

When Grand Father Pickering was a Little Boy.

To Linda, Nancy and Janie Longenecker:

Sept. 20, 1965

When your Grand Father Pickering was six years old -- younger than Janie is now -- he travelled by "covered wagon", with his father, mother and sister Charlotte (Lottie as we always called her) some two and one-half years older, from his birthplace on the farm in Hanson County, South Dakota to Louisville, Colo. This was a small coal mining town in Northern Colorado. The distance travelled was 750 miles, arrived at by inquiry at each town we passed thru, and faithfully recorded by my sister Lottie, in a little note book given out to advertise a John Deere Farm implement store in Fulton, our nearest town in So. Dak.

Hitched to our "covered wagon" were a matched team of grey horses, named Fly and Nellie. They were always ready to respond when hitched to wagon or top buggy when his father -- or mother -- said: "Biddap". (Nellie lived and served us until I was a grown man but Fly died while we lived in Colorado. My father had been up in the mountains to Rollinsville, a difficult place to get to in those days. While there Fly ate some loco weed and died after father got back to Louisville. I was leading her when she reared back and fell over dead. I was about eleven or twelve at that time.)

For this trip my father fixed the wagon by putting on "sideboards" on both sides, and the ends, so that the wagon box was twice the regular depth. Then he built a framework, called an "overjet", and this of course stuck out several inches over the edge of the top box of our wagon. The "overjet" was needed so that double bed springs would fit snugly inside of it. Then the bows, over which the canvas top was stretched, were fitted into clips on the sides of the overjet; the canvas pulled tight and tied securely. Thus we had snug sleeping quarters, in the wagon, with our baggage underneath.

We crossed the Missouri River on a stern-wheel ferry boat, from Running Water, So. Dakota to Niobrara, Nebr. and travelled Southward until we came to the main line of the Union Pacific R.R. along the Platte River. These we followed the most of the way

to Colorado. We carried a sheet iron stove on the back of our wagon, which had two griddles and an oven next to the fire box. My mother did wonders with this stove when we stopped for the night. The wood for the stove were pieces, Lottie and I picked up along the road, walking behind or beside the wagon as the horses walked along. I liked to hang on the back of the wagon when the horses trotted down the hills because I could take such big steps. Our evening meal was good as I remember - in fact every^{meal} was good to a growing boy. At night we tried to stop by a school house, or a stock yard (where they kept cattle temporarily and loaded them on the cars for shipment), as both places always had a well and a pump so that we had water for cooking and for the horses. Our noon meal most of the time was a can of pork and beans, or a can of tomatoes (seasoned with either sugar or salt and peper), plus bread and butter. Mother had brot along some two-quart glass jars of canned grapes which we had not eaten very well at home. But on this trip they tasted very good.

As we neared Colorado the mountains in the distance looked, at first, like low clouds on the horizon. Lottie and I were thrilled at the thot of seeing the Rocky Mountains. I learned by painful experience that it did not pay to step on the low-growing cactus. I did this until I got a cactus spine into my instep thru my shoes. But never again!!

^{one noon} One noon we stopped in the shade of some tall trees in the town of Grand Island, Nebr. They were in front of a large, two-story house, painted white, with a white picket fence along its ^{front}. We learned later that this was the home of Col. Wm F. Cody, or "Buffalo Bill" as he was familiarly known. While Lottie and I were playing on the grass in the shade of these trees, a lady came out and offered my mother some milk for "the children", meaning us of course. We thot this lady was very kind to think of us who were total strangers to her. Most of the people we met along the road were friendly. One man, a farmer with large house and barn, was the exception. He not only refused to sell my father hay for the horses, but ordered us off his place.

One day as we were riding along in the rain, the canvas top seemed very wet but was not leaking. I got to wondering what would happen if I should touch the top with my finger. I learned that was the way to make our top leak, as water began to driz down on

me. I never thidd that again!

We got to Louisville in December 1893, in a snow storm with high wind. We feared that the wind might blow our high wagon over when broadside to the wind so stopped in the shelter of a large building for a time. Then we drove to the home of my mother's cousin, Sam Page, who lived in Louisville. *I learned when grown that my Grandpa METCALF was PAGE* We lived here for a while as he had a teenage girl with no mother to look after her. Mother came to help if she could.

*when she married
Chas Metcalf*

Learning that the Russian who had rented our farm was not keeping his word, my father left early in 1895, by train, to look after things. When school was out (I was promoted to the 4th grade) my mother, with your grandpa about 8 years old, and Lottie a little past ten years old, started back to So. Dakota with our covered wagon, pulled, of course, by our faithful Greys, Fly and Nell. On this return trip, when we were stopped in Sterling, Colo., and us children were sitting on the wagon seat, holding the lines of the horses, watching what was going on in the street, a young man rode up on a horse and leaning over in his saddle, handed us a small sack of candy. We were taken by surprise and failed, I fear, to thank him but I am sure our eyes, and the expressions on our faces, said thanks.

When mother returned from the store she had, among other things, a loaf of home baked bread and a 5 lb. pail of strained honey. As she sat on the wagon seat she spread two slices of that good bread with butter and then this honey, and gave one to each of us. We thot it a rare treat.

