



Lawrence J. O'Toole

Dakota Images

The life of Lawrence J. O'Toole, who settled in Dakota Territory in 1880, is representative of the lives of many pioneers who came west in search of new economic and political opportunities. O'Toole, born 16 June 1860, left his native County Carlow, Ireland, at age eleven and journeyed alone to New York State, where he apprenticed as a stonecutter and lived with his older sister. At age seventeen, he traveled to Winona County, Minnesota, and worked as a farmhand during the summer and attended school during the winter. Upon arriving in Dakota Territory in 1880, he took a preemptive claim in Fuller Township, Codington County. Five years later, on 16 February 1885, he married Della S. Grammond of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.

By 1885, according to his diary, O'Toole was already acting as clerk of a rural school district although he was not officially elected to such a post until 1 May 1889. By that time, he was also serving as assessor of Fuller Township and as postmaster of Esterly, a position assigned to him on 3 August 1887 by Postmaster General William F. Vilas. On 15 April 1892, when the Sisseton-Wahpeton reservation was opened to white settlers, O'Toole acquired more land. The reservation formed a triangle with the point at Lake Kampeska, and one side of the triangle bordered O'Toole's land. To stake his new claim, he walked across the line and turned a shovel of dirt.

By 1908, O'Toole had fathered three girls and six boys. That year, while lifting sacks of grain with his older sons, O'Toole doubled over from the strain, and the incident caused him to give up farming and move to town. After moving to Watertown, O'Toole became interested in the Republican party and ran for county treasurer against Democrat N. F. Marx, whom he defeated 1,768 to 694. Two years later, O'Toole won reelection over another Democrat, A. Glen King. However, shortly after he began serving his second term, a heart ailment claimed his life on 12 February 1911.

His obituary, published 17 February 1911 in the *Watertown Public Opinion*, noted that O'Toole was "one of the oldest settlers of the county" and one of the county's "most prominent citizens."

by MICHAEL J. BUGEJA

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