Byron Vance

THE KANSAS ERA

As far as the eye could see the flat level plain was unbroken by either trees or hills. Only a few scattered dwellings broke the monotony of the view and had it not been for recent evidence of tilling of the soil and scattered livestock grazing in the open fields, one might have thought the country deserted. Such was the scene that greeted Father & Mother as they watched the surveyer establish the corner stakes of the homestead that they had just filed claim on.

Father & Mother were both products of the soil and when the land around the little settlement of Alton, Kansas was thrown open to homesteading it seemed a culmination of a dream they had of owning a place of their own. As one wag had put it "The government was willing to bet 160 acres of land that no man could improve and live on the place for five years in order to obtain a deed to the land". And indeed it seemed that the odds were greatly in favor of the government, but there were those who had the tenacity to give it a try and Father and Mother were of that breed and were one of the few successful ones.

Father had gone no farther than through the fifth grade in the common schools and by training and experience was tied to the soil. He was what one might call a dreamer, a plodder who was determined to make his dream a reality, however hard the physical task would be. He was inured to hardships and was philosophical enough to shake each one off as he met them. In fact in later years I had heard people remark "Here is a man that never worries", but as I knew my father, deep down inside was a sensitive man who kept his feelings bottled up so that only a few intimates that were close to him knew how adversity could leave its mark on him. Mother was the nerve center of the union, the pusher, who wanted things done in a hurry, who could meet a challenge head on and ask no quarter. She was the improviser who could take a whole lot of nothing and make something out of it. If a garment was too large, she made it smaller, if it was too small she sewed in a piece. If the potatoes gave out, she cooked beans and no one left our place at meal time without sharing what we had to offer. It was a happy union because each was able to supply those traits lacking in one another.

It was this couple that looked upon their new home and

found it good. Good because it was a place to put down roots, a place where for the first time they could say "This is our home".

The Kansas plains had neither stone or lumber of local origin so the building of a house became the first matter of concern. In the lower spots there were patches of sod called wool grass because of its toughness and tenacious root system. This sod cut into foot squares were used as replacements for brick and so was constructed a sod house the first home Father and Mother were to call their own. This sod house with a small opening on each end and one door in front, while no marvel of arcitechture was warm and later Mother had hung sheets over the sod walls and had packed and watered the floor until it was almost as hard as cement. They did not think of it as crude because love and understanding had gone into its construction, and if the good earth would yield its bounty in saleable crops so that their physical needs could be met, what else mattered. It was home a place to start their dreams and family.

The years that followed were hard years. Some seasons were good but generally the rains flailed to come and hot winds preripened the grain. It was just a matter of scrimping to pay back in the Fall, all that had been borrowed through the Summer. So far as I know, Father had never left a debt unpaid during his lifetime and business men were as willing to take his word as his note. Debts came first and what was left over we lived on.

During these lean years, my brother Clair was born and four years later my sister Maude. With these added responsibilities Father & Mother began to look beyond the horizon and in their minds eye began to wonder if perhaps a better future was possible in a more westerly frontier. Relatives on Mothers side had gone to the West Coast and work pictures had come back of tall trees, green grass and abundant rain.

In order to speed up the expansion of the railroads to the West Coast, the government had given them every other section (The uneven numbered) of land for twenty miles each side of their tracks. This land was of small value unless it was developed. Thus the railroads were giving special rates to settlers who wanted to take advantage of the free homesteads and the leasing of their own lands.

Shortly after Maude was born, the folks made their decision to go West. Mother had a sister that had settled in Mount Vernon, Wash. so Father sent Mother and the two children, there on a special emigrant ticket while he loaded up an emigrant car with their belongings, implements and a team of horses and followed later. Thus ended the Kansas Era in my parents life.

I

It would seem to me that the Pioneers were of a special breed. As my folks looked over Grandma's one hundred and sixty acres of buch grass and sagebrush they must of had a dream of waving grain, of livestock factories of meat, milk, butter and cheese, of grain produced fryers and eggs and pork to make bacon, hams, lard and sausage for this was their only hope of survival once they had commited themselves and family to a homesteaders life. Priorities had to be established and the first of these was a shelter for the family. A team of horses had been bought over from the Bickleton country. There were no roads as such, only trails that the horsemen had used over the years and it was over these trails that the lumber was moved for our first home, a tar papered covered shack of three rooms. The nearest water was a spring on land owned by one of the big horse spreads, the Cochran Bros. They were not too friendly as they could see that in the coming of ranchers and fences the end of an era of free range was doomed. Horses had been raised at practically no expense, except the yearly round up and branding and marking of the colt crop. The water was hauled in barrels a distance of four miles, so it was never wasted and to keep water for the bare necessities was time consuming.

Fuel was no problem except as it entailed labor for we had a supply of sagebrush at our doorstep. It was good fuel except that it required constant stoking and was a continuous source of worry to Mother as she attempted to keep the floors clean. Dad had acquired a couple of milk cows, a few chickens and a brood sow. In this respect his dream had begun to take shape, and now the big task of getting ground ready for planting was the next of the list of priorities.

