

# Walpole Murdoch—Pioneer Newsman

Murdoch, editor and manager of the *Hartney Star* was a character and a fine example of a newspaper man

Walpole Murdoch came to the Pilot Mound area as a child, and while still in his early twenties he and his father established two newspapers: the *Birtle Observer* in 1884 and then the *Pilot Mound Sentinel* in 1889.

In 1901 he and his brother-in-law F. G. Lewis purchased the *Hartney Star* with Walpole as editor and manager.

Murdoch took a keen interest in his new home and its progress. He reported in detail about the businesses and services available in his new community. He commented on the lawns, trees and shrubs, and held forth on the quality of the local farms and the natural beauty of the countryside. His reports leave us a wealth of detail about Hartney and area.

One item in May, 1901, says:

*"I hired a team at McDonald's livery and with a companion, drove east past the farms of Alex McDonald, H. Galbraith, J. L. Graham, Ab. Rollins and A. Coulter where we saw immense and prosperous looking fields of growing grain, well kept gardens and comfortable homes. We stopped at Frank Henry's farm, six miles east, for noon dinner. It is a place of refinement and comfort although Mr. Henry has been on it only about ten years."*

Although his praise of the district must have made him some friends, not all Hartney citizens were im-

pressed with some of his other attributes. He was divorced; one strike against him, and a bit of a free-thinker as well. He belonged to no church but attended all four in turn. He reported an argument on evolution at a time when most of his contemporaries accepted religious teaching from their ministers without question. To many, Murdoch's views appeared strange and alarming. Some accused him of being an atheist. To those accusations he replied:

*"Those who think they can find no religious thought in this paper may have themselves to blame. The soul of a religious person may reflect the natural world. To the thoughtful intelligent person there is an apostle preaching in every river, wave and cloud bank. The trouble is that many people do not see, nor think. They want everything prepared for them so that all they need do is swallow it."*

He weighed in on economic matters as well:

*"Farmers owe more than gratitude to the comparatively small flour mills of this western country that use large quantities of wheat in the district where it is produced. When local mills cease to compete with grain buyers,*

**...he was a bit of a free-thinker as well.**



▲ The Hartney Star was located on Hartney's Main Street.

*the price drops so low the smile is all in the city."*

For ten years Murdoch was a familiar figure on Hartney's streets and at community affairs. He wore his fashionable clothes with distinction. At train time he was on the station platform with a notebook in his hand to gather news of arrivals and departures.

His sentiments gained respect from those who sought new ideas, resentment from those who found it uncomfortable to have their accepted beliefs and prejudices disturbed, and complete indifference from the many who read "*The Star*" only to learn of local happenings.

In 1910 Mr. Murdoch, still a relatively young man, departed for the greener pastures of California.

Sources:  
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Pilot Mound Illustrated. *Pilot Mound Sentinel*. 1903.