

## FARM LIFE IN LOGAN COUNTY IN OKLAHOMA TERRITORY

*By Ina Lee Robinson\**

It was in April, 1891. that my mother with three small children left her native home in Leavenworth County Kansas and came to Oklahoma to join father.<sup>1</sup> He had come two months before and bought a claim twelve miles southwest of Guthrie. It is needless to say that mother rather reluctantly left her relatives and friends to enter a new life in a strange and new land. She had heard many stories about centipedes and tarantulas, and tales about Indians in Oklahoma.

From Leavenworth it was an all-day ride to Guthrie with changes to be made at Holiday and Newton. Soon after Mother left Holiday she met some men on the train who were also going to Guthrie. They were surveyors on their way to the Sac and Fox country. Mother always felt very grateful to these

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\* Miss Ina Lee Robinson of Oklahoma City is now retired after teaching in the Oklahoma City public schools for nearly thirty-four years. She has here contributed the story of her childhood days on the family farm in Oklahoma Territory through the interests of the Pioneer Teacher Committee of Delta Kappa Gamma Society (women teachers' professional group), with Mrs. Lavina Dennis, Chairman of the Committee. Miss Robinson came as a small child from her native state of Kansas, with her parents who settled on a claim in Logan County. She attended the district school of her community, graduated from Logan County High School in 1907, and was a teacher in the Logan County schools before she came to Oklahoma City in 1920. She holds a B. S. degree from the University of Oklahoma and the M. A. degree from Teachers' College, Columbia University, New York City. She is a member of the First Christian Church of Oklahoma City, Delta Kappa Gamma, American Association of University Women and a number of other professional organizations.—Ed.

<sup>1</sup> My parents were Pizarro Robinson and Elizabeth Deger Robinson. Father was born in 1855 near Frankfort, Kentucky of Scotch-Irish parentage. He was the second of three children born to Uriah and Nancy Robinson. His father fought in the Mexican War. He read Spanish history and called his two sons, Alonzo and Pizarro. (Father received the name of the "nefarious conquerer of Peru.") Both parents died before he was nine years old and he lived with an uncle for several years. While still in his teens he came with his brother and sister to Kansas where they lived on a farm. The years 1879 and 1880, my father spent near Leadville, Colorado prospecting for gold.

Mother was born in Leavenworth, Kansas of German parents. Her mother was born in Baden, Baden, and came to America when she was fifteen. Her father was born in Switzerland and came to Ohio at the age of thirteen. Her parents were married in Ohio, and then lived in Wisconsin before coming to Kansas. Mother spent her girlhood on a farm, attended county school and then normal school in Leavenworth. She and father were married in 1884. For five years after their marriage they lived in Lansing, Kansas where Father was a guard at the Kansas State Prison.

men who kindly assisted her in changing trains at Newton and stayed with her until Father met her at the Guthrie station about midnight. At nine o'clock the next morning we started for the country in a farm wagon drawn by two big iron-grey horses. The wind was blowing a true Oklahoma gale. Mother got down in the wagon with us children to keep us "from blowing out," she said. My brother's hat blew off and went tumbling across the prairie and was lost. The road was narrow and usually kept to the section line, but wound along at the edge of streams which had to be forded.

We arrived at about the middle of the afternoon at our claim in Logan County, three miles south of the Cimarron River. Father bought it from two men. Mr. Dupree had taken it in the run of 1889. Mr. Hagar had filed a contest against his right and had won in the first suit. Mr. Dupree had appealed the case. In this interval father appeared, and agreed to pay them \$250 apiece. They went with him to the land office in Kingfisher where he filed on the land and paid them the amount agreed upon.<sup>2</sup>

We took up our abode at the Hagar place, in a house built of sod. There were two rooms, only one of which had a floor. Both rooms had a thin coat of plastering on the walls. The roof was of natural boards laid over the rafters and then covered with earth. Since Mother did not like to look up inside the house at the comb of the roof, a kind of attic was made by putting pieces of lumber across underneath at the ledges, and covering the planks with screen doors and pieces of carpet. Other buildings were a sod barn and a sod chicken coop.

