

Buffalo Tales

MARCH/APRIL 2011

A TRUE STORY FROM EARLY-DAY KEARNEY....

Remembering Patrick Edward Fitzgerald

By Gerald A. (Jerry) Pickerell

Patrick Edward Fitzgerald was a native-born Irishman and proud of it! He used to say, "Aye peeped over the stars in 1861 on a farm near Ennis, County Clare, Ireland." Life's journey's brought him to Central Nebraska. He was my Grandpa.

His home county was located in southwest Ireland along the Shannon River. People were of modest means and just about 100 percent Roman Catholic. They were farmers.

Grandpa's story continues, "Aye remember little except living in the United States on a farm near Peoria, Illinois." His name in Gaelic was Porrack Egarrelt, so he told kinfolk.

The Fitzgerald family consisted of the father, John; the mother Mary Margaret; three children, Patrick Edward, Frank James and Mary Catherine. The younger two were born in Illinois. Frank often was called by his Gaelic name, Proenchee.

When the Homestead Act became law in America in 1862, this Irish farm family acquired and proved up on 160 acres in Center Township, Buffalo County, Nebraska. The moved from Illinois by emigrant train, a rail service that permitted a family to move everything, people, animals, household goods and farm equipment; or as Grandma used to say, "in one fell swoop!" Proving up on a homestead required building and living on the land.

Patrick helped with the farm operation but he also became a figure around the City of Kearney. He learned to be a brick maker and told stories about "chucking the mud" by hand into the forms and stoking the fires in the brick kilns at the Hibberd Brick Yard in northeast Kearney. That part of the city possessed just the right clay for making bricks. Patrick had a music talent and called for square dances at the Cotton Mill Lake pavilion, which later burned.

This writer, being the only grandson of Patrick Edward, was named "Gerald," taken, of course, from the last name, "Fitzgerald." And fate had it that he would be raised almost entirely by Pat and his wife, Mary Margaret "Maggie" (O'Dea).

Grandma Maggie told me never to irritate Grandpa Pat because he had an Irish temper and he would hit people. Never was this temper displayed to me. There was the usual Irish profanity used by Granddad while Grandma would shake her head side to side and give out with her "tsk! tsk!"

Grandpa was a striking figure of a man. He stood well over six feet tall and probably weighed 250 pounds, with no fat. In later years he had a shock of



*Photo of the Hibberd Brick Yard
Property of the Buffalo County
Historical Society*

short, white hair. He would have the barber peel him bald and the hair grew back until it reached its customary two-inch length. Then it was due for the clippers again. He was an easy man to find in the crowd, like at church. Just pass your eyes about and look for that crop of white hair. It protruded a good six inches higher than all else.

Shaving with a straight-edged razor was routine for Grandpa and this operation fascinated me, the small grandson. I was never satisfied until I had my face lathered up to match Granddad's. Then Grandma would see us, give out with her little female snort and towel off my face.

Grandma pushed Grandpa hard about bathing. The home in Kearney had a modern bath room with tub, but Grandpa was reluctant to use it. Summers, he claimed he just jumped into the horse tank out on the farm.

Grandpa took one unscheduled bath, however. He needed to relieve the sting caused by some liniment. The old gent had been kicked by a horse in his younger years and, as age crept in, so did what he called rheumatism. He kept a bottle of Sloan's Liniment on hand and applied it to his back and shoulders quite frequently.

One day he tipped the bottle of Sloan's a little to generously and a rivulet of burning liquid trickled down his spine. It reached some tender spots and Patrick Edward quickly stripped off what clothing he was wearing and jumped into the bathtub. Grandma wore a smile when she fetched him a wash cloth and a bar of Palmolive soap.

In general conversation, Grandpa would learn what he could about people, especially men, and then place them in a certain category. If a person was Irish, that was a big step in the right direction, as far as Grandpa was concerned. If the person was Irish-Catholic, so much the better. A fully, one hundred percent approved person was Irish-Catholic and a Democrat.

Being fiscally conservative was another of Patrick Edward's attributes. He was one of those kind of Democrats. He would not vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt beyond two terms, because "That's just not the way it should be done in this country." Grandma and Mother loved Roosevelt and admired his programs which they credited with the 1930's Depression. FDR had their votes.

There were times when my Grandmother would call Grandpa "Tight as Tanbark," whatever tanbark was. She also criticized him for being "land hungry." She told me, the grandson, that "Pat would let his kids run around the farmyard barefooted and take cash money to go buy another eighty acres of land somewhere." When Grandpa died, I inherited three of his eighties and the rest went to an adopted grandson who bore the name Fitzgerald. This lad was adopted by my Uncle John.

The place in Kearney Grandpa bought had a big, two-story red barn on it. This building was showing much wear, so it was demolished and the lumber salvaged. A new building was erected that would house an automobile and have a stall for a horse. For years Grandpa drove a horse and buggy back and forth from the farm to town. This new building was clad with corrugated metal siding. It holds a visible memory for me.

