

Our Little House On the Prairie

Zorene Thompson
A Family History



“Rain follows the Plow” — Not!

Our Little House on the Prairie

2nd Edition

Zorene Thompson

With Additional Notes and Comments by Ray M. Thompson



Copyright © 2022 by Ray Mack Thompson, all rights reserved. Joint work:

Author: Zorene (Todd) Thompson (Mother)

Co-Author: Ray Mack Thompson (Son)

Illustrations: Selected by: daughter Barbara (Thompson) Coleman
from a book that our mother read to us as children.

Poem: "That Special Day" by Barbara Jane (Thompson) Coleman

Prologue: Permission for use kindly given by the author, Jacalyn Carley

Publisher: Ray M. Thompson - PO Box 2512 - Sherman, TX 75091

(Contact for permission to quote from content.)

RAYMACK@MAC.COM

Original cover art by Chane LeBrun

Printed in the United States of America by Mixam

1st Edition (1989): Typed on Zorene's Remington electric typewriter.
Formatted and printed with Ray's first Macintosh computer, using the
MacWrite word processor. Copies to family only.

Manuscript 2nd Edition (2018): Formatted and printed in Apple Pages
with my MacPro computer. Distributed to family and contributors only.

2nd Edition (2022): Hardback Edition

Published on my MacBookM1Pro in Apple Pages.

ISBN: 978-1-7923-8395-3: Category - Family & Relationships

ISBN 978-1-7923-8395-3

90000>



Our Little House On the Prairie

V63

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the following contributors for their friendship, advice, and source material for the 2nd Edition. *Ray M. Thompson*

Dorothy Mizysak

Jacalyn Carley

Bob Peck

Don McAlavy

Tim Lakin

Harold Kilmer

John Carr

Steve'n Maureen Westphal

Pat Morrison

Shad Holt

Leon Moya

John Mulhouse

Valera Teague

Ken Yocum

Randy Dunson

Preface

For many years, I've wanted to write about my father, **Madison Lafayette Todd**. Dad had a mischievous sense of humor that belied his rather stern countenance—a wonderful “dry” sense of humor, as they say. He could tell outlandish tales without cracking a smile. We, kids, remember hearing mother (**Julia Adelia Mackey**) often say, “Oh, Madison, you know that's not true!” Dad would smile sheepishly but never recant what he had said.

And, I have a confession to make: the title I had long intended to use for the first chapter was “*Once There Was A Man.*” (This title has stayed in my mind these many years. It sounds as though it came from Mother Goose or some such nursery rhyme.) However, after I began writing, I realized that my mother was just as important as my father in all that I wanted to write. She was the spiritual center of our family (*Appendix A3 Page 147 and A4 Page 169*). Perhaps this realization has come a little late in my life, but to make amends, I have renamed the first chapter. “*Once There Was a Couple.*”

I am sure I won't get it all told, but what follows are some of the little snippets of memory about “The Olden Days” that came to me as I sat at my Remington electric typewriter...

Alva Zorene (Todd) Thompson (1985)

Our Little House On the Prairie

Madison Lafayette Todd,

March 22, 1875 - September 10, 1967

Julia Adelia (Mackey) Todd,

January 30, 1880 - February 5, 1969



Madison & Julia Todd, Pecos, Texas (1960)

Our Little House On the Prairie

Dedication

To my grandchildren:

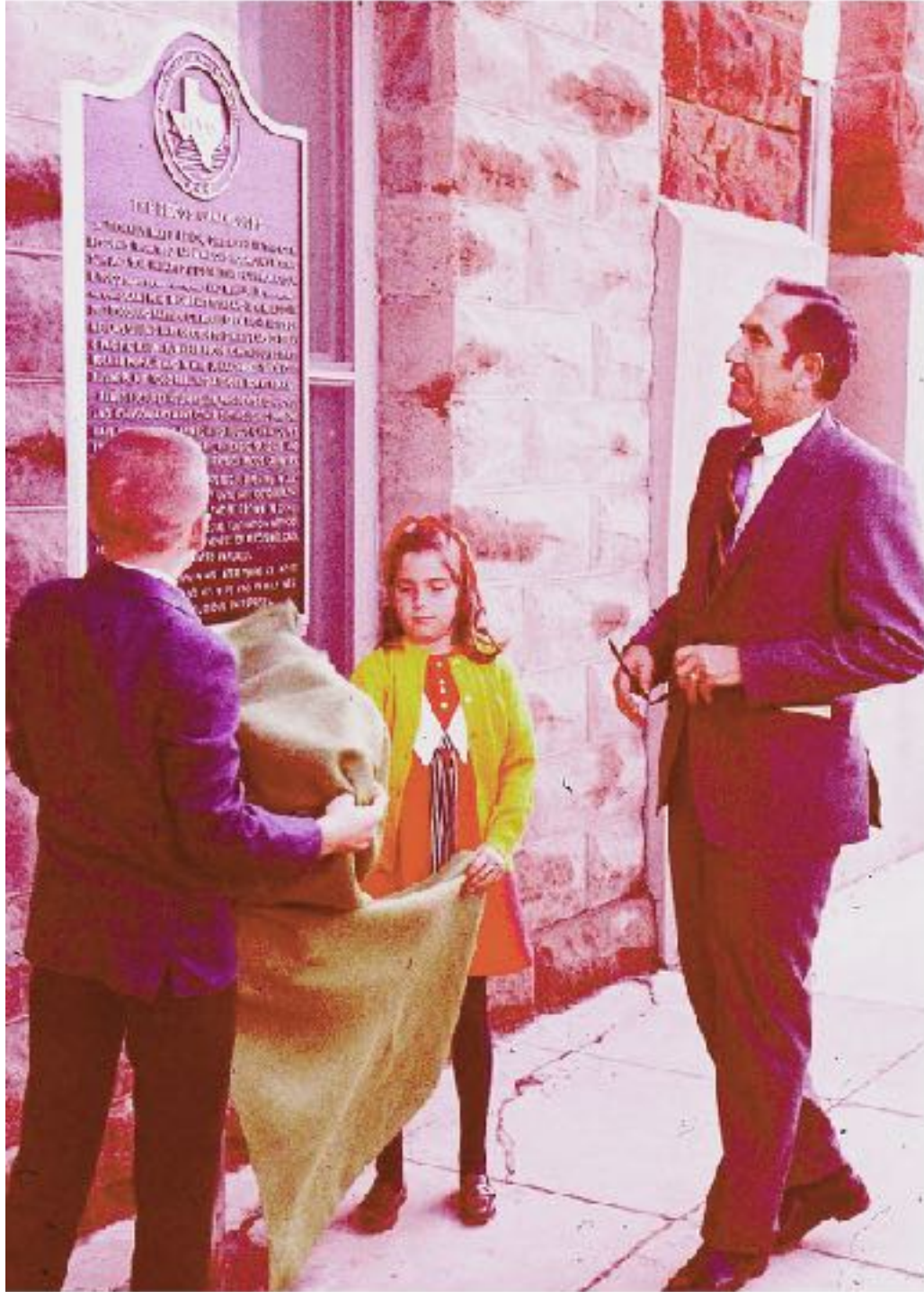
JOHN RANDALL COLEMAN &

NANCY GAIL (COLEMAN) DOVER

Who, in their pre-school days, never tired of hearing their devoted grandmother tell stories about the "olden days."



Our Little House On the Prairie



Randy & Nancy unveiling a state historic marker honoring their grandparents, Madison & Julia Todd, at the West of the Pecos Museum with State Representative Clay "Dick" Slack, a high school friend of mother's. (1970)

Introductions

By Ray Mack Thompson

This is a book of memories recorded by the author, my mother, **Zorene**. We children, **Ray Mack** and **Barbara Jane**, are responsible for getting mother's story into print and for adding additional family history. Yes, a family story can be very confusing, with several generations for our readers to get straight! Hopefully, these introductions will help.

The book is, first and foremost, about the author's parents **Madison and Julia Todd**, whom you read about in the *Preface* and will meet again in *Chapter 1*. **Zorene** remembers and writes about them with great respect, admiration, and love, beginning with her childhood in deep East Texas and continuing on a homestead in New Mexico Territory.

In addition to mother's narrative, you will encounter several other "voices" as you read this book, so perhaps more *introductions* are in order...

Of course, the principal "voice" and author is **Zorene (Todd) Thompson**. She began to write the original story when she was 84 years old. In this 2nd Edition, her narrative is intact, with a sudden remembrance stuck just where she thought about it!

A second "voice," frequently interrupting the narrative, is **Ray Mack**; that would be me, **Ray Mack Thompson**. I am **Zorene's** oldest child and ultimately responsible for the 2nd Edition—an unspoken promise to mother to give her story wider circulation. I've tried to engage with mother in conversation as I found research material relating to her narrative—adding, amplifying, and sometimes disagreeing with her—just as I would have done during her lifetime.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Mother sometimes addresses her children by name, “**Ray Mack**” and “**Barbara**,” probably because we were around and encouraging her as she wrote. She is reminding us of family history, shared experiences, and “not to be forgotten” stories. It has been a joy to help preserve these conversations. When I mention “**we kids**,” I’m speaking of sis and me.

My sister, **Barbara (Thompson) Coleman** (mother of **Randy and Nancy**), was my partner in getting the 1st Edition of “Our Little House On the Prairie” published, chasing down and selecting drawings she thought fit her mother’s narrative; she found them in a book that mother read to us as children. **Barbara** was a prolific writer, artist, and storyteller, but sadly had passed before the 2nd Edition took form. I’m so glad that one of her imaginative poems was preserved for the end of Chapter 6.

As the *Dedication* declares, mother’s long-range audience is the younger generation, her grandchildren: **John Randle Coleman** and **Nancy Gail (Coleman) Dover**, and untold descendants of her parents. She loved to fill their young minds with stories of “the olden days.” She knew that they would be the ones to share her story with her *great-grandchildren*—and future generations...

Finally, four other distinct “Internet voices” are heard in the *Prologue* and chapter 5. These are unique to the 2nd Edition and were a real surprise to me. They arrived via e-mail and are identified as follows:

Jacalyn Carley (*Prologue* and Chapter 5, Story 4)

Dorothy Mizysak (Chapter 5, Story 1)

Bob Peck (Chapter 5, Story 2)

Don McAlavy (Chapter 5, Story 3)

So, dear readers, I trust these introductions will help you to find your way through a loving effort to honor our revered grandparents and our beloved mother and father, all of whom poured into us most of what we feel and care about today. *Ray Mack*

Our Little House On the Prairie



Barbara Jane & Ray Mack as Children

*It might be of interest to you, our readers, to know that **Ray Mack** and **Barbara Jane** are the adopted children of **Neil and Zorene Thompson**. We were adopted as babies; we are related by adoption, not by birth. Our earliest memories are the poignant stories of our adoption, told over and over again by our mother. We are eternally grateful to our God for our adoptive parents and their families, who loved us, nurtured us, and gave us names and a place to stand in the world...*

In gratitude for their love and influence, I've added the last section of this book to tell something about all the families who have blessed my life! Ray Mack

Our Little House On the Prairie



*Zorene (Todd) Thompson — 1901-1994
(Taken at Pecos Cantaloupe Festival, 1987)*

Prologue

by Jacalyn Carley

Ricardo, New Mexico

Its place in American History – Setting the Scene:

In 1910, the circus of sounds heard in the New Mexican desert was loud, odd, and metallic; the cacophonous jumble was manmade and sent indigenous warblers, barkers, and buzzards scattering. Covered wagon rims rolled over the parched earth and stones, steam engines blasted clouds into the sky, and an occasional Model-T horn honked at tired burros pulling wooden wagons full of rattling household goods. The women in those wagons were thinking much too loudly, their thoughts were grating and harsh, louder than the yeh-hawing men skippering the prairie schooners. Late-model homesteaders were grinding their way into the southwestern prairie by every means of transportation available — with aspirations high-flying as their whips — coughing dirt and silently praying the properties they were about to take over were greener than the road to get there.

Their parade was a coup for the railroads. At U. S. senate hearings throughout 1900, larger-than-life railroad executives had collectively claimed that the only way for the industry to stay solvent would be to build new, more profitable routes, and to encourage settlement along the new lines. Despite the brilliance of the plans they were proposing, the elephants of the industry (who had all arrived in Washington on private trains with luxury parlor and sleeping cars, solely for their personal use) were forced to admit business was not profitable enough to follow through on their vision for America without substantial help; they were over-extended and nearly exhausted from so much nation-building. Many questions were asked at the hearings, but none were pressed or cut, and without much ado, the federal government appropriated land for

Our Little House On the Prairie

more railway lines and tacked on vast expanses for settlements. By 1910, a giant spider's web of tracks, telegraph poles, and wires had been laid on America's southwestern prairie, and invitations to take up the offer of free land were placed in newspapers throughout America. A deepening economic depression, however, meant that only the moneyed few, the entrepreneurs and remittance men, would be solvent enough to arrive by train.

The mule riders and covered wagon folk had been lured by advertising, standard 3x5 inch inserts in newspapers:

**Federal Government:
Homesteads Now
being Offered in the
Territory of New Mexico!
"Rain Follows the Plow"**

The Belen Cutoff rail line in southeastern New Mexico was begun during the boom of 1900-02. Designed as an East-West route to increase the freight between the Texas slaughterhouses and the California fruit orchards, it remains profitable to this day. Although the mileage was considerably greater than the existing lines that passed through Albuquerque and Santa Fe, the grade was appreciably less, ensuring faster and cheaper passage. As it was being laid, workers slept in rolling bunks drawn up each night to the last yard of newly laid track, parked at tent camps selling women and booze, in towns only recognizable by surveyors' stakes. When the federal government sent in agents to take land claims in 1905, lumber companies were already up and running a hefty business behind the brothels and bars. Money had become scarce between 1902 and 1905, however, and the US economy showed no signs of improvement. Despite that (and work stoppages and complicated business

Our Little House On the Prairie

negotiations), 249 miles of track were down by 1906 between Belen and Texico—all belonging to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company.

The company's calculation was solid. Industry planners and engineers knew exactly how much water a steam engine needed. Proximity to water was irrelevant when planning a town because the water was delivered by trains and stored in company water towers, the construction of which, in turn, bolstered an ailing steel industry. Every fourteen miles, on average, a water-stop town dotted the Belen Cutoff line. The AT&SF painted with broad strokes; they built depots and designed the stations in two variations: the run-of-the-mill variety with a small stockyard, no housing for linemen, and a pre-fab, inexpensive depot that could be erected within weeks. Others, and only a few in all of New Mexico, were top-shelf and included bunkhouses, large stockyards, especially large and beautiful depots with apartments upstairs for the agent and his family, a telephone on the desk next to the telegrapher's key, and twenty-four-hour access to the telegrapher.

Ricardo, named after a company executive, was one of ten towns on the Belen Cutoff. Located seven miles outside of Sunnyside – which would become known as Fort Sumner – it was one of the gemstones on the bracelet of the track. A company planner sketched lines on a map of the empty prairie and voile! Main, Sharp, McCabe, and McLeod Streets crossed Gannon, Cannon, and Nelson Avenues. Clapboard homes, stores, an office for the federal land agent, a school, a church, a two-story boarding house, businesses, a bank, and a solid stone Post Office rose in short order as if by magic, nailing down the tumbleweed, shooing long-legged jackrabbits, and encouraging the mice to populate. Homesteaders arrived with livestock, carpetbags, stick furniture, and iron cookstoves—or less. They built tents and shacks, dug their own wells (or had them dug if they had the money), prayed the water wasn't alkaline, gathered wood, spun their own wool, and read their seed packages, Bibles, and mail-order catalogs at night by oil lamp or candlelight.

By the time the first commercial timetable went into effect on the Belen Cutoff in 1907, America was in another severe depression, and AT&SF construction promises that weren't already in place were as good as dust. Still, the

Our Little House On the Prairie

opportunity to own land looked grand to thousands of Americans desperate to leave failure behind, and Ricardo, thanks to the AT&SF's design, had all the makings of a fruitful pact with the future. Homesteaders arrived in droves. However, when the federal Land Agent, Weddington, re-modeled his office in 1909, he quietly removed the fancy sign that read "Rain Follows the Plow" and replaced it with a gentle landscape painting of a pink sunset and a stallion tied to a single oak.

The homesteaders did their share of praying and plowing, but, except for an occasional spring torrent, the only water coming to the New Mexican desert with any regularity could be predicted by the AT&SF timetable. Hundreds of thousands of gallons were needed for a single crossing of the prairie — a far cry from the ten-gallon hat that still satisfied horses and riders. Water rolled into town on steel wheels as big as a man in special cars attached to the Scout, Fruit Express, or the Mexico and California Fast Freight. Station agents regarded track priorities and water distribution with equal importance. In terrain where not even scrub growth flourished, the railroad technology and logistics inspired awe in those seeing it up close for the first time; the mirage of hope was constantly replenished. The takers were dreamers and toilers, all nonconformists and anachronistic characters with calloused hands who believed owning and working the land was the ultimate manifestation of freedom. These people were, in 1910, still intoxicated by a prairie-oyster cocktail that mixed a double shot of 100-proof old-fashion pioneer spirits with a dash of old-Testament religion served up over ice-cold American technology — a concoction that, evidently, caused blindness. Well, after the homesteaders determined that wild, straggling bush and poverty grass were more bountiful than their carefully sown pinto beans and collard greens — sown from seed that had cost good money — they wouldn't blame the railroad. They never did blame the industry for conditions that were dreadful to start with, that only got worse with each passing month. And they never blamed the federal Land Agent for reneging on his promise. Since those who had come for free land had arrived with much, the loss was relative.

Our Little House On the Prairie

All too soon after Ricardo's birth, diesel technology left the town dry. By 1935, sleek and greasy locomotives, still bearing the same names, would scream one long violent scream to signal "passing through." No more coal dust dirtied the merchants' windows. The new "locs" speared Ricardo with the swiftness of a silver bullet, shaking the water tower — cutting the wasteland, exiting the wasteland — to deliver their goods to distant, real cities. Once a pride-and-joy baby, Ricardo was deadly ill at puberty; it would die before the Twenties could come—spending. In 1950, the railroad company carted off the lesser depot structures in their entirety, still in excellent condition, on flatbed cars. The wind took its time to gnaw away at the remaining structures — leaving only cornerstones here or there and a cemetery. It's a quiet place, now part of the large McCullom cattle ranch. Visitors are rare and tend to be mostly folks looking for a name in the graveyard, not staying for more than an hour before heading off to the attractions in Fort Sumner. There's no sense visiting the ruins at all, really, because Ricardo didn't die angry enough to leave a ghost.

Jacalyn Carley

<http://jacalyn-carley.com>

Kopernikusstr 32B

10243 Berlin

49-30-688-37072

Our Little House On the Prairie

TimeLine for Mother's Narrative and Our Family History

Upshur County, East Texas

- March 1875* Mother's father, Madison Lafayette Todd is born
- January 1880* Mother's mother, Julia Adelia Mackey is born
- April 1899* Madison & Julia Todd marry, Upshur County, Texas
- January 1901* Mother, Alva Zorene Todd is born
- December 1903* Mother's brother, Charles Judson Todd is born

DeBaca County, New Mexico Territory

- 1900 Initial work on Belen Cutoff begins in New Mexico
- 1905 Govt. sends in land agents to take homestead claims
- 1906 Critical bridge over Pecos River completed
- 1906 Belen Cutoff tracks completed between Belen and Texico
- March 1907* Madison Todd is 32 years old, and Julia is 27
- June 1907* Madison decides to go to NM to search for a homestead
- 1907 Belen Cutoff route running on a commercial timetable
- April 1908 Madison and brother Lon travel to Ricardo
- April 1908* Madison files homestead claim in Ricardo
- April 1908 Madison returns home to plan the move to his homestead

Our Little House On the Prairie

May	1908	Todd returns to NM alone, with household goods, stock
July	1908*	Julia and family arrive in Ricardo, live in tents
Spring	1909	Todd family builds "Our Little House On the Prairie"
Fall	1909	First schoolhouse completed in Ricardo
July	1912	New Mexico becomes a state; celebration in Ft. Sumner
September	1912	Murder in Ricardo, Madison Todd as Justice of the Peace, sent to arrest the perpetrator
April	1913	Todd family gains title to their homestead
September	????	Julia and the children move to Roswell to attend school
December	????	Madison brings the family back to Ricardo homestead
December	1916	Madison moves his family to Pecos, Texas
‡ ‡ ‡ ‡ ‡ ‡ ‡		
March	1962	Neil Thompson (father) passes
September	1967	Madison Lafayette Todd (grandfather) passes
February	1969	Julia (Mackey) Todd (grandmother) passes
December	1989	1st Edition of "Our Little House on the Prairie" is published
December	1994	Alva Zorene (Todd) Thompson (mother) passes
March	2008	Barbara (Thompson) Coleman (sister) passes
July	2018	<i>Draft</i> 2nd Ed "Our Little House on the Prairie" published
September	2022	Final 2nd Ed "Our Little House on the Prairie" published!

* *Date from Mother's narrative or records*

Contents

Chapter 1: Once There Was a Couple - 3

- An East Texas Wedding - 3
- Houses and Homesteads - 3
- I Am Born - 4
- A-E-I-O-U - 4
- Charles Judson Todd - 5
- Father's Journal - 6
- The Poison Egg Story - 7
- Mama's Fancy Desk - 7
- Our Last Christmas in East Texas - 9

Chapter 2: We Move to New Mexico - 11

- Filing Our Claim - 11
- Aerial View of Madison Todd Homestead - 14
- Journey West - 15
- Ricardo - 17
- Our Homestead - 19
- Stickers! - 20
- No "Witchers" Need Apply! - 20
- Snow on the Prairie - 20
- We Build Our Little House on the Prairie - 21

Chapter 3: Early Days in Ricardo - 27

- Where, But Not Why - 27
- Family Furniture - 27

Our Little House On the Prairie

- Milk Cows and Corn Shucks - 29
- The Lord's Mistake - 30
- The Lord's Mistake - 30
- Church - 31
- Home Weddings - 31

Chapter 4: Home on the Range - 33

- The Weddings - 34
- Our Chess Board - 35
- Our Secret Playmate - 35
- Swimming and Swearing - 36
- By-Words and Baseball - 38

Chapter 5: A Murder Story - 41

- Community Service - 41
- Murder Story No. 1: Dorothy Mizysak - 43
- Murder Story No. 2: Bob Peck - 52
- Murder Story No. 3: Don McAlavy - 54
- Murder Story No. 4: Jacalyn Carley - 56

Chapter 6: Memories of My Childhood - 57

- Paper Dolls - 57
- The Abundant Life - 58
- Polishing Apples - 59
- The Family Library - 60
- The Weather - 60
- Our First Automobile Ride - 61

Our Little House On the Prairie

- A 4th of July Picnic - 62
- Poem: "That Special Day" - 64

Chapter 7: School Days - 69

- Building Our School - 69
- Buckets and Beaus - 71
- Marbles - 71
- Underwear - 72
- Going to School in Roswell - 72
- The Yankee Viewpoint - 75

Chapter 8: We Move Back to Texas - 77

- Packing for Pecos - 77
- "Julia, Open the Gate!" - 81

Chapter 9: Return to Ricardo - 83

- Returning Home - 83
- Our Cemetery - 84

Chapter 10: My First School Teaching Assignment - 87

Appendix - 91

- A1 - Facebook Group: Ricardo New Mexico Homesteads - 93
- A2 - Researching and Writing Researching Our Family History - 133
- A3 The Origins of the Pecos Cantaloupe Industry - 141
- A4 - Singing In the Kitchen - 169
- A5 - A Family Doll Story - 171
- A6 - Daddy's Tools - 175
- A7 - Our Secret War - 185

Ray Mack Thompson's Families

Our Little House On the Prairie

Our Little House On the Prairie

Epigraph



"Our Little House on the Prairie!"¹ Shades of TV's Michael Landon — that was one TV program I could relate to! "His house may have been smaller and rougher, but our prairie was flatter, wider, hotter, and more desolate."² I also enjoyed reading the original book by the same name, by Laura Ingalls Wilder, and as she says: "There was nothing for a shadow..."

Zorene Todd Thompson

¹ *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:* Little House on the Prairie, an American Western drama about a family living on a farm in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, in the 1870s and 1880s. The show is an adaptation of Laura Ingalls Wilder's series of Little House books. The series began on the NBC network on September 11, 1974, and ended on May 10, 1982.

² From the DVD "A Personal Documentary of the C. B. and Laura Mackey Family," by Zorene Thompson. A family history and slide show narrated by Zorene Thompson and produced by Ray Mack Thompson. It was first presented at the Mackey First Cousins' Reunion, 1975.

Our Little House on the Prairie

Our Little House On the Prairie

Chapter 1: Once There Was A Couple

An East Texas Wedding

My parents were married on April 9, 1899, in the West Mountain Community of Upshur County, Texas, where they were both born. Because it was very stylish at the time to be married while seated in a buggy, father had rented a nice horse and new buggy for the occasion. They drove together to the home of B.B. Elder,³ who performed the ceremony.

Their attendants were Mary and Albert Shepperd (Jesse Scothorn's parents), who also came in a buggy. Mother told me that no other guests were “officially” invited but that the yard was full of relatives and friends who had walked over for the occasion. (Wedding invitations were not required or expected in their close-knit community.) After the ceremony, all were invited to the Charlie Todd home for an “Infare Dinner.”⁴

Houses and Homesteads

Mother and father's first home was a small two-bedroom house they had rented from one of my mother's uncles, Paschal Mackey. In July of 1899, they moved to O'Bryne's' Saw Mill, where they lived in another rented house. Madison worked in the mill, and Julia cooked for the millhands. By saving every penny they could, by the fall of 1899, they could buy 80 acres of good farmland. As was the custom of that time, neighbors helped them build a house. They moved into their new home just before Christmas 1899.

3 We all called Mr. Elder “Cousin Bert,” although I think it was really his first wife who was our mother's first cousin. He was a school teacher, and respected in the community as an educated man. He was a gospel preacher, and performed many of the wedding ceremonies in the area. Many years later, after Mr. Elder and my Aunt Octa had both lost their mates, they married, but I still called him “Cousin Bert.”

4 Webster: “A housewarming, especially one for a bride.”

Our Little House On the Prairie

My grandfather, Charles Grant Todd, died in September 1901, leaving my father to run the family farm and care for his mother and three children still at home: Betty, Polk, and Lola Mae. Father then bought a second farm, known in the community as "The Brown Place." It included 213 acres and a large three-bedroom house. My father then managed both farms until his health began to fail... Like many others at that time, my father was afflicted with tuberculosis early on. So, he decided to move his mother and siblings into our home and rent the Charlie Todd place. In the fall of 1902, father and mother sold their original 80-acre farm to Dr. Pritchett; to this day, that little farm is known as "the Pritchett Place."

I Am Born

I was born on January 28, 1901. Our beloved and well-known, Dr. T. J. Allison, came to our home to deliver me. Since he was married to one of my mother's aunts, he was always "Uncle Jeff" in our family circle. His charge for home delivery in the country, which required less than ten miles of travel, was \$10. Mother said they paid him \$2.50 for his services, and he told them they could pay the balance later in the year. A sister of my Grandmother Todd, Beed White, was hired to stay with my mother for a week.

"A-E-I-O-U"

This may be a digression, but I want to record on paper a favorite story of my children. It is a story about Uncle Jeff Allison's family that has been told many times, with many variations. Ray and Barbara like to try and tell it themselves, but not always correctly! Now, the point of the story has always been that Uncle Jeff's family named their children after the vowels: a,e,i,o,u—and, I guess, they nearly did. I want you to know, Dear Ones, that I am copying this from the "Family History" that Uncle Jeff wrote, and I quote from page 12:

*"To us were born seven girls and three boys. Two of the girls and one of the boys died in infancy. The remaining ones are as follows: **Ada, Ida, Una, Minnie, and Ena** (the girls); and **Oma and Virgil** (the boys)."*

Our Little House On the Prairie

Now, if you kids will remember these names, I promise I will never again try to correct you when you tell this story in my presence!

Well, Mother, you left out the best part of the story... You see, their *first* names began with an A, an E, an I, an O, and a U. So, with a special *middle* name and their *last* name, their initials spelled their *first* name! Sadly, mother failed to record the middle names, but here are our guesses: Ada **Doris** Allison, Ena **Nancy** Allison, Ida **Dagmar** Allison, Oma **Marilyn** Allison, Una **Norene** Allison!— Ray Mack

Charles Judson Todd

My brother, Charles Judson Todd, was born on December 10, 1903. He was a sweet, well-behaved little boy. Of course, he is included in all my memories as I write this, but we have not collaborated in the writing of these stories. I wanted them to be a surprise for him! Of course, I am sure we will remember a lot of things differently, but it will be fun to compare notes after I get “my account” down on paper!

Father's Journal

My most valued item of family memorabilia is a dog-eared journal of household expenses that my father kept when he and mother were first married. Somehow this mundane document was preserved and finally passed into my hands. Father's “Journal of Expense” begins in April 1899 with “Stove \$17.85” and ends with a December 1902 entry, “Church Contribution \$.25.” One of the last three entries is my favorite: “1 Doll, \$.60!” (I have always been certain that doll was for me!) At the end of the ledger, total expenses for nearly four years are \$1177.95. I have no reason to believe this is not a substantially complete list of my family's expenses for those years.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Expenses, from April 9, 1898,		
	\$	¢
1 stove	17	65
1 wash pan		10
1 coffee mill		60
1 slipper	75	15
1 Milk bucket	185	20
1 Churn	210	45
2 crocks	510	30
2 Tubs		100
1 set knives & forks		70
12 " spoons		30
2 Dishes		70
1 w. bucket		15
1 Lamp		85
1 Brown		20
1 wash board		15
2 well buckets		20
3 windows	8	20
1 hatchet		40
3 lb. nails		20
1 sack flour	1	00
sugar	1	00
coffee		50
pepper		10
soda		25
nutmeg		20
1 lb. butter		85
1 butter		10
1 egg oil		20
1 lb. lard		30
1 qt. meat		25
1 lb. tobacco		40
1 sh. salt		50
1 furniture	11	00
1 grubbing hoe		10
Total	\$44	85

Our Little House On the Prairie

The Poison Egg Story

An incident that I always loved hearing my parents relate occurred the following spring. A predator of some kind (probably a fox) began stealing eggs from their hen-house. To get rid of the thief, they fixed poisoned eggs, marked them carefully, and placed them in the nests. One morning, shortly thereafter, father came running in and fell moaning and groaning on the kitchen floor!

Julia ran into the room crying, "Oh, Madison! What's the matter?"

"Oh!" said Madison, rolling doubled up on the floor, "You cooked one of those poisoned eggs for breakfast, and I'm dying!"

"OH, WHAT CAN I DO?" my mother cried out... Then she remembered that hog-lard was supposed to be a good antidote for the poison. She grabbed a spoon and rushed out to the smokehouse where their year's supply of lard was stored. (Madison didn't think taking hog-lard sounded very good but thought he just might be able to swallow a little of it...)

However, Julia returned not with a small dose but with an eighteen inch, enamel cooking spoon piled high with hog-lard! This was more than father could take; he had to "come to" and admit that he was just "fooling."

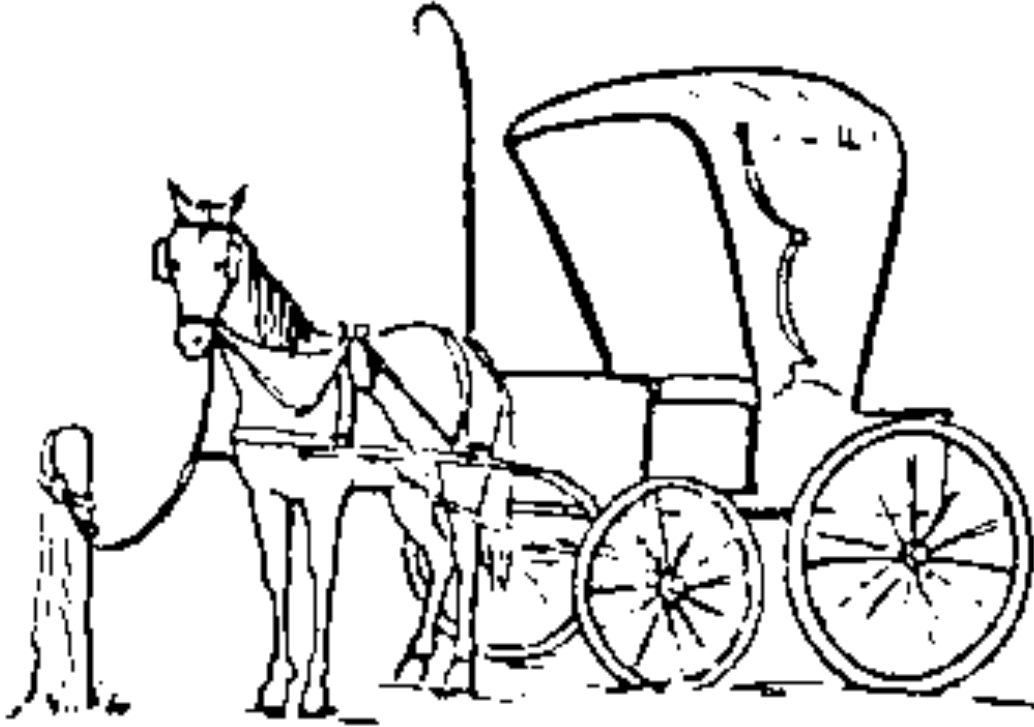
I think I would have hit him over the head with the spoon, but mother said she was so glad that he was all right she just cried.

Mama's Fancy Desk

As a young bride in East Texas, mama didn't have a lot of luxuries, but she did have one thing that many other young women in the community did not have—her own transportation! I can't remember how she came to have them, but mama was the proud owner of a young mare and buggy of her very own. The buggy was black, with a top and one wide seat.

Having her own transportation led to a "business venture" for mama that turned out very well. It began when she answered a mail-order ad to sell "flavoring extract." Father advised against the venture, telling her she would

Our Little House On the Prairie



be wasting her time." It won't amount to anything," he opined. Well, this was one of the few times I remember that mother didn't listen to father. Because she had her own transportation (so there was no interference with the farm work), mother could call on almost everyone in the community, and her sales were very successful! The reward for her efforts was a "premium" that came in a big crate and showed up on our porch one day. Mamma and we kids could hardly wait for father to open it. Inside was a factory-made desk. It was the first piece of "bought" furniture mama had ever owned.

The desk was medium dark in color, and we all thought the finish was beautiful. Even father conceded that it was a quality piece, and no one enjoyed it more than he. On one side was a bookshelf, covered by a glass door, and on the other was a drop leaf, exposing drawers and pigeon holes for paper and pens. I also remember there was a mirror above the drawers. It was one of mother's proudest possessions, and it would soon move with us to a new home...

Our Little House On the Prairie

Our Last Christmas in East Texas

I was nearly seven years old... Lola Mae, Uncle Polk, Aunt Betty, and Aunt Iris came to our house, and we went into the woods to cut a Christmas tree, the only time I can remember that experience.

The tree was set up in our largest room, where the fireplace and our two double feather beds resided.⁵ We decorated it with cranberries and popcorn strings. I faintly remember candles also, but father always worried about fire; maybe that's why we kept a bucket nearby!



Christmas in East Texas was always a wonderful time for our Mackey and Todd families. With nine children in each family, it was a special time of the year. Despite not having much money to spend.

I remember the season as a time of anticipation, with tables filled with food and surrounded by our loving kin. However, Christmas of 1907 was

⁵ Most families had a flock of geese. Why the geese? Well, we needed them for their feathers and down. Everyone had “featherbed” mattresses, and the finer “down” was used for pillows and quilts. Ray and Barbara, some of the homemade quilts and pillows you have slept on at your Grandmother Todd's house were stuffed with our family's own feathers!

Our Little House On the Prairie

bittersweet; Grandmother Mattie White Todd had died in June, and our father and mother had decided that we would move to a homestead in New Mexico Territory. It was to be our last Christmas in East Texas.

Uncle Lon⁶ had sent me a doll (see *Appendix A5-Page 169*) from Shreveport, Louisiana; It had beautiful blonde hair and blue eyes that opened and closed. Of course, I did not have a room of my own, and I was not allowed to keep the doll with my other playthings. It was hung on the wall (higher than I could reach), where it stayed until mother thought I had behaved well enough to play with it! I named her "Louise," and she has survived to this very day! Brother Jud got a train with a track and a windup engine from Uncle Lon.



Of course, we had lots and lots of good food, but I can't remember exactly what. With all our fruit trees, there were surely cobbler pies and probably turkey, as grandmother Mackey raised them. It was a special Christmas I would always remember...

⁶ Lon was working for a large hardware store in Shreveport and could not come home for Christmas that year. Shortly afterward, he was transferred by this same company to El Paso, Texas.

Chapter 2: We Move to New Mexico

Filing Our Claim

My mother was only 18 when she married; my father was 24. Father had known for some time that he had tuberculosis. Mother said the only objection her parents had to their marriage was the anxiety they felt about father's health. This natural concern was felt not only by the family members but by their doctor as well. At that time, this disease was very common in East Texas, caused (it was thought) by the damp climate and the prevalence of malaria. Both diseases posed a constant threat to old and young alike. I'm glad to say that in my father's case, he overcame "TB", as it was called, and lived to see his 92nd birthday plus 5 months and 18 days...

Needing to find a drier climate for his health, father was interested in the Territory of New Mexico, which the United States Government and the railroads were promoting and developing at that time. The Government had given large land grants to the railway companies; they, in turn, provided "Agricultural Agents" to advise settlers attracted to the West.

