

Story by Wesley Herrman

[Note: This story was written in the 1970s for Wesley's nieces and nephews so that they could gain some understanding of the Herrman family's early homesteading years in western South Dakota during the early part of the twentieth century. It has undergone minimal editing.]



This condensed story (history) of the John Herrman family is being written with the idea of recording for my own satisfaction some of the episodes of our family life and because of the suggestion of some grandchildren of John and Mary Herrman that such be written so they may know down through the years some of the more interesting details of the lives of their grandparents and of the younger days of their own parents.

The realization that I know so little of the lives of my parents prior to the days of which I have memories provides a real incentive to write these memories so you, my nieces and nephews, who may desire such knowledge, may have a little more information on the earlier lives of your parents to the extent that I remember and am able to properly categorize the detail of events of our family life.

I should say that while all our family members were very close and loving, to a great extent we lacked the ability to closely confide our intimate personal

feelings and experiences with one another (perhaps this is an inherited hardcore German trait). Anyway, I feel it inhibits my ability to convey many of the more personal details and facets of each of our family members which I am quite sure each of you are interested in to the extent your parent's lives are involved. However, I will do my best.

With the belief that it is of interest to you to know something of your Herrman family grandparents, I give you this information.

Grandmother Mary (Dingerson) whose mother died when she was 12, had a brother, John, and a sister, Emma (Hunt). Her father remarried and there was born half-sisters and brothers, Annie (Baker), Laura, Amanda (Brueggman), Lydia (Brueggman), Della (Galike), Walter (married Della Bauer), and Benjamin (died in World War I). All have died except Della. Their mother, our step-grandmother, was Caroline Kamper, Civil War veteran.

On a certain lot, quite far to the east in the cemetery at Philip, S.D., are two graves marked with a brown granite headstone on which is the name "HERRMANN". To the left is the name "Mary" 1867-1927. To the right is the name "John" 1864-1945. These graves contain the mortal remains of a true pioneer couple who settled in the wide open spaces of Haakon (then Stanley) County and endured the hardships of a harsh country and hard work of developing a home with the dream of supplying their children greater economic opportunity than they themselves had grown up with. In other graves in this cemetery lie the remains of their eldest child, Edna, and their youngest child, Reuben. But, let us look back some years to happier days to the start of this family.

On May 14, 1890, pretty, petite size 8 Mary Dingerson became the bride of dark, handsome, 5'11" John Herrman at the little village of Fosterburg, Illinois about 10 miles northeast of Alton. How mother prepared to be a beautiful bride I have never heard her discuss. But we know that she didn't go to a beauty parlor for there weren't any at that time. Neither did ladies use face powder or lipstick then, nor did they have sheer stockings.

But we know she displayed a penchant for beauty and perhaps even coquettishness in her young days, for sometime in her early days she had her ears pierced for earrings; nothing unusual in the 70s but in the 1890s?

I have never heard if they went on a honeymoon trip. If so, they didn't go by automobile for there were none. Nor were there any buses. They didn't go to a motel because no one then had ever heard of a motel. If they went to a hotel it is most unlikely the room had running water or other modern conveniences. Certainly, it had no radio or TV for neither of them were in use or were even made and most likely were not even thought of at that time. Telephones were not

common then and if a hotel had telephones it most certainly had no room phones.

They set up housekeeping in Alton. John worked as a carpenter. After living in Alton about four years, they bought a small 65-acre farm near the Herrman home place, 2 miles northeast of Fosterburg. There were no buildings on the farm so they moved into a small house on the farm of Will Herrman, which was less than one-half mile east of the 65 acre farm, along the road from Fosterburg to Woodburn. It was while living on Will Herrman's farm that our father built the house on the 65 acre farm. Some, but not all of you, have been on this farm and have seen this house. It is a two-story house with two large rooms and one small room upstairs. Unlike some homes built at that time, these rooms had generous-sized clothes closets.

The lower floor has two large rooms. The front door was about the middle of the east side of the house. As you come in the front door the "front" room, or parlor, is to the right. To the left is the door to the kitchen-dining room. Straight ahead is a wide stairway leading to the upstairs rooms. I think perhaps all of us six children, except probably Edna and Roy, have tumbled down those stairs. I remember I have. As you nieces and nephews know, our family consisted of two sisters, Edna and Josephine, four brothers, Roy, Nelson, Wesley and Reuben. Reuben was born in December 1900.

