

FROM THE BRAZOS TO THE NORTH FORK

The Autobiography of Otto Koeltzow

Edited by A. M. Gibson

Part I

Introduction

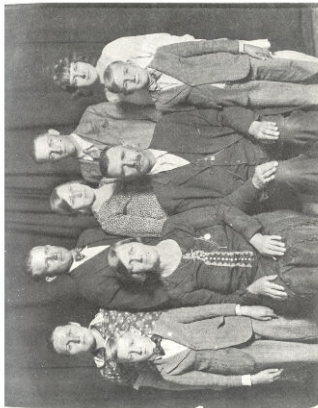
Otto Koeltzow's people joined those thousands of restless Europeans who fled chronic economic reverses and tyrannical governments during the 1870's and 1880's to seek a new life in the United States. Much has been written of the South European immigration to the industrial East and Midwest, and of those hardy Scandinavians who ventured into the Trans-Mississippi West and homesteaded the Northern Great Plains region. Otto Koeltzow's *Autobiography* accounts for another migration trail—the settlement of a colony of Germans in south Texas.

The story of Otto Koeltzow's life typifies the resourcefulness and tenacity of these German migrants. It is a saga of endurance and courage. And more than this, it chronicles the vicissitudes of a hopeful people in a new land, of hardship and toil, ubiquitous disappointment, and finally success.

A glimpse is provided of agricultural readjustment in the post-bellum South, notably the operation of tenantry and sharecropping as replacements for the pre-war slave labor. That a people could escape these vicious systems is shown by the Koeltzows' move from the lower Brazos country to free homesteads in Greer County, Oklahoma Territory.

The special problems facing the homesteader on the southern Great Plains are explained in satisfying detail. Survival of the fittest was a deadly reality in Greer County. And Otto Koeltzow's inventiveness helps explain his success in confronting, if not conquering, a capricious natural environment where so many others failed. With all his disappointments, Koeltzow kept his sense of humor, and adversity seasoned his appreciation of success once it had been achieved.

In an age of disintegrating family and group life, one can find comfort in this tight-knit Germany colony with its focus on the church and family solidarity, and its emphasis on the curious folkway, at least curious for our times, of helping one another. An enduring source of inspiration as well as tangible help for Otto Koeltzow was Pastor E. M. Eckhardt who had served south Texas Lutheran churches and parochial schools when the Koeltzows and other German immigrants first settled



Mr. and Mrs. Otto F. Koeltzow and family at their 25th Anniversary in 1925. Front row, left to right, Edwin, Mrs. Koeltzow, Mr. Koeltzow and Alfred; back row, left to right, Elele, August, Martha, Paul and Alma.

on the Brazos. Pastor Eckhardt well knew the suffering and hardships endured by these hardy people, and he was especially pleased when he visited Otto Koeltzow in 1921 to find him prospering.

Concerned that all knowledge of the German colony on the Brazos might be lost to future generations, he encouraged Otto Koeltzow to write a chronicle of these people. Koeltzow's autobiographical notes, extended to cover group as well as personal experiences, came to the attention of Pastor W. A. Haefer of the Granite, Oklahoma Lutheran Church. He in turn enlisted the interest of Dr. W. A. Willibrand, Professor of Modern Languages, University of Oklahoma, and an authority on German colonies in the Southwest. To both Pastor Haefer and Dr. Willibrand a word of gratitude is in order. And once the editing got under way, Pastor Haefer and Pastor Otto Urban of the Lone Wolf, Oklahoma Lutheran Church were of considerable assistance.

—A. M. Gibson

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I

The Crossing

I was born in the rich province of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, near Peterstorf, Germany on April 29, 1878. While my father, Ludwig Koeltzow, was an energetic and capable farmer, he could not prosper because tax collectors took at least half of what the people produced. As I recollect stories told of the oppressions suffered by the German people, I am certain that I would rather be a lowly tenant in the United States than a landowner in Germany. But high taxes were not the only hardships suffered by the German people in the nineteenth century. Compulsory military service and a state-sponsored system of education and religion were disagreeable too. The schools and churches belonged to the central government. The school teachers and clergy were paid from the national treasury. Religious toleration and freedom of worship were not permitted. The families of our community became restless under this tyranny, and several made plans to emigrate to America, where, it was reported, people were free.

Father decided to join the exodus. After selling his land and livestock he had enough money to buy passage to the new country for the eight members of our family. I was seven years old, and had been in school for one year when we sailed from Hamburg aboard the *Ruhgja* in November, 1883.

The weather was mild when we left Hamburg, but on the third day the *Ruhgja* ran into a big storm. At times, crashing waves covered the deck with foam-flecked sea water, and the ship pitched so violently that the cooks abandoned the galley, and

we had nothing to eat for three days. Father tied us into our bunks with ropes to keep us from rocking into the flooded passageway. One passenger, a girl of seventeen, was thrown against the bulkhead with such force that her neck was broken and she died almost immediately. The ship rocked from one side to the other in a regular rhythm, and, at the same time, as her bow nosed into the high breakers, one could see the heavy drive chain grinding on the stern. All aboard feared the big craft would break in two.

On the second night of our ordeal the wind and waves smashed the *Ruhgia* with renewed fury and the captain came below and warned that, as it was likely we would not see another day, everyone should pray to the Lord for deliverance. Soon thereafter a high-flowing wall of water flooded the rear smoke stack and all seemed lost. But at three in the morning the wind calmed, and the storm passed.

At daybreak the girl who had been killed by the storm was buried in the sea. The ship's crew spread a white sheet over a board about sixteen inches wide, laid the body on it, covered the corpse with another sheet, and tied it with three ropes—one at the head, one at the feet, and a third across the body. A heavy weight was tied to each end of the board. Sadly the passengers and the crew gathered at the railing, and after a brief sermon, the ship was brought to a standstill, and the body was lowered into the sea by two ropes, thus concluding the funeral.

A normal run for the *Ruhgia* between Hamburg and New York was seven days. Our crossing took seventeen, and during the storm we made only one knot, less than a mile, in twenty-four hours.

Changing ships in New York, we landed at Galveston, Texas on the first day of December, 1883. At Galveston we boarded a train for Brenham, Texas. This was a new line, the track was poorly laid, and a repair crew had to work ahead of the train. And to make matters worse, the wood supply used to fire the engine ran out, all of which made the railroad journey seem as slow as the crossing aboard the *Ruhgia*, but finally we reached Brenham, county seat of Washington County.

The region around Brenham was big farming country. Cotton, corn, and cane were the principal crops. In earlier times, local landowners had worked their land with Negroes, but with the arrival of Germans in this part of Texas, proprietors came to prefer German sharecroppers and tenants because, it was claimed, they were reliable workers and produced good crops. It seemed to me that Texas landlords had not as yet learned to work.

Before the Civil War, Negroes had worked in this region as slaves. After 1865, many Negroes had continued on the same land, but as tenants and sharecroppers. Since these former slaves were illiterate, they were easily cheated by their white landlords. The German immigrants came in for their share of exploitation too.

Fritz Summer, a Washington County landowner, had migrated from Germany to the United States before the Civil War. By 1861 he was reported to have owned 4,000 acres of cotton land and 500 slaves. After the war, his slaves, now freedmen, left his plantation and Summer, without laborers to work his land, wrote many letters to relatives and friends in Germany telling them of the freedom and opportunity in America, and promising that if they would come to Washington County, Texas, he would provide a home for them.

Many German families responded to his invitation, including my own. When we arrived at Summer's plantation, he rented a place to father and promised to furnish all the rations and farm tools we would need to make a fresh start. We soon discovered, however, that our landlord had no intention of keeping his part of the agreement. All he furnished was a yoke of oxen and one plow, and one-half bushel of cornmeal and seven pounds of bacon, rationed every two weeks. We had no coffee, sugar, or flour.

Considering our large family, we had only about half enough to eat. Shortly after our arrival in Washington County, father took sick and sent word to Mr. Summer that he needed a little flour. Mr. Summer replied that father could eat cornbread, adding "When I first came to America, I didn't get any flour either!"

There was great hardship that first season in Texas, and several of the children and old people who had settled on Summer's plantation died of starvation. Fortunately the members of my family survived, but all of us worked long, hard hours in the fields every day.

The chief crop in the new country was cotton. We knew nothing about the production of this plant, but we soon learned. Father opened the furrows with the ox team. Mother dropped the seed. The children followed with hoes, covering the seed. When the young plants showed above the ground they seemed to require constant attention. Besides cotton, we raised corn, some vegetables, hogs, and turkeys.

At harvest, after we had delivered Mr. Summer's share of the crops, we had two bales of cotton, a crib of corn, and thought we owed no one a cent. Besides, we had five nice hogs and seventeen turkeys. Mr. Summer, claiming we were still in debt to him,

came to our place and took everything—our cotton, corn, hogs, and turkeys. His other tenants suffered the same fate.

Father went to see a German lawyer in Brenham and reported the situation, but the lawyer warned that Fritz Summer was too powerful to tackle in the local courts. The next day we gathered our few belongings, and, accompanied by four other families, moved to Roan's Prairie, fourteen miles from Anderson in Grimes County, where, we had been informed, was a German colony.

At Roan's Prairie we made one crop—four bales of cotton. Land rent was paid out of the crop. Besides, father paid annual rent of twenty dollars for a yoke of oxen and ten dollars for the use of a plow and a wooden sweep stock. Oxen were plentiful in Texas at this time. Before the war, plantation owners kept herds of these work animals. When their slaves were freed, the landlords found it profitable to rent these beasts to their tenants, adding to this the tool rental and share of the crop.

Of course the tenant was responsible for feeding and caring for the rented ox team. Each night the animals were turned onto the grassland and herded by the children until they had eaten their fill. Then they were penned up in a corral. In the fall, when the trees were hanging full of moss, children went to the woods and pulled it off the trees and stacked it much like hay. This moss forage was fed to the animals each morning and noon.

Our second year in Texas was much better than the first, for, after we had paid the rent, there was enough cotton and corn left to buy one yoke of oxen and a wooden moldboard plow. While Roan's Prairie was a fine farming region, it had its disadvantages. We were fourteen miles from Anderson, the closest trading center and site of the school and our church—the Lutheran. On Sunday, we had to get up at two in the morning in order to get to church on time. When we couldn't borrow a wagon, we had to walk the fourteen miles. So, in the fall of 1885, we moved to a farm near Anderson. My brothers, sisters, and I were enrolled in the local parochial school.

I was nine years old, and, while I had already studied for one year in Germany, most of what I had learned had been forgotten. Thus I had to start all over again. But school days were happy times. The first year we lived just one and one-half miles from school and the children had it easy. I had plenty of time to help my older brother, Paul, herd the oxen and cut wood. While watching the livestock I prepared my lessons, and therefore did not have to study late in the night. The teachers at Anderson were very strict and if we failed to study our lessons we received a licking with a heavy rod.

Our harvest at Anderson was good—nine bales of cotton and fine corn. By the next planting season, Paul was old enough to plow, and so father bought a second yoke of oxen for fifty dollars and rented more land. This required us to move farther from town. It was a four mile walk to school in good and bad weather, but we didn't mind for there were several school boys along the road and we had good times together. Half-way home was a big bridge where we always stopped to rest. There we snacked on the food left over from lunch and studied our lessons for the next day.

School days were happy times, but misfortune continued to dog us. When I was eleven, father was struck down with a serious illness called the Texas Slow Fever. Since this happened during the busy crop season, I had to plow with his oxen. I was not yet tall enough to reach the handles, and Paul had to lower them for me. My first rows were far from straight, but I soon learned to plow as well as anyone. Father finally recovered, and while we made fair crops that season we decided to move onto so-called "new ground" where the rent was not so high. While the soil was rich, most of the "new ground" was covered with timber which had to be cleared off, which explains the low rental.

When this region was first settled, Texans established plantations on the prairies which were easy to work with slave labor. Until around 1882, very little of the woodlands had been opened up. It was at this time that the Germans arrived in Texas in great numbers. These thrifty, hard-working people, seeking new farm lands, were permitted by the owners to clear up the timber. After two or three years, good crops came forth. Most of the clearing was done in the winter. The brush and tree trunks were burned after dark, lighting the sky most of the night. The straight logs were used to build houses, corn cribs, barns, and fences.

Plowing was difficult in a new field because of the stumps. Seldom were horses and mules used in the "new land," for you couldn't stop these brutes as readily as an ox team when you hit a stump. Striking a stump or submerged root generally broke the plow. This meant a trip to town and costly repairs at the blacksmith shop.

