A PIONEER STORY[1]

By Mrs. P. V. Van Arsdale

I have been so much interested in some of the stories I have read describing the life of the early settlers and, as I have heard much of the early history of some of my own people, I have concluded to write what I can remember for the perusal of my children and anyone else into whose hands it may fall.

As I have not been well posted as to accurate dates I will have to say about the year 1829, or as the fairy stories begin, "a long time ago," there lived in New York State a family, descendants of the Hollanders, by the name of Van Dorn. As the portion of the state where they lived was quite thickly settled and land was high, prospects looked brighter in some of the newer states. So the father, Isaac Van Dorn, concluded to move his family of wife and seven children to Ohio where he secured a primitive home. The children of this family are the ones of whom I wish to write, but there is little more to say of the family as a whole.

Not long after settling in Ohio the mother died, leaving the seven motherless children in a strange land among unknown people. The oldest, Peter, was about eighteen, almost a man. According to the custom of those days he was apprenticed to a trade for two years receiving only board and rough clothing, and had not a minute he could call his own but must work early and late until two years were passed, then he would be a carpenter and receive one-half his wages and the other half would be paid his father until he was twenty-one. The next younger was a girl, Harriet, who stayed at home helping with the work out of doors and in the house. The third was Sarah, aged thirteen, who went out to service, which meant working early and late, doing washing, milking, and all other kinds of hard work and receiving from 50 cents to $1.00 per week. The next younger

[1]This remarkable story of pioneer times by the late Mrs. Van Arsdale, of Chariton, Iowa, was written in 1918 for her children, of whom Mrs. C. A. Post, of 4303 Kingman Boulevard, Des Moines, is one. They kindly turned it over to the Historical Department. It gives a glimpse of conditions in the Middle West and in the Far West of a time almost beyond the memory of any now living. Mrs. Van Arsdale died at her home at Chariton, June 18, 1921.—Editor.

MRS. P. V. VAN ARSDALE

were two girls, aged about nine and eleven, named Mary and Dorcas. They attended a very common school, walking a distance of nearly six miles a day to do so, but as the older ones had never had as good an opportunity they considered themselves fortunate and already had glowing hopes of some time becoming teachers. The youngest two were boys of seven and five, named George and John.

For a time after the mother's death they tried to keep on as they were, but crops failed and the father became discouraged and finally bound out the youngest four children. The two young girls seemed for a time to be doing well, but George, the seven-year-old boy, was with two maiden ladies of uncertain age who though well enough off were very grasping, and thought all a boy was for was to work hard and take all the scolding their hardened natures could heap upon him; but really a girl was treated about the same for they had a niece living with them who fared but little better. Another thing deep set in these old ladies' minds was that young people should not eat much, so poor little George was seldon satisfied unless Lizzie, acting on the motto, "God helps those who help themselves," helped herself on the sly and frequently gave little George a hand-out.

The youngest did not thrive under the treatment of his foster parents either, but for a couple of years had to stay and bear what fell to his lot. But about this time Peter finished his apprenticeship and to celebrate the happy occasion went to visit his sister Sarah who had gone out to work in a tavern. As she was a very capable cook and housekeeper she had secured a very good place. The work was heavy, with time stolen off each end of the night for extra work, but she was to have the sum of fifty cents per week, and was to go to school four days a week and have the privilege of going to church or Sunday school on the Sabbath. On Monday she stayed from school to do the heavy washing, while Saturday was the cleaning and baking day. I have heard her tell of the midweek bread and pie baking which she accomplished by working late at night and having all ready for the big brick oven when she would get up at an early hour in the morning.

When Peter visited her she went walking with him instead of going to church and they talked of the younger brothers and

sisters, and he planned to call on them and find out how they were getting along, as the father was married again and would perhaps be forgetful of them. His calls revealed the troubles of little George and also how poorly baby John, now five years old, was cared for, so at his earliest opportunity he again consulted Sarah and they decided to start housekeeping and take care of these boys, as they could easily take them from the people by proving how they had been treated. But before their plan had matured little George had run away from his place and found his way to his brother Peter, a distance of twenty miles, through rough, unbroken country, keeping away from public roads lest he be discovered and taken back. He was so terrorized that he had a serious sick spell after finding his brother.

The small, poorly furnished home was soon started and Peter and Sarah worked to care for their two young brothers, though they always said George helped with the home as much as they. Peter was away early and late and George, now nine years old, did the chores or worked in the garden, and occasionally picked up a little cash by working for neighbors.

John grew strong very rapidly and as he developed a taste for books and study they planned to give him the best education they could, and they really gave him a good start. By perseverance he acquired what learning he could in the poor schools of the country and when quite a young man studied law.

All this time Peter and Sarah were living lives of deprivation and hard work, but happy in the thought that they were performing a sacred duty to the best of their ability. The three sisters had been growing, and Harriet, the oldest, was soon to marry a nice young man with whom she had become acquainted in one of the homes where she sewed, as that was the way she supported herself. They were not possessed of lands or moneys, so made their plans accordingly, and after going to the humble home of Peter and Sarah where the marriage ceremony was performed, they climbed into a prairie schooner drawn by a yoke of oxen and taking Dorcas, one of the younger sisters, with them, started for Illinois where they could settle on government land. They were very young, but inured to hardship, and looked for nothing better than a few acres they could call their own. For some time they lived principally on wild game while the sale of

the skins furnished a little money with which to buy a few necessary articles. They entered a tract of land and began to break and cultivate it. At first they had only a few acres, but in that productive soil it responded abundantly. A garden helped to furnish the table.