The next morning after the arrival of the family a neighbor came and helped father build a cave. This was a storehouse for the fruit mother had brought with her, and also became a place of refuge from storms. A pack rat soon took up residence in this cave, and every morning mother found her pile of potatoes upon the ledge underneath the roof.

It was on the following day that mother received her first introduction to her neighbor. She saw a woman coming up the path barefoot, carrying a spade in her hand. When she came to the door she told mother who she was, saying that she lived across the creek and wanted to borrow the wirestretcher. The next visitor was a French woman who came with her children. She said that they were very poor, and that her little girl had had no shoes all winter. She became one of mother's chief advisers on ways and means of the new life, and remained a

<sup>2</sup>After five years, Father went to the land office again taking two neighbors with him to prove that he had lived on the claim continuously. He received a title to the land signed by President William McKinley. This farm is still in the possession of the Robinson heirs.

neighbor all the years we lived on this farm. The next caller was the school teacher, Mrs. Helton, who stopped to get some milk for her cat. Mother particularly liked her appearance, and they became good friends. On the second Sunday in Oklahoma, our family took dinner in the Helton home. They lived in a one-room frame house,—a box house. Mrs. Helton was a good housekeeper and had a very cozy little home. There was a carpet on one part of the floor and another carpet formed a partition between the living room and kitchen. There was wild hog meat for dinner that day. Mr. Helton had been hunting in the country of the Sac and Fox Reservation.

There was no fruit in the vicinity of our place except a few wild grapes and plums. When mother wanted especially to please one of her neighbors, she gave her a glass of jelly or a jar of fruit which she had brought with her from Kansas. We soon found that pork and beef were luxuries. My folks had brought meat from Kansas, and this was soon known in the neighborhood. Mother's first visitor came again a few weeks later with a pan of "greens" to trade for some bacon to cook with her own "greens."

After about a week we drove over five miles to visit some former Kansas' friends and to get some little chickens which they had hatched for us. The shortest way to their place was a road leading diagonally across the prairie. When we returned that night about nine o'clock we got lost off the trail. It was very dark and Father did not know which way to go home, so he let the horses find the way. When they found the trail, they started off in a trot. Some familiar houses were seen and our anxiety was over.

When Father came to Oklahoma he brought with him besides the household goods, two horses, five head of cattle, a plow and a cultivator. The first crop consisted of corn, which proved to be fairly good. Cotton was planted but the folks didn't know how to care for it. When it was picked once they thought the harvest was over, the cotton was ploughed up, and the ground planted in wheat. An attempt was made to beautify the yard without much success. One bunch of nasturtiums was growing and blooming fine when a storm in the night carried it away, and the plant was no place to be found the next morning.

In the early fall a building site was chosen in the southwest corner of the quarter section, and work on our new home began. After an interval of planting the fall wheat, the building continued. It was finished and ready to move into, about Thanksgiving. The house was a one and one-half story frame building, painted yellow with red trimmings, and had the honor of being the only painted house in the community for a

long time. The two rooms below were plastered and finished, and the upstairs was one big room. For several years our chief way of losing a thing upstairs was dropping it behind the plastering. When the house was completed, we held a big dance in celebration.

That winter my brother started to school for the first time. The sod school house was located just a mile from our house. School began in January and continued for three months. By this time our family felt very well established in our new home.

During the years which followed we passed a very happy life. Our farm had two creeks which ran together near the center of our pasture. We children had much fun running through these woods. One of our first duties was going after the cows. Sport, the big Sheperd dog, was quite a friend and an aid to us. We often had to search the pasture over before we found the cows. In the fall we gathered walnuts, wild grapes and plums. One of our favorite play houses was just below the barn and by a grapevine swing. We had much fun during summer wading in the creek. We always climbed to the top of the slanting, corn crib roof to get dry.

There were plenty of hardships, many dry years and consequently failures in farm crops. My best recollection of these years is the discussion of the drought at every meal time. When we had no vegetables at all I thought from what I heard that Leavenworth County, Kansas, was a paradise, or at least the "garden spot of the world." We had two springs in our pasture and one summer they became almost dry. Father took our herd of cattle over across the river to pasture and water. He had, however, only been gone a few weeks when a good rain fell, and he returned.

