



McPherson County News

~ Established 1889 ~

Incorporating The Tryon Graphic

Entering its 50th year of publication, *The Graphic* produced a special 16 page “Anniversary Special” on September 8, 1938. Publisher F.S. Snyder reported he had done his best to use the pictures and stories he felt would be of interest to readers and at the same time set down in historical form the events which had an important bearing on the history and development of McPherson county and the territory. The issue traced the history of the newspaper and county through the past 50 years in pictures and stories. Snyder was pleased to report at the annual meeting of the Nebraska Press Association in February, 1938, *The Tryon Graphic* won third in the contest for the weekly newspaper having the best front page in towns under 1,000 in the state. First place went to the *Leigh World*, and second to the *Orleans Enterprise*.

In commemoration of the approaching 130 years of the newspaper and county, Creative Printers will be bringing you some of the pictures and history from this anniversary edition in the coming *McPherson County News* section. Snyder wrote, “It is impossible to make a good newspaper in any town without the support of the citizens from that town and community. During the twelve years we have been publishing the *Graphic*, we have been treated splendidly and as we stay at the helm and manage the destinies of the *Graphic*, year after year, we hope to always hold this friendship.” This sentiment is as true today as it was 80 years ago.



Home of the *McPherson County News* in Tryon in 1895. This building, which we are told was a very good sod one, stood about where the Ready building, housing the Kinsman Cafe, is now located. It was built by Jay Smith while he was County Treasurer and owner of the newspaper plant and it was sold along with the paper in 1895. Shown in the picture are from left to right: Will H. Daly, Publisher of the *McPherson County News*, now living at Wallace, Nebraska and publisher of the *Wallace Winner*; Silas E. Clothier, County Treasurer, now deceased; Manford Harrison of Ringgold, now living in North Platte, and Levi Poor, a homesteader in the south part of the county, now deceased.

The picture was taken by W.E. Bowers and was entered in the contest by Mrs. Geo. E. Dolph. Engraving by Brown’s Studio.

First Jury Case - State of Nebraska vs. J. Robinson



The First Jury Called in McPherson County

Summoned in June 1903 to try Jim Robinson for the murder of Elmer Thayer at the Whitewater ranch in June the year before. Robinson was found guilty and sentenced to the state penitentiary. Shown in the picture are from left to right: Back Row - Harve Rogers, Woods, Jim Morris, Sheriff; Jim Berry; John M. Neal; W.H. Winters; Fred Brooks; Chas. Heldenbrand. Front Row - Woods; Mike Connell; Monroe Bender; John D. Brown; Geo. Sparks. Picture by Frank Dolph and Engraving by Brown’s Studio. Picture is the property of Mrs. W.H. Winters.

No event in the early years of the settlement of the county attracted the attention and created feeling as did the case of the State of Nebraska vs. James Robinson. The fact that it was the first important case in the county’s history may have been partly responsible, but feeling run high and it was the talk of the settlers for years.

In June 1902 James Robinson, blamed for the murder of his wife and known to have a penitentiary record, shot and killed Elmer Thayer on the Whitewater meadow a little east of the ranch house. Mrs. Haskell saw the shooting. Ranch hands found Thayer bleeding badly lying in the track in the road. Robinson was mounted on his horse, nearby. A pocket knife was picked up near Thayer, blade open.

Thayer was carried to the ranch house and everything done possible to save his life. The slug had entered his body below the shoulder taking a downward direction through the lung and coming nearly through his body. A doctor was summoned, but Thayer had died before he arrived. At the coroners inquest it was decided that Thayer met death at the hands of Robinson. However, Robinson was not taken

into custody.

Early the following spring Robinson was arrested and charged with murder and lodged in the county jail at Mullen until time for court to set. Robinson was brought across from Mullen in a buggy by the sheriff and was accompanied by an attorney.

