

## Omaha Old Timers in Reminiscent Mood Recall Early Experiences

Some Echoes of the New Year's Reception of Pioneers of the Gate City at the Omaha Club with Photos of Some Well Known Men and Women Taken by a Staff Artist

There was nothing perfunctory in the meeting of the old settlers and their descendants of Omaha and Douglas county at the Omaha club on New Year's day. The reception tendered the pioneers of the Gate City and surrounding towns of the county elicited more genuine interest than any meeting held here for many a year. More local history was crowded into the three hours the old timers mingled together than ever was reviewed in the same length of time since the incorporation of the commonwealth. Aside from the significance of the gathering from the historian's standpoint, the reception was a memorable occasion for those who attended. Many who started the struggles of life together in the little town half a century ago, but who were since separated by the exigencies of fate and fortune, gathered together once more

there in the rooms of the club. It was at first suggested that the old timers should spend the New Year day by calling around at each other's homes; but, after consideration, it was thought that a common gathering place would be more congenial for the old settlers, who are not quite as nimble in getting around we were forty or fifty years ago," continued the doctor.

Dr. Miller's name being so closely identified with the city's growth and history, it was suggested that he tell a few of the early-day reminiscences recalled by the memorable occasion of last Monday.

"Let me see—I hardly know where to begin; there is much that might be said, so many twice-told tales, that I am afraid I had better take a week off and write a book. But you said you wanted only a page here and there from memory's sketch book, didn't you?" added the doctor.

"That is the idea," responded the visitor, who was trying to picture in his own mind the Omaha of fifty years ago.

Dr. Miller said his meeting with J. P. McPherson, now of Greenwood, on New Year's day, brought back fond recollections of the old steamboat and ferry days of Omaha. McPherson operated the first ferry across the river here.

"As I grasped McPherson's hand and looked into his eyes

river. We had a trying time with sandbars, watching the Indians at night time and cutting timbers on the islands along the way so as to keep up steam. At Fort Pierre I saw 6,000 Sioux Indians in their original and grand estate, and I don't think I have ever since saw a more impressive sight. Mrs. Miller and I were gone six weeks. And, as I remarked, all of this was flashed back as if by mental photography when I met Wagonmaster Chambers last Monday.

"I must tell you of meeting Howard T. R. Judson, son of Henry M. Judson, who was one of the original hotel men of the city. When the younger Judson met me at the Omaha club he pulled out of his pocket a card and handed it to me to see. The card bore the name of Henry M. Judson as proprietor of what was known years ago as the Herndon house, which I helped to build. Our meeting then recalled the old Hamilton house, which was located on Douglas street, and which became our general dance hall. The name of the Hamilton house became a classic in the social life of the then small town. That was—let me see—that was in the latter '50s and early '60s.

### One of the Builders Not There

"And, of course, there were other faces which brought back the Omaha of other days. The presence of N. P. Dodge, sr., and wife of Council Bluffs made me think of the absence of one member of that family, the eminent soldier and engineer of the Union Pacific railroad, Grenville M. Dodge, whose picture you see on that wall in the group with General Grant and others. For thirty years Grenville M. Dodge had much to do with the upbuilding of this trans-Mississippi country.

"And then for the afterthought as I left the gaily decorated clubroom and glanced over the electric-lighted city, teeming with monuments of man's genius and endeavor, all in mighty contrast with the humble beginnings of the years recalled by the meetings

community. I knew the elder Bouvier well and the son told me last Monday he remembered me well, although he was but a boy in the days I speak of," said the judge. He added: "My meeting with Bouvier brought to mind one occasion particularly. During 1860, when I was district attorney and Judge Wakeley was district judge, our means of amusement were limited. A coterie of court attaches arranged to give a dance at Tucker's home, on the bottom, near De Soto. There were Judge Wakeley, his clerk, Roger T. Beal; the assistant, E. A. Allen; the county officers, myself, wife and 4-months-old child and others in the merry party. We all went down in a large sled. At first we were in a dilemma in the matter of music, but Sheriff McNeely came to rescue by saying he had a prisoner, being held on a murder charge and who was an excellent fiddler. The sheriff brought his prisoner with the fiddle and we danced until after midnight. The murderer entered into the enjoyment as much as the others did. He spent the rest of the winter in jail and broke out in the spring-time and was never heard of afterward.

