John Henry and Lewis Andrew Wetzel

My name is Lewis Andrew Wetzel and my story concerns my parents, their family of twelve children and my own life. I am the last and only living member of our family. My parents, William and Katherine Wetzel, five sisters and six brothers having all passed away onto Eternity. My story is based on the words of my parents and the things I saw and lived through. Every bit of my story is facts with the exception of a few items that I cannot prove. Those items will be stated as I come to them, as doubtful. One of the first of such is that my parents claimed that our family was descendants of a man back in the Colonial days who was known as Lewis Wetzel the “Indian fighter” and that I was named after him. The reason I do not vouch for the truth of the foregoing statement is that his entire family was supposed to have been massacred by the Indians and that he spent the remainder of his life killing Indians for revenge. If his entire family was killed by the Indians he would have no descendants unless he married again and had children from his second marriage. Not knowing whether he married a second wife or not is the reason I do not vouch for that part of the story. My parents were born and raised somewhere near Lebanon, Pennsylvania and as far as I know all of their ancestors were born and raised there, their ancestry having come to America from Germany in Colonial times. My father was a veteran of the Civil War, spent twenty months in active duty, took part in seven of the greatest battles and a number of skirmishes and was discharged at the end of the War- Honorably – and carried one severe wound from the battle of the Wilderness. He was with the 93 Pennsylvania infantry and as far as I know he never advanced further than the rank of “Buck Private”. He was very proud of the fact that he had fought for his country and the North, his side, won the war but often said that in his opinion, if the South had had the ammunition and provisions they so sorely needed, they would have the won the war, or at least, made it a lot longer. He joked about the fact that the only time he received a wound was when he was under orders, lying face down in the battle of the Wilderness because the Enemy had the Yankee’s under cross –fire and all they could do was flatten out and lay low. To us children it did not seem much of a joke about his wound when he showed just a white scar about five inches wide and five inches long on the back of his right thigh where the brass ring of an explosive shell had hit him as he lay flat on his face in the bush. No man was ever prouder of his military record than he and the fact that his discharge from the Army was on white paper (which means “honorably” discharged) also meant a lot to him and he often said that anytime Uncle Sam got into trouble, it was the duty of every able-bodied man to grab a gun and rush to the defense of his country, meaning his own sons as well as others. As we grew older, we children were able to get him to talk to us about his war experiences, some gruesome, some serious and some amusing. Later in my story, if it seems necessary, I will relate some his experience as related to us by him. Some time after the Civil War, he and Katherine Wolever were married and after the four older children were born, I think about 1882, they moved to Lafayette, Indiana. Let me say right here that when father left Pennsylvania, the uppermost thought and desire in his mind was to go west and take up a homestead, thereby coming into ownership of a home but things did not go as he had hoped so after three or four years of hauling straw to a local paper mill (he had acquired a team of horses and a wagon) and several years of running a Huckster wagon and other work he moved onto a farm somewhere north of Fowler, Indiana, where on March 1887, I was born, the tenth child of the family. Later in the story, I will relate some of the experiences, serious and otherwise that my father experienced while driving the Huckster route.

When I was about 12 years of age, we moved into a large tract of new land six miles west of Fowler, Indiana. The land was owned by a man named Hampton and he also owned a number of farms in the vicinity. The farm we rented was large and a small shanty of a house and an ordinary barn were all of the buildings on the place. I do that father raised as much as 350 acres of corn which was all husked by hand, that father drove nails until 3:00 and 4:00 A.M. Many a night, he built a large 14 room house, several corn cribs and other buildings, living there four or five years during which time two of my brothers and one sister were married and in the end he and Mr. Hampton fell out as it was called in those days and again father tried to put over his idea of gong west and take up a homestead but the older children would not hear of it so in the end we moved to South Dakota 2 ½ miles north of Worthing, South Dakota. The spring of 1885, we lived on a rented farm owned by a man name Leavitt, lived there one year, then moved two miles west to a large farm, 480 acres, owned by a man named Samuel G. Morrison of English descent and a Veteran of the Civil War, a cavalryman. We lived there six years. Sammy, as he was known to us was a widower and made his home at the Soldiers Home in the Black Hills and he spent about a week each year visiting the farm.

He and my father became very good friends, especially because of the fact that both had served in the Civil War. Sammy always brought his double-barreled shotgun, a bird dog and two or three greyhounds when he came to visit and my brother, two years younger than I am, and I always had a wonderful time while he was here. The prairie chickens, quail, cotton-tail rabbits and jack rabbits were very plentiful there in those days. Sammy was a good shot, his dogs were well trained and we went along to take in the excitement and to carry the game. We saw many a chase for whenever we in the excitement and to carry the game. We saw many a chase for whenever we flushed a jack rabbit, Sammy would turn one hound loose and hold the other until the jack rabbit with the first hound chasing him would circle and come back to cross his own trail, as a rabbit always, or nearly always does, then Sammy would turn the second hound loose, the first one usually pretty tired by that time (I have seen a jack rabbit run over a mile before circling back) and the second hound usually caught the rabbit. Greyhounds run by sight only and if they lose sight of the rabbit, they will run around this way and that for about a minute or two, then return. They do not have the ability to follow a scent. Sometimes my father went along on a bird hunt and the birddog would range over the fields until he go the scent of a covey of prairie chickens or quail then he would come to a point, so-called because he would stop still as a statue, point his nose in the direction of the covey, raise one front paw and stick his tail straight out behind him like a stick and remain into the pose until the hunters got to him after given orders to \_\_\_\_, advance very slowly until the birds began to fly up when he would stop again while the hunters emptied their guns (both men used double barreled shotguns) then, if the entire covey had departed the dog would go looking around and find the birds that had fallen while the hunters reloaded but if only part of the birds had arisen, the dog would remain at point until the hunters were ready to do some more shooting. My brother and I were not old enough to handle a gun but even though we dared not get ahead of the hunters; we surely did share and enjoy the excitement. Sammy always stayed about a week. For rent of this farm, my father gave one third of the corn, oats; wheat and barley that was sold on the market and to pay the rent on the 140 acres of pasture and prairie hay land, he and the hired man usually worked about a week with six horses on the road to pay the Land Tax. Father raised a lot of horses, cattle and hogs to sell and fed them to a marketable condition out of his two thirds of the grain and the hay he got of the upland prairie.

Father was a great horseman and always raised from three to seven colts each year. When he sold out at auction before leaving Indiana, he sold 22 horses, keeping about 10 to ship to South Dakota and after one year on the Leavitt farm and six years on the Morrison farm, he again sold 18 horses, keeping six and all of these horses were raised by him.

During the six years that we lived on the Morrison far we went through some very hard times. Father kept a hired man and paid him $18.00 per month the year round and I remember the shelled corn sold for 10 cents per bushel and father had the hired man hauling it to town, five miles away and father joking remarked that the hired man could hardly haul corn to town fast enough to enable father to pay him his wages. My brother and I always had a lot of fun with the hired man. During those six years my brother Charles (four years older than I) passed away and we went through the Spanish-American War and the assassination of President William McKinley and the rise and fall of the Populist Party, something very few people remember. Even though we went through some hard times, losing one entire crop in a hailstorm, we also had prosperous years and when father again sold out at Auction, he paid all of his debts and had $800 in cash left, a very neat sum of money in those days. That was the spring of 1902 and I was 15 years old.

The Morrison farm consisted of the three quarter sections of land or 48 acres and was one of the very few farms of that size was all Homestead. In those days a man could file on one quarter section under his Homestead rights and he could file on another quarter under what was called the Pre-emption and a third quarter by planting trees and was known as a tree claim. The Morrison farm was the only one I knew of that lay all in one piece.

From where the buildings were located it was 1 ¾ miles to the farthest side of the farm. Getting back to the Tree claims, the first tree claim law required that 40 acres of trees be planted on the homestead. The trees, mostly ?Boxelder, cottonwood and willow, had to be dug up at the Big Sioux river, fifteen to twenty miles away, hauled with horse and wagon and planted by hand. It was a big job and not many people took advantage of this, sometime later, and to get people to plant more trees, the required acreage was reduced to one half or 20 acre tree claims. The Tree Claim Quarter section of the Morrison farm was 20 acres and there were a many 20 claim acre claims in that part of the country. Still later, the required acreage was cut in half again, or, ten acre tree claims and the result was a beautiful country with nice groves wherever you looked.