All these long months since the brothers and sisters parted in Ohio not a word had they heard from each other. Now the little settlement about ten miles from their home had begun to put on the air of a town, had a post office and some stores, and had been named Lewiston. Thither Frank and Harriet went in their prairie schooner drawn by the faithful ox team that had brought them to Illinois and done the work on the farm. While there they started a letter back to the dear ones in Ohio telling where they were located and how they were prospering, but the letter never reached its destination. Mails were then carried by men on horseback through rough, unsettled country and many a poor mail carrier was drowned in a stream when trying to ford it, or killed by Indians, or devoured by wild beasts.

At any rate when they made another trip three months later they found no answer, but with true pioneer perseverance they started another. In those days stamps were not put on letters, but when one went to the post office and found a letter, or was notified that there was a letter awaiting him, he paid thirty-five cents to get it. They waited another two months, again made the long trip over the hazardous trail to the post office and were then rewarded by receiving the longed-for letter from home.

Peter was married and Sarah was soon to be, and Sarah and husband were planning to come to Illinois and no doubt would settle near them and would bring with them Mary, who had been sick, and so lost the home in which she had worked and shared the small pittance the times allowed, since her father bound her out. She was now thirteen. George was now knocking around from place to place taking care of himself. Peter would keep the youngest boy.

We have no knowledge of any more communications till Harriet and family, now numbering four, since the birth of a little daughter which they called Mary, were happily surprised by the arrival of Sarah and husband and sister Mary. And, strange to say, both Harriet and Sarah had married men named Wilcox,

very distantly related. Time passed. The young couples worked hard on the farms, and the two younger sisters worked out for the scattered neighbors, as was a common custom among early settlers. Mary learned tailoring and so made good wages for those days. Dorcas married the son of a Mr. Leslie. The elder Mr. Leslie died soon after, leaving his mill in Bernadotte to the son. The burg never grew much, though well situated on Spoon River. Luther Leslie did well in the mill as it was patronized by all the farmers for miles around. As lumber was in demand Mr. Leslie also started a sawmill.

I cannot describe all of the ups and downs that life at this time served these four sisters, but they had the comfort of knowing they were doing as well as any in their vicinity, and they were situated so as to be company for each other. But things did not remain in this happy state long, for Sarah's husband early developed a tendency to consumption and the hard work and exposure hastened the disease; so after about eight or nine years of married life Sarah was left a widow with one child, Adda Wilcox. She was thus left without help, and wrote to her brother George to come and live with her. He came and in that way she was able to hold her fine acres which in after years made a lovely home.

George tilled the land and raised stock for a few years, then Sarah married again, this time to Mr. Francis Overton who had been teacher of the district school in Bernadotte for a term of years. In the meantime Mary had married a man by the name of McIntosh who lived but a short time. I think he was drowned while loosening a jam of logs in the river near the sawmill. And now as Sarah had a husband to run her farm, George went to live with Mary and work for his brother-in-law, Luther Leslie, in the mill.

Now, though there had been sorrow of parting and death and hard work and hardships common to pioneer life, there were many happy days and jolly incidents. The following incident has caused many a laugh as I remember it told by my father, George Van Dorn, and his sister Sarah, when they were both advanced in life. During butchering time Mr. Overton and Sarah needed help, so George hooked up the oxen and with Mary went to their aid. Arriving there George turned the team loose

to go and get water while he strolled into the cabin a few minutes. When he came out to put the team in the shed to feed he found they had upset a large kettle of soft soap which Sarah had boiled and left to cool preparatory to putting in a barrel, and he began to scream "Oh! Sarah, your soap will kill my oxen," and she, running out, exclaimed imperatively, as she viewed the wreck, "Why! George, your oxen have spilled all my soap." Each thought only of his own misfortune. But the cattle did not die, as they had not swallowed any of the stuff, only lost some hair where it had slopped on them, and much of the soap was saved, so both Sarah and George were happy that it was no worse.

But back to my narrative. Now Mrs. McIntosh, or Mary, and George were living comfortably and happily, both working and saving and planning for a farm home to be owned and conducted in partnership. After some time they arranged that George go to Iowa where Harriet had already gone to live at Fort Des Moines where her husband was employed in a government store. If George liked the country he was to pick out a claim and go back for Mary and what movable possessions they had. Accordingly he started out on horseback about the first of September, with saddlebags well filled with provisions, and with an Indian blanket for use on rainy days and chilly nights.

