

STORY OF A PIONEER WOMAN

(Elizabeth Harrington)

Life started with me, as far as recollections go, when I was eight years old and my mother died. My father, Matthew Rule, had gone to California in 1849 and was on his way home at the time of my mother's death. Mother, with her family of children, had been left well provided for in Kansas City. At that time Kansas City was not much more than a steamboat landing. As my mother's health failed, her father took us to his farm some 18 miles north of Kansas City to care for us. Word was sent Father of Mother's rapid decline, and he hastened home. Hoping to make the trip faster by boat than over-land, he took passage on a sailboat from San Francisco. Shortly after sailing, they were becalmed and delayed three weeks. Finally they reached the Isthmus of Panama. Crossing this neck of land in a chair strapped to the back of a hired native, he reached the Atlantic coast and sailed for Havana; thence to New Orleans, and then up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, reaching home just one week after my mother had passed away.

My father, broken-hearted and discouraged, left for the West again in 1860, putting me in a young ladies' seminary, where, under the care of the principal, a Presbyterian minister, Prof. Scott, I received regular schooling and religious training. This early training has stayed with me through life.

The Civil War came, and the school arrangements were broken up. My father, who was in California Gulch, sent for me to come to him with a cousin and his family who were starting West to find a new home. My cousin, Thomas Rule, known to all as "Uncle Tommie", was a Baptist minister who had lost all his fortune during the war. So, towards the end of May, 1865, with ox teams and prairie schooners,

and quite a herd of cattle, we started out to cross the plains, with a desire of retrieving our lost fortunes in the West. Kansas City then was a western terminal for the railroads, and all who traveled west went as we did. Thence we journeyed southward through Westport, four miles south of Kansas City, which, with its numerous warehouses, was then the outfitting point for most of the immigrants going westward to Salt Lake, Santa Fe and Taos. In our party there were my cousin and his wife, his two sons and three daughters, a daughter of Col. Boon, then Indian agent for the Cheyennes, her husband and two children and myself, besides the old family cook--a darky known as Aunt Hannah, and her children. Old Aunt Hannah refused to part from us, even though freed, saying, "Masser Thomas, all de freedom I wants is to be wid you--if you don't provide for me to ride, I'll walk and follow." Poor faithful old soul! Little did she realize what a "walk" it would have been. That year the travel was exceedingly heavy, and the main route was along the Arkansas River, over what is now called the Santa Fe Trail. There was a constant stream of white-topped wagons--some going West to settle; others freighting for the Government, bringing in supplies to the military posts.

We traveled along without any incidents until we came to the "Little Arkansas Fort", a fort built to protect the immigrant from the hostile Indians, the Kiowas and Comanches; from there to Bent's Old Fort we were continually harassed by the Indians.

On reaching "Little Fort, Arkansas", we were detained ten days, waiting for enough wagons to come along to make up an outfit that would justify the Government sending a military escort. An outfit consisted of from 150 to 250 wagons. An escort would accompany an

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outfit from one post to another, then we would be given another escort, which saw us safely to the next post, while the first escort looked after outfits going east, which usually were freighters.

When we came to the Indian country, we also came to the land of the buffaloes, for they were the food of the Indian. For three days after leaving "Little Fort, Arkansas", we traveled through a moving mass of buffalo, which were emigrating from the north-east to the south-west. I remember so well how I stood up on our ambulance as high up as I could get to look at them, and as far as I could see in any direction there was that vast, solid-looking mass of buffalo. They were not frightened by our wagons, but passed between them whenever they found an opening. When we camped for the night, they kept on, and all through the night you could hear their constant tramp.

We women of my cousin's family rode in what was called an ambulance, a schooner fixed up with as many comforts as possible for the women. There were seats in the ambulance in the daytime which were lifted out at night and our beds made up. When we first started out we older girls were allowed to ride horseback, but once we entered the Indian country my cousin forbade it. The tongue of our ambulance was fastened to the wagon which my cousin drove, and I remember the merriment we had when a little young buffalo jumped over the tongue of the ambulance, raised as it was from the ground.