One team on a walking plow proved to be too slow, except for the establishment of a garden. The only source of supply for horses was range stock and that created problems, for a three or four year old horse that had never known a rope didnt take kindly to the humilating experience of bridle, collar and harness. Dad had a way with horses and with the aid of our gentle team, was able to get together a team of six horses capable of pulling a two bottom plow. These half broke horses were tough but were not to be trusted and as Dad would say

"Would run at the drop of a hat".

Horses by the thousands were running wild over the hills and we were now confronted with a fencing problem to protect our cultivated land. There was no timber available on the Rattlesnake Hills for fence posts, so Dad hauled oak posts from the Bickleton area to fence the homestead. It was a round trip of some one hundred miles but they were good posts and though they were so tough a staple could scarcely be driven in they were lasting, some of them were in evidence more than twenty years later or until the range horses were gone and fences no longer were needed.

We had no hay for night feeding so the work stock was turned out on the range bunch grass. Usually they were so tired that they didn't wander too far, but occasionally when they were out several days, they would take up with wandering bands of wild horses, this always necessitated several days of hard riding to find them and bring them back. This was one of my earlies jobs for as soon as I was able to straddle a horse, I was horse and cow wrangler.

In the Fall of our first year a family named Crooks moved in on an adjoining homestead, they had two grown sons and two grown daughters so were able to take up four homesteads. This proved to be a big boost for them, for shortly after they moved in they inherited a considerable sum of money and were able to buy mules and equipment which was beyond our means. In the following years the homesteads began filling in rapidly, roads were laid out and developed, at least thats what they were called but they were just dirt roads and in the Fall became almost impassable with one chuck hole after another. Families coming in brought children so the need arose for a school. A school-house was built close to the Cochran ~~school~~ Spread. At one time there were twenty eight pupils ranging from grade one through the eighth. One teacher handled all eight grades and strange as it may seem, it never was any trouble to find a teacher.

Father was on the school board and as such we were not supposed to board the teacher but most of the homesteaders were unwilling and mostly not equipped to take care of them so a special ruling had to be made for the teacher to stay at our place when no other place was available. Thus we became in a way, sort of the social center for all the neighbors and in those

days anyone within eight or ten miles was a neighbor. Maude played the organ and as there was no other forms of amusement our place was the gathering place for young people to have parties and song fests. After the first few years, Dad had put on an addition of two extra rooms so that with exception of the school house we had more room than any of our neighbors.

People who live miles from a doctor have to improvise as best they can. Mother, while having no nurses training was often in demand by the neighbors. Somehow her calm appraisal of a situation with her knowledge of home remedies seemed to bring healing to most childrens ailments or when adults needed a helping hand, Aunt Kate, as she was called was contacted. As there were no telephones and the only way of contacting a doctor and of getting him to a laboring mother was by horse team, Mother was called in and quite often the new born baby was in his or her crib by the time the Doctor arrived. Mother got nor ever asked no more than a simple thank you but I'm sure she had the love and respect of all who knew her and after all when the book of life is written she must have a favored chapter.

Grandma Clair made her home with us and we as children were taught to respect and mind her. The parents in those days were usually taken in by the oldest son or daughter and lived out their lives as honored members of the family. There were no nursing homes for Fathers and Mothers such as we have today. Perhaps it is as well that things are such as they are now, for it gives the old ones a sense of independence and I'm sure as we grow older we abhor the idea of being a mill stone around our childrens neck. As far as my parents were concerned, I was with my father when he passed away and with my mother at Maude's home when she passed away. While there was nothing I could do to ease their passing still I have always felt that I did all I could to repay them for the years they took care of me, putting me through high school when it meant quite a sacrafice to them.

The years that we raised wheat, there was no price support legislation, or crop insurance. At the beginning we found it necessary to rely on outside income to get those necessities such as clothes, flour, sugar and other items we were unable to raise. Each August, Father would load the entire family in the wagon

and head for the hop fields. For several years we picked on the Ashbaugh Ranch on the Ahtanum Creek, West of Yakima. While it was of necessity, yet it was a sort of vacation for us and the amount the entire family could make, helped to carry us through the winter. A man by the name of Sprinkle ran a general store in Prosser. It was said of him that you could buy anything there from a needle to a threshing machine, but what was more important was that if he figured you were honest and trying he would extend you credit from one fall to the next and without such help, few ranchers could even have gotten a start. His prices were high as one might expect and he wanted an accounting every Fall when the crops were harvested. If your crop fell short and he felt you had honestly done your best, he would tack the years shortage on to the new years account. In the course of the years he became owner of quite a number of homestead, mainly marginal lands that should have been left as pasture but in the main I think most men paid up, even though some were years in doing so.

Even in those early years the man that tried to make a go of it on just one quarter section of land found it was too small an operation. There was a section of land two miles, west of the homestead, owned by a Mr. Benson. He was agricultural agent for the Northern Pacific Railway and had gotten this land from them, Father got in contact with him and secured a share lease for a period of five years. There was a two storied house on the place and as the larger part of our work would be there, we moved to this new location. Right south of this place was a school section, which we were able to rent for pasture purposes, thus making a more secure place for our stock as it was all under fence.

