

Go Sisters, Pioneers Of Williston, On Hand To Greet Today's Oil Pioneers

WILLISTON, N. D. — Two former Fargoans can tell a story of pioneering days in Williston—a story of early pioneers who brought changes in this northwest corner of the state climaxed by modern pioneers of the oil industry.

Mrs. William Monroe and Mrs. Carmon Jaynes are daughters of



Mrs. Jaynes Mrs. Monroe

the late Rev. A. H. Nelson, who brought his family from Fargo in 1891 to become Williston's first minister. The Rev. Mr. Nelson was a Congregational missionary in the Fargo area who became pastor of a Community Church in Williston.

Mrs. Jaynes (Grace) admits her memories of those early days in Williston don't begin for several years because she was only 3. But Mrs. Monroe (Clara) viewed their arrival in Williston through the wide eyes of a nine year old miss.

You would have been wide-eyed too. The stockade built for an anticipated Indian uprising still stood. Indians were all around and the squaws sawed wood for use in cooking and heating the homes.

"That North Dakota would ever have coal, let alone oil, certainly was not in anyone's dreams those days," Mrs. Monroe said.

The Rev. Mr. Nelson died in February of 1892 and his wife carried on the work of the church until a student pastor arrived.

There was no doctor and "Grandma Gibbs" was the combined nurse and general dispenser of good will and pills.

Mrs. Monroe recalls vividly an Indian woman who slashed her arm to exhibit her suffering at the death of Mrs. Monroe's father.

The first school was in Heffernan's livery barn and the next

school in a granary which the children called the Black Maria because it was covered with tar paper. It also was the church.

Houses of logs were covered with sod roofs which proved to be drippy ceilings after heavy rains. Both women remember people using umbrellas inside the houses.

"Of course there was a rosy side to the picture," they agree, "for often the roofs would be blooming with flowers."

A livery stable was given by a saloon keeper to the minister for their first home. Mrs. Monroe says their little family joke centered about the story of the Nativity. "We used to say we were just like the Christ Child. Our only home was a stable."

Many are the names recalled of people who in all sense were the "first families" of Williston. Among them the Leonhardys, the Newells, the Newtons, Schumachers, Heffernans, Snyders, H. Monroes, Bells, Metzgars, Brueggers, Freemans, Zahls, Burgesses, Barnfathers, Jess Hill, Tom Shea, F. M. Harvey, H. V. Smith, Grant Conley, and Jacks.

Mrs. F. L. Barnfather, now of

Seattle, originated an Old Settlers picnic many years ago and returns year after year for the annual event in August. She was 96 last summer.

Barnfather, Hill, Shea, Conley and Smith were railroad men coming to Williston when the railroad went through, Mrs. Monroe recalls. H. V. Smith, in his 80's, is still active in real estate.

Most of these families were in Williston before 1890. The Brueggers, Metzgars and Newtons lived in tents until their first real houses of logs could be built.

From the memories of these pioneering days when broad stretches of this part of the state were grazing lands for sheep and cattle, these two daughters of pioneers turn to another pioneering era.

New settlers in Williston. A new industry. A city that suddenly finds unthought of problems.

"They're fine people," Mrs. Monroe and Mrs. Jaynes say of the oil families. "They are a part of our churches. Their children are in our schools. Old boundaries of our city have been pushed out. It is interesting to watch it all and be a part of it."

