

Arch and Lana Walrath Typical Among Pioneers

Father Often 'Refought' for Listeners War Between States

By MAUDE SILVERSTRAND (Special Correspondent)
ATKINSON — Archbald and Lana Kretzer Walrath came of a long line of Mohawk valley pioneers. Before their marriage Arch did his duty as he saw it in the war between the states. When, in after years, diphtheria took three of their four children in less than two weeks it seemed to them that happiness was lost forever. Friends suggested that a change would do them good.

A new country was being opened up known as the "land of rolling prairies." Some were taking advantage of the homestead acts, others were running cattle on the ranges. Arch was only a blacksmith but surely there was something there for them.

Many people of the Ingham Mills, Little Falls and East Creek districts in New York where Lana's and Arch's parents lived, had gone West to Holt county, Nebraska. They had written back glowing accounts of bounteous hunting and fishing, rich fertile land, and growing business opportunities. So, Arch decided they would go there.

The tale that follows only gives a few of the highlights in the lives of Arch, Lana and their only remaining child, Martin Henry, who was my father.

It was in March, 1885, when the Walraths arrived at the newly-built C & NW railroad station at Atkinson. The railroad had only recently been built from Neligh to Long Pine. The daughter of a young man who helped to build this stretch of railroad and who later became one of Holt county's pioneer lawyers was destined to become my mother. She was the late Coila Uttley Walrath, daughter of the late H. M. Uttley, of O'Neill, and Mrs. Alberta Uttley, 92, who now resides in Alvin, Tex.

Young Martin was six-years-old at this time. He was delighted with the horse and hack waiting to take them to the Conrad Boehme home. South and East of the station. They were to live with this family until other arrangements could be made. The Boehme's had several small children too, and Arch held them all spellbound that evening as he related tales of the battles of Antietam and King's Mountain and of Sherman's March to the Sea.

He exhibited the six bullet holes in his body, mementoes of the Confederates, and he took out his glass eye and put it back in for their pleasure.

These same tales delighted my sisters and me years later as we tapped out the rhythm of "General Grant's Grand March," along with the tired old feet.

Sometime later, Arch and Lana purchased a three-acre tract about a 10-minute walk from the railroad station, South and East along the North side of the track. They built a small house, almost in the center of the plot. They drove 40 miles North to bring young cedars from the banks of the Niobrara river and outlined the boundary on North and West. The South half was planted to native fruits, apples, cherries, plums, currants, raspberries, gooseberries, etc. Grandmother always raised her own sage, too. I can still smell the spicy tang of the sage bag hanging in the attic, sage gathered by mother from those same sage bushes. There were catalpas, lilacs, yellow roses and spirea. Some of those same lilacs and roses grow on the plot in Woodlawn, where Arch, Lana and Martin are resting now.

At first the remainder of the acreage was planted to straw-



A. WALRATH & SONS MEAT MARKET . . . Mr. and Mrs. Arch Walrath and daughters, Leola (Mrs. R. M. Stark, of Stockton, Calif.) and Helen (Mrs. T. R. Sparks, of Denver, Colo.) Smallest child is the author—Maude (Mrs. John Silverstrand, of Atkinson.)

berries. As high as 25 pickers were hired to pick, sort, and crate the berries for shipment, but this venture was too risky so they switched to rhubarb, horseradish, winter onions and all vegetables in season. The small acreage grew to be one of the show places of early Atkinson. Gardens needed no irrigation then.

In season and out, I suppose, Arch, Lana and Mart would go on hunting and fishing trips that lasted for weeks. Mart and Arch would shoot prairie chickens, grouse, ducks and geese, literally by the barrel full and Lana would salt and pack it in the barrels they had brought along for that purpose. Their big cave, though, was a store house of homemade sauer kraut, picallili, chow and choice dandelion and rhubarb wine.

Grandad often told of stealthy visits to that cellar by some of Atkinson's highly respected citizens.

All in all, they had an abundance of everything. Life had really taken on a new lustre for Arch, who was robust and lively. He lived to be 83, but Lana didn't thrive too well and when Martin contracted inflammatory rheumatism and almost died the strain was too much and about a year later she died. That was in 1900.

