

Almira

By Hazel Phillips Stimson

A story of pioneer dreams, hardships, death, and triumph. This work is based on the life of Almira Blanchard, who left Vermont at the age of eighteen to seek her fortune in a newly opened prairie state of Iowa.



Almira¹

Grandma was a character. She stubbornly wore her pepper-gray hair in an old fashioned bun and she refused to wear her shoes in summer time except to church. She was a big embarrassment to me. At least, I thought I was embarrassed for her but now I realize that I was embarrassed for me. She didn't care!

When styles dictated long, street-length dresses with huge bustles, she wore her dresses at shoe-top length and always she covered her dress with a huge apron. These were made of calico, with large pockets, in many different colors except that her Sunday apron was white and trimmed with lace. She could carry anything in her big apron, from a new-born piglet to the latest find in the garden. Many a time, she hunted and found nests of eggs, which the hens had hidden away, bringing the eggs to the house in her apron. Stupid half-grown chickens, trying to drown themselves under the eaves, were brought in and brought back to life in the warmth of the oven door. I remember once, she found my baby brother, tottling across the yard in the rain, and she wrapped him close in her apron and brought him home.

Grandma's small house was at the end of our garden, only a hundred yards or so from our back door. She kept up a garden of her own and happily shared her flowers and vegetables with us. We were the only part of her family still living in Iowa as all the other sons and daughters had moved on to other states from Nebraska to California. In those days, when you moved away, you didn't return for a visit every other month or year. You counted yourself lucky if you ever saw them again. Letters might follow. Might not, too. Father and Mother kept up her little house, checked to see that everything was taken care of and piled wood in her woodshed to last each winter.

Actually, she was my great-grandmother, Father's grandmother. When great-grandfather died, leaving Grandma alone, Father returned from Western Iowa to farm her farm and to take care for her. He took good care of her and he allowed her to do just as she pleased. We adored her. Father would hitch the team to the surrey and take Grandma to visit Ethel and her daughter near Junston about twice a year. I never did get to go with them. It was always, "Maybe, next time." The next time never came.

Grandma insisted on driving her own horse and buggy to church each Sunday, sitting upright in the single buggy behind her loved driving horse, named Fanny, holding the reins tightly in her black gloved hands. She wore her best black gown and a pill-box hat, although huge floppy hats were the style. When we were small, we delighted to ride with her but when we noted that the other children laughed at her, we became embarrassed and joined the family in the surrey. One very severely cold winter Sunday, Father decided it was too cold to go to church and walked down and told Grandma that it was too cold to go. Time for Sunday school and there went Grandma, in her buggy. No-one was going to tell her it was too cold to go to church! She took an active part in the services, singing loudly and happily and then joining in the prayers and the Amens. No-one had told her that old ladies, like children, should be seen and not heard.

In spite of my embarrassment, I loved her and asked and asked about the olden days when she was young. She seldom answered by questions but that intrigued me the more. She spoiled us as most grandparents do in any generation but we had to mind her. She caught my brother Jim and I, out behind the barn, building a nice little bonfire in the

straw. The paddled us both and sent us home without any matches but she never told our parents on us. We must have been four and five.

The time came one winter, when she fell and broke her foot. It healed very slowly so that she was housebound for the entire winter. I had finished high school so I stayed with her all winter. I finally got past her reserve and we talked freely about her early life, and especially about her early days in Iowa.

We broke the ice when she recalled that she had hurt her foot, years ago when the neighbors cut a bee tree. One thing led to another and to yet another. "Who's bee tree?" "Reilly's" "Did Reilly's live where they do now, years ago?" "Yes, they were among the earliest settlers." "When did you come?" "We were the very first around here," proudly. "Were you scared?" "Sometimes, but we loved it."

We chatted and chatted as we cut quilt blocks and sewed them together. Then we lined them, put them on frames and quilted them. Mother and one of my sisters helped occasionally. We finished six fine quilts and I had a good start on my hope chest.

I am going to let her tell the story in her own words, as I can recall them, editing them only for continuity. She lived to be ninety years old and she went to church until the last, although she did have to ride with us after Father bought his first car. I married and moved with my husband to a farm near Kansas City. It was a wrench when Mother wrote that Grandma had gone to her heavenly home. I thought of all the courage, dignity, spirit and I hoped that some of their grandchildren had inherited these features from her. She had strong beliefs in her family, her state, and her country. She faithfully served her church and worshipped God.

I especially admire her ability to make something out of nothing. I shall call her Almira. I write this as a tribute to her and to her pioneer sisters in early Iowa.....who made homes and raised their families in a new land, alongside their menfolks in our prairie state.

¹ Mother Hazel wrote this work to honor the memory of her GGrandmother Almira Blanchard Richardson. Because she had to regenerate and produce this work from memory, she decided that she would fictionalize the work to allow her more latitude in producing a story. She found the story of Almira Blanchard compelling because the family lore held that Almira came to Iowa as a young girl at the age of about 18 years, met her husband, pioneered with the original settlers and raised a family.

I have included this work on the premise that Mother Hazel was one of the last generation who actually knew and interacted with the pioneer generation, including several of her GGrandparents. Even though she fictionalized this work, I believe that many of the incidents, locations, descriptions are her memories of her conversations with her ancestors.

In fact, however, this opening sketch of Almira could not have been with Almira as Almira Blanchard Richardson died in 1896 and Mother was born in 1904. This sketch is almost surely a picture she drew from Grandma Eliza Bruce Phillips who Mother knew quite well and also mentions that she did spend three weeks visiting just before Hazel's marriage. Eliza Bruce was born 24 August, 1848, in Aberdeen, Scotland, and died 2 May, 1929, Coggon, Iowa. Eliza was the first-born of William Bruce and Helen Scott who emigrated to New York in 1849 and migrated to Delaware County, Iowa in 1855.

In the initial five or six chapters of this work, it is impossible to tell just how much is based on recollection and how much is pure fiction. As the work progresses, however, Mother Hazel relies less and less on fiction and we can identify more and more names, places, and actual incidents.

Chapter 1¹

Jim and I both came here from the East, from Vermont. We had never met in Vermont but came to Iowa to meet each other. I came in a covered wagon with Seth and Ethel in the summer of 1852. Jim came first in the Spring of 1850. This part of Iowa was just an open prairie as far as we could see. A few lines of trees followed the creeks but the grass was high as the wagon wheels in all directions.

Back in Vermont, I lived in a small village called Marron. I don't remember my father as he was killed in a lumbering accident when I was three years old. Mother and I lived with Grandpa and Grandma Blanchard and their daughter Ethel. Ethel was their late child, born long after her brothers and sisters. She was two years older than I and we were raised as sisters. We were often mistaken for sisters, even our names suggested it, Almira Blanchard and Ethel Blanchard.

Mother was mother to both of us and Grandpa and Grandma were devoted to us and we to them. All of them were very strict and firm but they were also very loving. Grandpa and Grandma were large and had grown heavy. Most of the Blanchards were tall and large. I take after Grandpa, with heavy dark hair growing low over my forehead. Uncle Tom was over six feet and he must have weighed two hundred and forty pounds. I was as tall at fifteen as I ever was. Ethel and I were always the youngest in our classes and we were also always the largest.

Ethel and I went to the school in Marron until we graduated from the eighth grade. Many of our classmates were allowed to quit after the fifth or sixth grade but Grandpa

insisted that we finish. We didn't really want to quit. We always helped at home. We leaned to cook and to clean and we were taught to sew and mend. We helped in the garden, whatever needed doing, we helped.

Our house was a big old rambling structure, two stories and ten rooms. There were was the usual parlor, dining room, kitchen, pantry, four bedrooms, a sewing room and a playroom for us girls. There were three fireplaces but the fireplace in the kitchen had been closed up and a huge iron range installed. The house was old and drafty but it was pleasant with a large shady yard.

Of course, we had relatives and except for Ethel, I have never seen any of them since I came to Iowa. Uncle Tom lived in Boston, where he was "in the trade" as they called it. I never did know just what he did. He only came home one in two or three years. He never married.

Aunt Lizzie Chapman was a widow and lived with her four grown sons on a farm North of town. I can remember, Grandpa drove us out to see them one rainy day.

Aunt Luella Sheppard lived in the village and her husband was the postmaster. They had one of the finest homes in the village and she lorded it over the rest of the families. There were three daughters, Isabella, Candace, and Marie. Aunt Luella bought fancy materials and patterns and expected Mother to make fancy garments. Then she criticized the sewing. After a particular angry outburst, Grandpa found Mother in tears and he put his foot down. "No more sewing for relatives" and he made it stick.

Then there was Aunt Josie and Uncle Orin, who lived about two miles out on the county road and she called on us the most often. She was hard working, bossy, bitter, with a most violent temper. Except that somehow, she managed her husband and six children. As her children were older and went to a nearby rural school, we seldom saw them except at church. Uncle Orin was a good man, good natured but he never crossed his wife. Never!

Of all the children, Luella's were the most hateful, as they wore their fancy clothes. I disliked Isabella and Candace the most. Marie was often insulting and hateful but she was young enough that she really didn't know any better. They never had to work in the garden, dig potatoes, milk the cow or feed the calf. Not them!

How it all comes back! I remember riding with Grandpa on the load of hay and remember carrying pails of sap to the shed and emptying them into the vat. We delivered finished garments for Mother. Yes, we worked, but we were also carefree. I really had a happy childhood.

Grandpa had forty acres and he raised oats, potatoes, hay and he had ten acres of sugar grove. His land lay just outside of the village. Mother sewed for friends and neighbors to earn money and she was always busy.

As I recall the carping of Aunt Luella about the sewing, life evidently wasn't as carefree for the adults as it was for us girls. After Mother didn't sew for them, the sisters constantly snubbed Mother and I and sometimes this included Ethel. I don't know why they were so jealous of Ethel. I suppose we had more than they did as children and they resented it. It didn't really bother Ethel and I. We were really too busy to even care.

Grandpa died when I was thirteen and Ethel fifteen. Life went on, pretty much as usual, except that another farmer worked the farm and paid Grandma rent. Grandma sold

the horses, the carriage, and the large pieces of machinery. We were left with a cow and a large garden. Mother kept up her sewing and now she did sew for relatives but Grandma kept the accounts and collected the money due. She wouldn't listen to any complaints.

Everyone in Marron attended church each Sunday and went to prayer meetings every Wednesday night. All of our best friends were there. If you are really in earnest about making a family tree, you might find baptismal records in Marron. I don't know how well they kept records.

It promised to be a very exciting year when Grandma rented the farm to a young unmarried man, named Seth Betzer. He was living in Johnson's tenant house on the north edge of Marron. He had just recently moved into Marron from across the mountains North of town. What a volley of words that caused! The Aunts were very disapproving. Disapproving? They were downright nasty!

"Mother, don't you know he is poor white trash from over on the other side of Coulter Mountain?"

"That is no real reason," said Grandma.

"He's never home. He's gone hunting or fishing all the time. He's a worthless so and so."

"He comes to church all the time," said Grandma.

"Oh, he's just trying to pull the wool over your eyes. Or something. Nothing good will come of it."

"I rented it to him and I won't back out now," said Grandma, nettled, "and I don't want to hear another word about it."

Of course, all this talk made us girls more and more curious. We had only seen him in church and he sang in the choir so we had scarcely met him. Ethel and I thought he was handsome. He was blonde with a beard and neatly trimmed hair. And he was well mannered. We were excited and eager for spring's work to begin. Of course we kept this strictly to ourselves. Even Grandma was capable of changing her mind if she thought we were interested. Mother, busy with her sewing never seemed to notice.

Our excitement died when Mother died suddenly of pneumonia. One day, she was well and four days later she was dead. I remember her as she was laid out in front of the bay window, in her bright blue and white dress, sweet and pretty as though she was just sleeping. Mother had no living relatives except me. She never talked about her folks. She had come from Eastern Maine.

After the funeral, Grandma, Ethel and I cried together as we packed her clothes in boxes to store in the spare bedroom.

Grandma said, "We won't give her things away. You girls may want some of them as you grow older. We'll wait and see."

We never found any papers or letters, except her marriage license. So there are no records of her family.

Seth Betzer did come to sugar, came early, in fact, and Grandma liked him. We had gotten used to seeing someone else working in the sugar house but we would have helped if we had dared. What silly ideas went through our silly heads! We kept busy as Ethel and I finished Mother's orders under Grandma's supervision. We did very well, too!

When plowing time came, Seth cheerfully plowed our garden the very first thing,

even before he plowed his own fields. This was happiness itself, as in other years, we had to wait until Uncle Orin finished his fields before he came to plow Mother's garden. Although we demurely said nothing we thumbed out noses at him Orin and aunt Josie, behind their backs, of course. Even Grandma was secretly pleased.

As we became better acquainted with Seth, all of us liked him for his good nature and friendly ways. I soon noticed that he was paying more attention to Ethel than he was to me or to Grandma. I didn't mind. I liked him but if he was for Ethel, that was fine with me. When Grandma noticed, she was appalled and brought up all the old arguments of the snooty aunts. Seth and Ethel won her over, however, and they were married in the parsonage in August. Grandma's sisters were screaming mad, but about all they could do was scream and ignore the newly-weds. Ethel was eighteen and Seth was twenty-two.

The day they were married was hot and sunny. Grandma and I went with them as witnesses. After the ceremony, as the pastor fussed with the papers, his good wife brought in tea and small cakes for the occasion. I felt very grown up and excited. I had made Ethel's wedding dress, a copy of one of Isabelle's patterns. Of course, Isabelle's was made of silk but Ethel's was made of a pretty blue calico with a small white figure in it. It was made with wide shoulders, a small waist, and a many-gored skirt. I trimmed the white cape-like collar with blue braid and made three rows of flounces at the bottom of the skirt.

Grandma had only worn black or brown since Grandpa died so now she gave me a nice blue summer dress to remake for myself. I made it much like Ethel's and I really felt very grown up with my swirly skirts dragging the ground. I can picture both of our dresses yet.

Both of us very nearly rebelled when we had to wear longer skirts as we grew older. We were ever fastening our skirts high enough to avoid the hems dragging the floor. The last three or four inches of the dirty hems had to be scrubbed on the board and those skirts were miles around, so it seemed. Then they were dried and starched, the dress had to be ironed, flounces and all, and those skirts still seemed to be miles around. Often, we hitched our dresses high enough so we could belt them to clear the ground. When we were caught, we were scolded. Our floors were clean enough to eat off of but choring and gardening were a different matter.

However, I made the dresses for the wedding as stylish as possible. Grandma smiled and helped us pin on braid and worked on the many yards of hemming. She allowed us to add some trim to her good black suit, some gold braid and new buttons. We loved Grandma and she loved us, silly or no.

Ethel made a beautiful bride, her dark shining eyes and her dark hair, combed high on her head in the newest fashion contrasted with Seth's blonde. I thought they were the most beautiful couple in the world.

Grandma never talked much about the past but now she did tell me about her own wedding to Grandpa, John Blanchard. She also told me about her father, who had been a sea captain but had left the sea and walked into Vermont with only his pack upon his back. She probably gave me his name but I have forgotten. The Blanchard's were also among the first settlers in Vermont before there was any law or order and they had to defend themselves against the Indians and ruffians.

Ethel and Seth lived in the house at the other edge of town and Grandma and I rattled around in the big house. Still, we had each other for company. I took up Mother's sewing and we were busy. I milked the cow and worked in the garden. Ethel came often and helped us, spending time with us when Seth was in the field. Although we missed her, we saw them each Sunday at church and each Wednesday evening at prayer meetings. We were doing quite well financially. The Blanchard's were never wealthy but we got along.

Aunt Lizzie came every week after church for Sunday dinner. She came alone in a single buggy with a work horse to drive. Grandma always asked about the missing grandsons but they never came. Too busy, was the excuse. I can't even remember their names, only that they were Chapmans.

Aunt Luella visited every week, sometimes twice a week, and sometimes the girls would come with her. She drove a team of ponies on a top buggy. Her clothes were always the latest style and she always wore a hat. Although we were always polite, I thought they were snobby stuck-ups, especially Isabelle. At eighteen, she was keeping company with the village doctor's son, another snobby stuck-up, if I ever saw one. I didn't envy her one little bit. Outside of Seth, I had never seen anyone I thought I could be interested in.

Aunt Josie stopped every time she was in town, perhaps twice a week, usually with some errand or some gift for her mother. She always went home with an armload of baked goods or vegetables from the garden or the cellar. I didn't exactly wish to deny these things for her family but I couldn't help but resent the little she gave Grandma in return. She was rude to me as she had been to Mother. Get this! Get that! She and the other aunts did pay for the sewing, however. Grandma collected it saying, "That well be a dollar and ninety cents for the coat and sixty cents for the waist." And she got it.

Seth's parents were dead and his two sisters had married and moved to Canada. He never heard from them. After his parents died, Seth moved into Marron and became part of the village.

He told us, "My Father and Grandfather did the best they could but the soil on Coulter Mountain won't support a family. I moved into Marron as soon as I was free."

A couple of times, Grandma and I walked down to Ethel's and Seth took us home in the wagon. We called on Luella once or twice but I don't remember going out to either Lizzie's or Josie's after Grandpa died. I rejoiced that we had outwitted the aunts. For some reason none of the cousins were married. I never know why, but it seemed a victory to have a wedding in the family. How young I was at sixteen.

Harry's note. In this early chapter, it is impossible for me to realistically comment on the family names and situation. We know the family name was Blanchard and I've changed the manuscript to reflect this. The dates are early as the dates should probably be about 1855. Mother introduces an Aunt Ethel who is only 2 years older than herself along with Ethyl's marriage to Seth Betzer. Ethyl and Seth are continued the length of the book but I must note that this couple is almost certainly fiction. We will later see that this couple follows the history of the Todd family. Mother always said that Almira came to Iowa with "Old Buck", a man named Buckingham who evidently purchased a large tract in Iowa and bought and sold land. "Old Buck," is mentioned in earlier family letters. I wonder if Mother didn't feel more comfortable bringing Almira to Iowa as a young single girl with a fictitious couple.

Marron, Vermont is almost surely fictional. Almira's gravestone gives Wittingham, Vt. as place of birth.

I'm also including a passage from the 1881 "History of Buchanan County." This history is flawed in itself as we know daughter Mary did survive but the passage gives more information.

"James Richardson was born in Bennington county, Vermont, February 28, 1927. He resided there until about 28 years of age, and then came west and settled in Newton township. He entered one hundred and sixty acres of Government land, at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. He has made additions, and has now three hundred and twenty acres of good prairie, also fifty acres of timber. He lived in a log house six or seven years, and then made his present residence, a large and beautiful house. He is doing a prosperous farming business. He was married February 19, 1955, to Miss Almira D. Blanchard, of Bennington county, Vermont. They have had ten children, eight of whom are living. Their names are: Herbert..., Nathan..., Mary J..., Bedia..., Ellen..., Julietta..., Orin..., Edith..., and two sons who died in infancy. Mary and Bedia are also deceased. Mr. and Mrs. Richardson are members of the Methodist Protestant church. In politics Mr. Richardson is a strong Republican. He has held several offices, such as justice, trustee, etc. He has been the architect of his own fortune, his entire fortune, at twenty-one, being his bible."

Chapter 2

Life Turned Upside Down

Grandma died the winter before I was eighteen. She died peacefully in her sleep one cold winter night. When I found her that morning, I ran all the way down to Ethel and Seth's with the news, frightened and only half dressed. Ethel hurried back with me and Seth went to call the doctor and inform the relatives. Soon, it was bedlam with the house teeming with grieving relatives and neighbors until the funeral. I was glad to be busy cooking and making beds to the tune of Lizzies's "Almira, will you please?", and Luella's "Almira, will you bring this kind lady a cup of tea and some of the bars which Josephine brought us, to Josie's "Get this! Do that," and on and on. I was happy to think that soon all would be going and leaving me alone, but that didn't last long. "Where are you going to live now?" I had never even thought of living some place else. Home was home.

Amid this bedlam, we managed to attend church as usual on Sunday and a neighbor boy walked me home. Aunt Josie jumped us with angry questions: my cheeks burn to think of them yet. Poor Kenneth! He escaped by going home but I had to listen to her tirade over and over because I had not waited to come home with the family.

Aunt Josie insisted that I come home with her until they could decide what to do with me. I flatly refused! I argued that we could not leave the house empty in fear of thieves or trespassers. I won. Sort of. Aunt Luella had to promise to check on me every day and I was to stay at night with Ethel or she with me. They didn't really trust Ethel either but it was better than nothing. All the locks were tested and retested. I was not afraid.

The settling of the estate caused many a wrangle. There were all kinds of

arguments. The Aunt's argued that Ethel had forfeited her share when she married against their approval. But because Seth had worked the farm for two years Ethel and Seth had had their share.

Not so, the lawyer said. "Ethel will get her share, so will Tom in Boston, and Almira will get her Father's share."

The three sisters were livid. The estate was small, not really worth all the squabble. There was the forty acres, the house and lots in town and no money. Grandma died February 15, 1852. I was eighteen on April 30th, that same year.

In all this turmoil, I felt all alone with only Ethel and Seth to depend on and of course they were left out, too. They did not know what they would be doing either. Although Seth had fall plowed a few acres, the Aunt's would never allow him to farm another year. I wondered if I could teach. One of the neighbor girls was teaching out in Ohio and she had no more schooling than I had. I didn't feel that teaching was for me. I could cook, sew, keep house, clean, garden, what was for me? In time I hoped to marry but here I would never have a chance. No wonder Aunt Josie's family were still unmarried.

I couldn't decide what to do but it soon came to a head. Aunt Josie and Uncle Orin were buying the farm and the house and lots and moving into Marron, leaving their two eldest sons, Delmar and James on the farm. Their oldest sister Minnie would keep house for them. An auction sale was planned to dispose of all of Grandma's goods, which no one wanted. They had planned the future without even asking me. I was stricken on the day that Aunt Josie told me of their plans.

"You will live here with us most of the time. You can keep your present room for the time being. You will help Aunt Lizzie with her spring housecleaning as soon as you can after the sale and I am settled here in this house. Then you will help Aunt Luella once a week on Mondays with washings and ironing. It will work out well for all of us and for you, too, Almira. We'll keep the sewing room and you can continue to sew for all of us."

I really cried that afternoon. I was so angry that I stomped across the yard and split wood so violently that I broke the ax handle. I cried for Mother, for Grandma and for Grandpa. Now I was alone and no one really cared.

When Aunt Luella and Conduce drove in to check on me, I washed by face and brought out the pretty dress I had just finished for Candace. It fit perfectly and they were very pleased with it. Aunt Luella praised me, saying, "How well you sew. You are as good as your Mother. I wish I had your knack. No! You can't wear it tonight. I'll pay you later, Almira. Keep an accounting and be sure and keep all your doors locked. I'll give you a ride to Ethel's.

I really faced up to the future that day. I knew I couldn't stay there. I couldn't and wouldn't live with Aunt Josie. She hadn't paid me for Jamie's coat last week either.

"Just as soon as I bring in the eggs," she promised.

But she hadn't brought in any money this week either. I realized that this would be the way it would be. I would be an unpaid member of the families but with none of the privileges. I suppose that Aunt Josie had her good points for her family were all still at home but she drove me up the wall and I didn't even live with her. I knew I could stay with Ethel and Seth but they couldn't afford me. I decided to ask Seth if he could find or knew of a place I could stay in Bennington until I could find a job. I only had a few

dollars which I had saved from the sewing.

Of course, Seth and Ethel didn't know what they were going either. At this late date, it would be impossible to rent another farm. Because Seth had done some fall plowing, he had tried to talk the Aunt's into letting him run the farm another year. They had several stormy meetings.

Aunt Lizzie and Aunt Luella were coming early Monday morning to start sorting and to prepare for the sale, and to divide whatever they might want to keep. I waited until after dark to go to Ethel's and walked through the dark with Grandma's voice ringing in my ears, "No good girl ever walks alone after dark."

I found them wildly excited and just bubbling over with plans. "You beat us to it. We were coming to get you tonight. But now you are here. Hear our news! We are moving to Iowa just as soon as we can get ready. And we want you to come with us!"

I was so surprised that I was speechless. I must have stood there staring with my mouth open. Questions raced through my mind. How? When? Money?

"Just us," explained Seth. "You knew John Arnold was coming.¹ Well, he came and he left already. He's on his way to Iowa and we will follow him. He has bought 160 acres of land and he had staked out another 160 acres of land for me. He's marked all the corners. All we have to do is pay for it and do the legal work when we get to Dubuque unless someone else beats me to it. If that happens, we'll find another spot."

I was so dazed by this turn of events and they were so excited. Pay for it. Money?

Ethel explained. "It will cost \$1.25 cents an acre and some costs. We sold my share of the estate to Josie for \$400. She was so anxious to move into Marron, that she really paid me and in cash, too."

I could hardly believe all this news. Ethel threw her arms around me and asked, "Will you come with us? We really want you. Will you come with us?"

Seth added, "You are free now. We would love to have you. It will be less lonesome with three of us."

I was so overwhelmed, I could barely answer. It was a light at the end of the tunnel. I didn't need to think about it. Of course I would go. So it was settled.

I oddly thought to ask if there would be Indians. Seth grinned at me saying, "No Indians. Mud surely, snow maybe, cold, camping, rain, dirt, heat, mud and more mud, new country, you'll love it."

"I saw a wagon in Bennington, today, no yesterday. I'm going up to get it tomorrow and two more horses. It's an old circus wagon and looks pretty bad but we'll make it do. We want to leave by the first of May."

So soon!

"We'll make it. Pack all your warm clothes, all shoes, everything you can pack in say, two trunks. Remember, we are moving and we won't be coming back. We'll have to take all the food we can pack in. We'll be on the road for maybe two months and we may need food through next winter." Seth was cheerfully optimistic.

When Ethel and I discussed what to take, she told me there would be no toilet facilities anywhere. We were to take a chamber pot in the wagon but most of the time, we would step off into the timber or the grass, where we would be private enough. Two babes in the woods. That was us. What did we know?

"Seth said to take a pot with a handle so we could carry it most inconspicuously,

like a pail." Ethel and I laughed at his use of such big words.

Ethel said, "Oh, Seth's been around. He's never been to Iowa but he has been to Illinois and to St. Louis."

I was already planning on what to take. Grandma had made some washrags out of an old blanket. I would take them. Ethel and Seth hugged me again and happily said, "We're so glad you are coming with us."

I lay awake a long time that night, going over and over what should I take, which trunk, what is mine and what was Grandma's. It sounded too easy when Seth said to take warm clothes mostly, but we were not coming back. What could I leave behind? What a wonderful chance to get away. I remember grinning widely in the dark and hugging myself with joy. Joy! Thank you, God. Thank you.

It was Aunt Josie who came promptly with Aunt Luella on Monday morning and we started emptying closets and wardrobes. Both had rolled up their sleeves and both donned dust caps to protect their long hair and both scolded me because I didn't wear a cap to cover my braids which were about my head.

As we worked, Luella told me, "Ethel has sold her share of the estate to Josie, so guess what that good-for-nothing husband is going to do with the money. He is surely a worthless son of a bitch."

Aunt Josie snorted, "He is going West and taking Ethel with him. Disgraceful. I'm almost sorry I helped them get the money but I did want to move into this house right away. And get them off my back. Well, she has made her bed and now she will have to sleep in it."

Aunt Luella inquired, "How much did you have to pay them?"

"Too much but we did want to move right away before spring's work got any later. He had done some plowing and he left his sugar tools."

I noted to myself that she hadn't offered to buy my share. I felt so full of joy at going with Ethel, I thought I would burst. And surely they would notice. But something stopped me every time I opened my mouth to tell them. Either it was rude scorn for Seth's plans or their total lack of interest in what I might say. They wouldn't be listening anyway.

We sorted clothes, some to be thrown away, some to be divided with relatives, and some to be placed in the Mission box. Grandma had saved everything. The house was in such a mess, I could put some of my clothes in a large trunk. I could wear Mother's clothes so I kept some of her warmest and nicest things for myself. I put in her silverware and some of her prized dishes.

I gently wrapped a small silver cup, which Mother had given me on my tenth birthday. She had told me, "My Mother gave this cup on my tenth birthday and I want you to give it to your oldest daughter on her tenth birthday then she can pass it on to her oldest daughter." It was the oily thing I ever had from my Mother's people. I did give it to Mary Jane and she gave it to Viola and now Effie has it. I hope she can pass it on to her daughter someday, but I'm getting far ahead of myself.

Aunt Josie aroused me with a sharp, "Almira, quit your daydreaming and come help me. This drawer is stuck. Darn the thing!"

She continued, "Here it is Monday and the sale is next Monday. We'll never be ready. We won't get much for all this trash but at least someone else will haul it away."

We want to leave early next Sunday."

"Whatever for?" asked Aunt Luella, just as though she didn't know.

"I hate being late, that's why. Those old gossips at Deerfield would have a heyday. I'll have the girls kill and dress three chickens and start some rolls and make a cake for the picnic. Almira, you'll ride with us. We'll be along about 9:30 so be ready, you hear."

The camp meeting at Deerfield was an annual outing including several churches, for a big picnic and a grand camp meeting of singing and praying.

I told them, "I don't believe I'll go this year." But Aunt Josie ignored me as she replied, "Nonsense, of course you'll go. Whatever would people think or say if we left you at home?"

Aunt Lizzie came to help another day and they pulled out all the clothes in Grandma's wardrobe and closet. "For goodness sakes! Look at all the stuff Mother saved. Tsk! Tsk!" She pulled out six pairs of men's woolen underwear. "These are good but gee whiz, Father has been dead for five years. Put them in the mission box."

One day, I carried all the chairs and small tables down into the parlor. We had rooms full of furniture. The men would carry the beds and heavy pieces next Monday, early in the morning. No-one had kept up the fires so we quit early that night. About everything was ready so all planned to come early on Monday morning.

When Seth and Ethel came, Seth asked, "How come it is so cold in here?"

I admitted that I hadn't wanted to carry wood and had neglected the fires. I told them that I hadn't got a chance to tell the Aunts that I was going with them.

"What the heck! You are a big girl now, even if they don't know it."

He carried in an armful of wood and build a good fire in the kitchen range until we were warm and comfortable. Grandma's range might be huge and an eyesore but it still worked.

"We're about done packing. Seth brought the wagon home and has spent two days mending it. We hope to leave Sunday."

Sunday, I was surprised. Leave on Sunday.

"Yep! There's no churches along the way and no church here Sunday. We might as well get an earlier start. We'll serve him wherever we are and we might as well get used to making our own prayers. I believe that we are going with the Lord's blessing."

I really had a time packing. First, I had packed in linens, sheets, pillow cases and so on until the trunk was about half full. I knew this would never do so I emptied it and started over again. Next time I put in clothes first, which fill it faster than the linens. No again. This would never do if I was to take something of everything. I would have to pack better. How could I decide and leave so much. It made sense to take all my shoes so I packed them and Mother good everyday shoes as well as her high laced shoes. I laid these on the bottom of the trunk and stuffed them with scarves, stocking, underwear, gloves, filling the spaces around with smaller items. I become a good packer. Years later, I was dragging out things from the trunk and finding a use for them.

Mother had made a canvas bag and covered it with bright yarn embroidery, which she had use when it was necessary to visit a customer. Now I used this as a catchall for the many small items we might need in an emergency. I put in a large pair of scissors, large needles, darning needles, yarn, a sharp knife, a spoon, cut, handkerchiefs, a ball of

cord. I kept these behind my dresses and added to it as I thought of something.

Ethel said, "Seth said we would have no trouble with water. There are many streams to cross. I bet the water will be cold. I wonder about bathing and washing our hair. We'll have to wait and see."

I had anticipated such a battle to free myself from the Aunts and here it was time to go and I hadn't even told them. I would have to tell Aunt Josie in the morning. I felt guilty and wished that I had more nerve.

That night I emptied the Captain's sea chest, which had sat on the porch as a woodbox every since I could remember. It had come into Vermont with the Blanchard's years ago. So now it went with me to the West. I cleaned it as best I could, then went to bed. Tomorrow was the day!

I was too tired, I fell asleep at once but I awoke early and rejoiced in the promise of a lovely day. Aunt Josie's last instructions had been to make a pot of beans for the picnic so I set the beans to cooking over the fire. When Orin and Josie and the family came at 9:30 in their three seated wagon, I handed in the beans as my share but drew back and said that I wasn't going, I wasn't ready. Anyway, I was going....

Aunt Josie broke in furiously, "You ungrateful slowpoke. Why aren't you ready?"

Uncle Orin spoke up, "Now Josie. Hurry and get ready Almira, we'll wait for you."

But Josie said, "No, we won't," as she slapped the reins, "Giddap, Giddap! I'll teach you a lesson right now. Next time, you'll be ready."

I laughed and I cried and I cried and I laughed as I watched them drive away. I couldn't picture their surprise when they returned and found me gone.

¹ I believe that this character is based on "Old Buck" a man named Buckingham.

Chapter 3

Along the Way

When Seth and Ethel drove in, I was appalled. The poor old wagon looked very dilapidated indeed, and the second harness only hung by a thread in places. The canvas top was faded and old but it looked as though it might turn the rain. Could this outfit possible hold together for a thousand miles? Not that I cared very much. I was ready to go whatever.

We loaded the empty Captain's chest and I filled it with quilts, blankets, coats, even Grandpa's old underwear, retrieved from the Mission box. It took all three of us to load my trunk. I had my emergency bag, a box of garden seeds, which Grandma and I had saved, everything from radish to corn and flower seeds. Seth approved and urged, "Take all the seeds and take all the food we can carry. We have our tools but take some for yourself. We can fasten them here beside the plow so I picked out two hoes, a spade, a shovel, a rake, a crosscut saw, an ax and crowbar. When I looked again at the sorry harness, I took Seth to the barn and we took every stray strap and rope we could find. We would need them.

When I hesitated over something in the pantry, Seth and Ethel urged me, "You and Ethel earned every bit of this food, and Grandma, of course, so take everything that well keep. We'll be on the road for two months, maybe, and we may need to live on it all winter."

So I did. We took all the cornmeal, flour, sorghum, oatmeal, fried down pork, hams, all the dried fruit, all the seasonings, salt, salaratus, dried beans and peas. We packed these into pails, a wash tub and two barrels. I remember thinking as we piled it in that we would have to repack this many times. We even took three bushels of potatoes which I had sprouted earlier. We put these in the bottom of one of the barrels, hoping they would keep and we could plant them. It didn't bother me to take all this as Ethel and

I had raised most of it and I knew that Grandma would want Ethel and I to have it. I poured the morning milk into glasses and we drank to our journey.

Ethel had brought a three drawer chest in which she had packed her linens but when we started looking for a chest for me, Seth called a halt as he decided we had too large a load already. Ethel had brought two kitchen chairs which were tied onto the side of the wagon and she insisted on bring a third chair for me. These were on the outside of the canvas top above the plow and water barrel.

We brought out from the wash house, where they had been stored for many years, the big iron kettle and the fireplace andirons. These, along with two smaller iron kettles and a long-handled frying pan were fastened to the back of the wagon along with Seth's camping gear.

Seth's dog, Rusty, was resting under the wagon and I asked if he was going with us.

"Yes, indeed. He is a part of this exposition. Come here, Rusty. Now Almira belongs to this family and you take care of her too. O.K."

As I stroked his velvety head, I really believed that he understood his master.

"I can leave you girls alone with the wagon if Rusty is with you."

He did indeed prove a working member of our party.

We finished the morning milk and gulped down the remaining biscuits from yesterday and we were ready to leave. At the last moment, I left a note for Josie and the other Aunts.

"Dear Aunt Josie and all, I thank you for your plans for me but I am going with Ethel and Seth. I will write when I have an address. I tried to tell you but somehow I never could. I'm sorry to be leaving this way but we are going today. I took only such things as belonged to me or to Mother. And I earned all the foodstuff. Almira."

The horses were good looking sorrels, in good shape, hitched tandem, that is two in front and two following the first team. But some of the harness looked like an accident about to happen.

Seth said, "I wanted oxen but good ones are hard to find. I've been helping Boyles with his sugaring so my first team are somewhat hardened in to work but we will have to take it easy, especially at first. There are Inns along the way but we planned to camp out to save money. Do you mind?"

