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Article Summary: Pioneer settlers took pride in the appearance and surroundings of their homes. They even found time for some cultural interests. Music and reading were favorite pastimes.

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Photographs / Images: claims of Sylvanus Dodge and G W Dodge on the Elkhorn in Nebraska, portable organ that Lily B Munroe of West Point acquired about 1887, melodeon brought to Nebraska in 1881 by Simon D Park

Culture on the American Frontier

EDWARD EVERETT DALE

It is an old axiom that "the roots of the present lie deep in the past." Expressed in a somewhat different way we say: "Great oaks from little acorns grow." These fundamental truths are clearly recognized in the realm of material things. One does not have to be a historian to realize that behind the great ocean liner proudly plowing the seas lies the crude dugout canoe in which primitive man poled, or paddled, his way along the more sluggish streams, or across the still waters of lakes and land locked bays, with an occasional daring soul venturing far out from land upon the broad bosom of the ocean itself. We know that back of the streamlined train rushing over the rails at ninety miles an hour is the creaking ox cart, or that behind the majestic sky scraper reaching high toward Heaven is the rough bark lodge or hut of palm leaves constructed by some enterprising aboriginal man, and for which he left his earlier cave dwelling despite the jeers of his more conservative neighbors.

What is true of material values, however, is equally true in the realm of those things which we call cultural. Behind the greatest of symphonies is the booming kettle drum used by the chief to arouse the martial spirit of his warriors, or the notes of the reed or bone flute with which the young savage wooed his dusky mate. The forerunners of the priceless masterpieces of painting or sculpture were the crude drawings on skins or birch bark depicting exploits of war and the chase, or rough figures modeled in clay or chipped from stone. The beginnings of grand opera or the Russian ballet were the ceremonial songs and dances of primitive peoples, and of the great works of literature, the picture writing by which primitive men recorded the story of important events in their lives.

Culture is, moreover, a relative term. The tribesman who was most adept at beating the drum, playing the flute, or painting designs on buckskin or pottery was an artist in the eyes of his fellows. The most graceful dancer, the ablest orator, the cleverest story teller or picture writer, or the most melodious singer was a cultivated man

among his own kind regardless of how crude the results of his efforts might appear to the people of what we are pleased to call a more civilized social order.

It is not to primitive peoples of an alien race and a different color, however, that America owes most of its present day culture. Much of it is rooted in old world soil, though perhaps more of it than we think is the product of our own plains and forests; moreover, even that part of it originally brought from Europe has been so colored and transformed by a new environment as to affect greatly its tempo and pattern. It has suffered a "sea change" to such an extent as to be scarcely recognizable by its originators.

From the beginning of our Country's history to the present, many people of Europe have asserted that America is a nation of money grabbers whose people have little interest in scholarship, and above all, no understanding or appreciation of art, music, and literature. Emerson's immortal essay, *The American Scholar*, was in a sense our intellectual declaration of independence, but even today, a hundred years after it was written, not a few people of the United States are still all too willing to accept the dictum of Europe as law and gospel and to insist that only by long and patient study abroad can one hope to become a real artist.

In the older settled regions of the East, moreover, even those who are willing to admit that America may have something of an intellectual and cultural nature to contribute to the world are likely to think that the people of the frontier regions of the West are gross materialists, interested only in things of the flesh or in supplying their own physical needs. This is far from true and has never been true of any frontier area, whether it was that of Piedmont, Virginia in 1690, of Kentucky and Tennessee in 1790, or of Oklahoma and Texas in 1890. Since pioneer life in America has always been essentially the same, however, it seems well in discussing the cultural life and interests of the frontier to choose the most recent one which is that of the West approximately half a century ago.

Obviously it would be impossible to give in a brief paper any complete discussion of the cultural life of frontier people in all of its aspects. In consequence attention will be directed only to three phases of the pioneer settler's culture—art, music, and literature.

The roots of the cultural interest of pioneer peoples must be sought in the self selection of those who migrated west to occupy

virgin lands on the American frontier. As a rule they belonged to a certain type. When Longfellow, speaking of the Pilgrims, said:

“God had sifted three kingdoms
To find the wheat for this planting
Then had sifted the wheat
The living seed of a nation.”