### Juries Were Queer Even Then.

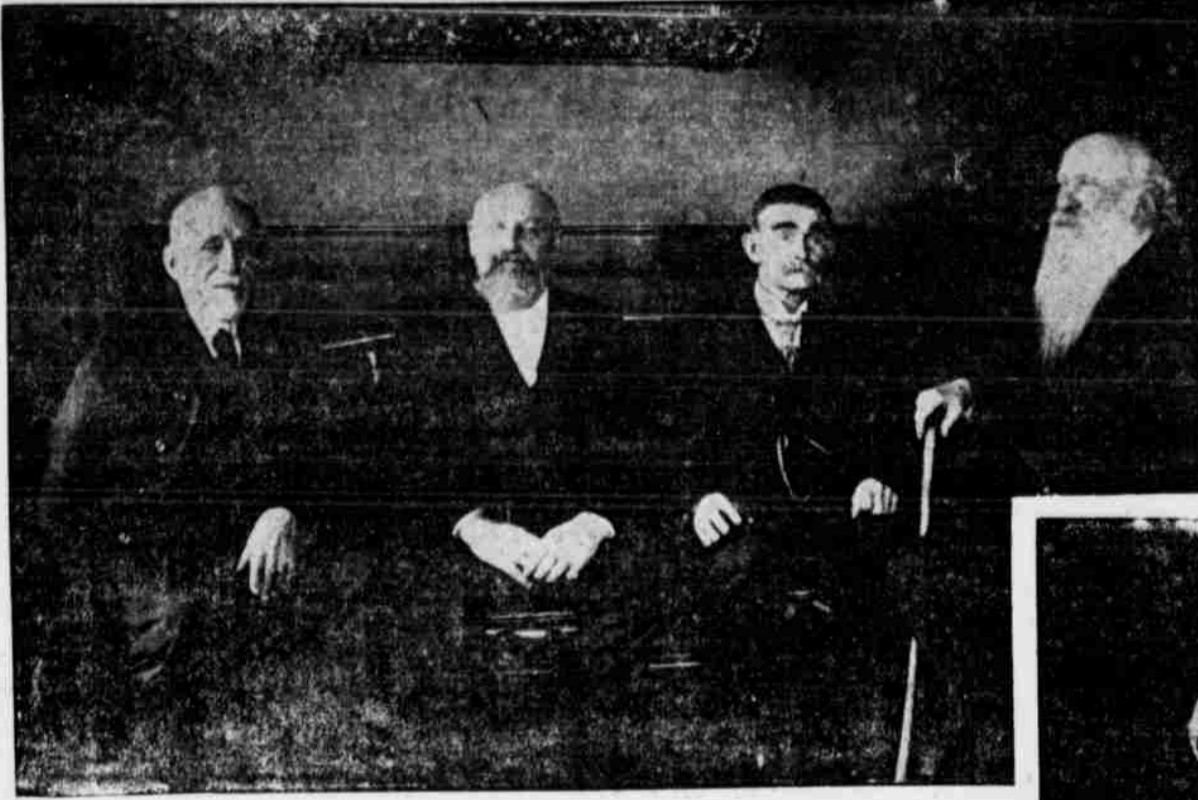
"When I returned home and began to think over the days of 'Auld Lang Syne' in my more leisure moments and in a more quiet way I thought of an amusing incident which occurred during my official service with Judge Wakeley, with whom I had an interesting chat at the reception. This circumstance happened at Ponca, where a man was on trial for assaulting with intent to kill. The hearing of the case took up a whole day. Judge Wakeley instructed the jury in a deliberate and careful manner, after which the twelve good men and true retired and spent the entire night going over the case. It was thought there would be a hung jury, but when daylight came the foreman announced the jurymen wished to see the judge. The judge having arrived, the foreman announced that he and associates had been at loggerheads all night over the question of whether the prisoner had pleaded guilty.

"And what do you suppose we were trying this case all day for if the prisoner pleaded guilty?" responded Judge Wakeley, with some slight show of impatience. The jury returned and soon brought in a verdict of guilty."

