

PIONEER BIOGRAPHY  
James Bartron II

Mr. and Mrs. James Bartron II were the names of my grandparents. James Bartron II was born October 30, 1834 in Potter County, Pa., near Athens. He was married to Sarah Hulett near Winterburn.

He spent his boyhood and youth in this vicinity working on a farm and in different lumber mills. After his marriage he lived in Baltimore and also Williamsport superintending different saw mills in which fine lumber was made. Mr. and Mrs. Bartron were active in the city life of Baltimore and it was while here he was made a Knight Templar.

Hearing of obtaining land in the west by meeting certain small requirements he determined to gain some for himself and growing sons. So he left his wife and children in Waverly, New York and struck out for the west, going by rail to Bismarck. At that time the railroad extended to Dickinson. He arrived in Bismarck April 1, 1882. The trip was made by team to Coal Harbor, McLean County, sixty five miles north of Bismarck.

Five miles north of Coal Harbor this pioneer erected a log shack in township 147, section 11, range 84, and lived there alone three years. The shack was of logs and the roof of split poles and sod. All poles and logs were secured from the woods along the Missouri River which was just a few miles distant.

The family of this pioneer arrived in Bismarck in February 1885 on a cold bleak day. The ground was covered with snow and huge icicles hanging from the water wagons was quite a decided change from the mild climate of New York where green grass could be seen from under the snow, and the pioneer's family felt this change keenly.

The trip to the homestead north of Coal Harbor was made by three horses hitched to a covered wagon. The family endured intense suffering from the cold though stones were heated to keep them warm. It took several days to make the trip, driving a certain distance each day. This home to which the pioneer brought his wife, four sons and one daughter was located on the prairie where one could look miles and miles and see nothing but a rolling prairie with not a tree in sight. In order to have groves on these prairies the government gave the homesteaders a certain number of acres if they would plant tree claims. Year after year the pioneer, wife, and five children would plant small trees and the hot winds and drought would come and burn them all and not a patch of trees could be seen on any of the prairie.

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In that locality to gain a large head of horses was the ambition of each homesteader and there were always lots of cowboys to break the bronchos. The pioneer's wife often remarked that she always had more cowboys to feed than her own family. In those days it was an unwritten law that all strangers were welcome at mealtime.

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Venison was always easily secured as living so near the woods a great many deer were killed. At one time there were seven deer hanging up all dressed. There were no buffalo to be seen at this time though they were still numerous farther west near Dickinson, but their bones were found all over the prairies and Indian arrows could be found, several in a day, as these were what the Indians had killed the buffalo with. Large herds of beautiful fleet antelope could be seen but were very seldom killed as they roamed on the prairies and were very hard to get near enough to shoot them. For several summers picking up buffalo bones gave the pioneers a little money, as big and little would take a wagon and roam over the prairies picking up these white bleached bones. Then the men would take the load to Minot and sell it. Great stacks of the bones could be seen near the depot to be shipped to eastern points to be used in refining sugar. At one time the buffalo were so numerous that a very large herd of them crossed the Missouri while a steam boat was passing and stopped the steamboat. A few otter, mink and muskrats could be found in the near by creeks. Coyotes and wolves could be heard every winter night. Coyotes did not do very much damage though the dogs would be killed and eaten if they would chase the coyotes and get in a fight with them. Often young calves or colts would be taken by the wolves. The garter and blow snakes were often seen in the grass but were harmless.

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This pioneer passed away February 1916 at Leeds and is now resting in the Cooperstown cemetery.

This is written by the pioneer's grand-daughter.

Homestead certificate No. 1597, application no. 1615. Northwest quarter of section 11 in township 147 north of range 84 west of the 5th principle meridian in North Dakota containing sixty acres. Recorded 21st day of October 1890. Signed by President Benjamin Harrison, Ellen Macfarland, Asst. Sec., J. R. Conewell, Recorder.

Mrs. James Bartron died April 17, 1918, in Seattle, Washington. She was born at Athens, Pennsylvania, September 22, 1842, and married January 18, 1866.

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The winters were intensely cold and long and quantities of snow. Blizzard after blizzard. One instance was when the stock in the barn had no water for four days with the exception of some snow which was given them. Often during a blizzard they were not watered until the third day. Sometimes a rope would be attached to a person's waist or attached to the house and barn and in that way they would go to the suffering horses or cattle though this was not entirely safe as the snow was so suffocating and blinding it was not wise to venture out into it.

The fall that the pioneer and family left Coal Harbor the winter came on unexpectedly early. Just before Thanksgiving a young boy about fifteen started across the prairie with a flock of sheep to Turtle Lake. A blizzard came up the boy was frozen to death and most of the sheep were lost. Several different parties searched for his body but it could not be found. The next spring the pioneer's eldest son found parts of the body, parts that the wolves had left. Stones had to be put in the coffin so the mother would not notice the lightness of weight at the funeral.