It was more beautiful than natural wooded land because the groves were laid out in a king of quilt pattern effect. It was so nice; it seemed to me to be the garden spot of the world.

Some of these beautiful groves were 30 years old and some older. I remember one day when Sammy was visiting the farm, he and we boys stopped near a stately old cottonwood that was better than two feet through at the stump and at least 75 feet tall, down by the road, not far from the house, and he placed his hand against the tree and said “it was 30 years ago that I planted that cottonwood.”. He must have planted that tree in the late 1860’s. The period of time during which we lived on the Morrison farm was part of what is known as the “Gay 90’s” and I must say it was the most wonderful and enjoyable era of my whole life. During the time we lived on the Morrison farm, we saw the Ringling Bros. Circus, twice, the Gentry Bros Dog and Pony Circus once and Buffalo Bills Wild West circus one. Each circus was at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, fifteen miles northeast of where we lived.

Father had a two-seated carriage with top and side curtains and a dashboard apron. On the day of the circus we would arise at 4:00 A.M., take care of stock, and mother would pack a sumptuous lunch that always included fried chicken. When the fifteen miles to Sioux Falls was over and the horses comfortably housed in a livery barn and fed, our whole family located at some choice place along the street in time to see the Big Parade which started at 10:30 A.M. Afterwards we would do some shopping and eat our lunch, often in company of one or two other families from our neighborhood. My mother was a very good cook and her fried chicken was just out of this world. I will never forget how good things tasted.

The circus usually started at 2:00 P.M. so as soon as our noon lunch was over we would go to the circus grounds, buy our tickets and enter the Big Top ten which, to boys of my age, was a place of magic and wide-eyed wonder. The trained animal acts, the trapeze and the tight rope performer were wonderful but the circus clowns were what hit the spot with me. Never will I forget the comical, and what might be called crazy, things they did. People laughed until their sides ached and no one enjoyed it all more than I. About 4:30 P.M., the afternoon performance being over, we would start home, wishing the chores were done but glad to find everything ok at home. As soon as father would see a bill advertising a circus, which in those days would be in every town, village, or hamlet and even on some of the most traveled crossroads, he would come home and tell us about it and say, “Well, boys, if we get the corn cultivated, the hay up or oats shucked by the time the circus comes, we take in the circus. Believe me, the corn would be cultivated, the hay would be up or the oats shucked, as the case may be, even if we had to do it by moonlight or the light of an old smoky lantern. Good old Circus days. Enough of that

My father often said, look at this beautiful homestead, the Morrison farm were living on, “Why?”, he said, “I could own one just as good if I had only gone west and taken up Homestead. But, as I stated before, the only one in the family who had Homestead fever was Dad. None of the rest of us encouraged him with the idea. There were still homesteads available in the northern and the western states, so my brother Bob and I offered to go with Dad if he would go and file on a homestead. That was the spring of 1902 and he had sold at auction, all of his personal property except what he kept to carry on as farming at a small scale. Even though he appreciated our offer in regard to the homestead idea, he wanted my brother Bob, sister Maud and I to get at least a High School education. So he and mother bought a house and three and one-half acres of land in the northeast part of Beresford, South Dakota, a town 25 miles south of where we lived. He had kept four horses, six cows and some farm machinery. And his idea was to live in town and rent some land near town to farm and make a living so we children could attend school, but he paid $1300 for the home in town and gave the owner a mortgage for the $500. That was due after he had paid down the $800 cash he had on hand. This left him without working capital of course, due to the fact there was no money to hire help, with my brother and I compelled to stay out of school for a period of four to six weeks in the spring to get the crops planted and for about the same period of time in the fall to help harvest crops. After trying for two years to pass the 8th grade and failing because of the time I was compelled to miss school, I gave up the idea of an education and decided to spend my life farming. My brother and sister, younger than I, decided to do the same. Again, brother Bob and I told father we would go with him and take up a homestead if he wished to do so but about that time he met a man owned several farms and that man, James Johnson, who lived about four miles southwest of Beresford made a deal with Dad and we moved onto one of his farms and rented our house in town. Back in those days a common saying was that if a person lacked education or was too dumb to do anything else, he or she could still make a living farming.

That is not the reason I chose to be a farmer I was neither smart, dumb, educated nor uneducated. I chose farming I loved farming. I loved nature and loved to work with and near it and if I had my life to live over, it would be on the farm; the only place that is near to God and the best place in the world to raise a family.

In August of the first year that we lived on the e Johnson farm, an old friend of my father, Joseph Boyer and wife from Lafayette, Indiana, arrived by covered wagon after a six week trip. They had a good team of horses and in spite of the long trip, they had made, the horses looked really good. Mr. Boyer was on his way West to take up a Homestead and when he found out that the nearest place where any choice could be made in homesteads was western North Dakota, he an my father decided to go by railroad to North Dakota and take up homesteads. At last! Father was on his way to his Homestead... They got off the train at New Salem, North Dakota, the first section of any size west of Mandan. They contacted a Locator, a local Real Estate man to whom they each agreed to pay the sum of $25, providing he was able to locate them on a homestead that was satisfactory to each.

In those days, nearly every odd numbered section, such as 3, 7,9,11, etc. belonged to the Northern Pacific Railroad, which ran through Mandan/Bismarck, North Dakota, the Twin Cities of the West. The odd numbered sections that did not belong to the Northern Pacific Railroad, were sections that had been sold to speculators, who in time, had the human foresight to know that someday the would bring some sort of price. I do not know just when the U.S. government made the Land Grant to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company and that the Grant that the Northern Pacific Railroad Company had, was every odd numbered section of land to a distance of 50 miles north and the same, south, from the proposed survey of said Railroad right-of-way. When figured up, that is a lot of land for each section of 640 acres. The even numbered sections, such as 2, 4, 6,8,10, etc. were known as Government Homestead land and the job of the Locator or Real Estate man was to find the corner stone of section so and so in a section where land was still open to show the prospective homesteader where the four corners of the 160 acres Homestead were and to show him enough of such quarters or homesteads so that he would finally decide on and locate on one. When a location was decided upon, the part would rush back to Bismarck and if the location, in question, had not been already filed upon, the prospective Homesteader would file his claim. And then, and not until then did the Locator or Real Estate man received his fee of $25.

Mr. Boyer and my father took the west ½ of a section of land. Father took the northwest quarter and Mr. Boyer took the southwest corner. Because of some family difficulty Mr. Boyer, proved up on it, moved to the State of Washington and passed away sever years ago. My father came home very much elated over the kind of location he had chosen as his Homestead. That was the fall of 1905. To meet obligations, he had to be on the Homestead within six months of the date of filling, which meant that in late April 16, he again departed to his Homestead to fulfill his obligations to Uncle Sam. :This meant building a Homestead Shack at least 12 x 14 feet in size, breaking up at least five acres of the virgin Prairie, digging a well that would supply a family with water or framing up a spring that would do likewise and living on the Homestead at least six months.

My brother and I, now 17 and 19 years of age, respectively, did the farm work at home. That fall after had six months in on the Homestead, he came back to South Dakota and arranged a carload of stock, machinery, and household goods to Glen Ullin, North Dakota. His Homestead was 35 miles south of Glen Ullin and until 1914, that was our nearest railroad town. Stanton, county seat of Mercer County, was 22 miles east on the west bank of the Missouri River and there was little inland town called Krem, 20 miles northeast of the Homestead, but Glen Ullin was the nearest Railroad town.

