

Notes on Thomas D. Lyons Commonweal essays— (*Oklahoma Days: Dakota Son, Oil Country Lawyer*)

By Frank Lyons, September 2010 (Rock Island, Illinois)

Thomas D. Lyons (1883-1948) and his eight or nine siblings were well educated. Several times in Thomas Lyons's essays he mentions working his 160 acre "relinquishment" in Charles Mix County. A relinquishment was available when land was homesteaded and then abandoned. The "relinquished" land could be acquired by paying a few dollars per acre and continuing with the government obligation for developing the virgin land into a farm.

Apparently Thomas farmed his quarter section of land after he received his college degree from Notre Dame but before he attended the South Dakota University Law School.

When I was a little boy I remember a relative (an uncle or cousin) telling the story of driving by the relinquishment as Thomas was ploughing his field. When Thomas came to the road to turn the machine around, he stood on the plough and recited a speech given 2000 years earlier in Rome by Cicero. Cicero was an orator, philosopher, statesman, and linguist. The teller of the story did not mention if he recited in Latin, Greek, or English.

This story has some credibility. Two of Thomas's brothers had such good memories, they could each recite all the works of Shakespeare from memory. Unfortunately both brothers had a mental affliction that prevented them from functioning normal lives. They were institutionalized. The son of brother Richard became a noted Psychiatrist, Dr. Henry Lyons. . After his father's death he examined the hospital records and observed that the tragedy resulting from his father and uncle's illness (bi-polar disease) could have been avoided with modern medicine. Great family bitterness surrounded the illness.

Additional note—

A book entitled, *Enterprise in Oil*, the history of Shell oil in the US, gives further information on Thomas D. Lyons and his seminal role in the origin of Shell Oil in the US. The company was originally called, Roxana Oil, named after the wife of Alexander the Great. The name was because an involved oil company official admired Alexander. (The book did not speak of the beloved boy who accompanied Alexander on most of his military campaigns.)