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Mr. C

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(Arapaho's "poet laureate")

By Marj McAlister

I first "met" Mr. C., as I liked to call him, about fifteen years ago. He was "introduced" to me by a mutual friend. From then on, we enjoyed a lively correspondence until the time of his death two years ago at age 98.

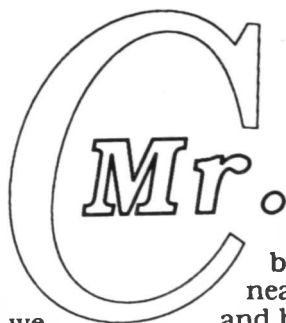
R. R. Chapman was one of the few remaining pioneers who helped to shape our state. Last year was the one hundredth anniversary of his birth. When he was 11, he, his parents, and his older brother came to the Cheyenne-Arapaho country from Kansas in a covered wagon in 1898. They settled on a homestead near Arapaho. From the first, young Dick carefully observed his environment and later recorded it.

To read these stories is to feel how it must have been to live in Oklahoma Territory at the time it was settled. He wrote about coyotes, rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, longhorns, and buffalo; of family, neighbors, cattlemen, sodbusters, and outlaws. For years he wrote once a week for the *ARAPAHO NEWS* and for the *CLINTON NEWS*. His work appeared in almost every issue of *WESTVIEW* and still does—two years after he is gone. He wrote, "They seem to like most of my stuff; I must have them badly fooled."

As a young man R. R. was a waddy. He wandered for a few years and then came back to Arapaho. He farmed and reared a family, living on the family homestead. His daughter Lucille lives there now.

He spent his later years in a little house in town, reading and writing historical pieces as well as poetry. His health wasn't good as time went on. As he expressed it, "Both my ears and eyes are gone." He had other health problems too. He was a spunky little man who protested every ailment. He reminded me of the Gene Fowler title *DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT*.

Dick was a survivor. Perhaps the best recipe for being a survivor is to be salty and peppery with a dash of cayenne. This he was, but the gentle side came out in his poetry. He penned some dainty love lyrics and humorous verses as well as ballads. This from a person who spent only four years in the one-room school, District No. 3, near Arapaho.



I drove out to see Mr. C. a few years ago. He was concerned that I was a "city lady" and would be disappointed with him and his modest abode. I tried to dispel his apprehension. We had a nice visit, but I had difficulty dealing with his near total deafness. But we managed and he was in his element displaying his album and telling about his family.

The relatives had a birthday party for him in June, 1986 with thirty-five people present. He wrote of it with joy and appreciation, wishing a few more might have been able to attend. He had a strong, warm feeling for these family members and corresponded with many of them. He died six months after the family reunion.

One of the Chapman poems is a classic; it strikes a chord with the reader:

DISOBEDIENT

The Lord is my shepherd—I shall not want, But I want many things I need not.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, But I stay not on the right pathway.

He leadeth me beside the still waters, But I dare to wade into the breakers and dangerous places.

He restoreth my soul But I befoul it again and again.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, But I choose my own way and fall by the wayside.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me But I wander into evil places and risk my very soul.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over, But I am not pleased with thy bounty and seek after strange things.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. But only by the grace of God shall I escape death And live to see His blessed face.