In 1912, the Northern Pacific Railroad built a branch of railroad up the Missouri River Valley to Stanton, the County seat of Mercer County. But the accommodations were so poor that we continued to recognize Glen Ullin as our railroad town. Here I am, getting ahead of my story. Father and my brother Robert or Bob as we called him shipped the carload of six horses, 4 cows, some machinery to the Homestead. Neighboring homesteaders and ranchers helped them haul the property out to our Homestead. Father and Brother Bob built a sod barn and put up some prairie hay after they reached the Homestead and also dug some lignite coal to last over winter. In late December father came back to South Dakota to help me finish husking by hand, the 80 acres of corn we had raised and to get the crop sold, debts paid all business affairs arranged so that by early in the spring of 1907 we would all be set on the Homestead. But alas, at that time things began to happen. Brother Bob had been left on the Homestead to look after the stock and that was alright but in early February of 1907, we received a telegram from a neighboring homesteader that brother Bob was sick in bed with inflammatory rheumatism. The neighbor, C.J. Johnson had traveled the 35 miles to send the telegram and had moved the sick boy to his homestead and took care of him till mother and I arrived a week or ten days later. Before he seen the telegram, Carl Johnson drove to Krem and got a Doctor to come out before me made the trip to Glen Ullin to dispatch the telegram and he never accepted one red cent for all his trouble. That is a fair example of the kind of hospitality and neighborliness existing between the homesteaders and ranchers in that part of the country. In those days that was only a sample of the neighborliness and hospitality that we experienced in such a short time later. Martin \_efstad, our neighbor who took up the Boyer Homestead took care of the livestock from the time Bob was taken ill until Mother and I reached the Homestead. He also refused to take care a cent for his work but brother Bob and I were able to help both of them some years later and we thanked God for the chance.

The first part of February 1907, when we received the telegram that brother Bob was down with inflammatory rheumatism, my mother and I made hurried preparations to depart for the Homestead in North Dakota. This was not the first time brother Bob had been stricken with the ailment. I forgot to mention, earlier in my story that in the spring of 1902, when we were ready to move to the Morrison farm to Beresford, he was suddenly stricken with the same ailment and my mother had to remain on the farm for several weeks with the people ho moved onto the farm and take care of him after we moved Beresford before they were able to move him to our new home.

As a result, I lived alone in Beresford while my father traveled back and forth between the two places. My sister Maud stayed with mother on the farm helping to take care of brother Bob and I go my first experience “baching”. I took care of the horses, cows and chickens, did my own cooking and kept house to the best of my ability. From the time I was old enough to work, I helped my mother with housework, the garden, poultry and helped her milk the cows.

Milking was a job that was done by the women and the children. She had also taught me a lot about cooking which came in very handy. Brother Bob was always with father in the fields and driving herds of horses, which he liked very much and he got to very much as able, as was my father. In fact, many years later in Wisconsin, in the winter of 1926, I was trying to pull a load of logs out of the woods and got stuck. Brother Bob told me to step aside and he picked up he lines and got the load started. After he had the load on good footing, he handed me the lines and said, “If you can make it, go ahead and if not, I will take the load to the mill. You know”, he said, “You never learned to herd horses, let alone drive them.”

Well, getting back to his illness, he spent most of the summer after we were able to move him, taking some kind of electrical treatments and by late fall he was able to help with the corn husking.

Now, back to the telegram from Carl Johnson, stating that brother Bob had been moved to his hoe so they could take better care of him. My mother and I left Beresford, South Dakota about 2 P.M and I will never forget that day as long as I live. I was 19 years of age; I dearly loved that part of South Dakota. I felt that we were going out into a bleak, lonesome prairie, miles from civilization. Leaving dear friends and I had one dear one whom I did not like to leave, but in those days, at the age of 19, folks called it “puppy love”.

I was very mistaken about the bleak, lonesome prairie because I soon found that a lot of people were already on homesteads and more came day by day until every homestead worth taken was gone by the time I reached 21. It was amazing what crowds would gather at country gatherings of any kind, especially dances. After leaving Beresford, mother and I rode the train all the night, reaching Oaks, North Dakota the next forenoon, waited awhile to get a train, which finally came and took us onto Jamestown, where we stayed overnight at a hotel. We attended a good show at one of the Opera Houses, as they called at the time, and I really enjoyed it, especially the music. It was the first time I ever had to hear a large orchestra and it was a very good one. Toward evening, the next day, we reached New Salem, North Dakota, stayed overnight at the hotel. At about eight A.M., the next morning, we started out with the mail carrier over lots of snow in an open sleigh and team of broncos that really did travel. The weather was clear and not very cold, with no wind to speak of, so it was not a bad trip. We were told before we left New Salem, that we would reach the Post Office, which was 55 miles away, by night. Then we would be only eleven miles from our homestead. We reached the Hanover Post Office about noon. There was a store, church and a few other buildings at Hanover. The Post Office was in the store. The mail carrier, William Christman from Hazen was there and as soon as the mail was made up and we h ad lunch, we bad farewell to the carrier from New Salem and continued with Mr. Christman. We got to know Billy, as everyone called him, real well, as he called square dances at many a country dance at which brother Bob and I furnished the music years later. I met him several years ago at Hazen, North Dakota, the only time I saw him since leaving North Dakota 35 years ago. I believe he is still living.

They claimed there was four feet of snow on the level that winter and of course, the wind, for which North Dakota is famous, and about the only objection I had to that state because the climate was simply wonderful. We blew the snow off the higher ground into the \_swabs?, draws and coulees. We were told by the mail carriers, that, at times we were traveling over as much as 35 feet of snow. Tab may be hard to believe but if anyone has ever driven a team of horses hitched to a sleigh loaded with 50 bushels of wheat, a tone of coal or a head of hogs over the top of snowbanks five and six feet deep without hardly damaging the crust, they will know hard the wind and cold can pack the snow. Our horses were so used to it that they would go right over the drifts without the slightest hesitation but it was like riding high waves in a row boat. It was earth rough. Once in a while we see a clump of willow or boxelder trees along a small creek. Or maybe some rancher or early settler may have grove of trees. In either case, the trees caught the snow as the wind blew it and I saw, with my own eyes, drifts fifteen to twenty feet high, as high as the trees. I found it more interesting every minute. About the middle of the afternoon we came to what was called the Pinto Post Office and stopped there just long enough to drop off a mail bag or two and pick up some mail. We reached the Hazen Post Office about dark. The Hazen Post Office was in the ranch home of John Gallagher, who was taken care of by his two daughters, Sarah and Kate. Their father and mother owned the ranch, which, as far I know, was never very large. They had a son, John, Jr. who lived near them on his homestead. I do not remember for certain, but I believe the Post Office was occupied by the father and mother, who were elderly, when I first met them. As I remember, John, Jr., or Zack, as he was known by everybody, operated a small country store. The elder folks gave us our supper and offered us a night’s lodging. But mother was so anxious to reach the bedside of brother Bob that she asked if there was any way we could get to the Carl Johnson homestead where brother Bob lay ill. Billy Christman, the mail carrier said, “My team is too tired to go any further but that he would send a man to take us to the Carl Johnson place. About eight o’clock, a Russian boy, about twenty years of age, arrived with a large stout team of gray horses and a jumper to take us the elven miles to the Johnson place. A jumper, as it was called, is a box with a seat built on it or wit the old fashioned wagon spring seat. The box is about six feet and is part red onto the front pair of runners of a farm sleigh. After you ride on one, you will say the jumper is the right for it because it surely does jump over the snow drifts. The sky was clear and there was no moon. It seemed like the stars were a lot nearer to the earth than they were in South Dakota. I will never forget that night. The prairie seemed to be one large expanse of snow that faded away into a dark horizon. We had not gone more than one half mile before we were on a snow trail. I will explain a snow trail later.

A short time after we started, it seemed to me we were going north and I asked the driver which direction we were going at the time. He said, “West”. In fact, every time I asked him a question he would answer west or southwest. Several times the driver would stop the team, stand up in the jumper, study the situation, then sit down and go on again. He talked very little. It seemed that he did not care to carry on a conversation. Once at one of the forks in the trail, he took the one to the right, went a short distance, stopped, stood up, looked around and then swung the team off to the left across the unbroken snow till he came to the left fork. I was a bit uneasy. The jumper sat on top of the snow but here and there one or the other of the team would break through then drop down the full length of its legs, then would make a powerful lunge and come up on top again. It was not very far to the other fork of the trail and we were glad when he hit it. We followed it from there on and arrived at the Johnson place about two hours after we left Hazen Post Office. As I remember, the driver only charged us $2.50 and as soon as he had unloaded our luggage, he started back home.

We wished him luck and when we said, “We hope you get home safely.” He said “Oh, I’ll make it alright.” For some reason, we never learned his name. He seemed shy and said very little at any time but he surely was kind and accommodating and certainly did not overcharge us. Needless to say, my brother was very glad to see us and although he was suffering very much he seemed to perk up when he arrived.