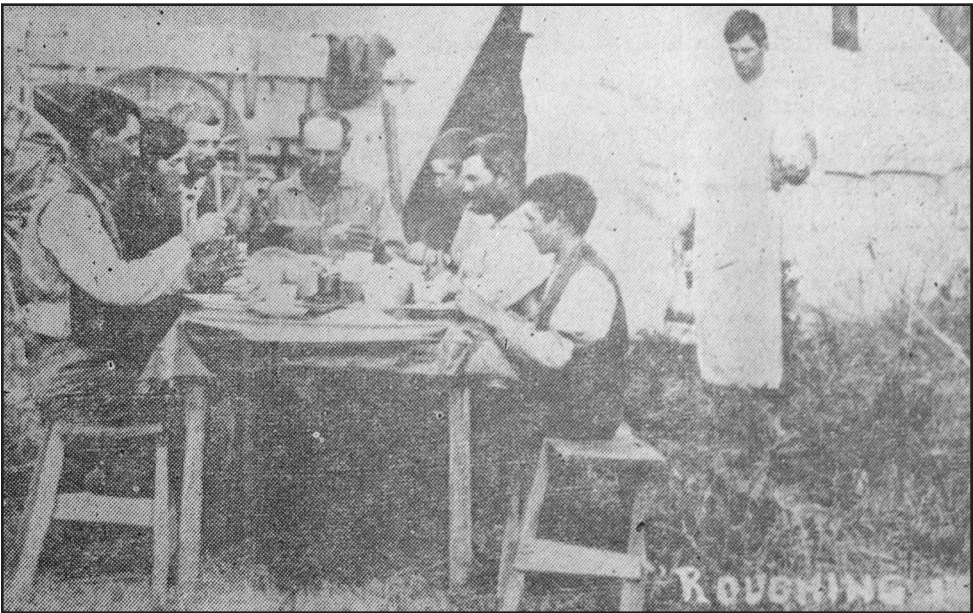
The task of selecting a jury was a difficult one as every resident in the western part of the county had learned considerable about the case, possible cause for the killing and were quickly disqualified. Those selected were mostly from the eastern part of the county.

The trial got underway and the State attempted to prove that Robinson and Thayer had quarreled. Both were employed by the Whitewater ranch and had spent months together on the ranch. Robinson’s record was not a good one which had considerable weight with the jury. The defense argued that Thayer was of sullen disposition quarrelsome and held a grudge at Robinson and while arguing, the day of the killing, grabbed the bridle of Robinson’s horse and attempted to stab Robinson. In self defense, Robinson drew his gun, shot Thayer through the shoulder not intending to kill him. Robinson was not put on the stand.

The testimony was all heard, many being called, several to attempt to prove that Thayer was walking up the road whittling on a small hard wood stick when confronted by Robinson. The case finally went to the jury.

Many of the jurors were for finding Robinson guilty in the first degree which carried the penalty of hanging. Finally the jury returned a verdict of guilty in the second degree and Robinson was sentenced to life imprisonment and committed to the state penitentiary.

Robinson served about nine years and was pardoned by the Governor.



“Roughing It” is the title of this picture taken on the Whitewater meadow in the nineties. The picture by Bowers is the property of Elmer Waits at the left in the picture. Link Sells of Eddyville was the boss of this crew and is shown at the head of the table. Settlers from this part of the county often found employment on the Whitewater Ranch in the early days.

Much Early History Centers Around The Cottonwood Ranch



“Supper Time on the Trail” -- These riders for the Circle Outfit, John Bratt & Co. Ranch in Lincoln County, are shown at supper as they camped on the trail while taking 700 head of cattle to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The picture was supplied to us by L.C. Reneau. N.E. Trego, County Commissioner, was one of the riders on this drive, but is not shown in the picture. Picture by Bowers, Engraving by Brown’s Studio.

A lot of early history of the western part of the county centers around Cottonwood Ranch, owned by Nate Trego since before the county was organized. The ranch was for many years the voting place for west McPherson precinct and the ranch is steeped in early ranch history.

