh, where the monster heaving sea covers it fathom deep, twice every twenty four hours, with its restless and restless tides. The graves were enclosed by a rude fence that could only be seen at ebb-tide, and then not for long, except at neap-tide which occurs in the dark of the moon, and then for a few days the tides appear to sleep and the resting place of those lost men is freed from its accustomed salt baths from the Gulf. Spring tide at that place, which occurs at new and full moon, rises to the height of thirty-three feet, the second highest tide in the world.

In an idle hour and when the tide was low, I went out to visit those graves on the lonely marsh. There was nothing in sight that appeared to be possessed of life, and not a sound was to be heard, except that produced by silence—for silence itself is sometimes so profound as to be audible. What I thought on that visit is not to the purpose, but I could not refrain from some speculations on the monotony of the eternal ebb and flow of the tides above those lonesome graves, till the sea shall give up its dead and the heavens be rolled together as a scroll. But to be buried in such an out-of-the-way place, where habitation was impossible, where the living can seldom come and where no sound ever breaks upon the brooding silence, but the rush of the tides flowing from and back to the sea, seemed an awful fate even for the dead.

To me it was a shrine, a sacred spot, a small section of God's acre, the like of which I had never seen and one I shall never forget. The same impulse that sends the pilgrims to the Holy Land, to the vast solitary pyramids of Egypt, to the ruins of those crumbling castles on the Rhine, and in feudal countries over the earth, sent me to visit the resting place of two unknown mortals on the salt marshes at the head of

the Gulf of California in old Mexico. Next to an old ruin, an old tomb, or an old churchyard, is some ancient record or old document, or legendary story made or written by men long dead, for somehow they bring one in touch with lost lives, once vigorous, intelligent, and forceful who in a way swayed the thoughts and actions of others and illustrated the genius of the times in which they lived.

I have before me an old record, but not particularly of the class just indicated, but one that brings back in all its vivid and terrible reality a tragedy that was enacted in this city now nearly fifty years ago.

It is the record of the coroner's inquest held over the dead body of one T. J. Meek, who was killed in the Minnick hotel, the one built by Jesse Crook two years before, on the 16th day of April, 1860, during an election then being held to permanently locate the county seat of this county. This was the second of the three authorized, by the act of the winter before and the one locating the county seat at Falls City, to commence with. Rulo and Salem were in combination against Falls City, and certain parties from both these towns were at Falls City that day, and with the evident design to make trouble.

Dr. J. H. Davis, William Holbrook, afterwards a citizen of this city, and some others were here from Rulo, and Dr. T. J. Dunn, and probably one or two others, were here from Salem. All these parties were heavily armed, and somewhat insolent in their conduct. Trouble was brewing all day and it required very little to develop it. The polling place was near Squire Dorrington's residence, on the corner where Sowles' candy shop now is, and when the street duel opened between Dr. Davis of Rulo and T. J. Meek, a pistol ball struck a window case near which Mrs. Dorrington was at the moment standing, though she did not know it until another struck the house in a different place. Meek was a man of fearless nature, had gone through the Kansas trouble, and been wounded in several parts of his body in numerous fights down there. Davis shot Meek in the hip in the street fight, but whether Davis received his death wound on the street or in an upstairs room in the hotel was never known. Meek though wounded and his revolver empty, went into the Burbank store and procured another revolver, and learning that Davis had gone to the Minnick hotel, followed, revolver in hand, to finish the fight with him. He went into the hotel and up the stairway leading from the door on the north to the second floor. At the top landing a door opened into the northwest room in which Davis had taken refuge, and it was at that door he received his death wound. There was but one witness to the last act in the tragedy, his name was William McFarland. It is certain that two or more shots were fired after Meek went upstairs, but no evidence on that point appears in the records before me, but I know the fact from others who heard them.

Dr. H. O. Hanna who had just moved into the country from Ohio, performed the autopsy on the body of Meek, and the following is his testimony as it appears in the report of Sheriff Keefer, who was acting as coroner. H. O. Hanna sworn saith:

Omitting formal questions as to age residence and occupation the doctor's evidence was as follows:

Q. Were you acquainted with deceased (Meek)?

A. I knew him when I saw him.

Q. Where and what is his condition?

A. I saw him less than an hour since lying dead in the hotel.

Q. Did you make an examination of the body?

A. I did.

Q. Did you perform a post mortem on the body of the deceased?

A. I did.

Q. Where and by what manner did he come to his death?

A. His death was produced by a gun shot wound through the body the ball entering the right side between the fifth and sixth ribs, about four inches below and a little back of the arm pit, cutting in its passage the fifth rib about half off, passing through the upper portion of the lower lobe, and the lower portion of the upper lobe of the right lung. Thence into the right auricle and through the left ventricle of the heart through upper lobe of the left lung, thence between the fourth and fifth ribs lodging against the skin on the left side.

