

## I lived in Soddies

On Mar. 18 - 1880 the Rundall family consisting of R. W. Rundall and wife, two daughters Minnie 9 years old and Grace 6 years old and a son Arthur one year and eleven months old landed in Orleans from Lyons Iowa. Tickets could not be bought in Iowa farther than Red Cloud when we left but by the time we got to Red Cloud the railroad had been completed to Orleans and we got tickets on to Orleans.

Here we found the hotel so crowded two families occupied one room. The two benches of children stretched out on blankets on the floor

In the morning my Uncle Arthur Kirkwood <sup>that boot them here</sup> drove in with a lumber wagon and Team, and took us to his Mothers homestead. I had been told she had a dugout to live in and was I surprised when I saw we could walk in thru a door as in any house for I supposed we would have to go down steps as to a cellar. This was in

a bank facing the west and only had what now we would call one cellar window. It was about 12 x 16 feet. on the South East quarter of Sec 18 in Eldorado township. It contained three beds a stove table and rocking chair a bed made seats at one side of the table <sup>drop leaf</sup>.

and boxes made chairs. The children could stand to eat. An uncle Zack Kramer and a friend from Iowa John Miller lived near and they with Father and Uncle Arthur soon made <sup>off the ground</sup> us a house <sup>in the</sup> west bank. Grandmother <sup>was in her 70's</sup> had brought a breaking plow and they soon had twenty acres broken. The wagon was stripped so they could lay the (brick) layers of sod in it and haul them to the site. The bank had been squared up and they laid the sods which were all cut about 20 or 24 in long <sup>about</sup> into it. These were laid brick fashion to make the walls. They had procured 2x8 lumber of which they made window and door frames were made and sod lain against them held them firmly. Then they went to Prairie Dog creek bought a tree or two and brought them home to make ridge logs and <sup>short ridge supported</sup> rafters. On these were lain brush and corn stalks then a layer of sod, which must always be lain grass side down, and fitted very close together and filled in and covered with loose <sup>clay</sup> dirt. These very seldom leaked. We had two 2 sash windows in the east with a door between and a door in the east end of north

wall and a cellar window on both north and south wall. The walls were then shaved with a spade smooth and plastered with magnesia - a kind of soil found in many banks which could be used much like lime. This was one large room about 20x16. Mother had brought with her her <sup>ingrain</sup> carpet but it was hardly suitable for dirt floors even if they had been "moped up" and packed by bare feet till they were almost glazed and could be swept with out too much dust. So a wire was stretched across and the carpet hung over it for a partition. However if we leaned to hard against that ~~wall~~ <sup>it</sup> we were apt to land in another room feet up.

Of course water was the first thot. Grandmother had a well bored near the bottom of the draw which is what we called our waterways. But this was the head of the draw so the well was 180 feet deep and about 6 inches across. We raised the water by a bucket that would go into the well attached to a rope that we wound on a ~~wind~~ drum turned by a windlass. This bucket had a valve in the bottom so when set into the trough released <sup>the water</sup> into our pail

Father and Uncle Arthur planted the 20 acres of sod to corn. It grew wonderfully and by July 1 was 2 feet high and a beautiful green. But a south wind came hot as a furnace blast and in 48 hours our corn and hopes of corn bread lay flat on the ground - not even <sup>fit for</sup> fodder left.

As father was working for the Ennis Nursery when we started west. ~~He~~ Dr Ennis sent father a large box of shrubbery as a good will gift to plant <sup>around</sup> on the new home. It had been carefully planted and tended carrying water from the 180ft well to keep it growing but the few drops we could get to it could not suffice in that parched ground. And anyway we must eat. As we landed with <sup>only</sup> \$30 cash which was spent in a lump for a longhorn Texas cow we were penniless. Grandmother was getting a small pension - about \$15 or maybe \$20. She also had a cow. As the prairie had burned off that spring <sup>so</sup> grandmother and I each took a cow by a rope and lead her from one bunch of grass to another bunch of grass as the bunch grass came up in the spring so we might have milk to use. Father took corn we bought to the



Riffenberg mill and had it ground into meal. Corn bread and milk for breakfast and dinner - corn mush and milk for supper. Father bought a bushel of potatoes to plant in the spring. Mother had always used potatoes in making her bread so she cut these so she might have a few centers to cook. She smashed them all on a plate and we girls huddled close during the process and were rewarded by a bite. Um good I can almost taste it yet. But Mother got one batch of bread made with potatoes. Father having chronic dysentary contracted in the Civil War could not eat the coarse corn meal <sup>hence</sup> ~~so~~ his loaf of white bread every week and for Sunday dinner we each got a piece of white bread (our cake). But after the first year we nearly always had a porker salted down. Many pieced out with rabbit, prairie chicken and quail. While some gathered the buffalo pea for a treat. And sometimes we killed a chicken though we needed the eggs to buy what little salt sugar etc we used. Then we found nettles docks and so forth made greens. We nearly always could raise some garden too and watermelon was an almost sure crop on sod.

