

## JOHN HICKEY WHO CUT WILD HAY ON FARNAM STREET

Another Irish Lad Who Ventured Across the Ocean to Find His Future and Life's Work in a Land He Helped to Redeem from the Wilderness and Who Has Prospered with Nebraska.

JOHN HICKEY once mowed hay on Farnam street, between Tenth and Fourteenth streets. He first marked out the boundaries of that now busy thoroughfare by plowing a furrow along each side after he had mowed the hay and gathered it into two rows of haycocks. Of course, all this was long ago—back in 1854, when he arrived in Omaha penniless. Today Mr. Hickey, 74 years old, and worth a few hundred thousand dollars, is living near Gretna, Neb. His career is full of events and his keen, witty Irish mind has preserved the memory of them with all the humor of their small details.

He was born in Parish Lochlin, County Carlow, Ireland, in 1833. His father had a farm of twelve acres, where farming was carried on in the summer. In the winter he hauled coal from the coal mines to the towns in a cart and thus managed to gain a living for his large family. John was 9 years old when a number of the neighbors began to prepare to go to America. The boy begged his father to let him accompany them, pointing out that there would be one less mouth to feed and that he might gain a goodly portion of the wealth which was so abundant in America. Eventually he gained his point, the 50 shillings were scraped together to pay his passage and he sailed with the party from New Ross on the ship *Empire*. The passage was a stormy one, requiring seven weeks and three days. The ship was old and scarcely seaworthy. The boy had failed to bring food, as the other passengers had done, and he was compelled by the captain to do hard labor for his board.

The ship arrived finally at Quebec, where the boy immediately began to look about for something to do. No one wanted to hire a mere child in the city and he searched long before he finally secured a place as an apprentice in a cooperage. He remained there three years as apprentice and then worked one year as a journeyman. Then he went to Montreal, where he worked as a gardener and driver for a French woman of means. After a short time there he determined, contrary to the advice of his employer, to go out into the backwoods and work in the logging camps. He did so, working for Farewell Bros., who were building a ship on the St. Lawrence river. Here his skill as a cooper netted him results, for he was able to make axe handles and therefore received the munificent salary of \$18 a month, while plain woodchoppers received only \$8.50. Subsequently he went to Buffalo, N. Y., and worked two summers in a cooperage, spending the intervening winters in the logging camps near Prince Albert, Hamilton and Toronto.

### Not a Life for Hickey.

"But," he says, "I kept looking at the poverty of the woodsmen. I saw them working there for nothing and I saw them coming out of the woods greyheaded and humpbacked and sure, thinks I, 'tis no place for me."

Just as this time he heard of the Nebraska treaty with the Indians and the opening up of that territory. He set his face toward the far west and went by boat over the lakes to Chicago, which was only a village then. "I'd like to 've broken me legs in the mud in Chicago," he says. Thence he went by railroad to Rock Island, Ill. From there he pushed westward in the stage, but at Iowa City found himself without money. Fortunately, there was a cooperage establishment there and he secured employment. After saving \$25 he continued to the west, theoretically by stage, but really on foot.

"They had old horses in the stage," he says. "We had to get out at the hills and walk, to say nothing of pushing now and then. At last the blooming stage broke through a temporary bridge. I left it then and walked ahead. Sure, and it was three days before the stage caught up with me."

"I arrived in Council Bluffs finally and then I thought sure I was out west. One of the first things I saw was Bill Clancy driving a team of six elks that he'd caught and broken to harness out on the plains."

After viewing this odd sight he passed on, heading toward the Missouri river. Soon he beheld a man coming toward him running. "Where are you going?" asked Hickey when the man was within halting distance.

"None of your business. I'm going where I please," was the quick reply.

"But he didn't go where he pleased," says Mr. Hickey, "for just at that minute the sheriff appeared behind him riding a fast horse. He caught the fine rascal. The man swore at the sheriff something awful and said he wasn't going to stay in jail without tobacco. The sheriff said if he'd stay in the jail and not break out again he'd see that he got tobacco. The man said he would and away they went back to the place they called the jail in Council Bluffs then."

### His Start in Omaha.

Arriving at last at the Missouri river young Hickey looked across to see Omaha. Where he had expected to see a thriving settlement he saw nothing but Indians. A man named Higley ran a ferry across the river. Because of Indians on the west bank Higley left his ferry each night on the Iowa side and returned to his home on the Nebraska side in a skiff. Hickey went over with him in the skiff, paying his last shilling for his passage. Where Omaha was alleged to be he found nothing but a village of half a dozen rude huts. It was as desolate as the northern woods and the young man had no friends and no money. "Kentucky" Woods owned one of the shacks and also a big heart. To him Hickey went.

"Do you want some supper?" asked Woods.

"Yes, but I've no money," said Hickey.

"It's all right. You'll have money some time," was the reply. Woods took him in, fed him and gave him a place to sleep.

Hickey hunted everywhere for employment, but in vain. He could have gone to Florence and worked as driver for the Mormons, but this he didn't want to do. One day he met a tall man out on the prairie. He looked like an Indian.

"Can you talk English?" asked Hickey.

"Yes, I went to school in Washington," was the reply.

"What do you do for a living?" asked Hickey.

"I hunt," said the tall man.

"I'll hunt with you," said Hickey. And so he became a hunter with the Indian, who was a half-breed, and the two roamed the plains together until the appropriation was made for building the territorial capitol. Then business opened up and Hickey secured other employment. He was well acquainted with Acting Governor T. B. Cuming and knows a little about the details of bringing the \$50,000 of gold to pay for the new capitol to Omaha.

### Story of the Kegs of Gold.

"Governor Cuming sent me down to the river to cut the ice away from the banks," he said. "I'd not finished when he came along in an old wagon without any endgate and his brother-in-law, Mike Murphy, with him. They went over the ice to Council Bluffs and late in the afternoon they returned. They had two small iron-bound kegs in the wagon. As they were driving up the west bank the kegs slipped out of the wagon and rolled down the bank and onto the ice. Both of the men had been drinking and they never noticed when the kegs slid out. Well, I knew each keg contained \$25,000 in coin. I rolled them across the ice to the Iowa side and buried them in the snow among the willows."

"Next morning I was at the river when the governor comes down. He looks around quite awhile. I could see he was considerably troubled. Finally says he to me: 'Johnny, have you seen anything of two small kegs?' 'What kegs?' says I. 'But me face gave me away. When he saw I knew about the kegs he looked a lot relieved. I took him over the ice and showed him where I'd buried the kegs. They came with a wagon and got them. And, would you believe it, I never got a nickle for saving them \$50,000. That's the fact."

"It was before this time that I'd mowed the hay on Farnam street. It was a good crop and I had two rows of haycocks down the



JOHN HICKEY.

middle of the street, from Fourteenth to Tenth. After it was cut I took the plow and sort of graded the street, plowing a furrow down each side. The ground was hard and I remember I had to put on an extra horse to do the job."

He was in the personal employ of Governor Cuming for a while and then worked on the capitol building. Water had to be hauled from the river to make the mortar. Just before Governor Cuming left for a trip to the east he arranged with Hickey to dig a well. This Hickey did for \$350. It was seventy-eight feet deep and had seven feet of water. It was in use for many years. Seen after this he went with William Paxton to Texas and brought cattle to Omaha.

He spent seven years in freighting from the Missouri river to Pike's Peak and to Utah points. He also was one of the early gold miners in California, but made more money in trading than in mining. He was associated with William Morrison, another Omaha pioneer, in some of these enterprises. Mr. Hickey saw for the first time the woman who, after an exciting courtship and after various vicissitudes, he won for his wife. The two young men were riding past the pioneer hut of Jonathan Edwards, located near Forest City.

"A bit of a grove of elms up the gulch was the 'forest' and three or four houses were the 'city,'" explains Mr. Hickey. As they passed this but a handsome young woman was drawing a bucket of water from the well.

"I nodded my head toward the young woman and says I to Bill, 'There's the girl I'm going to marry,'" relates Mr. Hickey, as he has proudly related the story a thousand times. "Says Bill to me, 'Don't talk that way. Who are you to be thinking of marrying the daughter of General Edwards?' They called him 'general' and the Edwardses were the aristocracy of the town all right. The young woman was the school teacher for the district and a girl of great education. I was nothing but an ignorant, rough freighter, without any money or anything else. But I meant what I said."

On March 10, 1855, Mr. Hickey married this girl, who was Miss Rhoda B. Edwards. The marriage was clandestine, for the parents of the bride were unalterably opposed to the match. The groom was so poor that he even had to borrow a pair of shoes from a friend, Mike Langdon.

"I had our little elopement all arranged with Rhoda," he says.

"We started out to get me wife late in the evening and drove up to the Edwards house about midnight. Everybody was asleep. I got out, carrying a heavy blanket I'd brought along, for the weather was bitter cold. She was waiting for me at the window. I can see her now, looking so sweet and trusting. First she handed me out her bit of trunk and then I received her, me heart beating hard all the time for fear the old folks would wake up, Mrs. Edwards being a light sleeper altogether. I wrapped me wife in a shawl and took the trunk on me shoulder as if it was naught but a cigar box. Back we went to the wagon and drove away to the squire's. He had instructions that we'd be along and he married us right away. We stayed there the rest of the night as his guests. Next day we went out to my claim on the Santee bluffs and began housekeeping."

The anger of the parents of the bride was great when they found that their only daughter had married the rough freighter. For months it was rather a grim joke about the community that General Edwards was "laying" to shoot his unwelcome son-in-law at sight. But eventually a reconciliation was brought about when the son-in-law had proven that he was worthy of the girl. While the young people were still living in their log home Mr. Hickey built a pretty frame house nearby, in which his parents-in-law lived.

### Trials of a Young Wife.

Mr. Hickey and his children and friends never cease singing the praises of this cultured young woman who underwent the hardships of the pioneer life there on the lonely claim. Money was so scarce that the husband had to leave the farm and go to work. He had no horses at the start and was accustomed to walk twenty-two miles to a place where he had employment. His young wife remained alone in the cabin, surrounded by Indians. One day while the husband was gone two big Indian bucks came in to the cabin. They demanded meat and to enforce the weight of their demands one of them grasped the young child in its cradle by the hair and flourished a knife above its head. "Scalp baby if no give meat," he said. Of course, the terrified woman did the only thing there was to do, gave up the precious store of meat and lived as best she could until her husband's return.

But the time of vengeance came duly. Mr. Hickey was at home one day when two bucks arrived on one of their predatory expeditions. He was at some distance from the house, cutting wood. The bucks made sure he was not at home and then proceeded, according to their habit, to ransack the little home and terrorize the occupants. While this interesting little proceeding was going on Mr. Hickey appeared over the hill and, answering the gesticulations of his wife, who had been watching for him, he hurried to the cabin. The bucks were too much engrossed in eating and plundering to notice his approach. Just as he came up to the house they saw him and ran. He reached inside the door, where a rifle stood loaded, and a moment later the fleeing redmen dropped in their tracks.

### Indians Always Remembered.

The Indians had received no more than they merited, but still the pioneers were haunted with a fear of terrible vengeance. Only a few miles away there was a camp where hundreds of Indians lived. Would they come to find the missing and if they came what would they do when they found them dead? But time passed and no one demanded to know what had become of the braves whom Hickey had shot and later had buried side by side during the night. Nevertheless, the Indians knew well who it was that had shot their brethren. A year later they had not forgotten it. At that time Mrs. Hickey was in Forest City when a squaw came in with her papoose. This she exhibited proudly to a small crowd of the settlers. Mrs. Hickey pressed forward and begged to have a look at the baby. Then the Indian woman's manner changed suddenly. She looked angry. "No," she exclaimed, snatching the baby to her breast. "Not show papoose to smoky man's wife. Smoky man kill Injun. Puff, puff."

Illustrative of their poverty in those days is the fact that Mr. Hickey made three trips from his home to Omaha to tell the postmaster here to hold a letter which was addressed to him, but which he had not been able to get because he lacked the 25 cents due on it for postage.

Mr. and Mrs. Hickey had eight children, of whom six are living. They are: Timothy D. Hickey, a farmer near Gretna; John Hickey, Jr., a rancher in Sioux county, Nebraska; Mrs. Mary Winter of Adrian, Mich.; Mrs. Mary Novotny, who lives on a farm near Gretna; Edward Hickey of Gretna and Roy Hickey, who is in the hardware business in Hemingford, Box Butte county, Nebraska. Mrs. Hickey died in 1901.

Mr. Hickey is still in excellent health, though confined to a chair on account of a broken hip, which he sustained a year ago. He lives at present with his daughter, Mrs. Novotny, near Gretna. He owns 1,440 acres of land in Sappy county worth \$100 an acre and 2,500 acres in Box Butte county.

## Southern Tobacco Growers Gain Victory Over Trust

IN Kentucky and Tennessee, along the southern boundary of the one and the northern boundary of the other—the border of the famed blue grass region—are twenty-odd counties whose chief product is "dark" tobacco, so called because of its color and texture. This tobacco is peculiar to the locality, as much so as is the celebrated Perique tobacco of Louisiana, whose growth is confined to a single parish; or to the fragrant leaf which flourishes only in Cuba's Vuelta-Abajo district.

The section which produces this dark tobacco is known as the "Black Patch," and over it one of the hardest fought of all the savage wars of peace has now staggered to a finish—a war between the producers of the crops and that formidable antagonist, the American Tobacco trust.

Victory rests with the planters. The foe has stacked arms and surrendered. The net result is that whereas three short years ago the tobacco grower, cultivating his crop on the slimmest margin of profit, and forced to take such prices as the trust offered, having most always to seek a purchaser, now has the purchaser seeking him—or, more accurately, the head of his association and with whom the vast majority of the planters have pooled their issue. And the purchaser is now paying 20 cents where he formerly paid 6 cents, and is glad that the association lets him off at that.

Three years ago the leaf tobacco of the district brought an average of 6 cents a pound. That was the exact cost of raising it. This condition had obtained ever since the Tobacco trust had entered the field to stifle competition and to cut profits of the planters. Its own profits were, of course, increased in the ratio that the planters' profits were decreased.

They rebelled. And out of that rebellion grew an organization—a cohesive and defiant body, a confederacy of planters which, through the untiring efforts of its indomitable leader, gained the support of the forty banks scattered throughout the district, these agreeing to tide over the immediate necessities of all members of the association. With that assurance the crops were stored

in central warehouses, and thus barricaded the flag of no surrender was run up and nailed to the mast.

Ensued a struggle as bitter as the one which brought that awful hemorrhage of '61. While the majority of the planters had become members of the association, there were many who held aloof, some for one reason, some for another. Naturally came estrangements and bitterness. Barns were burned, warehouses dynamited and there were other deeds of violence to mar this fairest of all fair regions.

But it should be strongly emphasized that the association never countenanced any of these regrettable occurrences. Nor has it ever been proved that association members were guilty of felonious deeds. It is known as the Tobacco Planters' Protective association, and its leader, Mr. Felix G. Ewing, who is now an invalid in this city, having worn himself into sickness over the cause which he had espoused, again and again impressed his followers, by speech and by letters, that the association would countenance no deed of violence, and that the association would itself prosecute any member guilty of such deed.

The inception and growth of the movement which resulted in the overthrow of one of the greatest trusts in America is in itself an absorbing chapter. The tobacco produced in the Black Patch is used more extensively abroad than it is in this country, its usual exportation to England, France, Germany, Italy and Austria, exceeding the exportation from all of the other tobacco-growing regions of the republic. It was the staple crop of the regions and up to the time that the trust appeared upon the scene it had been a very profitable one to the planters.

The trust came, that is, its agents did; the independent buyer was forced from the field, and the prices which had been kept normal by the competition of the independent purchasers dropped lower and lower—the margin of profit grew less and less, until in 1903 the price of the tobacco just balanced with the cost of its production. The method of the trust was to divide the tobacco growers into various small territories, to each of

which certain buyers for the trust were assigned. If the planter did not want to accept the pittance which the buyer offered he knew that the tobacco would rot on his hands, as there was no competitor to offer a higher price. That the American Tobacco company, the Continental Tobacco company, the Imperial Tobacco company and the Regie contractors of Europe had entered into a criminal combination was brought out by Representative Stanley before the house committee, when he secured an indictment of the American Tobacco company.

The foreign companies, whose agents, Mr. Stanley asserted, had entered into the combine, were purchasers for Italy, Australia, England, France and Spain. But up to 1903 there was still an open market, this being the German port of Bremen. The method which the trust adopted to kill off the independent buyers who had been sending their purchases to this port was related to the house committee by Mr. R. E. Cooper, a warehouse commission sales agent of Hopkinsville, Ky.

"We sent to Bremen, which had been an open market heretofore, until last year, a quantity of tobacco to sell in the open market there. This year the American Tobacco company, when we shipped our tobacco to Bremen, took from its reserve a quantity of tobacco and put it on the market at cost. I was one of the unfortunates. We put our tobacco on the Bremen market expecting to have a sale for it, but instead the American Tobacco company put its tobacco on the market there in opposition, and sells it at prime cost here—just what it cost, without any freight or expenses; and it cost us 2 1/2 cents a pound to ship tobacco and sell it in Bremen, to pay the expenses of it. The American Tobacco company threw its tobacco on the market and just knocked ours out entirely—at a tremendous loss to the American Tobacco company, of course, but while they can stand the loss, we cannot. We have our tobaccos in Bremen today and we cannot sell them."

The independent buyer was forced to retire from the field. He could not compete financially with the American Tobacco company and its foreign allies.

Such was the situation when Mr. Felix Grundy Ewing sent out an invitation to a few of his former friends of Robertson county asking them to meet him at his home, Glenraven, Tenn., for the purpose of discussing the tobacco situation. The best price which the farmers could then obtain for their tobacco was 6 cents a pound. That was the actual cost of raising it. The "sense of the meeting" was that the situation had become intolerable and that the only way in which relief could be obtained was to form an organization to fight that other organization—the American Tobacco trust and its foreign constituents.

Mr. Ewing was chosen head of the incipient order and at once set about the formidable task of combating the powerful foe. With indefatigable energy he entered into the contest, made many speeches in many different localities, and then burned the midnight oil over correspondence, circulars and newspaper work. The purpose of the campaign was to enroll all the planters and to bind them to an agreement to place all of their tobacco in the hands of a central committee.

Mr. Ewing came to New York and sought aid of the big financiers of this city. They listened coldly and refused to have anything to do with what they considered a Utopian dream. But still stout of heart, Mr. Ewing returned south with the determination of trying to effect another organization—that of the local banks. His earnestness and energy won. The banks, about forty in number, entered into an agreement to see the farmers through in their battle with the trust, pledging themselves to advance money to the amount of three-fourths of the value of all crops grown by association members.

On the heels of this announcement came a great increase in membership. Every week added scores of new members, and now the membership includes 27,000 bona fide planters, these controlling more than 80 per cent of all the tobacco crops grown in the "Black Patch." And it expects to control during the spring of 1908 fully 60,000 hogheads of tobacco, and at the advance reached this year of from 6 to 20 cents per pound.—New York Times.