[Mollie Grove Smith]

Date: February 17, 1939.


PIONEER STORY.

I have lived in the State of New Mexico for about forty-five years and in Lincoln County about twenty-five years. I was born September 15, 1878, near Memphis, Tennessee. My father was J. O. Grove. He was born July 25, 1854 on a farm near Memphis, Tennessee. My mother was Mattie Hill and was born September 18, 1856, in Mississippi. I do not remember the place. My mother and father were married in Middleton, Tennessee, October 26, 1873. They moved from Middleton, Tennessee, to Brown County, Texas, in 1878. I was about six weeks old when they moved and had an older sister and brother. My father farmed in Brown County Texas, but they did not like it very well there so in the summer of 1884 they moved to New Mexico.

There were six of us children then. We moved in a covered wagon and had all of our household goods and a coop or chickens, besides the family. …. I remember that my father and my oldest brother, Herbert, slept on the ground and Mother and the rest of us slept in the wagon. Mother cooked on a camp fire. I remember gathering fuel. After we got on the plains we had to gather cow chips to cook with. We had three horses. I do not know how long it took us to make the trip.

…

We traveled slowly and grazed the cattle along. We came to the Lower [Peneasco?] and to the Upper [Peneasco?] and on to James Canyon where we camped for quite a while. At that time this was in Lincoln County, New Mexico. This was a lovely place to camp with lots of grass and water. My mother told my father that she had found the place where she wanted to live, right there in James Canyon. All three families decided to locate there so each man filed on one hundred and sixty acres. My father homesteaded his one hundred sixty acres to include the spring where we had camped. Mr. Evans located about a mile above us and the Castleberry family about a half mile from Mr. Evans.

Each family got a tent and we lived in these tents for several months until the men got houses built for their families. The houses were built of hand hewn logs with the roof made of boards rived by hand. At first the houses were just one big room with a large fireplace. I remember that my mother cooked on this fireplace and we depended mostly on the fireplace for light as well as warmth. Each man cleared a field and fenced it with split rails. My father cleared about twenty-five acres at first and enlarged his field each year. My father planted oats, Irish potatoes, and all kinds of garden stuff. The grass was about waist high then and my father cut grass hay with a hand scythe, to feed his horses through the winter months. I remember that we used to thresh out our seed oats with a pole or flail, as we called it. My mother and we children did most of the work on the farm. Father had good horses and he decided that he could make good money freighting. At first he had only one wagon, but before very long he got another wagon and team and my oldest brother Herbert helped him and drove one of the wagons.

…
After we had been on our homestead for about three years three other families located not far from us, two families named Hunter and one named Holden. That gave us quite a settlement. We had a post office then called Pine Springs and the first [post-mistress?] was Mrs. [Caleb?] Holden. I remember that an Indian carried the mail on horseback. I was just dreadfully afraid of him and he often stopped at our house to warm and sat. I always hid behind Mother's big quilt box until he left. Mother used to knit soaks and mittens and sold them to him for fifty cents a pair.

The men of the settlement built a log school house. I do not remember the name of the first teacher that I went to school to, but he was fat and bald headed. I remember at one time that at one time the Hunter, Holden and Grove family (ours) had a governess by the name of Elvira Kinney. There were sixteen of us that she taught and each family boarded this governess for a week at a time and she would go from one family to the other. Her salary was ten dollars a month and her board. She taught us for two summers.

…

There was no doctor in the settlement. I remember once that my brother Luther got very sick and we did not know what was the matter with him. My mother and a neighbor woman took Luther and went to the [Mescalero?] Indian Reservation to a doctor. When they got there they found that the doctor was a negro. My mother was horrified but the baby was so sick that she decided to let the doctor prescribe. The doctor said that Luther had bone [erisipelas?] and that the bones would work out of his foot. Sure enough they did and my brother is crippled in that foot to this day. My mother was the mid-wife in our community and often was called on to doctor the minor ailments in the settlement.

As we children got older my mother worried about not having better school advantages for us so she decided to move to Las Cruces and send us to school. We lived there for three years.

