

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State
Historical Society

Nebraska State Historical Society

1885

Some Historical Data About Washington County

W. H. Woods

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebhisttrans>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Woods, W. H., "Some Historical Data About Washington County" (1885). *Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State Historical Society*. 46.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebhisttrans/46>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nebraska State Historical Society at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Transactions and Reports, Nebraska State Historical Society by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

(meaning the western prairies). To abbreviate the interview, the chief proceeded to relate that, after wandering on the prairies for a long time, they became discouraged. Dissensions and differences of opinion prevailed, but all agreed to go back to the Ne-shu-da river. The tribe divided into four bands, as indicated by Father Hamilton, and started eastward to the river. What is now the Omaha tribe—their band reached the river farther north than either of the other three bands and for this reason were called the Ma-has. The interpretation of the word “Ma-ha,” given me by Noise, was “farthest up the river,” “up yonder,” “up above the others.”

As proof of the original name, “Ma-ha,” I have now in my possession original documents, credentials of chiefship, given to the “Ma-ha Indians;” one, in Spanish, given in 1794 to “Wa-ging-a-sa-by, head chief nation Ma-has;” two given by “James Wilkinson, Commander-in-chief of the Army of the U. S., and Governor of the Territory of Louisiana, and Supt. Indian affairs,” given on July, 1806, to Wa-ga-sa-by; one to Wash-co-ma-ni, chief of the Ma-has; and one to Wa-ho-ra-ka, a soldier of the Ma-ha nation.

Lewis and Clarke, in the narrative of their expedition in 1804–5–6, speak of the “Ma-ha nation” and “Ma-ha village.”

ROBT. W. FURNAS.

SOME HISTORICAL DATA ABOUT WASHINGTON COUNTY.

W. H. Woods, of Fort Calhoun, Washington county, furnishes me with following data:

Hon. R. W. Furnas, President Nebraska Historical Society:

DEAR SIR—Agreeable to our promise to continue our investigations, we, last Tuesday, visited the site of the old village mentioned in Bell's History of Washington County, page 39, as the site of an old Mormon settlement of 1845; but thought by Mr. Grenell and others to have been of much older date, and probably a farm station or outpost of either Fort Atkinson, which lay about one mile east, or Fort Calhoun, four miles south.

The location is but a few rods north of the present De Soto P. O.,

near Mills station, in a cultivated field belonging to the Hon. T. M. Carter. The buildings were in two rows, running north and south, and the foundations were so well laid as to be a continual annoyance to the plowman yet. Here in company with Mr. C. we scratched around in the frozen earth with our feet, and were rewarded by finding an old butcher knife, a piece of a glass dish of an antique pattern, and a portion of a tombstone, with the letters O and N in perfect condition and an S partly gone, making the word "son," the same being the end of the name. The top was neatly chiseled and ornamented, and of a species of reddish sandstone. Four kinds of brick were found, from a very small variety almost as hard as granite to a very large one, each differing in hardness, yet all keeping good condition. The small ones are covered on one side with a species of cement, and we understand of these kind were made the floors in the houses of Fort Calhoun and then covered with a thin coating of this material to form a smooth even surface.

We next visited the cave of the De Soto "Light Horse Brigade," Bell's History, page 38. The entrance was too much closed by the caving in of the bank and a stream of melted snow water to obtain an entrance. We will try again. The boys in the neighborhood who were inside last summer think they passed about forty feet, when they found a depression in the floor, probably a magazine or rifle pit, and as the entrance was nearly closed and they had no torches, they did not investigate further. Mr. C. also kindly presented us for the Society the lock and key to the door of the old Waubeek Bank, of De Soto, 1857, A. Castetter, now of Blair, teller. See Bell, page 38. The lock is a formidable affair, and apparently as good as new, and cost, Mr. Grenell says, twelve dollars and a half. The lock of the safe is in the possession of Mr. Grenell.

Mr. Carter has a five dollar bill of the old bank of De Soto that a few years ago could have been purchased for a few cents, now considered of more than face value.

