

A PIONEER NEWSPAPER.

Before me lie twelve torn and faded sheets, which bear the title The Omaha Arrow, and which make a complete file of the first newspaper that was published upon Nebraska soil. No. 1 is dated July 28, 1854, less than four weeks after the day when the new territory was legally opened for settlement. In many ways the Arrow illustrates the strong, self-reliant spirit of the pioneering days; it might well be said that "no gentleman's library is complete without it"; but unfortunately these old sheets are now very rare. I shall try to show something of the temper and humor of the men who managed the venture, and also something of the difficulties which opposed them and which they conquered.

The city of Omaha now holds about 150,000 people, and has all the advantages and the dignities of other cities of its size in other neighborhoods, no matter what their age may be. The citizens are proud of their home, not only because of what it now is, but also because of the strong growth it has made—a growth rapid and sure as that of a young giant. Until the 2d day of July, 1854, the site of the city was a wilderness occupied by camps of Omaha Indians. There were several reasons why the general government desired to have these lands opened for settlement, and a treaty was made with the Omahas by which they ceded their rights, and made it possible for the whites to occupy and cultivate the soil. July 2d was the date fixed for the first entry of claims. Before that time the whites had been permitted to cross the territory, en route to Utah, California, and other places in the far West, and there were some traders, missionaries, and Indian agents living here; but no white man had legal title to an acre of the ground for his own use. It was known that some of the newly opened lands were rich and very desirable, and as the day approached when entry was to occur, there were many who gathered upon the eastern bank of the Missouri river, waiting to cross.

Opposite the site of the city of Omaha stood the bustling trading village of Council Bluffs, where supplies were sold to the emigrant trains that were preparing to cross the plains, and where the pioneers of the region could buy the necessary tools, arms and provisions. At several places up and down the river were other similar towns; but at Omaha there was only a landing place for the old-fashioned ferryboats, nothing more. Yet before the month of July had passed the first number of the Omaha Arrow appeared.

An Ambitious Little Paper.

It was an ambitious little paper, as one may judge from the headline, in which it describes itself as "a family newspaper devoted to the arts, sciences,

general literature, agriculture, and politics." J. E. Johnson and John W. Pattison are named as editors and proprietors, and the following is a part of the first editorial:

Well, strangers, friends, patrons, and good people generally, wherever in the wide world your lot may be cast, here we are upon Nebraska soil, seated upon the stump of an ancient oak, which serves for an editorial chair, and the top of our badly abused beaver hat for a table, we propose editing a leader for the Omaha Arrow. An elevated table-land surrounds us; the majestic Missouri just off our left goes sweeping its muddy course down toward the Mexican gulf, while the background of the pleasant picture is filled up with Iowa's loveliest, richest scenery. Yon rich, rolling, wide-spread, and beautiful prairie, dotted with timber, looks lovely enough just now, as heaven's free sunlight touches off in beauty the lights and shades, to be literally entitled the Eden land of the world, and inspire us with flights of fancy upon this antiquated beaver; but it won't pay. There sticks our axe in the trunk of an old oak whose branches have for years been fanned by the breezes that constantly sweep from over the oft-times flower-dotted prairie lea, and from which we propose making a log for our cabin and claim.

Yonder come two stalwart sons of the forest decked in their native finery. They approach and stand before us in our sanctum. That dancing feather which adorns his head once decked the gaudy plumage of the mountain eagle. The shades of the rainbow appear on their faces. They extend the hand of friendship with the emphatic "cuggy how" (how are you, friend?), and knowing our business, request us by signs and gesticulations to write in the Arrow to the Great Father that the Omahas want what he has promised them, and they ask us also to write no bad about them. * * *

The Arrow's target will be the general interest and welfare of this highly favored, new and beautiful territory, upon which we have now for the first time established a regular weekly paper. Our cast is decidedly "young American" in spirit and politics.

The pioneering squatter and the uncivilized red men are our constituents and neighbors; the wolves and deer our traveling companions, and the wild birds and prairie vinds our musicians—more highly appreciated than all the carefully prepared concerts of earth. Surrounded by associations, circumstances, and scenes like these, what do you expect from us, anxious reader? Don't be disappointed if you do not always get that which is intelligible and polished from our pen (we mean those of the East and South; the pioneers understand our dialect). Take, therefore, what you get with a kindly heart and no grumbling. * * * We will now shoulder our axe and bid you adieu until next week.

The Editor's Sanctum.

Following this editorial was a notice: "The Arrow is published on Friday of

each week at Omaha City, Nebraska Ter. (opposite Council Bluffs), at \$2 per year in advance. For a time and until our press and fixtures arrive, it will be printed at the office of the Bugle, Council Bluffs, Iowa; to which point communications for the present may be addressed."

This was the second editorial in the same issue:

Last night we slept in our sanctum—the starry-decked heaven for a ceiling, and our mother earth for a floor. It was a glorious night, and we were tired from the day's exertions. Far away on different portions of the prairie glimmered the camp-fires of our neighbors, the Pawnees, Omahas, or that noble and too often unappreciated class of our people known as pioneers or squatters. We gathered around our little camp fire, talked of times in the past, of the pleasing present and of the glorious future which the march of civilization should open in the land whereon we sat. * * * We thought of distant friends and loved ones, who, stretched upon beds of downy ease, little appreciated the unalloyed pleasure, the heaven-blessed comfort that dwelt with us in this far-off land. No busy hum of the bustling world served to distract our thoughts. Behind us was spread our buffalo-robe in an old Indian trail which was to serve as our bed and bedding. The cool night wind swept in cooling breezes around us, deep laden with the perfume of a thousand-hued and various flowers. Far away upon our lea came the occasional long-drawn howl of the prairie wolves. Talk of comfort; there was more of it in one hour of our sanctum camp life upon Nebraska soil than in a whole life of fashionable pampered world in the settlements, and individually, we would not have exchanged our sanctum for any of those of our brethren of the press, who boast of its neatness and beauty of artful adornment. * * *

The little items of local news are quite as suggestive. Here is one:

"The Omahas are soon expected in from their hunt to prepare and dry their green corn."

There are also rumors of Indian troubles along the Western trails, and of massacres of white travelers, all recorded in a matter-of-fact way, but speaking eloquently of the wild discomfort of the time.

At that time there were, of course, no law courts upon the new soil, and the settlers had nothing to guide them save their own good will and good intentions toward one another. There is news in the first issue of the Arrow of the formation of an association among the settlers which had for its purpose the protection of the rights of its members in caring for their lands and homes. One of the by-laws of the association provided that "all persons who have families to support, or who are acting for themselves, will have protection from this association, providing they become a member of it and act in conjunction with a majority of its members." They were protected, too; and nothing more than that