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On the Banks of the Cimarron / Revisited

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ON THE BANKS OF THE CIMARRON

By *Bessie Holland Heck*

Mary Jane sat her horse at the 98th meridian,
Wedged among thousands waiting
the signal to
Run for free land.

"Unassigned Lands," they called it,
Meaning the United States Government
Hadn't allotted it to any Indian tribe.

A southwest wind blew her
Golden hair across her face,
Lifted red dirt that
Gritted in her teeth.

The noisy camp hushed.
Mary Jane tensed, Heart pounding.

April 22, 1889. Noon!
Cracks of pistol fire along the line
Turned calm to crashing thunder.

Mary Jane shot forward on her steed,
Stopped in a blossoming wild plum
thicket, Claimed 160 acres of virgin land
On the banks of the Cimarron River.

She met her claim neighbor,
Rangy, rock-jawed Jonathan,
Took his name in holy matrimony.

Jonathan planted;
Mary Jane watered.
They raised wheat, cattle, sorghum cane,
Four sons, three daughters.

They loved, laughed, lost, weathered
Floods, tornadoes, drought, blizzards.
Outwitted wolves, coyotes, rattlesnakes.
Helped build a church, a school,
A state called Oklahoma.

Mary Jane taught school,
The Ten Commandments,
Music.

They drilled for water; got oil.
Built a mansion over the dugout in which
Mary Jane had birthed nine.

(Two had died.)

The dugout became a cellar filled with
Vegetables, fruits, wild plum jelly.
(The plums produced plentifully
On the banks of the Cimarron.)

Old age came to Mary Jane and Jonathan
As surely as it comes to
All who live long enough.

A southwest April wind blew
Mary Jane's silver hair
Across her faded eyes as
She buried Jonathan in
The courtyard over the hill—
The one they had helped build.

Jonathan slept man's' long sleep
Near his first and last Human seed.

A week later Mary Jane was laid to rest
Beside her man—the man she had met
long ago...
On the banks of the Cimarron. *

(BESSIE HOLLAND HECK of Tulsa is author of several books for children. She works faithfully as vice-president of the Oklahoma Writers' Federation, Inc.)

REVISITED

By *Michael G. Smith*

*Though standing silent in the grass You
speak often to me through glass,
Which then young eyes peered from,
Broken boards, mortar, and some
Fragments of once precious toys
Reconstructed in memory
amid noise
Of prairie wind caressing your walls
And a dead child's whispers in your halls.
You once glowed through rainy night
And gave place of rest from plight
That still seems so. **

(MICHAEL G. SMITH, whose first WESTVIEW submission appears in this issue, is an attorney in Ada.)