

SOME REMNANTS OF FRONTIER JOURNALISM

A Record of Pioneer Life and Spirit

(Continued from last issue)

BY M. A. RANCK

The bright outlook of "The Day County Tribune" of May 30, 1894—"Epoch third begins with an era of good feeling"—found its fulfillment in various reports of a peaceful and optimistic trend;

"Sunday School at the Court House Sunday, June 3rd."

"When the fat steers go to market this fall money in Day County will become burdensome, and have to be spent; as a result you may see fine dwelling houses, schoolhouses, churches, and a lively town in the county, a man in Grand who will sell \$20,000 worth of General Merchandise within a year."

"District Court will convene in Grand October 10, when the first Grand Jury for Day County will be organized. Just think of it. A county organized over four years and no use for a grand jury."

The records of the years 1895 and 1896 are few, but they suggest something of the zest and variety of life on the frontier;

"Round-ups are nearly a thing of the past. Ten years hence some of the old 'Punchers' will be sitting comfortably by their firesides some winter evening with a kid on each knee telling them how their Dad used to round up cattle in the early days of this country. They are getting to be more of a sham each year. We can see the round-up rapidly going. It has changed wonderfully since we came here twelve years ago. We do not think it is because cattle are scarcer; but cattlemen are fencing large areas. . . ."

"We scarcely see the need of a county attorney in this county at present; there has not been half a dozen cases to prosecute since the county has been organized. It would be cheaper to employ council when needed than to keep a salaried officer."

A brief time before this item came out the county attorney, Shanon McCray, had been appointed Probate Judge

of Woodward County and had resigned his office in Day County.

The celebration for July fourth, 1898, was reported at length;

"The celebration is over at last and grand and glorious it was; such a mass of American citizens was never before assembled within this county. . . . As we have stated, it was the largest gathering of people that was ever together at one time. There were about 500 in all here the fourth, and yet only about one-half the citizens of this county were out owing to the condition of the river. The raise that came down last week left the river in bad condition. If there had been no rise in the river there would have been fully 1,000 people here.

"Captain Price delivered a short address of welcome which commanded the close attention of the audience. At the close of his speech he introduced the Hon. George E. Black of Taloga, O. T., who delivered a highly elating speech which drew the close attention of the audience for an hour and a quarter. . . .

"We will not attempt to describe the sumptuous repast which was spread and everyone invited to partake thereof. . . .

"At a few moments after one, P. M., the call was sounded, and everyone adjourned to the tournament grounds to see the performers. There were many who were offering to bet that there wouldn't be thirteen rings caught. In the following we give a list of the afternoon races and those who were winners. . . . After the tournament riding everyone went to the race tracks to witness the sights there; four horses entered the sweep-stakes and four ran. First prize was taken by 'Sledge Hammer,' owned by John Alcorn. The prize was raised from \$25 to \$30. Second prize was taken by 'Pig Pen,' owned by Alex Crawford. The foot race was next. . . . Then came the sack race; we did not learn the names of all who took part in the race. . . . Then to cap off the day's sport the grand tug of war was pulled. . . . When the word 'go' was given everyone that could possibly get a hand hold did so causing the rope to break letting everyone turn heels over head backward. It was some time before the

crowd could be held at bay so those chosen could get a fair pull, but finally everyone let them alone and a grand tug it was sure enough. . . .

“Then everyone moved to the large platform in the grove and tripped the light fantastic toe to the splendid music furnished by Messrs. Tousley and Newcomb until daylight the next morning. . . .”

“Everything went merry as a marriage bell. Even the ‘scrap’ up at the saloon was an artistic affair and gave general satisfaction.”

Three issues later the Tribune reported:

A \$20,000 Blaze

“Last Sunday night, July 24th, at about 12 o’clock the court house and all its contents were consumed by fire. By the position of some articles which were found after the fire it is evident that it was done with incinerate intent. The fire was not discovered until the house was half burned to the ground, and help could not be summoned in time to save anything and all of the records of the county since this county opened were burned to ashes. . . . A reward of \$500 is offered for the arrest of the party or parties who fired the building and if he had been captured soon after the fire he would have been roughly handled.”