After nearly three weeks' travel through an almost uninhabited wilderness he reached Fort Des Moines. He visited Harriet and family and looked the country over, but not until he started back did he decide on a place some forty miles from there. Then he hastened home before the heavy fall rains set in, which would make travel hard and the streams too high to ford. Near the first of November he neared his cabin home, his mind filled with plans for the future prairie home and a pleasant trip thither in the spring time with his sister in the ox wagon containing their household possessions. But the cabin seemed rearranged and strangely cold, as if deserted. He repaired to the nearest neighbor, a half mile distant, and there learned the sad fact that soon after he had left Mary had been stricken with western fever and only survived a few days. So he was left sorrowing and discouraged. After a few lonely days with the other sisters he loaded what he needed of the household articles into his wagon,

yoked the two teams of oxen to it, and started back to Iowa to be ready for early spring farming. After bidding farewell to the families of Sarah and Dorcas he started west over the long, lonely trail, his oxen, horse, and dog his only companions. For days he would not see a human being, and then more likely a wigwam or tepee where dwelt Indians, then a cabin inhabited by pioneers. When possible he kept at a distance from Indian camps, but if they could not be avoided he would have something to offer their chief as a gift and thus make friends with them. He had been wise enough to lay in a store of pipes, tobacco, bright blankets, red handkerchiefs, beads, etc., and could easily trade such things for dried beef (jerk, they called it) and other provisions. Several times he was forced to camp near a settlement, rest the teams, and secure a supply of grain for them. In February he reached Fort Des Moines where he stayed till time to think of spring work, then moved on forty miles to his little cabin with an immense fireplace, which was to be his lonely home.

Spring was so filled with work that there was no thought of neighbors, but as summer advanced George began to wonder what manner of people there might be living about three miles from him, and one day he rode over to see. Near the cabin were women, one small, delicate, tidy-looking, past middle age, was standing in her garden in which grew a few flowers as well as vegetables; the other a young girl, comely, with dark hair and eyes, was hanging clothes on the line. He inquired for the man of the house and, finding he was away, informed the ladies he would call again as he was their neighbor. He gave his name, learned theirs was Mesinger, and went his way. But the face of the girl haunted him. She did not look in good health and he thought she resembled his beloved sister Mary, and he wondered if the sadness in the dark eyes was caused by ill health or loneliness.

Before he had nerved himself to make another call, which was necessary as he wanted to get acquainted with Mr. Mesinger that they might plan the harvest work together, a great prairie fire broke out. Mrs. Mesinger saw when a long way off that it was coming right towards their place. She immediately put her young son Samuel on the riding horse (all early settlers kept one horse which was used only for riding) and told him

to ride fast to their young neighbor for assistance. She and daughter Almeda began to back-fire, that is burn a small streak around the buildings, whipping the fire out next to the buildings till a strip was wide enough that the approaching avalanche of flame could find no food for its fury.

The boy made good time, returned with George, and by the time Mr. Mesinger was back the buildings and stock were saved and those who fought fire together were good friends. As there was a small stream intervening George's place was not endangered. Now that the neighbor's fields were laid waste, George told Mr. Mesinger to come and help him care for his crops and there would be enough for both. As the summer advanced they became intimate friends. As George was a good cook and housekeeper as well as farmer, they ate their meals at whichever house they chanced to be working at meal time.

A cow at each place furnished her part, the two gardens were a great source of supply, a few chickens and wild game contributed to the variety, and with the addition of some wild fruit they had appetizing meals for hard working, hungry people, even though the bread was of unbolted flour ground in hand mills at home. Fine flour was only available when some one made the forty-mile trip to the Fort with ox team and wagon.

By fall George and Almeda were planning to get married, and as both were living quite a lonely life the parents made no objection, as George, being eight years her senior, was old enough to care for her, as well as being capable of doing so.

But think of a wedding in that country—no stores, no preachers, not even a justice of the peace within forty miles. But love and youth can bridge most difficulties. George was ready and willing to make the trip to the Fort to buy articles necessary for the occasion, but it was hardly the proper thing for Almeda to go the lonely trip alone with George, and she was hardly able to do so. So it was decided that her mother should go with George and take Sammy along for company, as the boy was anxious to see something of the world. But as Mr. Mesinger was taken quite sick it came about that only George and Sammy were to go. The bridegroom was provided with money to buy goods for a suitable trousseau for the bride and some extras for the wedding feast—a memorandum of extra length, yet I never

heard that any fault was found with the things he brought back. On the contrary, I have often heard that the shoes fitted, the shawl was nice and warm, and the bonnet was comfortable and becoming and went nicely with the goods which Almeda took to a woman who had been a dressmaker in some eastern state, and who now lived about five miles from the Mesingers. While the woman sewed Almeda helped with the housework, taking the completed dress home after a few days. And Almeda enjoyed the visit so much that she was lots better for it. It was about her first visit except with her married half-brothers and sisters, who never took any extra trouble to make it pleasant for her, as she was only a young girl and they had their own.

As the time for the nuptials neared great preparation was made. The cabin was made as clean and tidy as a scrupulously neat housekeeper could make it and plenty of good things prepared for the wedding feast. I never heard all the menu but know wild turkey formed a part of it. All with whom they were acquainted were invited, and the married children.

