Homesteading in Colorado

BY GLEN R. DURRELL

This is the story of eight years of experience from 1908 to 1916 on a homestead in eastern Colorado as seen through the eyes of a boy who grew from six to fourteen and as reported by a man of sixty-eight.[1] Most of it is fact. Some may be family legend; some fantasy. It is probable that there may be some of each, considering the ages and the time lapse involved.

The location was in the central part of eastern Colorado. More specifically, it was seventeen miles north and one mile east of the town of Arriba in Lincoln County. Hugo was our county seat, and it was some seventy miles west of the Kansas line. The legal description of our "quarter" would have been the northeast quarter of section 19, township 6 south, range 52 west, sixth principal meridian. The area is known as the high plains or the short grass prairie country. Dad said our homesite was on Poverty Creek at the head of Starvation Hollow—but do not look for these last two place names on a map.

The reason usually given for moving from Earlville, Illinois, where Dad had been the manager of an electric light plant, was to search for better health. Mother was subject to asthma attacks, and Dad was bothered with undefined "lung trouble." I rather suspect that there were other considerations—the lure of free land and the challenge of the frontier must have had considerable appeal to Dad, if not to Mother. My family consisted of our father, who in 1908 was thirty-three; Mother, thirty; Clyde, seven; Glen, six; and Donald, four. Loya, the last member of the family, arrived several years later.

My first impression of the country was gained when I awoke on the train that was taking us to Arriba—"Look, Mom; no trees." I was amazed at the distance you could see and to me, at that time, how little there was to be seen. The country looked perfectly flat.

[1] The following are excerpts, with a minimum of editing, from a much longer manuscript deposited in the Documentary Resources Department, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver.

Agriculture in Colorado

section of the there higher agriculture develop- by irrigation along the

Colorado & Southern Ry.

In the Rocky Mountain Region
Crop Failures practically unknown

COLORADO'S 1906 PRODUCTION

IN AGRICULTURE, $115,000,000.00
IN MINERALS, 50,359,395.00

Write for booklet, "Agriculture in Colorado," describing this garden of the world.

T. C. FISHER, General Pass. Agent, DENVER

Advertisements promoting Colorado's bountiful agriculture, such as this one that appeared in ***Ranch and Range*** *during 1907-8, were designed to stimulate interest in Colorado and encourage settlement.*

There were no hills. Of course, it was not as flat as it looked. A drainage system had developed over the centuries and the slopes down to the stream beds, which were dry most of the time, gave some relief to the monotony of the flat plains. At intervals of five miles or so we could see from the train what appeared to me as small, black boxes or groups of such boxes. The presence of windmills finally identified these as the homesteads of settlers. I imagine now that I expected to see buffalo and Indians, although I do not recall having had these thoughts.

At Arriba the boxcars containing our household goods, implements, and animals were shunted onto a side track. A family by the name of Winchell, who had filed on the quarter section north of ours, shared the boxcars with us. The presence of two families made the job of unloading the cars somewhat lighter, and also reduced the apprehensions we may have had about striking out across the plains.

Our goal was a quarter section of land that Dad had selected and had filed upon on an earlier trip. Under the Homestead Act a person could claim 160 acres, file on it, and if he built his home, lived there, and cultivated the land for five years, he could "prove up" his claim and obtain a government patent to it. We know now that this was probably a poor land disposal policy because the rainfall was inadequate or too unreliable to assure annual crops. The land was fertile enough to produce bountifully under irrigation or in a rare season of ample rainfall. The quarter section was much too small for a grazing economy. The result was that too much land was plowed and the pastures were overgrazed in an attempt to make a living. Many settlers had to give up even before they gained title to the land. Perhaps what we saw on the way out to our homestead represented the best use of the area. We passed three or four ranches in the eighteen miles. These were the homes of the "old timers." They plowed very little of the land and only the fields were fenced. They had developed a grazing economy over the years and had made peace with their environment. We, the "newcomers," fenced the land their cattle had been grazing for years, and we were confident that we could teach them how to farm the country.

The road we followed was a set of wagon tracks that headed in the general direction we wanted to go. We were not restricted by fences, and when the tracks we were following did not suit our fancy, we made our own. Later on, as more land was settled and fenced, our roads were restricted to the section lines. It occurs to me now that the rectangular system of surveys used on our public lands, and the resulting ownership pattern, was responsible in later years for many of our problems. Section lines were not necessarily the best road locations; following them frequently meant difficult stream crossings, excessive grades, road ditch erosion, and usually an increase in travel distance. The rectangular fields meant that the farmer plowed his fields by the fence lines rather than on the contour, which was in large part responsible for much of our soil erosion.

As far as I was concerned this was virgin territory. We knew that it once held vast herds of buffalo, but we found little evidence of this. We did find a skull in our pasture that we were convinced once belonged to a buffalo. Buffalo bones were absent but we were told that there was once a market for bones and "bone pickers" were supposed to have gathered them. There was an old trail across our pasture. It had been heavily used at one time; there were several sets of ruts and along it we found a few pieces of wagon iron. Was it once used by the pioneers, or perhaps by gold miners headed for Pikes Peak, or by the Mormons migrating to Utah?

There was some evidence that part of our place might have been farmed in the past. Although it was all native prairie and there were no plow marks, there were a few clumps of alfalfa (or was it sweet clover?) so well established that the roots would throw the plow out of the ground. This could have been the result of earlier cultivation but, more likely, it came from seed scattered by livestock of the travelers that used the old trail.

Our first home was a tent we had brought with us and in which we lived for most of the first summer and fall. Getting the land

plowed, a crop in the ground, and the land under fence were more immediate considerations than housing.

We had to find starting places for our fences to be sure they were on the property lines. The public land surveys in the prairie country were marked with a system of "pits and mounds." There were no stones for marking corners and no trees to be "blazed and scribed" for witness trees. Instead, at the point where four sections of land "cornered," some broken glass, some charcoal, or a piece of cedar fence post was buried. A pit was then dug in each of the four section corners and the dirt piled in a mound over the buried material. The pits were the "witnesses," and they were described in the surveyors' field notes by size and distance and by bearing (or direction) from the section corner. The half-section corners were also marked with pits and mounds, but in this case only two pits were needed.

We found the pits and mounds marking our corners without difficulty and dug down to find the cedar blocks. The corner in the center of the section was not marked by the surveyors, so this point was determined by sighting across the section from the quarter corners, those marking the half-mile points on each side. We had to set our fences back thirty-three feet from the section line on the north and east for roadways. All section lines were to be left open for public roads.

After the fencing was done and the crops planted, we built a "dugout," a place to spend the winter. This consisted of digging back into a slope to make a level floor of the size wanted. This left the front of the building at ground level. The back had a dirt wall, three, four, or five feet high, depending on the degree of slope. Then sod was cut and the walls built up to the desired height. Our dugout had a dirt floor and the walls were bare. It did get us through the winter, however, and afterwards served well as a stable for a number of years.

The next summer Dad built a frame house for us, one of the few in that part of the country. It was one and a half stories high and the bedrooms were on the upper floor. It had a sod covered roof, which kept the upstairs fairly cool in the summertime. I remember that it was cold in winter. On the coldest nights we used horse blankets for top covers and not infrequently we found snow on top of the covers in the morning.

Speaking of beds reminds me that our mattresses were ticks filled with cornhusks. We boys had the job of renewing these occasionally. We learned through experience to select the soft inner husks and to be sure that no pieces of stalk or cob were included. We later used wheat straw, which made a somewhat smoother mattress. With either filling we had to be a little careful the first night or two. We

In 1916, the year we left, our one and one-half story frame house with the sod roof and the lean-to looked like this.

stuffed the ticks full and they were apt to be a little high in the middle—noisy too—until slept on for a few nights.

Over time, we added to the frame structure. First, we built a lean-to on the west end of the house. We called this the milk room. In it was housed the mail order DeLaval cream separator and shelves to hold canned food, milk jars, etc. It also held the boy-powered washing machine, tubs, and a bench for the wash basin and water buckets. Later, a sod lean-to was built along the north wall. This provided a bedroom for our parents as well as a dining area for the family. It gave us boys more space upstairs. We did not know it at the time but the additional space was needed for an expected newcomer to the family.

These additions had wooden floors. The inside walls were plastered with what we called "magnesium." In a neighbor's pasture there was a "cut-bank," a place where the creek made a sharp bend against a small bluff. There was a layer of whitish material exposed in the face of this bluff. We dug this out and mixed it with water to form a pinkish plaster which, when applied to the sod wall, hardened into a satisfactory finish. It was not quite as hard as ordinary plaster, but it was a satisfactory substitute and all it cost was labor. I presume the material was what is now known as caliche, a limelike material that forms on or below the surface of the soil in dry areas.

Our first efforts at farming were directed at supplying food for livestock rather than at crops for sale. We had to have horses for farming the land—there were no tractors in those days except for the steam engines that pulled and powered the threshing machines—and we had to have cows for milk and cream, chickens for eggs and an occasional Sunday dinner, and hogs for meat. Buying feed for livestock was out of the question so we tried to raise it.

Although we usually cut our corn crop by hand and shocked it for fodder, some farmers and ranchers in the area used binders like this one.

Naturally the crops tried were those adapted to the areas we came from, areas of higher rainfall. Corn for grain and fodder was the important crop for the first two years or so. At first the corn was planted on flat-plowed land, in checkrows, so that it could be cultivated both ways as was the practice in Iowa. Lack of moisture resulted in a very short crop. Such ears as were produced seemed to be right at the ground level. Most of this crop was cut by hand with corn knives and shocked as fodder.

The next year the lister plow was introduced. This was a double moldboard plow that threw the dirt both ways, leaving a furrow about eight inches deep with ridges between the furrows. The corn was planted in the bottom of the furrow. The idea was to get the seed down where the moisture was and to develop a deeper root system. As the corn grew it was cultivated with a "go-devil." This was a sledlike implement that you rode on. It had two sets of three disks each on the rear. These disks could be angled in such a way that they not only cut the weeds, but they also pulled some of the soil in around the plants. After the third cultivation the ridges were pulled back into the furrow so that the ground was nearly level again. The team pulling the go-devil walked on the ridges. After a team was trained to stay on top of the ridges, cultivation became a relatively simple task, and we boys rode go-devils many a mile in the corn fields.

It was soon discovered that corn was an unreliable crop for dry land farming—I suppose any of the "old-timers" could have told us that, but we were not listening—and we gradually shifted to the grain sorghums (milo maize and feterita are the two I remember) and the more rapidly maturing small grains. If we had a fairly good snow cover in the winter, a couple of good rains in the spring months would almost always produce a crop of wheat. Summer fallowing, a

practice of leaving a field clean and idle for a year to allow moisture to accumulate, was talked about but never practiced. Land available to any one settler was too limited. The grain sorghums were still planted in lister furrows, as we had handled the corn. If this crop was short, it was cut with a grain binder. If it grew taller and too large for the binder, we cut it with corn knives and shocked it. It eventually had to be hauled in and stacked near the barn, where it could be fed in the winter.

Pit silos, the forerunners of the trench silo, were discussed and we had to have one. We dug a hole about ten feet in diameter and some fifteen or twenty feet deep. The walls were plastered. We filled this with green corn or sorghum, packing it down as firmly as possible as the pit was filled. This supplied green forage for our milk cows through the winter months. We got the silage out of the pit by using a hand-cranked windlass on a derrick of Dad's manufacture. As the feed got lower in the pit, we were lowered in the bucket, if Dad was there to turn the crank. Otherwise, we climbed down a ladder, filled the bucket, climbed out, cranked it up, and carried it into the barn to the livestock. It took a lot of labor but it did keep three boys out of mischief.

One year the wheat was so short that the binder would not tie it into bundles. Dad rigged a boxlike contraption on the side of the binder to catch the grain. When the box was full, it was dumped. He fastened an extra seat on the binder because another man (or boy) had to ride and keep the grain raked down in the box. A neighbor borrowed the binder to cut his wheat. He borrowed me also, since his boys were too small for the job. When we had finished, he paid me fifty cents a day for my work. I was surprised for I thought I had been loaned, not hired. That was the first time I was ever paid for work and I was quite proud of it.

As more wheat was grown, the header was introduced. This was a device much like the modern combine with two notable exceptions.

To hitch the five horses needed to push this McCormick "header" was complicated, as was maneuvering the machine in the field—and I was along to help, holding the reins on the team in the foreground.

It did not thresh the grain. Instead, the heads were elevated into a header barge, a modified hay rack. Instead of being powered by an engine, it was pushed—yes, I mean pushed—by five horses. A large pipe extended behind the machine. Toward the end of this was fastened the evener to which the horses were hitched, two on one side of the pole, three on the other. I can recall Dad and a neighbor trying to figure out the exact spacing and arrangement of the evener, the doubletrees and singletrees that would insure that each horse would pull his share of the load. At the extreme end of the pole was a small platform. This was supported on a wheel that was steered with a lever that the driver, standing on the platform, straddled. Driving five horses and keeping the header cutting a full swath required considerable skill. Turning corners was especially intricate. One team of three had to be turned at a right angle to the pole, the straddle wheel also turned at a right angle, and the inside team made to side-step until the turn was completed.

The header barge had one side lower than the other. Usually one man, or boy, drove the barge while another kept the grain pulled back from the elevator, tramped it down, and tried to build a load out of it. The driver had to keep the barge under the end of the elevator, a tricky task on the turns, and to drive at the same speed as the header. When the header barge was filled, it was driven to an area where the grain was stacked prior to threshing.

Threshing wheat on the Colorado prairie.

The one thing I especially enjoyed about harvesting was the meals. At harvest time I was one of the crew, and being a crew member I was counted as a man, and as a man I ate at the first table. It was not like Sunday dinner, when you had guests or were guests at the neighbors. Then there was always a second table and the kids had to wait, watching the chicken on the platter dwindle down to backs and necks, the biscuits, the mashed potatoes and chicken gravy, and later the pie, vanishing, and you drooling and slowly starving to death.

Many of the homesteaders around us also had young families so a schoolhouse became a necessity. The school land—section 16 in each township was set aside by the Homestead Act for school purposes—was a mile east of our place, and either by design or by accident was about the center of the community. A location was chosen on this section and the men of the community got together to build a schoolhouse. I do not know where the money came from for the necessary nails, lumber, windows, door, desks, blackboard, and stove, but I do know how the building went up because I was there, probably in the way, but I thought I was helping.

The men set a day, brought their sod cutters, wagons, spades, and carpenter tools and went to work. In a remarkably short time the building was up, the windows and door installed, and the two, little frame structures out back, one labeled boys, the other girls,

Clyde (next to the teacher) and I (third) posed with our classmates in front of our new, one-room, sod schoolhouse in 1909.

completed. A teacher was found and school was underway. All eight grades were taught in the one room.

There was no well at the school so the teacher usually brought a milk can of water with her. She also built the fire in the winter and did the janitor work as well. I do not know how much teachers were paid, probably about $30.00 per month. I would guess they earned every cent of it.

I still have a soft spot in my heart for the one-room school. It is true, perhaps, that you cannot have as many activities—of some kinds—as you can in graded schools. But, when you put eighteen or twenty kids, ages six to sixteen together, you will have plenty of

Here we are in the fall of 1914—all admonished to keep our mouths closed. Don and I are at the far right in the last row.

activity. While one class was reciting, the rest were supposed to be studying. You usually listened in, however, to the grades ahead of you because you would be covering the same ground later on. You soon learned to ignore the younger classes, except when something out of the ordinary happened—such as the time the teacher was trying to get Johnny Seal to identify numbers on the blackboard. Johnny had tired of the game. The teacher said, "Johnny, find seven." Johnny looked around at various things, then pointed above the blackboard and said, "I think I see him hiding up there in that crack."