Did I mind? I was so excited over the grand adventure, I would have walked all the way and helped the horses pull the wagon. Seth's rifle and shotgun lay in front within reach of the driver. He gave a final check to the load and outfit, retied a couple of knots, shortened a tug and said, "Let's go."

We clasped hands in a small circle while Seth prayed, "Dear Lord and Savior, as we start on a new life this beautiful day in May, grant us a safe journey. Put your blessing on our little expedition. Keep us under Thy wing and watch over us every minute of every day. lend us Thy strength, Lord. We ask it in the name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ and in the name of Thy Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen."

The horses were frisky and se started briskly down the road the South. I wept as we traveled, crying for the life left behind with Mother and Grandma, but mostly for the furtive manner of my leaving. All these years later, I still feel that I should have told the Aunts that I was going. I've never regretted coming West but I should have told them.

Ethel urged, "Don't cry, Almira. I'm so glad you are going with us. We'll be all right. Seth will take care of us."

I tried to smile at her, a watery smile, most likely, for I knew we could take care of ourselves. I had complete faith in Ethel and Seth. I knew I was crying because I was running away.

Seth comforted me, "You are tired. Sleep a little if you can. There is room to stretch out on top of the trunks. In fact, we'll all be sleeping there if it rains, most likely."

The horses stopped to rest only twice that afternoon so we were far down the road before dark. I didn't see how he could tell but Seth said we crossed the state line into New York State just before dark. The road wound along between big hills on either side but Seth turned off the most traveled road and followed a mere track Westward between more mountains. Already Ethel and I were far beyond familiar surroundings, but Seth had often hunted in the area. He walked beside the wagon and he suggested that we join him for a mile or so.

"Today you are tired but later you will want to walk much of the time. It is really easier than the jolting wagon."

It was getting dark when Seth turned the team into a small grove of trees with running water right beside the trail. No-one was near. We had seen no one all afternoon, which was not surprising as it was Sunday. We had seen no houses on this road anywhere.

We all helped care for the horses, unharnessing, currying, brushing, and leading them to water and back. Seth staked them out to graze on the fresh green grass. I noted that he had made new stakes but the hitch ropes were so worn and frayed, it made me nervous. I had visions of hunting horses in the morning, maybe even going back as far as home to find them.

Ethel had brought fried chicken and biscuits for our first supper so we made no fire the first night. It was warm for early May but it soon cooled after the sun went down.

We spread a horse blanket on the ground under the wagon and each of us rolled up in a quilt and huddled together in the chilly air. Rusty joined us, laying across our feet. I thought I would never get to sleep, everything was so strange. I heard Seth's evening prayer, "We thank you, God, for a safe start today. Bless us and keep us. Bless those we leave behind..."

The next thing I knew, Seth was calling us. "Get up, you lazy sleeping beauties. Look! I have your breakfast all ready for you."

"Wise guy," said Ethel. "I fixed that at home yesterday."

We scrambled out and sputtered over the cold water as we washed our faces while Seth laughed at us.

"Dear Lord, be with us today. Thank you for a fine start yesterday. Thank you for this good food and bless it to our use. Bless us to Thy service. Amen."

The horses were brought in, watered, harnessed, and hitched to the wagon. "After the horses are used to traveling, I think we will hitch one team and lead the other but for now, let them all pull together. We'd better find a better way to lay out this harness so we won't have such a mess."

I hesitated but mustered up enough courage to offer to mend the hitch ropes. I could use the extra odds and ends we brought from the barn.

"Can you splice rope? Sure, I'd be happy to have you. I can but I'm all thumbs."

So as I rode I spliced rope, starting on the poorest hitchrope I found.

The second day was much like the first, riding between big hills turning light green in the spring. We were the only rig on the road. We had to stop and rest the horses often and at noon, we ate leftover biscuits with cups of water while the horses grazed for an hour. Because of the bother of harness and all, we carried water to the horses in buckets. Toward evening, we approached a clearing with several houses and we camped nearby.

While Seth staked out the horses, Ethel and I rustled up some small firewood, some small sticks and fine dead grass. I marveled as Seth started a fire with his flints, he was so quick and efficient. When I commented, he laughed and put his arm around his wife. "It's all due to the fine kindling my wife prepares for me." Although I laughed and took it as a joke, I was to realize later that it was true even if it wasn't the whole truth.

Seth was an experienced camper and he soon had a tripod and two kettles over the fire, one for water and one for our evening meal. However, we still had biscuits and now he scrambled eggs with bits of ham in his frying pan over the coals. It was the last eggs we would see for many a month.

On the third day, we turned into a well traveled road, the road that led to Albany where we would have to cross the Hudson river. Now we met many teams, wagons, buggies, a stage coach, and all kinds of drivers and riders. These drivers stared at our outfit and we stared right back. That road was to be the best we found on the road West. It led through beautiful level country, had many covered bridges and the road was well kept.

The farms were well cared for with huge brick homes and enormous cattle and hay barns. There were many orchards and vineyards. Men were plowing in the fields. Washings blew in the wind from long clothes lines.

Seth told us that this section of the state had been badly ruined during the war, which had been fought back and forth only about seventy years ago. All the crops and buildings had been burned for miles and miles around. Now there was no nicer farm land anywhere. He had no hope of ever buying land here in the East.

When I asked about the ferry at Albany, Seth explained that, "There are no bridges across the Hudson anywhere, but there are many ferries in many different places. We cross here because it is the closest. There is much talk about building a bridge here at Albany but it is an enormous undertaking. Some say that it can never be done. I'll bet they do, someday."

There were hills again before we got to Albany but we followed the road down toward the town and river and wound around the city. Ethel and I stared and stared. We had never seen a large river before, nor had we seen a large town. It almost made us dizzy to watch the wagons come and go, especially the heavy dray wagons with the large work horses. There were top buggies with prancing driving teams, and a seemingly endless stream of people came one way and seemed to all go back again. We went around the biggest business section but we could see the large buildings, hotels and business houses, larger than anything we had imagined.

The horses were skittish on the ferry and Ethel and I were almost as bad, timid and afraid. Any kind of boat was unknown to us and here we were on a boat carrying teams and stagecoaches, wagons and horses. Seth held the first team, I held the second team

and Ethel managed the reins. The ferry could take four teams and wagons or two stagecoaches each trip.

Albany was such a frightening, confusing place that I, at least, was glad to be leaving it behind. It took us all day to drive across the city and we camped just outside of town.

West of Albany, the country was settled but the houses and barns were much smaller. We made good time on this stretch of road, however, because the road was graded and rude bridges crossed the many streams. Our road followed the Mohawk river and the Erie Canal most of the way to Buffalo. We could have loaded our outfit on a barge boat and rode to Buffalo on the canal but we had no money for that. We were happy to be going as we were and didn't let that make us unhappy.

Seth told us, "It doesn't look like it but Lake Ontario is just over that line of hills to the North. And those mountains you can see to the South are the beginnings of the rugged mountains of Pennsylvania and New York. I've hunted all over this country."

Our days fell into a pattern, early rising, a fire, breakfast, and morning devotions. Then Ethel and I fixed our lunch, stowed our blankets and utensils while Seth corralled and hitched the horses. When we finished first, we helped with the teams. I had mended several ropes and we were pleased with the improvement.

In the evening, of course, came the many camp chores. We cooked whatever Seth might have found on the hunt that day, most often rabbit or squirrel. We heated a kettle of water to use every day, whether we washed dishes, our clothes, or ourselves. Starting fires with flints isn't easy and often Seth's easy-going ways found him without dry tinder or flash kindling. Ethel filled that gap, either gathering dry grass or leaves and saving them in a dry place. Usually we found water close by and handy but sometimes we had to carry water in the buckets for some distance, even for the horses.

The horses had become part of the family. Only Flora had a distinguishing mark, a white blazed face. She, as well as Prince, Barney, and Bella, each had his or her own oddities. Bella developed a sore shoulder. We changed her collar but that did no good. Every other day, Seth had to grease the wagon wheels with a mixture of tallow and sheep's grease so we tried that on her shoulder. No success. I made a poultice of cornmeal, doubling several thickness of cloth and we put it on over a liberal smearing of the grease and under her collar. It must have helped because the shoulder healed.

We met many freight wagons, men on horseback, more wagons, mostly going back for another load of supplies. No one bothered us although everyone stared at our dilapidated outfit. We passed an Inn about every twenty miles or so. Every day, one or more stagecoaches passed us and we met them returning. We joked about the remarks that must go along with the stares, imagining all kinds of remarks. We stared right back. I have to laugh now to think how your and brash we were.

Then it rained! We had had such lovely weather but May is May and of course it is going to rain eventually. Our canvas top leaked like a sieve. It had looked waterproof but the rain opened up[holes and seams we had never suspected. We were facing the rain so that the rain came in the front opening and soon we were soaked and also freezing from the cold Northwest wind blowing off the lake. Ethel and I huddled together wherever we thought we found a drier spot, our teeth chattering. Seth was little better off as he sloughed alongside in the mud. The horses didn't seem to mind but Rusty did. He slunk

along, trying to keep dry under the wagon.

Seth was worried so he turned up a well worn trail, hoping to find an Inn for the night but instead he came to a little country store. He did manage to buy a small section of canvas which served to protect us from in front, in the driver's seat. We found some dry clothes in a trunk and changed, then using the canvas as a shield, we drove on. We drove three days in the rain, miserable all the time. We sure had to learn how to camp in the rain. When we stopped, we could find little comfort, but of course, we had to let the horses rest and graze. We slept in the wagon but the only thing good about it was that it was wetter outside. For two days we didn't have a fire. Seth growled at himself for not being better prepared to camp in the rain. We managed a few state biscuits and some dried fruit, but we were too miserable to worry about being hungry.

Chapter 4

The Mississippi

When the skies cleared, we had beautiful weather again. We lay over for two days in a bright spot of sunshine. We dried our blankets, our clothes, canvas and all. Seth made a pole line near the fire and we spread our everything over lines, bushes, wagon wheels, anyplace we thought to use.

Someway, Seth found some dry matter to start the fire and we warmed ourselves and we splurged. We cut into one of the hams and feasted on ham and pancakes. How good it tasted.

We were really very lucky because none of the seeds had been wet and none of the food was wet enough to spoil. We resorted all the boxes and barrels and dried the wagon as best we could.

When the canvas top was dry enough, Ethel and I patched many of the holes and seams. We used the awl from Seth's shoe repair set to make holes, then we threaded strands of rope through to fasten the patch, one of us on each side to push the strand through, then tie the ends in knots. Sometimes Seth had to stand on the plow or on a barrel to reach those we couldn't do. The patches had to go on the outside so we were looking more and more rakish.

We moved on the third day, sporting a line of clothes hanging from the plow and the chairs. many things were not yet dry but we felt we had to move on. We giggled and laughed at our appearance because we were now giving the teamsters something to stare at.

Ethel and I had now joined Seth in walking beside the wagon most of the time. Beside the wheel tracks on each side, often there was a path worn smooth by the many

people walking beside their wagons. We enjoyed the new scenery, the birds, the new plants, the strange trees, and the many small animals, which Rusty stirred up. Usually we camped alone but some evenings, we camped near by another wagon or group of wagons. Many like ours were just make-shifts but some others were marvels. One even had a tent and a rocking chair, where Grandma sat and rocked while the rest of the family did the camp chores.

Everyday something broke so that we had to mend it, repair it, or throw it away. Wagon spokes, straps, ropes: once the tail gate came off, throwing the kettles and irons onto the ground. I tell you, we become Ethel, Seth, and Almira Fix-it.

Somewhere in Ohio, Flora went lame and although we nursed her along for two more days, she couldn't keep up, and became worse. Seth thought that she must have a stone in her foot which he couldn't dig out and it seemed to be getting deeper. The next day, Seth left her with a roadside cabin and we went on without her. Ethel and I cried as we drove away. "Hush," said Seth, "She's only a horse." However, he scarcely spoke to us the rest of the day. With only three horses, we were slowed somewhat. We changed a horse every half day and led one horse at all times.

Constantly, we met dray wagons and freight wagons, pulled by four horses, on their way back East for more supplies to haul to the new towns springing up in Illinois and Iowa. That was what John Arnold was doing in Iowa but he was hauling between Dubuque and some other Iowa towns. I thought the new names were exciting. It was an adventure. I even thought it exciting when we had to help some freight wagon through a deep mudhole. The road followed the ridges but of course, eventually it had to cross a stream or a bog. We helped many a driver and many helped us.

We were never as miserable again when it rained, partly because it was warmer and partly because we learned to cope. We still had some leaks but we had redistributed the load and each time we added another patch. When we rearranged, we made sure our seeds and food would stay dry. also we carried a small supply of wood and kindling at all times. The piece of canvas was valuable by protecting in the front of the wagon and also from the damp ground when we camped in the wet.

We still found Inns along the way but houses and barns were scarce. We left the timbered areas behind and were crossing long stretches of grassland, much of it so wet and boggy, no one would want it. The Inns were set up to care for the stage coach passengers and the stage horses.

We had hitch ropes break, tugs broke, reins broke, wagon spokes broke, somehow we cobbled them together. Once Seth had to remake part of a wagon wheel, which took him most of two days. Prince threw a shoe and had to be reshod. The horses got thinner and thinner so that Seth had to spend a few precious pennies to buy oats for his horses. We were indeed lucky. We found an Inn willing to sell them to us. After all, we know that the oats had been freighted in for the stage coach teams.

There was just no way to hurry. Plod-plod-plod- through the mud. We crossed more and more grassland and fewer and fewer trees but the ruts got deeper. Whenever we got stuck in a mudhole or stream, we waited until some other outfit came along, then we helped each other across. Sometimes, we needed only to push each other, other times we hitched all horses to one rig and pushed besides, until everyone was on solid ground again.

One day, no one came along. We unloaded everything we could carry, carrying it through the mud to solid ground. Then, using pole pries, we pushed on the wagon to help the horses and finally freed the wagon and team from the bog. We were so tired that we camped right there, we simply couldn't go any further. Oh, we learned about mudholes all right. When to use the poles, and when to wait for help. Several times we helped the passengers push the stagecoach through the mire. It all sounds terrible but the men all swore, joked, laughed, sharing the good with the bad.

Each day Seth hunted for game but the game was scarce along the trail so we were forced to use more and more of our stores. After miles and days of prairie grass, the trail wound finally to the Galena Territory in Illinois. Here, there were trees and hills more like home in Vermont. I was dumbfounded when we came to Galena itself. Here was a bustling city with large brick homes, a brick business district all very elaborate. Hacks, buggies, wagons hurried about. How could this town be here? After all the miles of open country and the crude trails we had followed? As we marveled, Seth explained that all the city had come up the Mississippi and all the original settlers with their goods had come by boat and they had mined lead and sold it down the river. Most of the people were now engaged in helping people go West just as we were doing. Galena wasn't right on the Mississippi but on the Galena river which emptied into the Mississippi only a few miles away. It was the lead mines that made the town.

I especially enjoyed seeing timber again and asked Seth if there were trees on his land.

He replied, "Arnold said there was some trees but I don't know what he meant by some. I hope there are many."

West of Galena we struggled up and over and around some of the largest hills we had seen since Vermont. From the ridges we could see a far distance but most of the time we traveled down a tunnel of trees whether we were going up or down. At last the road led down to flat land and the Mississippi stretched before us. The Father of Waters. We stared at the vast expanse of water, almost disbelieving our eyes. Although since school days we had heard of this big river, I had never imagined the huge size of it. We had marveled at the size of the Hudson and the Mohawk, but this was unbelievable. Seth, of course told us how much wider it was at St. Louis.

On both sides of the river, there was a beehive of activity. Boats were everywhere, loading and unloading, big and little. Ferries were crossing and recrossing. Dubuque lay on both sides of the river and Iowa was on the other side. Crude buildings were strung along both banks. Men and women hurried about. Teamsters were loading their freight wagons nearby, fancy dressed men drove by in top buggies. There were all manner of carts, and many covered wagons, many much worse looking than ours.

The horses didn't mind the ferry this time. "They are so worn out, I bet they are thanking God that they can ride for a change." Seth made us laugh.

On the Iowa side, seemingly bedlam reined. Neat new brick buildings with wooden sidewalks were surrounded with crude shacks, tents, and open camps. Was everyone going West? The so-called street was a muddy, sloppy series of ruts almost as bad as those we had struggled through. All this was crowded into a narrow strip along the river and high hills towering over the town preventing any movement West. We stared at the hills in dismay. We had about reached the end of our horses strength.

We crossed about noon and at once we hunted a spot to rest the horses and ourselves. The hot sun and the steamy heat of this river town was awful. Ethel and I stayed with the outfit while Seth hunted up the land office. He was jubilant when he returned and waltzed Ethel around and around, as he reported, "I filed just as Arnold gave me the markings. Now we are landowners! 160 acres in Newton township, the last parcel, so the clerk said, in Newton township."

"It cost \$200 dollars, the filing fee was 50 cents and it took a dollar stamp. Now we own a farm even if we have little money left. Hurrah! Hurrah! It's less than a hundred miles now. By the way, we don't go over those hills. We follow the road along the river for some miles, South. This is so hot and I don't see any place to camp, let's move out of town right now."

Happily, we did so, leaving the flies and steamy heat. We camped when we found good grazing for the horses. The next day we moved on South on what was called the Iowa City Trace. There were other teams on the road but few in comparison with the trail East. The road was much better due to less travel and fewer recent rains.

We were to stop in Cascade for directions from Arnold. Well, Cascade was a surprise, too. It was just a log store with living quarters at the back and a log barn with a corral and rail fence enclosure for horses close by. Big Joe, I never heard him called by any other name, lived there alone and kept the store open for the stagecoach which came through once or twice a week.

We camped here for two days while we studied the map which Arnold had left for us, as we rested the horses. We could make no sense out of Big Joe's mouthy directions and we were about as puzzled over Arnold's map, with its signs and pictures of the trail. We hoped the map would be clearer when we actually saw the lay of the land.

We soon turned off the Iowa City Trace and followed a faint trail to the West. then we were really alone. The country was empty, no cabins, no roads, no people. The creeks were low and we made good time. We checked off each crossing on our map and we could still see a faint trail so we thought we were on the right way. We found ourselves singing as we walked beside the wagon in near perfect weather.

Rusty scared up some rabbits and Seth shot two for our supper. Tomorrow would be the day, maybe. At least we were getting closer.

We arrived at Arnold's camp in the late afternoon. Although he wasn't home, Seth had no difficulty in identifying his outfit. His horses grazed nearby and his freight wagon stood near his shelter.

John Arnold had built a lean-to shelter of logs, high enough in front for a man to stand up in but sloping to the ground in the rear. His blankets and bedroll were spread out at one end of the shelter and other gear was piled in a corner. A permanent campfire was set up in front of the shelter, with large limestone slabs surrounding the campfire to reflect the heat. He had a tripod with two kettles hanging from it. We wondered if he planned to spend the winter here in this open shelter.

We stared and stared as we set up our camp nearby and staked out our horses. Arnold's horses set up a whinnying welcome but they too were hobbled. His lean-to was set at the edge of timber with an open field sloping away to a small stream twenty or so yards away. We led our horses down to drink and back, then carried water for our own use. It was such beautiful country! Beautiful weather! We rejoiced! We hugged each

other and held a prayer of Thanksgiving. We had been on the road for Sixty-two days.

When Arnold came home that evening, he whooped at us as though he were welcoming angels. He had just returned from delivering a load of boxed freight to Marion and he was leaving again in the morning to pick up another load in Galena.

As we hugged each other, he told us, "I saw that I had a neighbor down the creek so I went calling on him. Name's McCloud. They're living in a tent. He has his wife and five year old daughter with him. He has already started to cut trees for his cabin."

"I'm not going to build this year. I'm going to wait until someone sets up a lumber mill, then I build a frame house. I like this hauling and it is good money. If I were married, I'm sure it would be different."

We talked and talked. Our evening devotions were a peon of Thanksgiving for our safe arrival, for our good health, for our pleasure of being together again, for our prospects for the future.

Teasing me, Arnold said, "I'm so glad you came with Ethel. We'll find you a good husband out here. I'll keep an eye open for a good looking bachelor for you." He offered to share his shelter with us but we slept under the wagon as usual.

Next morning, I awoke to hear Arnold rounding up his horses and Seth slipped from his bed to help him. Ethel and I dozed half asleep and listened to all the activity. Besides the men's voices, the horses were calling to each other. I could pick out Prince and Barney's whinny. Only a faint glow came from the East as he drove away and we were along again. Everything was still for a few moments.

Birds began calling above us, a woodpecker rat-a-tated nearby. Crows cawed in the distance. Rusty joined Seth and they walked into the trees. As I stretched, I wondered what this land would hold for me? I couldn't rely on Seth and Ethel forever. After the long ride, this setting seemed perfect. It was a wonderful spot. Wonderful trees. Wonderful weather. If this would last forever?

Sun sent rays of light into the softly waving tree tops. A covey of quail crossed the path as I went for a pail of water. The green of the grass and the green of the trees was as vivid a green as in Vermont. Much of our route had been covered with grass but last years tops still showed about the green. Here the new grass had overgrown the dry matter of last year.

Seth joined us, "Isn't this wonderful? Arnold has gone on his way. Today we start. Today we choose the spot for our home. I'll tend the horses while you girls get breakfast. Arnold has marked the corners. It lays just West of his. Just think! 160 acres of land and it is all ours and paid for. It's ours!

We soon found the corners and we walked over much of the farm. Tall oak, hickory, ash, and elm trees covered most of the North half of the land, gently sloping to the South. A small stream flowed through the center. We chose a knoll covered with trees and facing south, not too far from Arnold's camp. We would have one neighbor, whenever he was home.

We happily planned the house, the outbuildings, the barn, the chicken house, smokehouse, and the garden. We talked about the first field and where we should start. The sun was hot but it was pleasant in the shade.

We moved the wagon and arranged it between two trees, so that with the extra canvas we had some shelter on the ground. I was glad to be on the ground again. It

seemed like we had been riding forever.

Chapter 5¹

We Started in Iowa

How we laughed over our first improvement. At Ethel's insistence, Seth built the first privy in Newton Township. It was a crude palisade type of structure, which looked as though it was leaning against a tree. It provided privacy at last. Seth laughed at us but we were very happy because we were afraid someone might come, maybe even an Indian.

We set up a permanent camp with large stones in the center to reflect the heat and arranged the tripod over the fire area. Seth started to fell trees at once. We hoped to plant some garden this year although it was already into July. Ethel and I tried to spade a patch but found that we could do nothing. We would have to use the team and plow but when Seth set out to plow a strip for us, the plow would hardly cut the sod, let alone turn it over.²

Seth remarked, "The old Indian was right, maybe, when he said the plow turned the sod wrong side up." He had seven or eight trees down and trimmed and we cleared a spot where there was no sod. Seth used the horses to pull the logs off to one side and Ethel and I piled the branches and brush, clearing a spot, perhaps an eighth of an acre. Seth then plowed around the stumps, going this way, then that way, until the ground looked plowed, at least. Then he cut a short log with many gnarled branches and trimmed them to use as a harrow. His improvised hitch kept slipping to one end but after many turns, he called it quits and returned to his tree cutting and left us to plant what we could.

With hoes, we broke up and smoothed off more lumps and then we planted the very badly shriveled potatoes along with some beans, turnips, corn, squash, and pumpkin. We felt it was best to save most of the seed for the next spring. We took turns helping

Seth at the end of the crosscut saw. We tended our garden and cared for the horses, leading them to water and we carried water for our own use. Water was twenty rods³ away and we carried it in two wooden buckets. We set up a wash tub on a convenient spot on a stump and we improvised a table of two split logs. One end rested on a stump while the other sat on a cobbled up trestle. They might not have looked very fancy but they were solid. The garden thrived as we pulled the few weeds and hoed occasionally.

Each morning, Seth shot a rabbit, a squirrel or a prairie chicken, and we ate well. Everyday, we made a new discovery. Joyfully, we found currants, blackberries, wild cherries and plums and grapes. It was a wild, busy, summer, camping, exploring, and working toward the house. The few times it rained were welcome relief from the busy days and we lazily rested in or under the wagon and dreamed and planned for the future.

Arnold returned twice and helped for a couple of days but he was soon gone again on another trip. We didn't venture far as we were afraid of the emptiness and we feared intruders. No one ever did come. We could see where McCloud was cutting trees and see their campfire or rather the smoke from their campfire.

Then a camp appeared nearby, close to the South corner where Seth's and Arnold's met. We would have a neighbor. We took no time to explore these camps as we were urgently trying to get enough logs ready for the cabin. Seth hurried us, "Camping is fun now, in summer, but it won't be fun in winter. Iowa winters can be very bad."

Finally when Seth thought he had enough trees down and was splitting logs, Arnold came home one day with a tall stranger.

"Hi, Seth. Meet Jim Richardson. He is from Vermont also. I met him in Dubuque and I brought him along as I thought you two could help each other. He's looking for help in putting up his cabin and I figured you could use some help."

They reached an agreement. Jim would help Seth and as soon as they could, they would move to Jim's and put up his cabin. His claim was several miles to the Northwest, away from the trees, on the prairie.

Arnold found a chance to tell me, "Almira, I told you I would find a man for you. Grab him. He's a good one."

Actually, I wasn't immediately taken with this tall rough-appearing stranger. He was talkative, strong appearing, straight and tall. He seemed to have some education, was blue eyed, brown haired, his clothes were well worn and he sported a fancy battered coonskin cap although it was still too warm. His shirt had probably seen better days but now it was a dirty gray.

Jim, as we soon called him, was a willing capable worker, as was Seth so the work went rapidly. The days sped by as we worked together and became acquainted. We recalled our homes in Vermont. Jim had walked from Vermont and had been here one winter already. Both of the men were experienced woodsmen and they soon started laying up the logs. They carefully notched each end and laid each log, leveling the logs as they went. Ethel and I helped with their skids and the tackles, wherever we could.

One day, two men came walking into our camp and announced, "We came to help. I am Arlo Johns and this is Homer Bridely. We have our camp right over there, next to your corner. We came to help with the house."

Overriding our objections, "No money. So what! We have no money either but we will need your help when we raise our cabins." So it was agreed and settled and

understood that we would finish Jim's first.

With four men, the work went fast. Soon they were splitting shingles and putting on the roof. Shingles were made by hand. Logs were sawed into three foot lengths and then split as narrow as possible. These were overlapped on the rafters and held down with poles, which were then held in place with larger poles. The window and door were cut into the South wall. The door itself was made of hand hewn planks and hung on straps from my trunk.

Limerock from an exposed ridge was hauled for the fireplace. Ethel and I made yards and yards of mud, mixed with grass and we clinched between the logs of both the cabin and the fireplace. This was really hard work because all the water had to be carried and all the dirt dug from the garden with a spade. There was no floor. That would come later.

I stood back and looked at the finished cabin and rejoiced in our handiwork. I wondered what the family back in Vermont would think of it. Not much, likely. But I viewed it proudly. It was the work of our hands.

Jim didn't have any horses or wagon but he had his logs cut and split, ready to build. It was getting late in the season so we lost no time in moving to Jim's cabin. It made such a pile that Seth exclaimed, "Holy Mackerel! Did we bring all this stuff? Where are we going to put ourselves?"

We felt as though we were going on a picnic as we drove through more beautiful country, over small winding streams and through a belt of timber. The country opened up into wide prairie. Grass everywhere. A fawn leaped up to see, then dropped down out of sight, then leaped up again. Ripened seed heads and yellow flowers added color to the deepening green and the tawny heads of some of the grasses. We'll be lost but Jim lightheartedly assured us that he knew the way.

Like John Arnold, Jim had built a good lean-to shelter of logs, so we now arranged the wagon and canvas beside it to include all four of us. A row of trees followed a small stream across Jim's land which was not a square 160 acres like Seth's but one eighty lay East and West and the other eighty lay across the end of the first. The spot chosen for his cabin was on a slight slope above this small stream. The water glistened so brightly in the sunshine that I called the stream Silver Creek. Jim was pleased.

Ethel and I approved of his improvements. He had built a privy somewhat like Seth's except it didn't have a tree to lean against. He had made a small dam in the creek to form a pool from which we could dip water with a bucket. It was marvelous. Why hadn't we thought of that?

Jim's logs were smaller, mostly cherry, or elm, but they were still scattered along the creek. It didn't take long to drag them to the site with the horses. They repeated the process of notching, rolling into place, soon the roof and then the shingles. Finally, the ridge pole. Then the fireplace had to be made out of stones, confined with logs and heavily clinched with mud. There was no sand nearby so we had only very black mud to puddle with.

Since Jim had no window glass, they did not cut out a window. That would come later. The fireplace was almost as much work as the cabin.

"We should have brought a stove with us from home." "Yah." "With what." "It would take an extra wagon just to haul the stove." "Well, it would if it was like your Aunt

Luella's, it sure would." "I'm going to have a nice house some day, but for now," Jim surveyed the cabin with pride.

We celebrated the finish of the cabin with a picnic at the Wapsi River. We fished and the men swam but Ethel and I were afraid to get into the water. Besides it was too cold for me. We did catch all the fish we could fry and eat. The Wapsi was the largest river we had seen here in Iowa.

Seth, Ethel, and I returned home the next day, eagerly watching for sight of the cabin, fearing that it might have been molested in some way. Everything was as we left it except that a mouse had moved in. It was the last trip for the covered wagon. It was stripped down for use on the farm.

It was getting late for hay but Seth scythed the tall grass in the meadow, Ethel raked it and I loaded it into the wagon, ready to haul to the barn. We had no barn. Seth cut poles and set them in for a pole shed, then he cut longer poles for rafters and finished a pole framework. We covered the entire shed with hay and stacked more hay against the back. Then we had to build a rail fence around it. It was hot, tiring, prickly work, but if you have horses, you have to take care of them. We wished we had time to put up several stacks of hay but we had to be satisfied with the knowledge that horses could find feed under the snow through the winter.

While Seth helped Johns and Bridley with their cabins, Ethel and I rearranged the cabin and harvested what we could from the garden. We had a surprising amount of food. The two bushels of potatoes had grown to be ten bushels. We had beans to pick and shell. The corn didn't get ripe so we left it to dry on the stalk. We had some ripe squash and pumpkins but more were green. We sliced the green ones into thin slices and dried them in the sun.

We found all kinds of nuts, hickory, black walnuts, and hazel nuts. No matter what else we might not have, we could have the luxury of nut meats. We laid them out to dry but soon the squirrels were stealing so fast that we have to move them inside. Seth made a short false ceiling to store the nuts, beans and so on.

That was a happy time. Ethel confided that she was pregnant and the baby was due in May. I hugged her and rejoiced with her.

"I'll miss my mother. She'll never see my baby." I know how she felt. I assured her that I would be here and that we could do it but secretly I hoped that another older woman would be nearby by spring.

Snow came and the weather became colder. Seth hung a canvas over the open window and piled wood against the side of the house. He had all the tree tops left after the logs were used but they were scattered far and wide. The team and wagon were very useful in hauling wood.

Ethel brought out a white chemise and a white waist from her dresser and made baby clothes. I furnished a pale blue silk waist of mothers. I knew I would never use it and Mother would want Ethel's baby to have it. One of the old blankets, which we had not used was cut into sections avoiding the worn spots and hemmed with tiny stitches to make baby blankets.

We were very snug and cozy in our little cabin. Seth worked for days hewing and sawing and then smoothing short planks and made a table. The three chairs were very welcome. The dresser stood against the wall with shelves above it and Seth also built

shelves on each side of the fireplace. The shelves were made easily by drilling three or four holes in a row along a log, then inserted dowels, usually only a stout branch cut to the proper length. Then a plank was laid across the dowels to form a shelf. The bed was in the corner away from the fire and we made a makeshift trundle bed for my use, pushing it under the bed in the daytime. Our only mattresses were blankets laid over the mesh rope frame of the bed.

Articles not needed immediately were stored outside and covered with canvas, at the side of the doorway. Beside the doorway, Seth dug a small pit to store our potatoes and turnips. He lined the pit with hay, put in the vegetables, covered them with more hay and then a foot or so of dirt. Part of the canvas extended over the pit and we hoped we would be able to remove the potatoes as needed.

Jim stopped to visit for a few days in October on his way to Cascade. My heart fluttered whenever he looked at me but he made no motion to court me. I pretended that I didn't care.

We didn't have any more snow until December just as they had finished Bridley's house. The three men then went over to help McCloud finish his cabin. They were still living in a tent. Their's was a two room cabin with a loft and were they ever glad and happy to move into a house out of the tent. They even had a kitchen stove with them so did not need to build a fireplace.

It was all of our first Christmas in Iowa so we planned to get-together for Christmas day. The Arlo Johns and Homer Bridley families were back in Kentucky and would join them in the spring. Arlo's wife and children were with her parents, where his latest child had been born in October and he had never seen her or him. Both he and Homer were leaving soon to spend the winter in Kentucky.

On the day before Christmas, here came Jim with a big turkey and a jug of honey. He had found a bee tree. Seth was excited, "I never thought of a bee tree. We'll look as soon as possible.

Our get-together was a great success. Iva McCloud furnished roast prairie chicken, Ethel and I scrubbed potatoes to bake in the fire. And we made a cake using molasses and hickory nut meats. We made cornmeal stuffing for the turkey and roasted him in a big kettle over our fireplace.

I had made a family of acorn dolls for five year old Sarah McCloud. Outside of the cook stove, they had little furniture. We made benches of planks set on stumps with an extra one in the center for a table. It was a happy day.

Jim spent two days with us, happy days, spent eating, singing, story telling, many prayers and just plain talking. When Jim prepared to leave the next day, Seth suggested that I should send my address to the lawyer in Marron.

"You should have a little something coming. Jim is going to Cascade to mail a letter and he can mail yours too."

I finished my note and addressed it and turned to hand it to Jim but as he took it, he took me in his arms and hugged me. Ethel and Seth seemed to have disappeared outside somewhere.

"I really came to see you. Will you marry me? I need you," as he held me close.

I didn't hesitate. I knew that my future lay with this Vermont woodsman. I said yes as I accepted his gentle kiss.

Stemson and Associates Real Estate

Independence, Iowa

¹ Almira Blanchard finally found her home in Section 36, Newton Township, Buchanan County, Iowa. The location is midway between what is now Troy Mills and Coggon, slightly closer to Troy Mills. At the time she arrived, Troy Mills was a tiny cluster of cabins, with a sawmill under development. Slightly northwest of this settlement was an older cluster of pioneers located at Atlanta, a small community and Post Office, which has disappeared into history. The David Phillips family had also arrived and was located approximately one-half mile west of Almira.

² The difficulty of plowing sod which had developed over thousands of years led to the development of the "breaking plow"

³ One rod equals 16.5 feet

Chapter 6

Wedding Bells

We were married February 12, 1853.¹ in the little cabin by a visiting preacher, a Mr. Swanson, from Marion. Rev. Swanson had been asked by the McClouds to speak to a group of friends in their cabin on Sunday. It was arranged that he would marry us Saturday afternoon, stay the night with McClouds and hold his service as planned. So we were married in Seth's and Ethel's cabin. I was eighteen and Jim was twenty-two.

I wished John Arnold was home but only Seth and Ethel and the McClouds were present for the ceremony. I wore a light blue summer dress of Mother's which I especially liked. Jim rode out from Marion with Mr. Swanson, wearing a fine dress pants, coat, and tie under a huge overcoat. He grinned at our surprise.

"I wrote home and asked them to send me my good clothes in a big valise but they have also sent a barrel of something. They know that I don't have a team or wagon. I don't know what they were thinking of."

Ethel served us refreshments, a honey fruit cake and ginger tea.

Sunday, we attended the service at McCloud's cabin, enjoying the singing and the get-together. Swanson wasn't much of a speaker but he meant well and we were satisfied. Although Jim and I had planned on driving to Marion to get his barrel, it turned cold and stormy so Seth and Jim made the trip.

When it came time to load my own things to go home with Jim, it was quite a guessing game to decide what was Ethel's and what was mine. I returned the wedding dress to the trunk and it was loaded as it was. We had used many things from the sea chest. The chest was loaded and repacked with such things that I thought Ethel did not

need, extra blankets, quilts, coats, towels, even Grandpa's old underwear. I might need them now for scraps.

