

MY MEMOIRS

EARLY DAYS IN DENTON

By Alvin A. Bush

I was born in a little log cabin on January 22, 1889 in Denton County, Texas. Not long ago I went by the old farm place to get a picture of the old log cabin. Was told that that old log cabin was now the best hog pen in Denton County--so I don't have a picture like Lincoln and other famous men for my memory book.

I do not remember the log cabin but I do remember a trip from Denton County to Collingsworth County in a covered wagon. My grandmother Bush drove along in a buggy for several miles. I was in the buggy with her and she was crying as she handed me up to mother in the wagon. Another incident I remember was when we arrived at the gate where we were to enter the land where we were to make our home, two men were sitting there on their horses blocking the way. After a lot of talking, father reached back in the wagon, got his rifle, held it in one hand with the reins in the other and said "Sally, get out, open the gate, this gun will clear the road". My advisor doubts that I could remember all this when I was only one year old but I remember it OR it was told to me so impressibly that it has always been in my mind. A few years back I talked to one of the men who were on the horses that day and he remembered the occasion. He said it was a misunderstanding as to the purchase price of the land.

My memory is rather vague as to the first and second year in Collingsworth County but one thing I do remember was a snow storm. We were living in a half dugout. For two days we could see out the windows but could not get the door open. Finally, Papa got a window open, climbed out and dug the snow away from the door.

We had a lot of fun then. Papa made a trap fall out of a washboard propped up on a stick with a string attached. He set this up in the yard to trap snow birds. He sprinkled feed for the birds and when they came to eat the feed, he pulled the string. We ate snowbird pie for days.

Papa organized a school, which he taught. He named it Fresno. We all went to school--the first school I ever attended. The only thing I remember about the school was a big sand pile in one corner of the dirt floor building. In the sand were different sizes of tin cans. We had a lesson in measurements by learning 2 pints equals a quart, four quarts made a gallon, etc. I guess the "fifth" had not been invented at that time. I learned about that later. One evening after school, a girl started to saddle her horse and found a rattle snake under her saddle. Having nothing else to kill the snake with, papa whipped it to death with a bridle rein.

Herbert, the oldest child of the Bush family died about this time and is buried in the Old Wellington Cemetery. There being no cemetery when he died, papa went to town and got a group of men together, organized a Cemetery Association and laid out a cemetery. Herbert was the first person buried there. Several years ago I had the old cedar posts removed and replaced by a nice stone marker. The inscription is "Herbert, son of Harve and Sallie Bush. The First burial in this cemetery."

Farming in Collingsworth County must not have been very good for we moved back to Denton County. The deed records show that papa traded the two sections (1280 Acres) for 28 horses. I do remember the covered wagon trip back to Denton County. We settled on a farm near Bartonville

a mile or two south of Double Oak School. That was the first organized school I attended--about 1894 or 1895.

We did not live on the farm very long. Papa bought an interest in a store in Bartonville and we moved there. One interesting incident I remember in connection with the store was papa's rabbit buying venture. He made a deal with a wagon pedler from Dallas to sell skinned and dressed rabbits on a certain day shortly before Christmas. That created a big Hunting spree. There was a big turnout on the day of the sale. One man and two boys showed up with a wagon load of live rabbits. He was very disappointed when he was informed that the rabbits had to be dressed. He had over a hundred live rabbits. Said he could have brought in two hundred dead ones. It was interesting watching him skin the rabbits. I think the price was 10¢ each.

Papa died about this time. The next residence we had was at Little Elm where we lived for one year. Then Grandpa Bush bought us a small farm on Doe Branch from the proceeds from a settlement of the store at Bartonville. The school was at Salt Branch, a walking distance of four miles. In this school I learned a lot--history, geography, arithmetic and algebra. But in the meantime I learned how hard it was to make a living farming the small farm we had. Grandpa Bush had one of his hands help us put in the crops. Fred and I had to do the work. Tom had left home and was working on his own. One day Fred and I were starting to plow the cotton crop. I was holding the doubleshovel plow pulled by one mule and Fred was holding the lines. Grandma Bush showed up and stopped us. She gave Fred the hoe and told him to follow behind and cut the weeds the plow did not cut. Then she put the reins around my neck and gave me a lecture I've never forgotten. She said - "He who wishes to thrive, must both hold the plow and drive." I did hold the plow and drive but I didn't thrive. We had to work for the neighbors picking cotton in addition to our own crop.