We found the Johnson family to be very nice people, very kind and neighborly, and they had done all they could. They had gotten several of Mr. Johnson’s brothers onto the sleigh and took him to their house, which was a rather long sod building with four rooms. There were five of those Johnson brothers on homesteads within a radius of three miles, each one six feet tall or a little over that. The only one that was married and had a family was Carl, who was the eldest of the five.

The next morning, I saw for the first time the shack my father had built on his homestead. It was twelve by sixteen, had two windows and a door, and had a shed or slant roof, six feet high on the low side and eight feet high on the high side. It was about three quarters of a mile from the Carl Johnson’s place. From where I was, it looked like the roof and just the top of the north window was all I could see above the snow.

It was decided that mother would stay at the Johnson place to care for brother Bob. So, after breakfast, I went to our homestead and found Martin Nested, who had filed on the quarter that joined ours on the south, doing the chores. I took over and bached for a couple of weeks, until my brother, who was improving and the weather had become milder, to move him into the homestead.

Hazen was our Post Office. The settlers and ranchers took turns making the twenty-two mile round trip to get the mail for the entire community. About half of the homesteaders did not, as yet, own a horse because many of them were in their first year on the homestead. Most of them were single men and a few of them, single ladies. Of course, time took care of all that. But it was not an uncommon thing for a man to start early in the morning and walk to the Post Office, bring the mail back in a sack, that was taken along for that purpose.

The settlers usually knew who went after the mail. It was usually left at the Carl Johnson Homestead or at the John Henderson Ranch, about a mile from the Johnson place. All we had to do was see Johnson or Henderson. Either could usually tell us whether anyone was going or had gone for the mail. There would be quite a gathering at one or the other place toward evening. We were able, in that way, to get our mail, once, twice or as many as five or six times a week, for the mail arrived daily at Hazen.

While I was alone on the Homestead, I found out one evening how easy it is to get lost and that is really true. That when lost, a man would walk in a circle. I had ben to visit a neighbor, got back to the Homestead a little late and by the time I took care of the stock, it was 8 P.M. I knew the mail had to be left at the Johnson, so I decided to walk over and get my mail. There was a fairly solid foot path and as long as I stayed on the path, I could easily make it. The night was cloudy and very dark. I was about one fourth of a mile from the shack when I broke through the snow and knew I was off the beaten path. I stood still looking around me but could not see a single light. I could not see our shack or a light at the Johnson place. The walls of their sod house were three feet thick and unless you were lined up right, you could not see the light of an ordinary kerosene lamp very far. Thinking I had gotten off the path on the right side, I took to the left in search of the path stomping rather hard to determine if I hit it or not, lighting a match once in a while, when I thought I had hit it. But I did not have many matches with me and I was beginning to be alarmed when I finally hit the path. I struck a match and it took only a glance to prove that to me. Of course, I thought I had been going south all the time in search of the path. So when I hit it, I naturally turned right and walked stooped over to make sure not to do it again.

After walking a short way, I stopped and looked ahead and could see the dim form of a small building. That scared me more than ever, for I knew there was no building between our shack and the Johnson place. Well, I kept on and the little building became plainer all the time until my happy surprise. It turned out to be our shack. Believe me, when I went in and went to bed, I don’t know when I was ever so glad to get home. The next morning, I found that I had gotten off the path on the left side, instead of the right. By the places where I broke through the hard snow crust, I could see that I had gone in a nearly perfect round circle, not more than one hundred fifty yards across so that when I came back to the path, less than one hundred feet from where I had left it and turned myself home, instead of to the Johnsons.

A little further back in my story I mentioned that many of the settlers had not yet acquired a team of horses. Four of Carl Johnson’s brothers, all bachelors, decided to each buy one horse. That way they could get some sod broken and raise some flax, which brought a good price. It was the only crop, outside of flint corn, that could be raised on new breaking.

Along about the middle of March, when the snow was pretty well gone, the four brothers, Chris, Martin, Oscar, and Ole started walking first to one ranch and then to another and back again until they found what they wanted in horses. All four of those men were over six feet tall and when they walked, took such long steps that they really did cover distance. Several times when I happened to walk with them or either one the, I had to trot a few steps, every little while, to keep up. Traveling slow on foot was something that did not happen to them. They bought four horses, and a fourteen inch breaking plow, hitched the four horses, and broke ten acres of sod on each one’s claim and seeded it to flax. If you work hard enough, you can break two acres a day with that kind of an outfit. But if you lose any time, by changing plows or repairing a broken hitch or evener, you will likely have one acre done by the end of the day. So when you stop to think it over, they did well to break forty acres and seed it.

The fore part of April we received word that father and Sister Maud would arrive in Glen Ullin, our nearest railroad town, thirty-five miles south of our Homestead. On a certain day, I made preparations to get the carload of household goods, two horses, a wagon and some machinery, two cows, etc. which he was shipping my rail, hauled out to the Homestead.

My older brother, John Henry, had filed on a claim two miles west of ours, the fall of 1906 and had moved his family onto a rented place near Glen Ullin and was now building a house on his homestead. He had a team and wagon at the homestead with which had been hauling lumber for the house he was building. So he, Oscar Johnson, and I left for Glen Ullin early one morning. The Johnson brothers took their horses off this sod breaking job and the plow was idle two days while they made the trip with us. That is the kind of neighbors we all were to one another in those days. We reached town before sundown. Father had arrived that day. He came with the immigrant car, as they were called. Maud had arrived earlier and was with Brother John’s family.

Father already had the horses, cows and wagon unloaded. The wagon had been taken apart because you cannot crowd very much onto a railroad car eight feet long, thirty-six feet long and seven feet high, unless you take things apart. Especially when one third of the space goes for livestock. He had it together and had loaded things he could handle onto the horses. When we got there, we shoved his wagon away from the car. After taking care of the horses, we loaded Oscar’s wagon with heavy bulky articles, as he wanted to get back early the next morning to get his horses home as early as possible. Because the next day they would be plowing again and needed all the time they could get to eat and rest. We had our supper at a restaurant and took our blankets up into hay mow of the livery barn where our horses were and slept on the hay.

The next morning we arose very early, fed and harnessed the horses, had breakfast. Oscar started for home after which we loaded the rest of our property on three wagons and tied the cows behind one wagon. About ten A.M. we pulled out for home. That morning my father had sent me uptown for some nails and wire needed to fasten something together. I met a young man who had homesteaded about eight miles southeast of ours and his father had a claim adjoining his. His name was William Vincent and we had gotten acquainted at a dance. His mother and his youngest sister were in town with him. He pointed them out to me on the street. I had not seen them before and little did I think, at the time, that this young lady and I would someday become husband and wife but that is what eventually took place I will tell you about that later. I mentioned before that we left town about ten A.M., stopped at noon to feed and water the horses and cows. The trail wound around the largest hills and over the smaller ones. Because it was hard for the cows to travel very fast we did not reach the homestead on which lived a man named Arthur Smith. He and father had gotten to know each other the summer before when they had worked together at carpenter work. Although he had a wife and two small children and his claim shack was small, he would have it no other way but that we stay overnight with them. When his wife spoke of the small house, just two small rooms, he said, “Don’t worry, mother, we all get used to camp life in time”. We finally reached home the next day about noon and at last we were all on the homestead, lock, stock and barrel. Getting back to Arthur Smith, I never forgot him. He was the kind of a man who knelt at his bedside and said a prayer before lying down. My sister and I had taken turns driving the team and walking behind the cows all day and we were very tired and surely did enjoy a night’s rest, which the kind of hospitality of the Smith family made possible. Brother Bob had improved to where he was able to limp around and try to help but mostly getting in the way as we went about the task of getting settled on the homestead. We were all happy, especially mother and father. Uncle Bob, as we began to call him, took a back seat over all the excitement and father sent me to town to bring back the Doctor. I went with a team and buggy one day, reached town by evening and the next day the Doctor and I got back to the homestead quite early because with a light rig, like we had the horses could trot most of the way. The Doctor stayed overnight doing all he could for brother Bob and the next day I took him back again after he had given us instructions and left medicine for Brother Bob. He told me on the way back to town that Bob had congestion of the lungs and enlargement of the heart which often followed a bad case of inflammatory rheumatism. He was afraid brother Bob would not pull through. “But”, he said, “if you take care of him and see that he takes the medicine I left him, he may surprise all of us because he is young and brave and has a strong will to live. Doctor said that if brother Bob did get able, we should bring him to town as soon as he could stand the trip. Perhaps, it was the will to live, the medicine or the care that did the trick or maybe all three things put together. He never did complain and always had a lot of courage.