Sometimes, when "new land" was first cultivated, the stumps were so thick that only hoes could be used. After the crops were gathered, the stumps were fired and some of the big ones would burn for weeks. It was a pretty sight to see acres of glowing stumps on a quiet winter night. Finally the stumps would burn to the ground level, but it was several years before the roots were out. The average farmer, with a single team of oxen or mules, worked fifteen acres of cotton and ten of corn in cleared land. This was about all one team and family could handle. A

man was able to plow only about two acres a day with oxen, and to do this he had to start early in the morning and plow late into the night. In land with stumps one could expect to plow about one-half an acre each day.

The oxen were grazed in the parks in the timber. On Saturday nights the farmers turned their oxen out in the woods and got them up again on Monday morning, thus saving feed. It was fairly easy to find the animals in the big woods. Each farmer belled one of his animals and every bell had a different sound. The oxen that were worked together generally grazed together. One of my chores was to bring in our work animals each Monday morning. I could tell our bell from all the others and it seldom took me more than an hour to drive our teams to the corral, although on a few occasions I was out half the day looking for them.

The older settlers had wagons, but the poverty-stricken Germans had to haul grain and wood with oxen and crude sleds built from local lumber. We were in Texas four years before we could afford a wagon. Father paid twenty dollars for the chassis, and built the frame and bed from native lumber. While the wagon made our work somewhat easier, our lot, like that of all the pioneer families around us, was hard. All the family worked—father, Paul, and I did the plowing, and mother and the younger children chopped the cotton and corn. At harvest we were in the field from dawn until dark picking cotton and pulling corn. There seemed to be little time for rest for men and women, boys and girls of all ages. Wood had to be cut for the entire year; new land had to be cleared; then it was time to start the field work for the new crops.

During 1889 we worked twenty-two acres of cotton and twelve acres in corn with two yoke of oxen and we had all we could handle. We made a fair crop that year—seven bales of cotton at nine cents per pound, but after paying the land rent, blacksmith bill, church salary, and doctor bill the money was just about all gone. But we had plenty to eat.

Potatoes and cabbages grew well in the new land. We butchered five hogs, and had plenty of cornmeal and eggs. All we had to buy was coffee and a little flour to mix with meal for the cornbread. We could not afford sugar, but we had sweetening. This came from syrup squeezed from sorghum cane. After the juice had been pressed, the women cooked it in big vats over wood fires. When it reached the thick syrup stage it was stored in jars and crocks. Potatoes and cabbages were stored in a root cellar. Some of the cabbage was chopped up for kraut, and it used to be said that you could always tell where a German lived because each household invariably had a barrel of sauer-

kraut on the porch. And we generally had a barrel of home-made wine in the smoke house.

Big mustang grapes grew wild in the woods. When they were ripe the children were busy. The grapevines ran high on the tree trunks and the boys had to climb far up to reach the succulent bunches. The kick of this mustang wine livened weddings and other events, for although we worked hard, we had some social gatherings.

And we helped each other. If a settler was ill and got behind in his work, the neighbors came in and helped out. Money was scarce, and one had to work hard and be thrifty to have even a little to show for his efforts. It took us six years to own two yoke of oxen, one two-year colt, one cow and calf, two wooden moldboard plows, two sweep stocks and a wagon.

One reason a tenant was held back was the landlord's practice of requiring him to pay cash land rent, and some years when cotton prices were low, there was hardly anything left. Our very existence seemed to depend on cotton—our yield and the market price. Father generally took our cotton to the gin, but in the fall of 1889 he was bedfast again with the Texas Slow Fever, and Paul and I had to do this.

Because the gin was six miles from our place, it took all day to make a round trip, and the roads were so poor that four oxen were required to pull a wagon loaded with a 500 pound bale of cotton. Many times we were out as late as ten or eleven o'clock at night hauling cotton. Ginning was very primitive when we first arrived in Texas. There were no self-feeders in the gin stands, which meant that we had to put the cotton in baskets and hand it to a worker standing on a platform who carried it to the gin stands. The lint cotton dropped behind the stands on the floor. There it was picked up, put in the press, and packed by two men.

The simple gin machinery was turned by horse and mule power. Sixteen animals formed the sweep team. A single mule powered the press. Understandably it required considerable time to gin and press a bale of cotton with this crude apparatus. If the mill had a good run, the crew could gin six to eight bales a day. Day labor pay for the gin crew was from seventy-five cents to a dollar and you board yourself. A day's work was figured from sunrise to sunset. The price for ginning was \$2.50 for a 500 pound bale plus ninety cents for wrapping.

In 1885, the steam gin came to the cotton lands of Texas. These early machines were hand fed, had no blowers, and were fired with wood. Fuel was cut in the spring and summer and hauled to the gins by local farmers. Because of the scarcity of

mechanics on the frontier, when a steam gin broke down, there were often long delays. Gins were improved each year and by 1890, most of them were equipped with self-feeders and blowers, although operators continued to use wood for fuel. In the early days the seed collected in front of the stands and was carried away in baskets. Some farmers took the seed home and fed it to oxen. Others left it at the gin to help pay for the ginning. Erich Schumacher, a German immigrant, built the first oil mill at Navasota in 1890. Thereafter the farmers could sell their cotton seed for a reasonable price.

A good crop in those days, enough to pay the rent and other expenses, was from five to ten bales of cotton and from 100 to 200 bushels of corn. We raised hogs, but just enough for our own meat, for there was virtually no local market for hogs at that time. Townspeople of any means had their meat shipped in from the north. We had no flour bread during our early years in Texas. Children shelled corn by hand as part of their chores during the week, and the grain was hauled to the mill on Saturday where a two week supply of meal was ground. Neighbors traded trips to the mill, and since the grain was heavy, it usually took a full day to make the trip.

Time was precious to the German immigrants in south Texas, and it was little wonder that these thrifty people helped each other by taking their respective turns at hauling grain to the mill, making trips to the distant blacksmith shop for neighborhood implement repairs, and herding livestock. Every available hand, small and large, young and old, was needed to make each hour count in the battle to survive in the new country.

II

Settling the Piney Woods

School and church were of primary concern for the German immigrants in Texas, and every German settlement of any size contained a Lutheran Church and parochial school. The first school I attended in America was at Anderson, some four miles from our farm. The walk to school was pleasant in the fall and spring, but during the winter I dreaded trudging that rutted, muddy Anderson road each day. On very bad days it took as much as two hours to cover the four miles. Sometimes I could catch a ride on an ox wagon but these beasts walked so slowly, and no one liked to be late, for the teacher was very strict. Pastor E. M. Eckhardt, who served the Anderson congregation for twenty-three years, taught all the grades in the parochial school. In addition, he preached on Sunday and took care of the regular clerical chores.

When Pastor Eckhardt first came to Anderson, he was fresh

out of college and very young. It is interesting the manner in which the congregation paid him. Besides thirty dollars cash each month, Pastor Eckhardt received from each family in his parish three bushels of corn, twenty-five bundles of fodder or three bales of hay, and two cords of wood. In addition, his wife and he received all the hams and fresh meat they could eat. Our people were generous and his smoke-house was always full.

Pastor Eckhardt also received some salary from the school. Tuition costs varied, according to the number of children in each family. Parents were charged seventy-five cents a month for the oldest child enrolled, fifty cents for the second, twenty-five cents for the third, and the fourth plus any additional children were taught free. While the teachers and clergy received only a pittance, it was difficult for the parishioners to meet their obligations under any circumstances, and especially if the crops failed.

It seemed children worked just as hard at school as they did at home. Even at recess we did chores around the school, including cutting firewood to stove length from the stack of poles the church members brought in. The boys cut the wood and the girls carried and stacked it in the log-walled woodshed. This chore had its pleasant side, however, for Mrs. Eckhardt always served us candy and cake while we cut and stacked the wood.

Because father was ill most of the time, I was able to attend school only half a day since I was needed at home to help Paul with the farm work. But I passed the grades satisfactorily and in May, 1880, at the age of fourteen, I was confirmed.

The year 1880 was a wet one, and although we were late in getting the cotton planted, we had a fair crop. As a matter of fact enough extra was earned for father to purchase a third yoke of oxen. This team was mine. Since I had finished school, I could now work full time in the fields. At Anderson we did not have enough land to keep three teams busy, and unable to rent additional land there, we moved to White Hall, sixteen miles from Anderson.

The country around White Hall was mostly prairie and fine cotton land. It took us nearly twelve hours to make this sixteen mile trip due to the bad roads. The road bed most of the way was deep sand and we had to make frequent stops to rest the ox teams. At the halfway point we stopped to feed the oxen and let them rest an hour. Finally, we passed out of the sandy country to black, prairie loam, and just before dark arrived in White Hall, a typical south Texas town—a gin, store, blacksmith shop and post office.

German immigrants, arriving during the 1870's and 1880's, had converted this sparsely settled region into a prosperous

agricultural community. Father rented sixty acres, about all the land three teams could handle, and purchased two iron moldboard John Deere walking plows, the first in the area. While these plows had only six inch blades, they were the largest we could use in those days.

Before a farmer could prepare the seed bed, he had to root out the old cotton stalks. To do this he plowed the stalks on each side to loosen the roots. After the ground had been cleared of old growth and plowed, a log harrow, extending across three rows, was dragged over the cotton field. This made a fairly level seed bed. Next, the farmer opened the seed furrow with a four-inch sweep. Three persons were required for planting. Seeds were dropped by hand. This was the girls' job. The seeds were covered with a double shovel, a tool with two small three-inch sweeps that straddled the furrow and covered the seed. It always took three for planting. One opened the furrow, another dropped the seed, and the third worker closed it.

Our first year at White Hall was a good one production-wise, but the price of cotton was down, and after paying the ground rent there was not much left. Yet, we did not suffer since we had milk cows, chickens, hogs, and vegetables.

Farming changed somewhat for us in 1892. That year, horse traders started bringing in horses and mules from west Texas and New Mexico. Unless a farmer was working land with brush and stumps, in which case he preferred oxen, he readily bought a team of horses or mules. He could purchase a team fairly cheap, and if he did not have the money to buy a mule or horse team the traders would take oxen in exchange.

Most of these horses and mules were wild and had never been worked. A new chore for the boys of the community was taming these wild brutes, and we had lots of fun, as well as some bruises, cuts, and broken bones. We traded our ox teams, except one, for horses, keeping one yoke of oxen for heavy work.

Our place at White Hall had poor water, fit only for livestock. The landlord regularly promised to dig us a well, but never did. An added chore for me was hauling our drinking water from a neighbor's well, two miles away. For this I used a big wooden barrel fastened to a sled and pulled by the ox team.

Changing to horses and mules required a change in feeding, for these animals, not as hardy as the slow-moving oxen, had to have special care. We soon found that besides corn and hay, horses and mules held up well with a roughage made from corn stalks. After the corn ripened we would hand-pull the leaves from the stalks. To this we added the dried stalk tops, cut one joint above the ear. After the stalks and leaves had been tied in neat bundles, the fodder was stored in the barn. This fodder work

had to be done early in the morning while the dew was still on the stalks, since, when dry, the stalks and leaves would break and crumble, and would not make good storage bundles. During fodder-making season, we customarily went to the cornfield at two in the morning and worked until nine.

When the farmers of south Texas changed to horses, there was a boom in harness-making too. The harness we first used was a collar made of heavy cloth and stuffed with straw or cotton. The hames were fitted to the collar with hooks for the trace chains. Ropes served as lines during the early years.

Soon after horses and mules became popular for crop work, a German harness-maker arrived in nearby Navasota and began making leather harness sets. Within a short time he had a competitor. The penitentiary at Huntsville opened a saddle, harness and wagon shop. The prisoners made fine equipment which sold for less than that produced in the towns. The Huntsville wagon was made of bois d'arc wood, a tough material which lasted longer than other woods, and sold for forty-five dollars. After they had served their terms several of the prisoners who learned the harness, saddle, and wagon-making trades started their own businesses.

Huntsville prisoners also were leased by the state to big land owners. Most of them were employed in clearing up timber land. One proprietor four miles from our place had 200 prisoners cutting timber and clearing new land. The guards bought eggs and butter from us, and I made deliveries to the camps every night. Besides being an interesting trip, this chore was sometimes profitable, for the guards frequently gave me a quarter or so extra.

I saved this money to buy ammunition. My favorite pastime was hunting on the prairies and in the timber about our place. Since we were so busy with farm chores, most of my hunting had to be at night for coons and 'possums, but my favorite game were squirrels and rabbits, which could be taken only in daylight. About the only gun the boys could afford was the old Enfield muzzle loader, a single shot weapon used during the war, and which could be converted into a shotgun. These guns were government surplus and sold for \$3.50 each. While the Enfield was a fine shooting gun, loading it was slow.