New Mexico Territory originally extended west to the California border and included parts of present-day Colorado on the north; the Gadsden Purchase was added to the southern border of the territory in 1853. However, by the time of granddad's visit, Arizona and Colorado had been carved out, and the borders of New Mexico Territory were the same as they are today. Arizona and New Mexico both achieved statehood the same year, 1912, while the Todd family were still living on their Ricardo homestead. — *Ray Mack*

By promising to live and farm a "homestead" of 160 acres (a quarter section) for five years, they could receive a clear title to the land. The hunger for land, the warm climate, and the excitement of pioneering in a new territory induced many to sell all they had and move to the New Mexico Territory. They came from all over, especially from the northern and central states and neighboring Texas.

Our Little House On the Prairie

When grandmother Mattie White Todd died, Lon Todd, her second son, was living in El Paso and came for the funeral and a visit. While in our home, he persuaded father to return home with him to investigate the possibility of our moving to the drier climate of New Mexico. Father had a second cousin, Dr. Reynolds, who lived and practiced in La Lande, New Mexico, six miles east of Ft. Sumner; he and the Todd boys had been childhood playmates. On a previous visit to East Texas, Dr. Reynolds had also advised my father to investigate moving to this area; he also thought the dry climate would improve father's health.

When the Todd men got to El Paso, they rented a horse and buggy and drove to La Lande to visit Dr. Reynolds. They spent several days looking at available "claims," probably guided by a Santa Fe Land Agent.

Finally, father found what he wanted. The homestead he chose was three-quarters of a mile south of the railway station at Ricardo, New Mexico. Uncle Lon retraced their journey with the rented conveyance, and father stayed to "file on his claim."⁷ Father then returned to Gladewater (East Texas) by train. When he reached home, rapid plans began for our move from the green forests of East Texas to the dry, arid plains of the New Mexico Territory...

Mother, it has been fun speculating and researching an alternate route for Granddad and Uncle Lon to reach Ricardo on their survey trip. Your recollection of a buggy ride from El Paso seems unlikely, as it would have been over 300 miles! After considerable research, I believe the following is a more likely scenario for their visit. Uncle Lon was now living in El Paso, so he would have been familiar with the Texas & Pacific and Southern Pacific rail lines from Shreveport thru Gladewater to El Paso. He likely would have known that there was a branch line along this route: from Pecos, Texas to Roswell, New Mexico (Pecos Valley and Northeastern Railway)—a fortuitous circumstance for sure! In Roswell, they rented a buggy for a ride of approximately 80 miles to La Lande, New Mexico, to meet Granddad's cousin, Dr. Reynolds. (A two-day trip? See Page 85) He had much to tell and advise about the

⁷ In those days "filed-on" was an expression, meaning the party had visited the nearest "Land Office" and had signed the papers required to obtain a "legal claim" to the desired plot of land. Title to the land did not issue until the homesteader had completed his five-year residency on the claim.

Our Little House On the Prairie

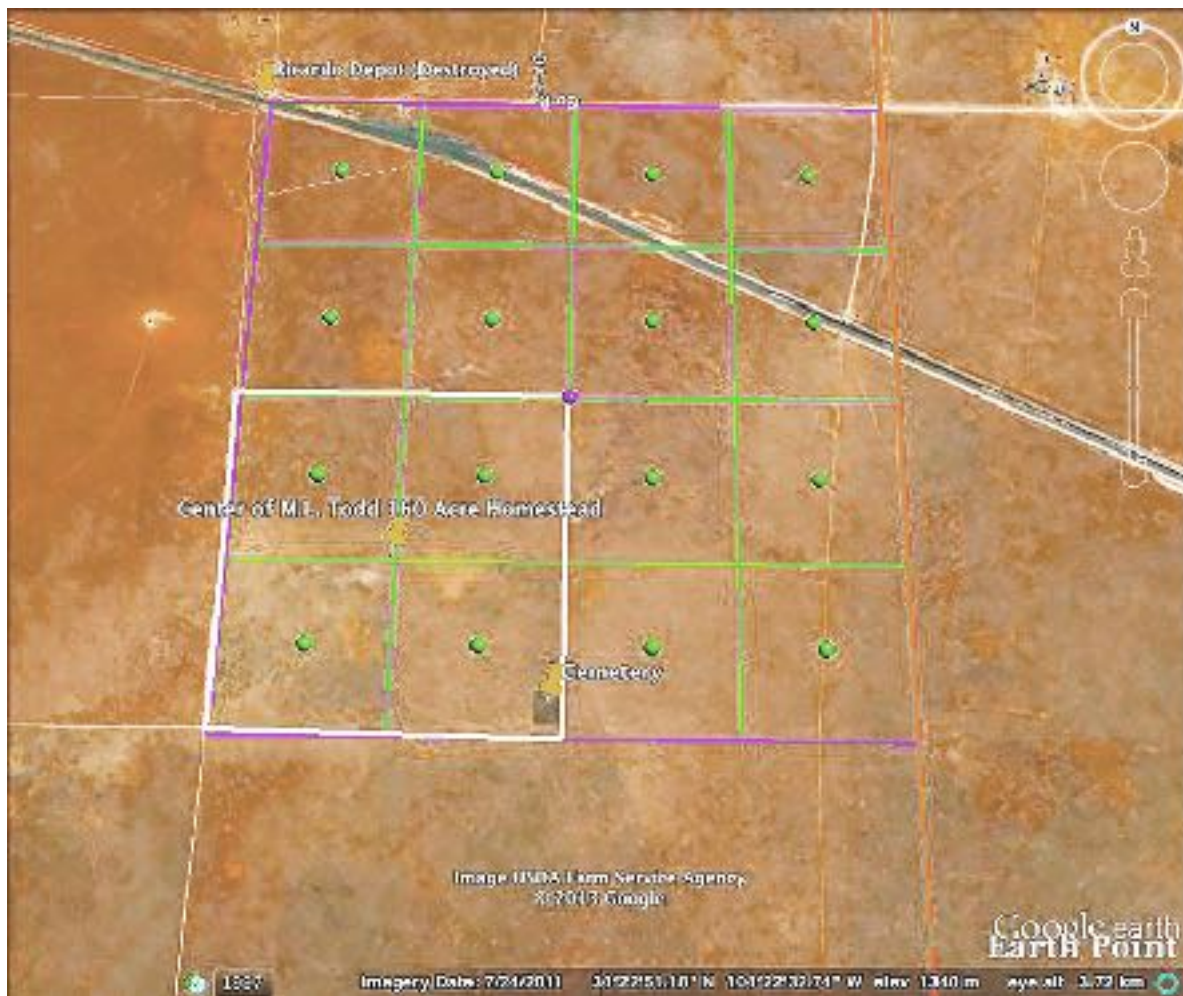
region, and they stayed with him for a day or two. Using their buggy for transportation, they then traveled west to check out Ft. Sumner, the largest town in the area, spending the night. Dr. Reynolds would have told them that the Land Office where they must file their claim was in the new community of Ricardo and how to make contact with a Santa Fe Land Agent. (Having Dr. Reynolds living in the area and Uncle Lon with him on this survey trip must have been very helpful and reassuring.) So, the next day, they continued their buggy ride west another seven miles, fording the Pecos River and checking out the area for the first time. Along the way, they observed the recently completed section of the Santa Fe railroad known as the Belen Cutoff, paralleling their buggy ride. This new track was a crucial and improved link for rail traffic flowing west to California and attracting homesteaders to the region. This line would soon bring the rest of the Todd family to their new homestead. In Ricardo, they visited the Federal Land Office for information about homestead sites and met with the Land Agent and their future neighbor, Judge Weddington (see *Prologue*). They probably spent a day or two at the hotel in Ricardo so they could drive south of town and carefully survey the site Granddad was considering for their homestead. We don't know how much time Uncle Lon had to spend with Granddad before he had to return home. Eventually, he had to leave his brother, retrace their steps to Roswell to return the buggy, then take the trains south to Pecos and west to El Paso.

Granddad's claim was patented on 24 April 1913, at the end of five years of homesteading. So, he filed his claim on this trip on 24 April 1908. His claim now filed, Granddad was eager to return to East Texas, but by a different route. He returned by the rail route he would soon use to move their household belongings and livestock to Ricardo: from Ricardo to Texico, then north to Amarillo (Santa Fe), then south to Ft. Worth, and finally east to his home in Gladewater (Fort Worth and Denver). – Ray Mack

Our Little House On the Prairie

Aerial View of M. L. Todd Homestead

I searched for an aerial view of the Todd homestead on the Internet, using the amazing Google Earth browser; I searched for “Ricardo New Mexico.” To my surprise, the only hit was the Ricardo Cemetery, which Granddad had donated to the community on his land; the town of Ricardo does not show on most current maps. Then I discovered the maps at the Bureau of Land Management (<https://www.blm.gov/maps>). Their website is a great resource for finding the location of a homestead. All of them are listed by the name of the person who filed the claim. Each listing includes the geographic coordinates bounding the claim. I then discovered Earthpoint tools for my browser. Earthpoint can draw a map of each claim on the barren landscape, as shown in this graphic for the Madison.Todd homestead. —
Ray Mack

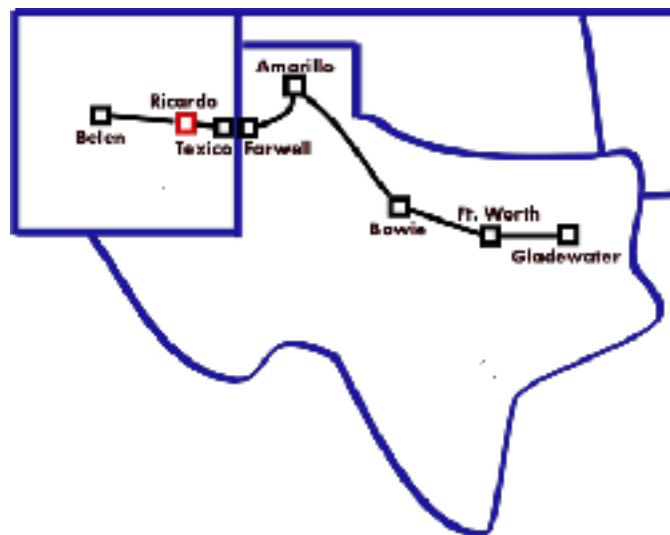


Our Little House On the Prairie

Journey West

Father traveled to their new Ricardo home in a boxcar! It was an ordinary box car but loaded with our belongings in one end and our animals in the other. Father rode in the boxcar, so he could tend to his stock. Along with our personal possessions, furniture, and farm equipment, a special part of the load was a barrel of ribbon cane syrup! My father had the reputation of being the best “syrup maker” in Upshur County, and this barrel of syrup sustained us for many months and was enjoyed to the very last drop! Father was accompanied on the trip by two of his life-long friends and cousins from the Phillips family.

My father's sister, Mary Todd, decided to “move west” with us. As soon as father wrote that our living quarters were ready, she accompanied mother, Judson, and me on the train west...



We boarded the regular passenger train in Gladewater, Texas, in the late summer of 1908. Mother said that when her father kissed her good bye, he told her, “Now Julia, when Madison dies, we want you to bring him back here for burial, and we can help you financially if needed.” *What a sad send-off!* Perhaps it made my mother more determined than ever to help father get well. No wonder she did all she could to see that he had the proper care and rest, worked by his side in the fields many long hours, and worried about his health for the rest of her life...

Our Little House On the Prairie

I remember we had no dining car on our train, but Grandmother Mackey had packed all kinds of good food for us to eat along the way. (I can't remember changing trains in Ft. Worth, but I think we did.) I do remember passing through Bowie, Texas, on the second day. Our father had told us about this stop, where small boys ran to the passenger cars calling out: "Chicken and bread! Chicken and bread!" The bread was hot homemade biscuits, and the chicken was freshly fried. How good it was after eating our cold lunches for two days!

From a little research I have done, it seems likely that the Todds traveled the Texas and Pacific Railroad (T&PRR) west to Ft. Worth, changed to the Ft. Worth & Denver (FW&DC), and traveled northwest through Bowie to Amarillo. Then, they changed to the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe, traveled southwest to Farwell/Texico, and finally west to Ricardo. — *Ray Mack*

There is a sequel to this story about our stop in Bowie... Many years later, my father's baby sister, Lola Mae, married Mr. Jim Small, a native of Bowie. He told us that a widow lady, Mrs. Carter, had thought up the "chicken and bread" idea and that her son, Amon, was one of the boys who met the train. Well, I suspect many of you know that Amon Carter became one of the wealthiest men in Texas and the "Grand Old Man" of Ft. Worth's growth and development! Ray and Barbara, you should remember that many years later, Amon Carter was one of our best customers for "Todd's Delicious Cantaloupes" from our family business in Pecos!

Mother, Judson, aunt Mary, and I finally reached Farwell, Texas, on the Texas / New Mexico border and across the line from Texico, New Mexico. For the life of me, I can't remember if we spent the night in Farwell or Texico, but I do remember that it was my first time spending the night in a hotel. I especially remember the next morning when we went down to the dining room for breakfast... I was so nervous that I spilled some milk on the floor. However, I managed to rub it into the floor with my foot without mother knowing it and escaped a good scolding!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ricardo



The only flower garden around!

In my research on the Internet for this 2nd Edition, I discovered that Mother's picture of the Ricardo depot is a rarity and a real find for railroad buffs. (See *Prologue*.) I've shared it with several of them who helped me with my research. - Ray Mack

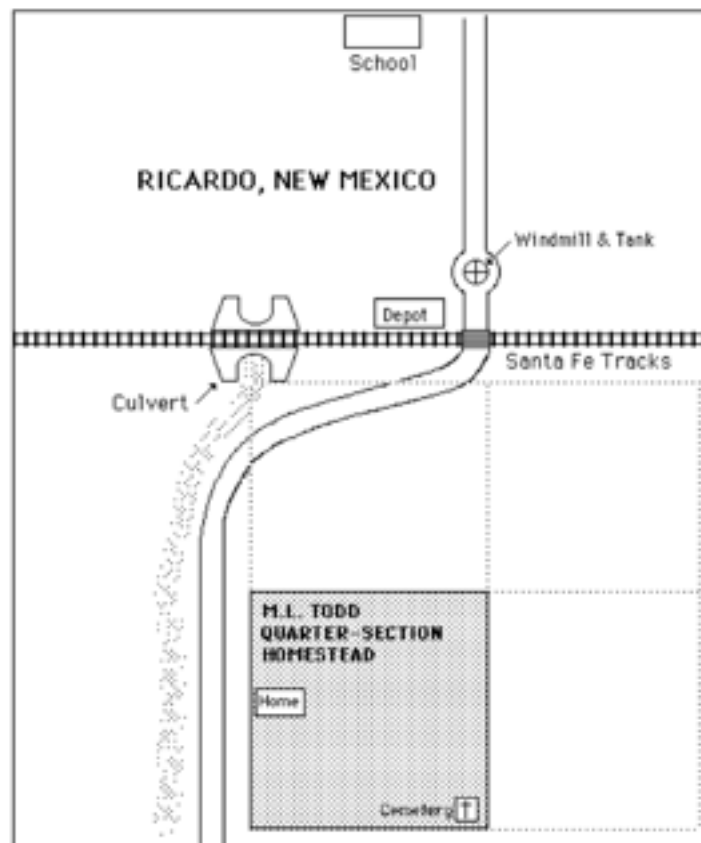
I think it was the middle of the afternoon before we reached our destination and saw Ricardo for the first time; father was there in a wagon to greet us! The depot was a lovely brick building, exactly the same as all the others that the Santa Fe Railway built along their line, every 14 miles or so! (I have often wondered if there are not many little towns 14 miles apart⁸ across New

⁸ See *Prologue*: steam engines needed water every 14 miles!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Mexico today!) Part of the depot was two-storied, with what passed then for luxurious living quarters for the railway agent and his family.

When we arrived in Ricardo in 1908, it had a post office, blacksmith shop, hotel (of sorts), a nice general merchandise store, a barbershop, and probably a few more establishments I don't remember. I do remember that there were four or five saloons, something we kids had not seen before. In the center of the town, a well had been drilled and equipped with a windmill and an elevated tank for a water supply. There was, of course, a trough for stock to drink. There were also a few residences in town but no school. The school shown on the map had not yet been built; more about that later.



A general map of the Ricardo area, as best I remember it.

Mother would have been 7-1/2 years of age when she arrived in her new home in New Mexico Territory, making her memories all the more remarkable!— Ray Mack

Our Little House On the Prairie

Our Homestead



Far from the green pine forests of East Texas, this is the only picture I have of our tents. I have no idea who made the picture (perhaps a traveling photographer), but I am glad mother saved it. The beautiful tall lady standing between mother and me is my father's sister, Mary Todd. Father and Jud are standing on our cellar, with our well-windlass in the background.

The first homes built by many of the homesteaders were earthen "dug-outs," built at least partially underground. Some of the better ones had rooms with wooden frames built above the underground cellar. Someone (probably our doctor) advised our father that his health might improve faster if we lived in tents, and this is what father erected for our first home. We had two; quite a large one for our living quarters and a smaller one for the kitchen. These were stretched over a framework of wood which included a plank floor and walls about five feet high with open rafters.

I wish I knew more about Aunt Mary and her stay with my grandparents in New Mexico, and her later life. After Mother passed, I contacted the children of Aunt Mary and sent them a DVD of family history and promised them a copy of Mother's book — Ray Mack

Our Little House On the Prairie

Stickers!

As soon as we reached our tent home, Judson and I were ready to get outside and play! Since we were used to going bare-footed in East Texas, mother told us we could take off our shoes and stockings. The next thing we knew, our feet were full of stickers—*the worst we had ever seen!* When we sat down to try and pull them out, we got them into our bottoms, legs, and everything we let touch the ground. Our loud cries soon brought mother and Aunt Mary, and then father. He scolded mother for letting us take off our shoes while explaining that in clearing off space for our tents, they had raked the prickly pear cactus into the soil and that it was no place for children to play without shoes! Judson and I were in a sad predicament and had to lie face down while our parents pulled out all the stickers! I DO NOT LIKE CACTUS! Yes, I have seen their beautiful blooms, walking through parks and gardens where they are displayed, BUT THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN PRETTY TO ME!

No “Witcher” Need Apply!

The second major phase in establishing our new home was having a well drilled. I remember hearing a neighbor say we would need a professional “water witcher” to use his “divining rod” to locate the spot where water would be found. I also remember my father's reply, “I will do no such thing! I know where I want my well, and that's where it will be drilled.” Sure enough, the drillers did find water in that spot! Then the well had to be “cased” and the wind-mill tower erected. In the meantime, water was brought to the surface with a bucket and rope on a pulley. This was hard work, and water conservation was a top priority. We had always had “soft” water in east Texas, but this water was “hard,” and it tasted awful! Until we were caught, Judson and I had some fun with our hard water by making what looked like buttermilk in the washbasin using our mother's best homemade soap...

Snow On the Prairie

One incident happened that winter that I will always remember... I was awakened early one morning by mother's excited voice; I looked up to see the top of our tent sagging low over our heads. Through the tent-covered rafters, we could see the sun shining, but the light inside our tent was different this

Our Little House On the Prairie

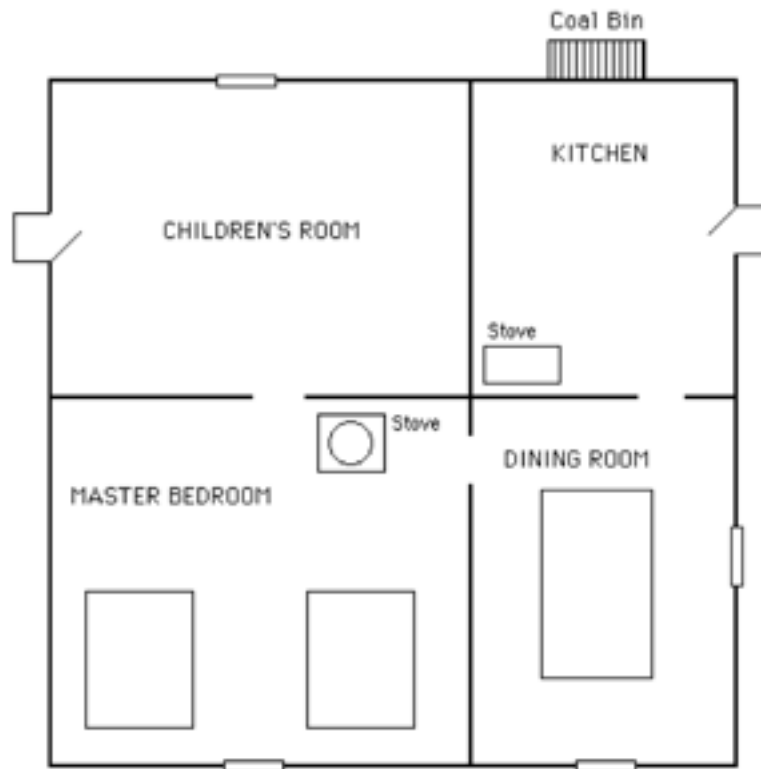
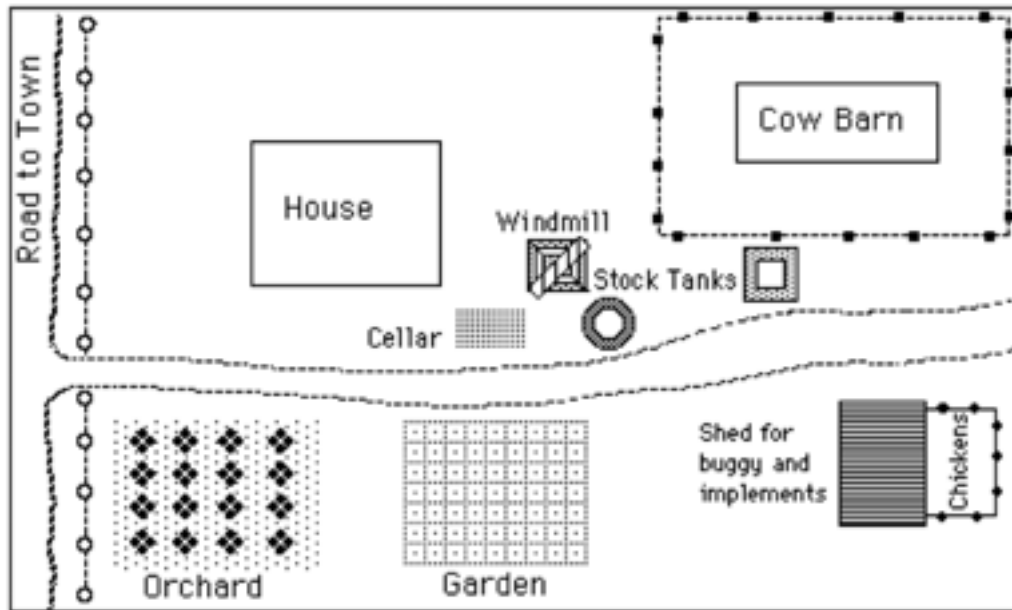
morning—there was an eerie feeling in the air... I remember father jumping out of bed and rushing to the door. When he tried to open it, a great wall of *snow* fell inside the tent! Without any warning, heavy snow had arrived during the night, but now the sun was shining as though it was mid-summer!

We were all in a hurry to get outside and see this new world! Father had a hard time getting out of the tent because of all the snow that was pressing against the outside of the door. Sometime during the day, father shoveled the snow out so we could have paths to the well, the barn, and the outhouse. This made the paths into little “canyons,” wide enough so that Judson and I could pull our little wagon. Amazingly, as the snow melted over the next few days, the paths remained dry. I still remember the fun Judson and I had, playing through those canyons of snow on dry land. To this day, that is the deepest snow I have ever experienced!

We Build Our Little House on the Prairie

Spring wasn't a good time for our tents, for the winds began to blow. Day and night, they blew, and along the top of our wooden walls, our tents began to split. We finally had to move into a rented shack, and plans for a new house had to be made. Out of the blue (as far as I can remember), a survivor from the terrible San Francisco earthquake appeared in our midst, claiming to be a building contractor. It was he who supervised the building of our new house. It turned out to be a fairly large one for the area, with four rooms and a particularly steep roof that made it a curiosity in the area. (Personally, I could never understand why such a high roof was built. In fact, I suspected that my folks were not too pleased either, but they never discussed it in my hearing). Of course, it took several years for our little homestead to be completed, and I don't have an exact recollection of all the details. We planted and grew fruit trees, which was surprising and a source of pride. With Ray's help, I have “remembered” some little diagrams, which I hope will help to “set the scene” as you read the following chapters.

Our Little House On the Prairie



Our Little House On the Prairie



In mother's own handwriting on the back of this photograph: *"This was the house we built on our homestead in New Mexico. We built it after our tents blew away in the spring of 1909. However, this photo was taken six or so years after we moved away. We lived eight and one-half years in New Mexico, eight of them in this house."*

Our Little House On the Prairie

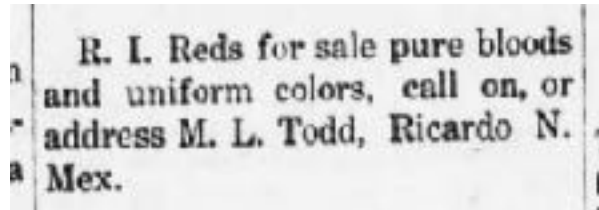


"Once there was a couple..."

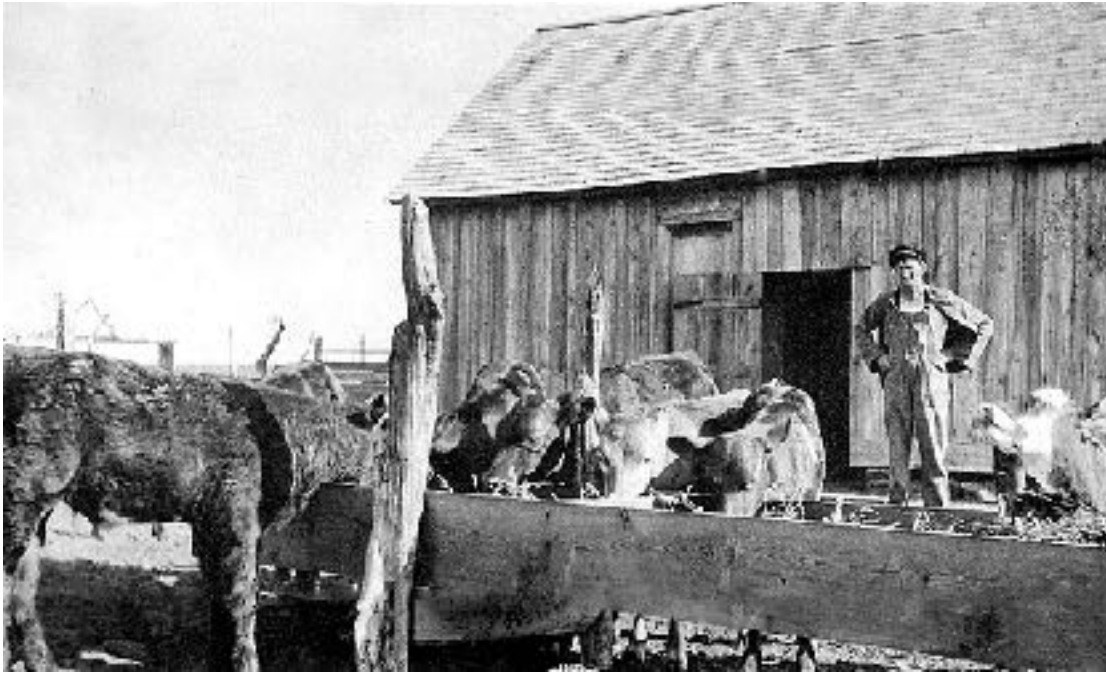
Our Little House On the Prairie



Our Little House On the Prairie



(Newspaper ad found on Newspapers.com, given to Ray by Chad Holt)



The quality of the above carefully saved photos of their homestead home and environs is amazing! Grandmother Julia was far from her family in the green piney woods of East Texas, and she wanted them to know that her family was doing well on their homestead in New Mexico Territory. So, she sent them pictures whenever she could. (I think mother kept, and I still have, the little black Kodak box camera these pictures were taken with, but I can't be sure.) Of course, their families (Todds and Mackeys) sent her lots of pictures also, and Barbara and I remember looking at them on Grandmother's back porch in Pecos—people we didn't really know. Years later, as we kids were introduced to family reunions in Upshur County, East Texas, we delighted in showing Julia's keepsake pictures and meeting the people pictured in them. In fact, Julia had saved a lot of pictures sent by her family that they had lost or never seen! —Ray Mack

Chapter 3: Early Days in Ricardo

Where, But Not Why

I preface the following accounts by recalling a social “rule” observed by people who came west to settle the territories. It was OK and proper to ask newcomers, “Where are you from?” but never, “Why did you come?” “Doctors, Lawyers, Merchants, Chiefs,” as we children used to chant—they all came, but there were always some we wondered about...

For some reason, we never figured out, many people who came to Ricardo were from the northern states, especially Michigan. The latter always seemed to build what were to us huge barns. Even if their living quarters were small, to begin with, sometimes just “dugouts,” they would put up large shelters for their livestock and farm implements.

Some brought expensive furnishings, carefully sheltered until they could build their homes. Alas, many who came only survived a few months, and when they were forced to leave, their fine furnishings often had to be sold. Most of these sales were conducted by professional auctioneers (I still wonder how they just happened to be in our community when needed!), and our father loved going to these sales. He and two or three neighbors would go, in a wagon or on horseback; the latter if the sale included livestock. I remember we kids could hardly wait for their return. It was usually very late, but it was hard to go to sleep if father was not back. It was like waiting for Santa Claus!

Family Furniture

One cherished piece of furniture father purchased at auction was a special kind of kitchen cabinet. On the left side was a large metal hopper for flour, with a built-in sifter and a door that delivered the flour to the countertop below. The countertop could be pulled out and used as a dough board for mixing, rolling, and cutting biscuits. On the right side were two additional bins for dispensing large stores of sugar, coffee, beans, or what have you, as well as a shelf with smaller containers for spices and such. The bins and shelf

Our Little House On the Prairie

were hidden by a wooden door with a pretty frosted-glass insert. On the right side, below the pullout cutting board, was a divided storage space for utensils. On the left side were two small drawers and one large lower drawer; the top one was used for storing cutlery, and mother kept towels and cookbooks in the other small one. The large bottom drawer was a metal-lined bread box with a sliding top. It always smelled good from a mixture of bread, cookies, and cakes stored therein! And yes, Ray and Barbara, we moved this cabinet to Pecos, and it was the one in your grandmother Todd's kitchen, with all the ingenious nooks and crannies that you liked to explore when you came for a visit.



I think the second auction purchase that pleased the entire family the most was an organ. Mother's family had always had an organ in their home, and while she couldn't play by note, mother was a good chord player. She could play many religious songs and a score or more of the ballads of the day with titles such as: "Father, Won't You Please Come Home Tonight?" and "You Wouldn't Dare Insult Me Sir if Brother Jack Were Here!" I can't recall the title, but my favorite song told of the sad plight of two orphan children; mother would play this one only after making me promise not to cry! We

filled many pleasant hours with mother chording our organ, playing not the classics but tunes that we thought had "life and soul!"

Our Little House On the Prairie

After father bought our organ, a Mr. and Mrs. Bush moved to a claim a few miles northeast of our place. Mrs. Bush was an accomplished musician and had a piano, so she began giving lessons. Our parents enrolled Judson and me, and for a short time, we rode double on our pony to Mrs. Bush's on Saturday afternoons for music lessons. When we moved to Pecos, Texas, we brought the organ with us, which was traded for an upright piano. Later, when Neil and I married, the piano came into the Thompson household and was moved to Lubbock, where Ray and Barbara took lessons on it. When we moved to Pecos (1938), it was stored for a while with some Lubbock neighbors, but when we moved to the North farm a year later, it was retrieved, and Ray and Barbara resumed their music lessons. When we built our new farmhouse (1948), we traded it in on a new Wurlitzer. The Wurlitzer passed to Barbara, completing a third-generation link to the original organ father purchased in Ricardo!

Milk Cows and Corn Shucks

Perhaps the thing we missed the most in New Mexico was milk and milk products—we were all big milk drinkers. We had canned milk, but it was expensive, and mixed with our homestead's hard water, it didn't taste good.

Father tried to find a milk cow to buy, but there were none. Finally, in desperation, he bought a young range cow that had just come “fresh” with her first calf. We fixed a place in our lot for her and a separate pen for the calf. Some of the neighboring cowboys delivered her. The cowboys penned the cow without any trouble, but when they separated her from her calf, she didn't like it one bit! The cowboys predicted she would have to be tied up short to a post to get her calmed down for milking. Although our parents didn't know much about range stock, they were confident that with good food and care, they would soon make a pet of her...

I will always remember the confidence and courage of our mother as she ventured into the pen, dressed in her usual long “Mother Hubbard” dress. She also wore a long apron filled with corn shucks, supposedly the favorite food of any cow—but not this cow! She lowered her head and charged mother! Mother screamed and threw the corn shucks towards the cow as she

Our Little House On the Prairie

ran towards the gate. Mother made it, but the wind caught the shucks, which startled the cow. She bawled and rushed blindly through our new fence and back to freedom on the open prairie. The cowboys came to father's aid again, rounding her up, returning her to the pen, and tying her to a post. (As they had recommended in the first place!). Mother braved the pen again and, still courageous, did manage to get a small amount of milk. However, when all was said and done, mother concluded that any cow who didn't like corn shucks wasn't worth the trouble taming her, and she was sold. Lucky for us, father soon found a Jersey cow—a real milk cow that liked corn shucks!

This bonnet is not mother, but me! In mother's own handwriting, this photo is labeled: "Zorene's Pet Calf".



The Lord's Mistake

As all "Westerners" know, mesquite wood is prized for the amount and quality of heat it gives when burned. It is much sought as a fuel for stoves, heaters, and especially barbecue pits. In clearing our land for a garden, orchard, and farming, father was amazed at the amount and size of roots from even small mesquite bushes. I remember one day he came in from digging them; he was hot and tired. Holding some large roots in his hand, he said, "Julia, look at these! I've been digging for days, trying to get all the roots for one little scrubby mesquite bush. You've always told me the Lord never made a mistake, but I believe he planted this bush upside down. Just think what a nice shade tree it would make if it had been planted right-side-up!"

Our Little House On the Prairie

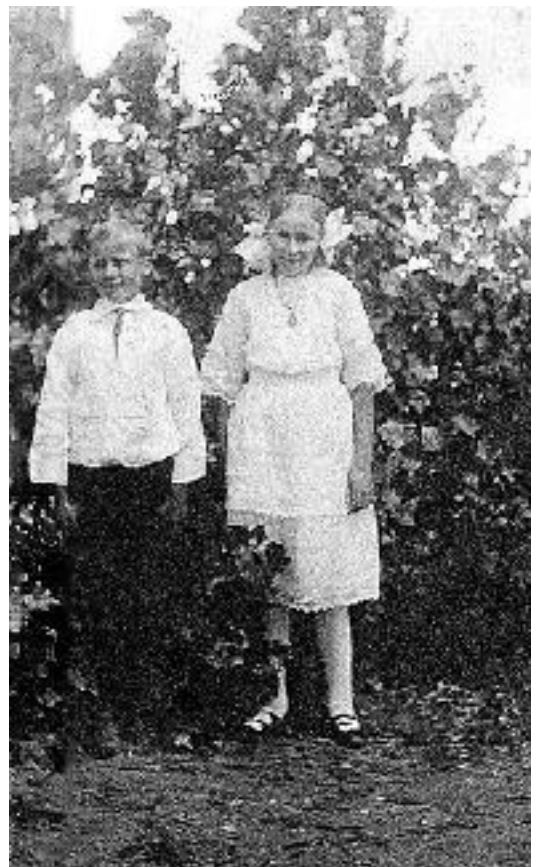
Church

We had none, but we studied our Bibles and worshipped at home, taking communion each Lord's Day. We traveled wherever we could to hear the Gospel preached.

Home Weddings

Another duty of the Justice of the Peace was to conduct marriage ceremonies, and father was asked to officiate for several of these. They were performed in the living room of our home. Mother would have us rearrange the furniture for the occasion, and I remember we always used her sewing machine as the altar. Mother would cover it with a white cloth, and we kids would pick some wildflowers, which mother placed with the Bible on the altar.

*All dressed up in our Sunday best! Or, perhaps
we were about to have a wedding!*



Our Little House On the Prairie

Chapter 4: Home on the Range



While our parents were working to make our “home on the range” more comfortable, Judson and I did a lot of playing. Our nearest neighbors (across the road and about a quarter-mile north) were the Weddingtons; they were a very fine family. I do not recall ever being told, but for some reason, I always thought that they were, or had been, wealthy. Certainly, they were an educated and well-mannered family. I remember they had many books and the first marble-topped table I had ever seen...

Our Little House On the Prairie

The Weddington's



*Ida Bell and William
Weddington (Picture given to
Ray by their great-grandson
Steve Westphal.)*

Thanks to the Internet, I've corresponded with some of the descendants of Judge Weddington, and we've shared family stories about "homesteading." (See AI) — Ray Mack

Mr. Weddington was a lawyer. He had an office on the second floor of the only hotel in Ricardo. He was known to all as "Judge Weddington." There were several children in their family. The youngest, a boy named Marion, was a little older than Judson and a favorite playmate of ours. Marion was allowed to visit often, but always with instructions to only stay a certain number of minutes. Upon his arrival, he would run into the house and ask our mother to be sure and tell him when his time was up! This clock watching was something of a chore for mother, but she tried faithfully to cooperate. After he had "reported in" to our mother, he would run outside, calling to Judson and me and saying, "Come on, kids, let's play FAST!"

