

APR 2 - 1981

UNIVERSAL Press Clipping Bureau

Great grandmother remembers 1865 sinking of Steamboat Bertrand

The following, was sent to Mrs. Arthur Pedersen, Nora, by Lucille Erlandson, Denton, Mont. It is a true story of Mrs. Pedersen's great grandmother. The article was written by John Edward Walton, a great uncle of Mrs. Pedersen.

Memories as a Child

I was born on Jan. 16, 1857. I don't think most people realize that the memories of their children go back as far as they do. I will tell a few things that I can remember of early date that I can prove by history.

My grandmother on my mother's side had slaves. She had an old colored lady to do the cooking and washing for the family. We were taught to be polite and kind to her and to obey her. She treated us children fine except when we had muddy feet, then she would stomp and scold and tell us not to come into her house with those muddy feet. She always called me "Massa Johnny". One day she was washing down by the spring under a big willow tree and she said, "Massa Johnny, take that gourd dipper and go to the spring and get a dipper of water." I did, thinking that she wanted a drink, and gave it to her. Then she said, "Massa Johnny, don't you want a drink?" Sure, I wanted a drink, and I tipped up the big two quart dipper and it covered my whole face. Just then she hollered, "Don't stick your nose in that dipper." It frightened me so I jumped and she broke out in a big Ha, Ha.

I always liked to go down to the negro quarters to hear them sing and see them dance and hear all kinds of ghost stories until it came time to go home to bed. Then one old mammy would say "Now Massa Johnny, I will hold the light so the Boogy Boos won't catch you", and she would tell me to run fast so they won't catch you. I surely ran. These things happened just before the Civil War.

Another time father went to the city to buy hardware and finishing lumber for the new house. He took me along and brought my first pair of red high top boots. He asked me if I wanted to take mamma anything so I said "Yes," and bought a big red apple. I surely was proud. When we go to the gate, I got off the wagon so my boots would show off better and I had the big apple for mother in my hand.

One incident that is also very clear to me is the following: One night my father took the family down to the river and we stayed all night. A small boy was there and he was on crutches. This made such an impression on me I never forgot it. When we asked how it happened, they told us that they had a hired man on the

other side of the river cutting wood and they had to cross to where he was on the ice. The man was afraid to carry the ax, so the boy took it and slipped and cut his knee. Afterwards I asked my mother when this happened and she said it was when father went to get trees to set out in his orchard. She laughed and wouldn't believe I could remember, but I did and I can still see that boy to this day. August 1, 1939.

When the war started, it was impossible for a man to stay home, so my father enlisted in Price's Army and served three years. In 1863, early one morning a company of Kansas Jayhawkers came by and asked for father. Mother told them that he was in the army and wasn't home. He had been home on a furlough the day before, but had left early that morning. They went on to a neighbor's and he told them that he had seen father the day before, so they came back and put a guard around the house. Then they went upstairs and cut a hole in the plaster with an ax and shoveled fire from the fireplace in the space between the walls. In a few minutes the whole house was in flames. The guard wouldn't let mother take anything out, so we lost everything. It was a damp December and we had to sit by the fire of the burning house all night to keep warm. The next day my uncle Smith came and took us to his place. We had been there about three months when the same bunch of Kansas Jayhawkers came and shot down my Uncle. He had been over to see his father who was on his deathbed. A brother saw the band coming and gave warning. This brother ran to the north and got in the timber and got away but my Uncle came out too late. The terrorists were between him and the timber, so he ran through the corn field. The K.J's tore down the fence and rode him down and shot him. His wife saw what was happening and ran screaming to where he lay. She was only a short distance away when they shot the last time. The next day Uncle's father died, so Mother and my Aunt Amanda had to dig the graves and bury the two men as there were no men around.

These Jayhawkers were not the regular soldiers of the northern army but a body of men called the "Home Guard". They wore the Northern uniform but they were just out to kill and steal, using the war for an excuse. After they killed my uncle we had to move to Versalia, Missouri. After Father had served his three years, he came home to us, but they wanted to draft him and he was convinced any further fighting

was hopeless, so he set out west to what was called Idaho Territory in the Louisiana Purchase. Montana was later formed from some of this territory. When the war was about over, Mother borrowed some money on the farm land to buy tickets on the river steamer, Stehmbot Bertrand, for herself and the family to go where father was. It took \$625.00 to get us tickets up the Missouri River to Fort Benton, Mont.

