

Ambrose S. Shelley
(1843-1930)
Frontier Co., 1871

NELLIE (LYNCH) SHELLEY -- 1861-1934

The death of Mrs. Nellie Shelley at her home near Stockville Friday, Oct. 26, marked the passing /of/ one of the last of the earliest pioneers, and one who had lived here continuously longer than any other person. She was the widow of Ambrose Shelley, a Civil war veteran, who came to this county in 1871 and was present when the county was organized in 1872. He was credited with turning the first sod in Frontier county for agricultural purposes. The log cabin now standing on the county fair grounds was built by Ambrose Shelley and is believed to have been the first house constructed by white men in the county. Mr. Shelley died Dec. 2, 1930, at the age of 87.

Mrs. Shelley was born at Henry, Marshall county, Ill., Febr. 28, 1861, /the daughter of John and Ella Lynch/ and was 73 years, 7 months and 28 days of age at the time of her death. When a small child she was taken to Cheyenne, Wyo., where they lived until 1872 when they came to Frontier county. Her father, John Lynch, homesteaded south of Stockville in July, 1872, only a few months after the county was organized. He died in 1878. His son, John, was a well known rancher in this section for many years. The names of the Shelleys and the Lynchs are prominent in all Frontier county history.

Miss Nellie Lynch and Ambrose Shelley were married in February, 1886, and were the parents of five children, all of whom survive and were with their mother when the end came. They are Percy, George and William Shelley and Mrs. Grace Fisher of Stockville and Margaret of Los Angeles, Calif.

Mrs. Shelley was highly respected as a pioneer mother who reared a family which maintained the best pioneer traditions. In the history of Frontier county in his book, "Pioneers, Indians and Buffaloes," Judge Bayard H. Paine, devotes a chapter to the Shelleys. With material gained in a visit with Mrs. Shelley only last May Judge Paine relates considerable Frontier county history and pays high tribute to both Mrs. Shelley and her husband.

Funeral services were held at Stockville Sunday. The sermon was delivered by Rev. L.H. Messersmith. Burial was in Stockville cemetery.

AMBROSE S. SHELLEY -- 1843-1930

Ambrose S. Shelley was born at Allentown, Penn., December 18, 1843 and died at his home close to Stockville, Nebraska, on [Tues.,] December 2, 1930, at the age of 86 years, 11 months and 14 days.

In Pennsylvania, he grew to manhood and enlisted in 1862 in Co. G 47th Penn. Infantry and served with it until the end of the Civil War.

For a time he was employed in the building of the Union Pacific Railroad, but came to Stockville, in 1871 homesteading on the Medicine Creek, where he has continuously made his home.

In 1867 he started for the West crossing the Missouri river on July 4 of that year.

In 1879 he was married to Hannah [Lynch] Gregory, [daughter of John and Ella Lynch,] who died in 1881. To this union John A. Shelley was born, and died in 1917.

He was married again to Nellie A. Lynch in 1886. Five children were born to this union all of whom together with his wife and one sister remain to mourn his departure.

Services were held in Stockville, on December 3. Rev. L.H. Messersmith in charge. Burial was made in the Stockville Cemetery.
CURTIS ENTERPRISE, Thur Dec 4, 1930, p.1, c.3

Interview of
Ambrose Shelley Letters on Frontier County
Place-Names

The following quotations on Frontier County place-names are from the J.T. Link Collection (MS-1220, Box 10) Nebraska State Historical Society Archives.

Brushy Creek -- One of the branches of Medicine Creek. So named by some of the cowboys. It was so named because it used to be very brushy.
--March 8, 1926

Cedar Creek -- Named by E G Nesbit as I now remember it. E G Nesbit and myself came to Nebraska together from Wyoming on a haymaking expedition for the government in the summer of 1871. He came to the Medicine about the same time I did in '71. He settled near the mouth of Cedar Creek.
--March 8, 1926

Coon Creek -- Named by the Indians, Sioux, Wee-Chee-Tick-a-licka-wah-ka-polla, meaning Coon Creek. Yes, waka means supernatural. Waka or, more correct Wah-kahn means spirit or ghosts or something the Indian ~~did~~ ^{could not} understand. Wah kahn Tonka great spirit or God. Wee chee tick a lica means coon or racoon. I do not know what each word means.
--March 8, 1926

Note on the above, by Dr. M.R. Gilmore, July 25, 1927: I can make nothing out of this but "wakpala" which means creek. I know of no such word as "lica". The word "lila" in the Teton dialect, "nina" in the Santee dialect is the most common word for "true" or "real" or "very". There is a synonym of "lila" "hoa". H, the rough aspiration of Ho, as ch as in child. There is no such word in the Dakota as palla. Also there is no such word as Wakpolla. The word is wakpala.