I must tell of them right here. Mrs. Mesinger had been married twice—first to a man named Parks who was killed or died of disease in the War of 1812, leaving her with five children, Asa, Isaac, Jane, Julian, and Cordelia. Some years after she married Kiby Mesinger, who was also a soldier. They continued living in Onondaga County, New York, and Asa. Jane, Julian, and Cordelia married there. Asa was married to a girl named Sweet, Jane to Samuel Howd, Julian to James Benedict, Cordelia to Durant. When the Mesingers went west they took Isaac Parks, and Orissa and Almeda Mesinger with them, and first settled on government land in Wisconsin. Here Isaac married and Samuel was born. Afterward they moved on to Iowa, lured by prospects of a better location. Isaac went also, and soon all the others and their families, except Jane and Julian, were in Iowa. And all were near enough to be at the wedding of George and Almeda even if some did have to camp more than one night on the way. George fixed his cabin ready for company and the bride, then made the trip to Fort Des Moines, brought his sister Harriet, her husband, and daughter Mary about ten years of age, and also brought the chaplain. After the wedding he took his bride, the chaplain, and his sister's fam-

ily to his own home. All this happened on October 15, 1845. After a day's visit they all embarked in the emigrant wagon again and went back to the Fort where George and Almeda visited a few days, then returned home, taking their household supplies for the winter.

And now Mr. and Mrs. Mesinger and Samuel were left to spend the winter without a daughter. Orissa had married a man named Williams sometime before, living near enough to permit of frequent visits. But this tale is of George Van Dorn and Almeda, so we will follow them.

Almeda had suffered from western ague till her health was very much impaired, and as George was used to doing housework and there was little for him to do in the winter except to hunt and slay suffiicent game for table use, or chop enough logs for the fire place, he continued efficient in the culinary department, especially as the young mistress had never cooked by a fireplace, and he was afraid she might burn herself up in the attempt. Remember her people had come from New York State where cookstoves were first used and had brought one with them. At that time every householder made most of the furniture himself. Stools made from hewn slabs for bottoms and stakes for legs were used instead of chairs.

However, the Mesingers and Van Dorns each had a couple of rocking-chairs brought from the Fort. The bedsteads were stakes driven into the logs on one side and legs in front; tables were hewn slabs smoothed on the upper side, long and narrow. These homemade devices were left behind when a family moved, thus lessening the job of moving.

A year passed with few changes. The first real event was the arrival of a little daughter November 11, 1846. A horseback rider made the forty-mile trip to the Fort and brought a physician who, of course, arrived too late to assist the stork, but was useful in caring for the mother and child a few days. He then left, riding the faithful horse the long trip home, his saddlebags well filled with lunch and horse feed after the common custom, and bearing good news to the Wilcox family.

The baby was named DeMaris Van Dorn and seemed to fill a place to the complete satisfaction of the parents. While the doctor was there to oversee, the father hollowed out a cradle

from a log for the baby. Then they cheerfully entered another long, cold winter, almost a period of hibernating. This baby is myself, the writer, now seventy-two years old.

Spring brought plenty of hard work for the father, as the young mother's health was still poor. The whole care of a baby is a colossal undertaking for a mother at the age of only sixteen years and five months, and no doctor within forty miles. But they were young and ambitious and each did the best he could and in time spring sowing and summer harvesting were over.

As they heard glowing reports of the climate of Oregon Territory and of the wonderful productiveness of the soil, they planned to sell their claim to some of the many immigrants now filling the new state of Iowa, just admitted to the Union, and go to Oregon, feeling convinced the climate would be better for the mother. Accordingly when I was near eleven months old they started with two large covered wagons and four yoke of oxen. The parting was hard for mother but with the hope of youth she pictured herself coming back in short years with good health and prosperity. One half-brother, however, objected so strenuously that he and father almost came to blows.

As mother was not able to travel all day without resting, a comfortable bed was arranged in one wagon for her use both day and night. The first day's journey brought them to Fort Des Moines sometime in the night, but they stayed in the wagons till morning and did not arouse the Wilcoxes, preferring to camp. They were joined by the Wilcoxes with a couple of wagons and teams, and others, and as they went on the number of wagons and families increased till there was quite a train traveling towards what was to be the state of Oregon.

It may be interesting to note some of the rules followed by the emigrants. They were to help each other through all difficulties, but each separate family provided for itself when able; only part of the men at a time were to ride on horseback and watch for game, which was always divided; when opportunity offered for fishing some were detailed for that; each day they drove as far as possible, but if any team gave out, or for some reason it was necessary for one outfit to stop a day or two, at least two others must stop with them to insure help in time of trouble.

It was deemed best for small parties to stop over frequently,

scattering the train over quite a long distance. As the rested teams caught up some of the tired ones would stop. During these stops the women would do washing, baking, etc., that they were too tired to undertake when stopping only for a night.

Slowly they made their way over the long stretch of miles, over plain and mountain, fording rivers, as there was neither bridge nor ferry. Within fifty miles of a fort with a small settlement (afterwards Oregon City), the headquarters of government land agents, the whole train camped in a body, forming a corral in which the oxen could be driven and not have to have a guard to watch all night. When they had rested a day or so they concluded to send three men ahead on horseback to interview the land agents and see the available spots for pre-emption. Ere long, after much riding and looking, each had selected a place to stop and called it home.