Another of the Weddington children was an older daughter named Mabel. One happening that both families liked to relate occurred one afternoon when Mabel and I had been sent to the General Store in Ricardo on an errand. As we started home, we heard a freight train coming from the West, on the tracks we had to cross. Since we knew the trains were usually very long, we decided

Our Little House On the Prairie

to run and cross safely in front of the train. Just as we were about to cross the railroad track, however, we heard Mabel's father calling us to stop! Since he was a rather large gentleman, he was quite out of breath as he rushed up to say, "Mabel, when you get home, look under my glasses and bring me my featherbed!" As soon as the twisted sentence passed his lips, he sputtered, then said, "Oh! I mean, look under my featherbed and bring me my glasses!"

Our Chess Board

Mr. Weddington was a polite and courtly gentleman that we admired very much. Their family had an expensive game table in their home, another "first" for me to see. He loved to play chess, but partners for this game were hard to find in Ricardo. So, after he became acquainted with father, he taught him to play chess. They spent many hours engrossed in the game. Our own chessboard was homemade. Father used what boards he had, putting them together so that the joints did not show, sanded them down, and painted them. It was used in the family for many years for chess, checkers, and dominoes. As far as we could tell, Judge Weddington enjoyed playing on our "homemade" board just as much as on his fancy one. Now, after all the years, I wonder what happened to our favorite checkerboard?

Our Secret Playmate

Somewhere along the way, I can't remember how, when, or why—Judson and I invented a playmate. We named him "Raymond," and he was our secret. We rode stick horses and played all sorts of cowboy games with him; Raymond was nice to have around. One day we noticed an unusual mesquite root that we thought was shaped like Raymond. This made him even more real to play with, and Raymond's wooden embodiment became a big part of all our adventures. Alas, one day, Judson came to me almost in tears. We had left Raymond unattended in the yard, and father had picked him up and handed him to Judson with instructions to take him to the woodpile for kindling! We couldn't bear to see our playmate chopped up, so the next day we stole him away from the woodpile. We took him out in the pasture, as far from the house as we were permitted to go, and hid him. We picked a spot we knew where the "bear grass" (a species of yucca) was especially plentiful and hid him

Our Little House On the Prairie

under the largest one we could find. We carefully marked the location in our minds and often returned to play “cowboy” and other games that Raymond enjoyed. I have no end for Raymond's story; I sometimes wonder if he still lies under an old bear-grass stump, waiting for us to come and play again... (See back cover!)

Swimming and Swearing

Our happiest times during the long hot summers in New Mexico were spent swimming in the concrete tanks that father had built to provide water storage for our cattle. The first tank (nearest the well) was round and 12 to 14 feet in diameter. Since the well was over 100 feet deep, the water in this tank was always very cold. It was also shaded by trees we had planted, making it even colder. The overflow water from the first tank was piped underground to a second and slightly smaller square tank. The second tank had no shade, so was warmer and the perfect place for us kids to swim.

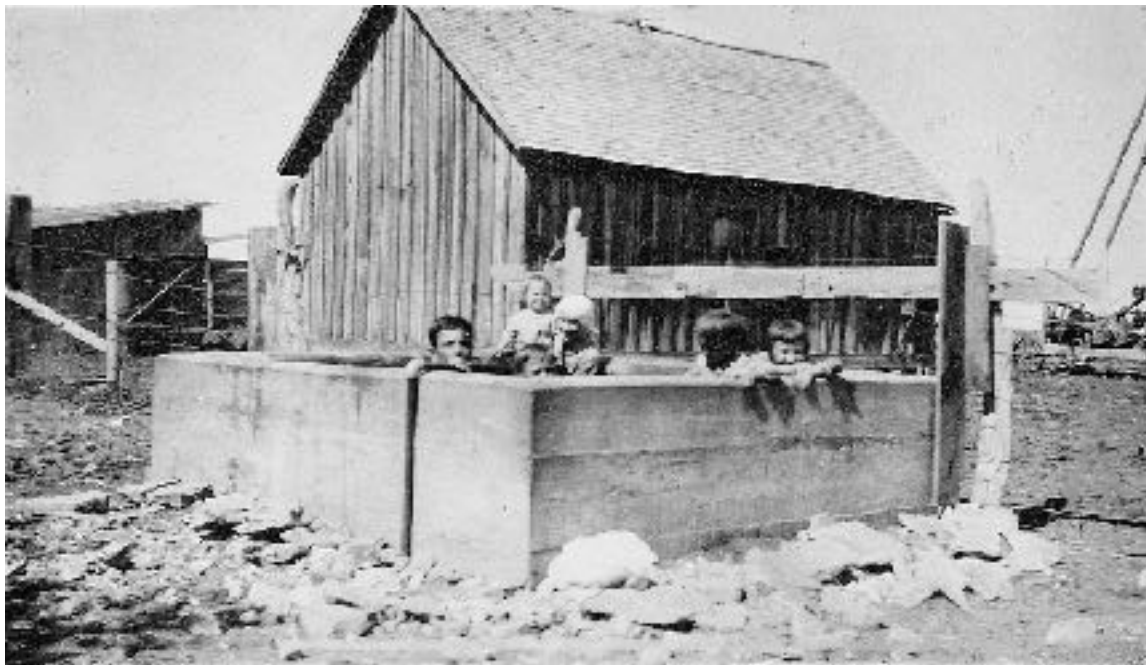
I particularly remember one swimming party, which revealed a side of our father's character we had not seen before! Father was very careful about his language, at least around Judson and me. We had certainly never heard him “take the Lord's name in vain,” and he was careful not to use “bywords” that we heard other men use.

On the occasion of my story, Judson and I and our friend Marion Weddington were having such a good time swimming that mother and Aunt Mary decided they would swim too. In those days, most country women wore long, full dresses, called “Mother Hubbards,” over two layers of underwear. To swim, they shed their underwear in the house and came outside well covered by their Mother Hubbards. They decided to use the more private and shaded tank for their swim, leaving us kids alone. It was quite a feat for two grown women to climb over the rim of the tank, and when they were finally perched on the rim and could test the water, they got a real surprise—the water was so cold they couldn't even keep their legs in! They began to shriek and squeal, taking on for several minutes...

Our Little House On the Prairie

Father was in the house, and after listening to several minutes of their carrying-on, he came to the back door and yelled, *"Go ahead! Just jump in! Jump in, girls!"* In a minute or two, before any of us had any inkling of what he was going to do, father came running out of the house, dressed only in one of mother's Mother Hubbard's. He ran toward the large tank, still exhorting mother and Aunt Mary, *"Go ahead! Jump in!"* Running full tilt, he put his hands on the rim and vaulted right into the middle of the tank. The next thing we heard was a loud cry from father, *"GOOD GOD ALMIGHTY!"*

In my memory, he then rose straight out of the water, vaulted back over the rim of the tank without touching it, and ran back into the house, hardly touching the ground. We were all convulsed with laughter, and while we were still enjoying his "fall from grace," we heard him calling mother in a pleading, plaintive voice: *"Julia! JULIA!"* Mother and Aunt Mary rushed to his aid and found him shaking so hard they had to wrap him in blankets and help him to bed. After that, we kids had the swimming all to ourselves...



Swimming party in full swing. Left to right: Marion Weddington, top of Judson's head, Zorene holding Jimmy Bowles, Lucille and Mary Bowles

Our Little House On the Prairie



*Jud and I, horse and dogs, in front of the larger tank where the grownups swam.
Note the shade trees!*

Bywords and Baseball

Speaking of “bywords,” I had my own struggles with them. The struggle I remember best caused me to get my last paddling—I have pondered it many times... I think I was eight or nine years old, and we were playing baseball. “Homesteader kids” all loved to play outdoor games, and three-man baseball was one of our favorites...

Our father was good about playing baseball with us, and mother made the baseballs. She used a small rubber ball for the center, then wrapped it with cotton twine. (In the “olden days,” we saved everything, especially twine.) Short pieces of twine were used for the first layers, with longer pieces saved for the outer layers. It took special skill to keep the windings smooth and even. When the winding reached the right size, mother used a long needle to pull the end of the twine inside the ball, so it wouldn't unwind.

Almost any stick could be used as a bat, and three flat rocks served as markers for home and first base and the pitcher's mound. That's all that was needed for three-man baseball! The positions filled by the three players were: batter, pitcher, and right field. The batter would try to hit the ball far enough so that he or she could run to first and back home before the pitcher or first baseman

Our Little House On the Prairie

could tag them with the ball. Three strikes, and you were out! The pitcher covered home plate for the throw from the field. At each out, players rotated positions.

On the day I remember so well, we were playing, and I was having trouble hitting the ball. After striking out several times, I threw down the bat and exclaimed, "Oh, the Dickens!" (The fact is, I had allowed this byword to creep into my vocabulary but had been very careful not to let mother or father hear me say it!) I remember thinking as the bad word came out: "I better not say that again!" Father didn't say anything, and I was confident I wouldn't forget again...

However, in the excitement of the game, and with my low batting average, I did forget, and out it came AGAIN! This time, father looked at me, and I recognized his serious tone when he said, "John (his pet name for me), I don't want to hear you say that word again!" Now I realized the pressure was on—I would really have to try hard NOT TO SAY THAT WORD AGAIN!

But, I had flirted with that byword too long, and despite my determination, it soon popped out AGAIN! I knew what to expect; father said not a word but gave me a good (and I believe my last) paddling. I recall that I didn't resist or resent the punishment, but all the time father was paddling me, I was thinking: "What am I going to do? I have this habit, and I have already found out I can't control it! Father, you are just wasting your time... I CAN'T stop saying that word!"

Well, my worry was unfounded. I never said those words again! It was no problem to stop—after father had gained my attention with the paddle! I don't know why it worked, but in raising my own family, I have relied on that experience...

Note to Dr. Spock: "Please explain to me again your conviction regarding corporal punishment!"

Our Little House On the Prairie

Chapter 5: A Murder Story

Community Service

Our father was active in the community life of Ricardo. He was elected to serve on the first school board (he was almost 30 years old) and gave a lot of his time and effort to get a schoolhouse and other improvements for our little town. He was the first Justice of the Peace for Ricardo, but I can't remember if he was elected or appointed.

I recall only a few events that required his official attention as a "JP," but I well recall the most tragic occasion for which father was called to serve as a "peace officer." It began late in the day... Two men from Ricardo came to our homestead to tell our father of a killing; father was needed to arrest the killer. One of father's friends (a young lawyer) had been shot and killed by the wife of the agent for the Santa Fe Railway Company! The story was that the young lawyer and his girlfriend had been hunting rabbits on the agent's property. The agent's wife saw them going into the field and became angry because she thought some cows belonging to the girlfriend were also eating grain in the field. She followed them with a loaded gun, confronted them, and killed the young man instantly.

We were disturbed and yet terribly excited that our father was to go arrest the killer. The plan was for father and two deputized friends to accompany the prisoner to Santa Rosa on the passenger train. Mother worried when told that the group would have to spend the night in Vaughn and go on to Santa Rosa the next day. However, as it turned out, Federal Officers (New Mexico was still a Federal Territory) met them in Vaughn and took charge of the prisoner, allowing the men folks to return to Ricardo the same night, much to our relief. Incidentally, the lady prisoner was judged to be insane and was committed to an institution.

Court records indicate that Sheriff Jose Duran officially took charge of the woman, but in Santa Rosa, not Ricardo. The word "arrest" is marked through, perhaps confirming Mother's recollection that Justice of Peace Todd affected the actual arrest in Ricardo. — Ray Mack

Our Little House On the Prairie

No one knew the address of any relatives of the young man who was killed. I remember that some years later after we moved to Pecos, our parents received a letter of inquiry concerning him. While the letter or the reply was never discussed in my hearing, mother did tell us that they gave what information they could about his death. Thus ended father's last duty as a Justice of the Peace in New Mexico Territory!



A Young Frank Brusnahan

Mother's brief account of this story has been a magnet for additional information, resources, and contacts about the details and circumstances of the local tragedy. From these, I have gained insights into the involvement of my granddad Todd, specifics about the town of Ricardo, the trial of the accused, a tantalizing glimpse into the life of the murderer, and four interesting e-mail friends who have shared their own family connection with the story... *They are my most important and interesting research find.*

— Ray Mack

Our Little House On the Prairie

Murder Story-Source No. 1: Dorothy Mizysak

I obtained the following account of the murder from an unlikely Internet connection with the niece of the man who was killed—**Dorothy Mizysak**. Dorothy quickly gave me the full name of the murdered man that Mother didn't remember. —
Ray Mack

Cornelius Francis Brusnahan

"My Dad's brother, Francis (Frank), was born in 1884; he was nearly sixteen when my Dad was born. He grew up on the family farms near Parr, Indiana. When he graduated from high school, he was sent to Valparaiso, IN, to study law. His sister Mary and brother Michael also went to school there. After graduation in 1904, he apparently taught school for a while because our Dad and his twin were sent to be schooled by Frank.

Frank's sister, Mary, married Uncle Charley Richardson in 1905 and moved to Oklahoma Territory. Soon, Frank moved to Clinton, Oklahoma to live with them and to work in Uncle Charley's law office.

In 1909, Frank filed for a homestead near the town of Ricardo in New Mexico Territory. As was required, he built a place to live on his land, not too far from the family of his Aunt Mary, who was also homesteaded there. Frank practiced law in the area, working out of the nearest Courthouse in Santa Rosa.

Frank was killed in 1912; the story of his murder is well documented in court records and in letters he wrote to his family as he lay dying. His mother never got over the loss of her beloved son; Harry and Aunt Mary grieved for him all their lives. He was 28 years old—ending his chance to fulfill the promise he had shown."

Dorothy Mizysak

Our Little House On the Prairie

Letter No. 1 Frank's Letter to His Father

In transcribing the following pages from scanned and handwritten copies, using OCR technology saved me a lot of time, although some editing was necessary. However, in doing this, I faced the dilemma of how closely to follow the punctuation and paragraphing of the writer. I soon observed that there was very little of either! Commas and apostrophes were not much used, and paragraphing seemed to give way to conserving paper! I debated with myself about how the letters were to appear here and finally decided to edit them for readability, for the sake of my readers. —

September 27, 1912

Mr. T.F. Brusnahan

Hamilton, N. Da.

My dear father and family,

I have a little bad news for you. While writing some letters in the post-office today a certain Mrs. Carly entered the room and without provocation opened fire upon me with a 38 smith & w. pistol. The first shot entered my wrist and rendered my hand useless. I made an effort to take the gun from her but failed to get it for the reason of my left arm being of no service to me. When I found I could not get the gun I made an effort to get out of the room, but of course I had been shot twice. The second shot fired is the most serious. This second shot was fired while I was making an effort to get out of her way. It entered my back just above my kidneys and came out in front between my stomach and upper cavity of the body. This is a very dangerous wound but the Dr's say at any rate I have a fighting chance for recovery.

The woman that did this shooting also shot Okie Zimmerman, the post mistress here, twice. This woman that did the shooting is reported to be insane but about three weeks ago this woman committed an assault upon Okie Zimmerman and myself and threatened to kill us both at that time. Today when she entered the post-office she opened fire without any warning whatsoever giving me a chance to get away or defend myself whatever.

Do not worry about me for I mean to get well in a few weeks. In case I should pass out I desire to be buried in N. Mex. I believe it admirable for H. L. to come out immediately. Your Son Frank Brusnahan

Written by Frank's friend M L Todd

Our Little House On the Prairie

Of course, I deemed this letter the most interesting because it contains Frank's own account of the murder and **because it was written by Frank's friend and my granddad, Madison Todd!** A part of the first page of the letter is below. Pretty good handwriting, don't you think?

Sept. 27/17/2

Mr. T. F. Brannahan
Hamilton N. D.

My dear father and family
I have a little had news for you
while writing some letters in the
Post-office to-day a certain Mrs. Carley
entered the room and without provoca-
tion opened fire upon me with a
38 Smith & W. pistol. The first shot
entered my wrist and rendered my
hand useless. I made an effort to
take the gun from her but failed
to get it for the reason of left arm
being of no service to me. When I
found I could not get the gun I made
an effort to get out of the room
but of course I had been shot twice.
The second shot fired is the most
serious. This second shot was fired while
I was making an effort to get out of
her way. It entered my back just
above my kidneys and came out in front

Our Little House On the Prairie

2: Clora's Letter to Clara

Clora is Okie Zimmerman's twin sister, the girl that was with Frank and was also shot. Clora's account of the day of the murder is certainly telling. The letter is to Frank's sister, Clara Brusnahan. — Ray Mack

Ricardo, N. Mex.

Nov 1, 1912

Miss Clara Brusnahan

Parr Indiana

Dear Miss Clara,

Doubtless you have come to the conclusion that I do not intend to answer your letter I received several days ago, but just as I received it I was starting to Albuquerque N. Mex. on business and did not get time to write while I was gone. Possibly you have heard from others before this time the particulars of Frank's death, as his mother and sister Dorothy came to the funeral, which was four weeks ago yesterday.

He was shot on Sept. 12th but was held for funeral until Oct 3—until his folks could arrive. It was all sure a sad affair. It seems like a bad dream to me yet. I just can't make myself believe that poor Frank is forever gone from us, and is buried out here in this new country so far from his home, but he requested to be buried here. He seemed to really like this place and people and every one here thought so much of him. He was always so cheerful and happy. If anyone should chance to have a case of the blues just a few words from Frank and it was all over with.

You no doubt, wonder why anyone should seek his life and that is the one thing that seems so strange (to the whole community here) for he never harmed any one in word or deed and especially the woman [Carly] who shot him. The community got up a petition to have the Santa Fe R.R.Co. remove her husband, and Frank's name was on the petition and they had it in for every one whose name appeared on the petition.

About two weeks before the shooting Frank and my sister Okie strolled out across the prairie with a target gun and [spotted Carly's cow in Okie's field, intending to drive it back home. She [Carly] saw them going and she pretended she thought they aimed to shoot her cow and she hurried her son off on horseback to drive the cow out of the field before Frank and Okie got half way there. But they strolled on and in about half an hour returned. I noticed after she got the cow home she kept herding her in one place and I couldn't think what she was up to, so finally Okie & Frank got pretty near to the office again and she began driving the cow over to meet them and she slandered them shamefully and as I heard it all I reported her to the R.R.Co. In about two weeks the company discharged her and one hour after she was discharged she did the shooting thinking that Okie and Frank had reported her.

Our Little House On the Prairie

(Clora's Letter, Cont'd):

She is now in the insane asylum and it is only three or four weeks until she will be confined so if she has any remorse of conscience she must be in an awful state of mind. I think though she is most too illiterate to feel the disgrace very keenly.

Okie is recovering nicely. She is just able to be around now but isn't very strong yet. She and two other ladies went to Frank's grave Sunday the first time Okie had seen where he was buried. They planted some native flowers on his grave, some he had gathered himself off the prairie and had them growing in cans.

I was certainly glad to hear from you and will be glad to hear from you again. Trusting you will pardon my seeming negligence in answering your letter and that you will write me again, I am,

Yours with deepest Sympathy

Clora Zimmerman

THE EVENING REPUBLICAN - RENSSELAER, INDIANA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1912 - The particulars of the death of Frank Brusnahan, son of Thomas Brusnahan, formerly of Union township, have been received by his uncle, S. A. Brusnahan, of Parr. It will be remembered that only a brief account of his death was received at the time it occurred. As his father now lives near Hamilton, N. Dakota, some time elapsed before relatives here received any further information. This Saturday morning a letter was received by S. A. Brusnahan, which had been sent by a man living at Ricardo to Frank's sister in Oklahoma and then forwarded here.

The story is substantially as follows... Frank was engaged in the practice of law at Ricardo. A man and woman residing there were both employed by the railroad company and had been discharged. They thought that Frank had something to do with their discharge and also blamed three other people, one of them a young woman. The wife of the discharged man procured a pistol and started out with the intention of killing all four of the people she blamed for their discharge. The girl was standing near the postoffice when the woman came up and began to upbraid her. Frank was standing near and he spoke to the girl and told her to step into the postoffice and not pay any attention to the woman. He caught the girl by the arm and both went into the postoffice. The woman followed them in and with drawn revolver opened fire on them. Both were shot and Frank lived 22 hours. The girl was thought to stand a chance of recovery.

The letter was from a brother of the girl who was shot and it spoke highly of Frank and said that he was shot for being a gentleman.

There was a great amount of feeling engendered among the better people there and it was thought that other murders might result as the woman was feigning insanity. She had been bound over to the circuit court.

Our Little House On the Prairie

No. 495

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

vs.

Murder.

Della Carley

A TRUE BILL

Celso Pena
Foreman of Grand Jury.

Witnesses:

Madison L. Todd

Fred J. Bush.

FILED IN OPEN COURT

September 30th 1912

Geo. S. ...
CLERK.

Optic Publishing Co., East Las Vegas, N. M.

Our Little House On the Prairie

STATE OF NEW MEXICO, }
County of Guadalupe, }

In the District Court at the
.....September..... Term, 1912....

The Grand Jurors of the State of New Mexico, taken from the body of the good and lawful men of the County of Guadalupe aforesaid, duly elected, empaneled, sworn and charged at the Term aforesaid, to inquire in and for the County of Guadalupe aforesaid, upon their oath do present that..... Della Carley.....

late of the County of Guadalupe, State of New Mexico, on the.....
Twenty-seventh..... day of..... September....., in the year
of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Twelve..... at
the County of Guadalupe aforesaid:

in and upon C. Frank Bresnahan, whose full first name is to the Grand Jurors unknown, then and there being, unlawfully, feloniously, wilfully, deliberately, premeditatedly, and of her wilful, deliberate and premeditated malice and malice aforethought, did make and assault, and with a certain pistol which then and there was loaded with gunpowder and leaden bullets, and which she, the said Della Carley, in her hand then there had and held, at, against and upon him, the said C. Frank Bresnahan, whose full first name is to the Grand Jurors unknown, unlawfully, feloniously, wilfully, deliberately, premeditatedly and of her wilful, deliberate and premeditated malice and malice aforethought, then and there did shoot off and discharge, then and there, thereby and by thus striking him, the said C. Frank Bresnahan, whose full first name is to the Grand Jurors unknown, with one of the leaden bullets aforesaid, inflicting in and upon the back of him, the said C. Frank Bresnahan, whose full first name is to the Grand Jurors unknown, one mortal wound, of which said mortal wound, so inflicted as aforesaid, he, the said C. Frank Bresnahan, whose full first name is to the Grand Jurors unknown, thence continually languished, and languishing did live up to and until the Twenty-eighth day of September, in the year of our Lord, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Twelve, on which said last mentioned date, he the said C. Frank Bresnahan, whose full first name is to the Grand Jurors unknown, at the County of Guadalupe, aforesaid, of the said mortal wound so inflicted as aforesaid, died;

And so the Grand Jurors aforesaid, upon their oaths aforesaid, do present, that she, the said Della Carley, in manner and form aforesaid, at the time and place aforesaid, him, the said C. Frank Bresnahan, whose full first name is to the Grand Jurors unknown, unlawfully, feloniously, wilfully, deliberately, premeditatedly, and of her wilful, deliberate and premeditated malice and malice aforethought, did kill and murder;

CONTRARY TO the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the State of New Mexico.

E. G. Ward

District Attorney for San Miguel, Mora
and Guadalupe Counties.

State of New Mexico
County of Bernalillo

In the District Court
14th Judicial District
September 1912 Term

In the Matter of
Della Carley, Com
vs one person

No. ~~495~~ 496

We, the Jury duly empaneled
and sworn in the above entitled cause,
find the said Della Carley to
be a Lunatic.

1. J. A. Julian
 2. Dionicio Martinez
 3. Pablo Zamora
 4. Gabino W. Rueda
 5. Remigio Baca
 6. C. W. Bullock
- Jurors

Our Little House On the Prairie

Court Records of the Trial

Dorothy Mizysak visited Ricardo several times before our first correspondence and provided me with copies of most of the court records about the arrest and trial of Della Carley. Granddad made the arrest and was a witness for the grand jury, but he was not one of the jurors.— *Ray Mack*

Summary of the court's actions:

On September 12, 1912, Frank Brusnahan and his girlfriend Okie Zimmerman were shot in the post office at Ricardo by Della Carley, wife of the local Santa Fe Agent. Madison Todd, Justice of the Peace, arrests Carley and delivers her to sheriff Duran in Santa Rosa.

On September 27th, a grand jury is empaneled to consider a charge of murder for Della Carley. On September 30th, the grand jury returns a "True Bill," indicting her for murder.

October 2, B.W. Carley, husband of Della (and Santa Fe Agent in Ricardo), states that his wife is insane and petitions the court to inquire as to her sanity. The District Court so orders and appoints three commissioners to inquire.

October 9th, the commissioners review the life, nature, and temperament of Della Carley and declare her to be insane. They further declare her to be a danger to society and recommend that she be committed to the New Mexico Asylum for the Insane and that this commitment be much longer than is customary.

In the "cause of murder" by Della Carley, the jury of six men accepts the report of the commissioners and finds her to be a lunatic. Della is delivered into the custody of the Sheriff of Guadalupe County and henceforth to the asylum.

It was a sad event in the brief history of Ricardo. Frank Brusnahan was the first burial in the new cemetery that granddad donated to the town.— *Ray Mack*

Our Little House On the Prairie

Murder Story-Source No. 2: Bob Peck

More information about the Ricardo murder came from a second Internet connection. The storyteller on the other end was **Bob Peck**. Bob is also connected to Ricardo through *his grandfather!* Bob found me through an excerpt of Mother's book that I had posted on the debaca.nmgenweb.us web page. — Ray Mack

Bob's Grandfather, James Max Peck

"Although Okie Zimmerman lingered near death for more than a month, she and her father eventually moved on to the Phoenix area. My grandfather, James Max Peck, must have been a charmer because Okie was allegedly his fourth wife. However, no one has ever found any evidence that they married. Further, he was a serial bigamist and married yet another woman in Reno while away from Phoenix on a business trip.

Okie died in Florence, AZ, in 1938 of a cerebral hemorrhage which appears to have been attributed to her having had her teeth pulled. I wondered if it had been related to her head wound from the shooting. Shortly after Okie's death, my grandfather remarried again and tried to probate Okie's estate in AZ to get land she owned with her father. Okie's sister Chlora smelled a rat and threatened to exhume Okie's body for an autopsy! A few days later, my grandfather shot himself on New Year's Day 1940 in what his new widow tried to pass off as an accident.

Max's last wife, Minerva, then attempted to probate his estate to inherit the land he had inherited from Okie. Chlora waited too many years before she started appealing the probate, and, although the file remained open until 1961, she eventually lost. I have spoken with members of Minerva's family, and she did get the land. I also have a copy of Okie's probate file.

One of the amazing things that came out of my research is that Max had taken a third wife in 1918, even though he was still married to my grandmother! Okie's probate file included a copy of a newspaper article detailing subsequent events. It seems that my grandfather had been perpetually away in Arizona on business until my dad (then age 12) visited him in Winslow and told the then-current wife Lillian that he was still married to my grandmother! So, they all were colorful characters.

I spoke with Chlora's daughter about 8 years ago, but she was then already elderly and in a rest home, so I suspect she is now gone." Bob Peck

Our Little House On the Prairie



Okie Zimmerman

Our Little House On the Prairie

Murder Story-Source No. 3: Don McAlavy

Don McAlavy was Curry County, New Mexico's historian. He helped me with much background material about New Mexico. He shared this important interview with Frank's sister, Mary Brusnahan Richardson. — Ray Mack

"An Infamous day at Ricardo Post Office"

By Don McAlavy: CNJ columnist

July 8, 2005

The community of Ricardo, now lost to just memory⁹, was 13 miles southwest of Fort Sumner. The Santa Fe Railroad placed a depot and a water station there when the Belen Cutoff was built. By 1908, a small town had sprung up, and many wannabe settlers came to find their Utopia. In February of this year, a request came to Clovis' Historical Society from **Timothy Lakin** (see *Acknowledgements*) in New York. He asked about a relative being gunned down in Ricardo in 1912. "He was a young 26-year-old lawyer named Frank Brusnahan who had lived in that area since 1908, coming down from Indiana," said Lakin. "My family does not have an account of what happened from a New Mexico source. Help!"

Nearly three months later, the historical society learned the tragic story through the words of Mary L. Brusnahan Richardson. Here's what she had to say:

"My brother Frank filed a claim at Ricardo, built a small shack, and soon made many friends. A Mr. Zimmerman, who owned the claim next to Frank, had an attractive daughter, Okie. They soon became friends.

The Santa Fe Railroad had built a beautiful depot with an apartment over it. At that time, a family named Carley lived there. They had several small children and a cow. One Sunday morning, my brother Frank and Okie Zimmerman, postmistress there,

⁹ Since 1956, little remains of Ricardo, except the cemetery.

Our Little House On the Prairie

saw Mrs. Carley's cow in Okie's little corn patch. They decided to take their rifles to shoot chipmunks [probably prairie dogs] and go down and drive the cow back to Mrs. Carley. Mrs. Carley met them as they drove the cow back to town. She derided them angrily and said they were trying to shoot the cow.

The next day Frank went to the post office. Mrs. Carley must have been watching for him. She took the gun kept in the depot office, hid it under her apron, and walked to the post office. As she entered, Frank was standing at the stamp window, posting stamps on the letters he had come to mail. She pointed the gun at him and fired. The first shot shattered his wrist.

Okie opened the office door and screamed for him to come back there (behind the stamp window). Mrs. Carley walked to the open stamp window and continued firing at them until her gun was empty. Then she hid it under her apron again and walked calmly back to the depot. There she put the gun back in its accustomed place as if nothing had happened.

The Santa Fe ran a hospital train with doctors and nurses to Ricardo. Mrs. Carley was placed under arrest. A trial found her insane, and she was later sent to a mental institution.

At first, it was thought that Okie's wounds were most serious; they were about her head. Frank insisted that she be taken care of first. Frank's wounds, besides his broken wrist, were abdominal and very bad. He dictated a telegram, which I received: "Have received probably fatal gunshot wounds, come down at once."

Frank died on Sept. 23, 1912. His mother and other family members came to Ricardo for a short time. Frank had requested that he be buried in the new little cemetery southeast of Ricardo. So they buried him there."

Mary L. Brusnahan Richardson

Murder Story-Source No. 4: Jacalyn Carley

Sometime after Dorothy Mzyak and I began our collaboration on the murder story, another amazing Internet connection came to us from a most unlikely source... We received an e-mail from the *granddaughter of Della Carley*, **Jacalyn Carley!** She informed us that her grandmother Carley did not stay in the asylum very long, and after her release, recovered her sanity and raised a family. Jacalyn provided no further details, explaining that she was also writing a book! Dorothy and I lost touch with Jacalyn for some time, but later, in a most magnanimous gesture of cooperation, she shared a historical narrative she had written about the homesteading era in the U. S. and gave me permission to use it. You will find this fine piece of writing as the *Prologue* to the 2nd Edition. Needless to say, Dorothy and I look forward to reading Jacalyn's full account of her grandma Della's story someday. Perhaps even a screenplay? — Ray Mack

As I began working on this 2nd Edition, I wrote to Jacalyn and requested her current contact information for the *Prologue*. Her reply is below! — Ray Mack

Ray!!!

You are quite simply amazing. An inspiration! Go for it!!

Maybe I can have a copy as Dankeschön for my contribution?
You can send it to my kids in the US, so no overseas postage.

I will turn 70 this year, and grandma Della is very much in my writing crawl. I just need to reconcile myself with a long long stretch at the computer if I'm going to tackle that story again —

Good luck! I love hearing from you. Thanks for staying in touch.

Jacalyn

Berlin, Germany

Chapter 6: Memories of My Childhood

Paper Dolls

As a young girl, I was a paper doll addict! My paper dolls were the old-fashioned kind—pictures of people cut from magazines and catalogs. This was before the day when little girls had special “undressed” dolls with extra clothes. When my dolls needed a change of clothes, I had to find another picture, properly attired. I was always looking for new dolls, but full-length pictures were hard to find, especially the same persons with different clothes! I kept my collection of paper dolls between the pages of a magazine.

Boys learned early not to do anything that would cause the men in the family to call them “sissy.” Judson was good to play dolls with me until our father or some other man appeared on the scene. Then, he would quickly turn his back on our playhouse, dolls, and related activities. When weather permitted, we played outside, but on cold or windy days (of which there were plenty), we had to play inside, and that is when I wished for a sister.

As long as we lived in East Texas my father's youngest sister, Lola Mae¹⁰, played dolls with me, although she was almost six years older than I¹¹. Now I missed her so! We had been in New Mexico for about four years when she and my father's eldest sister, Corry¹², came to see us. Father had fixed me a “play-house” in the yard. He had a covered wagon frame that wasn't in use, so he placed it over some planks by the garden fence, and I had a nice playhouse. I could hardly wait to show it to Lola Mae; she seemed quite impressed, and I was ecstatic! I still had my doll, “Louise” (see Appendix A5 Page 165) from my East Texas days, and I can still remember asking: “What shall we play first?”

¹⁰ Lola Mae Todd, born March 3, 1895

¹¹ Alva Zorene Todd, born January 28, 1901

¹² Florence Corrina Todd, born September 23, 1877

Our Little House On the Prairie

I will never forget her answer: "Let's have a wedding for Louise..." Suddenly I realized that Lola Mae was a grown young lady whose thoughts were not my thoughts. We enjoyed playing together, but it was not the same.



The Abundant Life

I'll never know how much my parents missed the abundant life of East Texas that they enjoyed before coming to New Mexico Territory, but if either complained, it was never in my presence. The beautiful pine forests, the orchards, and gardens, and especially the close and loving relationships with their respective families, were only cherished memories. For years, I really thought that I was some "kin" to every person in Upshur County! Now that I am considerably older and have had a chance to read various histories of East Texas peoples, I am even more convinced that most of us were kin, some way or the other!

Our father had been a successful farmer in East Texas, and it was hard for him to accept the fact that dry-land farming could not be profitable in New Mexico. Two related memories about this stand out in my mind... First, I remember how he and mother would watch the sky, hoping and praying that rain would come down from the passing clouds, but, of course, it seldom did. Second, I remember the year father had an exceptionally good crop of "red beans," or "pinto beans," as some called them.¹³ Alas, after they were picked, shelled, dried, graded, and sacked, he could find no buyer! The only place we

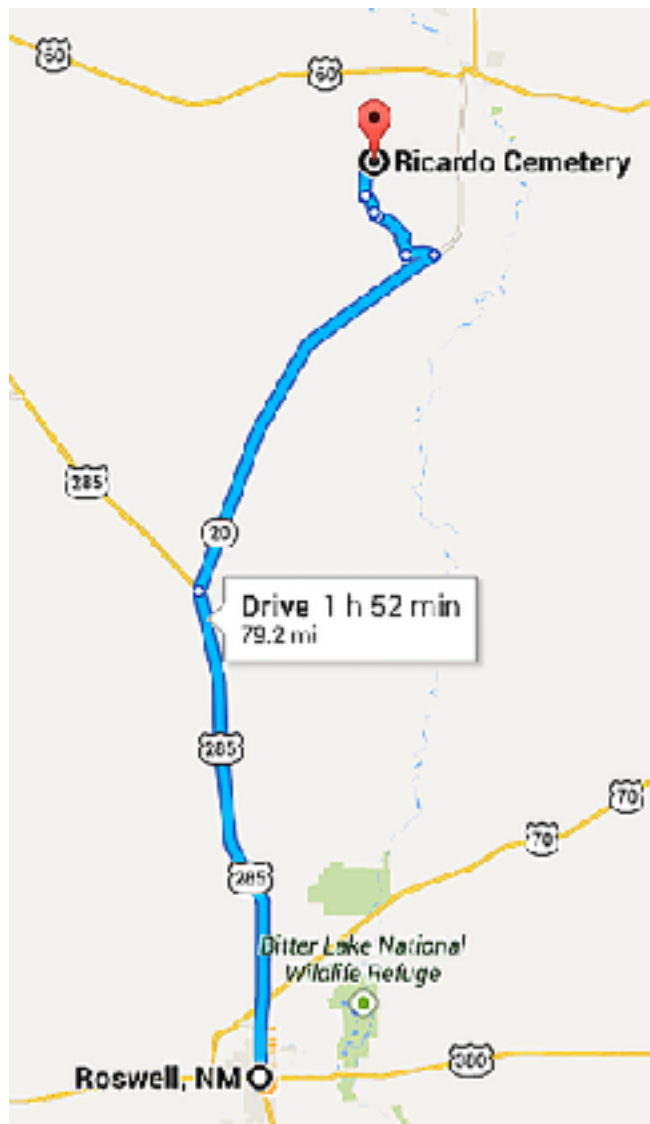
¹³ Early in the 20th century, New Mexico was the center of bean farming in the U. S. The City of Mountainaire, NM, became known as the capital of pinto bean production.

Our Little House On the Prairie

had to store the abundant crop was in the southeast corner of our dining room. I can't remember what finally happened to them; maybe we left them there when we moved to Texas! (Funny thing, I still love to eat red beans!)

Polishing Apples

Shortly after we moved to Ricardo, father began going with neighbors by covered wagon each fall to Roswell, a two-night trip of about 80 miles.