The Ogallala Sioux called Coon Creek Weechee ticka licka, Coon Creek Canyon is very rocky and a great place for coon to hide and they used to be very numerous.

--October 17, 1927

Coyote Canyon -- Named by one George Carothers. Probably because it seemed to be a favorite canyon for wolves to hold their nightly jubilee and they were very numerous in those days, this being such a great game country. Yes, George Carothers located on Coyote Canyon. He died many years ago in Lincoln in an insane asylum. Trouble caused by the kick of a horse on the head.

--March 8, 1926

Curtis Creek and town -- So named in honor of Major [James] Curtis, a little stream and large canyon. The present town of Curtis is located a few miles west.

--March 8, 1926

Frontier County -- There was no organized county in this part of the state (SW) that that time, hence the name Frontier. The name Frontier, my recollection is that Jack Bratt suggested the name Frontier. We organized the county in an Indian lodge Febr. 1872. I am the only remaining one. We did not have timber enough to fill the offices, so we had to draw on Omaha for our treasurer, Levy Carter who made his home at the Paxton.

--March 8, 1926

Medicine Creek -- Billa (Lake) Wha-khan-Wah-ka Polla. The Indian gets the cart before the horse. What he does mean to say is Ghost or Spirit Lake. It is also my Indian name.

I will say that the name Medicine for this stream not correct. They, the Indians, named it after a large pond or lake at the mouth of the canyon well up towards the head of the stream. After this pond freezes up solid the ice after it is frozen up for a certain length of time bursts open in different places and makes a very loud noise like distant cannonading. The Indians could not understand this or account for it and like all savage people are very superstitious, so they laid it to Spirits or Ghosts and called it Spirit or Ghost Lake and while the stream runs close by the foot of the pond, they named the stream after the pond.

Waka or Wah kahn means "spirit, ghost," for instance Minne Waka is simply saying spirit, water or whiskey. Remember the Indians nearly always places the cart before the horse. The Indians named me Billa wa ka the first night I arrived among them, meaning Medicine Lake or Spirit Lake or Ghost Lake, Billa meaning Lake, Wah-kan spirit or ghost. Wahka polla is the Sioux name for the stream,

--March 8, 1926

Notes on the above:

The Dakota word for medicine, meaning a healing or curative agent is pezuta (z as z in azure). A name to indicate abundance of medicinal plants on the creek would be Pezu-ta-otaⁿ wakpala. I do not know what the Dakota name of this creek in Frontier County is.

The Dakota word for "lake" is "bde" or in the Teton dialect of the Dakota it is "ble". In this word "ble" ("bde") ~~the~~ letter "e" has the sound of "e" as in they.

The Dakota word for mysterious, sacred, holy, wonderful, supernatural, spiritual or ghostly is "wakⁿ". If a Dakota wishes to describe or identify a lake by one of these attributes, ~~he~~ would call it ble wakⁿ. In the Dakota language, as in many European, but not the English the adjective follows the substantive.

If a creek flowed into or out of Ble Wakaⁿ (Holy Lake) it would be the obvious thing for a Dakota to call it Ble Wakaⁿ, the creek (connected with) the Mysterious Lake or Holy Lake. It has been common for the ignorant class of white men who have been most in contact with Indians, lacking ideas themselves, to make many inadequate or even erroneous translations of words like "wakaⁿ" which imply some degree of intelligence. This class of white men has imposed the word medicine in some cases, and the word "devil" in others, upon the word "wakaⁿ". Thus we have in North Dakota Mni-wakaⁿ Bde (Mysterious Water Lake), mistranslated "Devils Lake". In another case Ti wakaⁿ (Holy Lodge, Temple) mistranslated Medicine Lodge.

--M.R. Gilmore, July 25, 1927

The stream does not flow through any lake but passed the mouth of Lake Canyon close to the mouth of which is a large pond or lake. When it freezes solid, it makes a noise like distant cannonading especially during bitter cold nights, but those lakes up in the sand hills do the same thing. Well, the Indian did not know the cause of it and laid it to spirits or ghosts. Billa Wah Kahn. This lake is located some distance above Curtis.

--October 17, 1927

Note on the above: The interpretation (Medicine Creek) is not correct. In Indian they call it Ble Wakan, meaning Sprit Lake. As the lake always appears holy to them. Ble means Lake. Wakan means Holy or Spirit. The Indians called Mr. Shelly Ble Wakan and that is his name.

--Mrs. Rosa Ruff, Nov. 26, 1927

Ambrose Shelley Notes on Frontier County
Place-Names

I notice a few mistakes in dates Dad made in his writings to Mr. Link in 1926.

