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EARLY DAY HOME MAKING AND CUSTOMS  
IN THE CHEROKEE STRIP

In relating incidents relative to homemaking by pioneers of Oklahoma, if they seem to be too strongly colored with the personal and ego, it is because my own experiences were typical of those of the majority of early settlers.

Necessity usually forces us, whether willingly or unwillingly, to adjust ourselves to existing circumstances.

If one had a one-room house boarded up and down with the cracks stripped, having a floor, doors and windows but unplastered, he was considered very fortunate compared with his neighbor who lived in a tent on a dirt floor with aged parents, children and little babies gathered around a fire made of buffalo chips or maybe of the root of the Yucca or soap-weed.

Into such environments as these beings were ushered into life, also departed to that "Bourne from whence no traveler returns". Patience, determination and endurance were their dominant characteristics.

One saying goes,  
"They gathered chips to make their fires,  
They gathered bones to keep from starving,  
They gathered their courage to keep from leaving".

Almost without exception they arrived in this untried land with few house-hold furnishings, with finances sadly depleted.

The run or settlement having occurred in the autumn, September 16th, no crops or gardens could be planted till the next spring.

They faced an anxious wait, a winter season with meager means to purchase their daily bread on the scale of bones to the salt-mills, sugar refineries and button factories. Home made chairs, tables and beds constructed chiefly from boxes represented the furniture of the majority of houses. Such Plebeian foods as salt pork, dried apples and rice were considered luxuries. The daily diet of many was bread, sorghum molasses and sometimes coffee.

We knew one family who had saved some pop-corn, the only present which they could hope to give their children on Christmas being pop-corn balls. When they went to get their treasured corn, the mice had eaten it. A real tragedy.

It is not to be presumed, because these pioneers were subjected to so many hardships that they were devoid of refinement. We were personally acquainted with a young husband and wife, both college graduates, living in a dugout, there came a terrible electrical storm and semi tornado during nighttime, their supply of coal oil was exhausted, during the storm in the darkness their first baby was born.

How they endured the terrors of that night is difficult to conceive.)

This period really ante-dated the "horse and buggy" days, there being very few buggies in use. The most general mode of traveling was by lumber wagon. Autos, airplanes, sub-marines, radios, picture shows were of later invention. We had no electric lights or telephones.

If one became ill and was many miles from a physician he must wait till a messenger rode to deliver a call for the physician and still longer till the physician could travel the road to his patient.

A nurse was never heard of or seen. We had no hospitals. We depended on the assistance of kind friends in cases of severe illness.

We literally "bore one anothers burdens".

We ask ourselves the question, why did the pioneers brave these hardships of their own volition? Our answer is they were motivated by the same spirit which impelled our ancestors to seek the shores of a new land and found a home for posterity.

With the coming of spring they began to break the sod and plant, the few acres they were able to prepare, to corn, kaffir

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and similar grains, some melons and gardens. The year was a dry year. Then, as at the present time, gardens did not grow very readily. With "Hope which springs eternal in the human breast" they watched the stunted growth of grain and visioned the growing wheat in fields which they would sow in the fall in the ground which they had prepared in the spring.

If the supply of meat ran low a rabbit graced the family board. A very palatable sauce or pie could be made of pie-melon providing five cents worth of tartaric acid and a little sugar could be afforded to add tone to the mixture.

If pumpkins had matured in the drouth, they made a good food stewed and flavored with spices and sweetened with molasses.

If they had been unable yet to purchase a cow and had no milk, excellent biscuits could be made from sour yeast dough with soda to sweeten.

Occasionally friends 'back home' sent cast off clothing which could be made over into attractive garments by skillful fingers. In that day, children wore panties, Mothers would bleach flour sacks making garments out of them, sitting up

nights to crochet a little edge for them.

We actually saw a girl at a gathering with a dress made out of a crazy patch quilt. More pathetic than amusing.

One Mother made a dress over for her small girl and trimmed it with bias strips cut from the remnant of a silk umbrella.

There was always existing a spirit of comraderie and helpfulness.

A Divine Providence sustained them to struggle thru the first two years.

More rain fell the third year affording better crops and more comfortable living conditions.

I do not recall that they ever asked or received aid from the state or government, excepting possibly, seed wheat.

When they did not have what they needed they went without. The spiritual life was not neglected; religious services being held from the first day of settlement. Schools were organized the first year, the law and order of old communities was being established.

Forty three winters and summers have passed since that day, September sixteenth, 1893.

To those bouyant and valiant souls who survive, whose hair is whitened, to those who have gone to the great beyond all honor is due. We look back over the years and feel it was a privilege to have had a part in developing our beloved state of Oklahoma. That we were permitted to "Come into the kingdom for such a time as this".

We pass on to this generation the sacred duty to carry on and uphold the same high ideals of those who gave their youth, strength and intellect in establishing this commonwealth.

We charge them to keep the old ship of Oklahoma out of troubled waters.

"We know what master laid thy keel  
What-Workman wrought thy ribs of steel",

Mrs. James B. Gullison.  
Enid, Oklahoma  
February 9th, 1937