Pioneering in Nebraska, 1872-1879

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Photographs / Images: Frank and George Dean; Bella Vista, Dean home at Steele City, Nebraska, 1872-1884; Light Guards in front of Merrill Hall, Doane College, 1884

PIONEERING IN NEBRASKA, 1872-1879

— A Reminiscence —

BY FRANK W. DEAN

OUR family, Father, Mother, and eight children (seven boys and one girl, ages from one to fourteen years) had been living in Helen, Georgia for two years on account of Father's health. He had what the doctors called a sunstroke in India, where six of us were born.[1]

In February 1872 Father went out to what is now Steele City, Nebraska. He organized a church and bought eighty acres of land at five dollars an acre. The payments for the land were on the installment plan. He also put up a shell of a house. He came back for us, and we went to our new home in Nebraska, stopping at Lookout Mountain for my oldest brother, Horace, who was there attending school. We got off the train at Jenkins Mills. Steele City was later built about a half mile above the mill. The St. Joseph and Grand Island Railroad was built only a short distance beyond the mill. We made the last leg of the trip from Hanover, Kansas to Jenkins Mills on a construction train.

We arrived early in the morning of May 24, 1872. We ate our first meal in Nebraska, breakfast, at Mr. Baldwin's.

[1] [His father was the Rev. Samuel Dean, who became a home missionary after his return from India. The eight children were: Horace, Carrie, Walter, Frank, George, Edwin, Arthur, and Norman. All attended Doane College.—Editor.]

The late Dr. Frank W. Dean, prior to his death on July 3, was the oldest living graduate of Doane College. A practicing ophthalmologist in Council Bluffs for over fifty years, he was born in India of missionary parents and spent his childhood in Jefferson County, Nebraska.

Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin, Merrill, and Mary lived up the hill from the mill and perhaps a quarter of a mile away. It was a glorious spring morning. The old prairie grass had been burned off the land between Mr. Baldwin's and the mill, and the new grass was up just far enough to make a beautiful green, and, singing as only they can sing, were dozens of meadow larks. It gave me such a happy feeling. Even now when I pass a singing meadow lark on a fence post, the sound brings back to me the picture of that lovely spring morning. After breakfast Horace, Walter, and I walked over to our new home. We found an unfinished story and a half house. There was a good roof, but the walls were just studding and siding, no sheeting or building paper inside the siding. There was no cellar and no foundation. The sills rested on pillars of stone about eighteen inches high. Father would have liked to have finished up a more comfortable house, but when the money ran out he had to stop. Before winter came we had dug a cellar and put a foundation under the house.

There was no plowing done on the place except a strip across the north end of the eighty-acre farm. The strip was a quarter of a mile long and twelve or fifteen feet wide and had been plowed as a fire break. It was not nearly wide enough to stop a fire, but it made a suitable strip for starting a back fire.

I want to say something about prairie fires now and go back to the plowed strip later. The grass in that part of the state was what is known as bluestem. The blades of grass were from a foot to a foot and a half long and covered the ground thickly. The stalks which gave the grass its name grew to be from three to six feet tall depending on whether it was a dry or rainy year. Sometimes the prairie would not be burned over for two or three years. That left a mass of dried grass on the ground. When the grass was fired, if it burned against the wind it would advance slowly, and the grass that was burning at one time was a narrow strip. If the fire were going with the wind it was something fearful. The heat from the fire causes the heated air to rise; the wind rushes in and increases the velocity of what might already be a strong wind. When the velocity is thirty or forty miles per hour, as it often was on the prairie with nothing to stop it, the flames would flare up ten or twelve feet; then the wind would slap them down on the dried grass ahead. The

grass in one spot would burn very quickly, and still the fire would travel so fast that two or three hundred feet would be burning at one time. Nothing could go through a fire like that and live. A prairie fire at night is a beautiful sight if it is away at a safe distance.

