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## Letter of S. F. Nuckolls

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## LETTER FROM S. F. NUCKOLLS.

*Read before the Old Settlers' Picnic on June 17, 1874.*

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH,  
June 10, 1874.

*Maj. J. W. Pearman, President Old Settlers' Association:*

I thank you kindly for the honor done me in your letter of the 26th ult., in behalf of the Old Settlers' Association of Otoe county, Nebraska, extending to me an invitation to deliver the annual address before your Society at the fourth reunion, to be held this present month.

I would most gladly accept your invitation, but now is the busy mining season, and I have other and pressing duties that prevent, so that I must decline this opportunity of meeting my old friends in Otoe county—the best friends that man ever had.

It was October 1, 1846, when, being just twenty-one years of age, I left my native Virginia and traveled two hundred miles on foot to Wyandotte, on the Ohio river. There I took passage on a steamboat to St. Louis as a deck passenger. I have before me my passage ticket, which read as follows:

## STEAMBOAT SWATARA.

Trip No. 4. 1846.

S. F. NUCKOLLS

Paid Deck Passage to St. Louis.

To Wood and Coal.

From St. Louis I made my way by land to what is now called Civil Bend, but which was then known as Hog Thief Bend, about five miles from Nebraska City. On the steamer Swatara I had made the acquaintance of William Lambert, who lived there. When I arrived at his house he told me I could board there gratis, as long as I pleased, if I would help "grit;" as there was no mill in the country and all the corn meal had to be made in that way.

The next day there was a horse race, and as every one present had bets on the race except A. A. Bradford, Deacon Lambert, and the writer, we three were elected judges of the races. Judge Bradford was then county clerk of Atchison county, and he persuaded me to go down with him to Linden, Mo.

In a few days there was a wedding to take place at Mrs. Cornog's in Hog Thief Bend, to which all Linden went, ere the sun was low. But lo! the Methodist circuit rider, who was to tie the knot, did not come because the Tarkio river could not be crossed. The impatient guests arranged with B. M. George, sheriff of that county, to perform the ceremony between Wm. Wells and Miss Cornog. Mrs. Cornog was opposed to this proceeding, but every one else said it was all right; so the ceremony was performed, turkey and pigs eaten, and there was dancing on the puncheon floor of that log cabin "till daylight did appear." Two days thereafter the minister arrived and learned of the circumstance, and insisted that they should be remarried according to the forms of his church, which was duly done.

Judge Bradford, who was prominent at this wedding, some years afterwards was connected with Hon. J. S. Morton, Hon. J. F. Kinney, and Horace H. Harding in inducing Joseph Murphy, of Iowa, to give a grand oyster and champagne supper at the Nuckolls House, Nebraska City. At this social gathering there were present such eminent men as Gov. S. W. Black, A. J. Hopkins, E. A. Des Long, Dr. J. C. Campbell, John B. Boulware, W. R. Craig, Wm. McLennan, Geo. E. Crater, W. R. Sroat, C. H. Cowles, Dr. Wm. Dewey, J. H. Decker, Wilson M. Maddox, Gideon Bennett, Dr. Henry Bradford, H. P. Bennett, Gen. H. P. Downs, N. S. Harding, Thomas Morton, Judge Edward R. Harden, of Georgia, M. W. Riden, Mills S. Reeves, and many others. Hon. J. F. Kinney presided, and, after all the wine in town had been drank, at the expense of Murphy, the following resolutions were introduced by Hon. J. S. Morton, and unanimously passed:

WHEREAS, We are convened here this evening, at the invitation of a distinguished and eminent member of the high and honorable profession of the law—a bright particular star in that firmament of legal erudition, whose effulgence illumines the fertile and magnificent valley of the Missouri river—Joseph Murphy, Esq., of Fremont county, Iowa; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, 1. That in the intellectual economy of Joseph Murphy are all the elements and acquirements appertaining to the sound, practical, and profound lawyer, the ever reliable, staunch, active, energetic, and sagacious Democrat.

2. That the said Joseph Murphy, for his honesty, integrity, and indomitable industry and sobriety, is peculiarly fitted for a seat upon the supreme bench of the supreme court of Utah, for which place he seems to us *the man*—the man furnished at this crisis in the affairs of that polygamous commonwealth, as Napoleon was to France, by the hand of a never erring destiny.