When our corn laid flat with no prospect for corn bread they put a few things in the wagon - put the bows and canvas back and all climbed ~~in~~ and started to find work.

On July 4 we passed a grove where they were having a celebration. How much we children wished we might join them.

That night we were in a bad hail storm. Father had trouble controlling the horses and next morning they were covered with welts and every thing in our wagon was wet. For where ever a hail hit the stretched canvas it leaked. But we drove on till we came to a creek with water over the bridge. But a nice patch of grass by the road gave the horses a meal and us a place to spread things out to dry. Then we repacked and drove on.

We were very fortunate by night finding a bachelor who needed help. And we moved into Mr Vance's 3 room dugout and frame combination. Grandmother was so pleased with the nice grass in the yard where we could spread the wash but oh, oh, it proved to be sandburrs. Here near Inavale we stayed till the corn was all shucked and the first of January.

we loaded up and drove up the river on the ice to Orleans and over the hills to our abode. And now we were forced to use some buffalo chips for fuel.

In the spring of 1884 we took a deserted claim two miles north (N.E. 1/4 Sec. 6 Twp. 1 Range 19) There was a small dugout on this but the entrance had ~~not~~ been dug ~~as~~ lower ~~at~~ at the door and in one very bad storm the water came in to cover the floor and Mother and we youngsters took refuge on the bed. Mother sometimes slipping across on chairs to the little window to see how the storm was doing. The cow was picketed close to the draw and she feared the water would get high enough to get her.

Our well here was dug 3 or 4 feet across but only 20 feet deep. Here we had two oaken buckets on a rope that passed over a pulley as one went down empty the other came up full. And sometime they swayed back and forth. Mother hung her cream in a syrup bucket down there to keep it sweet and cool. One day I jerked the buckets till one upset the bucket of cream then that meant some one to go down and clean the well.

Our first job here was a comfortable house so a sod laying bee was called and in no time a nice 16 x 20 house rose up all above the ground

father had gotten boards instead of brush etc for a roof. It had a layer of tar paper over the boards then the sod and dirt. And before the summer was over he had brot from Bloomington boards for floor under the beds. But for a long time the kitchen end was dirt, Mother being a dainty woman the walls were white washed and newspaper lamberguins made for windows and shelves. True the door was boards nailed together with leather thong latch ~~string~~ In time a sod room was built on the north and a cellar on the west. It was nothing in those days to drive miles with the oxen for a visit. Two pair of oxen did duty for us but father soon tired of the heavy yoke and made them a harness. Even made a single harness and we drove Old George to a cart.

Then a span of Indian ponies which were much harder to manage than the oxen had been. How excited ~~we~~ we children got when father would run races with our oxen and a neighbors horses. As a sled glidded over the buffalo grass as easily as on snow we had many a sled ride. !

~~By 1891 father could not stand hard work and the boys needed better #~~

My summers were spent mostly heading the cows for there was no money to build fences. The prairie rattlers were plentiful



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For amusements we visited or went to church  
or Sunday school held in the schoolhouse  
or town. Every school closed with a program.  
And one year when fall came and we knew our  
Sunday School was about to dwindle out we  
decided to bury it with an appropriate program  
At it I gave "The widow and the Deacon" which poem  
I would like to find again.

I had a faithful dog that helped with the herding. No one could approach me when he was around. One day I was near a large outcropping of flat rock when I spied a large bull snake sunning itself. Soon its head came up slowly and swayed just as slowly back and forth. Then I saw a little bird fluttering above coming closer, closer till I feared it would have the bird for dinner and I broke the charm and told it to go find a mouse where no one was watching it.

The only frame house in the community was <sup>the Riddle home</sup> scattered over many miles of prairie in one of the early storms back east. (9B)

The daughter injured and family went to Iowa for a couple years of schooling so I might teach school.

But before this Dist 60 was organized and <sup>and the usually</sup> first school was held in grandmother's house. We had 3 months school in the spring and 3 months in the fall. Our seats were planks or slabs with peg legs against the wall and our desks were our knees.

