

Thomas Ross

As I have been asked to write my autobiography, will start by saying I am the son of Royal Daniel Ross and Harriett Eaton Ross, born March 9, 1861 on a farm about four miles from Quitman, Mo. The farm had eighty-five acres--seventy acres of prairie land and fifteen acres of timber in a grove of 400 acres.

The place being so close to the Kansas line, it was infested with the lawless elements from both sides and both parties as soon as the Civil War started, so that the lines were distinctly drawn.

The grove mentioned above made a refuge where father and E.J. Ross (when he was there) could take their horses at night and watch them, leaving the women and children at the house.

There was no market for what they raised. Butter was 5¢ a pound; eggs from 2½¢ to 4¢ a doz. After two years of that with no prospect of ever being better, the Ross' sold out and moved to Council Bluff, Iowa, about 90 miles distant. I do not know the exact time of their leaving, but it was after the election of 1862. The polls at that election were guarded by U.S. troops and only one democratic vote was allowed to be cast. E.J. Ross said he would vote the Dem. ticket or die in his tracks. They allowed him to vote but very likely the ballot was thrown out later.

Father (R.D. Ross) went back for a second load of goods. He tied the team to a cottonwood tree back of the house and sat by the open chamber window with a double barreled shotgun loaded with buckshot across his lap, and beside his chair a long straight corn knife. It was a moonlight night; a party came there but as they saw no horses in the stable lot, they did not look back of the house; as father's team was quiet, they left.

E.J. Ross clerked in a hotel in Council Bluffs that winter of

1862-63, while father went into a photo gallery and partially learned photography. June 15, 1863, father, mother, and I started for Eugene City, Oregon. The regular Oregon train had gone the first of June and as we could not overtake them, we had to go to the "Norther Mines" in East Idaho territory. A few days after we arrived at Bannick, Mother was taken with mountain fever. She died on the 28th of Oct. 1863. I also had mountain fever and came pretty near going.

Father went to Salt Lake City that fall driving a yoke of oxen for Mr. Homes. He reached the first Mormon settlements on Bear river on Jan. 1, 1864, that day being known all over the U.S. as "The cold New Year".

When father left for Salt Lake, he left me with a woman who he supposed to be the wife of "Buck Stenson". Father never learned any different but I found out a few years ago that she was his (Buck Stenson) mistress. However, I lived, and father, after working in the gallery of Savage and Ottinger came back to Bannack and took me to Salt Lake City, the fall of 1864.

Father worked at photography and teaching school till the Union and Central Pacific lines met.

I recall two incidents in photography which might be of interest to people now. The first father told me, and the second I know about.

As quite common then, a woman wanted the picture of her children taken in a group. When she saw the first picture she would not have that. One showed only one ear; she said her children all had two ears. The second incident: We had a big dish of nice ripe strawberries all ready to eat and a six-foot Indian with his squaw and papoose came in. Father asked them to have strawberries with us. The squaw stood the papoose up against the wall and sat down with us. One of father's samples was a picture of an Indian. John, as he was called, wanted his

picture, so father told him to come after so many sleeps (nights).

Father took John's picture and put it in a case and gave it to him. The Indian put it in the pocket of his buckskin shirt next to his heart. About a year later when another boy and I were playing in a hallway, someone knocked; I said "come in," and there stood a six foot Indian with feathers in his hair and wearing a buffalo robe. We were both scared stiff, till he reached and got his picture. Then I would not have been afraid to go anywhere with him.

There are two occurrences I recall when I was about seven years old. The first I was very nearly drowned in a mill race. The next I remember because so many people teased me about it. I took the daughter of a Mormon Bishop to a dance. I went to sleep and had to be carried home. Whether the young lady had to be carried home, Deponent-Sayeth Not.

In the summer of 1869, Father started east on the railroad, making his first stop at Weber, taking pictures in a tent. While there, I attended school a short time. At that time there were two passenger trains daily--an Express train and an "Emigrant train". A bunch of boys always went the latter and sold the passengers milk at fifteen cents for a pint cupfull. I found a place where I could buy milk at twenty cents per quart which left five cents a cup profit. I think I had only one cup but filled that till my milk was gone.

The trains all stopped there for water so we had quite a lot of time. I had a gold mine till father found out about it and stopped my milk at the source. I showed my Scotch ancestry by giving by profits to father to keep. He kept it all right.

We went from Weber to Waksotch; Waksotck has an elevation of 6800 feet and it took five minutes to boil eggs very soft. While at Waksotch, a stranger gave me a fifteen cent "shinplaster" (fractional paper currency) to buy an apple. I gave father the money and did with

out the apple.

