

## A PIONEER DAUGHTER

Mrs. James T. Bigelow 1949

My father, Charles H. Rorebeck, was born in 1844 near Rochester, New York. My mother, Juliet Ward, was born in 1848 in Wayne County, New York State. Each came with their parents to Illinois in the early days. Later father enlisted in the Civil War and mother became a school teacher. After the war was over, they met in Rockford, Illinois, and were married May 28th, 1868, in his home, and went to live on a farm near Owen Center where I was born. When I was a year old they moved to a farm near Rockford, Iowa, where sister Lena and brother Ward were born.

During that time a carload of boys from broken homes in New York City were brought to Iowa to be placed in homes. Father took one, Alex Snodgrass, about 15 years old, who proved to be of good habits and kind. He was like a big brother to us, and was treated like one of us. We was sent to school in the winter and when the snow was deep he used to draw me to school on our homemade sled.

Our mama was not well, and developed quick consumption and later passed away, leaving father with we three small children. I was five years old at the time. Mama's sister stayed to help take care of us until she was married. Later father married Charlotte Loucks and she was a good stepmother to us. Her parents came that spring to Dacotah Territory to take up land and give their five sons and two daughters a chance to file on homesteads, for three were married and with families, settled near them. Father was urged to come, so drove out with one of her brothers. He was so pleased with the wide open prairie and fine grass, and thought is a good place for a dairy farm. So he used his right and filed on a homestead of 160 acres in September, 1875. He broke up five acres to hold it while he came back to Iowa to sell out and get ready to move. The next spring they loaded two covered wagons with some household goods, bedding and food for the trip, and started. In May, when the grass was good for feed, they drove 12 cows with the two good teams. We slept in the wagons and ate by campfire. The boys slept under the wagons. Alex and our old dog Rover helped to drive the cows, with the bell-cow in the lead. They had to swim the creeks, for there were no bridges and so much rainy weather. There were only prairie roads that sometimes led through people's yards. The second night out everyone was so tired they did not hear the younger team when they pulled up their picket pins and started home. The next morning two of the men rode the other horses back after them and found them where a gate had stopped them, almost home. We were camped by a lake so had a chance to clean up and mother did some washing. Mother cooked a duck Alex had shot. We helped herd cows and had a good rest from riding but glad when they got back with the horses so we could go on the next day. Once when it was muddy the horses pulling the big wagon slipped down and all we could see was their heads. The men waded in and unhitched them so they could get up. It took both teams and a yoke of oxen on the bank to pull the load across. But with all the drawbacks we made it in about two weeks, for it was slow traveling.

We were so glad when, from the top of the hill, we could see the Big Sioux Valley where our home was to be. Grandpa and Grandma Loucks had know we were on the way and were so glad to see us. We stayed with them while the men unloaded the wagons and went over to plant corn and potatoes on the breaking. Grandfather Rorebeck had come out from Rockford, Ill., to drive one team for father and had brought seed potatoes in the top of his leather trunk, and seed corn. Luverne was the nearest railroad town and they had to haul the lumber there to build the house.

The house had one room, 18x20, and the foundation was made of hardheads from a knoll on the farm and hauled on a stoneboat. A hole was dug underneath for a cellar, and used to keep the milk and butter cool. We had to strain it in large tin milk pans and skim the cream off the next day and churn it with a dash churn. Mother made butter to trade for groceries, could get everything but white flour in trade at "The Dell" (now Dell Rapids). Grandfather bought a sack of white flour for mother, We had to ford the Big

Sioux to go there, and sometimes the river was too high. There was a creek of running water on our farm and the fish would come up in the ponds when the Big Sioux was high in the spring. We children would fish with a bent pin on our line. We put on and old apron and panties to go in wading (there wasn't such a thing as a bathing suit). Didn't like the crabs and bloodsuckers. In the summer we would pick wild strawberries in the meadow and mother would make shortcake.