As I am on the subject of prairie fires, I will relate what happened some five years after we arrived in Nebraska. Grandfather, Grandmother, and Uncle Albert lived on an eighty just south of our land. Their south line was the Nebraska-Kansas state line. One Sunday all the folks from Grandfather's and from our home had gone to church except myself. I was fourteen years old at that time. After the folks had been away a half hour or so, I saw smoke off to the south. There was a stretch of unburned prairie about five miles square south of Grandfather's, and I knew that if a fire came with the wind that was blowing from the southwest, everything of Grandfather's would be wiped out. I put some matches in my pocket, got on a pony, and was down at the southeast corner of Grandfather's land in a very short time. I saw the fire was sure to come, so I tied the pony where no harm would come to her and started to backfiring. There was a road going south toward Washington, Kansas, from the corner where I was and a plowed field east of it. Everything was safe in that direction. There was also a plowed field that met the southwest corner of Grandfather's eighty. There should have been a firebreak plowed along the south line of Grandfather's place between these two points, but that had been neglected. There was a road that ran along the line but it was not much of a road, just two paths with a ridge of grass between. Cattle had been driven back and forth on the road during the summer so the grass was not as high as it otherwise would have been. I had nothing to fight the fire down with if it got across where I was at work. I took off my coat and soaked it in the creek close by, then started to backfire on the south side of the road at the edge of the south path. The method was to light a few feet, let it burn south, and beat out any fire that started across the road. When that spot was safe a few feet more were fired. There was a quarter of a mile to backfire in that way. I hardly expected to get it all done but thought I would work as fast as I could and try for it. Fortunately the wind was not blowing very hard. I saw that the fire was going to get to the end of the quarter of a mile as

soon if not before I did. As I got three or four hundred feet from the goal, Uncle Albert and Horace rode up. They had seen the smoke from the church and had taken the harness off two of the horses and rode the two and a half miles in a hurry. We got the backfiring done in time but had no time to spare. I could not have done it myself, but I made it possible with help at the end.

I was very tired, and my eyebrows and lashes were burned off. My hands and face were burned enough to be painful, and one would have had to travel far to find one so black and dirty. Horace took me behind him on his horse so that I could ride to where my pony was.

Now to go back to the plowed strip at the north end of our land which we found when we arrived. We planted it to garden and vegetables. That first year about fifteen acres of breaking was done, and we planted it to corn, pumpkins, watermelons, and sowed turnips. The melons, pumpkins, and turnips were put in among the corn. We made a "dug-out" hen house. We dug into the side of a ravine a couple of hundred feet from the house, put up posts and poles across the top of the posts, then brush and a little hay, and covered it with earth. We made the stables the same way except the cover was hay instead of earth.

In the house we had a small wood stove for cooking and heating. The dining table was made from a carpenter's bench, and we used boxes to sit on in place of chairs. We stuffed bed ticks with straw and slept on the floor as we had no bedsteads. It was pretty tough for Father and Mother, but a lark for the boys. The first winter we suffered a good deal from the cold. We had only the small cookstove for heating, and the house was not built so as to keep out the cold. During snowstorms the snow sifted through the cracks under the eaves so that our beds were covered in the morning. It almost makes me shiver now when I recall getting out of bed and dressing on cold mornings.

Soon after we arrived, in the spring of 1872, we went to the river, the Little Blue, and got small trees, mostly elm and maple, and set them around the house. As I remember we set out about fifty that year, besides a number of very small ones that we set in groves close together. We carried these all on our shoulders as it was before we had a team. That summer of 1872, besides doing the work as told above

Frank and George Dean.

Bella Vista, the Dean home at Steele City, Nebraska, 1872-1884.

we walked to a schoolhouse made of cottonwood lumber. This schoolhouse was a little way from Jenkin's Mills on the north side of the river. Our teacher was Miss Nannie Phelps, a very pretty young woman. After that term of school I did not see that teacher again until the summer of 1932. She was about eighty years old and was still very good looking.

I can't recall the order of events so will have to write of them as they come to me.

When we were first in Nebraska, there were large stretches of prairie and few homes. Prairie chickens were there, thousands of them in flocks, during the winter. In the spring they would gather on a rise of burnt-over ground. Then they would boom and cackle, and the males would fight. I have seen twenty or more fights going on at one time. They made their nests on land that was not burned over so as to have the dry grass for their nests.

The quail were also very plentiful. They built their nests on the ground where there was dry grass, but their nests were mostly along ravines where there was some brush. We always knew where a good many nests were. When we saw a fire that we knew would burn out the nests, we used to bring in the eggs. We set the quail eggs under some of our pigeons and the prairie hens' eggs under hens. After they were hatched the little praire chickens would not follow the hens and were soon lost. As soon as the quail hatched we put them in a closed pen and fed them. We raised a number in this way. In the fall when they were grown we did not like to kill the pets for food, so turned them out. They were very tame and stayed around with the chickens through the winter. In the spring they mated and disappeared.

