

Tales

Number 10

from the general store



Thornton Stephens

1891 - 1985

*a
lifetime
of
stories*

FOR SALE

Two houses in Bellair, IL
(owned by Tales from the general store, inc.)



Two-story, four-bedroom country house on 2 acres. Excellent opportunity to remodel or restore into retirement or family home. Garage, woodshed, chicken house and other out buildings in poor repair. Abstract up to date.

Start your home
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and join others
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Contact immediately:

Ray Elliott, President
R.R. 2
Oblong, IL 62449
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Two-bedroom bungalow on 1.3 acres. Furnace. Built-in cabinets. TV antenna. Washer / dryer hook ups. Smokehouse. 30 x 45 pole barn in good condition. Good opportunity for retirement home or small family home. Abstract up to date.

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Thornton Stephens told many stories in his 94 years. After Thornton died last October, the "Tales" staff thought it would feature this story as a tribute to a friend who shared several of his stories with "Tales" readers in past issues.

Photo courtesy of Gladys Gower

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Ray Elliott

'Retreat, hell!
We're advancing in
another direction'

Back in the early days of the Korean War when hordes of Chinese Communist "volunteers" swarmed across the Yalu River to aid North Korean troops who were being pushed northward by combined UN troops (mostly American and South Korean) after the invasion of South Korea, Marine General Lewis "Chesty" Puller and his Marine forces, who had spearheaded the counterattack with a brilliant landing at Inchon only months earlier, found themselves virtually surrounded at the Chosin Reservoir and in full retreat with everyone else.

A war correspondent reportedly asked Puller at the height of the retreat if this wasn't the first time in Marine Corps history that its troops had ever retreated.

"Retreat, hell," Puller said, growling as he surveyed the situation. "We're advancing in another direction."

Be that as it may, the Marine Corps and the rest of the UN troops moved southward to below the 38th parallel where fighting stabilized until a truce was finally reached nearly two years later. The retreat was one of the longest in U.S. military history.

Puller, a World War II hero who had about every medal an American fighting man could earn except the Congressional Medal of Honor and was reported to have said he'd "give a boxcar load of Marine dogtags for one Medal of Honor," found retreating difficult to stomach—even with 200,000 Chinese Communist troops relentlessly bearing down on his Marines and the badly outnumbered UN forces.

While I can't comprehend or respect Puller's statement about what he'd do for the Medal of Honor, I can fully comprehend and appreciate how he felt about retreating. That's the position I've found myself in with the Tales project and magazine for quite some time now. But who didn't know that?

Since I feel the same way Puller did about retreating, though, I don't think he'd object to my using his quote about where the project and the magazine are headed: Retreat, hell. We're advancing in another direction.

While I can't comprehend or respect Puller's statement about what he'd do for the Medal of Honor, I can fully comprehend and appreciate how he felt about retreating.

If you'll look on the opposing page, you'll see where we're advancing with part of the plan to restore some of our property in Bellair. The two houses now owned by the Tales project are ideal for retired, semi-retired or working people wanting to enjoy country life at its best.

Several similar homes in Bellair have already been purchased and remodeled by those kinds of people. With the new bridge south of Bellair completed and the rest of the blacktop on to Oblong scheduled for completion this year, you can quickly and easily get out of town in any direction on blacktopped roads and still enjoy the easy-going, pastoral quality of life in a small country village.

And if you'll look on the back page of this issue, you'll find the magazine advancing in another direction, too. This is the last issue of Tales from the general store that will be published under the auspices of the Robinson Daily News and inserted in three other area newspapers, free to the subscribers of those papers.

That was made possible for the first ten issues of "Tales" through the generosity of Daily News publisher Larry Lewis and his interest in worthwhile community and area projects. The Daily News picked up the tab on 20,000 copies of each issue, most people never paid a penny for their copies and I went broke.

So from now on, if the magazine is to continue, it will function like any other publication: display and classified advertising, subscription and newsstand sales revenue, employees and real salaries. To get to the point where "Tales" is published regularly, we need money. Thus, the advancement in another direction.

With the proceeds from the special memberships and the tax-deductible donations for the houses, coupled with more realistic goals of restoration, perhaps some of the buildings in Bellair can be restored for office space and the magazine can continue to record our history and culture, all for your enjoyment and for posterity.

Now it's your turn. Are you going to advance in another direction with us? Or should we advance in yet another direction?

Whatever you collectively decide, it's been fun, it's been educational, it's been rewarding. I wouldn't have missed it for anything, for as Theodore Roosevelt said, "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best, knows the triumph of high achievement; and, who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

And now, as we used to say in the Corps, when taps rolled around each night, "Good night, Chesty, wherever you are."

Letters

Childhood memories include Jasper Co. farm

My grandfather, William Albert Freeland, was born in Bellair. Later, he bought land in Jasper County near Walnut Church. My father, Doit Freeland, was born and raised on this land. I spent a lot of childhood hours on my grandfather's farm and around that area. My home at that time was Olney.

I really enjoy all of your papers. I think it is wonderful what you are doing.

ROSEANN FREELAND LEO
Denton, Texas

Finding 'Tales' was happy accident

We were visiting our daughter in Casey, and I was looking for something to read. She gave me a copy of your paper.

I enjoyed it so much, I would like to know how I can obtain the back copies and subscribe to get it regularly.

ELMER LEISTNER
Troy, Indiana

EDITOR'S NOTE: You can obtain back copies of "Tales" by sending \$2 for each publication to: Tales from the general store, R.R. 2, Oblong, IL 62449. Please indicate which issues you want.

Play in the works could be performed at Bellair Store

It has come to mind how the Bellair General Store might, in time when things get rolling, become a sort of showhouse in another way, in addition to the projects already in vogue. So what I'm doing, along with other things, I'm writing a play that could be put on stage in the store by local talent. One might be surprised by the acceptance from those living miles around. And that money could be made to benefit the enterprise you have so dedicatedly started and put on the road to reality.

Give my regards to all connected with the magazine, and may your success increase in proportion to your time and energy given to this project.

JOHN FREELAND
Mansfield, Ohio

Remember those threshing days?

I have wonderful memories from my childhood days southeast of Palestine, one of which is of threshing days in the mid-1920s. I must have been around ten years of age at that time. The most memorable days were at my grandpa's farm.

Threshing days always began very early in the morning and lasted very late in the afternoon. My two sisters and I always looked forward to the wonderful dinners, even

though we always had to wait until the last to eat and hope there was something left for us. There were always at least two tables of men to serve and ten or twelve to a table. The women were marvelous cooks, and we would always have fried chicken, roast beef and noodles, fresh pole beans and corn, potatoes, salads, pies and cakes. Also lots of coffee, lemonade and iced tea made in a milk can.

The men worked hard, and it was a hot, dirty job. Boy cousins of mine were water boys and would take jugs of cold water out to the men in a horse and buggy. We girls always envied them and wanted to ride aong, but they wouldn't let us.

My grandpa would let us "watch gap," though, along with the boys, and he would write us out checks for \$1.50 for the day and it thrilled us to death. "Watching gap" was where we had to keep pigs from going through the opened gates where the wagons loaded with shocks of wheat went through.

We also had lots of fun climbing up on the rafters in the granary, where the wheat was stored in bins, and jumping barefoot down into the wheat. I remember it made our legs itch, but it didn't matter, it was such fun.

