by Isey Minney

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Territorial Reminiscences

I have been asked to relate some incidents of Pioneer life. I do not know why, but the true old Pioneer does not like to lay bare ~~before~~ to the public his most trying experiences, which are the ones the people are most interested in today. In the first place, the pioneer never acknowledged to any one not even himself that he was poor, so what looks to us as dire poverty, looked to him as riches.

As I look back I see a little log cabin 12X16, built in Utoe county, the logs hewn flat on the inner surface, and the chinks filled with "cat" and clay (a mixture of straw and clay) and the whole interior of the cabin treated to a coat of white wash, which rubbed off on ~~my~~ everyone who touched it.

My mother can tell you of what the roof was composed, and her experience the first night she spent under it. The roof was shakes laid over rafters covered with a layer of sod, and any person who saw one of our torrential rains knows what happened when the rain washed the dirt through the shakes and streamed into the room below.

There was one door which had a latch string for a lock. It consisted of a wooden bar on the inside of the door, that fell into a wooden slot on the door joint with a string attached near the end of the bar; a hole was bored in the door and the string passed to the outside. Anyone on the outside could pull the string and raise the latch. and if the one on the inside wished to lock the door, they simply pulled in the string, and it was done.

For light there was one small ~~x~~ half window. across one end of the room was two bedsteads made of poles, straw ticks then feather bed, and bed clothes laid thereon; a trundle bed or two to shove under them, provided sleeping accommodations for father, mother and five children. If guests arrived, the women slept in the beds, and the men rolled up in a quilt or blanket on the floor, which was mother Earth. This little cabin was typical of most of the Pioneer homes I was acquainted with.

For food, there was always plenty of potatoes, pork, beans and flour. sugar was used sparingly and

tea and coffee was scarce. Various substitutes were used for coffee, such as roasted peas, bean and molasses etc. The wild plums which grew in those days, were delicious and the choke cherries and even the sorrel was considered good enough for a company pie. Wild grapes picked off in the bunches, and dropped into a jar of sorghum molasses, and allowed to work, then used as a sauce or in pies we thought fine. The children used to beg for the apple peelings, whenever mother was fortunate enough to get apples for pie for threshers, and these peelings tasted mighty good.

Harvest season was a busy time. The Grain was cut with a machine where a man sat on one extra seat, and raked each bundle off the platform with a hand rake. It was then bound by hand with a straw band. If I remember right, it took eight men to follow a machine. Those wer busy days for wome too — a lunch was prepared, and carried to the field at 10 o'clock A. M. and again at 5 P. M, consisting of fried cakes,

pie, bread or rolls and coffee.

All sewing was done by hand, all stockings, underwear, pants and shirts were all home made as well as dresses and aprons. One pair of hands milked the cows, prepared the lunches, got the regular meals, tidied the house and cared for four or five children (We had no kids in those days) light was furnished by candles which the good wife made also.

Well do I remember the cande stick and snuffers, and how many times I tried to snuff the candle and put the light out. Our first lotern was a perforated tin affair, ~~and wh~~ with a candle inside. It had a door to let the light out, when you got inside the barn, (No! shed) which you carefully opened on the side away from the drafts, after carring it from the house, under your coat or shawl. Even then, you might have to relight it a half dozen times.

I wish I had the gift to make you see these prairies, as I can. The grass was so high on the bottom land, that a man

could ride horseback through it and could not be seen. Quail, prairie chickens, deer and wolves roamed at will through it; some of the wolves were large gray ones that were known to kill two year old heifers.

The Indians on their ponies with tent poles fastened to the sides of the ponies traveled Indian file. I never was afraid of the Indians, but those old Indian spotted dogs used to send chills over me. I see that long string or train of prepaps twenty five covered wagons each drawen by six to twelve yoke of oxen, hauling goverment freight to Cheyenne and Laramie from Nebraska City. Ther were other covered wagons followed by tired worn out women and children on foot, going to the promised land. One poor woman sleps her last sleep, in a now unknown grave, at the four corners north of Mr. McManus. Dying she was baptised into the Mormon faith, and left to her long sleep.

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Sometimes we went to our nearest neighbors 2 mi south east or 5 mi north west. In winter we went in a home made sleigh. A lot of straw was placed in the bottom of the wagon box, a quilt spread on it, the children laid on that, with the smaller in the center, quilt spread over all and securely tucked in. The sleigh or wagon was drawn by oxen. There were no bridges, except on the steam wagon road, and twenty nine streams were forded.

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One day my father and Mr James Waller had gone to Weeping water to take a grist to Rud's Mill and get flour. Mother and we little folks were left alone. Father was not sure he would return that night, but we half expected him. We were late doing the chores and as we were working a "Halloo" rang out on the other side of the creek. mother answered it, wondering how father happened to be on that side of the creek. You know there were no roads, not even paths, travelers generally followed the streams, or divides and drove stakes or piled up mounds to guide them back to the starting point. Again came the "halloo". This time Mother knew there were more than one, and that they were white people, for they were talking and swearing about

the location of the crossing. She hurried to the house with us and took two short handled pitchforks. One she gave to my eldest brother, the other she kept herself. She drew the latchstring in, barricaded the door with every thing that was moveable, and told brother if they came and broke the door in, to stick the fork in the eyes of one and she would attack the other. They sat there in fear and trembling all night, for every thing was still she couldn't be sure they were gone. But happily they couldn't find the crossing. They also went to Mrs Wallen's (Mrs E. Luff was spending the night with her) and knocked and knocked. Getting no answer they split the door with a rail and said if they were not allowed to enter they would "blow the occupants as full of holes as a skimmer". Mrs Luff said "Let us get under the bed for bullets will not go through feathers." This they did with all haste. After a time the men got tired and left.