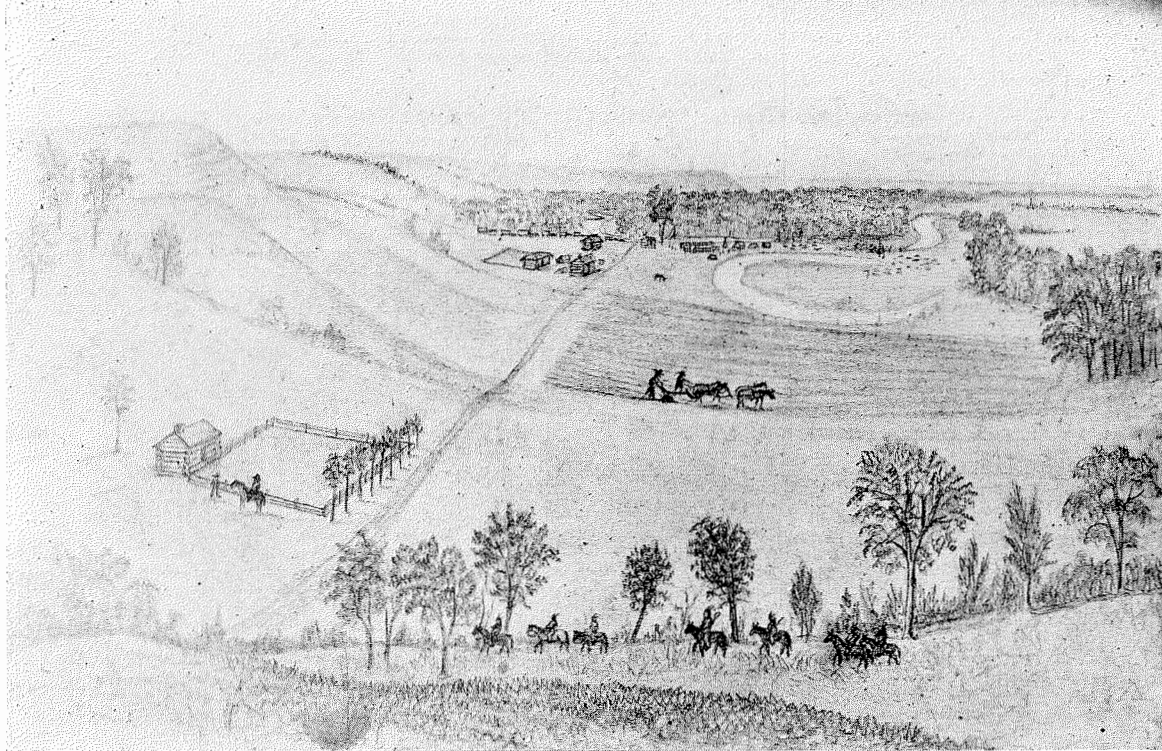
he was but voicing a general truth which might be applied to the settlers of every new land quite as well as to those who sailed in the *Mayflower* to establish the little colony of Plymouth. The bold, hardy, and restless migrated while the timid, the weak and contented remained at home. Nor was the pioneer settler always primarily interested in improving his worldly condition by removing to a new country. Often the lure of strange lands attracted him. He was eager to see what lay beyond the far horizon. In many cases he was an idealist, often an incurable romanticist, imbued with a spirit of daring and filled with an eager desire for change and adventure. He was a dreamer who looked far off into the future and saw these wonderful things. He was quite willing to endure hardships and suffering and frequently look upon the “bright face of danger” if only in some remote future his dreams might become realities. Such a man was not “stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox.” He was eager, ambitious and vital. Often he sought escape from sordid surroundings in the land of his birth and hoped in a new home to find a fuller and more abundant life.

