

Sibley Co. Ireland
1876

O'Neills Tell Of Life In Early Eagan

The O'Neill family were Eagan pioneers. Robert O'Neill came to Eagan in 1852 to Section 2. He was elected to the first state legislature in 1857-58, and chairman of the Dakota County commissioners from 1853 to 1858. After that time, the position of county commissioner did not exist for several years.

Mrs. O'Neill taught in 1860 in one of Eagan's first one-room schools.

William H. O'Neill of 2660 Dodd Rd., Eagan, has "O'Neill's Place" near his driveway. His two sons and a daughter, and their families live nearby on O'Neill Dr. Much of the farmland was purchased by Dayton-Hudson Corp. for a planned regional shopping center.

Mr. and Mrs. O'Neill and Mary O'Neill told of earlier days in an interview at their home. They attended District 11, on Lexington Ave. and County Rd. 30, a building still standing and used as a home. They attended eight months of school. The railroad men would cut a railroad wire so the children would have a short cut and not have to walk the three miles to schools.

Recreational activities included basket socials, and barn dances whenever a farmer built a new barn. Church card parties were held in the town hall in Mendota Village.

Sicknesses included diphtheria. Miss O'Neill remembers the John Rahn family lost all their children from that disease, but later had more children.

The O'Neill property was purchased from General Sibley. Hired men received \$3.50 per week at one time, plus room and board.

O'Neill said the farm formerly had 58 cows and 7,000 laying hens. Corn, potatoes, and onions were grown for sale at the St. Paul market. William and Frances (Silk) O'Neill were the parents of William H. O'Neill and Miss O'Neill. William the Third and Fourth also live on the home place in Eagan.

O'Neill served on the school board many years. Other school board members were Gustav Polzin, Fred Boettcher and Herve Fournier.

The janitor, Bill Smith, received \$4 a week from the school district. He trapped skunks on his way to work some mornings, which added to the atmosphere of education.

One teacher, Annie O'Leary, fried onions on the stove for her "hot lunch." The students brought lunches and hoped they did not freeze during the winter months.

The ferry at Mendota which preceded the Mendota bridge was recalled vividly.