The trading in the winter time was done by horseback. Spring was anxiously waited for as to get to town for some of the necessities. Coal and wood was easily secured from the Missouri River as there are great veins of lignite coal all along the eastern banks of the river. There is also a burning coal mine from which smoke can be seen issuing. The whole top is honeycombed where the coal has been burned. Further to the east, a distance from the river, buffalo chips were used for fuel though people would haul wood from the river going a distance of twenty miles and more.

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- \* Five miles north of Coal Harbor this pioneer erected a log shack in township 147, section 11, range 24, and lived there alone three years. The shack was of logs and the roof of split poles and sod. All poles and logs were secured from the woods along the Missouri River which was just a few miles distant.
- \* The family of this pioneer arrived in Bismarck in February 1885, on a cold bleak day. The ground was covered with snow and huge icicles hanging from the water wagons was quite a decided change from the mild climate of New York where green grass could be seen from under the snow, and the pioneer's family felt this change keenly.
- \* The trip to the homestead north of Coal Harbor was made by three horses hitched to a covered wagon. The family endured intense suffering from the cold though stoves were heated to keep them warm. It took several days to make the trip, driving a certain distance each day. This home to which the pioneer brought his wife, four sons and one daughter was located on the prairie where one could look miles and miles and see nothing but a rolling prairie with not a tree in sight. In order to have groves on these prairies the government gave the homesteaders a certain number of acres if they would plant tree claims. Year after year the pioneer, wife, and five children would plant small trees and the hot winds and drought would come and burn them all and not a patch of trees could be seen on any of the prairie.
- \* For a season or two the men worked in a small sawmill on the river and as carpenters making lumber from cottonwood which was sold to the pioneers for shacks.
- \* This pioneer was superintendent of Fort Stevenson for a while having been appointed by the Indian Agent at Fort Berthold to oversee the Indian school that was organized by the government at Fort Stevenson which the soldiers had recently abandoned.
- \* In that locality to gain a large head of horses was the ambition of each homesteader and there were always lots of cowboys to break the bronchos. The pioneer's wife often remarked that she always had more cowboys to feed than her own family. In those days it was an unwritten law that all strangers were welcome at meals.
- \* While there was an Indian school at Fort Stevenson medicine and doctors were easily gotten which made it so convenient for the settlers. Major Clifford, LeRéaux, and C. A. Burton were the other superintendents at the Fort and C. A. Hall had Fort Berthold in charge. Later the Indians--Bees and Gros Ventres--were removed to Elbow-Woods from Fort Berthold. Mr. Hall's son is still there.

\*The Indians were frequent visitors to the homestead, always begging for something to eat. The pioneer's wife, though never really afraid of them, yet had their former atrocities in her mind and would give them almost anything she had, such as loaves of bread and large pieces of pork or beef. One night a small band of Indians camped in the yard and they begged to have one of the dogs. The boys reluctantly gave the dog to the Indians and the mother of the boys asked what the Indians did with the dog. One of the boys said, "The last I saw of the dog a rope was put around its neck and there was an Indian at each end of the rope pulling." "Oh, dear," the mother said with horror. "Are they going to eat it tonight?"

\*Venison was always easily secured as living so near the woods a great many deer were killed. At one time there were seven deer hanging up all dressed. There were no buffalo to be seen at this time though they were still numerous farther west near Dickinson, but their bones were found all over the prairies and Indian arrows could be found, several in a day, as these were what the Indians had killed the buffalo with. Large herds of beautiful fleet antelope could be seen but were very seldom killed as they roamed on the prairie and were very hard to get near enough to shoot them. For several summers picking up buffalo bones gave the pioneers a little money, as big and little would take a wagon and roam over the prairie picking up these white bleached bones. Then the men would take the load to Minot and sell it. Great stacks of the bones could be seen near the depot to be shipped to eastern points to be used in refining sugar. At one time the buffalo were so numerous that a very large herd of them crossed the Missouri while a steam boat was passing and stopped the steamboat. A few otter, mink and muskrats could be found in the near by creeks. Coyotes and wolves could be heard every winter night. Coyotes did not do very much damage though the dogs would be killed and eaten if they would chase the coyotes and get in a fight with them. Often young calves or colts would be taken by the wolves. The garter and blow snakes were often seen in the grass but were harmless.

\*Lack of school was felt by this family. The school term was usually held three or four months during the winter in Coal Harbor. The children usually managed to attend sometimes driving and other times staying in town and attending.

