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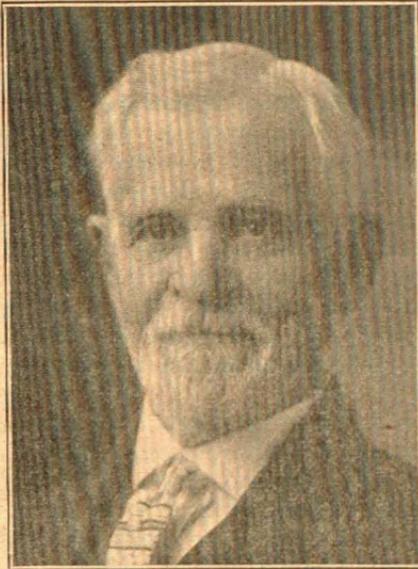
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S. D. FITCHIE

THE FIGHT FOR PROHIBITION IN NEBRASKA

S. D. Fitchie, Formerly of Nebraska, Now of Stockton, California, Writes
an Historical Story

Editorial Note:

Prohibition of the liquor traffic was a live issue in Nebraska from 1855 until 1918. There were ups and downs of popular interest in the question during that long period, but the agitation never ended. During a large part of this time Nebraska was a storm center of the campaign against alcohol. The cyclone periods included the enactment of the first prohibitory law in 1855; the repeal of the same law in 1859; the establishment of local prohibition at Nebraska City by its business men as a condition required by Russell, Majors & Waddell for making Nebraska City the terminus of their overland freight business; the "Red Ribbon Movement" of 1877 to 1881 led by John B. Finch; the enactment of the Slocumb high license liquor law in 1881; the submission of a prohibitory amendment, and its defeat, in 1890; the county option fight of 1910; the final prohibitory amendment campaign with victory for prohibition in 1914; the adoption of national prohibition in 1918 with Nebraska as the thirty-sixth state necessary to make prohibition a part of our constitution.

Argument over the liquor question is not yet ended any more than contention over slavery was ended by the adoption of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments. But the great issue of prohibition now takes rank with the great issue against slavery as a historic land mark in the history of the American people. The incidents and the memories of the sixty years conflict in Nebraska upon that issue are among the most dramatic of all Nebraska events.

The many actors in this long conflict who were prominent in Nebraska, are now rapidly passing to the other side. It is the purpose of the editor of this magazine to assemble the literature, the manuscripts, the recollections, of this great social conflict and place them in the library of the Nebraska State Historical Society as a permanent part of the records of this commonwealth. Great progress has already been made. Most of the newspaper files on both sides of this conflict are now available in our newspaper collection. Many of the important personal letters and memoranda have been obtained. In January, 1923, Mrs. Mamie M. Claffin, of University Place, for many years president of the Nebraska W. C. T. U. gave a most important address upon this subject which will later be published. Mr. A. G. Wolfenbarger, another great leader of the prohibition cause, was engaged at the time of his death in putting together a history of his recollections of this conflict.

Mr. S. D. Fitchie, formerly of Weeping Water and of University Place, now living in Stockton, California, was a visitor at the Historical Society rooms in July, 1923. He was chairman of the prohibition party organization in Nebraska during the later period of the conflict. While the prohibition party movement never carried the state of Nebraska for its candidates, no one familiar with the history of the state doubts for a moment its tremendous influence toward the final victory. The prohibition party voters, like the Liberty Party and Free Soil Voters in the anti-slavery conflict, registered themselves as a band of determined people who were resolved to sink all other considerations for what they regarded as the supreme social question. It was impossible to head them off, or to keep them from making converts, except by going in the direction of their drive. The struggles in the inner circles of the managers of the major parties to sidetrack the liquor question were stupendous and tragic.