Brookfield was a mile and a half east of where Trent now is, and the Postoffice was located in Wm. H. Louck's house, then was just a box nailed high on the wall where the children couldn't reach it. Mr. and Mrs. Loucks were postmasters. The mail was brought on horseback across the country from Mederia and "The Dells."

Father had some grass mowed and we twisted hay to burn in the cookstove. They dug a well, broke up more land, and that fall they built a sod barn for the horses and cows and put up some hay for feed in winter. When the snow came and it was cold, father traded with a squaw for a big tree by the river, cut and hauled it home in a bobsled so that we had wood to burn. When it was very cold he burned a lantern in the cellar to keep the potatoes from freezing at night. Later the cellar was stoned up with cement and hardheads and house enlarged with kitchen and bedrooms built on.

A few years later father filed on a tree claim adjoining and had to plant ten acres of trees, so then he had 320 acres altogether, Anyone could live on the homestead five years, but would have to pay \$1.25 per acre to prove up any and get a deed. They fenced off a pasture with barbed wire so then we did not have to herd cattle. We had heard so much about the Indians that mother kept the hoe behind the door; said she couldn't use a gun. The Indians came to beg but never troubled us so we got to know some of them. Every summer they camped near when they were on their way to Yankton for their pow-wow.

Mr. and Mrs. N. W. Holdredge were earlier settlers and school was kept in their house and they boarded the teacher. The next summer more families came to the neighborhood, so school was held in an old log house once a claim shanty. They had boards across nail kegs for seats. Had our own slate and pencils, and reading, spelling, numbers and printing were taught. Boys wore knee pants and calico shirts and girls wore 5-cent calico dresses and aprons and sunbonnets, and all went barefoot and carried dinner pails.

Sometimes later D. P. Ward came to organize a Sunday School. Manlius Rodgers was superintendent. He with his twin brother were good singers. Mama and auntie had taught us some of the gospel hymns. We liked to go. All were in one class in the same log house. One time when sister and I had to walk, we had to cross the creek on big stones. The water was high so we took off our shoes and stockings and hid them on the bank and went barefooted like the other children did. Our auntie had given us high shoes and stockings to wear to Sunday School. Lena and I were always dressed alike then.

The Rodgers Brothers built a store on the corner from the Post Office and later school was held in the room back of the store and he was the teacher.

The farmers were raising fine wheat on the new ground and after harvest the threshing with machines run by horse power. Father took some wheat to the grist mill at Rosco to have ground into white flour. He had to give a share for the grinding but had the bran for feed. Mother had bought a hen with twelve chicks for one dollar. Father had traded for pigs for he had butter milk to feed them.

When it was hot and dry the prairie fires were fierce. One Sunday we were all ready to go to Sunday School and we saw a smoke in the distance coming down the ravine where grass was high. We had to hustle into old clothes and with sacks and water to fight fire.

Alex took the team and plowed the firebreak while father backfired. We put out the sparks that came across. Lucky the creek was near so that we could get more water.

One summer the sky was getting dark, and we could hardly see the sun. Just hordes of grasshoppers came down and stripped everything. We

pulled weeds and made a smudge around the garden to save some of it. Some years there was no rain and some too much rain and the wind would lodge the grain so it was hard to cut. Sometimes the hailstones as large as hens' eggs just pounded everything into the ground and broke our windowlights. In 1880 the October fifteenth blizzard was the worst of all. It started with rain and before night had turned to snow. The next morning a raging blizzard surrounded and we could not see the barns. Father tied the clothesline rope to the post to hang on to when he went down to feed the stock so that he could get back to the house. By the third day the windows were covered and the pump frozen so hard that we had to melt snow for water to use. In the afternoon the wind began to go down so the men had to dig stair steps down to the barn door to get feed to the stock. Drifts were so hard that we could walk over the top and slide down with our homemade sleds and skis, made of wooden barrel staves. It would thaw a little and then snow again all that winter. The year before, 1879, the railroad was built into Flandreau so that we had coal to burn. But many times the train was blocked for a month and stores were getting short of supplies; but that fall each time father hauled a load of wheat in grain sacks he would bring home coal or supplies. He did miss his weekly paper and Farm Journal. He would put a lighted lantern under the blankets and with straw in the bottom and the sideboards on the bobsled and sleighbells on the horses, he would go across the fields twelve miles to Flandreau. Everyone dressed warmer and we knit our stockings and made hoods and mittens of heavy cloth lined with red flannel. We sewed carpet rags that winter and when it was woven it was enough carpet to cover the room. With building paper and straw underneath, it made the floor warmer. We had to sweep with a broom then (no such thing as a carpet sweeper or vacuum cleaner).

