



MR. AND MRS. G. E. LEMON AT THE TIME OF THEIR MARRIAGE IN 1903.

REMINISCENCES OF PIONEER DAYS
IN THE CHEROKEE STRIP

By G. E. Lemon *

I left Kentucky on my twenty-first birthday, February 27, 1893, for Phillipsburgh, Kansas in company with my brother, Jack, John Wood and Al Travis. It was the first train ride in my life. Was at Dick (A. M.) Gilbert's store at Iron Hill the day before starting and told him I was leaving on my birthday. He said I wasn't treating Kentucky right. Kentucky had raised me and now I was going to spend my usefulness elsewhere.

We arrived at Phillipsburg March 1, and finding no work there we walked 24 miles cross country to Long Island on Prairie Dog creek in northwest corner of Phillips county. From there we drifted west 12 miles to Almena in Norton county where we all found work on farms. I worked for old Mr. Coulson for one-third of the crop—75 acres of corn. He furnished everything including board.

Will Coulson, the youngest son, was still at home, but working other land. Will was married in June and he and his wife decided to go to the opening of the Strip. John Wood and I decided to go with them.

The four of us loaded a covered wagon with things needed for the trip including cooking utensils, bedding, also a sod plow and a 10 gallon keg for water for we expected to need them in our new home. We guessed right, only the keg was about one-tenth large enough.

We traveled across the State 200 miles south and 90 miles east to Caldwell, Kansas. The roads were lined with covered wagons all the way, all headed the same direction. The further we traveled, the thicker they became. John and I sat in the back seat and practiced shooting rabbits in the hedges. John had a 38. revolver and I used Coulson's. John was the better shot when we started out, but soon I could take them away from him, often killing them with-

* The Recollections of Pioneer Days in the Cherokee Strip were written by my brother, G. E. Lemon in 1933 as a matter of record for the family and with no thought of publication. But it seemed to me the more historical parts might be well worth preserving in some form.

The brother Jack, he speaks of, is J. E. Lemon, who pioneered in Grant County along with the rest of the family, taught school terms at Nash, Renfrow and Pond Creek and later served in the Legislature from Grand County about the time of statehood. He died in 1933 and his necrology written by the Honored Campbell Russell was published in the *Chronicles*.

The writer of these reminiscences now lives near Booker, Texas, where he pioneered a second time.—Daisy Lemon Coldiron, Perry, Oklahoma.

out stopping the wagon. Killed one just 75 steps away. This one was sitting still and I had the wagon stopped, but got him the first shot.

We arrived at Caldwell about the fifth of September, camped there several days trying to get to register. We finally decided to go west to Cameron where it was reported the crowds were not so dense and the booths were keeping nearer up with the work. We registered there September 14, and the next morning John Wood and I started to walk back to Caldwell, 27 miles. John had decided to go in on the train, and I went along as he was to lend me some money since my funds were getting low. We walked every step of the 27 miles and reached Caldwell after banking hours. John loaned me \$10.00 he had with him as he would have time to draw the funds he would need from the bank next morning before the Opening.

John went to a hotel to spend the night. I paid 25 cents for a cot under a tent. There were perhaps a hundred cots under the same tent, arranged in rows with barely room for passage ways between. Just at daybreak next morning, I started back to Bluff City, 10 or 12 miles west where I was to meet the Coulsons with the wagon. Reached there about 10:30 o'clock. Found him camped on east side of trail and back of the crowd as pre-arranged.

We fed and harnessed the horses, filled our 10 gallon keg with water and were ready, but still back of the crowd when the shot was fired. We waited a half minute and followed up the rear as our only hope was to find something that might be overlooked in the rush.

Many along the line stood ready with stake in hand, and just stooped down and stuck them in the ground when the signal was given, a dozen or more to the claim, and all claiming to be first. One man directly east of the trail had his house loaded on a wagon and merely drove across the line and was hooking onto his plow when we went by. I heard later that he got in his bluff and the others pulled up and left it with him; though his settlement would have been no better than theirs had they followed up their stake setting with other improvements in reasonable time.

We drove at a lively rate down the Bluff City trail to Pond Creek Station in the sand just north of the Salt Fork between where Jefferson and Pond Creek (Grant County) now stand. Were there when the trains from the south passed through. But did not know then that John Wood had gone in on the train from Caldwell, staked a claim adjoining Pond Creek on the south, found four others on the same claim, including a woman and a negro, and had told the woman she could have his interests. John had boarded the north bound train for Caldwell and was on this train.

John stayed that night in a hotel in Caldwell and headed back to Kentucky on the train next morning. He told me afterward that the clerk of the hotel came to his room after he retired and asked admittance, stating some papers had been misplaced and might be in his room.

He accordingly rummaged in the dresser drawers awhile and went out, but returned later with the same excuse. This time on leaving he asked John to leave the door open as he might have to come back. John told him to take all the papers he wanted with him, that he would not be admitted again. Next morning he learned most of the guests had been robbed. The proprietor claimed that the clerk was a transient employed for the rush and paid off at midnight.

Leaving the Station, we drove back northeast on the Chisholm Trail a mile or two, then east looking for a claim that had, perchance, been skipped. Near night we found a corner stone which, by reading the marks, we found to be at the southwest corner of Section 16. This being a school section, we camped on it knowing we would not be trespassing on anyone's claim. I took the spade and dug down three or four feet in the bottom of a little stream for water, but gave it up as dry. We used the water in our 10 gallon keg as sparingly as possible and gave the rest to our horses.

Next morning, Sunday, September 17, we started back towards the station and in going around a bend of the creek we came to where some folk had dug to water in the bottom of Pond Creek. They were carrying it up to the Chisholm Trail along the bank, and selling it at a nickel a cupful. We bought a drink apiece but could not get water for our horses at any price.

We were out of change by this time and went to the Station to try to get \$5.00 changed but failed. We then drove to Pond Creek, the officially designated county seat. To get there we had to ford the Salt Fork but were told the water would kill our horses, so we did not let them taste it. We found Pond Creek a town of tents. There was considerable business going on but we could not get \$5.00 changed in the town, so we left as dry as we came in, though they were selling water at 5 cents a tin cupful.

We were told that we could find a hole of water in Wild Horse Creek about 10 miles southeast. Our informant said to drive southeast to the top of the Divide when we would see a lone tree, drive to it and find the water. We did accordingly and found the water but it was so salty we were afraid to drink it or give it to the horses. The river had been up and deposited the water there, perhaps a month or two before, and, in the meantime evaporation had rendered it even more salty than the river water. We fed our teams and ate dinner without water and then started up the creek looking for water.

