



The Pioneers

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Article Summary: Brown describes the life of her family in Nebraska's early days, drawing upon stories told to her by her two mothers-in-law.

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Photographs / Images: "Mary spent tearful, heart-breaking hours beside those little graves"; "Annie stood at the door of the sod house and gazed unseeingly across the endless prairie"; "Long after John had gone to sleep she lay looking out at the full moon"; "Annie's eyes were heavy next morning and John pitied her"; "Fear and grief gripped Annie's heart, for John was going blind" (illustrations by Cecil Rose O'Neill)



"MARY
SPENT
TEARFUL,
HEART-BREAKING
HOURS BESIDE
THOSE LITTLE GRAVES."

Drawing by
Cecil Rose O'Neill

(See Page 246)



"ANNIE STOOD AT THE DOOR OF THE SOD
HOUSE AND GAZED UNSEEINGLY
ACROSS THE ENDLESS PRAIRIE."

The Pioneers

MADELEINE PACKARD BROWN, Lexington

Illustrated by Cecil Rose O'Neill, Omaha

Editor's Note: Technically this story is neither fiction nor history. It is a simple narrative of facts portraying the life of the author's family (and many hundreds of other families) in Nebraska's early days. Not speculators, nor adventurers, not mere seekers of romance, but the average American family seeking only to create a home and a future for their children: the family to whom the Nebraska Capitol is dedicated. So sincere and unstudied is its appeal that we waive an unwritten rule of this office to publish it in full despite its length.

The wash drawings which illustrate this story were selected from a group drawn for quite another story written by Augusta L. Packard, mother of Madeleine Brown, some thirty years ago. Faded and broken tho they are, the reader with imagination and tolerance will see that they fit into the text almost as tho made for it.

"Honour to Pioneers who broke the sods that men to come might live."

Annie Brown stood at the door of her brother's sod house and gazed across the miles of prairie unseeingly, trying to dislodge the lump in her throat so she she could speak.

"Look, Annie," said her brother. "Over yonder you can see Grant's place, and east of it you can almost see Scott's; and look over there — the railroad! Watch a bit: it's nearly time for the immigrant train. Look! yonder go two men on horseback — no, it's one man on a horse leading a cow. Now right in there where he is, that's where Jim is going to build. Gosh, Annie, when we first came here it was five or ten miles to a neighbor, and now we've got them as close as four miles. Greatest place in the world to live, Annie! Bet you're beginning to love it already. Say, ain't you?"

"Sam, are you crazy — stark, staring mad, or what does ail you? Like it? I think it's simply awful! How can you stand it? How does Mary endure it? What do you mean by keeping her here? No wonder she has that scared look in her eyes all the time. I will never stay here! John won't make me. He will take me back at once if I ask him to."

"Shucks now, Annie! Don't you go making John to worry. All the women feel that way at first but they get over it, and so will you. You'll enjoy growing a nice garden, and you'll get a lot of satisfaction out of picking your own vegetables out of your back yard instead of runnin' to the grocer for 'em. We have all the milk and cream and butter we need — er — that is, of course, just now old Whitey is dry, but she will be in soon; and say, we have all the meat we can use. See those rabbits out there; and the pond over yonder is full of ducks most of the time. Take your produce to the store and trade it for the things you can't raise, and your wheat to the mill and trade it for flour. Of course this year we didn't raise much, and as we were so short of corn we had to feed it to our animals. But generally we raise a lot of stuff, and once you get going you'll see what a grand life it really is. Here's Mary — ask her. She wouldn't move back to the city for anything!"

"Surely, Mary, you can't like this life! What do you do besides work? What on earth could a person *do* in a place like this?"

"You will learn, Annie. And if it is *home* you will feel different about it. The Indians are gone now."

"Indians!" repeated the terrified girl. "Indians — here?"

"Gee, Annie, don't look that way! You look as if you were about to be scalped."

"But do they — did they ever —"

"No, no, Annie! The first year we came here they scalped a couple of fellows, but they're pretty peaceful now. Ain't any worse than some white folks. Some homesteaders were burned at the stake the first year we were out here, and they weren't no Indians did it, either! They don't do those things now as they did at first. Just keep your grit and think how lucky you are to have pump water and a floor in your 'dobe and such luxuries. John being in the army, you see, you can get your deed in two years, and that is better than most of us can. Lots of things you will never have to put up with. When we first came here folks lived like coyotes with a hole dug in the side of the hill, and no floor except the hard ground under our feet. But it was a right warm little place. Ours was the first soddy to have a floor —

folks thought we were putting on style; but if it didn't leak it would be the best little house in the county. We move our beds around a bit and keep buckets under the leaks, but I'll fix the roof one of these days and then our house can't be beat. In a few years you'll be as well fixed as we are and you will be glad you stuck it out. I'm rich to have a team like this, and a barn to keep them in."