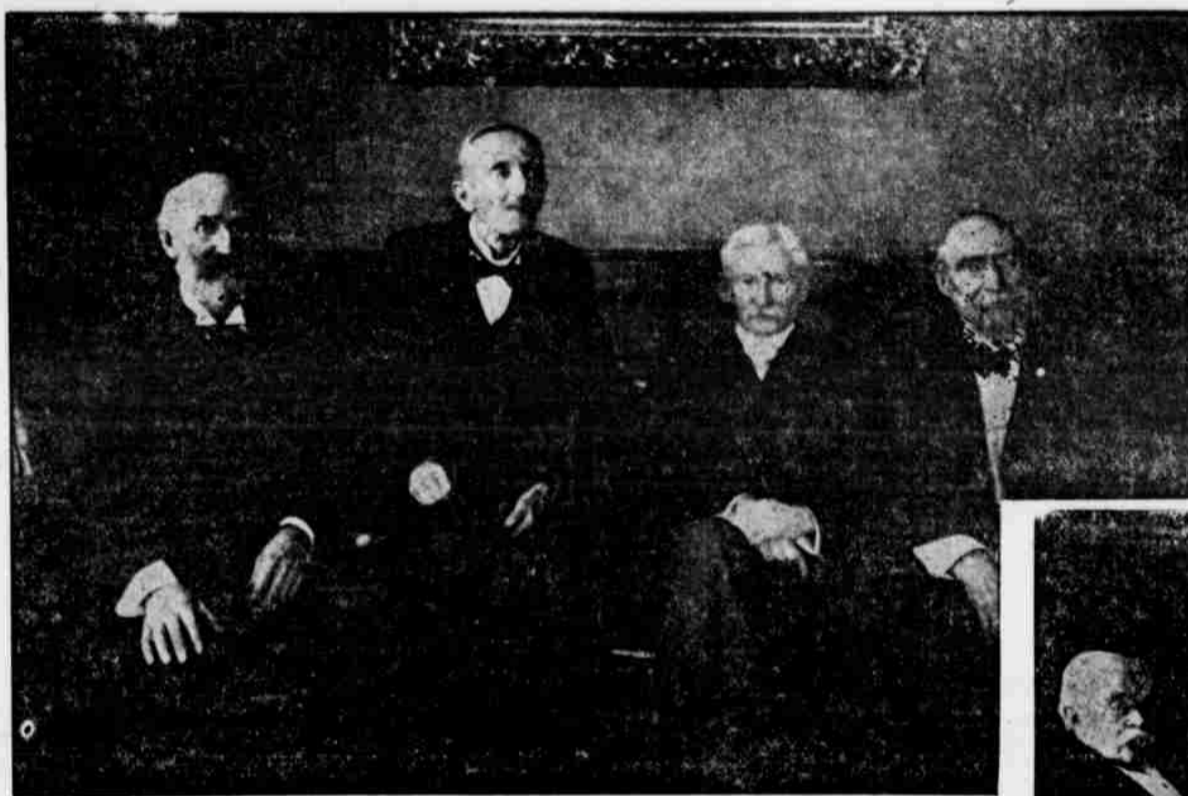
"Can you recall the first day you spent in Omaha?" was asked of the judge after he told of the pig-headed jury and the murderer who fiddled for the elite down at Tucker's.

"I was thinking of that very day when I met Tom Swift at the Omaha club last Monday. The boat on which I came to Omaha landed at what was known in those days as the 'Lone Tree landing,' a place at the foot of what is now Burd street and so-called on account of a lonely cottonwood tree, which nodded in the wind as if welcoming the newcomers to the town. Just ask any of the old-timers about the 'Lone Tree landing,'" responded the judge.

The judge explained that his meeting with Mr. Swift last Monday was the first for many years and that Swift was the man who hauled



JOSEPH REDMOND, JAMES STEPHENSON, C. J. EVANS, COLONEL E. D. PRATT.



D. T. MOUNT, D. C. SUTHPHEN, THOMAS A. CREIGH AND DR. O. S. WOOD.



COLONEL J. H. PRATT, CHARLES TURNER, H. A. KOSTER, S. D. BOUVIER.

last Monday as a happy family and glanced down the vistas of the half-forgotten years.

The meeting was in every respect a representative one, albeit many of the old settlers have passed to their rewards, while others have established themselves in places far remote from the scenes of their earlier activity. The surprise was that so many who had passed the three-score and four-score marks in the cycle of life were able to respond to the invitations sent out and assembled to recall the days of steamboats and the arrival of the first railroad train.