About four o'clock we came to where somebody had dug to water in the bottom of the creek just below the Rock Island Railroad. No one was around so we got water for ourselves and team and keg. Mrs. Coulson told me afterward, she thought I never would get back with the water. I was probably gone from the wagon two minutes but it seemed like years to her.

We then drove northwest and just at dusk we camped in a little valley where we could see no stakes close. But directly after we had made camp, Lincoln Smith came to us from south of us to inform us that we were on his claim. However, he believed the one east of him was vacant. He said he was the first to stake in that part, then a man staked west of him and another east of him. They had found the corner stone north of us and in looking south the other two had decided that Smith's stake was east of the line so the man east had pulled his stake and moved on. Smith believed he was on the west place in which case the west man would be without land and the east place would be vacant.

Coulson owned the team and wagon and, of course, would get the first claim. So I took his handkerchief while he was still talking to Smith and, running about 30 rods east, tied it to a tall weed. At daybreak we moved camp over and took down our old mould board sod plow from the side of the wagon where we had hauled it all the way from Norton County, Kansas and began to plow sod. Had just got started good when some folk (Will Case and his brother-in-law, Jackson) came through on the line south of us locating corner stones. They had a rag tied to a buggy spoke and were counting the revolutions to get the distance. When they stopped their team they were in five feet of the corner, which showed that Smith was on the west place. Then we know that Coulson had a farm—the southwest of 30—25—7, eight miles southwest of Pond Creek on a tributary to the Wild Horse.

I camped with him and kept looking, hoping to find a place that had been deserted, and on October 7, found one a mile west and a little south, the N. E. of 35—25—8. I made settlement on this but on account of the crowded condition at the Land Office could not get in to file. Coulson succeeded in filing on his place and about the middle of October he and his wife left for Norton County where they made ready to return in January. Jack shucked my corn up there, and sold part of it and shipped the balance down to me. He and Coulson chartered a car. Jack put in corn and Coulson a team and wagon, a cow and household goods. They arrived at old Pond Creek Station about the middle of January. I had built a shack 8 by 10 with shed roof and Jack and I soon built a larger one 14 by 18 adjoining it thus making a "lean to" of the original shack. We had to have more room for Mother, Sister and two younger brothers, Lee and Bob, who were coming

out from Kentucky. They arrived March 16, 1894. Jack bought a cow the day they arrived and a team of ponies a little while before.

I had trouble trying to get to file on my claim, always out of luck. Would often stand in line for a day only to have the land office close when I was nearing the door. We finally succeeded in getting numbered and the officials agreed to recognize our numbers. So we did not have to stand in line any more but when my number finally went through, December 16, 1893, I lacked \$1.00 of having the necessary \$14.00 to file. Jack had been sending a little money as I needed it but the best I could do, it had gotten away. I was expecting more at this time but it had not arrived and the next day a man I had thought my friend filed on my place.

Under the Homestead Entry Act opening the Strip, settlers had three months from date of settlement in which to complete their filing. Therefore, if I had made settlement on the 16th of September my filing period would have expired on December 16, but I had settled on October 7, so had till January 7 to file. I therefore filed a contest.

This contest did not come up for trial. In the fall of '94 after my Mother and Jack had bought relinquishments on claims 4 miles southwest of where the town of Nash now stands and found another adjoining Mother's claim on the west, which I could have by making settlement, I sold out to the man who had the filing on my place and moved my improvements to the new claim.¹

I was to get two crops off the fifty acres I had plowed, move my improvements off, and get \$20.00 to be paid March 1, 1895. The place I was moving to was a rough claim that had had a Soldier's Declaratory statement filed on it which had expired without being completed. I made settlement about December 1, which would give till the same time in March to file.

Soon after this, I left in company with Will Coulson and Richard Depew to go to Claremore to hunt work, but we barely got work enough to live and returned in March in worse shape than when we left. In the meantime, Mother had collected the \$20.00 owing to me for my former claim and sent it to me at Claremore only to arrive after I had left for home. Now I must have my mail forwarded back from Claremore. I did not have a penny to get a postal card, but Mother had a two cent stamp which she gave me

¹ In 1903, Gus E. Lemon returned to his old Kentucky home to marry Miss Birdie Horning, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Elias Horning of the Iron Hill Community. Twenty years they lived on his claim southeast of Nash in Grant County and then pioneered again removing to a wheat farm twenty-five miles south of Beaver, Oklahoma, in the Texas Panhandle where they still reside. His sister, Daisy Lemon Coldiron, of Perry, is an outstanding State poet. Her book *Songs of Oklahoma* was published by The Kaleidograph Press (Dallas, Texas, 1935).

and I walked over to Coldwater, 5 miles and bought a card but when I offered the stamp in exchange, Mr. Pierce, the Postmaster, told me he was not allowed to exchange. So I told him my trouble and he loaned me a penny with which to buy the card.

So I wrote and in due time received the letter but the money was in the form of a money order on Pond Creek, Coldwater not being a money order post office at the time. So I got on my Mother's little old mule, the only saddle horse we had and rode bare back to Dick Depew's, 11 miles, and borrowed a saddle, then to Pond Creek, 9 miles, cashed my money order, then to Enid, 23 miles and filed on my place, then home 27 miles, stopping at Depew's to leave the saddle, 70 miles in one day on a little mule and 22 of it bare-back.

On reaching home about nine o'clock that night I found Mother worried to death. A neighbor had been in and left a card of a lawyer in Enid and said the lawyer had filed on my claim and wanted me to come in and see him when I came to town. When I told her I had been successful she could not believe it till I jerked out my filing receipt and handed it to Jack who was present, to pass judgment on.

The fact was the neighbor knew that my 90 days had elapsed and, wishing to hold the claim for his brother who was soon to arrive from Nebraska, had connived with the lawyer to bluff me out till his brother could get there.

This filing went on on the 19th of March, 1895 and on Thursday, April 11, I started out looking for work. Walked by way of Pond Creek to Will Easterly's 18 miles southeast of Pond Creek, covering 36 miles in one day but caught a ride in a wagon 10 miles leaving 26 miles walk. Stayed that night with Easterly for whom I had worked in harvest the summer before and who would have liked to hire me at this time but could not see his way clear to do so.

Leaving there next morning, I walked east down the divide between the Salt Fork and Red Rock Creek. Stopped often to inquire for work but everybody shook their heads and, with a sickening grin said, "No work." I decided to go via Ponca City and east into the Osage Nation hoping to find work on a cattle ranch. Reached the Salt Fork opposite the mouth of the Chikaskia River just after dark and could not tell the width or depth of the stream, so had to stay on the south side but having no bedding and the night being frosty, walked up and down the road most of the night, walking two or three miles back and forth. After midnight I pulled some tall, dead grass and made a bed and slept a little.