From Sterling, Colo. to ~~(Alesburg)~~ ^{Greely} Colo. was a two day trip for a team hauling a loaded wagon, but about half-way between was a place where travellers could stop called "Genfield Ranch". This time we apparently reached the ranch too early, in my mother's opinion, to stop for the night so pushed on toward ~~(Alesburg)~~ ^{Greely}. Night overtook us where there was nothing in sight but prairie. Rain had fallen recently so that the horses had water - and we got along some way. The horses were tied to the wagon for the night, so that when coyotes or wolves howled and nipped at their heels, and the horses kicked at them it shook our wagon and awakened mother. She at once got up, dressed, got us up, then harnessed and hitched up the team. Then putting the lines in our hands she

took the lighted lantern and struck out for the road. We guided the horses to follow the light and were much relieved when mother got to the road, climbed into the wagon and we were on our way.

We reached our farm home safely and found that the Russians - "Rooshens" we called them - had broken into the rooms we stored some of our things and ~~had~~ ^{had} used, broken or taken with them. Our churn was gone, so mother made butter by ~~stirring~~ the cream with a large spoon, ^{also} several other useful things in a farm home. We went to school again in the country school, built on an acre of land my father had given for that purpose because my parents were interested in schooling for their children. Here both Lottie and I started our education. The subjects taught were Reading, Writing and Arithmetic -- with discipline thrown in. My memory of those school days recalls picking a handful of beautiful violets, for my teacher, as I ~~walked~~ ^{walked} to school thru our pasture in springtime. The pasture had a lot of flowers but I thot the violets, the prettiest. Our school house had what we called an "entry", ~~extending~~ the full width of the building, where we hung our water wraps, caps and left our lunches. It was also a place of storage for kindling, as the teacher had to build her own fire in the stove when it was cold. Here we played "blind men's buff", on days it was too cold to play outside. It was just wide enough so that ^{the blindfolded} a child, with their arms fully outstretched, could almost ~~touch~~ the coats hanging along the side, and catch those trying to slip past to the other end of the entry. When the first snow came we played "fox and geese" in the fresh snow.

Along each side of the school room, at the front end where the teacher's desk stood, were two long benches. There were about ten pupils franging from those in the first reader to the fourth or fifth reader. Before we went to Colorado, when I was in the third reader -- and earlier probably -- I vividly remember the Michel girls -- they were young women to me -- reading dramatically the poem which contained the words: "Morgan, Morgan, the raider, Morgan's terrible men". This was shortly after the Civil War. These long benches mentioned above, were used when classes were called up front to recite. Of course all the school heard each class recite. ^{On} ~~one~~ of these benches was the water pail, with a long-handled dipper in it. We all drank out of this dipper --

some dripped water on the floor and some drank over the pail and let the dipper drip into it. (When we got to Colorado we found that they called a pail a "bucket".)

At the close of school, the last year we were in So. Dakota, each pupil got a souvenir, dated 1897, which listed the teacher, Ida M. Anderson, the school board, and the pupils, who were: Frank and Fred Boehmer (brothers; Leslie Boehmer (a cousin); Minnie and Rekie Shell; Lottie and Frank Pickering; Arzam Blumenberg; Andrew Hosh and John Liska.

We sold our farm in 1897, which my father had homesteaded in 1876, "Centennial" year, shortly after Sitting Bull, the Sioux chieftain was captured and his nation contained, and put on reservations. When we moved to Colorado to live we took two wagons. Fly and Nell, the horses, pulled the old wagon with its overjet and a span of black mules, the little one named, "Billie" and the larger one named, "Jack", pulled the new wagon, with our top buggy tied on behind. We bot a wagon with a brake on it because all wagons in Colorado had brakes on them because of the need for them in the mountains. When we crossed the Missouri River this time I was told to stand at the head of the mules, to keep them quiet when the machinery started. The mules were standing, hitched to the wagon, on one side of the ferry boat, where they could see the paddle wheel. We had not owned them long enough to know how easily they could be frightened, so this ten/year old boy was pretty anxious standing there with nothing but a wooden rail to hold them, or me, on the boat if they acted up. My heart went "pit-e-pat" when that paddle wheel began to splash the water and I saw the mules prick up their ears and shy a bit; but they remained quiet and I was thankful.

We had some hills to climb to get out of the river valley and this time the ground was wet from rain and slippery. We found that mules will not waste any effort pulling a wagon, if they do not have solid footing. So after the horses had pulled their wagon up the maddy hill, father unhitched them and brought them back to pull the new wagon and buggy up the hill. They did, but before they could make much headway my father and I had to take our brake off the wagon because the mud the wheels brot up clung to the brake blocks. We loved our faithful team of Fly and Nell., as they never failed to respond.

This is the beginning of a series of tales I have in mind for you girls. Gordon, your uncle, has asked Grandpa to write something similar for Stephen and Stephary. He said he had been telling them what he remember^{ed} of our "travels", but he had forgotten some of the details.

In closing this I will list the subjects taught in the Louisville, Colo. public schools in the 3rd grade. While your Grandpa entered the 3rd grade in Louisville from the "3rd Reader" in the country school in South Dakota, (he had to make the transfer in Dec) because of additional subjects taught he had to take the 3rd grade over. He was 7 years old then. The subjects taught^{and graded} were: Deportment; Reading; Spelling; Arithmetic; Writing; Geography; and Language. They averaged the grades made on each subject and then averaged the grades made each month, arriving at a grade for the whole year. When I entered in Dec. my average on all subjects was 86%; the next year my yearly average was 91%.

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