

WE CAME TO LIVE IN OKLAHOMA TERRITORY

By Fannie L. Eisele*

My parents, Charles and Elizabeth Gopfert, lived in Saxe Meinigen, Germany where I was born on February 6, 1884. I had one brother and one sister, Herman and Ida. Our home until I was eight years old was in Germany where children had to learn to work at an early age. We went with our parents to the fields at harvest time to help harvest the grain. I had a willow basket with straps over my shoulders and a paring knife with which to gather dandelions for the geese. I also had to help get wood to burn, carrying as much as I could on my back. All this I did as a child by myself.

In harvest time, Father cut the grain with a scythe, and Mother tied it in bundles. We children had to pick up the heads of grain that fell and put them into a basket. Mother tied them into bundles, too. In the evening, Father would haul the grain into the home place on a wagon. When the grain was gathered in and dried out, it was threshed by a flail, all of us having to help and keep in time. A flail had a wooden handle and a whang of leather at one end to beat out the grain. Rye or wheat or barley grain was put on the ground and threshed and then scooped up. The grain was cleaned in the wind or by fanning. Then we put the grain into sacks and took it to mill to be ground. The sacks of meal and flour were taken home and stored under the roof upstairs in the house.

We grew crops of hay, beets, beans, carrots that were cut up and fed to the cattle in feed troughs. The cattle were kept in a barn, and so were the hogs and the chickens. The barn was partitioned off into separate sections, and everything was kept clean. We children had to help in all this work.

* Fannie L. Eisele has lived her life, full and brimming over with her activities as farm daughter, owner of her land claim and as teacher in Old Beaver County, farm wife and mother, nurse of the sick, worker and president of a farm women's club and a poultry club in the Garfield County agent's program and as a writer, since she came with her parents to Oklahoma Territory. Two of her books (printed at Covington) are *History of Covington, Garfield County* (1952) and *History of Noble County* (1958). Mrs. Eisele is a member of the Oklahoma Historical Society, and has been on its Annual Tour for several years. She and Mr. Eisele (82 years of age) live on their farm in Garfield County, with their post office at Douglas near Covington. This story of Mrs. Eisele's life has been adapted by the Editor for publication in *The Chronicles*, from her "Autobiography," a manuscript of notes on her life.

Wood was given from certain fields all around the town, and it took walking at five o'clock in the morning to get a supply. At ten o'clock, it was lunch time, and then we went to another field, for apples, cherries and prune trees were not planted together. Much of the fruit was picked and dried in those days. When the prunes were ripe, we made prune pies. The crust was a light bread dough in flat pie tins. The seeds were taken out and the prune fruit laid on the dough, then sugar and cream and an egg with a little flour for thickening were added. The pies were baked in large ovens located in the center of the town. Baking was done by lottery. A man started the ovens and ten people baked there in a day, each person given a number in turn. The bread was of dark rye flour, in ten, big round loaves worked into dough from a forty-five pound sack of flour. After the bread was baked, then coffee cake was baked in the ovens. Pies were baked last.

Children were out of school when they were fourteen years of age, and then they were hired out to big farmers where they had to milk and do the rough farm work. They had to cook and help the farmers' wives, each having different work in cooking for the harvest hands. Some of these young people learned tailoring. Most of the boys went out to work as apprentices but they did not earn much. Some of them got shoes and shirts made out of home spun flax which was grown at home and bleached on the grass in the meadows. My mother spun a lot of flax into thread which was taken to a weaver.

Where we lived in Germany, the people kept geese. We children had to bring them home in the evening. Everything was cared for inside the house or barn. The tame rabbits were kept under the manger. In the winter, large drives for wild rabbits were made by the big farmers in hunting parties.

My father had two cows and a horse at times. When his aunt came to visit us from America, he decided that someday he would come over here, too. When she came a second time, he decided to leave Germany. He sold everything he owned, and we started for this country, arriving in New York after landing at Staten Island, in 1891. Our aunt took us home, and we were now amongst strangers in a new land. Father worked as his trade as a stone mason and bricklayer, and Mother got a job at a factory sewing buttons on garments. We children were sent to school, and on Sundays, Father took us to the zoo. He also took us across Brooklyn Bridge. On the Fourth of July, there were fireworks on the Bridge. I

never will forget the fireworks at night that I almost missed seeing. A cousin gave me a lighted firecracker, and I was looking at it when it went off and shot me in the eye. Father took us out to visit all the parks, and out to see the river. He did not like the city.