At daybreak I effected a crossing on the Salt Fork only to find the Chikaskia more difficult to cross. I walked up stream three or four miles and finally found a foot log by which I could

cross. The bottom land on east side of the river had been burned off for several miles and as I walked east I picked up an old hand saw that had been lost for years. The handle had nearly rotted off it, but I thought I might be able to sell it at a second hand store for a nickel and get me some crackers. It would not be the first time for me to make a meal off a nickle's worth of crackers.

When about 3 or 4 miles west of Ponca City I stopped at a place on the north side of the road for water, a covered wagon had stopped there for water also. I asked the man on the claim if one could get work in these parts and got the same old sickening reply. (Had met one man the day before from the Indian Territory and asked him how far east I would have to go to find work, he said I might go east to the rising sun and I would not find it.) The man in the wagon overhearing my inquiry for work asked what wages I wanted. This was the first word of hope I had heard since leaving home. I told him I was not setting a price. If I could get work I would let the other fellow set the price. He said his name was Hall. He lived on a claim in the Strip southwest of Arkansas City. He was going with a man named Gamble to help drive Gamble's cattle to his lease in Pawnee county and was to stay a couple of weeks to help fence for the cattle. Said he needed to be at home, but as he was owing Gamble he would not expect to be able to give me his place unless I would work for nearly nothing. I told him again that I would work for whatever the other fellow said. He said, "Get in the wagon. Gamble is on ahead with the cattle."

When he found by questioning me that I had had nothing to eat since the morning before, he would have to get into the grub box. I wanted to wait till noon—it was then about 10 o'clock, but he insisted and I climbed back into the wagon and opened the grub box. Found some bacon, burned black on both sides and some pancakes—both cold. Have never tasted anything before nor since that was so delicious.

At noon I got dinner while Gamble and Hall had a talk to themselves. After dinner Hall got on his horse and rode toward home. Still nothing had been said between Gamble and me about my working for him, but the next morning at breakfast, Easter Sunday. (April 14, 1895) Gamble asked me what I wanted for work. I told him the same as I had told Hall. He said he would give me \$4.00 for one half a month, to drive the team down to his ranch and help fence it.

I hired to him at this price. After the one half month was up he gave me \$11.00 a month to work on the ranch till August 1, when I went with him to his home in Cowley County, 7 miles southwest of Arkansas City and cut and shocked corn fodder one month

for which he paid me \$13.00. He also sold to me 20 bushels of seed wheat and loaned me his team and wagon to take it home and sow it.

I had written Bob to plow 20 acres on Jack's place for the wheat sowing. This he did getting a horse from our neighbor, T. W. Lash, and using Mother's team, a horse and a mule and a walking plow. He plowed it the deepest I ever saw. Clods were turned over so big and hard it could not be made ready for wheat. So we sowed it on Mother's place where they had planted corn that had grown about knee high, which, when about burned up from drought, Bob had cut it by hand. We hauled and stacked the corn for fodder but a wind and rain blew it away and rotted it. The wheat burned up the next spring. Bob secured a mowing machine, cut, hauled and stacked it, but it too, blew down and rotted.

I had bought a young saddle mare (Pet) from Mr. Gamble for \$30.00 and worked out the price, had her with me as well as Gamble's team of mules. When I returned to the Gamble home near Arkansas City, his wife told me he had gone to the ranch with two wagon loads and left word for me to follow by horseback, so I spent the night there and started at eight o'clock next morning to ride 100 miles to his ranch in southeast Pawnee county. Rode 85 miles by eight o'clock that night and stopped with friends of Gamble's 15 miles west of the ranch, riding on to the ranch in the morning. This 85 miles was the longest day's ride I ever made though I have ridden 75 and 80 a number of times.

Soon after I reached the ranch, Mr. Gamble with his other hired man left me in charge and went back to his home to move household goods and his wife and two small children to the ranch. Soon after they returned with the family and goods. Mr. Gamble told me he was going to drive the cattle back to his father's place near his old home, and feed them on the corn we had shucked in the fall, leaving me in charge at the ranch.

I asked him why he did not send me with the cattle, but he said he just wanted to be with the cattle. Why he thought the 200 head of cattle more important than his wife and babies, a little girl of 2 years and a baby two months, 10 head of horses and mules (extra good ones), eight milk cows and 100 hogs, I could not see. But this is what he did. Left me to buy and haul corn, go 10 miles to mill to get it ground, feed the stock, chop and haul wood, build a barn, chop and split rails, go 15 miles to Pawnee or 3 miles to Lawson post office and store in Payne county, and take his wife and babies occasionally to her mother's 20 miles away near Ingles in Payne county, driving a big team of mules to a surrey.

However, this was one of the best spent winters of my life. Mr. Gamble took no periodical. His library consisted of two or three histories, a Home Medical book and a Bible. At first I read Bancroft's *Footprints of Time*, but Mrs. Gamble suggested that we read the Bible. So we began at the first, reading chapter about. We had read more than half the Old Testament, not skipping a word, when Gamble returned in the spring. We wanted to go ahead, the three reading on through together, but he balked so we gave it up.

It was now about time for me to go back to my claim as the law allowed only six months' absence at any one time without forfeiture of rights. Accordingly I left Gamble's one morning in March to ride home on my little mare—about 140 miles—with 15 cents in my pocket, having sent home the little I could save out of my \$10.00 a month I drew for winter work. Had gone but a short distance when snow began falling. By the time I reached the Black Bear creek on Oto Reservation at noon, the snow was falling about as fast as I ever saw, but melting almost as it fell.

There was no settlement in the Reservation and I was without horse feed, though Mrs. Gamble had put me up a lunch. It so happened that some Indians were camped on the north side of a creek in the timber. I went to the camp and by signs made the man understand I wanted horse feed. He held up both hands with fingers extended. I shook my head and held up one hand. He pointed at the corn piled in the tent and held up 8 fingers. I shook my head and held up 10 fingers. He nodded his head and I gave him a nickel and took my 10 ears of corn and fed my pony.

The creek was dry so I fed down in the bottom, then walked up and down the creek bed to keep warm while I ate my lunch and waited for my horse to eat. I then saddled up and started. Snow ceased falling and the sun came out just before night.