"Why, Almira," exclaimed Jim, "I didn't know that I was marrying a rich woman," as he help load the hoes, tools, tubs and kettles. I worried about taking this or that, fearing they might need them. I owed them so much for riding out with them; I certainly didn't want to take anything they might need. Besides, Ethel had as much right to some of the tools and pans of Grandma's as I did.

"You owe us nothing," said Seth, "We wanted you and we would have furnished everything but you shared and helped all the time."

Arm in arm, Seth and Ethel assured us of their love and best wishes. "We'll see you often. May God take care of you. We'll miss you very much but we want you to have a life of your own. God bless you both."

So we reloaded the wagon for yet another trip. There was no canvas top this time but we covered our goods and ourselves with quilts and canvas. It was a cold pleasant day when I went to my new home, where I have lived ever since. There were three or four inches of snow on the ground and I could see no trail but Jim and Seth seemed to know where they were going, as we angled northwest.

Jim and I walked from Vermont with only his pack on his back and his rifle. He had marked out his 160 acres and walked back to Dubuque to file on them, and pay for it.² Since then, he had accumulated his wood working tools, as his saw, axes and wedges, had build his lean-to shelter and now his cabin. Neither of us had any money. Jim's cabin was the only cabin in sight on that strip of prairie and he had been living there for almost two years. The immensity of the wide land awed me but I was happy to be going with Jim and I wasn't really afraid.

Although Jim had been living in the cabin, he had not cooked there but continued to use his camping equipment at the outside camp. So we installed my kettles and irons over the fire in the fireplace. Seth and Jim build shelves for my spices and seasonings which Ethel and I had divided. Jim had built a bed frame but he had no other furniture and the cabin had been mostly empty except for his bedroll and a couple of chunks of wood he was using for a chair. Jim had brought a striped bed tick in Marion and as soon as it was filed, we would have a good bed. My trunk was brought in and my other belongings were heaped in one corner of the room. The sea chest was covered and left standing outside of the door.

We really had a second wedding party when we opened the barrel because it contained many wedding gifts. There was a lovely wool filled quilt, a large double woolen blanket, knitted mittens for each of us, the expected shotgun and ammunition and a fancy quilted patchwork quilt which have prized for many years. Carefully packed in the center was a set of dishes, four of everything and a tea pot and six fragile cups. We stared at them, all of us wondering whatever will she do with them here in the wilderness. At last I said, "We'll use them."

"Atta girl," applauded Jim, "We may start with little but we have nice things someday."

Jim served rabbit stew for our supper and for breakfast we had fried venison strips with corncakes and honey. He had assured us that we would have plenty to cook and would not need to take any of Seth and Ethel's supplies. I had brought seasoning,

salaratus, and some dried fruits and lots of nuts. Jim lived off the land and very capably, too.

When Ethel and Seth prepared to leave the next day, we made plans for the spring. Jim would help Seth with his plowing and then Seth would plow for Jim while I stayed with Ethel while he was gone. I would stay until the baby arrived. We were alone.

All four of us had slept on the floor of the cabin, curled up in quilts with Rusty at our feet as usual.

Jim brought out the tick the next day and laughed at himself. "I wasn't thinking, was I? I didn't think that any one had any straw. Could we have filled it with hay at Seth's?"

As I thought of the dry prickly hay we had stacked, I doubted it would make a good bed.

"The only place I know of is down the creek about two miles south, where Jim Reece lives. He had some wheat this year, last year now. Do you suppose it would be worth it if he would let us have enough for a tick?"

We walked down the slight trail along the Silver creek, a deer trail most likely, Jim thought. It seemed like ten miles but Jim said it was two miles. It seemed very level ground but we couldn't see their cabin from our place.

They gladly gave us straw, helping fill the tick as full as they could stuff it. Reece was a talker, a rangy Yankee type. "We had a very good year last year. Nearly three acres of wheat. This seems to be very rich soil. Our corn ears were the largest I have ever seen. We wish you young folks the best of everything for a happy married life. God Bless You!"

We carried it home, awkwardly to say the least. We worked out a carrying plan, pushing the straw to the center and using the loosened ends to carry it by. When we raised it over our heads and started again, "Jim asked, "What would our folks back in Vermont think of this?" I broke up into laughter, just thinking about it, what indeed? Aunt Luella? Even Grandma? We again had to lay the tick in the snow while we laughed. We lay on the tick and watched the floating white puffs of clouds in the bright blue sky. At the thought of Jim's parents, we were off into another peal of laughter. We carried it home laughing all the way.

We lay the tick on the bad slats and stirred and stirred the straw with our hands until it lay smooth and level on the bed. Then I stitched the opening shut with a stout thread and our mattress was ready. I brought out my pillows and cases and quilts and made up the bed with our lovely new blanket.

Our most urgent need was for chairs. We maneuvered the sea chest into the cabin and upended it against one wall for a table. At first we used my trunk for a bench but it was a round topped trunk and was not very satisfactory. Jim made more shelves and put up pegs to hang our clothes along the wall. Together we made a table of hewn planks. We rested one end on the log wall and made two legs of proper length for the other end. It was crude but it worked. For chairs, we made a bench of the right height and long enough for two which could be pushed under the table when it was in the way.

Jim brought in some game every day, usually rabbit or prairie chicken but sometimes he wandered farther and came back with squirrels. He had part of a venison hanging from the front of the lean-to. The weather stayed cold and frozen but there were

no storms and we were very comfortable and happy. We had plenty of wood and kept a good fire. Each day we had a new idea, arranging and rearranging our possessions in the tiny house, sixteen feet by twenty feet. The lack of a window bothered us but we vowed we would have a window by next winter. Spring would soon be here.

The snow melted and we explored the farm, rejoicing in the dark soil and the gently rolling land that was ours.

The first few weeks we had been in Iowa, Ethel and I were fearful and very cautious, especially when Seth was away. As we grew used to being alone, we ceased to watch so constantly. But now often alone, I was afraid. Jim was gone hunting or exploring. I went with him as often as possible. From the doorway I could see southeast, miles of waving grass with enough small trees along the creek banks to form a hiding place for anything. Back of the cabin, I could see miles off to the northwest but a slight incline shut off the view to the northeast. Oddly, that is where I first looked as though I thought someone might come up over the hill. Our cabin was a snug refuge in this vast expanse.

Spring came early, that first spring we were together. Green sprouts appeared, blossoms burst out amid the dried grass of last year. Jim and I searched for and found dandelions and sour dock for greens and we enjoyed these first signs of spring. Without vinegar or butter to season, I experimented. I cooked the greens in broth from the prairie chicken and also in the dripping of the fried venison. They were delicious. We dared not use some very good looking plants. We should have hunted up an Indian to ask about plants instead of being so afraid of finding one. No Indians ever did come to our cabin but they did visit the cabins along the Wapsi. They were selling bead work or begging.

Violets, dandelions, buttercups, shooting stars bloomed. Many I didn't recognize. When the wild plums burst into bloom along the draw, Jim decided that it was time to start plowing so we better get down the Seth's. We packed a few needed clothes into a roll and each carried his own as we walked. The countryside was beautiful with flowers out all over. Some of the trees were leafing; soon everything would be green again.

It really took both strong men to turn over the sod, even with three horses on a single moldboard plow. It was hard to keep the furrow upside down instead of falling back into its original position. It was tiring work for winter softened muscles. After they had plowed about five acres or so, they rigged a few more knots and brush to the improvised drag and worked the soil over and over.

In the meantime, Ethel and I had chatted and chatted, happy to see each other again. We cooked for the men, hunted greens, cleaned the cabin and made plans for the coming baby. Ethel had been very well but neither of us knew very much about babies. We would just have to use our common sense. Of course, we had listened to much woman talk but we know very little. I was still hoping Mrs. Johns would have moved in by the time the baby came.

Jim and I slept on the floor with Rusty again at our feet. Seth and Jim made a trip to Dubuque to buy seed wheat and seed oats. They could afford only a few bushels each. It took the last of my hoarded money from the sewing. They also managed to buy a bushel of potatoes each.

Seth sowed his wheat and oats and they dragged it under. Then they moved the wagon, plow and drag to our place while I stayed with Ethel.

It was lonely without the men but we kept busy. We brought out the prepared baby clothes and folded and refolded them again and again. Three soft bands for the baby, two tiny homemade shirts, ten soft flannel diapers. Seth had managed to bring home a bolt of white cotton flannel from Dubuque. There were three long dresses, six small blankets, all made and finished with Ethel's tiny stitches. We even cut out a section of canvas to use on the bed under the baby. We carefully blanket stitched all around it, using red yarn unraveled from a worn out sock.

When we expected the men to return home, we cooked up a big pot of beans and Ethel made a cake, using honey, cornmeal, and hickory nut meats. Can you imagine it? It tasted good, too. We spent a lot of time in those early years cracking nuts and picking out the nut meats.

That was the day that Rusty frightened us with his barking. I watched him as I got an armful of wood where he was occupied along the creek bank. I thought I saw movement along the creek but Rusty quieted and we decided that he must have cornered a fox or deer, except he had never barked like that before. He returned to his fury, rushing toward the creek, retreating toward the house, then rushing forward again, barking all the while. We closed the door, checked the gun to be sure it was loaded and stood it near the door. We wouldn't see anything from the window as we waited anxiously and frightened for we knew not what. Rusty barked all afternoon. It was a long afternoon. Were we ever so happy to see Seth ride in on horseback.

"I left the team with Jim to finish putting in his wheat. I was so afraid I might become a Father and me away. That would never do."

The next day, we searched all around the creek and we did find horse tracks. Was it a stray or had somebody been lurking there? We never did know.

Now Ethel and I helped Seth plant his corn and we planted much of the garden. We planted all the seeds we had brought from home. Ethel and I had divided hers and mine and Grandma's so we each had some of everything. We planted the bushel of potatoes, cutting the seed into as small eyes as possible, even planting the peeling from the potatoes which we ate.

Ethel gave birth at five minutes past midnight, the tenth of May, after five hours of labor. A fine boy. We guessed his weight at eight pounds, and he was named Thomas Edward. I tied off the cord, bathed and dressed this tiny bit of new humanity. I tied a soft band about his belly, thus fastening a soft pad over the cord, put on the little shirt, a diaper and a dress long enough to cover his feet. I folded a blanket under him to absorb moisture and wrapped a blanket around all this, just leaving his elfin face exposed. I had never even held such a small baby before. I fell in love with babies, especially small babies, a lifelong passion for me. After his first noisy outcry and protest of flailing fists, he had subsided and lay quietly.

While I cared for the baby, Seth cared for Ethel. He changed the sheets and nightgown and took the soiled clothes outside and put them to soak in a tub of water. He fastened a wide band around her middle, pulling it tight and fastening it snugly.

"That feels good," said Ethel, "I'm missing the baby already. Can you let the baby lay here close to me?"

A little later when the baby stirred and started to cry, we tried him on the breast. He nursed at once but soon dropped off the sleep again.

"You two are so efficient. Here we have a new member of the family and everything is all done up as though it happened everyday."

Everything did go well. The days passed rapidly. I was busy adoring little Tom, caring for Ethel, cooking, working in the garden although I was getting anxious about Jim. I thought it was time for him to finish and return.

One morning, Seth announced, "Arlo Johns are back. Now we will have neighbors." After spending the winter in Kentucky, Arlo and Homer were back with their oxen, wagons, furniture and their families. The John's cabin was at the corner of Seth's fence line and Bridley's was forty rods down the line.

I hurried down the call and offered my help in getting settled. The John's family consisted of wife Julie, four year old Brad, two year old Roy and six months old Cindy. As we worked and visited I told her about Ethel and the new nephew, Tom. She was very startled. "A new baby here?"

She hastened to return my call and together we discussed baby care and answered many of our questions.

"You have done wonderfully well," she assured us, "Just you young people. You're a grand baby, Tom Betzer, so you are."

Julia was a joy to me.

When Tom was three weeks old, I felt that I could go home. Julia and brought many seeds and plants from Kentucky and she generously shared them with us. I helped Ethel set out some lilacs and pie plant. Then here came Jim with the team, wagon and plow. I ran down the trail to meet him, straight into his arms. "I missed you!"

"You missed me! I was lost without you. Is the baby here?"

We left the team standing and I introduced him to our new family member, Thomas Edward Betzer. As Jim held the baby, he said, "Hello, Tom. I'm your Uncle Jim. We're going to be friends, how about that?"

Tom stared at him as though he understood. Watching, my heart swelled with love for my thoughtful young husband.

Seth took us home the next day. Julia gave me two lilac bushes, some mint, a pie plant root and a weeping willow twig. Jim dug two promising young oak trees and we planted them in front of the cabin where they could shade us as they grew.

As we hoed, planted and weeded, I told Jim about the baby, the Johns, and the Bridley's. Jim had used his outdoor camp so we continued to do this. It was pleasant to cook outdoors and even eat outdoors, even when it rained, sitting in the lean-to and watching the rain on the growing crops. Our first summer was a beautiful summer, everything grew lush and green.

¹ Feb. 19, 1855

² The pioneer had the option of paying cash for his 160 acre purchase or making his claim and posting a bond, due and payable in one year.

Chapter 7

New Land-New Neighbors¹

Neighbors were appearing around us also. Elmer and Orange Faye staked out a claim of eighty acres just south of our line. Jim offered to help them with a cabin but they were not going to build now but wait until they could build a frame house. Charlie Cook and Enos Bruce were building a dam across the Wapsi and hoped to have a saw mill soon. In the meantime, Faye's were going to live in their wagon and cut logs for the mill. They had bought five acres of timber along the river, which was about two miles away, and were busy felling logs for their new house.

Jim and I were very glad we had our cabin. We loved it. Someday, we would have a nice house.

Faye's were very nice fellows. They had left their families back in Pennsylvania with the home folk and would bring them to Iowa as soon as the house was built. I was pleased to know that we would have a family nearby and I wished that they could come this summer.

Jim came in one day, "I found a new patch of strawberries, nice and ripe, over on the south side of the knoll. Let's go." It was a lovely day, bright blue sky, warm sunshine on a south slope. Between picking, we lay on our backs and basked in the sunshine. We ate and ate and took home several quarts of the wild sweet berries. What is so rare as a day in June? It was a day to remember!

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could save some of these instead of gorging ourselves?" remarked Jim.

I had seen Grandma make strawberry jam with maple syrup so I tried it with honey. I tried to remember how she had done it but I still can't remember. Anyway, I hulled the berries, mixed them with a bit of honey and spread them out in the sun. Jim smoothed a couple of slabs to use. I turned the berries every few hours. It was delicious. We didn't know how well it would keep so we smeared our strawberry jam liberally on

our daily corn cakes and enjoyed them.

"The country is filling up," announced Jim one fine morning. "Someone is camping over on Cedar Creek, straight west of here. I could see smoke and the top of a tent. Let's go and see who it might be. No one was there last week."

I grabbed a sunbonnet and followed him as he continued. "It's a nice place there but there are no trees, only shrubbery."

I was used to stumbling along beside Jim's big strikes, through the bogs and sloughs, holding up my skirts high above the mire.

When Jim hallooed, "Hello, there, hello," a tall gaunt young man arose from beside his fire and greeted us, "Where did you kids come from? I thought I was the only one within miles."

"We live just east of here, over that knoll and a couple of bogs away. We saw your smoke and came to see who was here. Do you need any help to get up a shelter? We are Jim and Almira Blanchard."

"I'm Eric Johnson. I just came yesterday or was it Monday? But, no I don't plan to build a house right away. I plan on a frame house but they tell me that there is no saw mill as yet."

"That's right. Someone is building a dam but the mill is a long way off yet. The part they had done washed out this spring."

"Yeah! Well, I think this is a lovely spot, here on this creek bank. I bought eighty acres. Took all the money I had. Have a cup of coffee?"

It was a lovely spot. The new grass covered the old, the willows and elderberries were flourishing. Eric had set up a camp site, tethering his horses nearby. A small tent, two rolls of provisions were all he had. The coffee was black and hot. We had not tasted coffee for a long time.

"I'm glad you came this morning. I told Ollie Cramer, I'd help him raise his new store building in Quasqueton. I'll be gone all week, most likely. Where you folks from?"

Jim answered, "We're from Vermont. Almira came with here sister by wagon and I walked all the way. We came all the way to Iowa to meet each other. We were married just last February."

Eric said, "I rode one horse and led the other all the way from Ohio. My folks are still there near Athens."

Jim and I hoed and weeded. The greens and the strawberries were the first of many changes. Soon we had turnips, peas, and green beans, carrots and early cabbage to add to our daily meals of game and cornbread or cakes. Jim and I picked wild raspberries, currants, and wild cherries. Later came elderberries, wild plums and grapes. Oh, everything grew so big and bountiful!

Eric Johnson rode over to see us several times, eagerly accepting our invitation to eat with us. He praised my cooking, saying that he was tired of his own cornpone as he called it.

One morning late in the summer, Eric rode over to tell us good-by. "I can't see staying here all winter if I can't build a house. So, I am joining a wagon train, which is leaving today from Independence. We're going west to the gold fields in Colorado. If I make it I'll come back right and build a mansion. Here!"

"Gee, we'll miss you. We liked having a neighbor."

"Since I'm joining the train, I won't need two horses. What will you give me for Goldie?"

Jim, "Joining the wagon train, eh? Now you know we don't have any money."

"Could you let me have some grub, meal and so on?" I need a blanket badly, like that one there, pointing to the horse blanket covering the big chest in the lean-to.

We made a deal, the horse blanket, Grandpa's old coat, some meal, some dried venison, dried fruit and a big piece of canvas.

Goldie is a good horse and I hate to part with her but I need these things worse and I know she'll have a good home with you." Happily he tried on the coat, threw his ragged blanket onto the woodpile and resaddled with the new blanket tied behind. As he repacked his belongings on the canvas, he told us, "I feel respectable again. The train started two days ago so I had better get going. If I don't find anything in Colorado, I may go on the California."

Shaking hands, he said, "See you next year, maybe. Take care this winter and thinks for everything."

"God speed you! Good journey and my God go with you."

Hand in hand, we watched him disappear into the horizon in the West. "Dear Father in Heaven, be with Eric as he goes on his way. Guide his footsteps. Keep him under the shelter of Thy winds. Amen."

We often wondered if he reached Colorado or maybe even California but we never heard from him again.

So now, we had a horse. First we visited Seth and Ethel the very next day, riding double all the way. We didn't let that bother us although my skirts were a nuisance. We didn't mind riding bareback. We found them very busy and little Tom was growing like the proverbial weed. At four months, he looked almost twice as large as when I first saw him. We didn't visit long because now we had to fix a shelter for Goldie and also cut some hay.

Jim cut poles from the willows along the creek and he and Goldie dragged them up to a spot close to the house. He set the poles upright for a frame, notching and lashing, made pole rafters and then we covered the entire shed with hay and fodder.

Grass was ripe now but we scythed, raked and carried it to the shed and piled it nearby. We definitely needed a wagon. We cut the corn for fodder, leaving the ears on, and we stacked it all around the shed. Then we covered the entire shed, fodder and all with hay. Poor Goldie wouldn't find much hay here for the winter. We hobbled her and turned her out to feed herself. We would have to keep what little hay we had for severe weather. More posts were cut and more poles and we built a rail fence around the shed and the stack before she ate herself out of her new home.

We had carefully scythed the wheat and tied and stacked it near the house. Jim scythed and I tied the bundles, using several stalks of wheat to tie around each bundle. Then together we had carefully stacked the bundles to cure, arranging the bundles until we had a teepee-like stack with the heads in the center and the butts exposed to the weather.

We dug our potatoes and harvested our pumpkins and squash, leaving only the root crops in the ground. We dug a pit beside the lean-to, lined it with hay and stored the potatoes.

About this time, we went to visit Seth and Ethel for a few days and we stayed two

weeks. We helped Seth raise a new barn. The mill at Junction was now sawing lumber so Seth had taken logs to the mill and hauled his lumber home.² On the last day, McClouds, Johns, and Bridley's all helped and their women folks came with them. It was a busy, happy, day, working and visiting together. We ended with a party in the new barn. It had stalls and mangers for four horses, two oat bins and room for some hay. We played charades, held a spell down and sang all the songs any of us could remember.

Ethel and I had prepared meals for the men, cared for Tom, now crawling about under our feet. We also picked up and shucked many walnuts, hickory nuts and two pecks of hazelnuts. Ethel warned me not to leave ours very long as the squirrels were bolder and bolder. Seth had added a ceiling to one half of the cabin to have a dry place to store nuts, beans and dried fruit. We would have nutmeats in everything, maybe even in our corncakes. No, the cracking was no problem. We had plenty of time during the winter.

I asked about her beans and Julie Johns had told her to heat them over a low heat for several hours to kill the weevil larva. I remembered that Grandma had heated the beans each fall but not the ones saved for seed. I heard of sailors forced to eat weevilly food but ugh.

We started home late on Saturday. We knew there had been rain but we were surprised at the amount of water at every crossing. Goldie would always cross but she had to be coaxed each time so it was dark when we came to the strip of timber. Someway, we became confused and were headed in the wrong direction. We dismounted, trying to get our bearings when Goldie decided to take her own way and left us. In the dark, we couldn't chase her and we called and coaxed in vain and had to give up. It wasn't dangerously cold but we didn't relish spending the night in the open. Jim was especially upset because he was lost. We tramped around, looking for some trace of the trail but we found nothing. It was hard work walking through the tall brambles, thorny bushes, and tall weeds which wrapped around our legs, be they pant legs or skirts.

As we rested, leaning against a stout tree, we noticed a light off to the South of us. Now we saw it and then we didn't. We worked our way though more brambles and bushes, most likely, some of the cherished raspberry and gooseberry bushes. We fell over logs and fallen branches but we finally came to a clearing and a house stood before us, dark and foreboding. At Jim's hail, some dogs set up a dreadful clamor. A tall thin man came to the door and hushed the noisy dogs. It was Mr. Reece.

"Hello. Hello. What brings you two kids out in the dark and cold? Come in. Come in."

"To tell the truth, we were lost. Someway, we started wrong and we most have been traveling in a circle. I am certainly confused. We followed a light to get here. Apparently we could only see the light when you opened the door. I thought I was traveling west and we would come to the Faye camp. We would find our way from there even in the dark."

"I'm glad you found us first. There is no one at the Faye's. A big grass fire swept across and burned out their crop and their camp. They have gone back to Pennsylvania."

Appalled, I stared open-mouthed, while Jim asked the dreadful question, "Did it go as far as our place?"

"It stopped at Cedar creek so you are all right. It would have come this way but it

rained in time. I plowed another four furrows the very next day around our buildings. But with the rain this week, we won't have any more fires this year."

"You'll stay all night, of course. It's too dark to be wandering around in the open. Tomorrow it will be easy. Are you walking?"

"Well, we were riding but our horse took off and left us, I hope she doesn't wander too far."

Reece was talking again about the fire. "In winter, we dare not let the fire go out and in summer, we hardly dare have one. Although likely this fire was started by lightning. Lucky it rained when it did."

The workmanship of the cabin was super, a work of art. I noted the smooth puncheon³ floor, the neat bed along the wall, the homemade table and chairs and the large stove used for both heating and cooking. Six youngsters were posing over a book at the table, the older one reading to the others. Soon they disappeared up the ladder into the loft. When extra blankets were brought out to fix us a bed on the floor, I apologized for making them so much work. Happily, Mrs. Reece assured me that they loved company.

Jim and Mr. Reece compared yields and Reece said, "We had a very good year, this year. The wheat heads were the biggest I ever saw. We have forty bushels of potatoes. We had an extra good garden. I still have to thresh the wheat and the buckwheat."

The next morning, we crossed the blackened fields, very thankful the fire hadn't crossed Cedar Creek. There was almost nothing at the Faye's camp so apparently they had been able to move the wagon out. Goldie was waiting for us at the gate. We should have let her take us home. It was quite an experience and we did become better acquainted with the Reece's.

We enlarged our root pit to hold all the carrots, turnips, squash, pumpkins, and cabbages and we shaped an opening into the lean-to. We covered the vegetables with hay, then piled dirt over all. It was almost a root cellar. Happily, we surveyed our winter stores. The corn was still in the fodder and the wheat in the stack.

I dried the last of the plums, adding honey and stirred it over and over until it was dry and chewy. Jim called it plum leather, but we chewed and chewed the tart leathery trifles. I tried to make a pie with no luck. Without lard, milk, or eggs, pumpkin was just another flat tasting vegetable. Ethel had made a pumpkin cake which we all liked.

We needed many things but we had no money so we didn't worry about it. When we went to Seth's for the nuts, Arnold was home for once. He had news for Jim, "I found this old broken down wagon on the road to Galena, broken down and abandoned. It must have been in a runaway or something, anyway it is all broken up. If you want it, you can have it. I loaded it. Piece by piece, and brought it home. I thought maybe you could make a two-wheeled cart out of it.

It looked pretty awful. I don't think there was a piece that wasn't broken. Jim and Seth went to work and they rebuilt that wagon piece by piece, spokes, wagon wheel rims, a new reach, bolsters, new tongue, everything. It was all fashioned from oak lumber cut and shaved as wanted.

Seth told us, "I'll bet it's stronger than it ever was. If we can rig up another harness, you can borrow Barney for awhile."

Jim was embarrassed by the general offer but felt that he had to accept. "I'll return

the favor some day.”

“Why, you already have. You helped on the barn all that time.”

We hauled the nuts home. Also we borrowed some short boards left over from the barn. Jim built a small bin for his wheat, the first milled lumber used on our farm.

We smoothed and swept a section of hard frozen ground and broke some wheat bundles in the center. We drove the horses across and over the wheat, time and again. The straw was added to the hay stack and the wheat winnowed and winnowed again, then the grain was stored in the bin. After we had finished all the bundles of wheat, we cleaned our only two barrels and filled them with wheat and Jim drove to Dubuque to have flour ground.

Reluctantly, I stayed at home. We had such good supplies that we were now afraid to leave them for very long. Although no one ever came our way, except professional hunters sometimes wandered through, we knew the state line went only a few miles to the North and all kinds of people might be following the trail. Jim left the shotgun for me. I had learned to use both the shotgun and the rifle but I couldn't hit the broadside of a barn. Still, any prowler wouldn't know that.

Jim was gone a week. It seemed like the longest week on record. He returned very happy with his purchases and his trading. One barrel of wheat was ground into flour. The other was traded for gunpowder and wadding, for a jug of molasses, for tallow for candles, salt, salaratus, cornmeal, strips of leather, rivets, and shoe nails. Happily, we hugged each other and rejoiced in our plentiful supplies for the winter. Wood was piled against one side of the cabin. Our evening devotions were deep and sincere.

Cold settled down and became severe. Snow drifts piled higher and higher around the cabin and the shed. There was so little to stop the snow, that great drifts gathered around every building. Jim shoveled a sort of path to the barn and he and the team had to take a wide circle around some drifts to get to the creek. Then he had to chop a hole in the ice so the team could drink. Before the hole froze shut again we carried what we needed for the house. Although the woodpile was just outside of the house, it was buried in snow and each day Jim cleared a spot in front of the house and sawed the wood into fireplace lengths with a bucksaw.

Each day Jim managed to slice, chop might be a better word from the venison hanging in the lean-to. Also each day we had to pull some of the contents from the root cellar, do it fast and recover.

During the day, we fed the fire heavily and kept the cabin reasonable warm. When the fire was allowed to die down and was banked for the night, the cold penetrated every nook. We learned to wash and or bathe in the day or early evening because it was just too cold in the morning. We had so many covers on our bed, we could hardly move. We wore our underwear to bed and our socks, and we giggled and giggled over each other's ridiculous appearance in our homemade night caps.

Christmas came and went and we celebrated alone, the first, last, and only time, we had Christmas with just the two of us. We read the Christmas story, sang hymns, and exchanged gifts. There was no one nearby and it was too cold to go to Ethel's.

While Jim was busy with the horses, I had knitted him a cap and muffler, which I proudly presented to him. Because of the cold, Jim had been unable to finish his gift to me so now he brought it into the house to work on. He had made a simple chess board and

whittled simple chess pieces. It was a delightful addition to our home.

After Christmas, the weather was fine again. All the storms came early that year. Jim could resume his hunting as the snow settled.

¹ According to the 1881 "History of Buchanan County" the government survey was completed in 1843 and settlement was slow for the rest of the 1840's. Starting in the early 1850's, settlement increased dramatically until by 1860, all the land had been "entered" in Buchanan County, Iowa.

1846 population-149

1850-population-517

1860-population-7,906

1875-population-17,315

² One of the first businesses to be formed on the new settlements was the saw mill. The Troy Mills saw mill known as "Long and Company" was finished and in operation in 1856. Lumber was sawed for so much per board foot or for half the lumber. A person with no funds could work for a day at the saw mill in return for two hundred feet of sawing.

³ A heavy slab of timber, roughly dressed, for use as a floorboard.

Chapter 8

Immigrants Here Too.

One day Jim told me, "Someone has moved into that claim where Hackman was last fall. I wonder if they're back. I can't see any horses or a wagon but someone is moving around. It's kind of early for anyone to arrive from the East. I'm going to see who's there."

Hackman's had only lived in a canvas and brush shelter during the late summer and they had moved into Independence as soon as it turned cold. They, like Eric, were seeking a warmer climate, not a winter on an Iowa prairie. Hackman's claim was on up Cedar creek just North of Eric's.

Since the Faye's had gone back East, Jim and I had spent the winter in the only cabin in this vast expanse of snowy prairie. Of course, Reece's were South of us two or three miles, and we knew from hearsay, that there was a cluster of cabins a few miles West of us but we had never made any contact with them.

"This man said he had bought the claim. I think he said his name was Reilly. Sounded like he was saying Reeley. He talks so broken, I can't understand him. He has his wife and four children and a Mother, his Mother, I think."

Four children! How old were they, I wondered, startled.

"Yeh! Four of them, all small. They speak no English and I think they are all under six or seven years old. I wonder how they can manage with ones so small."

"Reilly himself is small and thin. I even wondered if he was afraid of me. He kept saying that he had a paper."

I couldn't imagine anyone being afraid of Jim. I was pleased to know we would

have a family nearby and I happily planned on a visit as I prepared the potatoes for planting.

"I told him I would help him with his cabin but I'm not sure he understood me. He has some nice trees along the upper reaches of Cedar creek. Should make a nice cabin. He is so small, he only comes up to my shoulder, or so."

Jim was doing his own plowing this year with the two horses and a borrowed plow from Mr. Reece. It was easier this year but very slow work. Some of the sod turned right side up again. I planted the potatoes in a furrow at one side of the field and then the next furrow covered the seed. I planted a bushel of seed, planted in every second furrow. Jim kept plowing until he had six or more acres, about two more than last year. He made a big drag, similar to Seth's be fastening logs together, taking advantage of all knots and short branches. He dragged the plowing over and over to soften the root bound sod. With a sack of wheat tucked under his arm, he walked back and forth, scattering the seed with his hand, one handful at a time. Then he dragged it over and over again and again to cover the seed.

"I stopped in at Reilly's yesterday to see how they were coming. They were spading by hand and with a wide bladed spade. What a miserable job. Tomorrow, I'm going to take the team over and plow for him a couple of days. It's too early to plant corn yet, anyway."

I know the family was living in the brush shelter but I had never seen it. I would go with Jim and meet the new family.

Jim told me "They have repaired the Hackman's shelter and seem to be fairly comfortable. Camping out. They seem to be workers. Gee, it seemed fine for me to come here and you too, with your sister but with small children, I don't know. I am glad you can come with me, maybe they will be more assured if I bring my missus."

I made a face at him. I wanted to make a welcoming gift but what? As they were not expecting Jim for a meal, I decided on a big pot of rabbit stew and two loaves of bread. When we arrived with the plow, Reilly protested, "No, no! No money, no mon!"

Jim shook his head, holding out his hand, palm down and repeated, "No money. No Money."

Jim went ahead and plowed a furrow, showing Riley how to help hold the sod to keep it from turning back over. I carried my kettle to their shelter to meet these strangers on our own strange prairie. The spit was empty so I hung my kettle over the fire, and tried to enter into conversation with them. It was a hopeless task. They took my bread as though they were afraid of it and lay it on the stones beside the kettle. The wife and Mother continued to take turns with the spade now that the Father was helping Jim. Feeling big and awkward and very much out of it, I tried to talk with the children but they were shy and hid behind each other. It was not a success.

The children began to notice the odor coming from the kettle and edged closer to peek in. I told them it was rabbit which didn't mean a thing to them. I even wrote rabbit in the dust. The silence was deafening.

I was relieved when Jim and Reilly came in to water the horses and get a drink. I helped water the horses, carrying it by pail from the creek. It took some time to fill each pail so after the men returned to the field, I busied myself making a pool such as the one in our own Silver creek. The children noticed what I was doing. They understood this and

came to help, and carried many of the smaller stones. Stones, I taught them and water. By noon, we had a nice little pool at the edge of the creek and we could dip a pail of water almost without waiting.

When the sun was high, the men came in to care for the horses and rest themselves. By gestures and actions, I explained what was in the kettle. Mr. Reilly understood me enough that he had his wife bring out dishes, dark brown mug type and cups, and I doled out stew to everyone. I had added carrots, potatoes, and the last of the turnips to the rabbit. I broke the bread into pieces and passed it out and his wife passed out two biscuits to each but I noticed that although Jim and I had ours, neither the wife or Mother had any.

Conversation flowed through the meal as Jim and Reilly were both talkers, although they often misunderstood each other. I think all enjoyed the meal after Jim explained to Reilly what was in the stew and he had told the family.

The children dragged their Father down to see the pool with a pail and he come back all smiles and thanked me.

To save any embarrassment, Jim worked around home all morning and after dinner he plowed for the Reilly's all afternoon so he wouldn't be there at noontime. It was so evident that they had so little. After he had plowed two or three acres, he brought the drag and worked the ground over and over again. For the first time, the entire family seemed to take notice and they gathered around, oohing and aahing. They dropped to their knees and ran dirt through their fingers, still aahing and oohing.

Proudly, Reilly brought out his paper to show Jim. It was a proper deed to the farm, 160 acres at five dollars and fifty cents an acre.¹ It was a legal deed, listing all four corners.

Riley seemed so pleased that Jim did not comment to him but to me he sputtered, "That was highway robbery. I bet Hackman's didn't get fifty cents an acre for the claim. I bet this guy made a killing. I suppose it is legal. I helped Reilly find all four corners. It was Greg Garner from Independence that brought them here. They came to Independence by stage coach. I didn't see any seed at all. I wonder if they have any?"

Riley did have a bushel of wheat, a bushel of oats, some bean seed, and a peck of seed corn. The language barrier was almost a wall between us but I did manage to share some garden seeds with them. They vehemently protested sometimes but I insisted and since we couldn't actually know what the other has said, we really couldn't get too angry with each other. We had learned from the deed that his name was Sean Reilly. His wife's name was Sarai and his Mother's name was Mara.

They had come by ship to Boston from Ireland and from Boston to Iowa by stagecoach. We understood that there had been a famine in Ireland, there was no work and even if there was, there was no food to buy. Although we couldn't grasp the details, it seemed that the Irish government had paid for their passage on the ship and their fare to Iowa.

One morning, Sean came to our door and asked questions about building the cabin. We showed him everything, both inside and out, and we thought he understood. I marveled at his small size compared to Jim and Seth. He carefully looked over our cabin, seemingly impressed with our neat cabin, our bed, the table and benches, the fireplace. Jim showed him how the logs were notched, the clinching between the logs and our false

ceiling in one end.

This was our first guest, not counting Seth and Ethel and I wondered what to serve him, if anything. I don't expect he expected or wanted anything but my Vermont hospitality bade me do something. I really had nothing, no coffee or tea, no cakes, no sandwiches, only cornbread. Well, I thought, what I had was what I had. I poured off cups of broth from the cooking prairie chicken and served it hot, with slabs of last night's cornbread. Both Sean and Jim ate it eagerly, and I was pleased. I think that day was the first time that Sean really relaxed and accepted us.

I offered to send home some potatoes for seed but he refused. However, when Jim showed him our root pit and he saw the amount of potatoes still there, his eyes gleamed and he accepted some seed. I'm sure that the thought of his own potatoes growing overcame his reluctance to become indebted to us.

