

Braved Pioneer Days

by Douglas McIntyre, MD

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Martha A. Taylor Rhoads and her sister, Effie Taylor Rhoads had vivid recollections of coming to the Inland Empire by covered wagon as children of 9 and 7, replete with Indian scares and all of the other hardships of those pioneer days.

In the year 1877 my father, Peter Taylor II, mother {Sarah Bruner Taylor}, and eight children left from {Siloam Springs}, Arkansas for the far west. The children ranged in age from 18 years to 4 months. We had one team of small black mules and one wagon, another family by the name of Kidwell started with us. They had six children, the two youngest twin boys six weeks old.

They traveled with us until we came to Wichita, Kansas, where my father's three half-brothers lived. They persuaded my father to remain with them. The Kidwell family continued their journey westward, and we never heard of them since that time.

We noticed that all the houses in Kansas had long props on the lee side. When the storms began, we discovered the reason. Night after night during the storms, we were afraid the house, which was a light building, would be blown over.

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About that time, another family from Arkansas came by on their way west. They had a large ox wagon and drove three yoke of oxen. Still it kept storming and we were so sick of the weather that we loaded our wagon and resumed our journey west with them.

The storms always came at night, and each night we prepared for them. We could see the cloud rising near the setting of the sun. The men placed our small wagon on the windy side of the big ox wagon. They dug holes and let all of the wheels down eight or ten inches. They tied the four inside wheels together and with long ropes tied the four outside wheels to large wooden pegs. Our wagons were covered with canvas, and the men would stretch canvas along the sides of the wagons also. No tent could stand that wind.

Following the high winds, the rain came in torrents. The noise it made on

the tightly stretch canvas was deafening. The wagons rocked as though they would go in spite of everything, and it was impossible to make oneself heard above the roar of the storm.

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It was a long, slow trip for we had to keep pace with the oxen. One day we went a long distance without water. Finally we came to a rise where we could see a slough of water ahead of us. Upon seeing the water, the oxen in the lead started to run. The men driving them did their best to keep up but couldn't. When our wagon arrived on the scene, the oxen were standing in the water. They had run down a steep bank and the front wheels of the wagon were in water, while the wagon had almost upset endways.

Fortunately no one was hurt. The mother and two little boys, 2 and 3 years old, had escaped. She had taken one child under each arm, stepped on the broad tire of the wheel and jumped. The men unhooked the oxen, put a chain on the back of the wagon, and our mules pulled the wagon back up the bank.

At another time, we met a drove of frogs -- millions of them -- all hopping in the same direction. Our mules and wagon wheels ran over and crushed many of them. Where they came from and where they were going was a mystery to us.

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We traveled along the Arkansas river * on the old emigrant trail via Pueblo, and Colorado Springs. We stopped at an ** old fort in the suburbs where there was room for both families. We arrived there the last of October, 1878, and prepared for the winter. There was plenty of work to keep us busy, and were soon settled. We found this a tough place outside of the incorporated town; lots of drinking and drunken men. They made much trouble for us.

By spring, father had another small team and another wagon. *** His three half brothers and families from Kansas came by on their way to Oregon and Washington and we went with them. My father had two teams and wagons, and the four families traveled together through Wyoming, Ogden and Salt Lake, Utah, and on to Boise, Idaho.

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We entered Boise valley a short time before an Indian raid. There were many Indians, and we had several scares but were never attacked by them. The Umatilla Indians helped the whites and were friendly to them. When we were within six miles of Boise, our teams were tired and hungry, for all the feed they had was obtained by grazing while we camped. Our teams lay down and the rest of the wagon train went on into the valley without us.

In the evening, my father and oldest brother (Hickman) watered the teams in the Boise river. They met a man who lived by the river who told my father there was wonderful soil in this locality. To prove it, he dug a bucket of potatoes and gave them to my father. The potatoes were our supper and breakfast, too, for we had nothing left to eat. The next day we went on into the valley. Harvest was beginning. The crops and gardens were good, and there was work for all.

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We stayed there until the fall of 1879, and then traveled on to Grand Ronde Valley, Oregon. Three Indians traveled from Boise to Grand Ronde Valley with us, for their own protection. They were dressed in bright colors.

In Grand Ronde Valley, we met an uncle who had been there for some time {Who?}. My father, uncle and oldest brother, Hickman, settled on a timber claim. They built a log house; a long building roofed with shakes with a partition through the center and a double fireplace. We had lots of wood for fuel. We lived here for three winters. Another baby was born October 28, 1879 {Peter Taylor}. This made nine children in all. All of the children in our family who were old enough had to work.

In the spring of 1881, my father decided to go to Colfax, Washington, with an uncle and aunt from Pilot Rock, Oregon -- the Arrowsmith family, who settled near Colfax. We also located there and drove the team of black mules with which we had started our journey from Arkansas. Two more children were born here, making the total 11 -- five boys and six girls.

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A few years later, my oldest brother, Hickman, came to the St. John vicinity and homesteaded. The family moved to the St John vicinity later, and my brothers, John and Jim, also took up homesteads. My brother, Henry, went back to Boise where father's half brothers had located, married and lived at Meridian, Idaho, for many years. My oldest sister married Marshal Chase and lived in and near Colfax until 1946 when she

passed away. Hickman married (*Dora Perkins*) and lived in and near St. John until November 17, 1939. My brother, Jim, and sister, Dora Perkins, have passed away. My sisters, Mrs. Margaret Canutt and Mrs. Ella Canutt, lived in Oregon. John and Pete, brothers, live in Walla Walla. My sister, Effie Rhoads, and several of her children live near St. John. Mother died at the age of 81 and my father was almost 94 when he died.

When a young man in Arkansas, my father became a licensed minister of the Methodist church. After coming to Whitman county, he worked with the United Brethren denomination until the division of the church in 1888. After that time he belonged to the Free Methodist church. In all his Christian ministry it was never a question of money with him. The gospel came first. His time was always freely given and he took special delight in ministering along the byways where the Christian religion was seldom heard.

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I was married to George W. Rhoads in 1885. We lived five miles west of Palouse {City} for 15 years, then bought a farm near St. John. In 1915 we moved to St. John, where my husband passed away. After my husband's death, I moved to Seattle with my son, where he finished his schooling. He was married to Beatrice Rea, and they live in Spokane and have a family of four boys.

I passed my 80th milestone in January 24, 1947. I live alone in my own home in St. John, somewhat of a shut-in. My hobby is making quilts and rugs and reading. My eyes are good, for which I am thankful. I am always glad to meet my friends and old acquaintances.

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Mrs. Rhoads' story is the typical tale of the covered wagon, the tale of pioneers who forged their way through all kinds of difficulties and overcame all sorts of obstacles to forge out a new empire in the far west. Many left their loved ones buried in graves along the trails, victims of disease, hardships or Indian attacks but they kept on with their eyes lifted toward the setting sun, kept on to make the west what it is today.

Those were the days of rugged individualism, with a generous sprinkling of teamwork and joint endeavor. There were no 40-hour weeks or unemployment insurance, instead, each family, closely knitted together, made the best of what it found and, generally in the end, came out to found a new home or establish a new community.

From the Spokesman Review, end of the historical article by Martha Rhoads.