Some went into the settlement near the fort. Among them was the Wilcox family, as uncle liked business life and could have employment in the government quarters. My father selected what he often said was the "most beautiful prairie land that the sun ever shone on," with a border of timber on one side, mostly tall fir trees, and a stream of water, thirty miles from the settlement. Here he immediately went to work to prepare a place for his family and teams, and the cow that had made the long journey with them, and even the two dogs that had helped herd the cattle and had made themselves so useful that they were almost considered part of the family, especially as they had been so watchful over the baby.

First a corral was built of logs of the tall fir trees for the cattle at night. Next father cut timber for a cabin, and when he had sufficient he drove to the settlement for men to help. All this time they had been living in the wagons. And here my mother stayed and cared for her babe while father made the three days' trip for men, provisions, ammunition, etc. Occasionally roving bands of Indians were to be seen, but so far they had not disturbed us. While father was gone mother planned her domicile, staking it out right near to shade and water. Quite heroic, for she was not yet eighteen years of age. I have heard wonderful description of the double cabin—two rooms, with hall between broad enough to drive an ox team bringing large backlogs

for the immense fireplace. In that mild climate they needed no windows, only small openings for light and air, and doors for protection from wild beasts.

But now father was obliged to quit work on the house before putting the doors in, as it was time to break prairie, which would not be much good the first year, though he might try to raise a little grain for his own use. But fortune favored, as a man living three miles down stream needed help with his ground, which had been under cultivation for a year or more, and would give father a good share for work with team. So father took his helpers back and on this trip brought mother a present, an old hen with fifteen chickens, a veritable prize.

About this time father traded his riding horse, which he always considered unsafe for mother, to an Indian for a very pretty, fleetfooted Indian-trained one, which the Indian said was "good for white squaw," and his word proved true. With the new horse came a squaw saddle with beaded blanket. All this time mother's health had been improving, and now with horseback riding she had a degree of happiness hitherto unknown. When father went away to work she often went with him with me in her lap, one dog following and the other left to keep wild pests from her chickens and garden. Some of father's work was quite a way from home, so he made a canoe after the fashion of the Indians and would leave his team where he worked and paddle home at night and back in the morning.

They were living happily with bright prospects and, through a letter to Aunt Harriet Wilcox at the settlement, had heard good news from the home folks. Father was not only earning some of the crop by helping the elder settler but also was getting his place ready to raise some another year. Some real fencing had been done with rails that he himself cut and split, and the doors were hung so they no longer had to keep a fire burning outside to keep the wolves and other wild animals away, when it was rumored that gold had been discovered in California.[2]

Many were making a rush for the mines, in fact men were wild to go, as they thought to pick up the precious metal. They

[2]The discovery of gold in California was made January 24, 1848, on the American branch of the Sacramento River, but it was as late as May of that year before it became generally known. (See "History of the United States," by J. F. Rhodes, Vol. I, p. 111; "History of the United States," by Garner and Lodge, Vol. III, p. 1001.)—Editor.

loaded their wives and children into wagons and with incompetent young men sent them back to Iowa or other states. They started to California in gangs. When the Indians saw so many leaving, and feeling imposed upon by the great amount of travel which frightened away the game and scattered their herds of ponies, they began to be savage and the war cry was sounded. This made it dangerous for the few that wished to live peaceably in the homes they had started. Numbers flocked to the fort for protection. But with none to till the soil and such poor facilities for bringing supplies from other places, they soon found they must abandon this place, leaving it to the government agents.

A council was held and some thirty men, with teams and wagons loaded with what supplies the government agents could spare, made a start in the same direction the greater crowd was traveling. Among these were the Wilcoxes, my parents, and one other man with his family. Father now had eight yoke of oxen—two wagons with four teams to a wagon—two cows, and the two faithful dogs that had been my companions and protectors whenever I was outside the cabin door. Mother had her horse which she rode most of the time, carrying me in her lap. When they forded a stream she would get into the wagon; so did Aunt Harriet Wilcox and Cousin Mary, as they felt "safer with George for teamster." Mother's horse turned loose would swim along near the oxen, and when one wagon was across father would mount mother's horse and swim back and take the other teams across, hanging onto the leaders' (ox) bows on the downstream side to keep the oxen from turning and swimming downstream. Sometimes he had to use the whip to keep them straight. The wagon boxes were tight like a boat and bolted fast to the running gears.

All were well armed and ready for an attack at any time, as the Indians were still on the warpath trying to keep the whites from their hunting grounds. Even the women had fire arms and bowie-knives. All this time the Indians did not have guns and were very much afraid of them. The company kept together, as it was not safe for any to stop and let others go on. When they reached the mountains the work of doubling teams so often and helping each other made progress very slow. The teams were tired, the soil was poor, and vegetation was short. They

had to camp longer each day and sometimes rest for days.

They finally reached Waiilatpu Mission about the first of December and made application to stay till spring, but could not be allowed to do so as there were lots more to follow and grass would become scarce. However, they stayed two or three weeks and then went on with still more of a crowd than before. They had only made a couple of weeks more time when they were overtaken by some horsemen from the Mission who had escaped during the great Indian massacre when nearly all at the fort were ruthlessly slain, including Rev. Marcus Whitman and his wife and family, the missionaries who had been so kind to the Indians and had taught them so faithfully.[3]

When our party heard this terrible news they camped for awhile and some of our men, well armed, rode back a distance in the hope of finding some others that might have gotten away, but not till long after did they hear of any. A girl had crawled into a storage cave and must have become unconscious from fright, and when she came to, found herself alone with the smouldering ruins of the Mission in which all the dead had been burned. She wandered away she knew not where, and after days was picked up in a starving condition by another emigrant train and was cared for, eventually reaching the same destination as the other emigrants, and was recognized by my mother who remembered her at the Mission. She clung to mother some time.

