

Note — by Ethel Reed Willford

This material was taken from a booklet sent to my father William Reed, (son of William and Phoebe Reed) sometime in the 1930s— by a daughter of Rebecca's who lived in California. I believe her name would have been Leila - since I found a letter from her to Dad among his papers. The booklet had been printed by Harold Chilton of Angwin, Calif. And dated 1933

Autobiography of Rebecca (Knight) Kennedy

I was born April 8, 1843 in a little town called Nanticook, on the shore of Lake Erie, in Walpole Co. Canada - 12 miles from Port Dover. My parents moved 2 miles into the big pine woods. I was only 4 years old, but I can remember how big the trees looked.



We would leave the house when the men felled the trees for fear they would fall on the house- my father bought 160 acres right in the big forest and went into the lumber business, getting out ship timber as well as lumber. When his farm was all cleared he bought other trees-at that time most all kind of trees were to be found in these woods; white pine, oak, hickory, hemlock, beach, box elder, poplar, bass wood, cedar and elder trees. Here lived wild beasts by the score. Black and cinnamon bear, large gray timber wolves, panthers and wild hogs. The wild hogs were dreaded most of all. Deer and all kind of small animals were to be found here.

There were 10 children in our family, 7 girls and 3 boys, and in clearing so much timber not many of us escaped the axe. My youngest brother has not a toe that has no scars- My oldest brother went to Iowa and bought 160 acre of land thirty miles from McGregor's landing on the Mississippi River. He wrote Home for father to come- I remember the great sale we had of horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, chickens, turkeys, ducks and pea—fowl. I also remember how much I hated to see them go, for I was a great lover of all kinds of stock on the farm. When it came to selling everything in the house, it made us all sad? But I thought as long as I could keep my big spotted cat I could bear it, but poor kitty had to go too.

On April 10, 1853 we started on our westward trip. *(Here Will Reed has made note of: " I have a letter written April 15, 1853 from Canada by Grandfather Knight saying that they would not*



start before May 10th- so Aunt Rebecca is mixed on her dates".) Our boat on Lake Erie was one of the finest boats on the lake at that time, yet how different the traveling is today. We were two weeks reaching our destination where now they go in two or three days. We traveled all night to cross the lake to Buffalo. Here we stayed all day. We went to a big hotel to breakfast after which my father took us children with him for a walk to see the city. My oldest sister stayed with mother. As mother was born and reared a few miles from Buffalo, it was no new sight for her but it was to us children. I was only 10 years old but I shall never forget what I saw that day- He took us to see what , at a distance, I thought was tall trees which proved to be acres of tall ship masts. We saw many beautiful boats before we returned to the hotel tired and footsore. I had never taken such a long walk before, but felt repaid as it was a sight to be remembered.

At midnight we continued our journey on Lake Erie to Detroit, there to wait two days before we could take the train for Milwaukee. From there we were on Lake Michigan. While we were crossing this lake a storm arose and the water came into the boat shoe deep. The captain called all down on the lower deck- There were 600 passengers, besides the crew. We were sitting on some grain sacks, all huddled together, father, mother and children.



All at once there was a big crash. The boat had sprung a leak. All the men who could work gladly responded and soon stopped the leak although the water had been coming by the barrel. Father put his arms around us two little ones and said, " I guess we will all go down". My 8 year old sister said "If one gets drowned I hope we will all go." She thought it would be so sad for those who were left. Some were crying and some were praying. I remember one old foreign lady who went right on

getting dinner for her family as though nothing was the matter. My mother said afterwards that the old lady did her more good than all the rest on board by her calm demeanor. The captain said it was the worst storm that he had ever seen on the lake.

At Chicago we boarded the train. In those days passenger cars were like the freight cars of today, having little holes to admit light, while the seats were plain benches with no backs. I think we were two days and one night in those cars with no place to lie down and it was very crowded at that. The babies suffered most and they cried much of the time. We pitied the poor tired babies and their mothers.