In the year 1909, I was ready for high school. Clair had gotten a job with a telephone construction crew on the coast and Father and Mother decided to move over there for the winter so I could go to school. Clairs work was near Bothell so they rented a house there. The folks came back in the Spring and I finished my freshman year there. The winter of 1910 we moved into Prosser during the winter and I took my sophomore year there. In 1911 and 1912 I had to skip school but in 1912 and 1913 a teacher stayed at our place who was able to teach high school subjects and

and an arrangement was made with the Prosser superintendent to let me take the subjects in our rural school. I was able to successfully complete the year with satisfactory grades that were accepted by the Prosser schools.

At this time Dad & Clair had bought a half section of land one mile east of the Benson Ranch. Clair had married and had moved to a homestead that my Uncle George Allen had taken up. Uncle George was a painter by trade and soon found that the hazard of farming was not to his liking, so had decided to return to the coast. This place joined the half section on the south so it was handy for farming both places.

After Clair had married Dad gave up the Benson section and moved to what was known as the Severyns place. This was grass land with outside range, lots of water, adapted for cattle raising, and we started the foundation of a beef herd by using a beef bull on dairy or part dairy cows. We continued to farm the quarter section as well as the old homestead. The winter of 1913-14, we moved into Prosser during the winter months, so that I could complete my high school. In February we moved back on the ranch and I rode back and forth to Prosser every school day until the end of school. This was a total of 28 miles round trip. I had a good saddle horse and could make the trip in about one and a half hours each way. When we needed something from town I would take the buggy and team. This proved to be the end of my schooling and I shall be ever grateful to my parents who sacrificed so much to give me the best schooling they could afford.

Sometimes fate takes a peculiar twist. I think it was the year of 1915. Dad and I had gone up to see how the wheat was coming. It gave promise of a good crop and would be ready for harvesting in a few weeks and we felt sure that all bills could be paid in full. On the way home we saw a black cloud rolling in from the West. We had scarcely reached the house when the storm broke. Hailstones the size of marbles and larger covered the ground to a depth of about 6 in. in a matter of minutes. The canyon behind our house became a small river. It was all over in less than one half hour. Fearing the worst we drive back up to the wheat fields, we found the grain which a short hour before gave such promise, beaten into the ground a total loss. A years work and income destroyed in minutes. I'm sure this blow aged Dad several years. He found it necessary to go into town and work

out refinancing for another year. The hail had cut a path about a mile and half wide and one of the ironies of it was that the Crooks' who had been able to get off to a good start, hadn't been hurt by the hail but had benefited by the heavy rain on each side of the hail belt and they were able to harvest a bumper crop.

The summer of 1917 saw the beginning of the U.S. entry into World War One. I had registered for the draft and my number was the second one drawn in Benton County. Elmer Shedd who was later to marry Ethel was also subject to the draft and we had decided to enlist in the navy if possible. We were in the midst of harvesting when Clmer came out into the field where I was running the header and said there were two ratings open for enlistment, musician and cook and we would have to hurry before the quota was filled. The next day Clair took my place on the header and Elmer and I went to Yakima and enlisted as cooks. We came home, packed our bags and the next day left for Bremerton. So ends another chapter.

WORLD WAR 1

The time that I spent in the navy during World War I was possibly one of the best experiences of my life. I had never been far from a farm environment and to be suddenly transformed from a header puncher, livestock wrangler, general farming to a ships cook was like stepping into another world. Farming with all its hardships and economical uncertainities, has a certain amount of built in freedoms that are not available in any other type of endeavor. There are decisions to make and the ability to carry them out rests entirely on your own shoulders. To be told when to get up and when to go to bed, what moves to make and when to make them was all alien to me, but it was experience that was valuable to me because one should never get so wrapped up in one set of rules that we can't appreciate the rules that other people have to abide by. As I had enlisted as a cook without any cooking know how, I was to learn that the way to being one was to start at the bottom, which for me was to wash a stack of what was called "Black Pans" and scrubbing out steam kettles. To stand on one's head in a hot steam kettle had some of the same effect as pitching hay in 110 degree weather and any surplus weight I had was soon disposed of, altho at that time I didn't have many surplus pounds to lose.

After spending four months washing, peeling spuds and getting up at 3 A.M. to get breakfast going, I changed my rating to storekeeper. As "Jack of the Dust" I ran the little dispensing store, where I rationed out supplies to the cooks and kept a record of feeding costs. This was an interesting job as it was sort of a gathering place for the cooks and bakers when they were off duty. Fellows that were off duty and had been on liberty had a way of spinning some pretty tall tales about their conquests on shore. I and one of my helpers decided to run a little news sheet which we caller "Spoofers Times" in which we chronicaled some of the stories. Needless to say some faces got red where they saw their stories in print and it seemed to have the effect of toning down some of the more rabid ones. New recruits coming in that were faced with the same problems we had encountered were always a source of some amusement. Boys that had never slept in a hammack strung up several feet above the deck always encountered difficulty turning over and after a group of recruits came aboard the

first few nights would be punctuated by a few choice words as some fellow hit the deck with his mattress on top of him. One young fellow who had never been on the water, asked me about "sea sickness". I told him to watch "Spoofers Times" and I would try to put it to words.