Q. Were there any other wounds on the body?

A. There were several scalp wounds, and also a gun shot wound

through the fleshy portion of the right hip.

Q. Were these last wounds sufficient to cause death?

A. I think not.

(Signed) H. C. HANNA. This testimony is important as showing that Meek had been shot in the hip before he went to the hotel, and that whoever shot him was standing at right angles to the direction he was facing at the time, making Meek, the target for at least two assailants. Holbrook was thought to be the man who shot Meek in the hip, while the street fight was on between Davis and him, but this is mere conjecture.

The report is in the hand writing of Mr. Aug. Schoenheit, long a resident of this city, but who only the day before had arrived at Falls City, from the state of Ohio. It seems he had been asked to supervise the post mortem examination, as he was a lawyer and was willing to accommodate the sheriff. I was in the state of Illinois on the day of the trouble and therefore had no personal knowledge of the facts, but as I came to know them afterwards, I was, and always have been, of opinion that Davis was not the man who killed Meek. The circumstances, and the location of the parties, made it impossible for Davis to have killed Meek. Meek went up a stairway leading from the north. That brought his right side to the west. When he got to the top of the stairs he had to turn his face to the west to see into the room where Davis was; that would bring his right side to the north. If Davis had shot Meek at all, the ball, instead of hitting him in the right side, would have struck him in the breast, but that was not where he was shot. There was a narrow passage or hall upstairs on the east side of the stairway, with a door opening into a bedroom in the northeast corner of the hotel, about the size of the room in which Davis was on the other side of the stairway. This latter door was located at the north end of the passage or hall, while the door on the other side, opening into the west room where Davis was, was at the extreme south end of that passage, so that when Meek turned at the top of the stairway to attack Davis, his right side would have been exposed to any one desiring to shoot him from the door at the north end of the passage, and whoever shot him was at that door or near it in the passage. The circumstances all contradict what McFarland said about who killed Meek, and besides I have another and convincing reason for knowing, but I shall not give it here—that his whole story was a fabrication.

Davis had emptied his revolver in the street fight, or he would not have used it as a club when Meek attacked him in the hotel. Every circumstance points unerringly to the fact that some one other than Davis killed Meek. Dr. Dunn was upstairs in the hotel when the murder was done, but he was not in the room with Davis. That he was suspected of complicity in the killing of Meek, is shown by the verdict of the jury sitting in the inquest: to-wit:

"And we the jury do further find that one Dr. T. J. Dunn was concerned in the perpetration of said violence and death as an accessory."

From what premise that conclusion was drawn, does not appear in the evidence returned with the report of the coroner. The general consensus of opinion of those who knew most about the facts was that Dunn, and not Davis, killed Meek. Certain it is, that Dunn was never in Falls City afterwards, and in a very short time left the country and has never lived here since. So ended the bloody chapter, but not its prehistoric effects. Meek was killed instantly, but Davis died of the wounds received in the fight the day after. They were both brave but reckless men, and both were looking for trouble that day, and found it in abundance.

The report of that day's awful doings is before me by grace of our accomplished and accommodating clerk of the district court, Mr. Charles Loree, who kindly placed it at my disposal for the purpose of this sketch, and for which I am greatly obliged. It is worn and old; it's inkfaded, and the wasting finger marks of time are apparent on every sheet of the paper it is written upon. The witnesses, the jurors, the physician who performed the autopsy on the body of Meek, the sheriff who acted as coroner and the lawyer who conducted the proceedings and formulated the report, are all dead; gone out of life into the same land of shadows to which those two misguided men hurried each other on that pleasant, smiling spring day—nearly fifty years ago.

Everyone would be benefited by taking Foley's Orino laxative for stomach and liver trouble and habitually. It sweetens the stomach and breath, gently stimulates the liver and regulates the bowels and constipation. It cures the laxatives today? Kerr's Pharmacy. Why not try Foley's Orino laxative? Why not try Foley's Orino laxative? Why not try Foley's Orino laxative?

WHAT THE NEIGHBORS SAY. Opinions of County Exchanges Regarding the Missouri Pacific.

Falls City is to get the division of the Missouri Pacific. It is well that the citizens of that burg are not particular enough to look their gift horse in the mouth.—Auburn Republican.

About the only effect that the removal of the division from Auburn to Falls City will be to mark a semi-colon in the history of the city.—Auburn Republican.

Incident to the establishing of the new freight division at that place, Falls City is in midst of discussion on several matters of public policy, such as extending the city limits, paying the business district and furnishing all day service at the power house for the benefit of those who wish electric motors.—Humboldt Leader.