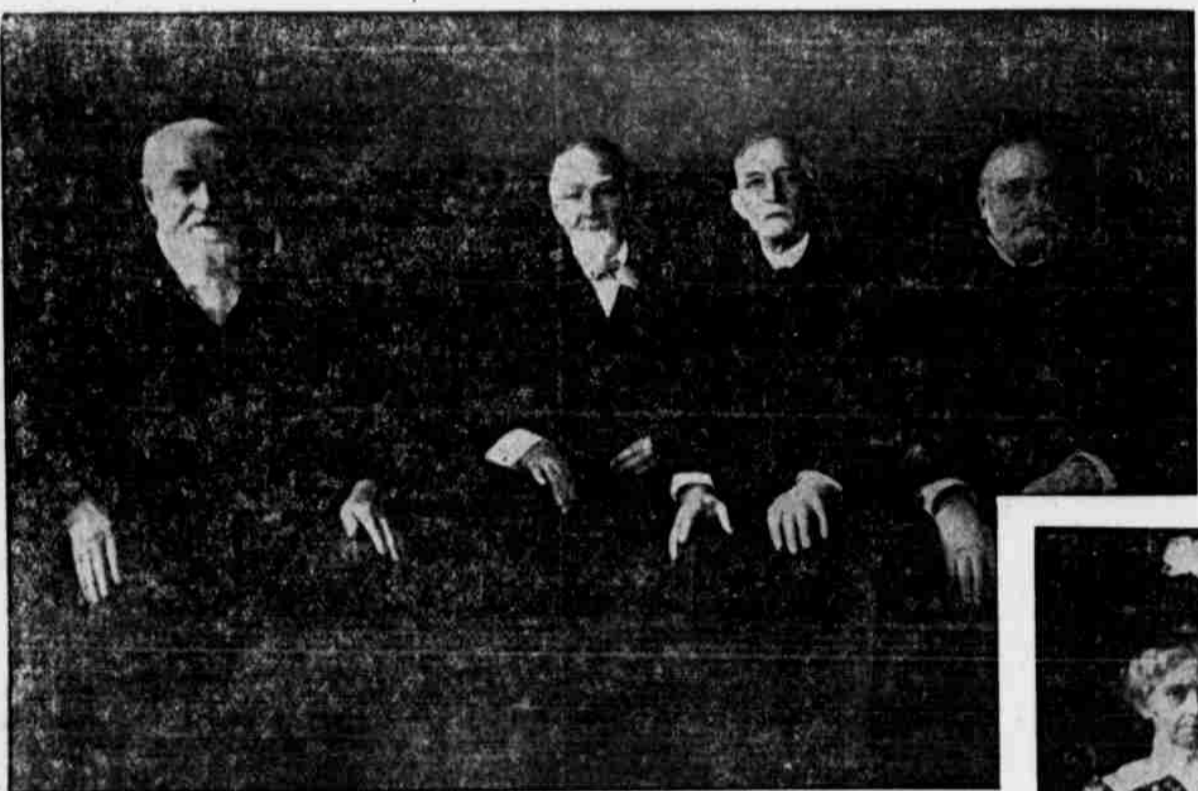
Omaha's growth during the last half century has been such as to make the reminiscences of last Monday of peculiar value. Many of those at the reception could recall with vivid accuracy the early struggles with the Indians, the thrill which went through every heart when the first steam locomotive blazed the way for the far-sighted pathfinders and the luxuries and comforts which followed with advancing civilization.

Before the reception at the club was proposed it was suggested that the old timers have a real old-time New Year celebration, such as might have been in vogue in the days when the homes were clustered together as in a hamlet and the ties which bound the citizens were equally as close. But such a scheme was soon deemed impracticable, as the old settlers are not as nimble in getting around today as when Samuel Burns made forty New Year calls in his sleigh in one day, many, many years ago. So the happy

I imagined I could see a steamer coming up the river as it did in the olden days, when the arrival of a pack-et boat from the south was the occasion for a gathering at the landing. We had no railroads then, so the occasional arrival of a boat was of as much interest to us then as the appearance of a circus parade is to the small boys of today," stated Dr. Miller. "The arrival of two boats; the same day was the signal for a general jollification. Usual the steamer's whistles would blow as the craft came near, and the aptain would proudly be at his station on the quarter deck. Frequently the captains would tender us the use of the boat for an evening for a dance, on which occasions the belles and beaux would gather from Omaha and Council Bluffs and make merry. Those occasions were considered social luxuries. We were all neighborly then and lived as one large family, being far removed from contact with other communities. Then the steamboat and ferry days passed away with the advent of the railroad lines.