Again my father wanted us children to see the sights and when mother spoke of the expense he said " no matter, these children will never travel over this road again with me, and I want them to remember it always."— I know I shall never forget it. He took us to a



large hotel 5 miles out of Chicago. The building was situated on a hill with about 5 acres of land covered

with lovely trees and flowers. We had a very good dinner which we were hungry enough by this time to enjoy. If I remember rightly that was where we had to hire teams to take us to Galena on the Mississippi River. This part of our trip took us several days and with big heavy loads, we children had to walk many miles for it was the only way we could go at that time. There were no hotels for our convenience, but farm houses had signs saying they would keep travelers. We stopped at a beautiful little place, a little white house. I was tired and when I cried the dear old lady took me to a nice room and told me to lie down on the lounge. I thought her the prettiest old lady I had ever seen and I never forgot her name. It was Mrs. Snow and to me she was as pure as the snow. She had such lovely flowers, both inside and outside the house. I wished we could stay there.

When we reached Galena we found it to be a dirty place. The houses were built on hills, one above the other and looked like they would fall down the hill on the ones below. Every little way we saw a sign "look out for mad dogs." My youngest brother had his big dog with him on a leash, and he slept that night in the barn with his dog. While he was at breakfast the next morning someone struck the dog in the head with a pitchfork and it was many days before his head was well again. He was a valuable dog and had a great name. My father had named him after Sir William Wallace. He lived with us until he died of old age. He had many mourners.

The next day we took the river boat and when I saw so many cattle and horses taken on board besides the passengers I was afraid the boat would sink. While we were on board a cow had her leg broken and a calf jumped overboard. I mourned to see the little thing carried down into the water and drowned. There was a big storm and the boat landed at Debuke (Dubuque). The captain said it was because of the storm but father said he thought it was because of a big dance in town. Next morning we heard cursing and swearing on board, also loud singing of rough songs. Father and mother were frightened. I could tell mother was. She was quiet but turned white. I asked father what was the matter. He said "keep still - there are twelve pirates on board and the captain is afraid they will make trouble". I shall not forget what awful looking men they were - dressed in buckskin clothes and with knives and revolvers in their belts. The boat officers did not think best to interfere, and after the men had put everyone in fear of their lives they stopped the boat to land in some rough looking woods and everyone was glad to see them go. The captain said that sometimes they robbed and made lots of trouble.



At McGregor's landing we found a small hut for a hotel and three or four small houses. Ten years later when I was there it was quite a city, and now it is a very large city. (*Here Will Reed has made note of: "McGregor, Iowa probably*) From there we took the stage and traveled 30 miles west until we came to a small town by the name of Moneak on the Yellow River in Winneshiek County. There my brother Edward met us and we were glad to see him and to know that our journey was ended. He took us to his farm two miles from town. I was afraid on such a big prairie. We could see for miles. Being out of the woods to which we were all accustomed, we were all homesick, but father most of all. However, it was

a pretty place with fifty acres in wheat, thirty in corn, fourteen in buckwheat and potatoes, and a large garden. It was April (May) the weather warm and the crops soon came up and looked fine. The house



seemed strange to us. It was quite large, story and a half, good doors and windows. But just boarded up with boards and had large cracks. – We had a box for a table and nothing but the floor for seats, with the furniture thirty miles away at McGregor's landing. We had only two or three neighbors and they were several miles away. But we were young and soon became used to the strange surroundings, and began to like it. We loved the wild prairie flowers and green hills, but one thing was a terror to me. There were a few wild Indians. My brother was working in the river bottom where there was a large

belt of timber for the timber grows on the river bottoms in some parts of Iowa. While he was at work some distance from anyone else, two big Indians rode up on their ponies, and pointed their guns at him. He said it made him feel like he was in danger but knowing that when an Indian thinks a white man is a coward, he is more likely to shoot, he just looked at them and they put down their guns and rode away. They did not trouble us long, however, but went to Minnesota where they massacred many whites. Some people went to Minnesota from our locality and were nearly all massacred by the Indians. I will not spoil my story by telling the awful things they did.