After we had been in Nebraska a few years we owned some horses, ponies, cows, pigs, turkeys, and chickens. With milk, eggs, butter, chickens, turkeys, vegetables, and wild game, we had plenty to eat. There were enough eggs to trade at the store for coffee, sugar, etc. I remember we traded eggs at eight cents a dozen for brown sugar, which was so wet that one could almost squeeze water out of it, at nine pounds for a dollar. We paid ten cents for a box of fifty sulphur matches. In the winter we had traps set all the time. What game we caught we dressed and hung up to freeze. Saturday, when there was no school, we killed

what turkeys and chickens would be needed through the week, dressed them, and hung them up with the game. There was always something ready to cook. There were ten in our family, and we had visitors most of the time, so it was necessary to have a good deal ready for the table. Once in a while we butchered a hog. I liked pork very much and would eat so much that I was always sick the next day.

After the first winter we made the house more comfortable by filling the space between the studding with concrete. There was no cement, so we used lime and sand. Then little by little we acquired comfortable, but inexpensive furniture.

In the fall of 1873 Uncle Simon, Father's youngest brother, came and stayed with us for a time. He was slim and six feet three or four inches tall. He rode out from Walhalla, South Carolina, on horseback. I think he was with us about a year, then started West by train. When he got to Battle Mountain, Nevada, he dropped something between the train and the platform. The train was not moving so he got down to pick up whatever it was he had dropped. The train started and rolled him between the car and the platform. He died in an hour or so.

The first real blizzard we experienced was April 12, 1873. When we got up in the morning the wind was blowing hard from the north, and the air was so full of snow we could not see the stables, some two hundred feet from the house. No one went out in the storm until after breakfast. Horace, who was fifteen, got ready to go to the stables to milk and feed the stock. He tied a rope around his waist, and the rope was let out from the house. It was fortunate Horace did have the rope, for he made three attempts before he found the stables. The rope was left tied between the house and stables as a guide. In a blizzard like that one the wind and snow take one's breath away, making it necessary to turn around to breathe. One does not know whether he turned all the way around or only part way and loses his direction and is lost. Two of our neighbors had driven to Beatrice to the flour mill with wheat to trade. Beatrice was twenty-five miles distant. They were on their way home when the storm struck them. One man unhitched his team and let them go. Then he rolled himself in all the wraps he had and lay down in the bottom of the wagon box.

The other man tied the lines to the dash so they would not drag, then rolled in all the covers he had, and got down in the wagon box. His horses took him home. The family heard the wagon drive up to the house. They found the man so nearly frozen that he needed help to get in the house. His face, hands, and feet were frozen but not so badly but that they got all right in a few weeks. The other man's team came home, but the man was found in his wagon frozen to death.

The Oto Indians were on a reservation with headquarters at Blue Springs, Nebraska. The western limit of the reservation was within about three miles of our home. The Indians used to go by our home on their way west to hunt buffalo. I think they more often went west on the north side of the Little Blue River. Some of our neighbors used to go west in wagons to hunt. They would be gone three or four weeks and come back with meat, hides, and sometimes young buffalo calves. The Cranes, who lived a half mile north of us, kept a buffalo bull calf until he was two years old, then had to kill him because he would walk through any fence they built. The Indians sometimes had a successful hunt; at other times the Sioux Indians got after them. The Otos were afraid of the Sioux and would retreat as fast as they could, losing some of their equipment, buffalo meat, hides, and sometimes a few scalps.

When en route for the hunt they were a queer sight. The buck Indians would ride the ponies, sitting on a pile of blankets or quilts which were always dirty. There was a pole on each side of the pony fastened in some way by the butt ends, the tips dragging on the ground. On the poles behind the pony were a pile of blankets or whatever they were taking on the trip. Often it was a tent cover; on top of this pile of stuff was a squaw and maybe a papoose or two. The squaws had to be taken along because they did all the work, a true example of the saying, "Everybody works but father."