### Judges in Those Pioneer Days

Judge Doane declared the old settlers' reception one of the most enjoyable functions he has attended for many years. "There were people there I had not met for twenty years; some I had hardly remembered by name, while others brought back to my mind fond recollections of the pioneer days." Judge Doane came to Omaha by boat, arriving here on April 21, 1857. On the boat with the judge was Judge Wakeley, who came from St. Louis, while Mr. Doane embarked at a nearer point up the river. Judge Wakeley was the pioneer judge at the reception, having been appointed by President Pierce in 1857. Judge Doane was district attorney of the Third Judicial district during Judge Wakeley's term on the bench in the very early days. Both attended the reception



WILLIAM DALL, P. L. PERRINE, HARRY GILMORE, CAPTAIN H. B. PALMER.

idea of meeting together on the community of interest plan was devised and most successfully carried out. The only qualification needed at the old settlers' reception was "are you an old settler or a descendant of one and in good standing?" Hand grasped hand and hearts beat lightly in a most delightful manner. Many declared they felt years younger after leaving the Omaha club.

### Reminiscent Recollections Numerous

During the festivities one old settler would come across the man who drove him from the steamer at the Lone Tree landing to a boarding place, nearly fifty years ago. Another would recall to an old friend his first ride in a street car in Omaha, the car in question having been drawn by a mule along Farnam street, from Fifteenth to Ninth streets. Some recalled the first real New Year's celebration in Omaha, the one held by Governor and Mrs. Cuming at the executive mansion, then at Nineteenth and Dodge streets. Henry A. Koster, who will be 89 years of age on Washington's birthday anniversary, next month, said he remembered meeting Dr. Miller on the streets of Syracuse, N. Y., during 1855, when the doctor told Mr. Koster about Omaha and induced him to come out and grow up according to Horace Greely's method. Mr. Koster did come, and started in by painting a house for A. J. Hanson at Fourteenth and Douglas streets, the first house painted here by the venerable painter. One of the pioneers told of the first shipment of anthracite coal to Omaha. The consignment came by steamer and sold for \$50 per ton.

### Dr. Miller's Memories

"As I mingled with the old timers at the Omaha club on New Year's day, visions of the early days in Omaha passed through memory's halls like a mighty panorama," remarked Dr. George L. Miller as he sat in his easy chair the other afternoon and closed his eyes in a reminiscent mood. "Scenes and memories of the bygone days were conjured one by one by the sight of a face here and

Well, never mind—I just like to call him Wagonmaster Chambers—as I said, when I met Wagonmaster Chambers one of the most impressive chapters of my early life in Omaha was instantly recalled to mind. Shall I tell you of the early associations clustering around the name of Chambers?"

A nod of assent was the signal for the doctor to proceed.

"While Wagonmaster Chambers did not figure to any great extent in this experience of mine, yet such was his personal characteristics that his name became one to conjure with when recalling old times. Chambers was wagonmaster under Captain P. T. Turnley when the captain brought four boat loads of troops up the river from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Pierre under orders of General Harney, who wanted the troops concentrated at Fort Pierre, where a meeting was held with the Sioux Indians. The boats tied up at the Council Bluffs landing, fourteen miles down the river, and the captain hurried up alone to Omaha and sought my two-room cottage. Some of the soldiers had been stricken with cholera and the captain needed a surgeon. He was directed to me. That was in June, 1855. I agreed to join Captain Turnley, so I made the trip, Mrs. Miller accompanying me on the perilous journey. In those days navigation above Sioux City was little thought of on the

and recalled between themselves and others many of the old-time experiences and incidents characteristic of early Omaha.

For some time Judge Wakeley lived at De Soto, then the county seat of Washington county, but now a cornfield, while Judge Doane lived not far away, near Calhoun. The presence of S. D. Bouvier at the reception and his chat with Judge Doane awakened old memories in the mind of the judge.

"Mr. Bouvier and I talked of the days when De Soto was the social and commercial center of that com-



MRS. BYRON REED, MRS. ALFRED SORENSON, MRS. HETH, MRS. DEWEY.



MRS. EPENETER, SUSAN ARTMAN, MARY C. FRENZER, MRS. FRED LANG.