3. That we earnestly, solicitously, anxiously, and prayerfully petition His Excellency, James Buchanan, the President of the United States, to nominate and, by and with the advice and consent of the United States Senate, confirm our friend and host as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Utah. And furthermore, be it

*Resolved*, That we wish Joseph Murphy, Esq., long life, honor, happiness and prosperity in this world; that we thank him for this entertainment; and that when late he may be called to *return* to heaven, his ecstatic psychological essence may evaporate to sing forever and ever beneath the ambrosial palm trees of that viewless world, where the Hesperian oligarchy blooms perennially forever and aye.

A newspaper printed up the river, called the *Bugle*, in 1854, published the following:

The Military Reserve on which Nebraska City is situated has not been publicly abandoned. What assurance have settlers that the War Department will not order the whole Reserve—six miles long, three broad—upon which the pleasant town site of Nebraska City is situated, to be sold to the highest bidder? The public buildings are yet unsold, and the people may at some future day find their happy homes subject to the auctioneer's hammer.

During the fall of the same year the first foot race took place, in which Wilson M. Maddox was beaten by the writer.

In 1855 the first legal "mill" occurred, before Judge E. R. Harden, of Georgia. Hon. O. P. Mason and H. P. Bennett engaged in physical combat, but no blood was shed. The court was much astonished at western habits.

During the same year Hon. J. S. Morton became interested in the Nebraska City *News*. Upon his first arrival with his estimable wife they visited the printing office, then in the second story of the old Block House, in company with the writer, finding Shack Grayson the sole person in charge, who afterwards—owing to his early associations—became a distinguished member of the Mississippi legislature.

In 1856 the proprietors of Nebraska City, fearing that the town of Wyoming would eclipse Nebraska City, concluded to buy that town, and did so, but they did not pay much for it.

Later in the same year Riden & White published the following statement of the stock market:

Nebraska City lots, \$50 to \$300. No choice ones offered.

Omaha scrip, no inquiry.

Omaha lots, no sales.

Wyoming lots, heavy transfers to capitalists.

Hamilton, ten shares for a brass watch and a little black dog.

Otoe, Gideon Bennett reports that no sales made except to those who will build.

Delaware, no inquiry.

Powhocco, 20 shares for an old blind horse and two Peter Funk watches.

Fairview, 36 shares for a big white dog and an old gun.

Xenia, 50 shares for a gilt watch chain and ten cents *cash*.

Fredonia, 20 shares for a pewter watch and a pair of boots.

Brownville, lots donated to any man who wears store clothes.

Kearney, 7½ miles distant, too high (on the hill).

In January, 1857, the Otoe County Lyceum was established, and the following officers elected:

President—W. R. Craig.

Vice-President—Wm. E. Pardee.

Recording Secretary—Philip K. Reily.

Corresponding Secretary—H. H. Harding.

Librarian—H. M. Giltner.

Treasurer—Francis Bell.

Sergeant-at-Arms—J. O. B. Dunning.

Trustees—Joshua Garsiele, M. W. Riden, Henry Bradford, S. F. Nuckolls, M. K. Kay.

In 1858 the great firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell commenced freighting for the government from Nebraska City to Utah, New Mexico, and military posts in the West. During that year they started out 4,000 teamsters, with 3,000 wagons, and over 30,000 head of oxen. Their business was managed by Alexander Majors, Esq., in a manner that gained the admiration of the country and gave the city an impetus in every branch of business.

The writer and other old settlers were invited to go out to camp to see the first train started, upon which occasion Mr. Majors addressed the "Outfit" as follows:

OX TEAMSTERS: I am a moral and religious man, and feel it my duty as a member of society to carry out and enforce so far as possible a wholesome moral influence; therefore I give every employe one copy of the Holy Bible to defend himself against moral contaminations, and also a pair of Colt's revolvers and a gun to defend yourselves against warlike Indians; and each of you are required to sign a contract to the effect that while in our employ you will not use profane language, nor get drunk, nor gamble, nor treat animals with cruelty, nor interfere with the rights of citizens or Indians; nor do anything ungentlemanly towards

any one; and a violation of this agreement shall make you liable to a discharge and a forfeiture of your wages.

We pay the highest prices that are paid for the services that you are now about to engage in, and your good behavior is a part of the value that we receive for what we pay you.