This portion of Nebraska promises to open up a rich field for the antiquary, the dry-a-dust of those particularly interested in the early days of our now wonderfully prosperous state of Nebraska. Brick that have been buried in foundation and cellars for over half a century are being constantly exhumed and used, and they are in just as perfect condition as they were when first laid. Fire-brick, also in the

most perfect order, are also still here, the last remaining monuments of the old hearthstones, many of them, no doubt, as bright and beautiful in their surroundings as the joy and cheer that may pass around the hearthstones of to-day. They have left behind them also specimens of their handicraft, their arms, coins, metals, etc., many of which are now in the hands of our citizens. The site of the old blacksmith shop under the bluff has been established and a careful digging may reveal many things. A portion of the old dairy house still remains just west of town; the old spring still running, surrounded by the same stones, quarried and brought from Rockport hills probably more than sixty years ago.

The old grave-yard, too, on the highest point of the bluff west of the fort, may yet bring forth some treasures in names, dates, etc., as it is but a few years, I understand, since the last stone fell.

We have now added to our collection in addition brick, fire-brick, fragments of cement, a barrel of a flint-lock musket, a cannon axle weighing about fifteen pounds, of charcoal iron, hand-forged, the points turned in a lathe, but of inferior workmanship; also specimens of hand-made nails, used in the construction of their buildings, and three varieties of delf, all varying in color, design, and thickness, one with a green figure and the other blue.

For many years there has been a legend current here that two lieutenants from the South, stationed at Fort Calhoun, fought a duel here upon the point of the bluff about a half mile north of the fort, and that both were killed and buried where they fell. Mr. A. P. Allen reported a few years ago that a portion of one of the grave stones had been plowed up and thrown over against the timber, and in conversation with Mr. Frahm we learned that the stone was in the possession of his little seven-year-old son Otto, and that the other one had been for some time on the premises, but now mislaid, and that it bore the word "Hanson." The one in the possession of little Otto he kindly presented to the Society. It is of triangular form, evidently from the center of the monument, is six by twelve inches in size, two and one-quarter inches in thickness, of limestone, and bears the following part of the inscription complete, except the letter C, here noted, and other marks not strictly legible, ——— C—eniber, 30 years.

Mr. Frahm's son, Freddie, also permitted us to examine and measure the head of the femur and also a section of vertebræ of a mam-

moth found upon Mr. Frahm's farm. The former originally measured thirty and the latter fifteen inches in circumference.

W. H. WOODS.

To Hon. R. W. Furnas, President Nebraska State Historical Society:

Mr. Craig having called our attention to certain discoveries made at the dairy house and spring, already mentioned, while building his fish ponds, we again visited it, and found that after the stone had been removed that the extreme diameter of the well was about eight feet, of octagon form, a curb having first been made of three sided cottonwood posts with two-inch cottonwood boards, spiked upon the outside of these with a peculiar form of hand-made nails of various length and thickness, and so well preserved was the wood that we had hard work to secure good specimens of the spikes, although the latter were as good as though but recently driven. About two rods east of this, where some charred timbers had been exhumed, we found a portion of an oak framing timber 8x8, with the tenon and oak pin in good shape, also three-inch oak plank measuring about fourteen inches in width and mortised across the end to make a smooth joint. These were evidently a portion of the milk room; and by placing on edge on the outside of a frame and placing the earth back they would require no nails; no marks of nails could be found upon them, and they came from out of the side of a high bank. Mr. Grenell and others expressed doubts about the age of the well, and cited us to Mr. Daniel Franklin for information, but in conversation with the latter gentleman we think we are in the main correct.

Our attention has also been called to a ditch and earthwork half a mile south of the fort. But as it runs across a bend in the prairie with steep banks and timber on three sides, it was probably a sod fence for garden or corral purposes.