When my people started from Oregon they had two cows. One they left at the Mission as a present to the missionaries, the Whitmans, who had been so kind to them. Mother was determined to keep the other, driving it as she rode on horseback through canyons and over mountains, though father kept telling her not to work so hard with it. One morning the cow was missing and mother was obliged to ride on without her, and never knew whether she got out of the corral in search of better pasture, or was driven off by the Indians as she strayed away from camp. The lost cow was named Bob. I had been told the old

[3]Dr. Marcus Whitman, a Presbyterian medical missionary, whose home had been in central New York, in 1836 established a mission at Waiilatpu, twenty miles up Walla Walla River from Fort Walla Walla, and erected buildings there. On November 28, 1847, he and his wife and several others were massacred by the Indians. (See "Pioneer Days of Oregon History," Vol. II, pp. 369-544.) —Editor.

nursery rhyme of the cow jumping over the moon, but hardly believing it, made up a version that suited better, viz., "Old Bob jumped over the barner," the shed at the Oregon home.

About this time one of the valuable dogs that helped with the hunting, and was the fierce protector of mother and child, was missing. So well were these dogs trained that when they had a wild animal "treed" one would guard it and the other go for father, and when he heard a certain peculiar howl he would grasp his ever-loaded gun, sure of being guided to something worth shooting. One day the dogs found a grizzly bear and chased it toward a small lake in front of the wagon train. The men immediately grabbed their guns. Father ran up to mother who had me in her arms on horseback, helped her down, jumped on her horse and rode furiously after the dogs. This is the only incident I can really remember of the long, tedious journey. I was not yet three years old but I can see how the bear jumped into the water and the water splashed high. They got the bear which meant fresh meat. The hide was saved with many others to be sold to the first fur company they came in contact with.

But the longest journey will end in time, so after six months of homeless traveling and camping they crossed a swift river and set foot on new soil where Sacramento now is. And the three women of this train, Aunt Harriet Wilcox, her daughter Mary, and my mother, Almeda Van Dorn, were the first white women, and I was the first white child, that reached the wild land or camp, as the other family who started had joined another party where they found relatives and acquaintances and camped some time before crossing the river.

In this city of tents were also many members of the Hudson Bay Company of early fame. I was the only white child in the whole settlement, but was not old enough to realize the distinction. Soon after getting into this camp where the Hudson Bay Company had headquarters, father hunted up the head man of this division, a Mr. Burnett, and sold him the hides and furs that our party had saved up, and also sold him the claim back in Oregon for $600. He hated to part with the claim as he liked it so much and wanted it for a permanent home, but he was out of money and he feared it might be a long time before it would be safe to go back there. But it was not many months

before the government sent troops to many points in the western states and territories and the Indians were somewhat subdued.

But now just imagine father receiving the price for his claim and those furs in weighed out gold! No coin at all! And the only way that he could take it back to camp was in his hat, and that was somewhat the worse for wear. Within a couple of days father had secured a large tent from the Hudson Bay Company and had cleared out his wagon and started two hired men with his teams to the mines with loads of men, implements, and provisions. And these men were to bring back report of the mining location, etc. My father never went to the mines but kept teams going back and forth all the time. He also hired two colored men, that is, he bought their time of their masters who had brought them from the South. They were cooks.

Father and Uncle Francis Wilcox, with mother and Aunt Harriet for partners, commenced keeping boarders and, by the way, did a big business in that line, as it was the only place where the great rush of men that came either by land or by sea could buy a meal.

Not long after they were located a man came in to dinner with a fine dog following him. Father spoke the name of his lost dog and immediately the dog jumped to greet him. The stranger said he had traded for him, getting him from a man who claimed to have raised him. Then father got me and stood me where I could see the dog, and what happened convinced all present that two fond friends had met after a long separation. Stub had already died and Bounce soon followed.

Ere long a number of the men that belonged to the Hudson Bay Company and Uncle Francis Wilcox and father began to plan for more permanent homes. Father sent to New York City by a sea captain and had a large house framed and sent by steamer all ready to set up, and thus was the first to erect a frame house in what is now Sacremento City. Soon carpenters began to work and numbers of men sent for their families, mostly Spaniards and Mexicans, but Mr. Burnett of whom I have spoken was an American, and his wife and family came by water from the Eastern States I think. They also built them a house at this time, I am not informed as to the material.

I do not know how much of a family Mr. Burnett had, but

of a wife and a son and daughter I am sure. This son and daughter were young and they and Cousin Mary Wilcox were soon fast friends. Mrs. Burnett had been a teacher before her marriage and the Burnett young people had brought their books, and as Cousin Mary had never had much opportunity for attending school, Mrs. Burnett taught them all for a time. But ere long the son, who began to be his father's helper in many ways, concluded that he and Cousin Mary could just as well study and work together, and in about a year after their first meeting Dwight Burnett and Mary Wilcox were married.