Father wrote to Uncle Fritz in Beattie, Kansas, and finally decided to come west. In Chicago on the way, we saw rats at the depot so large that we were afraid. We had to wait three hours for our train connections. When we arrived at Beattie, Kansas, our train was late and Uncle Fritz had gone home. So father hired a livery man to take us out to the farm and we were glad for all of us were tired and worn out from the long journey west.

Uncle Fritz lived on his farm five miles northwest of Beattie, and we stayed with him until we located a home in town. Uncle Fritz was a good man. His wife had to move about in a wheel chair as she had the rheumatism. She often read to us out of a large Bible that was different from any I have ever seen. It had a lot of pictures, and Aunt would read and tell us about them.

Uncle Fritz had a large farm and was owner of 18 horses, 300 chickens, 350 hogs of all sizes and some cows. My sister would go and bring the cows to the barn in the evenings; she helped gather the eggs and also picked plums. Uncle Fritz had two old mules, and he put me up on one of the mules to ride, which scared me as I had never before been on a mule or a horse in my life. He told me to get the mail at Quartz, a nearby trading post in those days. The post office there was kept by two old ladies. The trading post was an interesting place with a peacock, chickens and turkeys round about, and caravans of people moving west or east stopping there to trade. I often walked to the trading post with my dog, Fellow, that Uncle Fritz gave me. Fellow afterward came to Oklahoma with us and lived to be fifteen years old.

I went to school at Beattie, taught by Miss Nellie Berry, the Mayor's daughter. And I attended church—the Baptist, the Lutheran and the Methodist at different times. I learned to sew quilt pieces at the Methodist Church, and attended the Sunday school.

One of my schoolmates was Lena Fitzmeier, the adopted child of Mr. and Mrs. Bowers who owned a large farm out in the country about a mile from Beattie. They were members of the Lutheran Church and very religious. Lena and I were good friends, and had good times together for my Mother

would let me go visit the Bowers on week ends. I loved the farm. I rode a large gray mare after the cows in the evening, and learned how to milk. There was a big orchard on the Bowers' farm, and Lena and I would gather apples and plums. A lot of the apples were stored for the winter, in the cellar. Mrs. Bowers and her daughter, Emma would make aprons. Then Lena and I would take them to town at Christmas time, with fruit and jelly as gifts for the needy. After we came to Oklahoma, I wrote to Lena for thirty-five years. Her sister, Emma, lived to the age of 99 years; her parents lived to 100 years, and her brother, to 89 years—all on the same farm.

One day in 1894, there was talk of a new land for homesteads in Oklahoma. Father wanted to come to get a farm but I took sick, one doctor said it was rheumatism and another said it was dropsy, and I was sick for four months.

The next year, Father left for Oklahoma to find a farm. When he arrived at Enid, he hired a livery rig to take him around to look at the land, and found plenty at different prices. One day while at Enid, he walked over in Garfield County and found a 160 acre land claim that was being contested as the man who had filed on it had already used his homestead rights elsewhere so he would lose his claim here. He had made some improvements here so Father bought him out and was then the owner of 160 acres of land. He wrote a letter to Mother to get ready to come to Oklahoma.

Father went to Hiawatha, Kansas, and bought a young team, wagon and bows, oats, harness and a canvas wagon-cover besides hoops to stretch the cover over the bows so we would have shelter in case of rain. While traveling, the oats were in the bed of the wagon, and over the oats was our bedding. Then dishes, chairs, table and stoves were placed on top, with a box of chickens and some pigeons packed in, too. The canary bird was in a cage hung on the center bow in the wagon. Our horses were named Jennie and Charlie.

Father, Mother, Ida, Herman and I and my dog Pellow started from Beattie, Kansas, to make a home in a strange new land. It took us two weeks to get to Oklahoma as traveling by team and wagon was slow through rain, sunshine and heat, as it was August haying time. In Kansas, we stopped in the evenings to camp and buy hay from the farmers along the way. And we got melons, too. We bought milk at 5¢ a quart, butter at 10¢ a pound and eggs at 5¢ a dozen since Mother had brought potatoes and other food along with us. A lot of traveling was done this way in those days.