About this time, Seth and Ethel and Tom came visiting us for a day. Seth had finished planted and brought his surplus seed for Jim if he needed it. Jim decided to plow another two acres and accepted it. The two men then drove over to the Reilly's to offer him the remaining seed and left it over his protests.

"I have this extra. You are welcome. If you must, you can return it someday when you have a surplus but in this country, we must help each other."

Jim worked up another two acres and planted it to corn. He then worked up another two acres for the Reilly's.

Spring had come and almost gone and it was almost as hot as summer. One day Jim asked me, if I needed any more water as he was going to shed his winter underwear and take a bath in the pool. We filled the tub and a pail with water, then I accompanied him to the pool but I couldn't bring myself to get in the cold water. Just putting in my toe, made chills run up and down my back even though I envied him as he soaked and splashed. After a winter of wash basin bathing, it looked glorious but I couldn't although he threatened to pull me in.

Instead, I put the kettle of water over the fire and when it was hot, I added it to the tub of water sitting in the sun and then I bathed myself. It was glorious. Jim finally removed the rocks necessary to drain the pool and came to help me. We had no soap but I washed and washed my hair and rinsed and rinsed. Jim poured cups of water over my hair for a final rinse and then he toweled it vigorously.

With light summer clothing and no underwear, we felt absolutely free as we chased each other around and around the yard in pure puppy frenzy. When our hair was nearly dry, we collapsed on the bed and it dawned upon us that we should also change the blankets to summer sheets. So we did, dragging the heavy woolen blanket to the lean-to and immersing it in the remaining bath water. How wonderful we felt. Of course the next day was wet and chilly but that was a small matter. We could always add another coat or two.

Washing the blanket was a chore. Since all woolens must be washed in warm water, never cold, we heated more water and struggled with the heavy blanket. We washed and rinsed with our hands. When we decided that we had done all we could, we wrung out all the water we could manage. We laid it out on the grass to dry, smoothing the blanket as best we could, and left it in the sun to dry. It really turned out very well.

One day, I made a spice cake and took it with me to call on the Reilly's. Along the

way, I found and picked some raspberries, about two quarts; Sarai welcomed me with eagerness, pouring out a torrent of words. The children crowded around over the berries. It was obvious that they knew what they were. I divided the cake and the berries and soon they had disappeared. Raspberries, I repeated, raspberries, even writing the word in the dust of the yard. I knew that there were many berries around so I led an expedition and soon all were picking berries. At least I had broken through their fear and I hoped that we could be friends.

The next day, I noticed that Sarai and the children were picking berries on the far side of Cedar creek. I told Jim that I had done them one good turn at least. Now all they needed was a bee tree.

Reilly had sown his wheat and oats, then left the planting of the corn and the garden to his family, while he started felling trees for his cabin. Believe it or not the very first tree was a bee tree. Jim and I helped them smoke out the bees and save the honey. Jim made a makeshift hive and hoped to keep the swarm in his improvised hive. The hive was a makeshift, a combination of smooth boards and a hollow log and looked really funny but it worked and this was our first swarm of bees. One time we had ten hives.

While working with the bees, in some way I stepped wrong over a log and twisted my foot. It was very painful and exasperating. Sean and Sarai were very concerned and would not allow me to try the foot while Jim went for the team and wagon. When I tried to rise, it was No! No! And they would push me down again, so I waited in tears and exasperation.

At home we decided that the foot wasn't broken, so I soaked it in warm water and Jim bound it as tightly as he thought proper. It did feel much better the next day but I limped about on it for many weeks. I had almost forgotten that long ago day.

A few days later, here came three small children to my door, bringing a wooden pail with four or five quarts of berries. I couldn't refuse their offering after looking into their bright expectant faces. What did I have to offer small children? I had some left over cornbread which I expected to use for supper. I added strawberry jam to the cornbread and served it with a cup of water. I was rewarded by their eager appetites. Politely, they chattered at me, thanks I thought, and retrieving their now empty pail, they hurried away.

I told Jim, "They shouldn't have. They need it so much. You should have seen them devour the first berries."

"I know," he replied, "But we have to let them help us, too."

Sarai and Mara and the children came another day, smiling and trying new words. With motions we began to understand each other. We were beginning to communicate a little.

By many words and motions, Sarai finally made me realize that she wanted to know how I had made the cake. I puzzled over that one until I actually made a cake to show them. I didn't really have a recipe as I had used what I had and tried it. I wrote down each as I made the cake, one cup honey, two cups of cornmeal, one teaspoon of cinnamon, one teaspoon of salaratus, and one cup of nutmeats. Everyone helped me crack the nuts and pick out the meats after I showed them how to crack the nuts. I baked it in a breadpan, a round one, set in the large kettle over the fire. It was good and I served it fresh and added some of the berry jam.

They had brought me another two quarts of raspberries, so I stirred in more honey

and spread them on the slabs to dry with their very interested help. I sent them home with a pail of walnuts so they would have some nut meats to use. I thoroughly enjoyed the visit.

The children looked much alike, fair skinned, blue eyed and all had very dark hair. Clara was the oldest, eight years old, James was seven, Katie, five and Bridget was just four. Sarai was twenty-four and she had four children. We learned that they had lost a two year old boy on the long journey across the ocean. I thought that they said that Sean was thirty but I was lost when they tried to give all the ages.

I helped them learn new words each time we met, often writing the word in the dust. I found that they could not write in their native Irish. Clara and James followed my words carefully and easily memorized them. Someway, we seemed to understand each other. Sean had the English as they called it but he had such an accent, we had trouble understanding him. He was helpful with their new words, however, and I started teaching them their ABC's.

¹ The rapid influx of population resulted in a great inflation in the value of the first land holdings. The value of land was also subject to great variation due to the various panics that developed during the times.

Chapter 9

More Neighbors

The Faye Brothers were back and busy putting in some crop. They still waited to build a house. They seemed so alone that Jim invited them to Sunday dinner. It was a great success as everyone visited and visited. Jim asked Orange to give the grace before dinner and he overwhelmed us with the length of his prayer. Afterward, Jim remarked, "That was carrying thankfulness a little too far to let the dinner get cold."

The lumber mill was expected to be ready soon, so they returned to sawing trees into logs as soon as their crop was planted. They were friendly but were busy in the opposite direction so we saw little of them. The fire had set them back but they were starting over again.

To the East, a new family, Henry Smith, his brother Sid Smith, and Sid's wife, Evie settled on a slight hillside, building a half sod and half log cabin. They had a team of oxen and a plow, suited to plow sod. Jim help them lay up a sod wall at the back and put up a log front. It was a nice cabin of two rooms and a loft.

I was very curious about the new neighbor lady but could find out very little. Jim replied, "I didn't see her, just barely. She stayed in the wagon all the time. She is tall, wore a long fancy dress. Her hair is light colored and combed up someway. She didn't even speak to me." Daunted, I didn't call on her right away.

One day, I caught up Goldie and went to call on the Smith's. I took along a dish of fresh blackberries. Sid was jolly and talkative and Evie was quiet and reserved but they both seemed glad to have company. Sid was shorter than Jim and on the heavy side, his

sandy hair was thinning at the tip. Evie was a tall, stately appearing woman, wearing a long skirt with a waist tucked into the top. I felt uncomfortable in my shorter calico dress. Her long blonde hair was combed back and piled on top of her head, allowing soft curls to escape. She was a beautiful woman.

"Evie, we got company. They live over there where we see the smoke from the cabin every day. You remember Jim helped us with the cabin" he said as he eagerly introduced me to his wife. He chattered on about my fine horse and what a lovely day for a ride. Although Evie was polite, there didn't seem to be anything to talk about.

The cabin was more than adequate, part log and part sod, two rooms and a loft. There were two windows, one on each side of the door, all facing South. I was awed and uncomfortable as I watched Evie make and serve a cup of tea in fine thin china cups and with thin sweet wafers on a thin china plate.

"We're from Pennsylvania and strangers to the West. You are our first visitor. Henry has missed you. He left this morning for a load of supplies in Delaware. We brought a team of horses because they can travel faster than the oxen. Who is the other smoke we see South of you?"

I explained about the Faye brothers and that they were cutting logs for lumber to build a house and that we had neighbors to the North of us, Sean Reilly's. Evie did say that she was awed by the big empty country and she was sometimes afraid when she had to stay alone. I could sympathize with her.

Sid remarked, "We arrived to late to plant anything this year. We are buying supplies for the winter from Delaware. I understand that last year you had to go clear to Dubuque. Henry has just left this morning for another load. We ordered some extra sent to Delaware. We want to have plenty. They tell me we can't travel anywhere after snow comes."

Eagerly, Sid asked about ways to store potatoes and we discussed an outside pit, ways to keep mice out, and how best to keep the fire going. although it was a nice fall day, the house did feel damp and chilly. I hesitated but told them how Jim and I had hung our extra quilts on the walls and it seemed so much nicer and really felt warmer.

At their interested questions, I explained that Jim had bored holes in the logs and inserted pegs to hang shelves or anything else we wanted. As I noted the lovely satin spread on the bed, I added that I had sewn loops on the quilts so that I wouldn't damage them. Apparently, Henry's bed was in the loft.

Evie said, "I have never sewn even a seam in all my life. Would you show me how to fix the quilts?"

I was willing to help her and said so but I couldn't come for a week or so as we planned on visiting Seth and Ethel over the week end.

As home, I told Jim about it and how awkward I had felt. I wondered how come they were in Iowa when they didn't seem to know anything, not about Iowa, at least.

"It's odd how such different people can have the same dreams. Sounds as though they have more money to do with, more than the rest of us around here."

Everyone was thriving. Little Tom was walking, running around all over. He was such a darling as we played with him and his new puppy. McClouds had had a litter of collie pups and given Tom one. Rusty seemed to accept the addition to his family without any jealousy. Good old Rusty.

Ethel and I caught up on our sewing, our gossip, and our hopes, while Jim and Seth worked on a shed Seth was building onto the barn for the cow he had purchased. Ethel was delighted to have milk for Tom, for cheese, for butter and for seasoning.

Seth and Arlo Johns had worked together and they had plowed about ten acres for each this fall. They hoped that the freezing and thawing through the winter might soften the sod and make work easier come spring.

Jim wanted to fall plow also but had would have to borrow a plow. "I've got to get a plow someway. We should have a few bushels of wheat to sell this fall. Did you hear Seth say that there is a new grist mill in Marion? So we won't have to go to Dubuque this fall. Wheat is ready to thresh and we have to cut the fodder yet. Soon. Don't you admire my haystack?" and he pretended to duck. We laughed together as we embraced.

Next week, when I went to the Smith's I took by bag of sewing and help Evie put up several quilts, so lovely that it seemed a sacrilege to put them on the dark log and sod walls. It made the room look so much cozier that the Smith's were delighted.

I met Henry that day as they showed me the storage trench they had made near the cabin and they had stored potatoes, apples and pumpkins. Henry was taller than Sid, quiet where Sid was talkative. They had added new shelves around the room. I was impressed and praised their accomplishments and changes. I noted the fine linen tablecloth on the table and wondered how she managed the washing. I learned later that Sid had taken all the stacked up dirty clothes to Delaware and hired a woman to wash and iron them, ready for his return trip. Evie seemed willing to learn but she was a puzzle to me.

Jim was building a rail fence around a section of the yard so he could allow the horses some run without them wandering away. I helped him lay up rails, four high, and he made a gate or door for the shed so they could be confined in bad weather.

About this time, everybody helped Reilly raise his cabin. Jim, Sid, and Henry Smith, Elmer and Orange Faye. It was sixteen by twenty feet in one room, with a full loft with a ladder leading to the loft. It was now October and cold rains came often so they were very happy to have a roof and a fireplace. We were getting used to Sean's accent and his family were picking up many words.

I went to see them on a nice warm day after the cabin was finished. They met me with eagerness, talking a mile a minute, which, of course, I couldn't understand. They had made a bench right outside the door and there we sat in the warm sunshine. Mara served us hot tea made from roasted wheat kernels, a new idea to me but I soon copied it. It never occurred to me to learn any Irish but I always tried to give them new worlds in English. Boy, girl, chair, bench, tea, drink, writing it out in the dust in front of us. None of us had any paper or pencil. I did learn that bairn meant child.

Jim had learned that some organization in Boston, an Irish group, had helped Reilly and fellow Irishmen to find land in the West and acted as go-betweens. Many of their countrymen joined them in the next few years, establishing a new settlement, called New Ireland.

Jim and I loved the family. They never seemed to resent their poverty. I guess that they were used to it. They laughed and danced, full of fun and frolic. We called on each other often exchanging fruits of our gardens as one ripened ahead of another.

Jim worried because they were unprepared for winter. He had tried to tell them

but he thought that they didn't understand, so he asked me to try and see that they were better prepared, at least in clothing. Oh, yes, they knew about winter. They had winter back in the old country. They had snow, ice, fog, wind. Doubtful, I wondered. We had all those things back in Vermont but Vermont doesn't have winter like those in Iowa. I did manage to impress upon them that they must never let their fire go out. They did have a big woodpile and their fireplace was a good one.

I had found that they were a very practical people. I invited them to help me tie a quilt, which I had made from an old scrap bag and lined with an old blanket. We had a nice day and I'm sure they had made quilts many times before.

We were very thankful for another good year. We had enough to eat for all winter, good food, too. Clothes and shoes were becoming more of a problem. Mrs. Johns had given me a hen and a setting of eggs, so the hen and I had raised six chickens. Now they looked so miserable and cold that we decided to dress them ready to eat later. We could keep the frozen birds in the chest in the lean-to and we would have chicken for Christmas. We filled the storage pit, recovered the shed with fodder and straw and had two stacks of hay nearby.

After we had tramped out the wheat and winnowed it, Jim and Sean took the grain to Marion and returned with grist and other supplies.

Our wheat had purchased strips of leather, salt, coarse thread and a bolt of heavy material for outer clothing. I was disappointed that it was brown, a deep dark brown. Jim said that it was all they had. We gathered several bushels of nuts at Seth's and we divided them with the Smith's and the Reilly's.

When Jim and I called on the Reilly's one day, we were proudly served some dandelion wine, which they boasted they had made themselves. To me, it was awful. Sean explained the process and the use of honey, very pleased with the product. After we returned home, I followed Jim to the rail fence and asked him how he like the wine.

He chuckled, "You should have seen your face when you tasted it. They were so pleased to be serving something of their own making, I don't think they noticed how awful we thought it was."

My own thought had gone back to Grandma and I had been asking her forgiveness for even touching the wine. The lips that touched mine were not supposed to touch wine. Could I give them something different when they called. I could only serve what I had, as I remembered the broth. Jim and I would never have any wine or liquor in the house anyway. We were both temperance people from way back.

Shortly after the first snow fall, which came very early that year, we visited Seth and Ethel. I had made a little coat for Tom and I knitted him a pair of mittens as we visited. Jim and Seth, as usual, were working on some project but they wouldn't tell us what they were making. They were so mysterious and underhanding that we were consumed with curiosity. It turned out to be sled runners. They had made each of them a bobsled and they were delighted with their prowess. They loaded ours into our wagon and we took it home.

It turned bitterly cold shortly after that and we had heavy snow and a raging blizzard. As each day dawned, Jim arose in the freezing cold, uncovered the coals in the fireplace, added shavings which I had whittled the night before, then he added more fine twigs, and soon larger pieces of wood until he had enough fire that he could use the logs.

It was an every morning ritual. Jim had vowed he would get a window before winter but winter was here and he lighted a candle. He promised me that someday we would have a window to the East so we could see the sunrise.

Most of our breakfasts had been game with corn cakes or cornbread, but now I had wheat flour and I made bread. At first, I had no yeast but of all places, Jim got some from the Faye's. They were making sour dough biscuits and they gladly gave me a starter. Later, I shared this with both the Smith's and the Reilly's. I could only bake one loaf at a time because I had to bake it in a kettle over the coals. Crude, but it was yeast bread and a welcome change. I tried cooking whole wheat as a cereal, tried flour in all my cornbread recipes. Some were a success, some were failures. Seth had sent home a small mill to grind the buckwheat but we were waiting to try this. About all you can do with buckwheat is make pancakes and I was tired of pancakes. However, I browned some wheat kernels and ground them to make a kind of tea. It was an easy way to make a hot drink and when we added a little honey to each cup, it was most satisfying.

One morning, just shortly after daylight, came a pounding at the door. It was Sid. "I saw that you had a good fire going, can I borrow some coals?"

Although he was horseback, we looked at his small pail rather dubiously, surely the coals would be out before he traveled the three-quarter mile in the deep snow. We loaned him a larger pail or rather kettle. Jim chose as large a stick of burning wood as would fit into the kettle, adding many coals and then a tight lid.

"Do you have shavings or fine paper? Fine grass will do if it is dry enough. Here is a handful of shavings. Put them in your pocket so they will stay dry. Be sure and put them of the coals before you add anything bigger. We'll watch your chimney to be sure you get it going. If it doesn't start, I'll bring over my flints."

We knew, of course, that they had either let the fire get too low or they hadn't banked it for the night. I thought of Evie, waiting in the cold semi-sod shack and I shuddered, was she staying in bed?

For Christmas, I invited the Faye's, the Reilly's and the Smith's, our small colony at the time. We were excited over the prospect of so many in our cabin. I was uneasy about Evie, as she had never been to our cabin and I wondered what she would think. The weather was cold but Christmas was a clear day. Jim took the sled and went for the Reilly's, Smith's came in their own sleigh and Faye's walked. They carried their contribution to the feast, fruit cake, a real fruit cake, sent them from back East.

"My wife baked it and sent it to Marion so it should be well-seasoned by now. We planned on spending the winter here but we have changed our minds. We miss the family, too much. We're leaving tomorrow. We'll leave the team in Marion and take the stagecoach from there. Hope we continue to have good weather."

Jim had brought in some chunks of wood to support hewn planks along the wall for seating and there were our benches and the bed. Twelve of us. It was more than a little crowded but no one seemed to mind. All of us made over the children.

Riley's brought Irish bread with nutmeats and potatoes to bake, Evie brought a teapot and tea for all and a lovely serving dish filled with Christmas tarts and cookies. The chickens baked to perfection in a tightly closed kettle over the fire. The potatoes baked in the ashes. I made gravy and served raspberry jam. We enjoyed the lovely day, the last we would have for many weeks. Although I had worried about Evie, I needn't have as she

seemed to join in the fun and enjoyed the food and company. I had been a little worried about the Christmas Grace, knowing that the Reilly's and the Smith's were Catholic and that Orange would drone on so we decided that Jim should ask the blessing himself. I was proud of him as he gave a simple beautiful summary of all our thought.

"Dear Father and Lord of all, we thank you for a busy year, for a bountiful harvest. Thank you for the opportunity of owning land in this prairie state. Guide us and care for us and care for our loved ones in their distant homes. We thank you for this Christmas time in memory of the birth of our Savior. We thank you for the food we are about to consume. Use it to our needs and us to Thy service. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen."

I served each one in his own dish, right from the fireplace shelf, which Jim and I had made for me on the right hand side of the fire. It made a wonderful serving table. There was enough food for seconds and even for some thirds, until everyone could eat no more.

I had made mittens for each of the four children. I had used some new-old woolen yarns and I had lined the mittens with the tops of old stockings.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first entertaining.

Chapter 10

A Hard Winter

The very next day after Christmas, it snowed again and turned extremely cold.¹ We dug out more quilts and our night caps. It snowed for three days, then quieted and the air was still. The sun glistened on snow banks as far as we could see. Huge sun-dogs sided the sun, giving everything a ghostly appearance. Jim fought his way to the barn to feed the horses and to the creek to cut a hole in the ice and bring water to the house. The poor horses were allowed into the railed-in yard where they had access to snow at least. One monumental task was to dig out the root pit, remove what we could use and recover the pit again. It opened into the lean-to so we managed it but if it had opened outside, we might have gone hungry.

One of those icy mornings, as Jim stepped outside, he stopped short. Not fifty feet away, stood a beautiful stag and a doe, and three more came through the willow. Silently, Jim backed inside to pick up his rifle, hoping to be unobserved. As the deer browsed among the willows, he knelt in the snow, outside of his own door and shot a medium sized buck. The others took off with wild leaps and were gone, racing across the snow filled fields. Elated, Jim plowed through the drifts to reach the animal before it could revive and trail off somewhere. It was dead. What a stroke of luck to have it come to our door.

Jim butchered it then and there. We carried the clean carcass inside and cut it up on our table. "Here's the liver for our breakfast!" Jim crowed as we worked. We lay the cut pieces outside and when frozen, we stored them in the chest in the lean-to, and weighted the lid down with heavy chunks of wood. "What luck! What luck!" we crowed again and again. One another day, Jim carried a big roast to Reilly's and a smaller one to the Smith's.

Cold and snow had come early so when storms and cold shut us in again, we were already tired of winter. We kept the fire going day and night so the cabin was reasonably warm. We had plenty of food, good food, too although we had to earn it again by digging it out of the pit. But our clothes were getting thinner and thinner and our shoes were falling off our feet.

I couldn't patch Jim's underwear fast enough to keep them together. In searching an old barrel one day, I ran across the six pairs of Grandpa's underwear, which Ethel and I had brought along for rags but never used. They were so much better than the underwear we were wearing that I was delighted. They had no holes but I mended the worn spots and we had good underwear for the rest of the winter. Three pair apiece, what if they were too big?

Jim's socks were a mess, nothing left but the tops and the overmended feet. I could have knitted us socks but I didn't have yarn, so I cut a pattern and experimented until I found the right size, then I made feet from the good parts of our old underwear, mostly the sleeves and the backs. I looked at those feet and I laughed and laughed. Grandma always said to waste not but even she would not have suggested those feet. It worked, however.

Jim worked on our shoes, everyday, cutting strips of leather he had purchased. When that ran out, he cut strips from the venison hide curing on the outside wall of the cabin. He was practically remaking our shoes.

I sewed rabbit skins together and made each of us a pair of mittens. I tried to make Jim a pair of socks from the rabbit skins but they were too bulky.

More snow came and the drifts piled higher and higher. He looked each morning to be sure that the Smith's and Reilly's had smoke rising. Jim had to feed the horses and water them, and carry the water and wood to the house each day. The wood was piled against the cabin so it was nearby but it had to be dug out of the snow, sawed into proper lengths, and his surplus for the next few days was usually covered with snow each morning. After the creek froze solid, we had to melt water for all uses, even for the horses.

Last winter, we had water from the pool all winter under the ice. The horses had thrived, running in the open field, digging out feed from under the snow and using snow for water, but this year, the snow was too deep. We heaped large tubs of snow and carried them into the house to melt. When we couldn't wait, we filled the kettles and hung them over the fire. It takes tubs and tubs of snow to make a pail of water.

Jim brought out the chess set and we had games going all winter. We had no books except the almanac, a calendar, remarked from two years ago and the Bible. We read the Bible through again, but our light was really too poor for reading.

Jim carved three wooden spoons, pretty crude but I loyally used them to stir stew or beans. We were disappointed in the buckwheat. Both of us had a bad case of hives and after we decided that it was caused by the buckwheat, we made no more buckwheat pancakes. Even if we had enjoyed them, it wasn't worth it.

Hunting was very poor that winter, the snow was too deep to hunt and the game was holed up as well as we were. We were very fortunate, indeed, to have the venison come to our door.

We knew that Seth and Ethel were well prepared for winter, and that the Johns

and Bridley's would look after each other. Sid and Evie were alone but they had a fine stock of supplies as we had only the Reilly's to worry about, mostly because they had six mouths to feed. That was our entire world that winter.

One clear cold day, Jim walked up to Reilly's, carrying a sack of cornmeal and a chunk of venison. We thought that if they were in dire straits, they would have contacted us to let us know but what if Sean was sick? Anyway, Jim went. He was able to walk right over most of the drifts but when he did break through, he had to flounder around to get back up on a drift again.

Although they were too proud to admit that they needed it, they did accept the food, saying that they would repay him someday. "Right," agreed Jim, "We have to help each other in times like this."

Of course, like us they were confined to the cabin. None of them had any winter clothing. Even Sean was having trouble getting his wood cut and carried in. They had a window in their cabin but since they had no glass, the opening was well covered. "They had no candles so they were sitting in the dark except for the fireplace. 'I'll go back someday soon but I'll wait a few days. That was a hard walk.'"

Jim and I had made candles early in the winter. We had no mold but we used the drip method. You dip a string in melted wax, in our case it was tallow, and hang it to harden. When it is hard, it is dipped again and again, allowing it to harden after each dipping until you have a candle large enough to use. Jim made a rack so we had eight candles hanging and dripping at once. The tallow which dripped on the table was scraped off and remelted and used again. For the string we unraveled an old piece of rope and used the strands.

"We have plenty of tallow, so I'll take some tallow and the rack with me and go again, so they can make some for themselves. That was the hardest walk I can remember taking, so cold and the wind almost blew me down. It was horrid walking into the wind but it wasn't so hard coming home. I'll wait a few days, though."

Jim made a small hand sled to pull over the drifts, wooden, of course, which he polished and polished. He smeared the runners with tallow so they would slide easier. When he went to Reilly's, he took the tallow, the rack and the entire bag of buckwheat. It didn't seem right to send them something we couldn't use but we gave it to them anyway. Perhaps they could use it and would have no trouble.

"Almira, what do you suppose they were doing, when I got there? They were dancing. An Irish Jig, they told me." Sean said, "It keeps us warm and happy and it gives us some exercise."

I thought that was a splendid idea. So we tried it. In our small space, we ended up clinging to each other in laughter. So we tried ballet. Neither of us knew anything about ballet, only having seen some picture of a posing star. But we tried steps, stands, and poses, all we could improvise, stretching and bowing. We were rewarded by feeling more vigorous and alive. Every day the weather allowed, we played outdoors, chasing each other into snow drifts to come in wet and cold, and had to dry our clothes.

Jim wrote a long letter to his folks, although it was hard to tell when we could mail it. Jim and I had followed the trail westward which Faye's had been using, to discover where they were building the mill. We discovered there were several cabins along the river bank near the mill site. We visited with Pete Diltz and watched the workers for a

while. Pete told us that there were four or five cabins to the North and West of us by the big spring. A new post office had been set up on one of the houses so now we wouldn't have to go to Marion or Cascade to mail a letter. It was called Atlanta.²

The cold weather hung on into March. Cabin fever was getting to us. Jim turned the horses out into the yard for exercise but did not dare let them run for fear they might get down in a snow drift and be unable to get up. The hay and fodder was disappearing at an alarming rate but there was still their food covered house to eat.

When it seemed that winter was going to last forever, spring crept in and the snow slowly disappeared. How we rejoiced over the miracle of green sprouts, of dock and dandelion greens. I especially noticed the bird's return that year. It is the same miracle every year, of course, but the winter had been so long with such a complete absence of any bird life, that the prairie seemed to explode with wings and song.

It seemed like in only a week, here were the meadowlarks, the bob-whites, the bluebirds, and the crows. Did crows go south for the winter or did they hole up in the timber? Red-winged blackbirds, purple grackles, passenger pigeons and bob-o-links came in huge flocks and settled on the willows and reeds and set up a musical racket for us to enjoy. A wren even built her nest in a knot hole in our cabin wall. Woodpeckers visited. The winter had been hard on the prairie chickens but many survived and we heard them booming each morning.

Jim hunted again, to bring in mostly rabbits but an occasional squirrel or prairie chicken. Usually, in the spring or fall, Jim was able to bring a duck or goose or maybe two, but he did not follow their flights along the river as many do. Jim hunted to supply our food and sought no more. After the one turkey before we were married, he never saw another turkey. As we worked more ground each year, he had less time for hunting.

After the long winter, spring was late but the work went on very well after it started with few rainy days as we plowed, sowed and planted. That year, Jim and Sean were working together as they plowed and dragged and worked up the ground. It was a good plan for both of them.

In June, I stayed with Ethel and Seth for two weeks after Ethel had her second baby. Julie Johns had acted as midwife and the baby arrived before I did. Katie Marie was such a darling baby. She was blonde like Tom, and Tom and I adored her.

There was lots of work but I enjoyed the visit. I cared for Ethel and Katie. Tom got the meals, planted more garden and helped Seth mark out his corn rows. Seth was his usual helpful self about the house and family. He cared for the milk when he brought it in each morning and night, joking that I had probably forgotten how anyway. I enjoyed using milk again.

Tom and I visited Julia one day to see her new son, George, now two months old. Babies were the fashion that year in the neighborhood. Besides Katie and George, Sara Bradley and Inez McCloud arrived later in the summer.

Each family called on Ethel to see the new baby, while I was there and I also enjoyed the visits very much. They kidded me about my being next. Not yet, I told them. We sat grouped around Ethel's bed and visited, comparing our trials of the winter and spring and planning the summer. We felt very close to each other, a big happy family.

Two weeks were long enough to be away from home and my work, so I was really happy to see Jim when he came after me at the end of the second week. Jim carried Tom

around on his shoulders to Tom's great delight and he held Katie and made her acquaintance. Tom was now using my old trundle bed so we slept together. The cabin was getting crowded.

Back at home, I was soon involved in raking, hoeing, weeding, picking berries and cooking meals. Clara and James often went with me and we explored the countryside, hunting fruit. Often Sarai or Mara went with us. Faye's had cut down a big tree which turned out to be a bee tree and we all received some of the honey, a welcome addition to our stores and especially during the fruit season. We continued to pick berries and conserve them as long as there were any. They were the dessert of our practical living.

Our bee hive had succumbed to the bitter winter and Jim was hoping to find another swarm.

When I felt the first faint stirrings of new life within me, I was so happy, so proud and unafraid. Ethel had come through with two wonderful babies in this country without a doctor or midwife and I could, too. Jim rejoiced with me, holding me gently he said, "The Lord will send us children and we will love them and care for them. I would like a son but then I want a daughter, too. As many as the Lord sees fit to send, the more the merrier."

Happily, I rested in his arms, enjoying his strength, secure in the knowledge that he would be a good father.

Like me, Jim had been captured by the Reilly children. Communication was still a problem but they were learning new words every day. In their innocence, they would often grasp our meaning without words. I was teaching them their ABC's. Their cabin was about 80 rods away and we had a well worn path between us. Their happy spirits delighted us every day. How they could laugh and sing.

The late summer turned dry and several alarms of fire had caused all of us to plow a fireguard around our buildings. Around the house and the lean-to and the pole shed. To the West, McKee's house burned and started a large fire, which burned over many, many acres before it was stopped. All the neighborhoods joined in fighting the fire and they saved all the cabins.

Prairie fire in the tall ripening grass is a frightening sight. It seems to leap across to the next clump of grass, galloping across the fields faster than a horse can run. As the grass ripened and dried and the tawny heads were dotted with blooming sunflowers and golden rod, a couple of alarms had caused Jim to add several furrows to his fireguard. We kept an old blanket and some sacks near our water barrel. Jim had rigged a wooden eave spout at the front of our cabin and ran the water into a barrel. Of course, it hadn't rained but we kept the barrel full, carrying water from the pool. We were so afraid of fire that I was cooking in front of the lean-to with two pails of water standing by. Distant smoke had alarmed us from time to time but they had disappeared shortly.

Jim was pulling the last load of hay into the lot one day, when he noticed smoke and flames to the West. He wet a sack and galloped off while I unharnessed the other horse and turned him into the lot. Then I wet more sacks and waited. I was to wet everything down, everything possible if the fire came our way. I saw Smith's team and wagon tearing along toward the fire, stopping long enough for the Faye brothers to climb in. The smoke and flames grew higher and higher and then began to subside. I busied myself with refilling the water barrel.

When the men returned, all riding in the Smith wagon, Jim climbed wearily off and led his horse into the lot. "It started at Peyton's. They have lost their house. No one was hurt. Must have burned over two sections of land before we got it stopped."

Silently, I helped him remove the soot and dabbed grease on his burns. His eyebrows were gone and his hair and beard badly singed. His eyes were bloodshot. His shirt and pants were a mess. I would never be able to mend all the burned spots. I was crying inside at the thought of all the danger they had been in. And all the while, I was sending a prayer of Thanksgiving that Jim was safe at home.

"Peyton's lost all their possessions. I offered to have them stay with us tonight but they are going to the Foreman's and the Walton's. It's closer and they are acquainted. Peyton's have six children."

Now we hardly dared build a fire even for cooking. I kept a pail of water handy at all times. I pulled all the weeds around the house and wet down the grass around the water barrel. There didn't really seem much we could do but pray for rain.

¹ Winter storms in Iowa follow a pattern. The wind turns to the east, the snow begins, and after the snow stops, the wind turns to the northwest, bringing in the cold arctic air. Lows after such storms can reach 20 to 30 below zero.

² From the History of Troy Mills, Iowa, "The first settlement (later called Atlanta) was situated on the north side of the Wapsipinicon River around two springs... One near a grove of trees in Newton Township, Buchanan County, and the other one a short distance southeast in a grove of trees in what is now Spring Grove Township, Linn County. To distinguish them, the early pioneers called them "Upper Spring Grove" and "Lower Spring Grove"... Both settlements have a cemetery..."

Chapter 11

Tragedy of Fire

Late in the summer of 1855, after weeks of no rain and many grass fires, Jim was watching storm clouds gather in the northwest, hoping it meant rain at last. Instead, he saw lightening strike and flames arising. With horror, he saw the fire was bearing directly toward the Reilly cabin. He yelled at me, grabbed a couple of sacks, caught a horse and galloped off. I took one look, grabbed another sack, another horse and followed him. The cabin would have to take care of itself.

Sean and the family were already fighting the fire. I helped Jim set a backfire and guided it away from the buildings. We stopped it at his firebreak, and it turned off to the East. No cabins lay in that direction and I could see men congregating on the fire. This one wouldn't get far today.

Screams alerted me to trouble. Someway, James had gotten too close and I turned to see him racing toward his father, his clothing ablaze. Sean grabbed the boy and put out the flames with his hands and his body. Jim was nearby and he wrapped a wet blanket around them both to put out any lingering fire and heat. I stood stunned. It was too late. I knelt beside Sarai as Sean and Jim worked over the dying boy. Mara knelt nearby holding the three frightened girls close to her. When they admitted that the boy was dead, we cried together, praying for the strength to accept this terrible tragedy. Through our tears, Jim and I did our best to make him presentable. The storm clouds had passed with no rain.

Smith's, Faye's Walton's and Peyton's now collected near the cabin after the fire was out. Sadly, they discussed the tragedy as they cleaned up at Sean's water barrel. Sean's hands and face were burned and we hoped not too deeply. Jim tended to his burns

as best we knew how. Sarai and Mara sat huddled with the children, too stunned and numb to react in any way. The men marveled that James had died with so few burns and so soon. They decided that he must have breathed in too much of the flames.

There was no cemetery, of course, no preacher or priest. Peyton volunteered, "Walton has lost two babies and the McPike's a small child and they are buried on a spot just west of me on my West forty.¹ It is a nice spot and you are welcome to lay your boy there. Jessop will make you a coffin, be pretty crude but a coffin." So it was arranged. It seemed better than a crude grave beside the cabin.

It was a sad lonesome group that buried their first son in this wild wilderness land. Everyone wept and the family especially mourned because there was no priest on hand.

"God understands," comforted Jim, as he read from the Bible and offered prayers. Walton offered some comforting words and all the family fingered their beads. It was a shocking experience for us, two young people who had so happily enjoyed this same wild wilderness.

Life went on as it always does. Crops had to be garnered, children taken care of, fuel brought in for the winter, supplies brought from the Marion depot. Rains came and lightened our worries. The saw mill was finished and they were busy sawing lumber. George and Elmer were now hauling their logs to the mill and Jim helped them for several days.

On a visit to Seth and Ethel, we found them well and busy as usual. Tom and Katie were such a joy. When I confided my pregnancy, Ethel threw her arms around me and we rejoiced together. "I'm so glad for you. I hope you will be as lucky as I am. Isn't Katie a beautiful baby or am I just a doting mother?"

Both, I told her and we laughed together.

Seth was plowing more sod for next year and he had bought a mare from the livery barn in Marion and hoped to raise a colt the next year. They also had a second cow so they had plenty of milk, butter and cheese. Ethel was able to trade some butter to Mrs. McCloud for some geese and she hoped to raise some goslings the next year.

When we sold the wheat, Jim had enough money to buy his horse and return Barney to Seth. Seth was now plowing with four horses and a breaking plow.