The first article from Mr. Fitchie follows:

I was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, and when nine years old my father took me to hear the noted lecturer, John B. Gough, the most popular temperance orator in America, which made a lasting impression on my mind. As I advanced to manhood, from observation and some bitter experience within our family circle, I realized that the liquor traffic was the blighting curse of the Nation. Having been born and bred in a republican home my father was despised by the democrats, who called him a "nigger lover", and with some shadow of truth as he was an intimate friend and co-worker with Mr. Kagy, the father of John Kagy who was the secretary of the noted John Brown of the Harpers Ferry insurrection and was shot upon that memorable occasion with followers of John Brown in an attempt to free the slaves. I well remember the cave at Nebraska City where the slaves were secreted on their way to Canada where their freedom was gained; this was known as the Underground Railroad. At times excitement got to a high pitch between the republicans, who favored the freedom of the slaves, and the democrats, who opposed and hurled bitter epithets upon the

"Black Republicans"; and at a public meeting shot at my father for advocating the freedom of the slaves.

Thus reared and nurtured as I was in republicanism, that party became my idol, and in my childhood days I verily believed that no democrat could go to heaven.

With unbounded faith in the republican party I honestly believed it would smite the liquor traffic, but as year after year rolled on the party supinely obeyed the behest of the saloon and dodged the question, and finding myself stranded politically I finally allied myself with the then insignificant and spurned prohibition party, which, however, stood four square for prohibition.

In 1884 James G. Blaine was nominated for president on the republican ticket, and John P. St. John on the prohibition ticket. I fairly hated him and the party because I believed it would help defeat Blaine, and the country would go to the bad; and wished St. John would be hanged and the party that nominated him be wiped out of existence. On the evening of the election after I had spent a strenuous day at the polls striving to get votes for Blaine; wife asked me how I voted. I proudly answered, "The republican ticket". She said, "Did you not pray this morning for the cause of prohibition?" "Sure," I said. She said, "In voting for that party you lost your vote, for it stands in with the Rum Power, and refuses to aid in rescuing suffering humanity from the death grip of the saloon."

In 1892 the "Garten Institute" for the cure of inebriates and morphine habituates was organized and located at University Place. I was elected president, L. G. M. Baldum vice president, Dr. J. R. Green and T. J. Merryman, physicians. These doctors treated the patients, of which we had quite a number, some of whom were permanently cured. In the treatment they were first permitted to drink all the liquor they wanted. The medicine was then injected into their system, producing a terrible nausea like seasickness which resulted in a horrible dislike for even the smell of any kind of liquors. The many drunken men about the village before cures were effected, created quite a commotion in the college town of University Place, much to the disgust of citizens and annoyance of students of the Nebraska Wesleyan; hence we decided to abandon the drink reform in that town.

My confidence in the G. O. P. began to waver. I woke up to the fact my faithful wife was right in her assertion that I was putting my vote where it told best for the saloon interests. The Book says "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick", and I was tired and sick working with a party dominated by the saloon hence I became a third party prohibitionist. One of my first attempts to support that party was in the Good Templars' Lodge in Weeping Water. I was repeatedly called to order and the Grand Worthy informed me that I must desist or leave the lodge. I left in disgust. This shows how unpopular the little party of true principles was. All great reforms pass through several stages before culmination; indifference, abuse, calumny, defamation,

spurnings, beating and murder as in the case of Haddock of Sioux City and many others who fought the saloon. Of course I had my little share of it, having been burned in effigy for leaving the G. O. P. and following my principles, but I am proud to leave this as a legacy to my children.

Upon my advent in 1899 into the prohibition party I was voted in as chairman of the state executive committee. Mrs. M. A. S. Monagon, an active worker in the W. C. T. U., was made secretary. Under advice of the executive committee we rented office rooms over Fitzgerald's store in Lincoln, established headquarters, and buckled into setting the prohibition house in order. We found the party discouraged, with a depleted treasury. The populist party had sprung into existence and at a prohibition convention in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, an attempt was made to fuse with that party, hoping it would espouse our cause, but the majority objected, hence occurred what was known as the "Pittsburg Split."

