

MY LIFE AS A HOMESTEADER

BY MRS. ETTA ARMSTRONG

TAKEN FROM "TRAILS, TRIALS AND TRIBUTES" COMPILED BY THE EGLY COUNTRY CLUB - 1958

In December of 1912 I journeyed from Chicago, Illinois to Great Falls to file on my homestead - N1/2 of Section 22 Township 28 N. Range 6 East, and doubled back to Chicago -- the trip consuming a week. I lost eight pounds on the trip. It was a part of my vacation, as I was teaching the 7th grade for the fourth year, in Rossville, Illinois -- 101 miles south of Chicago.

In June -- in fact, June 29th, 1913 -- I established residence on my future home for ten years. I helped to saw every board and timber on my 12' x 18' shack and to shingle at least eight rows on each side of the roof. I spent my first winter on the Marias River at the former WARREN place (now known as the THISSELLE place) where I taught an 8th grade boy in exchange for my room and board and little else.

On the first day of March, I started to teach the first term of school in the newly created district in Chouteau County, with May FLANAGAN as County Superintendent. The school was held in a 11' x 13' shack on the Dave RAUSER homestead, across the road from the W. H. EARL residence. The school site was dubbed "Sloppy Junction" by one of the patrons. "Sloppy" being the nickname for Dave RAUSER, a man from the state of Washington, who came to homestead with the EARLS, LEEPERS, STAFFORDS, and many others from that state. After completing my nine months term of school I accepted a position up north, to teach the winter term at the ERICKSON School.

That spring I was married to Thomas ARMSTRONG and we remained on my homestead through thick and thin (mostly thin) for the next eight years. To us three children were born, the older two passing away as babies.

During the term I taught at the Low School (M. Isaac LOW deeded an acre to the district in 1915 or 1916). I walked or rode to school, sometimes using an umbrella to scare a vicious bull away right on my own land, until I finally earned enough to have it fenced.

In order to accommodate as many pupils as possible only four months of school were held at "Sloppy Junction" where I had 15 pupils and the other five months were held in another of Mr. EARL'S buildings four miles northeast of my homestead on the BLACKBURN place. This necessitated my using a horse for transportation instead of walking. There I had almost a turn-over of pupils --- those from the eastern part of the district attending and those from the southern part, not being able to walk so far. Those I had in school were of the neighbors LOW, EARL, CRAWFORD, LUDWIG, PETTAPIECE, HAGEN, QUARLES, McDONALD, BROUILLARD CANFIELD, SKIERKE, LORD (from west of Dugout Coulee); and later on ROMAIN, KAUFMANN, WAREHIME; and later still, BAUMMGARTNER'S who bought a relinquishment just north of me.

Other old time residents were the WELLS, STAFFORDS, Gene WEST, and McISAAC. CRAWFORDS in the immediate Marias Post Office (Mrs. SKIERKA being postmaster) area. And possibly others who did remain long enough to make a lasting impression on my mind. In 1919 Liberty County was formed and I was living in a new county.

In 1923 Mr. ARMSTRONG and I were completely eaten out with grasshoppers so we said "Quits" after ten years of frustration, but many happy days, too; and we went to Chicago to live. I was the more homesick of the two, so in the spring of 1924 we returned to sort of run Mr. James TOWNSEND'S cattle and hay ranch for him, as he was getting up in years. In 1925 a baby boy was born to us while we were on the Townsend ranch. We stayed on it and the newly organized Marias Sheep Company -- which took over in 1928 -- for almost 16 years, when we purchased the W. F. QUERY place 12 miles west from our original homestead on Basin Coulee. We remained on the place until Mr. ARMSTRONG'S death in November 1944. I managed as best I could until our son, Alan, came home from overseas, on navy duty, in spring of 1945. Then in 1946 I turned the place over to our son, James, who with his wife, Violet, are living on the place, along with other land they acquired themselves.

I am now living in Chester, our County seat, which was a "boom town" during the creation of Tiber Dam and which is yet a pretty lively place at this date, March 4, 1958.

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TAKEN FROM LIBERTY COUNTY FARMER--JOPLIN -JUNE 4TH 1931

Chester RUDOLPH and Almira LEHRMAN were married at the home of A. G. RUDOLPH Wednesday, Rev. ENGH from Joplin performed the ceremony.