One of our best cotton years was 1897. After expenses, father had enough money left to buy me a new single barrel, breech loading, twelve-gauge shotgun. I also purchased a loading outfit which saved half or more on each cartridge. Empty shells cost one cent apiece, powder was forty cents a pound, and shot of any size, except buckshot, cost ten cents a pound. Buckshot, which we used on deer, was fifteen cents a pound. Caps were cheap, costing only ten cents a hundred.

Every now and then during the winter after I had cut and cicked the wood and caught up on all the other chores, I was permitted to take off on a hunting trip. It was great sport to roam the woods hunting squirrels and those big swamp rabbits.

Once in awhile the family could spare me for a deer hunt. On one occasion my brother-in-law, A. J. Fetter, and I went on a deer hunt in the piney woods. We were excited about the hunt, and while we packed a sack of provisions, we forgot our water jug. Heading for the piney woods on horseback, we rode for about seven miles when we came to a spring and had a cool drink. Nearby we took up a stand on a game trail, and shortly a big buck came into view. Both of us fired, but only wounded the huge animal. After trailing the wounded buck through the tall timber and into the thickets for four hours we lost all sign. Thirsty and tired, we decided to ride back to the spring for a drink. The day had turned off quite warm and our thirst became severe. After hours of searching we decided we were lost, and gave our horses a free rein. These dumb brutes knew better than we the course to follow, for about dark they carried us into the clearing to the spring. We must have ridden thirty miles out of the way before we turned our horses loose. It was far into the night before we reached home, and the day's hardship taught us a lesson. Thereafter we always carried a canteen and watched our trail for landmarks. This was the only time I was ever lost on a hunt.

Then as now the administration in power in Washington was blamed or praised for the prices the farmer received. In 1892, Grover Cleveland, the Democrat, was elected President. No sooner was he inaugurated than farm prices hit rock bottom and of course he received the blame. Crops were good but cotton was five cents a pound, and corn was thirty cents a bushel with no market at all. And produce men would not buy butter and eggs. Practically all our cash went for doctor bills (we had considerable sickness that year), land rent, and hired help.

While we had a bumper corn crop, there was no market for this grain and we fed it to the oxen, horses, mules, hogs and poultry. As a matter of fact, so heavy was the corn crop that we had to build additional cribs. Father, Paul, and I cut logs, raised the walls, and splied shingles out of pine blocks. So snug were these cribs that our neighbors had us help them erect log cribs too.

The forest furnished logs for practically all our buildings. Some cabins were built from big cedar and pine logs. By 1890 sawmills had moved into the south Texas forests, and several land-owning farmers built substantial two-story homes from sawn lumber these local mills produced. The tenant farmers

bought low grade lumber for from two to three dollars a load, which was as much as could be pulled out of the sawmill with one yoke of oxen. There were no open roads through the pine woods, and sometimes to reach a new lumber camp, we had to make our own road. Frequently we got stuck, and the only way to pull a load of lumber out of that boggy ground was to hitch a second, and sometimes a third, yoke of oxen to the wagon. Quite often we were two or three hours moving a load twenty feet through the bogs.

The lumber camps employed large crews of cutters, mostly local Negroes, who used crosscut saws to fell the trees. It was said that the summer heat was too great for a white man on a crosscut or double-bitted axe in the piney woods.

Some of these trees were over sixty feet high. Once felled, the trees were topped. Then heavy chains and three to four yoke of oxen were used to snake each log to the mill site. Some fine lumber came from these Texas forests. I have seen mountains of boards, cut from logs up to forty feet long, without a single knot in the grain.

With simple tools like the saw, axe, maul, hammer, chisel, and draw knife, German farmers did wonders with this lumber. Barbed wire was expensive, so to fence in vegetable gardens, cow pastures, and make corral rails, we cut oak trees into eight foot lengths and split rails from the trunks. Sometimes gardens and yards were fenced with pickets split from pine logs. Chicken houses, horse stables, and other outbuildings and even houses were constructed from pine and oak logs. We made our axe and hammer handles out of hickory and ox yokes from linwood. Much of the cut-over land was sandy but it would produce fairly good cotton, although corn did not do well on it. Farmers could make a living in this type of land, but it took much hard work to root out the pine stumps.

The year 1894 was another good crop year. Our place produced seventeen bales of cotton and 300 bushels of corn. But prices were down again. Cotton was selling for two to six cents a pound, and corn brought only ten cents a bushel. After picking our cotton I worked for a neighbor who was short handed and my pay was only twenty cents a hundred. But that was all the tenants could pay in the face of low cotton prices.

Local buyers offered only ten dollars a bale for 500 pounds of clean cotton. One of our neighbors, a Negro tenant named Duke Watkins, had made twelve bales. He talked among the Germans, suggesting that a cotton train be made up for Houston where, he had heard, the price was several cents per pound higher.

Twelve German tenants joined Duke Watkins with sixteen

wagons and set out on the sixty five mile trip on a hot September evening. Our plan was to travel at night since it weakened the teams to pull the heavy wagons during the heat of the day. We stopped at midnight and fed, watered and rested the animals. At nine the next morning we had reached Cypress Creek, only twenty-five miles from Houston. We camped there until five that evening. During the day cotton farmers from five counties joined us in a noisy, colorful camp.

We reached the edge of Houston soon after midnight. This was my first trip to this city and I saw many new and strange sights. There were no paved streets in the town. Clumps of pine trees and boggy land flanked the main street. The cotton caravan had to drive along the streetcar line for four miles. Passing streetcars spooked the horses and mules. In an attempt to quiet the teams, each driver dismounted and held his animals up close until the streetcar had passed. Several teams bolted, broke the reins and harness, and overturned the wagons. After a number of runaways we arrived finally at the wagon yard at three in the morning. Dead tired we slept on the cotton bales until daylight.

The wagon yard was managed by the best known cotton buyers in Houston, Henke and Pilot. Their agent paid us five cents a pound, or twenty-five dollars a bale which was the most pleasant surprise we had received for sometime. Before we left for town, Henke's agent warned us to check our guns with him, since Houston had an ordinance forbidding weapons in the city limits. All farmers carried firearms to guard their cotton to market and to protect the supplies and money they carried home.

In the trading houses of Houston we were pleasantly surprised too. Coffee, sugar, flour, and other staples, as well as tools and implements sold for less than half what the same items cost us in the country stores nearer home and where we had traded for years. Thereafter we formed a convoy and hauled our cotton to Houston until local buyers began paying Houston prices.

When we arrived at White Hall, there was no Lutheran Church. After considerable coaxing we persuaded Herman Forster, the Lutheran pastor at Cedar Creek Church, fifteen miles distant, to come twice each month and conduct religious services for us. Since we had no church building at the time, worship was held in the various homes. Eight German families participated in this arrangement. Pastor Forster was a man of courage and great stamina, for besides having to travel great distances over bad roads in all kinds of weather, his life was in constant danger from the outlaw packs that infested the piney woods.

When, in the fall of 1894, two additional German families settled in our community, we decided to build a church and

attempt to persuade Pastor Forster to settle in our community and serve us full time. He accepted the call and we set to work building a church. Since we were financially unable to construct a church and parsonage at this time, it was decided to improvise both under one roof. When we had gathered from here and there lumber and other materials, the men set to work on five acres donated by the landlord, C. B. Stoneham. In a few short weeks we had erected a structure which contained, besides a twenty by thirty foot room for a church and school, four rooms for Pastor Forster and his family. August Meinike, the station agent managed to purchase lumber from a local mill at a substantial saving for us, and the railroad company donated fifty percent of the freight from the mill to Yarborough Station, where we hauled it to the church site. Many of the Germans were expert carpenters, and in no time at all we had finished, besides the church and parsonage, a smokehouse, stable, and chicken-house.

It was a happy day when we moved Pastor Forster and his family, to White Hall. The ladies prepared a big supper and we celebrated the event together. The following Sunday, right after worship, we had the first business meeting. My father, Ludwig Koeltzow, was elected elder, Frank Lang, treasurer and secretary, and Ludwig Melt, Carl Voelter and Fred Weber trustees. These officers, on behalf of the congregation, negotiated the following contract with the new pastor: Salary—\$360 per year; each member to furnish twenty-five bundles of corn or two bales of hay and two bushels of corn for the pastor's horses and chickens; the members to supply all the stovewood needed at the church, school, and parsonage during the year.

For conducting school, Pastor Forster was to receive the customary seventy-five cents per month for the oldest child in each family; fifty cents for the second; twenty-five cents for the third, all additional children in each family to be instructed free of charge. And finally, the congregation agreed to pay the pastor the following rates for various services: marriage, three dollars; baptisms, two dollars; and funerals, two dollars. The pastor agreed to prepare a constitution and covenant for the new congregation, and after a benediction and the Lord's Prayer, the meeting was adjourned.

Our church became a community center not only for worship, but for recreation as well. The highlight of the year was the children's Christmas Eve program. The young people of the church had organized a local branch of the Walther League. This youth group managed the Christmas program. Practically every child and young adult in the community had some part on the program, and we practiced our recitation parts for months before Christmas Eve. The program opened with a Yule message by our pastor. Then the smaller children were examined by him

in the Catechism. After recitations by the older children and young adults, we sang Christmas carols. The program was capped with a bounteous feast. Neighbors came in from miles around for the Christmas celebration and sometimes the sanctuary was so crowded that there was standing room only. While the Walther League's big event was the Christmas Eve party, it also sponsored special programs, dialogues, and picnics through the year.

Besides being the center for community social life, worship, and educating children, our church also sponsored an adult education program. Pastor Forster taught English language classes twice a week. Few of the young men could speak and write English adequately, and this proved a popular course. Seven students, ranging in age from eighteen to twenty-seven enrolled. Since the men were busy in the spring, summer, and autumn with farm work, this language school met four months during the late fall and winter.

After four years of study, all the enrollees could speak and write good English. Our pastor was a capable teacher and I became proficient enough in English to be regularly called upon to write business letters and papers, and to interpret for various citizens in the German settlements. On one occasion, the gin at Navasota broke down. A drive shaft had snapped. The only person competent to grind down a new one to size was an old German mechanic who had only recently arrived in Texas. The directions of the gin owner had to be translated into German, and the mechanic's questions had to be translated into English. The gin owner sent for me. I was building fence, but came right to town, and stayed at the gin from sundown to sun-up, communicating back and forth. Just at daylight the old German mechanic tightened the last clamp and the gin started up again. For this service I was paid fifty cents by the gin operator.

Community picnics drew the largest crowds. These were generally held in conjunction with school activities, and Negro tenants joined us in these. The big celebration for the Negroes was June 19—their Freedom Day. For this event, the landlord furnished a beef and hog which the Negroes barbecued. The whites ate with them on this day, but at separate tables.

Sometimes these former slaves made good workers. Those whose masters had treated them kindly stayed on the old plantations, but where they had been roughly handled, they left. Their places after the war had in many cases been filled by German immigrants as was the case for my family. After we prospered a bit, father hired Negroes to pick our cotton. During harvest season I went to town every Monday morning, picked up a load of these African workers and hauled them out to our place. We got good work from them and had no trouble, but we always

fed them well and paid them what was due, and hauled them back to town on Friday night. Some of our neighbors had trouble because they cheated the Negroes on payday.

In 1896, horse traders began importing mules and big draft horses from Missouri. These animals, because of their greater size and strength, could do considerably more work than the horses and mules we had been using. Father purchased a pair of these Missouri mules from the first consignment to reach Texas.

That year we planted fifty acres of cotton and twenty acres in corn. The growing season was wet and the army worm invaded our cotton. To check this pest we mixed Paris Green in low grade flour. To this compound we added rosin, which made the mixture stick to the cotton leaves. It was dusted onto the plants with a meal sifter, one row at a time, and had to be done in early morning while the dew was on the cotton, since the poison would adhere better to the leaves while they were wet. Many a morning we dusted cotton in the moonlight, beginning about three, and working until nine. This was slow work but it got the army worms.

In later years we speeded up the dusting of our cotton patches. Pure Paris Green was packed in two-pound tobacco sacks. A pouch was tied on either end of a stick spanning two cotton rows. This was carried on horseback between the rows, and dusted out of the pores in the tobacco sacks onto the dew-covered plants. In Texas during wet years there were heavy dews every night, which helped the dusting process. In dry years the army worm was no problem. The insect poison was deadly and it had to be spread when the wind was quiet. Not only was the worker endangered, but the horse as well especially if the animal had sores or became sweaty. Workers protected themselves by covering their mouth, nose, and ears. The boll weevil did not enter south Texas until around 1900. Some say the big storm of that year blew this pest in from Mexico.