Photo taken by Kinnear, 1891

Charles and Elizabeth Gupfert and their three children: standing left to right, Fannie, Ida and Herman.

When we came into Oklahoma, the houses were small and there were sod houses and dugouts. There was not much land tilled. When we came to a town along the road, the buildings and stores had false fronts, and cotton goods—calico and percale—sold for 5c and 10c a yard of poor color that would fade out when it was washed the first time.

Life was different in Oklahoma. Much of the country was prairie with few trees. Most of the people that we saw were very poor. They drove their cattle behind their wagons when on the move, until they came to their place to live. The farms had no fences. We finally came to Black Bear Creek. In fording the stream, our horses could hardly make it up the steep banks. One day Father said to me, "Take the harness off the horses while I look for some hay." Not knowing any better, I unbuckled and took the harness all apart to get it off the horses. Then Father had to spend a lot of time putting the harness together again before we could hitch up the team and travel on.

We came to a store on our way called Garber. Mr. M. C. Garber, his cousin, Mr. Paft, and Bird Garber owned the store and sold merchandise here—dry goods, hardware and tools of all kinds. They freighted the heavy goods and tools from Perry, Noble County, and from Enid, Garfield County, in wagons with teams of four mules. There were no well traveled roads, just trails in this part of the country, and the creeks had to be forded. The store was moved sometime later to a new location and a town began building which is now known as Garber, Garfield County, named for Mr. M. C. Garber. His father from Iowa was a judge and held court in a log house. Later, M. C. Garber became a lawyer, and served as judge and as Congressman from our Oklahoma district for thirteen years. He was well known and prominent in the western part of this state, and was honored in the "Oklahoma Hall of Fame."

Finally, we arrived at our homestead, twelve miles from Garber's store. Father said, "There's our place!" There stood a sod house dwelling, a sod chicken house, and about five acres nearby on the farm had been broken with a plow. There were no fences, and it was my job to lead the horses and let them eat grass. The place near the house was full of weeds, and we had cut out tumble weeds and all the other weeds with a corn knife and a hoe. Then the new ground was plowed, and I helped plant corn with a hoe. The ground squirrels were thick and would eat the germs of corn so we had to plant again. We drowned out most of the squirrels by filling their holes in the ground with water carried from the creek. Father gave us one penny for each squirrel we children drowned.

Father and a neighbor, Otto Pfeiffer went to Crescent, Oklahoma to buy trees for posts. It was thirty-five miles to timber, and it took three days to make the trip. Afterward a shed was

fixed up on one side of a hill closeby, and covered with bundles of feed as a barn for the horses. Another neighbor, Mr. Groom, had some kaffir corn, and we cut it on shares with our corn knives. A son of Mr. Groom had a patch of peanuts, and we harvested them on shares.

Father started soon digging a water well with a pick and shovel. Mother, Brother and I carried away the dirt as it was brought up from the hole. It took some time to finish the work and we had good water. The well was forty-five feet deep, and Father walled it up with rock. The water is still being used, drawn from this same well with an electric pump. Father carved a watering trough from a tree trunk, and it was used near the well for many years to water the stock.

My job on the farm was to help out doors. The second year we bought a cow, and more cattle were bought as the years passed. As long as I was home with Father and Mother, my job was to milk the cows, churn the butter, wean the calves, and yoke the cattle to keep them from straying off as the fences were poor. At first, only one strand of barb wire was used for a fence but later two woven wires were used. For a long time, I milked from five to twelve cows every morning and night. When any cattle were sold, I rounded them up and started them out because when the buyers came, the animals would get scared and run and jump the fences. In 1897, Father bought some fine, registered short-horns, and from that time, our family always kept this stock.

Brother and I worked at haying time, and in harvesting the grain. I helped haul in the hay from the meadow and stack it in the racks. One time the team ran away when we drove over a nest of bumble bees that swarmed up and stung the horses. I shocked the bundles of wheat in the field, helped scoop up grain into the wagons and haul it into the bins.