We had no fruit for a long time. Grandmother used to send us dried peaches and apples, and two winters we were sent seven barrels of apples by Uncle John who had an apple orchard in Kansas. We felt rich then. We raised watermelons on the sod of the new land, and watermelon rind preserves were good in the winter. Several families often went to the Cimarron River to gather sand plums. This was always an enjoyable event with a picnic connected with it.

When I started to school, a new frame building had just been completed in the spring, and the term of school was held during April, May and June. The length of the terms of school lengthened as the years went by. We were taught reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic, from McGuffey's readers and spellers and Ray's arithmetic. The teachers, I always thought, were ideal. The visits of the County Superintendent stood out as the red-letter days of the term. This distinguished

person often spent the night at our house, and we had a double chance of knowing her. The first one I can remember was a woman, and it then became the height of my ambition to become a County Superintendent. We enjoyed our school life, and tried hard during school hours to keep ahead of everyone else in arithmetic and get the most headmarks in the spelling class. At recess we were all good ball players, girls as well as boys. We attended school regularly, and were absent only on account of sickness. We used to hear some talk about a Township High School, but when we children passed the "Eighth Grade County Examination" we entered the Logan County High School in Guthrie.

Social life was not lacking in this country. At the completion of every new house a dance was given. Later after frame school houses were built, they became the center of community life. Literary Society was held every other Friday night. This was the time when the talent of the neighborhood was displayed and old time topics were debated. The spelling school had its time, too, when it was quite an honor to stand up the longest. The last day of school was a celebration. Our mothers came with lunch baskets about noon, and after a picnic dinner we gave our program. I might add that there was always a feeling of disappointment if the teacher did not give us a "treat" at the close of the program. Fourth of July and Christmas were the happy times of the year. We always attended a Fourth of July celebration at some picnic grove. Christmas time we had a Christmas tree at the school house. Santa Claus came to our house every year, although at times it did seem that his pack must have been almost empty when he got there. This was made easier as Grandmother never failed to send us a box of gifts at this time of the year.

Quite early we had a church organization at our school house. Although the church services were held here only a short time. Sunday School was held intermittently during our entire life on the farm. The baptizing pool was in our creek where we saw many people baptized. The first or second Sunday in June was always Children's Day. We attended at least two of these services every year. Sometimes we went to Downs which was eight miles away.

For some years our mail came to Guthrie. When a neighbor went to town he usually brought the mail for all the families in the neighborhood. Later the Post Office of "Cedar" was established at one of the farm houses, one-half mile distant from our place. A carrier brought the mail from Guthrie every day. He went by our house. We children used to watch for him and then go to the Post Office to see if we would get

a letter from Grandmother. If per chance we got a notice that there was a registered letter at the Post Office or found on opening the letter that it had the edges well folded over we knew it contained money. Sometimes it was sent for mother's new hat, and sometimes for the children. The mail carrier was always a very accommodating man, and many times he brought us ice cream from Guthrie so we would have ice cream on a birthday. We all felt that we owed our rural free delivery to Congressman, Dennis T. Flynn. First the rural mail came from Guthrie, then from Cashion, which was eight miles away, and later from Navina, five miles away.

This country improved rapidly as the years went by. In 1907 we got the rural telephone. Our farm was improved in about the same way as those around us. The upstairs of our house was finished and an addition of four rooms added, making eight rooms in our house. The shed stable was replaced by a big red barn with a cupola on top, and a windmill kept a tank full of fresh water for the stock. The old spring wagon gave way to a buggy. Next came a surrey "with the fringe on top" to which we drove a fine team of black horses.

Better roads had now been built, the bridges of logs and earth had been changed into steel bridges or stone culverts. We lived a little over four miles from a railroad station, and we could call a doctor from there by telephone. Pioneer life was passing away.

During this time Oklahoma had developed from a territory to a prosperous state. On November 16, 1907, we attended the ceremony at Guthrie, uniting Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory into one new State, and we heard Governor Haskell take the oath of office as the first State Governor.

In the spring of 1908 we left our farm to the care of a tenant and moved to Guthrie to live. Still remembering many happy days spent on that farm, I feel that I had a very happy childhood in "Old Oklahoma."