"SEA SICKNESS"

When your ship sails out, and you're tossed about,
By a wild and stormy sea, and there's nothing left
But a dark brown ache where you're stomach used to be.
When at each chow call, you can taste your gall,
Instead of the regular stew, and you want to die
And you wonder why, your friends don't want you to.
When you've thrown up all that there is to throw
And still game for another try.
It's hell to live and you don't realize it's probably
Hell if you die.
When you've eaten tomatoes to sooth your pain
And tried many another trick, and you still keep on a
prayin to die,
My boy you're sure "seasick".

As I went in early in the war, Bremerton was just building up and a big new cafeteria was built near the Charleston gate and I was sent there as storekeeper when it was opened. It was while I was stationed there that an opportunity was given to me to take over one of the large government warehouses, which would have been a semi-civilian job and I could have lived on the outside. My commanding officer didn't want me to leave and as I wanted to get home as soon as the war was over, decided not to take it. It was have been a permanent job and from an economical standpoint perhaps would have been a smart move, but I still had some hay seed in my hair and I knew Dad needed me more than the government.

About four months before the armistice was signed, the Lieutenant Commander called me into his office and told me he wanted me to take over the Commissary Stewards job at the old Marine Barracks, that was being used as a detention and

discharging camp. The Commissary Steward that had been in charge had been caught grafting and was to be relieved. There was no Commissary Steward with the rating to take over and even thought my rating was still storekeeper 2nd class, I was to take over as acting commissary steward. It seems this officer was living on the outside and had been taking out flour, sugar, hams and other commodities which he sold on the outside. Then too, there were about eighty permanent men stationed in the camp and he was collecting one dollar per head and furnishing them with pie, cake and steak beyond what their ration called for. Needless to say his ration was running way out of reason which accounted for his being apprehended. My job was to put the camp back on the same ration schedule as the rest of the yard. This I did and I found myself about as popular as a rattlesnake in your living room. Every few days I was called on the carpet by the camp commander because of the complaints that came in from the men, but the officer that had sent me there said to hang tight and he would back me if it came to a showdown. After the men found they couldn't dislodge me, things quieted down and was a rather enjoyable job until the armistice was signed. After the armistice was signed, men were shipped into this camp for discharge and therein laid the headaches. Some days I would start out with a full Compliment of cooks and mess cooks and by night I would find myself short because some of them were always being discharged. Lots of nights I would be called on the phone, saying there was a group of as many as four hundred men arriving on the ferry as late as ten P.M. and that I was to fix rations for them. Then I would have to rustle out cooks and mess cooks if I could find them as nearly always some were on leave and those that could be found weren't too happy. The best we could do would be cold meats, canned fruit and coffee and as sometimes the ones coming in had been on a long train rides from the east coast and weren't easily satisfied. This was one of the big frustrating times of my life and no one could have been happier than I was when my application for discharge came through.

Even though I had been gone only about 18 months picking up the reins again was another adjustment. Dad wanted me to take over

the one half interest in the half section he and Clair owned. As I look back at it now, Dad was always trying to do the best he could by me. I suppose it was because Clair was married and I had stayed at home except for the war. Dad couldn't do much figuring with a pencil but was always a surprise to me in how close he could come to the correct answer in his head, but he always wanted me to do his paper work.

On the way to town we had to cross the Sunnyside Canal about four miles north of Prosser. Below the canal, the homes with their lawns and shade and green fields always seemed to hold out a new way of life that was enticing, so in the fall of 1918 we found forty acres of land north of Grandview and during the winter of 1919 began making our switch from dry to irrigated farming. The place we had chosen had been a hop field, the hops had been removed, but the old hop house still stood. The old dwelling was two stories small and needed a lot of remodeling, so one of our first jobs was to tear down the old hop kiln and use the lumber to add more rooms and make the place more liveable. A drainage ditch had been dug across the place, leaving the dirt piled in big mounds on both sides. Clair and I spent the winter of 1919 leveling off these banks with a sixteen foot planer, using six head of horses. There were four large cisterns on the place about twelve feet in diameter by sixteen feet deep, we were able to dispose of some of the dirt in filling these. There was no well on the place and these cisterns had been filled with filtered irrigation water when the place was in hops. We kept the one cistern that was near the house for our domestic use until such time as we could drill a well. In the spring of 1919 Clair decided he would stay with the wheat land so I traded him my quarter section for his share of the new place. This was the beginning of another new era.

From sagebrush, to wheat, to cattle, to irrigation to marriage, to a family of four girls and two boys (our first son died at birth) and to a home that was to last for forty six years. They were hard years mostly, with some sadness because Mother and Father both passed away but they were

rewarding years too for here our family grew up. When I see the advantages that children have today, it seems we had so little to give to our family, but at least we shared what we had and one of our finest possessions is a family of which we are so very proud.

