

NORTH NEBRASKA IN THE EARLY EIGHTIES

(Continued)

I Locate June 27, 1882. The Town. My Armamentarium. Saddlebag Days. Early Social Events. A Benedict. Hard Times. Barter. I Arrive, Economically.

JUNE 27, 1882

I came to North Nebraska and located at Madison, a county seat town, June 27, 1882. I had friends living in the town from whom I learned that the place had but one physician, and this decided me to



A pen sketch of Madison, Nebr. made in 1881. This sketch is identical with the author's recollection of the town when he located, June 27, 1882. Note railroad yards, mill lake, mill, etc.

locate. The town was said to have a population of one thousand but it always seemed to me it could not have had half that number.

THE TOWN

The buildings were all of wood construction and most of the business houses were of but one story. Small panes of glass, probably 18 by 24 inches were used in some store fronts which made them unat-

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tractive. There was no established grade to the business streets and no established curb line. The plank sidewalks were, therefore, irregular, uneven, up or down, as the several adjoining property owners saw fit to lay them.

In 1882 Madison had two hotels, four general merchandise stores, one exclusive grocery, two banks, two hardware stores, one restaurant, a confectionery, two blacksmith shops, two implement stores, a flouring mill, two lumber yards, a coal yard, two livery stables, five attorneys, one other physician, four churches and a weekly paper. The above was representative of every other town of like age in Nebraska.

There was no court house building in 1882 although Madison had been the county seat for seven years. A story and a half frame building housed the offices of the county clerk, treasurer, sheriff and county superintendent. The county judge who was a lawyer transacted business incident to the judgeship in his law office. A number of interested business men formed an association and built a frame building modelled like a small town store room, known as the Town Hall, in which court could be held.

Business was not rushing in any of the stores and it was a common practice for persons who came in to do trading, or to gossip, to sit on the counters. The railroad had reached the town a little over two years earlier and the service consisted of one mixed train each way a day.

The only physician then located in the town had graduated seven years previously and was the community idol. He was not anxious to have a competitor. Could he have foreseen how little competi-

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tion my advent would bring he would not have worried.

There were two homesteaders in the community who professed some knowledge of medicine and did



The Author's Office in 1882.

some emergency practice. One professed also some knowledge of the law. An attorney told me this particular "doctor-lawyer" came into his office and after looking at the law library which was a pretty good one for the day, suggested it was fairly good

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and that if he had, in addition, the Indiana **Reports** and the Michigan **Digest** it would be complete! The other so-called physician claimed the euphonious name of John Quincy Adams Harvey. He was the



The Author's first piece of Furniture. Secretary-bookcase, writing desk, instrument drawers, combined.

first coroner of the county. A story current in the eighties was that a homesteader having been found in his cabin frozen stiff, Coroner John Quincy Adams Harvey was summoned to inspect the corpse. On reaching the cabin he pushed the door ajar, looked

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in and in his staccato voice gave his verdict, "Deader 'n hell!"

Four months elapsed before I could get an office because of the crowded condition of the business portion. During this time the owner of the hotel where I lived gave me permission to use the ladies' waiting room which adjoined my bedroom and which was little used by patrons of the hotel. On some occasions I was obliged to use the bed on which to examine the patient.

A new brick bank building was erected during my first summer's residence. When the institution was



The Author's first examining and operating table. Home made.
Now in use in basement of the home.

moved to the new building I rented the old one for an office at seven dollars a month. It had three rooms.

I furnished the waiting room with a walnut secretary and a few chairs. For the private office room, I had a carpenter make a table 6 feet long, 30 inches wide and 30 inches high which served as an examining and operating table for a number of years.

As soon as my income justified the expenditure I

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purchased a physicians' adjustable office and examining chair. The chair was ornamented with tassels (see cut). With the development of the principles of surgical cleanliness physician's office furniture



The Physician's First Office Chair

took on a more practical aspect and ornamentation disappeared. A bed in the third room completed my furnishings.

MY ARMAMENTARIUM

At this time my armamentarium consisted in addition to the furnishings mentioned, of a pocket

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medicine case containing twelve remedies namely: Bismuth, Dover's Powder, Morphine, Podophylin, Compound Cathartic Pills, Calomel, Mercury with Chalk, Bromide of Potassium, Tincture Aconite, Fluid Extract of Ergot, Tincture Belladonna, Tincture Hydrastis. I had a pocket case of instruments, a fever thermometer, and an obstetric forceps. An esteemed friend in town made me an oilcloth roll to wrap the forceps. My library consisted of seven of the medical books mentioned in a previous chapter.