We had the usual spelling and arithmetic papers to hand in. We also had spelling bees and "cyphering" matches. The possibility of having someone younger or in a lower grade "spell you down" was a powerful incentive to study. Having older children help the younger ones with their lessons was also a useful learning tool. The responsibility for looking after a younger brother or sister on the way to and from school and at recess taught some lessons.

When we later went to high school in Iowa, we found that we were able to compete satisfactorily with the others. This may only indicate that most of the Iowa kids had attended one-room schools too, rather than any effectiveness of the system. At any rate the system made schooling possible and it fitted the needs of our times. It is interesting to follow educational research today and to note that some of the principles of teaching and of the learning process now being "discovered" were inherent, unconsciously so perhaps, in the old, one-room school system.

To children, the important parts of the educational process are recess and lunch. School lunch programs had not been invented in those days so each child brought his own. Lunch pails were gallon syrup pails, lard cans, or any other type of container that would serve the purpose. Lunches consisted of whatever was available—bean sandwiches, biscuits, pieces of fried rabbit, boiled eggs, an occasional cinnamon roll, green onions in season, most anything could show up in a lunch pail. We children benefited from the fact that Mother's cooking was on public display. Trading, and some eating, started at recess.

A favorite recess game was called, "Shinny-in-the-hole." This required a circle some eight or ten feet in diameter. Around the circle were dug small holes, one less than the number of players. A larger hole was dug in the center. Each player had a straight stick. The puck was an empty, evaporated milk can. The object of the game was for the one who was "it" to knock the can into the center hole. If he succeeded, he could name the next "it." The boys in the circle tried to keep the can away from the hole. However, they had to guard the hole assigned to them by keeping the end of their stick in it. If the one who was "it" could get his stick in an unoccupied hole, the one whose hole it was, became "it." A satisfactory number of bruised shins, stamped toes, and hurt feelings resulted. The one difficulty connected with the game was finding suitable sticks in a country without trees. Broom sticks were favored but were hard to come by. Brooms seemed to last a long time.

One piece of playground equipment was a total loss, a basketball. We acquired one somehow and affixed an iron barrel hoop to a board on the north end of the building. After a few shots at the hoop,

the ball escaped and the wind took it rolling and bounding across the prairie. We could never make it hold air again. It was full of cactus spines.

One of the most used items we had was a length of rope. Perhaps the fact that we had earned this rope made it more important to us. One of our cows had died and Dad told us that if we would skin it, we could have the hide to sell and we could buy whatever we wanted with the proceeds. With the help of some neighbor boys we got the skin off, scraped it, and salted it and eventually traded it in for some one hundred fifty feet of three-quarter inch rope. This was used for tugs-of-war, jumping rope, tying-up-the-bad-guys, marking bases for dare-base, and in many other ways. We tied one piece from gate post to gate post, fastened some sacks in the middle for a saddle, and had a bucking broncho that could not be ridden. Why we did not end up with some broken bones is hard to determine.

Of course, there were always things the schoolhouse needed that the limited budget could not supply. Box suppers provided both entertainment and some money. The ladies spent much time designing and decorating boxes and more time cooking to fill them. Dad once worked every evening for several weeks making a miniature covered wagon, complete with "Pikes Peak or Bust" painted on the canvas top for Mother. We boys were greatly disappointed when he did not bid it in at the auction. The wit of the auctioneer and the competition between the bachelors for what they were sure was the teacher's box added to the excitement. The shortage of cash kept the prices from going too high, but over the years enough was accumulated to buy an organ, lights (kerosene lamps on wall brackets with reflectors behind them), and curtains for a stage. The curtains were bed sheets hung on wires with safety pins.

If the teacher was an enterprising one, we had school programs at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and in the spring at the end of the school year. These included recitations, songs, and plays. Each child had to perform. There was no escape. At Christmas there was a tree and gifts and sometimes a Santa Claus. I recall one Santa, a fat, young man of the neighborhood who was selected largely because he fitted the Santa outfit Mother had made. Dad built a frame to resemble a fireplace and chimney and covered it with red building paper marked out in rectangles to simulate bricks. When it was time for Santa to appear, Dad jingled a set of sleigh bells as a signal and Santa stepped out. He had stage fright so badly he could not say a word. Dad yelled "Ho-Ho-Ho" for him, and other adults, realizing what had happened, helped him hand out the gifts.

Christmas trees were scarce items. They did not grow in our area and if we wanted a real one, it meant a trip to Arriba, eighteen miles, and they did not always have them—nor did we always have the money, if they were available. The acceptable substitute was one made out of tumbleweeds—a big one for the base, a middle-sized one in the middle, and a small one on top—much resembling a snowman in shape. The younger children made chains of loops of paper and of folded strips of paper, and both the tree and the schoolhouse were decorated with these. Popcorn strung on thread was also used for decoration. Of course, we could not use candles on our tumbleweed trees; they were too dry, but we did use candles on evergreen trees, when the school was affluent enough to afford the evergreens.

Of course, at Christmas time we received gifts from the grandparents and the aunts and uncles who felt sorry for us away out on the plains. One Christmas each of us boys received four knives, ranging from a small pen knife in the form of a ladies slipper to a real four-bladed jack knife. I recall that I had lost my last one within three months. The gifts we appreciated most, I think, were books. The gifts we usually received were "practical" ones, like underwear, socks, and new overalls.

The schoolhouse was also the gathering place for all community affairs. Some of the women, feeling the lack of cultural activities, organized the Emerson Literary Society, which met regularly. The meetings were for families, not just the ladies. In fact, all gatherings in those days were family affairs. Baby sitters were unheard of. I do not recall much about the programs, but one does stick in my mind for some reason. It involved four men in a debate: "Resolved: The Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword." Dad was one of the speakers and Earl Richardson was his partner. They got together at night at our house to prepare for the event. Most of Dad's efforts, as I recall, were spent, not at gathering material but at keeping Earl convinced that he could do it. The fact that grown men could be afraid to get up and speak before a group of their friends made quite an impression on me. My brother Don recalls that another debate topic was "Resolved: It Is Better to Be a Homesteader in Colorado Than a Tenant Farmer in Iowa." Richardson, who was considering selling out and moving back to Iowa to a rented farm, was required to take the affirmative side of the question.

Until we got the organ for the school we usually loaded Mother's organ in the back of the wagon and took it to the meetings. Some of the men had excellent voices and part singing was popular. One of the neighbors sang the names of the notes rather than the words. This was considered quite an accomplishment.

Mother was parliamentarian for the society and she studied, and enforced, Robert's Rules of Order. There was a short session on rules at each meeting, which was useful training for later years.

I do not recall much discussion of public affairs among the adults. I do not suppose such discussion would have made much of an impression on me. The war in Europe (World War I) was discussed, primarily along the lines of whether or not the United States would become involved. As I recall, opinion was divided. Some wanted to get in at once and get it over with; others wanted no part of it. Prohibition was also under discussion. Mother was an ardent supporter of the W.C.T.U., and a neighbor, who kept liquor in his house at all times and who was raised that way, said that if it came to a vote, he would vote dry. His argument was that it might make some poor wage earners take their pay home rather than squander it all in the first saloon they came to. He also said that even with prohibition, he knew that he would be able to get all the whiskey he needed anyway. One other topic came up periodically, the end of the world. There were always those that forecast the end, quoting the Bible for verification each time some unexplainable event occurred —an eclipse, Halley's comet, the European war.

The meetings always ended with refreshments, usually cake. In fact, most notices of meetings ended with the phrase, "Ladies Please Bring Cake." It even started to show up on handbills advertising public auctions.

Religious training was not neglected either, and a nondenominational Sunday School was started at the schoolhouse and lasted for several years. Since most denominations were represented, we children in our corner of the room often listened, with one ear at least, to the heated discussions of religious philosophy going on in the adult class. Our Dad taught the adults most of the time. He probably was selected for the job because he did not claim any particular denomination. (In later years he maintained that his views were similar to those of the Unitarians.) He always managed to bring up something controversial, which he said kept the class busy studying their Bibles the next week to find scripture to refute him; he spent his time thinking up some new statement to aggravate them.

An occasional itinerant preacher found the Sunday School and preached for us. One of these finally succeeded in breaking up the truce that existed in the Sunday School. He was horrified to find us using the David C. Cook interdenominational literature and insisted that we switch to that published by his denomination.[2] Those of his faith agreed with him. The Sunday School soon ceased to exist.

[2] Established in the 1870s, the David C. Cook Publishing Company was, and is, a publisher of Sunday School materials (*First Yearbook* [Chicago: International Sunday School Council of Religious Education, 1924], p. xxiii, deposited in the Ira J. Taylor Library at the Iliff School of Theology, Denver).

After that our principal religious instruction came from attendance at revival meetings. These were interesting and to youngsters sometimes frightening experiences. The preaching was of the "Hellfire and Damnation" style, and fear, rather than love or faith, produced the converts.

My faith was considerably shaken at one of these meetings. After wild exhortations, the preacher reached his climax and asked all Christians to stand up. I started to get up. One of my friends, sitting next to me, held me back. He whispered, "You're not a Christian. You can't stand up." Until that time I had assumed that there were only two classes of people, Christians and heathens. I knew I was not a heathen. I was born in the United States and only foreigners were heathens.

These meetings were followed by the baptizing of the new converts. Since there were no natural bodies of water, baptizing was done in a reservoir, a large, water storage tank. Not too many ranchers had them. A stepladder was required to get from the rim of the tank down into the water. The preacher entered first and used a broom to sweep back the algae and scum that usually formed on the surface. Then while the assembly sang, "Shall We Gather at the River," the converts—the girls usually wearing old dresses of their mothers'—entered, one at a time, and were immersed. The baptizings were followed by dinner on the grounds, an event always appreciated by growing boys.

When our sod schoolhouse had served for seven years, it was learned that a frame schoolhouse near Arriba had been abandoned. Our district was told that they could have it if they would move it. While the proposition was being discussed, word came that an injunction was being sought to keep the building. This called for immediate action. A caravan of men and wagons left our community before daylight the next morning and that afternoon we could see a building moving slowly across the prairie in our direction. By nightfall the building was in place. The sod schoolhouse was torn down and Don and I finished our elementary schooling in the new building. Clyde had finished the eighth grade the previous year.

While the activities in the schoolhouse were an important part of our social lives, the Fourth of July was always the big celebration of the year. Dad was a Spanish-American War veteran and was quite patriotic. The flag was always flown at our house on all holidays and we boys competed for the honor of putting it up. It got to the point that we were violating flag etiquette by putting it up before sunrise. Whoever woke up first got out of bed, tiptoed downstairs, climbed the ladder to the roof, and tied the flag staff to the chimney —then sneaked back into the house and into bed. One night we

caught Clyde putting the flag up before he went to bed. We decided that this was unfair and a violation of the rules.

We always had firecrackers each Fourth and when money, or eggs, were more plentiful, we sometimes had a few sparklers, Roman candles, and pinwheels. One year Don and I were allowed to take the eggs to Thurman. We were to get two pounds of soda crackers and could have the rest of the proceeds for fireworks. The price of eggs must have been up because we got an unexpectedly (for both us and Mother) large amount of fireworks. On the way home we met up with a neighbor boy a little younger than Don. We were feeling so good about our good fortune that we gave him a package of firecrackers. To our surprise he wanted to know how to eat them. We managed to get more "bang" out of our firecrackers by shooting them off in milk cans or barrels. We also learned of their power by shooting them off in holes in the ground, under piles of dirt, or under tin cans. No shooting of firecrackers was allowed before the Fourth and there were not to be any left over for the next day.

One Fourth of July celebration was at Eckhart's grove. This was a ranch of one of the "old timers" located some ten miles southeast of us. They had a grove of black locust trees that had grown quite well. Probably the area on which they were growing was subirrigated. The trees were tall enough to furnish shade for picnic tables and there was a rope swing in one of them. We always had a big picnic lunch, neighbors getting together in groups and sharing. Sometimes ice cream was made on the grounds. After the meal there were patriotic speeches and recitations, followed by a variety of races for the children: three-legged races, potato races, sack races, and sometimes horse races for the older "cowboys."

One year we went to Arriba for the celebration. There was supposed to be a band and a parade. We boys were standing on the street waiting for something to happen when we heard a mysterious screeching sound. We had about decided that it was the town windmill badly in need of oiling, when here came the band. It consisted of a man playing a snare drum, his wife a trumpet, one daughter a fife, another a piccolo, and the small son carrying the flag. A few of the town children were marching behind them—and that was the band and the parade.

Our first ice-cream cones were at the celebration at Shaw—a store and post office some five or six miles west of us. An enterprising citizen had made up a lot of ice cream, had acquired a dipper and some cones, and was in business. He also had some tubs with ice in them cooling soda pop. We heard one of the neighbors buying his first ice-cream cone. He asked the salesman, "Do you have to bring this *comb* back?"

The last big celebration I recall must have been in 1915. It was held in a pasture near Flagler, the first rail station east of Arriba. The war in Europe was very much in the news at that time. Some local inventor had made up three airplanes. They were supposed to be unmanned bombers. One was a monoplane, one a biplane, and the third a triplane. They were designed to fly a certain distance, drop a bomb, then circle and return to their starting point. This was all to be regulated by preset clock works in the plane. The initial direction was controlled by a pair of wooden troughs, one for each wheel. This made a takeoff ramp that was aimed at the target. The planes were powered with Ford automobile engines, which were about all that were available at the time.

The crowd gathered and was restrained behind lines at a respectful distance and the great demonstration was under way. They rolled the monoplane on the ramp and tried to start it up. The motor would not go, and after about fifteen minutes of effort they gave up, rolled that one off the ramp and wheeled up the biplane. The motor started on this one and after a short warm-up period, and some fiddling with the clock works inside, they opened the throttle wide and turned it loose. The plane gathered speed on the ramp—probably got up to ten miles per hour—when a wheel crumpled and the whole thing tipped sideways off the runway, wrecking both ramp and plane. The crowd took off in all directions because the plane was supposed to be carrying a bomb. When nothing happened, they slowly and cautiously returned. The inventor announced that it was obvious that the Ford motor lacked power and that he would not test the third plane until a better power plant was available. He was just a little ahead of his time.

With no television, radio, movies, organized sports, or other forms of entertainment, what in the world did we do to amuse ourselves, especially in the evenings? In the long days of summer we played outside until dark, and dark was bedtime.

In the longer evenings of winter our activities usually centered at the round dining table. There we did what little homework there was required, prepared our Sunday School lessons, read, or played checkers, dominoes, or card games such as Flinch, Hearts, or Pitch.

We kept up with the outside world by reading newspapers and magazines. I think we got the weekly edition of the *Kansas City Star*, which included a comic section, and we boys received the *Youth's Companion*. In the comics the Katzenjammer Kids, Jiggs and Maggie, and I think, Barney Google, were favorites. The Montgomery Ward catalog kept us informed on current fashions and new developments in machinery. When the new issue came, the old one served well in the little house out back.

Our light source almost forced congregation at the table. It was a kerosene lamp. At times—I suppose it was in the spring—we had large numbers of moths. They were called Dusty Millers. They hovered around the light and made nuisances of themselves. When they were especially bad, the lamp would be set in the wash basin, which had about an inch of water in it and a little kerosene floating on top. This made an effective trap. The development of the mantle lamp, a kerosene lamp with a circular wick, which heated a mantle, gave us much better lighting and allowed us to move a little further back from the table. I believe the new lamp was called the Aladdin.

Mother was always busy with handwork of some kind—patching or mending clothes, darning socks, knitting, or sewing. Dad sometimes read to us. We were introduced to *Treasure Island, Robinson Crusoe, Call of the Wild,* and many of the other boyhood favorites in this fashion.

