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Settlers Who Won't Die

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SETTLERS WHO WON'T DIE

By Aaron Baker

They are waiting at the ranch when the guest arrives. They sit in the shadows of the old front porch, waiting for the chance to show the home-place to a stranger, to have him find something to talk about.

Right away, I see in an old carport a dust-covered, time-frozen horse collar, a lucky horseshoe, and a rusty pair of wicked-looking spurs hanging from spikes on the wall.

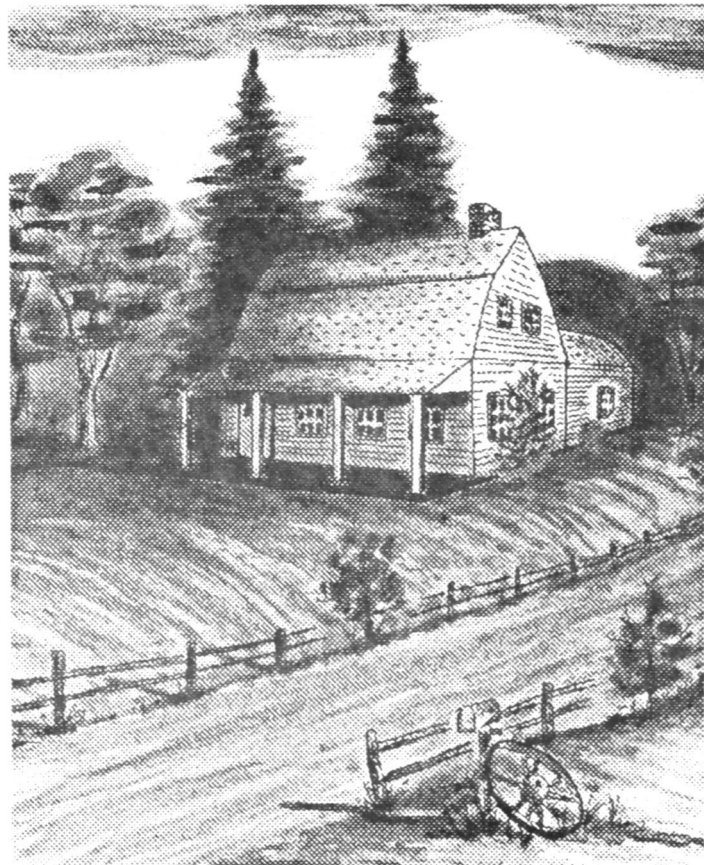
Down at the barn and hayloft there's a brown, now brittle, leather saddle with one stirrup missing, thrown over a rafter above a few square bales of black, rotting hay.

In the kitchen of the old farmstead, I see an antique mill for grinding home-roasted coffee beans and an old wooden churn once used for making golden country butter.

In the den I talk about an iron shoe last standing near a withered, water-stained duck decoy used as a door prop, and I notice on a rustic table a huge ring of keys for which there are no locks. On the wall is an ancient clock which ticks loudly and proclaims with a dignified alarm the half-hours.

While up in the musty attic they open an old green-chipped trunk with broken leather handles and find a battered gray copy of *MCGUFFY'S FIFTH GRADE READER*. One rarely sees a McGuffey for any other grade. The fifth grade was a tough one for pioneer children. By the time they had finished it, they had grown old enough to work in harvest fields.

At the end of a bent, tree-lined driveway, the visitor notices a busted, narrow-rimmed wagon wheel leaning against a rural mailbox. Though today the postman fails to leave them any mail, old red-dirt farmers sense the Second Coming will prevail. *



Artwork by Mike Sigurdson