On mentioning the county organization he gives the date as Feb. rather than Jan. 1872. And yet he knew, because he was there.

Also he indicates that he came to Nebr. first in 1871 with Nesbit from Wyo.

Actually he came from Wyoming to Ft. McPherson in 1869 and put up hay there for two years.

Then he must have went to Ft. Laramie and both he and Nesbit came back in 1871.

He came to the Indian camp on the Medicine on Xmas Eve 1871. He was unreliable on dates but usually asked my mother.

When they put up the headstone for old Ena, the Indian woman sometime in the '20's he gave the date of her death as 1884 when actually she died in 1886. A "granger" who had come about 1884, noticed the mistake and never tired of mentioning that it was too bad they buried her 2 years before she died. He had a big mouth anyhow.

I think sometimes he got awfully tired of answering questions and maybe a little careless.

Then there were nights here at home when he would talk about those old events for hours.

Maybe the next nite he'd shut up like a clam. It was not hard for us to tell when it was safe. He came to Nebr. from Penn. in 1867 and stayed awhile with an uncle in Omaha.

The uncle was B.Y. Shelley who went on to Niobrara and I believe was one of the founders of that city.

I notice there is not a complete meeting of the minds on translating those Indian words into English spelling. I was in California from 1925 to 1927 so never heard of Mr. Link or Mr. Gilmore but I know Rosa Clifford, so since she seems certain his name was Ble Wakan I guess I must be Ble Wakan, **Junior.**

William Shelley, Stockville, Nebr. 69042
letter to Donald F. Danker, Dec.22, 1966

John A. Lynch
(1854-1932)
Frontier Co., 1872

JOHN A. LYNCH -- 1854-1932

John A. Lynch was born at Henry in Marshall County, Illinois, on October 15, 1854, and departed this life [Tuesday,] December 20, 1932, at his home southeast of Stockville, at the age of 78 years, 2 months and 5 days. [Son of John and Ella Lynch.]

When but a small boy he moved with his parents to Omaha, Nebraska, where they resided about a year. Then moving to Sidney, Nebraska. Mr. Lynch secured employment with the Union Pacific Railroad Company in and about Cheyenne, Wyoming. In the year 1872 Mr. Lynch with his parents moved to Frontier county, where they homestead in the year 1873, a part of which is known as the Lynch ranch. After establishing their home 1873, Mr. Lynch was later employed by the government and served in the various sections of the northwest until the year 1879, when he returned to Frontier County, where he has since made his home.

In 1883 Mr. Lynch was united in marriage to Miss Elizabeth Maycock at Arapahoe, Nebraska. Immediately after their marriage they located on their homestead now owned by M.A. Marcellius, where they lived for three or four years, later moving to the place now owned by Mr. Lynch, occupied by Earl Riley, which place was their home for many years.

They resided in Stockville during the time Mr. Lynch served the county in the capacity as sheriff and clerk of the district court, and until the death of Mrs. Lynch in March, 1925. Since which time Mr. Lynch has made his home with his children.

To this union four children were born, two sons and two daughters, who were guided through life by the kind and loving hand of this father and mother.

Mr. Lynch was one of the pioneers of the county, who successfully fought the battles of the early settlers. He was a good neighbor, a loyal friend and a kind loving father.

He is survived by Robert G., of Roseland, Nebr.; Walter J., of Rawlins, Wyo.; Mrs. Nellie Riley of Stockville; Mrs. Beulah Arnold of LaGrange, Wyo. One sister, Mrs. Nellie Shelley, of Stockville and 12 grandchildren.

CURTIS ENTERPRISE, Thur December 29, 1932, p.1, c.5

...Mr. Lynch is remembered by all of the early inhabitants of this western region of Nebraska as a sheriff of Frontier county, when that territory included all of the land west to the Colorado line and south to the Kansas boundary[sic]. He had been one of the original law enforcement agents of this territory and was very widely known. The aged pioneer had also served in the capacity of assessor of this land when the first tracts ~~xxxxxxxixd~~ of homesteads were being layed out...

Mr. Lynch was a member of Lovel Lodge A.F. and A.M. at Stockville.

Funeral services were held here Thursday afternoon with Rev. Clarence Britten of Stockville in charge. Burial will be made in the local demetery....