Annie gazed at the scene before her: a dilapidated sod barn propped up with poles, a bony black-and-white cow and two half-grown pigs standing in the corral. This corral was made of long slender trees with the smaller branches still on them, and the bark clinging where the cattle and horses had been unable to reach. Six or eight chickens and one wild duck wandered around the yard. These were the possessions of her "rich" brother. She felt she was going to weep, but her sense of humor saved her as it had many times before and as it was going to do thousands of times in the future. Looking to the south she saw John driving Sam's "fine" team hitched to a home-made wagon. John, with their six-year-old son and the two small nephews, was returning from a visit to an old friend some miles distant. The team consisted of a short fat gray pony and a tall lank roan — so tall that the pony could almost walk under him. The sight was too much for Annie, who burst into hysterical laughter, to the amusement and delight of everyone. "Annie is surely enjoying herself!" Sam said to John as they unharnessed the team.

That afternoon the men and older boys went to pick up coal along the track while the women visited and Annie rocked her baby to sleep. Mary went to the garden patch below the barn to pull onions. Instantly a silent, stealthy figure entered the kitchen and moved to the table, where the remains of the midday meal still stood. Annie had never seen an Indian before and sat frozen to her chair, clasping her baby frantically. The Indian made no move to go near her, but took the food from the table and ate greedily. "Good Indian! No hurt squaw!" he grunted. Having satisfied his hunger, he took the remaining food — bread, beans and potatoes — into a corner of his blanket; then, picking up the syrup jug, he poured the entire contents on top of all. A piece of salt pork that lay on the table was added to his collection; then he left as silently as he had come.

Annie still sat silent and frozen when her sister-in-law returned. Mary looked at her in astonishment.

"Annie," she cried, "what is the matter?" Then, looking at the table, she answered her own question: "Big Wolf — that dirty thief of an Indian! Don't be frightened — he is really friendly, Annie. Don't ever make him angry, for he might be able to do you a good turn sometime. They are hungry. The trapping has been poor this winter and they have to beg. Don't shake so, Annie! Here, let me take the baby, and don't you cry! Let me put you to bed." And Mary lost the grim look in her concern for her guest; and Annie lost some of her fear in seeing Mary's face once more as it was when she first knew her as Sam's bride.

Poor Mary! Both her mother and father had died since she came to Nebraska, and neither time did she have money to go back and help lay them to rest. No one knew how often she lay in the long grass on the slope and wept, willing to die in her misery; but never to Sam did she expose her grief, nor to her boys. There on the slope was a tiny grave that held her little daughter, and beside it the grave of her young brother who had come to live with her after the death of her parents. Both might have been saved had a doctor been available. Mary spent tearful, heart-breaking hours beside those little graves. Her mouth had begun to draw itself down into a straight line, and at the corners lay what Annie called "that grim look." Mary saw Sam watching her out of the tail of his eye one day and determined never to let him guess how sore her heart was. Her boys were the pride of her life, and for them and Sam she lived. Ethan was eleven now and could ride a horse, so he was able to go to the school five miles away through all the fall and spring months. She had tried to teach him at home during the winter, and the last year his teacher had praised his work when he returned in the spring. Ross was eight and Johnnie six. She had taught the younger boys at home, but Ross had ridden with Ethan the fall before and they would soon start again.

Annie slept at last, and Mary took the wailing baby on her knees before the fire. The day that had been so warm was growing cold and the wind was rising. Presently Mary put the baby on her own bed and went about the outside chores, then began

preparations for the evening meal. Many a glance did she cast at the sleeping Annie. Her heart ached for the girl—little did she know what lay before her! She recalled the days when baby Ellen was born, and the dark hours she spent alone while Sam went for a neighbor. Little Ethan, only eighteen months old then, was ill with croup and she must care for him thru her suffering until Sam came with help.

And when little John was born, Sam had floundered thru drifts on an old mare that finally died on the trip of old age and exhaustion. He had gone the rest of the way on foot to the nearest neighbor, only to find them gone. Then he had trudged on for six weary miles to find an old woman who mounted her own pony and made the trip. Sam walked back, reaching home at last in such a state of exhaustion that he could not speak. The old woman made coffee, forced him to drink it, shook him vigorously, and finally made him understand that he must take her pony and go for a doctor. She helped him into his coat and onto the pony, but he had not gone three miles until he was utterly and completely lost. The prairie was a smooth, unbroken white stretch with never a landmark to guide him. Hour after hour his pony floundered on and at last reached a soddy, where he tumbled against the door and tried to call. They dragged him in, but it was nearly morning before he was able to tell his need and where he lived. Then, with fresh horses, the trip was made to Plum Creek, where the good old country doctor (who lived to bring three generations into Dawson County) mounted a fast horse and returned with them. Mary shuddered to think of Annie going thru all this.

Evening came, and the men lit their pipes while the women washed the dishes and put the children to bed. Annie listened with growing fear as Sam related details of the Plum Creek massacre. She screamed aloud when he told how one of the section men was cut to pieces with tomahawks, and two men scalped. It was an old story to Sam, and he could not realize Annie's fear.

"John," she whispered as she snuggled close to him that night, "let us go back! We can't live in this awful place and raise our children."

"No, Annie, there is no going back! We are here, and here

we must stay. We have staked our claim and spent our money. We will soon get used to the rawness of our surroundings and things will adjust themselves. But as to going back, Annie — it just can't be done!"

This Annie knew to be the truth, and long after John had gone to sleep she lay looking out at the full moon. Then, just as she dozed off, a most unearthly noise wakened her and she shook John frantically.