I reached settlement in Noble county about three miles north of Red Rock just at sundown and, at dusk rode across a small stream. Finding some green grass along the edges, I picketed the mare out and, gathering dry wood, made a fire and lay down by it. A bachelor living near by saw the fire and thinking some boys were fishing and might let the fire get out, came down to see about it. When he saw my horse had nothing to eat but very short grass and learned that I had ridden all day and had another day of it ahead, he told me to come up to the shack where he had some corn piled under the bed. I went with him. He told me to take plenty for night and morning. When I offered to pay him (I still had my dime) he refused to take anything saying that all he asked was that I pass it on; if I ever had an opportunity to help anyone out do so. I assured him I would gladly do so and have never forgotten the promise.

Resuming my journey early next morning, I rode to Will Easterly's by late noon. Will was away from home but his wife gladly set me some dinner after I had fed my horse at the barn. After dinner I saddled up and rode home, about 30 miles by sundown still possessing two-thirds of the money I had started with.

I had many dear and excellent friends in my pioneer days in Oklahoma, including both Will Coulson, with whom I came to the Strip, and Will Gamble. But the two persons that linger in my mind with most admiration and respect are Mrs. Will Coulson and Mrs. Will Gamble. Two of the noblest and truest women I ever knew. Will Gamble said he was not much of a letter writer but his wife offered to answer my letters, so we corresponded for some time after I came home.

One other person whom I am proud to say wielded a great influence over me was Reverend A. Odell, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister, whom I first met at Caldwell, Kansas while in camp before the opening of the Strip. When we arrived there we found that the next camp to ours was occupied by a preacher and his son, Bert, just my age—21 years. Bert Odell was the most enthusiastic and ambitious one in the crowd. His father, though hopeful and cheerful, was anxious too, seeming to fear that if Bert should fail the disappointment might be too great, kept telling him that they couldn't all get land and he was as likely to miss as anyone. But Bert was not to be held down.

A "blowhard" came along one day and began telling us about his horse. Said he was a wild horse captured on the plains and trained. Could outrun and out-wind any horse on the line. In fact he could ride him across the Strip in four hours. So Bert made a song on it. The refrain, as I remember was:

"I could ride across the Strip,
In just four hours at a clip,
If Daddy'd only buy me a wild horse,
A wild horse."

The father seemed to take an interest in me from the start but when we broke camp and left for Cameron to register, we did not expect to see them again.

You may imagine our surprise when we were driving across the prairie from Coulson's place to Pond Creek one day about the last of September, to drive right up to Brother Odell's camp four miles southwest of Pond Creek. He was camped on Bert's claim while Bert was gone back to their home in Republic County, Kansas, to raise funds for filing and to make some improvements on the claim; also, to move his mother down later.

Brother Odell had used his homestead right in Republic County, Kansas, in an early day, so he was helping Bert to get a place that

he might live with him and help improve it. Their experience as he told us was this: Bert went in on the train at the time of the opening of the Strip and when about three miles south of Pond Creek, jumped off. Now to avoid staking on same claim with others who were continually jumping off the train and staking, and those on horseback who rode down the Chisholm Trail and even beat the train, (which was allowed to make only 10 miles per hour) he ran more than a mile west where he had his choice of the surrounding country. The horsemen who came across the country were compelled to hunt a crossing on the Salt Fork and had not yet reached there.

When he had set his stake and recovered his breath he beat it back to the Chisholm Trail where it neared the railroad tracks, for there he was to meet his father, who, as pre-arranged, came down the Trail at a lively rate with a U. S. flag hoisted above his covered spring wagon. Brother Odell said when he was driving down the trail about two miles south of Pond Creek, he heard Bert give the Comanche war whoop and knew he had a home.

Coulson was soon to leave for Norton county, so Brother Odell invited me to camp with him and I gladly accepted. We camped together most of the time for over two months. He was dependent on Bert for support, and I, on Jack in Norton county. Neither of them found money plentiful and we had to economize to the limit. One true story Brother Odell used to tell on me was that one day when beans were getting low, he said to me he didn't know what we were to do for bean soup. "Ah," said I, "I'll tell you, just put in more water."

On May 20, 1894, Coulson and a brother-in-law of Dick Depew and I started to Kansas to hunt harvest work. Will furnished the wagon and team. I begged a sack of flour and side of salt pork from Mother out of the provisions she had laid in with the little cash she had brought with her from Kentucky. Between us we were able to muster up a frying pan, some tin cups and knives and forks. I had \$2.65, Will had less than a dollar and the other fellow had one cent his sister, Mrs. Depew, had given him to enable him to write her a card when he found work. When we returned on June 8, nineteen days later he, like the unprofitable servant in St. Matthew 25, still had his penny. He said since he could not help with the provisions he would do the rustling for work. He proved an excellent hand at that but work was not to be had.

We drove clear to the Solomon river in Northern Kansas and back without finding a bit of work. We were a bit early as we went up but willing to camp and wait if we could get a promise of work, but there were local men to take every job and then some.

At one place in northern Kansas, we stopped near where a man was cultivating corn. I went with—well, call him John, as I have

forgotten his name—to hit this man for work. After we had received the usual “No,” John asked if we could find a place to camp (it was then nearly night). “Yes,” said the fellow, “right up there by that cotton wood grove is a splendid place to camp. You will find a well there where you can get water and plenty of grass for your team and you can get dead limbs for fuel if you have anything to cook.” (Some campers carried their grub ready cooked.) John looked down at the ground and said as we turned to go, “That’s the hell of it, if we just had anything to cook.”