Memories are wonderful, especially the happy ones. Fifty years of memories can't all be happy ones, but I'm sure those years since 1919 that tried us, were just the levening we needed to give us the desire to do a better job.

Old folks are accused of living in the past and to a large extent that is true. Rivers have all been bridged, the frontiers have been tamed and even the moon has lost its privacy. This leaves us nothing to gloat about except what little we have been able to contribute to the past. Young people disregard the past and look to the future and that is good, for the future is the product of their dreams. The dreams they build will someday be their past to remember.

Written by Byron Vance 1974

Irrigation

A whole new concept in farming . Now instead of scanning the sky looking for signs of rain clouds, when in need of more moisture we just leave a note for the ditch rider and more water will be turned into our head ditch. With fertile soil and abundant water the matter of raising a crop resolves itself into the operators ability to correctly supply tillage practices while the raising of a crop from seed to maturity is pretty well under the control of the farmer, there his control ends for there the marketing and sale of his crop is turned over to a buyer whose foremost interest is a profit for himself. An inefficient distributing system often leaves certain segments of the country short of certain commodities while at the source of supply, with too great an abundance, the market is glutted, causing such variation in price from year to year as I have known with potatoes in particular where the price one year might reach $100 per ton and the next year they would be hauled to the dump. For years after we started irrigated farming there was no coops or marketing agencies such as came into being in later years, bringing some sort of marketing stability and hence alleviating to some extent the feast or famine trends in agriculture as was the case in the 20's and 30's.

Diversify

That was the trend when we started in the valley. Business men and bankers were of the opinion that a farmer should never put all his eggs in one basket, so in line with that type of thinking most farmers, milked a few cows, raised a few hogs, had a few chickens, some hay, some corn, some grain, hoping that if anyone crop failed to pay off something else might carry the load. Specilization was considered too risky and bankers who had held unpaid notes on dumped potatoes simply pulled the purse strings shut. Fruit was an exception to the rule as they were unable to switch from one crop to another. The fruit men were largely financed by the fruit buyers, because, since they held the mortgage on the crop they were pretty well assured of getting their operating loans back. At one time most of the orchards near Grandview were owned by big fruit concerns and the original owners were nothing more than working tenants.

Such was the trend of farming when we started in 1919. In line with our neighbors we started out with a mixture of livestock and crops. One thing to be said for this type of farming was that the farmer need never go hungry, but as to making money and paying off the mortgage on the land that was something else. In order to meet land payments and maintain two families, for Mom and I were married in 1920, it became necessary to find a source of outside income. This led to a good many years of "sunlighting". I call it that because I worked out during the day and took care of the farm work, early morning and late at night. I had several sources of work. George Higgins, a close friend and neighbor was road surpervisor over about 25 miles of country roads, mostly dirt roads that were maintained by using a grader pulled by four horses. I put my team on the lead and drove, while Goerge handled the grader blade. This work took from two to three months each year. Then each fall after the water was turned off in the main canal, the burm on each side of the canal bank had to be plowed down and hauled out. I worked with my team on about a 15 miles stretch. Then too the larger arterials had to be cleaned, and as my buckskin team were easily controlled I found plenty of work for several weeks.

Land can only absorb so much water and eventually drainage became a serious problem. I was elected drainage supervisor of our district which consisted of about 20 miles of open ditch with about an equal amount of underground tile. Except as we would have an obstruction in the tile, necessitating digging down ten or twelve feet to the pipe and rodding out the trouble, this type of trouble had to be taken care of whenever it occured otherwise the open ditches could be shoveled out during the winter. This was back breaking work as often the ditches became clogged with tules, especially where the flow of water was small. Noami's brother Fred was one of the best workers I ever had for this type of work. He always seemed to be able to shovel just as much at the end of the day as at the beginning. For this type of work the wage scale was $3.00 per day, with the supervisor drawing $4.00. Not much pay but there was no unemployment, no welfare,

no food stamps and as long as our backs held out we prefered it that way.

One thing that was a big help to me, was that though Dad wasn't well, he was able to take care of the irrigating, a job that couldn't be done after dark. During the 1920's there were lots of sheep in the valley. Most of the lambs at that time were shipped to the Chicago market for slaughter and those that were not ready for butchering were sold as feeders. An organization of sheepmen known as the Woolgrowers Assn. wanted to work up a market for lamb feeding in the valley. They wanted to place a carload of feeder lambs in each locality in the valley as an experiment, to try to interest farmers in feeding lambs as an outlet for hay and grain. I was recommended by our bank to get a carload for the Grandview area. We got a carload of 307 ~~Merono~~ Rambouillet lambs in October. Dad herded them in our alfalfa and corn fields also on neighbors fields, then we fixed up a feed lot and fed them hay and grain for about 90 days. Although the lambs we fed were from fine wooled sheep and not really the feeder type, we got real good gains. A carload of lambs had been placed at Mabotn, at Prosser, at Sunnyside and at Toppenish. The man who fed at Mabton had been given black face lambs which are a mutton type and he get the best gains, we came in second with our wool type. We lost four lambs which was considered exceptionally good. The feeding was under the auspicious of the State College at Pullman and we had to keep track of every penny of expense. Our rate of profit also ranked second because of our slightly less gains. While we made a fairly good profit, Arch Fleming our banker was skeptical of the sheep business as he had, had some personal losses with farm flocks. None of the fellows who had fed the sheep went on to become feeders.