In the spring when the snow melted we had a real flood, the whole Big Sioux Valley was covered. Everybody was out of sugar, coffee and kerosene. So we burned homemade candles that Grandma Loucks made for us. Some people browned wheat, rye and barley and ground it in the coffee mill for coffee. We children always had milk to drink. When we made new calico dresses or aprons in summer we exchanged pieces with friends and cut and sewed quilt blocks. When there was no school we girls had to sew a block before we could play with our dolls or games. So we would get busy with lessons and chores before any of our friends came. We were always busy in the morning for when we washed the dishes we had to scour the steel knives and forks. Then we filled the lamps and trimmed the wicks and washed the chimneys for the night. I liked to get the vegetables from the garden and get them ready for dinner while Lena made the beds and swept and mother did the baking. It took lots of bread and food those days for there were always six or seven to eat at our table.

In 1881 the branch line from Egan to Sioux Falls was being built with a flag station they called Trent, for there was another Brookfield on the line. Trent was one and a half miles west of Brookfield. The store was soon built and the Postoffice moved there. Mail was thrown off and outgoing mail hung on a crane so the train only stopped for passengers. The depot was built later. The Brookfield store was made into our first schoolhouse and called Brookfield school with a term of eight months. By that time there were other schools in the county so that sometimes we had spelling schools on Friday night. Sunday afternoon a minister would come down from Egan to preach and had Sunday School. They used to have 10 cent socials and we would play "Roll the platter" or "Charades," also guessing games and "London Bridge is Falling Down".

W. H. Loucks and father broke the first road north on section line to Flandreau. Soon Egan had a bridge across the river and it was seven miles from Trent. Father had traded a cow for an organ and I rode horseback to take music lessons. Girls rode sideways then and I had no side saddle so had a small blanket with a strap to hold on to. The big boys had a baseball team and father and Alex went on Saturdays to the games. On holidays we could go to cheer for our boys. Every summer the Grand Army Encampment was held at one of the parks. Father took us to camp in tents with straw for beds. We cooked up and packed blankets to camp for two or three days. We had our first

merry-go-round rides, then run by horsepower and just seats to ride in (not fast enough to take your breath away). When a new barn was built we could go to the dances on Friday night. Father was quite strict about with whom and when we went. When Egan celebrated on July Fourth we Brookfield girls were asked to wear white dresses and ride in the parade on the Liberty Wagon. Each girl carried a banner representing a State--it was a pretty sight on a built-up hayrack covered with bunting. We would have a picnic lunch with friends and take in the bowery dance.

Mr. Tobin built the Opera House in Flandreau and used it for rollerskating rink so we could come up to skate. We rented skates for 25 cents for the evening. Sometimes he had dances there, too.

When I was sixteen my aunt in Rockford, Iowa, wrote for me to come and go to high school and help her. So in September I went alone on the train and had to stay over night in a hotel in Alberta Lea and go down the next day. That was a great experience for a country girl. When I was acquainted I went to Sunday school; my uncle was superintendent. We had a fine teacher. She invited us to her home on Saturday to study and mark verses in our Bible with colored inks. Later most of the class united with the church. Easter vacation I came home to help on the farm for there was much to do. In those days we did all of our sewing, even to shirts and overalls for the men, and all the papering and painting, laundry and ironing, heating the irons on the cookstove to iron those long skirts that were four yards around. Father kept a hired man and they were milking twenty two cows and we had the butter to make. We had a windmill by the milk house and set the milk in tall cans in a vat of running water to cool so that we could skim it the next morning. We had never heard of a cream separator at that time or ice. Father had a barrel churn run by horse power. The butter was allowed to stand in salt bring over night and worked the next day with a big roller butter-maker and packed in wooden firkins with a ladle without touching it with our hands. Every two or three weeks we shipped two 60 pound firkins to Chicago and got the highest market price next to Elgin, which was 18 cents to 20 cents per pound.