The prohibition party had been in existence for some years in Nebraska and was kept fanned into life by the New Republic, an uncompromising prohibition paper edited by Wolfenbarger and Roberts. It was spicy, newsy, interesting and dealt heavy blows at the forty saloons in Lincoln; supporting Mayor H. W. Hardy who stood firmly for prohibition principles. This so irritated the saloonists that they shot at him through the window while sitting at his desk and placed a coffin at his door as a warning for him to desist. But nothing daunted the Grand Old Man who continued to fight booze until, at a ripe old age, the summons came, "Come up higher". The ably edited New Republic was so meagerly supported that it would have become extinct had not H. C. Bittenbender made valiant efforts and great sacrifices to continue its publication. As he was a printer he set his type, got up the forms, slept on his office floor, lived part of the time on crackers and cheese. Our first strenuous work was writing letters and sending such literature as our limited means would afford. In this way we got in touch with three hundred faithful prohibitionists throughout the state who had not "Bent the knee to Baal."

Amongst our staunch supporters were Hon. A. G. Wolfenbarger, an able lawyer; L. O. Jones, a merchant; Miss Emma Hedges; Rev. Dr. Zane Batten; Dr. B. L. Paine; Dr. T. J. Merryman; C. C. Crowell of Blair; The Nebraska W. C. T. U., and others.

In 1899 I began the publication of the Nebraska Patriot, a monthly prohibition paper, giving my pledge to the executive committee that I would assume all liabilities and no debt would devolve on them. The little paper was greatly appreciated and well supported so that at the close of my term of office it came through clear of debt. In 1900 the Mayor and Excise board of Lincoln were notably wet. At the city prohibition primary we nominated Carlton E. Loomis a member of the First Presbyterian Church, a loyal son of God, with the courage of his conviction, and by flooding the town with prohibition literature and making a house to house campaign, to the surprise and consternation

of the wets we came within sixty six votes of electing our man. It was amusing to hear the opposition asking each other, "How did it happen". The result of this election caused the saloon men to increase their efforts, and they became thoroughly entrenched in politics and every line of business and church circles, rendering it difficult to secure churches and public buildings for prohibition speakers. On one occasion, through the influence of Dr. B. L. Paine, the First M. E. Church of Lincoln was secured for that noted Prohibition orator John G. Woolley. So unpopular was prohibition through fear of the saloon, that just seventeen persons were present to hear the speech. Nothing daunted the faithful few buckled in with renewed effort, so that some months after we secured the auditorium, engaged Mr. Woolley, advertised him as the world's greatest orator, had five thousand tickets printed, distributed them free of charge, got Dr. Wharton, pastor of First M. E. Church, to introduce the speaker. The result was a packed house and several hundred turned away.

A state delegate prohibition convention was called to meet in Lincoln July 12 and 13th in 1900. Our bunch of delegates were commented on by the State Journal as "Only one and a half dozen and would not amount to thirty cents." However the state was well represented, and it was said to be the best prohibition convention ever held in the state. That year John G. Woolley was nominated for president and Henry B. Metcalf for vice president, L. O. Jones for Governor and a full state ticket was nominated, and in November when the votes were counted our party had jumped from three hundred to thirty-six hundred and eighty-five in Nebraska.

Churches and school houses were now beginning to open their doors for prohibition speakers, which had previously been positively refused. Upon one occasion I went to Raymond to arrange for the "Beverages" who were very fascinating entertainers, with five saloons in that town plying their damning trade. Every place, even the M. E. Church, was refused, but by the persuasion of Miss Dewey, an active W. C. T. U. worker, and my paying for the use of the church, a crowded house for several nights turned the tide in that town.

Often we rallied around our speakers to prevent their being mobbed. At one time Mr. Wolfenbarger was severely beaten over the head in an attempt to speak. It would fill volumes to tell the difficulties encountered, the scorn, ridicule, and contempt heaped upon the prohibitionists.

The little prohibition party was despised, defamed, and cursed, but the loyal men and women that composed it, through prayer and persistency nailed their banner to the masthead, marching up and down the state, singing "Nebraska is Going Dry", while the opposition were declaring, "You can't, You can't."

The following are some of the speakers we put in the state beside flooding it with prohibition literature: A. G. Wolfenbarger, Rev. R. A. Hawley, Prof. Chas. Scanlon, Oliver W. Stewart, Clinton N. Howard,

Miss Marie Brehm, Frank Regan, the chalk talker; Rev. C. A. Bently, L. O. Jones, Hector, the Black Knight; Brubaker, C. C. Crowell of Blair, who gave largely to support the cause; Miss Belle Kearney, Rev. Dr. Zane Batten, D. B. Gilbert, John Dale, Dr. T. J. Merryman, Harry S. Warner, the latter especially for speaking in colleges.