Some evenings were spent around the organ singing the standard folk songs and the old-time hymns. Dad, on occasion, could be induced to recite poems or to sing some of his humorous songs. He had quite a repertoire of these, none of which I have ever heard elsewhere. I presume they must have come from his boyhood days. Perhaps some were of his own composition; at least in later years he became quite a writer of poetry. I am pretty sure that the songs did not come from his father, whom I remember as a rather reserved and dignified gentleman. Dad also had a wealth of stories drawn from his experiences of winters spent in the logging camps of northern Minnesota and his service in the Spanish-American War. Mother also had stories of her growing-up years and of her teaching experiences around Dayton, Iowa. For some reason Dad's experiences were more interesting to us boys, perhaps because he was not adverse to embroidering them a little.

Colorado must have had a healthy climate. I can remember very little sickness. This was a fortunate situation as there was no doctor in Arriba for at least the first five years we were there, and had there been one, our only way of getting word to him would have been by horse and rider. The only infectious disease I recall was pinkeye. This ran through the group in school quite rapidly one year. And why not? We had one wash basin, one towel, one water bucket, and one dipper. We were well set up to share anything that was going around. We boys put off having measles, mumps, and whooping cough for high school and college days.

There was no dental service. People in serious trouble had to go to Limon. That meant driving to Arriba and catching the train. We boys learned to keep loose teeth to ourselves rather than have Dad pull them. Toothbrushes had not been invented as far as we were concerned. A Colgate salesman once visited the school, gave a lecture on tooth care, and handed out small sample tubes of toothpaste. Most of this was consumed before we reached home. It had a nice peppermint flavor.

We had two standard remedies on hand for stomach problems: Castoria and castor oil. The little ones got the Castoria. Boys were given castor oil. Just the thought of having to take it was quite effective in keeping us well.

Mustard plasters, which most stores carried, were used for pleurisy and other chest pains. Poultices were applied to infections. It seems to me there were two kinds: bread for mild cases; onion for more difficult ones. My infections were usually boils and in a spot where a poultice could not effectively be kept in place. Horseback riding was a real pain at times.

Insect stings were treated by tying on a quid of tobacco. It was supposed to draw out the poison. I recall that our teacher was stung on the back of the hand one day. The closest tobacco chewer was a bachelor who was courting the teacher. She sent the bachelor's nephew to borrow a quid from him for her hand.

Soaking the feet in hot water while sipping sage or senna tea was good for the croup. In winter, many of the children wore a little bag of asafetida on a string around their necks to ward off colds. It was evil smelling enough to ward off most anything. A few drops of camphor on a teaspoon of sugar was good for quinsy. Turpentine was our antiseptic for cuts and abrasions. Bleeding cuts were stopped by packing them with cobwebs. Once when the folks were gone to town, I cut my thumb rather deeply with the butcher knife while slicing bread for lunch. We could not find any cobwebs (fortunately?) so we packed the wound with the red paper wrapping from a package of fire crackers. It stopped the bleeding and the cut healed without becoming infected. I still have a faint scar as a reminder. The only treatment for sprains that I recall was horse liniment. It burned so much you soon forgot the pain of the sprain.

Our primitive medicine must have been effective, or at least not harmful. There were no deaths in the community and I can recall no serious illnesses. Accidents, too, were rare and usually not severe. Perhaps the fact that the population was generally young and well dispersed and that there were few automobiles and no electrical or power driven machinery was in large part responsible for our good health and accident record.

Just after school was out in 1916, a friend asked me to go with him to Flagler. He had bought a new stallion and wanted help in bringing him home. I got a whole dollar for the job, paid in advance so that I could spend it in Flagler.

When I got home that evening, I found Mother in tears. This startled me because I could not remember Mother ever crying. When she told me they had sold the farm, I joined in her tears. I would guess that she and Dad had been discussing this move for some time. The arguments against moving, as I can reconstruct them now, must have been pretty much as follows: in the first place, the last two years had been good to us. We had a new member of the family, our sister, Loya. Crops had been good and we were doing well with cattle. We knew everybody from Thurman to Arriba and from Glen on the east to Shaw on the west and they were all good friends. The folks had established themselves as leaders in the community. Dad was on the board of directors of the new bank in Arriba. He was active in organizing a local chapter of the Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union.[3] We liked the way of life. There was little or no crime. It was considered ill-mannered to lock doors on homes. The idea was that someone might be caught in a storm or in trouble of some sort and need food and shelter. The code required that if you took advantage of such a situation, you washed any dishes you had used and replaced any fuel burned.

In general, we liked the climate. It was true that we had an occasional blizzard in winter, and dust storms were coming a little more frequently as more land was plowed. It was always cool in the shade if any could be found. The air was exceptionally clear most of the time and on some mornings, if conditions were just right, we could see the top of Pikes Peak, over one hundred miles to the west. We had abundant cool, soft water. We were all healthy. Mother had no trace of the asthma that bothered her before we came to Colorado and Dad had not complained of lung trouble for years. (Dad lived to age ninety-three, Mother, ninety-four.)

The arguments for selling out, I imagine went about like this: the family had three sons ready for high school. Clyde had completed his sophomore year in Arriba. Donald had finished the seventh grade but had taken the county eighth grade examination and had passed with a score about as good as mine. It seemed out of the question to board us in Arriba, the closest high school. Dad could not handle all the farm and range work by himself and we could not

[3] After a local unit was organized in Texas in 1902, the National Organization of the Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union of America was formed in 1905. The first Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Unions in Colorado were organized in 1907 with one of the mottoes being "To the producer belongs the product of his toil." Chartered and incorporated in 1908, the purposes of the Colorado unions were to educate the farming class in scientific farming methods and to develop cooperative marketing systems. For a historical sketch of the organization in Colorado to 1926, see Alvin T. Steinel, *History of Agriculture in Colorado . . . 1858 to 1926* (Fort Collins: State Agricultural College, 1926), pp. 342-45.

afford hired help. And, some of our friends and neighbors had already sold out and moved away.

And so we sold out, lock, stock, and barrel. We had a nice day for the sale, a good crowd, and decent prices. We reserved only

PUBLIC SALE

Having sold my ranch, I will sell at Public Auction, on the N. E. Quarter Section 19. Township 6. Range 52 W. which is 16 miles north and 1 mile east of Arriba, 5 miles south and 2 miles west of Thurman, on

Tuesday, May 2nd, 1916.

Beginning at 10 O'clock A.M., the Following Property

Horses 1 bay mare, 9 yrs old, colt at side; 1 bay mare 12 yrs old; 1 gelding 5 yrs old, wt. 1350; 1 saddle mare 6 yrs old; 1 yearling filly.

Cattle 16 head of cows and heifers, ranging in age from 2 to 8 yrs old, some good milkers in the bunch. 1-2 yr. old Hereford bull; 11 calves, from a few days old to yearlings.

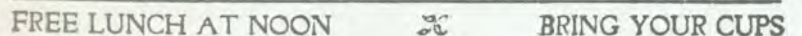
Chickens 5 dozen, part of them being full blood S. C. R. R., including 4 full blood S. C. R. R. roosters. Will also sell some Belgiaa Hares.

Machinery Etc. 2 wagons, 1 binder, 1 new 14 in. gang plow, 1 - 14 in. sulky plow, 1 - 14 in. walking plow, combination disc drill, 3 section harrow, riding cultivator, corn sled, lister, wheel barrow, 30 gallon kettle, all small tools, some carpenter tools and bench, good Frazer saddle, 2 sets farm harness, 2 sets fly nets.

Grain and Hay Some good millet hay, 150 bushel oats, 150 bushel barley, lots of good shelled corn, 60 bu. millet seed, some Mexican beans

Household No. 12 DeLaval Separator, and most of the household goods including beds, chairs, tables, dressers, dishes, washing machine, gasoline range, heating stove, 20 gal. jar, some meat and lard, etc. Everybody come.

TERMS: On all sums $10.00 or under, cash in hand. On sums over $10.00, 6 months time will be given on notes secured by chattel mortgage and bearing 8 per cent interest. 3 per cent discount will be allowed for cash on sums over $10.00. No goods to be moved until settled for.



FREE LUNCH AT NOON BRING YOUR CUPS

CLAUDE ERVIN, Auctioneer J. R. CANNON, Clerk

W. B. DURRELL,

OWNER.

enough to camp with on our trip. We told our friends good-bye and started north to find the Lincoln highway, the only marked road in the nation at that time.

We eventually landed in Ames, Iowa, and visited with Mother's Aunt Dora. Her husband, Peter, dabbled in real estate. Ames looked like a good place. It had a new high school and the state college was there. Pete showed Dad a farm north of town. It had a timber pasture with trees to cut and work into fire wood, a brushy patch that could be cleared and farmed, and a field with lots of rocks in it to be picked up and hauled off; enough work to keep three boys busy for a spell, so Dad bought it and we settled down and started a new life.

This new life included high school, a degree in forestry from Iowa State University at Ames, marriage to my high school sweetheart, and then a career in forestry in Arkansas and Oklahoma. I served as a forest ranger with the United States Forest Service, a forester for a large lumber company, the assistant state forester of Arkansas, and the state forester of Oklahoma for ten years. For the last twenty years of my career, I organized and headed the Forestry Department at Oklahoma State University. I retired in 1966, and my wife and I are now enjoying life in the beautiful "Shepherd of the Hills" country in the Missouri Ozarks. Perhaps my eight years on the treeless plains of Colorado had something to do with my selection of forestry as a career. I do know that my experiences and the lessons learned there have been exceedingly useful.

My Childhood on the Prairie

BY CLARA HILDERMAN EHRLICH

Along the South Platte River in Colorado stretches a ribbon of land that was the universe of my childhood. In that day of horse-drawn vehicles we thought it a grand stretch indeed—this stretch of about one hundred miles that lay between Greeley and Sterling. Our little prairie town of Orchard was situated in approximately the center of it,[1] and Fort Morgan, thirty miles to the east, was the city to which our parents made periodical shopping expeditions. I do not remember ever making a trip to Sterling in a buggy. To visit relatives there, we went by train, for service on the Union Pacific was well established, and trips to Greeley were rare.[2]

Now I am reminded how when I was a girl in high school in Sterling my English teacher, looking out of a window over the town, exclaimed that there is nothing in the world uglier than that—extending his arm to indicate the drab and undistinguished view of Sterling on its level site, smoke from the engines being repaired at the roundhouse darkening the air. It was a shock to me then, but now

[1] Located on the Julesburg branch, or cutoff, of the Union Pacific Railroad about eighty miles from Denver, Orchard was first known as Fremont's Orchard, after John C. Fremont's encampment in a small grove of cottonwood trees along the South Platte River near the town site. Surveyed and platted in 1890, Orchard in 1906 was described as having a railroad station, a post office, a general merchandise store, a hotel, and homes of farmers and railroad people (M. S. Richeson, secretary of the Orchard Power, Light, Water, and Gas Company, to the State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver, 24 January 1935, Reference File, Documentary Resources Department, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver, depository hereinafter cited as SHSC; Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado, . . . 1858 to 1890*, 4 vols. [Chicago: Blakely Printing Co., 1895], 4:241; Emma Burke Conklin, *A Brief History of Logan County, Colorado with Reminiscences by Pioneers* [Elbridge Gerry Chapter, DAR, 1928], p. 55; *Colorado: Resources of the State Population, Industries, Opportunities, Climate, Etc.*, 12th ed. [Omaha, Neb.: Union Pacific Railroad Co., 1906], p. 134, Railroad Collection, SHSC).

[2] Sterling was also on the well-traveled Julesburg branch of the Union Pacific Railroad, which was completed in 1881 and linked the main line of the Union Pacific to Denver (Robert G. Athearn, *Union Pacific Country* [Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1971], pp. 184, 219-20, 228). For a history of Sterling, including the impact of the railroad, see Conklin, *A Brief History of Logan County, Colorado*, pp. 90-96.

that I have lived in other areas and comparisons are possible, I, too, can say it is ugly. Yet, I know that great beauty is to be found in the prairie as elsewhere.

In the following pages I have attempted to describe in detail the daily life of my parents Jacob and Katherine Hilderman during the early years of my life. My parents came to the United States from Russia—my father in the autumn of 1890, my mother a year later with her infant daughter, my oldest sister Amalia. They settled first

My parents Jacob and Katherine Hilderman in 1896 with my sisters Amalia and the twins, Margaret (left) and Marjorie, and me in my mother's lap.

near LeRoy, Colorado, on a claim near cousins who had settled there some years earlier. My mother, accustomed to village life, was very unhappy in the "sandhills," and, as a consequence, they found a place in the irrigated South Platte River valley, four and one-half miles across the river from Orchard, Colorado.

Our English neighbors were puzzled because, although my parents had come from Russia, they considered themselves German and spoke that language and no Russian. They had come from a fairly exclusive settlement of German farmers near the city of Saratov in the Volga River valley, settled during the reign of Catherine the Great.[3]

[3] Catherine the Great (1729-1796), empress of the Russians, offered land and freedom from government interference to any Western European settlers who would colonize what was then the eastern border of the Russian Empire—the Volga River. In 1763 after the end of the Seven Years War, thousands of Germans emigrated and settled around the city of Saratov, some five hundred miles east of Moscow. Their enclaves on the Volga remained German in language, dress, and food, but a century after their arrival, the Russian emperors began to pressure them into becoming Russians. In response to this the German-Russians again left their homes and immigrated to the United States to settle on the plains of Kansas and Colorado.

My father came as a "hired man" for B. B. Putnam, who had invested his money in the irrigation ditch that watered the choice farms that lay along the south side of the river.[4] My father bought his first, small farm of 40 acres from Putnam, and a few years later he went further upstream to a 240 acre farm. During his farming lifetime, his chief crop was sugar beets—he was among the first farmers to test out this ultimately very successful crop.

In the spring of 1907 my family moved to a farm near Sterling, Colorado, in order to be within reach of a high school and a German church. My father farmed there until the late twenties when, following the pattern of beet farmers in the area, he and my mother moved to a cottage in the town of Sterling, where they spent their remaining years. My father died in 1950 and my mother in 1954.

We were seven children in the family, five girls and two boys—we were a great help with the thinning of the beets—and all but one grew to adulthood. The accident of being awarded a scholarship to the New York School of Social Work after my graduation from the University of Colorado in 1917 took me away from my native state and centered my life on the East Coast. I married Dr. Moses L. Ehrlich in New York City in 1921 and our children were brought up in circumstances totally different from my own. At my daughter's request, I wrote this little story of my childhood on the Colorado prairie.[5]

The eastern prairie of Colorado is not one unbroken unity; it has been cut by two river systems, the Platte and the Arkansas. If you have driven through the monotonous roll of the plain, come down to the Platte from the south, watched the cloud shadows flit over the sunburnt surface, noted the isolated farmsteads, so stark and for-

[4] Burton B. Putnam and his brother P. W. Putnam were among the earliest ranchers in the Orchard area. "B. B." was born on 21 September 1851 in Big Bend, Wisconsin, and came to the Weldon valley in Morgan County, Colorado, in the mid-1870s. He and his brother P. W. contributed to the agricultural development of the valley. "B. B." died in Fort Morgan 3 July 1926; his brother P. W. was still living in Sacramento, California (*Fort Morgan Evening Times*, 3 July 1926; Mrs. Clara Schaefer's contributions in chapter four of "History of Morgan County, Wiggins, Hoyt, and Surrounding Areas: Including Early Area Pioneers," compiled by Robert A. and Anna C. Baer [n.p., 1966?], mimeographed volume in SHSC; David Boyd, *A History of Greeley and the Union Colony of Colorado* [Greeley: Greeley Tribune Press, 1890], pp. 192-3).