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At Christmas he hung up our stockings and usually found a cluster of raisins, an apple, candy and sometimes an orange in them. Sometimes our parents sang hymns or told us stories of the long ago. Our play things were few and simple. A bunch of rags for a doll, a top from an empty spool, bows and arrows made from willow twigs and twine (which was made of from paper and came to pieces when wet.) We made wonderful houses from corncobs, and spent many happy hours cutting dolls, furniture and clothing from newspapers.

The mail was brought by stage to Mr. J. R. McKees, I think where Ed McRae now lives. My Uncle Mr Robert Renold wrote to Washington and had a postoffices located at Guss Floatman's store, which joined Mr. Wallen's residence, on the steam wagon road. He asked that it be named Paisley for his old home town in ~~Sco~~ Scotland. I can remember when Mr Thomas Wills carried the mail to Paisley post offices in saddlebags.

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promising they would be sure to send it to Mr. Vose the next day, he consented to proceed with the ceremony, to the great delight of all concerned.

Young people were much the same in these days, as now, only they went about more in groups. three or four young men would invite three or four young ladies to go to singing school, or church, all going in one wagon, and good times they surely did have.

What a young couple considered necessary, to furnish a home depended on the pocket book, and how little they could do with it. I have known some very nice, and happy homes, that started with nothing but a cook stove, some store boxes for table and cupboard and bed on the floor. They are today considered among our most successful people both financially and otherwise.

The dress of those days would seem strange now. The men wore cow

hide boots - but the least said about our every day clothes the better. We were not all proud or anxious to be seen in them. I still have a couple of pictures taken in the early days. The first of mother and brother taken in 1860 in Neb. City by George Hair, the other a seven year old girl, also taken by Geo. Hair in 1869 in Neb. City.

The early settlers were as anxious for schools as for the post office. The Paisley school district was the 6th to be organized in Otoe county and contained 36 sections in town 9, Range 10 and one-half of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 in town 8 and part of what now is Dist. 20. Five whole districts and parts of others have since been formed from the same territory, 63, 65, 77, 85, 103 are the five districts.

Paisley Dist. No. 6 was organized in 1869; my uncle Robert Ronald being Director, Mr Thomas Wells moderator; and Fred W. Strachan, Treasurer. The school house was built on the steam wagon road on land given by Messrs. Wallen and Luff. The house was

longer east and west than north and south. There were three windows on the north and south, and the door was in the east. A long bench desk ran the length of the room to the raised platform on the west where the teacher had a small table and chair. Benches without backs served as seats for the pupils who of course all faced the center of the room. When called to recite we slipped off the bench and crawled under our desks.

We were well supplied with charts hung on the wall from which we studied our lessons, all lessons being prepared in the school room. The charts served as books for most of the pupils the first term. There were A B C charts, reading charts multiplication charts, etc. The reading charts contained such sentences as "see the cat," "see the rat," "see the cat catch the rat." Each new word was printed in red while the remainder was in blue.

Miss Lucinda Mercein now Mrs Huges

of calif. a sister of our townsman, Mr Sam Merwin, was the first teacher. She received something like ($15.00) a mo. and board around. Mr. H. R. Raymond was supt. and usually walked when he came to pay his annual visit. This school grew from a few pupils to an attendance of 60 who got most of their education under these conditions

I do not know what our modern teachers would do with such a medley of books. There were Hillard's reader, Saunders Reader and national reader, about as many text in arith. What a variety of classes, ABC learners, five reading classes a history class, and arithmetic classes from 1+1=2 to a class in algebra; Geo. classes, Phy. classes and spelling in all grades.

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the first picnic. We all met at the school house and marched to the big tree near Wallen's bridge where we played such games as drop the handkerchief, or swung till tired. At noon we again formed in a line and marched to the school house where the elder women had been busy. I can yet see that old school house immaculately clean, and the long benches with white table cloths, the glistening steel knives and forks, the wreaths and boquets of wild flowers and the green branches; the cake and pies set on whole but sliced ready to serve, and all the other good things and they were good for we only tasted them once or twice a year. It was beautiful to us children and we were allowed to drink tea from Mrs. Saunders china cups, that came from England.

I wore a white dotted swiss dress made from one of my mothers but it was my new dress, and a white sun bonnett. That was a red letter day and stands out in my memory.

Excellent

Later the old school house served as church as well as school where we heard many a good sermon. It also sheltered a singing school and a good Templar's lodge, but best of all, as far as I know, all who attended school in the old school house made good in after life, among the first pupils were only a few boys who used profane language or tobacco in any form. altho some were brought up in close contact with both, and a few played cards.

But these days are past. Only one of the older people that settled in this immediate neighborhood remains, Mrs Margaret Thompson, age 86, the territorial settlers with there loneliness (?) and hardships are fast passing away and the whole story of their struggles will never be known.

Mrs Orrison.
1924

This was written as a school assignment,
" To interview and write up the story of some
interesting person residing in Palmyra Nebr"
It was also necessary, after it was completed
to have the party interviewed, read the finished
article and sign it to verify its authenticity.

This is the story of Mrs Orrison as she told it
to Inez Elizabeth Minney in the year 1926.

This typed copy was made June 2 1975, copied from the
original which was hand written, by Inez Minney Walters

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