When they returned, their wagon always carried several barrels of apples; I remember them as the best I have ever eaten. Father stored our barrel in the cellar, and we usually had enough to last us through the winter. Mother occasionally went through the entire barrel, removing apples that were blemished or spoiling. She used them for cooking and canning. One very happy memory is Judson and I going to the cellar after supper and bringing up enough apples to fill our beautiful fruit bowl. This red-glass fruit bowl had been a wedding present to mother from her aunt Eugenia Morgan Mackey (wife of grandfather's brother, Jim Mackey). We kids enjoyed polishing the best apples and arranging them in that fruit bowl, kept on a table near the wood-burning heater in our parent's

bedroom (this room also served as our living room).

Our Little House On the Prairie

According to Google, using “Ricardo Cemetery” (located on Granddad Todd’s claim) as an approximation for the Todd’s homestead, today, this would be a drive of about 80 miles up Highways 285 and 20. Again, according to Google, this would be 26 hours of walking! Google doesn’t provide a “buggy time!” However, mother recalls that this was a two-night trip with campouts. — *Ray Mack*

The Family Library

Also on this table were two books that mother would read to us before bedtime: Hurlbut's Story Book of the Bible (now at Ray's house) and a set of books by Charles Dickens (lost!). I think mother ordered our set of Dickens from Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward. After the age of 68, I had the good fortune to make two wonderful trips to England and Europe with family and friends. Some of the things we saw that meant the most to me were places that I remember from the writings of Charles Dickens. For example, on a trip up the Thames River, our guide pointed out the area where the infamous “Artful Dodger,” Fagin, was supposed to have lived and operated with his band of young pickpockets! When mother read to us, these and other characters from Dickens were as real to us as our neighbors and friends in real life.

The Weather

Sandstorms (not dust storms!) were a normal part of our weather on the barren and flat prairie where we lived. It would sometimes blow so hard that it was difficult to walk, much less see one's way on foot or horseback. I recall two events that occurred when the sand was swirling...

Even though it was a good journey, our father liked to go to Ricardo for the mail every afternoon. One day the wind was so bad mother advised him not to go. However, he was restless to get out of the house, and so he asked her if she didn't have something that he could wrap around his head as some protection from the stinging sand. She allowed as how she had a light scarf that he could wrap around his head and wear under his cap. I remember her

Our Little House On the Prairie

helping him tie and adjust it so that it covered his face completely, but it was thin enough so that he could see through it. Then, off he went.

A few minutes later, we heard a cry at the front door, "JULIA! OPEN THIS DOOR!" Of course, mama opened the door as quickly as she could, and one very uncomfortable man came in—poor father! You see, father dipped snuff, and when he put on the scarf, he forgot he had snuff in his mouth... He soon needed to spit, but the scarf trapped his spittle, and the wind blew it back in his face and eyes! To make matters worse, mother had done such a good job tying the scarf that he could not get it off for several excruciating minutes after he stepped into the house! Of course, we all had to laugh. Father didn't exactly join in, but he allowed our amusement. However, our family didn't relate this story to others for a long, long time.

Our First Automobile Ride

On another windy afternoon, I especially remember the Railway Agriculture Agent's¹⁴ knock on our door. Although he had visited our home before, my father was surprised to see him because he usually came by train; local homesteaders furnished him transportation and often accompanied him to visit their neighbors. But on this sandstormy day, he had come in an automobile! It was the first one we had ever seen—we could hardly believe our eyes! He wanted father to ride with him into Ricardo to meet someone, and he diplomatically asked our parents if Judson and I could go with him as far as the railway station, from where we would walk home. Walk home, nothing, we fairly flew! In my mind's eye, I can still see that little one-seated roadster... To even have seen a car was something, but to actually have ridden in one gave us "bragging rights" at school for days, and we were excited for weeks!

¹⁴ His job was to travel up and down the rail system, trying to encourage the homesteaders (who the railroad had helped lure to the area) who were trying to scratch out a living on their arid acres...

Our Little House On the Prairie

A 4th of July Picnic

The 4th of July was always celebrated in a big way in New Mexico Territory, and nearby Ft. Sumner always had a program. I especially remember one that we attended...

Plans were made well ahead of time, including the clothes we would wear. Our East Texas families always sent mama sewing material, so she had some white linen intended for a suit for Jud. However, I guess mother didn't think white linen was appropriate for a young boy in the Territory, so she made a long linen skirt for herself and a suit for Jud out of something else. Mama made my dress from white "dotted Swiss." It had puffed sleeves with ribbon woven through the eyelets.

We rode in our surrey,¹⁵ with Jud and I, in the back. Since it was fourteen dusty miles from Ricardo to Ft. Sumner, we wore everyday clothes for our trip and then changed behind some big mesquite bushes before we reached the river crossing. Then, we all four squeezed into the seat of the surrey for our arrival at the picnic!

Mother, I wonder if this picnic might have been in 1912, the year New Mexico achieved statehood? I imagine they had a rather special 4th of July celebration that year! On the other hand, mother would have been 11 years old by now, and it's surprising that with her good Ricardo schooling, she didn't remember that it was the statehood celebration.— *Ray Mack*

The picnic was originally to have been held on the west side of the river, where there was a grove of cottonwood trees that the soldiers had planted many years ago. However, unbeknownst to us, the river had "come on a rise" and washed away all of the preparations that had been made. When we arrived, we found the water still running higher than normal. Locals were on

¹⁵ We called it a "surrey," but it was really an extra large "buggy." The one seat was wide enough for three grownups and two small kids, between or in someone's lap. It had quite a bit of room in the back and that was usually where we kids rode. (It was not the little buggy that mama had in East Texas.)

Our Little House On the Prairie

hand to tell us that the picnic site had been moved to the east side and that we would have to ford the river...

Helpers were stationed on each side; only one party could cross at a time. By the time our turn came, I was scared! I had seen how the men had to whip their teams to get them into the fast-moving water. The horses had to swim a distance in the middle, and the wagons floated off the sandy bottom. Jud and I got down on the floorboard (under mother and father on the seat), and I covered my ears so I wouldn't have to hear father whip our horses! It was scary, but we arrived safely on the other side...

Everyone brought lots of food, and it was spread out together at the new picnic site. Old friendships were renewed and new friends were made. I remember important speeches and important people to make them, but I can't recall any of them.

Later, Papa asked us kids if we wanted to go into Ft. Sumner to the drugstore. Despite little money for extras, my father was always generous with Jud and me on special occasions, seeing to it that we had most of the same "experiences" as other children of our age—something that we probably didn't fully appreciate at the time; we never felt deprived or poor. We had never been to the drugstore before, and I well remember the fancy twisted-wire tables and chairs. We had ice cream sodas, and it was a very special time. After this visit, that drugstore rated a visit each time we went to Ft. Sumner!¹⁶

I was worried all day about crossing the river to go home, but glory be! When we reached the river bank, the flood was gone! We drove the wagon safely through the low water and across the prairie to home.

¹⁶ Mother didn't go with us to the drugstore; she said she would "just stay and visit." Looking back, I am sure it was to cut down on expenses.

Our Little House On the Prairie

*Told from an 11-year-old's point of view...
No, Zorene didn't write this, but it's her story!
(Read at the Mackey First Cousins Reunion, April 1997)*

That Special Day

It was July 4th! The wagon was loaded
with food—and a ball and a bat!
Our new clothes lay carefully folded
beside Papa's Sunday hat.

Mama's new skirt was white linen
and I had Dotted Swiss.
Jud had a brand new suit
with a buttoned vest.

We children rode in the back,
dressed in our everyday.
Mama and Papa sat up front,
watching the narrow roadway.

Fourteen miles of dusty road,
then the Pecos river we would see,
winding near Ft. Sumner,
with its shady cottonwood trees.

But... the river had run high,
it was deep enough for rowing!
but men were there to help
and Papa said, "we're going!"

So, we had to ford the river
to reach the drier ground.
Mama said we'd be all right and
she didn't think we'd drown!

"You must lie flat in the wagon,"
Mama firmly said,
because Papa would have his
hand's full, finding the river bed.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Out in the deepest part,
I thought we were going to float,
and wished we didn't have a wagon
but some kind of boat!

We watched the corner of the wagon,
where a little water trickled in—
Jud held on tight to me
and I held on tight to him!

Safely across—we made it!
Mama said a little prayer.
Then Jud and I saw all the kids
that had beat us there...

We put on our new clothes,
but Mama said, "stay clean!"
Jud and I hardly listened because
we were needed to make a team!

While the ladies spread the food
on tables made of boards,
the men began to smoke and dip
and talked about the ford...

There were many long speeches
but no one seemed to mind,
Everyone clapped and shouted Hoo-ray!
The history was lost on Jud and me...

We played and ate and visited
until it was very late.
It was a special day for us,
That year our home became a state!

(Barbara Jane (Thompson) Coleman - Age 60)

Our Little House On the Prairie

My Thoughts on Homesteading In Ricardo

Some would say that Mother's story about life on a homestead is pretty idyllic, and I would agree. Remember, her's are the recollections of a 7-15-year-old! Her experience reminded me of my family's sudden transition from city life to austere farm life when I was about Mother's age, 8 years (Appendix A3 Page 148): *"Two city kids were thrust into an entirely different life—and we thrived! It was a time of great stress for our parents, who had given up good-paying city jobs for an uncertain future in farming, but to Barbara and me, it was an adventure!"* I still remember the years of our farm life as the happiest of my life...

So, I view Mother's story in the same light. Their life was surely a stressful one for their parents. Madison and Julia had left green and fertile East Texas and the embrace of two large families. They began with only what Grandad brought in his boxcar. Grandad suffered from "consumption" or tuberculosis. Mother told us that he was so weak he could not assist in the building of their house. She said he laid out in the sun while the house was being built, to "burn the consumption" out of his body."

Perhaps the Todds came better prepared and financed than most? They were able to build their house and drill a well right away. Their family visited them via the railroad from East Texas. Although their farming efforts were unsuccessful, they had a garden, trees, tanks, and transportation. *They were a resourceful, prayerful, and God-fearing family that never quit... Somehow, they persisted and survived for 8-1/2 years...*

In her wonderful Prologue, my friend Jacalyn tells something of the disaster that homesteading turned out to be for most who tried it. It was over-promoted and over-promised, yet "free land" was the cocktail that intoxicated many. Like many Government projects, those intended to receive the free land often failed to receive any lasting benefit; many retired broke and broken-hearted. Although the intent was to grant land for agriculture, 640 acres was generally too little land for a viable farm. Speculators soon learned to manipulate the provisions of the act to gain control of resources, especially water. A common scheme was for an individual acting as a front for a large cattle operation to file for a homestead surrounding a water source under the pretense that the land would be used as a farm. Once the land was granted, other ranchers would be denied using that water source, effectively closing off the adjacent public land to competition. That method was also used by large businesses and speculators to gain ownership of timber and oil-producing land.

Our Little House On the Prairie

The Madison Todd family's story continues in Appendix A3, Page 142. Another adventure was awaiting them in Texas! Madison Todd became "the father of an agricultural industry!" And, guess what? That became my heritage as well!

The History of Ricardo

In Mother's story, she says very little about the *town* of Ricardo, except, "I do remember that there were four or five saloons, something we kids had not seen before." I believe Mother's story should be viewed as a snapshot of family life on a homestead as remembered by a young girl, certainly not a historical record. However, from Mother's account, her family managed a happy everyday life as homesteaders. They lived on their homestead for 8-1/2 years. The "magic carpet" of the day, the railroads, brought them frequent visits from family in East Texas.

You will find a glimpse of Ricardo's history in my Facebook Group, which you can read in Appendix A1 Page 119.

I have searched for more on the history of the *town* of Ricardo and found a few sites that you might like to view on the web.

City of Dust Blogspot

<https://cityofdust.blogspot.com/>

Beata Certo Photographer

<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100051937342457/search/?q=ricardo>

— Ray Mack

Our Little House On the Prairie

Chapter 7: School Days

There is a little song that goes with the title of this chapter. I've known it all my life, but I think it fits in my memory book of school days in Ricardo. I can't resist "singing" it right here:

School days, school days,

Dear old "Golden Rule"
days...

Reading and writing and
'rithmetic,'

Taught to the tune of a
hickory stick!

You were my queen in
calico,

I was your bashful bare-foot
beau.

You wrote on my slate: "I
LOVE YOU JOE!"

Building Our School

My father was a firm believer in giving one's children an education. Many a time I heard him say, "Children need to be educated and able to make a living on their own; Inherited money can slip through their fingers. What they learn from a good education can never be taken from them." His greatest worry about our living in Ricardo was the lack of a public school...

Our Little House On the Prairie

I have no exact account of what was done to get our first school, but I believe the men of the community just banded together, raised money for a lot, and erected a building on their own. The results, raised on the Northwest corner of the townsite in the fall of 1909, were a one room schoolhouse and two outhouses! It was a single-walled building, with exposed studs on the inside and the rafters visible overhead. Our benches and desks were also “homemade,” each wide enough to seat four or five children.¹⁷



I remember our first teacher—a lovely young lady named Miss Nina Cullens. She was the daughter of a well-to-do ranching family who lived in the Yeso Valley, south of Ricardo. Again, I don't know how the community raised the funds to pay her for our first semester of school (3 months). I only remember how much fun it was to go to school for the first time!¹⁸ We loved our teacher very much, and it was great fun to be with other children.

¹⁷ I really think that the one who gave our school building project the most thought and energy was Madison Todd.

¹⁸ In addition to her salary, she was furnished room and board. So few families had any extra living space that she had to board with different families from week to week. I believe her family came and picked her up on weekends.

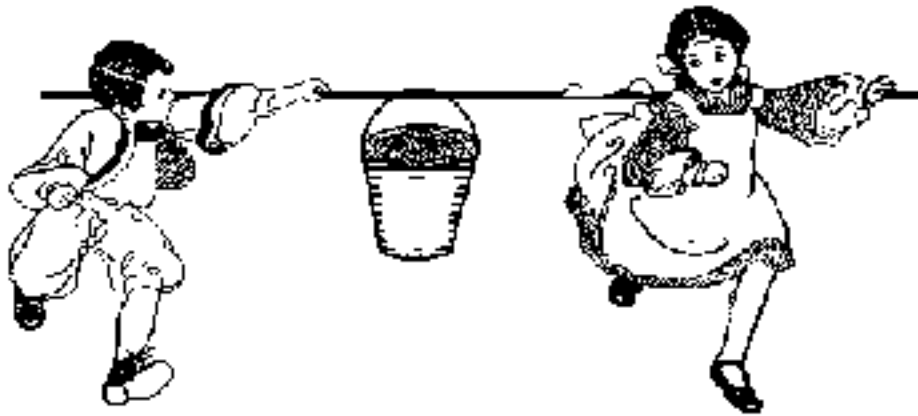
Our Little House On the Prairie

Mother, did you mean “for the first time in the Territory?” You don’t mention going to school in East Texas, but you would have been 7-1/2 the summer they arrived in Ricardo. — *Ray Mack*

As the years passed (and perhaps after statehood in 1912), the government increased its financial support, and improvements were made to our building. A second room was added on the west side, and we got real “bought” desks—one per child! Later we had other teachers than Miss Cullens, and the year we moved away (1916), we had two teachers, eight grades, and I believe our school year was a full nine months.

Buckets and Beaus

One of the “privileges” of going to school in a one-room schoolhouse was to be asked by the teacher to go to the well for a bucket of drinking water. This was accomplished by suspending a two-gallon zinc-coated bucket on a



broomstick carried on the shoulders of two students. Usually, a boy and girl were selected to go, and if we were very lucky, we got to go with our current boy or girlfriend!

Marbles

Speaking of “boyfriends,” I’ll always remember how I felt the first time I realized that another girl had taken my place in the affections of my boyfriend. You see, we spent a lot of our recess time playing marbles. Boys always selected one special marble (usually an agate) to shoot with, called a

Our Little House On the Prairie

“taw.” If you were his favorite girl, a boy would let you use his taw on your turn to shoot. But—on the day that your boyfriend passed his taw to another girl, you knew you had lost his favor!

Our schoolroom was heated in the wintertime by a large pot-bellied stove in the center of the room, with seats all around it. It was fun when it got cold enough to be allowed to take one's book and move to a warm seat by the stove—hopefully by a cute boy!

Underwear

One “burden” school kids of our day had to bear was wearing “long-handle” underwear in the winter. As we walked to school on cold days I spent a lot of time trying to keep mine pulled up above my knees, so they wouldn't show. Girls always wore dresses, of course, with heavily ribbed hose. What a blessing “slacks” would have been!

Going to School In Roswell

School teaching was a family pursuit on both sides of the Todd family, a bent I was also destined to follow when I grew up.¹⁹ When we decided to move to New Mexico, father's sister, Mary, like father, was beginning to have lung trouble and she decided to come with us for a chance at better health. She was a good teacher and got a good job teaching in the Santa Fe schools, where she lived for several years. She always came to spend the summers with us in Ricardo.

Father's sister Betty also came to see us in New Mexico, which leads to another part of my school days memories. Aunt Betty wanted to get an education, and father and others in the family were willing to help her. She

¹⁹ On the Mackey side of the family, my mother taught a short term before she married, and Aunt Octa taught for many years. On the Todd side, father and his brother Lon both taught a short term. (I have always had the feeling that if the terms had been longer they might have continued a teaching career.) Three of the Todd girls, Corry, Lillie, and Mary, taught many years, and were outstanding teachers.

Our Little House On the Prairie

decided to go to a business college in Roswell, which was about 75 miles south of Ricardo. Like other young women of the day, she was able to go to school by working for her room and board. So, with father and mother's support, she moved to Roswell.

Finally, I had gone as far as I could in the curriculum of the Ricardo schools. This was of great concern to father and, through information from Aunt Betty, it was decided that mother, Jud, and I would move to Roswell so we kids could be in better schools. So, in September of that year (I can't decide for sure what year), father loaded us all into our wagon and surrey and we drove to Roswell, where father rented a house for us to live in. We kept the surrey for our transportation, and father then had to return to the homestead.²⁰

I started in the 3rd grade, and Jud started in the 1st. Of course, the Roswell schools were a new experience for Jud and me. We had been used to a one-room schoolhouse, and going to classes in different rooms seemed very strange! Other things were different also... I remember that on the first day of school mother thought she had Jud dressed just right, with a nice little suit topped with a cute straw hat. However, he came home in tears, reporting that the other children had made fun of him and had sailed his hat around the schoolyard until it was in tatters!

Father was not able to return for a visit with us until Christmas, and when he arrived—*Goodness Sakes!*—Mother was shocked to see he was nothing but skin and bones! *THAT WAS IT!*—As far as mother was concerned, we were going home! I don't think father argued with her too much, as he had really missed his family. We loaded our belongings into the wagon and surrey and started our trip across the prairie, back home to Ricardo.

Jud and I rode in the back of our wagon, happy to be with father again and engrossed in our own play world inside the canvas top. Mother drove behind us in the surrey, but we paid little heed to the trail behind... As we moved north it began to snow lightly and the wind came up. We pressed on without

²⁰ If “homesteaders” did not live on their property they forfeited their chance for title.

Our Little House On the Prairie

any particular worry. To stay warm, father got off and walked beside his team, something he was used to doing behind his plow. In the back of the wagon, Jud and I were snug as bugs in a rug and paid no mind to what was going on...

Mother saw father walking, and since it was equally cold on the seat of the surrey, she decided that she would also walk for a while. She stopped her team and got down, then let her horses "have their head" to follow our wagon. Mother was a strong woman, but the walking both warmed her up and tired her out, and she was soon ready to return to the seat on the surrey. However, her team, feeling the lightened surrey and frisking in the cool snow, didn't stop when she told them to! She was still well within view of our wagon, so she called out, "*MADISON! MADISON! STOP!*" However, the wind and the distance prevented father, Jud, and I from hearing her call for help. Mother was gradually left behind on the trail, calling for help and beginning to cry...

It was not too long before father heard mother's frisky team prancing up behind our wagon; he turned to see that Julia was not in it! He yelled to Jud and me, caught mother's team, and we all finally looked back. Thankfully, mama was not too far behind, but by the time she caught up with us she was not crying anymore, she was mad! She was particularly upset at Jud and me for being so careless about watching behind the wagon!

We camped out two nights, which Jud and I really enjoyed. When we arrived safely home, mother immediately set about to "fatten up" her Madison, although he never had an ounce of extra flesh on his bones that I can recall!

I am not for sure, but I believe I did not go to school the rest of that year, and by the time the next school year started Ricardo had hired another teacher and I was able to continue my education...

Our Little House On the Prairie

The “Yankee” Viewpoint

I have spoken before about the rich mix of people that came to our little community. I remember that the year that I studied U. S. history in New Mexico, my teacher was from the North. At Christmas time that year, we moved to Pecos, Texas, where U.S. history was taught in the last half of the school year. With my “northern” slant on the subject, I had to fight the “War of the States” all over again against a strong “southern” leaning in Texas schools! It didn't help my image or acceptance in the first “big” school I had ever attended!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Chapter 8: We Move Back to Texas

In 1916, after we had lived in New Mexico Territory for eight and one-half years, mother and father gained title to their homestead. At one time, I had the title papers to our New Mexico homestead. I recall giving them to Ray Mack for safekeeping, but now it was lost. Ray wanted it because it was signed by President Woodrow Wilson! I was 16 years old and had completed the 8th grade; Judson was 13 and had completed the 5th grade in the Ricardo schools.²¹ That same year, during our Christmas school vacation, father decided that he should move to where his children could finish their education. Father told us, "An education can never be taken from you, and that is what I most want to give you." Of course, our farming efforts in New Mexico had not been very successful, and that also had a bearing on their decision to leave...

Thankfully, mother, with the help of the Internet, I have been able to retrieve the lost title to granddad's homestead! (See next page. - *Ray Mack*)

Packing for Pecos

Father worked out a trade for his New Mexico homestead with a young man who was farming in Pecos, Texas. He had decided he wanted to be a rancher, so traded his 80-acre farm in Pecos for our 160 acres in Ricardo. The Pecos farm was unimproved (except for a little two-room house), but was irrigated with water pumped from a deep well, instead of the more common artesian water source—this turned out to be the secret to successful farming in Pecos. So, we were all resigned to moving back to Texas. Jud and I didn't want to move because we were told we would have to leave our dogs behind! We had two Collies, and Jud had trained one of them to harness and pull a little wagon. We cried, and to stop our tears and soothe the hurt, father said that he would take us to the "picture show" in Roswell, where we planned to spend


²¹ At this time, Texas had 11 grades and New Mexico had 12. Thus, when we moved to Pecos I was in the 7th grade and Jud was in the 4th.

Our Little House On the Prairie

the night on the way to Pecos. "Moving pictures" was a new wonder that we had heard about but never seen. With that promise made, the job of planning to move could begin.

Fort Sumner	08562	4-1003-B.
The United States of America,		
On all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:		
<p>WHEREAS, a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Fort Sumner, New Mexico,</p> <p>has been deposited in the General Land Office, whereby it appears that, pursuant to the Act of Congress of May 20, 1882,</p> <p>"To Secure Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Domain," and the acts supplemental thereto, the claim of</p> <p>Madison L. Todd</p> <p>has been established and duly consummated, in conformity to law, for the southwest quarter of Section twenty-</p> <p>four in Township two north of Range twenty-four east of the New Mexico Me-</p> <p>ridian, New Mexico, containing one hundred sixty acres,</p> <p>according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said land, returned to the GENERAL LAND OFFICE by the Surveyor-General</p> <p>NOW KNOW YE, That there is, therefore, granted by the UNITED STATES unto the said claimant the tract of Land above described;</p> <p>TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract of Land with the appurtenances thereof, unto the said claimant and to the heirs and assigns of the said claimant forever; subject to any vested and accrued water rights for mining, agricultural, manufacturing, or other purposes, and rights to ditches and reservoirs used in connection with such water rights, as may be recognized and acknowledged by the local customs, laws, and decisions of courts; and there is reserved from the lands hereby granted, a right of way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States.</p>		
IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I		Woodrow Wilson
<p>President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made</p> <p>Patent, and the seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.</p> <p>GIVEN under my hand, at the City of Washington, the TWENTY-FOURTH</p> <p>day of APRIL in the year of our Lord one thousand</p> <p>one hundred and THIRTEEN and of the Independence of the</p> <p>United States the one hundred and THIRTY-SEVENTH.</p> <p>By the President: <i>Woodrow Wilson</i></p> <p>By <i>M. P. Le Roy</i> Secretary,</p> <p><i>John O'Connell</i> Acting Recorder of the General Land Office.</p>		

(REAL)



RECORD OF PATENTS: Patent Number **828054**

U. S. G. T.

Our Little House On the Prairie

In this day and time, we would probably have moved by truck, but at that time, we depended on the railroads. This meant that we had to sell many of our household possessions and even some of the farm implements. Mother's beautiful little desk was one of the things we had to leave behind. It was sold to our good neighbors, the Davis family, and the parents of our favorite school teacher "Miss Jennie." Ray and Barbara will recall visiting with Miss Jennie several times in Ft. Sumner. On one visit, I asked about the little desk, and Miss Jennie said she would search through her parent's possessions (which were in storage) and try to find it. Unfortunately, she later reported that someone broke into the storage site and the desk was gone...

Because everything had to be packed and loaded as freight, we spent the last night in Ricardo with the Lines family.²² They owned and operated the general store in Ricardo and had several boys and one girl, Alline. Jud was sweet on Alline, and they wrote to one another for a long time after we moved to Pecos.

The next morning, we boarded the Santa Fe train in Ricardo, eastbound, for our new home in Texas. In Clovis, the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe switched us and our belongings to the southbound line that took us south as far as Roswell, where we spent the night in a hotel. I remember our rooms were upstairs, another new experience! True to his promise, father took Jud and me to the picture show. (I don't recall mother going; probably to save money.) It was a very special treat; I am sure it was a silent movie, but I can't remember the name of it...

The next morning we boarded the train again for the last leg of our trip, through Carlsbad to Pecos. It was a "mixed train" of freight cars and one passenger car. (They didn't run the passenger car every day.) Jud and I thought the train was terribly slow! We passed the time as best we could, watching the jackrabbits in the slow-moving "shinnery" landscape alongside the train. At one point, the train slowed and came to a complete stop, and

²² We were very close to the Lines family, and kept up with them for many years. They moved to a farm in O'Donnell, Texas, and we visited them occasionally.

Our Little House On the Prairie

everyone wondered what was wrong... Father got off to go see; he soon came back to tell us that the train had been stopped for the conductor to hunt rabbits!²³ I have always remembered this as “something funny” that happened on our move to Texas!

In Pecos, Mr. D. T. McKee, the uncle of the young man father had traded land with, met us with a wagon.²⁴ We stayed with him and his wife for a few days while father fixed up the small two-room house on our new property. Mrs. McKee was a “Virginia blue blood” who never did “cotton to” farm life in Texas, and they later moved back to Virginia. At that time, father purchased another 80 acres of irrigated land from Mr. McKee.

My parent’s farm home in Pecos (we called it the North Farm) was known as the old Grissom place and I believe it adjoined granddad’s original 80-acre property. I’ve always intended to do a title search to verify this but never got around to it. —

Ray Mack

“Julia, Open the Gate!”

(I must tack on one more story here, which Ray and Barbara have always enjoyed hearing.)

Since we lived 5 or 6 miles from town when school started that fall, father bought us a pony and a small second-hand buggy with one seat, so we could ride to school.

Two years later, father bought our first car! Father went to El Paso on the train and asked his brother Lon to help him find our car. They selected a used,

²³ Probably for his dogs.

²⁴ I guess the nephew's ranching plans in New Mexico didn't work out, because he eventually came back to Pecos and served as Band Director in our schools.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ford touring car, and Uncle Lon drove back to Pecos with father. When they arrived, Jud and I were ecstatic!²⁵

Uncle Lon came home with father, so he could teach him how to drive. So, the next morning, eager to get in his first driving lesson and to show the neighbors his new vehicle, father and Uncle Lon left the house early. When we came out of the house, we noticed that they had left our wide, wire gate in front of the house open, and some stray range cows had wandered in and were helping themselves to our feed troughs. Jud and I chased them out and fastened the gate, not realizing that father had left it down for a reason...

Before long, father and Uncle Lon returned, *with father at the wheel!* He turned into our yard at almost full speed and only then saw the gate was closed! We heard him yelling at the top of his lungs, "JULIA! JULIA! OPEN THE GATE!" We came running out just in time to see him drive the car through the fence, sparing the expensive gate. Father had slowed enough so that no serious damage was done and upon dismounting from his vehicle, offered this piece of advice: "When you start to learn how to drive, learn to stop first!"

²⁵ Later, we were allowed to drive our car to school, which greatly improved our "social standing" with our classmates! So, you see, its not a new convention to be judged by what kind of car you drive!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Chapter 9: Return to Ricardo

Returning Home

In the fall of 1955, Neil, Ray, and I decided to take a trip. Ray had recently returned from Europe after serving four years in the U. S. Air Force. He got home in time to help us with the cantaloupe shipping season, but by the time the season was over he had decided that he wanted to enroll in Texas Tech in Lubbock and begin work on a degree in Electrical Engineering, using his G. I. Bill. Barbara, now married and living with her husband, John Coleman, was teaching school in Carlsbad, New Mexico. So, Neil and I thought it would be nice for the three of us to take a trip through the western states, visit some friends, do some sightseeing, and—visit my childhood home in Ricardo, New Mexico!

Ricardo, New Mexico, no longer exists; it is not shown on current state highway maps. However, we found our way to where the little community used to be. We could find only the foundations of a few of the town buildings that I remembered, and I was sad to find that the lovely little brick railway station had been completely demolished—the place where it stood swept clean. However, I was glad to see our old schoolhouse still standing, on the Northwest corner of the townsite; it was being used by a rancher to store hay. Outside, what had once been our happy playground was now littered with the remains of some of our school desks. I remembered them when they were new and beautiful, bought just a short time before my family left Ricardo in 1916.

On the other hand, the Santa Fe line that brought the Todd's to Ricardo has survived and prospered and is now one of the busiest east-west rail routes in the western states.

Ray Mack had come home from Germany with a new hobby, photography. He had the finest of German camera equipment (Leica) and had become a serious amateur photographer. Knowing how much Ricardo meant to me, he

Our Little House On the Prairie

came prepared to fully document our visit on film. He did shoot several rolls of film, capturing multiple views of nearly everything in sight. It was a photographic opportunity Ray will never forget—*but for all the wrong reasons!* The camera gods were very unkind to Ray that day... Some problem with his camera kept the film from going through; he didn't get a single shot! By the time Ray discovered the problem, we were long gone from Ricardo, and he was mad, embarrassed, and ready to quit photography entirely! Ray never had a chance to reshoot his lost documentary, but, fortunately for the family, he did finally forgive his camera equipment (and himself, I think!) and begin taking pictures again.

Our Cemetery

When we lived in Ricardo we had no funeral home. When a death occurred, neighbors made the casket and did all the necessary things for burial, including a prompt grave-side ceremony. At first, we did not even have a cemetery, but our father deeded a plot of land on the southeast corner of our claim for this purpose. Father's young lawyer friend, Frank Brushnahan, was the first burial in the new cemetery.²⁶ When we left Ricardo, there were three graves, all marked by homemade wooden markers, and all personal friends of our family—a sad spot on our “lonesome prairie.”

After I moved to Carlsbad in 1978 to live near Barbara and her family, I visited several times with my former Ricardo school teacher, Mrs. Jean (Davis) Stearns; she will always be “Miss Jennie” to me. On one visit, we tried again to drive to our old homestead but found that the site had long since been enclosed by a large fenced lease and posted against trespassers.

On another visit (1980, I believe), accompanied by Barbara and a Carlsbad friend, Christine Bowers, we decided to try again to visit the old Ricardo Cemetery. Accompanied by Miss Jennie, we enlisted the help of some of her friends. The friends lived on a large ranch between Ft. Sumner and Ricardo. The rancher friend was very sympathetic but quickly told us that there was no way we could drive to the cemetery by ourselves in my '54 Buick! However,

²⁶ See aerial map, page 14, and “Community Service” in Chapter 3.

Our Little House On the Prairie

his son was home from vacation (from Texas A&M, by the way—Judson's alma mater), and the father volunteered his son to take us to the cemetery in their pickup. Barbara and Miss Jennie elected to stay at the ranch house, but Christine and I climbed into the young man's pickup, and off we went!

DeBaca Co. NM. - Ricardo Cemetery
Submitted by Harold Kilmer

The Ricardo Ricardo cemetery is located seven miles west and six miles south of Ft. Sumner, in De Baca, County.

BRUSNAHAN, C. Frank, Mar. 21, 1884 - Sept. 27, 1912.

McDONOUGH, Thomas, Nov. 28, 1855 - Jan. 19, 1915.

MINOR, Florence M., 1914 - 1933.

POLK, Bettie E., Sept. 7, 1880 - Nov. 24, 1919.

POLK, C. R., Octs. 9, 1877 (birth).

RANDOLL, Edward Everett, Died May 28, 1946, age 92 years, 9 months, and 9 days.

SANDOVAL, Eugina J., Sept. 17, 1939.

SELLARS, J. W., Dec. 25, 1864 - Aug. 14, 1917.

SMITH, Cora J., Dec. 24, 1876 - Feb. 3, 1915.

STANDLEY, Lydia Irene, July 8, 1866 - Feb. 1, 1919.

WALTER, Mable A., May 4, 1897 - Mar. 15, 1912.

FOUR unmarked graves near grave of Cora Smith, two unmarked graves near grave of Florence Minor, two unmarked graves near grave of E. E. Randall, three unmarked graves near grave of Mable Walter, and two graves 1 mile north of Ricardo near foundation of torn down house contain a doctor and his wife.

Graves recorded in Ricardo Cemetery at the time of Mother's Visit

We had a very enjoyable visit with the young rancher, as he drove us over a very bumpy and dimly defined road to the old cemetery. When we arrived, I was glad to see that it was enclosed by a nice wire fence and that the wide gate was well marked: "Ricardo Cemetery." Our young driver helped us from the truck, opened the heavy gate, and told us to take our time looking around.

Our Little House On the Prairie

There were a large number of graves now, most of them well marked. I was able to locate the three oldest graves, just as I remembered them, except they were now marked by durable granite headstones.

I will always remember this trip in a special way—the surprising vitality of Miss Jennie in her 90-plus years,²⁷ and the kindness of the rancher and his son. That's the way I remember all the people from my early days in Ricardo...

From deep-green East Texas to a hot and dry prairie homestead in New Mexico Territory, the Madison and Julia Todd family were now headed to hot, dry, alkaline, far West Texas, where they would become important figures in the history of Pecos, Texas. Please read the rest of our family saga in Appendix A3 Page 142. RayMack

²⁷ “Miss Jennie” married Joel V. Stearns in 1914. They owned and operated the Fort Sumner Leader newspaper for many years. Miss Jennie became the superintendent of schools, served as the first secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and was elected as probate and magistrate judge. She passed away in April 1989 at the age of 99.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Chapter 10: My First School Teaching Assignment

I'm adding this lovely little story about Mother's life as a young school teacher, a glimpse of her young adulthood. I found it just as I was about to publish the 2nd Edition...Ray Mack

My family roots are in Upshur County, Texas, but we moved to a homestead in New Mexico Territory in 1908 when I was seven years old. We lived there until I was fifteen, when we moved to Pecos, Texas. I finished high school in Pecos, graduating in 1920.

In 1921, the first year after I graduated from Pecos High School, I took an examination for a teaching certificate at the courthouse in Lubbock, Texas. I received a temporary certificate to teach. School teaching was in my blood; many in my family for generations were teachers...



Our Little House On the Prairie

My first teaching job was for the School Board in Cochran County, Texas, in the area of the state known as “the panhandle.” Less than 100 people lived in the county at this time. I was hired to live and teach on the large and remote Surrat Ranch. This ranch covered 55 sections (35,200 acres) and was owned by Marshall Surrat (1849-1927), a wealthy attorney and district judge who lived in Waco, Texas. Because of this remoteness, several teachers had already been hired but left before finishing the school year. I was determined to meet the challenge!

I was to teach the three children of the ranch foreman who lived on the ranch. The school board furnished and paid for this teaching position because of the remote home of the children. I worked for the foreman, and he provided a room for the teacher in his home. Half of the room was my bedroom, and the other half was fixed up with a table and benches for the classes.

I stayed the entire nine months. My parents came to see me once, and I went home for a two-weeks visit at Christmas. Of course, there were a lot of cowboys, and I was the most popular young lady around! I guess I really was the young “school marm” often portrayed in Western stories! However, the only social life we had was when ranchers would meet at someone’s home for a square dance. This happened only occasionally because everyone on the ranch worked from dawn to dusk.

I remember the ranch had one old car that we infrequently drove to town. It was parked on a ramp so that it would be easy to start, and the cowboys sometimes built a small fire under the ramp to warm the car and the engine in winter! I also remember that we had to open 17 gates between the Surrat Ranch and Littlefield, Texas!

I met the challenge of my first job and made several life-long friends, including a cowboy who became a well-known western artist. I also gained a rich understanding of ranching people and the environment they lived in.

Our Little House On the Prairie

The next winter, I continued my education at North Texas State Teachers College in Canyon, Texas. I received my permanent teaching certificate, and my next teaching position was in Shallowater, Texas (1923-25), where I was to meet my future husband, Neil Thompson!

[Surrat Territory](https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=167632): <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=167632>

Our Little House On the Prairie

Appendix

Our Little House On the Prairie

**A1 - Facebook Group:
"Ricardo New Mexico Homesteads"**

Ray Mack Thompson

In 2015, I organized a Facebook Group intended to attract descendants of families who homesteaded in or near Ricardo, in New Mexico Territory.