For a history of irrigation in Morgan County, including the Weldon valley irrigation ditch near Orchard, see John M. Dille, *Irrigation in Morgan County* (Fort Morgan, Colo., 1960), pp. 3-10, and for an overall view of the importance of irrigation in Colorado from 1858 to 1926, see Alvin T. Steinel, *History of Agriculture in Colorado: . . . 1858 to 1926* (Fort Collins: State Agricultural College, 1926).

[5] The following are excerpts, with a minimum of editing, from a much longer manuscript, deposited in the Documentary Resources Department, SHSC.

lorn despite the effort to grow trees about the houses; if you have felt the timeless vastness, the untameable quality of this arid land, then reaching the river bluffs at sunset brings a welcome surprise. Here is a valley suited to the habitation of man.

Once the larger centers had been established along the Platte—at points where irrigation water was most easily available, the possibility for smaller ditches to provide enough water for a few farms encouraged men with some capital to build them. Under such a ditch, built by B. B. Putnam and called the "Putnam Ditch," my father's first farms lay. For in this area on the south side of the river—Orchard was on the north—the receding river had left an ample flood plain below the bluffs, which mark the beginning of the wide prairies.

In this sparsely populated land, there was ample opportunity for men who were strong and vigorous, willing to work without hours or season as the occasion demanded, and many such men came from European peasantry. The river valley became a patchwork of the so-called Americans and the foreigners. The first families did not often farm; they were the ranch men and a kind of white collar people, connected with the railroads, the general stores, the promoters. Or if they did farm, it was a genteel pursuit conducted by horseback with the help of a hired man.

So it was that my father came as a hired man to a "first" family, the Putnams, who were the owners of the irrigation ditch in this section. (It was on their land that the sod barn stood—the barn that was distinguished from others by having been originally a fortress against the Indians.) Everything was at hand and the promise great for a man who was not afraid of labor—forty acres would suffice for a beginning and forty acres were to be had—for a man with only his wife to lend a hand where you could not manage alone.

To meet family needs the sod house where I was born came into being. A house so primitive, so indigenous, so truly a part of the earth upon which it stood, that there was scarcely a seam to show where the vertical walls began. A plough cut loose the closeknit turf, held securely by the roots of plants undisturbed for centuries. With a sharp spade suitable blocks for building could be cut and laid into a strong wall, four feet across for warmth and durability.

I never saw a *sod house* in the building, for with my coming into the world the era of frame building had arrived as well. This bit of progress, I feel quite certain, arose from the need to conform to the approved pattern of coming up in the world rather than to provide any added comfort. Frame houses were proper to the East and to that civilized life, so as soon as the necessary money was available a more commodious wooden building was added to the south side of

Although not my home, this sod house is from the Colorado prairie.

the old sod house. The frame addition was a sign of rising in the social scheme, and we took great pride in the "new house."

No more pleasant or delightful house can be built than those old sod houses of the Platte valley. The great thickness of the walls and their perfect joining with the earth itself provided a shelter so cozy and proof against the extremes of either heat or cold that no housewife who had once lived in one cared to abandon it completely. She kept it on as her kitchen, the place where she spent the major part of her time indoors. Of course with money becoming more plentiful these dwellings could be made snug and sound by better roofing and a more durable coating of the outer and inner walls.

As the pioneer built his sod house, he took thought only for the grossest comfort. A few leaks during a heavy rainstorm were not unendurable hardships, and a bit of dust shifting down from his roof boards was also no great matter. To have endured the hardships of the overland trip in those pioneer days in the canvas-covered wagon made a sod house appear the most perfect of shelters.

The most usual plan was an oblong, twenty-four by eighteen feet, or some such figure. The door stood in the center of the east wall, though occasionally it could face south. This was the case with one, a house set off in my mind by the airs of the wife who lived in it. The thickness of the walls added some architectural features, willy-nilly, which made for comfort and a kind of luxury in this workaday simplicity. When the roof boards had been laid on, and the outside door hung, there was left a snug little porch and entryway in winter when the screen door was removed. Though no builder would have dreamed of adding a porch to his "soddy," the thick walls of them-

selves provided him with something of the kind. And while the pioneer, eager to get his house up and be freed for the more important tasks of getting a farm underway, may have given never a thought to the provision of wide window seats for his child's playhouse or his wife's house plants, there they were despite his haste and intention of doing only the things needful. For the window frames were set, in contradistinction to the door, toward the outer edge of the wall, so that the whole breadth of it was left for a window sill. Flaring out to admit the maximum of light, neatly plastered to the broad board seat, it made a delightful playhouse. In my first home the south window was always put to this happy use and the house plants were kept to the west.

When the modestly sloping roof boards were put in place, for the protection of the wall they extended well over the outer edge. This necessity left a fine wide shelf around the room, a most convenient place to hide away a childish treasure, or set a special plate or pitcher —a thing of charm and beauty in this earthen dwelling. In the sod houses I knew there were always wooden floors, though no doubt in the earliest days the hard clay of the earth was used. Once the turf was removed, this clayey surface became extremely hard with use, packed down so that even in the dooryard no blade of grass ever grew. To the east the bare earth made an outdoor floor, hard and firm, and often swept for Sunday or when company was expected.

The earliest roofs were made of sod, two layers placed on the roof boards, breaking joints as well as possible. If there was money, a second layer of boards covered the whole. This allowed for the sight, so amusing to us children, of having grass grow on the roof, a whisker here and there through the cracks of the boards. Later as prosperity came these roofs were replaced by shingles and made quite rainproof. This bit of progress was always exceedingly welcome to the women, for then it was no longer necessary whenever rain fell to rush about the house with cooking pots or wash basins in hand on the lookout for possible leaks; nor did you have to change the bedding if a pan was not of sufficient capacity or accidentally capsized by a child.

The early houses, too, were plastered only on the inside, the outer wall left rough with a strong root from the turf or a faded wisp of buffalo grass extending from it. It was this exterior surface that gave so primitive a tone to the pioneer home. It had the look of falling to decay, of a temporary expedient against the elements. But once inside, the comfort and cheer of the white plastered walls, the bright windows with the blooming house plants, the geraniums, the hanging basket of oxalis, the precious begonia, marked off sharply the two faces of that four foot wall of prairie turf.

Never having seen a prairie house built, I do not truly know that it was put in order before a barn was built. It is quite possible that a farmer's thoughts turned first to the comfort of his livestock since without his workhorses and his cow the family would be in dire straits indeed. But since the early prairie stables were built of straw left from the threshing of grain, I have always thought that it could not have been erected before the first harvest, and for this reason, in my mind's eye, the stable has always been the second building to mark the site of a new farmstead. The cottonwood saplings were easily cut from the thickets, which lined the river banks, and hauled up in the wagon box. These were set to form two barred fences of poles, set two feet or so apart, and into this space the straw was packed for the walls. And a thatch of straw was laid over the horizontal rafters of the roof. I think these barns were warm and comfortable for the animals, and as easily cleaned as any other stable. But they made a home so wonderfully easy of access for all the wild things of the countryside, the rodents and the snakes in particular, that every farmer was glad to come upon enough money to set up his commodious frame barn, with a storage loft for hay and a tight roof over it all. Since a child's swing could be easily tied to the roof rafters, it was not uncommon to be swinging merrily away, with toes almost touching the roof thatch, while a blacksnake or even a rattler made his way from rafter to rafter in search of mice or other food.

Every pioneer farm had also its dugout—a great hole in the deep, readily dug earth, roofed over with boards and a generous heaping of dirt. In the dugout of my first home the wide, double doors faced the west, and often as I sat upon the stored farm machinery, the doors wide, the western sunlight found its way to the forepart of the cavern, and I could watch, fascinated, the dust swirling in its beams, and the cobwebs lit up, while to the rear the eerie dark seemed blacker than ever.

It was with these three buildings, provided for the most part from the prairie earth itself, put up by the industry of a vigorous, young farmer with but occasional help from a skilled carpenter, that a Platte valley farm belt, under the lee of the Putnam irrigation ditch, was developed.

The experiments with irrigation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century laid the basis for the introduction of new crops—grain, potatoes, and then the sugar beet, which fulfilled my father's hopes. One year during the early ploughing two men arrived from the city. We knew at once a city man by his clothes. There was much pacing about over the fields and long, long talk. We children sensed that something of great importance was afoot, and we could scarcely restrain our curiosity until the visitors left and our father

came into the house, with his team still in the field, to tell Mother of the new crop these men wished him to test out—the sugar beet. Nothing more important can happen to a farmer than to be offered a sure cash crop. Hay was good, but being usually plentiful, it was cheap. And when potatoes yielded well there was an over supply so that the bulk of the harvest rotted away in the cellar or was fed to the stock. Here were these men from the city holding out this alluring prospect of a crop that would always be bought by the sugar company, and my father agreed to plant four acres.

The occasion was momentous for my father and other farmers like him because it gave them a new status in the scheme of things. They were no longer appendages to the cattlemen, producers of winter fodder for the men who fattened steers for market, nor were they only subsistence families, supplying their own needs and a little over. They were tied now to the Great Western Sugar Company, and belonged to a commercial enterprise and the high destiny of

This is an example of the advertising carried in ***Ranch and Range*** *in 1902-3, encouraging farmers to plant sugar beets and prosper.*

New Sugar Beet District

He invested in sugar beet lands at Sterling

The great South Platte Valley is recognized as the future Sugar Beet producing section of Colorado. Around Sterling, Colorado, where a modern beet sugar factory is assured for the crop of 1904, 2,500 acres of sugar beets are now growing and the acreage will be more than doubled next year. Sterling is the most prosperous town in the northeastern part of the state. As soon as ground is broke for the factory land will more than double in value. We have choice 5-acre tracts adjoining the town and 10,000 acres irrigated lands in the county. Write for illustrated literature, giving full description, to

Harris-King Land Co.
STERLING, COLO.

their country. It was momentous for us children, for here was a farm chore seemingly designed exactly for us. Every June for years to come was devoted to the thinning of sugar beets. The timing was correct for parents who valued the schools and would not keep their children out on the slightest excuse. By the time the green rows were large enough for thinning, school was over and the long summer holiday had begun.

The beet drill was drawn carefully down the full length of the field by a docile team, and from the great red box behind the driver's seat four drills dropped the crumpled seeds into the furrow, which a blade in front of them had created in the soft, well prepared earth, and they were covered by a foot behind. To insure a good stand, for which we always prayed, the seed must be sown generously. When the green rows appeared, they were a dense mass of tiny beet leaves, so thick and close together that they would have choked and stifled each other and would have produced but most indifferent beets in the end. But the enterprising brains of agricultural engineers had thought of a way to give a single beet plant ample room to expand, once the solidly planted row had insured the stand, by creating a hoe. This hoe was of the well-known garden variety, but somewhat wider than those ordinarily in use, of a size which allowed the proper space between beet plants to insure their maximum development. For the larger the beet the more sugar it yielded in anybody's arithmetic.

Now the purpose of the hoe was to cut away ruthlessly most of the plants in the dense green rows, leaving only small clusters a hoe's width apart. This process insured an even, regular stand so that each plant could mature in ample room without crowding its neighbors. But no hoe could cut closely enough to leave a single beet plant, so each cluster had to be thinned by hand. Behind the hoe someone had to crawl or go bent back, if his back was stronger than his knees, pulling out all but one plant in a block, theoretically the largest, though I am sure that we sometimes fumbled and took the largest by mistake. Then, too, if we were overhasty or clumsy, we pulled them all out. If your conscience had not yet become too dulled through fatigue and a longing for the end, the accusing space of two hoe lengths made you furtively set a plant back with a prayer for its taking hold again. On sandy stretches where the beets were uniform in size the task was not difficult. The plants fell away from their common center and were easily removed. How we longed for the sandy stretches in the beet field! But on heavy ground it was terrifyingly easy to pull the tops off the plant, and then there arose one of the most exasperating moments of the thinning. It was necessary to probe about in the tenacious earth to destroy enough of the top so that the plant would not put forth new shoots and grow again. The

importance of leaving but a single beetling in each block was never for a moment forgotten.

Now when the tiny, two-leaved plants that first pushed their heads through the ground had put forth still a second set of leaves and the tips of the third were showing, the moment for thinning had arrived. This was an event, like the preparation for a holiday—hoes were sharpened, old sun hats furbished up, and new strings were sewed on for tying them securely against those sudden gusts of wind, which sent the unwary scampering down the field after a hat that was rolling along merrily like any tumbleweed. The girls had to be fitted out in overalls, new if an old pair was not at hand. Thinning required crawling down alongside the row on your hands and knees, and sturdy clothing to protect the knees was very important. Gloves interfered with a perfect job and had to be abandoned, even though the juice of the plants stained your fingers a deep greenish brown—and it was long in wearing off. I seem to recall mitts on my eldest sister's hands, for this extraordinary glove of half a century back left the fingers free. But for the most part in thinning we had to attack the job at first hand with no mitigating clothing allowed. Besides, it did not last forever, and attacked with a will, your powers of endurance would suffice.

As the hot June sun rose higher and hunger and thirst grew, that first fine elation died away, and to keep your row and not to fall behind required determination and a call upon your will or your pride or whatever. For as the day wore on, your knees burned, and your wrist ached from leaning on it. You would try leaning now on the back of the hand, now on your fingers alone, or you would finally give up the crawling for a time and go bent back. Whatever expedients we thought of, nothing seemed to help; our knees burned and when we pulled up our trouser legs, our knees showed an angry red. Except for running to the house for a drink of water, if the field lay near enough, or going to the water jug, if we were farther afield, no matter how the strained parts ached, we kept at our stint and hoped that dinner time would not be too far away.

When dinner was over and we had had our little breathing spell, the sight of our parents taking up their hoes—for they were brought home to be filed to a fresh sharpness—did not produce the elation of the morning. We went from a sense of family solidarity, from a sense of duty or necessity, that the work was vital and must be done, but not for an instant from a sense of high adventure.

Afternoon work usually brought another trial, the gnats. They loved the clear hot sun and still air, so that we always trudged to the field hoping for a breeze. By nightfall our faces were a mass of reddened welts. As the afternoon wore on, no matter how you called on

your will and pride or both combined, you would fall behind in a row and a sister or parent had to thin down a space to meet the laggard. What a relief it was to straighten the back and walk on the soles of your feet to the head of the row! Now our parents began to encourage us, this would be the last row for the day, or there would be but two more.

The second morning was an especial trial for sleep had brought a painful stiffening to all those hard-used muscles, and it was an agony to move. As we gathered hoes and water jug, it was an incredible thing our parents told us, that a bit of thinning would limber us up and we would feel far better by and by. Presently we were all thinning with a will, making jokes and retelling our favorite gossip or our precious daydreams. Because I was but four or so, I do not recall the labor in that first four-acre field that my father planted as an experiment for the sugar company.

After the thinning the tiny beet plants grew rapidly in the hot Colorado sun, and day by day they were watched and praised for their performance until the wide, green leaves stood erect and proud and there was no doubt that the beet root had a firm hold. Now the real hoeing began. This was no work for a child, as the hoes were

Hoeing sugar beets was an arduous task.

heavy and their injudicious use meant reducing the stand by the accidental hoeing out of a beet. And a beet whose root was severed by a sharp hoe never grew new leaves as did those provoking tiny things whose heads we pinched off in thinning. Such an accident left a bare spot in the row, and if it happened often would substantially reduce the value of the crop. Hoeing need not be a heavy job for an adult unless the thinning had been badly done. This operation was useful not only for cutting away any sprouting weeds but also for spying out those left double. But if we had thinned well, pulling away weeds as well as the extra beets, the hoers went rapidly through the field, two or three rows at a time. The children were left to play in the ditches, the only unplanted parts of the field.