At Fort Larned we were given an escort of forty men--well mounted, who took us as far as Fort Dodge. We left the river and took what was called the dry route, to shorten the distance by a half day's travel. Besides, it was the best road during this wet season. After leaving Fort Larned, some twelve miles or so, we were traveling up a large arroyo and stopped for the noon day meal. Now, we did not carry fire wood with us, and in this part of the plains there was none to be had;

nevertheless, we had our three hot meals a day, the fire being built of buffalo chips. When we later came to the woods and the men brought fire wood to old Aunt Hannah she began to sputter and gave orders: "Go get me some of dem buffalo chips--none of em green cottonwoods singing for me."

You can imagine what a sight our white city of 250 white-topped wagons made. The wagons were always drawn in a semi-circle, or V shape, so that when necessary the cattle could be corralled in this enclosure, and this defended them from the Indians.

Across the gully, almost opposite us, were some Mexicans with their cattle grazing nearby. Two Mexican men and a Mexican boy were herding their cattle. I had just finished my dinner and had picked up my book, Mrs Heman's poems, to read. You know we could not carry many books with us, but how we did treasure the few we could tuck in here and there in our ambulance. Screams and cries from the Mexicans drew our attention. The Indians had sprung up from the ground somewhere, evading our pickets, and swooped down into the midst of the Mexican's cattle, trying to stampede them. Our troops rushed to their rescue and drove the Indians off, but the two men were killed and with my own eyes I saw the Mexican lad scalped. He had rushed into some tall grass and tried to hide in it, but an Indian spied him, and leaning off his pony, he grabbed him by the hair and cut the whole scalp off. We women hurriedly tore up some clean sheets and ran to the poor lad and offered our services to the surgeon who worked over him. The boy was still alive, but a terrible sight, with head of dripping blood. The men were wrapped in blankets and laid in the ground. A rude cross was erected and candles burned that night over their graves.

We did not go farther that day, but no one slept that night. All feared a second attack from the Indians, and when I would look out into the night I could see the candles burning there on the graves. It was a melancholy, weird sight that made a lasting impression on me.

Taking the poor Mexican lad along with us, we started onward the following morning. After traveling some several hundred yards we drew up out of the arroyo and there before us lay the plains as level as a floor. The wagons were bunched up, as many as eight abreast, to prevent the Indians making a charge and viding our forces. We had traveled along perhaps for an hour or so when we observed Indians to the rear and in front of us. They would approach just out of gun reach and tempt our guards to charge against them. As it was, our escort did not dare give chase or attack either those in front or in the rear, for then they would have left the caravan unprotected.

Finally we reached Fort Dodge, near sundown, the Indians following and annoying us to within a mile of the fort. We remained there several days, waiting for an escort. We left the Mexican lad there. He recovered and later went to his home in Mexico.

Traveling in our outfit was a wealthy merchant, Tom Boggs, a schoolmate of my cousin's wife, and hence our families visited back and forth when we camped for the night. Tom Boggs had married the daughter of a very wealthy Mexican, Bovino. One of Bovino's daughters married Maxwell, who came into possession of the Maxwell grant, through his wife.

Tom Boggs was very fond of fine horses and had with him on this trip a strawberry-roan, thoroughbred race horse. (The Mexicans were inveterate gamblers and Boggs won many a "pile" with his Kentucky thoroughbreds against the Mexican mustangs.) Mrs Boggs' nephew,

who had been in school in the East, was returning with them. The boy came down with typhoid fever, but was improving as we all thought, when one night in his delirium he mounted this race horse and rode off and never was seen again. We waited a whole day, hoping for his return. Our guards could not leave us, and search the country for him. We moved on. Five days later the horse dashed into our camp. Dried blood on his flank led us to believe that the Indians had killed the boy while the horse had escaped.

Many are the stories we heard about the prominent people who went up and down the trail and those who had settled in the new country.