When my father was freighting I used to go with him once in a while on his trips. I remember once that my oldest sister Olga and I went with father to White Oaks. Father had oats, potatoes, garden stuffs, butter and eggs, to trade for groceries and clothes. One of the merchants where Father traded gave Olga and me each a little breast pin. We thought they were the grandest things and were very proud of them indeed. We thought that White Oaks was the biggest city in the world. Another time I went with my father to El Paso. I saw my first street cars there. We went into a restaurant to sat and I went with my father into a small room to wash up. I saw a big fat chimpan standing behind a door pulling a rope. I could not imagine what he was doing and was very frightened. Afterwards I found out that the rope that he was pulling operated some fans over the tables in the restaurant.

…

[excerpted from original document, http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh001171/]
[L. C. McBride]

DATE March 21, 1939 SUBJECT American Folklore stuff

1. Name and address of informant. L.C. McBride, 1711 [Hardwood?] St. Lincoln, Nebr.

2. Date and time of interview. Mar 21, 1939 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

3. Place of interview. Home of informant.

Form B Personal History of Informant

... 2. Place and date of birth. Urbana, Ohio, May 25, 1847

... 9. Description of informant. Clear piercing eyes, one blind, fleshy face, regular features denoting strength, rugged, well kept military appearance unusually [neat?] for age, mustache.

10. Other points gained in interview. Goatee beard, medium short stature, stout, active, good talker, intelligent, with dignified poise seems in no way senile as would be expected at this ripe old age. Mr. McBride is one of the four or five active, G.A.R. members in Lancaster county.

Regrets loss of last wife, his third, indicates that life now is monotonous and restricted by age limitations.

... We lived in South Bend, Indiana from 1855 to the end of the Civil War. It was there in about 1859 that I got a chance to hear Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas make speeches in a sort of debate. They spoke of LaPorte, Indiana and the railroad ran an excursion, 50¢ for the round trip from South Bend.

At that time my father was a Democrat and of course, I was too, although only a boy. Mr. Lincoln appeared in a shiny black suit and rusty plug hat. Douglas was a regular dandy in tailor-made well fitting clothes and an elegant plug hat.

I was seated with four other boys on the first row of seats and when the speaking was finished, Mr. Lincoln stepped down from the platform and stopped by us. He said 'I want to shake hands with these boys, they are the ones who will soon take up this great work.'

It made us feel pretty good to be there to see and be seen. I came very near turning Republican that day.

In December 1862 when I was fifteen years old, I enlisted in the Union Army and was in service until August of 1865. We went with Sherman on his march to the sea and I got as far as Atlanta, Ga. Rebel General Hood had crossed the Tennessee river into Tennessee and our division was ordered back to clean them up. In the battle, which followed at Franklin, 2 Tennessee, I was struck in the knee cap by a Minnie ball and for 5 months I lay in a hospital 25 miles south of Nashville. At Murphysboro hospital gangrene had set in and they wanted to amputate my leg but I said I was going where my leg went so they left it on. It finally healed though it has always bothered. When I laid in that hospital I wished I was home with mother.

...
There were four Rebels in there and they used to roast me something fierce. ‘What did you'uns come down here to fit wouns for? I can hear them saying it yet. I had always been a Democrat but after that I turned Republican and have been so ever since. These Rebels are Democrats.

I voted for Abraham Lincoln. On August 15, 1865, I was discharged from the army and went out to Marenge, Iowa, where my father had moved. There I was elected Justice of the Peace later on and married 65 couples during my office. One day a couple came in to be married and after the ceremony the fellow asked me how much I charged. I told him the law allowed $2.00 but he could pay me anything over that, whatever he wanted to. He gave me $10.00. There happened to be another Justice of the Peace there, a Dutchman. He heard about this $10.00 fee and wanted to know how I managed it. Well I told him how it was. Later a foxy young Dutchman who was ‘putting on the dog,’ came in with his girl to get married.

My friend the Justice married them all right and hoping maybe he could get a bigger fee than the regular $2.00, he stalled around until the happy young groom asked him what the fee would be. And right there the judge got confused and stuttered a little. ‘Well, well’, oh, just whatever you want to give me.’ He got 50¢ and was so mad he gave it to his 3 constable to buy cigars for himself.

There were nine saloons in town and I was thoroughly disgusted with the business so decided to try Nebraska state and locate in some dry town. I finally landed in Central City in 1875 and started a grocery store.