III

The Great Brazos Flood

We had considerable sickness during the 1896 crop year, but despite this and the army worm, the cotton yield was fair, amounting to twenty-one bales, and we made good corn. Houston prices were so much better than local prices that we decided to haul our cotton there again. We had only one wagon, so father purchased a heavy four-horse wagon, built a fourteen foot frame on it, and loaded seven bales. Four mules were hitched to this vehicle, one of which was ridden by the wagon guide.

Two wagons were borrowed from neighbors to handle the

remainder of our cotton bales. Sixteen additional wagons joined the caravan. We started at five in the evening to avoid the heat, stopped at eleven, fed and rested our teams for two hours, and as on previous trips, we were twenty-five miles from Houston by nine the next morning at the camp on Cypress Creek. There were nearly 300 cotton wagons at this watering place, representing farmers from five counties. Many farmers were still using ox teams. It took these slower teams at least half a day longer to reach Houston than the horse and mule-drawn wagons. We left the camp ground at five in the evening and arrived at the cotton yard in Houston at one the next morning.

At the wagon yard we met farmers, some of whom lived over one hundred miles distant. Houston was becoming a big trade center. Cotton farmers bought their supplies there, and much cheaper than at the crossroads stores nearer home. Flour came in 200 pound barrels, and sold for four dollars a barrel. Coffee was bought in hundred pound sacks for three dollars. The coffee berries were green, and had to be parched and ground at home. But despite low prices for food, tools, and dry goods, cotton prices were low too. We seldom could buy all we needed, and we were short on necessities most of the time.

Cotton income had to pay the land rent, the blacksmith, church and school salary, and doctor bill. Family sickness during 1896 took \$200 from our cotton cash. And if the landlord, doctors, and merchants did not take all our money there was always the threat from outlaws.

The piney woods abounded in local toughs who took special delight in intimidating Negroes and German settlers. Sometimes their forays were more like pranks and resulted in mischievous destruction of property. They raided our corneribs, stampeded our stock, and every now and then burned a building. They slunk about in the timber during evening worship and disturbed the pastor's prayers with loud noises. One of my sisters was married in December, 1892. During the wedding feast, a gang of these hoodlums cut the circuit rider's buggy harness to ribbons and ran off his horse.

Some of these toughs became hard-bitten criminals and preyed on the farmers, cutting fence and stealing stock. Others ran in packs and terrorized the towns. Shortly before we arrived in Texas in 1883, an outlaw band, headed by the notorious Jim Alden ran wild among the settlement in Falls, Lee, and Grimes counties. Alden had about twelve gunmen in his band. They lived off the settlers, chiefly the timid German immigrants, raiding their smokehouses, rustling their livestock, and robbing the men at cotton payment time.

For years the town of Lincoln in Lee County was tormented by these desperadoes. Every first Thursday of the month Alden's band came to Lincoln, ordered all stores closed except one saloon, and after drinking up all the stock in this place, the gunmen rode up and down the street shooting out store windows and terrorizing the townspeople in their homes.

A merchant in Lincoln, a German named Scigfried Elber, had been looted several times. Dane Rash, a nineteen year old youth, was hired by Elber as a clerk at ten dollars a month. Elber explained that each first Thursday of the month Alden's men came to town for their spree and the store had to close on that day. Dane said he would not close the store if it were his, even if all twelve members of the pack came in the store. Elber then told the boy he was too old to do much fighting, but that if Dane would stay on and keep the store open his pay would be raised to twenty-five dollars a month. As the fateful Thursday approached, Dane cleaned and oiled the weapons old man Elber kept under the counter—a double-barrelled, twelve-gauge shotgun, a Winchester repeating rifle, and a Colt forty-five. The youth loaded several cartridges with buckshot and had old man Elber practice stepping from behind the door with the shotgun ready for close firing.

The pair was ready for Thursday. They waited all day, and the town remained quiet and tense. Next morning about ten, Alden's men roared down Lincoln's main street, spraying the street with slugs, and yelling at all shopkeepers to close their doors. After an hour or so at the saloon, Alden sent a squad of four gunmen to inspect main street. All the shops were locked up tight except Elber's. The twin front doors were wide open.

As Alden's men entered, they saw a young man behind the counter stationed as if ready to wait on them. Hearing a sharp click behind them, they spun as one to face the blazing double-barrelled shotgun, fired from the hip by old man Elber. Two of the squad fell to the floor, nearly cut in two by the close range blast of buckshot. Young Dane swept the Colt from beneath the counter and cut down the remaining two desperadoes.

Grabbing up the Winchester, Dane rushed to the door and waited for the remainder of Alden's party to emerge from the saloon. His careful, deadly fire checked their rush up the street. Two more outlaws fell dead in the center of the dusty street. Several were wounded. Surprised and shocked at this unexpected resistance, Alden's survivors limped back to their horses hitched to the saloon rail and fled from Lincoln. Grateful citizens raised a purse of 500 dollars for Dane Rash. The Alden gang sent threatening messages back to Dane and old man Elber, but the outlaws had all of Lincoln they wanted. Soon Alden's survivors

were bullying citizens in Falls County, but one by one they were cut down by brave peace officers.

We had nothing this serious to deal with, but there were still small bands depreddating the farmers and small towns. The desperadoes were especially active during the cotton sales. Sometimes they would plunder the cotton caravans on the way to market, but more often, they lurked along the timber-lined roads, waiting to ambush the farmers on their way home, loaded with provisions and cash.

We always went to Houston armed and traveled in convoys for protection. The closest we ever came to losing everything from the bandits was in 1897. McKinley had been elected in 1896 and farm prices started going up. Cotton was seven cents and we had sixteen bales. As we formed our Houston-bound caravan, word came back that a robber band had raided some farmers camped near Houston, killed two, and took their cotton money. We were especially watchful along the way.

Scouts on horseback rode ahead, on our flanks, and behind the eighteen wagon caravan, ready to sound the warning as we proceeded towards Houston. We had considerable trouble that trip. I was driving a four-mule wagon laden with seven bales. As before we traveled at night and rested during the day so that our teams could escape the heat.

Near Hockley we reached boggy ground. A heavy rain the day before had softened the road. Several wagons mired and this slowed the caravan. My wagon, in the lead, was the heaviest, and stuck first. The mules sank to their bellies. The mule I was riding pitched me into waist-deep water before he mired. High ground was found, the wagons behind the lead one were routed around the bog, and one of these was unloaded and came back to my wagon. We unloaded three bales at a time, and finally got the mules and wagon out of the mud.

It was seven in the evening and nearly dark when we reached our regular camp ground near Houston. A chilling norther blew in. I was still wet from my morning dunking, and the chills were about to take me. One of the boys passed me a pint of whiskey and I handed him back an empty bottle. I was warm and cozy for the rest of the night and I did not have the sign of a cold next morning. Farmers continued to arrive during the night and by morning there were over 400 cotton wagons at the camp ground. We formed up and were on the Houston road soon after five o'clock. After unloading the cotton and caring for the teams, the younger men went into Houston. We had a high time and the old men were sound asleep when we returned near midnight. The next morning we received eight cents for our cotton. While waiting for the sales to conclude, most of the younger men

went to town for dinner. Our meal cost twenty cents and we were served all the fish we could eat. Seldom did we have fish at home and the meal was appreciated by all.

The old men were anxious to leave for home that evening. The younger ones wanted to take in Houston again, and we reminded our fathers we got to Houston but once a year, that the crops were all in, and there was no particular hurry to return home. They finally agreed to wait, and we had another exciting night in Houston.

We were back at the wagon yard, had picked up our guns at the office, hitched the teams, and were ready to depart Houston before daybreak. Just after crossing the bridge outside the wagon yard, father had to halt his team and return to the public toilet, located about 200 yards from the road in a grove of giant pines. Since he was carrying our cotton receipts, 700 dollars in twenty dollar gold pieces, and was unarmed, I walked back with him. As we entered the pine grove, my eye caught two figures slinking out of the shadows of the bridge toward us. After father entered the toilet I slipped around the building, and took a position behind a tall pine tree near the path. When the two men reached a point ten paces from the toilet, I ordered them to halt and drop their weapons. With gun in hand I stepped out and covered them until father joined me in the path, then, sending him to join the wagon train, I backed slowly toward the road. Once on the road, I alerted the drivers, a cordon of armed riders was formed around the older men driving the wagons, and we continued homeward, arriving without further incident.

Our last trip to Houston was in 1898. Thereafter, local buyers began paying competitive prices and we sold our cotton at home. I missed the annual trip to Houston. I believe our patronage of Houston had much to do with its development. It seemed to us the town doubled in size in five years and so many of the trading houses, banks, and allied businesses were related to cotton sales.

Of all our years in Texas, none saw more drastic events and changes in our family than 1900. The year began quietly enough and just before planting season we took stock of our accomplishments. For the first time since arriving in the new country we were modestly prosperous. By hard work and saving we owned six head of mules and two mares, five milk cows, three wagons, and all our farm machinery which included three turning plows, three planters, and three cultivators. And there had been enough extra in 1899, following the cotton sale, to purchase a surrey. This was an item of family pride—no longer did we have to travel to church in the big farm wagon.

Misfortune struck first in the form of illness. A malady

called Texas Slow Fever infected each member of the family starting with father. This was a chronic ailment that lasted all spring and into the summer. We had suffered from the fever before. Common talk held that the heavy morning dew started the ailment. It was more severe in wet years than in dry years. The doctor prescribed a long drink of whiskey before going to the fields in the morning to keep the Texas Slow Fever down. This simple remedy brought amazing results.

When the Texas Slow Fever struck me, I did not respond to the whiskey treatment because complications set in—yellow jaundice and spleen trouble. My sides and back swelled all out of proportion. I was in terrible pain for five weeks, and, as the generally reliable home remedies seemed ineffective, the doctor was called in. First he covered my swollen, fever-racked body with patches of soothing salve, swathed these in bandages, then took a red-hot flatiron and pressed it to the bandages. The heat literally made me see stars. I had to submit to three of these agonizing treatments. Following the third application, I was cured. Although thin and weak, I left my sickbed for I was badly needed in the fields.

Father had rented seventy-five acres and I rented ten acres for myself for cotton. Our rent was \$4.50 per acre making a total charge of \$382, but our landlord agreed that if we could pay him the rent in advance he would let us have the land for \$350, which we managed to raise after some scraping here and there. With additional land it was our fond hope that in this year, 1900, we would finally get on our feet. Plowing and planting were finished early, and light spring rains made everything look good.

At Easter-time a community party was planned at the Navasota Lutheran Church. After chores, I saddled up and covered the sixteen miles in no time at all, little knowing the far-reaching effects the Easter party would have on my life.

Stopping for supper at a friend's place, I was told that some young people from nearby Washington County had been invited to the party. There was always something exciting about meeting new people, especially girls, and I was eager to get on to the party. When we arrived in the church yard, a crowd had already gathered. My eye caught a pretty blonde girl, and soon we were introduced—Elizabeth Emshoff was her name. I was too bashful to do much talking; it was enough just to gaze upon her and stand at her side. Both of us stayed over with friends at Navasota and attended church together Easter Sunday. It was easier to talk at our second meeting, and in no time at all we were well acquainted; as a matter of fact, it seemed to me that I had known her always. My courage mounted and just before we parted Sunday evening I asked if I could call on her, and that if I wrote her would she answer.

Elizabeth was much less shy than I, and her confidence helped me. She not only agreed to answer all letters I might write, but also assured me she would be pleased to have me call. Thereafter, for the duration of the courtship I wrote Elizabeth at least once each week, and called whenever I could be spared at home, although our visits were infrequent since her father's place was thirty miles from ours. I had courted girls in our neighborhood for years, and I was old enough to consider marriage seriously, but up to meeting Elizabeth I had never felt the urge to take a wife. This urge I kept to myself, not even mentioning to the family my meeting Elizabeth and our budding romance.

It was the common practice among the tightly-knit German families for the sons to stay with the parents and work for them until marriage; then when ready for marriage, it was the custom for the parents to set up the sons in farming. It was not always easy to stay on the homeplace, for during some years when crop yields were low or prices down, the sons would not receive a cent for working all year, and most young people then, as now, wished for at least some money for clothes and courting.

Only the year before, when I was twenty-two father had agreed that if I would stay with him until I married, he would furnish me a team of mules, a wagon, farming tools, planting seed, and a year's supply of horse feed, plus one hundred dollars cash for a stake.