"John, John, listen to that! It must be the Indians. Get the gun!"

Sam heard her from his bed on the other side of the room, and called to her.



"LONG AFTER JOHN HAD GONE TO SLEEP SHE LAY LOOKING OUT AT THE FULL MOON."

"It is coyotes, Annie. Don't be afraid — they can't get into the house."

Annie's eyes were heavy next morning and John watched her as she waited on the children and pitied her, resolving to protect her all he could from the hardships of pioneer life. Altho many of the hardships that Sam and Mary had been forced to endure would never be theirs, yet he realized that life would be full of raw experiences. He had laughed at her Indian caller and assured her that she had done exactly right, but even as he talked

to her he asked himself if he would ever have the courage to leave her alone while he worked in the field.

At that very moment Big Wolf was giving his squaw instructions concerning moccasins for the "white pappoose" which he delivered some weeks later with many grunts and gesticulations, causing Annie to tremble with fear as he insisted upon putting them on little Arthur's feet and then executed a dance of satisfaction when he saw how cunning they looked. The baby cooed and crowed and put out his hands to the big black Indian, who took him in his arms to the terror of his mother. Poor Annie clenched both fists against her mouth to keep from screaming. It is doubtful if she could have uttered a word, however, for her throat felt paralyzed and she seemed powerless to move. Whether Big Wolf knew of her fear and admired her grit, or was just drawn by her prettiness, one could not say, but he came many times to see her, bringing fish and game as well as beaded things. Once he brought her a piece of venison and Sam bade her reward him, so she gave him a small box she had brought from her old home—a box covered with tiny colored shells and beads and a small mirror in the lid. Big Wolf frightened her almost to death trying to express his pleasure, then rode away holding the box high above his head.

Among other pioneers who had come from Philadelphia was Aunt Amelia Richards, who was homesteading south of the railroad. She and her brother Amos had come west in the early 70's and had built a soddy closer to the river than the other pioneers, hoping to get better pasture. She and her brother had driven their seven head of cattle, purchased from discouraged homesteaders in Iowa, to the Platte Valley. They had bought a team and built a good sod barn and were just beginning to feel settled when Amos made a trip to Plum Creek on horseback. He was caught in a severe storm and became lost. Half-frozen and hungry he wandered for hours, then turned the pony loose and attempted to walk. At last he staggered into a camp of Indian trappers who thawed him out and kept him until the storm was over. A terrible cold and lung fever followed this experience, from which he never recovered. In the spring he said to Amelia: "You will have to sell the horses to bury me," turned his face to the wall and died.



"ANNIE'S EYES WERE HEAVY NEXT MORNING AND JOHN
PITIED HER."

So Amelia must depend on her neighbors for a horse to get about on. She walked up to Sam's place one afternoon, and after supper rode the pony back home. Ethan was to go next day and get the horse, when the emigrant train went thru, and ride the pony home. Aunt Amelia promised to be back by that time.

David wanted to go too, but Annie was fearful to let him go so far without John. The child appealed to his father and John told him he would "see about it." David stood impatiently between his father's knees while he and Sam and a neighbor discussed John's soddy which they were planning to build soon. Sam's house was twelve by sixteen feet, and he hoped to build another room of the same size that year. John decided to build one room, considerably larger than Sam's, and partition it off into smaller rooms.

It would take a long day to haul the lumber, and Annie dreaded to have John gone. She wondered what they would put in the house when it was done, and tried to remember the few little possessions she had brought with her on the emigrant train. She had thought John very arbitrary about how much "stuff" she brought, and amid tears and pleadings he had rejected her prized possessions until their freight consisted of their meager clothing, bedding, the most necessary of their dishes. Their furniture, and the few books and pictures, were left behind.

Their plans completed, the departing neighbors stopped to speak to Annie, who stood at the door. "Your home will be warm in winter and cool in summer, Mrs. Brown, and made of the newest thing in building material — 'homesteaders' brick,'" they told her. Then to John: "Set your plow so it cuts the sod an even thickness and width, Brown, and start at the south end of your place, as I am sure you will find that the toughest sod lies well away from the sand. When you plaster it with the light clay it will have a hard surface that you can whitewash."

John was all excitement. He prepared to help Sam cut wood to last while they were away working on his house and hauling the lumber from Plum Creek. Sam was looking at the sun. It was time for Ethan to start after his pony at Aunt Amelia's. David whispered to his father and in turn John whispered to Annie, who looked appealingly to Mary.

"Let him go, Annie. He's got to learn the country. Think I'd let Ethan go if it weren't safe?"

So Annie nodded and with a shout the two boys were off, never hearing the volley of instructions fired at them. Little David danced along beside Ethan over land that would be his some day, to plow and sow and bring forth joy and sorrow and heartache, happiness and life.

Annie watched them out of sight with a sinking heart. She picked Arthur up from the quilt on the floor and wandered out of doors. Whitey had a new calf now and Mary was trying desperately to teach it to drink skimmed milk so the family could have more for their own use, and even the luxury of butter. John had bargained for a cow from the Rainey's, who were leaving the country, and he was bringing it to Sam's place to help out while they were staying there. John and Annie had very little money, but they were determined not to be a burden to Sam and Mary. So John had bought flour and cornmeal and coffee at different times to make them feel more independent — not that Sam and Mary lacked hospitality, but independence was the pioneer's big asset: it was the quality that had brought them to the West and the Pilgrims to America.