About 1877 the Quakers came there and built a college. They called themselves ‘Friends' and were the finest people I have ever known, the nicest on earth, kindly, unselfish, honest and sincere. Their word was as good as their money. I was a railroad mail clerk in 1880 to 1882 running from Central City to Nebraska City. This work was interesting and I liked it fine. But they asked me to transfer to the Union Pacific run out of Grand Island; working Sundays too and I wouldn't change, as Sunday work seemed wrong to me.

After a few years in [Easter?] Nebraska in the hardware business, we moved to Lincoln and have been here ever since.

This isn't home to me anymore since my last wife died. She was Christian Scientist and my two daughters didn't like her or her faith and so they left me, and after I had put them through the University and did everything I could for them.

I was a bass drummer for 40 years and have sung lots in quartets. The old singing schools got me interested in singing. They used to go to these in big crowds and sing in fours and eights, sometimes all together. I have sung this ‘Nebraska Land’ song a good many times to the air of ‘Beulah Land.’

... 

The worst knock I ever got in my life was when they turned me down for a drivers license, said I was too old. Now here I sit, day in day out just waiting and doing nothing. I have eight afflictions and suffer a lot yet my physical health was never better.

We have a good class of people today. They're not bad at all, although lots of folks try to make out that way. A lot of those old timer pioneers fell away short of being angels.

[excerpted from original document, http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh001008/]
February 27, 1940.

Life history

Mrs. V. S. Williamson,

Room 609, Dyal-Upchurch Building, Jacksonville, Florida

... 

[Called from her desk in Room 609 Dyal-Upchurch Building, where she has for some time been serving as an editor for the WPA Florida Writers' Project, Mrs. Williamson said she would be very glad to be interviewed covering her interesting life experiences.]

“My great-grandfather was Joseph Branch, a brother of John Branch, who ... ‘was three times speaker of the Senate of North Carolina, three times Governor of that State, a member of the United States Senate and National House of Representatives, Secretary of the Navy, member of the North Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1835, last Governor of the Territory of Florida, and first Acting Governor of the State of Florida.’

... 

“Joseph Branch, with his wife, Susan Simpson o'Bryan Branch, left North Carolina in 1827 for Tennessee, where — according to the will of his father, Colonel John Branch — he had been bequeathed ‘ten thousand acres of land in the State of Tennessee on the waters of the Duck River.’ ... 

“On the way Joseph branch died and was buried by his wife and their four sons in the little cemetery at Franklin, a plantation town near Nashville, Tennessee. His widow later married Governor McMinn, of Tennessee. She was my great-grandmother.

“When he was only 19, my grandfather, Robert White Williams, rode on horseback from Tennessee to Pensacola, Florida where the land office was, and became connected with the office of Surveyor-General. ... Eventually, he acquired a great deal of property in what is now Leon County, including two large plantations — one called ‘Centerville’ and the other ‘Horseshoe Plantation’.

“He bought slaves to farm these sections, but never sold them. If one of his slaves married one of another plantation, he always tried to buy the other, and if he could not, he let his go, so that the two would be together.

“One of my earliest recollections concerns my grandmother's book in which she kept a record of the negro children born on the plantations. When I was about seven, I remember negroes used to come from all over that section to see my grandmother and get the birthdates of their children.

... 

“My father, Robert [Willoughby] Williams, was an only child of Robert White Williams and Susan Simpson Williams. During the War between the States he was a student at the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill.
“He was very anxious to enter the war in service with the Confederates, but his parents were opposed on account of his youth.

My grandfather, in addition to the two plantations he owned in Florida, had also acquired a large property in Louisiana about ten miles back from the Mississippi River on what is known as Old River in East Carroll Parish. So, his mind made up, my father left Chapel Hill and went to the Louisiana plantation where he joined the Confederate Army and served under General Edmund Kirby-Smoth until the close of the war.

…

“During this time, the summers of the family were spent in Tennessee, where grandmother Williams had been made lady principal of the Ward Seminary, an exclusive school for young ladies, now continued under the name of the Ward-Belmont College, of Nashville. During one of these summers I was born in Columbia, Tennessee — July 8, 1869 — in the home of Mrs. Mary Polk Branch, widow of grandmother's brother, Joseph Branch, who had been Attorney-General of Florida in 1845-7.