Once a cow of ours mired in a water hole and died. The Indians asked if they could have her. We realized that would relieve us of the work of burying her, so we gladly gave them the cow. We stood around to see what they would do. They tied a number of ropes onto the cow; then ponies and Indians all pulled the cow out of the mudhole. The men then sat

down, and the squaws went to work. They skinned the animal very quickly. They then opened the belly and removed the viscera. Half a dozen or more Indian children from four to ten years old were asking for something to eat. One of the squaws cut off a piece of intestine about a foot long, took hold of one end of the piece with thumb and finger, and with thumb and finger of the other hand stripped out the contents and gave the piece of intestine to a little boy. He went away chewing it. The squaw repeated the process until all had what they seemed to think was a dainty morsel. The carcass was cut up, and the Indians left, taking all the pieces with them, without any effort to protect it from dirt and flies.

In the summer of 1874 we had our wheat cut and in the stack. The corn was in the silk. That year we had more than a hundred young turkeys. One noon, while we were at the dinner table, through the window we could see the turkeys were excited and were picking at something. It was grasshoppers; they settled down in such numbers that within twenty-four hours there was very little of any green growing thing to be seen. All there was left of the corn was the stalks and some of the center ribs of the leaves. Everything in the garden was eaten up. Where the turnips were, there was a cup-shaped depression in the ground, and even the center root was eaten down about an inch below the bottom of the cup. The destruction of the gardens and the loss of the corn were a great blow to everyone. There were no canned goods in those days, and fresh vegetables were not shipped out our way. And even if they were, there was no money with which to make the purchase. Our family did what all our neighbors did, that was to live on what there was left. We did not have a great variety, but we did not suffer enough to stunt us at all in our growth. We ate all we wanted of what we had and were out of doors a great deal and got along very well. Of course the turkeys grew wonderfully on grasshoppers. In the fall we shipped ninety-six turkeys in one shipment to St. Joseph, Missouri. We thought we did pretty well, and still we received only nine cents a pound for them.

I think it was in 1875 that a man by the name of Jim —— came up from the Ozarks in southern Missouri. He had an ox team and wanted to work, so Father let him break

five acres of prairie land in the northwest corner of our farm. At the table Jim talked all the time. His dialect was so peculiar that we began to giggle and were sent away from the table. After dinner Jim saw Edwin in the yard and asked him what he was laughing at when at the table. Edwin said, "I was at Grandma's, but the boys said they were laughing at you."

Father had a very good telescope, the one used on the ocean voyage. The town of Steele City was about a mile and a half from our home. On the side hill Pearson's store stood out in full view. Jim had never before looked through a telescope. He sat on the floor, rested the telescope on the window sill, and looked in all directions. Finally he looked in one direction for some time, then reached out with his right arm as if he were going to take hold of something. Horace said, "What are you trying to do?" Jim answered, "I kin almost touch Pearson's."

Once Father and Mother were away for the day. We were just finishing our dinner when one of the boys stepped on a muskmelon rind he had dropped on the floor. It slipped so nicely that we all put rinds on the floor inside down, a rind on each foot, and skated all over the floor. Of course we were compelled to clean up the mess, but at that we had lots of fun.

Our table behavior was better than that when our parents were present. There were table rules, written by Grandfather Abbott, tacked on the wall in our dining room. If any of us misbehaved we had to get up and read the rules aloud. Then we were not allowed to talk much at the table. We were told, "Children should be seen, not heard." That I think is a very bad custom. Children's talk might be directed, but the habit of sitting at the table through a meal and not entering into the conversation is a habit hard to overcome.

In 1873 or 1874 someone organized a picnic. Arrangements were made with the St. Joseph and Grand Island Railroad for two or three cars. As I remember, they were cattle cars. At least the sides and top were openwork. In these slat openings branches of trees were placed so that the cars looked a mass of green. The reason I am not sure they were cattle cars was that there were openings in the ends allowing one to pass from one car to another by jumping the

space between them where they were fastened together with coupling rings. The picnic was at Marysville, Kansas. The whole family could not go, but Father and Mother took George and me with them. I don't think I had a very good time as I don't remember much about it, though I remember an accident on the way down. At that time the women and even the girls wore bustles that made them look like monstrosities. A girl of sixteen, not being able to buy a bustle, made one by fastening a bunch of paper under her dress. With that arrangement she could switch around as well as anyone. On the way down to Marysville a spark from the engine fell on the shelf of her dress made by the bustle, and soon the paper began to burn. The fire was extinguished without injury to the girl, but that part of her dress which was her pride was gone. Someone fastened a small shawl around her to cover her embarrassment. A collection was taken, and at Marysville a dress was bought for her. It was a bright colored dress and covered with large figures; I think they called it a Dolly Varden. The girl came home feeling very smart and important.