Anyway, a few days after the Doctor had been there, he began to improve just three weeks from the day I took the Doctor back to town, brother Bob insisted he was strong enough to stand the trip so away we went. He always did love to handle horses and I let him take the lines and drive most of the way to town. We got there early and he waked into the Doctor’s office. He always did have a powerful voice and on this occasion he put all the power head into it and s the Doctor looked up, he yelled, “Hello Doc”. The Doctor, with a surprised look on his face, said, “Well, I’ll be darned. You made it”. Of course, that pleased brother Bob very much but he always did think the Doctor was a very good one and we were all of the same opinion. I have forgotten the Doctor’s name but never forgot how he pulled brother Bob through. There other reasons why we went so far for a Doctor. Doctor L. G. Eastman carried on practice at Krem a small inland town in a Russian settlement about twenty miles northeast. I mentioned before that he had been consulted in brother Bob’s illness but after were on the homestead, were informed or, rather misinformed, that he was you and inexperience and not a very good Doctor. He took care of my parents later in their last illness before they passed away and no man could have done better than he did. In fact, he continued to be our family doctor until several years later when the rail road came through. A town sprang up two and a half miles east of our homestead (Beulah) and a Doctor located there. Much was to be done and we worked hard that year of 1907. Father and mother were not very well. Brother Bob was improving and was able to help with the work Martin Nefstad; our good neighbor on the homestead that joined ours on the south helped us a lot. In return, we let him use our horses to break sod and get in some crop. First we built an addition to our shack, 14 feet by 16 feet, and made the whole building 16 feet by 26 feet. WE then had two rooms. Money was very scarce as the only income we had was father’s Veterans pensions of $12 per month and the money my brother and I earned playing for country dances. As far back as I can remember there was always music in our home, as most of my older brothers and sisters played some instruments. We had an old-fashioned parlor organ for which father paid $90 when I was about four years of age. Two of my sisters played the organ. Brother Bob played the mandolin. He and I started playing for dances when I was seventeen years of age. He was two years younger than I. Even though money was a scarce, the men would chip in fifty cents each and we got about $10, as a rule, for our night’s work. The people had to have some kind of enjoyment and dances were, in those days the most popular pastime. There were several ranch houses on the homesteads in that part of the country with rooms large enough to dance in and people surely did dance. There was very little drinking or disturbance of any kind. People from miles around came to dance. It was usually three A.M. before the dance was over. Their excuse for dancing so later was that they could not find way home before daylight. We played as much as six to seven hours some nights.

Of course, there were other musicians in the country and they would spell us off for a number or two, at times, during the night. We did the same for them when we attended a dance they played. WE always knew who would be there as that nearly always they were all there unless sickness or something prevented them from coming.

Hazen, North Dakota is now one of the nicest country towns I have ever seen Mike Keeley’s ranch was located on the west city limits of the Hazen and the town was named after the old Hazen Post Office. Mrs. Keeley was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Gallagher, who operated the Post Office in the early days. Keeleys had an old ranch house on the place. They lived in a new one they had built. The old one, having large rooms was known as Keeley Hall and many dances were held there. At every dance, it was always announced where and when the next one would be. That is how they did the advertising; everyone knew where and when to go. The host would serve sandwiches and coffee at midnight. Most of the ladies would bring a cake, so we would have lunch. After lunch there would be singing, story-telling or someone would dance a jig. Then the party would go on again for several hours. We really enjoyed playing and we were proud of being able to wear the crowd out. After the collection was taken up, the host was paid for sandwiches and coffee, the musicians received the balance. We received as low as $6 and as high as $17. . But when we were hired at a set price, as was the case now and then, it was $10. We used most of the money to live on and if it had not been for that source of income, it would have been very rough.

We had a few cows and chickens that kept us supplied with milk, butter and eggs. Sometimes we had a few dozen eggs or some butter to trade for groceries at the country store, but it did not go very far.

Getting back to our dance playing. Bob used to say when we were on our way home, “There is quite a lot of satisfaction in having people dance to your music”. He always did the driving but he was also a sleepy head. He could sleep soundly in a boiler factory. We would start home from a dance and would start nodding. The lines started slipping out of his hands. Then I would take over and he would sleep all the way home. That summer we built several more sod buildings, including a sod house forty feet and fourteen feet wide. We dug the winter’s supply of coal, hauled it home, broke some more land, raised some crops, though poor they were, put up all the hay we could and were pretty well prepared for winter by November first. Most of the summer, it was too dry and we had to really scratch for hay. We had a little garden in and raised some potatoes.

As I stated before, prairie grouse were plentiful and tasted very good, when properly prepared. Father would bring out the two shotguns to where Bob and I would be working and say, “Boys, go down along the creek and us a mess of chickens”. And lots of times we were not gone more than a half hour and bring back three or four or more nice young fat grouse.

We often remarked that we did not really go hunting but rather that we would go out and get enough for a meal or two and come back to work.

Erecting a sod building was quite an art, if it was done right. It had to be right or it would settle to one side or the other and ruin the whole structure. The toughest sod was in the bottom of a coulee. With a fourteen inch breaking plow, we turned the sod over about four inches thick. Then with a sharp spade, cut the sod in pieces twenty-eight inches long and hauled the bricks, as they were called, on a wagon to the building site, which had to level and square to start with. The first layer on the ground was usually done by laying the blocks or bricks crosswire to the wall. After a layer was laid clear around the four sides of the building, a sharp how was used the surface even, the loose dirt being worked into the joints, to make it airtight. In the next layer, the blocks were laid lengthwise on the wall. The first two, having seven inches cut to make a break in joints and it was very important that every layer be laid so as to break joints, just as in laying brick. Door and window frames had to be set up and held in a plumb and level position by a brace, attached to a stake driven into the ground inside the building. The wall was twenty eight inches wide. As the work progressed, the inside and outside was trimmed with a sharp spade to keep it straight and even. When properly built, a sod building is snug and warm. Sometimes the walls were plastered, inside and out, with gumbo mud found mostly around the coal mines. The gumbo plaster got hard when dry and it lasted a long time and served to make the building still more snug and warm. The wind could be howling outside but inside the house, you would notice it very little. Of course, the sod was cut very carefully to fit snugly around the door and the window frames. Some put on a wood shingle or rolled roofing but many just put up rafters and plain boards, then heavy tar paper, weighted down with sod laid on careful with the grass side down; in some cases, plastered over the gumbo mud. At least it was comfortable building at little cost except labor.

For barns, etc., we often dug into the side of a hill, for the ground was hard and seldom caved in; then rod up the balance of the building. Carl Johnson lived in a sod house built many years before by a horse rancher. It was at least fifty feet long and had about five rooms and was lined inside with muslin and building paper. One evening a kerosene lamp was accidentally upset and exploded. The fire spread so rapidly that the family barely got out with only the clothing they were wearing. I believe it happened in late March of 1908. They lost all of their belongings. They fled to a country store about a quarter of a mile away. It happened just after dark in the evening and could be seen for miles. Neighbors from miles rushed to the e scene but nothing could be done. The crowd finally all gathered in the store where the family was and one man, William Stevens, took off his hat, dropped two dollars into it and said, “I have a couple of collars for these folks, how about the rest of you?” Then someone else asked for volunteers to visit the surrounding communities, seeking donations, which was a done the next day. As, I remember, $1000 was raised that way. Within a few days Carl’s brother, Chris, who was a good carpenter, joined the folks in planning the size and kind of a house which they would build. After which my brothers, Bob and John, and four or five others with teams and wagons made the trip to Hebron, about forty-five miles away and back, bringing out all of the lumber, windows, doors, shingles, nails, and hardware needed to build the entire house.

