

Mrs. Parleville

PIONEER STORY OF MRS. GEORGE NEWBERRY

It was in early spring (April 1885) when we arrived in North Dakota. I was born in Ontario, Canada, and accustomed to the wooded areas. I was transplanted within a week to the prairie vastness of Dakota Territory.

We came as far as Sanborn by rail but the branch not being completed to Cooperstown we took the stage from Sanborn to Dazey in a dreary, drizzling rain. At Dazey we were lodged with home of a Scandinavian family who knew only their own native language which was strangely unfamiliar to us and seemed a compound of threats and derision. Bewildered and weary and unable to comprehend a word they said, we were almost immediately to find out how more than kind our hosts could be for it was their team which carried our little group over the miles from Dazey to Cooperstown, our destination. Near the present town of Hannaford we were obliged to ford Bald Hill Creek whose swollen waters crept up into the box of our wagon and over the backs of the faithful horses.

At Sanborn we had discovered that, through an oversight, our clothing and household goods were being held in Chicago until they should be re-checked. It was six weeks before they finally arrived. This complicated matters for the mother of the family for we had brought with us just the clothing we thought needed for the journey and were unprepared for this contingency.

Arriving at Cooperstown we found reserved for our use, two claim shanties on opposite sides of a road. One served as living rooms; the other for sleeping quarters and in the latter we awakened one morning to find ourselves blanketed in snow which had blown in through the cracks in the wall during the night.

Everything in the new environment, even that experience, was of interest. One morning I remember of seeing Twenty-one Four-mule breaking outfits start out together to turn over the prairie land owned by Mr. R.C. Cooper for whom our town (Cooperstown) was named. To me, accustomed to a one man team in the fields, that was an amazing sight.

In the first year we were anxious to make the most of our land rights and so my husband filed on a claim. Leaving the other children with friends in town he and my brother loaded up a small stove and other necessary household effects and with the two smaller children and me set out by ox team for our cabin. Scarcely had we arrived when a band of men rode up and with hootings and much shooting of firearms dashed round and round our cabin shanty. I was terrified. My husband and brother went out to ascertain the cause of this visitation and were told the claim had previously been filed on by one of the men in the party. All our efforts to arrive at an amicable settlement failed and their disturbances continued until, thoroughly worn out and discouraged, we packed our goods, took down the little stove which had just been set up, and wended our weary way back to town. That was the extent of our attempt to farm in Dakota. Schools were not yet established on the prairie; work was to be had in town where our children could have the privilege of attending a good school under the instruction of those who proved to be friends and advisors for many years, and this seemed the only way in which we could assure them these contacts.

In the fall of that first year we moved from the shanties into a granary belonging to Mr. R.C. Cooper. About that time the question of a site for the county court house arose and he agreed if the county would build it where he suggested (on the present site) he would tear down the old granary which was located near by.

His offer was accepted. The granary had been painted, papered, and divided by partitions into rooms making a cozy little home but with the prospect of its being torn down we decided it was best for us to build a little home for ourselves, and so it happened that before this home was completed the granary was being torn down and one day the children and I sat out on the grass by our new home, with our furniture beside us, waiting until the roof was put on so we might move in. That was our home for thirty-seven years.

I was never homesick after coming to Dakota, but the longing for the trees and flowers never ceased. This hanger was not confined to me alone, as was later proved by the number of trees planted and the care expended to keep them alive. One day our son, G.S. Newberry, then a boy, found a little cottonwood twig which he brought home and planted in our back yard. With the quick response of that variety it rooted and in a few years developed into a good sized tree. So far as I know, that was the first tree ever planted in Cooperstown.

Lacking, too, were the church spires of the settled communities; quite in evidence were the saloons which followed with the opening of the new country. But worship we must--so it happened one day, for lack of a better place, we held our service in a saloon, the bottles and kegs mute witnesses of the character of the place.

Over the prairie which had been the home of the roving herds of buffalo were piles of their bleaching bones and horns. The bones had commercial value for fertilizing purposes and were hauled into town in loads to be shipped away. Many homes were decorated with the horns of the animal, scraped and polished until they shone like ebony.

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And always there was the surprise of the quick change of season. One August the farmers worked frenziedly building bonfires to keep away the frost which threatened the ripening grain. In winter the blizzards exacted their toll but the advent of spring always brought renewed hope and courage and when the fields were again carrying their golden sea of grain we thrilled to their beauty.

And so the new land became-and still is- HOME.

On Armistice Day, November 11, 1920, my husband and I -by this time alone in the home in Cooperstown- moved to Jamestown that we might be closer to our children, some of whom were living in that city and others nearby. On March 13th, 1923 we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary, and this was our first family reunion for two weeks later our daughter Minnie (Mrs. G.E. Macconnel) passed away. On October 15th, 1926 my husband found release from a long illness. Of the eight children born to us, six are living; Nell, (Mrs. R.C. Hazard) in Bismarck, N.D.; Mabel, (Mrs. A.L. Bowden) in Seattle, Washington; Fan, (Mrs. J.E. Christenson) in Jamestown, N. Dakota; Ethel, making her home with us; George S., our oldest son, married and living in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Frank W., our second son, married and living in Jamestown, N. Dakota. I have 11 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

Sometimes when the automobiles are rolling over the splendid highways and the airplanes are zooming overhead, in retrospect I go back to the days of the ox-team, the spread of the unbroken prairie -the priceless friendships made in those early days, many retained until the present time-and am proud to feel that even in so small a sense we have been Dakota pioneers.

Bibliography: Mrs. George S. Newberry
Jamestown, N.D.