Later the field was prepared for irrigation by a machine, which, driven down the rows, dug a trench between four of them at a time. The loosened soil was heaped up about the plants as a fine mulch so that it was a two-in-one job, cultivating the plants as well as providing an irrigation ditch. We children were not much in the fields if our father worked there alone with a team. But we could hear him calling out "Gew" and "Haw" and cursing now and again when the horses left the rows to endanger the crop. Cultivating in my father's fields was made easier by his accurate sense for planting a straight

My father on his riding plough, pulled by a team of four.

row. If by some mischance he swerved a bit in a row, it was always the occasion for a comment by my mother and a crestfallen look on his part. The straight row was an essential of proficient farming, and none could say that in any detail my father lacked the skills of an expert farmer. We were sent periodically with a drink of fresh water for him, and then we stood silently by while he drew up a great mouthful, swished it about in his mouth and spat, and then drank down gulp after gulp of the clear water. It gave the horses a moment for rest, and we watched their flanks quiver under their wet skins as they breathed heavily from their labor.

As September waned there would come over our household an air of expectancy. We were waiting for the order from the company to begin the beet harvest. For, while we wished to have the roots fully ripe and as large as possible, there was always the fear of an

early winter with the beets frozen fast in the ground and all the family's aches and pains gone for naught. When the order arrived at last, the exact date set, there was a bustle of preparation. My father made sure that the knives were sharp as razors, that the puller and rack and fork were all in good order. On a clear, crisp, autumn day, he set out early for the field, if he had not already done this chore the night before, to pull a strip of beets. The machine he used looked like the old-fashioned hand plow, as far as the above ground part went, but its functioning section was made up of two curved knives like a squirrel's paws about to clasp a nut, for they did not meet completely. This tool, set deep down near the tail of the beet root, was dragged through the row, loosening the roots yet leaving them underground for the most part to provide against wilting or shrinkage. A strip was a dozen or so rows, and once pulled, the strenuous hand work of the harvest began.

The pullers with hands encased in work gloves marked the area of the first pile by gathering beets two at a time, slapping them soundly together to shake off loose dirt, and heaping them at each of the four corners of the proposed pile. It was dirty work and heavy, your back ached from the bending and pulling, and your arms from the slapping and tossing. But in the crisp air of October it was exhilarating once you caught the rhythm and grew used to the dirt through your clothing. The sweetish beet smell when the roots and leaves were bruised a bit in the handling, the dark perfume of newly turned soil, and the sense of attacking the last step in the months long tender care of the beet, gave zest to the going. Soon the strip was pulled and each looked for his knife to begin the topping.

An energetic member seized a rake and smoothed out the ground between the four corner piles to provide for ease in loading and the greatest possible cleanliness in the finished heap. If you were a good topper you grasped a beet firmly by its small end and severed the top with a clean neat stroke. This was an operation calling for skill; too shallow a cut left leafy refuse behind, which the sharp eyes of the tare man were sure to see; too deep a cut lost some of the weight of the beet and reduced the sum of the harvest. For the naturally handy a little practice brought this skill to high proficiency. It was a pleasure as a little child to kneel beside my parents at the heap and watch them top. One clean stroke followed another with the fragrant beet roots flying in balanced and rapid rhythm into a great white heap.

Enough of these heaps needed to be topped to fill the large, high frame box atop the wagon with beets. The height was dictated by the need to dump them into the freight cars on the siding; there was no thought of the drain on a man's energies in loading. To fill the large

fork with its long ball-tipped tines and toss them aloft into the high box was no child's play, and it was the work of a young farmer with his first adult vigor still about him. To save trips to the distant railroad siding, the rack was very large and it was filled to the nice point of just not overflowing. When it was filled beyond the capacity of a single team, another was added. As the rack was piled higher and higher, the family prayed that the four, heavy animals would be able to draw it. For there were times when in the soft earth of the newly worked field a loaded wagon would mire down and there was the devil to pay. If the horses did not pull together, seesawing back and forth, excited and distraught by the shouting of orders and the demon weight behind that would not come, then a child's heart stopped beating at the sight and sound. My father's temper was very short when things went wrong, and no doubt the fatigue of the heavy, wearing work and the importance in farm life of keeping things to schedule played a part. Soon there were orders for every member of the family, and with the soothing and quietening voice of my mother, things were finally set to rights. Perhaps the dirt was dug away from the hind wheels to make for a shallow gradient, or we clambered on the rack and threw off some of the beets to lighten the load. Presently the four, great bodies of the animals strained in unison and the wheels turned forward, then my father sprang hastily into his high seat and was off on the long, slow journey to the dump.

Unloading sugar beets at the railroad siding.

The harvesting of the beets was never a time-consuming role in the lives of us children. It came on after the school term had begun, and, as our parents never kept a child out of school to help with the farm work, we knew it only on Saturdays and holidays, or possibly if the need was very great on an occasional evening after school. But it was the last act of the most significant farm drama and we followed it with eager interest. In the evening there was always the checking over of the weight tickets by our parents and speculation about the percentage of tare. No farmer was allowed the full weight of his beet load; from one rack during the day, the farmer never knew which it might be, a company official would pick off a basket load of the dirtiest beets his sharp eyes could espy, and on these a percentage deduction was based. This circumstance led us to pay close attention to providing a clean load, for the whole family was aware of the importance of keeping the maximum weight. There was some competition here for farmers compared their tare rates, and those with the lowest always swaggered a little.

While we were living in our first home, the sod house, there were certain other autumn activities, very vivid in my memory, which I do not recall having taken place in our second prairie home. When the cabbages had attained enormous size and the first frosts had seasoned them, they were cut and brought to the house for the *making of sauerkraut*, a fundamental staple in our household. The beautiful, firm heads, once the tough outer leaves had been removed, were cut into quarters with the butcher knife my father had carefully sharpened. The shredding apparatus, which consisted of a long board with knives inset at the center over which a box was passed, back and forth, was laid across the wooden barrel. The cabbage sections, which had been fit into the box, were cut up as the box was passed over the knives. Falling into the wooden barrel, the cabbage would ferment to make the delicious sauerkraut we all loved. While my father was shredding the first layer, two of us children were carefully bathed and clothed in clean underwear—we were being made ready for a task we greatly enjoyed. When a sufficiently thick layer had been dropped into the barrel, we were lifted into it to tamp the mass down and break up the fibers somewhat. We seized hold of the edge of the barrel and jumped up and down with all our might. The pale lamplight illuminated the room, for this process always took place after the early dark of the autumn night had come. There was much laughter and banter, the parents preparing more shredded cabbage and the other children looking on with interest and some envy, no doubt, as the pair in the barrel stomped away. After a time, a cold juice gathered in the barrel and it was always icy cold so that we had to be lifted out to warm our toes now and again. When all the cabbages had been shredded and the juice had come up over the whole mass, my father placed a heavy weight on the board and covered it, and the barrel was set aside for the fermentation to begin. After a few days it was opened for inspection, and if active fermentation was taking place, it was carefully watched thereafter so that our first kraut soup of the season could be enjoyed as soon as possible.

The *soup* was a simple affair, really; a substantial cut of beef was covered with water and when it had come to a boil sauerkraut was added—sometimes potatoes, too, after the meat and kraut had cooked to a certain tenderness—a most delicious dish, surely, for a large, hungry farm family. The beef was provided by a steer that had been fattened for the winter's meat supply. The butchering took place in the daytime, and it was necessary to wait for the cold weather, since there was no refrigeration and the great quarters of beef were hung out in a cold shed to cure and to be preserved for the whole season. From time to time the meat froze when the full winter was upon us, and there was a great deal of sawing and hacking before my father could get the piece he wanted severed from the icy mass.

Butchering was not a pleasant process, and I usually stayed out of sight unless there was a specific chore to perform. The poor animal, destined for the slaughter, was tied by a very short rope to a post near the place of the butchering; he was brought low by a heavy blow from the blunt edge of an axe, aimed at the forehead. Then the flensing began, and once the beast was dead we could bring ourselves to watch for a time this very skillful performance of our father as he separated the hide without ever cutting into the flesh. But the unpleasant smell overcome us in a very little while and we ran off to play at a distance. Curiosity would bring us back to watch when the carcass had been strung up by a special set of chain and pulleys, and the carefully smoothed stick, kept for this purpose, had been inserted between the hind quarters to keep the great inner cavity of the animal wide open for easy maneuvering. Now parts had to be carried to the house for my mother's attention—the liver, the heart, the stomach—and now there was cooking and chopping—the liverwurst prepared, and something called head cheese, which I never cared for. We would wish only for the butchering to be finished and the familiar kitchen smells to be restored.

The *butchering of the pig* was an even more harrowing experience. Once the animal was "stuck," it was allowed to run about the yard until it bled to death, while my mother was boiling boilers full of water in which to scald the beast so that the bristles could be scraped off. Then there was the rendering of pails of lard, which my mother prized for she never used the grease of the beef, and the

grinding of meat for sausage. It had its excitement, all this butchering, but I longed for the smells to be gone and the pleasant time of eating the good food to come.

Then there were the inclement days when my father brought his saws into the kitchen, where it was warm and comfortable, for sharpening and setting. The shrill scream of the metal sent shivers up my spine and brought tears to my eyes. And as with the howling prairie wind, it was necessary to bury my head in the pillows to escape.

We never minded the smell or noise, however, when my father brought a new-born lowing calf to lie on a gunny sack behind the stove, if the mother had not been able to lick it into a suitable warmth. But I think my mother was never happy with all the mess, though she offered no protest; the calf must be considered first. Very often baby chicks were brought into the house in a box if they had hatched on a cold, stormy day. We adored the yellow fluffy things and had to be admonished often enough not to handle them—we did so love to feel the silky softness in our hands. Occasionally, too, a chick still in the shell, a late hatchling, came in the box. We watched his patient pecking, pecking until he had made the hole large enough to emerge from the egg. It is pleasant to think of the roomy kitchen where, in winter, so much of the farm life went on.

People fell into three classes in our prairie community. There were those that maintained a certain status, year in, year out, their material position changing in no noticeable way. They continued to own the same land, to live in the same house, once the shift from sod to frame had been made, and to carry on a seasonal routine with but the smallest variations. Others came into our community, tried to establish a foothold, but often failed so that we knew them for only a season or two. They went from our midst to greener pastures, we hoped. There were a few like my father, who outgrew his farms and from time to time sought a new one, more suited to his expanding needs and his improved material circumstances.

In 1901, when I was in my sixth year, we left the 40 acres with the little sod house, the great wide-mouthed dugout, and the straw stable to move up the road westward a mile or so to the spot where many cherished childhood memories cluster. Here was an ideal family farm, it was large enough, 240 acres, to accommodate the varied needs of a growing family. It lay in four natural terraces, formed by the successive floors of the retreating river bed. The highest terrace lay above the Putnam ditch. It was a stretch of virgin prairie, used as a pasture; the sparse but very nourishing buffalo grass sent up its graceful plumes between the mats of cactus, the clumps of yucca, called soapweed in our area—we never used it as soap, but the Indians of the Southwest did so—and the bushes of purple sage. In the spring it was covered with wild flowers, a joy to us children.

Below the Big Ditch, as we always called the Putnam, lay a second terrace where irrigated crops — alfalfa, beets, grain — were grown. At its lower edge stood the farm buildings, looking south over these two levels to the low, rolling bluffs of the sand hills. To the north lay the third terrace, also of irrigated fields, that stretched to the north to a point where the barbed-wire fence separated it from the fourth level, the wide, green, wild hay meadow.

The river was associated with hay making, for it was during the time when the wild hay was cut and stacked that we had the opportunity to play near it and, in certain spots, to wade in its cool waters. Into the preoccupation with the beet crop, the making of hay had to be fitted. A farmer must keep his wits about him to be in readiness at the precise moment when a field required his attention. If a farmer wished his hay to be prime, he must cut it at the precise moment of maturity. So the farmer kept his eye on the blossoming of his hay crop and timed his irrigations properly. In sunny Colorado the weather was no great problem; almost any day was suitable, although everyone watched the skies with an anxious eye during stacking, for the stack must be topped out before the rain fell. As the sky would darken everyone quickened his motions, my father heaving huge fork fulls of hay into place on the stack. We would shiver in our sweaty clothes, glad of the relief from the sultry heat.

The farm work was always given first attention, and when planting or harvesting time was at hand, it was only the fields that counted. We came in at the end of the day, heavy with fatigue and content with work well done, and no thought beyond the rest that would enable the work to be resumed with the new day. But in the intervals when some phase of the work was completed, there was the great bustle of laundry and house cleaning.

The work would begin very early with the heating of the great boilers of water that had been filled from the pump the evening before. The great wash tubs were set up on two kitchen chairs and with washboard and soap the scrubbing of the clothes would begin. The "white wash" came first, and rubbed clean on the board it was put into the boiler to boil in soapy water. Then the dark clothing was rubbed clean. Great tubs of water were carried from the well for the rinsing, and then came the pleasant part of washday—the hanging out of the laundry on the long lines strung on poles to the west of the house. Usually a gentle breeze blew off the mountains; the boiled wash smelled clean and fresh, and while we shook out the wrinkles we could gaze up to the blue peaks of the Rockies and

marvel at the snow still white upon them. My sister Mollie (Amalia) always remarked at the beauty of the mountains and contemplated their wonder whenever an opportunity came her way.

Laundry day was an important event for yet another reason. It afforded an opportunity for asserting your superiority over your neighbors—you wished to have your wash on the line earlier than any other woman, to have the "whitest" clothes, and to have them hung properly. The various categories must not be mixed up—hanging a dish towel between sheets, for example, was an insult to laundry etiquette. Also, you never spread out the underwear; it was pinned up as discreetly as possible. The "English" neighbors had strong Victorian prejudices.

Another day, much looked forward to, was *baking day* when the weekly supply of bread was provided. Here, also, the preparations began on the previous evening. The large pan for setting the bread was brought out—flour sifted, the "potato water," carefully reserved from the cooking of the supper's potatoes, was added as was the yeast, which had been soaking for hours in a cup of water, salt, and other ingredients (if there were any, I do not remember) all stirred vigorously. Then the pan was carefully covered for the bread to rise by morning. Here, too, it was desirable to be up early to stiffen the batter and set it aside for the first rising—not because of competition with your neighbors but because the baking of many loaves, each batch for an hour's time, would require almost the entire day. "Fine wood" was required to heat the stove and keep the fire at a relatively even pitch. This was work for children, but it was done willingly, for all the while you could keep an eye on the interesting proceedings within the kitchen. The kneading of the great mass in the big pan was a pleasant sight and you longed to be able to do it. However, if given the chance, you were soon tired for it was not easy work and required skill in the manipulation.

The exciting time came when the two risings were over and the shaping up of the loaves and the rolls, which we called buns, began. We always hoped that there would be sufficient dough left over for one of my mother's delicious crumb cakes, or in the apple season, an apple cake. These crumb cakes were simple affairs, really, a bit of sugar added to the dough, which was rolled out reasonably thin, the "crumbs" of butter, cinnamon, and sugar spread over the top. If an apple cake, slices of apple were pressed into the top with cinnamon and sugar to flavor them. We children found these cakes a great delicacy and with our large family they were far too soon eaten up.

If it happened, and this was the usual state of affairs, that all the bread of the previous baking had been consumed, if we were completely "out" of it, then there would be "cripples" for lunch. My mother heated a pan of deep fat, snatched up a bit of the dough, stretched it thin, dropped it into the hot fat, browned it to a golden brown on each side, laid it up for the fat to drip off, and when slightly cooled, it provided our favorite lunch. To be sure, our parents called them crepel—no doubt the same root as the French crepe, and the Yiddish kreplach, but we children always pronounced the word "cripple."

Now and again my mother cooked a raisin soup—various dried fruits cooked to be very soft, with sugar and a bit of cream added. This dish would have been a dessert in the "English" homes, but we relished it as a soup. For in the European mode, we often had a soup for supper. A meal of this sweet-sour, creamy soup was an "occasion."

