



Covered Wagon Days

No.1—We Move to Colorado

Because the story my uncle wrote to our daughter is good for both young and old, I asked his permission to send it to THE FREE METHODIST. Major F. I. Pickering, now retired, who tells this true account, lives in Upland, California, where he is an active octogenarian. God bless him, and others like him!

ALMA K. MADDOX.

SO YOU WONDER, Ann, why my hair is white—how old is old—and how far is a little farther! If you'll pull your chair up closer to the fireplace, I'll tell you a true story about "the olden days," as you call them.

Now, how old are you? Ten? Well, if you'll multiply that by eight, you'll understand why my hair is white! (Lucky to have hair, don't you think?)

In the olden days my Ma and Pa were pioneers in South Dakota—they homesteaded 160 acres in Hanson County. There my father—your great-grandfather—built a little shanty, shingled on the sides as well as the roof to keep out the winter's cold. Even so, I've seen frost half an inch thick on our windows in winter, and though we "banked up" the foundation each fall to keep the cold from getting under the floor, it was hard for us to keep warm. In this pioneer shanty Lottie, my older sister, and I were born.

My parents being interested in education for their children, father gave an acre of the farm for a little country school. In the schoolhouse that was built, Lottie and I started our education. Subjects taught were Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic—with Discipline thrown in. I recall picking a handful of beautiful violets for my teacher as I walked to school through our pasture. In the spring, flowers were everywhere, but I thought the violets were the prettiest.

The schoolhouse had what we called an "entry," extending the full width of the building, where we hung our outer wraps and left our lunches. Kindling was also stored for the teacher, who had to build the fire in the stove when it was cold. Here we also played "blind man's buff" when we couldn't play outside. The entry was just wide enough so that a blindfolded child could, with his arms fully outstretched, almost touch the

coats hanging along the sides, so it was easy to catch someone.

When the first snow came, we played "fox and goose" in the fresh snow at noon or recess. All twelve of our school family would bundle up, rush outside, and make a huge circle in the white snow. Then we would scuff our feet to widen the rim and to "cut the pie," and our game of fox catch the goose was on. When the fox chased us around the rim of the circle we would yell, "Cut the pie," and would take a short-cut. This fun-game would end all too soon by the ringing of the bell.

At the end where the teacher's desk stood were two long benches. Classes called up to recite sat on these, each person standing when his name was called. I remember vividly the Fichel girls—to me they were young women—reading dramatically the poem which contained the words, "Morgan, Morgan, the raider, Morgan's terrible men." I imagined how terrible they must have been—those raiders—after the close of the Civil War.

On another bench was the water pail, with a long-handled dipper in it, out of which all drank. (When we got to Colorado we learned a pail was a "bucket.")

Each Friday afternoon we had a program. Every pupil was expected to get his own recitation. One Friday I chose, without consulting anyone, a poem I had learned from our hired man. I secretly thought it would really wake everybody up. It did, but the teacher told me it was not the kind of poem for a boy of my age to be repeating!

In September 1893, when I was six years old and in the "third reader," my parents, sister and I left our farm to travel to Louisville, Colorado, by covered wagon. A coal-mining town near Boulder, with ten saloons, Louisville was a "tough" town. Sam Page, my mother's cousin, who lived there, was having trouble with his motherless, teenage girl. But our coming did not seem to help, as she ran away from home very soon, and we never heard from her again.

Lottie kept a record of the distance traveled—it totaled 750 miles—in a notebook given her by a John Deere implement dealer—a very choice gift. Sometimes our school notebooks were made by mother out of wrapping paper, ironed smooth and sewed together.

Preparing for our journey, Father first put a "double box" on the wagon—that is, sideboards on the sides and ends of the regular box, which doubled its normal depth. Then he built a framework and fitted it on top of the double box, just wide enough so that double bed springs would fit snugly inside. This "overjet" protruded several inches over the narrower sides of the wagon box. The bows, over which the canvas top was stretched, were put through clips on the sides of the overjet, the canvas was pulled tight, and tied securely. Thus we had snug sleeping quarters, with our baggage underneath.