\*Year after year crops would be planted and the hot winds would burn them up. Besides the drought they had the prairie fires to contend with. Great huge masses of flames would sweep over the prairie burning everything before it, as soon as the grass began to dry which was in very early summer. The first thought of every pioneer was to plough fire breaks around the entire farm. At first one wide strip of ploughing was made but this was found insufficient as the fires would leap over creeks, roads or these strips so two strips of ploughing were made several rods apart and the grass burned between the two strips. Then a fire was seen approaching by great leaps and bounds all hands would rush for sacks and pails of water, dousing the sacks into the water then whipping the fire until not a spark was left. Once a great fire was rushing toward the house, flames eight to ten feet high. Everything was carried out and placed near a spring. The little girl came out hugging her dolly thinking all would be well if her dolly was saved. The fire reached the fire breaks and died out.

\*The winters were intensely cold and long and quantities of snow. Blizzard after blizzard. One instance was when the stock in the barn had no water for four days with the exception of some snow which was given them. Often during a blizzard they were not watered until the third day. Sometimes a rope would be attached to a person's waist or attached

to the house and barn and in that way they could go to the suffering horses or cattle though this was not entirely safe as the snow was so suffocating and blinding it was not wise to venture out into it.

The fall that the pioneer and family left Coal Harbor the winter came on unexpectedly early. Just before Thanksgiving a young boy about fifteen started across the prairie with a flock of sheep to Turtle Lake. A blizzard came up and the boy was frozen to death and most of the sheep were lost. Several different parties searched for his body but it could not be found. The next spring the pioneer's eldest son found parts of the body, parts that the wolves had left. Stones had to be put in the coffin so the mother would not notice the lightness of weight at the funeral.

The trading in the winter time was done by horseback. Spring was anxiously waited for so as to get to town for some of the necessities. Coal and wood was easily secured from the Missouri River as there are great veins of lignite coal all along the eastern banks of the river. There is also a burning coal mine from which smoke can be seen issuing. The whole top is honeycombed where the coal has been burned. Further to the east, a distance from the river, buffalo chips were used for fuel though people would haul wood from the river going a distance of twenty miles and more.

Patrick O'Connor the nearest neighbor was about two and a half miles away. They were of Irish descent of the lower class but proved to be kind neighbors. Peter Longbelle located a year or so later about a mile northwest of the homestead.

The farm machinery was very limited as everything had either to be brought by steamboat from Bismarck or carted by team a distance of sixty five miles to Coal Harbor from Bismarck.

The family lived on the homestead five years and then moved to Coal Harbor. Here the older boys engaged in driving mail routes. One from Washburn to Fort Berthold and the other from Coal Harbor by the way of Hancock to Washburn. Each took two days to make the trip. The pioneer had a blacksmith shop and was also engaged in farming. Coal Harbor was a small place boasting of one store and hotel combined, owned by George S. Robinson, he and his wife both English, a school, and five dwelling houses, also a log building built by Mr. Robinson for the accommodation of Indians, especially during wet weather. Also here the Indians were once greatest friends. Once when there was quite a large encampment of them in town some of the older ones invited all the town to one of their dances in this log building. After everyone was in two of the large husky Indians stationed themselves in the small doorway with tomahawks in their hands and after the Indian dance they made each one pay ten cents before they could leave. One quiet afternoon when only the pioneer's wife and daughter were in the house an old Indian by the name of Texas Joe walked into the house making himself perfectly at home. Soon he began to sharpen a butcher knife and a razor, the more he sharpened them the more nervous the pioneer's wife became. Finally the little girl ran over to the neighbors but before anyone returned the Indian quietly put them away and left.

While in Coal Harbor many were the various duties the pioneer and his wife had to perform. George S. Robinson lost their third child, a tiny baby. The pioneer made a little coffin out of rough lumber planing them as best he could. His wife lined it with cotton and white material and the baby was laid in it and buried a short distance from town. The father pronouncing a few words of benediction over the grave. The doctor lived twenty five miles away at Washburn and once when the pioneer's wife was very sick one of her sons rode horseback all one



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- night to go to Washburn and back to obtain medicine.
- After eight years residence in Coal Harbor the family moved to Bismarck to assure an education to the three younger children.
- The descendants of the pioneer are Herbert Bartron, Bowdoin, Mont., James Bartron, Neche, N. Dak., Verton Bartron, Douglas, N. Dak., Artley Bartron, Seattle, Washington, and Mrs. Walter J. Houghton, Cooperstown, N. Dak.
- This pioneer passed away February 1918 at Leeds and is now resting in the Cooperstown cemetery.
- This is written by the pioneer's grand-daughter.
- Homestead certificate No. 1527, application No. 1615. Northwest quarter of section 11 in township 147 north of range 84 west of the 5th principle meridian in North Dakota containing sixty acres. Recorded 21st day of October 1896. Signed by President Benjamin Harrison, Ellen Macfarland, Asst. Sec., J. F. Conewell, Recorder.
- Mrs. James Bartron died April 17, 1918 in Seattle Washington. She was born at Athens, Pennsylvania, September 23, 1842, and married January 13, 1863.

--Jess Bartron