The teachers desk was a dry goods box but she had a chair. I think Etta Reneau was the first teacher and Eunice Robbins the next. \*<sup>make</sup> Mrs. Maggie Morgan was our county superintendent. \*

The first school house in 60 was a soddy about 1/2 mile north of the present school house. When I got back from Iowa I got a 3rd grade certificate and a school in Dist 35 at \$20 a month. I was

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We had grown accustomed to green house beauties but found Nebraska prairies ~~would~~ <sup>were a close second</sup> rival them. In early spring the blue and white anemone wind flower or daisy, the wild onion and a dandelion like flower. Then the wild fuschia collinsia and buffalo bean two kinds. Now the most beautiful of all the buffalopea and sensitive rose on the banks white rocky out cropping produced the candytuft youth-and-old-age and yucca. In the draws the iron-weed and an umbel like flower of purple

But in order to survive most of them sent their roots deep enough to reach the clay soil which held the moisture ~~they were~~ it was almost impossible to transplant them. The daisy and onion were bulbous.

On the creeks could be found buffalo-berry elder-berry wild grape and plum and currants and I knew of one patch of gooseberries. With the sorghum which was made of cane planted stripped and headed and taken to a neighbors who had rollers to squeeze out the juice and large pans to boil it down to a syrup in mixed with the wild fruit it made a very tasty spread for our bread.

over

only 16 and had pupil older than I and  
 an enrollment of <sup>over</sup> 30 pupils in the little old  
 log school house. My certificate being for 6 mo  
 I must get another in Feb. getting a <sup>second</sup> first for 1 yr.  
 \* I followed the profession for 12 years when I  
 married and again moved into a dugout until  
 we could buy and build ourselves a sod house  
 on sec 26 town 1 (Fairfield) Two small bed rooms  
 were made in the end and a closet behind the door  
 my grandmother came and spent the next night  
 after we plastered it with us but she said nothing  
 ever did hurt her in Nebr and so it proved

The walls were so thick the houses were warm  
 The windows deep and every one grew house plants.  
 At one time we made the lower half of one into  
 a cage and raised canaries. At one time having  
 11 young ones

But as the teacher is to board with us a small room  
 was built on the south and porch like room was  
 built over the door on the east where I cooked on  
 hot summer days. Here my two oldest were born

But a <sup>in 1907</sup> 7 room frame supplanted it and the sod's  
 became a chicken and calf shelter.

The T.M. built a church of sod in the San Vincent homestead and  
 where Eli Vincent raised his family and still lives

Free Methodists



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The water after rains draining off through the draws often washed big holes which held water. These the animals puddled till they often held water all summer and saved us drawing so much water.

The roads almost always followed a ridge tho that caused lots of zigzagging. Then if we wished to go some place where people lived we turned down the head of a draw and here had lots of <sup>more</sup> zigzagging. Often the main roads on the ridges would be 6 or 8 tracks wide and worn so deep our wagon beds grated. And how the travelers gronched when people began fencing and made them follow section lines.

Father usually went to the creeks for our fuel supply. Here he might nearly always get what ~~was~~ timbers he could salvage from drift piles or was permitted to cut dead limbs and sometimes dead trees. Once while preparing them two logs rolled together pinning one of his legs between them, bruising it till he was forced to lie in bed for several weeks.

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The large wild animals had mostly been driven out by prairie fires by the time we came. Of course the sod houses would not burn but it was hard to watch every thing else go up in flames. Every one broke a strip one or more rods wide around their place to help in fighting fire. We women folk drew water into tubs and soaked rags in the water for the men to use or haul in barrels to the fire and they would come home nearly exhausted.

Many came but could not take the hardships and went back to "Misfolks" <sup>East or West</sup> So our neighbors were constantly changing. Often they left after staying a year. One family sold their rite for a pound of butter. When they sold and made out papers the new comers time was cut that much short. We put a prescription on ours which was good for 2 years and followed it with homestead which was for 5 years. Therefore we had no taxes to pay for seven years. One could also take a tree claim by planting 20 acres to trees and if a certain number were alive at the end of 2 years if a certain number were alive Uncle Sam gave you a deed for it.

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Of course any thing that brot in cash was a life saver. So father worked a great deal for the rancher <sup>of 54 mport</sup> Nic Nelson. Then at other times for the Miller <sup>wrote & cleaned up the gaps</sup> Mr Boehl who also had a saw mill. It was from here our slabs were gotten for our school house. And then here we got our grets ground <sup>later</sup> many evenings we spent shelling corn for the quist. The youngsters tipping and cleaning the ears while father shelled it with a spade on a chair into a tub.

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There were hollows on the prairie called buffalo wallows or Lagoons supposed to have been puddled by buffals, deer etc which held water most of the summer. One such was in a field on our place. Into it much stuff was hauled - even a whole straw stack thrashed into it once. But to this day if a heavy rain falls when the crop should be dry a whole acre or more of the crop was lost.