However the commissioners estimated the loss at about \$7000.

The same issue reported:

“The new court house will be built on the court house block, one block east of where it originally stood.”

“The county commissioners adjourned until Monday in order that they might negotiate with the lumbermen of Higgins and Woodward for lumber to rebuild the court house.”

“The commissioners met Tuesday to make arrangements to rebuild the court house.”

“J. E. Bull was in Wednesday figuring on the basement which is to be built under the court house.”

Thus the frontier rushed its steps to put this calamity at once into the past.

The next few surviving records of the Tribune throw

some light on local elections and the preliminaries. September 25th records;

"Although the bad weather was raging Friday night and Saturday, the delegates came out amazingly. . . . The convention was called to order and got down to business at about 2 o'clock. After transacting some routine business, the following candidates were placed in nomination and received the following number of votes. . . .

"The name chosen for the ticket was 'Peoples' Ticket,' and the device chosen was a western steer."

About a month later there was called to meet at Grand the "Citizens and voters in mass convention for the purpose of placing in nomination candidates for the various offices to be voted for at the coming November election." Presumably an opposing party was in prospect.

At the same time it was announced;

"Remember that delegate Callahan will address the people at Grand the 26th inst., and the Hon. Dennis T. Flynn will address them the 28th inst. Come out every body and hear these big guns blow their bazoo's. you might learn something."

"NOTICE—Hon. J. Y. Callahan, the anti-Republican candidate for congress, will address the people at Grand on Saturday evening, Sept. 26th, 1896, at 7:30 o'clock P. M. Come out everybody and listen to a discussion of the issues as presented by an able exponent of Free Silver and the interests of the masses."

"The gold bugs are trying to work the stock growing fraternity. Everytime any state talks favorable to McKinley, there is a little raise in the stock markets. Let them shove out their baits; all the better for the stock growers. . . ."

Issues of the spring of 1897 record various projects for improvements and the realization of some. There was much talk of the need of a bridge over the river at Grand. The need of a new school building was also urged. Mr. Saunders, a photographer of Woodward, established a temporary gallery for a few weeks. He was followed by another photographer and "scenic artist." "A good chance to secure the shadow ere the substance fades,"—so the editor commented.

In April a small hardware store was installed in a dwelling adjoining the Tribune office, and a black-smith shop was open for work.

The editor of the Tribune advertised himself as an agent for real estate and for the first time a few ranches and deeded farms were mentioned for transfer. Town lots were priced at \$2.50 to \$5.00 each.

In July of 1897 there was at Grand a meeting to form plans to pipe water from Robinson Springs on to the townsite of Grand.

In the same month another meeting decided upon the building of a school building to be eighteen by twenty-eight feet.

The following November, the 6th, it was announced that "on the 26th the school house is to be dedicated by a ball and a supper."

December 31st.—"The magic lantern show at the school house was well attended. The music of the graphophone was a new thing to many children and it was a real Christmas treat to them."

"School will open January 3rd, 1898, with Della Cann (the County Superintendent) as teacher.

January 21st.—"A hanging will soon take place in Grand when we can get men and ropes. We will hang the school house bell. It is a fine one."

February 4th.—"A history class was organized at the school house to meet every Thursday night."

May 14th.—"Professor G. A. Dean of Stone begins vocal music classes at the school house in Grand. There are 14 enrolled and he expects to have twenty. Good singing is the life of an entertainment of any kind. We at least ought to learn our national song."

The project for piping water to the town of Grand was dropped for some months while a townsite quarrel raged on. March 25th, 1898, the case was in District Court again. April 1st. it was announced;

"There were 876 feet of pipe and the fixtures unloaded in Grand Friday morning and the water will be run to the center of Main street as soon as the work can be done."

July 22nd.—"The water pipe is at last laid from the spring on the hill to the Court House."

As always in the spring the Tribune did not neglect news of interest in the conquest of the county's virgin soil.