Father said that he received a larger check for the butter when he got the returns than he received for a load of wheat at forty to sixty cents a bushel. When it was cooler they would butcher a hog and we had lard to try out, hams and side porkstrips to cure and smoke later. Mother made sausage and head cheese and stuffed the heart and baked it. Then the liver was divided with neighbors who liked it fresh. We had spareribs with sauerkraut. Then we made soap with the fat scraps and homemade lye made with wood ashes and rainwater. There was no waste in those days.

The new schoolhouse was being built in Flandreau that summer and I came to high school that fall. During the winter our class put on a play to help pay for the piano for the school. The Churches' Ladies' Aid Societies were always working to help pay the preacher, so asked the school girls to help with the entertainment. The Methodist Ladies planned a Milk Maid's Convention. We girls wore short skirts and jackets (every one wearing long skirts then). We carried milk pail on one arm and three-legged stool on the other and marched and sang. Then they served a 25 cent supper. Then later the Presbyterians sang the Mikado in the Opera House. Good singers in town helped sing the parts and three of us girls, dressed in Japanese kimonos and with our hair done high, with little fans and our eyebrows painted, sang "three little maids from school are we, Pert as a schoolgirl well can be, Filled to the brim with girlish glee."

One Friday night when the snow was deep the class got a bobsleigh with sleighbells, horses and driver and came with me to the farm. They had a jolly time guessing games and the folks served apples and popcorn. The next spring several of the class took teachers' examinations and I got a school a mile from home at \$20. a month. I walked home to help father check the books for he was a County Assessor then. Rev. John Eastman was interpreter for the Indians when he assessed them.

I had met Jimmie Bigelow a few times. One day about 4 o'clock I noticed the school kids looking out of the windows so excited. He was coming

down the road on that big high bicycle. They had never seen anything like it. After school closed they had a chance to look it over. He walked home with me pushing the wheel. That was the first time he came to my home. The next fall sister was ready to go to high school. so we planned to work for our board so that we could both go to Flandreau high school. She entered in September and later mother got a girl to help her so that I went after Thanksgiving. Then I had school work to make up and work in the home so that I did not have time for outside things. Flandreau school offered only ten grades then, so I never graduated. That spring I took a school north of Colman, a three-month term.

After school closed that summer Jimmie and Will Spear (Lena's boy friend) came to the farm sometimes on bicycles on Sunday. Then when it had rained and the roads were muddy (no graveled roads then) they would come in a livery rig. Our hired man liked to play jokes, so one time they put several cats in a sack in the back of the buggy. When they got to town, they found the sack and opened it. Cats scattered in every direction, but they did not tell it for a long time after. Father kept cats to catch mice and rats. Father liked to get news from Flandreau, so often would ask them to stay to dinner. We had chicken on Sunday. We girls made whipped cream cake and the boys liked that. Jimmie was then keeping books in the Moody County Bank at \$50. per month. We planned to be married in the fall. That summer we made our quilts and invited our friends for quilting bees. Will brought two live geese so that we could use live geese feathers and down in our pillows. I made all of my wedding fruit cake, and Lean made the bride's cake and I put some into little boxes to give girl friends to put under their pillows for good luck for them. Had a few friends invited to the wedding.

James T. Bigelow was born in 1867 in North Carolina. After his father died, he went with Dr. Spafford to Vermont to live with Uncle Bill Spafford and his maiden sister. He attended school at Black River Academy and went to the Baptist church and Sunday school. He was there at the same time as Calvin Coolidge. In 1885 he graduated from the Business College at Poughkeepsie where he had earned a scholarship through merit as a student. Dr. Spafford then persuaded him to come west and keep books in the law office of George Rice, and study law.