When Ethel and I picked up the walnuts and hickory nuts with the hindrance of two year old Tom, we stained our fingers so badly that the men threatened not to eat our cooking. We laughed at them and said that will be the day.

Later, we spent Thanksgiving with them and the John's. It was such fun with children around. I realized that one of the reasons I liked the Reilly's so much was because of the children. Although I shed a tear for my pal, James, I hugged the thought to myself, that next year, I would have one of my own.

Mrs. John's had received a barrel from her church in Kentucky, filled with assorted clothes, all usable but much too large and odd sized for her children. There were even some high-heeled, pointed toed boot type shoes for men, good for nothing in this country. Her oldest was only five and these garments were size 14 or 15 at least. "I'm sure I don't know what they were thinking of. They knew us well and they know the children couldn't have grown that much." We speculated that they either mixed the barrels when they were sent or they thought she could use the garments as material, which she could have done if she needed to.

I thought that perhaps Sarai or Mara or even Sean might be able to wear some of them so I took home the jackets, coats and warm underwear. I certainly didn't know how to give the garments to Sean and Sarai. Finally, I simply carried them to their cabin and left them, to tell the truth. They came in a mission barrel to Arlo Johns and no one could use them. If Sean's could use any of them, they should use them. Otherwise, they should pass them on to anyone they pleased. It worked because I saw them wearing many of the garments next winter.

In spite of the late dry summer, most of our crops yielded well and our gardens furnished plenty to eat. Sean's and our root cellars were filled to overflowing. He and Jim had gone to Marion together with wheat so we had whole wheat flour and were well prepared for the winter. We still depended on Jim's hunting for meat. New people had settled North of Sean's, the Burke's and the O'Briens, so they had Irish neighbors. Sean had managed to get a team and wagon. One nice fall day, they invited us to go along and we went into the timbered section and picked up a wagon full of nuts. It was a happy day.

Winter came again with its snow and cold. Still we had many pleasant days. Smith's invited us and the Reilly's for Christmas that year. Faye's had gone back to Pennsylvania for the winter. Sean, at first declined to come for Christmas but Jim persuaded him to reconsider. Jim volunteered to bring the sled and we would all go together. "You need to get out and the children will love to. Even if you do feel too sad it will do all of you good." It was a very cold day but we rode snugly in the bottom of the bob-sled on straw and blankets.

The cabin was warm and gaily decorated. A small tree stood on a shelf with candles on each side. It was trimmed with popcorn and bits of red cloth made into steamers. The children were wide eyed as they looked at the tree. Then Evie presented them each with a darling new dress. "After Almira showed me that I could sew, I have been learning ever since. I love to sew."

Sid beamed, "Hasn't she caught on fast? I'm so glad because she is happy with it."

"When I called on them last summer, Mara helped me make a pattern for each girl." Evie proudly showed the dresses. She had made a bright apron for each of us, Mara, Sarai, and me.

Sid said, "I bought the prettiest calico material in the store in Delaware." as he proudly surveyed his wife's gifts.

I had told Sarai and Mara of my pregnancy but not Evie but by now it was obvious and Evie brought it up.

"I'm expected a baby in June. I'm afraid. Without a doctor. I don't know. If you can do it, maybe I can, too."

Henry was staying the winter, this year, so he was home also. He was the hunter for the Smith family but on Christmas day, they had roasted a large ham. We brought potatoes, bread and boiled turnips, while the Reilly's also brought bread and sauerkraut and home made wine. It was a feast with Evie's tarts and tea.

It was a nice day, with the Christmas story, songs, and each of us repeated our own version of many prayers. A happy day.

That winter was another cold hard winter, with perhaps a little less snow but bitterly cold and windy all the time. We had to start melting snow right after Christmas for the house. The horses were able to forage for themselves most of the winter and we

only had to melt water for them in stormy weather. Often enough.

We managed to spend a little time outdoors although I couldn't roughhouse like the year before. We brought out the chess set and started another lasting game. We busied ourselves with the cooking, sewing, and Jim was making a new chair.

Jim again worked on our shoes, using the new strips of leather from Marion. He resoled and patched. We had two venison hides curing on the cabin wall but we could not find a way to use them. We had salted the hides and they were as hard as the leather strips he bought. We know that Indians made moccasins so we tried. We soaked the hide but soak it as we could, it did not soften.

We did cut a sole in the shape of a foot and made rabbit skin uppers. Then we used the awl and made holes all around the outside of the sole and laced the rabbit skin to it. We used extra strands of rope to fasten together. It worked but we looked at them with jaundiced eyes. We made a pair for each of us but we seldom used them.

Although we had planned for Ethel to be with me when the baby arrived, the weather made that impossible. We were pleased because Sarai agreed to come. She was nearby and she was more experienced.

To our delight, Seth rode in one cold day to visit us. He had rode and walked alternately and although he was cold, he was in his usual good spirits. He told us, "We were worried about you and needed to know that you were all right. Ethel was so worried that I came. I'll tell her that you have good friends and neighbors just as we have." It was a joy to see and hear him and we hated to see him ride off into the cold again.

Our Jamie was born during that hard winter, February 12, 1856. The night I went into labor, it was snowing lightly with a bitter wind blowing the snow along the tops of the drifts. Jim and tried to keep some sort of a path open between our cabins but there were many drifts which filled all the hollow spots and shifted with every change of the wind. That night he took both horses so Sarai could ride back with him. I readied everything, bedding, baby clothes, and hot water.

Jamie was born about daylight of the morning of February 12th, a husky, vigorous baby, who arrived yelling his displeasure. After Sarai dressed him, in the usual undershirt, band, diaper, and blankets, she tied a ribbon with a small medal around his neck. "It's to ward off evil spirits," said told us. After she kissed the baby and made the sign of the cross over him, she brought him to me.

Sarai stayed with us for four days, caring for me and the baby and helping Jim with the washing sheets and blankets. They put them out to freeze dry in the cold and snow.

I felt fulfilled and happy as I nursed by tiny son, rejoicing in my plentiful supply of milk and the hungry sucking baby. Jamie was nearly bald, with a wizened old man's face but I thought he was beautiful. Almost as beautiful as Tom and Katie. I didn't have many baby clothes of course but I had leftovers from Katie and Sarai had brought me a few from her saved hoard from Ireland. Thank of it, so far for the clothes to come and she was sharing them with me. I had made some small dresses and shirts from a dress of mother's.

Jim rode off one day to tell Ethel that all was well. It was a bitter cold ride but we knew that they would be very worried until they heard from us.

"Ethel sent word that she can't wait to see you and Jamie. She said to stay in bed and don't catch cold. It seems that Eva McCloud got up too soon and she caught cold or

something and nearly died. She's still bothered, for one leg is swollen and weak. They had a doctor come out from Marion and he called it milk-leg.² They have a fine boy and have to feed him on cow's milk. They get the milk from Seth. Lucky for them that Seth has a cow. So far they think the baby is doing all right on the cow's milk."

Sarai went home to her own little family and I cared for myself and the baby with Jim's help, of course. I felt weak and woozy when I first stood on my feet but that soon passed and in a few days, I had resumed my usual activities. Jim carried all the wood and kept the fire going. Washing was the big problem. It was a constant process of thawing snow for water. I hung the garments out to freeze dry if it wasn't too stormy. Inside, I had only one small line to the left of the fireplace to hang wet clothes. Mostly, there were one or two diapers hanging there. Even our drinking water had to be melted snow. Between melting snow and washing in a pail, we kept busy.

We had named our boy, James Alvin, always called Jamie. It didn't seem possible that one small baby could take up so much room. Because of the baby and the melting snow, we had been keeping the cabin warmer than in former winters. The snow and cold lingered on and Jim became alarmed as his wood pile dwindled every day. Snow was too deep to permit hauling wood from anywhere.

Spring came in a rush that year. Everything was awash from melting snow. Our little creek was a river by our door. One big reason for rejoicing, no more melting snow.

Sarai and Mara came every few days to check on me and Jamie. As soon as the water went down enough so as to allow crossing, Evie came to see me, in her muff and fur coat. I had lost my awe of her and welcomed her as a fellow neighbor after a long hard winter. They had wintered the season well, she told me.

Evie brought Jamie a darling long white dress of white linen. She assured me that she wanted to make him a calico dress but she was afraid I wouldn't like a colored dress on a baby. She had used a lined tablecloth and made ruffles and embroidery. It was darling. Evie had certainly taught herself to sew well. I treasured the dress and used it as baptismal dress for each of my children. It was made with love and caring.

"I'm so glad you told me about your chess games. Sid and I don't play chess but Sid made a checker board and we used red and yellow kernels of corn for checker men. Without the checkers, I don't think we would have gotten along so well. How did you get along and isn't he a darling baby? It makes me feel better just to visit with you. I envy you your knowledge of everything in this country."

I assured her that she was learning it just the way I had. Her baby was due in June so we discussed what was needed and we made plans for me to help her.

"Sid went to the mill today, to find out if there is any chance of buying lumber this summer. He says we can build a house as soon as the crops are in, if we can get lumber. Both he and Henry are good carpenters. Henry got back last week."

"Orange Faye is back but Elmer is bringing a wagon load from the East. Here's Sid, now. Oh, Jamie, you are so precious."

It was a very pleasant afternoon.

Although I had written to both Aunt Josie and Aunt Luella, I had heard from no one. I had also written and sent my address to the lawyer. He had answered saying he would write me when ever he had anything to report. Still no word and it was not three years since Grandma died.

I wrote to the Aunts, telling them about Jamie, adding that I thought they should know that there was a family, part Blanchard, coming on in this part of the world. James Alvin Richardson. It had a nice ring to it.

Months later, I received a letter from Vermont and of all people, it was from Cousin Isabella.

"Dear Cousin Almira, I saw your letter to Mother, telling about your baby and your home in Iowa and I wanted to write you. I never did blame you for running away. Everybody was ordering you around like a slave. I am glad to know that you have a home and a new baby boy. I am married to Jack Kingman and we have two, John, age three and Kate, age thirteen months. Of course, I am a doting Mother. Jack is the doctor here in Marron now the old doctor died. Mother and Father are doting Grandparents which rather surprised me.

"Aunt Lizzie was buried here in Marron last week so we were all together. All the rest are well. Tell Ethel that I would like to hear from her also.

"Affectionately, Isabella Kingman."

My memories were so blurred by the words of the Aunts and their actions, especially Aunt Josie that it was hard for me to realize that Isabella was a decent girl cousin, just like me.

¹ Several of the first burials in the little community were made on the farm of Jesse McPike. Soon after, McPike donated land for what would be called the Upper Spring Grove Cemetery, and those previous burials that could be located were then moved to the new cemetery.

² Milk-leg- a painful swelling of the leg soon after childbirth, due to thrombosis of the large veins.

Chapter 12

Company's Coming

Jim had ridden over to the new post office at Atlanta to mail my letter and his own to his folks. He said it seemed like two miles over but probable only about half that. I had sent the new address to Aunt Luella and to the lawyer, but I didn't expect any mail for ages, if ever. Ethel and never heard from her sisters either but she did write to Isabella and they wrote each other some years.

One morning, I noticed that Jim had walked down to our corner and stood visiting with the Smith's. Something is up, I thought as I saw Jim start running toward the house, waving a letter. Smith's had brought same mail sent to Marion and then brought on North by someone in the mill area.

"Almira, Almira! They are coming. They're coming. Father and Mother are coming.¹ Here to see us. They are really coming!" as he waltzed me around and around. I was simply appalled. Where would we put them? There wasn't room for the three of us without two more.

"It'll be all right. I'm so glad, glad, glad. Won't it be jolly?"

I was dazed. I wasn't at all sure about that. Here I hadn't even met them. We were in the midst of spring's work. Jim had finished plowing or rather he and Sean had finished the wheat and the plowing. Soon we would be starting the garden.

"Let's see," referring to the letter, "They said they would be leaving in a few days. So we have no idea when they will arrive. Letter is dated two weeks ago. They could come any time but probably some time yet. Here's the letter."

The very next day, Jim came home with another bed tick under his arm. "I tried to buy one in Long's store but he didn't have one. Elmer heard me ask and he offered us an extra one he had. So here it is. We can fill it with straw, keep it under our bed in the

daytime and pull it out at night. We'll be comfortable."

So it was. He also finished the two chairs he had been working on for so long, so now we had two chairs and the bench seating room for four. To make room for the tick, my trunk had to go elsewhere. We finally put it beside the fireplace and Jim built a shelf over it for a work table. We had very little but the cabin was full to overflowing.

A few days later, a strange rig drove in from the west and they were here. Jim was beside himself with pleasure at seeing his parents. Well, I thought, I would feel like that if Mother and Grandma came driving in. Fearfully, I waited to meet them, especially so as I remembered Jim had said, his Mother always reminded them, "Now always remember you are Livingston's," whenever she scolded him. I was deeply afraid to meet them.

She appeared to be tall, dressed in a long black suit and a plain hat as she came to greet me, a new daughter-in-law for the first time. I needn't have worried. She took one look at Jamie and reached for him. I stood aghast, fearing Jamie would be frightened by a stranger but he only stared. I don't know what I feared but he had never seen any strangers and he was only three months old.

"Oh, you darling baby! Papa, come here and see this darling baby."

Father held and jiggled Jamie while Jim beamed and managed to introduce me to them. They hurried off to unload so the driver could return. They had ridden the stagecoach to Quasqueton and hired Pete to bring them here. They had trunks, boxes, bags, much more than our little house could hold. Much had to go into the lean-to.

"We thought we might stay all summer, at least. If we liked it. It is a time of change. All the kids are settled and we don't want to be left out into the excitement of the new west."

We showed them the cabin, the pole barn, the plowed fields, the garden spot ready to plant, the pool of water. We started cooking outside again because it was so crowded and it was very pleasant to use the lean-to shelter. I often wondered what they really thought of our small cabin, so dark, with only a dirt floor, sitting alone or almost alone midst miles of grass with no timber. They were Vermont people so had to be used to hills and lots of trees. Still, the Vermont I knew was pretty crude when compared with some of the swank, magnificent houses we saw along the way in New York and at Galena.

The very first Sunday, we drove to Seth's and Ethel's with Mother and I riding on the seat, only a board across the top of the box. We took turns holding Jamie while the men either walked or rode in turn. It was a lovely time of year to show our great Iowa countryside. We received a rousing welcome. All the babies had grown like weeds. Tom was now three, Katie was walking and Jamie was trying to sit up alone.

Ethel was also a little awed by this well-dressed lady from back East as I was. She asked, "You came by stagecoach? Was it tiring? How long did it take you?"

Mother Richardson laughed and told us. "I never dreamed of having to get out and walk across the muddy flats or help push the coach across some ravine but did. There wasn't much choice either we stayed there or we helped. It was all so muddy and dreadful."

Ethel and I could relate to that. We told her about our helping and we weren't even riding the coach.

"The railroad trip wasn't much better. We came as far as South Bend, Indiana, by train. The boy in front of us got a hot cinder in his eye. I don't think they ever did get it

all out. After that we were very careful. Either we kept our window closed or we covered our faces with a scarf."

Ethel was anxious to make boy clothes for Tom. He had been in dresses long enough. We help her make a pattern and to cut out several garments. Mother told us about the new styles and trimmings which were fashionable in the East. We had little real interest. Ethel and I had both defied Grandma's edict and now wore our dresses at about boot-top length. There was no one to really care anyway. We each had some of our long dresses hung on the wall, waiting till they might be needed but we had shortened those we wore every day at home.

Father Richardson was very interested, so Jim and Seth showed him everything they knew about the cabins and the buildings, just all they could think of. Seth had just bought two sows and was building a small shed for them. We had a very nice day.

Mother had brought several pieces of materials so we made small garments for Jamie, Tom, and Katie. I lost my fear of my Mother-in-law as we worked.

Sarai and Mara came calling and Mother met them. We must have developed our own understanding of each other, because Mother could not understand a word they said. And I was so proud of their ability in English.

Father wanted to buy a piece of this prairie for himself so he and Jim spent several days looking at parcels of land for sale. They decided on eighty acres just a mile west of us which he could buy from C.D. Buck (Buckingham) for four dollars an acre. He hired McKee to do the surveying for him and to mark the corners. There were no trees on it so he also purchased two acres along the river for two dollars and acre, not for farming but for the many straight trees to use for lumber.

It was a busy summer. All of us planted, hoed and weeded and in between weeding the men cut logs and transported to the mill to be cut into lumber. This meant a drive of two miles to the timber, two miles to the mill with one or two logs and then another three miles home.

Elmer Faye arrived from the East, with his wagon loaded with furniture, two stoves, bureaus, boxes and boxes of kettles, pans and dishes. He brought two crates of chickens. The families came soon after to Delaware by train and by stagecoach. Both Elmer and Orange drove to meet them. There was Orange's wife Milly with their two children, Sally, eight and Thomas, seven. Then Elmer and his wife, Janet had three children, Glen, age ten, Horace, age eight, and Susan, who was six. I called on them at once and found them neighborly and pleasant.

It was reassuring to see children racing about, all excited over each new discovery. Milly told me that Orange hadn't wanted them to come until the house was finished but they came anyway. She said, "I thought, if they can camp out in all kinds of weather, then we can camp out for one summer. If for some reason the house isn't ready, we could go back but I'm sure it will be."

Milly and Janet were busily putting in a big garden. It was a pleasure to see the hens and the boastful roosters strutting about. I traded a gallon of honey for three settings of eggs and the use of three broody hens when they became broody.

Faye's had finally finished piling their lumber and then they had to haul the brick for the chimneys from the kiln near the Junction, farther yet than Seth's. It was a long tiring trip for the men and horses. Jim, Father, Sid and Henry helped many days on the

house between their own work. The house was nice. It had two rooms up and two rooms down, nice large rooms and they added an ell for the kitchen and dining room. That room was about twice the size of our cabin. Then they added a porch to the South and later a large woodshed.

Ethel and Seth came and surprised us one day. We were surprised to see them and we were surprised because they had a letter for me from the lawyer. It contained a check for my share of the estate for 137 dollars. It doesn't sound like much but I felt rich at the time. Remember, we hadn't really had any money since we left Vermont. Everything we had we traded. Except for the land, of course.

When Father and Mother ordered things for their house, we added to the order and ordered some window glass. They went to Marion to get the order when it came and it made such a load they could hardly find room for it in the wagon. They had a stove, window glass, well pump, new kettles, blankets, almost everything needed to set up a new home.

As soon as Faye's house was finished, Father started on his own. It went rapidly, just two rooms with a loft, using his newly milled lumber and shingles and board flooring. Orange having proved himself a good bricklayer, was chosen to build the chimney. There was no running water on Father's eighty, so now they dug a well. I knew of course that the Smith's and the Faye's had dug wells because they had no running water by their door as we and Sean had. I had felt that it was a shame because our running water was so handy, we were fortunate that we didn't need a well.

They dug the well, three feet square, shoring the walls as they went down. The dirt was pulled out with a bucket and a rope until enough water gathered in the bottom that they thought they had enough so they couldn't pump it dry. Then they installed a pump and pipe and they were ready to pump water. The well was about thirty feet deep and a wooden cover was build over the hole around the pump.

Father and Mother moved into the new cabin at once. Jim and I helped them add some shelves and hooks for storage. The new stove was set up ready for cold weather to come. I even made curtains for their four windows. Big hinges and a lock had been purchased for the door. Father had sent his order to his brother back in Vermont and he had ordered from the necessary companies and the goods had come to Marion.

Amid all the building and farming, we had our share of sadness. Sarai and I stayed with Evie during her time of travail, hour after hour of labor. She finally gave birth to a girl, a perfect baby, stillborn, too tired out from the extended labor. We shed tears over the tiny perfect child. Sid cried with us. Sadly, still crying, we cared for Evie and bound her breasts to prevent them from filling with milk.

By now, there was a church organization north of us called New Ireland,² where they were holding occasional services and they had established a cemetery. Their priest came out from Dubuque every six weeks on horseback. Jim and Sean went with Sid to bury little Anna Marie. Henry had shaped a small coffin. Jim read from the Good Book and they repeated many prayers. Both Sid and Sean lamented because there was no priest present.

Would a doctor have saved the child? We had no way of knowing. The nearest doctor was thirty miles away and he could hardly have been summoned in time. It would have been thirty miles and then thirty miles back and he might not have been available at

once. Sarai, Mara, Mother or I spent many afternoons with Evie that summer.

Father and Jim drove to Dubuque and they returned with a team of horses, a wagon, and a plow for Father. Jim told me, "You should have heard them haggle over the price. It makes a difference if you have a little money. Father doesn't have much really, but even a little helps."

Even more important to me, Jim brought back glass for our window and wonder of wonders, a new pump and pipe for a well. They dug the well only about twenty feet from our house and installed the pipe and pump. It was wonderful. I had only to step out of the door and pump a pail of water, instead of going to the pool and dipping it. No more melting snow, we hoped. Jim was especially careful of the well cover because children get careless or curious.

Enos Cook, at the saw mill was a skilled man and could make anything on order. They had him groove some planks and they made a small stock tank on each farm to use in watering the horses. Of course, our horses could still water at the creek but Father or Mother had to pump water for the team.

When my broody hens were ready, Father and Jim were busy as Mother and I made a stockade of small willow poles to confine them, and to keep the varmints out. It worked although the gate was heavy and clumsy. Sally and Glen helped me carry the hens home in our arms with their heads covered with a towel or in my case with my apron. I set forty-five eggs under the three hens.

Sid and Henry were hauling lumber, and piling it, we bringing up rocks and small stones, getting ready to build their house. It seemed as though someone was always going to Marion or to Delaware for supplies for the houses.

Jim and Father cut a window in our cabin and then they laid a floor. With a window and a floor, I was coming up in the world.

After cutting more logs and taking them to the saw mill, they built a small barn for Father's horses. All of us working together had put up two good sized stacks of hay at each place. Our wheat was cut and stacked. Fall would soon be here and winter not far behind.

Father Richardson had made friends with the Walton's,³ who lived near the new Post Office at Atlanta. It was about five miles North and West of us. They spent Sundays with them occasionally attending their church services and prayer meetings which were held in each other's homes. Walton also owned and operated a blacksmith shop and he hired Ollie Jessop to run and work the shop. Father liked to visit at the shop and sometimes when they were rushed, he helped with the work. He was as good as any one in shoeing horses.

One day Father came home laughing over their school troubles. School was held in an old log cabin with a new teacher, Sally Potter, only seventeen years old. Pete Peyton was the director and he kept hearing rumors about all kinds of unruly behavior. His own children insisted that everything was fine and all of the kids loved the new teacher. He decided to find out for himself so one morning before school time, he hid in the loft and waited for school to start. When the noisy fracas started below, he couldn't stand it. He dropped down through the only opening into the loft, frightening the teacher and the children half to death. They ran screaming in all directions before they recognized Pete. Turned out that Pete's own children were the worst and Jeff was the ring leader.

Father laughed and laughed over the idea of big lanky Pete coming down out of the loft, long legs first. "Pete is going to keep Jeff home after this. There is plenty of work for him to do. And he read the riot act to the rest of the kids."

One fine day, we visited Seth and Ethel and on another day, they visited us. Jim purchased a bred heifer from Seth in exchange for the labor on the barn. Crops were good again that year. Sid and the Faye brothers and Jim often bragged about the size of the heads of wheat, the ears of corn or the size of their pumpkins or squash.

Seth's two sows produced twelve shoats, which Seth was fattening on pumpkins, unused produce from the garden, wheat, and corn. Father bought two of them when they were heavy enough so for the first time we had lard to use. The hogs were butchered and the hams and meat were cured in Seth's smoke house before Father brought them home.

During the fall, every day, unless it was raining, Jim and Father drove to the timber and returned with a load of firewood and stacked it near the houses, ready for the winter and the bucksaw. Since wood was our only source of heat for cooking and for hot water, we used a lot of wood, even during the summer.

That year was surely a busy eventful year. Jamie's birth, Father and Mother's arrival, Evie's loss of her baby, the building of two houses, the work on our cabin, the two well, along with the work on the crops and gardens kept everyone very busy.

Someway, Sarai and I managed, with the help of the children, to gather many berries and to keep the path between well traveled. If my beans came on first, I shared with them and if their potatoes might be usable first, she shared with us. They had come through another year in fine shape and a new baby boy, named Patrick Joseph, a big name for a little boy. We called him Packy always.⁴ Some later shortened it to Pat.

A group of fellow Irishmen had settled in the Northern part of our township. None of these were known to Sean's but they did have the common tongue of Irish and a common bond in the Roman Catholic Church. The group had formed a church society and held services every time the priest rode out from Dubuque. The services were held in their log cabins but they had organized a cemetery society and established a cemetery. There were no roads so neither Sid or Sean had ever attended but Sean had asked that he be notified when next time the Priest was coming.

The word got around because one day, Father O'Halleron drove down to see them. One of the boys from his settlement parish, with a team and buggy or rather a light wagon, drove for the Priest and was his guide. There was only a trail leading from one cabin to another or leading toward Quasqueton, although there was now a well traveled trail, going East and West between Quasqueton and Delaware. I wondered how the boy could find the Reiley's.

As it happened, Jim was helping Sean build a shed for his new cow and I was helping Sarai when they drove up to the door. Sarai, Mara, and Sean, rushed to meet the Priest with a great outpouring of talk, in Irish, of course. Jim and I quietly went to leave, although the girls clung to me in wide-eyed wonder and fear of the unknown.

Sean stopped us and asked Jim to ride over and see if the Smith's could come over for the afternoon. Then he introduced the children, Jim and I to Father O'Halleron. When Smith's arrived, explanations, tears, and prayers were repeated in English as the Smith's knew no Irish. So Jim and I also understood. "No, the Lord does not hold it against your beloved children because there was no priest to perform the last rites. I will be glad to

administer them to your children if it will comfort you. Little Patrick was brought out and presented. Sean, Sarai, and Father then drove over to the grave where Jamie was buried. Jim and Sid went back to work on the cowshed while Evie and I tried to answer some of the children's questions. But only Mara seemed able to make the most understanding.

Father O'Halleron arranged for Sid and Evie to follow him to the cemetery for a service at the gravesite of Annie Marie. Before he left, he pronounced a Blessing on all of us, children, parents, and on Jim and me.

We hadn't understood the depth of feeling of both the families. Never having been away from their church and a Priest, they felt lost without the familiar comfort in times of deep trouble. I was very glad that Father O'Halleron was a kind and understanding man. I will always respect and love Father O'Halleron for the love and comfort he brought to these lonely settlers on the prairie.

Jim remarked, "We must do something to start services around here. We are getting too used to having no church. I'll talk to the Faye's about it. Their youngsters need a Sunday school. I hear that there is a preacher who goes out from Marion every Sunday but of course, we can't expect him to come this far for three families."

We filled our root cellars and pits to overflowing. By trading with each other, honey for potatoes, eggs for honey, buckwheat for wheat flour, pumpkins for turnips, on and on, all of us had plenty. Jim had captured another swarm of bees and we hoped they would survive this winter. Sid and Henry had finished their house foundation but would wait for another spring before they started on the house proper. Sean had gotten a team and wagon as well as the cow.

I had saved twelve pullets from my adventure with the broody hens and their chicks. We added a little pole shelter at the sheltered side of the barn and covered it with straw for the pullets. I hoped for a few eggs next year. We had eaten the roosters as fried chicken, what we were able to rescue from the weasels and minks.

The wheat was tramped out and winnowed and grist taken to Marion but we were hoping there would be a flour mill beside the saw mill by another year. It was getting much colder as we stacked the fodder around the barn and covered it with the straw. Winter was coming.

That Christmas, the Faye's invited the group to meet with them at the new house. It was by far the largest house in our group. It was very nice, with a parlor, and bedroom downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. An added ell, one story, made the kitchen and dining room in one room with an added pantry. There was a parlor stove and the range in the kitchen. The groups now included the Faye's, five in Elmer's family and four in Orange's family. Sid and Evie Smith, Father and Mother Richardson, Sean and Sarai with Mara, Clara, Katie, Bridget, Patrick, then Jim and I and Jamie. Twenty three counting the babies. We were all within a mile of each other and still the only houses in sight on this grassy plain.

¹ Nathan and Jane (Livingston) Richardson

² To become known as Monti

³ Reuben Walton is recorded as being the second permanent settler in Newton Township and settled near the area of a spring that became known as Walton's Spring.

⁴ In my youth, across the section from the farm where I was born, lived "Packy" Reilly. When I attended Reilly school, in the late 1940's, my only classmate was Donald Reilly and our first teacher was Catherine Reilly.

Chapter 14

Fire

I have very good reason to remember 1859. That was the year of the bad fire. After a good growing season, it turned hot and dry as the rains passed us by, leaving the grass dry and dead. We feared fires again like in 1853 and again in 1855. We had dry spells in other years but for short spells and the fires were small and easily controlled. Everyone plowed a firebreak around his farm buildings and homestead. The wind came out of the southwest every day, drying the grass, shriveling the heads of wheat, leaving everything exposed to a bad fire. Jim and Father plowed another five furrows around the buildings and dragged the barren strip again to kill any weeds which might have grown again. Twice we had seen smoke but it had drifted away.

The year before, Jim had seen Tom Cooper, using a new style of scythe, called a cradle, really several scythes fastened at one end at an angle so that the cut wheat lay ready to tie. He had bargained for one from Ollie Harner in Quasqueton, so one hot day, he drove to Quasqueton to get the cradle. When he left, he warned me, "Take it easy today, Almira. It's hot already and going to get hotter. Don't try to work in the garden today. Yes, I know the beans should be picked but let it go. We can pick them in the morning, early. You look tired, the heat is getting to you."

Jim left early to take advantage of the cooler air in the morning and hoped to be back by noon or shortly after. He had to take it slowly because the heat was hard on horses, too.

I put Ricky down for his nap and took Jamie with me to the garden to dig potatoes, and bring in tomatoes and cabbage for dinner. With sliced tomatoes, bread and milk and slaw, I would have plenty for dinner. I dreaded to build the fire to cook the potatoes. Jamie and I sat on the steps in the shady spot and fixed the vegetables for

dinner.

Although I didn't expect Jim to be back before noon, I looked up the lane to see instead, a black cloud of smoke and flame, bearing toward us. I could see some of the Reilly's running toward the creek with water buckets. Really scared, I dunked a blanket in the water barrel as I watched the smoke engulf Reilly's cabin and roll toward me.

I rushed into the house to get the sleeping Ricky but I didn't dare stay in the house. I carried both boys to the pool in the creek and we sat in the pool and soaked our clothes, our hair and all and I pulled the wet blanket over our heads as a protection from the billowing smoke. The pool was small and the creek now only a trickle but I huddled under the blanket and tried to calm the protesting boys. They, of course, were too young to understand, only three and fourteen months. All the time, I was praying that Jim was safe, that the Reilly's were safe and that the fire would stop at the firebreaks.

The fire did stop at the firebreak and after a few false starts in our yard it fizzled out. The bulk of the fire rushed around us but stopped at the creek, turned and roared away toward the Northeast. I couldn't see anyone fighting the fire. I carried Ricky and with Jamie clinging to my skirts, I rushed around, put out small spots of fire in the yard with the wet blanket. The house was black with smoke and black ash lay everywhere.

I was crying with relief that I and the boys were safe and sick with fear for Jim and the Reilly's. Their house was still burning. With all my being, I wanted to run toward them, to help, to do something but all I could do, like in a terrible nightmare, was cry and comfort the boys. The fire was still burning off to the Northeast.

The cows had broken out and fled across the creek, I hoped. The sows and pigs were not too close to the actual fire but they had already been suffering from the heat. I carried cool water from the pump to give them a drink and then poured a pail of water over each sow and her litter, as I watched for hot embers left in our yard. Some of the fence posts still smoldered and the rails but I was satisfied at last that the fire was still out.

Father's and Faye's buildings were on the other side of Cedar creek so were not in the line of fire, and the fire had bypassed the Smith's. No one came to help. I had seen the Faye's leave early in the morning, and waved at them as they left. Going fishing, we had guessed, but where was Father and Mother and the Cosgrove's and the Smith's. Still crying, I took the crying boys to the water barrel and washed them and myself. And took them into the house for clean clothes, leaving our wet, dirty, smoke grimed ones on the step. "Please God, keep my Jim safe."

When Jim finally came, he looked as burned as he had after the Peyton's fire, long ago. He stared about at his ruined wheat, the smoke blackened house, the still smoldering fence posts, the heap of dirty clothes outside the door. "Thank God! I thought I told you to take it easy today, not have a damned grass fire," he murmured as he reached for me and we clung together in a mixture of relief and misery.

I roused to ask about the Reilly's "They are all safe. No one hurt. The house and furniture are ruined. I helped put out the last of the fire. I saw it coming when I was over by Coopers. Cooper and I set a back fire on McPike's corner so we saved the horses. The biggest fire I have ever seen. Coopers have lost their house but the firebreaks saved most of the cabins. All the crops are gone. The wheat burned like so much chaff."

"I asked Sean's to stay here tonight. I'm not sure how livable it is here either. I think they can rebuild the house. The roof is gone. The fire didn't jump his firebreak but

embers caught on his roof. His other buildings are safe.”

Gently, I tended his burns and cleaned his eyes as best I could. We had butter to use on burns now. “Cosgrove’s must have been in the line of fire. I see it didn’t jump the creek. It’s so nearly dry, I don’t see why it didn’t,” his voice croaked hoarsely. As Jim cleaned up and we regained some of our senses without crying, we took stock. With Jamie and Ricky riding our shoulders, we hunted and found the cows in the corn field, of course! Another fear, that they might have eaten too much corn. Some of the chickens were dead but some seemed all right and came for their supper as usual.

It was nearly dark before the Faye’s and Father’s came rushing in, just getting home to see the devastation and very worried about our safety. The men drove on to the Reilly’s to see if they could be of any help.

The Reilly cabin had lost its roof and the walls were black and scorched but still standing. The firebreak had stopped the fire so that his barn and out buildings were all right. A prayer of Thanksgiving was repeated over and over again. No one was hurt. The Cosgrove cabin was gone. He had been new to the area and had not yet plowed a firebreak. He and his son had saved themselves by riding their horses across Silver creek. They stayed with Smith’s for a few days but he did not rebuild. “I want nothing to do with such a country. We are leaving for good.”

I don’t think any of us slept much that night. It was so hot and sultry. The kids sprawled on the floor, outside or just anywhere. The pump was in almost constant use as someone wanted a drink or just wanted to wash again. We couldn’t touch much of anything but that we rubbed soot onto ourselves. Sarai, Mara and I, all of us would lay down, be unable to sleep, we would rise and scrub another pan or dish or table or bathe the babies again. Just about everyone was suffering from prickly heat. We had use the fresh milk and sliced tomatoes for supper.

Seth and Ethel came the very next day, having heard about the big fire. We had a regular bee that day. All the neighbors came also and they swept and brushed the inside and the outside of the house, washed windows, scrubbed furniture, reset fence posts, rebuilt the rail fence around the yard to corral the stock. Although our trees had made a good growth, the shade was not much so that the house was still the only shade. All the helper families had brought something for dinner so I didn’t have to worry about it. We decided, we wouldn’t cook anything but serve picnic foods. Still, at noon, here came McKay’s and the Walton’s with steaming kettles of stew. Bless them.

The wheat and the oats were gone but our corn was across the creek and although it was drought damaged, it was still there. Although it hadn’t burned, the heat had destroyed the garden, only the root crops were safe. We replanted some greens and some turnips for fall use. This would be a lean year. The cows had no trouble with the feed of corn for which we were very thankful.

The following day, all gathered at the Riley’s and rebuilt the loft and roof, using lumber hauled from the mill. They also cleaned all day. Some pieces for furniture showed up. Everyone know that Reilly would never accept any favors, but he had no way of knowing where the shelving, bureau, table and chairs came from. They stayed with us for three nights. Each day, Mother and I kept the little ones so Sarai and Mara could work at home. They had lost all of their crops except what they could salvage from the garden. They also would have a lean year.

The heat had shortened the crop of both wheat and corn, even where there was no fire so the entire township was affected. We had plenty of potatoes, turnips, beets, carrots and so on. Seth brought us a wagon box of pumpkins and divided them with us and Sean's.