From Waksotch we went to Coalville, a place built on top of a coal mine. A widow named Uorton made me an over-coat. Believe me it was some coat--heavy gray woolen goods and about three sizes too big. While there, some one unknown to us tried to burn our tent but did not succeed. Early in Dec. 1839, we took the N.P. train at Echo, and started for Hudson, Michigan. Father could only get a ticket as far as Omaha. There was a cousin on mother's in Omaha and one in Council Bluff. We had to wait five days before our baggage got to Omaha. I was eight years old but short, so father did not buy a ticket for me. I recollect only one of the conductors--a fat, good natured man, who was always going to throw me off the train C. R. and P. (?)

We got into Chicago in the forenoon and could not leave till 9 p.m. About dusk we went into a place, kept by a woman, where father bought something we could eat on the train--The Lake Shore and Michigan Southern R.R. We arrived at Hudson the next morning just about daylight, Dec. 19, 1839. Father asked the way to Rollin Village about five miles away and we started out on foot. A little before we got to Grandfather's we saw a man ride up to the barn on a white horse, who father said looked like Grandfather. I wanted to run then but he kept me back. Grandfather let "Topsy" go into the stall and came out to meet us. When Topsy heard voices she came ojt of the barn on a run with ears back and mouth wide open. He had to put her in the stall and tie her before he could shake hands with us. Topsy was a very peculiar piece of horseflesh. She had been teased as a colt and abused until Grandfather bought her. He was so good to her that she would not let any one near her when he was around.

Grandmother died in 1868 and my Aunt was housekeeper; father and I both did ample justice to her cooking. That winter of 1869-70 I

had intermitent fever and came pretty near passing out but Grandfather pulled me through. Soon after we went to Rollin, my Aunt had a suit made for me with a cap to match which made a very different looking boy of me.

Grandfather moved in 1870 to Rome Center into the house of a widow named Douling. 1871 he married the widow. In Jan. 1873, her son, Enoch Douling married my Aunt. They had two children, a girl and a boy. Both are now living in Toledo, Ohio. After we moved to Rome Center, Enoch became very attentive to his mother, likewise my Aunt. When he was there in the evenings, we would bring up a milk pan full of apples. Grandfather, Grandmother and my aunt ate each one and Enoch and I cleaned the pan. As he weighed about 200 I can see where he stored them. But me, I must have had a rubber stomach. If I could eat half as much now, I'd be happy. They say every dog has his day. I guess I've had mine and about all I can do is to wait for the time when I can join my ancestors.

The first year and a half that we were in Rome, I suffered with ague (chills and fever) so that I could not go to school. Grandfather gave me quinine galore in liquid form. Grandmother kept telling me that eggs and vinegar would cure ague. I finally told her if she would fix me up a dose I would take it. She beat three eggs in half a pint of strong cider vinegar. I swallowed it and have never had ague since.

In 1872 I attended a three months spring term of school in the "Little Red Schoolhouse". The summer I attended a four months term in that. The teacher they hired died during the Christmas holidays so another finished the term. Just before the term closed, I was eleven years old and I had the equivalent of about twelve months schooling in four different places under seven teachers. After school closed that

spring, I left my grandfather in Rome and went to Utah, Adams, nineteen miles distance and stayed there three years and had about thirty months schooling. That was the last. I worked out on farms till the spring of 1881 when we came to Dakota territory.

We arrived in Valley City at 11:40 A.M. April 28, 1881. We went to the "Valley City House" and I had a job almost before I started to eat dinner, tending mason for Andrew Coddington at \$1.75 per day. In 1890 I went to Valley City and had a job at \$2.50 per day within half an hour after getting there on my wheels from Cooperstown. In 1881-2 a man couldn't run fast enough to catch a job.

Ross "It was a common sight in the days of 1862 and 1863 to see people driving around the country with a team of oxen and a prairie schooner," says Mr Tomas C. Ross, who has lived in North Dakota for 48 years.

"In the year of '63 when my father and I were in Bannit Montana, there was a large company of men who were called road agents but are known now as highway men. ~~the~~ Zane Gray refers to these men in his book The Heritage of the Desert. A man by the name of Plummer^m was a leader of this outlaw gang and was the sheriff of the county. When a schooner was held up, the sheriff with his men would go out and track down the robbers, take the gold and then report that the men had escaped.

"There were 40 men included in the gang, under Plummers leadership. It was a common occurrence for these men to go out and murder a man. At one time after this group had killed a man a posse of law abiding men tracked down the gang and were fortunate enough to catch the secretary of the gang and so got the names of all the members of the Company. The members were rounded up and all but two of them were hung. Plummer was the first to be hung and the deputy who was known as Stinston was second.

"One of the men who escaped the hanging was known as ^{Long} ~~Little~~ John. This man came to Cooperstown, and after living here for a short time attempted to kill a clerk^{named Cushman} working in the hotel, ^{then} called the Arcade. He was later hanged. The quick action of Cushman with his guns is what saved his life."