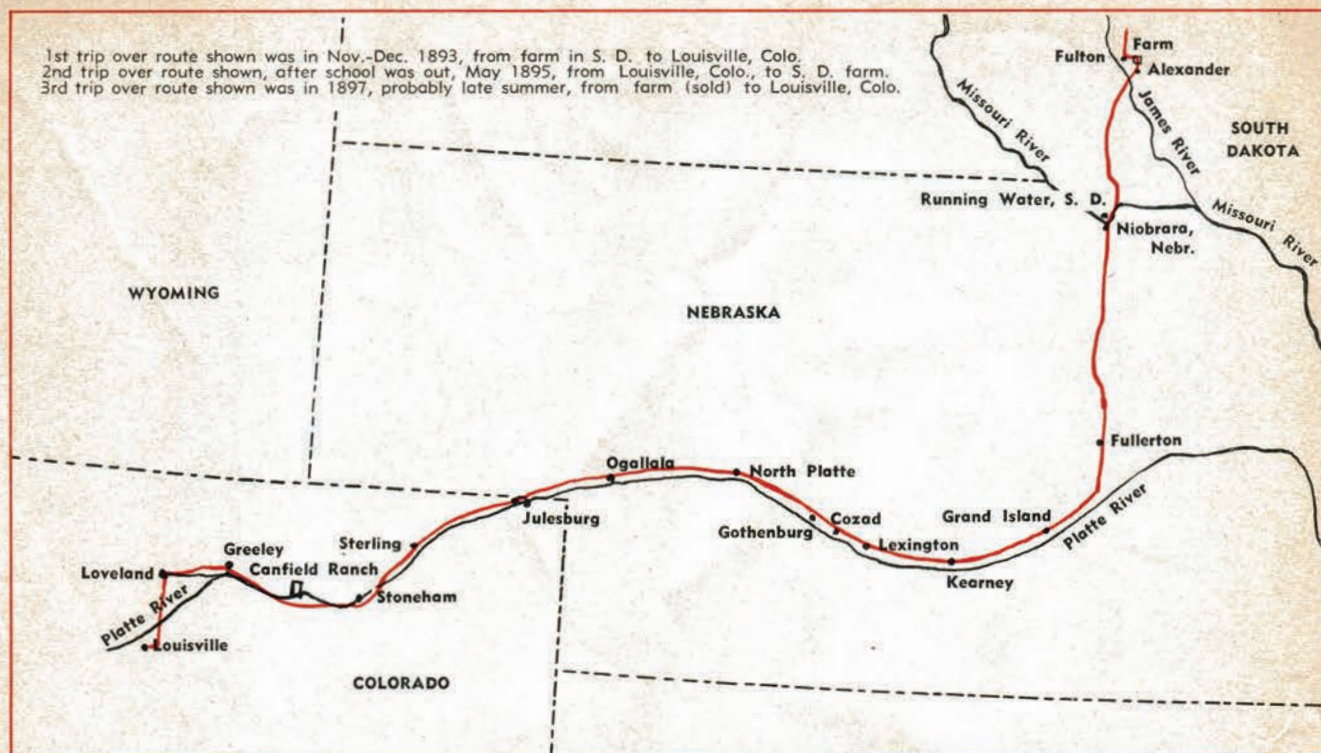
After crossing the Missouri river on a stern-wheel ferry boat, from Running Water, South Dakota, to Niobrara, Nebraska, we saw Indian boys racing their ponies over the prairie. Since we were on land which the Sioux had roamed not many years before, we wondered whether the Indians were friendly. But we had no trouble with them.

Since it was fall, we ran into rain, and at times the canvas top became very wet, but normally it did not leak. Once as we were riding along in the rain, I wondered what would happen if I put my finger up to the wet canvas. I tried it; water began to drip down. I never repeated the experiment!

We always slept in our wagon, though friendly settlers often invited us to sleep inside, especially when it was colder than usual. Mornings were chilly, but none of us got sick.

On the back of the wagon we carried a sheet-iron stove with two griddles, and an oven next to the fire box. Lottie and I picked up wood for fuel along the road as we walked beside or behind the wagon. One day in eastern Colorado I stepped on a cactus—I saw no reason to step around it—and found that the spines would go through the sides of my leather shoes. I had learned another lesson.