Edna and Roy were born while our parents lived in Alton; Nelson was born on the Will Herrman farm and Josephine, Wesley and Reuben were born in the house your grandfather built on the 65 acre farm. In those days it was rare for a mother to go to a hospital when her baby was born. I dimly remember the time Reuben was born and I only remember that by remembering the presence of a mid-wife in our home.

We were very fortunate to have the parents we had - Christian parents who taught us early about God and the love of Jesus. Going to Sunday School and church every Sunday was a must. Our father was Sunday School superintendent during some of our childhood years there.

Edna, being the oldest, and Josephine too did a lot of work helping their mother in the home, for it took a lot of work to maintain a farm home with a family of six children. You see there was no bath tub or running water in that home. Originally our mother carried much of the water from a well which was a considerable distance from the house. Later there was a cistern just off the back porch. It should be noted that your grandmother Herrman never did live in a home with running water nor a bath tub, nor electricity.

Of course Roy and Nelson helped their father a lot with the farm work. And Roy also at times worked for some of the neighbors.

As I remember it, less than half of the 65 acres was farm land. I have no recollection of the acreage of the fields that were in cultivation. I remember the South field which was through the pasture across a rather large drain branch. There was a field west of the timber patch just west of the home buildings. Then there was the field north of the buildings which joined the county line on the north and through which the road to the outside led. In 1905, before plans to go to South Dakota were made, our father planted this north field to fruit trees, apple and peach mostly. The rest of the farm was quite hilly and was devoted mostly to pasture. Some of it was quite heavily timbered, mostly with oak and elm. There were a number of large black walnut trees from which we gathered a lot of nuts every year. Also scattered among the timber were many filbert bushes which we knew at that time as hazel nuts.

Our parents were very much prejudiced in favor of farm life and with four sons your grandfather became very obsessed with the idea of obtaining 160 acres of level farm land just for living on it for five years. So in April, 1906, he along with Henry Burjes, Alf Woods, his daughter Mrs. Philips (later Mrs. Burjes) went to Pierre by train. In Pierre were men with horses and light spring wagons for hire to take homesteaders out to look at prospective homesteads. This group employed one who happened to be Mr. Axel Olson, who brought them out to the Frank Rood ranch (Ash Creek), which happens to be where Dale Keyzers live now. They stayed there a couple of nights from where Mr. Olson drove them around while the four of them each picked out his desired location. They then returned to Pierre and went to the United States land office and filed on their land. They then returned to their Illinois homes.

The law required that homesteaders settle on their homesteads within six months, so the summer of 1906 was a very busy summer for our father operating the farm and getting ready to leave for S.D. Roy and Nelson did much work on the farm and helping with the preparations. I was 9 years old and should have been able to give much help but I don't remember anything constructive that I did. Reuben, of course, was only six at the time.

The railroads gave special lower freight rates on what was called "Emigrant Cars" (boxcars) which allowed homesteaders to ship some of their belongings, including limited numbers of livestock. So they allowed one attendant in each car to care for such on the trip. It took several days. An additional person could go along by paying passenger fare.

Our father and Henry Burjes together loaded a freight car of their possessions. I don't have a clear recollection of all the items they took but I remember Henry took a milk cow; incidentally, the milk she gave helped provide food for the trip, and also a little barn aroma in the boxcar in which they were traveling.

One of the things I remember our father took was lumber to build the claim "shack". He had built a 14' x 24' chicken house on the farm which he dismantled and loaded in the emigrant car. I distinctly remember the day they loaded the car at the little town of Brighton. (Unless you have spent a few days in the area it won't mean much to you.) It was a few miles northwest of our home. The month was October and it was after dark when the train came along and attached that emigrant car to the rest of the train with our father in its dark confines, and off on a week or ten days bumping and jerking ride on. Freight train conditions they went, headed for Pierre, S.D. There was no bridge across the Missouri River at Pierre so they had to unload the car in Pierre, ferry across the river and then by team and wagon along the old Deadwood Trail for the nearly 100 miles across the trackless, fenceless prairie, except for three or four ranch homes, to what was then the Ash Creek country. It took several trips to Pierre to take all the car's contents to the homesteads.