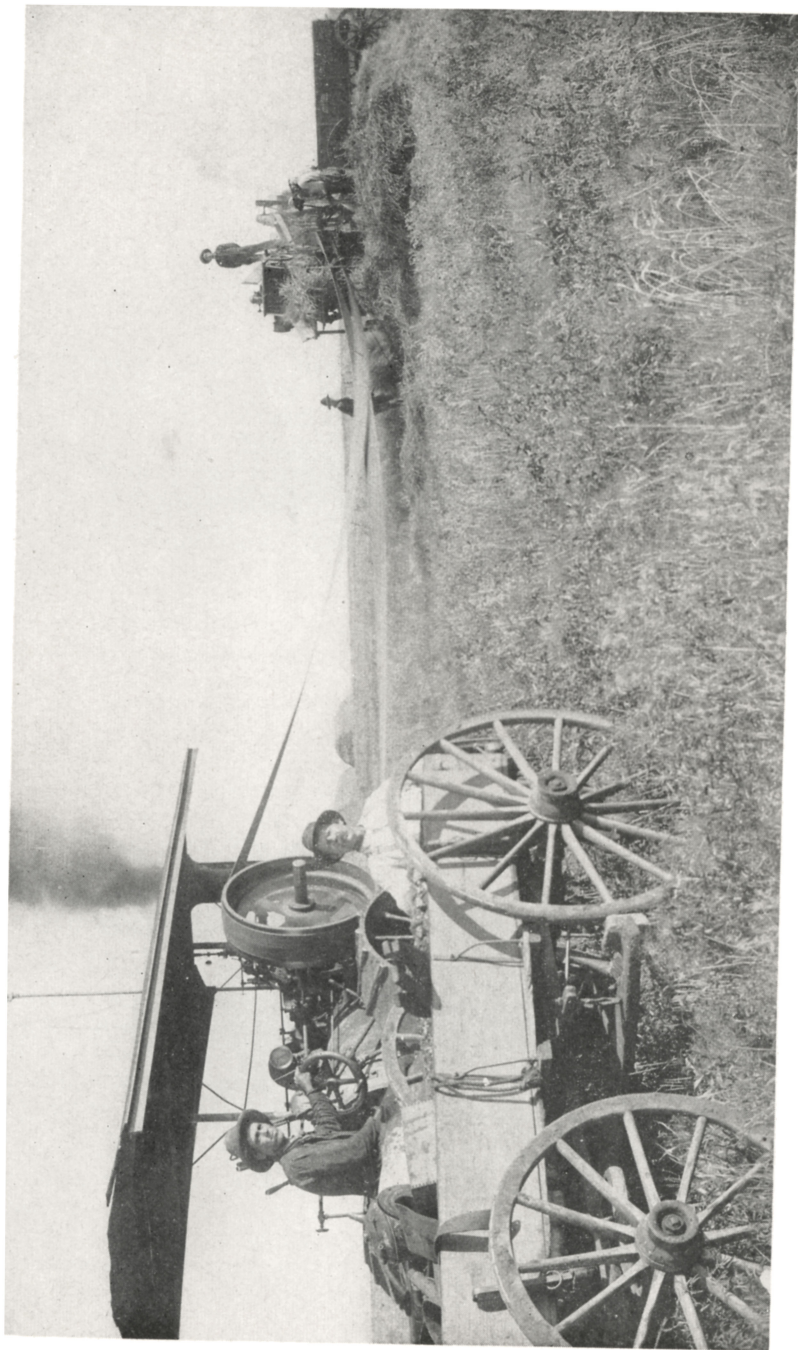
Returning home on June 8th we found a freight train piled up in Pond Creek. A wrecking crew was busy trying to clear the track. A transient who had paused with them was coming down towards us so we stopped the wagon and asked him what had happened. He said, “One of the workmen says the switch flew open.” We knew there had never been a switch there and guessed the rest. (Will tell more about this wreck elsewhere.)

On reaching home June 8th, I learned that Mr. Thrush on the school quarter east of us had been up to tell Jack that Will Easterly who lived then four miles northwest of us had written him from his old home in Harper county, near Freeport, Kansas, saying that he could furnish Jack some harvest work. Jack having taken a job with Orville Green to help harvest and thresh in the same neighborhood in Harper county, I procured the job. Early next morning I took two quilts to be used for bedding and mounted Mother’s little old mule bareback and rode 48 miles to Easterly’s place before sundown. I found them all ready to go next morning with plenty of help and to spare. Will said as he had promised the place to Thrush and I had come in Thrush’s place I should have it. But Will, having a partner who had a friend selected for the place, thought the friend should have it since I had come only as a substitute and had never worked with a header.

Will had his way in the matter, but his partner took a dislike to me from the start. To make it easier for me, next morning Will put me in a barge with a boy from Arkansas who had worked for him for some time and was a good hand. This boy said we would drive and load turn about. He drove the first round and showed me how to drive to the wheel mark and also how to load the barge.

But the very first drive I made to the barge was a bad one, ramming the spout with the corner of the barge. This caused the dissatisfied partner, who was ill tempered as well as displeased, to rail out with an oath and tell me if I could not beat that I’d better quit; that he could not afford to have the machine torn up with a green hand when there were plenty experienced men for the job.

I was scared to death that I was going to have to quit, but the Arkansas boy helped me to get straightened out and said, “Don’t



LEE LEMON'S THRESHING OUTFIT NEAR NASH, OKLAHOMA, 1897. LEE LEMON WITH HAND ON STEERING WHEEL OF ENGINE.

worry. We are working for Will, not him." He also told me not to take any more cussing off of him and that if I couldn't handle him alone, he'd help me. This did not sound very brave to me as I was fully as large as the header driver and the boy was decidedly bigger than I.

I said nothing, however, and only determined to hold my job if I could. A day or so after this my partner made an awkward drive, stopping the corner of barge some two feet in front of the elevator spout so a little wheat would spill before they could get lined up. The header driver cursed and told him to drive around and come under right.

Instead, he dropped the lines, ran to the rear of barge and before I knew what was taking place, jerked my fork from me and jumped to the ground. I landed with him, however, and snatching the fork from him, threw it back into the barge and told him if he was going to fight not to take my fork to do it with. I then climbed back into the barge and he followed and the machine began to move again. We had no more trouble and when harvest was over, Will told some of my neighbors that I was the best hand he had.

Harvest lasted 7 days. I got \$1.00 a day which was the first money I had earned since the Opening. I rode down to old Mr. Green's where Jack was working with threshing machine for Orville. Ira Green was leaving for home and Jack would like to go along, so I took his place at the machine. Had worked about two hours when the machine broke down and Orville told us he would have to send to factory for repairs, and would probably be delayed a week or longer.

I learned from the men that they were getting 15 cents per bushel each and were having to pay 15 cents a meal for board when the machine was idle; and that a 500 bushel average or 75 cents a day was hardly to be hoped for. I looked up and saw Will Easterly with a four horse load of implements headed for home. I ran out to the road and told him I would like to go along. I then got my mule and tied him to the end of the wagon, threw my bedding in and climbed to the seat beside him. We stopped on Bluff Creek for dinner and while the team rested, gathered wild plums for his wife to preserve. We camped at night in north part of our (Grant) county and arrived home late next day.

Will sold his place here, 4 miles northwest of us, in the fall to Sherman Miller and moved to a new location 18 miles southeast of Pond Creek near where Hunter now stands, where I stopped over night with him the next spring on my way out to hunt work as told elsewhere.

In the spring of 1895 when I hired to Will Gamble to drive cattle west of Ponca City, we stopped to camp the first night,

April 13, on the east side of Chikaskia river just opposite the Tonkawa Indian Agency. We had just stopped when some Indians passed us headed for the Agency.

We thought nothing of it, but a few minutes later a white man rode down, crossed the river and asked me whose cattle these were. I told him Gamble was down watering the team. He started down and met Gamble coming back. The stranger stuck his hand out and said "Hello, Mr. Gamble," as though he was an old friend. Neither had ever heard of the other before. He told Gamble that he was the Indian Agent and they had seen us and asked him to make us give them an "oxie" for camping on their ground. He said the Indians would not bother us but would torment the life out of him if he failed to secure the beef for them.

He also told us that two miles east was the Ponca Reservation and their Agency was far enough away that we would not be bothered till we would get away in the morning. We therefore drove back 2 miles east after the cattle had watered and camped. The next morning (Easter Sunday) we drove back through their town pretty early. The Indians stood on both sides watching us with long faces, but said nothing.

We detoured around the Oto Reservation because we had heard it was infested with Texas fever. Our precaution did not prevent our losing eleven head (two year old steers) the next summer, however.

On Monday evening April 15, we camped on north side of Black Bear Creek just north of Perry. Will rode to town for provisions and left me to watch the cattle grazing in the creek bottom. The weather was balmy but soon after he left there came up a "norther". The cattle became so restless I could not leave them to go to the wagon for my coat. Was most frozen when Will came back and brought me my coat and helped round in the cattle.

A Pawnee paper telling of this storm said a citizen driving out in the afternoon saw a man skinning an ox. He stopped and asked the trouble, learned the ox had died of sunstroke. Returning in the evening, he saw the same man skinning an ox, again asked the trouble and was told this one had frozen to death. Another wise guy said that frogs froze up with their heads sticking out of the ice not having time to draw them in.

When we reached the west edge of Pawnee county, Gamble decided not to go direct to his lease in Southeast Pawnee county but left me with the cattle while he rode to his brother-in-law's (Billy Snyder's) in Payne County, near Ingalls.

When he returned a week later his brother-in-law was with him and they brought over a hundred head of Snyder's cattle. Billy

returned home and came back in a day or two. I was greatly surprised when he rode up and handed me a used shirt and pair of overalls and said that I was welcome. He had noticed I had no clothes but what I had on, and without a word to me had gone in to G. V. Small's store in Stillwater and said, "G. V., haven't you got some old clothes you would give a poor devil?" G. V. gave him the shirt and the overalls. I could now wash my suit without embarrassing the cattle.

They soon left me to watch the herd on Snyder's place some 20 miles northwest of Gamble's lease on the lagoon, and each went on to his home. At this time my one half month was a little more than up. I asked Will for \$5.00 to send home. I then wrote the first message home since leaving, enclosing the \$5.00, and asked Will to furnish the stamp and mail it. I soon got an answer from Mother in which she stated Fred had sent her \$5.00 from Kentucky and Cousin Annie Lemon, the same. They are also, she said, taking "aid."

The settlers round about had met in Old New Home sod school house and selected a committee, composed of Tom Boyd, Preacher Bowerman and T. B. Nash to go to Denver, Kansas City, and Chicago to solicit food and clothing. They had been fairly successful. A committee distributed it as nearly according to need as possible. Some injustices were done, of course, despite the carefulness of the committee but the "aid" proved a life saver.

The settlers managed to raise some watermelons and turnips and some very poor kafir fodder. A few people had some small patches of castor beans. These proving to be the best dry weather plant known, for a few years most everybody raised castor beans. The price stayed around a dollar a bushel, but they had to be shelled by hand and when we later began growing broom corn and wheat, we found we could not afford to grow castor beans.

When Will Gamble and Billy Snyder left me to herd their cattle on Snyder's lease, they told me his lease was the south one-half of the section. The north one-half seemed to be vacant and I could let the cattle graze on it until some one stopped me. One day when the cattle were grazing a man came to me from north of the section line and said that was his claim and he wanted me to keep the cattle off.

I knew where the half mile corner was on the south side of on the northwest section which was his claim. One day when the cattle were grazing on his claim he came out and began rounding section but was not sure about the locations. I thought the cattle were on the northeast quarter, so I kept them off that but let them run to the northwest. However, I was mistaken. The cattle were them up. I went to him and asked what he meant.

He said the cattle were on his grass and he was driving them over to corral them on his brother-in-law's place across the road to the north and hold them for damages. I told him how I had made the mistake and would certainly not let them on him again. Nothing would satisfy him but damages. I asked what he wanted and he said \$1.50. I told him I had no money and that Gamble was in Kansas and would not be back for two or three weeks.

He went rounding up the cattle. I told him it would never do to attempt to hold them in a small corral so long and asked if he would take the saddle as security till Gamble came back. He said he would, so I left Will's saddle worth about \$40.00 and drove the cattle back bareback.

The man had three horses ranging out on the prairie and they often grazed around my camp. When they came that night, I caught them and tied them to the wagon. When he came down early next morning, I told him I wanted \$1.50 for taking them up. He said if I was going to charge full price on the horses he would have full price on the cattle. (The law allowed 50 cents a head for taking up horses and 25 cents for cattle). I told him that he had already made his charge on cattle. He insisted he could change it. I then told him that I had pawned the saddle to him for \$1.50 and would hold the horses for the saddle. He went back feeling pretty sore.

His brother-in-law soon came down and he seemed to be a gentleman. He said one of the horses was his and he needed it. I told him to take it, and I would hold the other two for \$1.00 and take my chances on the 50 cents. He said his brother-in-law had told him if he could do no better he might let the saddle go for the horses, so if I would go with him I could have the saddle. I took my pony and he the three horses and I got the saddle. The man had seen us coming and had left the place.

Besides the cattle I had the pony and the team of young mules that we had driven to the wagon in moving down to this country. I tied a mule to each end of a picket rope. When I needed the team, I would get between the mules and while they pulled away from one another I would get hold of rope and tie it to the wagon. One day when I went between them they ran around and got together, leaving me in the rope. I threw the rope down and tried to step over it but they were too quick for me. The rope caught me around the ankles and away they ran. I hit the ground only about every 10 to 15 feet.

The only hope I had was that they would cross a branch nearly a half mile away where there was timber. If the mules should run on either side of a tree, they would have to stop. This was a slim hope for though they were running toward the timber, they were likely to turn at any time.

Gamble had left me his Collie dog "Caesar", the best dog I ever saw. He kept barking at the mules and I kept scolding him lest he keep them running longer than they otherwise would. But he finally caused them to separate and pull against one another on the rope again. This threw me high off the ground and, when I came down, I found that the rope was twisted tight around my ankles. My knife had been lost in the race. But I finally got the rope worked off of my feet just as the mules got together and started to run again.