W. H. W.

Mr. E. H. Clark, now of Blair, in 1856, probably planted the first orchard in Washington county, which is now a portion of the residence property of Hon. L. Crounse. The next year two or three others were planted, and three or four years after the well known Stevens or Grenell orchard was planted. They have all made a good growth, and been more than ordinarily fruitful. We, to-day, measured one of the neatest, smooth-trunked apple trees it has ever been our

pleasure to examine, and found it to measure four feet and nine inches in circumference two feet above the ground. We also examined the deciduous trees planted by the roadside at the same time, and give the result with the same kind of measurement: White elm, 5 feet and 10 inches; hackberry, 5 feet 7 inches; black walnut, 4 feet 3 inches; coffee bean, 3 feet 6 inches; black locust, 5 feet 8 inches; while cottonwood planted by the late Col. Stevens at the present residence of S. N. Pennell in 1863 measures 6 feet 6 inches.

Mr. Hiram Craig thinks he has the largest transcendent crab tree in the state, three feet ten inches, while a Scotch pine planted by our venerable horticulturist, Dr. J. P. Andrew, measures thirty-two inches. And it may be a matter of surprise to many to know that by close observation of a number of years we can find less than a dozen trees now standing upon this plateau that were here at the time of the evacuation of the fort. At that time, said a trader at Fort Randall in 1853 to Mr. Chester Bannister, of this place, I was a soldier at Fort Calhoun, and the river ran where is now the old slough, and the timber on the other side of the stream was not larger than a man's thigh. This then is the hundreds of acres of large cottonwoods cut by the settlers during the past twenty-five years. The channel of the river would have been about seven-eighths of a mile from the present depot of the St. P. & O. R. R. The channel now lies, by recent government survey, a fraction over three and a quarter miles from the above building. This is from the surveyor's note book the day the line was run.

In 1856-'7 the steamboat landing was about half or three-quarters of a mile west of the present channel, supposed to be the exact spot where stands the cabin near the still water, known as Nichol's shanty.

For the benefit of travelers by railroad we would state that the camp of Lewis and Clarke was supposed to have been nearly east of the first railroad bridge north of Calhoun. This may have been the reason why this spot was chosen by the two unfortunate young men spoken of in a previous issue.

Mr. Woods, in a subsequent letter, referring to his previous communication, adds the following notes:

And here also remain the younger scions of the old black locust grove (probably the first artificial grove planted in Neb.), from which

hundreds of trees have been sold and planted in Iowa and Nebraska. Horseradish and asparagus still remain in the old garden, from which our citizens have supplied themselves for the past twenty-five years. Several varieties of plums are also supposed to have been brought here and planted at the same time.

In addition to which, Mr. Gideon, now of Iowa, states that in 1865 he first ploughed up the sod, and in so doing he came across a number of fragments of grave stones in two places at some distance apart. The one was of a white color, and the other much darker in color, and also differed very much in thickness, the white being the thicker; and that the stones lay in a line from N. E. to S. W., which would also agree with the shadow of the sunlight coming from the east and shining squarely upon both parties to this sad affair. We know that two kinds of tombstones were used by the soldiers, as we have the two kinds referred to here, but not both from the same place.

We have reason now to suppose that the plank used were barge plank, brought up from below with them, probably a portion of the boats used in coming.

Should you chance to pass here on S. C., St. P. & P. R. R., by a little study of this rough diagram you can have some idea of the points of interest. The plan is drawn for two city blocks for each section as numbered, streets included. The cemetery is upon the high point of bluffs north of the grove, five blocks west and four north of depot, and is at present marked by a large pile of manure hauled upon it. (*) is very near where Legerd states that an Indian chief was buried with his pony and trappings, and for several years his friends came to hold lamentations over his grave.

W. H. WOODS.

From Washington county papers I present the following data relating to death of old settlers in that county:

HUMPHRIES—On Saturday, March 16th, on a U. P. train, in Western Nebraska, Mr. Edwin Humphries, of this place, aged 64 years.