Traveling then was a great treat to me, now I do not care to see strange country or new scenes. We lived on that place two years or until father traded the place for 160 acres with better soil. But we were two miles farther from a town. The new home was four miles from a little town called Frankville. Here we had plenty of timber for fuel. We cleared the land of grubs and stumps until we had 100 acres under cultivation, on which we raised most all kinds of crops and for which we received good prices and had soon made fourteen hundred dollars to pay off the debt on the place. Two girls and one of the boys worked on the farm to help father and the youngest girl helped mother in the house. I well remember working in the fields all day, then milked six cows and fed calves and pigs until nearly dark. But I was young and did not mind it much unless the work was pitching wheat or hay. Then my arms would hurt so that I could hardly sleep, but next morning I would be alright.

This was just at the beginning of the Civil War and it was hard to find men to work on the farms. My only single brother had all he could do with our help. Then my father met with a very serious accident while hauling hay, his shoulder and spine being injured. He was sick one year and three months. He dies in 1861 just as the war broke out.

Soon we were scattered. Mother and Esther went to Canada on a visit. Sister Emma married and lived three years. (*Here Will Reed has made note of: "more than that, for she had four children"*) Sister Jane died at the age on eighty-four. Brother Edward moved to Little Rock, Arkansas and went into the

sawmill business. (*Here Will Reed has made note of: "Edward was in Bay City, Michigan for many years before moving to Little Rock "*). He was taken sick and lived only one week. He owned six sawmills at the time of his death. His wife lives at Little Rock, now at the age of eighty-six. Almira died on the farm in Canada where they moved when first married. She left a fine family, all good obedient children, so I am told. Sister Jane died a faithful follower of her. Lord singing the good old Hymn "Meet Me At Heavens Gate". Emma died at Frankville leaving four small children. John died at Burr Park, Iowa. He had never married and was not over 28 years old. (*Here Will Reed has made note of: "44 or 45 as I remember well when he was 42 and he lived several years after that".*) Sister Esther lived to be over eighty and also died near Burr Park, leaving a husband and three children. Mary Ann died in Illinois at the age of eighty-two and left a large family. Silas, my youngest brother, lives in Alberta Canada. He is 78 years old, strong and well. Phebe lives in Burr Oak, Iowa and has raised a family of 10, and I away from them all here in Oregon.

I have a good husband, one son and two daughters, all good children. The son in Portland, one daughter in Redlands, California and one here in Beverton. I have two adopted children, a boy and a girl - both grown. I am trying to live so that when the blessed Lord comes I shall be ready to meet him and say "This is our God, I have waited for him ". And when I shall hear the welcome voice "Well done, enter into the joy of thy Lord ".

Rebecca Knight Kennedy

Dad had written many notes in the booklet which I have included in their proper sequence. All these were additions he had made to correct what he considered errors in Aunt Rebecca's recollections. It's possible that he may have been right since he would have been younger. He had an excellent mind and was quite tuned in on all that went on. He kept good track of many things. At the time of his death I was much too busy to go thru all his papers but have been so thankful that I kept them intact. Now that I've had time to go thru them, I've been amazed at some of the things he had written. I found pages of early Burr Oak history which was just fascinating. I typed it all up and took it to the little museum there in Burr Oak - the Laura Ingalls Wilder museum - along with many of the old time clothes, and memorabilia. We had been 3rd- generation pack rats - saving everything. When we moved in the fall of 1979 I had gone thru all the stuff accumulated over the years. Since at age 16 Dad had taught the Burr Oak School while the Ingalls were living in Burr Oak, I felt it a suitable place to leave the things relevant to that era. Laura and Mary (Ingalls) went to school to him.

Ethel Willford