Father's wheat was poor but he had enough for flour for us and themselves, ground into grist at Marion. We borrowed some corn from Seth to feed out our shoats. So we had lard and pork.

The biggest problem for the men was the loss of the stacks of hay as feed for the horses and cattle. All had gone together and cut, raked and stacked all the grass they could from neighboring farms to feed the horses. Our corn, although it was poor yield, was cut for fodder and would be good feed for the cows and the calf.

Reilly's received some help from their Northern neighbors and the church friends helped also, so they were getting along. Jim hunted again and we had many squirrels and rabbits. He left some of the game with Sean's if he had good luck. We would miss the usual store of some fruit and vegetables but we would manage. Our preserves and plum leather were safe in the cellar. Our cows soon went dry and we had to get along without milk again. Our hives had survived but we couldn't rob them of honey as there was no way for the bees to replace their stores. All the families had been busy cutting wood, hauling it home and piling it against the coming winter. All of them were cutting fence posts out of the heavier part of the trees and using the branches for fuel. The wood was varieties of oak, hickory, maple, and elm. Most of the families also had the remains of trees cut for lumber logs, so every day, someone was hauling a load of firewood.

Sarai and I helped Evie make soap and she learned of our efforts to teach the family to read and write. She gladly loaned us some books and sent away for a first grade reader and a speller. How we enjoyed them. We talked about starting a school and hiring a teacher but that would have to be left for another year. Clara was now thirteen and she was a great help in teaching the little ones.

We ourselves had many more books and papers to read. Jim's brother sent a box of old papers from Vermont, several times. We managed to subscribe to a church paper.

Snow came early in December and we had good sleighing all winter. A good winter, snow and cold, but few storms.

Seth and Ethel spent Christmas day with us and Father and Mother. It was a memorable occasion because usually it was too far to travel in cold weather with small children. It was a day spent in love and laughter, singing, storytelling and good eating. We didn't forget the Bible and the prayers. As they say, a good time was had by all. I especially remember them as they left, all bundled in blankets in the straw in the bottom of the sled with several heated sadirons near their feet. Seth in his heavy coat guiding his sturdy team off into the after noon afterglow with a gay salute to us. "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

Chapter 15

War Clouds Gather

Our Mary Jane¹ was born February 18th in 1860. Everything went well and we rejoiced in our growing family. Both Mother and Sarai stayed with me through the night and she was born about six o'clock in the morning. Jim and I were very pleased to have a little girl. She was born with dark hair long enough to cover her shirt collar. She seemed very girlish after our bald headed baby boys. She was active and vigorous and was soon watching everybody, a bright spot of beauty and love.

Almost before we knew it, another spring was here, greens were available again, fresh grass, and bright flowers covered the blackened fields, another year to rejoice and forget the fire. Although the fire had given us a bad setback, we were very thankful for our many blessings. Rains came often enough that there was no fear of fire although Jim and Father kept the firebreak barren so they could be cleared quickly if needed.

Jim now had four horses and a breaking plow, a plow with a long slim point, which cut the sod and turned it over. The men helped each other whenever breaking new sod. It was a big job for both men and horses.

Our garden was as big as ever, in fact we planted more potatoes. Our cows freshened and we had milk again, plenty from the two cows so I could make cheese often. The hens laid and we had all the eggs we could use. I could have sold some eggs if there had been anywhere to sell them. Our three sows produced eighteen pigs and we had to borrow more corn from Seth. We were able to pay him back that fall, I am thankful to say. I raised forty chickens that year, a lot with such crude coops as I had.

I could no longer hunt wild strawberries and could only go berry picking when Mother stayed with the children. Even then I had to come back shortly because Mary

Jane was hungry. I missed my former freedom to wander around looking for berries or following Jim as he worked but I enjoyed by family and wouldn't have traded places with anyone. Mother and I took the children and called on neighbors often and they came calling also.

One nice day, Clara came with the wagon and asked me to go with them as they had found a large patch of blackberries and everyone was going to help pick. What a day we had! Sarai and I fixed blankets on the ground in the shade of the wagon and we took turns watching after the younger ones. I only stopped picking long enough to nurse Mary Jane. She enjoyed it, too. We watched her wide eyed wonder as she lay on her blanket in the shade. With Jamie, Ricky, Lucy, and Tommy, all racing around the child watcher was busy.

I had a grand day! I wasn't as used to being out as formerly and although I worked regularly in the garden, I was slightly sunburned around the edges of my sunbonnet. Even Mary Jane had a slight touch of sunburn even though she had never been out of the shade at any time. I used the last of my honey to make the blackberry preserve. I hoped our bees were busy also.

War talk loomed higher. Every time, Jim came home from the store, he bought more troubling news. Father was a strong state's rights man and there was much discussion. Clark, Jim's brother in Vermont sent him a paper concerning the coming battle over state rights. There was also a lot of talk about the slavery question. Some said there was an underground railroad through Iowa to help slaves escape. We doubted it. I had never seen a black man. Jim had seen them working in St. Louis and other river towns but they were far away. Father said he had seen one black man working in a circus back in Vermont. If there was an underground, it had to be along the Mississippi river. This was much discussed on Sundays, both for and against slavery.

We were now holding services each Sunday, each family taking turns as host family and acting as the lay preacher for the day. This included our family, Father's, Faye's, Reece's, and two of the new families, the Dix's and the Patton's. They would fight now if we called them new families. There were plans to build a school house near Reece's and we hoped to be able to use it for church services. When everyone could come there were thirty of us. We had a Sunday school but it was small. Most of the children were too young.

Jim came home one day with the news, "South Carolina is threatening to secede from the Union and is asking other states to secede with them. This war talk is getting serious."

The possibility of war worried us but we felt that the North was in the right. Ideas, both pro and con kept our meetings in an uproar sometimes. We ended these discussions with deep prayers for the right decisions and for peace.

1860 was a good year and we felt positively wealthy as we viewed our grain, hay, and stock. Our cellars were full of vegetables, especially the many bushels of potatoes. We had salted down meat, fried down meat, and hams in the smokehouse. Both of our calves that year were male so Jim was feeding them for beef for another year.

Last year the cradle had not been used, rather it wasn't needed with no wheat but now Father and Jim and Sean made good use of it. Everyone still helped each other and we were very busy. All the men, if they weren't working in the fields, were cutting posts

and firewood and hauling them home. It is a never ending chore to prepare for the next winter.

We were off the beaten path, so to speak, as the trail from Anamosa was now a well worn track going past the Faye's and Father's, on to Quasqueton, and then to Independence. The railroad was now past Independence so much of our supplies could be bought there. Nearly every day, teams with wagons, loaded freight wagons, or top buggies could be soon. The ruts were getting as deep as some we had found on our way West.

We still used the wagon and the bobsled in winter, as did Father and Mother. Sid and Evie had purchased a top buggy and that winter they bought a cutter, a form of sled, or rather a form of buggy with runners under it. Very stylish. Seth and Ethel had purchased a two seated wagon called a democrat. Sean and Sarai had found an old buggy that had lost its top and once in a while two or three of them would join the services at New Ireland. There were still no roads going North and South, just the muddy trail that wandered around the many bogs.

The winter of 1860-61 was long and hard but all of us were well prepared so we relaxed from the summer's work and ate the fruits of our labor. We brought out the chess set but it is hard to concentrate with three youngsters wanting to help. Jim had made a cradle for Mary Jane and we kept this in the kitchen but she slept with us at night. The second bed for the boys was still in our bedroom but I planned on moving them upstairs in the spring. It still got very cold at night but we kept the fires burning later each night and on very cold nights, Jim got up and added wood in the night.

When the pool froze solid, Jim had to pump water for the horses and cattle and I carried water to the chickens each day. It was my only foray out of the house most days. Jim sometimes shoveled out doorways and paths and sometimes we tramped right over the drifts. The boys were confined to the house. Between water and bucking wood, Jim was fairly busy and did not feel the shut in feeling as I did.

Spring was very welcome with its rebirth of green, of flowers, birds, calves, baby chicks, colts, new gardens, and budding fruit. I loved spring. We had scarcely begun to savor spring when the news came that Fort Sumter had been fired upon and we were in war. We resigned ourselves to the inevitable, praying for the safety of all the soldiers both the North and the South. Wednesday night prayer meetings now became an exchange of news and deep prayers for our neighborhood boys.

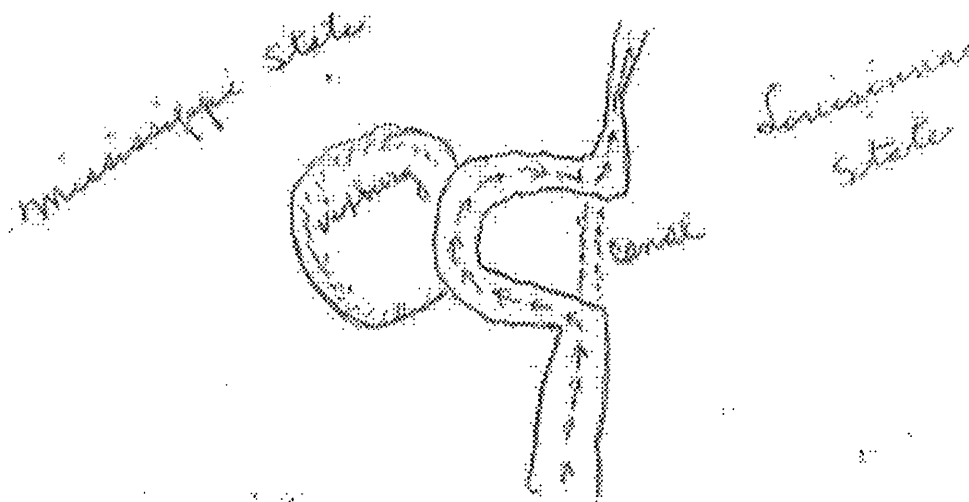
Many of the boys and young men rushed off to join their respective units. The call was issued for the militia. Jim Reece and John's joined the Linn County unit of the State militia. George Carson shouldered his gun and marched off to the war, leaving his young wife and two boys alone on the farm. "I'll be back soon?" he bragged, "When I get there, those Johnny Rebs will turn tail and run. I'll show them."

Letters came slowly and the war dragged on. Bill McKay wrote from Vicksburg and his Father read his letter in church one Sunday.

Let me interrupt Almira's story for a moment. I am including Bill McKay's letter, bad spelling, poor grammar, and all as an example of the times and worries. Saved with other papers, the letter is as written and received long ago. Only the name has been changed.

Dear friend I taken my pen in hand to let yo now from me and where's I am. I told you that I had enlisted the 4th of August 1862 in the 113 Vol Co C Cept Woodoff and we

stay in Chicago three weeks, and then we left and came to Memphis and stay there two weeks and then we got marching orders to go to the Talahacie river for General Price was there with 20 thousand rebels an we started with 40,000 men and we chased them 2 weeks and they would not stand and fight so we went back to Memphis and stay there 1 week and then started down the river to Vixberg. We sailed one half day and then went ashore. We sailed down the Mississippi river to uzoo river you can find it on the map and then we turned up the uzoo and sailed one half day and then went ashore. I forgot one thing. The day before we turned up the uzoo was Christmas morning we land on the Lousisanna side of river and we march out into the country about 12 miles and tore up the railroad that runnin to Vixberg and the next day was Satterday and then the fight commenced at Vixberg and they fought all day Satterday and Sunday they fought again and I though I would try my chance and I went to fight on Sunday and I got in but I could not get out again and the ball whistled around my head and I got enough of fighting that day and they fought four days and we got whiped and new years night we had to retreat we got aboard one of the boats and we sailed up the river to Arkansaw river and there was 10,000 rebels fortified there and we took them all prisoners and they took the prisoners to Springfield, Ill. And half of our regiment went to gard them and our company stayed and then we came back down the Mississippi river again and we stoped at Napolian that is at the mouth of the Arkansaw river and we stayed there two days and got reinforcements and came down the river to take Vixberg again and now we are at Vixberg 4 miles this side we are digging the canal crost the farms the land there is a bend in the river that is 16 miles around it is one mile and 1/8 and it is four miles from Vixberg. I will show you on paper the shape of the river and Vixberg and where we are digging the canal. They can not reach us with thar big guns and it they come out to stop us from digging we will take then and Vixberg and if they don't we cannot take Vixberg for it is to strong fortified here the way it lays



The lack of punctuation makes it hard to copy and to read.

We worked and lived as usual but it was more difficult with so many of the young men gone. Some newly plowed fields could not be worked. New ideas were creeping in

like the cradle and there was talk about a new machine, pulled by horses which could mow hay and grain. Also, they talked about a threshing machine, also powered by horses for threshing and winnowing the grain. Desperately the men sowed more wheat and oats because they just couldn't work more acres of corn.

Our second daughter, Belinda Sue was born in 1862, a sweet addition to our family, born in January during a cold spell, almost as bad as when Jamie was born. Mara came to be with me as Sarai had another girl in December, whom they named Edna Lynne. These two girls became pals as soon as they could walk. We were very proud of them and Edna.

Jim Reece came home a shadow of his former self, so weak he could hardly hold up his head. His recovery was desperately slow. Brad Johns died in Andersonville.

Jim's brother sent him some bundles of newspapers over which we pored many days. All of our Iowa families were thriving. Sean and Sarai had another girl in 1863, a boy named Mary Lou. Evie and Sid also had a new baby in 1863, a boy named Dennis Roy, both babies born in September. None of our boys were of military age and I was happy about that. As soon as Glen Faye was fifteen, he ran away to join the militia. He never did get into battle but they did use him around the camp near Vicksburg.

When Frank Jessop enlisted, Father filled in at the shop but one man couldn't keep up with the demand for horseshoeing and for wagon repair.

Wheat was a poor crop for two straight years, due to the Hessian fly and cinch bugs. One year, hot searing winds out of the Southwest shriveled the heads as they should have been filling. We still had some prairie fires but they were smaller and more easily controlled. Fire guards were plowed around all the buildings and homesteads but also across the end of farms where fires might more easily be stopped. The new breaking plows were a Godsend to our prairie farms.

All of us were affected more or less by the war but in our small group, none of the boys were old enough to be drawn into service. If your name was drawn in the draft, you could hire a younger man to go in your place. I never heard of any from Iowa. There were always plenty of volunteers. I hugged by two boys and prayed that they would never need to be soldiers.

¹ Mary Jane Richardson Todd, known to our family as Grandma Todd

Chapter 16

War and Peace

Work and life went on but many had to work harder with the young men gone. Some of the newly plowed fields could not be worked and lay neglected. New ideas were creeping into the neighborhood. McKay sent for and tried out a new horse drawn machine that cut hay and grain. It had a long straight sickle made of small blades and fastened to a long bar. This was run from the wheels by a rotating gear. Oh, you know more about this than I do but it was a daring discovery then. It worked, and soon, someone came up with a so-called dump rake and then they could put up much more hay. Some loads of hay were even hauled to Manchester and loaded on the train to go to Chicago where it was needed for horse hay.

When they used the mower for wheat and oats it worked but someone had to ride the platform and gather a bundle of wheat at a time and tie it into bundles. It would work but it took a young and strong man to keep up with the falling wheat so it was not always satisfactory.

Everyone was still using horses or oxen to thresh out the grain on the hard ground after a freeze. Patton bought a threshing machine which was a great help. I never did understand just how it worked but a team of horses or oxen were hitched to a long pole and driven around and around turning the mill. Someone fed the broken bundles of wheat into the hopper to be shaken and shaken. Someone else watched the end of the spout and sacked the grain as it poured out. All of us used it the very first year. We still had to winnow the chaff out but the next year he bought a fanning mill to clean the grain. It shook trays and grain, allowing the grain to fall into the trays below and blew the chaff out behind. A sort of fan kept the chaff agitated. It worked.

Mr. McKay also tried out a corn planter. It had grooved wheels to cover the corn, two boxes, one on each side to contain the seed. One man drove the team into as straight rows as he could, like the use of the old bobsled. However, on this machine, the second man sat and pulled a lever to trip so many seeds into the row in front of the wheels. If you were alert and steady enough, you could plant the corn so it could be cultivated both lengthwise and crosswise.

Jim spent all one day helping him and then borrowed it to plant his own corn. It wasn't very many years until everybody used a version of this, to this day. We owed a lot to McKay for his willingness to experiment with these machines. His worries were deeper than ours because his only son was in service near Vicksburg. Everyone paid him whatever he asked but I'm sure he never made any money on his machines. Also, his wife and daughter fed all comers as they worked there, at meal time, as we fed whoever was at the farm.

Our Marietta Ann was born in May, 1964, our third little girl. We were so fortunate, with our beautiful children, all thriving and growing. Little Etta as she was soon called was a bright spot of sunshine in our home. Jim adored his new baby and the children were ecstatic over a new arrival. James and Ricky were lots of help for me already, running errands and doing small chores. I had no trouble and I had plenty of milk for my new baby.

Frank Long left to join the Army but he made arrangements for his wife and girls to occupy an empty cabin near Walton's and help keep the little store open. Liza Carson was still living alone on the farm with her two boys. George's brother, Omar, lived nearby and she seemed to be getting along all right.

When word of the Proclamation came, giving freedom to the slaves, it caused some rejoicing, some concern and many mixed feelings. Bill Phelps died of typhoid in Mississippi. Bill McKay came home with something seriously wrong with his eyes. He was never well after that and he died a few months later of lung fever. His Father never got over the loss of his son and died a few weeks later, of a broken heart, many claimed.

George Carson was killed in action at Shiloh. Jim and I felt called upon to call on his widow, Liza Carson, and offer our sympathy and such help as she might need. We were strongly rebuffed. "I'm all right!" she said tartly. "He wanted to go off and get himself killed." She turned her back on us and walked back to her task.

There was nothing we could do or say. Silently, we returned home. That night, we especially prayed for the widow, praying for help with her boys and her bitterness. "Help her as she refuses to allow us to do. Forgive us for any neglect on our part. Show us the way. We ask in the name of the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."¹

When peace came, there were heartfelt sighs of relief and much rejoicing, accompanied by tears for the dead and the maimed. Slowly, the men trickled home from the war. Frank Long returned and took charge of his little store again, moving it to the settlement at Union Mills, as we now call the settlement on the Wapsi. He thought he could serve more people there. There was now a post office in Union Mills also. Jessop, the blacksmith came home but he didn't linger long but moved on West to another county to buy land for himself. Walton had hired another blacksmith and he and Father were training him for the work.

Thomas Burke returned and soon claimed Clara Reilly for his bride. Jim and I went with the family to the wedding in the New Ireland church, in a log cabin. Katie soon followed her sister's example and married Joe Kenny. Both lived some distance away on farms.

Father continued to help at the shop but one fall day, he was caught in a miserable rain and caught a cold which developed into pneumonia. He died October 6th, 1865. Jim and I were stricken. We tried to be a comfort to Mother and the children. It was hard for them to understand the loss of a beloved Grandfather. We buried him near the plot where Jamie Reilly had laid on the Payton farm. There were ten or so buried there now and it was a cemetery now called Upper Spring Grove.

Mother was at a loss without Father and she decided to return to Vermont to visit the rest of the family and share their grief over the loss of their Father, whom they hadn't seen for ten years. Though Jim sent many messages and good wishes with Mother to his brothers and sisters, our hearts were heavy as we put her on the train to go back to Vermont.

We missed them sorely. We hoped that Mother might return later for it seemed that our lives were empty without them. But of course, we went on. Jim rented Father's eighty acres to Glen Faye who was marrying Jamie Reece in the spring. They would be living in Father and Mother's house. We allowed them to use some of the furnishings and stored the rest in one of our upstairs rooms.

In the springtime, Mother sent a tombstone for Father's grave. Jim drove to Masonville through deep mud to bring the stone home, fifteen miles of mud each way. It was a simple stone with his name, date of birth and death, about eighteen inches by three feet and maybe six inches thick.

One day, Jim and I left the children with Sarai and Mara and we drove to the gravesite where we leveled the grave and set the stone. It was a lovely spot. The cedars had grown, wild flowers bloomed and wild crabapple blossoms scented the air. I pulled the weeds from the small graves of the children and lay a bouquet of flowers on each and on the spot where James had been buried before they moved the remains to the cemetery at New Ireland. Together, we stood in silence before Father's grave and before Mr. McKay's grave, each mourning silently with our own thoughts and prayers.

We tied the horses to a tree while we worked together. It was almost a holiday without the children. The beautiful day, the bright blue sky overhead, the scent of spring in the air, reminded me of the day we picked strawberries, seemingly so long ago. When we finished, we rested on the green carpet of grass. Affectionately, I rubbed by hand across Jim's workworn hand and he closed his fist about mine.

"We've come a long ways since then. We'll always miss Father and Mother but life goes on and so will we. God's with us." It was another day to remember.

Our Ella Marie was born a few weeks later, a sweet pretty child to win our hearts. I was so proud of my family. They were so alert, smart, and pretty. Each one seemed to perfect. It almost seemed a sin to be so proud, as I fondly cared for my four girls and two boys.

Our church services were finally meeting in the school house South of Faye's. We had a nice Sunday school going and already we were outgrowing the school house. I was teaching a first grade class and had fun doing it. Jim taught the adult class.

Seth and Ethel had a little girl, named Patricia Ann, just a week older than Ella. We couldn't see much of them that summer because the babies were too young to travel. Tom was thirteen when Pattie was born and Jamie was ten. Our families were growing up already. In a young family and a young community, something happens every day or maybe twice a day at least. It kept us busy and involved. One day as I looked across to Faye's house, I noticed that I could see nine houses from our yard, where only grass and sloughs had been seen when we were married only thirteen years ago. Thirteen years, such a change. I could have said the same every year, I suppose. Always changes.

We were shocked when the news came about the assassination of President Lincoln. It seemed so barbaric. I guess we shouldn't have been so shocked when we consider all the killing during the war. To think that he had suffered all the trials and burdens of the war and to be shot down on the eve of peace. We held a special service at the school house to honor our President.

We had finally got our school house, and a teacher, that fall before.² It was a small frame building, with a big stove in the center. It was erected by a team of carpenters from Union and paid for by county taxes. It was on the corner East of Reilly's and North of us. Reilly's boarded the teacher. Everyone furnished a load of wood. Everyone still hauled wood. As soon as the crops were in, work would begin in the timber, cutting logs and posts and soon firewood would be stacked in every yard.

There were 22 pupils the first year. Some of the older boys only attended during the winter term after the crops were in. Some had to walk nearly two miles. Some of the younger ones missed often in bad weather. Cedar creek flooded across the road after heavy rains, so no one could cross. We could see Reilly's cabin from our house but we couldn't see the school house although it was only a quarter of a mile away. The Phil Diltz family had moved onto the place where McKay's had lived. Mrs. McKay and her daughter had gone back to Ohio where she had family. The Diltz family had children but they did not attend the school because it was two miles across some pretty boggy fields so they studied at home. Phil was able to teach them himself.

Evie and Sid had another girl in 1865, Lois Evelyn. We continued to be good friends. Henry had gone back East and worked in a factory during the war years but he was back and very welcome. He brought with him a new McCormick reaper. This was a wonderful help. Jim and Sid, Henry and Sean worked together. It was wonderful. Then Patton bought a steam engine and a threshing machine. Times changed so fast.

Our oak trees now made good shade and we had planted others like elm and maple. Our fruit trees bore apples, plums, and cherries. I raised strawberries instead of hunting wild ones. We picked wild berries, however, raspberries, blackberries, cherries, grapes and plums. We had rhubarb. I still call it pie plant, mint, sage, and dell for seasoning.

In the late spring, all of the children came down with the measles. All six were sick at once. They must have been exposed at church although oddly, some of the Reilly's had measles, too. None of mine were seriously sick but of course, they were confined to the bedroom which I kept darkened to protect their eyes. When they were sick enough to be quiet and not really care if they stayed in bed, it wasn't so bad but as some of them recovered a little, they were getting to be a trial. Harassing or teasing each other until I was at my wits end. Someone was always crying.

Since all of her pupils had the measles, the teacher had gone back to her own home and school was closed for the year. She sent their grade cards to the Reilly's later and they sent them around. Sean came and brought us a mess of the first pie plant. He reported that everyone from Bridget to Baby Rose had the measles although Bridget was almost over them and Patrick just coming down with them.

With the children sick, Jim was left with all the planting to do. Still, one day, he suggested, "Almira, why don't you take the horse and buggy and go calling on someone. I'll stay in the house this afternoon. You need a rest."

I hugged him and told him I would go visit the Reilly's.

Doubtfully, he asked, "Are you sure? They are sick, too. That won't be much of a change."

I changed to my one good dress and took a kettle of broth from the fire. We simply didn't have anything for finicky appetites at this time of year. Jim came in and bowed deeply, "Your carriage awaits, my lady." I hugged him again as I laughed. I went to the Riley's. Perhaps I needed Sarai. I don't know but somehow that was where I wanted to go, measles or no.

Bridget was feeling well again although she had many spots but Patrick was a mess of spots all over. He didn't feel sick so they were having an awful time keeping him in bed. I had brought some copies of the Youth's Companion with me and I sat and read to the children for a half hour. I then told Patrick there was no reason he couldn't read them for himself. Soon Bridget was reading out loud and Sarai, Mara, and I visited over cups of tea at the table. Baby rose had one single spot on her fat little stomach.

I was proud of this family who had learned a new language and learned to write as well as speak it. Of course, they had an accent but we understood each other. Really they were better with the writing than the speaking. I knew that I had helped them but they need not have allowed me but they did. I had even copied simple stories for them to read and when Father O'Halleron gave Clara a prayer book, I had faithfully helped them to read it. Of course, we couldn't do anything with the Latin parts but they actually learned to read the English prayers. Sometimes I wondered if they were reading or memorizing the prayer book. Now Patrick was learning the prayer book. I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.

All things end eventually. All the measles kids recovered and were soon about their usual pranks and mischief. They never could decide whether having the measles was worth getting out of school for the last few weeks or not.

¹ The Spring Grove Nine- nine men from the Spring Grove area served in Company C, Iowa Ninth. Seven of the nine were either killed or wounded at the battle of Pea Ridge.

² The Reilly school

Chapter 17

A Church at Last¹

When the children were sick with the measles, Jim went to church alone and came home full of talk about suggested plans for building of a church. "The new school house is to be built a mile south of this one so it won't help our church a bit. It is more in the center of the school district but we will have to meet in our homes again for church. Until we can arrange something else.

There are so many children in that district that some hoped the new school would have two rooms. It won't and it will be the standard size so they will have their troubles. Jim Reece said they had counted 47 kids over seven years old and under 16. Many of them don't go to school. Anyway, we talked about a new church.

"We tried to figure the cost. It's sure hard to figure. John Johnson offered to give us three big logs from his woodlot if we build. Did you know that neither he or any of his family can read or write? He says that he is too old to learn. His younger kids will have to attend now that the school house will be close enough. It's too late for the older ones; I mean the school house is too late. They're nice kids too, well mannered and hard working. They'll have to learn on their own."

I brought up the most recent scandal, feeling sorry for the Johnson girl who had a darling baby girl. But the boy's family wouldn't let them get married.

"I know Carter's acted mighty snooty about it, refused to let them get married. They were both under legal age. Old man Carter will donate the money for the pews. Likely, we'd have to put his name on them"

Jim well knew that I probably wouldn't accept them from Carter or if I did, I put the name underneath where no one would see them.

"Jim Reece is going back east next winter to visit his old home in New Jersey and

he is going to see if he can find some used hymnals for us. His brother wrote and asked if we could use some books and chairs. He is going to ask about pews, too. Some of the churches in Newark have built new larger churches and they can sell or dispose of the old one."²

I could hardly believe that Jim Reece was really going back. He had talked about this ever since we had known him. Dubiously I considered this.

"John and Caroline³ will stay home and Maggie McKee will stay with them. John does most of the chores and woodcutting anyway. Jim is usually off helping someone with their carpentering. They'll get along. It really is all set for this winter."

Querulous cries came from the darkened room and Jim followed me in, still talking, "We counted fifty families involved with the church, some only once in a blue moon and some of us are there all the time. It's hard to tell how much it could cost."

I liked the idea. I thought that it would be so nice to have a church home like back in Marron. But could we? Even if everyone helps and we donated logs, it would still take money and most of us had little money. How much, I wondered? Where would we want to build it? Did God want us to do this?

Jim went on, "Old Hi Chandler said he would give us the lot for the church, right next to his house. Some won't like that but it is a pleasant spot and it is centrally located. It is on the new road laid out between Union Mills and Nugent's Grove.⁴ There would be enough room for a horse shed across the back and also for a picnic spot if we want it. Anyway, we are to pray about it all this week and bring any ideas we might have next Sunday. We plan to vote on it at the June picnic."

Sunday school picnic time arrived and it turned out to be a beautiful day. After long drawn out prayers and requests for God's presence at our meal by both Orange and Adam Bede, we were finally able to feed the children. Then the children were free to romp and play in the small creek. We had a bountiful picnic spread. From chicken and dumplings to the latest fancy pie and cake. Everything was delicious.

I only half listened to Reverend Williams as I sat on the grass, holding Ella and watching that Etta and see that she didn't get into trouble. After the sermon, the business meeting started. There were many objections. Many scoffers. "We couldn't ever. Where will we get the money? Who will do the work?" On and on. Fearful Nellie's, I call them. The congregation went ahead and voted to build a new church.

After that, every spare moment was spent on the church during the rest of the year. The logs were hauled to the mill and the lumber hauled to the church site. Luckily, the logs were well seasoned so work could go ahead with the building. The foundation was built, the framework raised. It was enclosed. It was shingled. A steeple pointed to the sky and a bell was sent for. A hired mason plastered the interior walls and arched ceiling. The lower four feet of the wall was wainscoting. Attractive suitable wall paper was applied. We painted the woodwork and wainscoting.

With small children, I couldn't help as much as I liked. Some of the women helped with the papering and the painting. I sent lunches and drinks occasionally. We were very proud of our new church. Enos at the mill, made a lovely walnut altar rail. The pews arrived. They had been bought through the pastor and came from a church in Ohio. Two heating stoves were purchased along with 60 feet of stove pipe. The chimney was built at the back of the church. There was room for one hundred people in the pews and added

seats were hinged along each side of the building to use when needed and dropped down out of the way when not in use.

We had many discussions of stained glass windows but we sadly concluded that they were too expensive and we settled for colored frosted glass. The bell arrived and was installed in the steeple with a long rope pull.

The church was filled to overflowing on the first day we used it. Reverend William's had moved on to another community but Elson Evans was with us to dedicate the new building to the service of the community for better and better things in the name of God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

On more work days, they erected the horse shed with hitch rails inside. We could drive the team or horse, on the buggy right inside and tie them under shelter. When you were ready to leave, you untied the team and backed out, all ready to go. Of course, in winter, you blanketed and unblanketed your horse or horses. In summer, horses were decked out in fly nets.

On another two work days, wood was cut and piled, rather corded in one end of the shed all ready for the coming winter.

What a pleasure it was to hear the bell each Sunday, ringing out its welcome to each and everyone. The peals seemed to drift up the distance toward us and Cedar Creek. Sean and Sarai and Mara enjoyed it as much as we and shared their pleasure with us. Although, some of them were now attending occasionally the services at New Ireland, they listened each Sunday for the ringing bell.

Services were now every Sunday with the pastor coming every other week. Jim was a good lay preacher as was both the Faye's and Adam Bede. We shared many good religious experiences together.

Our farms were now busy productive farms. They swarmed with life, be it cattle, pigs, chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, or children. We still helped each other, trading, borrowing, and teaching.

Many Irishmen had moved into the area North of Sean's and Sean and Sarai were drawn into the life of the church and its social life. Smith's life was drawn that way also because of the life of the church while Faye's, Reece's and of course Seth and Ethel drew us the other way as well as into the life of the church.

Most of the older children herded cattle during the summer, bunching the cattle together so they and their friends could spend the days together. About the only stipulation was that they were to keep the cattle out of the cultivated fields. Along with herding, they fished, hunted turtles, dug out ground squirrels, and brought home an array of dead snakes to frighten their younger sisters and brothers. The common varieties were harmless as the garter snakes and the bull snakes but it was hard to convince some people. Jim assured everyone that snakes were helping keep down the mice and the shrews which abound on the prairie. Few listened.

All our gardens in the neighborhood were rich and produced abundantly. Each family had bushels of potatoes and a large assortment of vegetables to use during the summer and to store for the winter. We had apples for fruit and vinegar, and we had corn for meal and to hake hominy besides for livestock food. Wild fruit was still plentiful. We had milk and many cheeses, eggs in season, fried chicken in the fall and fowl most any time of the year. Jim kept four brood sows and sold some of his shoats to a butcher shop

in Independence, and we butchered the rest. We had four hives of bees. We had fresh meat in the winter time and used the cured hams and shoulders and the fried down meat in the summer time.

Jim and the boys would bring in prairie chicken or rabbit most every day in winter. It was a treat when they went hunting on our woodlot and brought home squirrels. Nothing like a good squirrel.

Jim had bought another ten acres of woodland so we had plenty of wood to use this year. The trees were thinned and the large trees which could make good saw logs were left standing for later use. It took many days to cut, trim up and haul enough wood to last the winter. Everyone took turns on the buck saw but it was Jamie and Ricky's job to keep the wood box full each night. Oh, yes, we were using the Captain's sea chest again for wood. The boys also had to carry out the ashes.

We had a kitchen range in the cabin so we seldom used the fireplace unless it was extremely cold. Now I had an oven to bake in and room for two or more pots on the stove at once.

Mary Jane washed dishes and swept the floor while I was much happier to mind the baby and keep Etta out of mischief.

We always had lots of honey; we often traded honey for other needs. About this time Cooper's put in a vat for boiling sorghum and we planted sorghum cane every year after that. Cane is planted and cultivated like corn. Before ripening, the leaves are stripped from the stalks and the stalks are cut off a few inches from the ground. Then the stalks are stacked in a wagon and hauled to the vat at Cooper's. The stalks are then crushed in a horse powered mill and the juice collected in a long flat cooking pan. The juice was boiled slowly until it boiled down to a thick syrup or sorghum. Twenty or thirty gallons would last a season for a large family. All the family loved to suck on the raw stalks for the sweet sap.

Life became easier in many ways. The new-fanged matches had made their way into Iowa and we no longer had to keep our fires burning at all times, or rely on flints to start a fire. With a good heating stove in the parlor and a range in the kitchen we were comfortable and warm.

Of course, there were always problems and troubles. For two years straight, wheat was a failure or at least a near failure. Jim sowed more oats for horse feed and planned on more corn. We really wanted to raise more corn because a market was opening up for hogs. One of Seth's neighbors had driven his hogs clear to the Mississippi where he found a ready market on a river boat. We laughed and laughed when we heard about this. How can you drive hogs or pigs anywhere they don't want to go? Seth assured us that it had been true. Four or so fat hogs could be sold in Independence which was a load for the team and box and the town was twenty and more miles away. The butcher there was buying for the workmen on the railroad.

Sid and Henry Smith tried out a wheel cultivator for corn, pulled by a team of horses. Several had a one horse cultivator which could be pulled between the rows of corn, which eliminated some of the necessary hoeing. This was on wheels; the team and the wheels straddled the row and had small shovels to dig into the dirt. It seemed to cover many hills of corn and would not be of much a help if someone had to follow and uncover the corn.

McKay's crude planter had been improved and now we all used some form of mechanical planter, to plant corn in a grid pattern so it could be cultivated both ways.

During this time, we lost two babies. George Isaac was born in April, 1868 but he couldn't seem to breathe for himself and we could only keep him for three days. Sarah and Mara both stayed with me and they and Jim did everything possible to help the baby breathe but it was no use. For a few hours, we would think he was all right and then he would turn blue again. Jim and I had rejoiced that we had another boy but it was not to be.

Then the next April, Susan Aylo was born. She was a doll; she was a flower of spring, with dainty color and a sweet smile. We lost her when she was just four months old. All the children had a summer complaint and Susan didn't have the strength to recover from it. All of us wept at the loss of the sweet baby sister. We buried her beside her Grandfather and baby brother. She was such a sad loss.

Our busy life went on, of course, but I felt especially bereft as no new baby came to fill my arms.