Hurrah for the "good old days!"
MRS. CHRISTINE SARTOR
Smyrna, Tennessee

Cemeteries are source of family history



This picture may be quite familiar to the residents of Bellair or those who visit the cemetery at Bellair. It marks the resting place of my grandmother, who was the wife of William St. Martz whose name has been mentioned several times in this magazine.

It stands a short distance from the main entrance. Although his name is carved on the stone, he was buried many years later in the Casey Cemetery in a plot which I understand was set aside for the veterans of the Civil War.

My great grandparents, Jacob and Elizabeth Martz, are in the cemetery that was once called Butternut. I understand that the name has now been changed to Willow Creek.

RUSSELL BLANKENBEKER
Alden, Michigan

Reader adds story to Bellair history

I have been enjoying some copies of "Tales." My sister-in-law Esther Elliott Bowen gave them to me when we were up to see my mother. Maybe I can add a little bit to "Tales."

In 1935 of the spring of '36 when Ray and Ada (Purcell) had the store, there were four or five schools went together and had the honor of receiving their grade school diplomas in the hall up over the store. There was Bellair, Cedar, Mulberry, Elbow and, I think, Sundown.

I have one question (for readers): In what year was the porch added onto the Dugan Church? I went to that church as a child, and the one minister I can remember the most was Reverend Catt.

It has been several years since I have been back around the old home place. I was born and raised on the Millard Payne place.

Thanks again for so much enjoyable reading.

IONE BOWEN ALFORD
Greenwood, Indiana

Family identifies 'Tales' tombstone cover

We enjoy "Tales" so much. In regard to the tombstone of Alonzo W. Parsons, he was my grandfather who died two years before I was born, so I never knew him. The only thing I know is what my grandmother and mother told me about his living. He must have been a good person.

His home place was east of Bellair where William Freeland's home is. That's where he was raised. He was a Civil War veteran and was wounded in one of the southern battles. I don't know whether it was Chattanooga or Shiloh, but it was someplace in that area. The bullet was a poison bullet, which caused infection that eventually led to his death.

By trade, he was a carpenter and furniture maker. He was a member of the Latter Day Saints Church in Bellair. He married Viola Watson. Their home was where Mick Harris lived in Bellair.

He would have been proud to have his monument on the front of "Tales."

SYLVIA MEYER
Annapolis, Illinois

Woman researching two family histories

I am compiling a history of the James B. Norris and Aaron Boyles families who resided in Crawford County in the early 1900s. I am preparing a search outline of the historical sources which have survived for this period of time.

ISABEL HALL
Marysville, Washington

EDITOR'S NOTE: Contact Dwight Richards of Annapolis for Mt. Pleasant cemetery records and Lucille Randolph of R.R. 2 Oblong for Bellair cemetery records.

Tales

from the general store



The difficult is easy;
the impossible takes a little longer.

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Tales from the general store, inc., is a non-profit foundation established as an educational and charitable organization to preserve the history and culture of the Wabash Valley region of eastern Illinois and western Indiana in the days of the general store era. The foundation will conduct workshops in cultural journalism for area residents, students and non-students, who are interested in journalism and history.

Students will also be given the opportunity to learn about their history and culture by talking with people who have experienced it. These students may also have the opportunity to participate in or observe such activities as hunting, fishing, butchering, furniture making, soap making, quilting and others customs from the past.

From these experiences, the workshop participants will record oral history, write stories, take photographs and collect tales, recipes and remedies that portray the rural life of long ago and a bit of what remains today. "Tales from the general store," printed and distributed as an insert to the Robinson "Daily News," the Lawrenceville "Daily Record," the Casey "Reporter" and the Marshall "Independent," will contain these stories. The program will be experiential and community related, in the tradition of educator John Dewey, where students learn by doing.

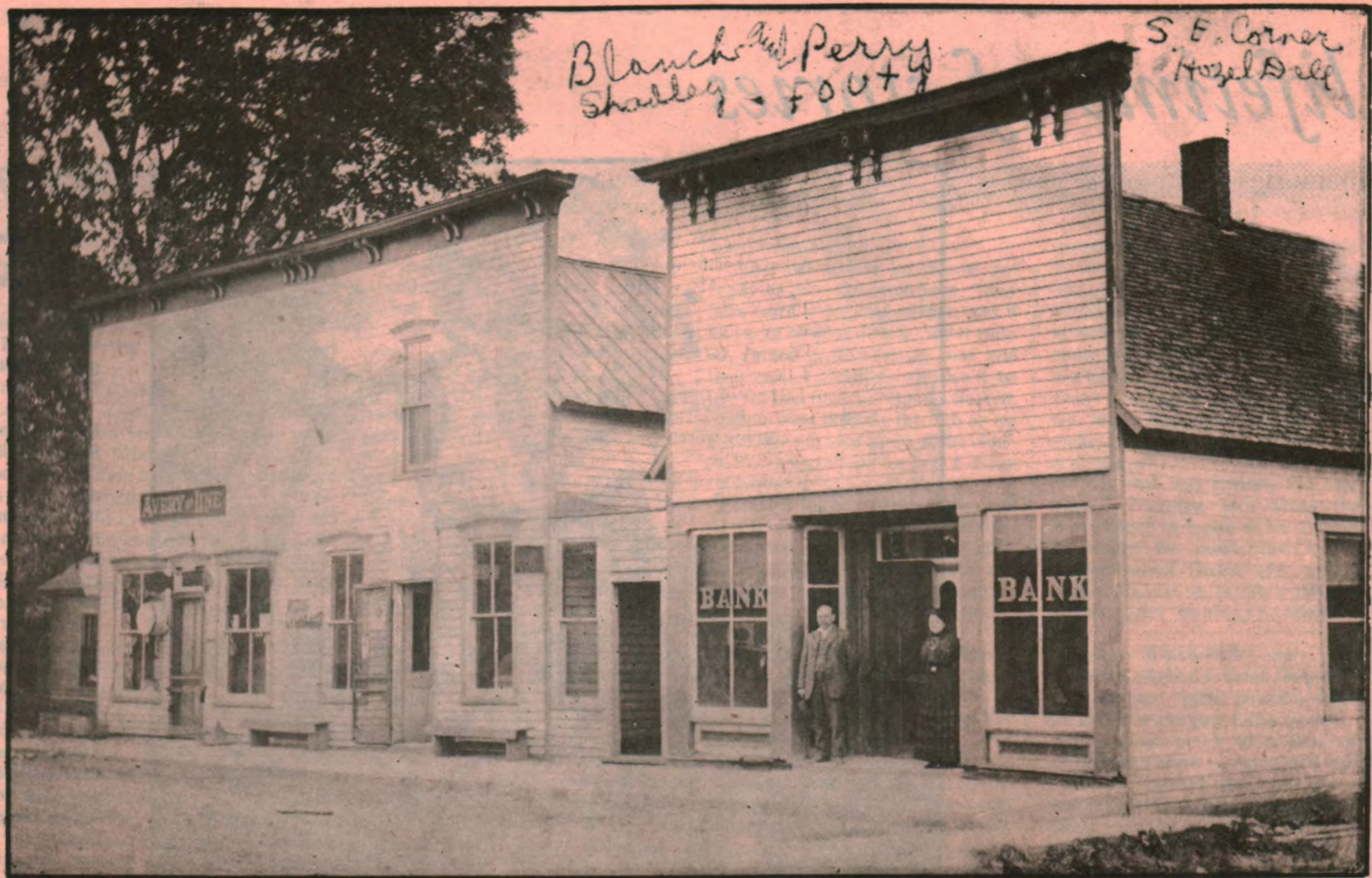
Workshops for the project will be held at the Tales from the general store, inc., headquarters in Bellair where the foundation is engaged in the restoration of that village which dates back to 1844. Initial funding for the project comes from tax-deductible contributions. Future funding will include donations, grants, subscriptions, syndication, book sales and other sources from services or merchandise provided by Tales from the general store, inc.