“Her father, William Julius Polk, had six brothers. All of them with the exception of his oldest brother, Thomas, located in Mississippi, lived within a few miles of each other in Tennessee. In 1837, on a site donated by the youngest brother, Andrew, on the family estate in Murray County, these seven Polks built for the community St. Johns Episcopal Church. In her book, ‘A Genealogical Record and Annals of my Past,’ Mary Polk Branch refers to this little church as ‘the most historic church in Tennessee. It lifts its ivy-crowned head as if to tell its tragic story. Around its walls fought Confederate soldiers, upon its floor were laid the dying and dead, at its feet rests the soldier at peace, after his unavailing struggle.’

“In this little church I was baptized by Bishop Quintard, who was a close friend of the family, and I have a photograph of the Bishop given my father for me on that day.

…

“I never attended public schools. When we were with grandma she taught us; at other times, while in Louisiana, we had governesses, two of whom I remember with affection — Miss Carrie Franklin, of San Antonio, Texas, and Miss Addie [Moss?], of Boston, Massachusetts. Miss “Addie” was an accomplished musician and taught us, as well as our mother, who was a musician. When we came to Tallahassee to reside permanently in 1883, Grandma was our teacher. I cannot remember when I began to study, as Grandma thought a child was never too young to learn, nor too old to continue to do so.

…

“I knew all of the old families in Tallahassee — the Shepherds, Beards, Winthrops, Williams, Hopkins. To enumerate my friends and associates would be like a roll call of these people, prominent in the life of the State capital and in Florida affairs.

“I finished school at sixteen and became my father's secretary.

“In 1893, I married Mr. Albert [M.?| Williamson, who was in Tallahassee representing the 9th Senatorial District composed of Citrus, Pasco, and Hernando Counties. As a bride, I went to live on an orange grove in Citrus County. That was in the fall of 1893. In December, 1894 there was a bad freeze which destroyed all the citrus fruit.
“In January, 1895 my baby was born, and in February, 1895 a second freeze came which destroyed the grove. Following the freeze we moved to Inverness, the county seat of Citrus County, where Mr. Williamson owned and published a weekly paper, in existence now as the Citrus County Chronicle.

“In April, we went to Tallahassee for the legislative session, as Mr. Williamson was still senator from the 9th District. Just at the close of that session, in fact, the day after, our baby died in Tallahassee.

“The opportunity came for Mr. Williamson to sell the newspaper, and in December, 1895 we came to Jacksonville to live. … A few years later, he bought the Floridian which had been established in Tallahassee in 1824, and moved it to Jacksonville. Having had experience as secretary to my father for six years before I was married, I told Mr. Williamson I would assist him in his work. … We needed a linotype machine, and I told him if he would purchase one, I would learn to operate it. With the assistance of a friend employed on the Jacksonville Metropolis who came to our office after hours, I learned to use the linotype.

“Until November, 1918 I worked side by side with my husband in every department of his weekly newspaper.

…

“When Senator Fletcher died, Mr. Williamson’s position came to an end, and he was appointed as a statistician in the Research Division of the WPA in the Florida headquarters in Jacksonville, his work being mainly in connection with the checking of payrolls. He was in this work for almost two years, or until his death in May, 1939, when I was certified by the WPA, and have continuously since been connected with different projects.

…

“I think the most important thing within my memory, as far as affecting the entire State of Florida is concerned, was the constitutional convention in Tallahassee in 1885, when an entire new State Constitution was adopted. I attended nearly all the meetings and listened to the speeches pro and con. The Hon. Samuel Pasco, of Monticello, who was afterwards United States Senator from Florida, was the president of this convention. I remember there were one or two negroes from Duval County sent as official representatives, and this was a new experience for me.

…

“The New Deal of President Roosevelt’s administration of national affairs has been a problem in welfare and economics never before attempted in this country. There was no example to follow, as there had never been a precedent, and while mistakes have probably been made, I am thoroughly in sympathy with all that he has done and tried to do. Personally, I am very grateful for the part that has come to me and to my late husband, and like a great many others, I can say, what would we have done without this assistance?

“I feel that one of the greatest contributions to the cultural development of our State and throughout the Nation, has been the Writer’s Project, to say nothing of the condition of those who would have been completely stranded without it. …”

[excerpted from original document, http://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh000460/]