

Frontier Doctor's Story Told

by DONALD BECKMAN
 Doctor Conwell was one of the very earliest doctors on the wild western frontier, serving on the "cut-off" trail which came across the Missouri River Valley and joined the Oregon Trail farther out in Nebraska.

The doctor never went out to where the big Indian battles were being fought, but stayed in the east which was now as unruly as the Missouri on the rampage. Nevertheless, she heard about the wars from the Overland Stage Drivers and the Pony Express Drivers who made regular trips right into the heart of the bloody battle grounds. She also heard much from the soldiers who returned to their homes after each uprising.

The Conwell company was made up of two covered wagons, three people, and four oxen, two for each of the wagons. One of the covered wagons housed the living supplies such as the bed rolls, cooking utensils, all of the clothes, and the stove. The other wagon was the one where the many bottles of medicine were kept. It was called a traveling drug store.

The doctor and her husband gathered all of the herbs (pronounced erbs) and made the medicine themselves. They believed there was no disease that a good hot cup of sassafras and some peppermint or cat-nip couldn't cure.

When the doctor was called on to go to a homestead where

there was a bad disease, she stayed until the patient was cured or killed. She never left until she had tried out all of her many, many remedies. They picked and gathered their herbs by the way they smelled. Their medicines weren't mixed accurately either, just some of this and some of that and it would cure any known disease.

In those days cancer was unheard of as was polio and a few more of our modern day diseases. Doctor Conwell said that most of the diseases were caused by the food they ate and the water they drank. If she were alive and practicing today she might say the same was the cause of today's sicknesses. In those days the people raised everything they ate. They butchered all of their own meat, too. Then, a disease was very uncommon.

The doctor and her family survived on the donations of the homesteaders given them for their service. In order to save their food they paid their visits to the homesteads early in the morning, mid-day, or late evening. They never arrived at meal time unless they were asked to, then they were invited to stay for dinner. Anyway, it was as close to meal time as she could make it hoping she wouldn't be too early, they'd wait until she had gone, or too late, but right on time. It got so that she knew exactly when everyone in her territory ate and she, with her family, always arrived at meal time right on the nose. They changed off everytime so no one would catch on to her sly scheme.

One day, just at noon, she pulled up to the door of one of the homesteads just as the family were beginning to eat there in the "lean-to." The lady heard a knock on the door and went to see who it was. As she opened the door she met Mrs. Cromwell. They had eaten when several times before so she invited them in. Then she noticed one extra wagon.

"Who's wagon is that she asked?"
 "Oh! said Mrs. Conwell. That is my son John and his wife and children. They can stay, too."
 They all stayed but when they left they were told to let them know ahead when they would

be dropping by for dinner so that the lady could have enough to eat for all.
 The Conwell's never had a home like everyone else, they called their covered wagon their home. They wandered here and there all summer long on the prairie delivering medicine and taking care of the sick homesteaders. They traveled all summer long, not quitting until the snows of winter when it got too cold to travel around in a wagon.

The doctor wasn't paid in dollars and cents, but the people paid them in pounds and ounces. Once in a while she took money to buy food not offered at the homesteads, and for clothes and shoes. In the winter time they lived in a little cabin or with their son. In summer time they were always moving on the trail with their medicine.

It was in the spring of 1868. The sun blazed down on the covered wagons of the Conwell Company. As yet the trail wasn't very plain as it wasn't often traveled, but it was getting more plain as the seasons went by. Since the new land had been opened long lines of wagons were seen moving lazily along the banks of the Platte River in search of the rich land of the new west.

The wind had dried the ground made wet by the melted snow. The new layer of green grass was already beginning to cover the prairie, and the golden rod was coming up, promising to burst in bloom before to many more days of warm sunshine.

The Conwell wagons moved slowly along on their endless journey that would end when the prairie grass died and the first snow of the next winter would cover the western world. By that time the Conwell's expected to have sold much of their homemade medicine.

As they slowly journeyed along, Dr. Conwell looked down the trail and saw a tiny black speck in the far, far distance. She thought to herself that she might just be seeing things as she sometimes did when she

looked far away. She kept her eye on it but didn't tell her husband because he would stop and run for the Winchester, and maybe kill a perfectly innocent person. You had to be on the alert constantly on the prairie because there were still so many Indians raiding wagons and homes now days.

The spot could be an Indian, she thought. Or, it could even be a dog. Finally she did tell Mr. Conwell to stop until they found out what it was.

As it came closer they could see that it was a lone horseman riding hard toward them. They recognized the figure as that of Mr. Judson, one of their best customers who lived far south on the prairie. Mr. Judson pulled up beside the wagons and the doctor and asked if she could come at once to their cabin. His little boy had taken sick and she thought she could help them. Although they never believed in the doctor (they bought her medicine mostly to get rid of her even though her oils and ointments had been proved as good), they said it wouldn't hurt to try out her medicine. The boy would probably die anyway.