When the grain was ripe for the harvest, it was cut with a binder machine. A push binder was run ahead of the horses, and I shocked the bundles of grain behind a six foot binder for many years in harvest time. Then "headers" came into use.¹ Father took care of the grain at the threshing machine, turning out as much as 2,000 bushels a day.²

¹A "header" was a farm machine pushed by 6 horses, 3 on each side of the tongue, driven in quarter day shifts of 12 hours. Two barges alternately pulled alongside with another team to each, to catch the cut-off heads of grain and haul them to the stacks for threshing later on. The crew in this first part of the harvest consisted of 1 machine operator, 2 large drivers who also pitched the heads of grain to 2 stackers.

²A threshing machine was a steam engine outfit that went from farm to farm early in the harvest for "shock" threshing, and late in the summer or in the fall for "stack" threshing. The crew for stack threshing usually



A mover's wagon ready for a long journey



Water hauling in early days. F. J. Elsie standing at left with team and some of his farm neighbors,

Father rented and farmed other land near our place as years passed. We farmed the Dr. Renfrow place and the Poindexter place, and later the Covington farm. When I was nineteen, Father bought another 160 acres (NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 16, T. 21 N., R. 4 W.).

My brother, Herman, and I did the plowing. We would come in from the field in the evening at seven o'clock, and feed our horses. First, we would brush the horses and wash their shoulders. Then I milked the cows, while brother would look after the plows and get them repaired for the next day. I drove three horses on a plow. It took six weeks to finish plowing 160 acres. Besides the grain crop, we would raise corn and use the cobs to burn in the stoves at the house as well as wood. Father fed corn to his hogs and we cured our own meat.

We were at work one day when a neighbor came by saying "What! Working on Sunday!" We had lost all track of the days. There were no churches nor schools in our part of the country the first year we lived in Oklahoma Territory. We had to walk four miles to our first church. Traveling preachers came to preach in the school houses. The second year after we came to our place, school was held for one month in a dugout about a mile west of present Covington; then the school was moved and held in a sod house for two months about a mile north of Covington. Recalling the teachers, I remember Mrs. Thompson was our first teacher; then the next teacher was Mr. Beard, a one legged man. Other teachers at different times, were Mrs. Covington, Mrs. Shores and Mr. McGill who drove his pony from Enid and boarded in the neighborhood of the school, by the week and paid for his pony's feed. He received a salary of \$25.00 a month. I only finished the 5th grade but I read and kept on learning by myself through the years.

Our first post office was "Luella" located one mile east and one mile southeast of Fairmont, Garfield County. This post office was five miles from our home, and we had to walk at first to get our mail. I walked the five miles over to Luella and back home in three hours but later I went horseback. The post office east of us was first called "Tripp," with John Beopple as the postmaster. The place later became Covington named after Mr. J. Covington.

consisted of an engine, a separator tender, water hauler (for the engine), 4 handle pitchers, 2 to 4 band cutters, 2 alternate feeders (before separators had blowers). There was always someone to serve as "water monkey" to carry drinking water to the crew.

"Shock" thrashing took about the same force except there were 4 to 6 field pitchers and 4 to 6 handle pitchers. "Shocks" of grain were small piles, of 10 to 16 bundles of grain each, set up over the field by 1 to 4 persons, called "shockers," who followed behind a binder machine when the crop was first cut. The "shocker" did the work methodically, setting up the bundles in a pile with the heads of grain up then covering or "capping" the pile with 1 or 2 broken bundles to shed the rain.

In my childhood days, Father would let me go with him sometimes to take a load of wheat to the mill at Enid—the Pale-jock Mill and Gieses Mill. It was rough traveling in those days for we had to ford the creeks. When anything went wrong I would help and drive the team. Enid was twenty-two miles from home, and we would start at 3 o'clock in the morning and get to town at 5 o'clock in the evening. We would feed the team at the Square, and buy what groceries we needed. Then would start for home, and get there at 4 o'clock in the morning. It was a heavy load both ways—to Enid and back home.

In 1898, nearly four years after we came to Oklahoma, we moved into the new farm house that Father built, and all of us helped him until it was finished. There were two rooms upstairs and two downstairs, with an arch cave under the house. Five years later, another room was built upstairs, and the house was in the shape of an L.