There was, moreover, much in a new and unpeopled land to stimulate the imagination of the new settler. The vast forests, the wide stretches of green prairie reaching out to meet the purple horizon, the blue mountains and swelling hills all served to stir his love of beauty. Everything was on a grand scale. The distances were great, the rivers and mountains much bigger than those he had known farther east. The clear air made distant objects appear very near. The stars at night seemed almost within reach of his hand. The violent winds, the heavy downpours of rain which turned dry stream beds into raging torrents, all were indicative that nature operated on a scale as huge as was the pattern of the country itself.

The frontier settler's interest in the field of art in the narrower sense of the word may be treated very briefly. In very rare instances did he paint pictures or model in clay or stone, and very few such

artistic objects were to be found in his home. In many other ways, however, did he evidence his love and appreciation of the beautiful. One of these was in the choice of a location for his new home. Often it was placed in the midst of a grove of trees on the crest of a hill so that he had a magnificent view of the surrounding landscape. In other cases it was nestled in an attractive glen or narrow valley in such fashion as to permit an outlook upon the encircling hills or mountains with their ever changing colors brought by sunshine or shadow and the march of the seasons. Those of us who are familiar with the frontier have frequently observed a primitive home placed in so perfect a setting that it seemed a natural part of the scene, or as though it belonged exactly there and nowhere else, and without it something would be lacking. It must have taken a real sense of the artistic to make such a choice of the site for a home.

The actual residence of the pioneer had about it little of architectural beauty. In most cases it was only a log cabin, sometimes with a lean-to at the back, or in some instances was a double log house with a "dog trot" between the two rooms and a stone, or stick and clay chimney at either end. In the prairie regions it might be a sod house, a dugout or a crude structure built of rough lumber. Yet, he and his family were very proud of the new house and worked diligently to improve its appearance and that of its surroundings. Often the settler's wife had brought flower seeds with her to the West, a few tulip bulbs or roots of the old rose bushes of her former home which she had packed away with tender loving hands in moist earth to be transplanted into the alien soil of a new home which, at the time, existed only in her dreams. Promptly her husband was drafted to spade up beds beneath the windows, in the yard, and on either side of the path leading to the front door, and here she planted the seeds, set out the roots, bulbs, and cuttings and tended the young plants with true motherly care. Before the end of the first season, the doors and windows were framed in a luxuriant growth of vines including morning glories, balsam apples, mock oranges, and Jack beans, while the flower beds flamed with a riot of colors. Here were zinnias, bachelor buttons, four o'clocks, phlox, and the sweet spicy pinks and other so-called "old fashioned flowers," though exactly why there should be fashions in flowers must always remain to some of us an unsolved mystery. Within a year what had been a rough, primitive habitation had become a real thing of beauty fitting as



Sketch by George Simons

CLAIMS OF SYLVAMUS DODGE AND G. W. DODGE ON THE ELKHORN IN NEBRASKA

The setting chosen for pioneer homesteads was often an expression of the innate love of beauty and artistic taste possessed by the owner.

naturally into the landscape as though placed there by the hand of God Himself.

Inside the home there had also been wrought interesting changes. No works of art adorned the walls, but the rag rugs on the floor and patch work quilts on the beds were often of a quality and appearance to attract the attention of any lover of beautiful things. Not a few frontier housewives were known far and wide for their beautiful quilts of which there were almost as many patterns as are to be found in Early American pressed glass. Among these patterns were the "log cabin," "evening Star," "sunrise on the walls of Troy," "Double wedding ring," "way to the Black Hills," and numerous flower patterns. In addition many a frontier housewife did crochet work, knitting, needle point, and made hooked rugs, hand woven coverlets, and artificial flowers. Her husband also did his bit at times and constructed ladder back chairs with hickory seats, wove baskets, and fashioned in wood household utensils as bowls, bread trays, piggins, and other articles all with such graceful lines as to indicate considerable artistry on the part of the maker. Women also did embroidery, or made mottoes and samplers to hang on the walls while the huge bed in the "front room" often had at its head two great pillow shams on one of which had been worked in Turkey red the legends: "I Slept and Dreamed That Life was Beauty," while on the other the couplet was completed with the words: "I Woke and Found That Life is Duty."