They made the trip in two days, and then neighbors all went at the job, building the house. Within a couple of weeks, the Carl Johnson family moved into the new house. Many articles of furniture and dishes, etc. had been donated by the good people of the community. While it was not new, it served the purpose and also proved the kind of people we had in that part of the country in those days. The old sod house burned for days. You may not believe it, but the dry roots of the grass that been in the sold, furnished fuel for the fire. That part of North Dakota was known as a semi-arid belt. I sometimes think that whoever invented that term should have left off the “semi” because I saw it so dry that, as one old Missourian said, ‘”It is dry to raise my voice. We had a lot of homesteaders from Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Indiana and they were all good steaders. The house we built for the Johnson family is still there. I saw it last summer when we were there, July of 1961.

Down the Knife River, about six miles east of our homestead, was a clump of boxelder trees called Cooks Grove because a man by that name used run a ranch there and some of the old buildings were still there. The homesteaders and ranchers got together and held a rousing Fourth of July in the Grove the summer of 1907. They hauled umber from New Salem and built a Bowery on which a dance was held in the evening. During the day there was Bronco riding, horse races, foot races and a hotly contested ball game between the Hayseeds and the Red Buttes. The latter team won. There was no parade or band. The only music was in the evening when Brother Bob, I and several others played for the dance.

My father had a navy blue suit with brass buttons which he always wore to such affairs. He enjoyed it as much as the rest of the folks. During the fall of 1907, my mother and father were not very well. I went back to South Dakota about November first to earn some money but the corn crop was poor. I was only able to husk 40 to 50 bushels per day at three cents per bushel. I was able to earn from $1.20 to $1.50 per day so by the time I paid train fare back to North Dakota, I had only a few dollars left. A few days before Christmas, I left South Dakota on the train for home. As the corn crop was light, the husking was over sooner than if the crop had been bearing. I got off the train at New Salem with the intention of riding out the next morning with the mailman. It was about seven P.M. when I got off the train and after I had supper at a restaurant, which cost me $0.35. I started to find the mailman to make the arrangements to ride out with him the next day. I had not yet been to the hotel see about a bed for the night. It was a good thing I had not paid for a bed. I did not need it for, as I walked, and I glanced in a store, I saw a man named Leonard Sysver. His homestead was about 10 miles southeast from ours and it was 35 miles to his homestead. He was all alone with a team and buggy and said he was driving home yet that night. There was no snow on the ground and we knew the team would average about five miles or six per hour. So we had at least a seven hour night drive ahead. Leonard said he did not have the price of a night's lodging for himself and team. I was nearly broke so we hit the road. The sky was clear and full of stars. It was so cold we could not keep warm riding so one of us would drive while the other trotted behind the buggy. Whenever the man trotting felt warm enough to drive awhile, he would hop onto the buggy, climb over the back of the seat, get under horse blankets, take over the lives and the other man would hop out and trot until he was warmed up. That way we did not need to stop to change off. I think each of us trotted about twelve or fifteen miles that might. There was no wind, but it was very cold and as the trail passed right through the yard of many homesteaders, we could smell the lignite coal smoke from the heating stoves, which had been stoked for the night. As it got to be about midnight, it seemed to be a lot colder. Leonard said that if he knew any of these people he would stop and blanket the horses, get to one of those stoves, have a cup of coffee and maybe a bite to eat. But that would take more nerve than either of us had. Although, I am sure it could have been done and the people would have been glad to give us a handout, even in the middle of the night. Leonard had five brothers on the homesteads in his community. They were John, Albert, Oscar, Morgan and Frank. They were Norwegians from Iowa and put me so much in mind of the Johnson brothers in our old neighborhood, who I have spoken of, so many times.

Along about two A.M., as we began to get nearer home, Leonard said, “By golly, we will be going right by the Oscar’s place about two miles this side of the mine. He will have a warm shack and if we go on to my place, it will be colder in the shack then out of doors. So we will stop at Oscars, put the horses in the barn (He had a lantern with him.) and surprise Oscar. John and Albert were married, but the other four, including Leonard, were bachelors so we did what he suggested: put the horses in the barn, put the blankets on them after un-harnessing, fed them some hay, then went in and found the stove cold and Oscar not at home. So we built a fire and nearly froze while waiting for the stove to warm up. In the meantime, we made coffee and found some food. About 4:30, after we had thawed out and eaten, we went to bed. About four hours later, we were up and preparing breakfast when Oscar walked in. He had spent the night with Morgan.

After breakfast, we did the dishes and harnessed the horses. They had been fed as soon as we arose. WE went on to Leonard’s place. I was very anxious to get home. So it being about ten miles as the crow flies, I struck out on foot across the prairie over the hills and through the Coulees in a bee line for home. Two creeks and a river frozen solid were easy to cross. About noon, I reached home and found that father had had a stroke and was paralyzed from the waist down. Mother was also very poorly, spending most of the time in bed. Doctor Eastman was taking care of them. Brother John Henry and wife Ida Mae were there most of the time. The Doctor came the next day and I went back with him twenty miles to Krem where he lived and practiced. He told me that I could saddle the horse and ride with him in the buggy and bring back medicine for mother and Dad. Mother was past 63 years of age and Father was not quite 63. The Doctor said there was not much chance of either of them living very long; that with a stroke like father had suffered; a person rarely lived more than a week or two. Mother had a bad case of asthma. It is hard for me to explain how I felt as I rode home on my saddle horse. I tried to hurry with the medicine. It was getting late, the days were short, and there was always the danger the horse could step into a hole and break a leg, if I tried to make him run too fast. Besides, it was cloudy and very dark. My brother Bob and sister Maud were at home. So were John Henry and his wife. I imagined all kinds of things and I was certainly relieved and thankful to God when I reached home and found both of my parents feeling better. The medicine I brought seemed to help and for a few days, it all looked brighter.

Of course, father had to be taken care of every moment of the day and night. Mother and Father’s beds were both in one room of our two-room house or shack, as everyone called it. Brother Bob spent most of his time at the bedside of his father. Between all of us we managed to get some rest always with one or two of us on duty. Mother was up and around, part of the time, but spent most of her time in bed. Neighbors and friends stopped in to see them and they both tried to be cheerful, not matter how sick they were. But we all knew that neither of them could live very long. It had always been their wish that no matter which one passed away first, the other would not have to live long thereafter. As it turned out, God did grant them that wish or prayer.

The evening of January 3rd, 1908, mother was sitting up in bed combing her hair, when suddenly she dropped back on her pillow and without a word, passed away. My brother John Henry and his wife Ida, brother Bob, sister Maud and I were all there. Of course, when father saw us all rush to mother’s bedside, he knew at once that mother had passed away because when John went to tell him, he said, “I know Mother is gone but I will be with her soon”. Even though we expected it, her death came as a shock. After perhaps half an hour had passed, John walked out of the house and sometime later, several neighbors and their came. The women, one of them Mrs. Carl Johnson, carried mother into the other room and prepared her body, for burial. In those days, undertakers were scarce and people knew what to do when death came. In our case, there was no undertaker nearer than 35 miles. Still some more people came a little later and sometime after midnight these good people, knowing that we were all tired out with work and grief, suggested that we should all go to John’s home and get some rest. So a team was hitched to the wagon and we were ready to start. Brother John decided to stay and no amount of urging could change his mind so Ida and the three of us children went without him. Father even insisted we should go, saying that he was in good neighborly hands and would be alright until next morning. Those were the last words we heard him utter.

The next morning, January 8th about 8:00 A.M., we arose, hitched up the horses and started back home. On the way, we met John Henry walking to his home. When we met, he told us, Father had passed away at 8 o’clock and he was going home to get his team and wagon to go to Glen Ullin to buy the caskets. We were so stricken with grief that there was very little said the rest of the way home. When we got home we found more neighbors had arrived and some were taking care of father. Several of the women were doing housework.

Before he left, I gave him the last five dollar bill we had to pay his overnight expenses. I don’t know how word got around so fast but before the day was about 40 men and women from near and far had gathered. I don’t know, to this day, how word got around so fast but before the day was over, about 40 men and women, from near and far, had gathered. The country was so new that there was no cemetery nearer than 20 miles. So these people held a meeting to decide on a location for a cemetery which was on an upland prairie \_\_\_ of two acres on speculator land, the owner of which lived in Iowa, I believe.