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Anyone may submit articles, photographs or drawings for publication in "Tales from the general store." If published, all material becomes the property of Tales from the general store, inc. No responsibility for returning unused submissions can be assumed; however, every effort will be made to return all submissions.

Subscribers to the Robinson "Daily News," the Lawrenceville "Daily Record," the Casey "Reporter" and the Marshall "Independent" will receive the magazine as part of their subscriptions as long as the Robinson "Daily News" prints and distributes it. Non-subscribers to the four newspapers may purchase individual copies for \$1; back issues are \$2 each.

Address all correspondence to: Tales from the general store, inc., Rural Route 2, Oblong, IL 62449 or phone (618) 569-5171.



Perry Fouty and Blanche Shadley stand in front of the bank on the southeast corner of Hazel Dell. Date unknown. (Photo courtesy of Dorothy Taggart).

Did you know ...

Tales board member receives appointment to folk arts panel

Tales National Advisory Board Member Professor Larry Danielson has been appointed to the Folk Arts Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts. The panel studies funding sources and recommends them for folk art projects around the country. It also honors achievement in the field with the Heritage Awards.

Danielson teaches folklore at the University of Illinois.

Relatives of Lincoln, Cody lived in area

In 1842, Robert R. Lincoln came to Crawford County following the old buffalo trace, that became an Indian path, a pioneer road and a stagecoach route, the Thomas Lincoln family had travelled in 1830. Robert Lincoln was a grandson of Levi Lincoln, brother to Thomas Lincoln, father of Abraham Lincoln.

Robert Lincoln first built a one-room log cabin some two miles west of Porterville in Licking Township. The cabin was built on a slight elevation some one hundred feet south of the road among a grove of pine trees. He later built a story and a half log house a short distance northwest of the original cabin.

The Matthew Cody home was

located a short distance southeast of the Robert R. Lincoln home. Matthew Cody was a relative of "Wild Bill Cody," the youngest Pony Express rider. Matthew Cody wore his hair in long curls, as did "Wild Bill." Bill Cody brought his circus to Robinson and no doubt visited his relatives.

—History of Crawford County

Oil Johnnies boarded at 'Hungry Hill'

During the early oil boom in Honey Creek Township, a boarding house was built atop a high hill on the north-south road east of the Parker Pool (five miles west of Flat Rock). Many of the "Oil Johnnies" boarded here and others ate here. They christened the place "Hungry Hill." A former patron said if you stuck your head out after dark, you would get it blown off.

—History of Crawford County

One telephone helped warn about blizzard

News could spread pretty fast when just one telephone was in the neighborhood. For example, in 1908 or 1909, E.L. Douglas had the only phone in the area south of Oblong. Word came over the wire that a big blizzard was on the way, so he called his wife, Atlanta, down at the farm

to get word to the teacher at Central Union School where his children attended. She donned warm clothing and hurried to the home of Sylvester Smith, a neighbor one-fourth mile south, to get help.

Frank Douglas, then a little school boy, remembered how "Vester" Smith looked when he came to the schoolhouse and gave the order to close the school and send the children home. Deep snow was already on the ground, and the children who headed west followed "Vester," who was bundled in a long overcoat, earmuffs, shawl and boots which broke a path for smaller feet. The older boys followed in the rear to see that the little ones could make it safely through the snow.

—History of Crawford County

Robinson gets first post office in 1845

The first post office was established in 1845 with William B. Baker as Postmaster. He was a county surveyor, his home in a cabin off the southeast corner of the Square.

Mail was received by horseback once or twice a week from Palestine. The mail was not heavy, about a dozen papers were taken in the community and a few letters were coming. The postage charged was not entirely based on weight but the distance of travel.

Since Mr. Baker was an accommodating person, he kept the letters

in his hat and gave them out to the persons to whom they were addressed whenever he met them, providing they had the money to pay the postage.

—History of Crawford County

Lazy man award

"...around 1910, Hutsonville merchants provided entertainment for surrounding patrons which they called 'Street Carnival.'"

A merry-go-round was set up on Main Street. It revolved to the songs of a steam calliope. "The popular tunes of the day were 'Has Anyone Seen Kelly' and 'Casey Jones.'" There were bands in the bandstand, which was a permanent structure located at the intersection of Main and Cross Streets.

A variety of vendors sold confections, trinkets, photographs for a penny and the merchants sponsored various contests. In one such contest, a rocking chair was awarded to the man judged to be the laziest among his competitors.

—History of Crawford County

Early history of Ohio Oil Company

Westfield was the site of the first oil strike in southern Illinois in 1904. By 1905, the fever had spread to Crawford County and the Ohio Oil

Company became the leading producer and also the leading purchaser of crude oil produced by the other companies.

By the end of 1906, Crawford County was the focus of a major oil production area fifty miles long. It was the third largest producing area in the United States. The crude produced in this field is essentially sulfur-free and produces gasoline, kerosene, naphtha and lubricating oil.

A small primitive pipeline, built by Buckeye Pipeline Co. in 1905, was purchased by the Ohio Oil Company. They soon added more line to this meager gathering system and also tank storage units were erected at Stoy, Casey and Martinsville.

In 1962, Ohio Oil Company celebrated its 75th anniversary, and the name was changed to Marathon Oil Company....

—History of Crawford County

Readers become Special Members of Tales project

CONTRIBUTING MEMBER:
The Kiwanis Club of Lawrenceville

SUPPORTING MEMBERS:
Garth Doyel of W. Palm Beach, Fla.

Barbara Castello of Buchanan, Mich.

C.D. Deahl of Tucson, Ariz.

Mr. and Mrs. Arlie Guyer of West York, IL

A lifetime of stories



Tales told around the supper table

by Ray Elliott

Storytelling grew out of a response to an event. It answered a need. It taught a lesson.

Donald D. Davis
Storyteller

By the time Thornton Stephens began his "schoolin'" at a one-room country school in Crawford County near where he was born on February 11, 1891, and lived until he died on October 31, 1985, he had already begun telling stories without any trouble and with only the slightest

provocation. His parents, he said, weren't storytellers. Neither were any of his six brothers.

I interviewed Thornton in April 1983 for a folklore project I was doing at the University of Illinois. My plan was to collect the stories he told and make some attempt to classify them in the correct folk narrative genre, using several comparative sources for annotative purposes.

I hoped to accomplish the latter by drawing on several tapes about southern Illinois folklore that Marvin Harrison, a recently deceased former school teacher, left to his

grand-nephew, annotations, interviews and transcriptions from Fox] fire Records, a division of the Fox-fire Fund, Inc., and published sources like Richard M. Dorson's "Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States." I also planned to pay some attention to Thornton's storytelling style.

With this approach, I hoped to write a paper that would fulfill length and format requirements for academic purposes and still have an article that could be cut and used in a future issue of "Tales from the general store." I thought I'd find

some clue that would link Thornton's tales and storytelling inclination to some identifiable aspect of narrative folk tradition.

And perhaps I did to an extent. But for the most part, Thornton's stories don't fall into any certain motif or tale-type number in Stith Thompson's "Motif-Index of Folk-Literature." Thornton said, and I tend to believe him, that except as he noted, he made up the stories, sometimes, but not always, using a portion of a real event or a happening in his own life as a starting point for his stories.