Other delicious foods were grown in the garden—large vine-ripened watermelons and cantaloupe were laid into a tub of cold water for a time and then sliced and eaten in mid-afternoon. Nothing could be more refreshing on a hot summer day, and we followed behind father, who usually picked the melons and brought them to the house, as he "plugged" one—a small, square chunk taken out of the upper side of the melon, which could be replaced if the watermelon was not quite ripe. Of course, he did not go about "plugging" at random—he first snapped his fingernails against the surface. If this act produced a sharp, clear sound, he knew it was green and left the melon for a later day. If the sound was dull and flat, he proceeded with the "plugging" and usually had a fully ripe melon. The cantaloupes needed no plugging; the ripe ones came very readily from the stem. You had but to examine the stem and if it looked brown and dry, you wiggled the fruit, which usually came off at once.

When the cucumbers were well grown, we would pick a fine specimen, peel it, cut it in two lengthwise, rub the halves together over the bit of salt that had been spread over them until a wet foam appeared—we had an excellent salad to enjoy. The large, very red tomatoes could be picked and eaten as we walked home from the garden. Late summer was a happy time with all these delicious vegetables to be eaten fresh, and often after a trip to Orchard, where at times berries were to be had, the kitchen was fragrant with preserves being cooked up and sealed for winter.

The shopping trips to Orchard—four miles away from our second house—were events of importance and an interesting break in the everyday routine of the farm. The drive itself was pleasant; it passed through the familiar countryside where we could watch for any small change in the scene, which, however, remained much the same throughout my childhood. There were always the horses to amuse us, and when interest in the horses waned, there were always

the familiar sights along the roadway. Presently we would pass our first home, where various relatives from Russia were living until they found permanent homes in the Greeley or Sterling areas. Sometime later we would pass the Putnam place, which, too, had various occupants once the dear, old people had moved "across the river." The sod barn with its circlet of ragged sparrows' nests and its flock of pigeons did not change; it was always a scene of gaily fluttering wings even when no other animals were about.

The road followed the great bow of the river until we reached the bridge. As we followed the stream our parents commented on the amount of water, which varied greatly depending on the time of year. They enjoyed the high water, which meant an ample supply for irrigation, and seemed anxious if it were unduly low for the season. We children laughed at the sticks that had been caught high up on a bush or low tree when the spring floods were carrying their load of debris in their swollen currents, or we shivered a little if one of the dark eddies of the largest channel was in close to the river bank and seemed to threaten the road. As we approached the bridge, a new excitement filled our breasts—who would be first at the bridge? It was a long, narrow one, only wide enough for one team and long because the river was many channeled and covered a wide stretch. It happened rarely that anyone drove up on the bridge when someone else was already part way across. But I recall one such occasion, and how the erring driver cursed when his horses refused to back properly. Of course, this little drama was a laughing matter for the whole family. Courtesy required that a driver stop and look first and if a team was crossing, pull up to one side and wait. There was a low, wooden railing on each side of the bridge, not high enough to prevent us from seeing the flowing water in its several channels or to dampen our delight in the wide sandy beaches with their pebbly fringes. The clopping of the shod feet of the horses and the iron rims of the wheels made a kind of music, and the slow crossing was a restful ruminating moment before the last trot past the pleasant frame house where the station agent lived—the agent

was an important personage who knew all about the trains, the freight, and most important of all, he could tell my father where and when railroad ties were being replaced so that the precious kindlings could be provided—then over the railroad tracks themselves and on up the wide, dusty street to the hitching bars before the Eli Etchison store.

Usually we found other farm teams with their wagons or buggies already tied to the bars, which stretched off for a distance on each side of the store entrance, providing space enough for several vehicles and saddle ponies. Our parents scanned these horses and cried out to each other, if they recognized the team of someone known to them, and their faces lighted up at the thought of seeing some friend again, for a shopping trip was a true social occasion and was always leisurely and deliberate—only at the end of the afternoon, when the demands of the evening chores began to press, did there ever seem to be any hurry.

We clambered out of the buggy to climb upon the covered porch, which ran the length of the store front and hid the great, high, false front that rose above the porch and announced the general store even at a distance. The wide, plate glass windows allowed us to study some of the store's treasures before we entered—there would be various styles of workgloves, overalls, as bluejeans were then called for they were loose and had a bib in front, intended to be worn over another pair of trousers—they were a kind of masculine apron—small tools, and the patterned red- or blue- and white men's handkerchiefs. Spread out as they were on the wide shelf, which extended into the store from the lower edge of the large glass pane, it took some minutes to study and remark upon the whole display. Also these moments were spent, too, in sniffing luxuriantly the indescribable and precious odor that came out to us through the screen door. It was a compound fragrance, made up of such diverse scents that we were never sure what it was we were smelling—vinegar, spices, tobacco, shoe leather, chocolate, oranges, ripe bananas, kerosene!

When we entered the store, the storekeeper, in shirtsleeves and vest with a necktie, a dark green eye-shade on his forehead and woven straw wristlets over his cuffs, would greet us all cordially, and to our embarrassment, for we were shy country bumpkins, he would remark how much we had grown since last he saw us and ask if we were good children and did well in school—if we said yes, as was usually true, he would give us each a bit of candy. The variety of sweet varied, depending, I suppose, on his supply, and I always hoped it would be horehound drops—I did so adore that flavor. Now began our slow inspection of everything in the store, being first admonished by our mother not to touch anything; we went slowly

from one counter to another admiring, commenting, and hugely enjoying ourselves. Meanwhile our parents were talking prices and quality of the staples that must be secured at the store since they were not produced on the farm. Sugar came in hundred-pound sacks as did the flour, which was always bought several sacks at a time. Since boiled lima beans were much enjoyed in our home—called butterbeans, I never knew whether it was because they had a buttery consistency when very well cooked or whether the name came from the great lumps of butter my mother melted over the hot beans to make them especially delicious—these, too, were always bought in a bag of perhaps twenty-five pounds. Rice was bought in bulk and eaten with sugar and milk; it made a very fine supper dish. Tapioca for puddings, seasoned with vanilla and sugar, we could scarcely have enough of. Then there was jelly in its wooden pail with the wire handle, if we were "out of it" at home—it made a welcome purchase. The great stalk of bananas, suspended from the ceiling, had been longingly examined for a long time by us children, and it was a happy moment when Etchison picked up his sharp, curved knife, kept especially for this purpose, and cut off the bananas my mother pointed out for him—a mixture of green, ripe, and riper for longer lasting at home. If, as sometimes happened, the supply of flour had given out and there was no more bread at home, there came that coveted moment when some loaves of "baker's bread" were bought. For a meal or two we would have those fluffy slices, well buttered and with jelly, perhaps.

Sometimes shoes were tried on, but they were usually bought at Fort Morgan, and even if we were not to have a pair we loved to pore over the styles on display. The dry goods shelves were a special pleasure—all those charming calico patterns, which we sometimes touched; they seemed so wondrous, the sprigged, the dotted, the overall, the striped patterns in the warm appealing colors, the soft closely woven chambray that felt like silk, and the great variety of checked ginghams—the good man pulled them all from his high shelves and let us study them. If it was late summer, some of this splendid yard goods would be measured off on the counter's graded edge, yard by yard, for our school dresses.

Since all farm tables were covered with oilcloth for easy cleaning by the housewife and for reducing the huge pile of laundry on wash days, that pleasantly patterned material, which was stacked in great long rolls with only the dull undersurface showing, was infrequently purchased for it tended to last a long time on the dining table. But we loved to lay back surreptitiously the outer edge, if we felt quite alone, to admire the pattern, and when our mother was planning to buy a length for the table our eyes grew wide when the rolls were placed on the counter and a goodly strip unrolled. The strong smell of this material, the "oilcloth smell" as we said, was an affront but we suffered it gladly to be allowed to admire several patterns.

Last of all the kerosene for the lamp was bought. One of us was sent running back to the buggy to bring in the "oil-can," and we watched it being carefully filled with this precious fluid. Now, as far as the wife and children were concerned, it was time to go home. But that was not our choice; it lay with our father. Whenever he finished his visits with the men out among the grain bags, the lumber, and the machinery, he would suddenly announce that we were leaving and all of us would hasten to find a place in the buggy.

On the way home he would entertain us with an account of all the news he had gleaned, of the birth of a new baby or of the birth of an especially lively colt, of a family moving away or a new one moving in, of a raise in the wages of the railroad workers, which was unusual and astonishing, and most important of all, new speculations, for there were always men from "the East" with ideas of development. Our parents laughed over the absurdity of these novel notions and felt sure they would come to naught, as in truth they almost always did. There were, too, vague reports of government activity in Washington, a place the farmers generally regarded with misgiving. We were all staunch Republicans and felt that as long as they were "in," all was well with the country.

Once at home again the buggy must be unloaded with care—the sugar and flour sacks must not be torn, for no bit of the precious

"boughten" food must be spilled nor must these valuable sacks be damaged. So my father carried the heavy bags, breathing a bit heavily when he had reached the flour box, which one of us had run ahead to open so that, after a deft pull at the two strings of the seam at the top, which came out in a trice, he could empty the bag into the empty box—and we were enveloped for a moment in a cloud of sweet-smelling flour dust. Someone wound the cord that had been pulled out into a ball to be stowed safely in the cupboard drawer, for it was the only cord that ever came into the house. The bag itself was carefully folded and laid on one side to be washed with vigor until the printing had faded completely. By this time it was soft and absorbent, and it could be hemmed and no better dishcloth could be found. The sugar came in two bags, an outer burlap one, which went to the barn for various uses, and a soft, very closely woven white inner sack, which kept the sugar safe and clean. These sacks had no printing, and they could be used for underwear, for handkerchiefs, or for tablecloths when four or so were pieced together. I do not remember the can or crock into which the sugar was poured, but the flour box was a permanent part of our kitchen equipment. I never thought to ask where it had come from—a beautifully made box, dove-tailed with a close-fitting cover, carefully hinged, and a coat of gray paint to preserve it—and it was a thing my mother kept with care, so important was it to keep the flour dry and clean.

The excitement of the trip to town quickly died down. If there were no errands to be run, we fell to playing with a will—or if we were too tired for that, we could wander about the farm admiring the growing things, look west to the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies, or daydream in some retreat away from the house where now so much was going on—to make up for the time lost in the outing.

After a time the question of how to educate us began to be discussed by our parents. Another problem had to be considered, too—the long, four-mile drive to the dump with each load of beets was a hardship for our father. He came into the house often chilled and stiff from this autumn work and sat for a time on the opened oven door to warm his back. No one was ever happy about leaving this dear home, but the situation had to be faced. When I was in the sixth grade, we moved to the new farm near Sterling.

We all hated the thought of leaving the spot where we had been so happy and where everything seemed perfectly arranged. Yet the idea of a large town, of the vaunted city schools, of a new world, could not fail to excite us to wonder and dream and long to begin the new life. In a way it was the end of my childhood—all the simplicity, the innocence, the unquestioned acceptance lay in the past, on a prairie farm. Now we would face the town.

The Recollections of a Schoolteacher in the Disappointment Creek Valley

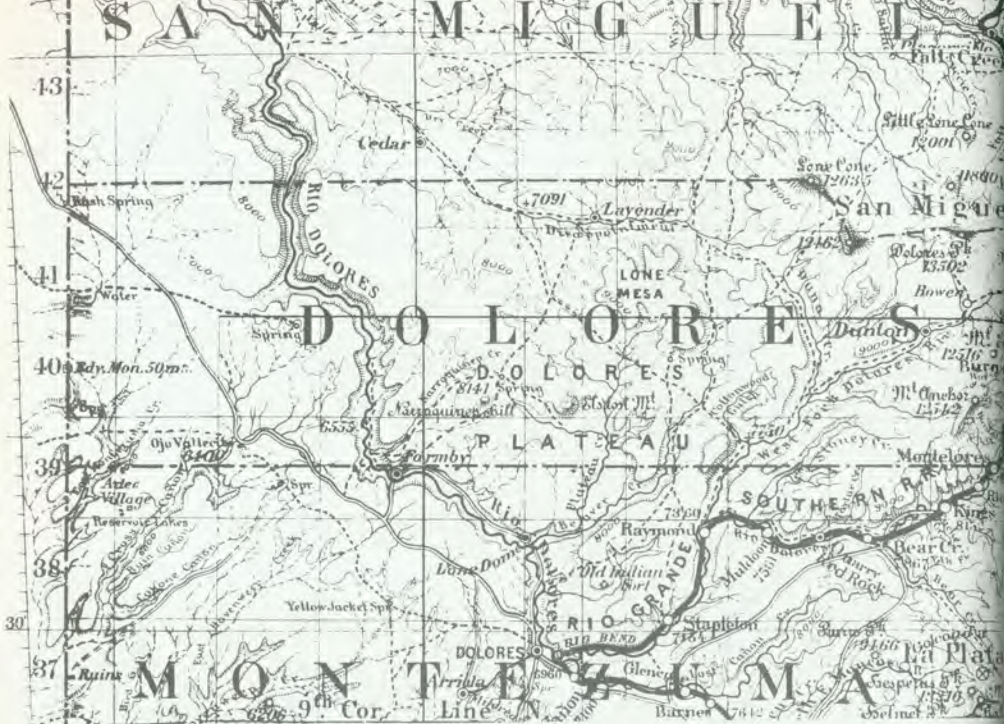
EDITED BY MICHAEL B. HUSBAND

Nellie Carnahan Robinson, the author of the following recollections of her experiences as a rural schoolteacher in the Disappointment Creek country of southwestern Colorado, was born near the village of Cataract in Monroe County, Wisconsin, on 17 February 1867. Her parents were both schoolteachers but gave up this profession in 1884 to take up farming in South Dakota. Nellie attended the South Dakota Agricultural College in Brookings (now South Dakota State University) and the State Normal School in Madison (now South Dakota State College) and then returned to Wisconsin to teach for five years. Her last year in Wisconsin was spent in Phillips, where she taught sixty students in a one-room schoolhouse. She was in poor health during this period, and on the advice of her doctor, she went West to seek a teaching position and to regain her health.[1]

After a stay in Denver, Nellie accepted a teaching position in 1897 at the one-room schoolhouse near the isolated settlement of Lavender, Colorado, on Disappointment Creek in the vast north-central portion of Dolores County, and it is this period in her life that she describes in her reminiscences. Stretching for many miles along Disappointment Creek, this valley, the setting for Nellie's recollections, was settled by cattlemen in the late-1880s.[2] Although

[1] Dr. Husband wishes to thank Mrs. Paul Cullens of Southbury, Connecticut, whose assistance in preparing the reminiscences of her mother is appreciated, and the *Providence* (R.I.) *Sunday Journal*, in which Nellie Robinson's unedited recollections first appeared in 1945. Although pioneer memoirs are often written decades after the events described and the years sometimes cloud the memories of the writers, Nellie's recollections, based on notes she had kept while in Colorado, provide an accurate and interesting insight into life and work in a remote Colorado ranching settlement.

[2] Lavender reportedly had a post office, with Henry Knight postmaster, and a population of fifteen in 1889 (*Colorado State Business Directory*, p. 111).



the population of the Lavender area only exceeded one hundred by the turn of the century, there were enough children to warrant the establishment of a school in 1892. School District Number Two of Dolores County was organized in May 1892 with Samuel Rodman Robinson as president of the local school board.[3] In 1899, after two years of teaching at the Lavender school, Nellie married Samuel Robinson, "the bachelor member of the School Board" mentioned in her recollections.