Surely, some of our families knew each other way back then! To date, our "homesteading group has attracted over 60 members. The following are edited posts in this group thru 8/30/22. By the way, a "Group" is always in reverse date order. So read it backward for the best understanding!

Ricardo New Mexico Homesteads

Public group - 67 members

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Ricardo, New Mexico Territory no longer exists, but in the years 1990-1920, many families settled on homesteads in DeBaca County, near the original town. This page is devoted to bringing together families whose ancestors were some of those homesteaders. My grandparents, Madison & Julia Todd, and their two children: Zorene (my mother) and Judson (my uncle), moved to Ricardo and lived on their homestead for 8-1/2 years before moving to Texas. Zorene wrote a book about living there, which I'm now republishing with additional information I've researched. In the process, I've been in contact with a number of other descendants by e-mail. However, since Facebook has become so central to our family communications, I decided to create this page to try and contact others interested in the heritage of their pioneering family members. If this subject is of interest to you, I hope you will join our group! I still prefer EMAIL, and I hope to hear from you at his address: raymack@mac.com

POSTINGS

Jacalyn Carley

Ray, you are amazing! thanks for all your research and all the clarity you are bringing to that most forlorn place. I don't check in as often as I would like, but every time I am amazed at what you have added. The pdfs are amazing. And YES! imagine luring poor families to give up everything they have and move to the middle of an arid and in part, poisoned water desert by telling them Rain Follows the Plow. How inhumane. The railroads and the gov in cahoots - getting settlers. and then, it wasn't officially yours unless you lived and 'farmed' it for 5 full years. Lots of time for hunger and pain. My goodness. Thanks s-o-o much for all your interesting additions!

Ray Thompson Admin

Jacalyn, thanks for all of YOUR help! Hey! You should write a book? Or a screenplay?

Ray Thompson Admin

I'm excited to have made contact with the daughter of Mary Mizysak on Facebook! Of course, Mary passed earlier this year, but I did get a picture of her! Lovely lady! We enjoyed several years of e-mails about Ricardo but she never told me much about herself or her family.



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin uploaded a file.

Not sure how pdf's work in a group? Anyway, found this pdf listing all homesteads in DeBaca County. If you can't get it from this post, let me know, and I will e-mail it to you if interested.

DeBaca Homesteads.pdf

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Well, folks, I'm ready to print the 2nd Edition of "Our Little House on the Prairie!" I've added material to the 2018 draft, including the contents of this Facebook Group, and tried to do a better job of editing. This will fulfill an unspoken promise to my dear Mother to give her story wider circulation. This group has helped me keep this promise. Thank you!

The 2nd Edition will be a 220-page full-color, hardback book. I have a list of family, friends, collaborators, schools, and libraries who will receive a copy. It will take me a while to distribute these copies, but when that is complete, I will send a pdf copy to any of you who would like to have it. Please contact me by e-mail to request a copy: Ray Thompson - raymack@mac.com.

Since I'm not printing large quantities, it looks like the hardback edition will cost between \$35 and \$40, including wrapping and shipping; all of these costs have gone up! Before I set my print quantity, I'm glad to take orders from anyone that would like a copy or copies. No need to send money now, but please contact me with your order, including your mailing address: Ray Thompson - raymack@mac.com.

I hope our Group here will continue... Just this morning, I heard from a person who, as a boy, has a memory of helping his Dad tear down the old Ricardo School House! Thanks again for your support and help. At 92 years, my life has been bountifully blessed by my Lord, Jesus Christ. Working on the book is one of those blessings! Bye R@y

Ray Mack Thompson Admin uploaded a file.

In the wonderful Prologue to Mother's book (written and donated by my dear friend, Jacalyn Carley), the author writes: "The mule riders and covered wagon folk had been lured by advertising, standard 3x5 inch inserts in newspapers: The Rain Follows the Plow." It seems that in the early 1900s this theory was widely held—truly believed as good science. In searching on Newspapers.Com, I find numerous published stories on the subject; an example is below. However, going forward a few years, news stories begin to point to rainfall records which refute the old theory.

Our Little House On the Prairie

The Topeka Daily Capital (Topeka, Kansas) • 2 Aug 1908

RAIN FOLLOWS THE PLOW. The water all ran off to the stream that carried it to the ocean. The more the sod was broken up, the more moisture is absorbed and the damper the climate became. Gradually the whole country was broken up. When the rain came, it was absorbed by the plowed fields to be given off in evaporation that led to summer showers. Vast quantities of trees sucked up the moisture from the 'underflow -the great sheet of water that underlies this whole country and transpiring it through their leaves dampened the atmosphere and added to the humidity. Thus slowly but surely, the climate changed from arid to semi-arid and from that to humid. The rainfall became distributed instead of coming in torrential rains. In the spring with long dry summers, the rainfall is distributed throughout the summer, through June, July, August, and September. Maturing crops that formerly faded under the drouths of midsummer and the hot winds. "Rain follows the plow" used to be a well-beloved adage throughout this country. For a while, it seemed to be a fallacy, but in the past ten years, it has reasserted itself. **Rain Best.pdf**

- **Jacalyn Carley**

but how in the world did they survive???? nothing grew there. to this day, it takes the entire town and all surrounding parcels to produce enough brush to feed a few head of cattle. Nothing grows. How did they survive for 8 1/2 years? In our telling, it was just a dry place; the only water was in the RR water tower and a pump in the middle of town. That's why it was called one of the many jerkwater towns ... someone (i.e., my grandfather or my father and his brothers) had to climb on top of the train, connect the gutter and pull the cord, jerking the water spout to open it!

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

The Ricardo Hotel! Found on Newspapers.com

The Fort Sumner Review (Fort Sumner, New Mexico) • 11 Sep 1909



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Well, folks, I'm ready to print the 2nd Edition of "Our Little House on the Prairie!" I've added material to the 2018 draft, including the contents of this Facebook Group, and tried to do a better job of editing. This will fulfill an unspoken promise to my dear Mother to give her story wider circulation. This group has helped me keep this promise. Thank you!

The 2nd Edition will be a 220-page full-color, hardback book. I have a list of family, friends, collaborators, schools, and libraries who will receive a copy. It will take me a while to distribute these copies, but when that is complete, I will send a pdf copy to any of you who would like to have it. Please contact me by e-mail to request a copy: Ray Thompson - raymack@mac.com.

Since I'm not printing large quantities, it looks like the hardback edition will cost between \$35 and \$40, including wrapping and shipping; all of these costs have gone up! Before I set my print quantity, I'm glad to take orders from anyone that would like a copy or copies. No need to send money now, but please contact me with your order, including your mailing address: Ray Thompson - raymack@mac.com.

I hope our Group here will continue... Just this morning, I heard from a person who, as a boy, has a memory of helping his Dad tear down the old Ricardo School House! Thanks again for your support and help. At 92 years, my life has been bountifully blessed by my Lord, Jesus Christ. Working on the book is one of those blessings! Bye R@y

Ray Mack Thompson Admin uploaded a file.

In the wonderful Prologue to Mother's book (written and donated by my dear friend, Jacalyn Carley), the author writes: "The mule riders and covered wagon folk had been lured by advertising, standard 3x5 inch inserts in newspapers: The Rain Follows the Plow." It seems that in the early 1900s this theory was widely held—truly believed as good science. In searching on Newspapers.Com, I find numerous published stories on the subject; an example is below. However, going forward a few years, news stories begin to point to rainfall records which refute the old theory.

The Topeka Daily Capital (Topeka, Kansas) • 2 Aug 1908

RAIN FOLLOWS THE PLOW. The water all ran off to the stream that carried it to the ocean. The more the sod was broken up, the more moisture is absorbed and the damper the climate became. Gradually the whole country was broken up. When the rain came, it was absorbed by the plowed fields to be given off in evaporation that led to summer showers. Vast quantities of trees ducked up the moisture from the 'underflow' - the great sheet of water that underlies this whole country and transpiring it through their leaves dampened the atmosphere and added to the humidity. Thus slowly but surely, the climate changed from arid to semi-arid and from

Our Little House On the Prairie

that to humid. The rainfall became distributed instead of coming in torrential rains. In the spring with long dry summers, the rainfall is distributed throughout the summer, through June, July, August, and September. Maturing crops that formerly faded under the drouths of midsummer and the hot winds. "Rain follows the plow" used to be a well-beloved adage throughout this country. For a while, it seemed to be a fallacy, but in the past ten years, it has reasserted itself. **Rain Best.pdf**

- **Jacalyn Carley**

but how in the world did they survive???? nothing grew there. to this day, it takes the entire town and all surrounding parcels to produce enough brush to feed a few head of cattle. Nothing grows. How did they survive for 8 1/2 years? In our telling, it was just a dry place; the only water was in the RR water tower and a pump in the middle of town. That's why it was called one of the many jerkwater towns ... someone (i.e., my grandfather or my father and his brothers) had to climb on top of the train, connect the gutter and pull the cord, jerking the water spout to open it!

Ray Thompson Admin

Again searching on Newspapers.com, the small town of Ricardo seems to have been, for the times, a good place to live, *if NOT to homestead!* However, from Mother's account, her family managed a happy everyday life as homesteaders. They lived on their homestead for 8-1/2 years. The "magic carpet" of the day, the railroads, brought them frequent visits from family in East Texas. Here are a few newspaper clippings of the day touching on social life in Ricardo.

Evansville Courier and Press (Evansville, Indiana) - 5 Sep 1908

Walter J. Grubb has gone to Ricardo, New Mexico, to join his brother, V. F. Grubb.

(Belleville, Illinois) - 2 Mar 1929

Clinton Heiligenstein, aviator who spent the winter months in Ricardo, New Mexico, arrived safely home, Wednesday, at 3:30 p. m. in company with Robert Lyrick, of Ricardo, New Mexico. Heiligenstein has several very important positions offered him, but has not fully decided which one he will accept.

The Minco Minstrel (Minco, Oklahoma) - 9 Oct 1908

Mrs. R. O. Williams returned on Sunday night from a two weeks' visit with Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Williams, at Ricardo, New Mexico.

The Modesto Bee (Modesto, California) - 1 Mar 1916,

Mr. Alf Carson of Ricardo, N. M., and Miss Millie Bowen of Oklahoma, were married recently in New Mexico. Mr. Carson moved from Standford about a year ago.

Our Little House On the Prairie

**The State Journal (Mulhall, Oklahoma) ·
21 Jul 1911**

PARSON'S POEN A GEM.
From Rev. H. Stubenvoll, Alhison, Ia., in praise of Dr. King's New Life Pills. "They're such a health necessity, in every home these pills should be. If other kinds you've tried in vain, use Dr. King's and be well again. Only 25 cents at Hatfield's Corner Drug Store."

COUNTRY CORRESPONDENCE

Lone Star Briefs
BY JACK

Another fine rain here Monday evening.

Miss Laura Saxton is able to be up after a few days' illness. The long drouth was broken in

Tonkawa and Arkansas City, before returning to her home at Ricardo, New Mexico. Mrs. Barnett is a sister of Mrs. N. H. Kelso.

Roy Barker of Cedarvale has been quite sick with inflammatory rheumatism and a bowel trouble, but is now thought to be slowly improving. He is still unable to sit up, and is confined to a milk diet.

George H. Smith left Sunday evening for his home at Coalgate, Okla., after a two-days' visit with his mother and other relatives, and meeting his sister and children, the latter being here on a visit from Ricardo, New Mexico, spending the summer with her mother, and her sister, Mrs. N. H. Kelso.

Arizona Daily Star (Tucson, Arizona) · 21 Dec 1954

NOTICES

Lesemann, Dr. David Engle, Dr. John Mikel, Dr. U. M. Portman, Dr. Ralph Pailer, Dr. Ludwig Lindberg, Dr. Clarence Kuhlman, Dr. Donald Schell, Dr. Paul Holbrook, Dr. R. B. Wheeler, Dr. Hollis Brumard, Dr. George Hartman and Dr. W. C. Fink.

LYDIA CLAYTON

Funeral services for Lydia A. Clayton, 86, who died Sunday after a year's residence here, will be held at 8 tonight in Arizona mortuary chapel, with Dr. Linwood R. Berry officiating. The body will be sent to Keypart, N.J., for services and burial.

ZEPHA B. PAYNE

Funeral services for Mrs. Zepha B. Payne, 63, a Tucsonian for 23 years who died Friday, will be held at 2:30 p.m., Thursday, in Brink's chapel, with Dr. Harold L. Langer officiating. Burial will follow in South Lawn memorial park. Friends may call from 2 to 5 p.m., Wednesday.

A native Missourian, Mrs. Payne was preceded in death by her

husband, Frank F. Payne, who died four years ago.

Surviving are two daughters, Mrs. Rachel DeVaughn of Tucson and Mrs. Blanche Morris of Milan; two sons, Dwight, of Tucson, and Howard, of St. Joseph, Mo.; her father, James J. Dearing of Tucson; three sisters, Laura Dearing of Tucson, Mrs. Luella E. Myrick of Ricardo, N.M., and Mrs. Lena O'Connor of Homerville, Mo.; and three brothers, J. Frank, James and Wallace W. Dearing, all of Tucson.

ARTHUR JACKSON

Arthur Jackson, 63, of 324 East Lee street, died last Wednesday in a local hospital. He had lived in Tucson for the past one and one-half months, coming here from his native Colorado.

A veteran of World War I, Mr. Jackson is survived by a sister, Mrs. Georgia Coleman of Detroit, Mich.

The body will be sent to Fort Bliss National cemetery in El Paso, Tex., for services and burial. Brink's is handling arrangements.

GERTRUDE M.

VAN DEN HEUVEL

Mrs. Gertrude Margaret van den Heuvel, 65, a winter visitor here and a resident of Grand

Ray Thompson Admin

Found on Newspapers.com... Only 18 months after the Albuquerque Journal reported a disastrous fire in Ricardo (posted below), this optimistic puff piece appeared in the same newspaper! With a little research, I find that "commercial clubs" were quite the thing in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were usually nonprofit, but some required substantial contributions to join. Their goal was to promote the social and economic vitality of the area they served. Hey, we're talking "appurtenances here!"

Albuquerque Morning Journal (Albuquerque, New Mexico) 22 Nov 1909

COMMERCIAL CLUB FOR RICARDO ORGANIZED

Lively Village Expanding Rapidly Into a Good Sized Town; Homesteaders Arriving in Numbers.

(Staff Correspondence.) Ricardo, N. M. Nov. 1. Ricardo has given another token of its determination to break into the metropolitan class by the recent organization of a full-fledged commercial club, which has put its several and collective shoulders to the wheel and are now pushing vigorously for a bigger and better town. Ricardo is well located as a trading point and, as has been said, has its future all before it, with very little past to regret or praise. Ricardo now has two general stores, a grocery, a drug

Our Little House On the Prairie

store coming, a barber shop, a lumber yard and blacksmith shop, two hotels, a restaurant, and a beautiful concrete depot erected by the Santa Fe at a cost of \$10,000. Ricardo is blessed with a splendid water supply. In the immediate vicinity of this town, some 200 homesteads have been located, and just at present, following a slackening on account of the drouth, the home-seekers are again beginning to arrive regularly. There is perhaps more good land open to entry here than anywhere else along the cutoff: consequently, there are more business opportunities of all kinds for the newcomer.

The land is good, sandy, close land, and feed crops raised hereabouts this year will excel those raised anywhere else in eastern New Mexico. Many farmers, as a result of their first year's work, will sell anywhere from \$100 to \$500 worth of feed stuff aside from that needed for themselves. Although the severe dry season has caused some failures, there are no discouraged farmers around here, and everybody is optimistic and boosting.

Irrigation is now being discussed around here, and this spring, many of the farmers will drill wells and erect windmills and tanks for watering their crops. There was a fine rain recently, and there will be plenty of moisture for fall planting.

Ricardo also boasts of a U.S. commissioner, a Justice of the peace, and other appurtenances of civilization and is growing in a manner that warrants the most optimistic expectations. There is a good school and church with a large union Sunday school, and the population is composed of the most intelligent and thrifty farmers.

Ray Thompson Admin

[Randy Dunson](#) Here is a later map of Ricardo. Map and annotations provided by Randy Dunson!



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Thompson Admin

The Ricardo Hotel! Found on Newspapers.com

The Fort Sumner Review (Fort Sumner, New Mexico) · 11 Sep 1909, Sat · Page 8



Jac Car .Group Expert

I'm going to try to upload 2 original documents. The Interview doc is a lengthy interview w 2 drs to determine that my grandmother is insane - but criminally responsible for the murder of Brushnahan. The second doc is my grandfather, her husband, petitioning for insanity in her case. This will prove to work out ... she was never tried for murder but sent to the Las Vegas Mental Health facility. She 'eloped' as they called it, i.e., escaped, about 11 months later with help from...

Della Carley Insanity hearing.pdf

NL Garrett

Was she recaptured ever? Was the baby safe w/ her?

William Harpold

Westbound Madem Queen sitting in the siding waiting on a meet at west end Ricardo siding. Photo by Jack Delano 1943



Our Little House On the Prairie

- **Ray Thompson Admin**
- Thanks! Shows double tracks that Randy Dunson has mentioned. Do you think that is the depot...small rooftop far right?
- **Randy Dunson**
This is the west switch at Ricardo. I am guessing that the locomotive is blocking our view of the depot. It was between the siding and the house track.
William Harpold Author
Next time I'm out there, I will kick around and see if I can find any kind of foundation for the old depot, but I don't remember seeing anything
- **Randy Dunson**
There might still be a little concrete between the siding and where the house track used to be.

Ray Thompson Admin

Thanks to several who have contributed to this map, my best estimate of the perimeter of the town of Ricardo. The latest addition is the location of the depot, derived from an old railroad map provided by Randy Dunson.



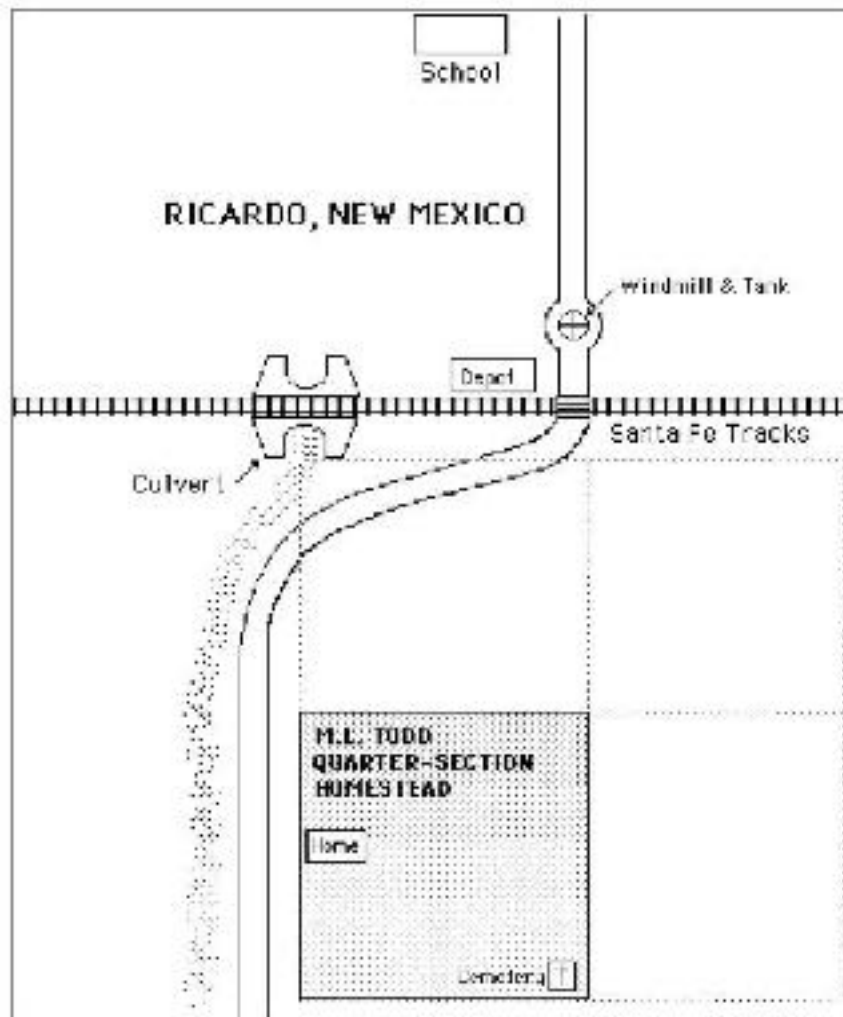
- **NL Garrett**
How cool is this!

Our Little House On the Prairie

•

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

I keep forgetting that MOST of you have not yet read Mother's book! Her story is the memories of a 7 year old girl, written down when she was an 84-year-old grandmother, but pretty amazing, I think! She does not recall very much about the town of Ricardo, but most of what she did remember is encapsulated in this diagram. I drew it for her on my very first Macintosh computer using the bit-mapped MacPaint program! We revised it several times until she thought it was the best of her memories.



•

Ken Yocom Group expert

Yes on all counts. I remember at least the foundations of the depot but didn't pay a lot of attention to it.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Here are section lines in the area of Ricardo.



Ken Yocom Group expert

Hi Ray, how do I get a pdf of your mom's book? I have read part online, I believe. I hope you are able, from the above section line picture, to see how well the map drawing fits. If you recognize the culvert as you call it and the crossing at Main...

Jac Car Group expert

Where is the graveyard on this map? The Brushnahan grave is still there.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

MAP SOURCES FOUND BY RAY THOMPSON - raymack@mac.com

I've been doing quite a bit of study on how to use the various maps on the Internet; perhaps some of you might be interested in what I've found. I hope you will share your sources with us in this Group. My info collected is pretty lengthy, so contact me by e-mail if interested. Thanks!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

A photographer friend whom I've shared the saga of publishing Mother's book suggested a title for this photo he took, positioning his camera to carefully isolate the subject of the photo: "Our Little Outhouse On the Prairie."



Ray Mack Thompson Admin

OK, with Ken Yocom's prompting, here is my latest estimate of the boundaries of Ricardo Historical!



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Here is a view from Apple Maps that actually pegs "Ricardo Historical Site!" Note the faint road leading north from the pin, then the map road labeled Ricadro Road W. Which do you think is the likely eastern Ricardo street named McCabe? Thanks!



- **Ken Yocom** Group expert

McCabe is two blocks East of Main and is likely labeled Richardo Rd. North. In the original Plat, it was more parallel to Steen, which is easily visible for its full length. I think that road has become more aligned with the true section line over time.

Ken Yocom Group expert

I believe the road North of the pin to be Steen street. It was 3 blocks long. McCabe has a fourth block between the RR right-of-way and the county road or Nelson Avenue.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Rita Rodriguez

This is the only building still standing in Ricardo. My cousin drove down and took this picture.



- **John Mulhouse**

there is one other structure still (barely) standing in Ricardo, and that's a two-story building that reportedly began life as a tuberculosis hospital (but may never have had any patients) and ended its life as headquarters for the surrounding ranch. It's directly north of the cemetery, on the other side of the tracks, just feet from where the depot once stood. It's visible from above on Google Earth, but you can see some photos in the blog post below. However, I was unaware of the building in the photo you shared, so thanks for passing it along! Is it a house?

Our Little House On the Prairie



Blog: The Ruins by the Rails: Ricardo, New Mexico

Jac Car Group Expert

I was told by the land owner that this structure was the hotel. I've done an awful lot of research and never heard of a Tuberculosis hospital. In fact, a hospital train came to Ricardo to care for Okie and Frank when my grandmother shot them.

John Mulhouse

I now know something about your family's history in Ricardo after reading Ray Mack Thompson's draft manuscript. It's very good to hear from you and, of course, I can only tell you what I've been told. The story about it originally being a TB hospital (that may never have had any patients) was passed along by Randy D. (whom I believe Ray knows) and came from an interview with Ms. Jean Stearns, a school teacher in Ricardo. I was initially told that it was the "Ricardo Hotel" (and still have it tagged as such in the FB post below, which includes the full comment from Randy D.), but a couple of people have now said it never operated as a hotel. Or at least not a "true" one. Here's a comment from the blog post: "My great grandmother is from Ricardo, so I thought I'd let you know that there was no hotel, the building you show as the hotel is actually a two-story home that was built and owned by the Michaels family. They had seven children that lived upstairs. It was also one of the first homes in the area to have indoor plumbing. The toilet was underneath the stairs adjoining the kitchen and parents' bedroom." That said, there definitely seems to have been a hotel because the "Ricardo hotel" is mentioned as having been "entirely destroyed" in the short Santa Fe New Mexican notice about the 1908 fire. Could the Ricardo Hotel then have been rebuilt?

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

My collaborator on the murder story in Mother's book was Dorothy Mizysak, now deceased. She provided me with much information about the tragic death of her uncle, Frank Brusnahan. When we met on-line, she had visited Ricardo a number of times as far back as 1914, I believe. She took pictures, but sadly the originals were lost, and even a few prints were mangled by repeated copying. Here is one that may be worth sharing. It is labeled: Ricardo Post Office, 1914."



- **Randy Dunson** Group Expert
Wonderful!

Jac Car Group expert

Totally interesting! The owner pointed out a stone structure when I was there a the post office. I will do my best to get my photos out of the boxes and posts.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ken Yocom Group expert

This Plat is on file at the county clerks office.



- **Ray Mack Thompson Admin**

Upside down! Does it give the name for plat?

- **Ray Mack Thompson Admin**

Ken, would you share a digital copy of the map you found with me? Send to raymack@mac.com

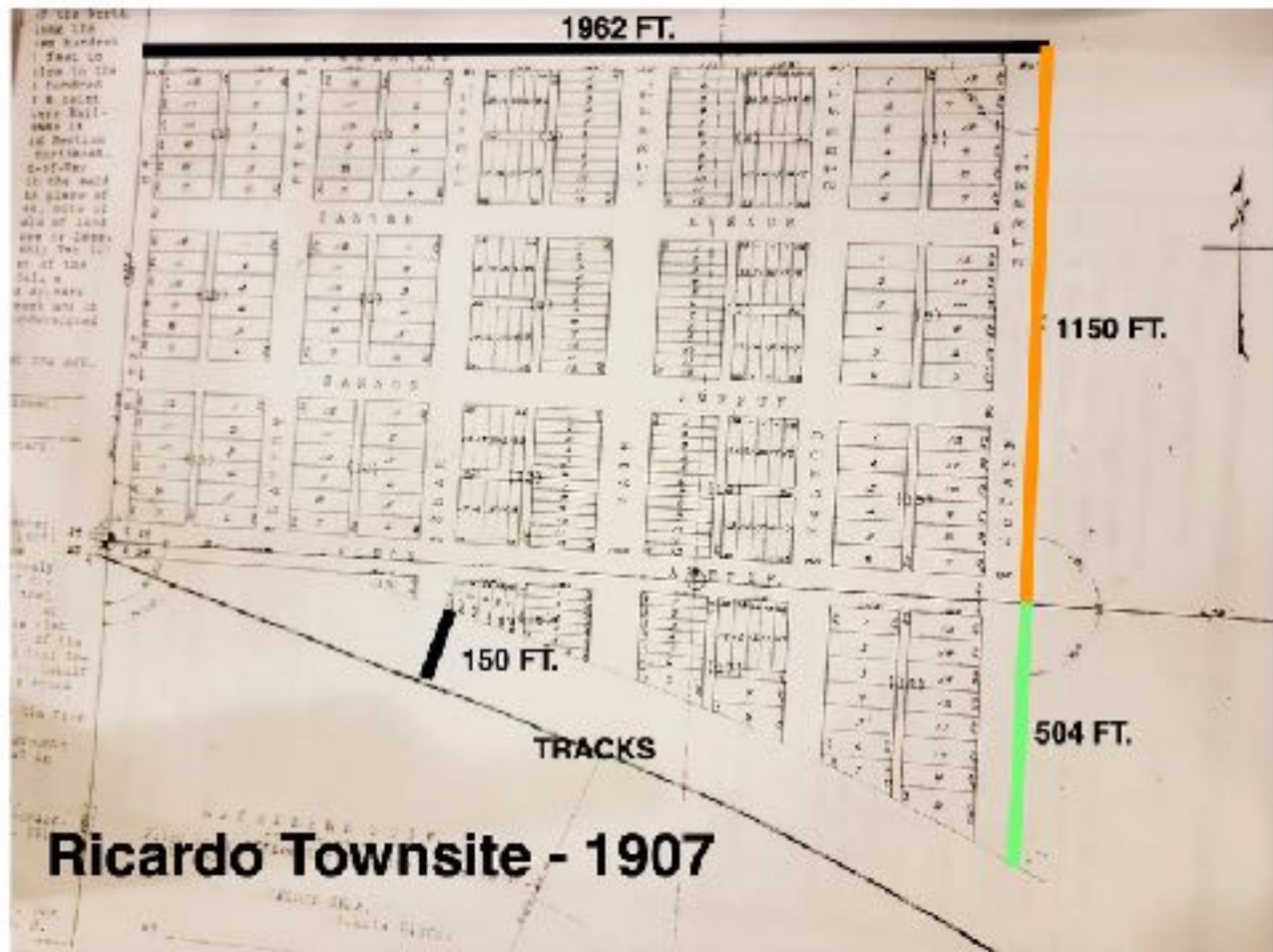
- **Ken Yocom**



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

The thought of getting drone footage over Ricardo area is exciting! In my mind, I've been trying to fit our Ricardo MAP into the current satellite view we get in Google Maps..To this end, I've done some "measuring," as you will see below. (The dimensions are just barely readable; if you read something different, let us know). Next, I'll bring up the satellite view and see if anything fits!



- **Marty McFarland**

Have you tried Google Earth? I was able to find the area by searching Ricardo, NM, and coming up with the Ricardo Cemetery, south of the area shown on Google Maps.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Thanks, Marty....Yes! I first located the Todd Homestead when I saw a tiny smug in Google Earth, which turned out to be the cemetery!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Ok, I've tried to put a vertical measurement here, roughly based on the scale shown at the bottom of the Google image. What do you think? Yeah, I ran out of room at the top. Hmm! Any ideas?



- **Marvin Hasenak**

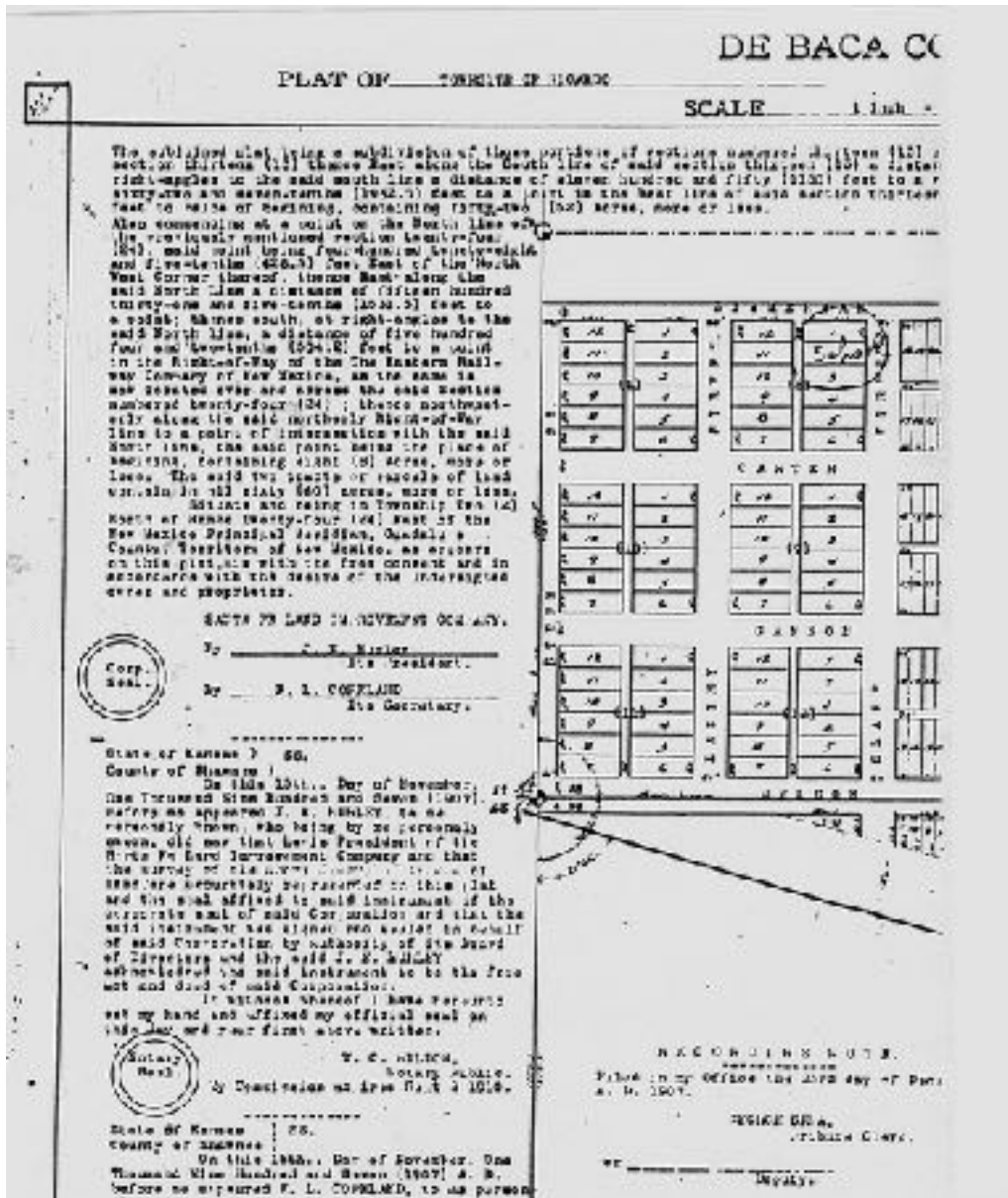
I would guess that culvert is a trestle that is fenced so the landowner can access both sides without crossing the tracks.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

From Dorothy M., I have two maps; neither of them complete are entirely readable. The first is titled “UNTY” and seems to precede the first. It might be a “DRAFT” copy or possibly a previous name for the place that never was used. I haven’t spent much time on UNTY.

Below is what I could scrape off of the 2nd map, RICARDO, with street names, although the east side of this map is incomplete, and one or more streets are missing.

Our Little House On the Prairie



Randy Dunson Group Expert

I believe Steen had the contract to build over the EP&NE at Vaughn. The station just east of Ricardo is Agudo, Spanish for Sharp.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Did anyone notice the circle place on Dorothy's map labeled "school?" That is about the same place (north edge of Ricardo) that my Mother placed the school, which she attended!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Now that Ken Yocum has found us a complete map, it would be interesting to speculate about just where the map fits into the barren landscape we see today. Mother is very clear that Ricardo was north of the tracks. I can't see any notation about tracks on the map. Things that would be interesting to place on the map: Depot, Post Office, School, Frank's office...



•

Marty McFarland

Good morning, Ray. I may have misunderstood your statement about the railroad tracks and if so, please forgive my comment. I think the dark line through the image is railroad tracks, not roadways. When I enlarge the image, I think I see the ties of the railbed.

Our Little House On the Prairie

William Harpold

The depot sat on the north side of the tracks.



- **Ray Mack Thompson Admin**

Thanks, William! Actually, the original of this photo was preserved by my Mother, and I first shared in on the web several years ago, where it has been well received, especially by railroad buffs! Glad to have you in our group!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Bob Peck

I am Bob Peck. I am a retired accountant and live in California. My grandfather (James aka Joseph Peck, aka Max Peck) was allegedly married to Okie Zimmerman about ten years after the shooting. So, Okie was my step-grandmother. Okie was a colorful woman, and Max was pretty much her equal in some things. I am looking forward to seeing Ray's book soon.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Welcome, Bob! Okie was the girlfriend of the murdered man, Frank Bresnahan...

Bob Peck

And Okie herself was shot in the head, as documented by Jacklyn's research. They never removed the bullet, and she ended up dying of a cerebral hemorrhage 25 years later. I would not know about any of this but for the Internet. Years ago, I posted a search for Okie Zimmerman, correctly thinking that there has ever been only one woman with that name. In response to my posting, I heard from Jacklyn Carley, living 5,800 miles away in Berlin, which later led me to make contact with Ray Mack.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

From Dorothy Mizysak. I have two maps; neither of them complete are entirely readable. The first is titled "UNTY" and seems to precede the first. It might be a "DRAFT" copy or possibly a previous name for the place that never was used. I haven't spent much time on UNTY.

Below is what I could scrape off of the 2nd map, RICARDO, with street names, although the east side of this map is incomplete, and one or more streets are missing. By the way, I'm sure that our group member, Jacalyn Carley, had this map because she used the street names in her "Prologue" of the times, which she graciously gave me permission to use in Mother's book.

You will find a puzzle about the plat below; at least it is a puzzle to me! The deed (?) to the town of Ricardo, De Baca County, New Mexico Territory, was filed in Kansas, county of Shawnee!

(Following transcribed from partial map of a plat of townsite Ricardo.)