I've known Thornton since I can remember, since back in the forties. He lived most of his life next to a 40-acre field called the Sally Place after a family who lived there before the turn of the century. Then my grandfather bought the place. My father owns it now.

Thornton was an old man when I first remember him coming to the field to talk with my grandfather (not the one who owned the field), my father and me during farming time. Thornton told us stories then, many of the same ones I've heard since, and continued making up new ones and telling many of them until the last time I saw him alive.

In the early days, I listened to his stories, often thinking I was merely humoring an old man. In the last few years, I listened to his stories, often thinking he was humoring me.

"In school," Thornton said, pausing and drawing out school, during the April 1983 interview after he had placed a recent copy of the "National Geographic" he had been reading on the library table beside him and removed his wire-rimmed glasses, "we had a language class. And the kids said, 'Oooooohhh, I don't know what to write.' I was never lost. I could write on any story. And I wrote some.

"Let's see, uh, sittin' there thinkin' one day, 'Oh, I said, 'I believe I'll write about an apple. Yes,' I said, 'in the Bible they tell about Adam and Eve eatin' an apple.' I said, 'Now what I want to know, was this a little old wild crab apple or was it a modern apple like Stark Brothers (a commercial nursery) put out.'"

Thornton never said any more about what he said or wrote about that situation and tried to think of similar stories, but he couldn't think of them offhand. Bright rays of the late-evening, spring sun glistened through the window to the living room and off Thornton's white hair. He was wearing bib overalls and a short-sleeved, blue chambray shirt, the same kind of clothes he had worn when I first remember him.

Off to his right and back in the corner of the living room, Mabel, Thornton's wife of nearly seventy years who died September 30, 1983, lay on a small bed where he could care for her more easily. Frail and drawn, Mabel listened to Thornton, a frown knitting up her eyebrows and forehead, and tried to help him remember. But the words wouldn't come, and she'd whistle out of frustration.

"Yes," Thornton said, tryng to think of another story he'd written in school, "and, uh, what was that story Shave Beals copied off of me?"

Mabel's eyes said she knew the story he was thinking about. She tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come out.

"Oooooohhh, well," Thornton said, "I can't think of what it was. I was athinkin' of it not very long ago. A story that I had that I just thought up and read up. Now it was good enough that he held it over until the next school term, and he wrote it up as his own."

Thornton's storytelling bent and experience from those early school

days developed and carried over into his own family life when he was a grown man, married and had a family of his own. He said telling stories to his children had always come easy to him.

"I didn't have to learn how to tell stories," he said. "And when my kids was agrowin' up, I was aridin' the tractor, and I was athinkin' up the next chapter of some story I was atellin' 'em."

That's how Denzil Stephens, since deceased, one of Thornton and Mabel's four sons remembered his father's storytelling times, too. Before a stroke slowed his activity, Denzil spent much of his spare time on local archaeological digs, making several discoveries of Indian culture in Crawford County.

"After supper," Denzil said, jerking a thumb toward his father on one of my earlier visits to Thornton's home, "he'd scoot his chair back and say, 'Well, now, let's see, where were we last night?' And off he'd go."

Some of those stories were set in places Thornton had never been. He said he had travelled little outside of eastern Illinois in his lifetime.

"I told them some western stories," Thornton said on that late April afternoon, rocking back on his rocking chair and beginning a story set in Colorado.

The story was a long, rambling one about early settlers and their relationship with the Indians. After several minutes, Thornton seemed confused and stopped to see if I wanted him to continue.

He'd told me one time that he was able to detect interest or the lack of it in people's faces when he was telling them stories. Before I could answer him, he said the story went on, but he didn't see any reason to continue it.

"It's based on one of them stories I told the kids when they was little," he said. "Gen'ly while we was aeatin' supper. Yes, and supper was a prolonged meal, asittin' there alistenin' to me atellin' that story."

As he spoke about his story telling at those family suppers more than fifty years ago, Thornton slipped into the same storytelling style and tone of voice that he had used with other stories I'd heard him tell over the years.

His hands and his head moved here and there to make a point or to roll with the story. His eyes had a far-away glint in them as he talked. Every so often, he'd pause and chuckle at what he was telling, slapping his knee when he did. Mabel listened and laughed with him.

"As we heard the screen door flap just a little bit," he said, "we'd look around and there'd be Gracen Elliott (Thornton pronounced it Elit). Yes. He'd come in to listen to that story."

Stories to Thornton were the kind he created in his own mind. While he said his folks didn't tell him stories of that kind when he was a boy, he didn't discount the fact that they may have told him stories.

"If it was stories they told," he said, "it was true stories. Not the kind I told."

It was interesting to me that he made a distinction between stories

and true stories. I was trying to find some origin or reason behind Thornton's storytelling. Several times during the interview, I asked him why he told stories and how he got started other than what he did in school.

"Well, I told you before," he said after I asked the same question again and threw up his hand and laughed, "that I was full of stories. And the kids liked to hear 'em, and I soon learned that. So I, uh, we, had five kids. They'd set there—sometimes it's take us an hour to eat supper. And we'd look around and there's be Gracen, a settin' there on the stair step alistenin'."

Supper for the family back then was between six and seven o'clock in the evening, after the evening chores were done. Thornton did the farming when the kids were small. They did the chores, and Mabel took care of the chickens and the garden. She also did the cooking.

But so far I hadn't really learned what I wanted to learn. Two years earlier, about ten of us had stopped by Thornton and Mabel's one sum-

mer afternoon. Thornton had entertained us all afternoon with his stories. I wondered about the source of a story he'd told us that day about the driest summer he remembered.

"Now the three us teamed up together would go over there to Chapman's and get Ira, and we'd go to the crick and swim. But along about the first of July, the cricks dried up."

"And then Harry Nave and Walter Reed was astandin' there in the garage, and I said—just to go ahead with the story—I said, 'It got so dry that the frogs went to the woods and clumb the trees and built nests up there like squirrels and raised their younguns up there.'"

Thornton paused and laughed. "Walter Reed seen I was asellin' 'em down the river," he said. "He come back and he said, 'How'd them frogs get up there?' I said, 'I never did know.' I said, 'That was their problem to solve, not mine.' But since then, I've added to that story."

"Along in the fall after that, 'Well, I said, 'now the fish, they dug down in the sand about eight inches and laid their eggs down there and suckled their young down there. We'd creep along on our hands and knees and listen at the old fish agruntin' to their young ones down



Thornton in the midst of a tale.

there anursin' 'em like a sow nurses a pig. But when the rain did come in the fall, the crick was full of fish six inches long that had never learned how to swim."

And Thornton said he added more to that.

"Yes," he said and chuckled. "I said, 'The old fish had to stay with the young ones 'bout a month and teach 'em to swim before she could leave 'em.' Well, uh, along in the fall after I told them that story, they was a funeral over east yonder. Way over east. East Baptist."

East Baptist Church is east of Thornton's house, northwest of Annapolis on the County Line Road a quarter of a mile, then north a half of a mile and east another two miles through a narrow county road that now turns into a dirt road before you

come to the church.

"And just as me an' Mabel got ready to go," Thornton said, "why here come a northwesterner, and it had a lot of wind with it, and it rained, rained, rained fer an hour and then quit. I thought, 'Oh, we'll be late fer that funeral.' But we started. And we went directly through as we could. We got over there at the church, there wasn't over a half a dozen rigs there."