It was a very busy year of hard work by our father from October, 1906 to October 1907 to build the claim shack, have wood and in general do the work necessary to start family living on the raw fenceless prairie. Mr. Frank Rood had a ranch at Ash Creek which was the Post Office. But, he was serving as Stanley County Treasurer at that time and Charley Price was taking care of the ranch and Post Office. Charley and Pa lived together. Our father made arrangements to live at the ranch that winter of 1906-1907 and on into the summer of 1907. He also hired a team of horses and a wagon from Mr. Rood (pronounced rude) for transportation and hauling wood and fencing.

So it was a year away from his family coupled with a lot of hard work. And, it was an equally hard year for our mother back on the farm with we six children and getting ready to make the move to Dakota. Of course, she had much help with the farm work from Roy and Nelson. And Edna and Josephine contributed much too, not only in the house but also with some of the outside work. I do not have a clear remembrance of how much livestock we had that year. All of us except Reuben went to school that winter (1906-1907); he was too young. I remember having a two-week bout with pneumonia in December 1906. I do not recall what was done about farming the land in 1907. I remember that Roy worked for Uncle Matthew some part of the summer.

I remember that father came home from South Dakota for a short time during the summer of 1907.

But all attention and effort was directed to October to the time that we were to start for the homestead. Arrangements were made for Edna and Roy to stay in Illinois with our Grandma Dingerson and Aunt Emma so they could continue school as it was uncertain what the school situation would be in South Dakota. And besides the claim shack was rather small and crowded for eight of us.

We started for S.D. in October. We traveled by day coach and all of us, including our mother, slept in the chairs. It must have been terribly tiring for mother to have to get what sleep she could. We "brown bagged" it for our meals. We changed trains and depots in Chicago and nearly missed the train out. I think you all know, or have heard, that the Edwards family, Viola's folks, were in the same car on the same train from Chicago and that was our first acquaintance with them. We stopped off over Sunday with Uncle Ben's at Brookings.

When we got to Pierre, that was the end of the line for that train as the Missouri River bridge was just being finished and regular passenger train service over the bridge had not yet been established. However, it so happened that a freight train was being made up in Pierre that was to cross the bridge and go on West as far as the track was completed which was west of Philip. Our mother was informed that a passenger coach was to be attached to that freight train and that we could go on that car and arrive in Philip much earlier than if we waited for the passenger train service that was to be started that night. So we got on that car so that was the first actual passenger train service over the Missouri River bridge at Pierre. (I don't recall the exact timing of that freight train as to how early we left Pierre and whether we spent the night on the train.) We arrived in Philip about noon on October 14, 1907. Our father was not at the depot as he had been informed the passenger train would get in at 11:00 pm. Therefore, the whistle of a train coming in meant nothing to him. So while Nelson and Josephine stayed on the train with mother, Reuben and I walked uptown. Without much trouble we located father at Rood's Feed Store which was where the First National Bank drive-in window is now. Of course he was very much surprised to see us as he had no idea we would get there before the night passenger train. So, we immediately gathered at the train and took our luggage off. We ate lunch in a restaurant which was north from the depot across Railroad Street above where the pool hall is now or maybe a little east of there. Not all the lots on Main Street had buildings on them. I remember father and we boys walked up on the hill where the water tower was until recently. I remember he told us that a hotel was to be built at the foot of the hill which later was built and known as the Winchester Hotel. It was built and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Joe Roberts. They also operated a dining room therein. All meals were served "family style" and cost \$0.25 for a full meal including coffee or tea. So each person got all he could eat and drink. The rooms rented for \$1.00 for two or \$0.50 for 1. Remembering that all travel from the country was by team and wagon or buggy and that from as far out as Ash Creek or further, it was one day in and another day back home, necessitating an overnight stay in town, the Winchester did a very big business. (There were two children in the Roberts family, T.B., who homesteaded near Hilland, married Scotvold of Cottonwood. He died quite young and his wife married Abe Blumenthal of Rapid City. Daughter Ethel married Jack Pishek of Philip and after he died she remarried in Philip until her recent death.)