Cottonwood Ranch was established in the early 1880’s by Col. Cody, Buffalo Bill and his ranch partner Col. Luke North. They moved a log cabin from near the head of the Dismal River and established a ranch headquarters. The name came from a lone cottonwood tree growing in the valley.

The Cody-North ranch was established after Cody and North went into the cattle business in the sandhills. Later they sold to John Bratt & Co. Bratt ran cattle from the Valley north to the south branch of the Dismal River and

west a considerable distance into what is now Arthur and Keith counties.

The log house moved to the Cottonwood Ranch is still standing and is possibly the oldest building in the county. Of course it has long ago been abandoned as a ranch house, but is still used as a bunk and store house. It was built of hewn cedar logs cut on the Dismal river and no doubt will withstand the elements for many more years.

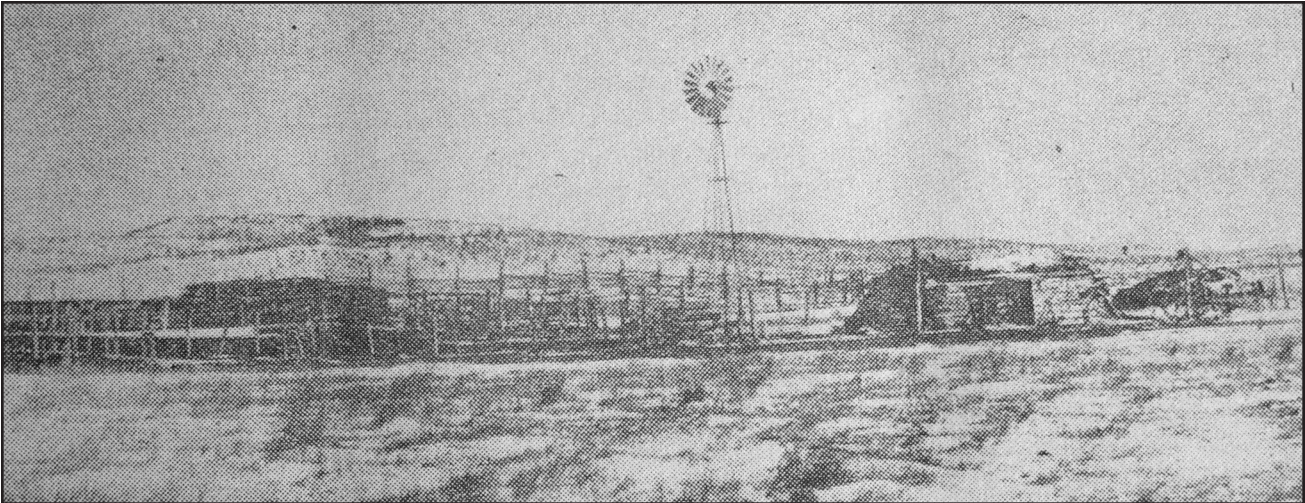
When Bratt & Co. broke up the ranch, selling it out in smaller tracts, the buildings at Cottonwood Ranch were sold to a Mr. Brown. Brown homesteaded the land and later sold to Trego.

On the crest of the high hill which shelters the Trego ranch, stands a large red cedar post, placed there it is said by early wild horse hunters who had a camp in the

valley below. A lantern was hung on this post to direct the riders back to the camp per chance they were caught out by nightfall. In those days landmarks in the sandhills were very scarce. The wildhorse hunters often set tall posts with flags on the higher hills as landmarks.

The Southwest precinct, in McPherson County received its name from Cottonwood Ranch and should a history ever be written of the county the name will be mentioned hundreds of times throughout its pages.

The Trego ranch today is one of the best in the county. Aside from the regular herd, the ranch boasts of a fine herd of Registered Herefords, which are the pride of Mr. Trego and his daughter and family, Mr. and Mrs. Mart Mathers, Don and Jo Anne who make their home on the ranch.



Cottonwood Ranch showing the old cedar log house and the corrals. This picture, the property of N.E. Trego, was taken by Bowers soon after Trego bought the ranch from Browns. Read the story above. Engraving by Brown’s Studio.