We secured the services of the noted "Hatchet Saloon Smasher", Carrie Nation, sending our secretary, Mrs. Monagon, to Kansas for the purpose of accompanying Carrie in her raid, and learn her methods of battling the saloon.

After being with her nights and days for three weeks Mrs. Monagon reported her gentle, kind, and convincing, living close to her God, and after her first outbreak she had abandoned the use of the hatchet. I was with her when she visited the saloons in Lincoln, saw and heard nothing but ladylike action and irresistible argument, in several instances getting promises from bartenders to quit the business.

M. L. Trester, a lumberman on 27th street, Lincoln, erected a temporary tabernacle at his own expense where temperance meetings were held nights and Sundays, but he forbade prohibition politics discussed. A potent factor in moulding public opinion was the Red Ribbon Club, organized and conducted by Jim Skinner, a valiant temperance reformer. This club had a crowded house every Sunday, J. M. Skinner possessed a strong, pleasing personality, and was humorous, witty, and dramatic in action. The pledge was signed each meeting, and many drunkards redeemed. Only Eternity will reveal the good accomplished by this Club.

Time and again it was asserted that prohibition **never could prevail in Nebraska**, for the reason that the population was largely composed of Germans who had been accustomed to their beer from infancy. But all honor to the rising generation, who were fast finding the disastrous effect of liquor drinking in this country, and the noble sons helped turn the tide on election day. The prohibition workers, by patience, prayers, and persistency, under the guiding hand of God, brought every influence possible, to bear on election day, and at night when the polls closed John Barleycorn's coffin lid was screwed down tight and **Nebraska was dry.**

One delightful, never to be forgotten experience, I enjoyed, was a trip from Omaha across the state of Iowa when Woolley and Metcalf were canvassing for the presidency and vice presidency. The great private train, managed by Oliver W. Stewart from New York to Omaha and return, stopping at the principal towns and holding prohibition meetings manned by the best speakers in the United States; with reporters, secretaries, stenographers, sleeping cars, diner and every equipment for comfort, short addresses from the rear of the car at smaller places. Doubtless this great undertaking eventually had its effect when the nation later on passed the Volstead Act and added to our constitution the eighteenth amendment.

Since writing the enclosed my mind has reverted to several items that I overlooked. While living at Weeping Water H. G. Race, Editor

of Cass County Eagle, wishing to visit his former home, requested me to take charge of his paper during his absence.

His editorials gave me great latitude to get prohibition before his readers: here is the way one editorial read:

"The EAGLE and its mate have left the country. When our readers get their paper this week we shall be rustivating among the scenes of former years where our youthful days were spent on that sacred spot known as the Old Homestead. We think we are entitled to a short vacation, after the hardships, trials and vexations of our first year's experience as a country editor. During our short absence S. D. Fitchie will have editorial charge of THE EAGLE, should he squeeze a little more prohibition into it than our readers like, remember it will be for a week or two at the most."

At the same time I was editing the Sunday column in the Weeping Water Republican, which also gave me an opportunity to let fly a few prohibition bombs.

Often the printer's devil would steal the red hot copy I had placed on the files, but enough leaked through to give the EAGLE a respectable prohibition showing. Later on when the prohibition party was organized in Cass County I was placed on the ticket for state senator. Then my limited editorial knowledge came in good play. I issued a small prohibition paper called, The New Republic, the motto of which was, "We are for the home, against the saloon." Through this medium we got the prohibition candidates before the voters under difficulties, as it was convenient for the mail bags to get lost until after election. Every obstruction possible was placed in the way of getting our matter before the public. Often the little paper was stamped in the mud, cursed; and for long years we "piped for those who would not dance."

