1930

Memories of the Old West

Thaddeus J. Foley

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A Letter from Mr. Link

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
LINCOLN

CONSERVATION AND SURVEY DIVISION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

STATE ACTIVITIES
- Soil Survey
- Geological Survey
- Industrial Survey
- State Forester
- Information Bureau
- Photography and Film Service

Mr. Thaddeus J. Foley
Marshfield Hills, Mass.

Dear Mr. Foley:

This department of the University of Nebraska is trying to determine the origin of all place names in this State. We intend to issue a bulletin by this department containing the information gathered in order to preserve the names of the early settlers of this State.

We have been informed that Foley Lake in Grant County was named for you. Is this correct? Was it named by the early settlers or ranchmen or by some person in particular?

We are,

Very truly yours,

J. T. Link,
Conservation and Survey,
Station A,
Lincoln, Neb.

The above letter and the insistence of Mr. Link for more stories lead the writer to send to him the following stories:
The boy had saved enough to buy a ticket from New York to Omaha, and there he was, in a strange country with no acquaintances to whom he could look for help or advice, and badly in need of a job. For a time the prospects appeared most dubious, but there must be truth in that old saying, "Fortune favors the brave," for the very afternoon of his arrival the boy got work which would take him to the western part of Nebraska. After paying his hotel bill he had just fifty cents left on which to base his career. With a party of ten he left Omaha immediately. Ten weeks later, the work on which they had been employed by the Government completed, all hands were in town waiting for their pay checks.

The only loafing place, aside from the twenty or more saloons, was an eating-house and general store owned by Major L—, a former major of artillery in the Army of the Tennessee known as the "Flying Dutchman."

Major L— was a brave and courageous man, well able to take care of himself in a new country. At the close of the Civil War, with many others he had drifted West, had seen the opportunity and had prospered. After he had been there awhile, finding himself in need of a housekeeper, he had visited a Mormon train then in camp and en route to Salt Lake. Here he picked out a wife from the five hundred or more women destined for Utah. Before the elders consented to the
marriage, however, they investigated the character of the Major, his circumstances and position, and considered whether he might be of service to the cause—for in those days, under the leadership of that great pioneer, Brigham Young, it was the hope of the church that all that country beyond the Missouri would be dominated by the Mormon faith.

On the particular morning referred to, the party of ten were seated on empty boxes in the store when they observed the Major going around with his right arm in a sling. Approaching a desk, he attempted to write with his left hand an address on a tag he was preparing to place on a box for shipment. While the men commented on the awkwardness of the Major’s efforts, the boy stepped forward and offered to do the writing. Then he carried the box to the depot, returning with the receipt.

“How much I owe you?” asked the Major.

“Why, nothing,” said the boy. “I was glad to do it.”

A young clerk had been around telling that he had had his fill of the West and was leaving for Norfolk, Virginia, that evening. The boy thought that here was his chance.

“How about a job, Major L—?” he asked.

“Yah,” said the Major, without hesitation, “I hire you.”

Thus, in the party of ten, all—with the exception of two engineers—looking for work, the boy was the only one to land a job. Removing his cap, he stepped behind the counter, ready for business. When customers came in the boy, ignorant of prices, appealed to the Major, who good-humoredly gave the needed information. Later, the boy was told that an emigrant train from the West would arrive at two o’clock and to be there when it stopped to solicit business for the eating-house. This particular train had been put on to give early settlers in California a chance to go East for the first time by rail at reduced rates. It was, therefore, unusually well patronized.

There was a bitter rivalry between the railroad eating-house and the Major’s establishment, and bad feeling had existed for a long time. It seems the railroad company owned all the land for two hundred feet on each side of the track, and the Major had been warned to keep off. This he refused to do, and the company had sent out a detective and gunman from Omaha to prevent trespassing. He and the Major met one day, and the latter came away with a bullet in his arm. This explained his keeping the arm in the sling.

The Major, therefore, cautioned the boy to “keep his eyes peeled” and be on the lookout for the runner from the Railroad House. By good luck the train stopped directly in front of the Major’s on this day, and as a result the receipts were $147, an unusually good amount.

That night, when the time came for retiring, the boy asked Mrs. L— where he would find a bed. She turned on him with disgust.

“Where are your blankets?” she asked. Since the previous job had made blankets a necessity, he was well equipped, and soon produced them; whereupon the woman opened a door, and said, “Here’s your room.”

Not a single article of furniture was in the room, not even a chair; but the blankets were rolled out and, thankful for the job, the boy accepted the situation and slept peacefully. The next morning he got an early start in the store with brooms and dusters, and this routine continued for a week or more.

The Railroad House, dissatisfied with their share of patronage, about that time reduced the price of meals from $1.00 to 75 cents. With great disgust the Major
met the price, but in a few days he had more cause for complaint, for he was startled to hear: “This way to the Railroad House, best meals for 25 cents.” The Major became anxious and, calling the boy, said: “See what they give for 25 cents. You go in with the emigrants; sit with them, and tell me all.”

Obediently joining the crowd, the boy was comfortably seated at the table, when the proprietor spied him and, walking over, took him firmly by the collar and led him to the door.

“When I want you, I’ll send for you,” he said, with a parting shove.

Crestfallen and humiliated, the boy returned to the Major, and related the experience. As he proceeded the Major became more and more infuriated.

“Did you kill him?” he finally demanded, ferociously.

“No.”

“Then I fix him!”—and, making rapid strides to a drawer, the Major pulled out a revolver, and started for the door.

The boy hurried to intercept him, and grasping his arm, begged him not to go, insisting that the proprietor of the Railroad House was justified in his action and not harsh in his treatment, and after a time succeeded in quieting the Major and taking away his revolver.

There was little harmony between the Major and his wife. She was always in a hurry to count the cash after the departure of the trains. One day, during the Major’s absence, business was particularly good, the receipts amounting to $200. On his return the Major went to the money drawer and, finding it nearly empty, asked where the money was. On being told that his wife had taken it he went in search of her, and presently from another room there came the sounds of angry voices, in which the Major could be heard accusing his spouse of having taken the money so that she might leave him and join her friends in Salt Lake. After that she came into the store, and heaped such a tirade of abuse on the boy’s head for telling the Major that he had no alternative but to quit his job. Before he left, however, the Major said, “Put on your cap, and come with me.” The boy followed him to a vacant store near by, where the Major turned to him and said, “How you like this?”

“All right,” said the boy.

“I start you in business,” proposed the Major.

“What business?” asked the boy.

“Saloon business,” said the Major.

“No, Major, thank you,” was the reply; “I would not go into the saloon business.”

The Major seemed crestfallen; nevertheless, they parted good friends. Out of work again, the boy applied to the “enemy” at the Railroad House for a job, which he took, with the understanding that he would not be required to go to the trains in competition with his old boss.

This position lasted six weeks. Then a job was secured from the railroad company to wipe an engine on a gravel train out on the line. In this capacity he was employed for two months, when he succeeded in getting a job firing a locomotive. In three months trade slackened on the road, and the engine crew was laid off. The boy was out of a job again, but with $400, the savings of fourteen months, laid by, it was not so bad. One month alone he had received a check of $116 for firing his iron horse.

Not knowing where next to turn, he had about decided to return to the East when he heard of a young man in the shops who was planning to get funds from Ohio to locate on a homestead near Lincoln, where a great rush was going on for Government land. Here was a chance which appealed to the boy. He looked the young man up, made arrangements to throw in with
him, and the next morning found him in the old Pacific House in Omaha.

