

McFARLANE, JOHN
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JOHN McFARLAND, PLATTE TRAIL BLAZER DIES MONDAY
Was Ranking Pioneer Of Platte County, Arrived 1866
HELPED BUILD OLD FORT
Drove Cattle From Oregon 40 Years Ago

With the death of John McFarland at his home in Wheatland early Monday morning, Platte county lost a man who was in all probability the ranking pioneer of this section. While he was always the simple unassuming gentleman, and would have been the last to claim any public attention for a recital of the stirring events of his long and varied life, it is well worth while to relate them for the interest and educational value they might have for the younger generations, who have but little idea of the experiences encountered by those who broke the trails and cleared the land in preparation for them.

In 1866 Mr. McFarland went to Nebraska City to hire out as an ox team driver to Ft. Laramie. He secured a contract with a man there who owned a train and was sending them thru under another man. While on the road, there was a division between a number of the drivers and the wagon master, who attempted to turn them adrift in the desert, young McFarland among them. They insisted on their contract with the owner of the train, however, and staid by their teams until they reached Ft. Laramie.

There the wagon master refused to pay them their wages, but the commanding officer at the fort refused to pay for the transportation of the government supplies until he paid all wage claims in full.

McFarland arrived in Laramie on August ii, 1886. There he became associated with Dick Dickerson, a son of a U. S. minister to one of the Central American Republics, who was engaged in contracting work for the government. The government was then building the adobe structures which yet remain at Ft. Laramie. Dickerson had a contract for making 300,000 of the bricks, and was employing Mexicans who were hired and paid on the basis of 200 bricks for a day's work. McFarland and a partner contracted to make them at the rate of \$25 per thousand and were able to make double that quota apiece per day. The bricks were made on the bank of the Laramie river about 150 yards from the Fort, and were a foot square by 15 or 16 inches long.

While McFarland was a Ft. Laramie, there occurred the famous council with all Indian tribes then inhabiting this section, including tribes of the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Crows. There were gathered at the old fort the largest assemblage of redskins ever seen in the west. An army officer estimated that there were present 10,000 Indian warriors, in addition the women, children, and other dependents.

With the money saved McFarland bought ox teams and engaged in hauling supplies from the Union Pacific R. R., which had then just reached Cheyenne, to Fort Laramie. He was among the first to make the trip with a freight train, and helped to establish the old Cheyenne-Ft. Laramie trail. During the winter of 1867-68 he conducted a road ranch where that trail crossed Lodge Pole Creek.

A year or two later, he had made plans to winter on the Sibylee, at a point near where the Grant ranch now stands. His partners in the winter camp were to be Charles Clay, a young Virginia gentleman who was book keeper for Col. Bullock at the fort, and Dick Dickerson. Clay had already established the camp. Dickerson was waiting for McFarland to finish a government contract at Ft. Laramie and accompany him to the Sibylle. He became tired of waiting and went on alone, against the warning of McFarland, John Hunton, who was then at Bordeaux, and others, who feared hostile Indians. Dickerson had imported a fine running horse from the east, and was sure that he could distance any redskins that might give chase.

But while crossing the southern part of the Wheatland Flats, Dickerson was attacked at close range by Indians who had hidden in a swale, and who broke his horse's leg at the first volley. He dismounted, shot the horse thru the head, and taking refuge behind its body he stood off the Indians until

his ammunition was exhausted. He was then killed and scalped.

When the cattle began to come in soon after 1870, McFarland engaged in the cattle business with his brother-in-law, Dan McUlvane. They bot the M Bar ranch, now owned by the Two Bar, and located at Slater. That ranch had just been established by Charles Clay, who sold them the buildings. Together they carried on a live stock business there for several years.

On the occasion the Indians ran off all their horses and engaged in a fight with McUlvane and David McFarland, a brother of John McFarland, killing both their horses and shooting David through the shoulder. One of the Indians and several of their ponies were left dead on the ground, and the Indians later reported that several of their number died of wounds.

John McFarland was away on a freighting trip at the time, but a rancher by the name of Ashenfelt was visiting at his place. He went and reported the loss to a U.S. Patrol of 10 soldiers, who were encamped on the river between the present sites of Slater and Bordeaux. In company with the soldiers and several civilians, Ashenfelt trailed the Indians to the head waters of the Reishaw, where they found them just making camp. Ashenfelt and a civilian left the soldiers covering the Indians, and attempted to steal between the Indians and the horses and cut the latter off before they were detected, when one of the soldiers called them back, and attracted the attention of the Indians, who rushed to their guns and horses. A battle ensued in which one of the soldiers was killed.

McUlvane and McFarland sold the M Bar ranch to E. Nagle, and McFarland established the present McFarland ranch west of Wheatland on the edge of the Laramie Plains. Then in the early eighties, he went to Oregon, buying 500 head of cattle and trailing them back to the ranch, over a 1200 mile route. He lost 50 head of cattle on the route, but a man following with 10,000 head divided into five herds of 2000 each lost nearly their whole herd when they broke control while crossing a waterless desert just beyond the Snake river.

McFarland lived on the Laramie Plains ranch until recently when he suffered a fall, and came to Wheatland in company with his wife to be near medical attention. His wife preceded him to the hereafter, passing away last fall. After her death, McFarland was never well, and gradually weakened until his death Monday morning.

(Please note that the newspaper misspelled Mr. McFarlane's name as McFarland. That spelling has been kept for the sake of historical accuracy in the obituary's reproduction.)