Another wedding with many obstacles! The day was set and both families were interested in the preparations. I think it was the latter part of March and spring was coming on, with rain and sunshine that melted the snow in the mountains. The water came pouring down into the river and filled the beautiful valley, washing away many habitations. At this time my uncle and parents and the Burnetts were all living close together in some kind of small houses. The Van Dorn Hotel which stood on the highest ground in the settlement was occupied by renters, as the work and care had proved too arduous for aunt and mother. Father had a man living with them who had a team of horses. They needed an extra man in every household as there were so many lawless people. When they went to bed this rainy night they were aware the valley was fast filling with water, so father began to mark it and watch the time, and found it would take the quite temporary house. He called the teamster and told him to get out his horses and they would go to the hotel. When they left the house mother stepped from the door, where the water was already several inches deep on the floor, into the stirrup of the saddle, and when seated father put his accumulated gold into her lap, and the teamster in front of her, then he mounted the other horse with me in his arms, and the horses were guided towards the hotel, swimming part of the time. When this haven was reached father immediately sent a boatman for Aunt Harriet and family, also the Burnetts.

The following day was appointed for the Burnett-Wilcox wedding and here they were at the Van Dorn family hotel on the highest ground in the settlement, the lower floor covered with water to the depth of several inches and a boat fastened to the

front steps so they could escape if matters grew still worse. But fortunately the rain stopped and the water seemed stayed the next morning. So the young couple insisted that the wedding be not postponed as that was considered a bad sign. A man with a boat was sent out to look into the deserted houses for the few nice things that had been prepared for the bride. The clothing which was packed in a chest was wet and would need a thorough renovating. The cake that my mother had concocted with the best ingredients available was soaked to a sloppy mush. In fact all that had been prepared was ruined, but they were not to be thwarted if the priest were alive. The Burnetts were Catholics and a priest was the only clerical available. There was no justice or magistrate of any kind, and no law but the law of the strongest and quickest over the weakest and slowest, or each for himself as best he could.

So the wedding was solemnized without fancy clothes or extra viands and sweetmeats, but there was this satisfaction, no other young people were watching and laughing at their discomfiture. Soon after this great inundation the government began looking after its rich estate and a dike was made to protect this section, and I believe it is so protected to this day. In due time California was made a state and Mr. Burnett, Dwight's father, was made the first governor and continued in that position for either two or three terms.[4]

A couple of personal incidents may interest my grandchildren. While my people were living at the Van Dorn Hotel a theatrical troupe from the States found their way to the settlement, thinking to make a lot of money off the lonely men congregated there, but finding no place at all suitable for their entertainment, they began to pack up and go to some other place. As some of the company stayed at our place I was used to playing with them, so when one of them took me to their camp and hid me I was

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[4]Peter Hardeman Burnett, first governor of California, was born at Nashville, Tennessee, November 15, 1807. He became a lawyer, removed to Oregon in 1843, farmed, practiced law, and was a legislator and a judge. In 1848 he left Oregon for California with the first company of gold seekers. Arriving there he worked in the mines, but in 1849 became agent for the Suttin interests. He was active in urging the formation of a state government prior to the admission of the territory into the Union. He was elected governor in December, 1849, although California was not admitted as a state until September 9, 1850. Governor Burnett resigned in January, 1851, and engaged in the practice of law in San Francisco, and in 1857 became a justice of the Supreme Court of California. From 1863 to 1880 he was president of the Pacific Bank of San Francisco. (See National Cyclopedia American Biography, Vol. IV, p. 105.)—Editor.

not at all frightened. It seemed to be their idea to kidnap me, thinking they would be able to get a good ransom. But before they left on the boat I was missed and my father and friends gave alarm and began to search. Some one had seen the showman playing with me, so to their camp went armed men. Of course they denied knowing anything of my whereabouts, but at the point of a gun one of them led the searchers to the place where I was hidden and soon I was home. It is needless to add that the troupe was quickly escorted from the little settlement and given to understand they dare not return.

A little child was a curiosity in this new land and amid such surroundings. Lonely men would watch me play, thinking perhaps of little ones left behind. One such brought me a pair of bracelets of rather crude style. It was not until sometime later when in playing I broke one that mother herself realized that they were fashioned out of pure gold, a loving gift fashioned by hand.

When I was five years old, or in the spring of 1851, my father disposed of most of his property in Sacremento and started for New York State. At that time they made their way down what was then called the Chagres River and crossed the Isthmus with pack mules. And right here was one of the most dangerous parts of all their travels. The trip down the river was made in small boats manned by incompetent men and many were drowned. When crossing the Isthmus they were in the power of lawless Mexican mutineers given to thieving and robbery of the worst type. In company with my people were several men who had been in their employ and who like themselves wanted to get back to the States, or "God's country," as they often called it. All were well armed and fully determined to protect themselves. My mother also wore a belt with two revolvers, and she was capable of using them to good advantage, too, quiet, mild-spoken gentlewoman that she was.