In our next installment, Ann, I'll tell you about our wonderful pioneer cook-out.



Covered Wagon Days

No. 2—Mother Is the Driver

by MAJOR F. I. PICKERING

(As told to his niece)

HOW ABOUT that cook-out story, did you say, Ann? Yes, I enjoy wiener roasts, and charred marshmallows, but I think the food tasted best on the long road as we traveled from South Dakota across the plodding miles to Colorado.

We all had good appetites, and mother could do wonders with our little sheet-iron stove when we stopped at night. Noon meals usually consisted of pork and beans, or canned tomatoes seasoned with sugar, or salt and pepper, plus bread and butter, and water to drink. Never since then have I found any pork and beans which tasted so good as those on the road. Lottie and I vied for the small piece of pork in each can! One noon we stopped to eat under some shady trees in Grand Island, Nebraska, in front of a large, white, two-story house. Later we learned that it was the home of Colonel William F. Cody—"Buffalo Bill," as he was familiarly known. While Lottie and I were playing on the grass in the shade of these trees, a lady came out and offered milk for the "children." She seemed such a nice, friendly lady to think of us total strangers. She may have been Mrs. Cody—intriguing thought! We met many friendly people along our journey. I think only one man refused to let us buy some hay from him. Though he had a large house and barn, he ordered us off his place.

We arrived in Louisville, Colorado, in a snowstorm, accompanied by high winds. We feared our wagon would be blown over, so stopped for a time in the lee of a large house before trying to find the home of Sam Page, mother's cousin.

According to my report card for 1893-94, I entered the third grade in Louisville. The next year found me taking the third grade over, as there were subjects I needed to qualify for the 4th grade.

Pa had rented our Dakota farm to a "Rooshen," as we called them. We learned that our renter was not keeping his word, so father went back on the train to look after it. After school was over, when I was eight and my sister past ten, mother took us children and started back to South Dakota with our faithful greys—Fly and Nell—hauling our covered wagon. Two incidents on this trip stand out in my memory. One occurred in Julesburg, Colorado. We children were staying in the wagon, holding the horses, while mother went to get groceries. While we were intent on what was going on in the street, a young man—a cowboy, we thought—rode up and, leaning over in his saddle, handed us a sack of candy. We were so surprised that we scarcely thanked him. But I'm sure our eyes and the expression on our faces did. Mother returned with some home-baked bread and a 5-pound can of strained honey. Sitting on the spring seat of the wagon, she spread butter and honey on slices of bread. It was quite a treat for us.

The other incident was this: The distance between Greeley and Sterling, Colorado, was a two-day journey for a team hauling a load. There was but one stopping place—the Canfield Ranch—midway between the towns. We apparently arrived at Canfield early, and as mother was never any hand to wait around, we drove on toward Sterling. Night overtook us, with nothing in sight but prairie. Rain had fallen recently, so there were pools of water for the horses, and we made out some way. In the night, however, some coyotes or wolves nipped at the horses' heels and, as they were tied to the wagon, they jerked the wagon, waking mother. We could hear the beasts howling! Mother dressed, got us up, hitched up the team, and, putting the reins in our hands, she took the lantern and started for the road, guiding the team. It was very dark. How relieved we were when we reached the road, so that mother could climb in the wagon, take the reins, and we could go on our way again.

I'm looking forward to our next visit, Ann, when I'll tell you about the mules, and becoming a Christian.



Covered Wagon Days

No. 3—My Sins are Forgiven

by Major F. I. Pickering
(As told to his niece)

"One step, and then another, and the longest walk is taken" . . .

WE SOLD our South Dakota farm in 1897, and in the fall started back for Colorado—again by covered wagon. Father hated to leave the farm, but the last winter in Dakota had been very severe, while Louisville was warmer, and there was plenty of good fuel. Also, there were better schools.

When I tell you, Ann, that there were 90 days of sleighing, you can see that there was a lot of snow. Though the spring had been wet, the crops were poor, and prices for grain were low. We felt disappointment over leaving our birthplace and early home, and sensed—some-what, at least—father's feeling of frustration at leaving what he had worked so hard for—a home for his family; but, like most children, we soon forgot this in our anticipation of the fun we would have in making another trip by covered wagon. I still look forward to "trips," don't you?

