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An IOWA STORY "GRANDPA AND GRANDMA BISHOP BUILD A HOME"

By Wanda Smith

(This is a story of my grandmother's family from the early 1850's until grandmother's marriage about twenty years later.)

My father's mother was born in 1849 near what is now the site of Fort Dodge, Iowa, but she moved with her parents to a claim in Cass county when she was a very small child.

The long perilous journey was made in an old covered wagon, along with fifteen other families who made up the wagon train. As the wagons jugged along over rocks and rugged country, the old pots and pans which were tied to the outside clanked and clanged together. The dusty, bumpy trail was fast becoming a road that summer because so many people were traveling over it. On some days during the journey the heat inside the wagon became so intense that Grandma Bishop (grandmother's mother) had to walk beside the wagon part of the day. On those occasions the children tagged along beside her. Whenever the going was rugged or when there were streams to be forded, Grandpa led the horses.

Toward evening of each day, when it became too dark to go farther, the wagons in the train were pulled together in a large circle, and the cattle were turned into the circle. This method of camping was also a precaution against the Indians and wild animals which were roving about. After camp was made, the campfire was built, and the old coffee pot was set among the coals to boil. The women went about preparing the evening meal. Usually the main part of the meal was venison, and the sizzling steak sent up an appetizing aroma, which smelled good to the hungry travelers after their long day's journey. After supper, when the battered tin plates and pans had been washed, the family prepared to go to sleep in the wagon. Morning and the next day's travel always came quickly for all the travelers, except the sentry. All night long he watched with sleepless eyes for danger.

The trip of the wagon train across Iowa took a month's time. At the end of the journey the fif-

teen families separated, each to find its new home.

When Grandmother and Grandfather Bishop arrived at their claim, they began the building of their first house. It was a log cabin built from the timber along the banks of Turkey Creek. Grandpa Bishop hewed and notched the logs and, in general, built the cabin by himself. He also made a puncheon floor by leveling the earth, then sawing wooden slabs about five or six inches in thickness from three trunks. The slabs were fitted together to cover the ground. The floor was not very smooth, but it served the purpose. Grandma Bishop kept it scrubbed white and clean with a broom made from strips of bark tied to a handle.

As soon as the house was finished, Grandpa Bishop planted some corn. He planted only enough for the stock and for corn meal for the family. He also planted enough wheat for his family, and a little extra, for sometimes a neighbor would run out and have to buy wheat. Flax was also one of Grandpa's crops, for the fiber was used in making the family's clothing.

After the crops were in and the farm was running smoothly, Grandpa Bishop turned his attention to his chosen calling, that of a minister of the old Christian faith. He traveled the country for miles around, teaching the gospel wherever he went. The little church-going groups of people sometimes met with their pastor in the various homes, but more often the early meetings were held in the little school houses that were being built by the pioneers. Soon Grandpa Bishop was rewarded for his efforts by seeing little churches spring up all over the county.

While Grandpa went about his work, Grandma was busy too. As the settlement grew, she served as a doctor in the neighborhood. She had her own herb garden and dried the herbs and made them into different medicines. She had much work to keep her household running for the family kept growing in size, but she was never too busy to look after some sick person who was in need of attention.

At this time money was a rare thing in the county. Grandma

Bishop had hardly enough money for essential things, let alone any for luxuries. Almost all of the living had to come from the farm. The family had five or six cows, about twenty-five sheep, six hogs, and a few chickens. The family grew only what it could use, because there was so little demand for surplus; other folks raised their own supplies.

Still Grandpa Bishop was more fortunate than many pioneers, for he had a team of horses. Many of the neighbors had to use their cattle to do work in the fields.

Each home was a factory in Grandma Bishop's day. In addition to the cooking, cleaning and washing, there was shearing and washing of wool to be done. Getting the grease out of a sheep's wool with Grandma's laundry supplies and equipment was difficult. Then, when the wool was clean, it had to be carded and spun into yarn that was later dyed and used for stockings, mittens and other garments. All of the girls were taught to knit at a very early age, and each had to do her share of knitting for herself and the boys.

Grandma Bishop had learned the tailoring trade when she went to school, so she made all of the men's and boys' clothes as well as garments for the girls. But her skill went even further. When anyone in the family needed a new hat, the children were sent to the straw pile to pick out the longest straws they could find. These were treated with some herb mixture so they would not break, then braided and fashioned into hats.

Grandma's mother was a passionate lover of beauty. From her herb garden and from some of the barks of the trees, she learned to make beautiful dyes. With these she not only dyed her yarns and cloth, but she made flowers to decorate the girls' hats. She fashioned pretty cushions and other articles for her home. Neighbor women sometimes whispered that Grandma Bishop was silly, almost wicked, for spending so much time in that frivolous way. Sometimes she was openly criticized for her "wickedness" because she was the minister's wife.

However, the food that the family had was plain enough. Molasses, another product from the farm, was almost the only sweet. In the fall when the plums and crab apples were ripe in the timber, the whole family went to gather them. Apples were made into butter molasses for sweetening, and

put away in sixty gallon barrels. The plums were washed and put down in a brine which formed an acid so the fruit would not spoil. In the winter the plums froze, and when the family wanted some, they chopped them out of the barrel, sweetened and cooked them with molasses, and insisted that they were good. The diet was apparently healthful for there was seldom any sickness in the family, and the children were bright and active.

Before Grandpa Bishop became a minister, he had, by trade, been a cobbler. So he continued to use this skill by taking care of the shoe needs of the family. He tanned his own leather, which was sometimes cowhide, sometimes the skin of sheep or other animals whose hides were tough enough. For everyday shoes he used the cowhide because it was longer wearing, but for Sunday shoes he used the sheep hide which was softer and better looking.

The Bishop children all went to school at College Corner. At times there were almost enough of them to fill the school room; by the time Grandmother was grown, there were nineteen children, plus three or four sons-in-law and daughters-in-law and a few grandchildren.

When the oldest ones of the children were old enough to marry, the family had outgrown its first house. As they married, the older children built homes of their own nearby and helped absorb the "overflow" from the old log cabin. But even though they had homes of their own, the children and grandchildren were more or less dependent on Grandfather Bishop for help and guidance; they were often in need of Grandma Bishop's vast store of knowledge, her nursing or her motherly kindness.

Grandmother, being one of the older children, was less dependent on her father and mother than the others. So when she married Jackson Clay Smith, a Christian minister, they moved to a Kansas homestead to begin life much as Grandma and Grandpa Bishop had done ten years earlier.