I had been so proud of my family and now I had trouble. It seemed as though nothing went right. Jim understood how I felt but I hope the children didn't realize how heavy my heart had become with the loss of two babies in a row. I soon began to wonder if my child bearing days were over. My arms were so empty as I yearned for another baby to hold and feed.

¹ Spring Grove Church, built in 1882.

² This could be a reference to the trip back to New Jersey by David Phillips, who did visit the old churches in New Jersey and procured used hymnals for the pioneer churches.

³ John Morris Phillips and Caroline Phillips

⁴ Troy Mills and Coggon

Chapter 18

The Grand New House

We were still bartering most of our needs as none of us had much money. We could now buy sugar and white flour at the store in Union Mills but we seldom did. Our little bit of money went for tools, seeds or something important. Most of our money had gone for the new machines to speed the work, more horses and hired help in harvesting time.

Once a week, I gathered the children around the table to study the next Sunday's lesson. We memorized many bible verses. Every morning, we had a bible reading and morning prayers. Sometimes I read aloud to them, from the small magazine, called The Youth's Companion. It was the only paper that came to us on a regular basis. Jim's brother in Vermont often sent a bundle of old newspapers and sometimes books. He sent several books of the Chatterbox series, which we enjoyed very much.

The county surveyed the roads and they had graded a road on both sides of our farm and we began to wish that we lived on the road instead of eighty rods in the field. Still, we were so happy with our farm and with our family. We still missed Father and Mother very much. Their little house was now empty as Glen Faye had moved to a larger place and Jim was farming the acres which were broken.

Our little house, which once seemed so light and roomy, now seemed cramped and small, so we began to plan for the big house on the road. Sean and Sarai added a new ell to their house, two large rooms down and two upstairs. Although Clara and Katie were married and lived some miles away, they still had seven at home, counting the latest Rose Almira, the new darling that year. All their children were small and petite, which made ours look big and awkward beside them.

Mara had developed a bad cough and was thinner and thinner every day. Alarmed, she was taken to see the doctor in Quasqueton. He gave her some pills to take but she seemed no better. No one ever had more living care than the family showered upon her. She left us on a Sunday morning with her family around her. Although she was Sean's Mother, she had seemed like an older sister to me. I loved her and missed her very much. She was buried in the cemetery at New Ireland with proper prayers and ceremony. She never got to enjoy the new roomy addition to the house. Still, I think she would have liked it but she was happy with the small cabin when all the family was there.

We decided that next year, we would build the new house on the road. There wasn't any large knoll but we chose a spot as near the road and leave room for the barns and outbuildings on the farmstead with a large garden. The spot was level and on the other side of Silver creek, not far from where Silver Creek joined Cedar Creek.

Plans were made, logs to go to the saw mill, lumber to be readied and stacked, brick for the chimneys to be ordered. Brick still had to be hauled from Junction.

All winter, we pored over the plans. We drew a picture of a room on a slate, then erased it and tried another room. We wanted a dining room, a parlor, a big kitchen, a large pantry, a bedroom downstairs, and three bedrooms upstairs. The stairway should be enclosed and come up from the dining room into a center hall upstairs. It was to be two full stories high because Jim felt that the houses built with only a story and one-half were simply dumps. There would be a full cellar under the main part of the house with a second cellar way opening inside the kitchen or pantry. We wanted a nice enclosed back porch for work clothes and boots, and a large front porch for summer use.

We were still using our original cabin with its hand-hewn door and the latch string, along with the new addition but it was now too small. It was a big move because we would have to move all the buildings and yards. We didn't mind this because many things were wearing out and or ready to fall down. But it made an awful lot of work for one season.

Jim hired Elzo Briggs, a young man from near Ehler to work for him all summer. With the help of James and Ricky, the crops were sowed and planted. The girls and I planted the garden. A wooden fence was put up around the new cattle yard, and a small shed built to shelter the horses for the summer. He wanted them near where they would be working on the house and not have to bring them up the lane every time they used them.

They dug a well and installed the pump. Jim borrowed a slip from the township road crew and dug out the new cellar. My, it made a big hole in the ground. The extra dirt was piled in the yard nearby making it a muddy mess whenever it rained. The Frank brothers from Union Mills had been hired to build the house and to oversee the building of the foundation and cellar. The cellar was lined with lime rock, which also had to be hauled two miles. Lime rock and stones were made into a smooth wall with mortar.

The Frank brothers were well known, capable carpenters and they new started on the framework. For our men, it was now a time of moving lumber into a handy place and carting away the trash and rubbish as it accumulated. Between times, they cultivated the corn and the garden. Then they built a cowbarn, ready for our cattle when we should move. We set up a camp fire near the well so that I could some days feed the men right on the job.

This was a busy, busy year for me. Ethel and Seth had a new baby; Susan Marie in May and for some reason Ethel did not seem to regain her health but remained weak and run down for a long time. I took the three middle children home with me and kept them for three months. Seth was his usual helpful self but he and Tom were milking twelve cows and delivering the milk to the nearby creamery and they really had more than they could do. Katie stayed to help her Mother and to take care of the baby but I took Ronnie, Patty, and Steve home with me.

How my mind boggles now, to think of all the work we did that summer. Jim hired Sally Faye to help me so we got along. She was now a grown woman and very capable. Just to think about the meals. Besides Jim and I and the six children, there were Seth's three, Sally and Elzo for every meal. We fed the carpenters their noon meal, and usually Sean or Sid or one of the Faye's were there helping also. The carpenters drove out from Union Mills each morning, about three miles and returned home after dark. Of course, there had to be extra drinks and treats in the late afternoon. Think of all the cooking, washing, and ironing. It was a nice summer and the work went splendidly. I revived the cooking spit near the lean-to and we set up a long trestle table under the shade so everyone could eat outside. Flies were horrible and they were everywhere. Just think of all the bushels of potatoes and vegetables we prepared that summer. Jim hauled all the men to our cabin for meals each day using the hay rack. In the afternoon, Jim would come to the house and take whatever we had ready, back for the men at the building site.

Amidst all this, we had the gardens and the chickens. Of course, the children had lots of fun and lots of work. There was always someone to help and there was always someone in the way. Jamie and Ricky were, at 16 and 14, busy helpers for their Father and worked right along with Elzo and the carpenters. They could load and unload lumber as well as the men.

Mary Jane, Etta and Patty washed dishes, peeled potatoes, and worked in the garden while Ronnie and Steve rustled firewood and carried water and many other myriad things to do, although Steve was only four years old. Everyone lent a hand as shelling peas or snapping beans. Steve and Ella were really too young but they were mixed into the busy pot with the rest of us.

Sally Faye was a wonderful help. She was capable, got along well with all the children and we managed with good cheer on all sides. Even Sunday's were hectic with church services at eleven O'clock and Sunday school at nine-thirty. Sally went home on Saturday nights and came back Monday mornings. After all, she just lived down the road. Elzo couldn't go as often but he did go home several times during the summer, borrowing a horse to ride.

Elmer Fare built the three chimneys. We ordered a fine new kitchen range and a new parlor stove. We would have to move the old one into the dining room. I blackened and polished it ready to go. We moved in October. We moved all our old furniture as we needed it. We purchased a large oak dining table and eight straight chairs to match it. The pantry was light and airy. Seth came two different days and helped Jim make needed shelves in the pantry and the closet.

Jim and the boys next built a long woodshed just back of the house and attached to the back porch. No one ever need go outside to bring in wood. Then they rushed to fill the shed with wood. Everyday, some one was sawing with the bucksaw from the pile that

Jim was bringing from the woodlot, and piling it in the woodshed. It really looked like a wonderful idea from my sight but I noticed that the wood had to be handled an extra time. Still we would always have dry wood. More work, however.

It was getting late and the weather was colder. Jim and the neighbors built two small sheds for the calves and the pigs. Still much of the winter was spent in going from one site to the other to bring grain or something. The chickens hadn't been moved but Jim cared for them each morning.

Mother wrote from Vermont but she did not return. She was very interested in the new house and sent us materials for curtains and new quilts.

"I am anxious to see the house and am especially anxious to see all of you but I don't quite feel like making the trip at this time. Give my love to all the children. How I would like to see little Ella. Love, Mother."

I gathered some flowers and we visited the gravesite as I placed them on each of the graves, Father's, Little George, and Aylo's. I didn't forget James Reilly. Death is so permanent, I thought, allowing my thoughts to go back to my Mother and Grandparents.

Shortly afterwards, word came that back in Vermont, Mother Richardson had passed away at the home of Jim's sister Jane. It was a hard blow. We felt the loss deeply and Jim especially felt the loss of his parents keenly. He was also a tower of strength. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. We'll meet them one day. Now we must go ahead on our own. I think the Lord every day for the pleasure of my wife and my children."

All that winter, we continued to work some on or in the house, putting up a shelf here or adding a drape to the East window. It was wonderful to have wood without having to go outside. I know that Jim especially appreciated this as I remembered all the nights he had added wood to the fire in the stove and then had to bring wood from the snowbank before we had any more.

We used left over lumber and built two tables in the cellar to work on and to hold the pans or crocks of milk waiting for the cream to rise. A new creamery was coming to Union Mills, much like the one at Junction.¹ Then Jim hoped to milk several more cows and sell the milk. This next year maybe. We gradually moved everything down from the old building spot, even cutting up the logs of the lean-to and the cabin for fuel. We would miss the garden spot and all the trees and plants we had nourished but we would move as many as we could in the spring. We continued to harvest the fruit trees for many years although we immediately set out a young orchard.

When it thawed up in the spring, our yard was a muddy mess. We put down lumber slabs and boards to walk on wherever we could. When the crops were planted, Jim leveled the pile of dirt and made us a nice level yard. Then we moved pie plant, the herbs, set out a strawberry bed and planted elm trees for shade. We moved some currants and gooseberries and some plum runners.

Seth brought us two wealthy apply trees and a Northwestern Greening tree, which someone near Junction was starting in a nursery and so far had not been able to dispose of any of his trees.

That summer, Ralph Otis was born, July 6th, 1872, a fine husky boy. He was the answer to our many prayers. And we were very happy that he was a boy. The children were overjoyed. Sarai was with me when he was born and I had no trouble as usual.

Sally came to help for four weeks. How beautifully the new house worked, room for everyone. We even had a spare room for Sally. The new range in the kitchen with its big firebox and generous reservoir, huge warming oven, everything went well. There was much clattering up and down the stairs, happy voices and noises as I rested with my new baby and yearned over this beautiful new son.

Ethel and Seth came the very next Sunday, anxious to see us and the new baby. And very thankful along with us that the baby and I were having no problems. Mary Jane had made a big cake because we thought they might be coming. Sally had fried ham, had made potato salad, and cornbread and fresh applesauce. I enjoyed eating someone else's cooking. Sally's tomato sauce was different. She stewed the tomatoes and seasoned it with salt, pepper, and sugar, then just before she served it, she added two or three broken up slices of dried bread and then at the last moment, she added a cup of cream. Fabulous.

As I lay in bed, I had been thinking about the old days back in Vermont. Isabella had written a few times and once Uncle Orin wrote to tell me that Aunt Luella was very sick. Since then I had heard nothing. I had written them after each child was born, I hardly know why, but I felt I had to. Why Uncle Orin had written, I don't know unless Aunt Josie wouldn't and he felt I should know. I would write again about our new baby. Perhaps Isabella would answer.

I asked Ethel when she came if she ever heard from any of them and how things change. I have been so happy here in Iowa and never regretted leaving the old home, not even once.

Ethel was enthusiastic, "Indeed, we have made it here in Iowa. I wonder what life is like back in Vermont. Do you ever hear from anyone?"

Jim heard from his family, sisters, and brothers, not regularly but once a year or so. Sounds just like here, really.

"I am getting my strength back. I was sick so long that it seems wonderful just to feel good. I thank God every day."

Ethel remarked that she had noticed this morning, how very nice the church looked. "I think it is a very lovely building. We are outgrowing our school house. There is quite a settlement springing up at the Junction where the creamery is. I think they are going to move the post office to Junction. Our church may unite with the congregation at Junction. And then we might build a church. For us it is only another mile or so and we may approve it if we can work it out. Seth is on the committee to check out the possibility.

"School will soon start again. Our kids liked Miss Dooley so well last year and she is coming back. She put on a dandy Christmas program last year."

The day was too short for us to cover everything we would have liked. As they rounded up their family to go home, Patty asked "Can Ella come home with us?" We hesitated but when Tom said he would bring her home any time she wanted, we agreed. If all went well they would bring her back next Sunday after church. It is surprising how lonesome it is without one little girl but a week soon passed and Ella was back, very anxious to see her baby brother.

Sarai was with me when Ralph was born and she came several times to see me and bringing the younger children to see the new baby. Her youngest, Rose was nearly the same age as our Ella. Evie came and Millie Faye. Orange and his family had bought a

farm over near Union Mills and moved, leaving Elmer's with the eighty acres. Only Sally was at home part of the time. I wondered if Millie was lonesome sometimes. Our lives were changing.

¹ Along with the sawmills and the grist mills, creameries were established early. These were the days before the yet to be invented small farm-sized "cream separator" and whole milk was transported to the new creameries. I have puzzled over Mother Hazel's several references to "Junction." Since she mentions Quasqueton by name, and has renamed Coggon and Troy Mills, I am guessing that she is speaking of present day either Keine or Hoover, which are both located between Troy Mills and Quasqueton. There is a Church and cemetery at Hoover and there was a Church at Keine.

Chapter 19

Death and Birth

It was such a busy summer; we were late getting all the hay stacked for winter. The wheat was already cut and stacked for the thrasher. We had two large stacks of hay but would need another to last all winter. All of us were helping, Jim bringing it in from the field, Jamie and Rick were stacking on the stack, and I or Mary Jane took turns driving the horse of the fork. It was a simple job, sometimes Etta insisted on driving.

The long hay poles were put up as a tripod, fastened together at the top and a pulley fastened there. A rope through the pulley was fastened to a harpoon fork to stick in the hay. Another pulley was fastened to the foot of one pole; the rope ran through the pulley and then fastened to the evener pulled by the horse. A big forkful of hay would be dragged from the wagon and carried to the top of the pole, then dropped onto the stack and the fork pulled back and to reset in the hay and the process was repeated. Someone worked the hay, leveling it and preparing for the next forkful.

I was in the house, taking care of Baby Ralph, while we waited for another load from the field, when I heard a terrible screaming. Ella came screaming, "Mother, Mother, come quick, come quick." Something had broken or someone made an awful mistake, but the hayfork had descended from the top of the pole and struck Jamie, who was still on the stack, right in the back, back of his breast. He had drawn out the point but had collapsed on the stack. Rick managed to carry him down to the ground, while Etta and Ella ran screaming to the field to get their Father.

The life ebbed from him as I held him in bloody embrace. Was this horrible sobbing coming from me? How could this be? Hadn't I fought cold and fire and pestilence for my oldest son? I couldn't seem to accept it. Jim tried to help me but he was too anguished in his own heart to be able to help me. Why? Why?

Everyone was so kind, as helpful as they called and cried with us. Why? I never

did find an answer. Why? Why? We buried him beside his Grandfather and brother and sister in the Cedar Grove cemetery.

We had a physical explanation, although it did our hearts little good. Jamie had decided to grease the upper pulley and boy fashion had pulled the fork to the top and climbed the rope to the pulley. So far, it was all right but instead of climbing down he had jumped down to the stack and the fork descended almost as fast as he.¹

My misery showed in many ways. In sloppy work, neglect of the baby and the children. I went on and on, why? One day, I overheard Mary Jane tell Ella, that Manna loved Jamie so much that she didn't have any love left for us anymore. Shocked, I told Jim I was sorry. We wept together and he took me to the cemetery plot where we again cried together over the many memories, both good and bad. After that, I resumed my caring and was able to act rationally. It wasn't true, of course, that I loved Jamie more, it was just that he was gone.

As always, life went on, day by day, and year by year. Baby Ralph needed my care. I couldn't just shut off the tears in one day but I gradually accepted that it was God's will. We went on in our lovely new home with saddened hearts.

Two years later in the summertime, a little girl was added to our family, our last baby. A little girl who we named Edith Doris. Soon she was the spoiled darling of the entire family.

Jim waltzed his baby around and around. "Thank your Mama for giving you life and beauty, my child. God had blessed us with you. We thank the Lord, for you and we will love you and train you as best we know how. Thank you God, and thank you Mama." Oh, Jim, my heart was filled to overflowing.

After we moved to the new house, we were always busy. New fences, new hog lots, and cattle yards. New garden plots, new poultry house. Jim hired help sometimes to help him and Rick. I raised more chickens but there was not much of a market so we ate or traded most of the products. I had three geese and a gander. I tried ducks several times but something always seemed to happen to them. I set the goose eggs under broody hens and sometimes had thirty geese. We weren't all that fond of geese but I needed the feathers for pillows and quilts. I tried turkeys also but they were a problem with other poultry and so I let someone else raise the turkeys. Several years Ethel and I traded fowl for Thanksgiving, turkey for goose. I sold a few eggs but they were only worth five cents a dozen.

We sold milk to the creamery at Union Mills, hauling the milk each morning in a light wagon, called a democrat. Jim and Rick took turns hauling the milk, three miles each way. It was a nuisance and time killing but it brought in a small amount of regular money.

There was a stockyard now at Masonville, twelve miles away where they could haul a load of shoats, four or five fat ones to a wagon. The farmers helped each other, usually two or three loads going at a time. Although roads had been laid out and graded North and South, it was wet, boggy, country, and often the roads were mud, mud, mud.

Every year, more sod was broken until Jim had about everything under the plow which wasn't too wet. Jim and Rick were farming our 160, Father's eighty, and the eighty which Eric Johnson had bought. Since Eric had never come back, the ownership was in doubt and Jim rented it from the county. Taxes would take it eventually.

McKee put in several strings of three inch cement drain tile through a troublesome

slough, which they had to cross with machinery to get to the fields. We were watching this with great interest. Luckily, we could use the public road to cross Silver Creek to get to the fields on the North side of the creek. We did have one troublesome spot back of the barns between the barn and the pasture, so they watched McKee's tile with great interest.

At the new homestead, we had built nice sturdy buildings for the needed tool shed, the poultry house, the smoke house, a shed for the geese and so on. We built a large new barn with a big hay mow down the center from the floor to the rafters. Horse stalls were on one side and cow stanchions and a calf pens on the other side. There was also an oat bin and a room for mending harness and so forth. The harness was hung behind each horse on huge hooks, ready to use again. We were very proud of the barn.

We started a new strawberry bed and set out some fruit trees, apple, plum, and cherry. We moved the pie plant and the rose bushes. We dug up the lilac bush and divided the roots so that we had a long row of lilacs. Ethel brought me a start of yellow roses and Sarai brought me a new red rose. Luxury, in land, stock, and children.

It seemed as though our families grew up overnight. Soon, Tom was a grown man working with his Father. Seth and Ethel had also built a nice new house. Now Katie was 20 years old and was marrying Roy Johns in the fall. The date was set and they were going to move onto and run the farm where Bridley had pioneered. Bridley had gone on to Nebraska and Seth was buying the land, and he rented it to Roy and Katie. Seth had lots of help with Tom, Ronnie, and Steve. Their youngest was only a year older than Ralph. So our families always had cousins to mix and play with.

Faye's families had grown up and were working away from home. Only Sally was at home with Elmer and Millie.

Evie and Sid's Alice at eighteen was a beautiful girl, looking very much like her Mother. The boys were helpful to Sid and Henry. They, too, were farming 300 acres. Their youngest boy was also a year older than Ralph.

Clara and Katie were married with families of their own but Sean and Sarai still had six at home. Bridget was in school in Dubuque, in a convent, training to be a nun. Patrick and John were busy with their Father, always farming more and more. Lucy was still at home but she was entering nurse's training in the fall. The three younger girls were still in school.

How the years flew by. Our gardens got bigger and bigger. More corn was raised each year as horse drawn equipment was purchased. Two gangs of shovels were hung between the wheels of a cart and pulled by two horses, guided by the farmer's hand on the handle on the gangs. It really worked, they could straddle each row. If a hill of corn was covered up by the rolling dirt, the farmer could stop the team momentarily, and uncover the hill with his foot. With the new corn planters, we were able to plant corn so that it could be cultivated crossways, too. Weeds could be kept out although it took four or five cultivations.

Jim bought a two seated buggy with a top to take us to church and to town. We didn't go to town very often. We did drive to Independence to help celebrate a Fourth of July, one year in the new buggy. That was quite a day, I tell you. I prepared fried chicken and the picnic dinner while the men milked and finished the chores. Rick took one team and took the milk to Union, to meet us later. It was still dark when we started. Mary

Jane and Betty rode with Rick, which made six of us in the two seated buggy and all the lunch. We met Rick and the girls at Walton's corner and traveled along together.

It was a wonderful day, the speeches, the flags, the bunting, the many people. There were firecrackers, clowns; our young people took in everything. At noon, we joined some friends and picnicked together under the shady elms. This was held at the fairgrounds. We resolved that we would come to the fair this year. We didn't.

We did go to the fair at Junction, one of the highlights of the summer for us. We could never stay for the fireworks and arrived home long after dark as it was. Once a year was about enough.

During the years, we had an epidemic of babies, now, we had epidemics of weddings. Rick had been using the single buggy as he drove around, taking his sisters with him but more and more often he asked for the buggy alone and he courted Elsie Freeman. He was 19 and she was 18. We thought them too young but what would we do? They were married in her home, a very nice home wedding. We like the Freeman's solid, substantial people. Elsie was a no-nonsense girl. They started housekeeping in Father's old house on the eighty acres and he and Jim worked together still.

I had hardly recovered from this when Larry Burch came calling on Betty. He was a slim, active boy from across the Wapsi. We met his folks, plain hardworking people. They were married in the parsonage at Union Mills. They started farming on his Father's farm west of the Wapsi. Betty was 17. Mary Jane was rather put out because Betty married first. She got left at the trough, some one said. Mary Jane had met a young man, named Lester Fallins when she went to camp meeting with Seth and Ethel. She was pretty smitten but he didn't call on her for a long time or so it seemed to Mary Jane.

Rick and Elsie's first baby was born the year of 1880, our first Grandchild, Nathan James Richardson. He was so nice, just as nice as our own had been. Being a Grandmother and Grandfather was fun for us.

Lester² did come calling. He was a tall, handsome boy who made me think of Jim when Jim was young. They were also married in the parsonage at Union Mills. All the girls would have liked for them to a wedding at home but Lester didn't want it so he carried the day. They set up housekeeping on his Father's farm near Ehler.

(Photo of Mary Todd)



Our family was leaving us.

We visited Larry and Betty, spending a Sunday with them and I stayed for a few days. Betty seemed to do a poor job of housekeeping. Dirty clothes were piled in the bedroom. It was an old house but four rooms and the well were nearby. Of course, they had very little to start with but to me that wasn't a good excuse. She complained bitterly about Larry's driving ways and how he forced her to work, helping him outside.

While I was there, they cleaned the chicken house getting ready to set some broody hens. I helped plant some late garden. They took me home on Thursday.

I was very troubled as they left me. I felt that I could have taken some of the washing home with me and give Betty a better start this spring. But I didn't. Uneasily, I thought Betty will have to make her own life. Perhaps Larry was too exacting and ambitious but he is a good boy, very hard working himself, trying to get ahead. Perhaps I had been too lenient with Betty. Mary Jane and Etta had always gone ahead and Betty was allowed to take the easier jobs. She helped too, of course. I still didn't think she was lazy, but I felt uneasy about her.

At home again, I was warmly welcomed and soon involved with the family and the work. Happily, I hugged Ralph and Edith, especially enjoying their youth, now that so many of them were on their own.

Mary Jane and Lester had a new Grandchild for us, a little girl, Viola Ruth and Rick and Elsie and a sweet little girl, Lavina Susan. Viola was soon an active tomboy, busy and into everything. Lavina, poor child, had asthma so badly, she couldn't run and play with the others. She was smart and alert but was confined to inactivity.

Etta married Will Bede, a friend she had grown up with. They moved to Jamestown, N.Dak. where they ran a small hospital. How the children scattered. And how we hated to see them go.

Ronnie Betzer married a sweet girl from Marion and he was running a livery stable in Marion. Patricia, patty, went off the Epworth Seminary to school and earned her teacher's certificate. She was teaching in the school in Council Bluffs. She wrote often and spent some of each summer at home.

Alice Smith also went to the Epworth Seminary and she married one of the teachers and was living in Epworth. They made a handsome couple. Evie and Sid would be grandparents in the spring.

Patrick Reilly married Mary Burke and they rented the farm just west of his Father's and they worked together. Edna Lynne married George Bargary and lived some distance away, also on a farm. John Thomas was working a home with Sean but he was courting the present school teacher. It looked as though Sean and Sarai would lose a teacher but gain a daughter.

About this time, Rick also decided that he needed more land and he moved from the eighty acres to 300 acres in Western Iowa, near Dumont. We missed them sorely. We had worked together and were close to the Grandchildren, Nathan and Lavina.

Now Jim and I had only Ella, Ralph, and Edith at home with us.

¹ This incident is an actual event that took the life of Andrew Phillips, who would have grown to be Mother Hazel's uncle, brother to her Father, John Edward Phillips

² Salah Todd

Chapter 20

Only Three of Us

Our farm life continued busy and hectic. Ralph, at seventeen, was able to work like a man and he and Jim continued to run the three hundred acres. We quit milking, however, and raised more hogs for the market. The milking was so much work, we couldn't keep up with it and get anything else done. So we only milked two cows for our own use. Edith or I usually milked them so the men could hurry to the field. Ralph was as tall as his father but he was as thin as a rail. And he could eat enough for three boys.

Ella had many colds and seemed so weak and tired, she could not help us as formerly. We took her to the good doctor Meythaler in Nugent but he couldn't find anything wrong, but he suggested she drink more milk and eat more meat. He also urged that she be careful of drafts and of catching colds. Good advice already taken and hard to do any further than we already were. Each week, she seemed frailer and frailer until she seemed to fade away. Our lovely, sweet Ella. Everyone gathered around to comfort us and to help wherever they could. We buried her in the new church cemetery, now established near the church. It was the only church home she ever knew and we felt that she would be glad to be near the church.

I was very sad and lost but I was not as devastated as I had been at Jamie's death. Perhaps, my faith had become stronger. Perhaps my reaction was different because of the shock of Jamie's sudden death while we could see that Ella was dying for many weeks.

Jim's prayer was sweet. "Thank you God for the gift of this beautiful daughter. We will miss her sorely but we know that she will adorn her heavenly home. Be with us and strengthen us in our need. We ask in the name of Thy Son, Jesus. Pray help us. Amen."



Ella May's grave at Spring Grove Cemetery

So soon, we had only Ralph and Edith at home. There was much coming and going with Mary Jane and Lester and the children, with Seth and Ethel and with friends and neighbors. Sarai and I still visited often. One morning, Sarai came hurrying down the road and I knew from her hurry that she was excited. Also, she was alone and most often one or more of the girls came with her.

"Almira, guess what. Read this letter, will you? The girls and I have read it several times and the girls have read it out loud to me but will you read it out loud to me? She claims to be my sister. My sister, imagine!"

The letter was written nicely in English, by a young steady hand, surely. "I think that you are my sister, Sarai (she had written Sarah and then changed it to Sarai), who left Ireland and came to America in the 1850's and was married to Sean Reilly. Was your name Sarai O'Conner before you married? And left for America with five children?

"My name is Janet O'Conner and I married Ed Duggan and we came to America and to Iowa in 1873 and settled and still live near Spencer, Iowa."

She gave her parents names and their Irish addresses. I asked Sarai if the parent's names are correct. She said that they sounded right but she had never seen them written. And she did have a much younger sister; she was only eight or nine when we left Ireland.

"I never saw any of my family after we moved to the other side of the island, near Sean's folks. I had a younger sister only three or four years older than our Clara but her name was Katie, not Janet. She and by brothers were living with our Aunt Clara after Father and Mother died. Father Reilly had just been buried when the word came that we were accepted to sail on the boat to America. Our priest had sent in our names and signed

the many papers. We had no time for good-byes or anything. It was go now or let someone else take our place. We were very lucky. The Saints were with us."

"Sean sent our address back to the priest after we finally had an address, Newtonville, but we never received an answer. He might have been dead or didn't even receive it. Because of the troubles, we were scattered among the many villages."

I turned back to the letter. Janet wrote further, "During the starving time, Aunt Clara and I lived in the back of the rectory and lived on what we could find. I married Ed Duggan and lived with his brother for a few weeks. Our two brothers, Jim and Eric were killed in the uprising and Ed and I fled to Belfast, where Ed managed to get a job on a boat sailing to America. When he was settled, he sent for me and the baby. We now have six children, now grown and all living nearby."

"I wondered about you all these years. I wrote Aunt Clara (she had now passed away) but no one knew of your whereabouts. Recently, I received a letter from our relative, Shawn Hennessey and he wrote that he was visiting the old rectory in the village and there was your address in America."

"I want to visit with you, Sarai. We will come by train to Masonville and hire a team to take us to your farm. Ed and I. We will come not this Wednesday but the following week, Wednesday."

"What do you think?" asked Sarai? "How could I possibly know her face? It is not possible. The names are right but anyone could find that out. Except that my sister's name was Katie."

The Duggan's came and went. Even then Sarai was unsure. "I can't see any resemblance to any of us or to anyone. I just don't think so. Maybe, I don't want to find another sister. You are my real sister." I was pleased to know that she felt about me as I felt about her. Ed and Janet Duggan were the topic of conversation long after they came and left.

A year or so later, Janet and a daughter, Lizzie, visited again. The daughter was startlingly like Sarai. The family accepted Janet as Sarai's sister but Sarai herself always had doubts. They lived far enough away, that were few meetings but some letters passed between the two families.

Ralph courted Lester's sister, Lottie. They were married in her Father's house near Ehler. Both of them were nineteen. Lottie was bright and loving, a lively talkative girl. She was a bright spot for Jim and me. We had gained another daughter.

Together, Jim and Ralph repaired Father's old house and rebuilt the small barn. They cleaned out the well and fenced off a garden patch. Ralph and Lottie started housekeeping there.

Our Edith had flirted with all the boys but never seemed to have a beau of her own to her steady annoyance. Jim and I were in no hurry to lose our last child. She spent some time with Susan at Seth's and she and Susan went to the Epworth Seminary for one quarter but both lost interest. She often helped Mary Jane and she helped Lottie when needed.

However, when an unmarried pastor came to Union Mills, she decided that was what she was waiting for. He was ten years older than Edith. He was a fine gentleman so we could hardly oppose him.

We finally had a wedding at home. The girls rallied around and we invited the

church family, all the near neighbors, Seth and Ethel and their families. We had quite a party. Edith and Philip were married in the parlor before a flowered arch. We served a wedding cake and tea on the front porch. Sarai and Rose had made the cake, a beauty. It was a wonderful wedding although rather a sad one for Jim and me.

Although Philip was a preacher in Union Mills when they were married, he was soon transferred to Springville, and then What Cheer, Indianola, places too far to visit very often. Edith drove the team home from Springville that year but other years, she came by train to Nugent where we met her. She has always written regularly and I am very thankful.

We settled down to living alone. Seth's and Ethel's youngest soon followed Edith's example and married George Dalls and lived in Marion. Ethel and Seth were also alone and like us in a big house. They gave up soon after and moved into a nice home in Junction and rented the farm to Tom and his family. He now had six little ones. Katie and Roy were living nearby with their four children. Steve had gone west to seek his fortune. He still lives there and has married a local girl from Fortuna, California. Patricia was teaching school in nearby Central City, still unmarried. She visited at home many week ends.

Betty and Larry bought a farm, two miles to the East of us, the same one where Cosgrove had settled before the fire. We saw them quite often as they came to see us or stopped on their way to town or to church. Betty never had any children, a big disappointment to both of them. They seemed to have made a good adjustment to each other and were happy and busy. Too busy, I sometimes thought. Betty had learned to cope.

Jim was really excited over his first barbed wire fence. Henry and Sid had put in a short fence last year and Jim was very impressed with it. He bought rolls of barbed wire and a keg of staples. He set a new post every fifteen feet, measuring it off with so many paces. The roll was unrolled, stretched tight, and stapled to the posts. The first wire was about eighteen inches from the ground, the second was twelve inches above that and the third wire another twelve inches higher. It made a good tight fence against cows and horses. It was so much better than the old rail fence. Horses especially leaned over the rails and knocked off the top rail. It had been a constant battle to keep the fence intact.

I walked down to look at the fence after they finished a stretch forty rods long. It was beautiful. The length of the tight straight fence was delightful. Now a tight pasture fence could be used and the boys would not have to herd the cattle during the summer. Back in Vermont, where were many stone fences but our stones were huge and not for fences. They brought the old rails to the house yard and cut them in stove wood lengths. They made excellent fuel for the cook stove.

We had several wet years, especially bad in the year 1892 when it seemed to rain every day. Lester had become interested in land farther West, in the Dakota's. After that wet year, he declared that he was tiring of mud and he was moving to the West where it didn't rain every day.

Jim and I hated to hear this but after all, who were we to tell them not to. Hadn't we done the same thing, years ago? Lester had cousins in Western Iowa and he went to visit them. He returned full of enthusiasm and made his plans. So in the summer of 1893, Lester and Mary Jane and their four children left us and moved on farther West.

Lester took two teams and two wagons, one with a three bed box and the other with a hay rack. He loaded all the furnishings he could in the wagon box and all the machinery he could load on the rack. He led one team and drove the other to where his cousins lived near Rock Rapids. I don't remember how many days it took, if I ever knew, to take the trip. He had to stop at livery stables each night and slept wherever he could find a bed.

A couple of weeks later, Jonas, Lester's older brother took the family to the train from Manchester, along with all the trunks, valises, and boxes. They had to change trains in Waterloo, so they stayed with friends overnight and then took the train for Rock Rapids.

They wrote us to tell us that all was well. Lester and a cousin had found a likely farm near Worthington, S.Dak., and he had taken an option on it. They would not move until spring but would stay for the winter with the cousins. Mary Jane wrote and Viola and the boys added their scraps. They missed us. The children were having a ball with cousins.

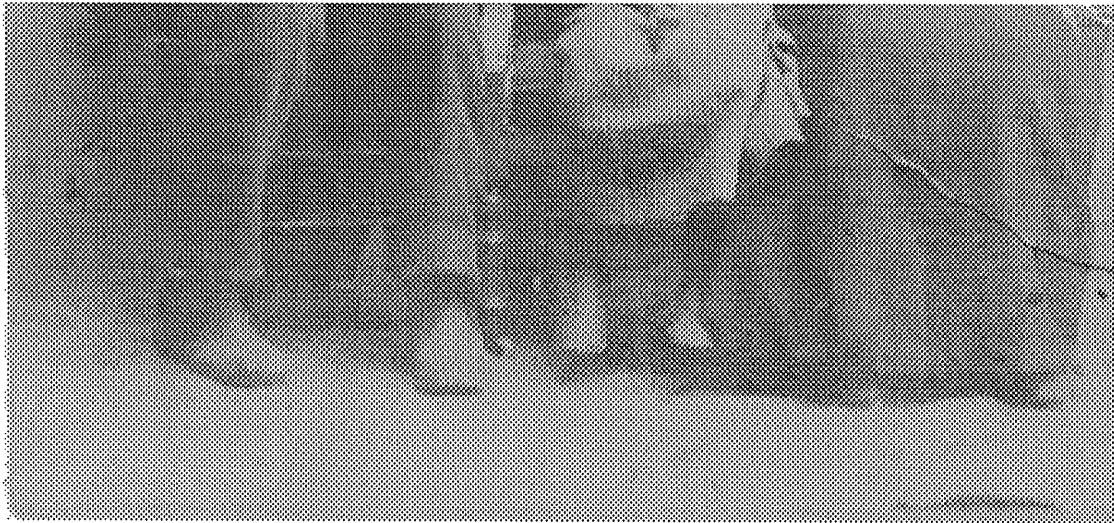
We heard little after the move in the early spring. Mary Jane wrote, "Lester had been sick with some kind of fever. He is well again. No one else got it. I planted garden today. Lester sowed wheat."

The lack of news rather bothered us. In May, they wrote, "We have another boy, Nathan Isaac. The school house is only forty rods down the road. I planted garden today. Wheat is up. Lester is plowing for corn."