Russell and Majors were well known freighters, supplying Salt Lake, Santa Fe and Taos. Majors was known as a very religious man and made all his wagon bosses, drivers, etc., sign a contract not to use profane language--a thing he finally found out was impossible for a man to do and drive oxen. He then presented each boss with a Bible and ordered no traveling on Sundays. The oxen really needed the rest. The men used to call it signing their souls away to work for Majors and Russell.

Solomon Young was a neighbor of my grandfather, and he went to Salt Lake and opened up a store with a Mr Byers. Brigham Young, hearing of Solomon Young, went to see him and Solomon, in order to humor Brigham, helped him trace out that they were distantly related, and so Brigham became a good customer of Solomon's, often visiting in the store.

Young and Byers had brought in a shipment of straw hats, the first in Salt Lake, and the string of straw hats in the store created considerable excitement, especially among the boys. Brigham was making one of his visits in the store when a lad came in and Brigham said: "Give the boy one of those straw hats." Solomon did so, and charged the hat to Brigham Young. Soon another lad came in: "I'd

like one of those straw hats", he piped. "Whose boy are you?" Solomon Young asked. "Young's", the lad replied. "What Young's?" "Brigham Young's", said the lad. "Well", said Solomon Young, "who is that man standing right over there?" pointing to Brigham Young. The lad gave a look. "I don't know", he replied. Well, Brigham didn't know either, but he said: "Give him a hat and charge it to me."

We continued our journey along the Arkansas River, finding many beautiful camping spots. (Frequently the valley would widen out a half to three-quarters of a mile.) One afternoon on a very hot, calm, dry day we climbed to the top of a bluff along the river, from which we could see for miles over the level plain. While standing on top of the bluff, we observed a company of some 15 or 20 cavalry troops, mounted on fine well-groomed steeds. Deliberately they rode along in a north-east direct. Looking farther, we saw a beautiful lake of clear water, along whose margin grew high grasses, and weeping willows, with now and then a stately pine tree. When the cavalry reached the lake they rode right into the water, and the horses drank and drank as if ever so thirsty. We could even see the ornaments on the brow bands of the horses as they stood knee deep in the water. We could see the soldiers turn their heads in conversation with each other, and while we stood there beholding this realistic scene, all in an instant soldiers, horses, lake and trees vanished, nothing but the bare plains remaining, and then we realized it was only an optical illusion, a mirage.

(Reaching Bent's Fort, we camped there for several days, At last, on the 25th day of August we reached Pueblo and located there for the winter. My father met me there. Pueblo then consisted of a few log huts with flat mud roofs. One only had a shingle roof-- the dry goods store of Thatcher Brothers.

My cousin's stock cattle we turned loose on the mesa, south of Pueblo, and grazed them over the grounds that are now occupied by the Pueblo Steel Works. In order to while away the time, for we were so homesick, we girls would ride our ponies and look after the stock and round them up. Another pastime for us young people was to secretly play a game with cards. My cousin would never have sanctioned a deck of cards being in his home, nor have allowed us to play, but the deck was there, and the harmless game went on just the same. It is my opinion that a deck of cards in the early pioneer days saved many from sheer desperation, and I feel like saying suicide, it being the only amusement that many had to while away the lonely evening.

I stayed in Pueblo one winter with my cousin, and for some of us it was a gay winter of parties and dances. We were young and happy and without responsibility. One dance in particular lingers in my memory as being so characteristic of our social life. It was no hardship to go eighteen or twenty miles to a party, and this one was at Jude Henry's ranch near Boon. I can still see the promising young men of the day--John Thatcher, O. P. Baxter, Lou Barnum--as they swung their partners in the gaily festooned hall. We always danced till daylight to a Mexican violin and a banjo.

Sometimes I think how crude and simple was our life, how different from the life in the seminary, and on my grandfather's farm, yet with it all there was true courtesy and genuine hospitality.