On being shown to their rooms for the night, and closing the door, they discovered that there was no key for the lock. In those days to make a complaint over such a trifling thing would only have been met with the remark, "If you don’t like it, get out." To make the situation more uncomfortable, it was reported that there was considerable looting in the hotels, so guests had to be on guard. Therefore the door was barricaded; but the night passed without incident, and in the morning the money was deposited in the Omaha National Bank, in which institution the boy continued to keep a balance for more than fifty years.

Lincoln being the objective—this was in 1870—the B. & M. had not long been in operation to that point. Inquiry was made in regard to the best land available, and, with what information they could gather, the two companions set out on foot, not knowing exactly where they were going. They finally reached Kiowa Ranch, then almost an outpost of civilization. Here the people were alarmed over news of Indian raids that had reached them from the west, and it was considered unsafe to go beyond that point unarmed. Since the two young men had no weapons, it was considered expedient to turn east, where after a few days' travel they reached a settlement one mile from Pleasant Hill in Saline County, off the railroad. They were received kindly by the people, who were enthusiastic over the country, and were so favorably impressed by the homesteads that they decided to buy two adjoining pre-empted relinquishments for $125 each, with the understanding that the Ohio boy would go on for funds and return to help build a house. In his absence the remaining boy was to make all preparations. The Government called for a house 8 x 12, but since two pre-emptors joined, it was permissible to build one house 16 x 24 on the line, with one window and a door on each side and a partition in the middle.

House building began. A team was hired to plow the sod; this was laid according to the suggestions of the neighbors, and completed to the point of roofing. Spring Creek was the most favorable place to obtain poles and brush and, after a hard day's work there, the boy returned to the house with a load big enough to make a good job of the roof. That night it rained; and it continued to rain for three nights and three days. On the morning of the fourth day it cleared, and the boy started to complete the house. But, on approaching it, he was horrified to find that the whole structure had collapsed. The incessant rain had made mud of the sod. Water-soaked and soggy, with no boards on top to protect it, the water had rushed through the walls like a sieve. The pressure was too great to withstand, and the walls had crumbled. To the boy this was nothing short of a catastrophe, and the most sorrowful day of his life was at hand.

Winter setting in, no word from Ohio, out of a job, the situation seemed black indeed. On the advice of his friends, he went to the land officer at Lincoln to surrender the relinquishment and file on the land in his own name. The first question asked was, "How old are you?"

"Eighteen," said he.

"You are too young to file," was the reply. "Are you the head of a family?"

"No."

"Then we can't do a thing for you."

So, added to his other misfortunes, it looked as though the chance of losing the precious price of the claim was due to follow. Another job had to be found.

Stopping at the Tichenor House conducted by Will
Ensey, a gentleman well known in the city at that time, the boy asked for work and found it, and a few weeks later his friends came in from Pleasant Hill and bought his claim for $125. Hotel work soon became irksome, and one day Mr. John Burke of Fort McPherson, a contractor, who supplied a Government Army Post with hay and grain for the cavalry and fresh meat and fuel for the soldiers, arrived in Lincoln. Approaching him, the boy asked for a job, and was told to take the train in the morning and go to work in the store. That same day the proprietor of the Railroad House who had led him out by the collar the fall previous met the boy on the street.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Nothing," was the reply.

"Then come along with me and I will open a store for you."

Here were two jobs opening up in one day, but remembering the first offer the boy considered that he was pledged to accept it, and so his friendly "enemy's" offer was rejected. He remained with the contractor for nearly a year, when a better chance was offered him in a distant town, which he accepted.

A few months later the boy was approached by an older acquaintance with a plan of opening jointly a new store.

"I have no money," said the boy.

"How much have you?" asked his friend.

"Only about five hundred dollars."

"That's enough," was the reply. "I will put in a thousand and with $1500 cash we can get goods to the amount of $3000 or $4000."

But on counting his funds the boy found that he was $37.50 short of the $500. He asked a friend for a loan of that much, but was refused on the grounds that it "would be like throwing money away to compete with the stores in town."

Disconsolate, the boy reported the shortage to his friend, and was overjoyed to hear him say, "Don't worry, that's near enough." Next day the partner started for Chicago, where he bought all the goods needed, while the boy cleaned the store and made preparations for the installation of the goods when they should arrive.

In due time the new enterprise was launched. The boy slept on the counter by night and by day carried deliveries on his back, cleaned the windows, swept the floor, opened early and closed late, was attentive to all details, and at the age of twenty-one—three years from the commencement of this narrative—he was on the road to a prosperous future.

In one year from the day the store opened it was on even terms with the leading merchants of the town, and the following year the partners took the lead and held it during the continuance of the firm.
In time word came that a lake was not far off and could be seen from the hill that was being approached. So the party drove on, climbing the hill, and the oxen, sniffing water, made great speed. At the top of the hill the lake was visible. The cattle did not wait for orders, but stampeded for the lake, and in their rush some broke wagon tongues, loosened themselves from the wagons and rushed into the lake, while others hauled their loaded wagons with them into deep water. Bull-whacker language had no effect, whips and arguments were unavailing. They drank and lay down to their hearts' content, and it took several days to clean up the "mess." In commemoration of that day the lake has been named Foley Lake.

On arrival at the agencies it was agreed that the road from North Platte was impracticable and had to be abandoned. About this time Jim Kerr of Beatrice, a practical cow man who was foreman for John Bratt & Co., took charge of the outfit, and at the agency heard Turkey Feather, a Sioux chief, make the statement that there was a good trail to Sidney. This was taken up, found to be correct, and the freight destined for North Platte was forwarded to Sidney, 123 miles west of North Platte, or 102 miles east of Cheyenne.

On the last trip from the agencies, at the crossing known as Sidney Crossing, where the Sidney bridge now stands, the entire outfit was caught in a blizzard of such fury that the cattle could not be held. They wandered about that winter, shifting for themselves. In the spring a number of them were found alive with yokes still on, while others disappeared, no doubt having perished or been taken up as mavericks.

A Buffalo Hunt on the South Platte

My companion and I, both young men, left North Platte, Nebraska, early one morning in the summer of 1874, for a buffalo hunt. With all the enthusiasm of youth—anticipating good sport and the pleasure of relating it to friends upon our return—we detrained at Julesburg, intending to ride twenty-five miles up the South Platte River and put up at Charlie Moore's ranch. In Julesburg we hired two dun-colored, clean-limbed horses from Harry Entreken, who recommended them for their speed, cunning in the hunt, easy gaits, and sure-footedness.

A glorious morning favored us as, with best wishes from Entreken, we set out on our journey. Talkative, exhilarated by the novelty of our adventure, and the mere joy of living, we were an exuberant pair.

About ten miles up the river, the Platte Valley is two to three miles wide, sloping up to a chain of hills that continues for almost the whole width of the State. At this point, we saw two buffaloes lumbering out of the river and heading for the hills. With one accord we gave chase, but before we could overtake the animals they entered a canyon and separated. Intent on the hunt, we each marked one as his quarry and galloped on, our trails diverging accordingly.

Following a long run through the hills the buffalo I was following escaped, and I found myself in an unfamiliar country, wondering what had become of my companion. How was I to find him? How was I to get back to the river? There were no houses dotting the prairies in those days; no place to seek directions.
That I was about twenty-five miles from Julesburg constituted my fund of information. For a moment I was panic-stricken. I called aloud; but no answer. Then, with all speed, I rode to the highest near-by hill and fired my gun repeatedly, while alarm for our safety increased. Finally I concluded that my friend must have reached the river and gone on to the ranch. This seemed the logical thing for him to do, since we had fifteen miles or more to travel in a country new to us, where the chances of missing the ranch after nightfall were considerable.