Robinson, born in Wakefield, Rhode Island, in 1859, left Yale in his junior year to spend a summer in Colorado and remained

The *Colorado State Business Directory* for 1898 describes Lavender as "a small settlement" with a population of twenty (p. 523); and the directories from 1899 through 1903 give the population of Lavender around one hundred. In 1900 the official population of the Lavender area was 123 (U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States, . . . 1900*, vol. 1, *Population*, pt. 1, table 5, p. 82). Lavender no longer exists; the *Colorado State Business Directory* listings include scattered references to a post office in Lavender through 1916.

For sketches on ranching in the Disappointment Creek valley, see "Southwestern Colorado Livestock Association," *Cattle Guard* 12, no. 9 (September 1967):18, 20, 22; and "Early Cattlemen in Southwest Colorado," *Cattle Guard* 12, no. 12 (December 1967):45-48.

[3] On 4 May 1881 School District Number One of Dolores County was established with the county boundaries the school district boundaries. In May 1892 the Disappointment country was organized into School District Number Two, with the boundaries not yet surveyed. S. R. Robinson was chosen the first president of the local school board ("Record for the Use of County Superintendent of Schools, Dolores County, Colorado," Colorado Division of State Archives and Public Records, Denver, depository hereinafter cited as Colorado State Archives).

twenty-five years, ranching in the Disappointment valley. Settling on his homestead in the spring of 1890, Robinson had constructed a cabin, stable, blacksmith shop, corrals, and ditches and had cultivated fifty acres by January 1896, when he received the patent on his homestead.[4] In 1907, for reasons cited in the recollections, the Robinsons, who by that time had two children, decided to leave their Colorado ranch and move East. They settled in Wakefield, where Robinson became established in the grocery business and in state and local politics. Their later years were spent in Saint Petersburg, Florida, where Nellie died in 1952.[5]

One summer during the late '90's I was one of many teachers in the city of Denver, Colorado, in quest of health and a position for the coming year.[6]

There was a teacher's institute in session which I attended; there were several hundred teachers, and the greater part of them looked as tho' they were there on the same mission I was.[7] I soon learned there were many more teachers than schools and that it was very hard to find a position unless one had friends to help them. One of the teachers, whose seat was next to mine, taught in the southwestern part of the state on the cattle range. She said she would try to get me a school down there, but it was late in the fall before she succeeded and at that time of the year I would have to travel seventy-five miles by stage after leaving the railroad. I didn't have the courage to try it. So I remained in Denver that winter. The next summer I received a letter from the wife of a cattleman in that country asking

[4] Robinson homestead case file, Montrose Land Office, Records of the Bureau of Land Management, Record Group 49, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

[5] Samuel Robinson died on 31 March 1945 in Saint Petersburg, Florida. The Robinson children are Agnes Robinson Cullens of Southbury, Connecticut, and Samuel Rodman Robinson, Jr., of Wakefield, Rhode Island.

[6] Our editorial practice was to reproduce Nellie's words and writing style exactly. Grammatical usage and spelling were faithfully preserved. "Sic" does not appear; and barring human error, a reader should assume that any unusual spelling is a faithful transcription of the original. A few revisions, however, were made in the interest of clarity. To facilitate understanding, appropriate punctuation was added to some parenthetical phrases. Where the meaning was unclear, editorial insertions were made in square brackets [ ]. To provide historical background and identification, editorial annotations were added and numbered consecutively throughout the recollections.

[7] Colorado had been divided into thirteen normal institute districts, which held institutes to improve the teaching abilities of local teachers during summer vacations. The third district held its 1896 institute at East High School in Denver, 3-14 August. The total attendance was reported to be 351 (*Colorado School Journal* 12 [September 1896]:16). See also the daily reports of the 1896 institute carried in the *Denver Post*, the *Denver Republican*, and the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* for 3-14 August 1896. For a biennial report of the teachers' normal institutes, see the biennial reports of the superintendent of public instruction to the governor, deposited in the Colorado State Archives.

me if I would consider teaching their school the coming year. If I did, she would have a man who lived there, and was then in the east, call on me on his return and tell me about the country before I came. Some teachers disliked the place so much they would not stay. I wrote her to have the man see me and in due time he came. He was an eastern man, a bachelor, a member of the School Board and had been in the cattle business some years.

After hearing the man's account of the people and the country, I concluded the major obstacles were the distance from a railroad and a doctor and the possibility of being homesick. My finances were getting low and there was no prospect of another position. I said that I would take the school. My salary was to be forty-five dollars a month, and my board fifteen dollars a month.[8] I was to be there early in the fall, but about the time I was to go, word came that a bank had failed and they had lost their school money,[9] so it was not until the middle of November [that] I finally started. Two of the cattle men guaranteed my salary.

It was a five-hundred mile journey over the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, by way of Alamosa and Durango, thro' a wild and interesting country. From Alamosa the only passengers in our coach besides myself were a Mexican woman and baby who stopped at a wayside platform, and a woman who lived at the small town where I was going. Our conductor was a jolly young fellow who often stopped to chat on his way thro' the train. When we were on the upgrade from Alamosa, he showed us a round-house which we passed three times. He told us that a traveling salesman missed the passenger train and took the freight train. When they got to the round-house, it was dark and they were having a dance there. When they passed it the third time, the man said, "This is the most sociable country I ever saw.[10] Every house we pass is having a dance." During the afternoon he asked me if I was a school teacher and when I told

[8] As a rule, the average monthly salary for a woman teaching in a rural school in Dolores County during these years was $45 per month. If Nellie had taught in the Rico public school, she would have made $75 per month ("Annual Report of . . . Superintendent of Dolores County, Colorado, to the Superintendent of Public Instruction," for 1898-1900, Records of the Colorado State Board of Education, Colorado State Archives).

[9] The Bank of Rico, whose advertisements on page one of the *Rico News-Sun* early in 1897 stated that the bank was the "Depository of Dolores County and Town of Rico," closed its doors on the morning of 18 September 1897. The paper reported that the bank had been "in a shaky condition for months past" (18 September 1897), that there was "a feeling of dissatisfaction . . . caused by the actions of the officials," and that "the people of the town [Rico] seem to think there is something extremely 'rotten' with the whole business" (25 September 1897). The 16 October issue reported that Dolores County lost $11,361.26 in the bank's failure, with School District Number Two (Lavender) suffering a $189.18 loss.

[10] Out of Alamosa and west of Antonito the track twists back on itself three times at Big Horn, just as Nellie describes. The buildings were living quarters for track crews and once an eating place for passengers (Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, *Bridges, Buildings, and Other Structures* [n.p., 1891], Fourth Division, p. 29, Railroad Collection, Documentary Resources Department, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver, depository hereinafter cited as SHSC; Gordon Chappell, *Farewell to Cumbres: Denver & Rio Grande, 1880-1970*, Colorado Annual 1967, no. 5 [Golden: Colorado Railroad Museum, 1967], pp. 3, 11).

On the upgrade from Alamosa at Big Horn, the track loops around these buildings three times.

him I was, he said, "I tho't so, and I am sorry for you. The country where you are going is a land of cheeko,[11] sagebrush, and lonely cowboys. I've taken many a teacher down there and never yet have I bro't one back." My traveling companion wanted to know what school I was to teach. I did not know the name of the school, but I told her the name of the people I was to be with and that it was a long distance from a railroad. She said, "That must be over in the Disappointment Country." And the expression on her face said she was sorry for me too. I had been quite elated over this venture, but all at once I began to feel sorry for myself. I asked her why the country was given such a dreadful name, and she told us that many years before when the country was first surveyed, it was late in the summer. The surveying party was badly in need of water and expected to find it when they reached the valley. When they did, they found the creekbed dry and they named it Disappointment Creek and the whole country has gone by that name since.[12]

When we reached the end of our railroad journey, my traveling companion, with true western hospitality, insisted that I go home

[11] Nellie's "cheeko" is probably the important cattle and sheep browse, chico. Growing two to ten feet high, this shrub commonly is found on semiarid or arid plains between 5,000 and 8,000 feet elevation throughout the southwestern United States (U. S., Department of Agriculture, *Important Western Browse Plants*, prepared by William A. Dayton, Miscellaneous Publication No. 101 [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931], p. 34).

[12] She could be referring to the Ferdinand V. Hayden surveys of Colorado (1874-76). One of the survey expedition's geologists, Dr. Albert C. Peale, wrote about Disappointment Creek: "In midsummer, water is found in it only in holes. . . . In September we found water only in pools" (Ferdinand V. Hayden, *Tenth Annual Report of the United States Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories . . . 1876* [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1878], pp. 166-67).

Dolores around the turn-of-the century.

with her instead of going to the hotel.[13] I told her I would be glad to do so, but someone was coming for me and if I wasn't at the hotel, they would think I hadn't come. She said that in half a hour everyone in town would know the new teacher for Disappointment Valley had come in on the noon train. It was with that assurance that I went to her house.

That afternoon the man who called on me in Denver arrived. He was coming into town and had been asked to take me back with him. That was Friday, but we did not leave until Sunday morning. Neighbors came in occasionally, but they all had the same dubious expression when speaking of Disappointment Valley. I was told that the teacher in the settlement below where I was to teach had only taught one week when she quit and went home; now they had to find another teacher.

I walked down in the town to do a little belated shopping and went in their one large store which supplied the country for miles around with everything from pins and shoestrings to furniture and mowing machines.[14] It wasn't a very busy day and I had to wait a

few minutes until a game of checkers was finished in the back of the store. The man who handed out my few purchases informed me that Disappointment Valley was a pretty tough place. I realized at once tho', that this was said more in a spirit of having a little fun with a tenderfoot than any desire to give the country a bad name.

Sunday morning I bade my newly made friends a reluctant farewell and we started for Disappointment Valley. We had a good team of horses hitched to a light spring wagon. It was early and pretty chilly, but we were soon up out of the valley where we had the full benefit of the sun and it wasn't long until I was discarding some of my wraps. The horses took a steady little jog-trot which they traveled mile after mile. At first our road led thro' tall pines, but later on we came out in a high open country which was a summer range for cattle. In the distance we could see groups of mountains. There was one beautiful symmetrical mountain, the Lone Cone, at the head of Disappointment Valley which could be seen for many miles.[15] The air was so clear and invigorating [that] I found myself involuntarily taking deep breaths of it.

At noon we stopped where there was water for the horses. While my companion was watering and feeding them, I spread down a Navajo blanket and laid out the lunch he had thoughtfully brought. A coffee pot was produced from somewhere in the back of the wagon —probably a grub-box—then he built a little fire and in no time we had a good cup of coffee. I don't remember anything tasting more delicious than that cup of coffee and the mansized sandwich I devoured. We were soon on our way again. My companion seemed so resourceful and equal to any emergency that I forgot my misgivings of the trip and had a marvelous day—until we reached Disappointment Valley. We virtually dropped into it late in the afternoon. The road was a steep grade cut out of the side of the mountain and the lower wagon track was badly washed and rutted by recent rains. We were riding at a perilous angle, I was bracing my feet against the dash board and hanging onto the seat when the wagon began to tip and over we went. My companion hollered, "Whoa!," landed on his feet and caught me as I came after him. My trunk rolled out and only because it lodged against some saplings did not go to the bottom of the gulch. I stood there too dumbfounded to speak when that man laughed so heartily I was rather disgruntled and told him I

[13] The "end of our railroad journey" would have been Dolores, if Nellie's recollections of the "noon train" are correct. Her journey from Denver to Dolores would have begun on the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad train number five, which left Denver daily at 10:00 P.M. Riding south to Salida then over Poncha Pass, she would have arrived in Alamosa at 10:15 A.M. the next morning. Leaving Alamosa about fifteen minutes later, she would have watched as the train climbed over Cumbres and would have arrived in Durango at 8:15 P.M. After spending the night in Durango, she would have taken the Rio Grande Southern Railroad mixed train number six at 8:00 A.M., which would have been scheduled to arrive in Dolores in Montezuma County at 12:55 P.M. (*The Rocky Mountain Official Railway Guide* 11, no. 5 [November 1897]: 47, 66, 84, SHSC). For a description, and a history, of the route that Nellie possibly traveled, see Chappell, *Farewell to Cumbres*, pp. 1-13.

[14] The "one large store" in Dolores would have been the J.J. Harris and Company general store and bank (*Colorado State Business Directory* [1897], p. 439). According to an article, "History of Settlement Is Epic of the West," in the 5 August 1938 issue of the *Dolores Star*, "the first store on the [Dolores] river was started . . . in 1880, ... In the year 1887 the Harris brothers bought the store . . . , where they laid the foundation of what for years was the largest mercantile and banking institution west of Durango. . . .

J. J. Harris & Co. moved their store to the new townsite [Dolores], erecting the first pretentious store and bank building in the town [1892]."

[15] Lone Cone, located east of the Disappointment country, is 12,761 feet high and "sweeps upward to a sharp summit from the contrasting flatness of mesa country surroundings. It has a reputation for brewing murderous electrical storms" (Robert M. Ormes, ed., *The Colorado Mountain Club's Guide to the Colorado Mountains*, 3d ed. rev. [Denver: Sage Books, 1955], p. 146).

didn't think it was any laughing matter. But it didn't bother him any; he went cheerfully to work as tho' tipping over on the side of a mountain was a commonplace affair and soon had the wagon back on the road and my trunk pulled up the bank. It wasn't long until everything was reloaded and we [were] ready to start again. I decided to walk the rest of the way down and I think my companion was just as well pleased that I did, for driving a pair of horses down that grade was responsibility enough without having a female tenderfoot in the wagon.

All day we had not seen a house or a person, but now we commenced passing an occasional log cabin and seeing cowboys riding after cattle. The valley at the head is narrow and has beautiful tall pine trees, but as it goes down, it gradually widens and the pines give way to pinon, cedar, and sagebrush flats.

It was nearly sundown when we arrived at my destination. A group of log cabins on the bank of Disappointment Creek, a few cottonwood trees and an alfalfa field—this was a Colorado cattle ranch. The children came out to greet us. There were five in the family, the youngest a boy of five and the oldest a girl of sixteen. The mother was away for a week with a sick relative and the father had not come in yet from riding. My belongings were unloaded and put in my room. It was a good-sized room, furnished with two beds, an organ, a stove, and a comfortable rocking chair. I was to share this room with the older girls of the family. They were bright, interesting looking children, but shy. I was so very tired that before attempting any unpacking, I lay down to rest. One of the children soon came in and asked if I was sick. When I told her I was only tired and resting a little, she said, "Well! I never saw anyone go to bed in the daytime before who wasn't sick." I felt that I had made a wrong start. After resting and unpacking a few things, I went to find the children.

There was a walk of hewn logs leading from our cabin to another. I followed this and went in. The room had beds and a fireplace. I went into the next room; this was the kitchen and dining room. The girls were putting the frosting on a wonderful looking chocolate cake which had been made in my honor. A neighbor had contributed the eggs. Their hens were not laying. There was a long homemade table with benches around it. The walls of the room were papered with newspaper and many times later I saw cowboys on stormy days walking around rooms that were papered, reading them; and they would be quite disgusted at the thoughtlessness of the one who did the papering when they found one bottom side up. I sat down in the kitchen with the girls, as there was no fire in my room and it was chilly. It wasn't long until the men commenced coming in—they walked right in without knocking and all seemed at home. They wore high-heeled boots, jingling spurs and wide sombero hats. One man took the empty buckets, with a few remarks about them always being empty, to the spring for water. Others brought in wood. One man brought in a quarter of beef and cut the steak which he cooked for supper. When supper was ready, the girls insisted I should sit down with the men. One young fellow with red curly hair had spent some time looking in a little mirror on the wall, combing and smoothing his hair. As he was sitting down at the table, another boy tousled it up, saying in an undertone which I caught, "You won't stand any better show than the rest of us now." It was a very quiet meal. One man talked to me a little. He was the boy friend of the young lady who had been the means of my being there. She was now teaching about forty miles away.