With thoughts of Elizabeth and our future constantly on my mind I worked hard at the crops, hoping my ten acres of cotton would yield a bumper crop. Beginning the first of May, we were plagued with rain until mid-June. Our fields were under water most of this time, and, after the water finally went down, we could not get into the crops for another four weeks with the result that grass and weeds nearly took the young cotton and corn plants.

Our farm was located in Grimes County. Elizabeth's family lived west of us in Washington County. Even while we were idled by the rains, I could not call on her, for the Brazos River, which divided the two counties, was out of its banks most of this period, the bridge being under three feet of water. When the fields finally dried out, we worked long and hard cleaning the weeds and grass from the rows. Already twenty-five acres of cotton were lost and it was too late to re-plant. Several neighbors were wiped out by the Brazos flooding. The cotton and corn we had salvaged looked very good—the cotton promised a bale to the acre, and little did we realize that the Brazos flood of May was just the beginning of a wild, stormy season.

When the crops were clean and laid by, I made plans to call on Elizabeth. At daylight on a Saturday morning in July,

I saddled the mare and headed for the Brazos crossing. Travel was slow, for the road was riddled with washes, debris, and huge tree trunks from the flood. The bridge was out and I lost much time finding a ford. At four that afternoon I arrived at Emshoff's farm. Elizabeth was waiting for me in the dooryard.

After supper Elizabeth, myself, and her family sat on the porch until ten o'clock, when her folks went inside to bed. Elizabeth and I talked on until twelve. Finally I mustered enough courage to make a proposal, and she accepted as though she had expected it for some time. That settled, we made marriage plans which we agreed to keep secret for the time being. Elizabeth's father had invited me to stay the night, so at midnight I went to the barn to sleep.

Next morning we rode to Elizabeth's church on horseback, and before worship began I was introduced to her friends. The girls were kind, but the boys were haughty, and pretty well ignored me. There had been considerable rivalry between the young men of Grimes County and Washington County, and I am certain that I was especially resented, for Elizabeth was the center of all male attentions. It was a delightful day I had with her. Following a Sunday evening party at the church and some precious moments alone with Elizabeth, I turned the mare east toward the Brazos. I reached home early Monday morning in time for chores, evasive to my family about where I had spent the weekend, and happier than I had ever been.

Through secretly written letters, Elizabeth and I planned, with another young couple, a railroad excursion from nearby Yarbrough Station to Galveston. This trip was popular among the young people of our area. The train left Yarbrough Station on Friday night at eight and returned Sunday night. The cost was only one dollar per person for the train fare. On Friday night, September 6, 1900, we gathered at Yarbrough Station and anxiously awaited the southbound train. After a long wait the railroad agent came out on the platform and told us that the train would not run that night—a wreck had occurred up the road. Disappointed, we took the girls home, little realizing the strange workings of fate. About midnight a hurricane swept in from the Gulf and smashed Galveston and all else before it. Had we boarded the train at Yarbrough Station, we would by that time have been in the direct path of this savage storm.

This hurricane of 1900 produced an extended storm and flood which took more lives and destroyed more property than any hurricane up to that time or since. Our farm was ninety-two miles from Galveston, but it shoved water to and beyond us as far north as Waco, two hundred miles away. Crops were under several feet of water. No one escaped total cotton and corn loss.

Luckily, we were able to drive most of our livestock to high ground. The Brazos was seven miles wide in Grimes County.

A wealthy farmer near us owned 600 acres of bottom land. On this property, called Steel Plantation, he had erected a substantial two-story house, comfortable dwellings for his Negro workers, big barns which housed 300 work horses and mules, and a gin and store. When warned to evacuate, the proprietor refused, claiming that his plantation had escaped earlier floods and that it would certainly weather this one. The water level rose above all previous flood marks, and the proprietor, his family, and the Negro families were trapped in the big house where they had taken final refuge. All were drowned, and every evidence of Steel Plantation—buildings, animals, and humans—was destroyed by the angry Brazos, whose rushing waters set new flood records that year. Over most of the bottom the depth was eighteen feet.

A little town named Courtney had built up on the railroad seven miles from our place. The depot was on some of the highest ground in the county, but even there the water was shin deep in the waiting room. Every day the boys of our community would ride and swim in to Courtney to watch the work of the flood. Houses floating on the current toward the Gulf became so commonplace that we scarcely paid them any heed. Several large frame store buildings from Waco drifted past us the third day of the flood. On one of these buildings stood a man, waving his hat, and crying for rescue. We went after him in four boats but had to turn back as big trees, floating beneath the surface, threatened to capsize our light craft. When finally rescued fifty miles below Courtney, he was out of his mind from the ordeal.

One morning at Courtney we noticed a Negro woman sitting in a tree top which had eddied into shallower water. She was holding a small baby. Some of the boys went out in a boat to rescue her and the infant. The crew-man in the stern reached up and plucked the baby to safety. As he turned back to help the mother into the boat, a heavy, floating log rammed the boat, causing it to capsize, with the result that the baby drowned and the boat's crew nearly lost their lives too. When the Negro mother saw that her baby had been lost in the torrent she cried out: "I held my baby for 150 miles in the worst of the storm; then I lose him so very close to shore." With that she seemed to faint away, fell from her tree perch, and drowned in the deep water.

Every day we saw hundreds of horses, mules, cows and hogs floating to the Gulf. Some were alive, and trying to breast the current and swim ashore; others were dead and floated downstream, made buoyant by the bloat which set in soon after these

creatures drowned. One day a big hog came floating by astraddle a cottonwood tree trunk. It was dead, but apparently not for long, since it was not bloated. Four hungry Mexicans swam out to the hog and, after considerable exertion, finally got the animal ashore. They were disappointed in their prize for there was very little meat on the hams, shoulders, and sides; these had been ripped and shredded by barbed wire.

Relatives living near Galveston told me of the terror the storm and flood provoked in that city. Two streets were washed completely into the sea. Houses were floating on the water, their roof tops crowded with panic-stricken people, screaming for help. Even the higher ground was covered with water and people waded aimlessly through the dark night, many with children on their shoulders, slipping in the mud and crying out for rescue. I was told that after the waters subsided a bit, looting began. Homes and shops which survived the storm were sacked by mobs. Corpses, victims of the storm, lay in the streets, yards, and in the mud-stained houses. These cadavers were stripped of all valuables; rings were cut from cold fingers.

The Galveston survivors were mustered by city officials and squads of police, and required to clean up the debris, bury the victims, and restore the city. Several of my relatives visiting in Galveston when the storm struck were forced to stay and work with the clean-up squad; some of my friends dug graves for two weeks.

While the storm caused little loss of life in Grimes County, it took a heavy toll in property. When the raging waters of the Brazos finally subsided the damage became apparent. In the rich Brazos Bottom, fields were rutted with holes ten to twelve feet deep. It took several years of hard work to level and restore this wasteland to cropland again. Dead fish of all sizes and species littered the valley. Our corn was flattened and the cotton was bent double from the mud and silt. The stench of decaying livestock, fish, and vegetable matter was nauseating.

On the third day after the flood waters had drained off, the cotton began to straighten, and there was a surge of hope. Then a new scourge struck. Each cotton stalk was alive with insects—on one stalk alone I counted fifty-three voracious, crawling, bugs.

The boll weevil had come to south Texas. Many planters claimed the storm blew this plague in from infested cotton fields in Mexico. Due to the ravages of the Brazos flood and the boll weevil, we harvested only three bales of cotton from fifty acres. All we had worked so hard to build up seemed lost; with thousands of other unfortunates, we were literally wiped out. Ther-

one night a friend came into our dooryard—Sherman Kromer. He had just returned from the new country to the north where, he claimed, land was free and families could make a fresh start—Oklahoma Territory.

IV

On To The Promised Land

Sherman Kromer's description of Oklahoma Territory made us think of it as the promised land. We gathered about the table and drank in every word. When Sherman said he was returning to the country north of Red River in about two weeks to file on a free homestead, Paul jumped up and said to father: "Our crops are lost. All we had was invested in the land rent, the cotton and the corn. Now we're dead broke. Let's go to Oklahoma Territory with Sherman!"

We discussed the proposed move most of the night, and just before daybreak it was decided to leave Texas for Oklahoma Territory. Kromer promised to guide us north. I had been silent through the long family council. My thoughts were of Elizabeth. After the decision had been made to move north, I stood to speak: "I'll go, but wait until I am married, so I can take my wife along."

The family roared with laughter, and Paul claimed I did not even have a sweetheart. After an extended explanation concerning Elizabeth and our secret romance, I finally convinced them that I did have a girl, and that she had pledged to marry me. Father asked how much time the marriage preparations would take. I said two weeks or less, and the family agreed to wait for us. I sat right down and wrote two letters. To Elizabeth I explained the plan to homestead in Oklahoma Territory, and that we must be married on October 25 if we were to accompany the family north. To her father I wrote a request for his fair daughter's hand in marriage. I rushed to Courtney to mail the letters, returned home, and helped with the preparations for the journey.

Four days later I received three letters. One was from Elizabeth confirming her pledge to marry and agreeing to accompany me to Oklahoma Territory. The second letter was from Mr. Emshoff. He approved the marriage, and said it would be held at his place on October 25. The third letter was an unsigned note, advising me that the young men of Washington County objected to the marriage, and warning me to stay east of the river.

I left early the following day for Washington County. Since I would have Elizabeth's effects to carry back, I took the wagon and a team of mules. Remembering the warning note, I

wrapped my Colt revolver in a heavy coat, and placed it beside me on the wagon seat. The thirty-mile trip by wagon was much slower than on horseback, and I did not pull into Emshoff's yard until nearly dark. After a big supper, we talked around the table far into the night, mostly about Oklahoma Territory. Washington County farmers had been hard hit by the flood too, and Elizabeth's family showed a keen interest in Oklahoma. I told them all I knew, based on Sherman Kromer's description of the new land.

According to Kromer, all the country between Red River and the southern boundary of Kansas had been the Indian Territory; this vast region running west from Arkansas to the 100th Meridian, through the years had been partitioned into Indian reservations and nations. Beginning in 1889, the central sector of the Indian Territory had been opened to settlement. Kromer said that prospective settlers had lined up on all four sides of this tract, and at the signal given by soldiers patrolling the four boundaries, homeseekers raced in a throng for homesteads. In this way, between 1889 and 1900, the various Indian reservations of central and western Indian Territory had been opened to settlement. As each reservation filled with settlers, it ceased to be Indian Territory, and came under the jurisdiction of the new Oklahoma Territory.

All of the Indian reservations of central and western Indian Territory had been opened, were filled with settlers, and were now Oklahoma Territory, Kromer said, except the Kiowa-Comanche Reservation in southwestern Indian Territory. This was being surveyed and soon would be opened, he said, not by a homesteaders' race, but by a lottery drawing.

There was only one area in Oklahoma Territory with homesteads available for settlers at the present time, according to Kromer. This was Old Greer County. Kromer had told us that this land, forming a sort of triangle—its sides the 100th meridian on the west, the Red River on the south, and transected by the North Fork of the Red—through an error in earlier surveys and maps, had, until four years ago, been regarded as Texas Territory. A Texas county named Greer had been organized, Texas law had applied there, and some settlers, notably cattlemen, had developed a few ranches in the area. In 1895, the United States Supreme Court directed that, in view of errors in earlier surveys, Greer County be attached to Oklahoma Territory. Thereby the unclaimed land in Greer County became a part of the Public Domain to be administered by the United States Land Office, and open to entry by settlers under the Homestead Act. Mangum, leading town in Greer County, was the site of the Homestead Registration Office. I explained to Elizabeth's folks that our plan was to reach Mangum, about 630 miles from Grimes County,

Texas, sometime around December first in order to file for free homesteads before the land was all taken.

Next morning we drove to Brenham, county seat of Washington County, and obtained the marriage license. That evening, Elizabeth and I called on the Lutheran pastor at the little town of William Penn, near Emshoff's farm. After two hours of talk, I finally got around to the purpose of our visit. He told us he would be most happy to marry us. This about completed the marriage arrangements.

On Wednesday morning I went into the timber with Elizabeth's brothers, cut wood, and hauled it to the house for the women who were preparing the wedding feast. Next, we butchered a 200-pound hog, and killed twenty chickens and five turkeys. We were far into the night picking chickens and turkeys.

The wedding day, Thursday, dawned bright. I was so excited that I decided to get off by myself and try to gather my wits. Borrowing Mr. Emshoff's rifle, I went into the woods to hunt squirrels. The day was mild, the forest was silent, and I sat under a tree until noon reflecting on the future. Dinner was on the table when I came to myself and walked back to the house. The kitchen was abustle with wedding feast preparations. All the rooms were clean and decorated, and the yard had been raked and smoothed.