On October 9, 1889, we were married in my home by Reverend Dexter of the Methodist church, as the Presbyterian church was without a minister at that time. After we were married we went on the train to Sioux Falls, where we had our pictures taken. Then we went shopping for a carpet and furniture. Soon we were settled in our little home in Flandreau. I kept accounts so that we could stay within his salary--\$50. per month. We joined ice skating parties and a card club. In the spring we had a boat and went fishing. We also had a nice garden.

The next July 12th a little son came to bless our home and we called him Dean. In due time, daughters Ethel and Bessie, then Curtis, our second son. Sister Lena passed away in March, so when the next girl arrived the following May I wanted to call her Lena. Later on we had the little house moved off and a modern home built, with a bathroom and furnace, the first modern house in Flandreau. We moved into the new house on our tenth anniversary. The children were so delighted to have a bath in a big tub with plenty of soft water. Later Marjorie and Alice were born in this new home. Our family was then five girls and two boys.

In 1891 Mr. McConnell had sold the Moody County Bank and my husband opened an insurance and real estate office downtown with Frank Bortle. In 1901 he helped to organize the First National Bank with Thomas Kelly, president, and my husband as cashier. It was located in the new stone building on the corner where the Farmers State Bank is now. Mr. Kelly had built this new stone building for the store and bank.

My people had moved to Flandreau sometime before and father came every day to see the children. He used to tell them they would be seeing people riding in horseless carriages some day. Little did he think, when he passed away in 1895, that we would own the first automobile registered in South Dakota. A four and a half horsepower motor, equipped with gas lights and a bell. It had no top or windshield or side doors. The license fee of

one dollar was for the life of the car. It came in a crate and my husband, together with Charlie Gray and Alton Locke, spent their free moments putting it together. The neighborhood children all followed it on its maiden trip around the block.

Our children attended school in the same building I had, and all graduated from high school here except Alice. They attended Sunday School and helped with the choir, playing or singing. and also in Young People's meetings. Dean helped organize the Young Men's Club and they met in the Kelly Hall. Sometimes they had school dances and always had chaperones. He helped in the bank on Saturdays and summer vacations. Later he was a member of the Masonic order and the Shrine and was city treasurer for several years. That winter I had six in school. The summer before I had been to Rochester for the third serious operation so the children each shared in doing the housework. I managed the dinner at noon. Alice was five years old then. One day I had asked her to help set the table when she was playing with her dolls. She hung her head. Just then her daddy came home and asked, "What's the matter, Alice?" I told him she didn't want to work, and he said, "It's just too bad, Alice, we cannot have one aristocrat in the family." He took hold and helped her. He always sliced the bread and got the things from the icebox and helped dish up the meal.

The next year Dean went to Vermillion University and took commercial law. After Ethel graduated, she chose Rockford College for there was a call for home economics teachers. Bessie liked music and sang in our church, so she went to Yankton College and was soon singing in a big church choir there. That year mother was here with the children so we took a trip to California, and while there learned they offered more advantages in the schools so that in September we closed our home and I went with the children to California. A teacher cousin helped locate them in schools where they could live at home. Curtis went to Occidental College in Eagle Rock and rode a motorcycle there each day. At Christmastime my husband surprised us and shipped us a new automobile. After New Years he came out for a month and we could take nice trips on Saturdays. When he was home he roomed at Uncle Jake Hoke's.

In the spring Ethel graduated in Home Economics at the Normal school. After we came home that summer Ethel had a class of girls taking cooking and sewing lessons. They always made something they could use for lunch. Some of the mothers then wanted to take a course, too.

When Bessie had finished she taught in the Tidd school, northwest of Flandreau. Guy Weigold worked near there so he built the fire for her. Later she taught in the high school in Gettysburg and Ethel taught home economics in the Consolidated school at Medford, Minnesota. Lena went to Rockford College and Curtis to the University at Lincoln, Nebraska.

