

MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF TERRENCE BYRNE

Gray County, Kansas

Written by Juanita Trebilcock

Consultant: Terrence Byrne/Burns, Ingalls, Kansas - Age 65 years

*For additional information on Terrence Byrne,
See... Mrs. Terrence Byrne (Nettie Mae Shasteen Byrne),
Project Consultant - Gray County.*



18 years old in 1889



The Older Years

At first, they spelled the name as Byrne. The family changed it to Burns, but eventually, Terrence returned to the original spelling.

Terrence Byrne came to Gray County with his father and mother (*Lawrence J. Byrne and Bridget J. Murphy*) in 1881, during the first part of April. Besides Terrence Byrne, there were two brothers, John and Arthur, who accompanied his parents here. Mr. Byrne was just ten years old at that time. He was born in February 1871. (*Church records in Dublin, Ireland provide the following... Terentius Byrne was born on 3 Feb 1872 in Dublin and baptized on 6 Feb 1872. The father's name, listed as Laurentius Byrne and the mother's name, listed as Brigida Murphy.*)

In 1882, Mr. Byrnes' father homesteaded about four miles west of the present town of Ingalls. The Byrnes family continues to own the original homestead and is well known as the "Byrnes' Place".

A town site named Belfast* was chosen close to there by the Santa Fe Railroad. Then,

they added siding to the tracks. Later, when A. T. Soule, the New York millionaire, started his great project, the Eureka Irrigation Ditch, several very close friends of Mr. Byrnes' father, among them, Dr. McCarty, John Rush, and Mr. Zimmerman of Dodge City tried to persuade him to turn over about 80 acres of his land, for the purpose of, starting a town. Mr. Byrne would not give his consent, and A. T. Soule built his town four miles east of the railroad siding known as Belfast, Kansas.

Terrence Byrne says if his father had given his consent for Mr. Soule to start the town on his property, the town of Ingalls would not have been created. Mr. Byrne thinks that Belfast would undoubtedly have been the county seat of Gray County. It was well situated, being almost in the center of Gray County, and was a place of historical interest. One of the old trails traveled by immigrants and traders ran through the area, and the original crossing is still there. It is now known as the Byrnes' Crossing. The trail may have been a branch of the old Santa Fe Trail, as I understand the river was crossed in the early days at any point where it was lowest. Mr. Byrne says the ruts caused by the wagons were about a foot deep when they came here, and they had not yet been grown over by grass. There were ten or twelve separate tracks, and he tells about when they were breaking the sod, the grooves were so deep that the plow would jump across them, not plowing that part of the land where the trail ran.

Ingalls was organized in 1886, and it was in 1887 that the siding at Belfast was torn up and moved to Ingalls. That was the first work that Mr. Byrne ever did on the railroad. He helped to tear up the siding on his father's farm in November 1887 and moved it to Ingalls. In May 1888, Mr. Byrne started working on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad as a regular hand, and he worked continuously until April of 1930. At that time, he was retired on a pension. Thirty-eight of those years, he worked as a section foreman for the railroad. Terrence Byrne has a certification of honor given to him by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad in recognition of his long and faithful service of forty-two years and six months. He has been placed on honor as a pensioned employee.

Terrence Byrne homesteaded some land for himself in 1892 when he was 21 years old. His homestead was one mile north and one mile east of Charleston.* He was married in 1896.

The town of Ingalls was named in honor of John J. Ingalls, a senator. A. T. Soule built most of the town. He built a lot of company houses, one of which still stands and is now the property of Henry Mooney. Besides the houses, he built most of the business section at Ingalls. The old Goddard building, situated on Main Street on the south side of the railroad track, was built initially by Soule on the north side of the track, where all of the business houses were first built. The building was bought by Goddard in 1894 and moved to the present site.

Mr. Byrne recalls hearing his father tell of the county seat fight, which occurred in Gray County. The county of Gray was formed in 1887, at which time a temporary

county seat was established at Cimarron. An election was held in January of 1888 to select a town for the permanent county seat. After the counting of the ballots, Ingalls won and was legally the county seat of Gray County.

Cimarron would not give up the county records, so Ingalls hired gunmen from Dodge City to come and help. Along with a few Ingalls men loaded into a wagon, the gunmen went to Cimarron to steal the records. They had the records in the wagon ready to leave before Cimarron awoke to the fact that something unusual was happening. A fight ensued, and two men were killed, and others were seriously wounded. However, Ingalls escaped with the county records.