I held on to the rope about 10 feet and then let go. The mules ran nearly to the branch and then circled and came back to the wagon before stopping. I walked back over the trail we had come (my body had made a mark everywhere I had hit the ground) and found my knife and match safe which was all I carried with me. I have often wondered how long it would have been before I had been found if I had been unable to free myself.

Will and Billy came back the latter part of May and we moved the cattle to Gamble's lease on the lagoon. We drove east to a place about 4 miles south of Pawnee where we camped for the night. Will and Billy went to town and came back about 10 o'clock. I was asleep but Will woke me to say that I would have to do the waking, as he and Snyder had been drinking and would likely sleep sound.

We always rounded the cattle in at night when we were on the move and watched them till they lay down. They would lie still till about midnight and then they would get up and must be watched again till they lay down. This time they would be safe till morning.

We had a corral on Will Gamble's lease, hence the cattle did not require watching. Gamble had done the waking when we had moved them before. I told him I would do my best to do the waking. I slept under the wagon right by the cattle. He and Billy slept in the wagon. About one o'clock Gamble called me and said he could see only part of the cattle. I got up and found about 40 head out of 250.

Will and I saddled our horses and rode back to Snyder's lease. There was no road but it was nearly straight west and by taking a star as guide we were able to find it. We failed to find the cattle. When we returned to camp just after daybreak, we found Snyder had taken their trail south. Will followed while I prepared breakfast. The two men soon came back with the cattle, having found them about a mile south in a small corn field. The corn had been about waist high and was mowed to the ground. We passed by there on our way to Gamble's lease. I never saw a more completely destroyed crop. The house was near by but it was Sun-

day morning and the people there had not arisen. We drove by as quickly as possible as we did not wish to disturb their morning nap. We never heard from them afterwards.

We put in about ten days fencing one half section, then Will left me in charge and went back to his home in Cowley County (Kansas). Billy soon moved his cattle away and soon after that our cattle began to take sick and die. I talked with neighbors but found no one could tell me anything so I rode down to Snyder's 20 miles south. He got G. V. Small, (who was a livestock man as well as merchant in Stillwater) and came up.

They pronounced it Texas fever but could tell me nothing to do for it. Fifteen two-year old steers died. Nothing else took sick. Will came down August 1, and we hauled his hogs, two wagon loads, back to Kansas where we put up a hundred acres of corn fodder. I went home September 1 to sow wheat as I have told before.

POND CREEK HISTORY

Here is some Pond Creek history. My account will differ somewhat from that of Mr. George Rainey's in his book, *The Cherokee Strip*, but I am depending on my recollections.

Before the Opening there was a station and water tank on the Rock Island railroad just north of the Salt Fork, called Pond Creek station for the creek nearby which was originally called Round Pond Creek. Hoke Smith, Secretary of the Interior serving under President Cleveland, announced the county seats of L county and O county (later called Grant and Garfield) were to be located at the two stations, Pond Creek in L and Enid in O. No sooner was the announcement made than the railroad company induced some Cherokee Indians to take their allotments at these stations and bought them out in the same deal. The Indians not even seeing or caring for the land but only for the money the Rock Island was willing to pay for a chance to speculate in town sites.

When Hoke Smith learned of the deal, he ordered that no county seat should be located within three miles of an Indian allotment. So both county seats were moved three miles south of the stations, yet still on the railroad. It was thought that the Company would move their stations to them or build more and discontinue the old ones. Thus it was that the two county seats bore the names of the stations to the north.

The Rock Island did not intend to have their plans thwarted by the government. The railroad officials sold lots on their Indian allotments to settlers with the understanding that railroad would not recognize the county seat towns and would force the county seats to move to the stations. All four towns petitioned for post

offices—two in county O under the name of Enid and two in county L under the name of Pond Creek.

Enid was soon given the post office and later the station to the north was granted one under the name of North Enid. In Pond Creek the appointment was a little slow coming and folks in the county seat concluded that it might be the contest for the name that was holding it up. Hence they called a meeting to name the town.

An old man whose name I have forgotten, arose in that meeting and make a good talk in which he stated that Round Pond Creek valley was wide and favorably known and that the name "Round Pond" was practically as good as "Pond Creek" and would eliminate the trouble over the name. His suggestion was agreed upon and papers were drawn up using the name "Round Pond" to send to Washington. The next morning before the papers were mailed the appointment came giving them the post office under the name of *Pond Creek*. The papers were destroyed and thus "Round Pond" was no more.

The people north of the river heard of the meeting and for a long time insisted on calling the south town Round Pond, thus causing confusion outside of the state. Even Mr. Rainey in his book, *The Cherokee Strip*, page 304, speaks of "Round Pond" as the site named for the county seat and on page 374 says, "* * * The railroad company sought . . . to make Round Pond, a little more than three miles to the north, the real town and there built a depot." We have already seen that the depot was there before the Opening and never was called Round Pond. While the folks on the north side were calling the county seat "Round Pond" those of the county seat called the north town "Sandy Hook."

When Enid and Pond Creek were given post offices the railroad was ordered to leave the mail at these towns. They erected cranes and proceeded to change the mail bags without so much as slowing down, often tearing the pouches and scattering the mail on right-of-way. Before the crane was erected at Pond Creek there was an interval during which our postmaster would go to the Station and get the mail, bring it to the office and distribute it. The would-be-postmaster at the station would come to Pond Creek with his list of names and get the mail for his town and take it back and distribute it. This continued after the crane was built except that the mail was left in Pond Creek instead of Pond Creek Station.

I was in the Post Office in Pond Creek when the postmaster from the station came in with his list for the last time. He announced that he had his appointment and would receive mail at the station thereafter, asking our postmaster to forward all mail on the list to his office. Our Postmaster (Mr. Cummings, as I re-

member it) asked what name, to which he replied, "Jefferson". Mr. Cummings asked if it was "Thomas" or one of the boys, to which the postmaster from the station made no reply but took his mail and went. The understanding in Pond Creek was that the people there refused to re-name the town and that the name Jefferson was sent from Washington. If the postmaster was from a town by that name in Texas and had therefore chosen the name, I never heard of it till I read it in Mr. Rainey's book (page 448). Anyway it bore that name at least two years as I remember, before it was moved to its present location.

A bill was soon introduced and passed the lower house of Congress requiring railroads in Oklahoma Territory to erect depots and side tracks at county seat towns. The United States Senate, composed largely of railroad lawyers, passed it with an amendment requiring that L and O counties should first vote on where their county seats were to be permanently located and then the railroad should build depots. The House refused to concur and it went to conference.