"But an usher ushered me in and set me down by the side of Walter Reed. And everybody was just still. After bit, Walter looked 'round at me and said, 'Say, don't you 'magine them frogs can come down out of them trees now?'"

"Well, uh, I said, 'won't this rain be worth ten dollars to every field, uh, ear of corn?'"

"He said, 'No, the corn is too fer gone.' He was right, except now there was this one feller, he farms partly by the Bible an' partly by hard work. Two 'r three different times when we needed a rain 'long to finish up the corn, why he got rain and he raised corn. And the rest of us got nothing. Two 'r three times when other folks around didn't get any rain, why he did and he had crops. But now he said, 'Now I never worked on Sunday.' I don't know if he thought that made any difference or not."

Like most stories Thornton told, he said the story about the frogs roosting up in the trees with the squirrels and the fish having to learn to swim after a particularly dry summer was entirely from his own imagination. The story line often varied as I heard the tale, and this one was different from the one that was part of a story about Thornton that appeared in "Tales" #1, although the essential elements were always the same.

And in this instance, there are several references to tales of that type in Thompson's "Motif-Index of Folk-Literature." Under the section titled "Humor of Lies and Exaggeration" in the motif-index you find the following:

X1633.3 Water gets so hot in stream that fish leave, swim up the road in the dust.

X16401.1 Frogs are unable to learn to swim.

X1643. Lie; How dry weather affects animals.

X1643(d) Fish kick up dust in river in dry spell.

X1643(e) Catfish leave river, swim in dust of road.

X1643.1 Bullfrogs several years old cannot swim, have never been able to learn.

X1643.1(a) Frogs die when they fall into water.

Stories with this motif have been around for hundreds of years. Thornton was nine years old during the dry summer of 1901. If he heard someone telling a story using this motif back then, undoubtedly he forgot it long ago. The similarities are so close that it is unlikely he didn't hear a similar story.

Another story that Thornton said sprang from his imagination is one he called "Professor Whistledick." The story centered around Professor Whistledick and his crazy adven-

tures with his cure-all elixir, Magic-X. Discovered by accident by the whiskey-making Whistledick brothers, the potion could make a grown man drunk with a few swigs, cause hair to grow back on an injury to a horse or a mule, roosters to crow every five minutes and chickens to lay more eggs immediately, and make cats run up telephone poles and jump off.

"Yes, that was entirely my own story," Thornton said about the story, which he typed on his ancient typewriter for publication in an earlier issue of "Tales" (#3). "I just studied up, that up, as, uh, I wrote it. I didn't have anything to start on that."

In the "Whistledick" story, termites are allowed to drink the potion and look like "giant pinching bugs but had tails and ears like a mouse . . . They would pinch off a piece of wood from a block . . . set up and nibble on the morsel till it was gone. Several mothers were nursing their young ones like a mother pig grunts to her young ones." Then they died and fell into saucers where the cats drank their milk. The cats ate the termites, and "a string of cats came bouncing past me with their fur all turned the wrong way, their tails all bushed out and screaming and squalling at the top of their voices. They ran up the telephone poles and thirteen jumped off."

Thompson's "Motif-Index" lists similar references to feats by insects. Under X1280.2, for example, "ferocious insects eat teams of horses and mules, pitch horseshoes to see who gets what's left of the harness and wagon." Not as close to the references to the dry-weather tales about the fish and the frogs, but there is a thread of similarity.

Thornton had told may of these stories for so long that if there were original sources, he evidently no longer remembered them. But in a more recent acquisition to his storytelling repertoire, he remembered the source and quickly acknowledged it.

"Now, just one," he said, regarding a story he borrowed from someone else. Like all the others, however, he told the story in the first person with himself as one of the main characters. According to Barre Toelkein in "Dynamics of Folklore," this is consistent with the common use of first person in the American Tall Tale tradition. "Just one I'll tell you that I borrowed part of it. That was old, uh, old—what's his name? Old, that old dog? What was his name?"

Again, Mabel's eyes said that she knew the name he was looking for, but she couldn't get the words to come out. Thornton never did remember the dog's name, which was Old Bugle, but he went on with story.

"That wasn't all my story," he said. "They was just enough in the story I told of that story in the 'Capper's Weekly,' a little magazine I take here. Some woman said she read that story in the paper, settin', a settin' up with her husband. He had a heart attack, and they didn't think he'd recover. He had all the land he could farm and was a gettin' old

general store

enough he ought to retire. But he said, 'No, I want that other forty acres down the road there.' And he went ahead workin' hard, and he had a heart attack.

"And she said, 'While I was a-settin' up with him, I run across that story. I got so much good out of it that it just helped me pass the time away. But, uh, now a lot of folks thought that was the best story I ever wrote, but that wasn't all mine. It was in 'Capper's Weekly' ten years ago. I reckon I had the story wrote and rebuilt. And if you notice the title on that, I didn't say that that was all my story. Partly borrowed."

Thornton had first told me the story for a column I was writing for the Robinson Daily News during the winter of 1977-78. In his version of the story he heard something in the chicken coop one cold winter night. He had forgotten to close the chicken-house door and something had gotten in to get the chickens. He took his shotgun and went to the chicken house with the rear-end opening to his long underwear unbuttoned. Old Bugle touched his wet nose to Thornton's bare behind, and he shot a dozen chickens.

Thompson's "Motif-Index" lists "Lies about dogs." The story is also related to the marvelous hunt motif in the index. Several others are similar in nature to the Old Bugle story. So while Thornton may have borrowed from the story he read in "Capper's Weekly," that story was seeped in the American Tall Tale tradition.

Other stories Thornton told over the years seem to have no source other than his vivid imagination. These stories are based on historical facts and his family geneology. One such story deals with his family coming to America on the Mayflower with the Pilgrims and was included in the "Tales" #1 article mentioned above.

In that story, Thornton said his grandfather, a British soldier during the War of 1812, deserted the army near Washington, D.C., and married a woman whose ancestors came from Holland to America on the Mayflower. On the way across the ocean, one man jumped overboard and started swimming for land because he didn't think the ship would ever make it across the stormy ocean.

When those left behind found him gone, they assumed he had fallen overboard and decided to divide up his possessions. But they were gone, too.

Weeks later, the Mayflower reached the shores of the New World. Miles Standish and six soldiers went ashore and found a log cabin with a clapboard roof. The man who had jumped overboard was sitting inside reading a daily newspaper and smoking a corncob pipe. He told them he "took his gun and axe and plunged in, took a dead reckoning on the North Star and headed fer New England. And here I am."

The man had also married the local Indian chief's daughter, a beautiful woman "with hair braided up and hangin' clear below her waist." When he told the story to a group of us who had stopped by a few years ago, he got to that point, paused and looked around the room at everyone before adding, "Now he was an ancestor of my Grandmother Stephens."

Like many rural Americans of his generation Thornton probably knew little factual information about his family's emigration from Europe. But what he didn't know, he filled in

with stories like that from his own imagination. Some people have the ability to tell stories as Thornton could, passing down the oral traditions from generation to generation; some people don't.

"That was just part of my nature," Thornton said in the April 1983 interview about why he became a storyteller. "I had, uh, I don't know, haaaaahaaaaa. Maybe I got the knack of tellin' stories. Haaaaahaaaaa. Well, some of them is real stories."

Real stories were the ones Thornton said were true stories. But he didn't seem to have as much interest in them as he did in the stories he made up. Nevertheless, he told them occasionally.

"Have you got the story where, uh, my oldest brother put the firecracker down in my dad's drawers?" he asked with a mischievous gleam in his eyes, beginning the story when I shook my head. "Well, my dad was forty years old when he got married. And you know it'd be pretty hard fer a forty-year-old man to live, to come down, to get down level with small kids."

"Well, Noah (one of Thornton's brothers) was about eighteen or nineteen, and Lewis (another brother) was about fourteen. They went to Napolis (Annapolis) afoot one evening (about five miles), one Christmas Eve. They come home with a new pair of skates. My dad said, 'Lewis, you're not agonna go askatin' tonight.' Just wanted to extend his authority. But Lewis and Noah went to the crick west of Dugan Church (about two miles).

"They come in home 'bout midnight, I 'spect. Now I slept with my dad, back in the bedroom. And I could see part of what was agoin' on out there in the front room. Well, Lewis and Noah come in an' my dad went out there where they was at. And he said, 'Lewis, goddamn you, I told you not to go askatin' tonight.'

"I had a little sister 'bout, well, she just crawled. And they had a board 'bout that high," Thornton said, pausing and holding his hands about two feet apart, "they put in the

doorway between the living room and the kitchen to keep her from crawlin' in the kitchen. That board was standin' there. My dad grabbed Lewis and he grabbed that board, and he didn't have time to strike Lewis with that board. There set a box stove, had a hearth out here with fire in it.

"Noah had a bunch of firecrackers, about twenty-five, I think, the fuses were all up there fast together. I 'spect you've seen 'em. He lighted that in the stove hearth and pulled my dad's drawers out behind and dropped it in.

"My dad dropped Lewis and the board, and Lewis and Noah disappeared out of doors. My dad fished them firecrackers out and opened the stove door and threw 'em in, and it threw fire clear 'cross the room. Lots of it. I could lay there in the bed and watch him pick them coals of fire and put 'em back.

"Now then he went back to bed. Lewis and Noah come in, an' I just doubt if they took time to warm. But they went on upstairs to bed. The next mornin' at breakfast, it was never mentioned. My dad never mentioned it. The next mornin' at breakfast he just had a carefree, bland expression on his face and never said a word. The subject never was mentioned between any of 'em."

The subject was kept alive, though, through Thornton's storytelling. In a section from "It Still Lives," a collection of interviews, transcriptions and annotations, recorded by Foxfire Records, a division of Foxfire Fund, Inc., Rabun Gap, Georgia, one of the old timers named Stanley Hicks says, "My daddy's gone on; my grandpaw's gone on; my great-grandpaw's gone on. But they still live—you know, the spirit's still here. Your folks can die and go on, but they're still here. I don't know whether you ever thought about it like that or not, but I can show you.

"Here is Dad's dulcimore. There's his dulcimore he built years ago: it still lives, it's still here. You see, it's still here, it's not gone. And same



Thornton and Mabel Stephens, 1942. (Photo courtesy of Gladys Gower)

way by myself—when I'm gone, they's some of my stuff that the young'uns. You know, it still lives."

Thornton still lives. Just as Hicks' father still lives through the dulcimore he built years ago, just as Hicks will live through some of his stuff he leaves behind and just as Thornton lives through the many

hand-made, hickory-bark-bottomed chairs, lamps, canes and other hand-crafted wood work he left behind, so he also lives through his stories, the oral narratives he told for so many years.

Over the last several years, I either stopped by Thornton's for his stories or he called occasionally and wanted me to stop by and get one story or another that he'd written. Finally, he gave me several stories and poems to use as I wished. Some of them are fiction; some of them are historical pieces about local happenings or points of interest. One of them is included in this issue; another may be used in a future issue.

Thornton's "storytelling grew out of a response to an event." He had stories for many events in his life. The storytelling "answered a need for him." He was center stage, in which the stage was his imagination and he entertained his family and friends for hours down through the years.

Storytelling also "taught a lesson" for him and those who listened to his stories. The lesson varied and probably never was the most important aspect of his storytelling. But the most important lesson he taught, it seems, is that you can get along in life better if you're able to laugh once in a while, particularly at yourself.

Somewhere back there early in his life, Thornton started telling stories because "I just think it was natural fer me to concoct some stories." He liked to entertain. That's the only way he could figure it, he said. That doesn't say much about how Thornton became a storyteller, but somehow that doesn't matter. It's the stories that count. And his stories live. Thornton lives.



Thornton helps prepare for a chicken supper. (Photo courtesy of Gladys Gower)

Fortune telling with tea leaves

by Thornton Stephens

A broken window pane allowed me to watch and listen to two old maids one night as they sipped their tea, then told their fortunes with the leaves to see if there might still be some chance of husbands in their future.

But both shook their heads sadly at what the leaves told them, as the time had long passed when they could hope for men of their very own to sit across the table from them and munch the bacon and eggs prepared by their own two hands.

One asked the other, "Sally," she said, "would you mind telling me why you are still single?"

Sally said, "I began dating when I was quite young, against the wishes of my parents. I dated anything that wore pants, expecting after a while to marry that tall, dark, handsome man of my dreams. But after many boyfriends had come and gone and most of the other girls my age were married, I began to think time was running out for me.

"I got impatient for some man to propose to me. Imagine my surprise when an older one did just that. I accepted his proposal so quickly he fainted dead away from the shock, but revived next morning in the hospital, where he was a patient for several days.

"He never called on me again. Other men somehow got the story and were afraid of me. I never had a date after that."

After Sally's little story, both ladies seemed to be thinking back over the years and of course regretted many things but knowing that those regrets only caused heartaches. And they could well dwell on the present or the future.

Then Sally became conscious of the present and asked, "Melinda, would you mind telling about what caused you to be single?"

Melinda's story was just as sad as Sally's.

"I don't think it is my fault I am not married. When I was dating age, my folks were so strict with me, a boyfriend hardly ever walked me home from meeting more than once. I was never allowed to have dates 'til I was eighteen. I was told not to let a boy put his arm around my waist, not to talk about anything but church, school or the weather, not to sit on the porch swing after dark and never, never, let a boy kiss me. Of courses the word got around that I was a prude, and of course that ended my dating.

"Then Mom and Dad got on me for not being able to attract a husband and fixing to be an old maid for the rest of my life. Imagine, if you can, just how I felt toward them when I thought they were the cause of it.

"But in the spring when my dad hired a farm hand for the summer, I thought maybe luck was with me.

"He was red-headed and about 40 years old and was left-handed and had a drooping, outlaw-style mustache.

"Well, he had a birthday coming up, and I bought him a left-handed mustache cup. That just thawed him completely. Then we began to set out in the swing and talk, and even sing occasionally. 'Til one night he suddenly kissed me behind the ear and suggested we elope and get married.

"So one night, he hitched the old mare to the buggy and left her standing by the road gate. He brought the ladder and helped me down with my plunder.

"Then, just as we were ready to drive out, my dad ordered him to get out. Dad gave him an awful beating and ordered him off the place and to never come back.

"Then, through my tears, I asked Dad why he objected to me marry-

ing that man. Dad said he didn't object to my marrying any man I cared to. 'It's you to live with them,' he said, 'but that darn fool left my ladder standing out in the weather.'"



Secret trapping bait finally revealed

by Felix Stephens

EDITOR'S NOTE: In late 1984, Thornton Stephens' brother Felix sent "Tales" the following letter. Felix has since died, but in the letter he tells of his secret trapping bait that he wanted to share with readers.

I was born March 20, 1896. I had six brothers all older than me. I started to school when I was five years old at Willow Prairie. I got the ABCs and learned to write and spell some the first term of school, which was four months in winter and April and May.



I walked to school barefooted in the summertime. One day, May 2, it started to snow at noon and snowed two inches. My father walked that one and one-fourth miles and brought me my shoes—no coat or socks. I ran all the way home, and when I got home, my father said my mother forgot to send any socks or coat. I told him that I would never forget it.

The next winter term of school, about butchering time, we had a lady teacher. One day, she went to the chalk box to get a stick of chalk and let out a scream. She had pulled out a hog tale with the hair still on it. She never inquired how it got there.

My older brother Joseph was trapping at that time and caught skunks, opossums, rabbits, house cats and dogs. I was interested, but never tried until after I was through with school in 1913. I caught a few skunks and rabbits the first season, then the next year I caught fifty-four coons with him—five up one tree, three up another tree, two up three other trees, and one up other trees. I trapped until I went into the army.

After serving in the army for a while, I happened to meet a professional trapper who was also in the army. He gave me some good pointers on trapping and a recipe for animal bait, which I used in 1919. The first night of November, I caught fourteen muskrats, two mink and one coon. I used hip boots, a hunting coat and thirty one and one-half victor traps that night. Fur was high that year: mink \$16, rats \$2 and coon \$3. When trapping, I used to wear rubber gloves and rub an

onion on them to kill the human odor.

I have trapped fur-bearing animals for about 60 years. My best catch was seven coons one night, three mink another night, sixteen rats another night, four opossums another night, four skunk another night, three fox another night and five rabbits another night. One time I set five traps for coon in a little ditch one-half mile from where I left my car. The next morning, I left the car and walked to the little ditch. I had gotten one in each trap. It was sure a load to carry five coons, five traps and a .22 rifle through rough country. I had to stop and rest four times.

One time there was a snow of two inches. I started to go to my traps, and I saw a fox track going southeast. I followed it in a field 20 rods, and all at once it turned northeast. I followed it 70 steps to where I had a trap set, and the fox was in my trap.

I was proud of my bait. I am 88 years old, too old to trap now. I never told anybody, not my brothers or children, about this bait. But now I wish to let everybody know all about it. This is the best deal I ever got from being in the army.

May God be with you always.

Trapping Bait

- 1 oz. oil of rhodium
- 1 oz. sweet fennel
- 1 oz. oil of anise
- 1 oz. asafetida
- Finish filling a 6 oz. bottle with fish oil. Use sparingly. This also makes a good rat and mice bait.

Because of a plow

by Violet Cowger

Will Rogers was often quoted as saying, "All I know is what I read in the newspaper." Well, I can say all I know about plows and our early history is what I learned in school and from my grandmother.

In the fifth grade at school, our teacher would plan a Friday afternoon program. She liked to read or talk to us about our state, its past and present. Then we would sing our state song, "By the rivers gently flowing Illinois, Illinois. . . ." Older folks remember it, but ask any school kid today if they know it, and they will give you a blank look. (It's not their fault.)

Sometimes our teacher would quiz us about what she had told us about our state. Once she called on me and asked, "What other name was our state called?"

I didn't know, but I blurted out, "My dad calls it the 'sucker state.'"

The class laughed, and she said, "You must have been absent when I said we are the Prairie State!"

Being sensitive and embarrassed, I felt like a dummy. I could hardly wait to talk to my grandmother after school, as she could explain anything I wanted to know and it was easy to remember. She had very little "book learnin'" (as she put it), but made up for it in good common sense, intelligence and experience. She was never too busy to sit and chat with me.

That afternoon, I told her about what happened at school and asked her why our state was named the Prairie State. She smiled and replied, "Try to picture in your mind grass growing taller than a man on horseback. I can remember how it looked like a beautiful wilderness when I was your age. Took our people 30 years to change it to the good farm land you see now."

"Then there was lots of timber that had to be cleared with axes. The logs were used for our houses. I was born in a log house. Not much land had been cleared when your grandfather and his two brothers came here from Missouri. Of course, you never knew your father's father, as he was killed."

My own father had never mentioned anything about his father to us at home, and I told my grandmother about it. A sad look came over her face.

"No doubt the reason your dad has never told you about his father is because he does not remember him," Grandmother said. "He was killed because of a plow. I think it's time you were told what happened."

"You see, Enoch, your grandfather, and his two brothers came around here in 1859. They had two reasons to travel to Illinois—to buy land and to leave Missouri as it had become a Confederate state. Illinois was a free state, and there was certain to be a war over slavery between the North and South. Enoch and his two brothers wanted no part in it."

"The three brothers were disappointed when they got to our state. The \$2-an-acre land they had heard about had that mean prairie grass

growing on it.

"Some settlers used a wooden plow to cut the grass, but these plows could break and a farmer could be badly injured by one of them. Land that had been cleared to till was priced at \$20 an acre. The land was infested with mosquitos, flies and gnats; and there were many cases of malaria and typhoid fever."

"The three brothers figured they were better off in Missouri, but Fate intervened their leaving right away after they had attended a dance at our country school house."

I noticed the changed expression in Grandma's face as her eyes had a twinkle, her voice softened to a pause and she had that far-away look one gets when recalling a happy memory.

Like most kids, I urged Grandma to tell me the rest of the story. I was really interested. "Well all right, if you really want to know," she replied.

"That's how I came to meet Enoch and his brothers. Enoch was unlike his brothers; he was so polite and handsome. We danced every round of the 'schottische' and it was love at first sight for the both of us."

"We became engaged and married, even though my father disapproved. My father said, 'Your young man ain't strong enough to be a farmer and support a family.' Enoch said he could teach school instead, as he had experience as a teacher in Missouri. But I coaxed him to invest in land and farm instead, as I could be of help to him."

"I loved the land, the planting and the harvest season, the pride of ownership. There was a new plow of steel made by a blacksmith that could cut three roots and make deep furrows. So that's what we bought. We were so proud of that plow, and all went smoothly for us."

"Enoch's brothers stayed on a few months fishing and trapping along the Embarrass River in what was called the Dark Bend. Then they left for Missouri, and we never heard from them after that."

"Trouble started after Enoch loaned his plow to a neighbor. Time passed, and he didn't return it as he agreed. He gave excuses, and after months of stalling our patience ran out."

"Harvest time came and Enoch and I were in the field. Across the fence in the next field, the neighbor was at work with a pitchfork in his hands. Enoch called out his name, but he never spoke. That angered Enoch and he said, 'I've treated you like a good neighbor, and now you're going to return my plow or I'm going to take it out of your hide!'"

"He started to climb the fence, and the neighbor ran the pitchfork through his chest. He bled to death before we got him to the house."

"There was a trial. The cowardly neighbor pleaded self-defense and went scot free. It was all such a senseless, tragic crime that I can never forget."

"What happened to that neighbor, Grandma?" I asked.

"I was told a year later that he hanged himself," Grandma said, "but I left there so I don't know for certain."



Family pet had limited future

by Rosalee Bonn

When I was about five years old, my father, mother, sister and I moved into a house that set along the road near an oilfield. There was a hill directly behind the house and barn; it was what I call a fairly high hill. Our old cow would graze behind the barn and walk up the hill. She looked like she was standing on top of the barn.

I can't remember how long we lived there, but I do remember a couple of things that happened while we were there.

Dad bought a little pig home with him one day. I think my granddad on Mother's side gave it to us girls. It was white, and it's skin was pink. We loved that pig.

We'd fill a bottle with cow's milk and bottle feed her. We put her in a big box and kept her clean—that pig was the cutest thing. We girls would play with her, and I believe she thought she was one of us. My sis would put doll dresses on her and a lace baby cap, then put her among some cushions, and that pig would grunt like she was talking to us. We'd die laughing. Sis brought in the toy piano, set her down on her hunkers and put her front feet on the keys like she was playing, dressed in those doll clothes and fancy lace cap. That little pig would lean her head back like she was singing. We had so much fun with her.

She and the dog were great pals. The dog would nip her while she was in her box, and she'd sort of squeal and nibble at the dog. They'd get rough. One day, the dog accidentally pulled the box over—from then on, the pig went where the dog did.

The dog would try to get away

from her to go west of the house in the woods to hunt. He never made it alone. The hog always went along. While she was small, she could get through the fence. After a while, she grew so fast she couldn't get through the fence. Of all the squealing you ever heard! The dog would go on, and the pig would finally lie down and wait for him. When the dog came back and under the fence, they were so tickled with each other. They put on all the shenanigans. The dog would bite her nose; she'd turn on him and try to bite back. They'd end up walking side by side to the house.

The pig was growing fast. I noticed Dad was slopping her and feeding her corn. One day I said, "Dad, do you like my pig?" And he said, "Oh, yes. We'll have to fatten her up." I was so proud that he liked her.

Fall came and she was getting huge. She was grown, ate all the time. And then winter came.

One morning, Mother ordered me to stay in the house; it was too cold to go out. She even had the blinds drawn in the dining room. I started out, and she threatened me. What was going on? About that time, I did manage to look outside. Dad and two men had a big fire going and a big kettle steaming. Mom made me go in the bedroom. Then a shot rang out. I wanted to know what it was.

"Oh, Dad probably threw a rock on the roof," Mother said.

I thought that was funny; he never did before. Mother managed to keep me in, but later I slipped out. Dad saw me coming and said, "Dutch, you get in the house or I'll. . ." I got back in so quick I never knew just what he'd do, but I had a pretty good idea.

About eleven o'clock, Dad came in holding a big crock up high. He gave it to Mother, and she told me, "You go to the front bedroom. I think your big doll is on the bed." I went in there. I looked on the bed and under it, everywhere. No doll. I went in our bedroom, and my sister was sick in bed. She groused at me, so I went to the living room.

What was that wonderful smell coming from the kitchen? I immediately went in there. Mother slipped a lid on the skillet real quick and told me to go to the dining room. I couldn't do one thing.

At noon, the men came in and ate dinner. Dad said, "Dutch, isn't that meat good?" And I wholeheartedly agreed with him. Mother, as always, had a scrumptious dinner. The men went back out, and Dad soon brought in a dish pan full of something that Mother quickly covered with a big cloth. Long toward evening, they told me I could go out awhile.

Something was wrong. Even the dog was lost. I looked out toward the pen where my pet usually was—no pig. I went in and asked Mother where my pig was. Dad came in about that time, and between them both, they told me.

I couldn't believe they'd kill my pig. I cried and cried. I flew to the bedroom and told my sis, and she cried, too. I swore I'd never eat any of the meat and cried some more.

Later in the evening, I smelled more of the delicious meat coming from the kitchen. By supertime, I was so hungry, I forgot and enjoyed my meal as usual.

Now I look back and remember vividly just how much we enjoyed that little white pig—an incident I'll never, never forget.



Franklin autobiography worth the effort

by Ray Elliott

Sometime during his long and productive life, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead, either write things worth reading or do things worth writing."

Franklin did both. Browse through any standard book of quotations and you'll find it replete with quotes from Franklin on just about any subject you can imagine.

He began publishing "The Pennsylvania Gazette," a weekly newspaper that served as a model for other papers of the time, in 1729 when he was 23 years old. Besides printing advertisements and notices, Franklin reported the news from around the colonies and across the ocean. He also wrote his opinions on whatever drew his attention.

He continued publishing the paper "at a profit" until 1766.

Throughout his lifetime, Franklin wrote and published (under his name and anonymously) pamphlets on subjects he deemed worthy of informing the public. One published anonymously was "The Nature and Necessity of a Paper Currency," credited with arousing public support for printing money to stimulate economic growth.

In 1732, Franklin began publishing "Poor Richard's Almanac." It became widely known and popular throughout the colonies. He continued publishing the almanac for about 25 years, slanting it to the "common people, who bought scarce any other book."

Perhaps America's first and only "Renaissance Man," Franklin did many things worth writing. He was a successful businessman, a scientist, a scholar and a statesman. In his autobiography, he combined his advice of writing things worth reading with the things he did in his life worth writing.

When he was 65 years old in 1761, Franklin began writing the autobiography while staying at the country estate of an English friend, the Bishop of Saint Asaph, in Twyford, England. The first

chapter, "Parentage and Boyhood," begins as a letter to his son, William Franklin, the last Royal Governor of New Jersey.

Other than the "Dear Son" salutation at the beginning of the chapter and an occasional "you" in that chapter, there is no other indication in the book that Franklin was writing the autobiography in the form of a letter to his son. The approach seems to be simply a means and a justification to start writing "the circumstances" of his life.

No justification was necessary. Franklin's remarkable life paralleled the birth of America. And he played an important part in it. "The nearest thing to having experience of one's own," Franklin's friend Benjamin Vaughn wrote to him in 1783, "is to have other people's affairs brought before us in a shape that is interesting... and what more worthy of experiments and system, (its importance and its errors considered) than human life..."

The first part of Franklin's autobiography is about that aspect of his life, the rags-to-riches story of the self-made man who shaped his own destiny while helping shape the destiny of an entire country. He uses the narrative style to tell about his early days as a printer's apprentice (to his brother James) in Boston until he runs away to Philadelphia and works there as a printer.

And he continues the narrative for most of the first part of the book, vividly portraying life in the early days of the colonies and his own development and education. The latter was an ongoing process that lasted throughout his life, due in large degree to the fact that he was withdrawn from school when he was 10 years old to help his father in his candlemaking shop and his later profession as a printer.

Being a printer's apprentice, Franklin had the opportunity to read more than he might have otherwise. The "Spectator," a London journal "considered a model of English prose and consisting largely of essays on social and ethical problems," had

a profound influence on him. He found the writing to be so good that he read the articles, made notes on them, set the articles aside and then wrote the papers in his own words, comparing his own works to the original to learn his mistakes.

Through this method, Franklin was able to develop his own writing. By the standard of the day, he became a good writer. Perhaps by the standard of any day. But the modern reader, accustomed to a simpler style, may be bothered by his use of excessively long, complex sentences. Explaining how he learned to write, Franklin wrote: "But I found I wanted a stock of words, or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for a variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it."

What Franklin has to say, however, makes it worthwhile to wade through the excessive verbiage. A modern editor might have spoiled the flavor, as well as the content, of this kind of writing.

The second part of the biography was not written until Franklin was 78 years old. By that time, he was more interested in looking at his life in terms of his successes and failures rather than his hopes and dreams. He used notes from a lifetime of observing humanity and offers what English professor Robert E. Spiller, who wrote an introduction to the Riverside Literature Series edition, called "a practical guide for the daily conduct of life."

That description is appropriate and is evidently what Franklin intended it to be. Taken as a whole, "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin" is worth reading. In fact, it should be read by every American.

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