Mr. Ross was born in Nodaway county Illinois, on March 9, 1861.

When Mr. Ross was but two years old, his father moved from Nodaway to Council Bluffs Iowa. The Ross family rode in a prairie schooner pulled by a team of horses. In June of the same year, Bayal Ross the father of Mr. Ross, who had the moving nature, started with a team of horses

~~to drive~~ ^{Driving} to Bannit, Montana. They got only part way when some Indians stole one of the horses so Mr. Ross had to resort to the ox teams. Royal Ross lived at Bannit for about a year and then left for Salt Lake City, Utah. Previous to this time Mrs Royal Ross died. Mr Ross left Thomas with some people known by the name of "Buck" Stintson. Stintson was hanged for defrauding the law and so Mrs. Stintson gave Thomas to another woman to keep. When Royal Ross returned to Bannit after one of the severest winters in the United States, which was in the year 1863, he found Thomas with the other woman.

Royal Ross took Thomas back to Salt Lake City where they lived until December, 1869. The year that the Union Pacific railroad was finished, they went to Michigan. In order that they could get to Michigan by the train road it was necessary for Mr. Ross to first buy the ticket at Coalville Utah to Echo City, there they bought the ticket to Omaha. Here they had to wait ~~for~~ five days for the baggage to get there. From here they took the train to Chicago, and then took the Rock Island Pacific railroad to Hudson, Michigan.

Living in Michigan until 1881, the Rosses came to Valley City, North Dakota on April 28, 1881. Here they worked on a farm owned by Frank Rice. The next winter they started a picture gallery in Tower City, since Royal had received some training along this line.

"On the seventeenth of March 1883, we had one of the worst blizzards in the history of North Dakota. A passenger train was stuck in the snow on the east side of Valley City, while about a mile behind this a freight train was stuck. The trains were finally dug out and when they got into the city the next night they were exactly 24 hours late." said Mr Thomas Ross.

The two Rosses filed homesteads in Greenville township, which is now called Steele county, in the year '82. Mr. Ross walked from Tower City carrying 75 ~~bands~~ bands of provisions for a distance of 45 miles.

In order ~~that~~ that he wouldn't get lost it was necessary for him to follow the Siblee trail past Luvenne, and then follow the section line.

There was so much snow that only two farms could be seen between Siblee and ~~Tower City~~ the honestead.

When the Mardell boom came in 1884, Mr. Ross moved to the ~~site~~ site of Mardell. It was thought at that time that the place would become the county seat of Griggs County. At that time E. H. Steele wanted Hope to be the county seat, while R. C. Cooper wanted Cooperstown. The parts were divided up and Hope was made the county seat of Steele county and Cooperstown of Griggs county, while Mardell, ~~was~~ which was right on the line was anneliated.

Mr. Ross planted his first crop in 1886, and had to have it thra~~sh~~shed by horse power. He hauled the wheat 17 miles to Hope where he received from ~~50~~ 50 to 60 cents a bushel. Because of the poor roads and the difficulty of crossing the river, Mr. Ross was unable to bring the grain to Cooperstown.

In recalling some of the trials of settling the county seat problem, Mr Ross told of an ~~and~~ incident which happened in Cooperstown. The records which had to do with the county seat being placed in Cooperstown, were being kept in a small shack which was located about ^{where} (where the present William Hammer farm is now) Three men were guarding the papers but were sleeping when some masked men came over from Hope to steal the papers. They used a log as a ram rod and forced the door of the shack. They then held up the three men, stole the papers and disappeared

"Some people gathered Buffalo bones for a living", said Mr. Ross.
"I do not remember seeing any live Buffalo on the plains but there used to be a few Antelope around here and one man killed a Moose in January, 1883, close to Luverne."

Relating incidents about the weather, Mr. Ross told of one winter morning when he was staying with another man in a shack, he awoke and found four inches of snow on ~~the~~ top of the bed. He had to dig his way out of the house and then dig down through the hay shute to feed the stock. Two farmers were snowed in so tight that they were unable to get to their barns until four days after the storm. The mules were packed in solid in their stalls with the snow. This storm had been predicted by a Canadian weather prophet named Wiggins. ~~The~~ man had written to President Chester Arthur and warned him to have all ships safe in harbor, which he did. *This storm was called "Wiggins's big storm".*

to Miss Mary McCall
Mr. Ross moved to Riverside township in 1894, and was married in March 1896. He stayed in this place until 1909, after which he moved to Cooperstown, He worked ~~working~~ nights in the winter time as janitor of the high school buildings, until 1919. After ~~that~~ he was janitor for four years. Mr. Ross was Janitor of the high school through the term of the ~~aka~~ graduated class of 1923.

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