McCook paper

John Lynch
(18 -187)
Frontier Co., 1872

ELLEN LYNCH -- 1812-1902

This morning at 10:45 o'clock Mrs. Ellen Lynch died at her home in this city at the age of 90 years, of old age, complicated by an attack of grip contracted last September. The funeral will occur from St. Mary's cathedral. Deceased leaves two sons and two daughters to mourn her loss. One son J[ohn]. A. Lynch, of Stockville, Neb., is in the city. Another son resides in Colorado, one daughter [Mrs. Marvin L. (Maggie Elizabeth Lynch) Waldraven,] in Oklahoma and another, Mrs. A[mrose]. S. Shelley, in Nebraska. Mr. George Gregory of this city is her grandson.

Mrs. Lynch is the widow of John Lynch, who came to Cheyenne with the Union Pacific in 1867, being one of the sub-contractors who built the road. She has travelled extensively and was present at the coronation of Queen Victoria and knew Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas of Illinois, when both men were coming before the public eye.--Cheyenne Daily Leader, [Fri.,] Feb.14.

J.A. Lynch was at the bedside of his mother two days before she passed away. Mrs. Lynch and her husband were early settlers in this county, locating here in July 1872 on the farm now owned by J.A. Lynch. While in Cheyenne Mr. Lynch saw E.H. Fenton who has recovered from his injuries received in the railroad some time ago sufficiently to go to work again soon, C.W. Wilson who is firing a freight from Cheyenne, O.W. Melvin who is working at the car shops, Amox Fox who is working in the machine shops, and John Shelley, who is working in the car shops. He also saw Mrs. Riggs and daughter Maggie, Mrs. Fox. Both are well.

Stockville, THE FABER

Thur Feb.20, 1902, p.5, c.4, 6"

"JACK" LYNCH OF STOCKVILLE PASSES AWAY

STOCKVILLE, Dec. 21, (Special)
—John A. Lynch, pioneer settled of this vicinity who is known to all as "Jack," 78 years old, died at 9:30 last night at the home of his daughter, Mrs. E. O. Riley, three miles south of Stockville.

Mr. Lynch is remembered by all of the early inhabitants of this western region of Nebraska as a sheriff of Frontier county, when that territory included all of the land west to the Colorado line and south to the Kansas boundary. He had been one of the original law enforcement agents of this territory and was very widely known. The aged pioneer had also served in the capacity of assessor of this land when the first tracts of homesteads were being laid out.

He was born at Henry, Illinois in 1864 and moved to Cheyenne, Wyo., when he was 12 years old. For the past 56 years he has been in this region, coming to Stockville in 1876.

Mrs. Lynch preceded him in death several years ago. He is survived by four children, two sons, W. S. of Rawlins, Wyo., and Robert of Roseland, Nebr.; and two daughters, Mrs. Leo Arnold of LaGrange, Wyo., and Mrs. E. O. Riley of near Stockville.

Mr. Lynch was a member of Lovell Lodge A. F. and A. M. at Stockville.

Funeral services will be held here Thursday afternoon with Rev. Clarence Britten of Stockville in charge. Burial will be made in the local cemetery. A great many of the residents of this vicinity will attend the final rites.

MRS. LYNCH DEAD.

Old Pioneer Resident Passes Away at
Ripe Age of 80 Years.

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Death Claims County's First Pioneer Mother

Mrs. Nellie Shelley Had Lived Here
Continuously Since 1872—Widow
of First Permanent Settler.

The death of Mrs. Nellie Shelley at her home near Stockville Friday, Oct. 26, marked the passing one the last of the earliest pioneers, and one who had lived here continuously longer than any other person. She was the widow of Ambrose Shelley, a Civil war veteran, who came to this county in 1871 and was present when the county was organized in 1872. He was credited with turning the first sod in Frontier county for agricultural purposes. The log cabin now standing on the county fair grounds at Stockville was built by Ambrose Shelley and is believed to have been the first house constructed by white men in the county. Mr. Shelley died Dec. 2, 1880, at the age of 87.

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Miss Nellie Lynch and Ambrose Shelley were married in February, 1884 and were the parents of five children, all of whom survive and were with their mother when the end came. They are Percy, George and William Shelley and Mrs. Grace Fisher of Stockville and Margaret of Los Angeles, Calif.

Mrs. Shelley was highly respected as a pioneer mother who reared a family which maintained the best pioneer traditions. In the history of Frontier county in his book, "Pioneers, Indians and Buffaloes," Judge Bayard H. Paine, devotes a chapter to the Shelleys. With material gained in a visit with Mrs. Shelley only last May Judge Paine relates considerable Frontier county history and pays high tribute to both Mrs. Shelley and her husband.

Funeral services were held at Stockville Sunday. The sermon was delivered by Rev. L. H. Messersmith. Burial was in Stockville cemetery.

Card of Thanks.

We wish to thank the friends and neighbors for their kindness and for the beautiful flowers and sympathy during the sickness and after the death of our mother.

THE SHELLEY FAMILY.