About this time the settlers began to take a hand. A small shack was loaded on a wagon to be moved across the track but conveniently stalled on the track. A man with a signal ran down the track some distance to flag the south bound freight which was known to be coming. The engineer pulled the throttle wide and scattered lumber helter-skelter. The *Pond Creek Voice* reporting the incident said that the wagon tongue lodged in the Milky Way and the king bolt hit the man in the moon.

No sooner had the train passed on than the spikes began to fly and ties and rails were piled high to be seen afar by the engineer. A man ran down the track to the south with flag in hand. The tantalizing freight that had demoralized the wagon and shack met this north bound freight at Kremlin and told the crew to look out for Pond Creek for they were "on their ear" up there. Despite this warning and the frantic waving of the flag the train rushed on. When they saw the track piled up, the engineer pulled the throttle wide open and jumped.

This was the first train that stopped in Pond Creek. It was the train I saw on returning from my trip through Kansas hunting harvest work as already told.

Soon after this a company of Dagos that could not speak English according to the *Pond Creek Voice* came down and arrested about 80 of Pond Creek's best citizens and took them to Kingfisher for trial. But Judge Mackey went along and plead their right to trial in the county in which the act was committed, which claim was sustained and they all returned on the next train, waived the right to preliminary trial and gave bond to await the action of grand jury.

One of the business men said to me, "We are all right now so long as we keep the sheriff on this side [of the river] as he summons the jury." The grand jury was unable to dig up any evidence to link any of the men with the act, and they were freed.

The railroad now concluded that Pond Creek was a good place to halt, so the engineers would get off and walk through the town ahead of their engine looking for dynamite or other obstructions. Guards were often marched off and bridges burned or dynamited before their eyes.

Pond Creek was always careful not to wreck a passenger and the freights were always signaled. But some folks in Enid must have become more desperate. They sawed the trestle, south part of Enid, cutting the post at an angle and leaving just enough to hold the bridge but not a train. A special freight happened to be ahead of the passenger and hit the bridge. The speed of the engine carried it over but the rest of the train went to destruction below.

It was claimed that the perpetrators knew the freight was ahead of the passenger but wanted to leave the impression that they cared naught for the loss of lives and therefore had chosen a special instead of a regular freight. At any rate, it was not signaled and it was little short of a miracle that no lives were lost.

This had the desired effect. The railroad would rather have it said the government had forced them to terms than that the people had, so they withdrew their opposition in the Senate. The bill was returned from the Conference Committee just as the House had passed it and was passed by the Senate. (See Rainey's History of the Strip, pages 384-5).

I do not remember that any cattle were on the train that was wrecked in Pond Creek but a switch flew open in Kremlin the winter before, long before any violence was thought of by the settlers. At this time, a cattle train was wrecked killing and mangling many animals and scattering the rest. The railroad allowed the settlers to dress the dead and wounded cattle, and I helped eat some of the meat.

One reason I remember this so well is that I was in Enid that day and was wishing to go to Pond Creek. I climbed on this train at the tank north of Enid, stood on the bumpers between two cars loaded with Texas longhorns, and held to the ladder above, intending to "beat" my way to Pond Creek. But a brakeman came along just as the train began to move and routed me. This is all that prevented my being the dish instead of the guest at the balogna feast near Kremlin.

After the afore-mentioned bill became a law, the railroad threatened to build just enough depot and siding to satisfy the law and

put them at as inconvenient a place as possible if the towns did not pay the bill. Enid was asked \$10,000 for a \$10,000 depot and Pond Creek \$2,500 for a \$2,500 depot. Pond Creek raised the money. Enid gave them the "horse laugh" and got their depot and siding where they wanted it. The railroad built the \$2,500 depot at Pond Creek as agreed, but adorned it with the name "Round Pond." So for some two years they maintained a depot in Pond Creek called "Round Pond" and one in Jefferson called "Pond Creek," thus causing much confusion and bother to the folks in both towns and railroad officials as well, merely to spite Hoke Smith for knocking them out of their pet scheme.

Finally Jefferson tired of the ever-shifting sand moved the town two miles north and induced the railroad to move the station and name it for the town. The railroad then changed the name of station in Pond Creek to correspond to that of the town, thus ending the long, foolish and bitter fight over a name. I find no fault with Rainey's account of the county seat fight that followed, but that in naming the county in November 1894, the Democrats chose the name "Banner" the same as in County "M" but, like the Republican selection in "K" and "M" counties, each was defeated. The Republicans in each of the aforementioned counties had chosen the name "Flynn." In County "M," the Populist ticket won with the name "Woods." I worked for the name "Banner" because I thought it was a name of which we could all be proud.

THE BLIZZARD

One day in January 1894 after Jack had arrived from Kansas, we had an awful blizzard. Jack had bought an old pony for \$15.00. We had no barn and were afraid the pony might freeze. I told Jack that Pete Erwin living a mile south had a barn not in use. Pete's claim was three miles northeast of me, but he was living on a friend's place who had built and then gone to his home in Texas for the winter. One of the Doozing boys had the place adjoining mine on the south and had plowed a fireguard all around it.

It was but a quarter mile south of my shack to corner of his place, so we decided to try it. We led the pony and found our way to the furrow, then followed it a half mile which took to within a quarter mile of Pete's house. Then by using the wind as a guide, we were able to find the house. But Pete was gone and both house and barn were locked with padlocks. I happened to have a padlock just like his and had learned, after losing my key, that I could unlock it by whittling a piece of wood down square to a size I could just force into keyhole, then turning it.

So I made a wooden key and unlocking the barn put our pony in, went to the house, made another key and we went in and made

a fire. Night came and no Pete, so we went to bed. The next morning was clear but awfully cold. Still a sharp breeze from northwest so we decided to have something to eat before trying to go back. I went to the well, got a bucket of water and started breakfast. Pretty soon the door opened and in popped Pete. He said, "Well, I stayed all night with you and you stayed all night with me!"

He had been to his claim and returning home, got as far as my place and decided not to try it any farther. He had slept in our bed while we had slept in his. He had come home without his breakfast, however.

About the second thing Pete said and with alarm was, "Say, you've got water in the bucket I've been using to poison prairie dogs." It was a wooden syrup pail just like most of us bachelors were using for water. Am sure that Pete's timely arrival was all that saved our lives. In a few minutes we would have been drinking coffee made of a deadly poison. I have not heard of Pete Erwin for many years but often think of him. He was one of my best friends.