After supper, as soon as I had an opportunity, I asked one of the girls if those men all lived there and where they were to sleep. She explained that it was "beef round-up" and as they were near the ranch, they all came there. They had their beds with them which they carried on pack horses and would put them down in the stock yard.

In the morning I was called at five o'clock—long before daylight—and told to get up as breakfast was nearly ready. The teacher they had the year before would not get up when they had their breakfast, so they were going to start in right with me—no extra meals. It was very cold, but I hurried and dressed, then waited a little, thinking some one would bring me some water to wash with; but they didn't, so I went out to the kitchen. It was full of cowboys washing in a little tin basin by the outer door. When they saw me, one threw the water out and went over to the stove and poured some warm water out of the tea kettle for me, then they all stood back while I washed. It was most embarrassing with all of them watching me. Then I had to go up to a roller towel which had already seen too much service. I did a very poor job of drying my hands and face, but I doubt if it was noticed in the hurry of everyone sitting down to an appetizing breakfast.

We rode horseback to school, sometimes as many as three of the smaller children riding on one horse. A little lame girl sometimes rode behind me. Our saddles were hung on the side of the schoolhouse and our horses tied to nearby bushes. I was amazed when I

saw the schoolhouse, but I made no comments. I am sure there was not another schoolhouse in the whole country as primitive as this one. There couldn't have been. It was made of logs and had been built in a day by the men in the settlement. The dimensions were about fourteen by sixteen feet. The logs were chinked and daubed with adobe mud. In many places the mud had fallen out. If a child wanted to look at anyone passing, he would peek between the logs. The roof was made by first placing a layer of poles, across which was the ceiling. The poles were then covered with straw and over the straw was a thick coating of adobe mud. From the ridge pole on each side were unfinished boards. There was very little slant to the roof, but it kept out the rain. On some days we had occasional showers of dirt when a woodrat would be prowling around up there. There was a half window on each side of the room. The floor was of unfinished boards and if a child dropped a pencil, he had learned to be quick to retrieve or it rolled through the cracks under the floor. At times we would have a general upheaval at the noon hour when the boys would take up the floor boards and reclaim the erasers, pencils, chalk, and various other articles the woodrat had hidden under there. The school room was furnished with two blackboards, two tables, and several benches, all homemade. Some thoughtful neighbor had contributed a chair for the teacher. We had a good stove and plenty of wood. It only took a minute to start a fire, for when a lighted match touched that pinon wood, it "went off." The neighbors took turns in hauling the wood and the boys chopped it.

There were fifteen children in the school, and except [for] two, were keen and bright. These were two brothers, thirteen and fourteen years of age. I was told that one could learn but wouldn't, and the other would learn but couldn't, and I found it so. I didn't make much progress with them. The others were as far advanced as average children of their ages. There were six children from one family, five boys and one girl. Their mother was dead; they did their own work, came to school neat and clean, and were a wholesome, happy bunch who loved to play pranks on each other and occasionally on the teacher.[16] At one time I rode a horse named Old Coyote who

Nellie riding sidesaddle, pursuing her favorite pastime.

had done some racing in his younger days. The children for some reason lagged behind one night on our way home from school and then loped their horses to catch up. As soon as Old Coyote heard them coming, his head came up and he was off "only hitting the high places." I could not pull hard enough to stop him. The children didn't catch up until they were home. This was great fun and happened quite frequently until the bachelor member of the School Board gave me a bridle with a bit that would hold Old Coyote.

Our greatest joy and pastime was horseback riding. I soon invested a month's salary on one of the famous Frazer side saddles, and I don't think any girl of the present time ever got a bigger thrill from driving a new car than I did from riding that new saddle.[17] Twice a week I rode to the Post Office after school for the mail, and I was happy when I went home with letters from home and friends.

[16] Regular attendance at the Lavender school began to improve under Nellie's predecessor, Miss Dunning. "Lavender school unde[r] the direction of Miss Dunning had its longest term of school this year and and [*sic*] reports increased interest in its 90% attendance" (Annual Report of . . . Superintendent of Dolores County, Colorado, to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1897," Records of the Colorado State Board of Education, Colorado State Archives).

The rural school enrollment in Dolores County is listed as eleven in 1897, thirteen in 1898, and seventeen in 1899 (Colorado, State Board of Education, ***Eleventh Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Colorado, December, 1898 to the Governor***, pp. 54, 57; ***Twelfth Biennial Report*** [1900], p. 88). See also "Annual Report of . . . Superintendent of Dolores County, Colorado, to the Superintendent of Public Instruction" for 1897-1900, Records of the Colorado State Board of Education, Colorado State Archives.

[17] In 1880 Robert T. Frazier, who had been employed by Pete Becker's saddlery in Leadville, went to Pueblo to work for the well-known S. C. Gallup Saddlery Company. He acquired an interest in the firm, but after about ten years he opened his own saddlery and became a leading manufacturer of cowboy saddles. "At one time the R. T. Frazier Saddlery was the largest manufacturer of cowboy saddles in the world" and Frazier, through his workmanship and advertising, contributed to the fame of the Pueblo saddle (Lee M. Rice, "The Gallup and Frazier Saddles," ***Western Horseman*** 14, no. 7 [July 1949]: 24-25, 36, 38). The firm apparently went out of business in the late 1950s (see the ***Colorado State Business Directory***). For a reminiscent account of Frazier, see Bob Lloyd, "The Pueblo Saddlemaker," *Frontier Times* 32, no. 2 (Spring 1958):46-47.

The outstanding characteristics of the Pueblo saddle are a small, upright nickel horn, large, square skirts, and a high, dished cantle. The Pueblo saddle was the western stock saddle that exhibited the least Spanish influence (Robert M. Denhardt, *The Horse of the Americas* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947], p. 240).

We always had a good hot supper. The cattlemen had no luxuries in the way of home furnishings—only absolute necessities, but they had the best of food and plenty of it. Supplies were brought in in the fall to last thro' the winter, and every family had a well-filled storehouse.

The girls were anxious to learn to play the organ. I wasn't a musician, but I could help with the rudiments of music, so evenings I helped for a while with the practicing. Some member of the family was usually looking thro' a mail order catalogue. These catalogues were indispensible in every home. At times I played high five with the older members of the family.[18] At nine we all went to bed. My health improved very fast. I asked the woman where I boarded one day if she didn't think I was looking much better than when I came and she answered, "Oh! I don't know. Perhaps you are or else I'm getting used to looking at you." There were few nights the family were ever alone. This ranch was a convenient distance from the town for anyone making a day's drive into the valley to stop or for anyone coming from the lower settlement to stay overnight so they would have an early start for their long drive into town the next day. This travel stopped with the closing down of winter as the snow was so deep in the high country [that] the roads were impassable; but there were always the cattlemen and the cowboys riding back and forth and they stayed for the night wherever night overtook them and they were welcome. Sunday was visiting day in the valley. Sometimes we went visiting, but more often we were visited.

One Sunday the girls and I went for a ride and stopped at a neighboring ranch where they were shooting at targets. The targets were empty cans. You always found a heap of empty cans in throwing distance from the cabin door of a cattle ranch. The girls took a few shots then they all wanted me to try. I aimed and put a hole thro' the tomato on the side of a tomato can. There were many exclamations of wonder and praise. I did not shoot again and I must confess I felt a little guilty that I did not tell them I aimed at a can some distance from the one I hit. This shooting, killing a rattlesnake, and being able to stay on Old Coyote when he ran away with me were the only achievements I gained that placed me a step above being a tenderfoot.

I was coming home from the Post Office one of the first warm days in June. I took a trail which was a cutoff from the main road, down through a deep arroyo. Just as I got to the arroyo, I heard a peculiar rattling like dead peas in a pod. My horse stopped and shied away. I looked at what he was looking at, and there was a snake coiled, his head sticking up from the center, sticking out his

[18] High five, also known as cinch, is a card game of trumps with fifty-one points making a game.

fiery tongue. I backed the horse away and went back to where the trail left the road. Someone had thrown off a load of rails there. In that country, wood dries out until it is very light. I picked up one of the smaller ones that I could manage and went back to where the snake was still coiled. I hit him as fast and as hard as I could. At first he fought the stick, then he tried to run away, but I pounded him until he lay still. When I went back to get on my horse, I couldn't get on my saddle. I had to lead my horse down the arroyo until I could almost sit on the saddle. When I got home, the mother came out to take the mail. She said, "What's wrong, are you sick?" I told her no, but that I had killed a rattlesnake down the road. I got a good scolding for that. They said there was not another girl or woman in the valley who would have tackled that snake. The next morning a man came up the valley. The snake still lay there. He counted the rattles—twelve rattles and a button.

One night when we were riding home from school, our attention was attracted by stones rolling down the steep slope of the valley. We soon discovered two men high up on the rim shouting down to us. They said they were hungry and wanted to know if we had anything left in our dinner pails. They were two young cowboys who had become involved in a shooting affray out at the town, and having friends and relatives in Disappointment Valley, had lost no time in getting over there. It was mid-winter, and not being able to follow the regular route, they had had a difficult time in breaking a trail. When they reached the valley, they stopped at the first cattle ranch for food for themselves and their horses, then went on down the valley to the next settlement. It was fortunate for them that they did, for only a few hours behind them, following their trail, were the officers. But when they reached the cattle ranch, it was night and the people had gone to bed. They expected to find the boys there so they surrounded the cabins and routed out the owner. When they learned the boys had gone on, they were disappointed and decided the best plan was to stay there all night themselves. The cattleman was not at all perturbed. He put their horses in the stable, gave them something to eat, and showed them where to sleep. When all was still, he went quietly to the stable, saddled his fastest horse, rode to the lower settlement, warned the boys, and rode back again before daylight. He had just time to start the fires in the cabins when the officers got up. While breakfast was being prepared, they went to the stable to feed their horses; when they came back, they told the cattleman one of his horses was sick—that he was wet with sweat. The man told them he probably had the colic again as he had it once in a while. After breakfast, the officers rode away expecting to be back in a few hours with the boys. Then commenced a game of hide and seek which lasted many days. During the day the boys would be in a lookout high up on the side of the valley where they

had a good view both ways and could watch the officers riding up and down the valley. Late in the evening they would visit some ranch house and have a good supper, stay for the night, and depart before dawn in the morning. This was great excitement for the settlement, but the officers finally grew tired and went back to town saying that it was impossible to get a man in Disappointment Valley as only cattle thieves and outlaws lived there. After the officers were gone, the boys soon grew tired of life in the valley and went back to town, gave themselves up and paid their fine, and the affair was only recalled as a minor incident in the life of a cowboy.

Prior to their departure from the valley, the men who were being sought had gone out in the country to an entertainment at a schoolhouse. When the entertainment was over, they put back the dishes and had a dance. The boys had been drinking and when they asked the girls to dance, they had refused to dance with them. This made them mad and they went to shooting out the lights. When they went out to get on their horses, the farmers took a few shots at them. One horse was killed and one man was shot through the hand and had to stay in town for medical care and had a guard in a private house. One night the young people thought he was getting pretty tired and lonely and they went in to have a party. They had the man playing the guitar and singing songs. The man whose hand was shot was having a difficult time. His hand was very painful and he was walking back and forth through the rooms. Finally the guard realized that he had not seen him for some time. When he went to look for him, he couldn't find him. His horse was saddled outside and he mounted his horse and made for Disappointment Valley. When he got there, he didn't tarry only to have his hand dressed and to get something to eat and then he went on for the Blue Mountains of Utah. I never heard if he came back or not.

The social event of the winter was a party given in the schoolhouse at the settlement twelve miles below us.[19] All were invited and the children talked of little else at the noon hour for several days. The party was to be Friday night. We didn't have school on that day as it took the greater part of the afternoon to drive down there.

[19] Although Nellie mentions a settlement with a schoolhouse about twelve miles "below" Lavender, the *Biennial Reports* for 1897-98 and 1899-1900, though brief and sometimes incomplete, list only two public schools in Dolores County, and the annual reports of the superintendent of Dolores County (1897-99) refer only to the schools in Rico and Lavender (Colorado State Archives).

Cedar, located across the county line in southern San Miguel County, appears to be the community nearest to Lavender (*Nell's Topographical Map of the State of Colorado, 1899* [Denver: Hamilton & Kendrick, 1895], SHSC). The residents of School District Number Seven at Cedar built a new schoolhouse in 1897 ("Annual Report of . . . Superintendent of San Miguel County, Colorado, to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1897," Records of the Colorado State Board of Education, Colorado State Archives).

I rode in a sleigh with the family. The father and mother sat on the seat in front, the children and I sat on hay in the back covered with Navajo blankets. The rest of the neighborhood rode horseback. The first part of our trip the children were very jubilant, but when the sun went down we were cold and huddled together to keep warm. Every home had its quota of visitors that night. We stayed with the family who boarded the school teacher, and I shared her room. We were given a hearty welcome by these people, a good hot supper was waiting for us. After eating it, we helped wash the dishes and then all went over to the schoolhouse. It wasn't like a modern party—all went early there.

The seats and desks were placed around the outer part of the room. In one corner some desks were arranged so as to make a bed for the babies. It was a friendly, happy gathering of neighbors. The dogs barked and at times the babies cried, but no one seemed to mind. The young people were soon dancing; the women visited and discussed problems common to them all. There was one woman with a large family of children who had never seen a railroad. Her people had been pioneers, always moving before the railroad reached them. Since the Denver and Rio Grande had been built in that country, she had always been too busy with her family to take the long ride out to the town. In the upper settlement was a woman who had never been in a church nor heard a sermon. The men gathered in one corner and talked over the condition of the cattle on the winter range as to how they were wintering and how the feed was holding out. They smoked cigarettes and chewed tobacco; some made frequent trips to the door, others near the corner did not seem to think it necessary.

There was one incident which afforded a lot of amusement to everyone except the two concerned. There was a pretty young bride of a year, dressed in her bridal finery, who had only recently come to the neighborhood. One of the cowboys from the upper settlement, who was always trying to get a joke on someone, tho't she was the teacher at that school and talked and danced with her at every opportunity—until her baby cried and she had to take it up.

At twelve o'clock the women served a lunch and the party broke up. It was a party that almost everyone would enjoy once, anyhow.

After we had gone to bed that night, their teacher told me how very homesick she was. She said that she had had enough frontier to last her the rest of her life and that these people were not her kind of people. All she wanted was a chance to get back to Colorado Springs. I could not help but feel she was a little unappreciative of the good things that had come her way, for she had a room to herself, a wash bowl and pitcher, a towel and a mirror. Her schoolhouse was built of lumber; it had real school desks and seats and out-houses at the back, while the only convenience our school had

was a very deep and crooked arroyo near the back of the school house which, by an unspoken agreement, was used. The lower part was used by the boys and the upper part by the girls. The sides of the arroyo had a thick growth of sagebrush which was a real lifesaver, climbing out on wet days. If you have never had any experience with adobe mud, there is no use in trying to tell you about it. It is something that has to be experienced to know about.

I taught two years in Disappointment Valley, then married the bachelor member of the School Board. We lived several years on his ranch, long enough for me to learn that I had the best and kindest neighbors in the world.

My husband decided that with two small children and a frail wife, life on a cattle ranch had too many problems so we "pulled up stakes" and came back to his old home in the East where we have since lived.

I have often been asked which I liked better—the East or the West. I like them both in their own way, but they are so different there is no comparison.

MICHAEL B. HUSBAND spent much of his childhood on cattle ranches in Cortez and Ridgway and became familiar with Dolores, Rico, and the San Juan area. He received his B.A. from Fort Lewis College in Durango in 1964, his M.A. from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 1966, and his Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque in 1970. He has published articles on the American West in the ANNALS OF IOWA, *the* KANSAS QUARTERLY, *the* MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW, *and the* PACIFIC NORTHWEST QUARTERLY, *and he is currently teaching at Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa.*