Also, Grandpa was a big gardener. He enjoyed working the ground by hand and grew many vegetables. His garden spot was divided by a path laid out with old bricks and pieces of brick, held in place just by the dirt. His garden was south of his tin barn.

I was a lad of about ten. Some neighbor boys had just shown me a new hand signal. It is the one where a person's thumb is placed at the nose and the fingers are wiggled. These boys did not tell me the meaning of it.

Grandpa was cultivating his garden and he thought of some chore I should be doing. I was busy playing and didn't wish to do what he asked, so I finger-waved him off. Uttering a,

"By Thee Gods!"...Grandpa picked up half a brick and threw it at me. I ducked into his tin barn and. "Whang!" The dent his brick made is still in the side of that barn 80 years later.

When I visit Kearney, I have to drive by that barn, look at the dent, and remember that Irishmen called bricks "Irish Confetti." When tempers flared, bricks got thrown.

Grandpa Patrick Edward prided himself in his knowledge of mathematics and always reminded everyone that he had only eight grades of country school. Since I, his grandson, disliked arithmetic intensely and was not good at it, I found ways for Grandpa to help me with my homework. I angered him one day with a math problem I presented to him.

It was a story problem about two men on an ice truck. Figures given were the weight of the truck, weight of the driver, weight of the ice and how much weight was lost by the ice melting. The question simply was, "What does the man on the back of the truck weigh?"

Grandpa figured and figured, but each time I'd tell him he was wrong. Finally, he asked, "Well, what does the man on the back weigh?" I put some distance between us and then told him. "He weighs the ice."

Grandpa took good care of Grandma whose health was bad. It took a lot of his money and he helped with the housework.

On washday he would pull the hand-powered washing machine out into the west porch to do laundry. Grandpa liked to sing, too. He would pull the handle of the washer to the rhythm of his song. The washer made a sound like, "Rip-Roar! Rip-Roar!" Grandpa would sing:

"Oh, Paddy dear, and did you hear,
The news that's going round:
The shamrock is forbid by law,
To Grow in Irish ground."

Grandpa loved it when I would play "Irish Washer Woman" on my harmonica.

As I grew older Grandpa and I grew closer. I obtained a Model A Ford Roadster and would drive Grandpa out to see his son, my uncle, John Fitzgerald. I was soon to learn that John was a progressive farmer with new ideas and Grandpa seldom agreed with his ways. John had replaced horses with a tractor.

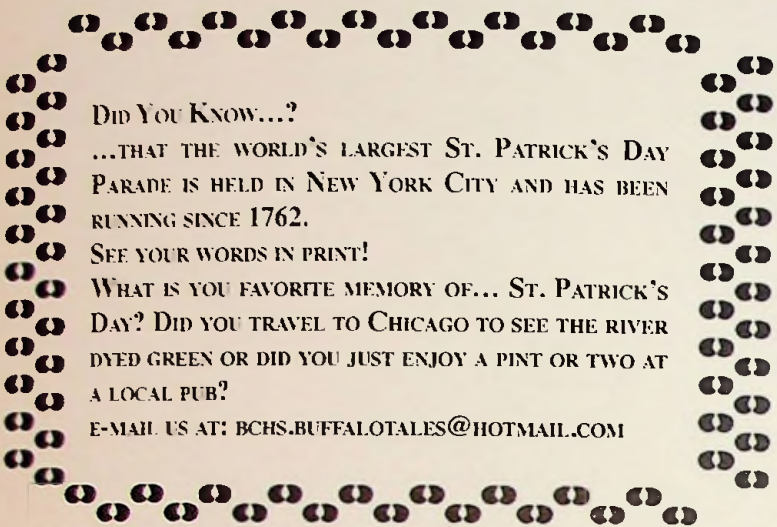
As we drove back from the farm, I'd hear how John wasn't doing it right. Grandpa never turned down the rent money John provided.

When I was in high school, Grandpa called me in for a conference. He asked what I was learning in school. I told him "Just the general stuff." He said, "They teach agriculture there, don't they?" I told him the farm kids studied that. He said, "If you were to take that course and go to work for your Uncle John sometimes, you might make a farmer. I have the land and I have the money to buy equipment and I'll set you up to farm."

The year was 1936 and I remember telling him, "Grandpa, we are in a drought and Nebraska farmers are all moving to Idaho, Oregon and California because they can't make any money here." I never cared to become a farmer.

When I was in the army for World War II in 1943, Grandpa became sick and died. I was let go home for his funeral because he was more like a dad than a Grandfather. I asked my grandmother, "Just what did Grandpa die of?"

She told me something surprising. "He died of stubbornness. He got pneumonia and wouldn't call a doctor. He tried to cure himself with home remedies. He put a poultice of turpentine and lard on his chest and it didn't work."



DID YOU KNOW...?

...THAT THE WORLD'S LARGEST ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE IS HELD IN NEW YORK CITY AND HAS BEEN RUNNING SINCE 1762.