At length the sun had set and no pony bearing two small boys was in sight, altho Annie strained her eyes to see. If Mary were uneasy she did not show it, but calmly stirred the cornmeal mush and sliced the salt pork and beat an egg into warm milk for Johnny because he was so thin. At that moment Sam and John and the little boys came into the house, eager for supper.

"John, the boys should be coming," Annie faltered.

"Yes, mother. Don't worry. We are going down to look for them. Give us some coffee and — Don't look that way, Annie!"

Annie's hand shook as she tried to pour the coffee and she set the pot back on the stove.

"Listen, Annie — don't look that way! They are all right, I tell you, girl! Annie — don't look that way!"

"John, those coyotes we heard last night — and Indians! John, I have got to go look for them. Come with me, John — I can't stay here!"

"Annie, stop!" John seldom spoke so sternly. "You cannot

go. Sam and I will go at once and we will bring them home. Do you hear me? We are bringing David and Ethan back."

"You should not have let him go."

"Maybe not, but I will bring him back. Promise me you will not try to look for him!"

And so they went out into the darkness, leading the sorrel horse and carrying a lighted lantern. Every few minutes they shot the signal that meant a child was lost, and soon every house in the countryside had a lantern on the roof as answering signal and a guide.

The wind was rising and it had started to sleet. Annie stood in the doorway and tried to see thru the darkness. She listened for the three shots that would tell her the boys had been found. She could see the twinkle of the many lights over the prairie and hear the hallooing of the searchers. Hour after hour she waited, but no news. Neighbors came and went. Mary made fresh coffee and tried to coax Annie to drink some, but she only shook her head and refused to leave her post at the door. "John won't come back without him, and he will never find him!" she moaned to Mary.

Over and over the path the boys must travel went John, shouting and firing his gun. Cold and wet, tired and utterly heartsick, toward morning John steered his horse once more toward Aunt Amelia's place, this time coming from the opposite direction than before. Sam had circled to the south toward the river, each reminding the other to fire the three shots if the boys were found. A small stack of hay stood near the barn and the hungry horse stopped to get a bite. Too tired to remonstrate, John called as he had for hours, and to his astonishment a small voice answered from under the hay.

"Boys!!!" he called again, tumbling off his horse, and two cold, frightened boys crawled out of the stack.

"Take us home! We are so hungry, and Aunt Amelia didn't come."

John's first thought was to take them into Amelia's house and see if he could find some food; then he remembered the look in Annie's eyes. Loading them onto the tired horse, he made all possible speed toward home. In his excitement he forgot to fire

the signal, and so he rode up to the door where Annie still kept vigil and lifted her little son into her arms.

Time flew. The new house was taking shape slowly. March was wild and blustery and much of the time they could not work, but at last it was finished and ready to move into. Annie was pleased with everything and happy to have her own home once more. They had made a table and some benches, and had built two beds one above the other the way a Swedish family living near had done. John had bought a stove of the Rainey's, and altho it was cracked across the top it was beautiful in Annie's eyes because now all this meant "home" to her and she was so eager to be under her own roof once more. With Mary's help she made ruffled curtains out of her wedding petticoat, and a little ruffle for the clock shelf. There was a small framed motto worked in wool and some gay paper flowers that she brought among her things from "back home;" her mother's clock, and a picture of a big St. Bernard dog that her mother had drawn as a premium with coffee. She stood in the center of the room viewing the effect of her labors when John came in.

"Ha, my fair lady, how do you like your castle walls? This space is for the parlor organ and this for a plush sofy. Annie, it is very humble, but some day we will have a better one."

"Oh John, right now it seems to me nothing could be more perfect. Let us not complain—we can be so happy here! We have each other and our children," and she buried her head on his shoulder to hide tears that she could not keep back.

Annie's pioneer spirit had been born the night little David was lost. "It serves me right for hating everything and making John feel so bad, instead of being helpful and brave like Mary," she had told herself during the dark hours of that awful night. "Send him back to me and I'll not fail again! Send him back to me, dear God, and I'll be brave," she kept repeating into the darkness. Poor Annie! She was going to be tested soon.

Mary helped her sew up the ticking John had bought and fill it with shucks and hay, there being insufficient of either to fill the tick. The men built a dugout barn for the cow and a calf that Aunt Amelia had given the boys as a peace offering for the bad

night she had caused them. The barn was divided into stalls for the team — which they did not own yet but hoped to get soon.

John and Annie slept in their own home that night. The next day was Easter Sunday. Sam and John were going to the section house to get a load of railroad ties. They cost very little and could be used for many purposes. Annie had been raised by parents of the old school who believed that work on the Sabbath was an unforgivable sin, and she secretly disliked to have them do this on such a day; but, knowing that time was precious, she kept her objections to herself.