When Arthur was a little fellow about four, he had the habit of holding his breath when angry. He was playing on the north kitchen porch, got angry over something, and held his breath. His face was getting to be bluish in color. Father came out of the house, picked him up by his collar, and soused him in a rain barrel which was standing by the porch under the eaves. He put him entirely under the water. Arthur began to breathe as soon as he was out of the water and was never known to hold his breath again because of anger.

In the winter of 1875, Mr. George Reynolds was teaching in the sandstone schoolhouse that was located just across the road from the northeast corner of our land, not much more than a block from our home. Mr. Reynolds used to leave the key at our house Friday night and call for it Monday morning. He lived four or five miles south in Kansas on Joy Creek and rode back and forth on a horse.

One Thursday I was sick and stayed at home. Friday I felt better and went to school with the others. In the afternoon I began to feel bad again and put my head down on my desk. The teacher hit me on the side of the head with a book. The blow was hard enough to knock me out of the seat onto the

floor. He then took me by the collar over on the other side of the schoolroom (the girls' side) and put me in one of the front seats which was so small I couldn't get my knees under the desk. I sat with my feet in the aisle. Mr. Reynolds then struck me across the knees and told me to turn and sit straight in the seat. By that time I was in such a frame of mind that I didn't care much what happened, and as I couldn't get my knees under the desk I hung my feet over the top of it. Then I did get a trouncing that was worth-while. While this was going on, I saw my chance and gave the teacher a good kick on the shin. It stopped the whipping for only a few seconds; then it began with renewed vigor. Finally he slammed me down in the seat and said, "Now you sit properly in that seat." I got up, went for my cap, and left for home. I felt much relieved when I was out of the schoolhouse, as I expected he would try to stop me. He did not even speak to me. When I got home Mother asked me why I came home. I told her I did not feel well. We never told when we were whipped at school, for of course it was usually our fault that we got it.

The morning after my trouncing Edwin and I were both red with scarlet fever. The Monday morning after, Mr. Reynolds stopped for the key. Mother came into the room where we were and said, "Mr. Reynolds looked frightened when I told him you two had scarlet fever. I wonder if he is afraid of it." Edwin said, "I guess he thinks maybe he pounded it into Frank."

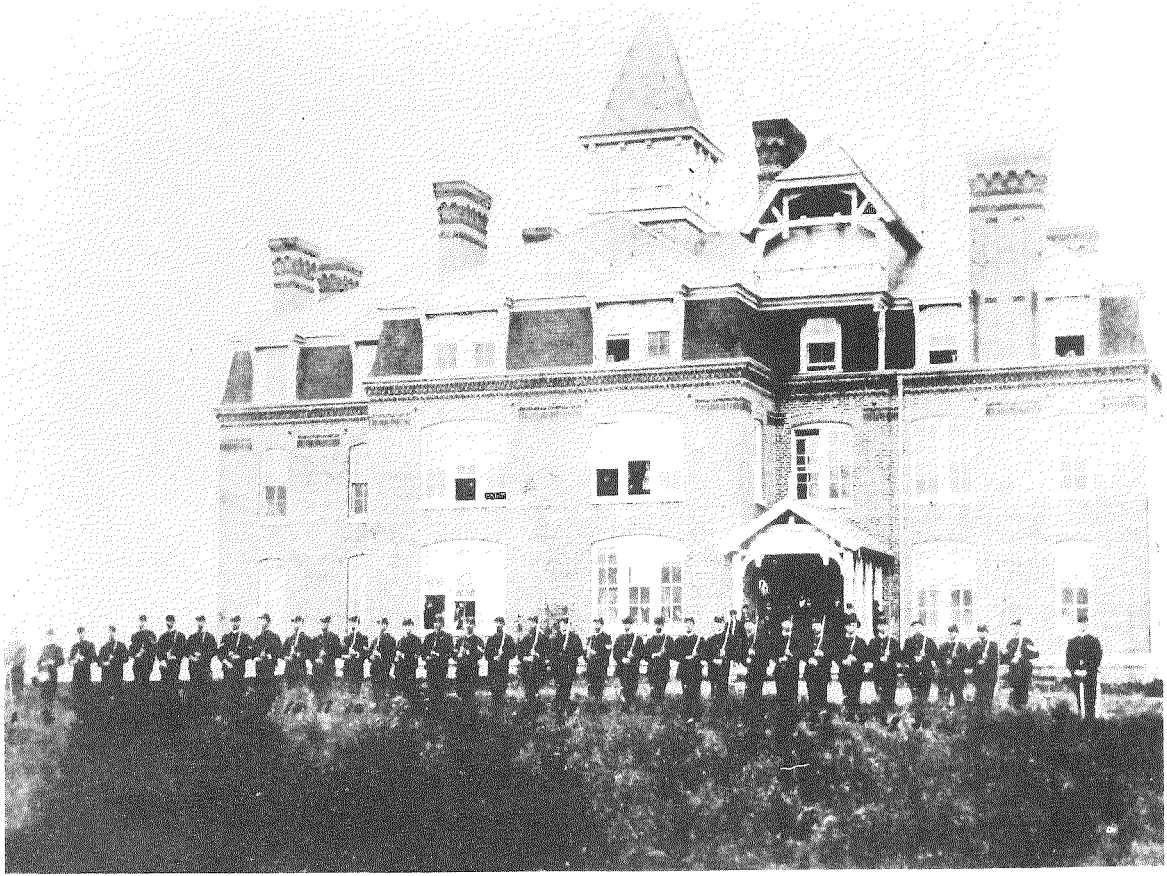
We all learned to swim in the Little Blue River. Our swimming hole was about three-quarters of a mile from home. We sometimes walked to the swimming hole but usually went in a wagon or on our ponies. We set a trotline across the river and caught a good many channel catfish. To go and look at the line every day helped out in a chance for a swim. Down near the river were thickets of wild goose plums. We used to go down when they were ripe and in a short time pick enough to furnish us plum butter for the year.