SEE YOUR WORDS IN PRINT!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY OF... ST. PATRICK'S DAY? DID YOU TRAVEL TO CHICAGO TO SEE THE RIVER DYED GREEN OR DID YOU JUST ENJOY A PINT OR TWO AT A LOCAL PUB?

E-MAIL US AT: BCHS.BUFFALOTALES@HOTMAIL.COM



Ghost Hunting with MPI

Ghost Hunting with Midwest Paranormal Investigators at the Trails & Rails Museum will be beginning April 29th and will continue throughout the summer and early fall. Prices for this year are \$40 a person or \$75 for a couple. Contact the Trails & Rails Museum to register or for more information at 308-234-3041 or bchs.us@hotmail.com.



Celtic Festival

Come to the Trails & Rails Museum March 19th 1-4pm to enjoy Celtic culture and music! The Thunder Craic Musicians and Dancers from Lincoln will be performing at different times during the day. The Highland Pipers bagpipe band from the Kearney area will also be performing. Free Admission! Come dressed in Traditional Celtic costume and add to the festive air!



Buffalo County Stampede

Join us for the 4th Annual 1/2 Marathon on June 12th!

Registration begins at 6am at the Trails & Rails Museum with the race starting at 7am. Registration fees are \$35 until June 1st and \$40 dollars after that. Registrants will receive a tee-shirt and goodie bag filled with items donated by area organizations and businesses.

Run like a Buffalo is chasing you!!!

BUFFALO TALES is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P.O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848-0523. Phone: 308.234.3041 Email: bchs.us@hotmail.com

Katherine Wielechowski, Editor

2011 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Individual	\$35.00
Family	\$40.00
Institutional Membership	\$50.00
Supporting Membership	\$75.00

We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 2011: Dr. Mark Ellis, Sharon Martin, Duane Muhlbach, Barb Riege

Term expiring June 1, 2012: Mary Kenny, Janice Martin, Dan Speirs, Garry Straatmaan

Term expiring June 1, 2013: Vicki Bissell, Jim Cudaback, Chad Henning, Lynn Rauner

Officers (1 year term)

President	Dan Speirs
Vice-President	Sharon Martin
Secretary	Barb Riege
Treasurer	Lynn Rauner

2011 Calendar of Events

Date Time TBD: Don't Come Event

Saturday, March 19 from 1-4: Celtic Festival

Sunday, April 10th from 1-3 pm: BCHS Annual Meeting

Sunday, June 12: 4th Annual 1/2 Marathon: Buffalo County Stampede—Reg. @ 6 am, Race begins @ 7

Saturday, June 25 from 10-2: 26th Annual Wagons West Celebration **Includes fiddle contest**

Date Time TBD: Golf Tournament

Tuesday, September 27th from 6-9:30: 5th Annual Trivia Contest & Dinner

Saturday, Oct. 22 (time TBD): Old-fashioned Halloween Party

Saturday, December 3rd from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 24th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

The first two weekends in December (3rd/4th and 10th/11th) from 1-5 pm: Open to the public: 24th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

Volunteers and sponsors are still needed for these events. Please contact any staff or board member to help!

Education notes:

March hours: Monday-Saturday 1-5 pm daily (crane season)

Wild Science Thursdays will return in the summer!

Ghost Hunting classes-check the web site for more info.!

Kearney Public Schools have the museum reserved for two weeks: May 2-14, 2011

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

PO Box 523, 710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE 68845
(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs.us@hotmail.com

We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County. We would love to have a stock pile of Buffalo Tales ready, so they can go out in a more timely manner. Please submit your memories and stories to us by e-mailing them to bchs.us@hotmail.com or sending them to the post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523 Kearney NE 68848.

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

-Ronnie O'Brien, Eric Hellriegel and I met to discuss what Eric found out about UNK's willingness to help with the map project. It sounds like UNK is very interested and we will soon be meeting with at least two different professors there to discuss budget and overall goals. Then Ronnie and Eric went downstairs to look at the maps that Aaron, the BCHS work study student, inventoried. They were very, very impressed with the BCHS collection.

-I invited Ronnie to join me on NTV on March 15 to discuss this map project and encourage the public to get involved. They may contact us directly and/or donated their collections to their county historical society. The map committee will soon be contacting several regional historical societies and small town societies to see how we can partner, too. Gene Hunt and Eric were also invited to join Ronnie and I.

-Barb Riege booked the Church building for the East Lawn Kensington's Anniversary party. I let her book it for a free will donation, instead of charging her rent, as she is a board member. The group would like to use the scrapbooks that they donated to the archives that day, too.

-Janice McGregor is sponsoring a table at the Gibbon Crane breakfast again this year for BCHS. This is fabulous publicity for BCHS.

Be sure to Join the Buffalo County Historical Society group or the Buffalo County Historical Society/Trails & Rails Museum fan page on Facebook!



Trails & Rails Museum
Buffalo County Historical Society
710 West 11th Street Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848-0523

Visit us at
www.bchs.us

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