She bathed the children and set the baby on the floor with a few clothespins for his play. David she took on her lap and taught him the old songs she had learned in Sunday school, and some Bible verses and a little prayer. She was surprised, when she put him down, to see how late it was. The afternoon had sped on winged feet. Baby had gone to sleep on his quilt and the house seemed dark, for rain and sleet were falling. Annie hurried to mend her fire and laid the baby on the bed. Then she skimmed a pan of milk and set it to warm for the calf while she brought in wood and buffalo chips to fill the fuel box. It was nearly dark when John returned. Part of the wood had been left at Sam's. He covered what he had brought home and cared for the team before he would eat. Cold and hungry, he welcomed the supper of hot biscuits and fried grouse. They had been able to bring only half of the ties and were returning very early in the morning for the balance.

At daybreak the rain had turned to snow and Annie insisted that he get an early start and leave her to do the chores, which consisted of feeding the calf and milking the cow — an accomplishment which she had mastered after weeks of struggling. So into the darkness John plunged and Annie busied herself. The storm increased steadily in its intensity and the snow was heavier every time she looked out.

By four o'clock she was afraid to wait until evening to finish the chores for the day. After numerous directions to David to watch the baby and stay away from the fire she fought her way to the barn. The wind was from the northwest. She had gone only a few steps when she remembered the calf milk. With great difficulty she returned to the kitchen, so exhausted that she fell

to the floor. She was determined to try again, yet feared she would never find her way back, leavning the children alone without a fire.

By then the snow was drifted almost to the top of the west window. The door was on the east side. It was only a short distance to the barn, and straight ahead. Her eye caught sight of the new lariat rope John had hung over the door after his last trip to town. She tied it securely to the wooden outside handle and the other end around her waist, then with her empty bucket she started once more for the barn. It seemed hours before she reached it and found the door blown open. She crept in against the cow's warm body until the chill left her hands, then milked and fed the calf. The cow had plenty to eat, as John had stacked the hay against the barn and left an opening where they could reach thru and get it. But Annie knew the calf would starve if it were left there and she could not get back the next day — or perhaps for several days: perhaps she would not even get back to the house again. At this thought she began to weep, but, jumping to her feet, she prepared at once to return. Taking the cow's rope, she tied it around the calf's middle. No use trying to lead it: she could drag it sideways and it could not brace its feet. She set forth slowly, holding the two ropes firmly and dragging the calf in spite of its strenuous objections. After what seemed hours she reached her house and managed to get inside, calf and all.

The fire was out. David had followed his mother's directions and crawled into bed beside the baby; both were asleep under the big feather tick. Realizing that she might be snowed in for days, Annie made only a small fire to re-heat the coffee and then, hanging her wet clothing to dry by the stove (if possible), she snuggled in beside the children and there they stayed thru all of Tuesday.

The storm increased and the snow covered the windows so that the house was dark. At intervals Annie made a little fire to warm milk for the baby and the calf and took bread and meat and cookies back to bed with her, cooking as little as possible. The soddy was tight and did not freeze, but the chimney was becoming clogged with snow so that the smoke came back into the room.

Tuesday night passed, and Wednesday. Her courage was at low ebb, and she began to believe that they were doomed to die

there. The food that she had cooked was gone, and she could not cook more. The milk too was gone. The calf bawled continuously, the children were cross and hungry, and Annie was at her wits' end. She choked back tears and invented new games and new stories and sang all the songs over again, but the time dragged by endlessly. Then there was a sound overhead, soon they heard John's voice, and in a few minutes he had them all in his arms, laughing and crying and comforting each other. Such stuff as those pioneers were made of!

Spring came at last, the prairie greened, the air grew soft and warm, the children played outside, and Annie's interest in her home and her neighbors increased daily. Her mother sent some money for her birthday and John smiled about the new hats and dresses she would be buying, but Annie shook her head. "John, I want to buy some hens." The next day they "shopped" for hens, and her five-dollar bill bought nineteen and a saucy rooster. Never was anyone so proud of anything as Annie was of the first warm pink eggs she found in the barn, and then of the little fluffy chickens that hatched later in the spring. John too was about to burst with pride — not in the chickens alone but in his wife and the children.

Annie's garden was not confined to vegetables, but bore the most gorgeous flowers that could be imagined. Every color that was ever seen or heard of could be found in that flower bed. Her Swedish neighbors taught her how to dry green beans and Big Wolf showed her the secret of drying corn; the rafters were thick-hung with strings of herbs and onions; the little cellar held carrots and potatoes and turnips. They sold the calf to help buy another cow. The weather was warm and every morning Annie rode over to Mary's house to care for little Alice, who had arrived in early fall. Another winter passed and a tiny girl came to Annie and John. They called her Mary, and tho so small that John declared she was only a sample, she was sweet and sunny and the young parents thought their happiness complete.

Prosperity seemed right around the corner, for crops had been good and many changes had taken place. The Grants had built a frame house with three rooms, and it was to have plaster and wall-paper and a pump in the kitchen — so Ethan told them breathlessly one morning when he came over on horseback to

borrow some home-made yeast. They would use the soddy as a cook-room to keep the new house clean. Such luxury! The Johnsons had a new Democrat wagon and wouldn't need to go to town in the ox-cart any more. Aunt Amelia had taken the little Weber girl to keep, for her mother had become insane the winter after the big blizzard. And Sam had a new roof on his house!