According to law, another county seat election could be held in five years by passing a petition around the county and getting two-thirds of the voters' signatures. The petition was passed around, and signatures were obtained. A new election was held at which Cimarron was chosen as the county seat and the records again changed hands.

Ingalls took the case to the Kansas Supreme Court, charging that part of the petition signatures was fraudulent. Before the Supreme Court considered the case, a man from Cimarron bought all of the county buildings in Ingalls and resold them with the understanding that they were to be moved out of Ingalls. Thus, when the Supreme Court handed down the decision in favor of Ingalls, there were no buildings in Ingalls suitable for county offices, so the county seat was left at Cimarron.

The above story of the struggle over the county seat is how Mr. Byrne told it to me. He said part of it is from memories of what his father told him. The other part is from what he remembers about it himself. He also says that Ingalls was quite a town at one time with two flourmills, a cheese factory, a printing press, and hotels. It was also the headquarters for the Eureka Irrigation Ditch Company.

Perhaps the most notorious place in Gray County in those early days was a place known as "The Joint," a combination gambling hall and saloon. Mr. Byrne chuckled as he recalled the fights that used to take place there. He told of one fight that took place one night between a horse seller and some other gambler. The horse seller had brought a herd of fine horses from Oregon to sell in Ingalls. He had sold all of them and had quite a bit of money on him. The gamblers were trying to win the money, and when they weren't very successful, they accused him of cheating. He said one of the local gamblers, who had been successful that evening and had quite a pile of chips and money before him, gathered them in his arms, slipped out the back door as quickly and quietly as possible, and disappeared. Almost as soon as the fight started, someone threw something at the big brass-hanging lamp, and it fell, leaving the room in total darkness. He said it certainly did not take long for everyone to clear out, including himself.

One night the business part of the town burned. There was a large two-story building that had the Odd-fellows Hall above and a pool hall below. There was a store building

on each side. "The Joint" was at the back of one of the buildings, the front part being left vacant. The vacant part of the building had had a bale of hay in it for some time. The bale had been broken open, and people thought it had been "thrown in the building" to be used later for feed. A few days before the fire, a few people noticed that the window had a hole in it, close to the bale of hay. Everyone thought that some children had broken the window with a rock, but it was only a short time later, that the fire started in that building. Some folks were suspicious that the window had been broken purposely by someone planning to burn the building and that a match had been tossed on the bale of hay. The fire was at night, and there was no way of fighting it. Mrs. Terrence Byrne said while she was working in their home, the room was light as day, and she could not imagine what was wrong. In a short time, someone came to the door and called out that the town was on fire. There were several conjectures as to who started the fire. As it was started just a day or two before the Supreme Court handed down its decision in favor of Ingalls as a county seat, some thought that someone from Cimarron might have started the fire to destroy buildings that would be appropriate for county use. Others believe that a woman started the fire. Her husband was a frequent visitor and customer at "The Joint," and some thought that she started the fire with the intention of destroying the gambling hall and saloon. She was the one who discovered the fire and gave the alarm. It was believed that she gave the warning after seeing that the Odd-fellows Hall was going to burn. Of course, these are merely conjectures as nothing was ever proved concerning the origin of the fire. Mr. Byrne said it could have been accidentally caused by carelessness. There was no insurance on the buildings, so the buildings' loss was never made right. When the business section was rebuilt, it was located on the opposite side of the railroad track.