After the folks completed what business they desired, we all loaded in the lumber wagon and headed for the homestead. There were no graded or

improved roads and very little fenced land. So as soon as we got out of town a few miles we started angling to the northwest along the trail followed by the homesteaders. The trail took us just west of the Grindstone Buttes and we got just west of the middle butte, about 14 miles, by nightfall and stopped there overnight. There was a hay stack for the horses and hay upon which we made our beds. I do not remember what we ate that evening or much about the night. But upon waking after daylight, father was not there as it seems the folks had forgotten to buy bread for breakfast. So he had walked to the Smith Post Office and store, about 4 miles northeast, to buy some bread. In due time, he returned and before long we were on our way again. There were numerous scattered claim shacks along the way and some fenced quarters of land so in some few instances, we followed the section lines for a few miles but in general we angled northwest. Incidentally, that same general road was followed for more than ten years. It wasn't until after World War I that the county started grading the roads along section lines, which then resulted in the road going east from Hilland to Elbon and then south to Philip.

We got to the homestead quite early in the afternoon as it was only about 14 miles from the Grindstone Buttes.

For myself, and I suppose for Josephine, Nelson and Reuben also, I don't have memory of serious thoughts of that time. I suppose we just thought of it as a great adventure. I remember one of those early days we were out south of the house, near where the well is, and found some little cactus. I guess we didn't know what they were and I remember Reuben said they must be South Dakota cockle burrs. Josephine, of course, was about the house much helping her mother.

Our father bought a team of horses from Malachi Foley, which we named Susan and Bessie. There was much work to do to build a barn, which was built with two rows of small poles about 15 inches apart for the walls between which was stuffed hay and poles were laid overhead and hay laid on them for the roof. (Early days people on every quarter - parties 2 or 3 nights a week.) It wasn't a beauty of a barn nor would it shed water when it rained, but it was warm and good protection from the wind and snow.

One big problem was water, principally for the house. Bridges Creek ran across the corner of Henry Burjes' homestead. He dug a well near the creek and had a good flow of good almost alkali-free water. So that was our source of drinking water and for all other house use. The problem was to get it from the well. The method used was hauling it in barrels on a stone boat. For those of you who didn't see stone boats, I should say it was a sled-like affair with two log runners about six feet long and 6 or 8 inches thick with boards nailed on top to hold the runners about 2-1/2 feet apart. The front end of each runner was slanted so it would go over any small obstruction. On the stone boat was placed two 55-gallon wooden vinegar barrels. After filling the barrels, an inverted wash tub or a

gunny sack was stretched over the top to keep the water from splashing out of the barrels. Considering that was the only source of water supply for cooking, washing clothes and bathing and other incidental needs, you can sort of understand the struggle our mother had with water problems. This water supply situation continued until the barn was built and a large cistern was dug to accumulate the water from the steel roof of the large barn.

During the winter of 1907-1908, our father made two or three trips a week to the Cheyenne River breaks where there was a generous supply of dead Red Cedar timber. The Red Cedar made better fence posts than could be bought anywhere. He fenced the four sides of the homestead using cedar posts set 16-1/2 feet apart. Those posts were set over 65 years ago and the fact that at least 90% of them are still standing firmly in place is evidence of their quality for there was no wood preservative applied before they were set in. Nelson and I also went along on many of those trips that winter in getting that cedar wood. Roy also was involved after he came in the spring of 1908. Roy also was involved in much of the work of digging the post holes and setting the posts around the homestead.

The law required that a public road 4 rods wide be provided on all 4 sides of each section of land of 640 acres, each quarter of which was a homestead of 160 acres. And so while each square quarter of 160 acres (1/4 of a section) was a homestead as a matter of fact two rods on two sides of each quarter had to be dedicated to the public for roads, so as a matter of fact each homestead actually had four acres deducted and a square homestead only provided net 156 acres. However, for sale or rental purposes each quarter is considered 160 acres.

During the summer of 1907, the Bridges Creek school house was built a quarter mile east of Harold Ferguson's. The lumber was hauled from Midland as there was no source of supply in Philip as yet. Henry Burjes and Haakan Einan (his claim joined Henry Burjes on the south) did the building. We four, including Reuben, his first year, started school soon after we arrived. It was a 2-1/2 mile walk for us. Other students that year were Myrtle (Philips) Handley, Nellie (Phillips) Burns, John Burns, two Green boys a mile south. Others were Eva and Raymond Schroll (where Roy Rogers lived), Irma and Verle Newton (lived where Valsvigs lived) and others I don't think of at the moment. The Humphrey brothers, Mayberry. All that October and fall was very nice warm weather. Sort of Indian summer, without much wind as I recollect. I don't remember much snow or cold weather that winter. Many neighborhood parties each week.