For a little more of a delicacy we had grape jelly. The grapes grew in the timber along the river and creeks. George and I went down to the river one time to pick grapes. We had a team and wagon with us. We each had a basket which when filled we emptied in tubs which were in the

wagon. We picked independently. After a while I heard George call for help. I found he had climbed out on a limb about twenty feet from the ground. In reaching out for some grapes, he had slipped and was hanging, head down, with his legs around the limb. He could not get back because his body was in a tangle of vines. I climbed out on the limb and after some work George was back on the limb. We crawled down from the tree and looked for grapes which grew nearer the ground.

Wild strawberries ripened during the first half of June. We knew where the patches were. The best ones were in the ravines where there was more moisture than up on the flat prairie. The wild strawberry has a great deal richer flavor than the cultivated variety. We often got a number of quarts at one time. As we had plenty of good cream for the berries we thought the first part of June a delightful time of the year.

I think it was in the summer of 1877 that I first went out into the harvest field to bind grain. The first day was in a rye field, and I was supposed to keep up my station. There were five of us; each had to bind one fifth of the distance around the field before the machine came around and caught up with us. The rye was heavy and tall. I was fourteen and small for my age. I had to work pretty hard. I got through the forenoon without being caught by the machine before I had bound my station. In the afternoon I went out again. I had on a heavy pair of shoes which began to blister my heels. I took the shoes off and put up some bundles of rye by them so I could find them. We were working behind a "dropper." It was before "harvesters" and "binders" were invented. The dropper left the grain to be bound spread out three or four feet. The very first bundle I was to bind after taking off my shoes I pushed together with my foot. As I kicked the bundle together, I felt something sharp and painful strike the side of my foot. I looked under the bundle and found a good-sized rattlesnake. I had a painful time at first. I walked to Grandfather's home. (We were cutting his rye.) He and Uncle Justin remembered they had read recently that for snake bites, put two tablespoonsful of spirits of camphor in a cup of milk, but they had forgotten how to give it, so they made me drink it all at one time. Of course with that amount of alcohol



The Light Guards in front of Merrill Hall, Doane College, 1884.