My mother had come to live in "the little house on the prairie." Mom had spent many weekends in Atkinson with young friends. On one particular weekend she was staying at the late William Dickerson home. She and Winnie Dickerson had gone to visit Winnie's aunt, Clara Bitney. (The Bitney home stood where the Presbyterian church now stands.) Dad came to see Bob Bitney, a young man of the house, and mom said, "I guess it was love at first sight." She was just past 15-years-old and dad was 21. A few months later, in May of 1900, they were married and mom came to live in the house where she and dad lived together the 30 years of their married life. Seven little Walraths, six girls and one boy the youngest, were reared in the same rooms their dad had romped throughout his childhood and it was only at the death of Martin in 1930 that the house had sheltered any other name.

About 1903, grandad and dad decided to start a meat market. It was to be known as A. Walrath & Son. At first it was located on the site where Hoskinson's men's wear department now stands. When they retired in 1914, the

market was located in the building now owned by Claude Humphreys and housing the Davis Cafe.

Meat markets in those days were not the cool, crisp, clean establishments they are today. I've heard it said that there were skippers in the cheese, livestock in the meat, etc., but people sort of expected such things in those days.

They just returned the goods, gave the proprietor a good scutcheon and bought or charged, as the case might be, a nickels worth of shipped-in smoked ham or bacon.

I remember the clean smell of new sawdust on the floor. How I loved to run my bare feet through it!

It was in the backroom of this meat market that I learned to eat raw oysters, a trait which invariably spoils my husband's dinner if I indulge where he can see me.

As the family grew, the house became a little crowded so grandad had a little cot and tippy stove in the back of the market. There, many games of whist and checkers were played "between customers."

Great problems were solved and the civil war was refought many times. Later, as he grew more feeble, Arch spent his winters at Battle Mountain sanitarium in Hot Springs, S. D. He always came home in March and we brought him home to rest beside Lana in March, 1924.

Oldtimers recall his fiery Declaration day speeches, given in the old rink. They lasted for hours. We three girls, Leola, Helen and myself, would proudly march up the steps to the platform and sing "The Good Old USA." Leola's dress was always red, Helen's white, and mine blue.

World Wars I and II were in the far offing then, although grandad did live to argue about that "treace peaty" of World War I. We children always giggled at his unconscious transposing of "peace treaty" in his excitement.

The years have passed. Our only brother, Mark, is a veteran of World War II and lives in Denver, Colo. The other girls are: Mrs. J. V. (Thelma) Walz, of Denver; Mrs. D. J. (Roberta) Peters, of Paso Robles, Calif.; and Mrs. L. R. Bechan, of Oak Ridge. Our mother died at the home of her sister, the former Darlene Uttley Stewart, in California, in 1934.

When mother moved to North Platte in 1930, she sold the remaining acreage to Mrs. K. F.

16 DAYS HOT WIND GREET'S SETTLERS

Undaunted, Northeast Holt Settlers Establish Themselves in '70s

By H. W. TOMLINSON of O'Neill

In the late 1870's we lived in "the little town of Gratiot, Lafayette county, Wisconsin (pronounced "grasht") my father, Joseph Tomlinson, my mother, my brother, George, and myself. In the Spring of 1880 my father and my brother-in-law, Will Blubaugh, came overland to Northeastern Holt county.

They landed about 22 miles North of O'Neill. Each took a homestead and tree claim of a 160 acres each and my brother-in-law also took a pre-emption of 160 acres. They hauled lumber from Niobrara and built a small frame house. Nearly all the houses were dugouts or sod-dies. They each broke out 10 acres on the timber claims to be planted to trees and some on the homesteads to comply with the law.

Mother came out in the Summer to look the situation over and she was not very much impressed with it. We were amply informed about what to expect as mother said that the hot winds began about the first of July and blew for 16 days and nights without a let up, and, of course, that was the end to the sod corn which my brother-in-law and father had planted.

Undaunted they all headed back for Wisconsin, had a sale of our household effects, loaded our stock and other things in two emigrant cars, landed at Running Water, transferred by ferry to Niobrara and headed for what my father called "the land of milk and honey."

We landed on the claims about the first of October, 1880, and we had another warning about what was going to happen to us when two weeks later—on the morning of October 13—it started to rain, which soon turned to sleet and then snow. We had a three days' blizzard, very similar to the last November storm, except we had only eight inches of snow. Lots of it melted while it was snowing.