In the spring Edna and Roy came from Illinois. Edna had stayed with Aunt Emma Hunt and Roy with Grandma Dingerson and both went to the Fosterburg school where Edna took the 8th grade and Roy the 7th.

In order to make a living and farm the land, it was necessary to "break" the sod which consisted of plowing the raw prairie with a plow. The plow used for

breaking purposes had a moldboard with a much longer curve than a regular stirring plow used for plowing regularly farmed land. The breaking plow ordinarily used had a 14 inch share, that is it cut or turned a 14-inch furrow. This raw prairie with buffalo and wheat grass had a thick mat of roots which made the breaking plow pull very hard and so it took four horses to pull the plow. We couldn't afford to buy another team at that time, so our father arranged with Mr. John Humphreys, whose homestead joined ours at the northeast corner, to use his horses to make a four-horse team to break sod on both the homesteads. Instead of four abreast, the teams were hitched one ahead of the other like one might see on covered wagons. The last hand horse on each team walked in the furrow. That required a driver for the front team which ordinarily was Nelson or me. I don't believe Reuben did that chore. The back team was controlled by our father or Roy who also handled the plow. It took a day to break 1 acre of sod so getting a 160 acre homestead into farming condition was a pretty slow process. In breaking sod, the plow was run from 3 to 4 inches deep. The grass roots in the soil held the ground in pretty much of a mat which the long slanting moldboard of the breaking plow turned over and the sod lay with the grass side down, leaving a smooth black earth side in view. This strip of sod with its thickly matted roots acted almost like a lumber plank as far as holding moisture is concerned, so corn or melon seeds or whatever is planted between the sod strips does very well with little rain or moisture. Usually corn, or other row crop, was planted the first year, for this root-matted sod did not lend itself to working up readily so wheat or other crops of that sort couldn't be sowed the first year. But the second year by use of a disc it became very fine soil for any desired crop. It is to be remembered this was before the days of the tractor and truck. So all field work was done with horse power and horse-drawn machinery as was all grain and other hauling.

I don't recall when more horses were acquired or how many years passed before all desired land on the homestead was put in cultivation. A homesteader could "prove up" after living 14 months on his homestead and paying \$0.50 per acre. Or if he lived on the land five years, he got the land free and of course there were no land taxes those first five years and that was the course our father took. Some neighbors took the shorter method and then sold out or rented their land and in that way we were able to farm a larger acreage.

We all worked together and gradually as the opportunity presented itself, enlarged the farming operations. Also, more cows were obtained for milking purposes.

Living 31 miles from town and with team and wagon the only means of transportation, it can readily be understood our trips to town (Philip) were few and far between. Of course our father, of necessity, for business reasons and to obtain food and supplies, made fairly frequent trips to town. But for we children, I question whether we averaged one trip per year in those early few years.

I remember one time, it must have been in the spring of 1912 or 1913, a circus came to Philip. Our folks, your grandparents, thought it would be good if we four boys could go to it. Of course it meant they would need to do all the chores, including milking the cows, of which we were milking quite a number, and this meant for at least three days for it would take one day to go, one day for the circus and one day to come home. So we got in the wagon that morning and headed for Philip. Much of the land still was unfenced so we angled much of the way which led us past the Grindstone Buttes. For those of you who are not familiar with these, they are three flat-topped grassy buttes with fairly steep sides standing in a north and south direction, about 14 miles from Philip. When we were in their area, it clouded up and some rain showers came along. We had a good sized tarpaulin with us for protection so we crawled under it and kept on going. When we got to Philip, we found it had rained a considerable amount there and as none of the streets were paved they all were a mass of mud and water. We went to the Marietta Livery Barn which in practice was a large barn set up for the purpose of keeping overnight and feeding the horses of homesteaders who came to town, as generally going to town from out as far as 30 miles meant a two-day trip with overnight accommodations for team and driver somewhere in town. (There were other livery barns in town.) The Marietta Livery Barn was set up by a Mr. and Mrs. Nash who had started the Marietta Post Office and store on their homestead about 10 miles northeast of where father homesteaded. When they sold out and moved to Philip, they built this livery barn. In connection with the barn, they set up living quarters with sleeping accommodations on the second floor for the drivers who used the livery barn. So after getting our team located for the night that also assured us a bed. There were many people in town that night so we could obtain only one bed. So we four slept crossways on it. I suppose we must have eaten at the Winchester Hotel, as one could get all he could eat there for \$0.25. There were still showers that afternoon. After being assured of overnight accommodations, we went to the circus grounds located south of where the railroad depot was - all open space then but now occupied by Farmers Union Oil Cooperative Elevator and other uses. To our great disappointment, we found that with the showers of the day had come wind which had blown down the big tent and had severely damaged some of the smaller tents which housed the animals and side shows. So the whole area was pretty much of a big mud hole - and no show. I know it was a much greater disappointment to me, and I'm sure all of us, than it would be now. The next day was sunny and nice. Roy, of course, was pretty much in charge of us. In spite of the disappointment it was a fun trip.