January 21st.—“There have been some fine orchards planted in this county. Peach trees that have only been planted four years bore some fine fruit last year. Grapes seem to grow here as fine as in any country in the world. There is no question about this being a fruit country.”

“EMIGRATING TO DAY COUNTY.—There were ten families settled on Quartermaster's Creek last week, all from Johnson County, Texas, and there are ten more on the road from the same place. . . .

“Mr. Adams on Quartermaster's Creek is 90 years old and challenges any man of his age in Oklahoma for a foot race. He is hale and healthy. Oklahoma is a healthful county and is fast settling up with a good class of people. This has had a boom, but is just settling up with people that have come to stay and make it their home.”

“Most of the people here depend entirely upon cattle raising, but those that have given proper attention to farming are satisfied with the results. We do not claim a man can make money here to depend entirely on farming. He can raise plenty of feed and vegetables while his cattle are grazing or lying in the shade of an elm tree.”

“People are learning that it does not pay to keep poor, scrub cattle. They are grading up their herds with good stock and raising more feed. There are several fine herds that are all white faces and some herds of Durhams.”

February 25th.—“There was a number of farmers in Grand this week from Pie Flat buying garden seeds and having their plows put in shape for farming.”

“W. F. Burnett has just received a fresh supply of garden seeds of all kinds. Rakes, hoes, harness, Hardware, plows, and a fine stock of fresh groceries.”

“E. D. Walck is surveying in the north part of the county. There is some one in town every day either to file on claims or have one surveyed. It looks like the county is being settled up with farmers.”

“If you want to see a pretty sight go up to the fish pond of Mr. Adam Walck's. Just think of the fish playing in

the clear spring water. There could be more such ponds made in this country with but little expense."

March 4th.—"All western Oklahoma needs is development. Stock raising is the principle business carried on now. A cheese factory would be a good investment for some one at this place where there are so many cows, cheap pasture, pure water and natural advantages."

"There is quite a demand for home grown alfalfa seed. Farmers should be more careful about saving seed of all kinds."

March 11th. "We hear more talk about planting cotton."

"Sell your cattle and invest the money in cotton. The time to sell is when anything is up and buy when it is down."

In the following October another industry of the county was given due notice;

"The sorghum making industry has certainly taken a violent hold on some of our people, as they were running full force day and night last week. They will probably make several hundred gallons of the clear and delicious liquid."

What frontier people have never been tempted to dream of wealth by luck? The February 25th Tribune front page has;

GOLD IN DAY COUNTY—"There is an old California miner prospecting in this county for gold. He claims he can find colors in the canyon that runs just north of Grand. He also claims that there are several sections marked on the government plat as mineral and not subject to homestead entry. They are in the Antelope Hills west of Grand. The man is a practical miner and found a regular Klondike. There have been other gold hunters here but so far they were unsuccessful."

The few surviving copies of the years 1898 and 1899 contain items of less spirit and enthusiasm than the early issues. Among them, however, are these of special interest;

"The District Judge after calling court and dismissing all the cases, then dismissing court, sat down on the court house steps and drew a long breath and said,—

'This is useless for me to ride four hundred miles and go thru the farce of holding court.' We certainly agree with him."

June 15th, 1899.—"Our assessed valuation runs over \$400,000 this year. This is a fine showing for this county. We will try to give a detailed statement next week."

For a while before the inrush of settlers in 1901 and 1902, Grand was described as a dead town. The newspaper had lost its spirit. News locals written in August came out in a winter issue. There was much federal printing to be done from time to time, and as this paid well a new press was brought in by Sam Miller, the county attorney at that time. "Miller, Richards, and 'Cap' Mitchel" became a new firm, owners and publishers of "The Progress." With the later boom "The Canadian Valley Echo" was founded by E. L. Mitchel, the brother of "Cap" Mitchel. The "Progress" was bought by "A. H. Richards, George Carr and other Republicans," according to a statement in the Echo.

The earliest copies of the Echo (1902, July and August) show something of a revival of the first hustling, enthusiastic spirit; but those times did not last long, for many changes were due in old Day County.