In these days, the Westerners were afforded much pleasure whenever an Easterner alighted from a stage coach, especially if he took the form of a dude. Perhaps a little of the same amusement still prevails in the West. Ian Hicklen, who married a third daughter of the wealthy Bovino, and who owned a large tract of land on the Huerfano River, often laughed as he told his story of one Easterner dude

who was obliged to stop and seek shelter for the night at his ranch. It had been a hard winter for the pioneers, and the table lacked the delicacies that perhaps the "dude" had been accustomed to in the East. Nothing was plentiful that winter but frijoles, and on the table for supper was a large bowl of frijoles, and a bottle of pepper sauce. The beans were offered the Easterner, who refused a helping of them with an upturned nose and the comment that he didn't ever eat beans. "Very well then", came back Hicklin, "just help yourself to the pepper sauce". What a rear Hicklin could produce from his listeners as he took off to perfection the tone and manners of the dude.

(The following spring, 1867, I came on up towards Canon City, where I met and married my husband, O. E. Harrington. In the days before the war he had gone from Kentucky to New Orleans, from there into Texas, and in 1860, with a company of 22 men, had driven 1600 head of cattle from Texas on up into Colorado, entering near Las Animas, then following the Arkansas River to Canon City, wintered in that neighborhood. Here they divided up the stock, and he drove his share of them on up to California Gulch, where he found a lively market for them.)

It was in 1867 that we were married and went to Twin Lakes to the mining camp, Dayton, then flourishing county seat of Lake County. Things were brisk and rustling there then, with three hotels, and, needless to say, several saloons. The Westons were in charge of one of the hotels. Later, when the camp went down, they took up land near Buena Vista and built their present home on its site the year Colorado became a state (1876). Later a slice was taken off Lake County and formed Chaffee County, and Buena Vista became the county seat. The mining excitement went to Granite of Chaffee County, and the court

house followed, making it a County seat of Lake County.

We then moved to Granite, Near Granite, where Clear Creek empties into the Arkansas, was a thriving mining settlement called Georgia Bar, nearly all the miners being Georgians.

It was in 1868 that we located in Adobe Park, taking up a pre-emption claim of 350 acres. This was ten years before there was any Salida. The present site of Salida was a soap-wood park.

Our first home was a cabin built where the county farm house now stands. This ground was later sold to the County, and we built the home that now (1934) stands on the Harrington Ranch, in 1880. Twenty-nine years we lived in this house with only one death, my father's, no births and no marriages. Our land also included Fairview Cemetery. This land, 80 acres, was sold to the Fairview Cemetery Association, and one-half foot of water was included. This was the only cemetery within miles that had water rights.

These were years, you must bear in mind, before there was a railroad into the valley. We went to Centerville to a little store for minor supplies. The stock of that store could have been hauled off in one white top wagon. Twice a year, spring and fall, we made trips to either California Gulch or to Canon City for supplies.) It was quite an event in our lives, for days before starting there was cooking to be done to last on the trip. We packed up, as if starting overland, for there were no hotels to stop in over night. We camped. It took two whole days to reach Canon City.

Being the only woman for miles around us, it is needless to say, that there were times when I longed for women companionship. There was always plenty to be done to keep me busy, for those were days when many necessities were made in the home. We made our candles out of deer tallow, for that made a much whiter, finer candle than beef tallow, and it was no effort to get a deer in those days, as

they ranged the foothills then.

In the spring of 1875 we put in 40 acres of wheat. That may not seem to many as an abundance of wheat to plant, but when we consider that we were working new ground and paying 10¢ a pound for seed, you can imagine how we looked forward to our wheat crop. It grew beautifully and was so promising, so tall that it hid me when I walked through it. Then, on the fifth of August we noticed a heavy dark mass hanging in the sky and approaching. Later, as the mass hung over us, the grasshoppers began to drop and drop, covering the earth. The plague was upon us. All the wheat was destroyed, the cabbage all eaten and the crops of the whole valley literally eaten up. They deposited their eggs, and the years of 1876-1877 were fruitless. Many abandoned their claims, having no stock to carry them through. Food values were high. We have sold many a pound of butter for \$1.00. Don't get alarmed over undue profit; on the other hand, we paid from \$12.00 to \$20.00 a hundred for flour, 60¢ a pound for coffee, etc.

