

Hillbilly Boy

Prologue

GREENER PASTURES

In 1850, soon after gold was discovered in California, men of vision, courage and determination were moving West. One of these men was my Grandfather Wilsey. His first name was William. The Wilsey's originally came from England. Grandfather Wilsey married a girl named Lucretia Stoker. They were living in New Harmony, Indiana, and in 1850 when they decided to come to California, they had three sons; Jesse, Dick, and Charles. They came across the country in a wagon train and Grandfather was the wagonmaster of the train.

When they arrived in California, they settled near Vallejo for awhile and then moved to Colusa County. Grandfather must have been a glutton for punishment or else a lover of adventure. After he got his family settled in California, he went back to Indiana and piloted another wagon train across the country.

After moving to California, the Wilsey's had a daughter born to them and they named her Ann. Then a son named James, then Eugene who was my father, then Oliver, known as "Doc." Later another daughter was born, named Lucretia after her mother, making eight children in all.

Soon after the last baby was born, Grandfather lost the mother of his children. A couple of years later he married a widow lady named Shipley. The Shipleys came to California from Tennessee in 1855. He died soon after arriving and left Mrs. Shipley with two daughters named Mary and Martha. After her marriage to Grandfather Wilsey, they had a daughter named Bell and a son named Henry, so Granny, as we called her, raised twelve children. She was the only grandmother I ever knew as my mother's parents died before I was born. She is my most unforgettable character and will play a prominent part in this story.

My father remembered hearing Grandfather Wilsey tell about some of the hardships they encountered on their trip across the country - their skirmishes with the Indians, their trouble crossing swollen streams, their fights with bad weather, break-downs, sickness and even death.

As soon as the Wilsey boys got old enough to work, they got jobs on farms in the valley. Stage lines were soon running from Sacramento to Red Bluff and later to Shasta. Some of the older Wilsey boys drove stage on the run from Colusa to Red Bluff. Uncle Jesse was old enough and enlisted in the army and fought in the last two years of the Civil War.

My mother's maiden name was Potter. Her family lived in Forrest Hill, Missouri, and they came across the country in the first emigrant train that ran from East to West. Mother was born in 1861 and she was eight years old when they came to California. The history book that I studied in school says that the Central Pacific Railroad Company started in San Francisco to build a railroad east in 1865. At the same time, the Union Pacific started at Omaha to build west. Five years later the engines met at Promontory Point near Ogden, Utah. There the last rail was laid. The next day, May 11, 1869, a through train from New York the first that ever crossed from ocean to ocean passed Promontory Point on its way to San Francisco. Mother didn't remember the month in 1869, they came to California, but it had to be after May 11th. I have heard her tell about the trip - how slow they traveled and that they had everything they owned in a box car where they rode and lived while coming. The train would stop once a day and let families get out and cook enough food to last them until the next day, so they were two weeks coming from Missouri to California.

The Potter family, when they got to California, settled first in Colusa County and later moved to Red Bluff in Tehama County. Mother's name was Eliza and she had three sisters - Molly, Dolly, and Sadie, and a brother named Ben. Mother told us that her parents both died in their forties from pneumonia and her father died first. In Mother's things, I found a deed for a lot in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Red Bluff. It was dated June 18, 1881, and was made out to Mrs. Levy Potter. This would bear out the truth of what Mother told us. One time in later years, I went with Mother and we found the graves of her father and mother and of her brother Ben.

Father met Mother at their home near Red Bluff and they were married May 1, 1881, when she was nineteen and he was twenty-two years old. This would have been a short time before her father died, being only 47 years old. Her mother lived until 1885 which made her 47 when she died also.

At the time my father's folks settled in Colusa County, the best of land was available cheap. They could have gotten land and become prosperous farmers in the valley as a lot of the early settlers did, but they were the kind of people who thought the only way to make a living was to work for wages. At that time mines and lumber mills were opening up in Shasta County so they migrated up to Shasta County where the jobs were.

My father's first job was at Enright's Mill above Round Mountain. Later it became the Terry Lumber Company. He drove a team of oxen to drag logs in the woods.

Grandfather Wilsey died in 1885 and is buried on the farm which he owned at the time. It is located on Highway 299E two miles west of Round Mountain. The family Bible shows the children born and the dates of their births as follows:

Edgar Adin Wilsey - Born November 9, 1882

Edna Leona Wilsey - Born September 24, 1884

Willie Wilsey - Born September 16, 1886
Nellie Wilsey - Born January 8, 1888
Roy Wilsey - Born December 5, 1889
Earl Wilsey - Born November 1, 1892
Lawrence Wilsey - Born January 27, 1895
Gladys Marie Wilsey - Born February 27, 1897
Pauline Wilsey - Born August 21, 1899
Jasper Wilsey - Born June 28, 1904

Mother was a little woman. She never weighed over one hundred pounds in her life. You will see that she bore ten children. Six of us lived to maturity. She worked hard to raise us as she had none of the modern conveniences of today. Yet she only lacked five months of living to be 90 years old. She was active up to the last year of her life, spending her time visiting around with her family. The last few months of her life we kept her in one of our apartments and hired a lady to take care of her. When I would ask her if she was in any pain or if she wanted anything, she would say, "No, I'm just tired and want to rest." Then one day about noon she just quit breathing and went to that rest and reward she looked forward to.



Granny Wilsey as I remember her.
Born in Tenn. about 1824. Died in
Colusa, Calif. 1911. Is buried in
Willows, California.