A real estate man of Lincoln whose name I cannot recall, (perhaps it is just as well as he was a member of a very respectable family), had fallen a prey to cursed saloons until the desire to drink became irresistible. I tried to counsel with him to reform. His reply was, "Fitchie, I cannot pass a saloon without inhaling the deadly fumes which set me wild for drink." He said, "I know it is sending me to hell, and I do not want to die a drunkard." I said, "When the drink appetite comes on you just make a break for my office." This he agreed to do, and did for several weeks and cleaned up and looked his respectable self. I then advised him to get into good society by joining a church. He asked me, "What church?" I said, "You must make your own choice." Then he said, "My folks are members of the M. E. church, but how would that help me when I know that not only the members, but the pastor also all vote and work with the political parties that maintain the saloons in Lincoln. I could not feel at home, there." Hence, in common parlance, I was up-a-stump.

Another time while engaged in the grain business in Nebraska City. One Saturday a drunken lawyer was sitting on my office step. I sat down beside him with my arm around him, begged him to reform. In his maudlin way, he said, "Can't do it, too much against me with all these saloons." I knew him to be a capable and brilliant lawyer, well worth saving. I helped him climb in my buggy and drove around all afternoon until he became quite sober, then drove to my home, and introduced him to my wife. After supper he said, "If I could be environed

by such men as you I might overcome this habit that is dragging me down to hell." I said, "the best society is the church." He asked me if the church would take him at once and thus throw around him a protecting influence. I said, "that is what the church is for." He said, "I'll go with you tomorrow (Sunday) state my case and condition to the members and ask to be received." At the close of the morning service the pastor, Rev. Beans, gave an opportunity for him to make a statement, a vote was taken and he at once became a useful member; taking up work in the Sabbath school, and became a great help to me as superintendent.

My advice to inebriates has invariably been to accept Jesus Christ as the only sure way to overcome the drink habit. As proof I will cite the case of a man by name of the Bouleware, living in Nebraska City, who both gambled and drank to excess; and when I advised him to reform while in bed recovering from delirium tremens, he said he would prove that he could reform in his own strength. He had a decanter of whiskey and glass placed on a stand by his bed in easy reach, and for some time he refrained from touching it, but his system had such an irresistible craving he took a little, and a little more, until the desire knew no bounds, and he went down dying, doubly dying, into a drunkard's grave.

I received recently a splendid letter from Mrs. A. G. Wolfenbarger giving a detailed account of her husband's sickness, and death. I will always hold dear the memory of him who gave the best of his life in battle against the liquor tyrant. Upon one occasion we both met in the same town, at the same hotel. After the meeting in which he expatiated against the rum power with might and main, we at his suggestion slept in the same bed, and when disrobed he knelt down on one side of the bed and I on the other, both sending up a silent petition to God.

1512 El Dorado St, Stockton, Calif.

Augustine H. McLaughlin, pioneer rancher in Box Butte county and esteemed to be the oldest settler there, died at Alliance, December 21, 1922, aged 76. He homesteaded on the Niobrara in 1882, became a successful rancher, owning two sections of fine land, well-stocked. He was a soldier in the eighteenth Iowa Infantry during the Civil War. After the war he freighted across the plains and from Sidney to the Black Hills. He was a most interesting and attractive frontier character, typical of the best upon the border.

The Women's Club of Holdrege gave its program January 12, 1923 on the topic "Early Nebraska History." The program was in charge of Mrs. Sundbury and those who had place upon the program were Mrs. Edward Gillett, Mrs. D. J. Fink, and Mrs. W. A. Dilworth. The wonderful natural beauties of Nebraska and the inspiring historical places and memories were presented. The plans for marking historical sites in the state and the work of the State Historical Society were well presented. Programs like this are well calculated to develop state and local patriotism and love of the region which is our home.

Isaac Preston, a member of the Omaha tribe, died at Walthill, January 21, 1923, aged about 69 years. Mr. Preston was a good Indian, peaceable, loyal and industrious. He owned 160 acres of rich land on the reservation. He was keeper of the holy tent of the Omahas in which was kept the sacred white buffalo skin, formerly used in the religious ceremonies of the tribe. Some years ago this relic was stolen and sold to people in Chicago, who refused to return it to the tribe.