RICARDO STREET NAMES 1907

East-West: Zimmerman, Carter, Gannon, Nelson

North-South: Steen, Lantry, Sharp??? (some streets missing)

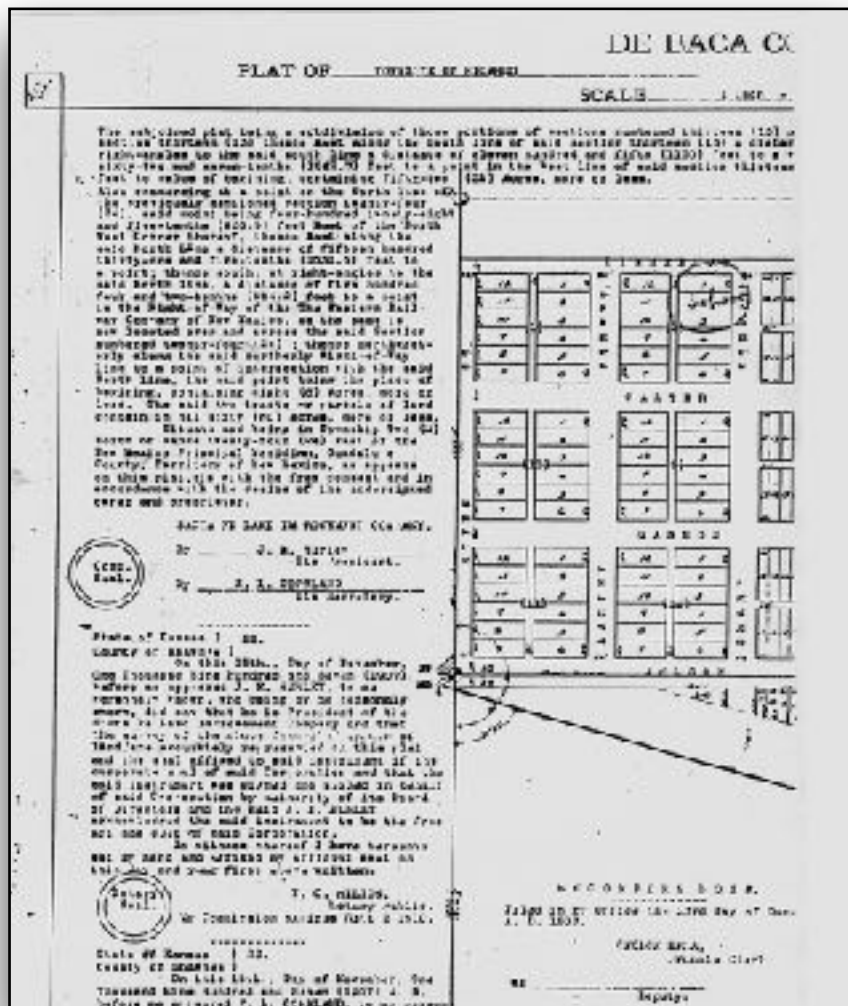
Our Little House On the Prairie

DE BACA COUNTY PLAT OF TOWNSITE OF RICARDO

State of Kansas County of Shawnee

On the 15th Day of November 1907, Before me appeared J. E. HURLEY, to me personally known, who being by me personally sworn, did say that he is President of the Santa Fe Land Improvement Company and that the survey of the above XXXXXXXXXXXXX land are accurately xxxxxx Xxx this lat and the sale affixed to said instrument is the corporate seal of said Corporation and that the said instrument was signed and sealed in behalf of said Corporation by authority of its Board of Directors and the said J. E. Hurley acknowledged that said instrument to be the xxxx and deed of said Corporation. In here witness whereof I have herxxx set my hand and affixed my official seal on this day and year first written above.

T. C. X ILTON Notary Public



Ray Mack ThompsonAdmin

Jacalyn Carley: Do you have a better image of the map?

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

I've been trying to contact the friends and family of Dorothy Mizysak thru Facebook, but with no success through Messenger. There are several Jake Brusnahan's listed, but now of them have responded. Does anyone have any ideas on how to get their attention?

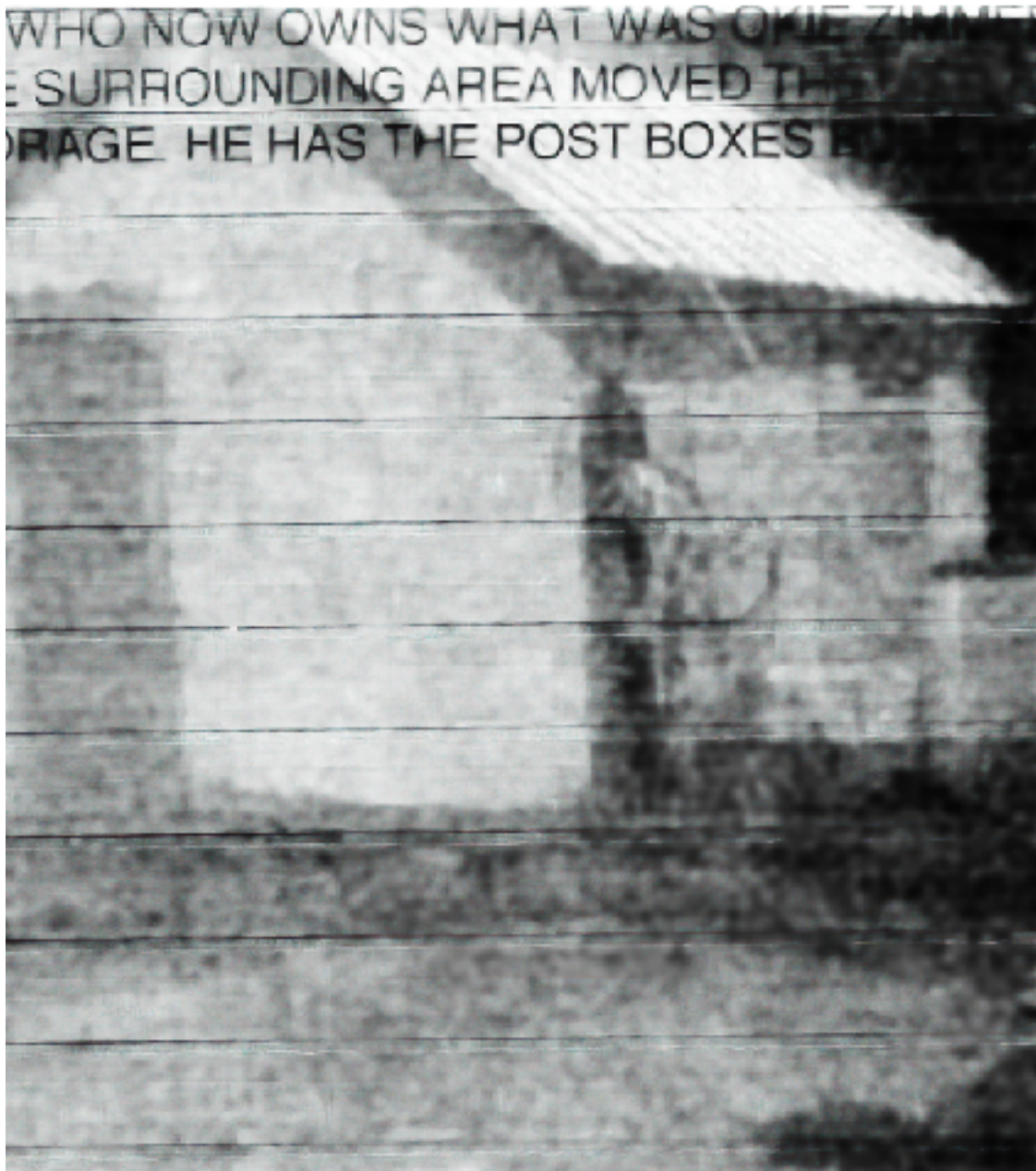
Ray Mack Thompson Admin



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Here are two more pictures from Ricardo I have tried to recover from Dorothy's Xerox copies of prints. I've tried everything I know with Photoshop and Topaz filters, but at most, they are a curiosity. Perhaps the most useful thing is the text on one of the pictures. Even this is not all readable. Here is my best guess: THE RANCHER WHO NOW OWNS WHAT WAS OKIE ZIMMERMAN'S HOMESTEAD AND ALL OF THE SURROUNDING AREA MOVED THE XXXXX POST OFFICE TO USE IT FOR STORAGE. HE HAS THE POST BOXES BXXXXXTO XXXXXME (? BROUGHT TO HIS HOME?)



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

SECOND, why not just take County Rd. I-20 west from I-20? The road is labeled "Ricardo Road" on some maps! This road appears to dead-ends at the middle of Ricardo! Also, from a little way back, there is a road running due north to US60, also called County Rd. I-20. However, it may be a private road.

Ken Yocom

I was there about a year ago, and that is the way I went. I believe I went on the old Ricardo road.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

I wish I could drive this route myself! Nope, we need SOMEONE to check it out! I compiled this after consulting two different maps: Google and Apple. They don't agree on road names, so I've tried to list ALL of them. Hope someone can drive and tell us the correct names!

DIRECTIONS TO HISTORIC TOWN OF RICARDO NM FROM FT. SUMNER NM:

From US 60 just West of Ft. Sumner, to:

NM 20 South to:

County Road I-20 W.,
also known as Ricardo Rd. W.
also known as Avenger Rd.

Turns north as Bigote Rd.

(Along here is the nearest approach to Ricardo Cemetery, off road, East)

(Bigote Rd. dead ends at the historic location of Ricardo, NM & AT&SF Railroad)

(County Road I-20 W. may continue north To US 60, but may be private road.)

Chad Samora

I'm going to check it out this weekend.

Ken Yocom

Do you want to go to the cemetery or to the remains of the old hotel?

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

My collaborator on the murder story in Mother's book was Dorothy Mizysak, now deceased. She provided me with much information about the tragic death of her uncle, Frank Brusnahan. When we met online, she had visited Ricardo a number of times as far back as 1914, I believe. She took pictures, but sadly the originals were lost, and even a few prints were mangled by repeated copying. Here is one that may be worth sharing. It is labeled: Ricardo Post Office, 1914."

Our Little House On the Prairie



Chad Samora

I love it! It's nice to see any pictures of Ricardo!

Randy Dunson

Wonderful!

Rita Rodriguez July

This is the only building still standing in Ricardo. My cousin drove down and took this picture.



Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Rita, thanks! Any more exact info about this view? Direction? Close to road/railroad? Thanks!

Rita Rodriguez

This building is located less than 100 yards off highway 20 around mile marker 13. There is an outhouse in the back that is still standing as well.

John Mulhouse

Rita there is one other structure still (barely) standing in Ricardo, and that's a two-story building that reportedly began life as a tuberculosis hospital (but may never have had any patients) and ended its life as headquarters for the surrounding ranch. It's directly north of the cemetery, on the other side of the tracks, just feet from where the depot once stood. It's visible from above on Google Earth, but you can see some photos in the blog post below. However, I was unaware of the building in the photo you shared, so thanks for passing it along! Is it a house?

<https://cityofdust.blogspot.com/.../the-ruins-by-rails...>

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

I wish I could drive this route myself! Nope, we need SOMEONE to check it out! I compiled this after consulting two different maps: Google and Apple. They don't agree on road names, so I've tried to list ALL of them. Hope someone can drive and tell us the correct names!

FIRST, here is Google's way to get there: 38 min (20.7 miles) via NM-20 S and Renegade Rd Fastest route now due to traffic conditions See more

Chad Samora

I'm going to check it out this weekend.

Ken Yocom

Do you want to go to the cemetery or to the remains of the old hotel?

Chad Samora

Are there any pictures of Ricardo in existence? My paternal Grandmother was born and raised in Ricardo. I would love see pictures of the town.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Chad, Mother's book has a number of pictures of their homestead, but none of the town except the depot. However, City of Dust has a very few pictures of the ruins.

https://cityofdust.blogspot.com/2016/05/the-ruins-by-rails-ricardo-new-mexico.html?fbclid=IwAR2Dx16seY9UYJalD5lQrUvAuSoR7liMfMr5ZXsDoLEFQVB_hS5Vk-BAQQk

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Also on [NewsPapers.com](#), found this story about a bad fire in Ricardo, preceded by a similar file in Clovis.

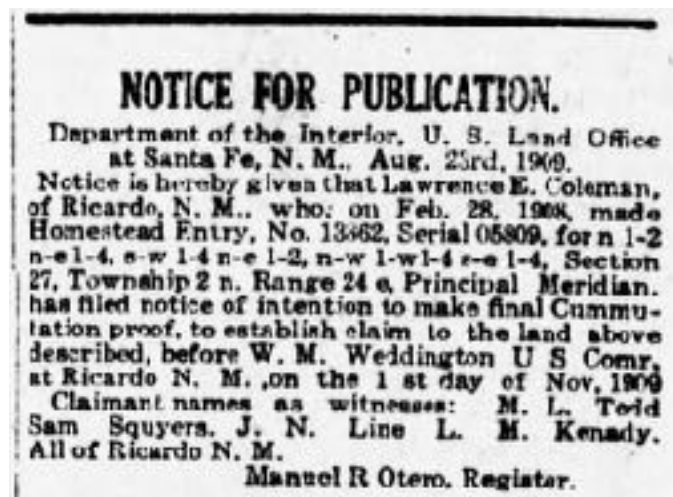
Albuquerque Journal 14 May 1908

TOWN OF RICARDO ALSO VISITED BY BAD FIRE

News has reached Clovis of a disastrous fire the other day at Ricardo, a village in Roosevelt county, the loss being some \$25,000, many of the principal buildings being burned. The large wholesale and retail store of Grosh & Strayhorn, the Ricardo hotel and barber shop, and several other buildings were entirely destroyed. The explosion of cartridges in the hardware department of the Grosh & Strayhorn store late at night was the first sign of the fire. In spite of the work of a bucket brigade, the fire burned until it burned itself out.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

I found this on [Newspapers.com](#)....there are thousands of them in New Mexico newspapers, weekly. I happened to find this one because I was searching for my grandparents, M.L. Todd. But, NOTE the names that appear as "witnesses!" It brings some of our ancestors in the group together! Surely they knew each other?



Our Little House On the Prairie

Rita Rodriguez

My great grandparents lived in Ricardo New Mexico in the early 1900 s.
Their last name was Olivas. My grandmother's name was Geneva Olivas

Fix Jess

Hello everyone I'm currently in Washington State, but will be moving to New Mexico in the next couple of weeks. I am in many homesteading groups here in Washington and am looking to find some like-minded people in my soon-to-be new home state.

Steve'n Maureen Westphal

Here is a postcard sent by my great grandfather to great uncle Tom Kenady just after he and my grandfather arrived in Ricardo. The pink note at the top left was added by my grandfather 44 years later.



Jacalyn Carley: "Dig your cave soon!" What good advice to keep out of the heat! The Kenady's were prominent citizens, at least it appears so on the 1910 census. Also love, "Tis quiet here but twil liven up soon!" Thanks for posting!

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

What a treasure! Let's hope we get some new posters soon!

Steve'n Maureen Westphal



This is a photo of Thomas Kenady and their family from about 1915. Great Uncle Tom took the 1910 census in Ricardo and listed himself as a lumber yard manager. Wife Clara and son Victor were also counted in the census. Their youngest son Oliver was born in 1910, after the census. I think they resided in Ricardo from 1908 - 1914, then relocated to Chicago.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Steve'n many thanks for this post! I'm still hopeful that others with family ties to Ricardo will find this page, and I appreciate the few who have taken an interest.

Jacalyn Carley

My great grandmother shot the postmistress and her boyfriend, C. Frank Brusnahan when they tricked the RR into having her fired from her position as Night Operator; Frank died. My grandfather was the Station Master (Telegrapher). There were 3 children, and she was pregnant with the 4th.

Others from her family, the Squyres, also lived in Ricardo, which I did not know until I found the census, as her family was from Texas. It was a short and terrible adventure in Ricardo for the whole family. "The plow did not bring the rain", and prayer didn't change a thing. Nothing but dust and bad luck, tempers, and poverty.

Jacalyn Carley

In the book 'Living in the Depot - the Two-Story Railroad Station' by H. Roger Grant there are a few pages about the stations on the Belen Cut-off, of which Ricardo was a critical part. (p.33) Also a floor plan, and Vaughn NM is mentioned, which was a stop after Ricardo.

Also, there's a book called "New Mexico's Railroads" by Myrick. I never found out if he was the son of the last couple living in Ricardo, the Myricks. I know from Ted McCullom that the post office stamp was only retired in the 1950s, after Mrs. Myrick died, which is why Ricardo remained on many state maps throughout the 50s. My grandfather was station master until 1913/14.

It's amazing that people kept coming and applying for land even up to 1915. it was already clear there was no making a living or even feeding a family, and that the railroad was not helping anyone.

Admin: Ray Mack Thompson

Jacalyn, I envy your research notes!

Our Little House On the Prairie

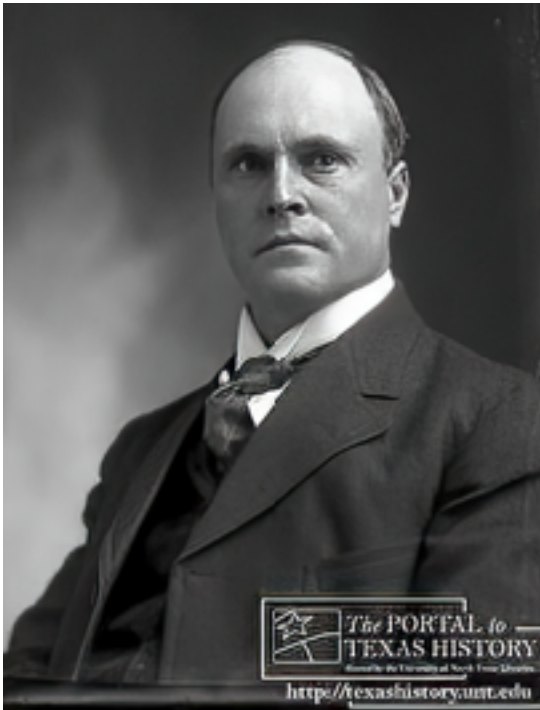
Steve'n Maureen Westphal

US Census for Ricardo NM 1910

STATE New Mexico DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
COUNTY Lincoln THIRTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES
TOWNSHIP OR OTHER DIVISION OF COUNTY Ricardo NAME OF INSTITUTION 6

LOCATIONS	NAME	RELATION	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION										Place of birth of each person and parents at date of birth in territory
			Sex	Color	Age	Marital	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Never married	Place of birth of this person	
1	Witchell, Emma S	Daughter	F	W	22	3							New Mexico
2	Frederick, George H	Son	M	W	20	3							New Mexico
3	Riegle, Walter T	Son	M	W	18	7							New Mexico
4	Beal	Wife	F	W	20	7	1	1					Texas
5	James	Daughter	F	W	2	8							Texas
6	Beal, Laura M	Head	M	W	35	5							New Mexico
7	Anderson, Regina D	Head	M	W	24	8							Texas
8	Small, George W	Head	M	W	29	9							Arkansas
9	Small, P	Wife	F	W	25	9	2	2					Texas
10	Thompson, J	Son	M	W	8	8							Arkansas
11	Thompson, M	Son	M	W	2	8							Arkansas
12	Lucas, Victoria J	Head	M	W	30	7							Texas
13	Lucas, Carrie E	Wife	F	W	30	7	4	4					Texas
14	Lucas, George	Daughter	F	W	5	8							Texas
15	Lucas, George H	Son	M	W	7	8							Texas
16	Lucas, George M	Son	M	W	2	8							Texas
17	Lucas, George	Son	M	W	8	8							Texas
18	Lucas, George	Son	M	W	34	7							New Mexico
19	Lucas, George	Head	M	W	34	7							New Mexico
20	Lucas, George	Wife	F	W	24	7	2	2					Texas
21	Lucas, George	Head	M	W	34	7							Texas
22	Lucas, George	Wife	F	W	24	7	2	2					Texas
23	Lucas, George	Head	M	W	34	7							Texas
24	Lucas, George	Wife	F	W	24	7	2	2					Texas
25	Lucas, George	Head	M	W	34	7							Texas
26	Lucas, George	Wife	F	W	24	7	2	2					Texas
27	Lucas, George	Head	M	W	34	7							Texas
28	Lucas, George	Wife	F	W	24	7	2	2					Texas
29	Lucas, George	Head	M	W	34	7							Texas
30	Lucas, George	Wife	F	W	24	7	2	2					Texas
31	Lucas, George	Head	M	W	34	7							Texas
32	Lucas, George	Wife	F	W	24	7	2	2					Texas

Our Little House On the Prairie



Steve'n-Maureen Westphal

This is a photo of my great grandfather William Weddington (U.S. Land Commissioner at Ricardo 1908-1918). It is a print from of a collection of glass plate negatives taken between 1890 and 1905 by Henrietta, Texas photographer Alice Snearly. It was first purchased in 1961 at an estate sale and then resold to novelist Larry McMurtry ("Lonesome Dove"). McMurtry loaned the collection to the University of Texas for investigation. I found this photo on their website titled, "Man in a Three-Piece Suit".



Steve'n Maureen Westphal

This is a 1912 photo of my Grandparents, Lewis and Alice Kenady with my aunt Louise. Louise (1911 - 1991), who was born in or near Ricardo, two months premature and weighing 3lb. 4oz. As per family legend, Alice kept her tiny baby warm by placing her in a shoebox among warm bricks. Not sure where the photo was taken, there may be a church in the background.

Our Little House On the Prairie

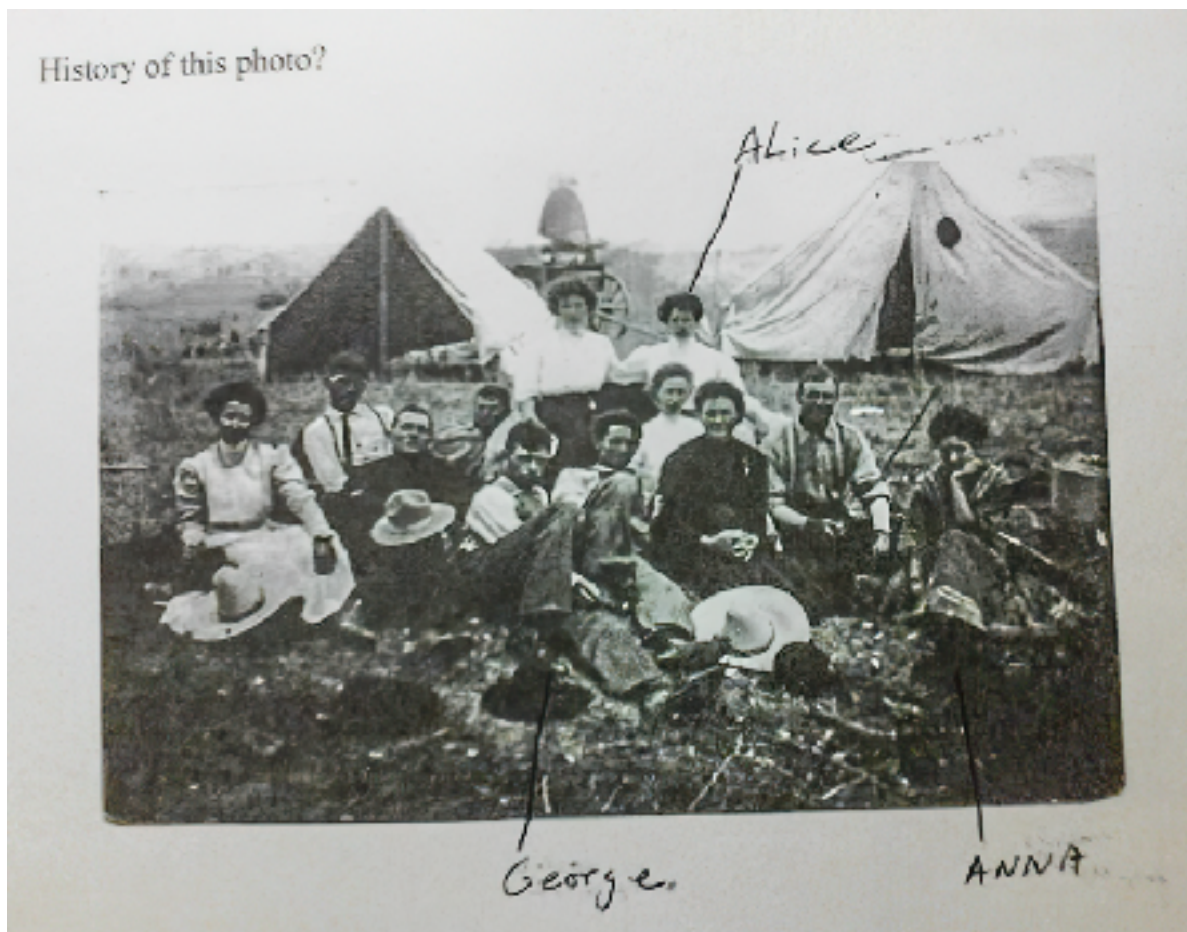
Steve'n Maureen Westphal

My grandfather, Lewis Kenady homesteaded 320 acres in sections 14 and 15 in Township two north, south of Ricardo 1908-1914. I found his "Land Patent" (dated 2/3/14) on the web last year.

In 1909 Lewis married Alice Weddington daughter of William and Ida Weddington, William was the U.S. Land Commissioner for 10 years (1908-1918); his office was in the Ricardo Hotel.

The attached photo may have been taken in the Ricardo area. My grandmother Alice (Weddington) Kenady, her sister Anna, and brother George, were identified in this photo by their sister Mabel some years ago.

Can anyone in our group name anyone else in this photo?



Our Little House On the Prairie

William P. Morrison

I have a 1998 email from Ted McCollum in which he states the following (submitted without the permission of Ted):

“My father relates the following: The old building is not actually an old hotel. A fellow named John Michaels was involved with a cattle drive in the early 1900s and they were holding cattle at or near Ricardo. He met a young lady and built the building as a house for their family. Later after World War II, one of the descendants still owned the property and either sold a part interest or all interest to someone that was going to start a nursing home. At the time, the upper floor of the building was divided into small rooms. The upper floor was originally four rooms”. That is the information from my father as he recollects from discussions with a lady named Sara Bell Hall Overton. This lady still lives in Ft. Sumner if you would like to contact her.”

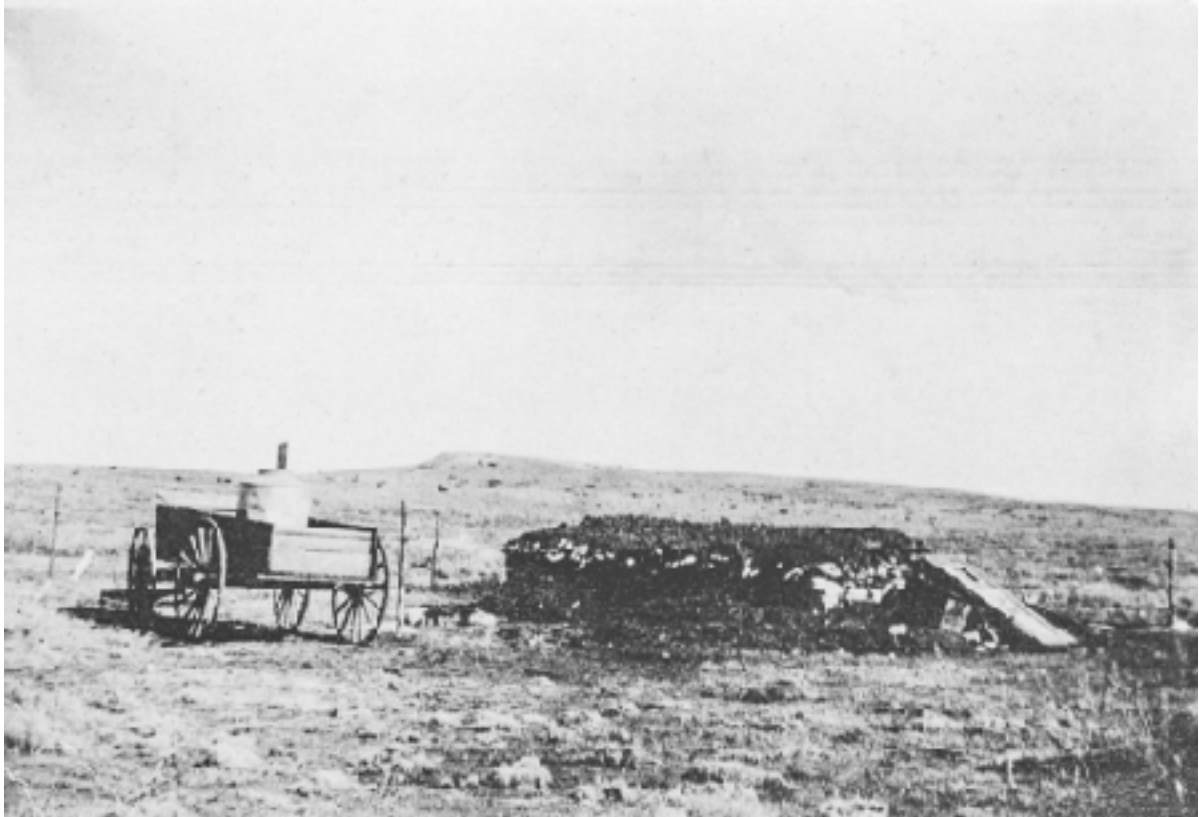
As regards the RR depot at Ricardo, it was the second water stop going West from Ft. Sumner. The first water stop was Agudo (7.8 miles West of Ft Sumner), then Ricardo (5.8 miles West of Agudo), then Evanola (6.7 miles West of Ricardo). This from “Santa Fe Depots—The Western Lines “ (1984, out of print). The book states that the Ricardo depot was built in 1908, and was a 24’X81’ stucco-concrete depot. It was retired in 1945.

William P. Morrison

My grandfather James Morrison, his brother Charles Morrison, and cousin Warren Copeland all homesteaded adjacent to each other 6 miles South of Ricardo in the 1910s. Warren's father, Lawrence Copeland also homesteaded in the area.

My "Uncle Charlie" and wife Arlie filed on their claim six miles South of Ricardo in May 1915. He stated in his 1919 final proof that in February 1916 he had finished his "house" (half-dugout) and moved into it. Ray has posted on this website an old photograph I have of this half-dugout and wagon with a water "barrel". Potable water was obtained from Conejos Spring, some 3 miles South of the dugout. The claim was just north of Yeso Creek, which had "gyp water" and was not good for drinking. The dugout claim of Warren was adjacent to Charles to the West. Charles and Warren both proved up. James joined his brother and cousin and filed on a claim adjacent to them in 1919. However, he never dug a dugout and soon gave up, returning to Gotebo, OK He relinquished his claim to John Funderbunk.

Our Little House On the Prairie



Charlie filed an additional 320-acre entry under the Stock-Raising Homestead Act in 1917, which gave him 640 acres total and exempted him from cultivation requirements. He left the homestead in 1920, going to Clovis where he worked with the railroad for a short time as a blacksmith before returning again to his hometown of Gotebo, OK. He leased his Ricardo section for grazing until 1942 when he traded the land for 160 acres in Snyder, OK.

Descendants of the Copelands still live in the Clovis-Portales area. I have more detailed information.

I also have one old photograph taken out at their homesteads of Arlie Morrison and Bernice Copeland holding a dead rattlesnake about 4 feet long on a stick.

Jacalyn Carley: My family, father's side, homesteaded in Ricardo as well as having the job of the station master, all eventually gave up and moved to Snyder. I am thinking these families must have known each other. We were the Carley's and the Squyres. Three homesteads, not a bite to eat ever grew on any of them.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

You can find records of homesteads all over the U.S. on the Bureau of Land Management Website. Here is the page where you can start your search. Try <https://debaca.nmgenweb.us> if you are interested in the Ricardo area.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Here is another link to Ricardo info on the web. I'm glad to have contributed snippets of my mother's story and a picture of the Ricardo depot to this site:

[DEBACA.NMGENWEB.US](https://debaca.nmgenweb.us)

De Baca County was created on February 28, 1917, from Guadalupe, Chaves, and Roosevelt counties. Named for Ezequiel Cabeza de Baca, the second governor of New Mexico. As of the 2010 census, the population was 2,022, making it the second-least populous county in New Mexico. The county seat is Fort Sumner.

Ray Mack Thompson Admin

Ok! Thanks to the helpful souls who have joined our group! My idea was for us to share our interests and connections with Ricardo. So, let's begin with some simple responses from you: (1) Do you know someone who lived in Ricardo, early or late? Please explain briefly. (2) Do you have family that actually filed on a homestead in Ricardo? Please explain briefly. Thanks, and please post comments and questions of your own. TELL OTHERS ABOUT OUR FLEDGLING GROUP! Bye R@y

A2 - Researching and Writing Our Family History

Ray Mack Thompson

Zorene Writes a Book

When my mother, **Zorene (Todd) Thompson**, was 87 years old, she announced to we children that she had decided to write a book about her life! She was living in her little apartment in Carlsbad, New Mexico, near her daughter **Barbara Coleman** and her family. I am Zorene's son, **Ray Mack Thompson**. I was living in the Dallas area at the time, visiting my mother and my Barbara and her family whenever I could.

Barbara and I didn't pay much attention to mother's writing project until one day, she said she was getting discouraged. We looked at her typed copy (mother was an excellent typist on her *modern* Remington Electric!) and realized she was trying to write down *everything she remembered about growing up in East Texas!* We advised, "Mother, just write the stories, and later we will put them together." "What stories do you mean?" she rejoined. We said, "Mother, write the stories that we have all *heard*, but you say we *never* get them right when we tell them! Write them down once and for all!" Well, this seemed to get mother going on a different track...

At this time, I was *in love* with my brand new *Macintosh* computer—the very first one! I persuaded mother to let me transfer her typed stories into the Mac. I had to retype them, of course, and then printed out a clean copy she could edit while she kept writing new stories. This worked! It was slow going, but gradually her writings took shape. Barbara and I soon realized that she was writing mostly about her family moving from green East Texas to a barren homestead in New Mexico Territory—*stories we had never heard!*

Thanksgiving 1988—While visiting Carlsbad, Barbara said, "Mother is having a hard time remembering things. I'm afraid if we don't get her stories

Our Little House On the Prairie

finalized soon, she may not get to enjoy what she has accomplished.” So, without telling mother what we were doing, we began arranging her “stories” into a book...

The new technical field of “desktop publishing” was a special feature of the Macintosh. I was eager to begin arranging and formatting mother’s material using the Mac’s first word-processor: MacWrite. Barbara began chasing down illustrations for the book. She found some amazing photos of the Todd family on their homestead in the family’s old photo albums. Barbara selected other drawings from a children’s encyclopedia that mother read to us as children. With mother’s coaching, I drew several small diagrams for her story on my Mac, using the “MacPaint” program.

We rushed the first copy of “Our Little House On the Prairie” (Mother had already decided on the title.) into print and presented it to mother at Christmas time, 1989. Only a few copies were printed and distributed to our closest family—especially mother’s brother’s family, the **Judson Todds**.

Well, haste makes waste, and I was soon embarrassed to find that several illustrations were misplaced; cousin **Marian Todd** pointed out numerous grammar and spelling errors as well. However, Barbara and I were just *relieved* to have “her book” in Mother’s hands—and none too soon... In the next few years, mother began to forget a lot of her life. *That is until we would bring out her book!* Then, mother’s face would light up, and she would retell the stories she had written, recalling even more details and reminding us, “Don’t forget your heritage!”

Life Gets In the Way

The years passed, and I thought time, and again I would edit and re-publish “Our Little House On the Prairie,” correct my mistakes, and give it wider circulation. But life sometimes just gets in the way...

Our Little House On the Prairie

My Writing Partner

Sister **Barbara** was a talented writer and artist, and we both enjoyed competing in recording our experiences and family history. With the arrival of her first granddaughter, I published Barbara's first book, "My Elizabeth Days."

In the late 1980s, Barbara's life was hit with the devastating disease of Parkinson's. She and her husband faced it bravely and creatively. Barbara documented the way their lives were changed by Parkinson's in her dual book, "The Parkinson's Predicament" and "A Spoonful of Sugar Helps the Bad Stuff Go Down." I was proud to self-publish it for her and the Parkinson's community in 1997. Barbara lived with Parkinson's for many more years, raising her family, writing and drawing—and *building houses!* Barbara and her husband, **John Coleman**, became great home builders, *building 11 of them—themselves!* Home No. 10 was so special that Barbara wrote a wonderful book about it, "The House In the Orchard." It began as a journal of their experiences in building homes but ended as a love poem to her beloved and talented husband, high school teacher, and builder, *John Coleman!* I was proud to publish it for her in 2002. My dear Barbara was freed from a terrible disease with her death in 2008.

Loss of a Mate

After 44 years of marriage, life dealt a blow to my life as well; I lost my first wife, **Avalyn Maddox**, to cancer in 2004. She was a loving mate and talented school teacher for 35 years. We were blessed to be members of the Skillman Church of Christ for our marriage years. We didn't have children.

A New Mate

Five years later came a string of unbelievable blessings—a *new romance, courtship, and marriage to Dorothy ("Dot") Murphy!* We were married in 2014. After our courtship, we settled in a new home in Dot's hometown, Sherman, Texas. Dot has three grown children and a bevy of greats and grand-greats that have enriched my life in wonderful ways...

Our Little House On the Prairie

The Internet

Beginning in 1978 with the very first Apple computer, the Apple II, my life has revolved around the computer. When the Internet arrived in the early 90s, I was quickly engrossed, learning and using it with my own webpage: <http://www.raymack.com>. At 70 years of age, this fascination brought me a life-changing revelation...

As adopted children, neither Barbara nor I knew anything about our birth families. Frankly, we were not interested in the subject because our mother had answered all our questions about adoption.... However, on the Internet, I found other adopted children searching for their birth families, and I was intrigued! with help from online friends, I began to search. *Unbelievably, within one year, I found the names of my birth mother and birth father!*

Although my birth mother and father were already deceased, I am blessed to have good relationships with both of my birth families. Such revelations do not always end well, but happily for me, it proved to be a great blessing and another adventure in writing. In 2009 I became absorbed in documenting the experience and self-published "The Blessings of An Adopted Child" in book form and a video DVD.