I was drunk in a little while and felt no pain. They hunted and found the directions, which were: "Give a teaspoon every half hour." In spite of the fact that I had already had an overdose of spirits of camphor, I took a second cup of the mixture as per directions. The smell or taste of camphor is very disagreeable to me even now. The harvesting was all done for the season before I was able to work again. The rattlesnakes were thick that year because the prairie was being broken and the snakes were driven into the adjoining fields. After I was bitten the boys took our dog Bruno to the fields with them. Bruno killed thirteen rattlesnakes in our wheat field that year. He used to bark at the snakes while they were coiled to strike. Finally they would strike. As soon as the snake was straightened out, Bruno would grab it in his mouth and kill it with one shake. The dog would pay no attention to any snake except the rattlesnake, though if any of us picked up a harmless snake by the tail he would take it away from us. Bruno was so anxious to kill all rattlesnakes, he once tried to get one out of a hole in the ground. He tried the method he used to get ground squirrels out. He enlarged the opening of the hole just enough to allow his muzzle to enter. He then crowded his muzzle in so that no air could get by. He exhausted the air by drawing in a long breath, then blowing it out the sides of his mouth. After a few breaths of this kind the ground squirrel came up for air, and the dog would grab it. Well, he tried it on a rattlesnake. I don't suppose the snake came up for air, for snakes do not need much air; at least they can live a long time without it. However, the snake came up and bit Bruno's nose. The dog was very sick, and his head was so swollen that he could not open his eyes for a number of days. When he was well again he was more of an enemy of rattlesnakes than ever.

Our home was just a mile from the Nebraska-Kansas state line. On the Kansas side there was an outcropping of red sandstone on some hills. The hills were there because the stones prevented the wash of the land. There is where we went for our stone for foundations. Before picking up one of these flat stones to load on the wagon, we always turned the stone over with a crowbar because very often there would be one or more rattlesnakes under it.

Coyotes troubled us a great deal. The country was very thinly settled, and there was nothing to stop coyotes from

multiplying. They did not trouble the chickens very much because we shut them up at night and they stayed pretty close to the house during the day. The turkeys were also shut in at night, but during the day they wandered a quarter of a mile or so off in the corn fields. This made easy picking for the coyotes. I think they must have killed almost a quarter of the young turkeys that got to be two or three pounds. When George was dressing one morning, he saw a coyote in the yard and shot it from the window. He shot it with a long-barreled muzzle-loading rifle. To load it we poured the powder into the barrel, then put a patch of cloth about an inch square over the muzzle, then a buckshot on the cloth, and rammed the bullet and patch down onto the powder and put on a percussion cap. George skinned the coyote and sent the skin to Professor Swezey at Doane College. He mounted it and put it in the museum with George's name attached.

Another animal that caused us trouble was the common striped skunk. They seemed to be able to get into the hen house at night though we thought it was skunk proof. A skunk will kill a number of hens though they can take only one away. One night Horace, Walter, and I were sleeping on a partly made haystack which was near the henhouse. I awoke hearing the chickens making a noise. I woke the boys, and Horace went to the house and got a gun. Walter got a lamp. I went to the front of the henhouse to prevent whatever was in there from getting away. The boys went inside. I could hear them talking. Walter, "There it is in the hen nest." Next came the report of the gun. Walter, "Did you get him?" Horace, "I guess so; he dropped his tail." The henhouse was a dugout, you remember, and the odor from the skunk was confined, so the smell was something awful. The boys ran for the door, coughing. The temptation was too great for me, and I held the door shut for a while. When I let go of the door I ran, snatched my blanket from the haystack, and found another sleeping place for the rest of the night. I thought it safer.

Another time Walter and I decided we did not want to go to prayer meeting on Thursday evening. We were slow getting our work done and were not ready when the others started. Father said, "Hurry and finish your work and come to prayer meeting on your ponies." We started off on our

ponies, but when we were an eighth of a mile from home we met a skunk. We thought we might be able to kill it by running the ponies over it. We rode over it, back and forth, one pony after the other on the full run. Of course the ponies jumped it each time, and finally the skunk got away from us by running off to one side of the road and into some bushes. We then went on to church. We attracted a good deal of attention and had been seated only a minute before a deacon came over to where we were and said, "You boys get out of here and be quick about it."

The cottontail rabbits used to make their burrows in the wheat fields. The burrows were made for temporary hiding places and had two or three openings, three feet or so apart. The tunnels met in the center about a foot below the surface of the ground. We often reached in and pulled the rabbits out. One day I reached in after a rabbit when something bit my finger. I soon discovered it was a skunk. My finger was a little sore for a few days, but no harm came of it.