Salah Todd & Mary Jane (Richardson) Todd. This picture was taken in Coggon before the family left for South Dakota

Of course, we were busy at home. Jim and Ralph had the farm to run. I kept a



good garden and helped Lottie with theirs. We were deeply involved with church work as were the rest of the family. Our ladies Missionary Society was supporting a missionary on an Indian reservation in Arizona. Someway, we managed to send the money and always there were barrels of clothes and each year, we sent a barrel of apples and hoped that they arrived in good shape.

Will Bede was killed by a falling tree. Etta wrote that he was working on the tree and evidently the tree fell the wrong way. So Etta was a widow with seven children and expecting an eighth. It was too late for the funeral but Betty and Larry took time off and went to see Etta and the children. It was very sad in Dakota. They brought two of the children home with them; Leslie, the youngest, was eighteen months and Bernard, ten years old, so Leslie wouldn't be frightened at being alone. Etta was having a hard time coping with the burdens of the hospital and with the children. The new baby was expected in November.

Because she was desperate, Etta let Betty take the two children. Betty and Larry were very good with them. Bernard attended the local school. Etta's girls could help at home. It worked out but Etta always mourned because it was necessary to separate the family, and she gathered them all home the next year.

They had stopped to see Mary Jane and Lester. Betty said that both Mary Jane and Lester were terribly thin. Lester had not recovered from the fever very well. He had typhoid and he had been very sick, still had a limp and a cough. Mary Jane had not written us how really sick Lester had been. Betty didn't think that they had enough to eat. The children seemed well, were growing. The baby was very cross and fretful. She wondered if there was something wrong with the baby because at four months, he still couldn't hold up his head.¹ Mary Jane was giving him some cow's milk and some mashed potatoes to add to her skimpy supply of milk. Larry had bought and left them a bushel of peaches.

A couple of months later, Jim and I went to Dakota so see for ourselves. Our worries had gotten the best of us. Ralph and Lottie could take care of the farm for two or three weeks, and they could have the help of Doris and Philip.

Doris and Phillip were in the process of moving to California. Phillip had accepted an appointment to a new parish near Sacramento. They were waiting for the new parsonage to be ready. They were waiting word that the house was finished. Their few belongings had gone on by train a few weeks before as they had to give up the parsonage at Indianola to their new preacher. In the meantime, they were staying with us for two months or so. Jim and I had a ball with the babies, fifteen month old Rodney and three month old Kenneth. We were leaving everything in good hands as we went to spend some time with the rest of the family.

It was a real vacation. Jim and I thoroughly enjoyed the ride on the trains. We boarded at Masonville, changed trains at Waterloo, Mason City, and at Sioux Falls. The noisy big engines, the elegant coaches, the bells, the whistles, it was all so new.

The wonderful fields along the way, the miles of open grassland, much like our Eastern Iowa when we came years ago.

It was so good to see Mary Jane's although we also thought they were much too thin. Viola and Penny and the boys welcomed us with great hugs and squeals of joy. The baby was fretful and weak, the poor little chap. They called him Nathan. Nothing was

said about money troubles but when Jim went to town with Lester, Jim went to the store and purchased treats for the children which included a lot of food. Both Mary Jane and Lester protested but we insisted, saying we could treat our own Grandchildren if we wanted to. Even if we could only do it once a year or so. We treated the ones nearby, nearly every week.

We soon fell into the old pattern of relationship, companionship. I rocked the baby while Mary Jane mended and Viola told all about school. Lots of Danes and Swedes lived in the neighborhood and the children at school often asked what nationality were the Fallins. Mary Jane had always told them that they were Americans. Period. We knew that Jim's background was English, but I didn't know where the Blanchard name came from. So I really couldn't help them out, but say that Mother was right. We have been Americans for many years. "You are all Americans."

On the train going to Etta's, Jim told me he had loaned two hundred dollars to Lester, which should help out through the coming winter. "He didn't want to take it but I insisted. It should help out this winter. Lester is giving up on this farm and has purchased another one, a 160 acres a few miles south of them. Traded and he will have a \$2,000 mortgage. That's cheap, if it were back home in Iowa but here, who knows?

"Lester should inherit a little something from his Father but he probably won't. His Father died at Isaac's in Minnesota this spring. He had been in poor health for some time.

"Levi, the younger brother bought a section of land in Texas and it turned out to be under a lake, a shallow lake but a lake, just the same. Levi made such a fuss that they did sell him another section of land. Lester thinks that it is pretty worthless."

I thought that Lester hadn't done so well, either, and said so.

"Don't be hard on him, he's trying. We went through some hard times, too."

I supposed we did have some hard times but somehow, Jim always seemed to be a pillar of strength. I just never felt so overwhelmed as Mary Jane did. We had had to live on produce from the garden or the fields, many a time, but living on Iowa's bountiful gardens was a different story from the drying out in Dakota. Mary Jane had harvested only beans from her garden. They had two scrawny cows and some chickens. The corn had only gotten three feet tall and the grasshoppers had eaten off all the silks so that there were almost no kernels on the few nubbin ears of corn. They didn't even cut the wheat but pastured it.

At Jamestown, we were royally welcomed. They had a small house beside the hospital and the house was overflowing, even with the two children gone with Betty. Mrya, Leone, John and Kenny and the new baby Arlo were darling. When Etta could take a day off, we took the children down to the park and we picnicked in some lovely fall weather. Jim helped ready the small house for winter and ordered coal for her use. She would have a hard time until the hospital was better paying. She seemed to accept the trials and was determinedly cheerful and busy. Will's family was dead and she had only our family to help her.

We stopped at Dumont and stayed several days with Rick and Elsie. Everything here was fine. Such crops. We decided that no one should leave Iowa. More delightful Grandchildren.

We enjoyed our vacation immensely. We arrived back home too to send Edith and

Philip on their way. We explained how well it had gone on the train as we wished them God Speed. But I am sure it wasn't so much fun with the two babies and several days on the train.

Iowa again had a good crop. It was an especially good year for apples. We had bushels and McKee's had bushels going to waste on the ground. We sent two barrels of apples to Mary Jane and another two barrels to Etta, by freight from Nugent along with the barrel of apples for our Missionary. The apples were packed in oats in regular large barrels. At least, we would know that the children would have some fruit to eat.

¹ Mother Hazel mentions later that she believed that Nathan's failure to develop normally was caused by rickets.

Chapter 21

Loss of Sarai

Sarai left us one winter night. She had been busy as usual during the day and sometime in the night; she had gone home to Jesus. John rode down to tell us, early the next morning. Jim and I went to be with Sean at once. I helped tidy the house and fixed breakfast for Sean and John. Their family had also grown and fled away. Patrick lived only a few miles up the road, so he and some of his family were soon there.

Father McCoy came from New Ireland and administered the last rites. The undertaker came and Sarai was laid out in the front parlor as though she was just sleeping. I remembered how sweet my mother had looked years ago. After the rest of the family began to gather, Jim and I went home, leaving them alone as a family. Clara and Bridget would soon be there and they could handle it.

We attended the Wake the next night. Many of the Irish neighbors had gathered early. I couldn't help but notice the sudden silence when we entered. Clara came to meet us, "Oh Almira," and cried on my shoulder. Patrick joined her, an arm about me and his hand holding Jim's. "We knew you would come tonight. Come and see Mama. She looks so nice." Sean also came to greet us. Crying together, we knelt in front of the bier, each praying his own prayers. When we arose, the small talk started up again.

Quite a chasm had developed between the younger members of the community and their neighbors to the South, not of the Catholic faith. Some of the Irish youth thought or at least acted as though they thought anyone not of the Irish church were heathen. The last two young priests had rather encouraged this.¹

There was a stir at the door and the now aging Father O'Halleron, now at Masonville, came in. As he greeted all of us, he told us that he felt, he had to come. He felt that Sean and Sarai were his friends. Although Father McCoy dutifully offered him a

part in the service, Father O'Halleron declined and Father McCoy read the beautiful Rosary service.

Food was served; I have no idea what, now. It seemed like a bad dream. Ralph had brought us in the buggy and when he returned and we rose to leave, Sean told us he would send a team for us on the morrow and we should ride in the funeral procession with the family.

Father O'Halleron understood the bewilderment of some of the young people and he gently told them, "We are all children of god, together." He then pronounced a blessing on all of us as we left. It was very hard parting with Sarai.

Of course, I missed Sarai. Very much. Although as families, we continued to be friendly, they were badly scattered. Now John and his new bride made a home for Sean, and he, Sean, and Patrick farmed together. Sean, who had almost never come calling unless it was on business or to attend a special occasion like a wedding or our Christmas get-togethers, now he come every week or so and would sit and visit with Jim and I over a cup of coffee and a plate of cookies. We enjoyed this and were glad we could help ease his loneliness a little. Jim and I always had a close relationship with all the Reilly children, especially the oldest, Clara, Bridget, and Patrick, although they now lived away from us.

Ralph and Lottie nearly engulfed us with Grandchildren. They had seven children in eight years. Darlings, every one of them and Lottie was a good capable Mother. Naturally, their little house was overflowing. So we decided to build this small house in the back of the garden for Jim and I so that Ralph and Lottie could have the big house.

It was a good move for all of us. Here, Jim and I were almost back to a cabin. There were two rooms down and two rooms up, a wide porch, a good cellar, and a woodshed at the back. We all worked together in the garden and the fields. We enjoyed those years, good ones for us. Our scattered family wrote but we didn't see many of them. We had Betty and Larry near by, and Effie, Mary Jane's girl came back and worked for Lottie two different times.

We visited occasionally with Sid and Evie. Henry had moved on the Kansas, where he was helping a group start irrigation. Their children were also grown and scattered, except for the youngest, John Henry who was still at home and working with his Father.

Our little circle of neighbors had expanded and almost exploded into a larger neighborhood. We were still very much involved in Church activities. We visited often with Seth and Ethel and they with us. Family get-togethers became summer picnics for those within driving distance.

We went to the Central City fair each year. One year, we went twice. One day we took the oldest four of Ralph's children to the fair and treated them to rides and ice cream. On another day, that year, Sid and Evie and Jim and I drove together and had a fine day. It was so different with no children along. We could really enjoy the circus acts, the dramas, and music on the stage. It was one of the few times we could stay for the evening show, coming home though the starry darkness. It was another adventure.

If I don't mention the children's names often, it was because I couldn't stand them. For some reason Lottie and Ralph picked out Bible names: There was Jeremiah and Ishmial the eldest. Then Dorcus, Tabitha, Deborah, Nathaniel, and Abraham. They called them all by their proper names and were very irked whenever we shortened or changed the

names. I am sure the names caused many problems in school and were likely changed as soon as they left home. I don't know why they couldn't have used simple Bible names if it was so important to them, like Mary, Sarah, Ruth, John, or James. Their youngest, born in Marshalltown, was more fortunate, however, she was Lydia.

We were surprised but we shouldn't have been, when both Ralph and Lottie felt the call to become preachers. We were proud to have them serving the Lord full time and encouraged them. It did make us many problems, however. Jim couldn't run the farm alone. Ralph was enrolled in a seminary in Marshalltown for the coming two years. Although Lottie couldn't take the course along with Ralph as she would have liked, because of the children, she did study his lessons at home.

We wrote the children while we were deciding on what to do about the problem and Clark Richardson, Rick's son wrote us asking if we would consider renting it to him. We hadn't seen Clark since he was a boy and now he was a married man with two children. He came by train to see us and the farm. Jim and I approved of him personally.

One week, Jim took the train and went out to Dumont to see Rick and his family. He came back well satisfied that Clark would come to us in the spring. I would have liked to have gone with Jim but Lottie was in bed with the latest baby and I felt that I could not leave her or the children.

Jim was called to his heavenly home, one late winter day. It was as nice as spring and Lottie and we were getting ready to visit Ethel and Seth for Lottie's last time. Jim started out to hitch the team. He just sat down on the step. One moment, he was well and busy, and the next moment, he was gone. I've never cried for Jim. He is only gone home and when the time comes, I will join him. We had a fine life together and life always goes on but part of me died with Jim.

Most of the children came home for the funeral. Mary Jane came with Nathan but Lester kept the other children at home. She said they didn't have money enough to bring all of them. Betty and Larry were a tower of strength. Rick and Elsie came and stayed a week. Clark and family had a rail car ordered and would be coming in a couple of weeks. Etta came alone. She had found a friend to stay with her house and children. Edith could not come. She had a new baby and it was too far. There was much meeting the train in Nugent, teams and buggies going back and forth. Neighbors and friends came and went, brought in flowers, lots of food.

We buried him beside Ella in the pleasant cemetery beside the church. I considered burying Jim beside his Father and Jamie, in Cedar Grove cemetery but the plots were not well cared for. Here he lay near his church and beside his beloved daughter.

Some of me died with Jim. Though still I had to welcome Clark and family. Neighbor wagons hauled his goods and machinery from the box car on the siding in Nugent and hauled Ralph's goods back to the same car which was then rerouted to Marshalltown. The entire season was a nightmare for me. Ralph rode with the car but Seth and Tom drove clear to Marshalltown with two teams and surreys with the family. It took two days and they stayed all night with the pastor of their church in Auburn. The children and I parted in tears as we hugged each other. I knew they were going on to a new life, in schools and the future; I could not really join in.

Since, Clark has farmed the farm and done a fine job of it. I have loved you and your folks, have worked and lived as best I could but part of me died with Jim. I am only

waiting to go home with him.²

¹ Religious conflict was not unknown on the new settlements. Mother mentions that her High School graduation was held in an abandoned church, abandoned because of a conflict over suitable church music.

And here is an account from the 1881 "History of Buchanan County." "On a pleasant morning in the early part of July, 1859, a singular cavalcade passed through the streets of Independence. The cortege was headed by Sheriff Martin, whose air was not that of an officer who realized in his demeanor the majesty of the offended law. Following the sheriff came a large number of men and boys of all ages, and at the rear rode the deputy sheriff, his position evidently designed to suggest the idea of a rear guard. The apprehended and witnesses numbered over fifty persons, residents of Jefferson township, and parties in an action before Esquire Glynn- the defendants being charged with disturbing a religious meeting. The particulars, as they were developed during the examination, were as follows:

Religious services had been appointed to be held on the Sunday pervious, in a grove in the aforesaid township. Seats had been prepared, and the people, on assembling, seated themselves as had been their wont, promiscuously, or more properly speaking, and with great propriety of custom, families were seated together. The preacher whose name and denomination are not matters of record, doubtless a well-meaning man, but possessing a zeal not according to knowledge, insisted that the sexes should occupy seats on the opposite sides of the speaker. This 'Shaker habit,' not commending itself to a majority of those assembled, the request met with a tardy compliance on the part of some, and a positive refusal on the part of others. The person who was to conduct the exercises not being able to overlook so flagrant a departure from what he esteemed of the gravest importance, the congregation was dismissed: and , subsequently, the above action was brought against some seventeen or eighteen of the offenders.

The action was not sustained, however, and the prisoners were discharged. They left town as they had entered it, singing with great heartiness..."

² Almira's surviving children were named:

Herbert Richardson 1856
Nathan Richardson 1857
Mary Jane Richardson 1860
Bedia Richardson 1862
Ella Richardson 1865
Julia Richardson 1868
Orin Richardson 1871
Edith Richardson 1876
Two other children died in infancy

As mentioned before, as Mother Hazel moved through this fictionalized account, she began to use more and more real names and places. Especially moving was her account of the death of Ella, who declined and died at the age of 29, and who is indeed buried alongside Almira and James Richardson in the Lower Spring Grove Cemetery.

The description of the death of James Richardson has come down to us over the years. Mother Hazel took the literary license of having Almira survive the death of her husband, however Almira died in 1895 while James Richardson survived until 1905. The entire effort that Mother Hazel put into writing this account was as her tribute to this pioneer woman who came to Iowa as a young girl, married, and raised not only a large family, but joined in building a home, a church, and a community.

Chapter 13

Another Boy

We had made the acquaintance of the group around the big spring, called McPike's spring. They had arrived earlier than we did in 1852. A new post office was opened in one of their cabins, called Atlanta. Other cabins had sprung up between us and the river and between us and Seth's. There were also six or seven cabins along the Wapsi where the sawmill was located.

Jim still hunted and kept us supplied with prairie chicken, rabbits and squirrel. After his first turkey, he had never seen another one. Last winter he had shot a deer again so we had venison but game was getting scarcer as more people moved into the territory. Professional hunters wandered through several times so game became scarcer still. Henry was the hunter for the Smith's and Elmer for the Faye's. Sean never did get a gun and try for game.

Each family had a huge woodpile, about twice as much as would seem necessary but no one was taking any chances. Jim had been seriously scared last winter, when he feared that the pile might not last out the winter. While the weather held, he helped Father pile more wood against his house.

1857 was a long cold winter but not nearly as severe as the past two had been. About once a week, I cooked up a big pot of stew or I made a cake or loaf of bread and we visited and spent the day with a neighbor. We became friendly with the Faye's. We loved the children and enjoyed the friendly atmosphere of the two families. The children played with Jamie, carrying him around and around and trying to teach him to walk.

Sleighing was good and we spent many days with Father and Mother and they with us. Sometimes, we spent all day with Reiley's. Evie still served us elegantly but we were

now used to the fact that she had different ideas and we all shared together. They had replenished their supplies from Delaware and Evie added many a cake or tidbit to our days.

Jamie was growing so fast that it became harder and harder to feed him. Although I was still nursing him, I had less and less milk for him. I gave him broth from the chickens and the rabbits, cornmeal mush, mashed potatoes, mashed vegetables, but of course, we only had root crop vegetables. Our cow, now named Sheba, wouldn't be fresh until May so we had to get along until then.

After Jamie and I tumbled out of bed for the umpteenth time, I made a pad for the floor by the bed. I used the best parts of an old horse blanket and sewed the strips together with a padding of straw, quilted into it. It made a good heavy pad, so that I could let him down on the floor if it was warm enough. He was walking around the bed against the wall but he was still pretty teetery. I made him some moccasins out of the cured rabbit skins. It was one of my successes that winter.

Jim repaired shoes but he didn't work at it quite as hard because we had new shoes coming. Father took it upon himself to order new shoes for us. His brother ran a shoe manufacturing plant in Boston, Massachusetts and he could get them at cost. He noted that the entire neighborhood shoes were no better than ours, so he ordered for everyone, large or small, trying his best to guess the proper sizes. I can't imagine that all were a perfect fit. He ordered for all of us, saying, "Pay me if you can but if you can't, I'll trade for them. I want everyone to start spring work with good shoes." Bless him!

One morning as we lingered over breakfast, I noticed that Jamie was buried under the covers with no tousled head showing. Suddenly, I thought of the ugly word, suffocation. I snatched off the covers to find him peacefully sleeping. In my relief, I sobbed tearfully against Jim's shoulder. I guess that we were so happy that I thought something would spoil it for us.

Jim called it shut-in fever. He suggested that we make a high chair for Jamie. It was a good idea. He cut and brought in small willow branches. I peeled them and helped Jim shape them to form the back of the chair. He painstakingly cut small wooden nails, mortised the rungs, and back, until when we put it together, we had a nice strong chair. We couldn't find a suitable board for the seat so we cobbled up some pieces and covered them with canvas over a padding, sewing it over and over underneath the seat until it was smooth and tight. We proudly introduced Jamie to his chair.

Naturally, he was happy to be sitting at the table with us but it wasn't all sweetness and light however, as he soon grabbed everything in sight, then crawled onto the table itself. I used a towel to tie him down. Still he used half of the table for himself and we had to be content with the other half. Many no-no's later, he learned to sit quietly at the table, bow his little head and wait for the Grace.

Some days were still long and dreary and we brought out the chess set. Still Jamie was vast entertainment and we rejoiced in our home and our good health. All in all, the winter of 1857 was a good winter. There were storms and snow but not like the previous winters. Between blizzards, we could travel by bob-sled to any of the near neighbors. We even went to Seth and Ethel's one fine day. The sleighing was perfect and we rode snugly, bundled in the straw in the bottom of the box.

We did start prayer meetings, supposed to be every Wednesday afternoon but it

usually happened about once a month. There was just the Faye's Father and Mother, and us, although Reece's did come once.

Evie was expecting again and I called on her several times. I prayed every night that this time, Evie would have a live baby. Twice during the winter, Sid and Evie called on us and they thoroughly enjoyed Jamie. Henry never came, even when asked especially, but stayed home to read, so he said. He did the hunting and kept them in fresh game. It was a good winter.

Soon it was spring and we were busy with plowing, planting all the usual tasks. More sod was broken and more acres planted. Showers came often but we finally got the garden planted between rains. Weeds flourished and it kept us busier than usual to keep the garden clean.

Sheba freshened with a nice heifer calf so for the first time in Iowa, I enjoyed the luxury of fresh milk. Each morning and night, I milked the cow, and then set the milk to cool in a flat gallon crock, which I then kept setting in a pan of cold water. Jamie had all the milk he wanted to drink before I skimmed off the cream and saved the cream for butter. We drank buttermilk and made cottage cheese. I now had milk and butter to season vegetables and to make cream dishes. I had to churn but Jim whittled a cover to fit over one of the two gallon jars, so I could churn butter. It was crude but it worked. It churned butter if I worked it long enough.

It was spring before the shoes, which Father had ordered finally came to Marion. Reece had gone to Marion and he brought them back with him. Mother delivered them to each farm house, riding horseback through the mud. She didn't want to worry anyone about money so she fixed that. She put a note on each pair, stating the size, price and all but she added, "I'm not collecting any money. You are to see Mr. Richardson about paying."

After the crops and garden were in, we built a nice addition to our cabin. Last fall, Jim and Father had hauled the logs to the mill, so now they hauled the lumber home.

They dug out the root cellar and made a wall and a cellar under the new house, lining the cellar with lime rock. We added two rooms to the East of our cabin with a full loft so we had two rooms down and two upstairs. What space! The cellar door was just outside on the South wall, so it would be warmer and so it was handy to the kitchen door. A brick chimney was built and a pot-bellied stove ordered. The upstairs rooms were plastered and the top half of the rooms down stairs but the ceiling was a grooved ceiling lumber and the lower half of the wall was wainscoting. We had two windows facing the East, where Jim had always wanted a window facing the morning sun. One window was in the parlor, another in the bedroom both to the East and there was also a window to the South in the parlor. It was beautifully light and airy. Upstairs each room had a window to the East.

Evie had a lovely little girl in July and they named her Alice Louise. Sid and Evie were very happy and proud. The child had everything they could imagine she needed, which made some of the neighbors jealous. Jim and I were so happy for them and rejoiced in their happiness.

I almost forgot to tell you about the pullets. That was almost as big a pleasure as the milk. Often, I found five or six eggs a day for most of the summer. With the milk, they made a big difference in our meals: they were very welcome as Jim had less time to

hunt and the game was much scarcer. When some of the hens stole off and hid their nests and came back with a brood of chicks, I herded them into our stockade to save as many as possible. Later I let them run but I always drove them in the enclosure at night. We lost some to weasels and some to minks. Living close to a creek, made it handy for such varmints.

All this time, I had had very little soap: the scraps we brought with us from Vermont were soon gone. Ethel had made soap last year and had shared with me. Now she gave me a batch of spoiled lard so Mother and I tried our hand at making soap. We had filled a barrel with ashes and poured water through them, catching the liquid in a stone jar and repouring it over the ashes until we had some pretty stout stuff. Mother helped me with the soap in the big kettle over our outdoor campfire. It made soap all right but after using so little soap for so long, this nearly ate up my hands. Practice makes perfect, so they say. Anyway, I learned to make very nice soap.

We ordered a new bed with metal springs and a table with six chairs for the parlor. When they came, we placed the bed and Jim made a small bed for Jamie in one corner. We emptied and washed the bed tick and refilled it with bright new straw. I made a tick for Jamie's bed. We put up shelves and hooks for the clothes.

The stove was moved in and the chairs. We continued to cook in the kitchen as formerly but now it seem like plenty of room after the bed was removed. Later, I always kept a kettle of water on the heating stove for soup or tea.

The pole structure barn held only four horses so now Jim enlarged it to include the cow and calf. He thought they would be warmer in with the horses. He built a bigger bin for his wheat and used the smaller one for oats. He also made a small crude crib for corn. So far all the corn had been left in the fodder until needed but now he would like to pick some ears and store them for next summer.

Father was always visiting at the post office and in Walton's blacksmith shop and had made many friends. This year, they elected him to the County board of supervisors from Newton Township.¹ So Father spent some time in Independence, helping organize the new townships, studying and laying out plans for roads and schools.

The only trail that could be called a road was the one from Anamosa to Independence, running across country southeast to northwest. The brick from the Junction had all been hauled over this road and was now being used often by strangers, strangers to us at least. The county planned to lay out roads on a mile grid pattern which would spoil this diagonal. Faye's and Father's would be on the new road but McKay's would have a long lane. Our house was not on either road so it would not make any difference and we would still have a lane. However the road would run across one end of our farm so eventually, we planned to build on the road.

Much of the harvesting fell on Jim with his Father gone so much. Mother and I helped as we could. Mother stayed with Jamie while I worked with Jim with the hay and when we stacked the wheat. As usual, we visited often with Seth and Ethel and the neighbors.

Sid and Henry were building their house. Everyone helped for a day or two now and then. They had finished the foundation and the cellar the fall before so the house went up fast. It was a large square house, two stories, eight rooms, large windows, a big pantry and two porches, very luxurious. Evie was making drapes to go with the lace curtains she

had sent for.

They did not build a fireplace but put up three chimneys. Orange Faye built the chimneys. Stoves were set up and lighted to be sure that the chimneys drew properly. It was by far the most elegant house in our section of the prairie. I loved my house, now so light and airy and did not envy them, their splendor. Some did, however, and they had no close friends except Sean's and us. Hard working and extremely busy, they didn't seem to notice.

Our second baby was born that summer and we named him, Nathan Richard. Although I had never heard from my Aunts, I dutifully wrote them about our new son, how Jamie was growing and about our new house. I also wrote to Isabella again and she was my only contact with the old home in Vermont.

Sarai was still nursing Lucy, her latest, so Mara stayed with me for four days. Then Mother Richardson stayed with me for two weeks or until I was on my feet again. It was so nice to have extra room and everything went well. Ricky, as he was soon called, was a strong baby like Jamie and I adored having two sons. Jim was also proud and happy with two little boys.

Mother had sent home for yards and yards of calico and worsted so together we made new dresses for ourselves, new shirts for the men, work pants for the men, and new dresses for Jamie. We didn't forget Tom and Katie. It was a busy fruitful summer. Besides the carpenter work, they had added ten acres of wheat and ten of oats. Mother and Father helped in the garden, as they had none of their own, we worked together and shared.

When it became time to harvest the garden, we found it so nice and easy to arrange the cellar to keep our plenty. Mother was very helpful as now I had to spend time nursing Ricky. We had bins of potatoes, pumpkins, and squash. Also many boxes of carrots, turnips, and beets, so on and so on.

Evie came with Alice Louise one day to see the new baby. Alice was walking and she was still a most beautiful child. Evie told me, "I'm indebted to you, Almira. I still rather envy you all your knowledge and common sense and here you have two sons. How nice. We'll hope for a boy next time although Alice is a perfect answer for us.

"I was such a know-nothing when we came to Iowa. You have helped me so much. Sid and I were married in England and his Mother never forgave him for marrying. I was working in a theater group and I met Sid at a friend's house. Sid was on a business trip to buy some parts for their foundry. Their company was involved in other products but Sid and Henry ran the foundry. Their Mother owned the original property and after their Father's death, Sid and Henry had managed the foundry for twenty years.

"We had a beautiful honeymoon coming home on the boat. We had good weather and neither of us was seasick. Here, we lived in his Mother's house, a huge place with servants and maids. I never would have learned to cook there, or anything else. She got very angry with the boys and installed her brother-in-law in charge of the foundry and threw Sid and Henry out. They took it to court and won a good settlement. We came West on the money we managed to save from the debacle.

"I almost went back to England. I have two sisters there. I was so afraid and Sid seemed to be under his mother's thumb. I was afraid of everything, from the mud and cold to loneliness and Indians. Sid tried very hard to keep me with him. I did feel that he

and his brother might be better off far away from their Mother. She's half crazy I think.

"I think I would have gone back to England again, if you hadn't come to see us that first time. Here you were, still hardly more than a child but you and Jim were making a home here. I thought, surely, if you could with so little, I could manage one year or more. After I began to try, it was easier and each year has been better.

"Henry had a girl friend but she wouldn't come with him. She's back in the city somewhere. I hope Henry meets someone where who can appreciate him for his real worth. Both Sid and Henry enjoy this prairie state and would never go back to the city. Sid writes to his Mother and now she is talking about visiting us to see the baby. I'm not sure I want her to. Here, Sid is his own man. Would she still rule us if she were here?"

I listened aghast! Thinking of the many times we had criticized her or at least our thoughts had implied criticism and here all she needed was help. I told her she should have told me sooner, that we might have been able to help her more.

"Oh, no. You have helped me so much. Sid and I will love you and Jim always for your friendship and neighborliness. Henry will, too. I am getting to be a pretty good farm wife. I am so proud and happy with my baby and my home. Now that we have Alice, we can hope for a boy next time. We are having Alice baptized next Sunday. I wish you could come."

Next Sunday, as we watched them drive by on their way to services at New Ireland, I told Jim about our conversation, and how I felt that I might have helped her more. Jim always had an answer to comfort me. "Perhaps. Perhaps not. We never know the wonderful ways of the Lord. They needed to do it on their own. We can be thankful that they are making it so well."

New babies were the style that year. Besides Ricky, Seth and Ethel had Ronald James, called Ronnie for short. Alice was not yet a year old and little Lucy Riley was only a year old when John Thomas was added to their family.

Each year, we became more enchanted with this prairie land. Each year we had weathered severe winters but our crops were so bountiful. Each of the families now had a cow and one or two sows so that we all had shoats to fatten for winter meat. Jim planned on saving two or three more gilts for next year as he hoped we might be able to sell some when the railroad finally came through.²

McKee's had a flock of sheep, which were such a nuisance, that most of us deplored them. The McKee children had to herd them almost day and night. However, we were happy to trade for yarn, which Maggie McKee spun from the carded wool. Mother and I made wool filled quilts and made some quilted coats for the small children. I traded eggs and frying chickens for yarn and wool.

Frank Long had started a store or small trading post in his home and he expanded it so we could buy some necessities. His goods came from Dubuque by freight wagon. Jim rode over occasionally but it was so muddy for a team and wagon that I seldom went. I loved walking in the tall grass, even in the sloughs but to ride along with the team pulling the muddy wheels through the deep mud was not to my taste.

Clare, Bridget and I had picked many berries and dried them or made marmalade with honey. We still made the plum leather from the wild plums and laughed as we chewed it. Grandma would have had a fit if she knew we were eating anything as crude as plum leather.

It was a lovely fall. Sean was able to build a second room to his cabin, doubling his cabin space, badly needed. He had bought two acres of timber on the river for lumber and for firewood. One day when he was hauling wood, the entire family went with him and they came home with nearly a wagon box load of nuts, hickory, black walnuts, butternuts and hazelnuts, from their own woodland. They happily shared with us, some of each kind. Our protests were silenced when we saw the pride and joy with which they gave them to us. Of the many times, I had given them nuts, these were given back to us. When I tried to thank Sarai, she shook her head no, so I said no more but showed the children where to spread the nuts to dry. At least, here, there were no squirrels to rob us.

More new neighbors were settling near by. Grimes and Bensons, South of the Faye's and farther East the Dix and Patton families. To the North of us, the Sheeleys and the Colemans had built new cabins, part wood and part sod.

That winter, we didn't try to get the families together for Christmas. There were just too many babies to take a chance on the weather. Father and Mother had been invited to spend Christmas with the Walton's so Jim and I and the boys spent the day with the Reilly's. We exchanged small handmade gifts. Jamie received a rag doll dressed like a boy and he loved it.

The weather held and we spent New Year's Day with Seth and Ethel and children. With Father and Mother along, it was easy to keep the baby and Jamie covered and warm. I think that was the only time in our lives that we could spend New Years with them. Usually the weather was just too uncertain.

¹ Nathan Richardson is recorded as Newton Township member of the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors in 1860.

² The railroad arrived at Independence in December, 1859. So anxious were the new settlers to sell produce that one observer noted that on the 22nd of November, 1859, in anticipation of the arrival of the railroad, he counted 25 wagon loads of grain on the streets of Independence, headed for new grain and produce buyers. In 1859, A William Jones, a pioneer in the livestock trade, shipped thirteen cars of hogs, a total of about a thousand, to Dubuque. Evidently, the railroad bridge wasn't finished and he waited until the river was frozen and drove the hogs over the ice to the railhead in East Dubuque.

Addendum

Almira always became rather vague whenever I asked about her later years. "Yes, Mary Jane and Lester were home several times. Yes, they did succeed and make it in Dakota. It turned out to be a good farm. They built a fine new house. It even had Delco lights, a new electric light run by an engine. Very fancy.

"I was there when Viola was married. Then again when Homer had died in the pulpit. Betty and I went to the funeral. Mary Jane was very broken up."

Lester died of a heart attack while he and Nathan were hauling a load of hay. Nathan never grew up mentally but has always required care and supervision. Now-a-days, they tell us that he was born with rickets (the reason he couldn't hold up his head) due to malnutrition and was never able to overcome the handicap. Mary Jane still lives in Dakota with Nathan.

Betty died of cancer when she was in her fifties. Larry was lost without her and moved to California. He had since remarried.

"Yes, I visited Doris and Phillip in California and I stayed two months. I went by train and it took four days. Larry and his new wife came to see them while I was at Doris's"

Phillip is now dead and Doris is alone. The family is scattered all over California.

Rick is still living in Western Iowa. He is so crippled with rheumatism that he is in a wheel chair. Elsie is still able to take care of him.

Etta continued to run her hospital as a nursing home for many years. Her family is a great credit to a fine woman and they are scattered all over the Dakota's and Montana. Etta has also passed away and is buried beside Will in Jamestown.

Almira always spoke of Ella, as though she was near by, as she is, still young and beautiful to her Mother. The babies she lost were still very real to her, as she mourned their fairness and her loss.

Ralph, the younger beloved son was ordained in the ministry and Almira was very

proud to have a preacher son, giving his all to the Lord. Ralph and Lottie moved to Nebraska, where they served many parishes over the years. Their eight children are also scattered all over the West with one exception, Dorcas is a missionary in India. Ralph and Lottie have been back only twice in all those years.

Twice, Almira has visited in Nebraska, Western Iowa, and the Dakota's going by train and spending some time with each family. She would take the train from Nugent.

I am ending Almira's story now. On one of my last visits with Almira, in her older age, she asked me to once again take her to the old cemeteries. At the Spring Grove cemetery we found the stone for James Richardson, with an empty spot ready for Almira's inscription. She would be laid side by side with James, Ella, with friends and neighbors. I looked at the names, the Faye's, Bede's, Reece's, Dix's, Patton's, McKay's, Johnson's, Caron's, Freeman's they settled this prairie together and now they lay in eternal sleep together.

We traveled to the graves at New Ireland. We placed wild flowers on the graves of Sarai, Sean, Mara, and James. Then there were Sid and Evie Smith and the tiny grave of Susan Marie,

Lastly, we visited Upper Spring Grove. It was such a quiet soothing spot, deep in green grass with gentle breezes sighing through the cedars, now grown tall and stately. It was too late for crabapple blossoms, but wild roses grew along the fence line and with Almira we placed a small bouquet on each of the graves, Grandfather Richardson, James, and the tiny graves of the babies. I stood before the graves of the McKay's and said a prayer for all those of us who benefit from their toils and struggles in this prairie land.

Sally Faye had worked for Jim and Almira several different years and she had memorized Jim's morning prayer, always given during the morning devotions. She found me in later years and gave me a copy of his prayer.

Our Father, we come before Thee this morning, feeling our whole dependence on Thee. Feeling the need to thank you for the preservation of our lives, to thank you that Thou hast brought us to behold the light of another day in comfortable circumstances as we are. We thank you for the privilege of hope this side of the boundless eternity. We pray that you keep us and our lived ones, both near and far away, under Thy blessed wings.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name,
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day, our daily bread.
May we forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from all evil,
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen