

The following recollections were written by Tom Wilson's grandmother, who was a child at the time of the family adventures. She reminisces about the family's two-year travels from Abilene, Texas, to Spokane, Washington, to northern California. Eventually, she settled on Spring Mountain, next to Summit Ranch, now known as Pride Vineyards. The original copy was so old and faded that we were unable to scan it in its original handwritten form. Grammar and spelling errors have been left as they were and [. . .] indicate illegible writing.

1890 Covered Wagon Days

We, our Mother, Grandmother, young Uncle and five little Wilsons, left Abilene Texas in the early 1890s. Traveling by Texas Pacific R.R., destination Spokane Washington. Our nine year-old brother, small for his age, carried the large lunch basket. When our conductor saw him, he smiled and said, here comes Jonnie with his lunch.

When we arrived in Ogden Utah, Coxie's army was camped on their way to Washington D.C. The R.R. Company had built a large fence around the depot. No one was allowed to leave the grounds. It was there little four year old Edie got lost. A kind lady had taken her in charge, knowing some one would be looking for her, that is where Grandma found her.

We landed in Spokane Washington, our Dad had rented a log cabin on a place we hoped to make our home. I do not remember much about it, but this I'll never forget. We had been out for a walk, our Mother, Grandmother, five young ones and a puppie. On our way home a large log lay in our path. Some where the coyotes begin to howl, we started to run, all scrambled over [the log] but the puppie. He let out a cry so our sister ran back to help him.

We made it home, but not long after we found the place was snow bound all winter. So we struck out for California in a covered wagon, three horses, one in the lead I think. They called it the spike team, and a Indian pony. Our Dad tried to ride him but he bucked him off and hurt his leg, so later when we reached Oregon, he traided him for flour. Those days flour was 50 cents for 50 lbs.

There was nine of us, five young ones, Mother, Dad, Grandma and Uncle Dick in our wagon. Another family went along in their out-fit. We traveled over-land through Western Washington to Eastern Oregon, had to cross the Snake River by Ferry. Being over loaded, the horses became frightened and a little colt jumped over board. We youngsters cried for fear he would be lost but he made it to shore.

Dad strong and a good swimmer jumped in and swam back, grabbed the cable and pulled us back, they had to unload one wagon before we could cross. When we traveled on toward Oregon, we had to cross John's Day river it was deep and we had to ford it, no bridges or roads in those

days. The water came up into the beds of the wagons, so we had to stop and dry out our bedding.

We would travel for miles and never see a ranch house, but fields of beautiful Oregon potatoes which sustained us on our long hard trip. Our second brother to this day tells us we had potatoes for breakfast, dinner, and supper. When we did come to a ranch house we offered to buy potatoes, but he said help yourselves, we cannot sell them any-way.

We traveled on through Eastern Oregon till we came to Pendleton a cattle town and farm country, dry and hot, we camped near by. The farmer gave our horses a good feed which they no doubt needed. We hobbled them at night so they could pick and not stray.

The farmer had just killed a sheep brought us a big chunk. Every one said nothing ever tasted so good. He told us to take plenty of water so we packed a keg on each side of the wagon. We traveled 75 miles or more, no water in sight, just a trail to follow no roads. We was six weeks in the road from Spokane to a little town in southern Oregon a few miles from Ashland. We camped in an apple orchard. The men folk got work picking and drying apples. We lived all winter in the apple dryer. Dad did some mining through the winter.

In the spring we headed for California over the Cascade Mountains very rough going when we camped. Our Dad warned us to look out for stranger while we women folks got supper. Suddenly there was an old country Englishman when he gave orders we jumped. But I guess after so long a hard trip our freedom was just to much we forgot. But turned out he was just following the men who was taking the horses to water. We was punished for not minding.

Some one killed a deer so we had fresh meat for a change. Then a few days later we met a hunting party, who had killed black bear, so we had a nother good feed. About all the food we had was potatoes and good old Dutch oven bread. No one could beat Grandma making bread. We had no butter but always bacon gravy.

The trip was very hard over the mountains. We lost our lead horse. We reached Redding Shasta Co. in May and camped in a wagon yard for awhile, then moved into a house, first in two years. Dad got work at Keswick, a mining town seven miles above Redding. The Mountain Copper Co. was building a smelter. There we stayed, all winter in Redding. Then in the spring Dad filed on a mining claim 3 miles from the smelter. He called it the Allan Dale mine for his little son. Our Mother and Grandma use to love minning had an old Rocker built like a cradle to separate gold from gravel. I still have a small nugget they found. When our two older brothers were not in school they used the Rocker [and] made \$1.00 a day. We small ones gathered quartz rock. Lots of it there. The smelter bought it, our mother used it to make her flower beds.

Our Dad worked at the smelter 12 hrs a day 7 days a week. It being summer we camped out. Our little brother then about three yr old says he can remember Mama stepping out and say, here is where I want our house. Our Uncle was handy. Years later he was an articet and builder in San Bernardino. So he with the boys help built our California house - four good sized rooms, front and back poarch, chicken house, log barn and wood shed. They fenced in the house and garden, let the chicken run. Both Grandma and Mama was good gardeners so they got busy. We had a wonderful big live spring, without no pump, so we young ones carried water by hand. We each had our jobs to-do. Our older brother was the wood cutter, 2nd brother took Dad to and from work, by now we only had one horse and cart.

Later the smelter smoke killed every tree for miles around nothing survived but poison oak and Buckeye. But three miles away our Mother had a beautiful flower garden, her no 2 son was a [.] she loaded it up with bouquets, he went to one company housing where the staff lived, the ladies there called him their flower boy. Even the old time saloons bought flowers, he always sold out 5 cents a bunch, but money was money those days.

There was no school in Keswick, yet. So we went to the old '49 town of Shasta, which was the first county seat of Shasta Co in the large gold-rush days, 1849 – we had two miles to walk and in the winter two very bad creeks to cross. One had a foot bridge “and I mean a foot”, the water came almost up to it. I still cannot walk over high places and look down. The creek near home spread out wide in one place could be seen from our house. One day after a real hard storm we could not even cross. Our Mother was watching for us, took the old horse down to the creek. He would go any place where my sister was so he came over, we climed up on his back all three.

When I look back to 1895 I just wonder how we made it. But I realy do believe we got more out of grammer school then than they do now in high school. We went to learn not to play. There was nine grades in that school, we even had to buy our own books. Our older brother had just passes head of his class to the 9th grade, the second brother passes from the 6th. By the time our brothers had quit school our dad was disabled. He was a fireman on one of the trains to the smelter. It was a very steep grade [and] the Engineer lost control and told our Dad to jump. The Engineer stayed with it [but] was killed and Dad was hurt to bad to work any more. He lived two years and was buried in the old Shasta town in 1901. In those days there was no [. . .] no hand-out, but I guess it made real men and women of us. My three brothers all learned good trades was not afraid of work. They keep the family together till we were all grown. Mama stayed with us till she was 80 yrs old.