Ed. Humphries was well and favorably known to almost everybody hereabouts. He was one among the first settlers in this county, locating at De Soto in May, 1855, where he continued to reside until last fall, when he moved to Blair on account of failing health. He has been troubled with a dropsical affection, and has been steadily

declining for several months. On Friday last he started on a trip to Colorado, seeking relief in a change of climate, and this effort proved fatal, for on Saturday evening a telegram announced his death on the cars at a point near Julesburg. The remains were returned by express, arriving here on Monday, and the funeral was held on Tuesday from Germania Hall, services being conducted by Rev. Doherty, of Omaha, according to the faith of the Episcopal church. Ed. was a warm hearted, genial man, and a citizen of sterling integrity, who had many friends and no enemies. He leaves a wife and one son—Wm. Humphries, of this place—to mourn his loss. He served with credit during war times in the Second Nebraska Calvary, and has always been recognized as a progressive member of the body politic. His death is the falling of another landmark in the early history of this county.

WARRICK—At his home in Cuming City precinct, this county, April 25, 1883, Amasa Warrick, aged 58 years. Funeral at the Baptist church at 11 o'clock to-morrow.

The subject of the above notice was born in Clearfield county, Penn., Aug. 10th, 1825. *Coming to Nebraska in 1856*, he located where Watson Tyson now lives. The next year he moved to the spot where he died, and has lived there with his family ever since, respected by all who knew him. Only a few months since Mrs. Warrick died from an attack of small-pox, and now her husband has gone to meet her in that happier and better land. By honesty and frugality Mr. Warrick accumulated a competency, supplying each of his children with a home for himself or herself as they reached their majority. He leaves eight children, respected, highly esteemed young men and women, to mourn his death. No man who ever lived in Washington county was more thought of or more highly respected by his neighbors and acquaintances than "Uncle" Amasa Warrick, and certainly none were ever more entitled to it. He lived as he died, an honest, conscientious, Christian man, respected by the rich and beloved by the poor, whose friend he always was.

FRANKLIN—At the residence of her son, W. B. Franklin, in Fort Calhoun precinct, on Saturday, July 14, 1883, at seven o'clock A.M., Huldah Franklin, wife of Daniel Franklin, in the seventy-fifth year of her age.

Mrs. Huldah Franklin, who died at her son's home near the village of Fort Calhoun last Saturday, was one of the oldest settlers of

Washington county. She came to Nebraska with her husband twenty-seven years ago the 23d day of the present month, and located near Fort Calhoun, where she has ever since resided. She was approaching her seventy-fifth birthday, and had been married about fifty-three years. Her husband, Daniel Franklin, and four children, Warren B., Monroe, D. L., and Mrs. Dean Slader, who are left to mourn her death—all reside in Calhoun precinct. Pioneers of the county who knew her as a kind and obliging neighbor years ago will join her friends and relatives in mourning her death.

RELICS.

The Society is in possession of the following valuable relics:

INDIAN DOCUMENTS.

A commission as chief of the "Ma-ha" Indians to "Wa-ging-a-saby." El Baron de Carondalet, Caballero de la Religion de San Juan, Mar de Campodelo Reals Exercistas Gobernador General, Vice Patrono de las Provincial la Louisiana, of Florida Occidental, Sub-inspector General de las Tropas of Milcias de las Mis Mas de," dated New Orleans, May, 1796.

A commission to "The-ro-chy" (two sides of a cow), "Chief Soldier of the Ma-ha Nation," dated July 27th, 1815. Given by "William Clark, Governor of the Territory of Missouri, Commander-in-Chief of the Military thereof, and Superintendent of Indian affairs."

Also two other Indian commissions given by same authority. One to "Wa-ho-ra-be," "Soldier of the Ma-ha Nation," of date August 4th, 1815. One to "Wash-ca-ma-nee" (The Hard Walker), as "Second Chief of the Ma-ha Nation," of date July 27th, 1815.

A commission to "Wash-com-ma-nii," a "Chief of the Ma-has," given by "James Wilkinson, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United States, Governor of the Territory of Louisiana, and Superintendent of Indian Affairs," dated July 27th, 1806. This com-