She rode a mule, as did all the rest but me, and I was carried on the back of the faihtful colored man who was coming back to the States with gold enough to buy his wife and his mother who were still slaves in the South. He was free because his master, who had taken him to California as a body servant, had sold him to my father cheap when it became understood that

DE MARIS ORISSA VAN DORN, aged 4 (Mrs. P. V. Van Arsdale)

California would be a free state and that soon his master would have no further claim on him. Although free he came with us as it was unsafe for a colored man to travel alone.

The nights they had to put in on the Isthmus they slept in seamens' hammocks, swung high, out of the reach of prowling beasts. But a greater fear was of human marauders. Part of the company stood guard while others slept, and at different times the company were aware that the robbers were trying to overhaul them. Once they tried to separate the company by trying to get Charlie, the colored man, away, thinking part would follow him and thus weaken the force. But Charlie was not easily led astray but kept close to mother, with me on his back in a small chair which was strapped to him, and in which I was fastened so I could sleep at will or keep awake and watch proceedings. Right here I must add that the camphor chest now in my possession was strapped to a pack mule and crossed the Isthmus with me. Do you wonder that I prize it so highly?

After we were on board ship and under way for the States I have heard mother say she then came nearest real rest of mind and body she had ever experienced, and father was of much the same mind, for he had keenly felt the dangers of crossing the Isthmus. My parents both escaped seasickness, but I did not. However, as the only child on board I was well cared for. I still have little tokens of the friendship of both the captain and mate. At Jamaica the mate stayed with me while father and mother went ashore. I still have the silk dress mother bought that day, with the many other things she needed as she had not been where there was an opportunity to buy for some years. To keep from paying duty on her purchases she cut the silks into breadths which made it the same as clothing.

Arriving in New York they went to a hotel awhile for a much needed rest. Father had Charlie, the colored man, with him as a servant until he could be sent off to his old southern home.

Father's substance was all in gold dust which necessitated use of scales, so he took it to the mint and exchanged it for coin. At that time there were no bank exchanges and one traveling must carry his money with him. And that is why this same camphor chest was broken into at two different times, the burglars thinking that father kept his money locked up inside, but both times they were mistaken.

As soon as she could compose herself after arriving in a civilized country and being located comfortably, mother wrote to her sisters, Jane Howd and Julien Benedict, who had stayed in New York State when the Mesingers went west, and from whom she had not heard for years. The return mail brought a hearty response.

We stayed in New York City about three weeks during which time mother copiously replenished her wardrobe. This must have been a wonderful experience, for she was still a young and comely woman, not much past twenty, and she had but few nice clothes. Indeed she had been so low on changes of dresses that she had colored some unused tent cloth with bark of a nut tree and made it into dresses, though she had saved her wedding dress and one or two finer articles of apparel while living where there were none but savages to see her.

When they felt presentable they went to Syracuse, which was their first ride on the steam cars, and so started on a delightful round of visiting among the relatives here and in other points in New York State. And I, who had no brothers and sisters and never but few playmates, became acquainted with a number of nice cousins who have ever since been very dear to me.

Soon after father bought a farm adjoining Uncle James Benedict's in Onondaga County, where we resided several years. Here my father became converted and he, mother, and myself, aged eight, all joined the Methodist Episcopal church, of which my mother had been a member in childhood. Father was made local preacher and for several years acted in that capacity, moving occasionally to a small town or country community that needed him most. He missed an education in public speaking as his youth had been so full of deprivations, so went to Fulton, a college town, and was for some time under private instruction.

In the fall of 1860, having sold the farm near Syracuse, he bought one in Oneida County, three miles south of Trenton Falls, and we lived there till the spring of 1862 when he again sold and started west, stopping in Ohio. Some time was spent in temporary abodes while looking for a location here and near Bernadotte, Illinois. In October, 1862, we settled in Fairview, Fulton County, Illinois. Here I formed many acquaintances, the most important in my history being Peter Van Der Veer

Van Arsdale, to whom I was married on May 16, 1866. In March, 1872, we came to Iowa and settled on a farm near Chariton, and this town has been our home ever since. Now I have led you back to the state where I started. My mother dropped dead in her garden here in 1879 and my father passed away a couple of years later. I have passed my golden wedding anniversary and still have the kind husband and four of my dear children, who grew to maturity and are married and living near in Iowa, to comfort me in my seventy-third year. I also have three grandchildren and I feel that God has been very good to me.

In thinking this over I see I have left out about my being stolen by an Indian in Sacremento. But fortunately I was rescued by a posse of men before he reached his tribe.

The editor of the Prairie Farmer, in noticing the gratifying fact that Illinois beef stands A No. 1, in the New York market, both in quanity and quality, would be inclined to boast, were it not that he thinks too much encouragement is given to the improvement of beef, instead of the improvement of brains—that the mental, moral and physical powers of the children are sacrificed to make them good herders of cattle, instead of intelligent and cultivated cattle breeders. We fear that both brains and beef are too much neglected in Iowa.—*Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist,* June, 1856. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

A correspondent in the Prairie Farmer asks the question, what are cattle raisers to do for a range for their stock, when the wild prairie is shut out from them. It would be well for the farmers of Iowa to think of this also, and prepare in time pastures of their own.—*Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist,* June, 1856. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

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