At two in the afternoon, wedding guests started arriving and in no time at all the house and yard were full of people. Toward evening, a storm moved in but I was so numb from excitement I hardly knew it was raining, when the ceremony was concluded, or when the marriage feast began. Elizabeth and I received some nice wedding gifts which included \$12.50 cash. This was welcome, for, after buying the license and paying the pastor, I had only \$7.

About two in the morning the rain stopped, and the guests began to leave, each wishing Elizabeth and me well, and cautioning us concerning the hazards of moving to the new country. After an early breakfast, I loaded Elizabeth's things in the wagon, she bade her family a tearful farewell, and we headed east to join my folks for the trek to Oklahoma Territory. All along the way I looked for trouble from the Washington County boys, but no one attempted to stop us. We had a delightful drive, and the folks were amazed to see the pretty bride I had brought home. A family story for many years was my secret courtship.

Preparations for the trip were nearly completed when we arrived. The farm wagons had been fitted with heavy bows, which were covered with sheets, then oil cloth to keep the sheeting dry and making a warm, cozy interior. We constructed mule and horse:

troughs on the sides and endgate of each wagon. Late Saturday night the last wagon renovation was completed; then we greased each wagon by lantern light. Sunday after worship the neighbors had a farewell dinner and party for us which lasted far into the night. I had a delightful time introducing Elizabeth to all who came.

Monday morning, October 29, 1900, we loaded the wagons and strung the caravan out to travel. The train contained seven wagons, three buggies, one surrey, and a heavy supply wagon for grain and provisions. Twenty-three horses and mules pulled these vehicles, and nine dogs tracked for us. Our party included Sherman Kromer, his wife and three children; Fred Weber, wife, and five children; Adolph Felter and wife; Arthur Kromer; my father and younger brother August, Elizabeth, and myself. Mother, Paul, and a sister were to join us later.

All these people had to show for their twenty years of sacrifice and hard work in Texas were the few possessions loaded in the wagons. In order to make a fresh start in Oklahoma Territory, they had sold their cattle and everything else of value which had survived the Brazos flood, and which they could spare. Fred Weber had \$400; Sherman Kromer had about \$800; and father had \$250. I had the least of all—\$19 in money; but I had great riches in a young wife, and good health, with the promise of a fresh start in the new land. Father had reminded me of his promise to pay me \$100 when I married, but regretted that he could not spare it at this time. I told him not to worry, for Elizabeth and I would make it fine.

We rolled out at nine o'clock. Sherman Kromer, our guide and wagonmaster, was in the lead. The first day's travel was pleasant and uneventful. We were getting the feel of the long drive that faced us. After covering a slow twenty-five miles, we made our first camp stop at Millican.

Kromer worked out a route which ran north along the valley of the Brazos through Grimes, Brazos, Falls, and McLennan counties to Waco. This was the principal wagon road between Waco and Houston. The grades were well packed, and we made fair time, averaging thirty miles each day although at no time did we hurry, since this was new country for all of us, and we enjoyed the sights. Kromer's schedule required that we be up before dawn, have breakfast over, be hitched up, and ready to travel by daylight. We always stopped at noon to rest and water the teams and feed the children, who were always hungry. It was generally my duty to ride ahead of the caravan along toward evening, select a campsite, and guide the wagons to the location. In selecting a campsite, the first considerations were wood and water. Below Fort Worth this was no problem; north of there on the prairie plains, these items were more difficult to locate.

The weather was ideal for traveling until the night of October 31, when a heavy thunderstorm struck our camp. Luckily there was no hail in the storm and the wagon covers kept out the blowing rain, and we were cozy inside. The heavy rainfall muddied the road and slowed our travel next day until noon, when a warm sun dried up the puddles and ruts and we traveled as easily as before.

Feeding twenty people three meals a day quickly drained the stock of provisions which had been packed in the supply wagon, and a stop was made at the little town of Belvert where a supply of coffee, ham, bacon, and hay was laid in. The other members of the party must have sensed my low financial state, for, although I offered, no one would permit me to pay my share.

The only excitement we had before reaching Waco occurred on the evening of November 1, just after we made camp. The dog pack began scrapping. Their snarling frightened the children and the women rushed them to safety in the wagons. The mules and horses had just been turned loose to graze, and the dog fight spooked the entire herd which soon was scattered over the countryside. We let the dogs fight it out, and ran to recapture the livestock. Eight of the dogs finally tucked tail and ran off into the woods. Buff, the biggest mongrel in the pack, strutted his victory and remained with us. He was the only one of our dogs to see Oklahoma Territory. After driving off the other dogs, Buff became a fine watchdog, protected our camp, and was kind to the children.

As a rule people along the way were friendly and kind, and permitted us to camp on their places, cut wood, and carry water from their well or spring. Nights around the campfire were pleasant. We sang, told stories, and made plans for our future in Oklahoma Territory. After the women got the children off to bed, we sometimes played cards or dominoes by lantern light.

Once the teams became adjusted to trail work, and accustomed to their feed troughs, they required little care. After a long day's pull, each team was unharnessed and walked a bit. Then we fed and watered them, and turned them loose. The herd stayed close together and grazed through much of the night. Grass was generally good, we used little hay, and the animals actually seemed to pick up weight on the trip. We stopped each Sunday and allowed the teams to rest.

On Sunday, November 4, we camped near Waco. After we had greased the wagons and tidied up the camp, Kromer suggested that the men go in to look over Waco. It was the largest city thus far on the trail. At noon we decided to eat at the big hotel, where we had a fine meal which cost only fifty cents each.

After eating, we walked down the main street and came to a saloon. In the window was an advertisement announcing whiskey for two dollars per gallon. Kromer suggested we each buy a gallon, pointing out we might need some before we arrived in Oklahoma Territory. I had only eleven dollars left, but I did not hold back for I did not want them to know I was so near the end of my rope. We each bought a gallon and returned to camp, arriving there about three in the afternoon. We spent a nice Sunday evening—the children played along the creek, the horses and mules grazed on the lush grass, and we played cards and dominoes.

Resuming our travels on Monday, November 5, we entered Hill County and made camp at Hillsboro. During the day we passed some of the finest black prairie farming land we had ever seen. Hill County cotton, we were told, easily made a bale to the acre, and corn yielded sixty to seventy-five bushels. The late summer storm and flood had hardly touched Hill County.

Noting the fine crops, Elizabeth asked, in view of the fact that we had only seven dollars left, why I did not suggest that we stay over a week or so and pick cotton. Around the campfire I discussed this with the men, pointing out that we might well need some additional money before we arrived in Oklahoma Territory. The men agreed that this was a good idea, and they promised to think it over. At breakfast Kromer announced that it had been decided that if we passed a good cotton field we would camp and work.

Just as we were hitching up, a man rode into our camp and introduced himself as William Bird, the owner of a cotton farm four miles from camp. He said that he had sixty-five acres of cotton and would pay eighty cents per hundred. He invited us to camp on his place, assuring us there was plenty of wood and water. When we agreed to pick for him for one week, he led us to his place.

We spent a pleasant week on the Bird Plantation. On November 13, the last day we planned to pick, Mr. Bird returned from Hillsboro with news of the election held just a few days earlier. Bird was elated to report that William McKinley had beaten the Democrat, William Jennings Bryan, and all of us were happy and relieved that we would have a Republican President for four more years.

It was with regret that we left the Bird Plantation, but, as we explained to Mr. Bird, we had to be on to Oklahoma Territory before cold weather set in. He complimented us on our work, and we received \$54 from him for picking cotton. Some of the men had pulled corn for \$1.50 a day, and I was paid \$5 extra for keeping the books.

We greased the wagons and buggies by lantern light and prepared to move on at dawn. It was difficult to get the teams back into the routine of travel after a week's rest, but we made our thirty miles that day. A noticeable change was taking place in the weather—while the days continued mild, the nights were getting colder.

At breakfast on November 15, a catastrophe occurred. Every meal, the biscuits had been light and delicious. On that particular morning, they were hard, flat, and tough. The women exclaimed that we had exhausted our supply of milk and baking powder, and that these pellets were made from soda and water. The men joshed the women unmercifully about the breakfast bread, but at the very next stop, a supply of baking powder was laid in, and thereafter, the men took special pains to obtain milk along the way from farmers. The fare was simple, but we ate hearty—ham or bacon, biscuits, syrup, potatoes, and coffee. We had a common mess. The women spread a clean cloth on the ground for each meal. We sat in a circle, and, after grace, we pitched in. Following the meal, the women jumped right up and cleaned the table, so that in a few minutes all was tidy and packed.

The country in Johnson and Tarrant counties changed somewhat—fewer trees, and more hills and sandy roads that slowed our pace. We reached Fort Worth near midday on November 16. Since the hard travel had fatigued the teams, and the women and children needed rest, we decided to stop over for a day or so. At Fort Worth we put in at a wagon yard. Up to this point, in order to save money, we had camped on a creek or at a spring away from the towns. The wagon yard, a common stopping point on the frontier for families traveling by wagon, consisted of camp houses with bunks and cookstoves, and a barn with stalls for fifty to sixty animals. The yard man furnished the animal feed and fuel for the cookstoves. The cost for a night in the wagon yard was fifteen cents for each wagon.

Right after we had unharnessed the teams, a man entered the wagon yard with a thirty-five pound blue catfish he had just caught in the Trinity River. We bought it for \$2.50, skinned and dressed it, and had a big fish fry. After this fine meal, we walked to the streetcar stop. Most of us had never ridden on a streetcar. We saw the town, getting transfers from one car to another, and this long, delightful excursion cost each of us only ten cents. The women and children especially enjoyed their first streetcar ride, which took most of the day, and we did not get back to the wagon yard until dark.

All seemed to have enjoyed our overland journey thus far, the more so, for, although we were eager to reach Oklahoma Territory, Kromer never pushed us, and when we or the teams

became fatigued, a stop was made for a day or so. On the evening of November 17, we stopped to camp near Saginaw on the banks of the Trinity River. The women decided to do a washing next morning since the children needed clean clothes. While they scrubbed clothes on the river bank, the men greased the wagons and made repairs. The women had the clothes dry, the children dressed, and we were back on the road before noon.

That night we camped on a high hill in the open prairie. Not a piece of firewood was in sight, and we had to take the teams one-half mile to a seep for water. A cold norther blew in before dark and the temperature changed from quite mild to very cold in less than thirty minutes. We had no fire to cook supper or keep warm by, and the children were crying from the cold. I searched until dark for wood without success. Near the seep was a long fence with high posts. I borrowed a saw from Kromer, cut the tops from several of these fence posts, and soon we had a warm fire, hot coffee, and contented children.

When we camped for the evening, we always hoped for a clear sky which generally betokened a clear tomorrow and easy travel. The norther pushed lead-gray clouds over us, and these dumped heavy rain for several hours, followed by hail. Luckily, the hail was small and did not puncture our wagon sheets. Next day the road through Wise County was boggy and rutted badly under the heavy wagons. We reached a long hill in upper Wise County in the mid-afternoon. It led to a raging creek which had washed out the crude bridge, and the canyon was too narrow to ford either up creek or down. The men took their axes from the wagons, cut logs from trees along the creek, repaired the bridge, and the caravan was on the north bank in two hours.

During the night, three men rode up to our camp and were in the process of driving off our horses and mules. The dog sounded the alarm, we grabbed our guns, ran out to the herd, and the intruders galloped off. For the rest of the night, and each night thereafter, we posted a guard on the livestock. Each time we were in plentiful wood, we always cut enough for one night's camp and carried it as a reserve in the supply wagon. Since Elizabeth and I had fewer effects in our wagon than those families with children, we packed the corn and hay in our wagon, so as to make room in the supply wagon for the wood. Feather ticks on the top of the corn and hay made a fair bed.

On November 21, while traveling through some of the flattest country I had ever seen, we came upon a prairie dog village. These little creatures especially delighted the children. We pulled into Ringgold, a north Texas town in Montague County, that evening and stopped at the wagon yard. This was to be our last night in Texas, for the Red River separating Oklahoma

Territory and Texas was just north of us. All were excited over being so close to the new country.

Departing the Ringgold wagon yard at eight, we reached Red River at a little past ten in the morning. A ferry carried us across at a cost of fifty cents for each wagon and team and ten cents for single horses. The last wagon and team were unloaded on the north bank before noon. While we still had several days to travel, our hopes were buoyed by safely crossing this river. From Red River crossing we struck due north for a piece, traversing the western Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory. According to Kromer's route, we would soon head west across the 98th meridian which separated the lands of the Chickasaws from the Kiowas, Comanches, Wichitas, Caddoes, and Apaches.