If it were right to take a man's labor for nothing, which it is not, I would not allow any one of you to travel with one of our trains if you would board and find yourselves and work for nothing, and at the same time violate the rules of propriety just laid down to you.

It is my desire that our firm shall be a means of largely benefiting our employes while they are associated with us. To do this, we must have rules and discipline for your government, which must be obeyed, otherwise there will be confusion, and your standard of morality would be lowered. There are two distinct kinds of influence that affect the children of men—what we call the bad and the good. If men enjoy the genial and wholesome influences desired, they must be practically right in their lives. Otherwise the bad influence will take hold of them.

I desire you, wagon masters, to be kind and gentle and dignified toward the men in your care, and for this your reward will be the respect and gentlemanly deportment of your men toward you.

I want you young men who are placed under these wagon masters to obey them, and shall anything then go wrong they will be held accountable for any blunders. Now, young gentlemen, you will observe by the rules established that I do not require you to sign a temperance pledge, but to keep from getting drunk. I will, however, suggest that the only sure way to keep from getting drunk is not to drink at all.

If I had a weakness of that kind, and a man calling himself my friend invited me to drink, I would consider him more an enemy than a friend. There are some here who may say that they cannot refrain from the habit of swearing. Perhaps you have not thought of what a wicked thing profane swearing is.

Many young men have mistaken notions in regard to this practice. I may think it an accomplishment, while it is a shameful disgrace. It carries with it other evils that you would be ashamed to acknowledge that you were guilty of.

Many say that it is the only bad habit they have—that they hate a liar or a coward. They forget that it is next to impossible to swear without commencing with a lie. The greatest cowards in the world are the most profane and vulgar swearers. No man who calls upon the Almighty to damn his soul means what he says. If he did he would not be guilty of such blasphemy. Now, young gentlemen—you who think that you cannot refrain from swearing—I will now tell you of three positions where it would not be possible for you to swear. I will call with you upon your mother sitting at her center table with the old family Bible on it, and two or three other ladies with her. Could you introduce me to them and wind up with an oath? Not one of you is so degraded as to be guilty of doing so.

I will now go with you to church. We will place three Christian ministers in the pulpit, fill the pews with fathers and mothers with their little curly headed, blue eyed, and rosy cheeked boys and girls. Is there a gentleman among you that could bring out a profane oath with such surroundings? The next situation

in which we will make the test will be in the position in which we are now associated. We are here in our rough costumes, we have the ox yoke, the huge wagon and log chain, and our situation is one that gives us nothing to bolster up or restrain us, but the manhood and remembrance of our good mothers and their advice. Now, young gentlemen, I will say to those who assert that they cannot help swearing I will cease speaking for two minutes, so as to give time for any man who is now present who says that he cannot refrain from swearing to deliver himself from some of those huge oaths. [A pause.]

So now, not one of you seems burdened with a desire to swear. I thank you, young gentlemen, for standing the test, and pray that you may always maintain true integrity and refrain from profane practices. If perchance I meet one of your mothers I pray that she will not say to me that while you were in our employ you lost your good name, and my aim shall be to send you back to your homes with your habits and business qualifications bettered instead of lowered. Now, young gentlemen, in time of peril remember your fathers and mothers who raised you, and the God who sustains you.

And now, Old Settlers,  
Farewell. I will omit no opportunity  
That may convey my greetings, love to thee.

F. S. NUCKOLLS.

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## OTOE COUNTY IN EARLY DAYS

By E. H. COWLES, One of the Oldest Settlers.

Thinking a sketch of the early history of good old Otoe county would be a readable article in your columns and at the same time be appropriate to the times, I will give a few items of the many incidents that fell under my observation at an early day in the organization, settlement, and progress of the territory; more particularly that which refers to the then Pearce, but now Otoe county.

As my books and papers referring to transactions which happened in those days were all burned when my house was burned, I can only speak from memory and approximate as to dates. It should be remembered that this whole country bordering on the Missouri river, including Kansas, was called Nebraska territory, or the Great American Desert, supposed to be an uninhabitable waste; not until about from '50 to '54, during the great California emigration, which passed over nearly every portion of this wild country, was the fact generally known that this vast country possessed agricultural qualities unsurpassed by any portion of our wide-spread country. Stimulated by these facts a few adventurous individuals put a practical test to the productiveness of the soil by planting different kinds of grain and