

O'Brien/Lute home

Michael O'Brien came to Ogallala from County Mayo, Ireland with his cousins Tom Scott and Jim Grady in the late 1880s. He traveled to Greeley, Nebraska where some of his relations resided. In 1876 he was employed by the Union Pacific Railroad as a section foreman. He worked at Willow Island and Ord, Nebraska before being hired as section foreman at Ogallala. While in Ogallala he invested his income in cattle and land.

In Ogallala he met and married Mary Helen Curley. Mary had come with her widowed mother, Mrs. Bernard Curley and siblings from Ottawa, Illinois to homestead in Perkins County in 1880. Mary's seven brothers worked and saved together. Mary and her older sister filed quarter-section homesteads as they reached legal age in the county. Michael O'Brien and Mary Curley were married by a traveling priest on April 19, 1896.

Michael began ranching in Keith County when he was loaned some money on a herd of horses. He then traded them for a herd of cattle. During this time he formed a partnership with Dan Kelley in ranching. He chose the North Platte Valley to build his ranch home in 1900. According to family, the home was a Kincaid home. The barn that was used for the O'Brien Ranch was taken from the old mill in Ogallala. There were no nails, just pegs in it.

During Michael and Mary's marriage they had two daughters, Agnes and Rose O'Brien. The couple also had two sons Bernard (died at age 2) and Tom who died as a baby.

The floor plan of the home consisted of one room. The original stove in the house is the one used presently in the Mansion. The wooden cupboard and closet are original to the home. Dishes were stored in the kitchen hutch while linens and other items were stored in the closet. The closet was originally a backdoor in the home when it was built. During this time prairie fires were a real threat to settlers and a second entry was necessary. Later it was boarded up and made into the present closet. The walls are made of plaster completed with original picture rail. Michael and Mary used the east side of the home as their bedroom while the west side was used as the kitchen and dining area. The two O'Brien girls slept in the loft by climbing the wooden steps.

After some time Michael and Mary O'Brien built a second home. The second home was much larger for the family. Michael O'Brien died in 1933 on a Thursday evening at 9:15. He was buried during a blizzard on March 4, 1933.

After Michael's death the women hayed and shipped while maintaining domestic duties. Rose also worked as a teacher. She received her education in a sod school house and attended St. Patrick's Academy in Sidney, Nebraska. She took high school exams and teacher's exams and taught at rural schools in Keith County. During the summer months she pursued her degree from Duchesne and University of Nebraska before finally graduating from Creighton University. Rose became employed in

North Platte Public Schools and was for a short time an elementary principal. Rose also served as a regular interval during North Platte's radio station program called "Story Hour."

She eventually went back to operating the ranch in the North Platte Valley. The valley was condemned for power and irrigation in the 1930's. The O'Brien women received \$2 an acre for their spring fed tree sheltered wintering area while some neighbors received \$40 an acre for similar land without a spring. According to the law, any building that was on a foundation went with the land. Many land owners had to buy back their property. It was at this time that the O'Brien women had to buy back their two homes. During this time she met Robert Lute II while on a committee to negotiate sale prices of land during the construction of Kingsley Dam.

As construction of the dam persisted the O'Brien's second home was moved to Ogallala and placed on East 4th St. Rose, her mother Mary, and her sister Agnes lived in the home while renting out other rooms. This was a source of income for the girls. The one room Kincaid home was moved during this time to the Lute Ranch east of Ogallala. On June 15, 1942 Rose and Robert Lute were married at St. Mary Magdalene Church in Omaha.

Robert I was born on March 5, 1905 on the family homestead east of Ogallala. Robert Lute's parents were Fred Lute Sr. who came from Germany with his family and brother John Lute. Fred married Bessie Sale of Dublin, Ireland on January 12, 1899 in the stone home still standing on the property.

Rose and Robert Lute I lived with Robert's parents for a year then bought a home in Ogallala. Eventually the couple moved back out to the family ranch after the death of Robert's parents. Their son Robert Lute II was born on January 19, 1944 in Omaha.

Telephone Service

The Ogallala-Keystone Telephone Company was the first telephone service in Ogallala. It incorporated in 1902. In 1903 the system was completed and joined to Paxton.

Life in the North Platte Valley

The North Platte Valley's life source was The North Platte River. Most settlers took up Timber Claims which allowed anyone eighteen or older to claim 160 acres of land in ten acres of tree were planted and cared for eight years.

Spring flooding, quicksand and brutal blizzards made life difficult in the valley. Summer months were hot and dry with severe weather. Rattlesnakes and prairie fires were often a serious threat to the early settlers in the valley.

There was an abundance of wildlife such as elk, deer, antelope, prairie chickens, and quail which often provided meat for the settlers. Wild fruit trees grew around the river such as plums, grapes, chokecherries, currants and sand cherries. Trees were minimal except for the cedars which grew along the southern hills of the valley. To meet the need of fuel, cow chips and left over buffalo chips were often collected by the children and used in the settler's homes. Early homes were often sod houses prior to 1900. After the Kincaid Act, more homes built of lumber began to appear in the valley.