Now Arthur was wearing funny little pants his grandmother had sent him from Philadelphia, and David picked out tunes on the mouth-harp she had given him. It was hard for Annie to keep the tears back when she unpacked that box. But now her mother was coming West. Sam and John had located a piece of land for her and she was going to homestead it in order to be near her children. Yet not very near, for John was disappointed in his land: his crops were never so good as those of his neighbors farther north, and he had resolved to make a change some time. So they settled "Grandma" up there where the soil was lighter.

A brother of their neighbors, the Grants, had taken land two miles to the north and hired John to "break out" what the law required and to build a soddy for him. In the meantime his family lived in a tent and covered wagon and he worked on the railroad track. "Walking track," they called it, and it was a job that John had considered; but their crops had been so good that they gave up the idea in favor of the land. And now their labor bore fruit and their garden was again a thing of beauty, their corn and potatoes the finest they had ever grown, with melons and squashes, cabbages and onions in abundance.

Then came the grasshoppers, wiping out in a single day the entire season's work. The slimy creatures were even in the house, eating bedding and clothing, curtains and books. At the end of a week not a blade of grass remained, nor even a weed. Annie went to bed and wept, but before John came home she washed her face, put on a fresh dress and met him with a smile, asking how he would like his grasshoppers served for supper. They ate their fried chicken with relish in spite of David's question: "Favver, if chickens eat 'hoppers and we eat the chickens, why aren't we eating 'hoppers?"

Many pioneer families left the country after this devastation, but John and Annie did not give up. John took Grant's place on

the track, and tho it was hard to be alone all day Annie knew they were fortunate to get it and put away the greater part of his wages for the "rainy day." The grasshoppers had not been so bad on "Grandma's place" and John cut and stacked her hay. Many families had no other fuel for winter but hay; when twisted into a hard bale it burned very well. They also gathered the hard buffalo chips and stored them in a dry place for their fires. The friendly Indians had taught them how to dry buffalo meat and dress the hides.

And that was the end of the year 1874, and the next one was very much like it. John planted his crops again but kept his job on the track. And it was well he did, for once more the 'hoppers swept the country and more settlers went back "home." Somehow Annie managed to eke out a living from her cows and chickens and the little she salvaged from her garden, saving John's wages for the day when they could buy the land north of them. It had been taken as a tree-claim and the owner found it hard to meet the requirements.

Th grandmother liked the West and enjoyed her homesteading. A big good-natured Irishwoman, she delighted Annie's children by mounting her pony and spending the day at the other homesteads whenever they came for her. Once when they were all riding the pony — she and David and Arthur — they met Big Wolf and he stopped to give the boys some quail he had killed. "Little pony — heap big load!" he grunted, and next day brought the boys a spotted Indian pony. Delighted, they named him Wolf, and this in turn delighted the big Indian. He asked for Annie, and Grandma brought the new baby, born that morning. He backed away like the typical bachelor, grunting and grinning. Grandma named the baby Josephine in honor of her brother.

And then the year 1875 was gone and the spring came and once again they planted their crops, for it looked as if the grasshoppers were really leaving. Comparatively few remained, but Annie and the children went out with towels many times a day and shooed them off the tender leaves: they could not do a great deal of damage when constantly on the move. So Annie's garden was once more a blaze of color and fragrance, and one more obstacle seemed conquered.

During these years there were tales of Indian outrages

around North Platte and elsewhere in the valley and Annie was in constant terror, tho she told no one of her fears. Long trails of Indians went thru the country frequently, stopping sometimes to beg, but they were always friendly and never made trouble in any way. This could not be said of the Texas cattle which roamed the entire region, eating hay and corn and fodder, and the farmer was powerless against them. Warnings had been sent to all homesteaders that they would be hung if they killed one of them. The cattle were ferocious, with long wicked horns, and more than one settler had fled for his life. It was hard to see them eat the little hoard of feed stacked against a long hard winter, and occasionally an irate farmer did shoot one and with the help of neighbors butchered and hid it away. Who could question his right?

One day a party of men from the East, looking for land, stopped at Annie's door and asked for a drink. Her garden had never been more beautiful and the place must have looked like an oasis to these travelers.

"You wouldn't sell, would you?" asked one.

Annie nodded, seeing "the north place" in her mind's eye.

"Name your price!" shouted one man. "This is the first land I have seen that I really wanted, and I want this!"

Annie set a figure far above anything she and John had ever dreamed of, and the stranger proclaimed loudly that the place was his.

So they bought the north piece and moved into the old soddy that was crumbling and damp. Annie worked for many days to make it clean and decent, but when she had done all she could it was still crowded and unwholesome. Yet she was determined to make the best of it, and would not listen to John's plans to stop his work and build a new house and plant the required trees. In the long evenings John plowed furrows and David and his mother planted the saplings they had dug up on an island one day when John could get a man to walk the track for him.*