Things were going fine for some time when all of a sudden we felt a jar, and found out that the boat had struck a snag and punched a hole in the bottom. Soon the boat began to sink. There was great excitement and confusion. I climbed to the top deck right away, but the river was so shallow that the boat struck bottom before much of it was under water. When it hit, it rolled part way over on its side and almost threw me overboard. We were all taken off the boat without a mishap and taken to a small town to await another boat.

One evening in the hotel a lady and some girls started to sing songs in the parlor. They were singing Southern songs and having a good time when the landlord stormed in and told them he wouldn't allow them to sing such songs in his hotel because the war was not yet over at this time. Some of the ladies were quite enraged. Finally the other boat came and we were all put aboard and then things went along fine.

One day our boat got stuck on a sand bar. We hadn't seen an Indian for several days, so the captain sent a pilot and six dick hands to sound the river. They found the channel over near the opposite side, so we had been away off course. Knowing that it would take several hours to get the boat off the sand bar, these seven men decided to take a walk. Later they decided it better to leave one man with the row boat. The others walked to a ridge about a quarter of a mile from the river. When they got to the ridge, Indians rose up from all directions. The men started running to the river and to their row boat. Some of the Indians on horseback rode up and killed the man at the boat and set it adrift. While the Indians were bunched on the beach, the Captain gave permission to his men to fire a

small cannon at them. How they did yell and scatter. We saw one of our men who was cut off from the river run down the ridge with fifty Indians chasing him. Finally they formed a circle around him and that was the last we ever saw of him. Finally only the pilot and 2 deck hands were left. While they were running the pilot told one man to jump into the river and try to swim to the river boat. The pilot dived off the bank which was about 30 feet high and started to swim the river. The man who could not swim jumped straight down onto a sand bank and crawled back under the bank and tried to hide.

Two of the Indians went back for their horses and started across the river after the pilot, but he raced to the other side and got into the timber before they got across. He began to pull his wet clothes on as he ran through the brush. Our Captain saw him and sent a group of men after him in a yawl. When he got into the boat he was torn and bleeding from the brambles but not wounded.

Two of the Indians ran up and down the bank hunting for the deck hand under the bank. At last they saw him and leaned over as far as they could and shot an arrow at him, at the same time yelling a war whoop. This attracted the steamer crew who began shooting. We saw the bullets kick up the dust so the Indians faded out. The man under the bank had an arrow in his shoulder which he tried to pull out, but he pulled so hard that the wood shaft parted from the point. This point was bent

double when it struck the bone of the shoulder blade.

About this time the third man had tried to swim straight to the steamer and was two-thirds of the way and couldn't swim any farther, so he hung onto a snag and waited for the yawl to pick him up. It had nearly reached him and he was preparing to get in when an Indian bullet hit him in the head. He sank right away and we never saw him again.

Soon the steamer was off the sand bar and the Captain wanted to go, but the passengers wouldn't stand for it. They told about the ban under the bank. The Captain said that if he backed down to get the man, the Indians would board the boat and kill all on board. At last the passengers won out and the man was brought aboard. There was no doctors to be had, so one volunteer sharpened his jack knife, got a pair of blacksmith tongs, and went to work. He pulled and cut, and pulled and cut some more until at last he got the point out. Then the question was raised as to whether or not the arrow had been poisoned. We got ice at the next town which was applied by passengers and eventually all was well with him, but we had lost five men on this episode.

When the Indians were first sighted, the women and children were ordered to go to the dining room and lie flat on the floor. A banker was aboard and he began to collect bedding and pile it around himself. Mother said that if she were to be killed, she wanted to see who was going to do it. That is why I saw so much of what happened for I stayed on deck right beside her all the time. All the other children were almost smothered. Indians fired at our boat several times but did no damage, however, we heard the bullets go whistling by.

After the Indian scare, all

went well for some time. But soon the water was getting too shallow. Our boat was a large one, and the water was too low for it. We then transferred to a smaller boat. A few days later we came to what was called "Doe Fawn Rapids". The crew had to unload a good deal of freight and carry it around the rapids. When they had done all this, it was still impossible to start. In the morning I heard a mate giving orders: "Take a dead man out and bury it," I was all excited as I had not heard of any one dying, but I kept my eyes open. Then they lowered the yawl and went ashore, but all they had with them was a short log. They went up the bank and began to dig a hole and set the post in it. Then they tied a cable to the post and came back to the boat. They fastened the other end of the cable to "winch or nigger" and started the engine. We felt the boat begin to move. By moving the post upstream again, and again, we at least were past the rapids. All went well for the rest of the journey and we arrived at Fort Benton, Mont., in the latter part of July, 1865. We had been three months on the trip.