An incident at this time occurred that effected the rest of my life. We were picking cotton one hot day and we kids were having a contest to see who could pick the most pounds for the day. I was trying to beat and near the end of the day I found a green watermelon in my row. I pulled it and put it in my sack. When we weighed at the end of the day I had to sneak my sack to the cotton pile and empty it and hide the mellow. I beat them all but that night I was suddenly very sick. They said it was sunstroke or sun fever. I was sick for six weeks. When I recovered, I had lost the hearing in one ear. I never did completely recover. I have always thought it was my punishment for cheating by weighing the mellow in my cotton sack.

I do not remember what we earned picking cotton but I do have a very vivid memory of a cotton chopping employment I was engaged in. It was on a farm of Grandpa Bush's. I, being the youngest boy in the bunch, was to get 40¢ a day (sun up to sun down). The regular guys were to get 50¢. I found out later Grandpa was paying Old Zack, a tall, big black boy 75¢ to be the leader. We were to keep up with him. I can never forget the work I put in for 40¢ per day. All the money we made from the farm and outside work went into the common purse. Mama paid the bills and bought our clothes for the winter.

A Christmas about this time, I remember as one of the best. A group of us were walking to Little Elm the day before Christmas. I don't remember having any spending money but on the road I found two whiskey bottles. Those I sold to the saloon for 10 cents. With this 10¢ I took a chance on a turkey shoot and won a turkey. They were short on turkeys and persuaded me to put my turkey up again for another shoot. I kept one chance and kept the other 90¢ and I won again. I took my turkey and went home after buying 90 cents worth of groceries. That was the best turkey dinner I ever had.

The next year Grandpa Bush hired a man and wife to take over the management of his farms so he could travel. His first trip was to St. Louis for the Worlds Fair in 1904. On this trip he was robbed by pickpockets on the train. He said, as usual, he figured out afterwards how it happened. A nice looking man bumped into him in the aisle. As he was apologizing, another man bumped into both of them. They all apologized but when Grandpa got back to his seat he found his bill fold was missing. The next trip he took was to Galveston. This time he took Fred with him. All Fred could tell us about the trip was the oysters he had to eat and the girls on the beach. The next trip he took me to San Francisco. No boys at Salt Branch had heard of San Francisco. We got on the train at Denton. We went clickety clack, clickety clack and after so many clickety clacks, I had to go to a rest room. Finding one at the end of the car, I had my first experience with a chain pull. This impressed me more than many of the sights in San Francisco. After a stay in San Francisco, we went on down to Los Angeles and took a boat trip to Catalina--the first ocean trip I ever had. We made the trip across the Island in a stage coach. I was 15 years old that year.

After arriving back home it was hard to put a cotton sack on and get to work. About that time Ivy got married and we lost our best cotton picker. Believe it or not, Iva was a very attractive and beautiful girl. Had a lot of boy friends. Just one instance I'll tell about her. A very dignified, well to do farmer visited us occasionally. He took a liking to Iva. He let her wear a gold ring of his. Iva also had a boy friend by the name of Jim Nail, who lived across the creek. On one visit, Iva let Nail put the ring on his finger and he wore it home. Later the other guy saw Iva didn't have his ring on. When he inquired about it, Iva's brilliant defence was "I have it hanging on a Nail". Believe me, the next time the guy came to call, the ring was hanging on a Bush. We were glad Iva married George Button. He had a rubber tired buggy--the first we had ever seen.

After the final settlement that year, it was decided we could do better by moving to town. We moved to Denton before Christmas. We were living across the street from the county jail on North Elm Street. I got a job at Beyatts Palace of Sweets--a bakery and Ice Cream Parlor--at \$4.00 a week. There were some fringe benefits such as bread, cakes and ice cream. This was better than cotton picking. I worked there a year. Grandpa Bush wanted me to go back to school. He said he would pay me \$5.00 a week if I would go to school. This worked out much better as I could continue to work after school and Saturdays. After coming up from a country school and being out of school for a year, I felt lucky to be admitted as a Freshman in the Denton High School. My four years as a student were very hard and at times very embarrassing. But by making near perfect grades in Math, History and Geography, I was able to overcome the lower grades in other subjects.