Every fall the Indians, Uncompahgre Utes, gathered in our valley, coming for their annuities from the Government, which were dispensed by the Burnetts on their ranch near Poncha. One of their favorite camping posts, as they came down the river, was opposite our ranch where the Ohio and Colorado smelter now stands. They often had with them buckskins to trade or sell, or to gamble. The squaws prepared the buckskins, but the men disposed of them. Many a time we have watched their horse and pony races, which they indulged in while waiting for the day to come to "get their presents". The annuities were paid in October, but they began to gather in our neighborhood in August. Each Indian, taking part in the race, would have his buckskins and trophies or whatever he could lay his hand upon, in a pile out in the road where the race was to take place.

The loser had his pile carried over and placed on top of the winner's pile. Then the loser would go rummage for more things to wager. A great deal of shouting and yelling, with such yells as only Indians can give, accompanied the start and finish of the racing and the bickering that followed.

Yes, the Indian was friendly, though at times, troublesome.

One October, we went to Burnett's Ranch to see the Utes receive their presents from Governor Hunt, as they said. For their land they received flour, sugar, dry goods, blankets, trinkets, old uniforms left over from the war, and so many head of cattle. Now, the Government's instructions were to pay the Indians with cattle, that you could call cattle, allowing a reasonable price to be paid for them. It was not much wonder that the Indians were dissatisfied and angry that day, for the cattle were cheap Mexican scrubs--all head and horns. The flour was the cheapest and poorest to be had. Nothing came up to their expectations. Some one was robbing them; the Burnetts had nothing to do with the providing, they simply stored the things for the Government. Shavano, the war chief, was present and was very angry. If things had been left to him, there would have been a fight or massacre. I am afraid if I had been an Indian I would have felt as he did--ready to fight for a "square deal." However, Ouray, the chief, was a fine looking man, dressed up in a U. S. officer's uniform, but with a red blanket thrown over his shoulders. The government men kept him appeased with presents and promises, and he addressed his tribe for an hour, cooling and calming them. How I wish I could tell you what he said! It must have been a wonderful address from the effects it had, for they departed in peace. I remember they were given some axes, which they turned over to the squaws, they having no use for them. One poor squaw came running into Mrs Burnett's house, crying; "Me no Gov. Hunt's present." Throwing back her blanket she showed us a

a string around her neck with an open end thimble dangling on the end of it. That was her present, which was "no present" to her.

Shavano and Ouray were brothers-in-law, both being educated in the Sisters School in Mexico. Both could read and write the English language. Shavano always stood when he prayed, but Ouray always knelt as his religious Catholic training taught him.

Our valley was nothing more than a pioneer's settlement until the approach of the civilizer--the railroad. Both the Atchinson, Topeka & Santa Fe and the D. & R. G. Railway Companies desired to build into the valley by way of the Royal Gorge. (Cleora was laid out by the A. T. S.F. Railway as their townsite, but after considerable litigation and almost a pitched battle between the Rio Grande and Santa Fe forces near Canon, the D. & R. G. W. won out in the Courts, gaining control of the right of way through the Royal Gorge. The following year it extended its lines into the valley and Salida was selected as the new townsite. Captain Blake, after whom the Blake Block is named, was the first Postmaster.

Shortly afterwards, the railroad company established its shops here, and it rapidly developed into a flourishing town.)

(Poncha was a well established town long before either Cleora or Salida came into existence. James True came into the valley from Colorado Springs in 1874, bought the McPherson claim, laid out the town of Poncha, and opened up a general store. A man by the name of Jackson built the Jackson Hotel, Davenport started a lumber yard, other stores followed and soon there was a prosperous town.) (When the railroad was built into Poncha in 1880 it was the most promising town in the valley, and it looked for a while as if Salida might be moved up there. After the railroad was continued over Marshall Pass, however, the town gradually declined, and Salida gained the ascendancy.)

A fire destroyed most of the town in 1882, and it was never recovered. It continued to decline until now there is left only a general store and a few dwellings.

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