Recalling My Boyhood

While editing the 2nd Edition of "Our Little House on the Prairie," I interrupted one project to work on a different one. I decided to re-publish a story that was on my webpage for many years, garnering comments from my high school e-mail list, "My PHS Friends List." Time-wise, the brief story fits nicely *after* mother's homesteading story, telling the family fortune after they moved from New Mexico to Pecos, Texas.

I grew up in Pecos in the family business and wanted to re-publish the memories of my growing up years there. I include my story in Appendix A3 Page 142. I also published this piece of family history as a booklet: "The Origins of the Pecos Cantaloupe Industry," and sent 200 copies to the West of the Pecos Museum in Pecos for them to sell, all proceeds to the museum.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Finally, the 2nd Edition, Our Little House on the Prairie!

This project had been a trial—of my own making. I should have published the 2nd edition of mother's amazing memories *20 years ago!* Many of her (and my) family and friends who would have enjoyed it the most have passed on...

After searching for and finding my birth families, I was even more addicted to the Internet, and I wanted to see what I could find there that related to mother's writings...

[I also started a group on Facebook: "Ricardo New Mexico Homesteads," which garnered more contacts with families whose earlier generations homesteaded in New Mexico. See A1]

What to search for? Googling "Ricardo" was a lost cause because it is such a common Spanish name, but one day I was amazed; I did find a story about the town of Ricardo! *It was the same story as one of mother's—the story of a murder in Ricardo!* I contacted the webmaster where I found the story, and he replied: "Mr. Thompson if you have any interest in this story, my aunt (?), **Dorothy Mizysak** (who wrote the matching story), will hug your neck! She has spent her whole life researching the story and has visited Ricardo several times. Sadly, no one in our family is very interested."

So, I began e-mail communications with **Dorothy Mizysak**. I found that the man killed was her uncle! Many years later, she had visited what was left of Ricardo and searched the county records for information on the trial of the murderer. Dorothy had collected a mass of material, which she promptly shared with me. However, her material was a mess; no folders and lots of duplicate pages. So, I took time to put single copies in notebooks, copied portions I was interested in, and returned the notebooks to her. Dorothy was ecstatic in her e-mail response! Of course, I thought it was some kind of miracle that we had even connected—over one small paragraph!

The next day I got this e-mail: "*Oh Ray!* I have something special to send you! I was so excited about discovering it that I put it in a safe place and forgot to mail it! You will be amazed!" In a couple of days, it arrived, and you will find it on Page 71.

Our Little House On the Prairie

The young lawyer who was shot lived for four days and was able to dictate a letter to his family. *Guess who wrote the letter? My granddad, Madison Todd! Turns out they were friends in Ricardo!*

All this exciting research became Chapter 5 of the 2nd Edition, a whole new chapter that Mother, as a child, didn't remember or was never told, new material, and research to add to my long-delayed project. I finally settled down to work on the 2nd Edition...

Little miracles come along now and then in one's life, and it is good to recognize the work of our Heavenly Father! How else can you explain my discovering the matching murder story on the Internet and the unbelievable connection with my family seventy years later?

With so much new material, I first published a manuscript of the 2nd Edition in 2018 (without good editing and badly organized!), just to get it into the hands of those who had helped me with the content. Their contributions need to be acknowledged while they are still *living*!

‡ ‡ ‡ ‡ ‡ ‡

It has now been over 30 years since Barbara and I published mother's original story and four years since the manuscript of the 2nd Edition. At 92 years of age, I'm relieved to share this, the 2ND EDITION, with my families, my patient readers, and contributors.

To those of you who helped with advice or contributed content for this 2nd edition, my *sincere* thanks. It was a special pleasure to meet you online and to share our family stories. May God richly bless you and your family!

Ray Mack (raymack@mac.com)

Our Little House On the Prairie

My Family's Writings

Compiled by Ray Mack Thompson

PRINTED PUBLICATIONS

Zorene (Todd) Thompson

"Our Little House on the Prairie" 2nd Edition ISBN 978-1-7923-8395-3

"A Family Doll Story"

Barbara (Thompson) Coleman

"My Elizabeth Days"

"The Parkinson's Predicament & A Spoonful of Sugar

Helps the Bad Stuff Go Down."- ISBN 0-964-2109-2-2

"The House In the Orchard" ISBN 0-9727-384-0-1

Ray Mack Thompson

*Newsletter No. 4 - To Those That Served in the
USAFSS 6910th Security Group - Sept 2000*

"The Blessings of An Adopted Child"

"The Origins of the Pecos Cantaloupe Industry,"

"Our Son in China"

"New Life Behavior Lesson Series: English, Spanish, Russian"

"A Good Funeral"

"The Oleander Street Reunion"

WEB PAGES

Ray Mack Thompson

"An Internet Romance"

"A Very Personal Home Page" www.raymack.com

"A New Chapter in My Life" (Tribute to Dot Murphy Thompson)

"Our Secret Cold War" (My Experiences in USAFSS)

"A Lifetime of Building" (Life of Barbara & John Coleman)

"A Life Long Influence" (Tribute to Charlie Lightfoot)

"IOU, Mother" (Our Tribute to Zorene, Ray & Barbara)

"Excellence"

"The Kennedy Assassination, A Personal Memoir"

Our Little House On the Prairie

DVDs AND VIDEOS

Ray Mack Thompson

"How It All Happened - History of Apple Corps of Dallas" (2010) Produced by Ray Thompson

"The Life & Love of Julia Mackey Todd" Produced by Ray Thompson, Narration by Zorene Thompson

"Centennial DVD - Rotan, Texas Produced by Ray Thompson, Images from Dr. Maurice Callan

"Thank You JJ Pearce HS Students (Vets Day 2009) Photographed and Produced by Ray Thompson

"Hillery Visits a Public School in Tomsk, Russia (2007) Produced by Ray Thompson & Hillery Motsinger

"John and Barbara at Home in River Bend (2006) Photographed and Produced by Ray Thompson

"The English Corner" with Mike Murphy, Zhengzhou, China, 2013
"Pablo Poormouse"

POETRY

Barbara (Thompson) Coleman

"That Special Day"

"If You Don't Use It, You Might Lose It"

Ray Mack Thompson

"West Texas Weather"

"Waiting for Postscript"

"Dear Mr. Harvey"

"You Don't Know Lonesome" (for Avalyn)

"I Don't Believe It!" (for Dot)



The Origins of the Pecos Cantaloupe Industry
by Ray Mack Thompson



A3: The Origins of the Pecos Cantaloupe Industry

By Ray Mack Thompson

Original Version Published on my webpage:

<http://www.raymack.com>

My Heritage

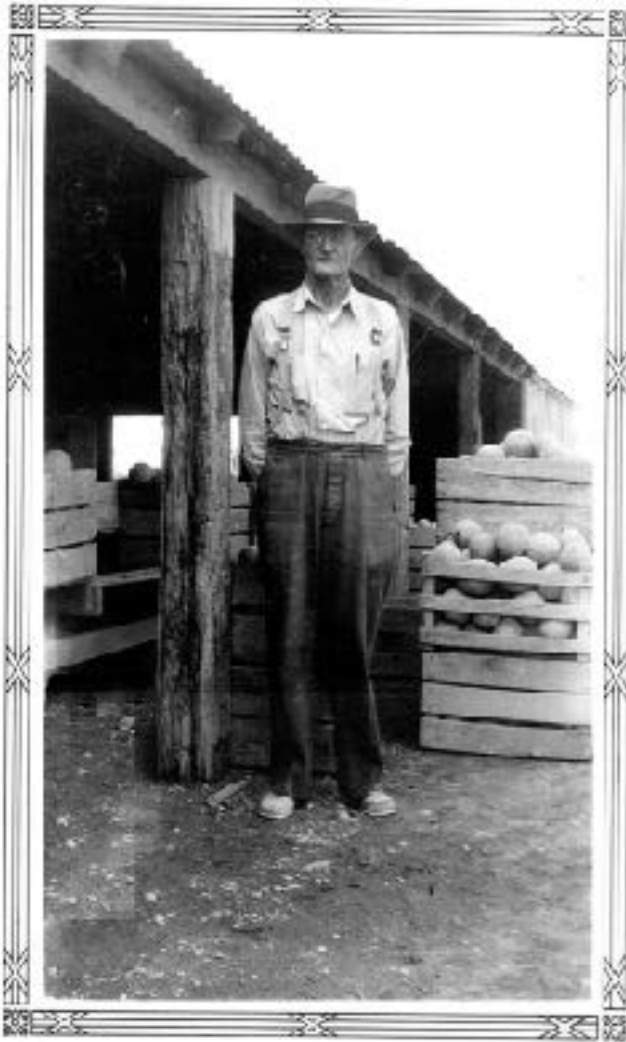
I can't imagine a better time and place to grow up than is told in the following story about my family. At 92 years of age, I've had many wonderful blessings and experiences in my life, but *Pecos* and *cantaloupes* were the foundation for all of them. I don't suppose I'll get everything right, but these are the stories I was told and the ones that I lived...



Me, at the West of the Pecos Museum in 2010, while attending a high school reunion

Our Little House On the Prairie

“Mister Pecos Cantaloupe”



Pecos residents from the 1880s grew delicious cantaloupes in their gardens, noting that the sun and soil of the area imparted a distinctive flavor to their melons. Some thought the alkaline soil and minerals were responsible for the tasty fruit; others pointed to irrigation methods combined with the hot dry climate and high evaporation rate. Old-timers thought that the “true Pecos cantaloupe” could only be grown in a small area west of Pecos, but nothing definitive on this has been recorded.

In 1910, a Mr. D.T. McKee bought 80 acres of land about three miles northeast of Pecos. He became friends with a Pecos old-timer, J.W. Moore. Moore was from Rocky Ford Colorado, an area famous for growing cantaloupes. Moore suggested that McKee plant a patch of cantaloupes with seed from a Rocky

Ford seed company. The experiment was a success! McKee’s melons that year were superior in flavor to any he had ever tasted. In the next few years, McKee increased his acreage and began selling some of his flavorful melons.

In 1908, my maternal grandparents, **Madison and Julia Todd**, moved their family from deep East Texas to a homestead in New Mexico Territory. They lived there for eight and one-half years, proving their claim, but finding little farming potential. [See “Our Little House on the Prairie” [by Zorene (Todd) Thompson ISBN: 978-1-7923-8395-3] Granddad Todd became concerned about the limited education available for his children in New Mexico.

Our Little House On the Prairie

So, granddad worked out a trade for his New Mexico homestead with a young man farming in Pecos, Texas. The young man had decided he wanted to be a rancher, so he traded his 80-acre farm in Pecos for Todd's 160 acres in Ricardo. The Pecos farm was unimproved (except for a little two-room house) but was irrigated with water pumped from a deep well instead of the more common artesian water source. This turned out to be the secret to successful farming in Pecos...

On Christmas Day 1916, the Madison Todd family (wife Julia, children Zorene and Judson) arrived in Pecos by train from New Mexico. *Mr. D.T. McKee, the uncle of the young man father had traded land with, met them with a wagon!* The Todds stayed with Mr. McKee and his wife for a few days while granddad fixed up the small two-room house on their new property.

As granddad began his farming venture in Texas, he and McKee became partners. They grew eight acres of cantaloupes in 1916, selling part of their crop to dining cars on the Texas & Pacific Railway. Word-of-mouth advertising by those that enjoyed half a cantaloupe on their breakfast trays was one of the first ways the special sweetness of the melons became widely known outside of Pecos.

A cantaloupe growers association was soon formed, including D.T. McKee, Madison Todd, M.C. Buchanan, and B.A. Odum. However, McKee soon bowed out of farming in Pecos, and granddad purchased another 80 acres from him.

(Mrs. McKee was a "Virginia blue blood" who never did "cotton to" farm life in Texas, and they later moved back to Virginia. Interestingly, McKee's nephew's ranching plans in New Mexico didn't work out, and he eventually returned to Pecos and served as Band Director for Pecos schools!)

There were other early growers, of course, including B.G. Smith, Phil Payne, and Jack Williams, but granddad was the first to capitalize on the special flavor of the Pecos cantaloupe as a *nationwide commercial enterprise*.

Our Little House On the Prairie

The Todds were pioneers in growing and shipping Pecos cantaloupes and making them widely known in the U. S. Granddad Todd remained a leading grower for over 40 years. In his later years and after his passing, Todd was recognized as the father of the Pecos cantaloupe industry, as acknowledged by a historical marker at the West of the Pecos Museum.

THE PECOS CANTALOUPE

NATIONALLY FAMED MELON, ORIGINATED IN THIS CITY. RESIDENTS FROM 1880s GREW MELONS IN GARDENS, NOTING SUN AND SOIL IMPARTED A DISTINCTIVE FLAVOR. MADISON L. TODD (1875 - 1969) AND WIFE JULIA (1880 - 1967) CAME HERE FROM EAST TEXAS AND NEW MEXICO. IN 1917 TODD AND PARTNER D.T. MCKEE GREW EIGHT ACRES OF MELONS, SELLING PART OF CROP TO DINING CARS OF TEXAS & PACIFIC RAILWAY, WHERE PECOS CANTALOUPE FIRST BECAME POPULAR AND IN WIDE DEMAND. MCKEE SOON QUIT BUSINESS, BUT TODD REMAINED A LEADER FOR 41 YEARS. FAMED LECTURER HELEN KELLER, PRESIDENTS EISENHOWER AND JOHNSON AND MANY OTHER DISTINGUISHED PERSONS HAVE ORDERED AND APPRECIATED PECOS CANTALOUPE. EXCLUSIVE CLUBS IN NEW YORK CHICAGO, ST. LOUIS AND OTHER CITIES ARE REGULAR CLIENTS OF PECOS GROWERS. GENUINE PECOS CANTALOUPE BEGIN RIPENING IN JULY AND CONTINUE ON THE MARKET UNTIL LATE OCTOBER. THE VARIETIES ARE THE SAME AS THOSE GROWN IN OTHER AREAS. CLIMATE, SOIL, AND SPECIAL CULTIVATION METHODS ACCOUNT FOR THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF PECOS MELONS. 2,000 ACRES ARE NOW PLANTED ANNUALLY. M.L.TODD WAS KNOWN IN HIS LATER YEARS AS FATHER OF THE INDUSTRY. HE AND HIS WIFE AND FAMILY WERE LEADERS IN CIVIC AND RELIGIOUS ENTERPRISES. (1970)

Text of State Historical Marker at the West of the Pecos Museum, Pecos, Texas

Our Little House On the Prairie



Madison Lafayette Todd
Father of the Industry

Our Little House On the Prairie



Julia Adelia (Mackey) Todd
Spiritual Center of Our Family

Our Little House On the Prairie

My Family Moves to Pecos

The Thompson family moved to Pecos, Texas, in 1938 to begin farming with grandmother and granddad Todd. My mother, Zorene, took over the business end of things, while my dad, Neil (a mechanic by trade), took over the farming operations.

When we arrived on the scene, grandmother Todd was writing their shipping labels with a fountain pen, and granddad Todd was affixing them to the crates of melons with a tack hammer! They still had two draft horses (Doggie and Blue) and one old tractor with lug wheels. Their only farm, where granddad had a small dairy, reached from the old Mount Evergreen Cemetery to the Balmorhea Highway. We called this the "South Farm." A.R. Elliot and his family lived there and ran the farm and dairy.

With our arrival, granddad purchased the "Grissom Place," northwest of Pecos, which became the "North Farm." Granddad knew he needed to modernize his farming operations, which became Neil Thompson's job. Dad learned the finer points of growing cantaloupes from granddad Todd while modernizing the equipment and operations. Mother, an experienced bookkeeper, began doing the same to the business end of Todd's small but growing business.



Our Little House On the Prairie

We moved into this old three-room house with no running water, no electricity, and an outdoor toilet. Two city kids were thrust into an entirely different life—and we thrived! It was a time of great stress for our parents, who had given up good-paying city jobs for an uncertain future in farming, but to Barbara and me, it was an adventure! Thanks to our loving parents and grandparents, we learned, grew, and adapted. Our lives changed in some amazing ways!



Me, age 8. The old house has a new coat of paint!

First things first! Dad erected a tower for a WindCharger to charge a 6- volt battery so we could hear our radio programs—while studying our lessons by coal-oil lamps!

We did not yet have a school bus, so Mother took us and the Mexican kids who lived on our property to school every day.

Our Little House On the Prairie



My sister Barbara, age 7, with her baby dolls and our farm pickup

Our nearest neighbor to the southwest was Mr. Brooks, to the west were Bessie and Harold Wendt, and a good distance to the north was Haley Bryan.

In the first year, dad built a tower for a water tank and piped well-water into the house, wired the old house for electricity, and installed a Kohler light plant and the first butane tank in Reeves County.

Things really got exciting when dad had a gas-burning Servel refrigerator installed in our kitchen! Neighbors came from everywhere to see this amazing appliance. Barbara and I learned to ride our horses and do our chores; mine included caring for the chickens. We had plenty of fresh milk from granddad's dairy on the south farm. At granddad's insistence, I rode my pony there evenings and learned to milk!

Dad soon tacked two small bedrooms and our first indoor bathroom onto the back of the old house. Barbara and I got the two *new* plywood-lined bedrooms, which seemed luxurious!

Before I graduated from high school (1947), dad built our "dream house!" Del Bond helped him with the plans. The house was built mostly with our Mexican workers—without whom we could not have afforded to build. Our new home had an office, kitchen, dining room, living room, three bedrooms,

Our Little House On the Prairie

and two bathrooms! We had beautiful hardwood floors and the exterior was white stucco.

Dad also built an attached washhouse for mother. It featured her new Maytag washer with a wringer, three tubs, a stove for heating water, and special drain troughs for draining the tubs. Mother was very proud of this new *modern* convenience...

Reinventing the Cantaloupe Business



The secret to our cantaloupe business was that we shipped almost all of our melons to individuals as gift shipments instead of peddling them to grocery stores, etc; much better prices! Mother gradually built a list of clients that ordered cantaloupes almost every year. Companies and politicians often placed large orders for the unique gift of fresh cantaloupes delivered to your home!

Mother counted many notable persons in her list of cantaloupe customers, including movie stars, all the presidents, and many congressmen and well-known public figures. Lady Bird Johnson, the wife of President Lyndon B. Johnson, called each year to order cantaloupes for "Lyndon," telling mother they were his favorite after his heart attack.

Mother garnered many of her new customers from envelopes that came through the Post Office addressed simply to: "Mr. Pecos Cantaloupe" or "The Cantaloupe King" because sometimes that was the only address on the envelope other than the city and state! She exchanged friendly personal letters with many of them, especially those customers who ordered every year.

Many large national restaurants ordered from us because their customers asked for "Pecos Cantaloupes" by name. One of the best examples of this comes from a Pecos High School friend and this story:

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray, I have a small remembrance about Pecos cantaloupes that I think you will enjoy! I think it was 1950, and I was headed to the international Scouts jamboree at Valley Forge, PA. We took a sightseeing ride with a guide in New York City, and he was pointing out the names of different buildings. One of them was the Waldorf Astoria building. I glanced at it – *and then had to look again!* There was a sign on the marquee saying, “WE HAVE PECOS CANTALOUPE ALAMODE!”

=Charles Stubblefield

Mother's management of the orders and shipping for our customers was every bit as important to the success of our family business as was dad's management of the field operations. Our cantaloupe gift shipment business grew rapidly over the next years...



At the height of the growing season, the office was as busy as the shipping shed, and mother used high school girls to help her during the summer months. The girl left front is Fanette (Dingler) Vinson (photo below), daughter

Our Little House On the Prairie



of Marcus and Marie Dingler. Second, from the left is Sharon (Gallegher) Robinett. Sorry, I don't know the other faces.... perhaps you do? I guess I took the picture on the right. Here are the rest of my family, posing in mother's office: sister Barbara Jane, Zorene, and Neil; granddad Todd is watching over us from his picture on the wall...



Mother taught Barbara and me to type while we were still in Jr. High from lessons from Parent's Magazine. Now she put us to work in the office! I can still remember the names of some of our regular customers for whom I typed shipping cards every week.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Growing and Shipping Pecos Cantaloupes

Granddad Todd always bought his cantaloupe seed from a company in Rocky Ford, Colorado, and we did the same. Mother had several stories about customers who saved seeds from their Pecos melons and planted them. They were disappointed—*they didn't grow a Pecos cantaloupe!* One customer even accused us of sterilizing each melon, so the seed was not viable! She was *sure* she found where we stuck a needle in each of her melons!

A more typical customer was Dr. G.C. Hall of Big Springs, who sent a check for \$2 and a note to mother which read: "Please ship me the very first crate of Todd's Delicious Cantaloupes each year, to be followed by a crate each week throughout the season—*for as long as I live.*" I always tried to pick an especially nice flat of melons for Dr. Hall...

Pecos-grown cantaloupes had several distinct qualities that distinguished them from those grown elsewhere: thin rind, small seed cavity, sweetness, and long ripening phase. No one could define the specific reason for these qualities. Still, one Texas A&M study attributed it to hot and dry growing conditions and a very high evaporation rate from the alkaline soil. Pecos cantaloupes began to ripen in mid-July and usually continued growing until mid-October. They were hand-picked in the field and brought to our packing shed for grading, packing, and shipment. Skill is required to pick cantaloupes correctly. Some of our workers had picked melons in Arizona and California and were eager to share their knowledge...

Because the melons had to be picked and processed daily, the cantaloupe shed was a busy place, and there were a lot of different things that had to happen with the melons before the end of the day. We thought we had a certain amount of efficiency, but by today's standards, we were very much hands-on, and it took ALL hands!

As you can tell, our farm operations were very much a "family affair." A vital part of our family was the Mexican families who lived on our property and worked for us. During the growing season, we also used what was disparagingly called "wetback," workers. These were illegal workers that

Our Little House On the Prairie

crossed the Rio Grande from Mexico to find work in the U.S. They had to stay on our property or be sent back to Mexico. We treated them with equal respect as part of our farm family. Some returned to work for “Mr. Neil” year after year...

Mr. Cantaloupe Bows Out

In about 1940, granddad Todd sold his remaining interest in our cantaloupe business to Neil and Zorene—but he didn’t retire! He continued to check the seeds, check the crop, and check the weather! He wanted to see that only the best melons were packed and shipped. After a visit to the shed, he would always take a few “culls” home to Julia. He was proud of the Pecos cantaloupe industry but always minimized his contribution. Once a reporter asked him if he thought he grew the best cantaloupes in the USA. Granddad paused, and with a perfectly straight face, replied, *“Well, if I don’t, I’ve got enough of them fooled that I can ship all of them I can grow!”*

Field Work

Cantaloupes are grown on raised beds, with a small irrigation furrow on each side. One of my field jobs was walking the cantaloupe beds, searching for aphid infestations. I staked the location and then returned with Black Leaf 40 dust to kill them—a terribly dangerous insecticide. You survived a lot of small dangers on a farm...



Our Little House On the Prairie

I was always fascinated by the cantaloupe vines and how they grew. After irrigation, the vines would have a growth spurt. Once, I staked a runner and returned the next day to measure the growth in 24 hours—*nearly 1-1/2-inches!* This rapid growth meant that the young vines had to be “turned” back to the raised bed and out of the irrigation furrow—another backbreaking field job I learned and supervised but seldom had to do! The vine runners had tiny tendrils that searched for anything to grab—including an adjacent runner. When “turning vines,” some of these tiny grabbers had to be gently broken so as not to knock off tiny melon buds. As the vines were turned, they were “stacked” on the raised bed. This provided cover from the sun for the young fruit as it matured. Rain was a problem for young cantaloupe plants. Droplets splashed the alkali soil onto the tender young leaves and burned them.

.Packing and Shipping

The melons came in from the field to this shed continuously during the day. The first step was "grading" the field melons. Granddad Todd only shipped "perfect" melons; culls were sorted out to sell to people coming to the shed or were fed to the hogs. Most of the culls were perfectly OK and flavorful to eat but were either overripe for shipment, sunburned, or were otherwise imperfect. Granddad Todd was a frequent visitor to the shed to check on the grading!

The "perfect" melons were sorted by ripeness and dropped into packing bins. This was critical, depending on how far the melons were to be shipped. They had to be selected and packed according to their ripeness. Interestingly, the degrees of ripeness was indicated by how much of the stem from the vine "slipped out" when the melon was picked: "full slips" were ripe, "three-quarter slips" were three-quarters ripe, "half slips" were half ripe, and "one-quarter slips" were one-quarter ripe. Full slips could be shipped for three-day delivery, three-quarter slips for four-day delivery, half-slips for five-day delivery, and one-quarter slips for six-day delivery. We shipped melons as far as New England. They arrived dead ripe, but our customers said they were the best they had ever eaten! This was a special quality of Pecos cantaloupes.

Our Little House On the Prairie



This is a “full slip;” it is “fully sugared,” as granddad Todd taught me. In two or three days, it will be golden ripe and delicious!

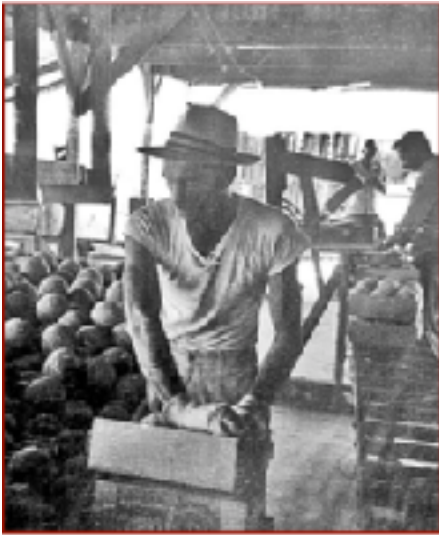
Yes, each year, several shipments arrived overripe; when informed by her customer, mother always wrote a letter of apology and replaced the shipment.

This label went on each crate of melons we shipped. It is our original label, although, in later years, we had others. My job was to stick the labels on with thick paste before the crate was assembled.



Our Little House On the Prairie

The men (and an occasional woman) who traveled across the country to harvest and process produce were called "fruit tramps." They were an interesting and hard-working group of people. Life for them was hard because their jobs were mostly "piece work," and the vagaries of weather, crop yield, and disease greatly affected their livelihood. However, for the most part, I guess we had "*regular* fruit tramps" because they either lived in Pecos or came back to work with us year after year.



The man shown here, packing melons from the grading bins, is our long-time friend and my personal "fruit tramp," **Marcus Dingler**. He came from East Texas for several years to work with us, and eventually, Marcus and his wife Marie moved their family to Pecos.

In many ways, our workers became part of our family. Marcus was like an "uncle" to me, and he could always talk me into trying some project that he had dreamed up; "seedless" cantaloupes, for example!

Marcus is shown expertly packing melons into a shipping crate so that they protrude slightly from the top of the crate. (Single-layer crates were called "flats," and three-layer crates were called "squares.") Then, the crate was pushed down a conveyor to the "lidding machine." Here, wooden slates were curved over the melons and nailed, holding them tightly in the crates but not crushing them.

Pictured here is another "regular tramp" our family loved, **Mansfield Morgan**. He too, was from East Texas and came to Pecos with Marcus. Mansfield was a "nailer," a worker who built the crates from piles of "shuck," the raw wooden slats and headers it



Our Little House On the Prairie

took to make a crate. This was piece work, and a nailer had to be very efficient and work steadily for hours to make a decent wage. My sister Barbara had a real crush on good-looking Mansfield, 15 years her senior!



This is a terrible picture, but the only one I have of the most trustworthy and loyal member of our farm family. His name is **Francisco ("Chico") Rodriguez**. Chico and his wife Rosa moved their family to live on our North farm in the early years. Barbara and I grew up with their kids, with Zorene driving us all to school and back each day in the years before we had a school bus. Chico was "*mi otra tio*,"—*another uncle* to me; I learned a lot from him. Chico did every job there was to do on the farm, and sometimes (early and out of season), he was the only one available when we didn't have a full crew.

Among other things, Chico milked our cows twice daily, a job I was supposed to do but soon begged off! Down through the years, I was able to keep up with Chico and his family. on visits home. Dad helped Chico get a job at Pecos High School, a new career for him! His son Dulce and his family lived in the Dallas area for many years, and we had fun visiting and recalling some of our play and pranks living on the farm...

The last step in processing a crate of cantaloupes for shipment was "tagging." This was my main job and involved a lot of responsibility, especially in keeping in touch with the office. It was my daily job to match "orders" that mother had waiting in the office with the melons harvested that day. It was a little complicated! We began with an estimate of how many orders of each crate size could be packed and shipped for short distances, moderate distances, or long distances. As the day progressed, I would have to call for more orders (tags) or return some that we could not fill on that day. Occasionally, if mother's four and five-day orders became backed up for



shipment, I would send word to the pickers, *mas gruen!* "More green!" Soon, more three-quarter slip melons would come rolling in from the field!

My "working orders" were kept efficiently in the rack you see to my left, which dad and I designed and built after much planning and discussion!

I see my sister Barbara (2nd from left) has taken a break from the office and perched herself on this load to get in the picture! Dad is standing by the cab door, and that might be Dulce in the front seat. I took the picture with



mother's old Kodak box camera. It's a shame we don't have more pictures of such a memorable time in our lives.



I think those maybe three of the Rodriguez kids on the ground beside the truck. Marcus is in his white t-shirt, and Chico is on the far right... I can tell just by the way he is standing! The rest are our crew from Mexico, who worked for us only during the growing season.

The last chore of the day was always a mad rush! We had to load the daily shipments and drive them into town to be loaded into the Railway Express car, a part of the evening passenger train. You may not remember Railway Express²⁸, but it was the precursor to today's UPS and FedEx service; all of our cantaloupe gift shipments went out this way. However, because it was part of a passenger train, every crate had to be manhandled into the Railway Express car in 20 minutes! So, we took all hands from the shed to quickly load the crates while the engineer blew his whistle in a threatening manner!

Our farm also grew other crops, mostly cotton and alfalfa. Dad carried me on his payroll as "Ramon" at \$.10/hour; the Mexican workers made from \$.30 to \$.35/hour. As a kid, I became an experienced tractor driver and learned everything there was to do! With my high school Spanish, I had a good handle on "farm Mexican," so as I got older, I was given the responsibility of supervising the workers.

28 Hap and Jack Jones were the Railway Express Agents in Pecos, We would see them often. These two Louisiana-born friends were, indeed, vital to our cantaloupe shipping business.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Publicity and Advertising



This picture of my parents was made (by Howard Studios, of course!) for an article written for "The Texas Stockman" magazine. A rare piece of publicity...

We always prided ourselves on the fact that our cantaloupes sold themselves—advertising was not needed. However, I can think of a couple of exceptions... For one thing, for several years, dad went to the Texas State Fair in Dallas and set up a sales booth. When he

came home he said, "People came by all the time that already knew about Pecos Cantaloupes!"

This photograph was our most bold advertising venture! When Trans-Texas Airways began regular service to Pecos, everyone wanted it to succeed, and the city wanted as much publicity as possible. The beautiful young lady in the picture is Martha (Holmes) Parton (PHS 50), who wore the crown of Miss Pecos Cantaloupe from the Cantaloupe Festival that year.



She told me several years ago that her mother made the dress for her, and I told her that grandmother Todd thought it was *"a little skimpy!"*

Our Little House On the Prairie

End of an Era for Our Family

In 1955, shortly before the demise of Railway Express, Marcus Dingler and his Pecos cousin, Bob Dean, purchased our M.L.Todd Cantaloupe Company, when Neil and Zorene were ready to retire. Marcus's two sons, Bill and Jimmy, followed their dad into the trade, working for him at the Dean-Dingler packing shed. A married daughter, Fannette Vinson, was their office manager.

After selling to Dean & Dinger, Neil and Zorene moved into town and retired. I was soon off to college at Abilene Christian, followed by four years in the USAF... Barbara married and began teaching school and raising her family in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Chico moved away from Pecos for a while but eventually returned. Dad helped him get a job at Pecos High School—a new career for Chico! I always checked on Chico and Rosa when I visited Pecos.

It was the end of a wonderful era for our family...and I began to lose touch with the Pecos cantaloupe industry. I've written about the "origins" of the industry but was no longer a witness to this history...

Big changes arrived in the 1960s. New growers like A.B. Foster brought in new methods of harvesting and shipping cantaloupes, and the industry peaked in 1969 when more than 2000 acres were planted. Sadly, by 2017 the total acreage had declined to less than 200. *Pecos became a modern boomtown, but it was not from cantaloupes but oil!*²⁹ Now, the Mandujano Brothers in Pecos County were the only cantaloupe growers, making their own family tradition growing cantaloupes...

No... I never made it back to the family farm, but raising cantaloupes and going to school and church in Pecos in the 40s and 50s was a great time and place to grow up. As the old song says, "*We lived ten miles from town and a hundred miles from trouble!*"

29 "Labor-intensive crop is losing land to oil and gas industry." (Houston Chronicle, August 16, 2019)

Our Little House On the Prairie

Memories of Pecos Cantaloupes

These memories were collected from my "PHS Friends" e-mail list after the original version of my story was posted on my website.

Dear Friends & PHS Classmates: My post seems to have struck a chord with many of you, and I want to share your comments with everyone! I hope you enjoy reading what others have remembered half as much as I have! It's nice to know your family was respected in your hometown. I will always be thankful for growing up in a small West Texas town—Pecos, Texas!

=Bye R@y Mack

Ray Mack, this is a great page... Boy, I spent many an hour at the shed. In the off-season, Chico would put me in a crate, set me on the rollers, and I had my own roller coaster! Your dad would be proud of the article and the pictures. Hope all is well with you... *[John Charles's dad, Johnny Fonville, was my dad's closest friend in Pecos. RMT]*

=John Charles

Ray, I enjoyed reading your stories about the cantaloupes very much. My memories start later, after daddy and his cousin, Marcus Dingler, bought M. L. Todd Cantaloupes. Mother even did a stint at Harold Wendt Cantaloupe company (although they were all from the same fields). My younger brother David used to sell the "culls" from a stand at the old Todd cantaloupe shed on Highway 80, and my friend Sallie Butts and I had a stand closer to the old Ramada Inn one summer. I remember watching the crates loaded onto a refrigerated railroad car with crushed ice to keep them cold. I think it costs \$4.95 per crate to send anywhere in the US. I'm looking for Pecos melons here in Dallas, but no luck so far.

=Nancy (Dean) Egan

Ray, I remember pulling a wagon door-to-door selling culls cantaloupes to earn a dollar or two. I enjoyed your cantaloupe memories. I haven't had a Pecos cantaloupe in years. I just don't seem to be in Pecos at the right time!

=Sterling Fisher

Ray, I don't know if you realized, when you compiled your family history, that you would be helping so many of us to get things straight! I did know the Deans and Dinglers were involved in the cantaloupe business but did not realize that your family started it! My granddaddy told me the story, but I did not get the founders correct. Thank you so much for this work of love you

Our Little House On the Prairie

have shared with all of us! I sincerely appreciate your putting it out there for everyone to share and enjoy!

=Patty (Glover) Squyres

Ray Mack, I do not remember if I ever met you—I doubt it. I graduated in 1959. My parents were Prater and Frances Powell. We moved to Pecos in 1951 when I was in the 7th grade. Daddy went to work for his uncle, Lester Prater, on his farm at Hoban and later on his egg farm and delivering gas for Newell Oil Company. Mother worked for Collie Electric and later as Tax Assessor-Collector for the City of Pecos. I have seen your notes on the Pecos High Notes and today decided to read your home page. I remember going to the cantaloupe sheds and buying cantaloupe by the grocery bag. We loved them and still enjoy them. My son and his family made a trip to West Texas this summer and brought some cantaloupe to me. They are still as good as I remember them. I enjoyed reading your stories very much.

=Frances (Powell) Pohl

Ray Mack, I was one of the high school girls your Mother hired to work in her office. I graduated in 1957, so it was probably the summers of '54 and '55. My Father was Sloan Paxton, and I also worked in his office at the gas company later in my high school summers. I remember your Mother as one of the nicest and most patient persons I have ever known. I still have fond memories of her and working at the "shed." It was fun indeed, and I appreciate all your stories. I just wanted you to know your parents were respected and cared for by many.

=Ann (Paxton) Etheredge

Ray, I am a 1959 graduate of PHS. Today I read your note in Pecos High notes, so I clicked on the Family Business... Unfortunately, I do not have the memory you do! I worked two summers for the Dingler family in the office of Todd Cantaloupes. I think it was 1959 (the year I graduated from PHS) and 1960, after my freshman year at Texas Tech. Fannette Dingler was in charge of the office. She was married at the time, but I forget her married name. The office was below the shed, where locals bought cantaloupes. All of it was right next to the railroad tracks, of course. The office manager's name was (I think) Ella?. A woman who had been a Catholic nun and another woman named Etta Sullivan worked with me there also. Mr. Dingler would come in occasionally. I believe Fannette's brother, Bill, was the main packer. People would call and ask for Mr. Todd. If Mr. Dingler was around, he would answer as Mr. Todd. Otherwise, we would take a message for "Mr. Todd!" I remember that the Rice Hotel in Houston received a crate either twice a week or once a week.

Our Little House On the Prairie

Hap and Jack Jones were the Railway Express Agents in Pecos, We would see them often. They are the parents of my classmate, Jane Jones. *[These two Louisiana-born friends were, indeed, vital to our cantaloupe shipping business. RMT]*

I very quickly looked through your website. I noticed that you were a "Mac" devotee, as is my husband, Rodney, and I.