The man described the sickness to the doctor and she knew at once that it was diphtheria, the dreaded disease of all pioneers. And, yes, she had just the medicine to cure it, too.

The doctor told her family to find a place to camp for a while, until she got back. She told them she didn't know how long she would have to stay but she thought it would probably be a long time if the little boy's sickness was as bad as the father said it was.

She got into her medicine wagon and started across the prairie toward the Judson homestead, Mr. Judson following beside her in his horse. James Judson lay on a straw mattress by the fire place. His face was as white as the snow that had disappeared. The doctor, although she was asked many times, never said what was

wrong with him, acting as if it was just a stomach flu, the kind that only hot sassafras and peppermint can cure.
 She doctored the boy day and night for several weeks. It was during one night that James turned dark blue. He began to cough and breathe hard. The doctor knew his throat was going shut.

She opened the boys mouth and his throat a dark yellow, had almost gone shut. "This was something she didn't know anything about but she still doctored him.

She went to her wagon and got some very strong liquid which was hotter than fire and then painted the boys throat with this while his father held his mouth open. It opened his throat but made huge blisters. After this he never coughed and he rested better. The bad part was over and the boy would slowly get better.

The patient stayed critical for many days. His parents didn't know whether he would get better or die, but Doctor Conwell did. She never gave up to death. That was as bad as becoming a traitor to your country.

The doctor stayed with the family until the child was better and gaining weight. From here she would go to another homestead where there was more of this disease which was causing so many deaths.

One day he was well enough so she could leave him. They thanked her for coming and her reply was that she was only glad she could help them and for them to feel free to call upon her at any time. She also told them that she would come again to see how he was getting along. She left lots of medicine so they wouldn't run out and she showed them how to paint his throat. Then she got in her wagon and went down the trail to the place where her family had camped for the past weeks.

As more settlers came and built homesteads along the trail, a real doctor with a more modern medicine came and aided the people. They hardly ever paid any attention to old Mrs. Conwell. Only those she had helped came to her. They said she could do more with her old remedies than any new doctor.

Even though more settlers came and turned to the new doctor, she never stopped. She still traveled from house to house with her herbs and oils offering her services to the newcomers, too.

ALVO NOTES

Mrs. Mabelle Winn
 Phone 420

Pinochle Club

Mrs. Edith Brown entertained the Double Deck Pinochle Club Wednesday afternoon with all members present but one. Mrs. Lauree Dremer was a visitor. Mrs. Mattie Skinner won high score; Mrs. Vera Sutton second high; Mrs. Grace Brunckow low and Miss Martha Dettmer door prize. The next party will be with Mrs. Elmer Klyver Sept. 28. Mrs. Brown served a dainty lunch.

Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Klyver were Sunday dinner and lunch guests of Mrs. Mabelle Winn and Ralph.

Brunkows Move

Mr. and Mrs. Herman Brunkow attended the sale of his brother, Bill Brunkow at Murdock Friday afternoon. Mrs. Amanda Kelley also attended. The Bill Brunkows moved to Lincoln Monday where he will be employed.

Mr. and Mrs. John Hopkins of Weeping Water were Sunday afternoon visitors of John's sister and husband, Mr. and Mrs. Herman Brunkow.

Mr. and Mrs. Joe Toseka of Wahoo were Sunday afternoon visitors of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Skinner.

Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Lenning drove to Beatrice Sunday to see an aunt of Mrs. Lenning who is ill.

Polio Patient

Mrs. Bill Davis was moved from Lincoln to an Omaha hospital. Mrs. Davis has been in the hospital several weeks with polio. She is slowly improving a little.

Mr. and Mrs. Boyd Edwards, of Iowa spent the past week with his mother and brother, Talbert Edwards and family.

Mrs. Grace Copple attended the funeral of a friend, Mrs. Sarah Spohn, at Weeping Water Sunday.

Mrs. Mabel Elliott spent Monday with her son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Dale Halvorsen near Eagle.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hemke, Mr. Charles Ayers and Mrs. Clyde Henderickson left Saturday.

Edwin T. McHugh

ATTORNEY
 Office in Corn Growers State Bank
 Murdock Nebraska

Rev. Fred Gardner Elected President County Fellowship

ELMWOOD — Rev. Fred C. Gardner, pastor of the Nehawka and Weeping Water Methodist churches, was elected president of the Cass County Christian Fellowship at a meeting of the organization of all churches in the county holding services in the Evangelical United Brethren Church here Sunday evening.

Others elected were Dr. R. A. Heim, pastor of the Murdock Evangelical United Brethren church, vice-president; Rev. T. H. Kampman, pastor of the Elmwood E. U. B. church, secretary-treasurer. August Hieke was elected statistician.

The Rev. L. N. Blough, pastor of the Methodist church at Louisville, bought a message to the gathering on "Faith." Following the service a young peoples meeting was held and the business meeting.

Next meeting of the Association will be 7 p.m., Nov. 6, at Louisville Methodist church. All churches of the county are urged to take part.