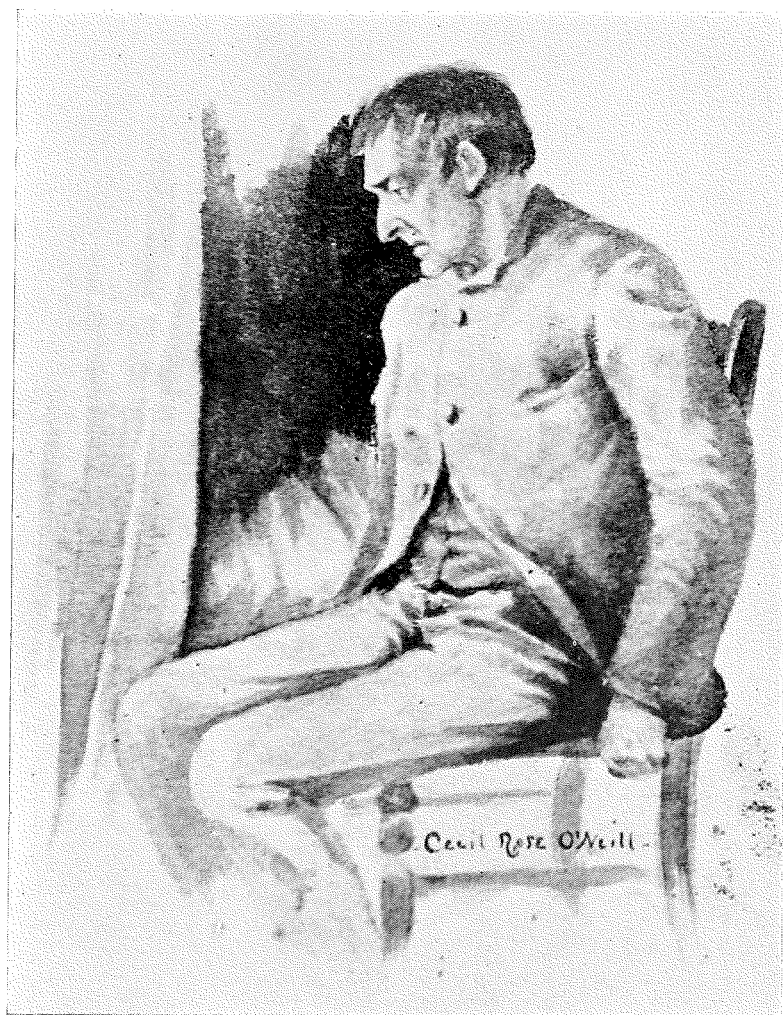
Annie wondered how they could ever endure that old house during the winter, and spent much time trying to make it more livable. The roof leaked badly. John promised to mend it before winter, but Annie dreaded to think of those close quarters when

**Author's Note:* This farm is owned today by J. O. Anderson, and the trees set out that summer are among the finest in Dawson County.

the children could not play outdoors. It was Grandma who finally settled the question. Old age was creeping up on her and she no longer liked to live alone. So the boys moved her house down to John's farm and Annie used the soddy for a kitchen, leaving the two deck beds in one end of it for the boys. The house had two rooms twelve by fourteen feet. Annie made a living room of one, with Grandma's bed in it; the other had two beds and space for her dresser. Never did woman take greater delight in arranging her home than did Annie in this. To have her mother with her while John was away at work was a source of great pleasure, and to have so much room made her forget her dread of the long winter to come; instead, her days were filled with happy preparation for it.

The year 1880 — and life had jogged along quite happily for the Brown family. The farm was fast getting into good production, and John had left the track to care for things at home. Besides, there was a matter that no one ever spoke of, yet it hung above the little house like a black and ominous cloud. Annie would not put the fact into words — it was too terrible — but John was going blind as the result of a scalp wound received in the war when he was performing an act of special bravery: an act for which he was given high official recognition, but which caused him to be totally blind during the last thirty years of his life. Not only that, but the exposure and poor food of the years he gave to his country were now taking toll, and a disease of the spine was developing. Fear and grief gripped Annie's heart as she watched him stagger and grope, and often she laid her head on her arm and wept bitterly against the side of the barn. She and David took the brunt of the work off his shoulders, and little by little it all fell to them, so that when again they had a chance to sell their farm they did so. The work was too hard for Annie with only the boys to help. And to add to her heartache, they laid Grandma to rest that winter.

January brought much fine weather and they were able to move to the new little farm home which they had secured at a sacrifice. Then the spring came, as it always has, and David worked early and late in the field, for John at last had been forced to give up and could only advise and direct from his chair, which now he could not leave without help. Annie and Arthur



"FEAR AND GRIEF GRIPPED ANNIE'S HEART, FOR JOHN WAS
GOING BLIND."

did the chores and prepared for a large garden. Even little Mary and Josephine tried to help, washing dishes when they were so small they must stand on chairs to work. John would have been lonely indeed without the little girls to help pass the long days.

Annie and her boys never hesitated at anything, but together surmounted one barrier after another as the years rolled around, finding them always courageous and full of hope. How they had done it she herself often wondered, but the year 1888 found them harvesting their fall crop, happy and brave, free from debt (that awful foe of the present-day farmer), "poor as church mice," yet thinking themselves rich. For their cellar was filled with good things for winter, they had stored plenty of fuel, and there was a new schoolhouse right on the corner of their land. John had a new medicine that was helping him, the children all had new shoes, and David had found a job for the winter on a big cattle-farm a few miles from home.