Twenty nine was the year of the depression and try as we might it seemed we couldn't make ends meet and by 1932 we were behind with taxes and payments. About this time an opportunity arose that looked like it might give us some relief. There were two bottle milk dairies operating in Grandview, a man by the name of Wellington and the other Fred Olstead. Personal difficulties

arose between the two and a milk war was started. Shorty Wellington had a small store and one Saturday, ran milk at 3¢ per quart. Under these conditions something had to gave and Wellington offered me his route and equipment if I could raise $500.00. Even with conditions such as they were the bank loaned me the money and I moved the equipment out to the ranch and was in the bottle milk business. I found Fred Olmstead a reasonable fellow and we later became of the best of friends. We got together and put the price of milk at 7¢ a quart. I got a 400 quart route from Wellington, also inherited a job that started at 4 A.M. and ended at 9 P.M. every day and 12 P.M. Saturday. It was a full family enterprise, with bottle washing, milking 32 head of cows, two deliveries in town every day. Expenses were considerable. Steam expense, bottle loss and breakage, caps, detergents, delivery costs and of course some collection losses, but we were able to save a few dollars and pay up our back bills. Hard labor has its reward when you can meet your creditors without apology and see some light ahead. One of the rough times we encountered was during the bank holiday. I could scarecly get in enough money to pay for gas for the delivery truck. Everyone had the same tale, all their money tied up in the bank, of course I was sure some of them had never had a dollar in the bank in their lives, but it was a good excuse for delaying payment on a milk bill, luckily the bank was closed but a short time. It seemed like the old adage held good "Where times get so bad, there is only one way to go and that is up". That seemed to be the feeling as for a time those with money were on an equal basis as those with little or none. It guess it could have been called the "Great Equalizer". The second year we ran the route we raised the milk to 8¢ per quart and the third year to 9¢. Meanwhile Olmstead had sold his route to our nearest neighbor the Higgins. After three years of 17 hour, 7 day a week job we found a buyer in Harry Davis' and disposed of the bottle milk part of the dairy.

After selling the route we decided to branch out in the chicken business. We decided on Rhode Island Reds as a dual

purpose chicken, food for both eggs and fryers. I bought some incubators and we raised several hundred pullets. Our old chicken house was of course too small for this increase, so I borrowed the money and built a new house with concrete floor capable of handling about 500 pullets. We had just completed the house and had oiled the roosts, nests and dropping boards as a precaution against mites. I had a straw stack across the drain ditch and was hauling straw to cover the floor and fill the nests. I had just one more load to get and was across the drain loading it when I looked back and saw a ball of fire shoot out the new chicken house door then shoot almost like an explosion the full length of the building. Leaving the team I ran back but by the time I got there the whole building was a sheet of flame. In less than one half hour I was able to walk among the ashes on the floor of what had been my new chicken house. About 50 pullets that had gone into the house also burned. The only explanation I could find for the fire was that in hauling the straw I had passed by where I had burned some trash from the building and evidently a spark must have gotten into the straw and I had carried it into the house. The oil on the roosts and nests, also I had lined the house with tarpaper for warmth, altogether I had created a terrific fire hazard with everything just right to go up in a flash. As that left my remaining pullets without a home I had to go to the bank for money to make a replacement. I had intended to put on fire insurance as soon as the building was completed but I was just a few days too late so it was a complete loss.

Early in the 30's the Utah Idaho Sugar Beet Co. had built sugar factories at Sunnyside, Toppenish and Yakima, and had interested farmers in producing sugar beets as a cash crop, but after a few years trouble developed with blight, a disease caused by the sting of what was called the "White Fly". Beets that were stung, died and it became so widespread that beet raising was given up and all the factories were closed. The ones at Yakima and Sunnyside were torn down. In 1937 the Beet Co. announced that they had produced a blight resisting seed and were anxious to reestablish the beet growing industry in the valley. They asked one or two farmers for each district in the valley to be their guest on a fact finding tour in Utah and Idaho where they had used this

new seed. I and Fred Olmstead had been invited from the Grandview district along with about eight other men from Ellensburg to Walla Walla. Agronomists had noted that in fields that were ruined by blight there were always a few beets that were untouched. Using these plants as seed stock they had developed a resistant seed. In the fields we visited in both Utah and Idaho where they had used the new seed, the crops were thrifty, so it seemed the problem had been solved. I was anxious to try beets as a cash crop so we fellows who had been on the tour were actually good will ambassadors for the beet company and they had no trouble getting a sizeable acreage, even the first year. Our soil being heavy was especially adapted to beet raising and over the period I raised beets I had an average of better than 25 tons per acre. One year on an experimental plot I had in conjunction with the State College where we were using different rates of fertilizer , I got a tonnage of 34 tons per acre. Beet tops, which were a residu left on the ground were especially good cattle feed and that along with the beet pulp available at the factory led me into the next phase of farming. Cattle Feeding.