Perhaps few of these objects mentioned would qualify as art according to our present day standards. Yet they were seldom made to satisfy any particular physical need but only to gratify the love which these pioneer peoples had for what they considered beautiful things. Moreover the eagerness with which modern collectors seek out these products of the skill of our pioneer forebears is some evidence that they are regarded even today as having an artistic value.

Turning to the field of music, a study of pioneer life reveals that the frontiersman must have truly felt that "He whose soul is not moved by the concord of sweet sounds is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils." Just as he all too often lacked the means of gratifying his love for beauty, however, so did he in many cases lack the means of gratifying his love of music. Certainly musical instruments were decidedly scarce on the frontier of even a half century ago. The children of course strummed Jew's harps and played on

harmonica's or French harps, often to the accompaniment of doleful howlings by the family dog, but that their efforts produced anything remotely resembling music is open to grave question. Yet a young man was occasionally found who lacked little of real artistry in playing a French harp, though they were quite exceptional. As a rule a harp was regarded as a childish toy merely to be played for the edification of the owner and his young friends and often to the considerable irritation of their elders.

Few as were the musical instruments on the frontier, virtually every community had at least one violin the owner of which was the local fiddler who played for the square dances and also in his own home for the entertainment of guests. His repertoire included many of the old "breakdowns" such as "The Downfall of Paris," sometimes known as the "Mississippi Sawyer," one called "The Wagoner," "The Irish Washer Woman," "Arkansas Traveler," "Pop Goes the Weasel," "Sugar in the Gourd," "Turkey in the Straw," and "Hell Among the Yearlin's." To these should be added an occasional waltz as "Evelina," or some other production as "The Drunkard's Hic-Cup." Occasionally a girl or man could be found who played the accordion, guitar or banjo in indifferent fashion, but it was rare to find more than one or two of all these instruments in a single neighborhood. Pianos were almost entirely unknown since the cost was prohibitive to people as poor as were these pioneer settlers, but a cottage organ might be found in at least one home in nearly every community.

With instruments so few, the well nigh universal craving for music must on the whole be satisfied by singing. This meant that virtually everyone sang or tried to do so. Children learned to sing almost as soon as they learned to talk. Women sang as they went about their housework and men as they toiled in the fields, cowboys as they stood guard over a sleeping trail herd at night or to "keep themselves company" during long and lonely rides. Wrinkled old grandmothers sang in quavering voices, the old songs of their girlhood days and taught them to their grandchildren. People sang as naturally as a bird sings, and a visitor approaching a house would sometimes pause to listen to the words of some old ballad as the "Gypsy's Warning" which the housewife sang as she washed dishes and scrubbed the floor.

"Trust him not, O gentle lady
Though his voice be low and sweet,
Heed not him, that dark-eyed stranger
Softly pleading at thy feet.

"I would only guard thy future,
Shield thee from the tempter's snare
Heed me now, Oh gentle lady,
I have warned thee, now beware."

Songs were by many people divided into only two groups—hymns, or sacred music and "Operry songs." The first named were usually about the only ones which were commonly seen with words and music complete. They were to be found in the song books bought for use at church or Sunday School, though hymn books were also common. These contained only the words while the singer was expected to remember the tunes. They included many songs which have come down to us today unchanged by the lapse of a century or more. Familiar examples are: "How Firm a Foundation," "On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand," "Washed in the Blood," "Amazing Grace," and "Jesus Loves Me." The number of such hymns, however, was enormous, and many people knew the tunes and at least some of the words of scores of them.

The so called "opera songs" to many people were any songs not of a religious nature. Strictly speaking, however, the term probably meant only recent songs by professional song writers of the East. In this group might be included "Silver Threads Among the Gold," "The Court House in the Sky," "In the Baggage Coach Ahead," "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay," "A Cottage by the Sea," "White Wings," "Down on the Farm," "After the Ball," "A Hot Time in the Old Town," "Two Little Girls in Blue," and a host of others. Most of the three or four last named did not appear until the late nineties, and just at the end of the century, the Spanish American War produced a new crop as "My Sweetheart Went Down with the Maine," "After the Battle," and "Just as the Sun Went Down." All of the songs named followed one another in successive waves of popularity just as best selling novels do today.