The weather turned warm and the snow melted on the hills and flats but still stayed where it had drifted into the gulches. It stayed nice for about three weeks and then started snowing again and kept it up all Winter. I think the Winter of 1880-'81 was as near like 1948-'49 as any I have ever seen here, except we had from three to four-feet of snow on the level. I do not think it drifted as badly as last Winter. Of course, we had no cars to shovel out and as long as the road or trails were traveled frequently the snow packed down and built up just like a railroad grade. If you got off the grade you were in trouble.

There were no wells in the country and all Winter our wash boiler was on the stove melting snow to furnish water for the house use, for our two horses and five cows.

Johnny Emerson ran a store at Dorsey and if he could get supplies from Niobrara we could get groceries there. All the land was taken up and a settler on every quarter or half section. A great many of them beat it back to the wife's folks after the October blizzard and stayed until Spring, which was a mighty smart thing to do.

Lots of people speak of the hard Winter of 1888, comparing it with the past Winter, but the Winter of 1888 was just another hard, cold Winter and was remarkable for just one thing—the greatest blizzard of all time. It began at our place at about eight o'clock in the morning and lasted for 16 hours and was very cold. Nothing has ever even approached it in its terrific intensity since and never will.

How the newcomers got through the Winter of 1880-'81 I cannot say, and I will give just two instances that will show you what they suffered.

Father had bought some hay and grain and had it home when Winter set it. The Selkirk boys, who lived just North of Dorsey, would cut cord wood out there in the gulches and haul it up on the hill and load it onto cord wood racks (holding about one and one-half cords) and then haul it to O'Neill for four dollars a cord, \$12 for the two loads. They started for O'Neill with two loads early in November and broke one of their wagons down at night, about one-half mile from our place, so they came down to see if father would buy the three cords. He did so and that gave us a good start for the Winter with fuel. However, not many of the neighbors were so fortunate.

A man named Milton Poynter, who afterward lived at Scottville, had taken a homestead just two and one-half miles North of us and had hauled sev-

Simeon, now Mrs. M. V. Pock, a small part had been sold to Myron Brotherton about 1911. Now another young veteran of World War II is building a new life and business on the old homestead. He is Virgil Pock, who owns and operates the Atkinson Flower Co. Good land? Yes. It has the power to heal.

eral loads of logs up on the place intending to build a log house in the Spring. He got scared out by the October storm and beat it back to Iowa to spend the Winter.

The homesteaders finally got so desperate for fuel that they were determined to go and get the logs for fuel and, of course, they would pay for them when he came back.

It was only two and one-half miles from our place and the road was broken out to the O'Neill-Niobrara road, a half-mile from our place, so they gathered there—my brother-in-law, Will Blubaugh; his brother, Lew; John Addison; the Fuller boys, of which there were five or six, and Andrew Watson, an uncle of Earl and Ike Watson, of Inman, and his brother-in-law, Will Craig. In all there were six or seven teams and about a dozen men and there were no pantywaists among them. They all were grim, determined men who knew what they were going to do. My father went too.

They left our place about 11 a. m. on a nice sunny day and headed for the logs. Of course, there was no beaten road and they expected rough going. About sundown they came trailing back. No logs—they could only get within a half mile of them.

The Shaffers lived about three and one-half miles Southwest of us. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Shaffer, a married son with his wife and baby, and several grown up boys and girls. About three o'clock of a mid-Winter afternoon two of the boys came to our place to see if they could get a couple of sacks of ear corn, as father had bought some at Dorsey and the boys picked out two sacks of nice ears while mother fixed them a lunch. She could not stand to see anyone go away hungry. Mother also baked a big flat cake, which was simply soda biscuit dough not cut into biscuits. She baked in the biggest dripping pan she could find. She gave that to them and a two gallon jug of milk. They would have to shell the corn and make hominy, which would require a day at least, or grind it in a coffee mill and sift it to make corn bread. I can tell you they did not sift out much.

The boys were like everybody else as they did not have overboots. The men wore boots and would take a grain sack and wrap one around each foot and tie it on securely. This served a double purpose—kept the feet warm and dry and prevented a person from sinking down in the snow.

Finally the Winter came to an end with great reluctance, departed with a big snow storm on April 22. The Summer of 1881 was quite a good season and the settlers raised quite a lot of corn on backsetting and sod. We also raised a great many vegetables and came for sorghum molasses.

When father crossed Iowa through Cherokee and LeMars they could have bought railroad land for a very small payment and other land almost for the asking. The grasshoppers had cleaned them out there and most of the people had left but later came back. We could buy buffalo hides for \$3 a piece and big split red cedar post on the Niobrara river for 10 cents each.