Bangs disease in dairy cattle had become a serious problem during the 30's. Almost every herd of any size had reactors and it required constant testing as it was extremely contagious both to other animals as well as humans. We were having trouble in our herd and for some reason it seemed to hit our highest producing cows. Bruce had contracted a slight fever from working with infected cows and as it seemed the only way to really get rid of the disease was sell the herd and clean up the yards, this we did at a considerable loss as even the cows that tested okay could not go into another herd because they would be considered suspect.

Two brothers, Ethan and Fred Taylor who lived east of Sunnyside had been feeding cattle for several years. It had proved to be a profitable venture for them and it seemed to fit into our program of hay and beets both of which we had in surplus after selling the dairy. Archie Fleming, the manager of the Old National Bank in Sunnyside was interested in getting cattle feeding started in the Valley so was willing to underwrite cattle loans through the bank. It takes a lot of financing to purchase cattle and

feed on a feeding operation of any size and as our local manager in the Grandview Branch of the Old National was limited as to the amount he could loan, Arch had to give his Okay to any transaction over ten thousand dollars. Arch being a director in the Old National chain had considerable to say about loans. He had considerable trouble convencing some of the other directors about the soundness of rather large loans to individuals but over the years it has proved to be one of their best paying sources of investment. Actually there was not too much risk involved so far as the bank was concerned if they were dealing with a responsible operator they they held a mortgage on the cattle as well as the feed and most operators had considerable feed of their own to utilize. My operations usually ran between thirty-five and forty thousand dollars as I had cattle coming and going.

There is a lot to learn about the cattle feeding business and I had to start from scratch. First of all is the physical layout such as corrals and watering facilities, feed bunks etc. When a bunch of feeders arrive you must be ready for them. The buying of feeders is one of the most important steps in a successful operation. Quality is of great importance, weighing condition is something else to watch, a steer that has just drank forty pounds of water means that you are paying meat prices for that much water, unless you can buy with a shrink. Feeders in those days had to be bought in cattle country. The first feeders I bought were Indian cattle that had been raised in the Mount Adams country. I bought cattle in Oregon, Idaho and Montana as well as Spokane stock yards and other sales yards.

To give you some idea of what is involved in a years operation, I'll take the year 1937. In February, Arch Fleming got together a few of us feeders, saying he had a chance at sixteen carloads of cattle in Harper Oregon. He and I and four other men drove down to see them. This place was in Central Oregon about 50 miles west of Ontario. The cattle consisted manly of cows, with a few yearlings. They had been driven for a couple of days to reach the yards at Harper. Like all range stock they were real thin and on the way in had been able to pick just enough new grass to scour them so they were in a weakened condition.

It took us about a day to sort them out into carload lots, further tiring them. Some few cows had already calved. We finally got the 16 cars sorted and loaded. I was to come back with the cattle and the other fellows went on back in the car to get ready for the cattle at home. A local picked us up and took us into Ontario where I was to hook onto a livestock special to take us into Pendleton, there I was to catch the local into Sunnyside. The cows were weak and by the time we got into Ontario I had cows down, but was able to get them up by the time we had been picked up by the special. The special was strictly livestock headed for the Portland market. We left Ontario after dark and the weather was extremely cold. There was a passenger coach attached to the train and all the men who had livestock aboard rode in there. It was heated by an old pot bellied stove. At every stop, I took a long pole and tried to get any animal up that was down, but eventually I had so many down that I couldn't get up, that I just quit trying. When we got into Pendleton I saw that we would have to layover, unload, clean up the cars for I could see some of the down cows were dead. I called Arch and he and some others came over and we unloaded the cars, pulled out four dead ones and a number that were pretty well tramped up, watered and fed hay and reloaded after a days rest. When we sorted again at Outlook I took 50 head of cows, and the others were parceled out to the other men. I had rented a 40 acre pasture in the Waneta district and put the cows there for summer pasture. We had expected some returns from veal after the cows had calved but only got about a 60% calf crop which was our first dissappointment. The cows had cost us $45 per head laid in. That fall I brought cows home, put them in the lot and finished them off in January. Then I was unable to find a buyer after holding them for a few weeks longer, finally sold them to McDonald Pack for $43 per head. That same fall I had put in some steers that cost me 6¢ per pound. It seemed at that price it was an exceptional buy but after bringing them to a choice finish there was just no market. I held them until they got close to the 1200 pound weight and finally found a buyer at $5.75 per hundred weight. I had also put in two cars of light steers and by the time they were ready in May the market had recovered and I got 8¢ for them. That was

all that kept me from taking a terrific loss. As it was I came out owing the bank several thousand dollars, but Arch who knew all the details told me that I was just a victim of circumstances beyond my control and the bank would carry me over and finance me for a new operation as they had confidence in me as a sound operator. That was the only year in my 14 years feeding that I didn't at least break even.