A stanza of one of the older ones—"The Court House in the Sky" is as follows:

“The angels on the picket line
 Along the milky way,
 Are seeing what you're doing boys
 And hearing what you say.

And when you get unto that gate
 You'll think it's mighty slow
 When they ask you 'bout that chicken scrape
 That happened long ago.

To that Court House in the sky
 I will spread my wings and fly
 To stand examination
 At the Court House in the sky.”

In addition to the two classes of songs mentioned, however, there was a third group of great importance. This included the old ballads and folk songs of which the “Gypsy's Warning” already mentioned is a type. Many of these were of Old World origin but had been brought to America very early by people who had settled in the mountainous districts of the East. Here they had been sung for generations by a people living in a more or less static society, and from here they were brought farther west by home seekers in covered wagons. Others were clearly rooted in American soil, but all were alike in that they had almost never been reduced to writing but had been passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth alone. In consequence, many variations appear, all directly traceable to a common source.

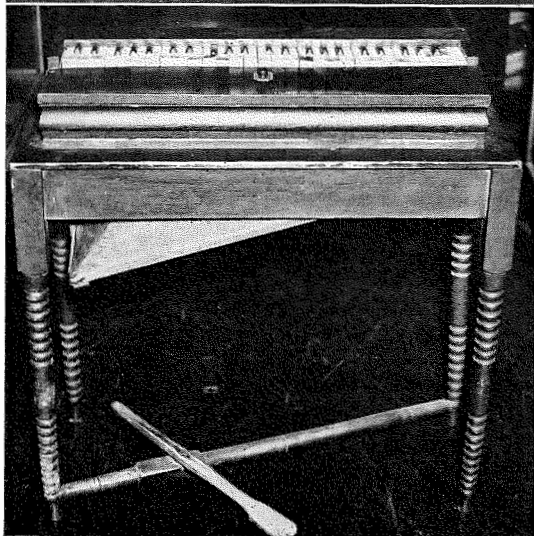
Of the old English songs “Barbara Allen” is a conspicuous example beginning as follows:

“In Scarlet Town where I was born
 There was a fair maid dwellin'
 As all young men were well aware,
 Her name was Barbara Allen.

All in the merry month of May
 When green buds they were swellin'
 Young Jimmy Grove on his death bed lay
 For love of Barbara Allen.”



Portable organ made by E. P. Carpenter at Brattleboro, Vermont. Presented to the Historical Society by Lily B. Munroe of West Point, Nebraska. Her mother, Phoneta Munroe, daughter of Uriah Bruner, won the organ as a premium for subscriptions to a teacher's magazine about 1887 and used it in her schoolroom during the greater part of the fifteen years she taught at West Point.



Melodeon made by A. D. Bartlett in Concord, New Hampshire, in 1840. Brought to Nebraska in 1881 by Simon D. Park. Presented to the Historical Society by George S. Park of Crete. It was easily carried to pioneer gatherings to accompany the neighborhood chorus.

There was another dealing with Young Randall the Proud who was "justly hanged to the door for shedding the blood of the fair Tommy Moore." There were many others including one about

"The rich old farmer
Who lived in the country close by
Who had an only daughter
On whom I cast my eye."

Some of those probably of American origin are "Nellie Gray," "Kitty Wells," "Beautiful Mabel Clare," "The Flowers I Saw in the Wild Wood," "Gentle Annie," and numerous others. Most of them were of a highly romantic nature, and in not a few instances fairly slopped sentiment.

Any girl whose family owned an organ was certain to be very popular if she could play and sing for visitors. Young men would ride long distances to pay her a call, and after a brief period of preliminary conversation, would always ask her to play and sing. The songs chosen were in most cases of a deeply sentimental kind varied occasionally by one or two of a more flippant and frivolous nature. In most cases, however, they were of a type calculated to wring the heart of a wooden Indian, and in consequence brought the romantic cowhand or granger lad to the very verge of tears. The words of one favorite called "Too Late" began as follows:

"And so you have come back to me-e-e
Since time alone has set you fre-e-e
And offer me again the heart
Whose early hopes were bound in me-e-e
And so you have come back again
And say the old love lingers yet.
You've tried through all these weary years,
You've tried though vainly to forget.