Certain legal proceedings were necessary to do this but we had men in the gathering who knew what to do in a case like this. So they proceeded to locate corner stones, measure out the land and open a grave in the Southeast corner of the cemetery. Today, 54 years later, the resting place of our parents can be seen. The cemetery is about four miles south of Beulah, North Dakota. We were there last, in July 1961. I have visited the place many times since we moved away from there, thirty-nine years ago. There are probably 75 to 100 graves there now. But when the railroad came and Beulah started in 1912, a cemetery was laid out just north of town. Since then most burials were made there although some are still being made in the old cemetery where my parents were the first to be laid to rest.

After brother John Henry left for Glen Ullin there were so many people coming and going that it all seemed like a bad dream. They took complete charge of the whole situation and did not allow us to do anything. I remember so well, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Hollister, Mr. and Mrs. B.F Evans, their daughter Phrona and fiancé, Herbert J. Roberts, for all they did for us through those sad and trying hours. Toward the end of the day on January 8th, one of the homesteaders named Pettis, came to me and said he just remembered we would have to see Doctor Eastman and secure death certificates before our parents could be legally buried. So about six P.M., one of our neighbors offered to go to Krem, where the Doctor was located. But as he had some chores to do first, we did not get started until about 9 P.M. We reached Krem, 20 miles away, about midnight. We did not awaken the people who owned the livery barn. But we got our horses into the barn and found a lantern, found feed and water for the horses, then got the doctor out of bed. The Doctor made us some tea and some sandwiches, which we surely appreciated. The Doctor goes the papers ready, then sat and talked with us while we gave the horses time to eat. About 2 A.M., we started back to the homestead. It was breaking day when we reached there. I was so tired that I slept till afternoon. About 4 P.M., Brother John Henry got home with the caskets. He and I signed a noted for $70 for the caskets, being $35 apiece. We paid that noted the following fall when we had some flax and wheat to sell.

The next day, January 6th at 2 P.M., services were held in the west room of our homestead shack. We had an old fashioned Parlor Organ which father had given to mother, when I was a very young boy. I do not remember who played the organ but I believe it was Mrs. Hollister. I know that the Holister and Evans families sang the hymns, one of which was, “Nearer My God to Thee”. If my memory serves me right, Herbert Roberts preached the funeral sermon. Although he told me in April 1960 that he preached several funeral sermons, in those days, so long ago. But he does not remember whether he preached the sermon for my parent’s funeral or not.

Two of our neighboring homesteaders, who had horses, transported the caskets to the grave. The y found two Spring Wagons, as they called these, the body of which is about 6 ½ or 7 feet long. There are two seats which are easy to remove, which was done in this case. The river had to sit on the end of the casket, over which a blanket was laid. I never forgot how carefully both men handled their horses, while crossing at what was known as Keogh’s crossing, named after Tom and Jim Keogh, two brother who owned and operated a ranch in that part of the country.

The river was not frozen except a little along each side of the stream. The water was no more than a foot deep because al crossings were on what is known as a riffle. In such places, the bottom was rock anywhere from the size of a hen egg to the size of a bushel basket. And as most of the larger rocks were usually removed, it still left a rather rough crossing.

After the funeral we came back to the homestead shack took care of the livestock and spent the night at the home of my brother John Henry. My sister, Ida Staigle and Brother Bill, as we called him, had homesteads near each other; about 38 miles east of our homestead. Ida came with Bill to the funeral. The next day after the funeral, Bill went home but Sister Ida stayed to help clean up the homestead shack and get beds and other things back in place. Nearly everything had been piled up outside to make room for the large number of people who had attended the funeral. Boards, planks and boxes had been used to seat as many as possible. Many stood outside as there was not enough room inside. All of this had to been moved before we could clean up. The next day I took Sister Ida back to her home where her husband, Martin, had stayed to take care of their large family. It took all day with team and wagon. We stopped at noon to water and feed the team and eat a cold lunch. Brother Bill had told me he would get a load of diamond willow fence posts. So the next morning he and I drove his team eight miles to the brush and timber on the Missouri River bottom, cut and loaded about 150 posts and then back to his homestead where my team had rested. I hitched my team to the load, went back to Staigles two miles and put up for the night.

Willie Staigle, the oldest son, about 16 years of age, had never gotten much schooling because there was no schoolhouse near. There was one near our homestead so it was decided that he should return with me and stay with us and go to school until spring. So the next morning we started for home with the load of posts. Before we started, Willie’s father, Uncle Mart, as we called him, came out of the house with a 50 lb. sack of flour, tossed on the wagon and said, “That may come in handy”. Then he pulled out his pocket book ad have me $3. He knew I did not have one penny to my name and to this day believe it was his last $3 at the time.

We did not reach home that day because the horses were pulling a load. About sundown, while we were still about 10 miles from home, we were passing the Henry Edwards homestead. He called out to the road and asked us how far we had come. We told him we had come 28 miles and he said that was far enough for the horses. He invited us to stay overnight and we gladly accepted. The next morning we did not arise very early but got home at about noon. Willie stayed with us until school was out. During the year of 1908 brother Bob and I broke up more prairie sod and raised a fairly good crop.

After Willie Staigle came home with me, we tried to do the best we could about cooking our meals. Brother Bob made a pan of biscuits one day. He rolled the dough two or three times and got too much flour in the dough. They looked when taken out of the oven but were hard as a rock. Willie took one and threw it against the door of the shack. It sounded as if he had thrown a rock and when it hit the floor, the dog grabbed it and as it was hot, the dropped it quickly. Willie shouted, “See there. It is so hard the dog hurt his teeth”. It finally fell to my lot to do the cooking and with practice; I was finally able to prepare a fairly decent meal. After school was out, Willie went home and he stayed with us the net term again and we had a lot of music. I also taught him all I could on the violin. He got to be a very good violinist and later had his own dance band of five players.

In those days, the violin was the main solo or lead instrument in dance bands. The fiddler, as he or she was called, had to lead all through every number that was played. Willie went home after school was out in March 1909.

Brother Bob and I got some sod broken, put in the flax, sowed wheat and oats, and raised a good crop. We had also raised some the year before in 1908. I went to the harvest fields up in McHenry County, about 125 miles away, with a team of horses, wagon and bundle rack. I earned $98. Bob stayed at home to care for things, including my outfit. There were four other young men with teams and wagons, two men without teams, two girls (one of which was Viola Dugan, a sister of Jake Dugan and Belle Vincent, who at the time this writing has been my dear wife of 55 years). She was Jake’s girl at the time. Our intentions were to all to get a job on one crew and the girls to work as cooks for the crew in the cook car, so named because it looked like a railroad box car. It was on wheels and was pulled behind the threshing rig from one job to another, usually left in the yard of the farm home where water, fuel and vegetables could be had. There it stood for several days while the crew did the farmers threshing. Our plans did not work out for we arrived a little late in the harvest fields. The men got jobs on different crews. The girls got a job in a restaurant in Balfour, North Dakota and worked until the threshing was finished.

We had lot of fun on our way to the harvest fields. We were on the road four days and nights. We cooked meals over an open fire. At night the girls had a place under the wagons. One of the men, and Irish lad, helped himself to four bundles of oat one day, to fee his horses overnight. The farmer saw him take; it jumped on a horse, went and got a constable, caught up with us, stopped the whole procession and made us pay $1 per bundle. That was the highest priced oats we got on the entire trip!

One Sunday, when we were getting near the end of the threshing, I went to town and there met one of our crowd, who told me that all of the other men and the girls had started home some time before. As he and I only had a few days’ work left, we decided to start home together, for it would be long and lonesome trip alone. His name was Lee Thomas and a joy fellow. We sat by our campfire evenings, smoking our pipes and telling stories until time to turn in. One of my horses developed a fistula the second day on the trip. A fistula is a lump or swelling at the g top of the shoulder blade and breaks open like a large boil, discharging puss and very painful. So we had to go slow.

Lee took the lead and often had to wait for me to catch up. I asked him to go on and I would get home as best as I could. But he said he would stay with me. If it got so bad that the mare could no longer pull, we would hook the wagon behind his, hitch the three good horses to his wagon and lead the ailing one. Bathing her should with cold water several times a day helped. Finally after five days on the road, we reached home, my poor mare barely making it.

The last 20 miles I traveled alone as Lee had to travel south to his homestead. We were traveling west at the time we parted. I tried as best I could to thank him for his kindness in sticking with me, like he did. Homesteaders were nearly all like that; always ready to help. We did not think so much about ourselves. We were concerned on how the other fellow was coming out.