One morning when we went out to do the chores before breakfast we found some dead hens in the henhouse and a track of feathers leading north from there. We followed the track of feathers about an eighth of a mile. They led us to a clump of yellow dock on the edge of the ravine. There we found a hole five or six inches in diameter. Two of the boys went for a spade and gun. When we dug down about two feet a skunk stuck her head out and was shot. We dug down another foot or so and came to a nest of nine little skunks. Walter threw them out one by one using their tails as handles. They were about one-quarter grown, but even if they were small they were well equipped with armaments of defense. As soon as we had dispatched the lot we went home for breakfast. Mother would not let us in the house. She passed some food out to us, but for once in our lives we found we were not hungry.

I think the most lonesome time I had while we were living in Steele City was when I herded sheep for Mr. Baldwin for four weeks. I was eleven years old, and to be out all day seeing nothing but prairie and sheep was enough to make a boy lonesome. One day there was something that was more exciting. A man who lived a mile or two from Mr. Baldwin had some sheep. His boy about my age drove their sheep up near where I had Mr. Baldwin's sheep.

We kept the flocks apart and played between. He said his Merino ram could lick my Cotswold because his Merino had horns and the Cotswold did not. I told him I thought the Cotswold could lick the Merino because it was the biggest. In order to see who was right we got the two rams together. They faced each other and backed away until they were about fifty feet apart, then raced toward each other at full speed. When they were ten or twelve feet apart they leaped in the air and struck their heads together as they were coming down. One could have heard their heads strike from a long distance. They shook their heads and backed off again to repeat the charge. The third time they came together, they must not have landed exactly square as my Cotswold broke the Merino's neck. I was glad that I did not have to report my ram dead.

In June 1877 I drove with Father to Crete, Nebraska to attend the commencement exercises at Doane College and to bring my sister Carrie home. Doane College at that time occupied the old academy building located between Fifth and Sixth Streets on Ivy Avenue. It was a two story building with a tall tower in which hung the bell which now hangs in the belfry of Merrill Hall. While there were only two stories, the ceilings were so high that the building was as tall as an ordinary three story one. On the first floor a hall went from the front to the back door. The space on the second floor was all taken up by a large hall. This hall was used for college gatherings for church as a church building had not been built. As we drove up toward the building, Father said, "I hope you will go to school in that building before long." It seemed to me that I would dread going to such a large institution. It was the largest building I had seen for years. On commencement day I went to the hall on the second floor and heard the three graduates, Will Bridges, Dan Tromble, and George Mitchell, deliver their orations. I thought if I did go to Doane I would not try to graduate, for I felt sure I could not get up and deliver an oration before a big crowd such as the one of that day. That was the first class to graduate, and it seemed as if the whole town was there.

At home we always had family prayers after breakfast and supper. In the morning we each had a Bible and read a verse as our turn came until the chapter was finished.

In the evening Father read one of the Psalms. One evening when we had finished the meal, Father said it was a little too dark to read and that we should each repeat a verse from the Bible. Arthur was an enormous eater; when his turn came he pushed back from the table and said, "For who can eat or who else can hasten there unto more than I."[2]

In the fall of 1879 four of us attended Doane College, Carrie a Senior, Walter, George, and I as "Preps." We drove from Steele City to Crete. Father with a light spring wagon took Carrie and our Aunt Chloe, who was to keep house for us. Horace took Walter, George, and me in a farm wagon. We took along beds and other furniture, and some vegetables and led a cow at the tail of the wagon. It took us two days to make the trip. From Steele City to what is now called Old Plymouth was sixteen miles, prairie all the way, with no houses after we left Steele City.

A few miles north of Steele City we crossed the old Oregon Trail. Teams and wagons make two paths across prairie land, with a strip of grass between the paths. The paths as we found them were worn eight to twelve inches deep. The paths are made by the feet of the horses and the wheels of the wagons. They kill the grass and make dust of the earth. The wind blows the dust out, and so the path or ruts, as they are called, gradually get deeper. If the land is not level the deepening is increased by the wash. When the ruts get so deep that it makes it hard walking for the horses, another track is started at the side. A new track is started after a rain; at that time it would be muddy in the ruts and driving is better on the sod. There were twenty or thirty of these double tracks side by side made by hundreds of wagons in the old time caravans on their way to the coast. Crossing the Oregon Trail with so many deep ditches was very disagreeable. The wheels dropped into one ditch after another. We had to cross at right angles; otherwise the wagon tongue would slap the horses with great force. We made the trip safely, and my entering the preparatory department of Doane College in September 1879 put an end to my life in the pioneer home in Steele City, Jefferson County, Nebraska.

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[2]Ecclesiastes 2:25.