Come close and let me see you now-ow
Your chestnut locks are tinged with snow
But yes, it is the dear old face
I loved so fondly years ago-o-o.
The same as one summer's eve
Bent over me and kissed my brow
Oh happy hour of trusting love
Ah, well, it is all over now."

Such doleful words sung to an even more doleful tune while the wailing organ sobbed its accompaniment were calculated to arouse in the heart of the bug-eyed listener the deepest emotion which threatened to make him break down completely and bawl like a lost calf!

In addition to the old songs brought from the East, the pioneer settlers of the prairie west soon picked up those of another type indigenous to the new land to which they had come. These were the cowboy songs too well known by most people today to require any extended description. Usually they were mournful and plaintive in nature as "Bury me not on the Lone Prairie," "The Dying Cowboy," and "Dying Ranger," and the "Dying Californian." As a rule they consisted of many stanzas indicating that the central character must have died a long and lingering death! In addition there were ballads of the "picaresque type" extolling the virtues of some dashing individual as Jesse James or Sam Bass who had lived beyond the law and died bravely with his boots on. A stanza of one called "The Forbidden Fruit" is as follows:

"Frank James in jail drinks it out of a pail
Governor Crittenden orders to suit,
There's Lee and Bob Ford drink it out of a gourd
The juice of the forbidden fruit."

Another relates that:

"Jesse left a wife
To mourn all her life
Three children they were brave,
But a dirty little coward
Shot Mr. Howard
And laid Jesse James in his grave."

Still a third states that:

"Sam Bass was born in Indiana
It was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen,
Young Sam began to roam.
He first came out to Texas,
A teamster for to be
A kinder hearted fellow
You seldom ever see."

It then goes on to detail Sam's exploits and adventures until the time when:

"Sam met his fate at Round Rock
July the twenty-first
They pierced his body with rifle balls
And emptied out his purse.

Poor Sam now sleeps in Texas
Beneath six feet of clay
And Jackson's in the bushes
A-trying to get away."

These prairie settlers wrote very few songs descriptive of their own lives, though one or two became widely known. Perhaps the most popular was "The Little Old Sod Shanty on the Claim," of which the first stanza and chorus are as follows:

"I am looking rather seedy now
While holding down my claim
And my victuals are not always served the best
And the prairie dog keeps barking so
That I can scarcely sleep
In my little old sod shanty in the West."

"Oh! the hinges are of leather
And the windows have no glass
While the board roof lets the howling blizzard in
And I hear the coyote
As he sneaks up through the grass
'Round my little old sod shanty on the claim."

While singing was so often an individual matter on the frontier, there was much group singing as well. Young people gathered Sunday afternoons at any home which boasted an organ to spend some hours in singing. So called "Singings" were also held at the country school house at more or less regular intervals and an "all day singing with dinner on the ground" was a popular social event. Singing conventions were also held attended by the people of an entire county at which considerable good natured rivalry among "teams" coming from various communities was evident.

From the time of Ichabod Crane and perhaps long before, a few men were to be found on the frontier who lived for music even though they were not able to live by it. Such an individual was usually a homesteader like his neighbors, but to him farming was only a more or less sordid means of acquiring a living while his primary business was singing and directing the singing of others. With his trusty tuning fork in his pocket, he ranged far and wide never missing an all day singing or a singing convention, and in fact was likely to appear at any place in an entire county at least where people had met to sing. He conducted the song service at revival meetings, sang at weddings and funerals, and was well known throughout a wide area.