Mr. and Mrs. Mart Nickel moved their household goods to Murdock Saturday where they will make their home. They have been residents of Alvo for a long time.

Mr. and Mrs. Dan Rueter attended the funeral of Mr. Herman Schewepe at Murdock Sunday afternoon.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee Stewart attended the County Fair at Weeping Water last Thursday. Sunday evening they were guests of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Stewart. Mr. and Mrs. Roy Stewart had attended the State Fair Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Brunkow, Mrs. Lloyd Brunkow from Murdock; Mr. and Mrs. Ray Willis and children from Omaha, visited Mr. and Mrs. Herman Brunkow. Mrs. Kelley went home with them to Murdock.

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ELMWOOD HIGHLIGHTS

Mrs. Dudley Leavitt Correspondent

Rev. and Mrs. N. F. Horn and Mrs. Ed Earnst attended the funeral of Vic Sowards at Ashland, Monday, Sept. 5. Burial was at Ashland. Mrs. Sowards is a niece of the late Ed Earnst, a daughter of his sister.

Back to College
 Students returning to college omitted from last week are Thomas Godby, son of Mr. and Mrs. L. D. Godby, who will be a senior at Wesleyan University, Lincoln, and John Hall, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ted Hall, sophomore at University of Nebraska.

Peru Student
 Fred Clements, son of Mr. and Mrs. Sanford L. Clements recently received his discharge from the Army at Camp Stewart, Ga. He will take his senior year at State Teachers College, Peru.

Cook Reunion
 The annual Cook reunion was held Sunday, Sept. 4, at Bethany Park in Lincoln with a gathering of from 50 to 60 relatives. Some were from Beatrice, Fairbury, Omaha, Ord and Plattsmouth. Those attending from Elmwood were Mr. and Mrs. Orest Cook, and Glori Jean; Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Cook, Mrs. Wm. Cook, Mr. and Mrs. LeRoy Cook and family.

Sharon Cook, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. LeRoy Cook, who has been employed in the record department of a store all summer, is home for a few days before returning to college.

Janet Turner, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Cloyd Turner of Ashland has been visiting her aunt, Mrs. Orest Cook, over the Labor Day weekend.

Minnesota Fishers
 The following men started at 3 a.m. Monday, Sept. 5 on a fishing trip to Minnesota: Orest P. Cook, Orley Clements, Vernon Perry and Marlon McCrory.

Dinner Guests
 Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Greene were dinner guests of the Ralph Kecklers in Weeping Water last week.

Thursday morning, Sept. 1, Mrs. Hazel Deering, sister of Mrs. Ralph Green and Mrs. Ralph Keckler, left for Norman, Okla., accompanied by Mrs. Keckler. Dick Apt has been home on a 21-day leave, staying with his grandmother, Mrs. Addie Felichman.

Summer Work
 Mrs. Howard Stege has been assisting in the Elmwood bank during the summer, as well as helping at a grocery and sometimes the variety store.

Home for Holiday
 Miss Beth Kampman, daughter of Rev. and Mrs. T. H. Kampman, was home over the Labor Day weekend returning to her college studies at Naperville, Ind.

Marilyn Mendenhall Heads Union Group

The Union Youth Fellowship met Thursday, Sept. 1, at the E. U. B. Church in Elmwood. New officers elected were, Marilyn Mendenhall, President; Joyce Miller, Vice-president; David Godby, Secretary-treasurer. The four chairman of committees are Betty Nielson, program; Iva Kay Irons, refreshment and Raylen Miller, recreation. A meeting will be held twice monthly, the second and fourth Sunday each month at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments and a social hour was held after the business meeting.

Doctor Returns
 Dr. O. E. Liston has returned from his vacation trip to California. He reports the weather not too warm. He left just before the heat wave but did not like the smog.

School Opens
 Registration and assignment to classes was the principal activities at school the first day, Monday, Sept. 5. School was dismissed at noon and the parents and friends all joined in a picnic and reception to the faculty at the Elmwood Park in the evening. This was sponsored by the P-T.A.

15th Anniversary
 Friday, Sept. 9, regular meeting of W. S. C. S. will be held in the fellowship room of the Elmwood Methodist Church, 2 p.m. This is to be an observance of the 15th birthday of the society and it is desired that all charter and long-time, as well as former members will attend. Mrs. G. R. Evland is president.

Convention Set
 The Annual Cass County Federation of Women's club convention will be held Friday, Sept. 16 at the Methodist Church in Union. Registration will be at 9 a.m. with luncheon at noon, served by Methodist W. S. C. S. Afternoon session will include services for past federated president, Mrs. G. G. Douglas, by Elmwood Bluebird club. All members and friends of this club are urged to attend this convention. Call the President Mrs. Dudley Leavitt for transportation, if desired.

United States authorities in West Germany have reported that \$571,400,000 in aid had been extended from American-owned counterpart funds to help West Berlin's economy in the last six years.

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