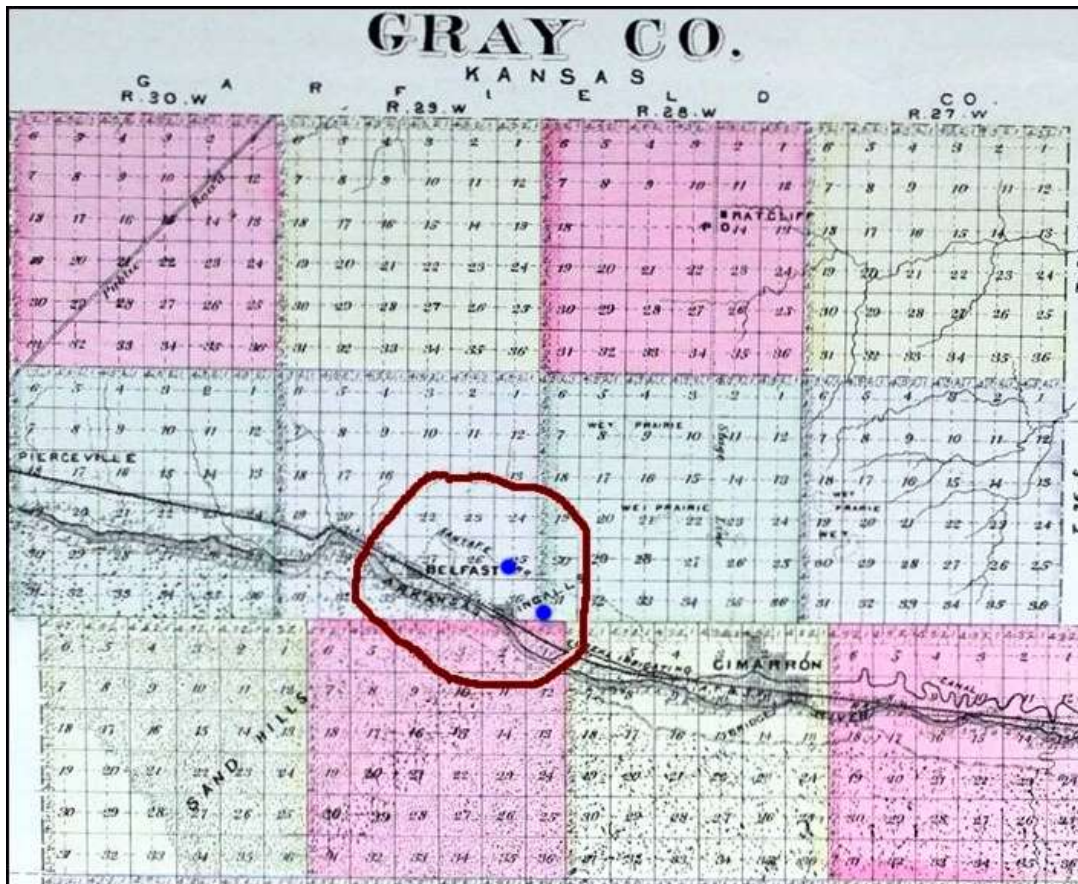
Mr. Byrne remarked about the large number of antelope here at the time he came. He said the buffalo were all gone at that time, but there were many antelope. Sometimes you could see as many as thirty-five or forty in a herd. He said they were here as late as 1897 and 1898. His father had a bunch of sheep, and he said many times when he was out herding them, the antelope would come to where the sheep were and mingle with them. Mrs. Terrence Byrne says she has seen a group of five or six antelope many times on a hilltop. They would stand perfectly still until you would move, and when they sighted you, they would turn and run. They were very 'fleet-footed,' and it was a great sport to hunt them.

The Byrne family has quite a record as being postmasters. Mr. Byrne's father was postmaster at Belfast when the railroad siding was there. At that time, there were only two post offices in Gray County. The other one was at Cimarron. His father was the second postmaster in Gray County. When the town of Ingalls started, he resigned as postmaster at Belfast, only because a post office had opened in Ingalls. Mr. Byrne had two brothers who were postmasters at Ingalls at different times. One of them, J. E. Byrne, now owns and operates the only grocery and dry goods store in Ingalls.

Terrence Byrne himself has a record in post office work. After he was retired on a pension by the railroad, he became a clerk and assistant postmaster of Ingalls, Kansas. He held that position for about three and a half years.

Mr. Byrne has been in Gray County for fifty-five years. He has seen the county's development and has helped in many ways to advance his community further. He says it does not seem so long looking back at the years he has lived and worked here. He has seen the many changes in the county and has been especially interested in the advancement of the railroad. When the sharp curve was taken out of the track last winter, and a deep cut made through a hill to make it possible to run a straight path through, just west of Ingalls, Mr. Byrne was one of the first to ride through the cut on a train. He had wanted this advancement to come for years. It makes possible greater speed and safety.

The people of Gray County and the Ingalls community owe much to Mr. Byrne for this region's progress.



Part of an 1887 Map of Gray County, Kansas showing the area of Belfast and Ingalls.

* Charleston was a station and shipping point on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. A post office opened in Charleston in 1908. It closed temporarily in 1912 and reopened in 1913. It closed permanently in 1944. Today it is an unincorporated community.