In the field of literature, the pioneer often showed quite as much interest as he did in that of music or of art. As a producer, he was naturally a complete "washout" unless we accept the idea that his pungent, colorful speech, tall tales told orally, and occasional ballads are literary contributions, but he was frequently an omnivorous reader, and eagerly sought reading matter wherever it might be found. As to what he read, generalizations are dangerous and are seldom more than approximately correct. As a rule he had little choice. An old pioneer in speaking of food on the frontier once remarked that: "We ate what we could get and not much of that." The same might be said of what the early settler read. The people were so poor that newspapers and magazines were decidedly rare, and if a family in the language of the time "took a paper" at all, it was likely to be a semi-monthly journal as the *Farm and Fireside* or *Comfort* with its pages devoted largely to farming, gardening, household hints, recipes and perhaps two or three stories.

Yet its coming was eagerly awaited, and every issue was read and reread until its contents were almost "known by heart." Often the father or mother would read the stories aloud to the entire family assembled about the fire on a winter's evening, and the characters and incidents were discussed for days afterward. Even the advertisements were diligently studied, and many a child learned new words and developed skill in reading from the glowing accounts of "Radway's Ready Relief" or "Sloan's Liniment, good for man or beast," and warranted "to heal cuts, wounds, burns, scalds, bruises, and abrasions." The children, accustomed to the coarse, and often scanty, fare of their pioneer home, also derived a sort of vicarious

pleasure from reading recipes for the making of delectable dishes which they had never tasted, and in all probability never would. Once the contents of the journal had been carefully mastered, it would be loaned to a neighbor and sometimes passed about throughout an entire community.

Books were as rare as newspapers and magazines, though virtually every family had a family Bible and perhaps a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*. These, together with the children's books, sometimes constituted the entire library, though many households had a few others ranging from dime novels, the *Adventures of Buffalo Bill* or *Peck's Bad Boy* to Shakespeare, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Yet, people with the barest rudiments of an education tackled any and all of them with enthusiasm and deep interest, and seemed to derive from them considerable pleasure, and, in their own minds at least, much profit. An ill featured cowhand who once saw on my own table a copy of *Festus* by the English Poet Bailey asked to borrow it and returned it a month later with the remark that: "there's an awful lot of mighty good readin' in that there book." Those familiar with the volume will doubtless wonder just how much of it he was able to understand.

Some of the works of Dickens or Scott's *Waverly Novels* were often found in a frontier home as well as volumes of Shakespeare, George Eliot, Bulwer-Lytton, or Thackeray. All of these were enthusiastically read and discussed, but it must be confessed that there were other books which were more numerous and which were often read with even greater interest. These included the Beadle Dime Novels usually dealing with the Wild West; the Old Sleuth series of detective stories, and the saccharine effusions issued by the F. M. Lupton Publishing Company. The last named included such novels as *Thrown on the World*, *A Mad Passion*, *Lord Lisle's Daughter*, *Heron's Wife*, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, and a host of others. Frequently the scene was laid in England, and the chief characters were lords and ladies. Authors were Bertha M. Clay, (Charlotte M. Braeme), Mary Cecil Hay, and a host of others. All of them tossed in adjectives with a reckless abandon, and every story always started with a bang, moved at hair raising speed, and skidded to a sudden and dramatic stop. Other writers whose books were widely read on the frontier were the Duchess, Mary J. Holmes, H. Rider Haggard, E. P. Roe, and a dozen others. Their books include *Airy*, *Fairy*

Lillian, Tempest and Sunshine, She, King Solomon's Mines, Nature's Serial Story, and a great many more. Some authors would give these novels a double barreled title as: *Dora Dean or the East India Uncle; Breakneck Farm, or the Merriman Twins; and Boys will be Boys, or A Harvest of Wild Oats*. Apparently the idea was to bag the interest of the prospective reader, and if you missed with the first barrel, you were nearly certain to get him with the second.

Any such device to attract readers was entirely unnecessary so far as the people of the frontier were concerned. A book was a book, and leisure was abundant and books scarce. When one was available, it was to be seized upon with avid curiosity and eagerly read with scant regard to the title. Many of those read by the pioneer settlers were trashy enough being merely blood and thunder or sickly love stories filled with impossible, or at least highly improbable, characters, but in most cases they were quite harmless. They did, however, take these pioneers temporarily out of their drab surroundings into a world of romance and adventure, and no doubt permanently influenced their mental outlook and attitudes toward life. As a matter of fact, most frontier settlers would have been horrified by some of our modern novels—even the best sellers—and would have refused to have them in their homes lest they contaminate the children, or even adults. With this view there are still a few of us old fashioned enough to have some sympathy.