Towns were few and far between in this section of Indian Territory. This was cattle country and sparsely settled, the only towns being Terral and Ryan. A few cattlemen had leases with the Indian nations and grazed their livestock over these vast grasslands. At Ryan we headed west and after a few hours on the trail, met a herd of range cattle driven by six noisy cowboys. Kromer ordered the wagon train off the trail to make room for the approaching cattle herd. One of the riders showing off his horsemanship came so close to one of the wagons that the team bolted and the left front wheel was smashed. Luckily no one was injured. We returned with the wheel to Ryan where a blacksmith charged us \$7.50 to repair it.

That night, while camped in the Ryan wagon yard, a norther blew in. We were accustomed to the mild weather of south Texas, and that night we suffered more from the cold than at any time since leaving White Hall. We visited with two men who were in the Ryan wagon yard that night. They had already filed homestead claims in the territory, and were on their way to Texas in search of work so as to earn money for a grubstake. They explained that the law required that, in order to hold their homesteads, they must reside on their claims every three months for a few days and make certain improvements.

On November 25 our wagon train left Ryan and headed west again. The country was rich sandy loam and light red soil, gently rolling in relief, and covered with belly-deep grass. There was no road leading to Greer County and Mangum, our destination; just a trail beaten smooth by cattle herds. Except for crude cow camps and a few riders, we saw no houses or people for days. The nights were progressively colder with heavy frost, and ice in the wash basin; and at our first camp out of Ryan we heard coyotes for the first time, and even saw a pack of them on a hill in the cold moonlight.

New sights and experiences seemed to come every day now

in this new country. On November 27, we reached Cache Creek and camped near a large Comanche village, and we saw our first Indians. When a mounted party of braves came to call on our camp, the women and children hid in the wagons. We were only six miles from Fort Sill, the military post constructed in 1869, and garrisoned by United States cavalry to curtail the depredations of the fierce Kiowa and Comanche.

Next morning we stopped at Red Store, leading trading post in the Kiowa-Comanche country and only two miles from Fort Sill, where we laid in a supply of coffee. High mountains jutting above the grassy plain were a source of wonderment for all of us. We ate dinner at the foot of Mount Scott, one of the highest of the Wichita Mountains. Two days out we had first seen this peak. After the meal, the men climbed Mount Scott, and when we reached the summit and looked down, the people in our camp appeared like ants. During the descent, I encountered a big rattler sunning himself on a ledge. This, the first rattlesnake I had ever seen, I shot through the head with my Colt revolver.

That night we camped on a creek with a fringe of trees along its banks—beyond on either side was flat, prairie grassland. The Wichitas were still in view, and Kromer estimated that we were close to the Greer County line.

November 29 dawned cold and clear. We arose at five o'clock and greased the wagons and buggies by lantern light. For breakfast we had hot coffee, biscuits, and syrup; we were out of meat and butter again. That day we made thirty-six miles, one of the longest stretches we had covered. Just before dark we came to a crude trading post. Due to the lack of trees for logs and scarcity of lumber, the proprietor did business in a dugout. We purchased some meat at the dugout store and had a nice supper. We also bought corn for the teams; these animals had gone two days with only hay and native grass. The trader told us we had entered Greer County last evening; that we had camped on the Indian Territory-Oklahoma Territory boundary. According to him, up until four years ago, when this was Texas territory, only a few families, mostly cattlemen, had taken up land; but after the Supreme Court decision in 1896, awarding Greer County to Oklahoma Territory, there had been a steady stream of homeseekers from the states. The trader told us that while the land from his store to Mangum, sixteen miles west, had been filed on by cattlemen, there remained considerable free land west and north of Mangum.

Kromer led the train out of camp next morning, November 30, 1900, and we covered the sixteen miles to Mangum by four that afternoon. This was our journey's end. The teams had made the 630-mile trip in good condition. We had much to be thankful

for, and each member of Kromer's party offered silent prayers of gratitude. Our health was good; about the only sickness en route had been colds among the children, and these the mothers had checked with stiff hot toddies. Many times we had been low on food, but we always had something to eat. There had been no quarreling among our members; all got along very well. For all of us, the journey from Grimes County, Texas to Greer County, Oklahoma Territory had been an exciting adventure.

V

Homesteading in Greer County

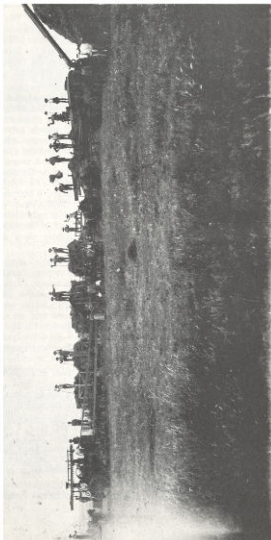
Mangum, a bustling frontier town and county seat of Greer County, had been established around 1880 as a trading center for cattlemen. When we arrived in Mangum in late 1900, the business district was strung along a single main street. Besides a court house, it boasted two general stores, one drygoods store, two hotels, a funeral home, two saloons and the postoffice.

Since the opening of Greer County to homesteaders, Mangum was changing from a cattle town to a farm trade center. This was evidenced by the new cotton gin and two hardware and farm implement firms. Three wagon yards were doing a booming business, catering to the incoming homeseekers. By far the most popular place in town was the United States Land Office, where each day a long line of settlers formed at the front door waiting to file claims on locations they had selected.

The farm settlement boom had encouraged the Rock Island Railroad to build through Greer County to within a mile of Mangum. Hack service carried people between the depot and town. Until the Rock Island reached the environs of Mangum, all freight and passengers were unloaded at Quanah, Texas, forty miles away.

There were few houses in Mangum when we arrived; most of the people had built dugouts on their town lots. These curious structures were excavated five to six feet. The dimensions varied. One man, with his wife and eight children, lived in a dugout just off main street. His dwelling, set five feet in the ground, measured fourteen feet by thirty-six feet. There was a window in one end, and a door in the other. Three logs carried the roof—one log was set on each side and the third, raised a bit in the center to give pitch to the roof, served as a ridge pole. After sheeting had been nailed crosswise to the logs, the roof was covered with packed, reddish soil.

This soil was a strange sight—deep sandy loam which augured productive farming land. While most of the land around town had already been taken up, not much of it was in cultivation



Orto Koelliker's threshing machine with old Rumley steam engine, bundle wagons and crew.

yet, for most of the settlers were so poor that, after filing on their claims, they generally returned to the settlements in search of work to earn a grubstake.

The cattlemen, who had held sway over this country for so long, were belligerent. They resented homeseekers coming into Greer County and cutting up the range with 160-acre farms, and they did everything possible to discourage the farmers. A favorite method used by the cattlemen to plague the farmers was to turn their cattle in to graze on the homesteaders' green feed and wheat fields.

When the farmers protested and threatened suits for damages, the cattlemen laughed at their plight and pointed to the "free grass law." In the stock producing areas of the West, the ranchmen favored "free grass law," which permitted livestock to range freely, and required those persons who raised crops to fence their fields. The farmers preferred the "herd law," which required that pasture lands be fenced and permitted cultivated fields be free of enclosures. States and territories generally authorized counties to settle this question by local option. Soon after our arrival in Oklahoma Territory, I learned from conversations with homesteaders that in 1897, when cattlemen were in the majority in Greer County, a referendum was held and the "free grass law" had carried. Now that settlers outnumbered cattlemen in Greer County, the former were agitating for a "herd law" referendum.

Our first stop in Mangum was at Doyle's Wagon Yard. After allowing the teams a day's rest, the various families comprising our wagon train began to scatter in search of homesteads. We had never owned land in America, and the Mangum wagon yards were full of families from north, south, east, and west—homeseekers like ourselves. And there was an ominous rumor about that Greer County, containing nearly the last of the nation's free land, would soon be all taken up with homestead filings. Kromer, Felter, and Weber joined father and headed out the west road seeking unclaimed land.

Father told me before leaving that, in addition to searching for a homestead, he was going to try to find a place with a dwelling on it, which he might rent. Thus he not only would have land to farm in the spring, but more important, mother and the children would not have to spend the winter in the wagon on an undeveloped claim. When father asked why I was not joining the search for homesteads, I explained that I had only \$2.50 left after paying my share of the wagon yard fees, and that I would have to find work in Mangum and earn some money even before I could pay the filing costs on a homestead.

Just after the wagons of our train began to pull out on the homestead search, a railroad superintendent came to the wagon

yard looking for men to unload an oil tank from a railroad car and place it on a foundation. He agreed to pay \$1.50 a day for good hands. We had been accustomed to receiving fifty to seventy-five cents a day (except at Hillsboro where we were paid \$1.50 for pulling corn), and I jumped at the chance to work for him. He told me to meet him at the railroad yards early next day.

At 4:30 on the morning of December 1, 1900, I rolled out for my first job in Oklahoma Territory. Elizabeth cooked me a hearty breakfast, using up most of our remaining provisions, and I left the wagon yard at five. The mile walk to the railroad depot was the coldest hike I had ever made up to that time. It was quiet, bitter cold. The town was sleeping, and I saw no one. I walked around the railroad yards for an hour and finally saw a light appear in the depot. I went to the door and the agent invited me to come in and warm myself. He was just building a fire in the pot-bellied heater.

After thawing out, I explained that I had a job unloading a tank from a flat car, but that the superintendent and remainder of the crew had not showed yet. The agent laughed heartily, asked me my name, where I was from, and then he told me that in Oklahoma Territory men worked only during the day, not at night. He assured me the job would start at eight.

Finally the superintendent and crew of three came into the yards. Apparently I worked too fast, for, after the superintendent left, one of the crew asked me if I wanted to finish in one day. I looked up and noted that I had worked three-fourths around the tank and had just met the other three. At noon, the superintendent sent two of the crew home, but kept me and one other worker, and told us we would have one more day's work.

We quit at five, and Elizabeth was surprised to see me come into the wagon yard so early. I explained that men worked only eight hours a day in Oklahoma Territory on jobs of this sort. Elizabeth had been busy too. She had washed all the clothes and cleaned out the wagon.

After supper we talked with various families in the wagon yard. According to people who had spent several years in Greer County, this night was the coldest on record for that early in the season. Bitter wind out of the north roared at forty miles per hour. But our team was warm in the stalls and the lodge house in Doyle's Wagon Yard was cozy. In talking with one of the homeseekers just in from the western edge of Greer County, I learned that a man named W. E. Kelly, who owned 320 acres of land west of Mangum, had lost his wife, was left with four small children, and wanted to rent his farm. This seemed to be exactly the sort of place father was looking for.

At the end of my second day in the railroad yards, the superintendent paid me three dollars for the work on the tank, and took me to the Stephenson and Brown Lumber Yard. I was introduced to Mr. Stephenson as a strong, reliable hand, and the railroad superintendent asked the lumber company to hire me. Mr. Stephenson was interested in our travels, where we were from, and he asked many questions about the Galveston storm and the Brazos flood. Then he asked what I had brought to Oklahoma Territory. I told him: "A span of mules, a saddle horse, farm wagon, two trunks of clothes, two feather beds, a Colt revolver, a young wife, and \$2.50 cash."

Thanks to the railroad superintendent, Mr. Stephenson offered me a temporary job unloading lumber from railroad cars at \$1.50 a day. When I returned to the wagon yard, Elizabeth had a surprise. She had found a job, too, as a cook at the inn. The owner agreed to furnish both of us room and board and pay her one dollar each week. This was especially good news for we would now be able to save more money, and thus could file on a homestead sooner.

During the late evening, father returned to Mangum and I told him about the Kelly place being for rent. He went out next day, looked it over, and decided to rent it for one year. The Kelly farm was near Jester, which, like so many villages in Oklahoma Territory, had only a store and a postoffice. Father invited Elizabeth and me to move out with him, but I told him he would be pushed for room as it was when mother and the children arrived from Texas. I did ask him to take my mules, wagon, and saddle horse to the farm and care for them so as to save me stable rent. This he was happy to do. At his request I wrote mother that father had a home for them, and I included instructions that she take the train at Navasota for Fort Worth, change to the Chickasha train, then take the Rock Island to Mangum, and that we would meet them at the depot.

After Elizabeth and I moved to the inn, we spent our nights estimating how long before we would have enough money to file for a homestead and how much we would need for a grubstake. Filing alone would cost us \$16.40. Since I had not filed intent to become a United States citizen, the so-called first papers would cost \$2.50. This had to be done before an alien could file for a homestead. And the various homestead fees amounted to \$14.00. It seemed a slow process getting enough together to file for a homestead and there was always the secret fear that all the claims in Greer County would be taken before we had accumulated the required amount.