The Winter of 1881-'82 was very mild. There was no snow to speak of and the ground hardly froze at all. Tragedy overtook our family in the late Winter and again in the Spring. My father was removing the curbing from a well that they had started up on the flat, when there was a cavein, killing him instantly. His body was removed from the well with great difficulty. This occurred on February 2. The day of his funeral the men went around in their shirt sleeves. There was no organized cemetery and father was buried at the crossroads at the Southwest corner of the school section where Mineola afterwards was built. He was the first one to be buried there.

My half-brother came from Wisconsin to live with us. He was a young man and on May 15 the same year he was shot and killed by a neighbor boy. It was really an accident.

We all had to go to Dorsey for our mail and for those of the settlers living North and West of us it was a long trip. A local politician named Andy Baldwin threw his weight around a little and finally had a post office established on the head of Louse creek, called Mineola. Andrew J. Little was appointed postmaster and his wife was made his assistant.

This was one for Bob Ripley; neither of them could read or write. In fact, they could not tell their own name on a letter.

The route went from Dorsey to Paddock every other day. J. B. Anderson carried the mail for a while and he distributed the mail. When the neighbors came they would look it over and take any that belonged to them. My brother-in-law, Will Blubaugh, started a store at his place which was part of what later became the Dishner ranch, and after a year or two had the postoffice moved up there and soon after C. W. Lamont came out from Gratiot, purchased an 80-acre tract at the Southwest corner of the school section and started a store. My brother-in-law owned a quarter right across the road so he moved his buildings up there and started his store, too. At one time there

were three stores, a lumberyard, meat market, drug store, shoe shop, livery barn, blacksmith shop and my sister conducted an eating house.

Lamont had the lumber hauled from Niobrara. We had a good team and wagon and my brother, George, made many trips for lumber. He got up before daylight and went to the trail and joined the other men. They would stop for dinner at noon, feed their horses and were off again. They would make it in to Niobrara in the afternoon, load up and drive back about six or seven miles to the Verdigris creek and camp for the night, eat a cold lunch and sleep under the wagon. They were off by day light the next morning and where the road left the river bottom there was a sandhill to mount. It was known as Gherkas hill and travelers had to double up their teams. If they had good luck they would get into Mineola early in the evening, and George would get home in time for supper. For the two 18-hour days with their teams, they received the total sum of five dollars. They knew nothing about time and a half for overtime or anything about portal-to-portal pay.

The people did fairly well for a few years and there was no trouble to get a thousand or 15 hundred dollars loan on a quarter section, but there was plenty of trouble paying it back. In the late 1880s people began leaving. With no crops and mortgages coming due, people just loaded up their belongings and left. Many of them would apply for a loan and just as soon as it came they would leave. They were just selling it.

I only knew of two small loans that were ever paid, one for \$150 and one of \$100. Much of the land later sold for two or three hundred dollars.

Some time after the death of my father and brother a nice looking young man, riding a good horse, came to our place and asked if he could get lodgings for the night. Mother thought it rather odd as we lived off the main highway and

our house was rather seedy looking. But, as no one was refused accommodations in those days, she told him he could stay. After taking care of his horse and having supper, he sat and visited with us.

We had a very fine young horse and mother expressed concern that the horse thieves would get him as horse stealing was one of the major "industries" at that time.

The young man said: "Mrs., you do not have to worry about that as horse thieves do not steal from widows."

After he had left we made some inquires around the neighborhood and found that he had been entertaining the famous Doc Middleton. He had been keeping off the main roads. He seemed to stand very high with the rustlers but not so high with the farmers. However, we kept our horse and he died at the ripe old age of 22 years.

Brittall Family Befriends Scotts

Fay Brittall recalls that his father, the late Frank Brittall, told him of bringing Mrs. Barrett Scott, little Fanny and the other two occupants of the Scott rig into O'Neill after Barret had been taken from them and the Scott team shot down. Some member of the mob that waylaid Scott put Mrs. Scott and the others in a rig and drove around over the prairie until dark, pulled up in sight of the light in Brittall's home, near Antelope slough, told them to get out and go to the house where they saw the light and someone there would take them into town. Frank had been to Orchard that day but he hooked up the mules again and made the trip into O'Neill.

Dedication Set — From The Holt County Banner, February, 1884: "The dedicatory services of the First Presbyterian Church in O'Neill will take place in the new church on February 10, 1884."

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