Another trip to Philip I remember was in the spring of 1908. It was father and I. At that time we went south about a mile past Green's home and then started angling southeast past where Fosse's house used to be on the hill. Then on across Bridges Creek about a quarter mile east of the Burjes home and on toward where Hilland was. That morning there were a couple of men out there with a team of oxen breaking sod. It is interesting to remember seeing a working team of oxen for the beginning of our age was about the end of the use of oxen

as beasts of burden. The place where they were plowing was Miss Entwhistle's homestead, the quarter west of Hilland and the place west of there was Henry Wallace's homestead. While we were visiting with these people, a Mr. Campbell who had homesteaded 1/2-mile east on the south side of the road came along. In visiting he said he intended starting a post office on his homestead, which he did and that became Hilland the next year.

I don't have the ability to put into words a proper tribute to our mother for her loving care of her family with the homestead conditions existing in the new country. She left a comfortable house; she left her church which she had always faithfully served in teaching her children of the love of God; she left her brothers and sisters and stepmother and friends with whom it was common practice to gather on Sunday afternoons and other special days for family outings; she left an area where fruit for eating and canning was readily available, an area of many wooded spots; and where creeks and branches (draws in SD) all had running water; these are just a few of the pleasant things she left. Of course our father left family and other things of his childhood. But of course such things, as is also true of the hardships of a new country, naturally more directly affect a mother than a father.

But a mother leaving a modest comfortable home and the many other advantages and pleasures of a developed country and taking up the task of making a home in a one-room house, lacking many necessities of home life; contending with water shortage and without facilities for cooling milk or cream or butter or any other food, all without audible complaint. I don't see how she did it. And, if there was sickness in a neighbor's home, she was there to help. She was among those most active in organizing a Sunday School in the local school house and arranging times for transient preachers to hold services.

The water situation in having to haul all the water for house use, cooking, washing, cleaning, laundry, etc. two miles had to be a terrific problem.

Grandfather John had sisters Louise (never married) and Theresa (Robertson), grandmother of Barbara, and brothers William (Hilke Denother), Ben (Katherine Herin), Otto (Hannah Burjes) and Matthew (never married). All have died.

Our Uncle Ben Herrman and Aunt Kate (children Eula, Mildred & Alvin) left Illinois and went to eastern South Dakota and in 1910 came out to the Hilland neighborhood and bought 160 acres which he farmed in 1911. It was a complete crop failure so they returned to Illinois.

The homestead days of our family were in many ways duplicated by thousands of other families on the Great Plains all over the west.

When I mention grandfather and grandmother I am referring to the father and mother of Edna, Roy, Nelson and Reuben, as well as Aunt Jo and myself.

On a small hilly farm in Illinois, about 30 miles north of St. Louis, Missouri, 75 years ago today, a son was born to John and Mary Herrman. They called him Wesley.

My parents were upright, gentle people and some of my early recollections are that we went to church and Sunday School every Sunday. In 1907, the lure of free land just for living on it by homesteading took us to western S.D. where I lived until coming to Sun City. Mother always promoted Sunday School and church in the neighborhood. I am thankful for the early Christian training.

I suppose I sowed a young man's usual quota of wild oats. Nearly 33 years ago, Helen and I were married and for me