When the threshing run was about over, a young man from St. Paul, Minnesota, who was on our crew, offered me a single-barreled shotgun that he gad and could not take with him for $2.50. I bought it. On the way home, I was anxious to find out what the gun would do. So I bought a box of shells, 12 gauge with No. 4 shot. The first target was a crow on a fence post about 100 yards away. I took aim and fired and the crow toppled off the post, like a lump of lead.

Next to the last day on the road home, we were traveling along the south side of the Missouri River when I saw lone wild duck about 85 yards from the shore. I fired one shot and the wind, blowing in toward the shore brought in my duck. After Lee and I parted that afternoon, I reached my sister Maud and her husband. It was still six miles to our homestead. They did not have to coax me to stay overnight with them. We cleaned the duck and put it in a cool place, as I was to arise early and take a trip through their cornfields, in hopes of bagging some prairie grouse, which were numerous those days.

As soon as daylight came, I was in that cornfield with my trusty single barreled shotgun. I raised one flock of grouse, fired into the flock and two birds came down. Anyone who has done any amount of wing shooting will tell you that two birds at one shot, happens very seldom. I left the grouse and the wild duck with Sister Maude. On the way home from there, the road or trail, as it was known, I followed the river part of the way. As I came around the bend of the stream, about 75 yards ahead, was six wild ducks swimming away from me. I fired one shot and three flew always. The other three, I fished out of the river and took home with me. Naturally by that time, I began to think that my $2.50 gun must be pretty good. It surely was for I hunted a lot those days and made several more shots with it that a lot people would not believe, if told.

Norman Bolstad, R 1 Gilman, Wisconsin is now the owner of the gun. I sold it to him about 10 years ago. It kicked like a three-year-old steer but anything in line ahead of it was liable to be in trouble when it barked. Enough for now about the gun.

Today is Jan 1st, 1966. In all of my life of nearly 79 years I have seen only one New Year’s Day that compared with this beautiful day. That was 58 years ago today in the small two-room homestead shack on the western North Dakota Prairie where both my mother and father lay ill and as it turned out their last bed on this earth. Their passing has been described farther back in my story but today even though there have been many light snows. The ground is bare, the sun shining brightly, temperature above freezing and it is hard to believe we are in the midst of winter. It certainly takes me back to that beautiful winter 58 years ago and I have thanked God many, many times that it was so. What in the world would we have done had there been zero weather several feet of snow and winds to whip it into a howling blizzard? Getting back to my story, we spent the winter in leisurely style taking care of the livestock and hunting jackrabbits and coyotes. Willie Staigle stayed with us again that winter and went to school. We had a lot of fun and good times together with a lot of music evenings. The next year, 1909 we had a good crop, put up our hay, dug a winters supply of coal, stacked our grain in the fall as soon as we could, left our cows with Brother John and we both went to the harvest fields with three teams, hiring a man to drive one team. We did not go as far as I had gone the preceding year but got in a very good run south of Underwood about 45 miles from home. Tom Boland, our hired man and I each hauled bundles on one crew and Bob got the job of hauling water for the engine on another crew. When the shock threshing was finished on the run we were on, Tom and I went home but brother Bob staid about two weeks longer because his outfit had stack threshing to do. Altogether, we cleared $298.00 that fall. We threshed and sold our flax and wheat, which was a good crop so we were in good shape financially and on Nov. 3rd Belle Vincent and I were married. On Nov 1st I drove to the home of my bride-to-be with our two-seated carriage and the next morning, her and I and her oldest brother and his lady friend departed for Glen Ullin, 35 miles distant arrived there early evening did some shopping, stayed overnight at a hotel and the next morning, Nov 3rd. We were married at the home of the priest, then traveled back to the homestead of my wife’s parents and enjoyed a nice wedding supper, prepared mostly by my wife’s mother. A few of our relatives and friends were there. Sometime after supper a crowd came and gave us an old-fashioned chivalry, if I spelled the word correctly, then we all celebrated for several hours after which my new wife and I drove to our homestead and arrived there about 2.00 A.M. We never had what is known, these days, as a honeymoon but we were very happy and contented at least. It was eight miles to the Vincent homestead and whenever the Mrs. wished to go home for a day we would hitch a horse to the top buggy and she would go for the day, returning in the evening. Sometimes I went with her but most times I stayed at home to work. I was very ambitious about building our future. As we live on our parents homestead, we had the household goods, as it was that my parents had left. The only new things we had, to start with were a few wedding gifts. About a week after we were married the people in our own neighborhood gathered and gave us another chivarie. We had nothing on hand with which to treat but that did not bother them a bit because they said that what they wanted was a free wedding dance so we rented Keeley’s hall, hired musicians and gave them a dance and a free lunch at midnight. My wife baked a lot of buns and we had ham sandwiches and coffee and cake. A lot of people commented on what a good cook my wife was and some said they had never eaten finer buns. In addition to Willie Staigle, we also boarded the schoolteacher, as we were less than a quarter of a mile from the Schoolhouse. He was a gruff old Irish widower named John L Cass and owned a team of ponies and an open buggy. We had two beds and a cot. Wife and I slept in the smaller room and most of what furniture we had was in our room and in the larger room we had a bed, table, cupboard, single cot and an old table model piano and chairs where we could put them. Brother Bob, Willie and Mr. Cass slept in the larger room. At bedtime we all retired and when morning came it like an Army barracks, everybody up at once. I was usually first to arise and start the cook stove and heating stove fires. While I did that the men dressed while my wife dressed and started breakfast as soon as the men were dressed so she could get to the cook stove in the larger room. Nobody complained about cramped quarters. We were used to making the best of what there was and we got thru the winter very nicely. My brother William, we all called him Bill, carried mail from Center in Oliver Co. To Washburn which is on the north bank of the Missouri River so he had to cross the river twice each weekday in a row -boat most of the time no matter what the weather. It was about 30 miles between the two towns. Bill lived about half way between the places. Bro Bob worked for him the most of the winter of 1909-1910 as Bill had to keep a hired man on his homestead to do the work as it took all day to make the Mail Route. Bob made the route and he would leave early each day with usually one horse, sometimes two, and a light rig, drive to Center and back to Bills place, eat an early dinner while Bill unhitched the horse, or horses and hitched a fresh one, then Bob, would go on with the mail unhitched at the river and, after blanketing the horses he would walk about 3/4 of a mile to Washburn. There was a ferry boat operating there but when the river began to freeze in late fall, and, also when it began to open in spring, there would be a channel open where the current was strongest and they would put the mail in the row boat, drag or shove the boat to the open channel, row across to the ice on the other side, hop out onto the ice, drag the boat up onto the ice, shoulder the mail bags and walk the remainder of the way. There were winters when the channel remained open all winter and others when the river froze over solid.

When that was the case they drove across on the ice, even with loads of grain or coal. Otherwise, when the river began to freeze in the fall, the ferryboat was hauled up into dry dock and they proceeded as explained above. Horses were changed again on the way back as on the way to Washburn then the mail was taken back to Center and I believe the driver usually came back to the homestead but sometimes staid the night in Center. At any rate he traveled 45 or 60 miles a day, changed horses twice, crossed the treacherous Missouri river twice, ate when he had a chance and slept when he could. It was a man sized days’ work but Bob liked it. The River, the general course of which is south, also has many bends in it and at many places runs east for miles. There were many days when the wind blew so hard and the waves were so high that the mail carrier crossed by Ferry but only on such days because it meant an added expense and carriers were not paid very high wager. The spring of 1910, Bob came home to help me with spring of 1910, Bob came home to help me with spring work. We put in wheat, oats flax and some flint corn. The season was so dry that we did not get our seed back. My Mother-in-law was not very well and seemed to be failing fast. My wife spent as much time with her as was possible, under the circumstances, and she really deserved it for she was a dear lady. I loved her as I did my own mother for she treated me as a son. One evening in June 1910, a neighbor from near the Vincent homestead brought us word that she had been taken to a small Clinic in Glen Ullin as she had become worse and needed extra care. We had retired when we received the word so we quickly dressed, I harnessed a team and we drove all night, arriving at her bedside about sun-up. She was unconscious and, as I remember, never spoke to us again. She passed away before noon and was laid to rest in the Glen Ullin Cemetery.