As times got better, buggies were bought and more horses. There were eight to ten horses on a farm; there was larger machinery and more land rented for farming. We rode horseback and in buggies or surreys or wagons and sometimes walked to entertainments in Covington. This town grew and a brick school house was built in the town, and later there was a high school.

By the time that we built our new farm house, there were more schools in the country and the school term was longer. There were more church meetings and Sunday school which we attended. "Literaries," spelling bees and community gatherings were held in the school houses. These community gatherings were held generally to raise money by having a pie supper, or sometimes a cake was baked and given the ugliest man present, or a cake for the brightest girl. We had parties where we pulled taffy candy or made popcorn balls or "dunked" for apples in a tub full of water. We played such games as "Hide the Thimble," "Drop the Handkerchief," "Fruit Basket," "Move and Andy Over," "Dare Base," "Sack Race." We had singing parties, too.

There were plenty of organs in those days. We would go visiting the neighbors, and sometimes stay all night. We played music and sang in the evenings. My sister played the accordion. My brother did the calling for dances. And I played the harp. These are a few of the many songs my sister and brother and I sang when we were young folks: "Long, Long Ago," "Old Black Joe," "Home, Sweet Home," "Lay my Head beneath a Rose," "In the Shadow of the Pine," "Red River Valley," "Barbary Allen," "A word of Advice," "Picture of Eighty-four," "The Fatal Wedding." I have these and other old songs handwritten in a book, the pages getting brittle with age.²

² Mrs. Eisels's manuscript lists the titles of more than 40 titles of songs, some of them sung more than 70 years ago.

As I grew to womanhood, I loved the farm and doing farm work for Father. I helped with the housework, too, and cooking. I often scrubbed six rooms on my hands and knees in those days.

In 1906 when I was twenty-two years old, there was still some public land that was open to settlement out in Old Beaver County in the Panhandle. I told Father that I wanted to go to that western country and try my luck for a land claim. My sister and brother joined me, and we made the 300-mile trip in mover wagons from our home in Garfield County to what is now western Texas County. A long journey that we made several times back and forth in the years that followed. Generally, two wagons traveled together, and it took nearly two weeks to make this trip overland. We took the route through Enid, Cherokee, Alva, Buffalo, Beaver City and northwest to the "Half-way House," thirty-five miles west of Hooker, half way to Elkhart, Kansas. This "Half-way House" was a building and corral where stages on this route changed horses. Mr. Green, an old range rider, owned the stage drawn by four horses, and brought the mail down into the Territory to Hooker from Elkhart. He also carried passengers with their luggage piled on top of the stage and trunks strapped on the back. Mr. Green had a brother who had a ranch in Kansas and later had a store, in which was the post office called "Kuhn" in Texas County.

We were lucky in getting land, and I got a claim six miles south of Elkhart which is in Kansas right near the north boundary of Oklahoma. My place was in what is now the northwestern part of Texas County where there was nothing but prairie land and buffalo grass. It was called "hard land" but it was good soil, 4 to 5 feet deep, and coke was found in some of the "breaks" of the red hills some miles away. There were still wild horses, antelope and prairie chicken in the Panhandle. Keltner was our post office.

There was a lot of longhorn cattle roaming over the farms for there was no herd law in the country at that time. I often had to shoot my gun to drive the cattle away for the longhorns would come and nearly knock the roof off my house. This was a dugout with a car roof and a stove pipe. There was only one room, 6 by 8 feet, the walls standing 4 feet above ground, with the floor 3 feet below ground, and 3 steps leading down into the house.

There were few water wells in this part of the country, and I helped haul water from Mr. Smith's "2 Circle" ranch. I cooked and, as I had helped in care of the sick in my home community, I helped the sick among my new neighbors, and did water hauling, too. There was another bachelor girl who had land on the same section as my place. Later, I moved from my first dugout nearer to my neighbor, Mrs. Chappee whose family had a well

and I used water from this well. Mrs. Chappee had two children and I taught them and six other children one winter. There were eight other children in the District and they were taught by another friend. Mrs. Chappee had taught many years in Illinois before coming to Oklahoma Territory, and she told some things about teaching school. There were no schoolhouses in the District so I taught the eight children in my home. All the books we had were different, no two alike, and I had no chairs so we used boxes for seats. Two of the children, of a neighbor family from Pottawatomie County, rode some miles on a donkey to my school. Sometimes, the donkey would stop about a half mile away and refuse to move. Knowing that something had happened to make the riders late, the other children and I would take off down the trail to bring the donkey and the two tardy pupils into school.