In 1944 the cattle feeders were being confronted with problems in brand inspection, stock yard controls, transportation difficulties, buying practices etc. so a few of us feeders got together and formed the Yakima Valley Cattlemen's Assn. so that we could bring concerted efforts to changes we felt were necessary. I was elected the first president and held that office for four years then one year as vice president of the State Assn. I did considerable traveling to National, State and Local conventions and we were able to straighten out some of our common difficulties.

Through the years, I had sold most of my cattle through McDonald Packing Co. I found them to be close buyers, but they were honest and any deal I made with them was always fullfilled. In fact I made a number of deals with Sam McDonald the owner, with nothing in writing, just mutual confidence in each other. He was in the cattle country all the time and bought a lot of feeders for me along with his butcher cattle. The last two years I fed cattle he furnished the cattle and feed and I fed them on a per head basis. He bought my feeds and I got the fertilizer as well as a good wage for myself and truck. The last year that I fed, I had in 750 head at once that was the most cattle I had ever had on the ranch at one time. I had great respect for Sam and I guess he had for me for when he died he had in his will that I was to be an honorary bearer. There was an integrity in those old time cattle men that might be hard to duplicate in the modern business world.

In 1950 a job was offered me as a manager of the Grandview Distributing Plant that Dairygold owned. Our ranch had become too small for the large feeding operations that were becoming the rule, where several thousand head were fed, thus requiring a capital outlay that I didn't want to chance. Bruce was ready to take over, so we built a modern dairy barn and he went into the whole milk business and I took the job as manager of the plant

in Grandview.

The plant in Grandview had been run in sort of a slipshod manner and the first job I had was in restoring confidence that a good product would be delivered on schedule. We had three wholesale trucks that delivered in Grandview, Prosser, Mabton, Satus, Granger, Outlook and Sunnyside and two retail routes, one in Grandview and one in Sunnyside. While the delivery boys were all good, concentious fellows they had lacked someone to be really responsible in meeting and correcting trouble and in hunting up new business. It was my first experience in meeting and dealing with public in a business way. We had two keen competitors in Milk Products and Carnation milk companies. New business was hard to come by and the slightest mistake could mean the loss of a customer. These were good, education years for me as I came to know the problems from the merchants standpoint from back of the counter. In trying to build up business and good will I made my job into a seven day a week one, as I was always on call for Sundays and after hours. This was especially true in the early years, until the stores got adequate refrigeration to take care of longer hours and Sundays. By taking an active part in community affairs I built up friendships in Grandview so that we controlled the bulk of the Grandview trade. I joined the Outlook Club, a charter member of the Rotary Club, a member of the Chamber of Commerce and acted as its president for one year, American Legion, the Grange, Methodist Church and an official in the Grandview Fair, worked every year on U.G.N. These contacts paid off and we were able to make Darigold an important factor in the milk business in the lower valley. In all I put in ten years with Darigold. In 1950 when I first started we had between 60 and 70 customers bringing in cream and in 1960 the number had dwindled to possibly five or six. It was just the change in farming from where nearly every farm had a cow or two until those few who kept cows sold whole milk and the cream separator became an antique. When I first started we serviced the stores every day except Sunday but in 1960 it had dropped to service three times a week both wholesale and retail. Customers at first were unhappy but with modern refrigeration it caused no great inconvenience and it was accepted as a fact of life. In my early years I did considerable cattle financing for

Darigold as they were trying to build up product but that too slowed down over the years as the dairy business drifted into fewer and larger herds and milk was hauled to Yakima for processing and financing was done through the Yakima office. I must say in all fairness that my ten years with Darigold were happy years and the rough spots I encountered along the way were just reminders that the "Middleman's" lot is not always a bed of roses, he has his problems too.

AN AFTERTHOUGHT

In just a few pages I have tried to set down some of the high spots in a life spanning some seventy-four years. In looking back over the years, we ask ourselves "Was my Life Worth-while?" "Did I accomplish anything of lasting value?""Has the world been any better for my being here?" A life is made up of day to day happenings which would be too tedious to chronicle and yet they all had a part in the pattern of our lives. For instance so many things went into the building of our home, the raising of our family, the disappointments, the good times we had together. In looking back I can scarcely remember any time that there wasn't some notes held by the bank and yet some way they got paid in time to write out a new one and keep our credit good. Someway with all our work, even when we had the milk route, we managed to work in a little recreation, even though it was of short duration. There was so many incidents in connection with the milk route days, the cattle feeding years, the managerial years, each one could be elaborated into quite a manuscript if I had the ability to make it readable. Those years all have a deep meaning for me, but to an outsider or ones who have their own memories they would be quite uneventfull and mostly meaningless.

So many things go into the Warp and Woof of our lives that in our later years with the imparement of our memory and physical being it is hard to fit them together in a pattern that truly reflects a lifetime of effort.

Perhaps in retirement we shouldn't try to dwell too much on the past, it is over and done with, it can't be changed and the life that we lived is ours for good or bad and no regrets.

Lets try to look into the future as though there will always be a tomorrow for us. I have trouble remembering what happened two or three days ago so I ought to be looking to the future for

it will soon be upon us.

Love, Dad

Written by Byron Vance 1974