To give some idea of what the M. P. is doing in the way of surface improvements, Mr. McManus, roadmaster for this division, says that the team work alone amounts at present to over ten thousand dollars a month. Verdon Vedette.

"The division coming to Falls City" is no longer a vision but an established fact.—Verdon Vedette.

Falls City is now sure of the Missouri Pacific freight division between Kansas City and Omaha. Falls City gave thirty-five acres of land at a cost of \$12,500. The land was purchased from J. H. Miles and is located south of the Burlington yards. The company agrees to begin work at once, and to spend \$200,000 building terminals, which will include seven miles of side track and an eighteen-stall round house. It is said \$90,000 has also been set aside to cut down Freeling hill and probably build a new depot.—Stella Press.

As stated in this paper a couple of weeks ago, there was a strong rumor that the M. P. was intending to make Falls City a division point. This time it appears that the rumor was founded on a basis of fact. A dispatch from Falls City states that the Missouri Pacific railroad has secured by donation thirty-five acres of land east of the Burlington depot at that place on which to build freight division yards to handle the traffic between Kansas City and Omaha. The city gave the land and the company agrees to spend \$200,000 in building the terminals in January. The plans also contemplate the spending of another \$100,000 in cutting down and changing Freeling hill to Strausville. The work will begin in ten days. It is stated that this will mean the moving of several families to Falls City, the number being estimated variously from fifteen to twenty-six.—Auburn Herald.

BARADA.

C. H. Martin made a trip to Falls City Thursday.

Mrs. E. E. Bolejack is suffering with a felon on her finger.

John Morehead of Falls City was in Barada Monday evening.

Mrs. Prine of Denver is here visiting her niece, Miss Carrie Rae.

The Spickler Bros., delivered a new auto to Mr. Hogrefe at Stella.

Jessie Cox was taking the teachers examination at Falls City Saturday.

Dr. VanOsdel was called to Lincoln Monday by the serious illness of his niece.

Miss Verda Kuhlman is assisting R. J. Dunn & Son in the store this week.

F. E. Smith of Auburn spent a few days with old friends at this place this week.

Walter Rockwell of Farmington, Ia., is visiting his uncle and grandfather at this place.

A number of relatives gathered at Mrs. Sarah Williamsons Monday to spend the day.

Mrs. E. A. Thompson of Falls City spent several days visiting relatives in this vicinity.

Miss Priscilla Woodring of near Shubert spent Sunday with friends at this place.

Neil Piersol and family were visiting Charles Thomas and family near Shubert Sunday.

E. Butler of Brownville spent several days with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Butler.

Elias Prine packed his grip and moved to Falls City, where he says he is going to make his future home.

Byron Dunn returned to his place of business in Lincoln after a two weeks' visit with relatives at this place.

Mrs. Wm. Bridgman of Verdon was the guest of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson Wamsley at this place Saturday and Sunday.

Mrs. Spickler and daughter who have been visiting relatives in various parts of the country for a couple of months, returned home Friday.

Earl Cox was surprised by about fifteen of his friends, who gathered at his home Sunday to celebrate his fourteenth birthday. The afternoon was spent in games after which refreshments consisting of ice cream and cake were served. Earl received several nice presents.

Excursion Rates Everywhere

It is impossible to present a detailed list of the attractive excursion rates now in effect.

You Can Go East on daily low rates to Atlantic cities and resorts; every day rates to Wisconsin, Michigan and Canadian resorts, and for the celebrated tour of the lakes.

You Can Go West. There are very attractive rates every day to Colorado, Yellowstone Park, Seattle, California, Black Hills, Hot Springs; homeseekers' rates every first and third Tuesdays everywhere west. Inquire about the personally conducted camping tours from Cody into the Yellowstone Park.

See Your Own Country. Between America's prosperity and low railroad rates there is every reason why you should join the great summer travel throng.



E. G. WHITFORD, Ticket Agent.
L. W. WAKELEY, G. P. A., Omaha.

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Call and see our engines, Cream Separators, Hay Tools, Plow Goods and Manure Spreader, in fact, everything in the implement line. It will pay you to get our prices.

Call and see us before you buy

WERNER-MOSIMAN & CO.

Special Chautauqua Sale of Fancy China

We will make special prices on all our Fancy China, and have some of the stock displayed in our south window with the regular and special prices. We have the

Largest Stock of Cut Glass, Fancy China and Dinnerware

in the county, and a full stock of good Groceries and Fruits at

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Seasonable Suggestions To be Found Here:

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Call Our Tinner Before the Spring Rains

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FALLS CITY CHAUTAUQUA

JULY 24th to August 1st