We set out this time with two wagons: mother drove the greys hitched to the old wagon, with its overjet and canvas top. Father drove a span of mules, recently purchased—Billie, the little one, and Jack, the large one, hitched to the new wagon, with our top buggy attached to the rear. Our family had ridden many times in this buggy to church at Fairview schoolhouse, a few miles from our home. These services were mainly kept alive, I think, through the efforts of an old couple known as "Father and Mother Peck," who were Methodists.

On this our last trip, after we had driven onto the ferry which was to take us across the Missouri River, I was told to

stand at the mules' heads, to quiet them if they got excited when the ferry started. Hitched to the wagon, they were standing facing toward the stern and the paddle wheel. When the wheel began to splash water, the mules pricked up their ears and shied a bit. My heart went pit-a-pat, as there was only a wooden rail between us and the river.

It had rained, so the hill we had to climb out of the river valley was slippery. The greys pulled their wagon to the top, but the mules refused to move. Father had to bring Fly and Nell back to pull the new wagon. But first we had to take our box brake off the new wagon, because the mud piled up against the brake blocks. I was wearing my first long pants—overalls—and had a new waterproof duck coat. I felt quite grown up as I helped father in the mud and rain.

Upon our arrival in Louisville for the second time, we bought a home on the main street. While we lived in this coal-mining town, I carried the *Denver Post*, delivering it to saloons and residences while avoiding the drunks. I've been very thankful that my mother was a strict disciplinarian. She did not allow me to play out in the street at night, as many other children did. Thus I was protected from much that was evil. I soon learned that I was expected to fight any boy who dared me, or I would be ridiculed. My mother had told me not to get into any fights, and, knowing my mother, I obeyed. But she soon discovered that I had to do something, so she removed that restriction. Soon the other boys respected

me, even though they did call me a "Sunday-school boy" in derision. Our whole family were regular attendants at the local Methodist church (the only Protestant church in town). It was here that I was baptized on May 5, 1895, by a Rev. Charles Heller. Because of regular attendance at Sunday school, I won several prizes.

It might interest you to know, Ann, that your maternal grandfather (George Knapp), who had moved out from Illinois, worked for a time at one of the Louisville mines. He was top man on the "tipple," as the superstructure of the mine was called, dumping the cars of coal as they were hoisted out of the mine. He kept track of the weight of the coal in each little car, since the miners down below were paid by the tons of coal they mined.

After my 8th-grade graduation, we moved to Boulder, Colo., so that Lottie and I could attend high school. This was really a preparatory school for the University of Colorado.

About the end of my sophomore year at State Prep School, I knelt at an altar in a service held by Free Methodists, in a hall at the corner of 20th and Pearl streets. Thanks to the assistance of your maternal grandmother, Sarah Knapp, I prayed until by faith I claimed the promise and felt my sins forgiven. I was free indeed. I probably would not have had the courage to go forward to that altar, but your maternal grandfather—led by the Holy Spirit, I'm sure—came back to where I was standing. I was trembling under conviction. He invited me to seek the Lord. What I received that night was something new and glorious. All my sins were forgiven! I was happier than I had ever been before.

About a year later I sought for heart cleansing. This was even more wonderful. I wanted all the world to know the riches of His grace. This gave me new courage at high school, where some made fun of me. They had heard me testify—those who had attended services—that the Lord helped me get my lessons, even though I went to church two nights each week, and never did any of my school work on Sundays. My report cards from Prep, which I still have, show that my grades did not suffer.

I'm very glad for the disciplined training my parents gave me. I'm sure it had a distinct bearing upon my becoming a Christian. I was taught to obey at home, so it was easier to accept the discipline required of an earnest Christian. Then, too, I had the convincing example of your maternal grandfather, showing me very clearly what "know-so" salvation, as he expressed it, really meant in daily living.

Now, even though my hair is white, I still enjoy trips and cookouts. But most of all, I enjoy living daily for Christ.