Trusting to luck, I threaded my way through the buttes, and at last, reaching the river, was following its course, when suddenly, from a draw, I saw a horseman emerge. I knew at once he was not my companion—but who was he? A horse thief? cattle thief? train robber? In that country every stranger represented danger. I had little choice in the matter, however, so I rode forward, and gave my name and reason for being there. When the stranger had heard my story, he extended a friendly hand, and informed me that he was foreman of the ranch. He had not seen my friend. On his invitation I rode with him to the ranch, hoping to find my fellow hunter on my arrival, but in this I was disappointed.

The place was a summer ranch where cows and calves were held. The foreman occupied the house alone, and after unsaddling and turning our horses into the corral, he cooked supper, and later divided his blankets with me. Throughout the night we listened in vain for my friend's arrival.

Morning came, with my friend still missing, and I was much concerned for his safety. After breakfast the foreman announced that he knew where there was a large herd of buffaloes and, venturing the opinion that our shots might attract my missing companion, offered to guide me on the hunt. We found the animals grazing among the buttes near the river, but with our appearance they stampeded, our mounts at once taking up the chase. In every herd there are stragglers, or tail-enders, as we called them. I was not able to pull abreast of the main herd, but these tail-enders were strung out across the prairie like the tail to a kite, and I was reconciled with bagging one of them, although I might have brought down a score.

Anxiety for my friend, however, prevented me from enjoying the sport as I might have under happier circumstances, so bidding the foreman good-by I started back for Julesburg, keeping a sharp lookout along the way for any telltale signs. At the point where my companion and I had separated the previous day I made a long detour through the hills, half dreading what I might find, for Indians still wandered through that section in small scouting bands, and seldom failed to visit their resentment over the usurpation of their hunting-grounds on unwary pale faces.

Indeed, I had been cautioned by the foreman to keep to level ground, where there was less danger of being cut off by the Indians. Therefore, getting no response from either my shots or shouts, I turned back to the river and headed for my destination. It was well for me, perhaps, that I did, for a few miles from the town some intuition caused me to glance quickly over my shoulder. What I saw caused a sensation around the vicinity of my scalp lock which was far from reassuring, and made me put instant spur to my horse. Ten Indians, whom I took to be Sioux, had just emerged from the hills, and were making toward me as fast as their ponies could travel. I sent a shot in their direction and, bending over my mount's neck, urged the loyal beast to its utmost exertions. Behind me I could hear the shots and yells of my pursuers, but my horse
plunged on, keeping a safe distance ahead of them and with his every step bringing me nearer to the sanctuary of Julesburg. Seeing that they could not overtake me before I reached the town, the Indians finally abandoned the pursuit and, with hoots of derision, rode off toward the hills whence they came.

Entering the town, I rode up to Entreken's store with the intention of organizing a searching party to hunt for my friend, but hardly had I tied my horse when the missing one himself stepped out and grasped my hand with every evidence of relief. On exchanging experiences with him I found that he had concluded that I, too, was lost and, making no effort to find the ranch, had reconciled himself to a night in the saddle. Night coming on, however, he had dismounted to rest his bones unaccustomed to horseback riding and, tying the lariat to his leg, stretched out on the ground. But his rest was short, for presently the coyotes began howling, and "for safety's sake" he remounted and remained in the saddle until daybreak. With the coming of morning he caught a glimpse of the river, and followed it to Julesburg, full of anxiety about me.

Rejoicing over the happy outcome of our adventure, we paid our bill, bid adieu to Harry Entreken, and took the first train to North Platte, firmly convinced that buffalo hunting had its pitfalls as well as its pleasures.

Trading With the Indians

As late as 1874, North Platte, Nebraska, was a popular trading point for Sioux Indians, since for many years the Republican River and Medicine Creek had been their favorite winter camps. Buffaloes roamed the surrounding prairies in great numbers and, as jerked or dried buffalo meat constituted the chief staple of the Indian's diet, made the locality especially desirable. Wild turkeys, deer, elk, and antelope also were abundant, while the banks of the creeks and rivers were well wooded, and furnished a supply of fuel far in excess of the Indians' needs. Good running water was likewise close at hand and thus, protected from wind and storm by the draws and canyons surrounding them, with all the facilities favorable to the nomadic life, the Indians found the environment ideal.

Horses also found good shelter in the region—herded, of course, to keep them from straying. They were in large numbers, the ordinary Indian having from five to one hundred head, and sometimes even more—a good deal depending on the brave's luck, with no questions asked. All Sioux men were expert horsemen, riding without saddle or bridle, but occasionally, if a horse was hard to guide, with a rope halter; and many of the stunts of present-day rodeos were handed down as the heritage of Indian horsemanship.

It was the duty of an Indian to provide food for his family and to this end the braves hunted in parties, making a distribution of their kill at the end of the hunt. There was usually plenty to go around, and discord in the division was practically unknown. The com-
munal kill would be brought to camp packed over the horses' backs (there were no wagons in those days). After being skinned the hides were dried or tanned, depending on the quality, and later brought to town in packs for trade at the stores.

Indian squaws were worked hard. It was their duty to carry wood and water—very often with their papooses strapped to their backs—and, indeed, whatever work there was to do around camp was recognized as the squaw's duty. An Indian would be degraded and driven out of camp if he attempted to do menial work, such as assisting his squaw with her drudgery.

To provide winter food, after killing and skinning, the carcasses of deer, elk, or buffalo were cut in medium-sized chunks, salted to suit the taste, and then tied to a rope suspended between poles in the open air, where they remained long enough to dry thoroughly. In time, the outside of these chunks became so hard as to be almost impervious to water, but beneath the outer crust the moisture and seasoning remained, and most appetizing it was, too; for cured in that way the raw taste of the meat was eliminated.

It was the approved custom in those days to have in every grocery store a chunk of dried buffalo meat conveniently displayed on the counter, so that all comers might have the privilege of using their jackknives to test the quality and flavor of the meat and even to remain with it long enough to satisfy their taste.

On one occasion Spotted Tail sent word that, having selected Foley and Senter's Store as an objective [the firm is long out of business], he was coming in with a trading party. To make ready for his visit, everything was removed from the center of the store, and arrangements were completed for his entertainment. Huge boilers of coffee were procured from the Railroad House then conducted by Keith and Barton; boxes were piled high with sweet cream crackers, thirty pounds to the box; and heaping pails of sugar were placed in readiness, together with quart tin cup and spoons to match.

On entering the store the Indians greeted the spectators with the customary "How!"—the salutation of every tribe of Sioux—and, since all was in readiness, Spotted Tail gave a signal, and immediately squatted on the floor, his companions, fifty in all, following his example. The feast was on.

An Indian loves sugar above all articles of food, and with that before them in abundance, together with a plentiful supply of square, half-inch sweet cream crackers, and more coffee in sight than they had ever seen before, the party kept dipping, eating, and replenishing until they were surfeited with food.

The feast ended. Spotted Tail then passed the pipe of peace, each Indian taking a whiff until it went the rounds and was returned to Spotted Tail, whereupon he gave another signal and all arose. Coffee, empty cracker boxes, and what remained of the feast were set aside, the clerks made ready for business, and trading began.

The procedure hardly ever varied. An Indian would approach with a robe and study all the articles on the shelves, on the line, or wherever displayed. Bright colors appealed to them most—especially red shawls, red calicoes, red flannels, and red headgear. Anything in bright colors they scrutinized closely. If the brave wished to trade for calico he would stretch out his arms a number of times, indicating the quantity desired, and if the robe was a good one he would ask for sugar in addition. That wish being gratified, he might further demand coffee, or a shawl, or some more expen-
sive article. To this the clerk would say, "No." Dickering then began in earnest, and usually there would be a compromise, the robe passing over the counter, and the Indian carrying his goods away.

On one occasion a man on the street saw a beautifully tanned buffalo robe of a very dark color. These were the choicest hides, and this particular one was painted gorgeously on the reverse side. In those days such a robe was valued at $25.00. The Indian who owned it agreed to trade, and both entered the store, standing close to one another at the counter. The Indian made known his wants and the bill was found to amount to $10.00, which the man paid. Picking up his packages and starting for the door the brave happened to spy a red cotton parasol, marked to sell for 75 cents. Looking back at the man he said, "Swap?"—meaning that he would give up all his packages for the 75-cent parasol. The other agreed, and the Indian, opening his parasol, was filled with joy over his trade and walked proudly forth to display his treasure to his companions.

Bright red shawls fascinated all Indian squaws; coffee and sugar were also favorite articles of trade. The Indians in transacting business were most artless. They had no idea of value and, relying on the honesty of the whites, were cheated on every occasion. A common expression in those days of trading was: "Why not? We are not here for our health."

One who lived in the West, as late as 1869, can relate many instances in which the Indians were robbed by Government contractors, and citizens as well. When they went on the war path it was because they were incensed with whites who had wronged them. They had no right to fight the whites? Well, perhaps not. Neither had the Government any right to take their lands. Treaties were broken, but they were broken by...
A Sun Dance at Pine Ridge Agency

In 1883, I witnessed one of the most amazing ceremonies which the Indian life of the Old West produced, and at the same time spent a few of the most uncomfortable hours of my life.

In those days I was part owner of a herd of cattle ranging on the forks of the North Loup, about one hundred and fifty miles northwest of North Platte, Nebraska. My partners—one from Jacksonville, Illinois, and the other from Herrick Center, Pennsylvania—were men many years my senior. Both being desirous of seeing how the cattle looked after the spring roundup, I had sent word to the ranch foreman to meet us in North Platte, and he had driven in with a light spring wagon, a good pony team, and two saddle horses.

In deference to our “distinguished guests,” before starting for the ranch we purchased a fine assortment of supplies, among which were many delicacies which a cow man would never think of finding on his menu. These were loaded on the spring wagon and, since this offered the easiest method of transportation, our guests were allotted to that conveyance. With the foreman and I riding on ahead, we set out. We were three days making the trip, the only house we passed on our way being that of Beach Hinman on the Birdwood. John Bratt & Company had several ranches in that vicinity, but they were off our trail.

On arriving at our destination we were informed that two days hence there was to be “big doings” at the Pine Ridge Agency, about fifty miles distant. The Indians, it seems, had been clamoring for a Sun Dance for years, but this ceremony was forbidden by the Government. Their pleas had finally become so insistent, however, that the White Father in Washington had relented and given consent for one final celebration, after which there was to be no more forever. Word of this had been sent to all the Sioux tribes and, judging from reports brought in by the couriers, it was estimated that 20,000 Indians might be expected to attend. This seemed like a spectacle worth viewing, and we decided that we could not afford to miss it. So again we started out, my two partners in the spring wagon, the foreman and I riding ahead as before.

As we neared the encampment we began to pass lone tepees, sticking out of the prairie like giant shocks of corn, and soon we were entering the Indian village, which consisted of one long, wide street lined on both sides with rows of smoke-blackened tepees. The space between these rough shelters was literally surging with Indians, who gazed at us with eyes seemingly devoid of friendliness. At first the sight of this assemblage did no more than give us a slight feeling of nervousness, but as we penetrated farther into the crowd this sensation increased until, although none of us would admit it, we all felt as though we were treading on very thin ice, the chill of which had reached our spines. The vast numbers of savages not only appalled us, but suggestions would keep coming as to what might be our fate should the Government decide to revoke its permission, or a heedless white start an irremediable disturbance, or the Indians suddenly emboldened by their superior numbers decide to rid themselves of their alien visitors. With such thoughts we passed through the throng, the foreman and I leading, as usual, by about two hundred yards.

That our fear was not entirely without cause was proven to us when, on looking back to see if our friends
were coming, we beheld an army of squaws following the wagon and unloading it as fast as they could grab. Bedding, camp outfit, grain for the horses, food—everything aboard was going out, while my two partners, not daring to remonstrate, looked straight ahead and wondered, I imagine, if they, too, were destined to follow the supplies.

Seeing the uselessness of interfering, the foreman and I rode straight ahead until we reached the Sutler’s Store. Here we stopped, and presently the wagon drove up. There was nothing left in it but the two men. To make a complaint was plainly useless, and indeed there was no one to whom we might complain. The Agency employed about twenty whites, but what could they do against an army of Indians? Anticipating the Sun Dance, the Government had removed all its troops from the vicinity, thus leaving the Indians freed from restraint. The only thing to do was to wink at our loss and grin, and this we tried to do.

Hearing that exercises were going on a short distance out, we went to a vantage point near the center of the crowd. So far as we could see, we were the only whites in that vast assemblage. In the arena a pole twenty feet high had been erected, in the tip of which a hole had been bored. Through this a half-inch rope was passed and knotted, the loose end reaching to the ground. The Indian youth who sought tribal honors would advance and permit slits to be cut in his breast, through which the end of the rope was inserted and then tied. Whereupon, standing erect and with arms outstretched a short distance from the pole, he would sway backward on the rope without a sign of pain until the weight of his body tore open the flesh and, thus released, he would fall to the ground, whence he would immediately arise. Thus, having passed the test for courage, he became a full-fledged warrior, eligible for the war path or any other dangerous mission that might be assigned him.

After witnessing the scene for a short time we returned to the store, more than ever impressed with the thoughts of what might be our end should some untoward event cause those twenty thousand Indians to turn on us. A long distance from the ranch, our supplies exhausted, we were all of one mind in our desire to put distance between ourselves and the Sioux. So, laying in a few provisions, we started our homeward trek, making sure to avoid the squaws and papooses by a detour around the villages.

Notwithstanding the fact that our ranch was fifty miles from the scene of the festivities, we were not wholly free from the fear, on our arrival there, that a scalping party might take to the war path and track us down. So the next day my partners started back for the railroad, having seen few cattle, but plenty of Indians, and no doubt consoled for the loss of the delicacies we had purchased for them, with the thought that these same delicacies were cheering many a savage palate.
The First Irrigation Ditch in Nebraska and the Passing of Range Cattle

[Lincoln State Journal, March 2, 1930]

The early settlers of Nebraska, in the vicinity of North Platte and beyond, will never forget the annual visit of the hot winds, and the controversies regarding their origin. It was a subject that never was settled, and various theories were advanced. The majority of the people claimed they came from the arid lands of the Panhandle; others just as positive said they arose from the Gulf Stream, while the cow men, who were numerous on the trail to Ogalalla in those days, declared they had their origin in Corpus Christi, Texas. Probably none of the reasons advanced were correct, but one who lived there knows from experience they became less frequent from 1872, until they ceased altogether about 1882.

Farming on a small scale was attempted in the vicinity of North Platte in 1872, where a favorable location free from alkali could be found; for most of the low lands in the Platte Valley at that time were covered with it, and vegetation would not grow in that kind of soil. The selected land mentioned would be plowed in the usual way and planted by the best methods of the farmer. Crops would look very promising in the early spring, but as the days lengthened and the sun became warmer the fatal day would arrive, and before nightfall, cornstalks and vines withered beyond hope.

Another enemy of the farmer was the cattlemen. They were not favorable to farming, for it meant encroachment on the free ranges, and quite often a settler inclined to be mean would file his homestead adjoining a cattle ranch and corral. In that case only one remedy was open and that was to buy his filing papers and have one of the employees of the ranch file on it. These homesteads meant fencing and the end of free range. A herd law was passed defining the rights of the farmer and cattlemen, and imposing a penalty on owners who allowed their cattle to feed on the crop of the farmer. Innumerable and annoying lawsuits for damages followed. Cattlemen urged fencing, and if a man was unable to buy it, quite often the cattlemen contributed to the purchase, and in many cases paid the entire cost.

Keith & Barton, with their enormous herd of fifteen thousand head or more, were mostly affected by the influx of settlers; for they commanded a range which was recognized as theirs by right of occupation by other cattlemen, and extended from the delta of the Platte to Ogalalla, sixty miles west, and to include all the vacant lands between the North and South Platte Rivers. For a home ranch they had headquarters at Dexter, a siding near the present town of Sutherland. Here Jay Gould and Sidney Dillon, of New York, and Fred Ames, of Boston, made their annual visit to the Keith & Barton ranch on their usual tour of inspection over the Union Pacific Railroad, for they practically owned it. Mr. Barton, knowing of their coming, would send word to his foreman to round up the herd at a certain time and have saddle horses in readiness. He joined the party in their special train at North Platte and accompanied them to Dexter, where all preparations were made for the guests. Gentle horses, with California saddles, stood before them, and, mounting, the party rode among the cattle, crossing hills and valleys, commenting on colors, ages, and beef steer,
watching the frolics of the calves jumping around their mothers, and forgetful of Wall Street and the stock market. Later they boarded their train, happy and joyous at the free life of the cattleman, and for miles on each side of the track the big herd would be visible from their car window.

Never again in any generation in Nebraska will one see in one herd as big an aggregation of cattle as the number seen on the last visit of the railroad men to the Keith & Barton ranch.

The big herds have passed and with them most of the owners.

The town of North Platte derived all its benefits from cattlemen, and the Union Pacific Railway shops, then under the direction of J. H. McConnell, the master mechanic, and the cattle outfits, as far north as Running Water or Niobrara, two hundred and fifty miles distant, made North Platte their trading point. It was not unusual to see eight and ten six-horse teams in front of a warehouse loading up with ranch supplies, and, in talking to a business man of that day, he gave the information that it was not unusual to sell one outfit at one time twenty-five hundred dollars' worth of ranch supplies. This was before the completion of the Elkhorn Valley Railway, and when trains were through to Casper, Wyoming, Valentine, Gordon, and Hay Springs secured the business which was lost to North Platte.

The old settlers of Nebraska will remember the land grants of the Government to the Union Pacific Railway; if not, it is worth mentioning. For the building of the road from Omaha to Ogden, then a distance of one thousand and thirty-two miles, the Government donated every alternate section of unsold lands on each side of the railroad survey, for a distance of twenty miles. The time came when the State thought it would tax the unsold railroad lands, although it must be said the company was generous and extended every consideration to the pioneers. In anticipation of the tax referred to, the company made further reduction in the price of their lands, varying from $2.50 to $10.00 per acre, depending upon the location and quality of the land. The terms were on ten yearly payments, with interest at 6 per cent, and to encourage cattlemen who could foresee homesteaders, they contracted with one cattle outfit to sell them thirty thousand acres of land for $1.00 an acre. About this time the range cattlemen realized they must make room for the farmer, so Keith & Barton moved their entire herd to Powder River, Wyoming, and gave the settlers a clean sweep of the Platte Valley. Then the farmers, considering themselves safe from the big herds, began to add cattle to their small holdings, and the opinion was then expressed the change from big herds to the small ones would be more beneficial and profitable to the town and county. In addition to their small growing herds they continued to farm, with indifferrent results. Usually the early prospects were promising, but the summer winds baked the ground so hard at times it was almost impossible to turn a furrow for cultivation.

In 1883, Guy C. Barton and J. H. McConnell, with Isaac Dillon, a nephew of Sidney Dillon, the railway magnate, and T. J. Foley, a merchant, joined in an agreement to purchase all the unsold lands of the Union Pacific, between the rivers, and to O'Fallons on the west, if they could be had at the price, with the idea of constructing an irrigating ditch to cover the land with water. A proposition was made the railway company and a survey made, with the result that there were fourteen thousand acres in the tract, the railway company agreeing to sell it, provided the purchasers carried though the project of ditch building for irrigation. To encourage the enterprise they made a price
of $1.00 per acre for the entire tract, which was accepted.

The buyers of the land, ignorant of ditch building, looked to Greeley, Colorado, for information. That town was flourishing by the means of irrigation, and the State of Colorado as a whole was overflowing with engineers and irrigation promoters. A committee was appointed to visit Greeley and Denver, regarding the best methods to develop the lands. At a meeting in Greeley, it was suggested they confer with Lord Ogilvy in Denver, the capitalist, who was fully equipped with machinery to construct irrigation ditches and eager to acquire them. The proposition was presented to him, and after a few meetings an agreement was reached whereby the owners of the land agreed to deed him half of it, provided he would build the ditch and deed half to them. Immediately surveyors from Denver in charge of J. T. Buckley laid out the route, beginning on the North Platte River, north of Sutherland, and emptying into the same river opposite the town of North Platte, twenty-three miles long. A head gate to draw the water to the canal was built by John Means, of Grand Island. On the completion of the work as above, a corporation was formed, known as the North Platte Irrigation & Land Company; the records of Lincoln County showing the deeds for the land from the Union Pacific Company were filed in the clerk's office at North Platte, May 20, 1885.

Then a series of wet seasons was on. A strong prejudice existed against the ditch, many claiming that it was a notice to newcomers that nothing would grow in the valley unless it was irrigated, and that all the ditch was good for was to carry away the surplus water. A few years later this feeling was partly overcome, then dry seasons set in, and a few of the bravest farmers bought a water right. A price of $16.25 was established for land and a perpetual water right and $6.25 per acre for water alone on ten yearly payments at 6 per cent. The investment at this time seemed to drag, and inducements, such as longer time for payment, were made to a few Colorado farmers, who settled on some of the best lands to improve them. About this time Bill Cody (Buffalo Bill) had a ranch close to the ditch. He was an advocate of irrigation and bought eight hundred acres. W. A. Paxton, of Omaha, made a big purchase, but, no small farmers appearing, the company built a farmhouse, which was later owned by W. L. Park, vice-president of the Union Pacific Railroad. Good results came from the experiment, and a great effort was made to induce settlement.

One day a man and his family arrived in North Platte from the East in a covered wagon. His wife was given a seat in a grocery store while he was purchasing supplies. Questioned where they were going, the man said, "Further West," but could not make up his mind where he would stop. He was asked why he wanted to go West with so much vacant land in the country. He replied his means were limited. He was asked if he understood farming, and he replied that he did. Then he was asked to look at the ditch farm referred to. After much persuasion he was induced to buy at the usual price and terms, with the understanding, however, if he could not meet payments at maturity an extension would be granted. The contract was signed for eighty acres. The first two years no payments were made, but in the third or fourth year he paid in full, and later bought additional land. The last we heard of him he was living in North Platte, retired, and his wealth was estimated at two hundred thousand dollars.

Another man came to North Platte, a friend of W. A. Paxton, of Omaha. This man was formerly a partner in one of the biggest cattle commission houses in St. Louis. His company had a big ranch in northern
Nebraska and Dakota, and in the winter of 1885 their big herd was almost wiped out, owing to the severe winter. The St. Louis Company met the same fate, so that at the age of fifty he appeared in North Platte ready for a new start. He saw at once the possibilities of the Platte Valley, and contracted for three hundred and twenty acres of land from the Ditch Company. Briefly, he set out orchards, worked unceasingly, acquired more land, and at the end of fifteen years he retired, regarded as one of the wealthiest men in the county.

A story of his firm will be interesting to Nebraska people. It is said his company, in the summer of 1885, was approached by a Scotch syndicate, who offered eight hundred thousand dollars for their herd without count; that is to say, they would buy from their books. That meant the ranch books would show the number of cattle purchased at different times, the calves added, making the total as on hand. From these numbers would be subtracted the shipments or sales, thus showing the number of cattle they were supposed to have on the ranch, making no allowances whatever for losses.

After the hard winter, when his company was pressed for funds, they decided they would sell, and approached the Scotch syndicate. "Yes," they said, "we will buy, but on different terms. We will not take your book account for numbers, but we want the cattle counted out, and to pay so much a head." The proposition was agreed to, and the syndicate paid $100,000 cash on the bargain. The round-up followed, all the cattle were at their home ranch. The interested parties met and counted out as agreed. At the end it was found they had to buy cattle to the amount of $30,000 to make up the deficit of the $100,000 paid when they agreed to sell; in other words, they lost in cattle that winter from their books $730,000.
A Surveying Party in Nebraska

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LINCOLN, Sept. 14 (Associated Press)—In 1869, Dan Parmelee, of Elkhorn, Nebraska, had a contract with the Federal Government to run subdivision and township lines at and around the 100th meridian, near Plum Creek, now Lexington. He sub-contracted with the Daugherty brothers, surveyors from Menominee, Wisconsin, to carry out the work.

The Daugherty surveying party was assembled at Omaha, their starting point, in June, 1869, waiting to fill their ranks before proceeding westward. At this time I, then a mere lad, arrived in Omaha with letters of introduction to a few commercial houses. I presented these letters immediately upon arrival, but was informed that “business is dull, and no places are open.” Matters looked gloomy; however, I kept up courage, notwithstanding the fact that my whole wealth consisted of $4.00 in cash, a trunk, and a fairly good wardrobe. As I walked down the street I noticed on a window the inscription Y. M. C. A. I entered the house and again inquired for work, but was again informed that Omaha was “remarkably quiet.” However, there might be a chance to work on a farm until something better turned up. I was also told that a surveying party, about to go West, had been inquiring for men. Forthwith I hastened to the Morrison House yards, where the surveyors were camping, and made application for work. Again I heard that “all places were filled.” There was something in the kind looks of the men that gave me confidence, however, and while standing before the

surveyors I was informed that they needed a cook. Here was my chance, I thought, and I asked for the job.

My city clothes betrayed the fact that I was a tenderfoot, and I was told, among other things, that I was too young and too delicate for such work, that Indians were in the section where the surveying was to be done, and that no one would be responsible for my safety. I also was questioned as to my experience in cooking. I answered that I had none, but that, if given a chance, I would obey orders, and do the best I could. I must have pleaded my case well; at least I was so persistent that I was told to report the next morning at seven o’clock. Thus, two hours after my arrival in Omaha I had a job.

At the appointed time next morning we left Omaha, the outfit consisting of eleven men, one wagon, and three horses. At noon the party arrived at Mr. Parmelee’s home, at Elkhorn. Here we had supper, and the next morning breakfast. Another wagon, a team, and two extra horses were added to the outfit, and the march to the West continued.

Our spirits were high, for we anticipated enjoyment and adventure. Noon found us fording the Elkhorn River, and orders were given to camp. Here I had my first experience as a cook. To me this was the crucial test; life and a job depended upon it. John Daugherty, one of the brothers, gave orders to prepare the noonday meal.

Hurrying to the wagon, I pulled out a sack of flour; the baking powder can, the salt, and the dishpan followed. Directions on the baking powder can were strictly followed; water was added, and soon the dough had the proper consistency. But the hands of the cook and the dough had become so attached to each other that they refused to be separated.

Noticing that John Daugherty was watching me, I
inquired, in a meek tone of voice, what was to be done. "Add flour," he replied. I asked no further questions. Coffee, biscuits, and bacon made up the lunch, which was served on the ground, a piece of canvas taking the place of a table cloth.

After dinner the horses were again hitched to the wagons, and the party proceeded on its way. Before me was the vision of another supper and breakfast, but fate was kind; in a few days I considered myself an efficient cook.

Winding our way westward, we reached Columbus, where we were told that Indians were bad around Big Springs, and to be on the lookout for them. Not particularly alarmed by this report, we continued our march to Grand Island, where a short stop was made for mail.

At Grand Island the news of Indian depredations was confirmed, and precautionary orders were given. Every man was to carry his Spencer carbine during the day, and every evening it was to be cleaned and placed at his head during the night, in order to be ready for an emergency. A night guard was established, each man taking four hours' watch when his turn came.

We had a few Colt revolvers and a limited number of paper cartridges for them. In the wagon were a thousand rounds of carbine cartridges. Orders were given that no ammunition was to be wasted; no firing was allowed except in providing game for the food supply.

The carbines were strapped to our shoulders as we left Grand Island, headed for our next goal, Old Fort Kearney, 190 miles west of Omaha.

The old adobe fort, once an important point on the old Oregon Trail, was now in ruins, having gone out of commission with the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad.

However, this was still a dangerous place, and we were advised to keep a close watch. I recall very vividly one particular night when it was my turn to do guard duty.

The rain was coming down in sheets, the tent was leaking, and thunder and lightning were furious. But the watch must be kept, and the outgoing man, as usual, had to load his rifle and be ready for danger.

Fumbling in my pocket for a cartridge, and not waiting for a flash of lightning to see what I was doing, the paper cartridge dropped from my hands, struck the iron of a whiffletree, and exploded. Every man in the tents turned out, immediately ready for action, thinking that the Indians were upon us. The matter was soon cleared up. The party recovered from its scare, and after bestowing a few very uncomplimentary remarks upon the culprit, soon forgot the incident.

A few days later Plum Creek was reached. Here we were informed that our work was to be done south of this point. We were told to pick up driftwood, or any kind of wood, as we went on, for fuel was scarce in that section.

I happened to find a piece of a broken telegraph pole, but being called away just at that moment, I did not put it into the wagon. Upon my return I was accosted by a man, who was somewhat of a nag. "Here, you——, help me put this into the wagon," he said.

This was too much, even for a cook, and a fight soon followed. The party looked on and grinned at us, evidently pleased with the course of events. Later the fellow was ridiculed for letting a boy get the best of him.

My opponent in the fight soon developed blisters on his feet from the unaccustomed walking. This incapaci-
tated him. As there was no man to take his place, it was decided that he should change places with me. Thus, I became a part of the surveying crew proper.

We had eleven men, divided into two parties of four each, who surveyed, two teamsters, and a cook. Every morning the teamsters were given orders where to prepare camp, and they rarely missed the mark a quarter of a mile. This is remarkable in a level country where no landmarks can act as guides and with no other directions other than to “drive twelve miles on this line.”

Ten weeks of surveying had passed; chaining had become monotonous. There were no signs of Indians during all this time. We never even saw a pony track. As a result the party became careless, and felt so safe that the night guard was discontinued. For amusement, target practice became popular. The cartridge supply box ran so low that you could almost see the bottom of the box.

But one evening, on nearing the camp on the edge of a lake where the ground was soft, we received a shock which struck terror into our hearts. There before us were fresh Indian tracks, in such numbers as to make sure that we were close to a big Indian war party. There was no escape from this danger.

We went into camp that night with a great deal of fear. The conversation was in low tones, and there was not much said. We were told that in two days the work would be finished, and that the march back to civilization would begin.

We had very little sleep that night; all sensed danger and feared an attack at any moment. We felt that we would be discovered, for an Indian is an excellent scout. Furthermore, these Indians had left their reservation, and knew that Government cavalry would be sent out in search of them, and it was their job to watch for the soldiers. So we had little chance of escape.

In the morning we all concluded that it was immaterial in which direction we went, for there was a probability of running into Indians, no matter which way we went. So it was decided to go on with our work. Two parties, of four each, left at the same time, going in different directions, to meet at a given point where the teamsters made camp. One of the chainmen had left his gun in camp, while the other carried his carbine in its accustomed place, strapped to his shoulders.

We proceeded about a half mile and were about to cross a chain of hills, losing sight of the camp, when I approached the surveyor and said that it was not fair for me to be carrying a gun every day for more than ten weeks, danger or no danger, and that the other chainmen were just as able to carry a gun as I was.

The surveyor replied that he had been thinking of that himself, and ordered the other man back to get his gun. The man refused to go, stating that he would not carry a gun, as it was too much of a load. Whereupon he was told to get the gun or quit. He replied that he would quit.

While this parley was on, we looked toward the camp and noticed a man riding past it. This was unusual, as none of the teamsters were in sight, having presumably taken their horses to water.

It was never considered prudent to camp on the edge of a lake in an Indian country, for fear of a raid from the rear. The open country was considered the safest.

In a few minutes the teamsters appeared with their horses, and almost immediately the report of a gun startled us. The man on horseback rode toward us quickly, and so near that we could tell he was an Indian.
The only gun in the party was that carried by the chainman, and, as the scout of our party was a crack shot, we realized that it was more useful in his hands than in ours. He immediately aimed at the Indian and fired. All agreed from the Indian's actions that he was hit in the arm.

The members of the other party, who had gone in an opposite direction, heard the shot, and suspecting danger, arrived at camp simultaneously with us.

When we were warned of danger the previous evening by seeing tracks at the edge of the lake, we took an inventory of our cartridges and counted two hundred in the case that contained one thousand when we left Omaha.

A hasty conference was held, and while this was in progress, we noticed an Indian on the highest knoll of the hills which we were to cross. He was waving a red blanket—an unfailing signal to his party beyond.

While this was going on, our helplessness in case of an attack became more evident. Some grumbling was heard at this time, and it was decided to go to North Platte, seventy-five miles away, for ammunition and supplies, both of which were getting very low.

It meant a great loss to the contractors to have the work unfinished, and while they demurred at quitting the job, the rest of the party, to a man, were in favor of heading for North Platte. Accordingly, the two teams were hitched without comment, and very soon the wagons were in motion. One of the contractors broke the silence by remarking that "we were a fine and brave outfit to have one Indian scare eleven men." No reply was made to this remark, and we kept trudging along silently behind the wagons.

Suddenly we were aroused from this state of mind by hearing loud voices in the rear, and on looking back we saw so many Indians chasing us at such a speed that it seemed as though we would be trampled into the dust.

Such yelling we had never heard before. Their whooping and war cries spelled death, and drove terror into our very souls. So panic-stricken did we become that some of the men, paralyzed with fear and not realizing the danger of their actions, ran away from the wagons.

At this critical time the two brother contractors, who were equal to the situation, ordered the men that were running away to return to the wagons, stating that they would shoot them in their tracks if they did not do so.

It was noticed by all that those of the party who had been wishing for a "scrap" with the Indians before they got back, showed the most cowardice of all at this time, in the face of a real danger.

Orders were now given to stop the wagons and to turn the horses loose—six in all. This was a piece of strategy, directed by the Daugherty brothers, who stated that no attack would be made until the Indians had captured the horses.

At that period on the plains, the wealth of an Indian and his power depended upon the number of horses he owned.

True to the prediction, the entire band of Indians gave chase to the horses, passing close to the wagons. They were met by our fire, and they shot at us in return.

During their absence we were ordered to get our surveying shovels out of the wagons and to dig pits deep enough to protect us from the fire of the Indians. On their return from capturing our horses, they held a pow-wow about two hundred yards from our wagons, and probably decided upon the best means of attack.

In the meantime, trenches were dug between the
two wagons, and we felt fairly well fortified and safe within them.

In a short time, they displayed a white flag. We considered this a ruse to close in on us and to find out the number in our party, and the easiest way of killing us without loss to themselves.

Our orders were to shoot and yell at them in our loudest voices, and to show them that we had no respect for their signal. Then they displayed a red and black flag, which probably meant some kind of punishment if we failed to respond to their signals. This attempt on their part was again met with by our derision and defiance.

Then a red flag appeared which meant "no quarter." Our voices against this display ran as high as previously. Then the attack began according to the Indian mode of fighting.

They formed a circle, gradually getting nearer and nearer to our wagons, firing all the time and increasing their speed. Finally they closed in on us. We were told that if we shot, we must take good aim and shoot to kill, and that none except the best marksmen should fire unless we got into close quarters.

One of our party had a long Tom and forty cartridges. That glorious old Springfield rifle, true and trusty in aim, with the report of cannon firing, stirred the valleys and the natives. It was equal in execution to all the Spencer rifles in the party.

The wagons and pits afforded us protection, and when the Indians had drawn near enough, the best shots were ordered to fire, the long-barreled Springfield was discharged, and an Indian fell from his horse, to be picked up immediately and carried away by his friends. Then the whole party of Indians went over the hills, and in a short time we heard their moanings and lamentations, grieving, no doubt, for their dead comrade.

Again they returned to fight in the former fashion, and were met with rifle fire from us, with the result that this time several Indians toppled from their horses. These were also picked up and carried over the hills. This time the mourning was louder and lasted longer. But they returned for another engagement, coming still closer.

Fearing that something might happen in the way of tricky attack, we were ordered to hold our fire in reserve for closer range.

They came on as before. We fired, and they again took to the hills, renewing their cries and incantations at the loss of their companions.

During the day they tried to trap us by picketing a fine horse within close range. An Indian crawled up and did the work, returning the way he came. The horse was a good target, but as much as we hated the Indians, we did not fire upon the animal. Their scheme was that the horse would appeal to us, and that one of our party would go after it and ride to the railroad for help; in this attempt they would kill him.

The only places from which help could come were Fort McPherson, ninety-five miles away, and Ogalalla, twenty-five miles distant. The citizens of the latter place consisted of a station agent, a section foreman, and six or eight section hands.

The Indians seemed to be well supplied with guns, although in those days it was a crime to sell them firearms.

At sundown, the fight was renewed with more vigor than before, evidently with the intention of finishing us. It seemed that the Indians had been reinforced, for their whole band, with their numerous rifles, burst forth with greater fury than before.
Their formation was the same, drawing closer and closer, until they were almost upon us. Then command was given for every man to fight for himself; it was a battle against death and scalping.

Those Indians who had no guns kept up a terrific assault with arrows, which flew in all directions. Here was a battle for existence; the scarcity of our cartridges was forgotten, and we blazed away, forgetful of everything except our determination to stop the fire of the Indians. Our fire was fast and furious, and the Indians could not hold out against our resistance. Had they continued five minutes longer, they could have swamped us and annihilated every one of our party.

Peace, quiet, and thanksgiving followed the withdrawal of the Indians, yet we knew that the fight was not over, and that it would be resumed in the morning. In our pitiful plight, we realized that nothing short of a miracle could save us. Being practically without ammunition and with a horde of Indians before us, our situation was one of dread. The brother contractors, while probably of this opinion, did not lose heart, and the elder explained to us that our only hope was to get away—if we could. To remain meant certain death. The Indians would either starve or kill us.

"To-morrow," he said, "they will come again; to-day we defended ourselves, to-morrow we cannot. To-night, at about twelve o'clock, we will leave these pits and start for the railroad."

Then he reached into the wagon and got hold of a bag of sugar. This he passed around. Several canteens were filled with water from a keg in a wagon and distributed in like manner.

Conversation then turned to the day's fighting, and its termination, all agreeing that the last defense was the most successful, and that the Indians, realizing that they were losing men, would resort to some different strategy.

"We must take a chance," Daugherty repeated, "and get away. To remain is sure death. I will begin," he said, "by burying my compasses and records in the pits."

Later we took more sugar, filling our pockets, and what remained in the bag we mixed with sand, to deprive the Indians of a luxury they dearly loved.

The hour for departure was approaching. The moon shone brightly, which gave us much concern. The Indian fires could be plainly seen.

In our party were men who had great faith in prayer, and they appealed to God for deliverance, as all men do in grave danger. While others remained silent, yet their thoughts were of hope, and all agreed that only a merciful Providence could free us.

Twelve o'clock came, and orders were given to take our shovels, so that in the event that we were followed, we could build breastworks.

Silence was the command, and the Platte River was our first destination, then the railroad. In a short time we crossed a hill. The Indian camp was now hidden. Then we arose to our feet and followed the direction of our leader, running swiftly, then walking rapidly, and finally resting. Fatigue set in, and recklessness and indifference took such hold of us that we were willing to be killed by Indians rather than to continue the exhaustion.

A strange thing happened about this time. The moon, shining in all her brightness when we left the wagons, became obscured in fog. This was so dense that we could not see our way. In a short time it cleared sufficiently so that we could see the North star in the direction we were heading. On we went, encouraged by the Daugherty brothers; sometimes we were so tired that
they picked us off the ground and set us on our feet, urging us on.

In this fashion we reached the South Platte River at four o'clock in the afternoon—after being sixteen hours on the way. After drinking water to our heart's content, we swam the river (no irrigation ditch in those days); got into the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad. We looked up and down the railroad, and saw a section house, which we found to be Roscoe, twenty miles north of the fort.

At ten o'clock we signaled a passenger train, and at twelve we arrived at North Platte. The next day we met General Emery, commander of Fort McPherson, informing him of the attack. A few days later he sent Buffalo Bill with an escort to the scene.

On their return, they reported that there was nothing in sight except ashes, all the equipment having been burned. The compasses were found intact. Later the contractors, at their own expense, furnished a guard for protection, and completed the work.

The heroes of this thrilling adventure were William and John Daugherty of Menominee, Wisconsin, subcontractors for Dan Parmelee of Elkhorn, Nebraska.

A few days later, Buffalo Bill was in the Spotted Tail agency, and learned from the Pawnee killer himself that they lost sixteen men in the attack on our party. The only wound inflicted on our side was a glancing bullet which struck a wagon tire, rebounded, and hit John Daugherty squarely on the forehead. Blood oozed out of the wound, and we thought that our greatest fighter was done for. While firing, a Spencer cartridge exploded, scattering the powder into his face. Five years afterward the specks were still there.

We figured that the Indians had shot two thousand rounds of ammunition at us that day.

One of our men found employment in North Platte, and had a coat, which was thrown over the breastworks before the engagement. Before leaving the wagons he had put this coat on. When daylight appeared, it was found to be full of holes. The story goes that a man from the East was in North Platte at that time, and seeing the coat, asked if he had it on during the fight.

We also learned that our escape from the wagon had been discovered by the Indians, and that our trail was closely followed until the fog set in. They had waited until it cleared away, by which time we were in safety.
(On July 16th The Independent carried a story of a historical nature, in which, among others, T. J. Foley, a young surveyor, was involved in a fight with hostile Indians. Today The Independent is in receipt of a letter from Mr. Foley, whose home is at Marshfield Hills, Mass., in which he stated that he had received a clipping of the story from The Independent, that it reminded him of some dear friendships formed in Grand Island, especially in the ranks of that old and excellent organization, the Masons.—Editor’s Note.)

Grand Island in 1876

It was my good fortune to make frequent visits to Grand Island in the year mentioned and at intervals for two years preceding, consequently acquaintances were formed with many of the people of the town, well known by name and remembered to this day. It was a great treat to forecast the reception that awaited one, and the privilege of again meeting a coterie of gentlemen never excelled in any land.

Today in recording their virtues it might be concluded they were of the old school. Far from it; they were not old-fashioned or fogy, but youthful, buoyant and free, full of fun and running over, never forgetful, however, of their duty and attention to friends and strangers. Those lovable early settlers of Nebraska possessed a charm of gentility and refinement so marked and lasting that after the passing of a half century and associated with men in position, the group of men in Grand Island at that period held sway, and the later associates faded away. Those pioneers broadcasted modesty, charity, chivalry and affection, men good and true and great men for the times. A heritage was bequeathed to Hall County in having such splendid men within its boundary.

A Masonic Town

In those days Grand Island had an extensive Masonic jurisdiction, reaching to the Wyoming line and including Sidney, Ogalalla, North Platte and Kearney. Candidates for the high orders journeyed from town and ranch and were received with joy and hospitality. The longer they remained the more reluctant they were to leave, but they had to go back, and what did they take with them? A memory that never can be effaced by one of the participants. All this was brought to mind a few days ago, with great interest, by the discovery of two diplomas, which set in motion an inspiration which made it possible to recall the past and its pleasures in Grand Island in the early days.

Deuel Chapter No. 11, Grand Island, Nebraska. Robert C. Jordan, high priest; W. A. Deuel, king; George E. Wilson, scribe; Claude W. Thomas, secretary. Dated June 10, 1876.


A good-sized book could be written eulogizing the exemplary character and eminence of the officers of the two branches of Masonry.

Friends Long Remembered

Referring to Deuel Chapter, Robert C. Jordan, a merchant, gentle, refined and courteous, with a remarkably pleasing voice which added greatly to his efficiency and impressiveness.

W. A. Deuel, then railway conductor, later sheriff of Hall County, and still later general manager of the Moffat Railroad. One of the most beloved of men, always ready for a frolic, had friends without number, every inch a man and had qualities to stand any test, to prove his friendship for rich or poor.
Claude W. Thomas, in the grain trade, dignified and revered, was very attentive to business, and the boys stood in a little awe of him.

George E. Wilson, Union Pacific agent, a most cordial associate, and a man of great kindness.

W. H. Platt, known as Judge Platt, a little bit retiring, but with his friends the reserve was forgotten, and he managed to hold his own under all circumstances.

Referring to Mount Lebanon Commandery: George H. Thummel, a lawyer, and the youngest of all the officers, recently married, in defiance of the decorum of a young bridegroom, and the drives from his friends, his smile remained and joined in the antics of the less dignified.

E. M. Bloomer, a railway conductor, a vital factor in the aggregation, but his duties were mostly on the road, and in spare time contributed to the cause.

Then came Johnny Moore, not until after he was married did they call him John. How can he be described? A wit, a story teller, he could make one on the instant, a prince with a big heart and a favorite of all. Later a high official of the Missouri Pacific at Little Rock.

Then there was Blake Howard, master mechanic of the shops, a member of all the lodges, and held in the greatest esteem, a little older than the rest, and while enjoying the sport of the grown-ups, if going too far those black eyes would change instantly, and Deuel would suddenly come to a halt, for he was most unruly.

This Blake Howard gave a son to the world, Clarence H., of St. Louis, president of the Commonwealth Steel Corporation, employing an army of men, of irreproachable character, a religionist of the broadest type, a contributor to every good cause, one of the big men of the country, on even terms with bankers and presidents, watchful of the poor, such is his reputation in his home city.