Books, like periodicals, were of course freely loaned to neighbors, and the temporary acquisition of a new one, or rather one not yet read, was an event of major importance. They too were read aloud of evenings and doubtless many a man plowing in the field or housewife toiling over the wash tub found the hours shortened and the work lightened by thinking over what had already happened to the fantastic hero and heroine of the book they were reading, and speculating on what would take place in the succeeding chapters to be read aloud that evening when the day's work was done.

Women had some advantage since a little reading might be done while waiting for the dinner to cook or the clothes to boil, and it is possible that many a husband was served scorched beans or burned ginger bread due to the tragic adventures of Wolfgang Wallraven, or Lady Jane de Courtland. One old timer relates that stopping at the home of Sam Smith, he found Mrs. Smith sitting on the back porch churning with one hand and holding in the other a

copy of *Lady Audley's Secret* which she was reading with wide eyed interest, the tempo of the churn dasher diminishing or increasing with the ebb and flow of action in the story!

Perhaps it is not so much what they read as it is their interest in reading, their attitude toward it, and the way in which it affected their own lives which should be considered in any discussion of literature on the frontier. That these pioneers thought a great deal more about what they read and were more influenced by it than are people today seems certain. Of course there were a few deeply religious souls who felt that reading novels was a waste of time and even slightly immoral even though their definition of the term "novel" was likely to be slightly naive. These were, however, quite exceptional. As a rule people read everything available and wished for more. Also the characters in the books were very real to them and were sometimes compared with their own friends and acquaintances in the community. Mrs. Gray once remarked that Lady Clare de Vere in the *Earl's Daughters* reminded her a great deal of Lottie Miller, a neighborhood belle, and further asserted that Sir Ralph Hadden, Master of Hadden Hall, was the "spittin' image" of Jim Blevins who was never master of anything more pretentious than his one room sod house a mile farther down the creek. Other such comparisons were common. Surely, a people with that much imagination must have been deeply and permanently influenced by the literature which they read regardless of the character of that literature as judged by modern standards.

It seems that enough has been given to show that the people of the American frontier were far from being rank materialists interested only in their own physical welfare. Perhaps it may be urged that the interests described can hardly be classed as cultural since their efforts, productions, and interests fall considerably short of being in the fields of what we, today, would call art, music, and literature. Yet, they were humble beginnings, or roots from which have grown greater things and wider interests. It is certain that many of our greatest artists in all three of these fields grew up under frontier conditions, and in all probability found their inspiration for a later distinguished career in exactly those rudimentary cultural activities which have been described. Cyrus Edwin Dallin, the sculptor who created *The Appeal to the Great Spirit*, was born at Springville, Utah, and grew up in a frontier environment. George Grey Barnard

was the son of a village preacher who came west when the lad was quite small. John Noble was born in 1874 at Wichita, Kansas, while Hamlin Garland was born and reared in Wisconsin, and as a young man took up a homestead in Dakota. William Dean Howells was born in Ohio when that region was still frontier and worked with his father who published a village newspaper. Numerous other men well known in the realms of art and literature spent their childhood on the frontier while in that of music, we all know men and women who grew up in pioneer homes and whose interest in a musical career was doubtless awakened by some itinerant teacher or the crude efforts of local musicians.

Not only do we find many great artists who have emerged from such an unpromising environment, but throughout our entire country are thousands of highly educated men and women deeply appreciative of the best in literature and the fine arts who lived as children in sod houses, dugouts, or log cabins, attended "all day singings with dinner on the ground," drew pictures on their slates when the teacher thought they were doing problems in arithmetic, and read *Nick Carter* as avidly as their own small sons and daughters listen on the radio to the story of the exploits of the Lone Ranger or follow adventures of their favorite hero in the daily newspaper strips. Truly "Great oaks from little acorns grow."