There were hard times and money was scarce. I continued to care for the sick on week ends, helping Dr. Jim Tucker with his patients in the community. I also helped clerk in the stores. The first harvest after we went to the Panhandle, I came back with my brother and sister to help my parents harvest their crops in Garfield County. Then I went back to my claim and stayed a year. This was the winter that I taught school in my dugout home.

In 1909, I married Mr. Ernest John Eisele who had come from Stuttgart, Germany, and had a land claim seven miles from my place. We moved over to his dugout and his land near his neighbor, Mr. Collier who had a well where we could get water. I was used to work and a new country and kept the home. The cooking was done on a little "monkey stove" with "two eyes" (stove lids) and a small oven up on the pipe about 2½ feet above the top of the stove. I baked bread three loaves at a time in this little oven. One day in a high wind with a storm coming, tumble weeds rolled up in a big pile on top of the roof against the stove pipe and caught fire. Alone at the time, I hurriedly climbed up on the roof in the terrible wind and dragged and pushed the pile of tumble weeds off to save our house from burning. We had no cows for mine were back in Garfield County but we got milk from a neighbor, and my husband in return helped the folks with their work.

Dry weather came and there were no crops for two years. Most of the farmers were gone to Colorado to work in the sugar beet factory. My husband went to Kansas to work in the harvest. The people left the country in 1911 for there were no crops, no work and no money. We called our claim in Texas County home though we went back to Garfield County at times, and my first son, Herman was born there in 1910.



Figure 1. Eisele's dugout home on her
land claim in the Panhandle.



**Farm home of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest J. Eisele
in Garfield County.**

Finally, we left the Panhandle in 1913, and bought a place in Garfield County (SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 9, T. 2 N., R. 4 W.), on the same section of land where my Father had filed his claim in 1895. My husband farmed Father's place, and I helped Mother until she passed away. Father lived many years by himself, and I cleaned his home and took care of him until he died.

Mr. Eisele and I and our four small children (three sons and a daughter) moved in 1917 to the home where we still live. We kept on with farming until 1931 when my husband's health was failing. Through the years, I did the work in our home and the sewing, and took care of the garden and the cows. At harvest time as always, I helped in shocking the wheat when it was cut by the binder in the field; then at threshing time, cooked for the harvest crew. I raised all kinds of poultry, and sold vegetables in summer in town.

When the children were growing up, I started showing my poultry and agricultural exhibits at the County fairs. I had the "Barred Rocks" for thirty-two years—the Thompson strain and the Parks strain. In 1927, Mr. Whitehurst held a meeting on agriculture in the State Capitol for three days, and I attended as a delegate from my county. When I came home, I started a farm women's club among my neighbors. We soon had a large club, and cooked meals at the convention hall in Enid to raise money in our work. For thirteen years, I worked with the County agents in the agricultural programs—canning and poultry division. With the study and work in poultry raising, I was elected the poultry federation president, and put on big poultry shows at different times in Covington, Waukomis and elsewhere. In this work, I had a part of the agricultural shows and programs at Stillwater, Enid and Perry, and traveled to different states—Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois and Ohio. Steadily for thirteen years, I reported to the papers on agriculture.

Crops were good in 1932 so I bought three registered short-horns myself, and we still have shorthorn and some white face cattle on our farm. Several seasons after our children were out of school in 1932, I worked in the poultry hatchery at Garber, with my quota of thirty-two families supplying eggs.

When my husband was in poor health in 1929, I began writing history at home, and have since completed and printed two books. We have six grandchildren.

This is something of my life story here in *The Chronicles*. Yes, it has been a busy life, some good and some bad. Our family has lived on the same section of land for sixty-five years since Oklahoma territorial days. My husband and I celebrated our Golden Wedding—married fifty years—on February 2, 1959.