We had the first wedding in the family when Bessie and Guy were married July 4th, 1917, in our home. They went to live in Trent where he worked in a grocery store. That fall I went the third time to California, with the four younger children, and Curtis was a senior at University of Southern California. In the spring, war was declared and Curtis enlisted in Aviation, and ten days before he was to graduate he was called to Berkeley to study the ground work. He was selected as one of the first ten to be sent to France for their training in flying. Later he received his commission as a first lieutenant direct from General Pershing.

April 28th Dean and Guy were called. Guy had permission to remain until May so Bessie came home to stay. May 17th their baby was born and three hours later, Bessie passed away. The first sad loss in our family. We kept the baby while Guy went to army camp. Ethel was studying at the Bible Institute in Los Angeles but came home to help care for baby Curtis.

Dean went with the 89th Division of Headquarters Company to camp and was sent across and served as a runner over there carrying messages through thick and thin. Then the time for him to go over the top and he was shelled between fox holes. He had made the supreme sacrifice only three days before the Armistice was signed. Curtis came home that spring and was with us a year.

We had sold the Flandreau home and sought a home in South Hollywood.

Alice attended and graduated from Hollywood high school. Marjorie went to Pomona College, and Ethel back to Bible Institute. She met a young man there studying for the ministry and after they had graduated, they were married. She was then Mrs. Choate Newton Balch.

Lena helped her father at the bank and later took a Mediterranean cruise which included a visit to the Holy Land.

January, 1920, we received word that Curtis had passed away after an operation at Harper's Hospital, in Detroit, Michigan. He had been employed by the Burroughs Adding Machine Company. Alice having graduated from high school and the boys were both gone, so my husband was not able to leave his business. I was ready to return to Flandreau and Mr. Bigelow said he would have a small house built here if I would send the plans. So we packed up and loaded the car-- Lena, Marjorie, Alice and little Curtis and I and drove back, using tourist parks and taking time to sightsee in Yellowstone Park. My husband met us in Deer Lodge, Montana, where the Reverend Balch and Ethel had a church.

We moved into our home in Flandreau on election day. Marjorie and Alice attended Brooking College that year. Marjorie taught public school music the next year in Elkton and then returned to California and was married to her college sweetheart, Everett Johnson, who is now in the advertising business in Oil City, Pa. Later Alice went back to California and was married to Jack Boes, who was employed by Warner Bros. Studios.

When Alice's little son was 2 1/2 years old, our girls and families came back to Flandreau to help us celebrate our Golden Wedding anniversary. They planned it all and it was nice to have them all home together. Many of our friends, both old and new, came to call which we truly enjoyed.

Two years later Alice had a nervous breakdown and she was the fourth child we lost. Lena entered nurses training in San Francisco, graduated, and is a registered nurse. While practicing her profession as supervisor of pediatrics she resigned to marry Judge Will G. Fields. He has an office in San Dimas and the Justice Court in Pomona. They live on a nine-acre orange grove two miles out of San Dimas.

During World War II, our grandson, Curtis was an aluminum welder on airplanes and is now a welder for an X-ray company in Chicago. His wife Lee is a beauty operator. They come home to spend vacations with me every summer.

My husband had charge of the Moody County OPA during World War II and I did knitting. During those strenuous times Mr. Bigelow's health was failing and he was called on February 27, 1947. He would have been eighty years old the following March. We had been together fifty-eight and one-half years.

Now I have three daughters left, all with fine husbands and good homes. They come to see me every year and I go to visit them. My home and friends are here in Flandreau and I enjoy them through the home contacts, as I enjoy the church and the Athena Society. Have been a member of Second Presbyterian Church here for over fifty eight years and the Athena Society for over forty-eight years. One can do "a heap of living" in eighty years and I will aim to keep my home always open to kin folks, my friends and all, so long as I am able.

May I close with this motto, which my husband always kept near his desk and which so clearly tells his theme of living:

"I shall pass through this world but once;  
Any good, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can  
show to any human being.  
Let me do it NOW;  
Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way  
again."

This history was written by Mertie Rorebeck Bigelow, born 1869, near Rockford, Illinois.