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Homestead

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ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY KAISER

Home Stead

On the eleventh of October 1898 our immediate family consisting of James and Clara Chapman, a son Avery, sister Nellie, youngest son Paul and myself - Richard R. and accompanied by friends Mr and Mrs Carl Eads a young married couple of one day left northern Kansas on our way to Oklahoma Territory intending to settle on homesteads in Custer County

HAND LETTERING BY TONI TAYLOR



which my father, and Carl Eads had filed on the previous summer.

We arrived at the elder Eads homestead (Carl Eads father) just south of the partially built town of Weatherford on or about the second of November 1898 just as the work train and crew were entering the eastern side of the new town of Weatherford. Our wagon train had consisted of three wagons, seven head of horses, eight people and one yellow dog.

The Father Mother and two older brothers of Carl Eads

Home' Stead

..... had come down and filed on land a year or two before just south of the Weatherford town-site. The northern half of the Eads place was bought by the city of Weatherford because of having several relatives in and about the town, so that was the end of their long overland trip.

The town was named, of course, in honor of an old settler and U. S. marshall by the name of Bill Weatherford.

Passenger service was not regular into Weatherford until the spring of 1899. After resting our teams and visiting for a day or two, we went on west another 20 miles farther to our claim, which was 9 miles southwest of Arapaho, the county seat, and oldest town in Custer County.

Father had made arrangements with an old ex-Union soldier to make his place our headquarters until we could construct living quarters on our homestead. His domicile consisted of a large dugout with a sheetiron roof, dug near a canyon which had an everflowing spring of gypsy water in it.

A dugout was cool in summer and easily warmed in cold weather. Brother Avery went to work on the excavation for our dugout while one of the wagons was unloaded and Dad went back to the railroad after lumber, windows, shingles, and one door as we were to have what was termed a half-dugout — four feet underground with the upper part made of pine lumber, a shingle roof, and four half windows.

Winter was upon us before the dugout was finished, but we moved in and made use of it while it was being finished. A shelter was needed for the horses and the cow. It was constructed in the canyon bank of willow poles with blue stem hay for a roof.

And a well was also a must as all the water we used had to be hauled. The water used for cooking was hauled on a sled in two barrels from a small soft-water spring on the north slope of a large red hill high above the

prairie. That unusual spring went dry a few years later and has never flowed a drop of water since that time about 75 years ago.

The overjet and cover from one wagon were set on blocks near the house; brother Avery and I slept in it during the first winter in the territory. If there was any special inconvenience in that arrangement, it has been forgotten or forgiven many years ago.

Our only neighbor within a mile was a large family named Hill; they lived in two adjoining all-dirt dugouts. There was a door in each one but not a pane of glass in either one; the only light was what came through an open door. We children went to a one-room school two miles from our homestead. Some children came five miles, but they had to ride. The number of students was between 35 and 40 ranging in age from 5 to 18.

The teacher received \$35.00 a month and was his own janitor except for carrying drinking water, which was brought from a well in a pasture a quarter-mile away.

Our most numerous neighbors were the night-singing coyote and an occasional bobcat. Both were probably on the prowl after the very numerous quail and prairie chickens roosting in the sumac, dogwood thickets, and horse-high blue-stem grass on the hillsides.

There were no more dangerous animals than the longhorned cattle that roamed the remaining areas of grassland, sometimes playing havoc with the settlers' cornfields in the redlands of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. As to the Indians, they were very good neighbors so far as any trouble was concerned as they tended strictly to their own business and molested no one. They lived almost exclusively in tepee camps along the Washita River and usually moved to higher ground during the mid-summer to escape the heat, mosquitoes, and other insects.

They were never beggars, to my knowledge, and the timber on their

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allotments supplied many a family with firewood and posts for which they paid the Indians little or nothing.

Prairie fires were always to be dreaded and could be very dangerous, but high water and flashfloods on creeks and rivers were much more destructive and caused more property damage to property and loss of life to both livestock and human beings — as well as being very unpredictable.

Trouble between the cattlemen and settlers was not uncommon before the turn of the century and often caused serious injury or death to someone involved in the disagreement before being brought to an end. This trouble was mostly caused when wire fences were erected to protect crops and thereby restricted the open range for the ranchers' cattle and horses.

People from many different states were eventually to come to the area. Most were real farmers of experience, while some were only "would-be" farmers from some town or city; and they knew little or nothing about farming, especially in a raw new land. Some were mere speculators who intended to stay only long enough to prove up on their claim, sell out, and go back home — wherever that might be. Others stayed only a year or so and left broke and badly disillusioned.

Some families were hard to become friends with as they still had the Civil War on their minds and had never surrendered. They felt very bitter over the war most of their lives; but as the younger generations became acquainted, this animosity eventually disappeared. ■

■ R. R. Chapman

THE UNSULLIED WORLD

A desolate war-weary world
lies barren beneath a blazing
sun that scorches life from the land.
Many wheels of battle have packed
the ground into a cement-hard
wasteland that cannot soak up the
pounding rain from the savage clouds
raging so fiercely over all.
Pillaged top-soil flows into streams
advancing on their winding way
toward the sea's filthy cesspool.

But it was not always this way.

Long ago God entrusted His
Creation to the human race.
The soil was rich and plant growth
lush.
The air was pure and water clear
and songs of birds enhanced the peace
that seemed to settle everywhere.
The humans and animals lived
in a perfect environment
but through the years man's onerous
deeds destroyed most of the beauty
of a world that was unsullied.