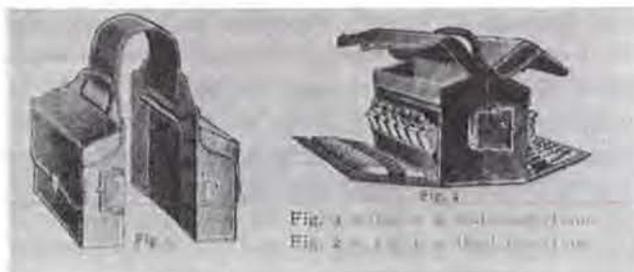
My father had promised me a young horse but when I claimed it he substituted an old pony that I had once owned which was subject to heaves. Only the direst necessity forced me to accept the nag. I soon disposed of the pony and got a better one. A good pony at that time cost fifty dollars.

SADDLEBAG DAYS

Practicing medicine pony-back or horseback required a pair of saddlebags. A saddlebag was never a thing of beauty, but of necessity, a clumsy work of art. It consisted of two leather pouches fitted with compartments for bottles, connected together with a heavy, broad leathern strap which fitted across the saddle and held the medicine pouches hanging on the sides of the pony or horse. About the time I began practice a refinement in the form of a convertible saddlebag or buggy case appeared and I purchased one. By doubling the leathern strap between the two pouches and fastening the pouches together with a pair of attached metal wire clips, a fairly presentable buggy case was fashioned. This was quite an asset, when, after a year, my saddlebag career ended, and I purchased an old open buggy from a liveryman. Gradually I acquired a second pony and

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drove a span. Prosperity of a sort! In time I acquired better ponies and a better buggy and eventually I owned two spans of horses and physician



The Author's Saddlebags.

phaetons which I drove until the automobile age appeared.

EARLY SOCIAL EVENTS

The social features of the town in the early eighties were wholesome community affairs for the most part. The Fourth of July celebration resolved itself into a barbecue with a lot of pioneer sports, such as pony races, foot races, catching the greased pig, climbing the greased pole, etc. A Fourth of July celebration required a bowery for the exercises and for the dance. Posts were set in the ground to support rafters and on the rafters were placed branches of trees with their green leaves to furnish shade. This was a bowery.

The Fourth of July oration was a work of art and oratory. I well remember one given by a civil war veteran, a minister. He began with the Creation, came down to the Noahan flood, the birth of Christ, the Dark Ages, the Renaissance, The Discovery of America, the Settlement of New England, the Revolution and finally the Civil War—and regretfully it

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seemed, reached the Peroration. Levity aside, some of the finest Fourth of July orations ever heard were the products of early day orators.

The Dime Social was the creation of the protestant churches which united for the events and pooled the receipts. The entire community attended. Each group brought a basket filled with whatever of food was available. The evening was spent in social



A Benedict at 26.

converse and in playing light games and singing until finally the time came for the lunch and the collection of the dimes. In these later years one's heart and mind revert to the dime social as a perfect social event of pioneer days not to be surpassed in fostering community spirit.

Then, there were the Pound Parties for the ministers who were all on a missionary basis, dependent

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in part on mission funds, and living on near-starvation salaries and friendly offerings from parishioners and others. Every one attending such a function took something useful for the minister's family, a



Prospective physician's bride of the Eighties.

pound of coffee, a pound of sugar, a gallon of sorghum, a slab of home-cured bacon, or salt pork, a sack of flour, a roll of butter or any other article useful to the family. Such events always passed off

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very pleasantly and were a tremendous aid to the missionary preacher and his family.

A BENEDICT

Timothy Titcomb said a single man has given no hostages to society and, therefore, has no claim on society. The third year, I acted on the theory that a single physician has no claims on society, and in spite of my financial stringency married the young lady with whom I had had an understanding for several years.

HARD TIMES

The first few years of family life were not without financial worries. The first baby of the new union arrived promptly the first year and I well recall that almost to the date of the child's arrival, lack of funds prevented us from providing the most ordinary layette. The third year I collected about a thousand dollars, the fourth year about twelve hundred dollars and the sixth twenty-one hundred dollars.

BARTER

Much has been said in the last years about community barter. Barter was a well established mode of trade in the eighties. Hay and grain for ponies, potatoes, butter, milk, cream, a hog and perhaps a quarter of beef in winter, were commodities of exchange on a barter basis for medical service. Hardship was not thought about; it was the way of the pioneer.

Many times during the first years I would gladly have left and taken any kind of a job if I could have paid my obligations and left honorably; but I would not run away from the debts, so stayed with them. The sequel proved my reasoning sound.

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One reason for this slow progress was that at one time during the first few years there were five physicians in the town and business was much divided; but the principal reasons for lack of clientele was, I suspect, inherent in myself. I was green, countrified and without a practical knowledge of the world and its ways.

I ARRIVE, ECONOMICALLY

Just seven years after I located, the pioneer competitor moved to the Puget Sound country. My opportunity had come, for we had many friends, who, up to that time had not been our patrons. My business increased a thousand dollars during the next year. I had arrived!