The most memorable event of my High School days was the occasion of a debate on which I was on the negative side of "Should the Philippines be Granted Their Independence?" I worked on this for weeks at the North Texas State College library. As a coincident, the debate was held on the date of a very distinguished visitor to Denton. My closing statement was " Shall we throw these Islands in the arena as a prize to a group of more powerful and ambitious nations by granting them their independence? Now, I say 'NO'". I lost the decision but was congratulated by William Jennings Bryan. I have been a Democrat ever since.

After graduating from Denton High School, I went to a Business College for three months then got a job in the Bank doing various minor jobs. My salary was \$40.00 a month. When time came to go to College that fall, a vacancy occurred for a bookkeeper in the Bank. I had been helping on the job and was considered qualified for it. Grandpa wanted me to go to College. The officials of the bank told Grandpa that they would give me the job at \$75.00. It was a hard decision to make. I took the job because I thought \$75.00 a month was all the money I would ever need. The first thing I did was to buy the little home on Locust St. at Hann Ave., paying \$100.00 down and \$25.00 per month on the balance. That was the first home we had ever had with an indoor toilet and bath and electricity. By giving up a college education, I gave our mother a home in which she lived to the day of her death.

The next eight years of my life were care free, happy and pleasant. No Social Security, no Income Tax or any deductions. But then World War I came along. With the first call, I went to Leon Springs as a candidate for Officers training. After three weeks I was rejected. Later I was accepted as a draftee in the regular Army. I did not burn my draft card. As we marched down Hickory Street to the Depot, I remembered the day in 1898 when I ran along side the boys marching to the depot to go to the Spanish American War. Fred and I left for the Army together. I remember World War I as a pleasant experience. First, when we reported to Camp Travis at San Antonio, we had to report for aptitude tests. Fred was in the line ahead of me. He told them he had worked on a farm. They asked him if he could drive four mules. Fred said "we never had four mules but one mule hitched to a double shovel--I can work Hell out of him." The officer said, "I don't know if the army needs one mule drivers but I will put you down for the job." I was a bookkeeper and accountant and so listed. The first day the Sargeant asked for four volunteers to work around the office. I volunteered and spent the next day digging a ditch around the camp office.

Things happened pretty fast from then on. I was sent to Augusta, Georgia, and then to Camp Upton, Long Island, N.Y. Sailed out of New York on the Cedric in October 1918. The first cold night out of New York, I was walking around the deck, getting acquainted with the ship. I found a bathroom opening out on the deck. No one was around so I went in, took off my clothes and had a nice, long, hot bath. Got out, dressed and went down to our quarters. There was a towel tied to the foot of my bed. I knew what that meant. I was tagged to go on K.P. duty in the morning. I was smart--but learned again that crime does not pay. I put the towel on the bed next to mine. In a few minutes the sargeant of the guard and the room sargeant came in. They wanted men for guard duty. The sargeant told him not to take the ones with a towel tied on the bed. I was pulled out and told to get my clothes on and report on deck for guard duty. I was hot and sweating from the hot bath but went up to report. After the first round the deck, it was so cold I collapst. I was put in the hospital and never

got out until we landed in Liverpool, where I was taken to another Hospital. The first day I was able to leave the hospital was Nov. 11, 1918. From then on I was in a rest camp depot in England--doing accounting work--counting spoons, knives and forks and dress equipment. I soon learned a shirt was a shirt and a pair of pants was a pair of pants regardless of condition. I soon had traded my old clothes for the best in stock and came out a best dressed private in the AEF. That was a good life but it didn't last long. We were ordered to report one morning with all equipment for inspection to embark for the U.S.A. On the inspection grounds in a damp, rainy field near Liverpool, we were all lined up for inspection when the officer came to me. He looked me over and asked where I got that uniform. I told him I had been working in the supply depot and got it. He said "Pull it off right now". I pulled it off and waited until the sargeant went to the depot for a privates uniform. The union suit I had on, I explained, was given to me at the hospital by the Red Cross.

When I came to at the hospital, I didn't have any clothes nor any of my military equipment, which, I think later accounted for the impression to others in my company, who went on to France, that I had died on the way over. This rumor was written home by some of my friends. But I finally proved the rumor false by showing up in person.

Homecoming after the war was great but after all the excitement, things were different. The feeling of all, I think, was well expressed in the song "How you going to keep 'em down on the farm, after they have seen Paree?" It was a readjustment--a change to a new life. The beginning of the second chapter, which I may tell you later.