After 10 years of suffering with a PC, we bought an iMac the first year it came out. We had to get a new one last September, as the motherboard crashed. We are not nearly as accomplished as you, but use it for many things. We recently installed a "backup" because if we were to lose our "stuff," we would also be lost!

=Belva (Hollingshead) Williams

Ray, thank you for sending this to me. I have passed it on to my sister and children. You may remember Hagar Bros. Super Market on the Ft. Stockton highway? My Dad, Jimmy Hagar, Uncle Earl, and Joe Hagar were there for a long time. We sold a lot of Todd melons! Dad served on the school board a long time and had a lot of young people working in the store, as did Uncle Joe. He had Joe's Superette by Al's for a long time. Thanks

=Donna Sanders

Hey Ray Mack! I did so enjoy your narrative and pictures of the old cantaloupe business. It brought back so many memories, memories of Barbara, your dad, and your mother, though I didn't know her as well. As you know, Barbara was a classmate for many many years, and she was loved by all. Your dad? Well, Neil was our Scout Master for many years and one of the best. I especially remember the time he took a bobtail truck loaded with scouts to the "new" scout ranch to try out camping there. That night one of the worst wind storms I have ever seen came down thru Madera Canyon and nearly blew us away! We wound up sleeping in the back of that bobtail, trying to keep the canvas cover from blowing off! We were back in Pecos this week and picked up some "Pecos" cantaloupes. They were good, better than most you can get in the stores, but as I tell the people at the stand, they are not like the cantaloupes of old. They just don't cut !! Thank you, Ray, for all you do.

=Tommy Beauchamp '49

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray, I so enjoyed the cantaloupe family story. Remember all of the folks you mentioned, but did not know how some were involved. Yesterday we got the first shipment to HEB, and the word spread over Odessa like a war was on!! Had to line up to get to the "bin" where the small allotment of Pecos cantaloupes soon was gone! Folks said, "how do you know if they are really from Pecos?" I said all you have to do is walk in the door and smell them! A welcome treat in our week of over 100° days!! Thanks for the wonderful memories.

=Jan (Dunn) Phillips, PHS class 1955

Hi Ray, Jesse James (PHS 63) here.. enjoyed all of your family history, etc., that you posted... I lived on a farm south of Pecos (Verhalen) and back east, past Collier ranch but before the Hoef Ranch...way down an old dust road... no utilities either... When we moved to town, it was my 8th-grade summer, and the Todd cantaloupe shed amazed me... really exciting to watch it all in progress... never worked there but worked in the fields, and with the planes dusting, etc... ate many melons right out in the fields... I got tired of these pickup truck melon/fruit sales guys coming into my office to sell us some of the "world-famous Pecos Cantaloupes!"... in JUNE? I had fun with them, asking all kinds of questions until they realized, "I KNEW what was going on!" Anyway... have a good one! There's nothing like West Texas-raised folks... they are so good to work within our business, compared to folks from anywhere else...

=Jesse James (PHS63)

Ray, I was in the Pecos fire department in the mid-'60s when the cantaloupe shed on west Highway 80 burned. The construction was so open that it burned fast and hot. The heat from the fire warped the rails on the siding and the mainline as well. They had to get a crew in from Big Spring to build a shoo-fly around the damaged section. Thanks!

=Jimmy Smith

Ray, in 1960, I was addressing envelopes at Todd's cantaloupe shed on Highway 80 West one Sunday afternoon... Suddenly, a long black Cadillac limousine pulled up with Louisiana plates, a black chauffeur with a driving hat and all! It was Gov. Earl Long, who had run off with a stripper and was missing in action, so far as the newspapers were concerned. Did not see the stripper because the car was dark! The shed was not operating, so I could not sell him any melons. Took his name down, and he pleasantly left. An unusual event in Pecos for sure!

=Zech Dameron III

Our Little House On the Prairie

Ray Mack, thanks for the memories. My name is Bettylu Daniel Cunningham. Barbara and I went through all grades together in Pecos schools. So it was a given when I was old enough to work in the office at Todd's I did, and I enjoyed every minute there. I loved your parents very much and remember many lessons learned from them. Again, thanks for the memories!

=Betty (Daniel) Cunningham

Ray, I enjoyed your writings about the old cantaloupe shed. My dad Carp and brother Ham Hamilton owned the truck stop right down from it; most of the trucks filled up at our truck stop. I worked there all thru school. We always had plenty of the great melons in the cooler, there, and at home... I remember Marcus Dingler ran it some during that time. Those were great days in Pecos! Thanks for the memories!

=John Carpenter (PHS 63)

Ray, I have a small remembrance to add to our memories...I think it was 1950, and I was headed to the international Scouts jamboree at Valley Forge, PA. We took a sightseeing ride with a guide in New York City, and he was pointing out the names of different buildings. One of them was the Waldorf Astoria building. I glanced at it— and then had to look again! There was a sign on the marquee saying, “*WE HAVE PECOS CANTALOUPE ALAMODE!*”

=Charles Stubblefield

Ray, I went to Pecos schools, and Girl Scout Camps and graduated with your sister Barbara in 1949!! Several summers when we were in high school, your Dad would pick me up when he came in town early mornings for mail, and I went back to the farm to work in the office!! Primarily, I typed address labels for the cantaloupe crates. They were shipped regularly all over the USA! Can you imagine how exciting that was for a “first” job? I had lunch with your family, and Barbara and I enjoyed the extra time to visit.

= Harriet Ross

A4 - Singing in the Kitchen

Ray Mack Thompson

Childhood Memories



My maternal grandmother, **Julia (Mackey) Todd**, came from a large East Texas family in a time and place where gospel singing was a family, church, and community tradition. The command in scripture to "Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord." (Ephesians 5: 19) was embraced as a way of life. One of the earliest recollections I have of grandmother is her singing in her kitchen while she worked; I was about eight, I think. However, what got my attention was the *way* she was singing.

At first, I didn't recognize it as singing at all, and thought it was funny: "Dee de DEE dee de de-de, dee de dee de de-de-de de de dee!" I

giggled behind her back and shared my mirth with my younger sister, Barbara, dragging her to the kitchen door to listen.

Mother noticed our whispered laughter and asked me what we were doing. I replied, "Mother, what is grandmother saying?" Mother said, "She's singing, Ray Mack. She is just carrying the tune without using the words."

"Well, why is she singing like that *in the kitchen*?" I wondered.

"Well, why don't you go and ask her Ray Mack—go ask her why she is singing in the kitchen," mother suggested.

Our Little House On the Prairie

So, Barbara and I went hand-in-hand to the kitchen, grinning at our question, but I couldn't get it out at first. Seeing our grins, grandmother, with a smile, asked, "What do you two want?" I suppose she thought we were going to ask for a piece of pie...

I then blurted out, "Grandmother, why are you singing in the kitchen?" Grandmother paused very briefly from her work, turned to look at us with a smile, and said, *"Because I am going to heaven, Ray Mack—because I am going to heaven!"*

"Dee de DEE dee de de-de, dee de dee de de-de-de de de dee!"

"When we ALL get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing it will be!"

‡. ‡. ‡. ‡. ‡

Recalling many family meals and stories around Julia's cozy table...



A5 - A Family Doll Story

By Zorene Thompson

601 West Orchard Lane - Apt. 25
Carlsbad, NM 88220

December 22, 1984

My Dear Granddaughter, Nancy,

I have just returned from visiting your parent's new home at 602 Elora Drive in Carlsbad—they are just about to get all moved in. It is a beautiful house, planned, designed, and built with their own hands, and I am so proud of them. John is a Master Builder, and Barbara is a Master Planner!

But Nancy, this letter is to tell you about my visit with "Louise", now living in your parent's new home, in a beautiful new room; I know she will be very happy there. Louise and I have had many wonderful years together, filled with love and play in many homes. As I visited with her today, I thought to myself... *"Congratulations, Louise, you've come a long way. Baby!"* From a farm home in Upshur County, Texas to a homestead in New Mexico Territory,



Our Little House On the Prairie

several other homes, and now to this lovely home in Carlsbad. I want to tell you Louise's story, for you see, Louise will live with you someday!

Of course, you know that Louise is my *doll*, but a very special one! If dolls had memories, she could tell you this story herself, but I suppose I must tell it for her...

Louise came to me for Christmas in 1906. I was almost six years old, and she was the most beautiful doll I had ever seen! She was sent to me by my Uncle Lon Todd. He was a simple man, living and working at that time in Shreveport, Louisiana. He boarded there with my Mother's widowed aunt, Lou Houston. At that time, dolls were sold unclothed, and Aunt Lou dressed her for the first time. (Nancy, Aunt Lou would be your great, great. GREAT Aunt!) *Alas, alack!* Her original dress and ruffled petticoat have long ago disappeared, but the long drawers she is still wearing were beautifully made by Aunt Lou. They are exactly like the underwear worn in that day for "dress-up."

Louise's white kid-leather body shows the wear and tear of time, but her china head (called "bisque"; made in Germany), with its haunting face and tiny teeth, has survived beautifully. Originally, she had a blonde wig and blue eyes with long lashes that closed when I held her in a reclining position.

After she came to me, most of the time, Louise had to hang on the wall, out of my reach. Only on special occasions, and when I wore a clean dress and my hands and face were clean, would mother take her down and place her carefully in my arms. Then, as long as I could sit still, I had the pleasure of holding and talking to her... Thankfully, as I grew older, mother relented somewhat with our "playtime"...

I had many adoring aunts, and they supplied me with plenty of other dolls, dishes, and playthings. My doll family included several prettier than Louise, but she was my favorite. Until we moved West, I had many cousins to play with, and I remember letting them play with the other dolls while I played with Louise!

Our Little House On the Prairie

In the summer of 1908, my family moved West for father's health. Our new home was a dry-land claim ("homestead") near Ricardo in New Mexico Territory, 14 miles west of Ft. Sumner. It was here that a tragedy befell Louise and me... One afternoon my brother Jud and I were playing with Louise outside when our mother called us to come into the house. I remember placing her *carefully* in the bed of Jud's little red wagon. We returned in a few minutes to find a large red hen in the wagon! *The hen had pecked out both of Louise's beautiful blue eyes... I was devastated!*

In those days, doll repair places were almost unknown, and certainly in New Mexico Territory! However, we did receive mail-order catalogs from Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward—what wonderful "wish books" they were! From one of these, my dear, compassionate mother ordered new eyes for my wounded doll. However, when they came, they were brown instead of blue, and they were too large! But, in that time and place, "make-do" was part of our lives, so mother put them in Louise's head and held them in place with stuffing. Alas, my lovely doll could no longer close her eyes—but I still played as she did!

Throughout my growing-up years, Louise always remained my favorite possession. When I married, she moved to a special place in my hope chest, where she remained in retirement, waiting for my *own* children to share her. (Ray Mack and Barbara both met her there and have heard parts of this story many times. I hope they will be glad I finally wrote it all down for you!).

When your mother began playing with dolls, I went all out to sew "real clothes" for them (and for a lot of other dolls in our family), but I felt Louise was too special and fragile to endure another generation of "play." So, she remained in safekeeping in my cedar chest... Yes, I finally understood how my mother felt when she "hung her on the wall" to keep her safe!

In June of 1954, plans were being made for a wedding... your mother, Barbara Jane Thompson, was to marry John Weldon Coleman in our home in Pecos, Texas. I decided I wanted Louise to come out of retirement and be a special part of the wedding. I took her to a doll hospital in Monahans, Texas. I hoped

Our Little House On the Prairie

and expected they would fit her with new eyes, but they could not get "sleeping eyes" small enough. So, they glued "fixed" brown eyes in place and fitted her with a dark brown wig. I then dressed her as a bride, with tiny yellow flowers on her veil and a matching bridal bouquet. Your Granddad Neil made a stand for her, and the florist made a ribbon-lined walkway to an arch bearing the wedding date. Louise became the centerpiece of Barbara's Announcement Tea.... *she was again on display and the "Queen of the Ball"!*

Of course, you know when this lovely little bridesmaid made her *second* wedding appearance! *You*, Nancy Gail Coleman, were to marry John Patrick Dover, on 8 August 1980, in your parents' home in Carlsbad. I made a new veil and bouquet for her but with tiny *blue* flowers just for you! You will recall that for your reception, we placed her on the dining room buffet, with blue flowers in crystal vases on each side and reflecting mirrors behind... Again, she was the center of attention from our family and friends.

For safekeeping, as you and John settled in far off California, Louise has lived with Barbara and John ever since your wedding... Your craftsman dad, John, built her a beautiful new "glass room", which I saw for the first time today. Louise can *finally* watch the world go by and be admired every day!

Louise, you have been a faithful friend, and although I am now 83 years old and you are 77, you are still my beautiful doll... *I love you! Long live my Queen!*

So, Nancy, the "tale is told"... I hope Louise will survive for you to tell it to *your* children... and *grandchildren!*

Love you!

Grandmother, Zorene(Todd) Thompson

A6 - Dad's Tools



I don't deal much with mechanical things these days... However, when I do, want or need to "bend a wrench," I am not intimidated; I am familiar with tools and mechanical things. *Why?*—because of my adoptive Dad, **Neil Sidney Thompson**. Neil was, by chance and by choice, a mechanic. Like a lot of kids, he began tinkering with cars as a boy and just never stopped. His formal education ended in the 8th grade in Anona, Texas. When I was adopted (as a baby) in 1930, Dad worked as a mechanic and parts man for Kuykendall Chevrolet in Lubbock, Texas. When I was eight years old our family moved to an irrigated cantaloupe farm near Pecos in West Texas. Dad had to learn about planting and growing crops from his father-in-law, but the mechanical skills he brought with him were an important key to our family's success on the farm. Despite all the frustrations of farming (finances, the

Our Little House On the Prairie

weather, and the markets), Dad's life was fulfilled as a "jack-of-all-trades" farm craftsman. The move to the farm was an opportunity for him to build his own shop for maintaining our cars, trucks, tractors, and pump engines. As farm needs arose, he learned: welding, blacksmithing, and carpentry. He also became a fair electrician, surveyor, veterinarian—and watchmaker!

As a born "Mr. Fixit," Neil would often drop his own work to help someone else when he saw a problem he could solve. Once on vacation in New Mexico, at a small isolated filling station and grocery store we frequented, Dad spent the most of two days of our vacation getting the owner's old gasoline generator to run again!

As a born mechanic, Dad loved and appreciated good tools. He respected their design, quality, and feel. In fact, he was a toolmaker himself; if he didn't have the right tool, he made one! He developed and adapted several farm tools and implements that other farmers copied from him. (I always thought some of them could have been patented.)

Dad could always justify the cost of a good tool; if he needed it—*he needed it!* The problem was that he was not very good at caring for them. He usually left his tools lying where he last used them and so could not find them when needed. Our Mother, **Zorene**, knew Neil's talents were essential to our farm business. However, as the family accountant, she saw money wasted to replace lost tools. It was a problem Dad didn't like to acknowledge and one of the few problems that I observed between my parents. (Mother often sent me to the shop to pick up and put away Dad's tools!)

Even as a toddler, most of my recollections of my Dad have to do with tools. Any time I was with him, we were either repairing or making something—*with tools!* Dad often let me "help him..." If my "help" slowed things down

Our Little House On the Prairie

too much, Dad would fix my own place to “work” and provide me with *tools*. I watched and learned fairly well, I think...

Neil collected all sorts of things—hundreds of items were piled around, inside and outside our shop. However, small to tiny items were kept in the top drawer of the green chiffonier in Mother and Dad’s bedroom. Dad always emptied his pockets here at bedtime, adding new treasures to his collection. Now, these might seem like *junk* to the uninitiated, but to Dad’s way of thinking, they were a treasure trove of valuable parts, just waiting to be installed! Dad had an uncanny memory of nearly every item in the drawer...

As I got older, Dad’s ability to build things inspired me, and I had an ever-growing collection of “projects,” most of them unfinished. I would use anything in sight, making something to show Dad. (Like the “perpetual motion machine” that sank in the irrigation ditch!) Physically, I was on the hefty side, and when things didn’t fit I substituted brute force for workmanship. The results were often broken parts and tools that had to be explained. I would sometimes hide them from Neil for a day or two, but the end result was the same—this lecture: *“Ray Mack, if you don’t know what you are doing, ask me! ‘Main strength and awkwardness’ are not the way to fix something!”*

Many of Dad’s tools have survived and passed to me. Some are a little rusty, but they are all quality tools and the patina of time only reminds me of picking them up out of the dirt! I am amazed at all the little things I learned and still remember using them—I had a good teacher. You don’t forget the rhythm of a properly thrown ratchet wrench, how to snug up a bolt without stripping the threads, the bite of a correctly sharpened bit, or the feel of a good saw cut. However, while Dad always knew exactly what size wrench or bolt was needed, I still have to bring three or four sizes to the workbench!

Our Little House On the Prairie

One of my favorite keepsakes is a cheap little ball-peen hammer. It was the first tool Dad gave me of my very own when I was about six, I think. Dad often engraved his tools with his initials: “NST”. He carved a single letter “R” on the handle of my hammer. Later, during an infatuation with painting everything, I painted the entire hammer black...



*“No man is born into the world whose work is not born with him.
There is always work, and tools to work withal for those who will,
and blessed are the horny hands of toil.”*

(James Russell Lowell)

Thank goodness our automobiles don’t need the day-to-day attention they once did, and electrical and electronic devices have replaced a lot of perfectly good mechanical contrivances. My education and profession (electrical engineering) have given me the knowledge and skills to deal with these, much as Dad grafted his life onto the mechanical side of things.

I built my first electronic device, a crystal radio set, with Dad’s shop tools. Since we didn’t yet have electricity on the farm, I heated Dad’s huge copper soldering iron on the kitchen stove to solder my first electrical connection. A few years later I purchased (with my own money, earned at 10 cents/hour) my first electronic tool—a little volt/ohm/milliamperes meter (VOM). I had no idea how to use it, but trying to be a jack-of-all-trades like Dad, I learned.

Our Little House On the Prairie

My serious introduction to the age of electronics was through amateur (“ham”) radio. My “Elmer” (ham radio’s title for a mentor) was **Charlie Lightfoot**, W5MVR, a godly young man in our church that patiently taught me the Morse Code. (The federal exam for a ham license required you to copy and send 13 words per minute.) After weeks of practice and study, Charlie administered the code and technical exam for my license. In a month or two, I was licensed with call sign W5OUS, the year I graduated from Pecos High School. When I went off to college the next year, I set up my ham shack in my dorm room at Abilene Christian College. W5MVR and W5OUS communicated daily via Morse code on the 40-meters ham band. Charlie became a life-long friend, and years later, I was the best man at his wedding...



My “Ham Shack” in My Dorm Room at Abilene Christian College (1948)

Our Little House On the Prairie

Mother and Dad sacrificed more than I knew to buy me the radio equipment I wanted. For my 16th birthday, I asked for my first short-wave radio—the Hallicrafters S-38! The S-38 was \$40, and the lowest priced one Hallicrafters sold, but I knew it was probably still too much for the family budget. On the morning of my birthday, I woke up to find a big box on my bed and inside the \$60 *Hallicrafters S-20R Sky Champion*! I could hardly believe it! It had AVC, BFO, ANL, and a vernier dial! Considering the path I eventually chose for my education and profession, it was an insightful choice—*how did they know?* Yes, I still have my wonderful Sky Champion!



Hallicrafters S-20R Sky Champion

*There is always one moment in childhood when the
door opens and lets the future in.*

(Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory)

My experience in “hamming” quickly grew into an all-consuming hobby, and I dreamed of having a tower and beam antenna, something that very few

Our Little House On the Prairie

young hams could afford. One summer, when I was home from college, Dad designed and built a mechanical marvel that was the envy of every ham. By now, I was using voice communications on the 10-meter ham band, and the beam antenna allowed me to talk briefly to people worldwide! Zorene loved to sit beside me and talk to them...

Although Dad had dabbled with auto radio repair, he let me explore ham radio on my own for many years. However, after his retirement and while I was away in the USAF for four years, Neil, with the help of local hams, learned the electronics theory and Morse code to pass the federal amateur-radio exam—I *was absolutely amazed!* He was licensed W5YNZ (“We’re 5 Yellow Nosed Zebras!”). Of course, the station Dad built was a mechanical monster, so heavy he had to reinforce the side porch of the house where his “ham shack” was located! I was stationed in Germany at the time and held call sign DL4LJ. Dad and I talked by short wave several times between Germany and Texas. Neil’s Ham Shack

With this new interest, Dad collected a whole new set of *tools*. His favorite was a Simpson Model 260 VOM—the best you could buy. Dad’s ham gear has been passed along to another generation of hams, but I still have both our VOM meters. They set incongruently beside my little ball-peen hammer, in my bookcase...



Our Little House On the Prairie



Neil's Ham Shack

As I started my career in electrical engineering, my real fascination in the field of electronics became the computer. It replaced ham radio as an abiding and fascinating hobby. And how is the computer classified in today's high-tech world? Why do all the pundits describe it as the *ultimate TOOL*! I am sure Dad would have been another "computer nut," like his son...

After Dad died, Mother asked me to go through his tools and radio equipment and take home what I wanted. However, Dad's ham gear was too large and heavy! So, with the help of the hams in Pecos, we arranged for his large collection of pieces and parts to be passed along to some deserving young ham that was building his own ham "rig".

There is an interesting follow-on to this story...

Our Little House On the Prairie

Twenty years later, in Dallas, where I was living, I met a young man at my computer club and was very impressed with some programming he had done. During a second visit, I discovered that he was also a ham (**Jon, K5VA**). I recounted my early days as a ham and happened to mention that I once lived in Pecos. He quickly countered that he had gone to high school in Pecos! He asked, "Did you happen to know Neil, W5YNZ?" *Can you guess?* Although he never met "Neil," the hams in Pecos had given him parts from my Dad's old ham rig to get him on the air for the first time!

I only hope that my tools and my life are as full-filled and helpful to others as were Dad's...

*Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks bread,
will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give
him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give
good gifts unto your children, how much more shall
your Father which is in heaven give good things to
them that ask him?*

(Matthew 8:9-11)

© Ray M. Thompson (v9-Revised 12/4/21)

Our Little House On the Prairie

A7 - Our Secret Cold War

Ray Mack Thompson

I remember it like it was *last* year, but it was over 50 years ago now... A bunch of very non-military college-age kids was serving in the **United States Air Force Security Service (USAFSS)**. Our unit was the **6910th Security Group**, based at a former German airbase just outside the beautiful little Bavarian town of Landsberg am/Lech. Our daily jobs were part of an Air Force intelligence mission and highly classified. Although far from home and in the land of a former enemy, most of us privately gave thanks that we were not with our USAFSS counterparts in *Korea*; we knew we had a plum assignment in Bavaria. We spent our spare time chasing German frauleins, drinking German beer, snapping our German cameras, traveling throughout Western Europe, and dreaming about getting out at the end of our 4-year enlistment.

On the other hand, we were all very serious about our jobs, part of a large intelligence-gathering enterprise. Because of the sensitive nature of our jobs, we were forbidden to take leave in the border area near the Iron Curtain, but listening to Russian radio signals *across* that border was our job. The truth is, we were hand-picked for our jobs. Not that we knew *anything* about what we were getting into, but many of us had college degrees or other aptitudes that filtered us into the USAFSS. We received on-the-job training in communications intelligence (COMINT) at Brooks AFB in San Antonio, Texas. We were then sent worldwide to work in a secret part of the Cold War. USAFSS units were stationed from Alaska to Korea and from Scotland to North Africa.

Yeah, we were kind of a smart-aleck bunch of kids, but we did our jobs well. Our work became most serious when the Russians made some move or change in their military operations, changes we were often the first to detect. These changes were usually preceded by changes in the Russians' radio call signs and frequencies—operational details which we spent *months* trying to specific military units (ground and air), thus defining their military

Our Little House On the Prairie

organization's "order of battle." *The Russians changed their call signs because they knew we were listening and that the change would confuse our monitoring efforts.* (Of course, the Allies did the same thing.) Usually, these changes turned out to be military training or maneuvers, but the Allies always had to treat them as the real thing—*perhaps an invasion of Europe.* Our monitoring could bring the entire Allied Forces to a silent alert. *Soon their listeners knew that we knew—this was the secret cold war. These were the days we earned our stripes...*

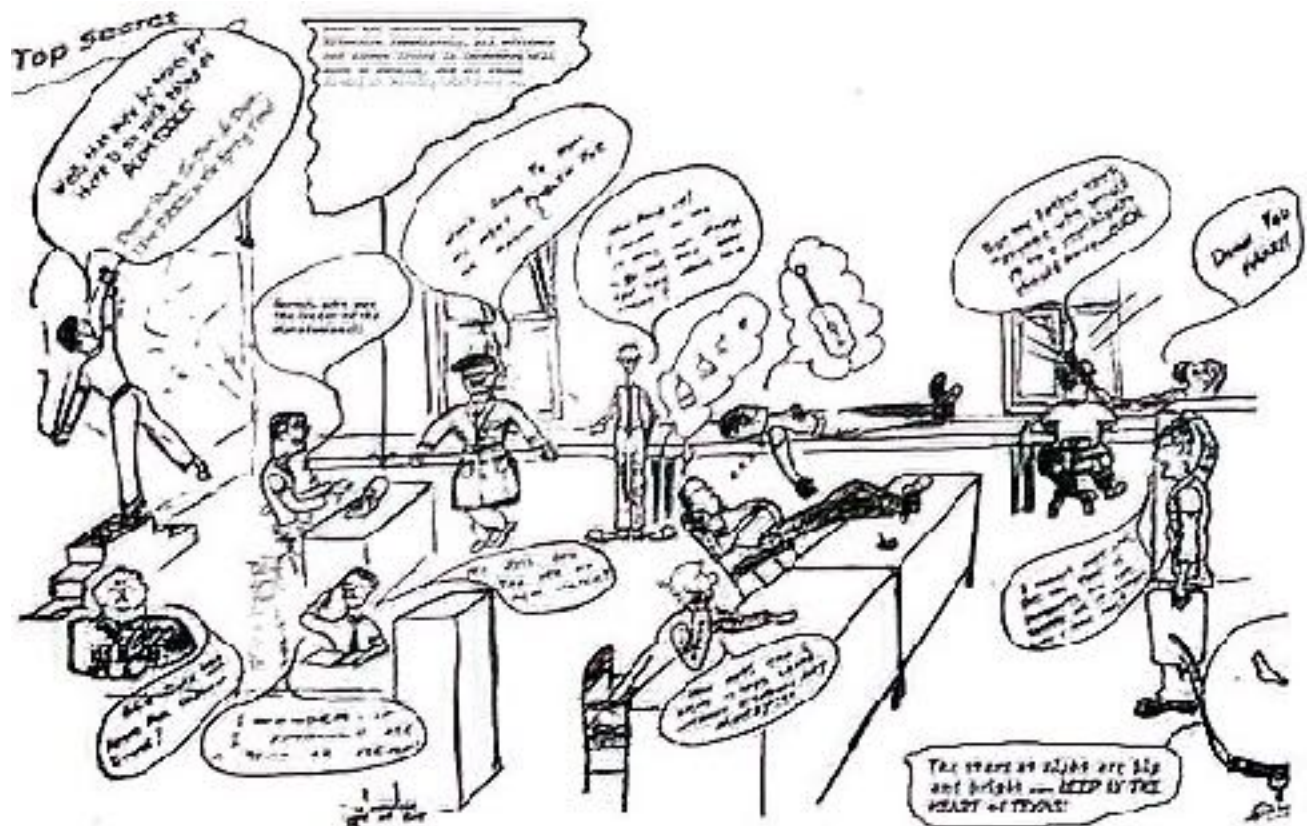
We were called to duty (often roused out of bed) at the first hint of a call sign change and worked around the clock until the crisis was over. (Or, if an alert was ever the real thing, we were prepared to burn our records and evacuate!) We worked on wall-sized maps of the USSR, labeled TOP SECRET. These "alerts" called for urgent and coordinated efforts by all sections, beginning with the Radio Intercept Operators ¹ who listened to the cacophony of static and radio signals in Morse code and copied them down with unbelievable accuracy, using typewriters equipped with the Cyrillic alphabet. Then, there were the Crypto Analysts, who dealt with the complexities of encoded messages and call signs. There were also airmen trained as Russian Language Analysts, whose job was to translate clear text and voice messages. We had Radio Direction Finding (RDF) Operators who tried to fix the positions of the Russian transmitters. Finally, there were the Radio Traffic Analysts, whose job was to learn as much as they could from the "headers" of the messages, i.e., the parts of the message that were not encrypted. All of our jobs depended, to some degree, on mistakes made by the Russian radio operators. All military operators are taught rigorous rules of "radio discipline" designed to prevent such mistakes, but they do happen and can reveal information the enemy should not know!

Secrecy was all-important in our highly sensitive work. We were warned regularly, in security lectures we were required to attend, that we could not *describe or discuss our work in any way with friends or family.* In fact, we were strictly forbidden to discuss our work with *each other* outside the secure buildings where we worked. Even within our secure compounds, the various sections where we were assigned were isolated from each other. So, even at

Our Little House On the Prairie

the office, we had no contact with buddies in another section unless we had “a need to know.” To my knowledge, among those I knew, we were faithful in observing all these security rules. (When we returned to civilian life, we continued this secrecy about our jobs, although our friends and families sometimes thought we made too much of our “secret jobs.”)

Satirical cartoon about our often boring office life, with inside jokes that only those present would remember or understand... [That's my rear-end, lower right!]



I especially remember one security lecture while in training at Brooks AFB that made a lasting impression on me. One morning at breakfast, we were shocked to read in the newspaper ("The San Antonio Light") a story about our training at Brooks. *The story pretty well told exactly what we were being trained for in our "secret compound" on the base!* Knowing this story would undermine the security lectures we were receiving, the CO called a meeting of everyone as soon as we reached the office. His message to us went something like this:

"We know the newspaper has this story and runs it periodically—it sells newspapers! *You bought one, didn't you?* We have taught you that the

Our Little House On the Prairie

elements of this story are certainly no secret to our enemies—they know of your jobs and your training and are training their operators to defeat your efforts! We are training our communications personnel to protect our communications from *their* analysts! *What our enemies don't know—NOW HEAR THIS!—is how SUCCESSFUL we are!* Do you see that if you *brag* about your “secret work” or *hint* at “the importance of your job” or *say anything at all*—you may infer something about the success of our efforts? That gentleman is why the only way to have security is simply to never, never, say anything about your jobs to anyone.”

So, did we help keep the Russian bear at bay? Yes, certainly, but I still cannot reveal any specifics about the successes or failures of our efforts. The fact is, as “worker bees” in a huge intelligence organization, we were never told the ultimate value of the information that we gathered. Why? *Because we did not have “the need to know!”*

Well, here we are 50 years later, and I’m writing this bit of personal history about my “secret job.” *Why?* Because the work we did in the early 1950s has little bearing on the world of COMINT today. Because the means, methods, and technology that we used (Morse code, for goodness sake!) are now so outmoded as to be only a page in COMINT history; we worked with card files, not computers! Because we have been superseded by five decades of COMINT gathering secrets that I know nothing about. Because much of our early work has now been declassified and is the subject of numerous books,² movies, and “discussions” on the internet³ about what we did and how we did it so long ago. Because I know there were some who lost their lives in the intelligence war—USAFSS airmen who flew secret airborne monitoring missions (SIGINT) against the Russians and were shot down. I’m especially proud that their story is finally being told.⁴ Because I’ve relished remembering and reliving my experiences with a great group of former 6910th airmen that I organized on the Internet—The USAFSS 6910TH 50’s GROUP. Our association included our web page (*maintained by webmaster Marvin Mobley*), a Yahoo e-mail-list (hosted by myself), newsletters ⁵ and two great reunions (*in 2000 and 2002, planned and hosted by Bill Purser*).

Our Little House On the Prairie

And finally, because in my dotage, I have longed to share *something* of what we did with my family and friends and to say that we took great pride in doing it well, *and we would do it again in a heartbeat if called on...*

The USAFSS motto was: *"Freedom Through Vigilance."*

A/1c Ray M. Thompson, AF18410468 - Radio Traffic Analyst Aide

raymack@mac.com

¹ We love to tell this story: one of the Radio Intercept Operators at Landsberg AFB was a guy named Johnny Cash. And, yes, he was *the Johnny Cash*, destined to become a C&W superstar. Read Johnny's own account of his USAFSS experiences in his biography "Cash," (written with Patrick Carr), Harper Paperbacks 1997.

² *I recommend Body of Secrets, by James Bamford, Doubleday 2001*

³ *Try these in Google: USAFSS, AIA, COMINT, SIGINT, ELINT*

⁴ Read *The Price of Vigilance*, by a member of USAFSS, Larry Tart; Ballantine Books 2001. It's been a privilege to have Larry in our USAFSS 6910th 50's Group mail list.

⁵ Newsletter No. 4 – September 2000, USAFSS 6910th 50's Group, 142 pages, published by Ray M. Thompson Some of My USAFSS Buddies...

Version 6 9/9/22

Our Little House On the Prairie



Our Little House On the Prairie

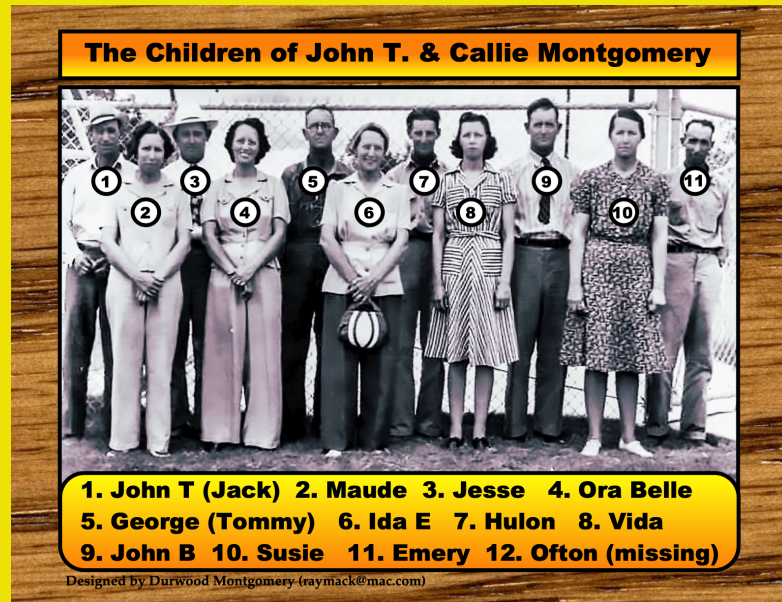


(I'm in the red shirt, on the right!)

Ray Mack Thompson's Families

No one will ever know or understand the fun
there was; for there was fun and there was
laughing—
foolish, silly fun and foolish, silly laughing;
but what it was all about you can't
remember, can you?
Just the memory of it—that's all you have
now—just the memory; and even now, ever so
soon,
it is being distilled of all its sadness; and
what's left is going to be precious precious
gold..

—Brian Friel, "Philadelphia, Here I Come!" (1965)



The Montgomery Family
With My Birthmother, Ida (Purse)



The Stevens Family
Allene, W.L. (my birth father), Dixie, Susie, Billie, W.L. Jr.



My Adopted Family, the Neil Thompsons
 Rau, Neil, Zorene, Barbara, Madison, Julia,
 Lorraine, Jud, Sharon, Don (Missing: Marian)



My Adopted Sister's Family-The John Colemans
 Nancy, Randy, John, Zorene, Avalyn (my wife), Barbara
 (I took this picture at Coleman's Moppy Home!)



My Stevens Half-Sister & Half-Brother
Ray, Billie (Benton) Stevens, W.L. Stevens, Jr.





The Warner Maddox Family

Ray, Avalyn (my wife), Tanyne, Margaret, Cynda, Warner



The Dot Murphy Family

Debbie, Dot (my wife), Michael, Mark



Ray & Avalyn (Maddox) Thompson (Married 1960)



Dot (Murphy) Thompson & Ray (Married 2014)

Thank You Lord!

*Thank you, LORD, for the part each
of these families played in my life.*

*A special thank you, LORD, for my
adoptive parents, who gave me a name
and a place to stand in the world..*

*Thank you LORD for over 50 years
of marriage to two beautiful
Christian women...*

Young Girl's Memories

A young girl's childhood on a New Mexico Territory homestead is recalled when she is an 84-year-old grandmother and great grandmother.

Family history is added for good measure. In this 2nd edition, her son joins her to add newfound history from the Internet and to engage his mother's memories.

Find Raymond!

We took Raymond out in the pasture, as far from the house as we were permitted to go, and hid him. We carefully marked the location in our minds and often returned to play "cowboy" and other games he enjoyed. I have no end for Raymond's story; I sometimes wonder if he still lies under an old cactus, waiting for us to come and play again...

Murder on the Prairie!

I recall only a few events that required father's official attention as a "JP," but I well recall the most tragic occasion for which he was called to serve as a "peace officer." It began late in the day... Two men from Ricardo came to our homestead to tell father of a killing; father was needed to arrest the killer. One of father's friends (a young lawyer) had been shot and killed by the wife of the agent for the Santa Fe Railway Company!

Marbles & Boys

Boys always selected one special marble (usually an agate) to shoot with, called a "taw." If you were his favorite girl, the boy would let you use his taw on your turn to shoot. But—on the day that your boyfriend passed his taw to another girl, you knew you had lost his favor!

Why Did You Come?

I recall a social "rule" observed by people who came west to settle the territories. It was ok and proper to ask newcomers, "Where are you from?" but never, "Why did you come?" "Doctors, Lawyers, Merchants, Chiefs," as we children used to chant—they all came, but there were always some we wondered about...