Elizabeth's helper at the inn, Mary Stacy, was being courted by a young bartender named Pete Kelley. Mary's room was next

to ours, and soon I was well acquainted with Kelley. One evening when Mary and he came to visit, Kelley saw my pistol, holster, and cartridge belt on the bedpost. When he asked if I would like to sell it, I told him not particularly, but after I saw his strong interest in the gun, I told him I would take \$18.50 for it. I was surprised when he said he would buy it. He gave me \$5 down, I kept the gun, and he agreed to pay the balance soon. I hated like all get out to part with that gun, but Elizabeth and I were happy for now we would have the homestead money, and while I was hesitant to part with the gun, we needed a home worse, and I could always get another pistol. I had never dreamed when I bought the Colt .41 at Navasota years before that it would fetch a 160-acre homestead for me. Now we could work for a grubstake, for when we settled on our homestead we would need some furniture, tools, implements, seed, and provisions.

I had to rise at 5:30 in order to get my two-man crew underway by daylight. Farmers were buying up lumber of all dimensions for their dugouts, barns, and chicken houses as fast as we could haul a boxcar load to the yard and stack it. Although there was a heavy demand for lumber, bad weather and slow railroad deliveries made work at the yard spotty. Most of the time I was able to work only two or three days each week.

On the evening of December 8, Kromer came to town. He had found a homestead thirty-five miles northwest of Mangum and he planned to file on it next morning. According to him, the claim was in very rough country, but it was in the only open land left. He warned that we should file soon for the free land was about all taken up. Since there was no work at the yard next day, I went to the Land Office to inquire about filing. Although I left the inn early, there was already a long line of people waiting to file. At eight, the outer office was opened to allow the people to get in out of the cold; the clerk's office did not open until nine. When I finally reached the Chief Clerk's desk and explained my business, he instructed me to return after closing at five, at which time he would explain all the steps I would have to take in order to file. I asked for and received a Greer County township map which included section and quarter-section designations. Six clerks were working in the Land Office and still there were so many homeseekers filing that many had to return the next day.

Just before noon, father and August arrived in Mangum. They had found some vacant land close to Kromer's claim, but they did not know the section number and quarter-section direction, essential information for filing a homestead entry. When I showed them my Greer County map, they located their claims.

After five we went to the Land Office and met the Chief Clerk. This kind official took the time to explain the require-

ments of the Homestead Law. According to him, the homeseeker looked over the available claims and when he found one that suited him, he filed with the Land Office. While he did not have to move onto the homestead for three months, the claimant had to make certain improvements within this period; and if at the end of the first three months he was unable to move onto the homestead, he satisfied the residence requirement by sleeping on the claim at least one night every three months until able to move onto it permanently. After breaking out some land and building a dugout, and after residing on the homestead for five years, the United States Government would issue a patent of ownership; or one could commute or shorten this residence period by residing on the claim for two years and paying \$1.25 per acre.

When I told the Chief Clerk that I did not have my naturalization papers, he said I would have to file first papers, which was a declaration of intent to become a citizen of the United States; then I would be eligible to file for homestead. Since none of the family had filed first papers, the Chief Clerk took applications from father on behalf of himself and all his children. The official allowed us to submit our applications for land and he assured us he would have the first papers ready when we came in to file for a homestead. Before leaving the office, father and I paid \$2.50 each for the first papers.

We planned to ride northwest in search of homesteads next day, but word came to me after supper that a load of lumber had just arrived in the railroad yards which meant I would have to work on the morrow. Next morning I handed father my Greer County map in order that he could match the section numbers with any land he found. I asked that he try to find a quarter-section near his claims for me, and I assured him that I would be satisfied with any selection he made.

After I had unloaded the boxcar and stacked the lumber, Mr. Stephenson called me into the office. Mr. Doyle, owner of the wagon yard, was with him. Mr. Stephenson explained that bad weather and slow railroad deliveries made my work with him uncertain. He added that he realized that I needed steady work so as to earn enough for a grubstake. He explained that Mr. Doyle was there to offer me a steady job. Mr. Doyle told me he was establishing a coal business, and that he would pay me \$25.00 a month and furnish the team and wagon. I accepted this offer since it would be all clear, for Elizabeth's job took care of our board and room—we would have our grubstake now.

That night Pete Kelley came to pay me the balance due on the Colt revolver. When I turned the gun over to him, it was like parting with an old friend. Pete brought a quart of fine whiskey along for me. I told him I would keep it for Christ-

mas—the entire family was planning to get together and this gift would liven the celebration. Pete insisted that we use it for the evening, and he promised to bring me another quart for the Christmas celebration.

Delivering coal in and around Mangum was hard, dirty work, but I did not mind for it was getting me a grubstake; I became acquainted with many people; and I made lifelong friends. I was curious to learn how much the mule team could pull. On a test run in deep sand, the team pulled 3,000 pounds of coal. I hauled coal from the railroad yards to Doyle's place; from there, I delivered the fuel in smaller quantities over town, to the dugouts, and into the country. I always loaded up the night before; thus I was ready to hitch up the mules and start deliveries the next morning without delay. And by doing this, I was able to make considerably more deliveries for Mr. Doyle. I started selling small amounts to the poor people in dugouts and this built up Doyle's business to such a point that he could not get enough coal to take care of all his new customers.

We sold four types of coal: egg coal, nut coal, lump coal, and Colorado heart coal. Farmers generally bought the big lump coal. This fuel they piled handy near the dugout door, and it was heavy enough that high winds could not blow it all over their claims. In town I sold more egg coal which was used for cooking and heating. Nut coal was cheap and small, and was used chiefly in the little bachelor heaters. Colorado heart coal was hard fuel supplied for the heavy stoves in stores and business establishments. It was high priced fuel with only a limited market. After we had been in Mangum about two months, a smallpox epidemic broke out. Every house and dugout was quarantined, but since I had been vaccinated twice, I continued to deliver coal.

On the evening of December 13, father rode into town with the good news that he had found homesteads for all his children. My claim, according to the markings on the Greer County map, was one-half mile from his. Mr. Doyle gave me the next morning off, and father and I went to the Land Office. The Chief Clerk had our papers prepared, we showed him our homestead entries. These were filed, fees were paid, and I was back on the job by ten. Elizabeth and I itched to see our new farm site but we stayed on our jobs and saved every cent for our grubstake.

Mother and the children were to arrive in Mangum at 3:30 on the afternoon of December 15. Father came to town with a wagon and team to haul their effects to the farm. It was a joyous reunion and we decided to celebrate that night at Doyle's Wagon Yard. First we had a big supper. Pete Kelley and Mary Stacy were there, and Pete brought a quart of that fine whiskey and a bottle of wine. The party lasted until midnight, and a good time was had by all.

Before the folks left town next morning, my brothers and sisters filed for individual claims next to mine, thus making the cluster of homesteads a sort of family colony. I asked the Chief Clerk if two adjoining homesteads could be held by a single dugout constructed on the line separating each. I raised this question since sister and brother were unmarried at the time and lacked the money to build separate dwellings for the purpose of meeting the "improvements section" of the Homestead Act. The Chief Clerk ruled that this would satisfy the law if the dugout was sufficiently large. When I proposed a structure fourteen by thirty-two, he agreed this would be satisfactory.

Elizabeth and I had been invited to the folks' rented place for Christmas. We were allowed three days vacation by our employers. Since our team and wagon were at the folks' place, father and Paul drove into Mangum for us on December 24. Pete Kelley handed me a bottle of that fine whiskey for a Christmas present before we left town. The weather was cold but clear, we had a pleasant drive, and all seemed to augur a merry Christmas.

Eighteen people were there when we arrived, eight of them children. Everyone received some sort of gift, but we had no tree. Mother lamented that this was the first Christmas we had ever celebrated without a Christmas Eve children's program and pastor's Yule sermon. We made up for this lack as best we could and still came up with a fair children's program. Father and I talked over the prospects for getting a pastor and church established. At this time there was only one church in the county, a Baptist congregation at Mangum. There were several Catholics, including Mr. Doyle, but no church for this faith had been established as yet. To the best of our knowledge we were the only Lutherans in the county.

After the Christmas Eve celebration, we tried to find a place to sleep. The rented house had only four small rooms. All the beds were made on the floor, several slept in the kitchen, and, by good management, all eighteen persons had a bed of some sort. Our first Christmas dinner in Oklahoma Territory consisted of potatoes, cornbread, navy beans, a little meat, and plenty of good coffee. Elizabeth and I wanted so to see our homestead, but it was a day's drive to Mangum, so next day we returned to town and work.

By January 1, 1901, Mangum was crowded with homeseekers and more were coming in every day. Dugouts seemed to cover the prairie around town, and I delivered coal from before dawn until well after dark. Doyle's wife had a young baby and she needed help about the house. Doyle invited Elizabeth and me to move in with them. He agreed to board us, pay

us \$50 a month, and allow us three days off in January to enable us to visit our homestead. This proposal was agreeable, especially since it meant a grubstake sooner than we had planned.

January 16 was a big day in our lives. We would at last see our homestead. Father picked us up in my wagon and team at daylight. The road to Reed, a tiny village twelve miles west of Mangum, was fair. It had been open for three years. The going thereafter was difficult; as a matter of fact, the county map showed no roads west of Reed. Rough country, hills, and deep canyons made traveling slow. We stopped at noon on Horse Creek, fed the mules, and ate lunch. When we took the mules to water, they would not drink from the creek. On tasting it, we discovered the reason—it was bitter gyp water.

The only cut in the high bank was in deep water, and we were nearly swamped on the crossing. The hill on the west bank was so steep the mules could not pull with us in the wagon, so we all got out and pushed while the mules pulled, and finally reached the crest. The westward road from the creek was no more than a faint trail. It led to a village called Francis, its postoffice and general store patronized for the most part by local cattlemen. Shortly, when farmers came to dominate this section of Greer County, the village was renamed Vinson.

The Francis postmaster told us we were twenty-eight miles due west of Mangum. I showed him my county map, indicating the location of my claim. He advised that my location was on the Newt Abernathy Ranch, which was seven miles northwest of Francis. There was no road, he added, only a trail, and this through four miles of very rough country, although the last three miles leveled off somewhat. He assured us we could make it that night.

Following the tortuous, thin trail, just before dark we met a cowboy. We asked if he knew Sherman Kromer. He nodded, and added he would be the new settler who lived one mile west and two north. The rider warned us there was no trail, just sign. He gave us hills and other landmarks to follow. According to him, Kromer's dugout was in a deep canyon. Just before he galloped off, the cowboy declared: "You settlers are going to have trouble with the ranchers; we don't want you to come in here and take up all the range. We expect to keep it for cattle."

Following the cowboy's directions, we reached Kromer's dugout at eight. They had eaten, but Mrs. Kromer fixed us a bite. Before turning in, I unfolded the county map, and Kromer showed me the location of our claim in relation to his. We were only two miles east of our new home. Kromer did not have room for us in the dugout, so Elizabeth and I slept in the wagon.



Otto Koeltzow's threshing crew and portable cook shack.

After breakfast at Kromer's Elizabeth and I hurried to our claim. We passed a ranch house and stopped at the front gate. A man came out and I introduced myself, and explained that I had filed nearby and asked if he could direct me to the claim. He acknowledged that his name was Newt Abernathy, and that my quarter was just beyond the creek. Then he went into a tirade against homesteaders. He wanted to know why nesters were coming in, trying to farm land that never was intended to raise crops, and driving the cattlemen out of the country. I answered: "God did not make the land just for Texans and cattlemen. The Government gave this land to the farmers to cultivate and develop." And I assured him we would convert it into as fine a farming area as there was anywhere.

Abernathy retorted: "Yes, you people come in here, scratch the earth, and you'll starve to death. This land won't raise anything but grass." I repeated that we would show him. I asked him how many acres he had. He answered that he had 320 in fee, and four sections of government land on which he pastured 2,000 cattle. I asked what he would do with his cattle when additional homesteaders filed on his range. He answered that since this was free grass country, the farmers would have a difficult time.

Free grass doctrine meant little to me at the time, and not wishing to continue the argument, I told Abernathy before we drove off that since we were going to be neighbors, I hoped that we could live together in peace and help one another as neighbors should. As we crossed our property line, I halted the team. This was our land. True, it was hilly, two deep canyons cut through it, and the soil was red. But it belonged to us; no rent to pay; no landlord to plague us. On this land we would build our home, and coax from the red soil food to sustain our children.

(To be continued)