It was on the twelfth day of January, 1888, that the family had their last "hair-raising" experience. The day was so fair that Annie got the children off early to school and decided to clean house. She put the bedding on the line and proceeded to scrub and polish to her heart's content. She loved to keep house, and begrudged the hours that the outdoor work kept her from it. So absorbed was she that she did not notice, at first, the change of weather. The wind had veered to the north, the sky had a peculiar cast, and soon it began to snow. There was a strange tenseness in the air. Annie knew what it meant. She had never forgotten her first blizzard, and lost no time in making decisions and preparations. She ran the cattle into the barn and threw feed to the chickens in their house. The hogs she could do nothing with but to throw feed into the sheds and call them.

She knew she must get the children home, but she stood for a moment at the door looking at John, so helpless, so dependent upon her, before she started out. Putting all her bread and cookies into a sack which she tied about her shoulders, Annie took a coil of rope she had brought from the barn and fastened it about her waist, as she had done so many years before. The school-house was only a few yards from the corner of the fence, and the rope would reach.

Out in the storm she reached the fence and clung to it as she made her way slowly — so slowly! It was less than a mile, but it seemed hours before she reached the corner. She threw the noose (which she had wisely made before starting) over the corner post and made her way to the door. Cold, exhausted and hysterical, she allowed the teacher and pupils to take off her garments and shake the snow from them, rubbing and slapping her hands and face. They had brought in a great pile of coal and wood and were warm and comfortable, but hungry. Satisfied that they were safe for the present she soon started back, taking Arthur with her. She knew the fires would be low if not dead before they could reach home, and bade Arthur make all possible haste. But there was no hurrying! Sometimes they stood perfectly still, wondering if they could ever take another step, then starting only to fall again and again. Arthur was sure his mother would die, and he was frantic as he dragged and shouted and cursed, sometimes even beating her to make her move. But she heard none of it as the storm roared and her senses were numbed with the cold. Only by the greatest effort was Arthur able to keep her from falling into the snow in fatal sleep. The journey seemed a nightmare that would never end.

At last they were home and both fell exhausted on the floor and lay there for what seemed hours before Arthur was able to fix the fires and put his mother in her own bed. For days afterward Annie was unable to be up and at times raved and cried, believing herself still out in the storm. Both John and Mary always felt that she never recovered fully from the terrible experience.

That year John got his pension from the Government. Tho small, it made a big difference to the family, for money was low in that little house and often they had no cash at all. Families less thrifty would have suffered. Thrift had been Annie's greatest asset thru all her pioneer years.

By this time crops were uncertain — one year wet, another dry, and only half a crop any year. Money was scarce everywhere and times were hard. Arthur got a job herding cattle over the unfenced farmland — some of which, years later, David bought and cultivated for thirty years. He married and raised six children, struggling along thru the best period of his life, only

to lose it entirely in the depression that followed the early thirties on to the present day. With three yet to feed and educate, he was forced into day labor of any kind in order to complete his life's work, in spite of the fact that he was crippled and ill.

With the help of Arthur's earnings and their pension, their cows and chickens and meager crops, John's family fared well—even laid a little aside.

The years rolled on, and one summer Sam and Mary came for a visit. They had lived in the city since the last grasshopper invasion, with which Sam had not been able to cope. "Rather fight Indians any time!" he declared, and sold his stock and moved East. Now the home that seemed so cozy and dear to John and Annie looked crude, even sordid, to their eyes. They begged John and Annie to return to the city with them, saying the boys could run the farm and John could see good doctors. They shook their heads in disgust when Annie told them that the same old family doctor who had brought their children into the world was taking care of John, and they were concerned about the girls.

"Mary must see something outside of this, or she will marry and settle here for life. Think of her and Josephine even if you do not consider yourselves."

So they argued. Then Annie's young folks took their city cousins to a barn dance.

"Oh Mother, how I wish we had never left this country! They have the best times you ever heard of! We never have such good times at home." And the cousins wondered a bit to see "that grim look" on their mother's face.

When they were alone that night John said, "Is it so bad, Annie?"

And Annie in turn asked, "Do you want to see the city doctor, John?"

"It would be useless, Annie! He would have to tell us so, and that would make us feel worse. It has all been so hard for you anyway, my dear wife."

"If it has been hard, John, my home and children have been worth the price," was Annie's reply. And John laid his hand over hers, saying,

"No doctor can help me, Annie. I just want you and the children and the prairie in the sunset of my life. We're too old to make new friends; and who would trade the old friends for new ones anyway?"

* * *

"Sam," said Annie next morning, "you are indeed a prophet. Many years ago you told me that if we stayed we would learn to love it and never want to leave. We did stay, we love it, and we are never going to leave it while we live."

Author's Note: "Pioneers" is a story of actual facts as told to me by the two fine pioneer women whom I have had the honor to call "Mother" by virtue of my two marriages. I have not followed the family life closely on either side but have picked out incidents from each and woven them into this story, which is absolutely authentic otherwise except for certain changes in names. My husband ("David" in the story) was the oldest child of John and Annie Brown. We have tried to impress upon our children the heritage of those pioneer days, the days of such simplicity and yet such high ideals. The days and the people that our great men of today have sprung from.

To Annie Brown, and to my other Pioneer Mother, Ida Camp, I dedicate this story.

